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Regional Oral History Office

George R. Stewart

A LITTLE OF MYSELF

With an Introduction by

James D. Hart

An Interview Conducted by
Suzanne B. Riess





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SERIES PREFACE

This interview with Professor George R. Stewart, Emeritus Professor of English, and author, is one of the Diverse Memoirs sponsored by the Friends of The Bancroft Library. The Friends established the series of Diverse Memoirs so that the Regional Oral History Office could record the recollections of individuals in a variety of subject fields who have made outstanding contributions to our knowledge of life in California and the West.

George Stewart's selection as a memoirist by resolution of the Council of the Friends of The Bancroft Library on April 15, 1971, reflects the Council's recognition of his singular position in the University world of teaching and scholarship, and in the world of popular literature. His interest in the ways of life and the movement of history in America, particularly in revealing the roots of California, have made George Stewart an especially creative user of western history resources. It is these qualities that make an interview with George Stewart a logical choice for the Diverse Memoirs Series, and an illuminating addition to oral history.

Willa Baum, Department Head
Regional Oral History Office

October 1972
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University of California
Berkeley, California

INTERVIEW HISTORY

George Stewart was interviewed for the Regional Oral History Office in a series of meetings in the Stewart apartment in San Francisco. The view of San Francisco, from the 20th floor, was always worth a long look, and came as a kind of grand climax to the trip from Berkeley. In fact, here I thank George Stewart, author, for making such indelible marks in my thinking about this part of the country that a trip across the Bay Bridge--not to mention into the Sierra--becomes a fascinating, distracting speculation into past and future. He shares his country, and the earth abides indeed.

At the time of our planning for interviewing him, George Stewart was making weekly trips to Berkeley to work in The Bancroft Library with Harry Roberts, master bookbinder, and to have lunch at the Faculty Club and meet appointments around the campus. That was not the right day for us to interview, it seemed, so San Francisco, in the afternoon, was settled upon. (Before noon was for writing.) At one p.m. I would arrive, migrate to the view, then attach the tape recorder; perhaps to counter my "edge of the seat" posture, George Stewart would settle way back into a cushiony armchair, feet up, and we would interview. When it was over, Mrs. Stewart usually joined us for talk. Then, after an expert assessment of the possibilities of entering the by then steadily-flowing traffic to the Bay Bridge, I would depart.

The interviews took place irregularly in May, June, July, September, and October 1971, and in February 1972. The transcribing followed close on the heels of the interviews, largely because of the transcriber's enthusiasm for the subject. So when the interviews were over, the editing, by the interviewer, took not very much time. It was completed in the office in February 1972, and was then back into the office again, with George Stewart's additions, in March 1972. James D. Hart, The Bancroft Library's Director, was the first reader, after Mrs. Stewart, and kindly agreed to write the good friend's reminiscence that is the Introduction to the volume.

The volume includes an additional reminiscing together of George Stewart and his very longtime friend and co-explorer in California history, Charles L. Camp, Emeritus Professor of Paleontology, and inveterate bibliographer. After a pleasant lunch one day in March, they talked about trips and memories they shared. Recorded after the George Stewart interviews were completed, the conversation has been left unindexed, and it is called Interview IX.

As George Stewart says, there is an autobiography in the works, and that manuscript will one day be available in The Bancroft Library, where several cartons of working manuscripts, letters, business correspondence, fan mail, reviews, unpublished fiction, dramatic works, and memos to himself are already deposited.

Suzanne B. Riess, Interviewer
Regional Oral History Office

September 1972
486 The Bancroft Library
University of California
Berkeley, California

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

For this collaboration on my life I have supplied the title. I must, indeed, make acknowledgement to Rudyard Kipling, whose autobiography is called Something of Myself.

Whether as "a little" or as "something" the title is an honest one. No autobiography can possibly present more than a small fraction of the individual's life. To attempt thus to write quantitatively would result in proliferation of details until the finished work resembled the Encyclopedia Britannica. To do so qualitatively, that is, by probing into the individual's psyche and deeper mind, is also impossible. Any autobiography, therefore, must consist of comparatively few and well-selected external details, and perhaps of a few hesitant attempts to probe beneath the surface of the mind.

In this particular series of interviews, there have been, moreover, some conscious limitations. We laid down some ground-rules at the beginning.

I have already written an autobiographical account taking me to the age of eighteen, and I expect to continue this narrative until I reach the age of twenty-eight. Possibly, even, I shall continue it still farther. This autobiographical account has not been published, and may never be. In that latter case, however, I shall try to see to it that the manuscript is deposited with my other papers in the Bancroft Library.

To have included here an account of my first twenty-eight years would have resulted in almost total repetition. Doubtless, under the influence of Suzanne's skillful questioning, I should have developed some ideas that I have not developed on my own. Here, however, we seemed to face a situation which could result only in diminishing returns with labor scarcely justifying the result.

There is also another autobiographical fragment (covering roughly my twenty-fourth year), that is, my contribution to the book There Was Light.

In addition, at the beginning I told Suzanne that I was not greatly interested in developing the theme of university history--not for the lack of interest in itself, but rather

that others more knowledgeable in that field have already contributed to this project. In addition, the small volume that I did on the Department of English and The Year of the Oath tell a good deal about my attitudes and possible contributions to higher learning and to the university.

We agreed that the chief emphasis should be upon my books, particularly upon such "inside" items as would not be brought out by reading of the books themselves or from reviews. I mean--my methods of writing, attitudes toward the material, my own appraisals of success or failure, and my personal contacts resulting from the books.

Perhaps unfortunately, a large area lay between the calculated omissions and the emphasized inclusions. As the upshot, I may seem to be a disembodied spinner of words, sitting at a typewriter or at a microphone. There is not much about my family and friends, about my travels, hobbies and general relaxations, about my teaching, about any deeper philosophy that I may possess.

So be it! After all, the title is A Little of Myself.

As for Suzanne, by calling her a collaborator rather than an interviewer I think that I express my appreciation of her.

Let me also express my thanks to the Friends of the Bancroft Library, and particularly to their Council, who have invested their funds in this project. I hope that at some time in the future their confidence will be repaid.

George R. Stewart

March 1972
San Francisco, California

INTRODUCTION

I have known George Stewart for almost forty years. He has been a good friend and a wonderful colleague with whom I've had long, happy, and diverse associations. Over the years we have visited back and forth in one another's homes, for long periods as often as once a week, and we have lectured in one another's classes. We have worked together on University committees and we have gone to the mountains to follow pioneer trails and to fish together.

When I first got to know George Stewart I was a graduate student at Harvard who came to ask him a question about his recently published biography of Bret Harte. A little later, in 1936, I became an instructor at Berkeley and he published Ordeal By Hunger. During the years since then, I have continued to read everything George Stewart has published; certainly every book and important article or story. I've had the privilege of reading most of his writings in manuscript and discussing them with him before they were printed. But even after such close association, this Regional Oral History Office interview adds a great deal to my knowledge and understanding of George Stewart and his writings. What an illuminating work it will be for those who have less personal knowledge of him! It presents invaluable information from an author talking fully and freely about his writing. Moreover, this is an author who is not only a novelist, historian and biographer but a critic too. Here is a man professionally devoted to literary studies displaying his highly trained powers and perceptions to analyze his own work.

Because George Stewart is remarkably thoughtful, clear-headed, honest and capable of self-discernment he creates a very important document here, unlike and beyond the more conventional biographical recollections that are the stuff of most of the ROHO interviews. It is typical of him that George Stewart should make his ROHO interview different from others. He is a man possessed of a remarkably original mind; everything he does is approached from his own special angle of vision. The very diversity of topics and forms represented in his books is indicative of that. Indeed, even within his own field of scholarship on English literature, he has been quite astonishing in publishing on Malory and Bret Harte, on Faulkner and William Henry Thomas, on Melville and Stevenson, on Chaucer and George H. Derby. I don't suppose any other

scholarly writer on Malory or Chaucer has even heard of Derby or Thomes, except perhaps through Stewart's work. Yet George Stewart's variety of interests and range of knowledge is matched by the equally great diversity of his points-of-view toward his materials and the different techniques he has used. He is always his own man, creating his own kind of work, whether in that unusual novel Storm or in his poetic and fictive techniques in the handling of history in Ordeal By Hunger.

Somewhere in these interviews George Stewart mentions humorously that he makes his neuroses work for him. Well, neuroses or not, he is always very secure as he moves from one sort of thing to another, from one book to another, from one genre to another, from one project to another, seemingly without effort. Of course there's a lot of effort--of research and thought, for example--but George Stewart is obviously so certain of what he is doing that he is able to move in his own way seemingly without problems and thus able to present time and again a new point of view or open up a new subject, book after book. Because we learn about how this occurs and what he thinks of what he has done, this text is another important contribution by George Stewart. I am delighted to have been the first to read still another of his works, one that I am sure will also be appreciated in many ways by other readers yet to come.

James D. Hart
Professor of English
Director, The Bancroft Library

May 1972
The Bancroft Library
University of California
Berkeley, California

INTERVIEW I, Family and influences, high school; discussion of writing methods, and some discoveries about writing. (Recorded May 26, 1971)

- Riess: Reading through your Untitled Autobiography* made me want to know how much study of psychology you had done.
- Stewart: Very little formal study, and not very much informal study. My wife has taken care of that department. She is a psychiatric social worker. But I have never got into it very much, no.
- Riess: Was interviewing people much a part of your writing?
- Stewart: Yes, if you could call it interviewing--not for their own personalities, but for what they knew about some subject. I did a lot of that for Storm and Fire and Earth Abides, on other books too. But it was mostly a matter of going to a person and saying, "What do you know about this particular thing?"
- Riess: And not, "How did you feel about this or that?"
- Stewart: No.
- Riess: You are so understanding of yourself and your family, and yet you seem to want to get on to talking about places and away from people pretty quickly.
- Stewart: Oh, I suppose my childhood, as I've said, was partly unhappy, and we all want to shy away from those things.
- Riess: You let the characters in your books have emotions.

*Refer to Author's Preface.

Stewart: There are certain things I shied away from, though, I think, certain kinds of emotional involvements. I think it's all right. I don't think everybody ought to write about the same thing. So, I don't mind that.

Of course the thing I always had to fight--not fight, exactly--but people were always telling me I ought to put more about people in my books and I think that was very bad advice. After all, every writing is a kind of specialty, no writer writes about everything. I was writing about certain types of things, and if they didn't call for people in depth or in large number I think that was just something that I had to my advantage, really.

Riess: What I was commenting on was that you had a lot of insight, yet in the Autobiography you were reluctant to indulge it.

Stewart: Yes, I think so, I think that's quite common, especially with people with my background; that Presbyterian-Scottish background is strongly disciplined, somewhat repressed, and I think that's what you are seeing.

Riess: Do you remember mentioning showing off?

Stewart: I don't like to get into analysis that deep, and you're never very good at analysing yourself, anyway. The showing off, I suppose, might be an overcompensation for being repressed; that would be a possibility.

You've got a real advantage there, having the Autobiography.

Riess: Does it seem nasty? Picking out phrases and throwing them back at you?

Stewart: No, I think it's fine, I'm interested to see what you do pick out.

Riess: Maybe it sounds like I'm trying to find loopholes.

Stewart: No, I think it's that you're trying to fill gaps.

Riess: As I read on I felt that I recognized a theme in the statement, "Give me a straightforward task and I can buckle down and learn, even with no special facility." It would seem that you have set yourself not just straightforward, but monumental, tasks, the dictionary for instance.

Stewart: Well, in that case it looks like a straightforward task when you get through with it, and sometimes it is a straightforward task. Take a book like Names on the Land, for instance, an incredibly hard book to conceive, because it didn't exist, incredibly hard to organize. Well, actually, writing a place-names dictionary is a straightforward job, but calls for tremendous efficiency.

Riess: Would you say that even as a child you liked the challenge of a difficult task?

Stewart: Yes, I suppose so, although I was not a particularly early bloomer.

Riess: Did you have goals, as a child?

Stewart: No, I had almost no goals at all. I had a terrific struggle when I had to get some. I don't know as it was worse than with other people, but I certainly did not have a sense of goal, that I was going to be a doctor, or a lawyer, or something like that.

Riess: Did your brother Andrew have ambitions?

Stewart: Yes, he did, he was going to be a millionaire. He never made it, but he might have, if he hadn't died rather young. His wife may be a millionaire right now, with what he was worth.

He was always trying to get me to go along with his plans. I could never go for it, at all. His idea was that I was going to be a mining engineer. He wanted to develop mineral properties, and I was supposed to do the work, but I didn't go along with that idea.

Riess: How about your parents' goals for you?

Stewart: They were very tactful about that. I think they always wanted me to be a minister, but I don't think their wanting was a very important influence. I think they were happy with what I did.

Riess: There was always the assumption that you would go to college.

Stewart: Oh, always. Again, to get into the environment, that group is and was very strongly for a college education.

Stewart: Just what it was going to do for me, that wasn't clear.

I think the influence of my brother was very strong. I brought that out pretty well in the Auto-biography. And I think it led to a tremendous amount of development, for the good or for the bad, and that continued for a long time until it gradually worked out. It continued even until the time I was married. My wife knew my brother, and she couldn't stand him. He has been dead about twenty years or so.

Riess: How did he do at school?

Stewart: He was very bright, and had very good grades, although he was never interested in the studies as I was. He was much more athletic than I was. He was a very active fellow, who didn't make a tremendous success out of his life by his own standards, but he probably would have if he hadn't died so young.

(I don't know why I should be talking about him.) He had a way of looking down on all technical skills, he wanted to be where the money was, where he could get it as it went by. Well, it was an age when John D. Rockefeller and J. P. Morgan were the heroes.

After he graduated from college, he and a friend who had a lot of money--Andy was always tied up with people with a lot of money--made a trip to South America, to Argentina, which was a tremendous trip in those days. They wanted to import Chinese labor, but the Argentinians wanted nothing to do with that.

He was always full of big schemes, like that.

Riess: Why?

Stewart: Oh, I think the idea that my father lost most of his money was important. That makes a difference in a family; you become much more conscious of money, much more than if you never had any money.

Riess: Did Andrew read much?

Stewart: Yes, he did, though his reading was somewhat differently focused than mine. We both read the Henty books, but Andrew also read Alger, you know, the Alger books, about how a boy makes money.

- Riess: Do you think that boys reading those books of heroes would be making the comparisons with their own dullish lives. I mean, do you think that Alger for a boy is inspirational, or does it make him think, "Wow, my life is nothing."
- Stewart: No, I don't think a child has that reaction you're speaking of, that's much more the adult.
- Riess: I guess it's like reading "escape" literature. You expect to come back.
- Stewart: Much escape literature is full of such horrors that you make a double escape when you come back, that is, you escape from the storybook into your dull but safe world.
- Riess: When the pages of the Autobiography end you are on a camping trip, at the end of your residence in Azusa. Was that your first time out in rugged country?
- Stewart: Yes, it was, at least overnight. I had been out other times, like the trip when I killed the rattlesnake. People didn't do it as much in those days as they do now.
- Riess: When such things happened to you did you have a wish to write it down? Put it in a diary?
- Stewart: No, not at all. I have practically nothing in the way of diaries except day by day notes when I was on trips, records of my European trips, and more recent trips. I never have enjoyed writing down day-to-day records. But I have a good memory, so that I can store up something to write about.
- Riess: So there wasn't much writing as a child.
- Stewart: Not particularly, no. Of course I, like every American, dreamed of writing a great American novel. I had that to some extent, but I didn't try very hard.
- Riess: Often people have that wish to write a book after going through the experience of war.
- Stewart: Yes, although I never had the real experience of war. I was in the Army for two years, but I didn't get out of this country.

Riess: Oh, I had thought that your disability, that you relate in There Was Light, was gassing.*

Stewart: No, pneumonia.

Riess: I recall you brought it up in that book, pointing out how surprising it was that with that in the background you lasted so long.

Stewart: Well, it was pretty unbelievable. I don't deny it. In fact, my whole medical history is kind of a cliff-hanger. Every time I've come to the end of my tether, along comes penicillin or something and pulls me out of it. [laughing]

About 1935, for instance, I was in a bad way, and just about that time the sulfa drugs came in and pulled me out of that. And I didn't have to have the operation on my lungs until after they perfected the technique. I had to have a lobe of my lung cut, all from this pneumonia. And if it had had to be done ten years earlier, they probably wouldn't have been able to take it out.

I've never been a robust person, but I have a tough constitution and I can recover well. I'm not one of these people who've never been sick.

Riess: Now, in the Autobiography, you had gotten into high school.

Stewart: Yes, in the next chapter I will bring out about my high school education in general, and what I got out of it, and what kind of institutions we had in those days.

I'm working on that chapter in my autobiography. Again, like my first year at Berkeley, my last year in high school was a very remarkable year. That's interesting to work on. On the other hand, my college years I think are much less important. My pattern worked out that it wasn't the important period in my life.

Riess: Is it when you get to writing these things down that the memories come back and you realize it was remarkable, or did you always feel that it was?

*See footnote, p. 20.

Stewart: I realize it a little more sharply when I think back. I have some documents on this. I have the little high school magazine and the annual that came out. Those focus my mind. It was a year in which I had a great deal of luck. In some ways it was bad for me, because it came a little too easily almost. I never had any luck in college, really, I should say. Maybe I will think differently when I get to looking at it again. Of course, adversity's good for a man too.

It's interesting having these two books, the magazine and the annual. My father got them bound up, you see, because I was mentioned in them. Being a proud father, he had these bound; so they're all very well preserved. There are various references to me, which are interesting. I expanded from that. It was interesting looking through the pictures of the class. Many people look familiar still. People I hadn't thought of for fifty years, you know. "There's some-one--oh yes!" Sometimes I even know his name. Just one Negro in that class, and one Japanese, in Pasadena in 1913.

Riess: How did they fit in?

Stewart: Oh, all right, I guess. I didn't know either of them particularly. I think the girl, the colored girl, was very undistinguished as far as I know. I don't know what the Japanese was like. I think he was quite bright, as they generally are. He figures in the book occasionally. He wrote a short story which was published in it.

Riess: What were the predictions for you in high school?

Stewart: Well, that was very amusing, really. That was part of the luck. I made my whole reputation in that class by writing a topical poem. It was no good as a poem. It wasn't supposed to be, but it fit into the period of the times just right apparently, and in an assembly one of the teachers told the presiding officer I had written this and I ought to read it to the assembly. So I read it to the whole assembly, to tremendous applause! [laughing] I was a marked man forever after in that school. That was the year I graduated. It was quite a big high school, about

Stewart: 1500 students I think, even in those days. It was a four year high school, of course, then.

[Interruption]

[continuing an interrupted conversation about book-binding and other interests]

Stewart: I have this great love of working with my hands. I've showed you the bookbinding. And I've done some wood-working; the bookcase in the other room--I made that years ago.

Riess: It's hard to imagine you finding the time, particularly when you were publishing almost a book a year for a while. In fact, I don't know how you did write as much as you did in those years when you were teaching too.

Stewart: I don't know either. I have one theory, though. What I was trying to do [telephone interruption]...

(I can't talk over the telephone with ease, and I always blame it on President McKinley, as I told in the Autobiography--the first news we ever received over the telephone was that McKinley was shot.)

Anyway, what I was saying was that many writers agonize in the writing of a book, but I always enjoyed the process partly I guess because there was always the sense of achievement.

Riess: You did have it organized with half a year teaching, half a year writing?

Stewart: I did for a while, yes, but actually I think I did my best writing, and my most writing, before that time. I didn't start that halftime arrangement until about 1950.

Riess: So how did a day go, back in those days when you were really writing so much?

Stewart: I tried to write in the morning, and then, as I say, when I got tired of writing I could go down to the University and teach.

Riess: And you had to do a lot of reading and research to do your writing.

Stewart: I did that largely in the evenings.

And there again I went and picked out what I needed, and not too much, although that's dangerous, and not to be recommended. You may run short. It's dangerous to try to get just enough and not too much, because you may miss some things you should get. Of course in a novel it doesn't really matter--the decision to not write more about something than you can avoid--whereas in a non-fiction work you can be criticized for rejecting some matter which should have been treated.

Riess: But I do think your novels lend themselves to questions of What About This and What Happened Then?

Stewart: Yes, but those are not really legitimate questions. A novel may be a good novel, or it may be an unsatisfactory novel for a particular reader, just as some people criticize my books because they felt they didn't get enough about people, and that's legitimate criticism too, from their point of view, but it really isn't from the author's point of view.

All of my novels had scenes that were written and then dropped out, and in a sense they still exist, and the writer may have all kinds of ideas about his characters, and about incidents, but he can't get to them all. What I'm saying is that the measure of a work of art consists in what is, and what is not there is not really a legitimate question. Sometimes you'll say a novel doesn't have enough depth or background, or detail, but that again is from the standpoint of the existing book.

In Fire, for instance, I drew that whole map, with great detail--the Bancroft Library has it, I believe. And a lot of the places on that map I never mentioned in the book. They were there in case I

Stewart: needed them.

Riess: The copy of Fire that I read didn't have the map in it anymore, since the cover pages were redone. Actually, the contour of the fire was easily visualized because of your description.

Stewart: Well, there's a question about maps in books, just like illustrations, whether they are a good thing or not in novels.

Riess: They imply that you will need them.

Stewart: And then the book is likely to be published without them in paperback or something like that. I always wrote them with the idea that maps and pictures were not really necessary.

Riess: Rereading Fire, I was really struck by the suspense and terror that you communicated about the impending disaster. Do you end each chapter with a cliffhanger?

Stewart: To some extent, yes. My theory of the chapter and paragraph is that they provide points of emphasis, because of the white space. I've had a lot of fun with that, as in Fire where the chapter ends (in the middle of a sentence) at midnight of one day, and begins immediately, the next day.

Fire and Storm were written with such terribly complicated topographical background that I had to keep a clear chronology to work with, to get one thing after another. The geography skips all over the place, particularly in Storm.

Riess: Picking up all the tag ends of the action, does that happen easily?

Stewart: That's quite difficult, and I made out an elaborate diagram, particularly in Storm. The time-span was twelve days, yet I didn't know at first how long it would be. It took me a long time before I could work out my basic background, which was the storm itself, in the twelve days, and then I had to work backwards. It was really quite complicated.

Riess: How much real stuff did you have at hand, like the log of a weather bureau, or something over a given period of time?

Stewart: None. I had all the cooperation I needed from the weather bureau, but I didn't have a log. My storm was a fictional storm, and the fire a fictional fire.

Fire was in only eleven days. It started out to be twelve days, like Storm,--they were companion pieces--but I didn't really need twelve days, and I didn't want to just put another day in to make it run parallel to Storm.

Riess: Do you like the words "documentary novel," used to describe your writings?

Stewart: Not particularly. I guess it implies that you have worked from non-fictional materials, and actually I always kept the distinction there, and made it a fictional fire. Lots of people confuse that distinction. Ordeal by Hunger is non-fiction and it's hard to take that so many people think that is a novel.

That was very valuable training for writing, though, because that's a very complicated book, many sides to the account. It uses a technique that most historians have not known how to use--I don't know how I learned it--a kind of novelistic technique.

Riess: The technique of weaving.

Stewart: Yes, I think that's a good term for it.

Riess: In Ordeal by Hunger did you begin your interest in pursuing trails, in writing about people's wanderings.

Stewart: Well, I sometimes wonder how I got so interested in writing about trails, in people getting from one place to another.

Riess: I can see how your books would lead off into the next.

Stewart: Well, I don't think most people do feel that. I think they feel more the variety. And to a certain extent I do too. And I think that's far more interesting, as a writer, that there is no thread of development.

Riess: The thread of development I see is the environmental statement.

Stewart: Well, I do feel for myself that I have chosen subjects for the variety. It was hard for me, for instance, to do Fire, because it was a kind of repetition. But in writing Storm I discovered the fact that you can write about the infinite divisibility of time--the wire falls, and then the wire falls further--and that was very--I hate to use the word exciting, but that was very exciting.

Riess: I wonder how you feel about the word "tricks," which you sometimes use in talking about your work.

Stewart: I suppose it's like what people mean when they use the phrase tour de force, referring to my work, which I don't appreciate. Oftentimes what they mean is that I have used an original form, and "I shouldn't like this, but I do."

Riess: Your form is original. Did you ever start out to write just the great American novel?

Stewart: Well, East of the Giants was that, I guess, a fairly conventional sort of novel. After Ordeal by Hunger I knew I could write, but the trick was to supply the motive power. The great difference between fiction and non-fiction is that you have to supply your own motive power. It's very difficult, and a lot of people think fiction is easier to write than non-fiction, but they are absolutely wrong. Non-fiction is easier to write; it's difficult enough to write well, but it's easier.

In East of the Giants I took the Western cliché, which is the simple situation of the blonde American man who comes west and falls in love with the dark-haired Spanish beauty, and I reversed that. I had a blonde heroine, a blonde American girl who came out and married a dark man.

INTERVIEW II, Study at Princeton, Berkeley, Columbia; about the satisfactions of being a professor at a good university; life in Berkeley in the 1930s; reviewers, fans, and agents; some themes; Doctor's Oral; "mapping out" a book; adversity. (Recorded June 16, 1971)

Stewart: I'm a great pencil sharpener. My wife never sharpens pencils, and then I sharpen hers. Can't stand a dull pencil, takes all the cut out of my mind, with a dull pencil. A sharpened pencil is something you can make a mark with.

Riess: How do you work? At a desk with a pile of new white paper and a lot of pencils?

Stewart: Well, I never do that. I never sit at a desk and write really. I always sit in a chair like this, and use a board, and write with a pencil. But of course I've done most of my work in the last twenty years with dictation.

Riess: But you get into a particular place that's your working place?

Stewart: Oh--well, I can be pretty adaptable on that, but I usually have a regular place, yes.

Riess: Now, what were you planning to do, when you were at Princeton?

Stewart: I went to college, I guess like most people, particularly in those days, without any very definite idea of what I wanted to do. There was this old idea of course, if you had a good old classical education, that was good for you, which I think was fairly all right. It probably was. I majored in English, actually, which is the line I followed, but I didn't

Stewart: do it with any great conviction. I enjoyed that kind of work. I had what was called an honors course in English. They had an experiment then. We had a group of five students who in the last two years kept together all the time. That was, I think, a very good arrangement. We had the same professor all the time--T. M. Parrott.

I can't remember now who all those people were. I was trying to think the other day. You do forget those things after a while.

Riess: In what sense did you work together?

Stewart: We met in the evening, I think about every two weeks. Somebody would read a paper on an assigned topic, and then we'd discuss that, just like a seminar class. It was in the Victorian period. It was a very enjoyable piece of work. I remember it with a lot of pleasure, and I knew the professor very well, of course.

Then I had other courses. We took four courses instead of the usual five.

Riess: Harvard around that time was going through changes in their educational system. What were things like at Princeton?

Stewart: It was not so very different from what the system is now in a great many places, or was until recently. That is, you had a core, a required core of material, and you had to elect a department for your upper division work. Actually, what I did at Princeton was very much the same system as what they were doing at California in my day when I was there teaching. I think it's changed some now under recent student pressure.

The work in the freshman and sophomore years was pretty much required, and then after that you elected a department and had some requirements in that, and some electives. I got a good deal out of my years at Princeton. I think I would have got that out of other colleges too. I of course got a good professional background in English work. That was very good there, and I was able to carry that on into graduate work very easily.

Riess: Were you doing much writing?

Stewart: A good deal. You see, classes were fairly small there. The preceptorial system was in effect then and you had a small group which met as well as a lecture system. That was the great change that Woodrow Wilson put in at Princeton, the preceptorial system. That was pretty much still intact at the time I went there.

[additional material dictated 15 March 1972]

In college I did very little writing except that which came along in connection with my courses, in what might be called an undergraduate scholarly tone. I did an honors thesis at the end of the course which was a study of the medieval element in Victorian literature, and it ran to 40,000 words. I don't know what became of it. Probably it got thrown out somewhere when I went into the Army just at the end of my college course. I wrote some poetry, and published two little poems in the college literary magazine, but I never was known around the campus as an author. I experimented with writing a short story or so as I went along. Nothing of importance.

I took only one course in writing, and, as a matter of fact, almost nothing in that way was offered at Princeton at that time. Just in my senior year they established a course in what would now be called Creative Writing, and I took the section on verse-writing with Professor Arthur Kennedy, who was himself a poet of some standing.

There was only one other student in the course, and we went out to Professor Kennedy's house one evening a week to meet there with him, as was the common custom with the preceptors of that time, to hold the classes at their houses. (A very good system with small classes, such as we had then.)

The course was well "structured" as they would say these days. We had regular assignments for experiments in trying different kinds of verse. Once there would be an assignment in blank verse, and once in disyllabics, and so forth. We had very pleasant meetings, and I enjoyed the course very much. It was not a line that I followed later on, and I would

Stewart: probably have done better to have taken the course in the short story. [end dictated material]

Then I got a great deal out of the electives that I took, which I selected carefully. I've always thought of education--even then I thought of it--as opening up new fields to the mind. I had, for instance, a course in geology and a course in biology, as they called it, a very broad course in biology. I had a course in Romanesque and Gothic architecture, and two or three others, which opened up a great deal to me. I've always enjoyed new fields being opened up. Remember in my Autobiography, in the first chapter, about looking through the window? That was in a sense what I mean.

Riess: So you didn't settle for a "gentleman's C" when you went to Princeton?

Stewart: Oh, no. I got a few bad grades, because I did elect things around that way. Not really bad, but not as good as I might. But I had a very high average as far as grades were concerned. I had a junior year Phi Beta Kappa, which was pretty hard to get. I graduated third in the class. If I hadn't wandered around taking some of those outside courses, I would have been higher.

Riess: Do you remember any particularly good advisors, or guidance that you got during those years?

Stewart: The professor with whom we worked in this small class was Professor Parrott, who was a good man. I got a lot out of him. Then J. Duncan Spaeth was a great character on the faculty. He coached the crew besides being professor of English, and I knew him pretty well. I got quite a good deal out of him. On the whole, however, I've never been the kind of student who was taken up by a professor, and so I don't look upon my education as particularly tied up with individual professors. I've thought about that, and--see, right now I'm beginning to think about doing this chapter in my Autobiography, so I had to think a little bit along these lines--I've never been a protégé. I always worked on own, really, and professors didn't mean too much to me. The same thing was true of my graduate work. I did it, and brought it in, and they said, "Okay." But they didn't give me much direction. That's a great strength, but of

Stewart: course it's also to some extent a weakness.

Riess: It sounds like you were going in directions of your own.

Stewart: I don't know about that. I had a fairly conventional course. I wasn't in rebellion against the establishment particularly. But I just--within my own limits-- I just was working on my own.

Riess: Your interest in metrics must have begun back then.

Stewart: I think it did, yes. I think that was a natural interest I had. You're thinking of my Ph.D. thesis, and the other book I did on metrics, yes, and I did several articles also.

Riess: What was it about metrics that interested you?

Stewart: Oh, I suppose a liking for poetry as it existed in those days. Of course, Jo (Miles) thinks I'm a great enemy of poetry, but I'm not really. Just certain kinds of poetry I don't like. Again, there, I had a kind of original idea, worked mostly on my own, and I didn't owe much of anything to any professor on that thesis.

Riess: I wonder if in your interest in place names, and naming, the sense of the rhythm and metrics is very important?

Stewart: I think it is, yes. There's a certain romantic sense about the names, which is very strong with me. I love passages in poetry that are full of proper names. Some of them go way back. There's a passage in the Homeric hymns, a Hymn to Apollo, which is built up about place names. I love that.

Riess: Were you reading poetry in earlier years than college?

Stewart: Yes, the sort of thing you'd expect. Macaulay's Lays of Ancient Rome, and the Ancient Mariner, and things like that.

Riess: Did you "declaim"--that is the word for standing up and doing it?

Stewart: No, not much. I've never been much good at that. I don't have a very good voice, and I did it mostly just

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Interview

GEORGE R. STEWART ON NAMES OF HIS CHARACTERS

[This interview was recorded on June 29, 1959, at Berkeley, California. The interviewee is George R. Stewart (indicated below by the initial S). The interviewer is Joseph M. Backus (indicated below by the letter I). The original interview has been edited, and the final text has been checked by Mr. Stewart for accuracy. This is the second such interview to appear in *Names*, the first having been with C. S. Forester (Vol. 1, [1953], pp. 245 to 251)].

I. Mr. Stewart, the readers of *Names* know your work on place names and other actual names. But, as a novelist, you have also worked with character names. Can you tell me how many novels you have written?

S. That's an easy question for a first one. I have written seven novels.

I. Can you give me an idea how many character names in all you have originated in your novels?

S. Just for a very quick estimate, I should say that I might have applied at least two hundred fictional names for characters, and in addition there would be perhaps half as many names for animals, ships, and especially for places.

I. You have probably made up more place names than most novelists have. Wouldn't you say so?

S. Yes, I suppose that has been something of a specialty of mine, probably because I have been particularly interested in place names.

I. I remember you have also named storms, forest fires, years — and probably some other inanimate objects as well. But before considering such names, I would like to ask about the names of human characters. In looking over your novels, I have found that *Doctor's Oral* contains what I suspect to be the largest number of character names — forty. Have you used any more than that in any one of your other novels?

S. I should think that there would be more in *Fire* and *The Years of the City* — and certainly so, if you count names of places.

I. In any case — since, in dealing with academic life, *Doctor's Oral* comes close to your own experience — I should imagine its character names would have to have been chosen in a way that would insure their not being identified with actual persons. To achieve this end, was any system of coinage used for these names?

S. I should not say that there was any actual system used. I took care with the unpleasant characters to have names which probably either did not exist or would be very rare. For instance, with Professor Martiness I made up a name which as far as I know does not exist, but which in my mind was a kind of combination of Martin and Martinez. It was also suitable enough, because of being thus made up, it was a somewhat exotic name for an exotic character.

I. Another unlikeable faculty member, Professor Brice, however, bears an actual surname that is not uncommon. Did this name cause the character to be identified with any real person?

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S. Not so far as I know. The whole name, J. MacNair Brice, is an unlikely combination, and also seemed suitable for the character, being a somewhat gadgety name for a rather gadgety person.

I. For this novel, did you draw from lists of actual names, such as telephone directorics or college catalogues — as novelists are sometimes said to do?

S. I don't think that I have ever used such lists. In *The Years of the City*, I compiled one for myself. That story deals with a very early time in Greek history when I would have had some difficulty knowing which names were in use. I went through some works which deal with this little known period, and from them compiled a list of about a hundred names actually recorded from that time. I kept this list handy when writing the book, and generally picked my names from it.

I. Did you ever make use of the names of friends or actual persons for fictional purposes?

S. Yes — but I think in only the two novels, *Fire* and *Earth Abides*. For *Fire*, I had to draw a detailed fictional map of the whole region, and this involved supplying fictional place names. I tried to proportion these so that the name-pattern would give the effect that might be expected in the region — that is, there were some descriptive names, some incident names, and so forth. In this way, I used the names of a number of my friends — on Hart Creek, for example — and they all seemed quite pleased with it. Rather amusingly, however, one of them told me he was disappointed because his name appeared on the map, but he did not find it in the text. The reason, of course, was that I had put the names all on the map, but it was not actually needful to use that particular name in the story. I also made a few references to professors in the University in that book, who are real professors, also my friends. In *Earth Abides*, I used my own house in the story. At that time, I lived on San Luis Road in Berkeley, and so I used San Lupo Drive. That made it seem natural to refer to some of my neighbors, who lived on the street, and so, incidentally, the Hart name came in again. One of the boys there afterwards yelled at me reproachfully because I had put the Hatfields' cat in the book, but did not mention his own dog. Hutsonville in that book has also been noted by one of my friends as being named for him.

I. Sometimes in your novels the name of a character appears without introduction, as the first word. But the chief character in *Earth Abides* is known only as "he" until he identifies himself by means of his signature after the first four pages. Can you tell the purpose of withholding the name?

S. I think that I withheld the name because here and elsewhere throughout that book I was trying to universalize the effect as much as possible, in order to make the reader feel some identification with the chief character.

I. Another question about the same character — why did you choose the unusual name Isherwood Williams for the character who survives a cosmic disaster and becomes the re-founder of the human race?

S. You are getting, now, really deep into professional secrets. If I was going to give him the name Isherwood, a very uncommon one, I would naturally balance it to some extent by giving him a common family name, so that his full name would not seem entirely impossible. The real question, however, involves Isherwood, though he is not called that in the book. He is known as Ish, and Isherwood was

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the name that I gave him so that he would have a name from which Ish could be derived. The use of Ish itself is merely a variant of the device frequently used by novelists and dramatists to give their characters universality, although at the same time to conceal it, so that the name becomes a private, or semi-private, code. In short, *ish* in Hebrew means "man."

I. Ish's wife is called Em, short for Emma. Does this name have significance?

S. Well, the Hebrew for woman is *ishah*, which is, incidentally, now the trade name of a widely advertised perfume. But I could not very well have Ish meet a girl named Ishah. Em, however, is really a mother-character, and *em* means "mother" in Hebrew.

I. Are there any more names in *Earth Abides* that have similar significance?

S. Most of them do not. The only other significant name is Ezra, which means "helper" in Hebrew. In fact, near the end of the book, Ish refers to Ezra as "my good helper."

I. Did any of your readers understand the significance of these names?

S. At least one person wrote me. I think he was a rabbi. Rather interestingly, he inquired if I knew what the names meant, or had stumbled on them by accident.

I. Do names in your other novels have any special significance?

S. I have avoided giving names, like Mr. Goodhart or Miss Flutters, which label character crudely. If I have done this, it has at least been covered up by some foreign language and has not been, I hope, too obvious. On the whole, I think that my use of names has become more free and imaginative, as my novels have progressed and I got a greater feeling of competence in what I was doing.

I. Do you think that moving in this direction represents an improvement in novelistic technique?

S. I am hardly the one to make such a judgment. Probably the reason why I have moved in this direction has been that I was trying, more and more, to universalize the experience in my novels. In *The Years of the City*, I used a device which one reviewer spotted and did not like. That novel is in four parts, each one centered in a particular character, who is in each case the son of the preceding one. As the reviewer noted, the names of these characters ran in a series A, B, C, D — for their initials. (Actually, I suppose it should have been A, B, G, D, since that is the order of the Greek alphabet.) I still treasure the detail, however, that the reviewer did not notice there are five in the series, because there is finally a character who is supposed to carry the story on still farther, and his name begins with an E. These names also had some slight significance, or suggestion of it, as is pointed out in the book itself here and there. Archias, while a real Greek name of the early period, suggests the beginning, as we see in the word "archaic" itself. Bion, his son, has a name derived from a word meaning "life," and it is suggested in the book that he is given this name as a good omen, since he is born to his parents as a first child — when his father is already old — and so there is the particular need that he should cling to life. It is also a good name in the course of the novel, since Bion represents the strength of the city. Callias is from the word meaning "beauty," and this suggests that the city has left its period of strength and is moving on to a kind of aesthetic middle age. Diothemis is probably rather bad Greek, but I coined it with the suggestion that it would mean the judgment of God, since Diothemis lives in the time of the city when

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it is approaching destruction, partly because of the sins of the fathers. The last one is Eschatz, which is obviously not good Greek. I used it to suggest that things had gone to pieces very badly, and that this barbarism (really a misunderstood baby name) was to be connected with the Greek word meaning "last."

I. Can you tell me something about the name of the city itself – Phrax?

S. More time and thought went into the selection or fabrication of that monosyllabic name than the reader might imagine. In the first place, there is, as far as I know, no such name in the records of antiquity. For my city, I wanted a "practical" name, that is, one which would not give too much trouble in pronunciation and one which would yield a good ethnic name – that is, Phragians – for the citizens of that city. I also did not want a Greek name, because the Greeks very rarely used a Greek name for one of their cities. So I made up a name from mere sounds, with the suggestion that this was some barbarous local name which the Greeks had taken over. There is a scene in the novel describing how they learned what the name of the place was. I used the same general practice for the other place names of the novel – that is, they are not Greek and have no meaning.

I. When you plan a novel, do you work out the place names and the names of characters before you begin to write?

S. Yes, I do. Of course, in writing a novel, one often has to use names for characters who may just appear incidentally, and it is not possible to think up names for them all in advance. On the whole, I would say that this is a good practice – to have names worked out ahead of time in so far as it is possible. When you are using a map, for instance, it becomes almost obligatory to get the names on the map properly, or you will get into difficulty and inconsistency before the end of the book.

I. Among the characters in your novels, do you have a favorite name?

S. There are many such names – ones that I like. But at this time I might say that I think anyone – most of all perhaps the author himself – must have difficulty in separating his feeling about the name from his feeling about the character. If a character comes off successfully, you have a feeling that the name, too, comes off successfully, and so is a suitable name. In fact, this brings me to say something about characters' names more in general. Although there would seem to be "suitable" names, the matter is not as simple as some people think. It seems to me something of a chicken-egg problem – as to which came first. It is like the argument as to whether a certain line of poetry is a good line because of its haunting rhythm or whether we think it to have a haunting rhythm because it is a good line to begin with. But to return to characters – when Shakespeare wrote a tragedy about Hamlet, did he think that Hamlet was a particularly good name for a tragic hero? After *Hamlet* proved to be a supremely successful tragedy, the name, by that very process, became a suitable one for a tragic hero. If *Hamlet* had been a comic play, doubtless Hamlet would be a good name for a comic character. In other words, if a character comes off successfully, you naturally begin to think that his name is a suitable name for that sort of character.

I. Can you give an example from your own work?

S. Well, a very minor character who appears in both *Storm and Fire* is Johnny Martley –

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I. Why do you call him Johnny instead of John?

S. Oh, just because he is never mentioned except as Johnny -- though that, of course, brings up the much larger question as to how much existence a character may be said to have in a novelist's imagination aside from what goes on paper. I suppose on the books of the utility company for which he worked he was carried as John, but he is always Johnny in the novel. And since Johnny Martley makes a pair of good trochees, that is undoubtedly one reason I think of it as a suitable name for a character who had a lot of energy and a certain amount of jauntiness.

I. Gelett Burgess, in discussing character names, indicated that he used geographical prefixes and suffixes to suggest a character's aristocratic background. Did you have any similar ideas in using Hawkhurst, or Holtby?

S. Everyone is likely to have certain associations with name-elements. I do not think that I have any particular predilection for names containing elements referring to place, even though I used those you mention. I think I have used such names somewhat commonly, because, by taking the elements of names apart, and then recombining them, you are often able to coin a name which seems quite familiar, and yet may not exist at all -- and is therefore a safe name for a novelist to use. Holtby may be an example. It looks like a regular name, but I don't think you will find it in the telephone book.

I. Can you say which of your names have been best accepted by readers?

S. I have always been pleased with the acceptance of Ponderosa National Forest. The name is in itself an obvious one, since "ponderosa" is the name of a common type of pine. To create the forest, I shoved the Plumas and Tahoe forests apart, and put the Ponderosa between them. The name was successful enough to make people stop in at the southern-most ranger station of the Plumas Forest and ask where the Ponderosa Forest was. They had been driving north through the Tahoe, expecting to come to the Ponderosa, but suddenly found themselves in the Plumas.

I. In an article in *Names* [3(1955), p. 34], Erwin Gudde indicated that *Storm* established a precedent that meteorologists have since followed in assigning girls' names to hurricanes.

S. I believe that is correct. The question might still be raised, however, why I called the storm Maria. As I have indicated in an introduction I wrote for a later edition of the novel, the name is to be pronounced in the English and not in the Spanish manner. For some reason, quite possibly because of the sound, Maria has come to have in English a certain loud and boisterous quality. At least, it had that association for me, and I think that this is why the storm got the name it did. . . . Going back to your earlier question, I suppose that I would really have to say, on my own premises, that Maria is my favorite name. At least, it seems to be the most successful one. It has been used in a song-hit, in the line "They call the wind Maria." I have also heard on the radio that "the storm was a regular Maria" and seen such references as "Maria has become a part of American folklore."

I. Is there anything you would like to add generally about the names in your novels?

S. I could certainly say a great deal more, but I think that perhaps Maria is as good a name as any with which to end.

Stewart: in my own mind. I still do it, now, still repeat lots of poetry to myself. Usually stuff I've known for many years. I've found that my mind doesn't pick it up as easily as it used to. What I know is mostly what I've had for many years. But I still like the sound of the words, and the way they fall into rhythm.

Riess: During the years you were in the Army, 1917-1920, did you keep studying on your own?

Stewart: By that time I had pretty well decided to go into graduate work in English, and I kept on reading along those lines. I read Tom Jones for the first time, I remember, while I was in the Army. My service was all in this country, and books were fairly easy to get. We usually had some kind of camp library, and you had a good deal of time in the Army like that, not out on active duty. So I got a great deal of reading done. I even studied Anglo-Saxon. I did the first course in Anglo-Saxon by myself in the Army. I never had a beginning course when I was at college, but I went into the Beowulf class at the graduate level at Columbia, and did the work successfully.

Riess: You just had a textbook, and worked your way through?

Stewart: Yes. Of course I don't think that's too good, because you get a kind of skewed knowledge. I think you ought to have the formal discipline. But I've worked out a lot of stuff by myself.

Over the course of the years I have taught myself a great many subjects, but I am not really sure that I am particularly outstanding in that respect, for I think that a great many people do that as they go along, if they are professors or otherwise indulge in intellectual work. I have never had a class in Spanish, but I have taught myself pretty well to read for scholarly purposes. I have also taught myself enough to do something with Portuguese and Dutch. I taught a Middle English course for many years, but the only work I had in Middle English in class was a course or two in Chaucer. Even in American literature I was largely self-taught.

In the study of place names I suppose that I am one of the leading scholars of the world, but I never had a course in it. As a matter of fact, it is not

Stewart: a field in which courses are generally given. I think, however, you will find that many professors have thus worked up fields for themselves.

Aside from not having been very much influenced by formal disciplines, I have also been a lonely scholar, and have not been greatly influenced by people with whom I have associated. I have never gone to meetings very much. I didn't feel the need of it, though I would probably have enjoyed going if things had worked out more in that way. Self-reliance to that degree is good on the whole, I believe. But it may be an eccentricity of scholarship, and may lead to bad mistakes here and there.

(One thing I've said about this bookbinding interest of mine is, "I'm going to take a course and get this started right." Then the course was so bad, I really didn't learn much from it. But I get something out of Harry Roberts [bookmender] over at Bancroft.)

Riess: Where did you learn your research techniques?

Stewart: I must have picked them up myself, and I've always felt rather weak in one department; I never have mastered the question of getting bibliographies together properly. I'm sure there must be some point when I should have learned to do that better than I do. Maybe there isn't. I don't know. Maybe it's a thing nobody can do, altogether; the very fact that you're trying to find it means that you have to go at it hit or miss, and you find what comes along.

Graduate study was not very well organized in my day really.

Riess: You're talking about the year at Berkeley?

Stewart: Yes, and Columbia. Now, for instance, they always have a course on bibliography, on getting material together.

I was saved on this American Place Names book by the bibliography that a couple of librarians got out.*

*R. B. Sealock, and P. A. Seely, Bibliography of Place Names Literature, Chicago, 1948.

Stewart: They were actually inspired by my Names on the Land to do the work! Their volume was absolutely essential to me. I never would have even tried the job if I hadn't had that bibliography. That gave me a check that I was not missing anything of great importance, at least.

Riess: You speak in There Was Light of the influence of Herbert Bolton.* That was your first feeling for Western history?

Stewart: Yes, it was. Very definitely.

Riess: But then you went back to Columbia and did the metrics thing. Why didn't you stay here? They were not giving a Ph.D. yet?

Stewart: They were giving a Ph.D. but they'd only given two or three I suppose, and the department was rather badly organized. Gayley was just retiring. They didn't have really good work on the graduate level at that time.

Riess: Why did you come here for the master's, actually?

Stewart: Well, partly I wanted to make the contacts here, because I had lived in California, and I liked the idea of being in California and I figured one way to make contacts was to come here for this year. (Actually it worked out very well. I've been here ever since--the wisdom of the serpent.) And it was a good enough place to do master's work in. I had thought it was better than it was when I came here. Actually it was not a very good place, but it worked out all right for that.

Riess: Did you have the work on R. L. Stevenson in mind when you came here?

Stewart: No, I didn't. I developed that after I came here. It was a very good idea too. It worked out very well. I told about that in that little chapter you're speaking of.

*There Was Light, Autobiography of a University, Berkeley: 1868-1968, edited by Irving Stone, Doubleday, 1970, p. 147.

Stewart: What might have been done and what could have been done--I thought about it vaguely--was carrying that on for a Ph.D. thesis, and doing the whole contact of Stevenson with the United States, which might have been all right. I started to work at Columbia with Carl Van Doren. I wanted to get into American literature. I had made up my mind on that too, although I had a very bad background in it because Princeton didn't teach any American literature. So I started in to work on it with Carl Van Doren and he started me working on what really was the study of reputations of American writers in England. And I did that study on Whitman, which I published, a little essay.

I got discouraged on that really because, I think, as I look upon it now, he didn't handle me right. He threw me into it, and the thing looked too big to me. I realize now it could have been cut down. That's what a professor should have done. He should have said, "Look here, you can't do all that. You've got to cut this down, and get a definite limitation." As a matter of fact, after I decided to quit it, and take up something else, he told me that, but he made his mistake by not handling me that way beforehand. If I'd done, say, three people, that would have been plenty I think. I could have done Whitman, and Emerson and Thoreau, or something like that. That would have been plenty. In fact now, the way they do theses, they probably would have done half of Whitman. The scale of theses is getting more and more minute.

But that's the time when I quit that and went into the metrics. I thought I had a good idea to work on, and it was something I could encompass. I did an awful lot of work, but I got through it in pretty fast time. Much to everybody's surprise, I think, in the graduate school there.

Riess: Were you working with somebody on that?

Stewart: Well, I was working with Professor [Ashley Horace] Thorndyke, but not really. I mean he wasn't doing much. He just let me stew around, but I came out all right.

Riess: Whitman, Emerson and Thoreau. Did you like those three?

Stewart: Not particularly. I just mentioned those as examples.

Riess: I had a feeling from something I read that you have no use for Thoreau.

Stewart: Well, I don't know what you read--you say something I wrote?

Riess: Probably it was one of those times when I assumed that the hero was speaking for you.*

Stewart: Yes. Well, I don't know. I am pretty ambiguous about Thoreau, particularly when they start crying him up as the great prophet of democracy. Thoreau is not a democrat--Thoreau's an anarchist, and I think--I don't go for Thoreau too much. Or Emerson either, as far as that's concerned. I took Emerson's primary advice, that is, "Be self-reliant." Having said that, I didn't need any more Emerson. [laughter]

No, I mentioned those three just because they would be good examples of that particular thing. You see, Whitman and Thoreau were more appreciated in England for a long time than they were in the United States. Perhaps not Emerson. But they would be examples. Melville would have been a good example, of course.

But for my Ph.D. thesis I ran through practically all English poetry from 1700 down to 1900, and put that together! Of course I looked upon the Ph.D. as a thing you ought to get into and get over with, and I think that's the right attitude toward a Ph.D. So many of these people go at it as if the Ph.D. thesis were going to be their great work in life. Often that's what it amounts to, with people working for years and years, and they grow old before they even get their Ph.D. Once you get your Ph.D., you're a great deal freer to do what you want to do than you were before. So I looked upon it as something which should be kept within scope, so it could get finished up, and then you can do things without the supervision of somebody else.

Riess: Your dissertation, Modern Metrical Technique, was then privately published in 1922.

*See Sheep Rock.

Stewart: Well, that was a crazy business. It was the rule at Columbia at that time. We had to publish it--a very bad rule. I think it stemmed back to the old German system, and of course in the German system publication was pretty cheap, and they were very small theses, generally, so the expense was probably not too much. But the American theses tended to run a lot longer, so the expense of publication became a serious matter. I beat that game, as it happened, because I had this disability from the Army, and there was a kind of G.I. bill at that time--it didn't amount to very much--but they would pay tuition and that kind of thing. I put it up to them, and said, "I've got to publish this to get my degree." [laughing] I had a good case and they published it! They did an awful job of it, though. They just took my manuscript and printed it, and I never even saw a proof on the thing, so it was really a shame. If they put all that money into doing it, they should have done it with care. I was ashamed to show it to anybody, it was so full of typographical errors.

Riess: Is The Technique of English Verse (Holt & Co., 1930), based on your dissertation?

Stewart: No, it's considerably different. Different approach. The dissertation was really historical.

Riess: I see.

Did you have a commitment from Berkeley to come back and teach?

Stewart: No. I went to Columbia, and I hardly heard from Berkeley for a couple of years, and then after I'd accepted that position at Michigan, they made me an offer, which I didn't feel I could accept under the circumstances. So I went to Michigan for a year, and then they made me an offer again; so I took it that time.

Riess: Then you returned to Berkeley in 1923 to teach.

Stewart: I had a--really I had a pretty frustrating time for a good many years in Berkeley. It didn't work out too well. I got stalled in the assistant professor rank for a long time. I was in the shade of a lot of people.

Riess: Was it the field that you were in? You mean, in the shade in terms of teaching?

Stewart: Yes, other people senior to me in the same field, and I guess I just wasn't too good in those days. I got better, then.

Riess: Did anybody ever pop in and listen to you lecture and give you pointers? Was there any sort of follow-up on teaching?

Stewart: Almost none.

Riess: Was it kind of painful for you to teach?

Stewart: Oh, teaching was never painful to me. I wasn't the kind of person that was worried too much about that. There are people of course who never get comfortable before a class. No, that didn't bother me too much, but I wanted to get into American literature and I did eventually, but it was a long time before I really got a chance. And that's when I got into teaching Chaucer and Middle English, which I really had no business doing at all. But I enjoyed that, and I got a lot out of it. I think I did some good teaching in that too.

I experimented with various fields, which I think is all right. I like to teach different things. I taught Shakespeare for a little while. I never took very well to teaching Shakespeare though, probably because I didn't like the way the course was organized. It was not a course in which I was free. It was a course which was organized for departmental ends, and I had to fit into a certain pattern. I didn't go on very far with that. The Chaucer course I organized on my own, and then I took on that Middle English course, which I taught for a good many years.

Riess: Did you get into cross-departmental things in those early years? I think of your interest, for instance, in geology and biology. Did you make a broad thing out of your courses?

Stewart: No, I don't think so particularly. I believe in sticking to your last on that kind of a course.

Riess: You seem like such an interdisciplinary person.

Stewart: Yes. I don't think I did much on those lines. Of course you always have to get into some historical background. I always enjoyed that. I'm an example to some extent of the uses of adversity in all that time, because the very fact that I wasn't working well in any particular line, I was just hanging on, I wasn't particularly successful, I was looking around for other things to do, that's when I got the good idea about Ordeal by Hunger, which was really kind of a key book with me.* (Well, I guess the Bret Harte book was too.***) That showed me I could really turn out a book. And then, with the idea about the Donner Party, I got away, strictly speaking, from the departmental field, and got confidence to go ahead along that line.

But I wouldn't ever have done that if things had been going along well for me, probably, in other ways.

Riess: Are you saying, "Thank goodness, I didn't take so well to teaching." Or is it not really important to you that you were almost forced into doing the writing?

Stewart: Well, I think I probably had a more interesting life the way it worked out than I would the other way. But I don't know. For instance, well, say I'd gone ahead more rapidly, promotions in the department. Say I had been somebody's protégé, somebody shoved me ahead, the way it often happens in any kind of work. Say I'd got to be instructor of graduate students, directing theses, that sort of thing. It's a very fine life. Actually I envy a man who has a lot of old Ph.D. students around. It's wonderful. A man like Joel Hildebrand, for instance. I have only four that I've directed. If things had gone along in that line, I would have been doing some writing, of course, some research work, I always would, no matter what I was doing, I would have done that. That would have been a very good life too. As it was, I was still an assistant professor when I

*Ordeal by Hunger, the Story of the Donner Party, Holt & Co., New York, 1936.

**Bret Harte, Argonaut and Exile, Houghton Mifflin & Co., New York, 1931.

Stewart: published the Bret Harte book. I didn't get my promotion after that either, though I really had it coming to me.

In a sense I'd got to feeling, well, I've done enough work up there to get my promotion, but they won't promote me, so what's the use of doing a lot more just to get my associate professorship? The Donner Party had always appealed to me as a great story which ought to be written. So I pretty consciously said, "What have I got to lose? I might as well risk something and do this." I had a wonderful time doing it. And the book is still going along, very nicely.

Riess: This was in the Montgomery department that you were stagnating?

Stewart: Oh, well, before that too, even when Durham was chairman. Then it got worse. I did get my promotion to associate professor in there somewhere, but it was awfully slow.

Riess: So you really have to believe in the power of departmental politics and selling yourself and all that kind of thing.

Stewart: Well, that's the sort of thing I never was very good at.

Riess: It amazes me that you can at this point say that one life would have been as good and as rewarding as another. As I read your English department history, I felt your sense of how Walter Morris Hart was a tragic figure, and yet he had obviously had all of the things that you are describing as being desirable, the graduate students, and the contacts -- .*

Stewart: No, he didn't have too much. Not really. He was in the position of being frustrated. You see, he never really came back after he was in the administrative work. He never caught up with what had happened in the meantime.

*The Department of English of the University of California on the Berkeley Campus, by George R. Stewart, University of California, 1968, p. 24.

Riess: Then you are describing the dangers of the too rapid assent?

Stewart: I don't think rapid assent is all bad. When a man has the stuff, I think that's when you should push him as hard as you can. Maybe I shouldn't have been pushed; that may be all right. I'm not complaining of that particularly. But I think either being pushed too fast or held back too much is likely to be bad for a man.

They've got men in the department now who have made full professor, oh, at not much over thirty. I think there's a question of whether that's a good thing for them or not. Maybe it will be, I wouldn't be surprised. I talked to one of them the other day, and said, "Now you've done everything at thirty-two, what are you going to spend the rest of your life doing?" That shocked him a little. It's a problem, just the same. Is he going to keep on going through the same old round of stuff, turning out Ph.D. candidates? That's a long time from thirty-two to sixty-seven.

Riess: Because why? Why isn't it just like a job? Lots of people do repetitive jobs.

Stewart: Well, of course, that's what would never satisfy me. I don't think it will satisfy this man either, probably. I don't think that's what a professor should be.

Riess: It sounds risky to attain goals too early.

Stewart: I think it is. I've known people around universities that would seem to illustrate that, people who I think were pushed too fast in the sense of never having to work for what they got, or didn't go on beyond a certain point. Of course you have this whole problem about aging. There are brilliant undergraduates who never got anywhere beyond that, and brilliant graduate students who never amount to anything afterwards. And I think you have brilliant young professors--I think it's a kind of aging process, often. They reach a certain stage, and they don't develop beyond that.

What I was thinking about was when I was in college, once with some friends we laid down our

Stewart: ambitions in life [laughing], the way people will at that time. I had the usual things, about having a good job and a nice family and so forth, the usual bourgeois ambitions. And then I remember something that I've often thought of since, that I wanted to have some kind of work that was expanding, so I'd always be pushed harder, always have the sense of being pushed harder to do the next thing. I really kept that up. I really had that kind of life. And I've always felt a sense of, "This next book is going to be the best book I've ever done. It's going to be something different from the last one." I've always managed to keep that up quite well. I haven't lost it altogether yet. Of course that's one of the great problems with aging. You get to the point where you can't quite do it. But this book I'm working on now is plenty tough! [laughing] It's going to be plenty big too.

(I was sitting here two nights ago and the telephone rang. It was the Metropolitan Museum in New York. Some girl was surely working overtime, because it was about nine or ten o'clock back there. They wanted to use two pictures out of my U.S. 40.* That's nice, you know. Called up the next morning, and they wanted to use two more. So there is the sense of still going to expand, to go on a little bit more. That's very important to me. You were speaking about doing a routine job--I couldn't-- Oh, I suppose I could do it, after all, I'd adapt enough so that I could do it, but that wouldn't ever be what I would think of doing.)

Riess: You said the Bret Harte book was a key book for you.

Stewart: Yes, it was, and I wrote most of that book in France. You see, I had a sabbatical year (June 1930-1931), and I squeezed it out some way or other so that I was able to take the family to Europe. I got a little break, and got some money from this Army disability. They made a kind of payment, and that was enough. I was terribly hard up.

Riess: How did you get the materials to work on it in France?

Stewart: I took them along. I'd done all the work and had my notes. I had worked in the Huntington Library quite a bit on that. There's quite a bit of material there. Oh, I worked around a great deal in a small way. I

*George R. Stewart, U.S. 40, Houghton Mifflin, 1953.

- Stewart: was up at the American Antiquarian Society, and I went out to Springfield, Massachusetts. They had a file at the Springfield Republican that I had to use. Things were harder to get at in those days. Now there's so much reproduction, you don't have to move around necessarily.
- Riess: Sounds like that would be expensive too, to do your own research and have to get yourself places.
- Stewart: Well, of course, I did that on the way to Europe.
- Riess: Did you have a publisher?
- Stewart: Well, I had a kind of contract with Houghton-Mifflin. No commitment, no advance. One of their men was over in France just about the time I was coming home. I had the book all done, and he read it, and they gave me a contract then. So I didn't actually wait around, although they pretty near failed then. It was when the depression was just hitting. They wanted to put off publication, but I insisted on getting it published. After all, it was worth a lot to me just to publish it, whether it sold or not. It didn't sell. It was terrible at that time. But at least I got it on my record.
- Riess: Did you think that this would be the thing that would jump you up to an associate professorship?
- Stewart: Well, it should have been, certainly. I already had the metrics book out, and several articles, scholarly articles. I had plenty of work as far as the--well, a lot more work than most people who are promoted to associate professor.
- Riess: I have a copy of a letter here that was written in 1935 [April 15, 1935], recommending you for promotion signed by A.G. Brodeur, J. Lowenberg, J.H. Hildebrand, S.G. Morley, J.S.P. Tatlock, M.C. Flaherty; and C. Paschall is the chairman.
- Stewart: I never saw that letter.
- Riess: It's very impressive.
- Stewart: Well, those letters have got to be impressive. That was a faculty review committee, you know. Does it

Stewart: say I was recommended by the department?

Riess: Yes. It says, "His teaching, while seemingly not distinguished, is regarded as sound and satisfactory. He has assisted in administrative work conscientiously and well, where it has been asked of him, both in the department and in the University at large. He is esteemed and liked by those who know him best, and it is felt that he is a man who will continue to grow in intellectual and scholarly usefulness.

"It is the unanimous recommendation of the committee that Professor Stewart be promoted to an associate professorship. We feel that promotion in this case has been unduly delayed, and that it should take precedence over any other case in the Department of English."

Stewart: Well, that's handsome! I knew some of those people were involved in my promotion--of course I wasn't promoted at that time. Let's see. Or was I? Yes, I guess I was.

Morley was a very good friend of mine. I knew he supported me. He told me he was on two of my committees. This must have been at least the second time I was up before a committee. Hildebrand's a man whom I see frequently now. I think that's probably the first time he ever focussed on me. I don't think he knew who I was before that time. And of course Tatlock had a lot of respect for me and my work. I think Brodeur probably did too. I see Brodeur occasionally now.* And the rest of those men I think would have been favorably enough disposed toward me. At least I don't think I had any enemies in that group. Who were they again, now?

Riess: Well, you mentioned them all except for this name that I don't know, Paschall.

Stewart: Yes, he was in the German department. I knew him slightly. I think he was friendly enough to me.

Riess: And Martin Flaherty.

*Arthur G. Brodeur may actually have died before this time, but G.R.S. had not heard of it.

Stewart: He was in Speech. I don't know about him.

(As I have stated this, it sounds as if I had been up for membership in a club or something. But when I put it that a man was friendly to me, I mean that it should be taken in a professional sense, that is, well-disposed toward my work in the University and my publication-record.)

Did you come across a letter Gayley wrote for me?

Riess: No. Was that also a letter for promotion?

Stewart: No. That was when I had finished my graduate work out here and got my master's degree. He wrote me sort of a general letter I could use for applying for a job. Of course, they are always laudatory, but Gayley wrote a particularly nice one. I gave that to Jim Kantor a year or so ago, for the University archives.

Oh, I figured my promotion would come along sometime. Eventually I had what they call "moral tenure." I had been around so long that I couldn't very easily be got rid of; so I figured it would come sometime. I did think that it wasn't going to hurt me to try something else.

Riess: It was important to you to be teaching and be connected with a university, I take it, because otherwise, why not just be a writer?

Stewart: Writing is too financially precarious, for one thing. You get yourself in an awful trap. Of course writing about Bret Harte was a good thing for me, as a matter of fact. [laughing] It showed me what a trap writing can be. He was a prime example of a man who should never have cut loose. He should have taken that job at the University of California when he had the chance. That would have changed his whole life. He probably would have written much better, and had a much better life all the way around.

No, writing is--for a man who writes as I do--writing is a good servant, but a poor master. I never have had the real touch or facility of writing things that people buy in large quantities. I've had some books that have sold pretty well, but not many. But

Stewart: I did go on half time at the University, for about ten years.

Riess: Benjamin Lehman said he didn't know how you could have kept going here under the Montgomery atmosphere. What did he mean?

Stewart: He has a very deep mind, Ben Lehman. I'd hate to try--I've got enough trying to get out my own ideas here, without doing anything on him.

You will see now more perhaps why I said in my Autobiography that I didn't think I'd had good luck when it came to my professional career. I've had bad breaks on that.

Riess: But some of them turned out well.

Stewart: That's because I turned them around that way. I think the thing about Ben Lehman--I can tell you an anecdote...

I was walking in Wheeler Hall with him one day when he was chairman, and he was talking about somebody who I think was on the junior staff--you know, Ben was always interested in all his people. He said, "You know, of course, he is talented, but very neurotic," and I said, "I get tired of so many of these neurotic people around here." He said, "Oh, you're just as neurotic as any of them!" I said, "Yes, but I make my neuroses work for me." I think that's a quite profound statement. I've been able to chain them and direct them. I am probably as neurotic as the next man, but I channel it.

I'm very curious what reactions you got from Ben. Anything more you want to tell me? [laughing]

Riess: He said, "George Stewart built up the department a great deal in the flat years of Montgomery." What did he mean by that?

Stewart: I suppose by the writing I did. I think not anything else much.

Riess: And he said it was amazing that you could keep going in the Montgomery atmosphere. In his interview he

Riess: talked a lot about Montgomery.*

Stewart: He probably knew a lot more about it than I did, as a matter of fact. He was in a better position to know. He was a full professor at that time. Of course he was one of the ones whom I criticized in my department book because they didn't do more about it.

Ben withdrew considerably at that time. He really stopped writing in there entirely. His great contribution to the University was as department chairman, and as a presidential adviser.

Riess: You wrote an amazing number of articles too. When you have an idea do you just like to work it through on paper?

Stewart: A few of them were compulsive. I get to thinking about something and I think about it for years, and finally I have to do it. Others were just things of opportunity. Each was something that was nice to work at, and it might help with promotion if you were going to be promoted at all. Then of course when I got to writing the books I didn't do so much in the way of articles, except I got into that work in Names, and they needed articles. I did some because it was good for the journal. And I did others that way too.

The articles sprang from all sorts of motivations. There are not nearly as many as many people have written, because I did so much in the way of books, too. I think they're more remarkable for the range of interest they show. Also certain themes keep coming out from a long way back, like the one I did on the stream forks in the Sierra Nevada, which was an early place-name study, which comes a long time before Names on the Land.

You see--anything I got an interest in, say from teaching, I tended to see in it something that could be written. There's even an article on Shakespeare in there, you know, a little note on Shakespeare, and

*Benjamin H. Lehman, Recollections and Reminiscences of Life in the Bay Area from 1920 Onward, Regional Oral History Office, Berkeley, 1969.

Stewart: one on Malory. And Chaucer of course too. I once figured out--somebody asked me about this, and I figured out I had published something on every century of English literature from the 14th on down.

Riess: When you were working on the articles, would you discuss them? Would you work through the ideas by talking to somebody?

Stewart: Oh yes. I often talked to people about them. I don't find that that usually amounts to so much. People don't usually have any very great contribution to make, because they don't know enough about the subject. You're talking to them about something on which you know a great deal, and they only have a general idea. Oh yes, I've talked to lots of people about all sorts of things. I don't remember getting too much out of it that way, except with Storm and Fire.

Riess: I was thinking also of the sort of competitive sense--like scientists when they come on to some discovery will quickly write it up. I wondered if that goes on in an English department, or in a humanities department?

Stewart: I don't think it does, no. I don't know how much it goes on in science actually. Of course you hear about it. It's the folklore of science, about these things always being discovered at the same time, and somebody rushing into print. I don't know actually how often that happens. At least in my time in English studies, I don't remember any time that I got involved in that. I can't think of anything.

It sometimes happens, of course. Now--oh, it didn't really happen in this case but Jim Hart was much perturbed because this man in Iowa brought out a study of the popular literature in the United States just at the time Jim was about finished with his Popular Book.* But actually the two things

*James David Hart, The Popular Book, A History of America's Literary Taste, New York, Oxford University Press, 1950.

Stewart: didn't coincide too much. I don't know quite why that is, but you don't find too many examples of it happening. At least you didn't. I think it may now, because there are so many more people working on things. There's just that much more chance for some kind of coincidence.

Riess: The number of ideas you took up, it seemed as if you were hounded by the intellectual dogs, or something like that.

Stewart: Oh, I think I was, in a sense. Yes. I had a certain amount of compulsion I suppose. That article on Melville, for instance, is one of the best things I ever did. I had that in my mind for about ten years. I kept thinking about this and that. I tried to get some other person to write it. I didn't want to write it! [laughing] They'd talk to me and say, "That's certainly a good idea, yes. Why don't you write it?" But I never did it, never got around to it. Finally I got that graduate course in which the whole idea was that I was going to make the students work on one particular project for half the course. That worked out very well, that course. It resulted in several publications.

The first year, I threw this Melville idea into the pot, and I got something out of the students. Of course it was still my article all right, and I finally published it after all those years.

Riess: I guess that would have been one of the great things that graduate students could do.

Stewart: Well, there's a certain amount of criticism on that, about professors exploiting their students. But I think that's a lot of hooey really, in most instances. In science particularly. I think if a graduate student publishes something along with the professor, that's fine for him. That gives him the gratification, and starts him off. I know I've had reports back occasionally from students who were in that course. They're very proud of this, you know. I mentioned all of them in the footnote. They think this is wonderful.

I did one article in collaboration with a student (Joseph E. Backus) out of that course. That was very interesting and it worked out well. It makes a nice

Stewart: bond. He's the only person I ever collaborated with on that kind of thing. I see him occasionally. He's teaching at the University of Hawaii now. A nice thing to have both of us together on it.

Another student I was working on something with ran away with the ball, and that was fine. He (Hungerford) did so much work that I lost track of what was happening. I said, "I can't sign this. You've really done the work, so you sign it." There was a lot of my stuff in it, but he put it under his own name. I said, "I can't sign this without going over all that stuff, and I don't want to take the time."

Riess: In the notes for Ordeal by Hunger--there does seem to be somebody working with you and doing a lot of reading of letters and giving you kind of synopses.

Stewart: It might have been Paul Johnson. He's still hereabouts. He just published a book, a pictorial history of California. It's had a pretty good run, I think. He worked for Sunset for many years. I see him once in a while.

Riess: How did you two get together on Ordeal by Hunger?

Stewart: He was on a student help project they had during the New Deal, a thing for students to make a little money. He was very good. He worked for me quite a little bit. I don't remember him on Ordeal by Hunger particularly, but that was the period.

Riess: How did you get him?

Stewart: Oh, I don't remember exactly, but if you had a topic they could work on, well, more or less what you were supposed to do was give these students a chance to help themselves. I suppose he came in and applied for a job, and this was something he could do. Often, of course, you had them working on things that didn't amount to too much. The idea was that if they could make a little bit of money, why, you didn't worry too much if what they were turning up wasn't of much importance. But he was a good man. He has had quite a distinguished record really, since then.

I had a whole WPA project going there for a while. It's still all in the library, the stuff they

Stewart: collected.* They had about ten people working on that.

Riess: On what?

Stewart: I had them collecting reviews on Western books out of the journals. It's still a potentially useful thing they did. A big file, of every kind of book that had to do with the West. They would find reviews on it.

Riess: Gosh!

Stewart: That was thirty years ago. There weren't so many books. They went through journals in the library, and collected all the reviews that had to do with Western books. It was fine. It's something they ought to be doing these days, you know, with the do-nothing administration we have now. Back in the New Deal they really made jobs for workers. That's what they should be doing right now.

I had a man running the thing, a graduate student of history whom I'd known. He was down and out too. It was one of the best jobs he'd held in a long time. Then there were about ten people who were all down and out. They had some education. They could read and write, that was about all. They weren't what you'd call research assistants. They could do this kind of thing. They made some mistakes of course. They'd get books in that weren't really--didn't really deal with the West, they just thought they did. That doesn't do any harm.

Riess: Then did you have to check it all, or did you have to pass on the whole thing?

Stewart: No, I didn't have to. This graduate student was a kind of director of it. He'd throw some of the stuff out that obviously shouldn't be there. I, at that time, had the idea of doing kind of a big history of Western literature. I gave it up after I got to writing novels, so I never even used this. It would have been very useful. I gave it to the library,

*Filed under George Stewart, author, in The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

Stewart: and it may have been used a good many times. I don't know how much it's known about. It never was put in shape really, but it's there.

Riess: How were the depression years for you?

Stewart: The depression years were not particularly hard for us, because the prices were very much lower. We were just as hard up in the twenties as we were during the depression! In fact I was very hard up always until Storm hit the jackpot there, with the Book of the Month Club. That really put me over the hump financially.

Riess: Was your wife working?

Stewart: She worked a little. Not very much. She gradually got her training, and she went into social work, you know. But when the children were small she couldn't do much. In her middle thirties she started taking graduate work in social welfare. It was pretty slow. She couldn't get much of it in at a time. Eventually she got her master's in social work, and she worked for a good many years.

Riess: Where did you first live when you came here from Michigan and you were married?

Stewart: We lived in a tiny place up on Canyon Road, right up above the stadium. We lived there for only a year, though, because we were going to have a baby and we didn't have much room there. So we moved into a little apartment in an old building on La Loma. We were there for a year, and we moved to another place down on Hilgard for a year. Then, Mrs. Stewart's mother had an idea--she was a widow then--she wanted to come live in Berkeley and get a house that had an apartment underneath where she could live. So she bought a house on Hill Court and we lived there for three years.

Stewart: In those years we moved a lot. We came back from Europe and went up to the top of Virginia Street and lived in two different houses up there about a year apiece. We always had some good reason for moving. By that time the children were getting to be four and six. This was the very depths of the depression, and we bought a house out on San Luis Road in 1934 for \$3400. It was a terrible place. We borrowed all the money we could get together, mortgaged the house, and got a veteran's loan. I think we raised about \$4000 more and remodeled the house, and made quite a nice job of it.

We lived there for sixteen years. That was really a very lucky house. The children grew up there and I became a writer and full professor and everything else. Then we sold that house, and built the house up on Cordonices Road where we lived until we came over here. We lived nineteen years in that house. That's our history of houses. That house on San Luis always pleases me, because I can still go out there and see the pine trees I planted, which are up over the top of the house. And there is lots of stuff there that I still can see I did.

In a way the most discouraging years were the first two years we were on San Luis Road, because that was the depression and that was the time of the Montgomery department, and not getting anywhere in the department, and all that. But from 1936, with Ordeal by Hunger and my promotion, things moved.

Riess: In the beginning, when you had children and the children were young, did you have a sort of "take it or leave it" feeling? or was everything really tied up with this University for you?

Stewart: No, I wasn't committed to this University particularly, but of course it was the only job I had. [laughing] So I was tied up in that way. I don't know. I was in a fairly confused state during those years when my children were little, but I think it's a very trying time in many ways. It's a completely new experience. It's a rather difficult thing. You probably know all about that! And of course at that stage it looks like forever, but actually it's a very short period, if you have a moderate number of children. They grow up so fast that somehow it isn't

Stewart: your whole life after all, but it seems that way at the time. In the old days, if you had ten children, it was your whole life then!

Riess: For you, how do you measure the success of your books, or a book?

Stewart: You measure it by the quality and the number of your readers I think, more than anything else. That of course is reflected in the sales also, at least the quantity is. Not by the reviews as much as a lot of people would think. I got cynical about reviews. Most of them are hurriedly done, and rather stupid things. I don't really pay much attention to reviews anymore. I think what I appreciate most is a really good appreciation and even criticism of the book by somebody for whom I have considerable respect.

Riess: Not a reviewer?

Stewart: Well, he might be a reviewer, yes. There are good reviewers too. Of course anybody's likely to review a book. Out of a lot of reviews you'll get some very good ones and some that you are very pleased with. There were a tremendous number of reviews of the American Place Names book. They must have just showered review copies out everywhere. Some of them are really very fine, very appreciative.

Riess: Do you have any control over who the review copies go to?

Stewart: Almost none. I don't try to do that. Of course sometimes the publisher will ask you for some advice, but not generally. I can't remember more than one or two times when I ever really tried to get a reviewer spotted for a book.

I think the quality of reviewing has deteriorated in my time as a writer. Maybe my point of view has changed, but I think the quality of reviewing, both

Stewart: quantitatively and qualitatively, has declined. There are not as many reviews ordinarily.

And the book publishing companies have got awfully big, you know. There's very little personal touch, I should judge. Of course I can't go entirely by my own experience.

There's almost no good editing done. There were the famous old editors, like Maxwell Perkins, and like--well, Saxe Commins, whom I worked with some, though he never did so much for me. But he was a very fine editor, and he had a sense of warm, personal contact which means a good deal.

Riess: Looking at your fan mail in Bancroft Library, I had the feeling that your books really spoke to your readers. Did those letters peter out as the years went by?

Stewart: Certainly for me, but that wouldn't mean anything, as I haven't been writing as popular books. So I wouldn't say that that means much generally. I don't know how other authors would feel about that, whether the readers write very much to them. I think it's an important link, really.

I remember I talked with a psychologist, a UCLA man, once, who was interested in that more or less. He called it feedback. He said it was a very important source of feedback to a writer, because a writer is likely to get the feeling that he's writing in a vacuum, and these things helped me much.

Riess: Or that he is writing for reviewers.

Stewart: Or that he is just writing for money. At least that would be one kind of feedback. Money is a kind of feedback. [laughing] I mean, you know that something is happening anyway if you have a big sale. But it's also important to have the other thing.

The phenomenon of fan mail is something that I think has never been studied very much. Do you know anything on that, for instance?

Riess: No. I just read yours. People put so much feeling into these letters.

Stewart: Tremendous at times. Yes. I think the phenomenon of fan mail ought to be studied, because I think it's an important phase of literary history. I'm not speaking just of what you get from writing books. What kind of books, for instance, inspire fan mail? Because obviously a controversial book will bring out more of it than anything else. I've got the most letters of any book on Man, largely because it irritated a lot of religious people, and they wrote letters.

A book which is controversial will bring out more, and I think also it's probably proportional to the number of copies circulated. The more circulated, why, the more letters you get back I suppose. Did you get that impression in particular books that you read?

Riess: Well, I've only got up really through the fan mail on Storm. I think often it wasn't so much a response to a particular book, but it was the kind of person who wrote a letter, and for them it was really a very meaningful experience, period.

Stewart: Yes, I think it means a good deal, because the ordinary person doesn't break down to write a letter very easily. For every one that writes a letter there must be a dozen who say, "Well, I think I'll write a letter," but who don't get around to it.

Riess: Maybe the average person who writes a letter wants to communicate in a give-and-take way. Yet, when you write to an author you don't expect that. So it's a special kind of letter.

Stewart: I think that most people have the hope that they'll hear from the author. They usually give their return address, I notice. I've acknowledged practically all of my letters. I don't write very much, but I have acknowledged them. Every now and then I've heard back in some other way how pleased the person was. So I think it's a nice thing to do. If you had too many of them you couldn't do it. Storm had a lot, and I had a girl work for me as secretary then. I acknowledged a lot of them just through her. Occasionally there's one I don't like, and I won't answer it. [laughter] You know people try to show off. They aren't really interested in

Stewart: the book so much; they're just interested in themselves. Those I sometimes don't answer.

Earth Abides was the book that inspired almost fierce loyalty. I think when you hit those letters you'll see the difference. I never got very many adverse letters, but I think that's natural because if people don't like a book they're not apt to write a letter about it. They'll probably be bored by it, and the last thing they'll want to do is write a letter. So, I don't think the fact that nearly all the letters are complimentary means too much. Unless, as I say, you've got a controversial subject, and so they get mad about something.

Riess: It does indicate that they were somehow the old days of the book, when a book wasn't just picked up and put down between television programs.

Stewart: It meant more to people on the whole, I think, yes. I haven't got very many letters, not nearly as many as I expected on this Place Names book, because that's the kind of book that rather tends to inspire letters. They send in for more information, and that kind of thing. But I didn't get as many out of that as I expected.

Riess: I noticed a lot of that from Names on the Land.

Stewart: Yes. That was pretty heavy.

Riess: Did you put in a request at the end of that book that if people knew anything--

Stewart: I did in one of the later printings. I don't think I did in the first printing. That's a dangerous thing to do. You can't tell what you're going to get. You more or less obligate yourself to answer, if you do that.

Riess: I was wondering how well protected against reactions, adverse or otherwise, you were after a book hit the bookstores. Did you tend to immerse yourself in the next book, or did you wait around for the public response?

Stewart: By the time a book came out I was usually well along in the next one. There's a considerable time lag in

Stewart: there. Unless you want to sit around for about a year, there's no use waiting till the book comes out. Some people do, of course. People have all sorts of different habits, but I was always hot on the trail of the next book. I'd be well along. I rather lost interest in the book by the time it was published, half the time.

Riess: I wondered whether you would lose interest; not only that, but whether it was really somehow part of your past already, so that you weren't even involved somehow.

Stewart: Well, I wouldn't put it as strong as that. You're interested in the book still, but you're moving ahead to the next book. At least I always was. That could be checked out very easily by--well, by the data (diary of events) you have there, for instance, you could tell when the book was published, and how far along I was in the next book by that time.

When I finished East of the Giants, when I was down in Mexico that spring, I didn't have much else to do down there, I was living a very quiet, pleasant life. So I started Doctor's Oral right away. I had about a third of it written before I left Mexico that spring. But that was a very short book.

Riess: And then even down there you had the idea for Storm, I gather.

Stewart: Yes, I did, although I was still holding it as something for the not too immediate future. Then I finished Doctor's Oral. Then I was playing around with an idea of another book on the West, and a novel. I got to thinking more about Storm. I was going to write this Western book first and then write Storm, and the Western book didn't seem too interesting to me, so I thought why not just drop it completely and go ahead with this idea on Storm. So that's the way I did that. I had a slight gap in there, but not much.

Riess: At this point were you in contact with Holt, or whoever your publishers were, so that they were pushing for work from you?

Stewart: Well, you see, Holt had a difficult time just about then. They, I think, got into financial trouble and

Stewart: had administrative troubles. Anyway, that's when I shifted to Random House. Holt did get a reorganization and they tried very hard to get me to give them Doctor's Oral but I had agents then, and they didn't want to deal with Holt because Holt was in too uncertain a position. So I went over to Random House.

Riess: How did you get hooked up with your agent?

Stewart: I think it was through Joe Jackson, Joseph Henry Jackson. He was a very close friend of John Steinbeck's. These people were John Steinbeck's agents. I knew John too. It was through that general connection that I tied up with McIntosh and Otis.

Riess: And with Annie Laurie Williams also?

Stewart: She was tied up with them, yes. She split off a long time ago. They had their offices in the same building.

I had a letter from her just this morning, or rather from her sister, because she's getting old. She's finally giving up her office. It's a little embarrassing to me. I won't probably have much more work of that kind, but she kept hanging on, you know. She would do her work from her room in the hotel, that sort of thing. That's not good, when a person gets too old.

Riess: You mean it's better for her to just sever connections completely?

Stewart: I think when people get that old they should quit, retire, and make some arrangement for their writers. Wouldn't you think so? I suppose some people, like her, just never feel they're ready to retire.

Riess: Maybe she has some other person in the office who in fact actually does the things?

Stewart: Well, that's been the way it is, but now she's giving up the office entirely. As I say, she didn't even write me this letter this morning. Actually, they sold an option to Earth Abides and they sent me a check for that. It didn't amount to much, but it will be something if they sell it. But I've had difficulty dealing with her, because she just wasn't at the point where she was answering letters very well.

Riess: She got in her share in the early days.

Stewart: She was a very nice person, a crazy kind of person, but very warm-hearted. And very efficient in her day, too. Everybody knew her. She was a figure in show business in New York.

Riess: Was it with any kind of reluctance that you went big time with the agents and everything?

Stewart: I don't think you could say I was very big time. I thought it was a very good idea at the time. I was very glad to do it. It does make you feel a little more important to have an agent. I got sick of it after a while. I gave up the agent after about eight years.

Riess: I can see why you might have needed one to guide you through the intricacies of the rights to Storm and translations.

Stewart: Well, you need an agent for that. That's pretty technical work. I wouldn't want to get involved with motion-picture contracts without an agent. In fact you need one for foreign rights. A. D. Peters in London handles those. And I've had Annie Laurie to handle all the subsidiary rights. The actual book rights I handle myself, ever since--Fire was the first book I took back, so they handled about four or five books actually, two of which I have taken back. I told them I didn't see any point in their handling these any more. Anything you'd sell would be very small.

There ought to be a termination contract on agents. Actually most agents work without any contract at all, so I suppose you can take the thing away from them. You can break your relationship any time you want.

Riess: That's harder than breaking a contract, isn't it?

Stewart: Well, not necessarily. As far as the book is concerned, they do have a contract on that. It's very irritating. You see, they've been drawing royalties on Storm now for 25 years without really doing anything at all.

Stewart: Publishers' contracts have a termination clause. If they don't keep the book in print, you can terminate the contract. Of course, they won't keep a book in print unless it's paying pretty well, so you can usually exercise those clauses if you want to.

Let me tell you a little more about the agent while I'm at it, that is, my experience of what an agent can do, and what they can't do. It's never been particularly gratifying to me. They arranged my contract with Random House to begin with, and I kept with Random House for more than fifteen years. But an agent is a third party, who is a nuisance in some ways, at least it was in those days. I think it still is, from what I hear. Instead of negotiating directly with the publisher--you do to some extent--yet at the same time the agent is in on it and it gets to be a nuisance. It's just another party. And of course they take their ten percent which they don't seem to earn very much, to me. And you have to keep accounts on them too. The accounting I thought they were very bad at, generally. I couldn't get my agents' accounts to agree with my publisher's accounts. That used to irritate me no end. I thought they ought at least to be able to keep accounts.

Of course, I didn't want agents stirring up business for me. I'd rather supply my own business.

Riess: You mean stirring up requests for you to write a book on a subject?

Stewart: That, or magazine articles.

Riess: That's the role I think of with them, the hard sell. Working up some business.

Stewart: Well, maybe they didn't do that with me because they didn't think it was suitable for me, and I wouldn't do it well, I know. Maybe with other writers they would do better. But anyway, I just couldn't see what they were accomplishing. In some ways I'm sorry now, because as I'm getting older, it looks as if it might be a good idea to have somebody taking care of all the details, but my experience was that they didn't take care of them. I couldn't see why I was having an agent, half the time.

Riess: It was just one more person for you to look out for, practically?

Stewart: Yes.

Riess: There was a time in the correspondence from Annie Laurie to you where I really felt "agent" in the old sense of the word, when she described the battle that she and Bennett Cerf had had selling Storm to Paramount.

Stewart: Yes. [laughing] I remember that letter.

You recall I spoke about bad luck in my professional life? Storm was a good example. It was published just before Pearl Harbor. We had something like seven motion picture companies interested in it, about all there are, and then, of course, when Pearl Harbor came, they all dropped it immediately. Eventually Paramount came back and picked it up. Of course they took it very cheaply. You probably saw the figures there. \$20,000. Yes. It would have gone for a lot more than that with some bidding.

Riess: And then was it made as a movie?

Stewart: It was made as a Walt Disney version, which is not too bad. Paramount sold it at some time to Disney apparently. You see, you lose all your rights when you make a moving picture sale like that. You're completely out as far as the motion picture industry is concerned. I never paid much attention to what was happening to it.

Oh, I did for a while. They had a lot of activity for a while, but they didn't get anywhere on it.

Riess: What's the Authors' Guild? What did it do for you?

Stewart: Well, it never did anything for me. I finally quit it. It never really got to be very strong. I got tired of it.

Riess: What kind of powers does it have?

Stewart: It doesn't have any powers at all. It's done a little bit of work on getting standard contracts, things of that sort.

Riess: One file you have a somewhat threatening note to somebody that you would "let the Authors' Guild know about it, if they did such and such..."

Stewart: Yes. I did that, but it obviously didn't do anything. That's one reason I didn't like it.

Riess: Was instructing the reader a value that you placed high in your writing?

Stewart: I don't think so high in my novels, no. Of course in a nonfiction book--no, I didn't place that very high. Oh, I suppose it's inevitable, having been so much a teacher in my time, that I can't get over the idea of telling people, instructing people. I suppose that's natural. But on the whole I didn't look upon those novels as being instructional.

Riess: Another assumption I made from my reading of your books is that you think it's important for people to be in touch with the ancient and uncivilized in our history.

Stewart: Do I think that? I guess I do, yes. Well, I think we would have to go into my psyche a lot deeper than we can right now, to find out about that! [laughter] I don't know why. I think essentially what appeals to me is simplicity. I often oversimplify, I think. I've been accused of that. It's probably true. I think it ties in with that. The simple, the direct.

On the other side, I have a great sense of what I sometimes call microcosm, that is, of trying to express the whole thing in a small way. My books are very carefully plotted, you notice. They're fairly much microcosms in themselves. You start with something, and build up to something, and go to the end. That was in Storm and Earth Abides, a lot of them. Of course Earth Abides is a microcosm in two or three senses. So is Years of the City.

I think the idea of simplicity is the way I would put it. That is, all my books I think have this--that's what you were saying, really, the interest in

- Stewart: the primitive in a certain sense. Take even Joe Grantland in Doctor's Oral. His virtues are really all in his simplicity. Did you get a chance to read that? Well, you can see how it is with him there. He's not brilliant but a very direct and strong person in his way.
- Riess: My strongest memory of Doctor's Oral is your statements in the beginning and the end.
- Stewart: Well, as you know I've always tried to keep a certain unrealistic touch in my books also. Those passages I put in I've done in so many of my books. Some kind of partly lyrical passages. They're very hard to know how to handle exactly, but I think on the whole they've been quite successful in most of those books. I tried that in Doctor's Oral at the beginning and at the end.
- Riess: I would have guessed that that was where you said what you wanted to say, that that was the point.
- Stewart: In a sense I suppose so. I think the beginning and end of Doctor's Oral are two of the best things I ever wrote. That book is forgotten about, but I like both those parts very much.
- Riess: I would like to ask the obvious about Doctor's Oral. Who were the people in it, and how was it received by the department here? And what were your feelings when you were writing it, about the department?
- Stewart: Well, I could talk a lot about that. I tried very hard not to make any of the characters in the book seem like the characters around Berkeley, and on the whole I think I succeeded pretty well on that. Have you heard any gossip about that?
- Riess: I just read in one letter that somebody thought Martiness sounded like Ben Lehman.
- Stewart: Yes. That was almost inevitable. There may have been some resemblance--the way Ben was in those days much more than the way he was later. I think the man changed a great deal in his development. Sometimes of course those so-called identifications of characters were based on some particular mannerism, a very small matter. I often had the idea that these characters were like certain people I knew, often not at Berkeley. But I tried to disguise them,

Stewart: so that I didn't have too much trouble on that. I had no trouble that I know of at all in the department. I don't know whether there was any real objection to it or not. There may have been some I never heard of. The older man there, Angle, of course many people thought to be a lot like Jack Tatlock. He was to some extent. The woman--I didn't really have anybody in mind particularly. She was rather a type. We had no women in the department at that time, so I couldn't be accused of making use of that.

J. MacNair Brice had some mannerisms like Merritt Hughes, who just died the other day. He was in the department, or had been in the department--he'd gone to Wisconsin by that time. His way of talking--he had a kind of machine-gun talk, talk in a rush, you know, little burst and spurts--that was something like Merritt. Of course that's a very small thing.

Both for Joe and Julia I had certain people in the background of my mind. But not too much. I used myself in that one fellow there. That's the only time I think I--no, I used myself other times too. You almost have to use yourself.

Riess: Who were you?

Stewart: The professor of history, a minor character, really. I more or less absorbed his point of view and I was writing from his point of view. I can't think of his name, but he was the one who wouldn't vote in the end. But he didn't look like me. He looked like a picture I saw in a book review. I have no idea who he looked like, but he didn't look like me at all.

The people in that book I think were pretty sharply characterized, for a small book. The whole scene was pretty well organized. I had had very little experience with giving doctor's orals at that time, actually. They weren't so common in those days. There weren't so many people, and I was a younger man in the department. So it was more based on my own than anything else; there were several incidents right out of my own doctor's oral, and some other instances that people had told me. All that business about "The Blessed Damozel," for instance, was told me as something that happened to a Yale Ph.D. That was an incredible thing! This man--I think he said it happened to him, and in pretty much the way

Stewart: I told it. It was not the same question but it was something equally unimportant. It was a comparable way of going at it and trying to break a man down.

The first question in German happened on my Ph.D. examination. It was a really friendly question, just as it was in Angle's case there, because Professor Krapp at Columbia asked me to explain the "Vierhebungs theorie." He knew that I knew it! [laughing] So I explained it. I was almost knocked over when he said it in German though. I knew what it meant all right, because I had done some of the reading in German.

Riess: You had that book plotted with maps, I saw, maps of Julia's room, drawings of the cafe.

Stewart: Yes, I always enjoyed doing that, having a bigger frame of reference than you actually use. I think we were talking about that last time, how a lot of what I did for the maps in Fire didn't get into the book, because I made the map as something in itself.

Riess: At what stage in your writing does the map develop?

Stewart: Well, it differs in different kinds of things. In Doctor's Oral the maps weren't very important really, they were just fun.

Riess: Were they included?

Stewart: No. On the other hand, with Storm, the various maps were tremendously important. In a sense when I got that series of maps done, I had written the book. They were very difficult, and meant a lot of redrawing, and much work plotting the whole thing over all those days, you see. Getting one thing going into another.

I always insisted upon having all the loose ends tucked in properly. Similarly in Fire. You'd be surprised at how difficult that is, because this fire depended upon the terrain very largely, you see, the terrain, and the tree growth, and so forth. You had to plot that all out. You would get along in your plotting, and you'd think of some other incident you wanted to put in, then you would go back and change everything, all the way back, you know! After a while, you'd just have to freeze it. Keep everything going there.

Stewart: And of course as you're writing a novel sometimes certain events don't develop very much and you don't make much out of them. That was true in Fire. There were certain things that I thought would be very big and they didn't turn out very big.

But really, in Storm and Fire, and Years of the City, mostly Storm and Fire, the maps were very important. Earth Abides, I didn't have any maps at all, because I used the scene there in Berkeley. I had it all in my head.

Riess: As soon as you do the map, it's as if it was a factual book and a reader would respond within that context, and even note fallacies.

Stewart: Well, that of course was particularly true of Storm and Fire. Earth Abides, a little bit. Oh yes, I got letters, as you probably saw in there, from engineers and all that sort of thing. That business about the spark on the owl's wing. That was something that bothered people quite a bit! But I never got too much worried about that, because I figured electricity's a pretty chancy thing. That was one thing. Oh, there were a few others.

It was translated into Swedish. That was one of the first languages it was translated into. The Swedes made a very elaborate translation, with a really top-rank meteorologist as consultant. Did you see any of that? A man named Bergeron, who is still living, by the way. I got to know him, and he's way past ninety now. Still going strong, one of those indestructible Swedes. They had him in as consultant, and they practically ruined the book. They had a lot of appendices and notes, you know. [laughter] I don't think anybody read it except somebody who was really going after instruction in meteorology.

Actually, Bergeron thought I had one thing wrong, and he changed the map. I didn't know anything about the translation, though, until after it was finished. They didn't consult with me. Of course it was in Swedish, so I couldn't read it.

The great problem they had was with the exclamation the man used, the "kee-riced!" The translator couldn't find this in any known English dictionary. [laughter] They consulted the greatest philologist in the

Stewart: university they could find around there. Finally somebody got it, you know. Instead of calling up the embassy and getting some second secretary, who would have known immediately what I was trying to say. [laughter] The Swedes are great people, but I think sometimes they lack a little humor.

Riess: Getting back to a few general questions, would you say here something about education today, and what you might choose to do now.

Stewart: Well, I don't agree with the modern attitudes of young people that there's mostly no relevancy in the past. I certainly don't agree with that. I go along with President Truman. I think you can learn something from the past. We need that very much. The great trouble now is that there hasn't been enough synthesis of all these different knowledges. The extent of knowledge has increased so much that it's very hard to get any kind of general view. I think that's the problem for the future, sometime, to synthesize these things, so you're able to get some kind of view of life.

Riess: New kinds of curriculum? Interdepartmental things?

Stewart: Well, I think so, yes. I hate that word "inter-departmental"--it never gets anywhere. More synthesis, yes. Of course there are courses like that. I suppose some of them are very good ones. I can't go into detail too much. I think education has two sides, one being the professional side, interpreting "profession" in the wide sense; the other is the side that develops the individual and makes a good citizen out of him so to speak.

Riess: Do you think in education there should be time out for kinds of living, and then coming back to education? Would you have liked to have done that sort of thing?

Stewart: Not particularly, no. At least I don't think I would have. That was rather outside the scope of our

Stewart: imagination at that time. We just weren't thinking in those terms. Of course there were people that did it. As I think I said last time, I looked upon the Ph.D. rather the other way around, as something that I wanted to do and get over with so that I could work on my own more completely. I would probably not have gone with that idea of doing some other kind of work, say going out and teaching for a year for example.

Riess: So you don't have a lot of "If I were to do it all over again I would do it another way" feelings?

Stewart: One often thinks of that sort of thing. I'm not at all sure I did it the right way. But--how are you going to know? I wouldn't lay down any particular thing that I would have been. I just think there are so many possibilities. I don't think I was ever outstanding as a classroom teacher. It's so hard to tell about those things.

Riess: Your quality of welcoming a real challenge in life, is this part of what's called the Puritan ethic?

Stewart: Well, if I knew what the Puritan ethic was, or just what you meant by that, I could say better. I think the Puritans get blamed for a lot. Usually it's the Protestant ethic, I think--isn't that what they talk about now? It isn't quite the same. But I never could say about that, because it's the Jewish ethic too, and the Chinese, and lots of people I think you'll find have pretty much the same idea. In fact I don't think the Catholics are lacking it either! You've got all sorts of Catholics. That gives the general impression that Catholics are all sort of southern Italians who are never bothered about anything. Not so. There are all kinds of Catholics. Lots of English Catholics probably aren't very different--they're probably as much part of the Protestant ethic as anybody else for that matter.

Riess: Do you have the belief that struggle develops a person?

Stewart: Well, I suppose I have it, very strongly. It's my natural way of thinking. As I say, I've always rather objected to the terminology there, because I don't think the Protestants have carried it out any more strongly than some other groups.

Riess: One of the results seems to be that people measure life in terms of the effort, the struggle, and when the struggle ends, they feel adrift. At retirement, for instance.

Stewart: They really do, a lot of them. We haven't got a good solution to that question in this country. It's very bad right now. That's something that I can see pretty clearly. But I don't know that it rests altogether on that one attitude, because you do have both the physical and the mental slowing-down, which has to be reckoned with. These people could not do their regular work in many instances.

I know the last two or three years that I taught, I felt the mere physical strain of teaching more than I had before. I don't think I could do it now. The physical strain of giving a lecture course is much more than most people realize. Much more than any person realizes who hasn't done it. I think it's a question of domination. You have to hold this group some way, and it's very tiring. For that reason I think 67 is a very good retirement age for the university. The question of whether you can retire gradually and ease out, I think that's very doubtful too, whether that's a good thing. It's tied up with the actual weakening of the individual. People are not as good as they were, very often. Some people are, of course. But not all.

Riess: I'm suggesting that some people don't let themselves stop struggling.

Stewart: I think that's a fairly deep individual trait. Some people just can't stand inactivity. I'm not very good at it myself. You can get activity in various ways. I know I have tried to adapt myself to the situation. When I got to be sixty, I said I wasn't going to hurry any more. I kept that pretty well. I didn't do much hurrying. I kept out of situations where I had to hurry, because I don't like to hurry. I wouldn't cross the street until I could cross the street without rushing too hard. I do that still. Of course now it's more or less necessitated. I started it really before I needed to very much. I certainly like to keep on being active as much as I can.

INTERVIEW III, Conversation about priorities and motivation; the plays; abandoned projects; Fire, Earth Abides; teaching writing; more abandoned projects. (Recorded July 16, 1971)

Riess: Once you told an interviewer--at first I thought maybe it was just a joke--that you decided to write a novel on October 10, 1936 at 11 a.m. on the other side of Petaluma. Really?

Stewart: Well, it just happened that I had been working on a big job. I had finished Ordeal by Hunger and had tasted the pleasures of doing that sort of book, which had a popular audience. I was getting a little fed up on the other job I was doing, which was going to be a long job. I had to go up to Santa Rosa, actually, to give a lecture, and on that particular day, I decided I was going to write a novel. My wife was with me in the car there, nobody else, and she thought it was a good idea. And so that's it, I guess. It is rather amusing. It's nice to have an exact answer to a question. [laughter] I didn't quite split any seconds on it, you see. I got a round number, 11 a.m.

Riess: At that time, was there anything you wanted particularly to say in a novel or book, or was it just the idea of doing that kind of writing?

Stewart: I think it was more the idea of doing just that kind of writing. Have I shown you this book, by the way? This is not like a diary, but a kind of book in which I write down things that happened which I think might be useful to know when they happened. I'm sure I've got that in there. [Looking in book.] Yes, it is there! So that's another proof anyway. Although I didn't write that down at the time, I don't think. I

1945

~~Completed letter offering me professorship at Columbia~~

Spring Teaching (300, 1300)

Apr 16-Apr 26 wrote first draft of man.

April Names on the Land published.

June 25-Jy 1 Trip to Plumas Forest school

July 1 Begin as Chairman, Library Committee

July 9-14 To Tillamook fire

July 30-Aug 13 Lookout service, flight to Yreka, Antelope fire.

Aug 21-31 Trip to Tahoe and Plumas Forests.

Sept 13 Wrote report at Disney's. Got Social Security 570-36-7611

Sept. 18-21 Kinslow fire

Fall Teaching (11, 13, 1300)

Oct 19-24 To Pyramid Lake

52

1946

16 Jan Wright's letter offering professorship at Columbia.
 Spring Teaching (30, 130, 230A)
 18 Feb 42 Shasta City, for Board of Review.

21 Mar spoke at Pomona, "Weather in Art" exhibition.
 31 Mar Andrew W. Stewart died.

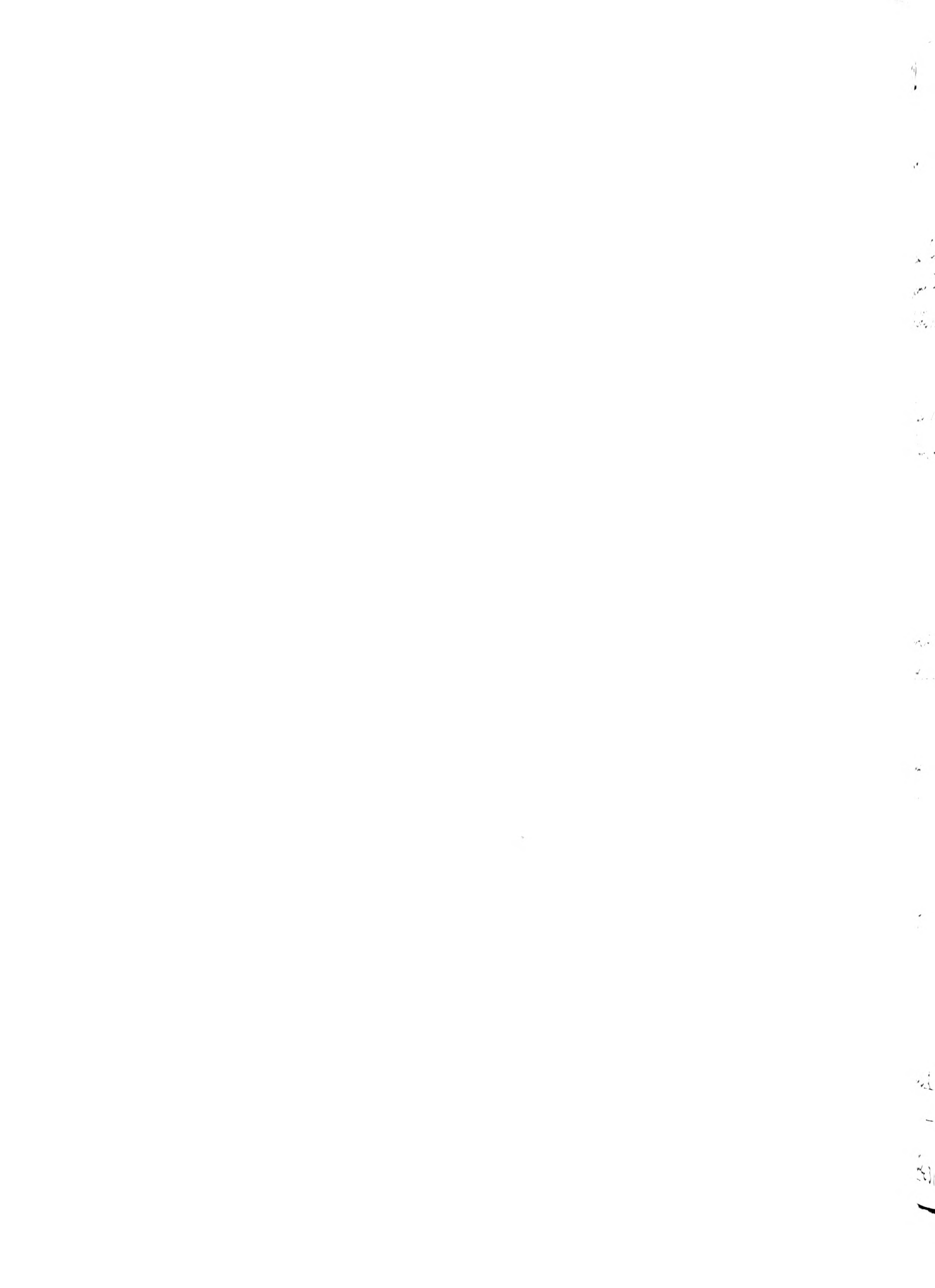
June 30 End as Chairman, Lib. Com.
 July 1 Began 1/2 year sabbatical.

Aug. man published

Oct 1 Dr. Zerkley for Allingqure, N.Y.C. Earth Abides trip.

Dec 2 As Zerkley

Dec 31 End of 1/2 year sabbatical



52

1946

16 Jan Wright's letter offering professorship at Columbia.
 April Theobaldy (30.6, 130.6, 230.4)
 18 Feb? Shasta City, for Board of Review.

21 Mar spoke at Pomona, "Weather in Art" exhibition.
 31 Mar Andrew W. Stewart died.

June 2 End as Chairman, Lib. Com.
 July Begon 1/2 year sabbatical.

Aug. Man published

Oct Le. Berkeley for Allingway, N.Y.C. Earth Abides trip.

Dec 2 As Berkeley

Dec 31 End of 1/2 year sabbatical

Stewart: made that book up later. You can look at that book if you want to.

Riess: I think it would be interesting to know what you thought should go in this non-diary book.

Stewart: Well, the first years there was hardly anything, because I was only putting in exact dates. I could write in a lot of things more or less, you see, but... And then, it's just a lot of notes. It's a very useful book to have, by the way. It's not like a diary, but it lets you check up very rapidly on certain things--not all of them very important. There's a lot more in there about trips and that kind of thing than really should be, because that gives you a definite time you can write down.

Riess: But that's good. In interviewing, it seems like a lot of time is spent trying to figure out people's comings and goings.

Stewart: Well, of course you tend to remember things, you say, "Is that before I went to Europe or after--oh, it was before." So that gives you--it's not that the trip to Europe was necessarily important, but it's a kind of punctuation mark. The stamps in the back here, that's something I started doing in 1957. Every time I got a letter from a different country, I put that down there. Those are all the different countries. Isn't it amazing!

You wouldn't think that just in the course of correspondence--you know, sometimes advertisements and post-cards people send back from various countries--all those countries! It's very hard to get another one, because they're just way out in the sticks now. I even got all the little countries in Europe, because I had a friend who made a trip there. I'd been to Andorra. That immediately inspired his going to Lichtenstein and San Marino and all the other little places. He sent post-cards so I got all those. I just mention that, because you might wonder what those stamps are doing in there. Do you want to take that book along? Because I won't need it of course. I'll be away. You'll take good care of it, I'm sure.

Riess: And it is something to take care of!

Stewart: Well, yes. It would be hard to replace.

Riess: There's a question. What would you take if you had to abandon this place quickly, at this point, in the event of a fire?

Stewart: Well, if I had a current manuscript, that had no duplicate, I think I'd take that. I don't know. It's pretty hard to say. Of course I've got all of my book contracts here, and they'd be quite a natural thing, quite a useful thing to take. And a few books of that sort. I've got one book that has all my financial statements in it. It's useful for tax purposes.

Riess: Oh, you wouldn't take advantage of that opportunity to leave that kind of thing behind?

Stewart: Well, I don't think that--these are all second thoughts anyway. We cleaned out so much stuff when we moved, you see, that I don't have the problem that most people would have. I've got my personal files still (I haven't given them to Bancroft), which are really more personal, they weren't about the books, that sort of thing. Those I'd hate to lose, but the trouble is, that all amounts to so much that I couldn't take all of that. I'd have to grab the first thing that came along.

Is that a good question generally?

Riess: It seems like a good question.

Stewart: That's like the question, if you were going to be some animal, what animal would you want to be?

Riess: Yes. What animal would you want to be?

Stewart: A seal.

Riess: That's very appealing.

Stewart: Well, it's such a nice happy animal.

Riess: How about an otter?

Stewart: I think otters are very fine. I don't know so much about otters. I read that one book about otters, but I've never seen a wild otter. But I think they're very nice. Of course dolphins are wonderful things, you know. That's not a bad question though, for a parlor game. People usually react to it, and you get very

Stewart: different reactions.

Riess: When you decided to write a novel, did you have a sense of being released from the other thing you had had in mind?

Stewart: Yes, I enjoyed it very much. I had a very good time writing it, and it all went very well, I didn't make any too bad mistakes.

Riess: Would you agree to the idea that there was a book inside of you waiting to be written?

Stewart: Well, I suppose obviously there was.

Riess: I mean, the idea that there was something to be gotten out, in the writing of the book.

Stewart: No, I don't think so so much. You mean some release for myself, that kind of thing? I suppose there was to some extent, yes. I don't think that was a very specific object.

Riess: What was the other thing that you were working on that you abandoned?

Stewart: That was a sort of general history of western American literature. A very large comprehensive study.

Riess: I remember reading at one point that you had saved the big Names book for "late in life, for old age and garrulousness," and I thought maybe the history of American literature --

Stewart: Well, it's really working out, isn't it!

Riess: Maybe the comprehensive history of western American literature might have been saved too.

Stewart: No, no, I wouldn't attempt that now. What I don't like to do now is all the legwork of research. I find that difficult, partly for physical reasons. It's just too tiring. And partly for other reasons too, I suppose. In a detailed subject, I can do a lot of work. I've done a tremendous amount of work on this Names book too. I can't very well say that I haven't done a lot of work there too. I don't know why. I think it's because I happen to be

Stewart: interested in that thing at the moment, so I can do it.

I find motivation gets to be a more difficult problem as you get older. I don't know whether most people notice that or not, but that's part of my thing, I notice. You're not working for a promotion, you're not working for money particularly. You don't really need that money. One thing and another of that sort. I think motivation gets to be very important. I have to be very careful to pick a subject that I'm really sure I want to do. I don't think I could possibly do a book for a publisher.

Of course, I never have done that, except in one case, which was my subject to start with, and that was the California Trail. But I would find it more difficult now, anyway.

Riess: Was there any writing that you ever did in order to pay a bill?

Stewart: Not specifically, no. Of course I've never had any objection to making money. In the thirties, people around the University were awfully hard up. Terribly hard up some of the time. So any little bit of money that I got in was extremely welcome.

Riess: But maybe short stories or something like that, that you wrote to pay the tax bill?

Stewart: Oh, I have written some short things, not exactly to make money, but just as I wrote novels. I was never very successful in short stories though. I never had the knack, some way or another. So I never went very far with them.

Riess: I looked at your plays. I would like to know what happened with them.

Stewart: Well, I never had any luck in that either, really, but that is understandable because making a break in writing plays is a very, very difficult business, the amount of money it takes to put on a play. Publishing a novel is a very small venture, but a play is more difficult. I wrote four plays.

I like writing plays very much. They came very nicely to me. I don't think they're bad plays, either,

Stewart: but as I say, again, I never had the knack with them.

Riess: Well, it sounds like that was a time when really an agent could have worked selling them.

Stewart: I had an agent for those.

Riess: But people haven't seen them, I guess.

Stewart: Well, they have. One of them was put on at the University, and our section club, the drama section there, has done three of them. And so they have been put on, that much.

Funny, I generally write comedies in plays. My books are not particularly comedies, but some way or other, whenever I try to write a drama, it always came out as a comedy, one way or another, maybe a tragicomedy, but that's the way I saw things. I like the sense of writing for the theater. I wish that I'd been able to do it a little bit more, or that I'd had more incentive to do it.

There's a sense of everything being spatially related, and I have a pretty strong spatial mind. Well, it's a temporal mind too, maybe. But I could always keep these people where they were, what they were doing, how you got them on and off. That came very naturally to me. Handling the theme through dialog I found very good.

Riess: Speaking of the time and space relativity thing, it seems that idea really took hold of you, particularly in the play where time stands still.* Can you remember the growth of that idea?

Stewart: Yes, I can tell you a lot about that. It's rather irrelevant, most of it. That play started in Crotona, in Italy, the old Greek colony of Croton. A terrible little town. We were there one night, and we probably had drunk a lot of wine at the table, and this man came wandering through, sort of not doing anything, just a crazy kind of Italian setting there. I never knew what he was doing. He'd wander in and he'd wander out again. And in the play, you know, this is that man who keeps wandering and and wandering out, and

*"I Wish I Might"

Stewart: never does or says anything. So we said this would make a good play, and we began talking about it. The thing developed up.

I don't know exactly where the idea of the time standing still developed from. I can't tell you that.

Riess: The clerk in the hotel keeps talking about being interested in science fiction. Maybe there was a very big vogue for science fiction.

Stewart: Well, there was at that time. But there has been at a great many times. That's not very unusual. I thought that play worked out pretty well, though. That went off.

Then I got this idea of having the scrambled proverbs. You noticed that part, didn't you? It's just a gimmick, but it's a very good comic gimmick. Those things are rather hard to make up. That is, I don't know whether I can quote one or not, but you take two proverbs and run them together.

Riess: Oh, yes! Malopropisms, sort of? Like making a silk purse out of a red herring, or something like that?

Stewart: [laughing] Yes, that's right.

Riess: Yes. I certainly did notice them.

Stewart: The play that I had in my mind for a long time I think is a very good play. It's the last one I wrote, the one-act play about the two people, where the war breaks out and they don't know what's happening, and they can't speak the language.

Riess: What was the name of that one?

Stewart: "Beyond the River." I had some other title for it, too.* I never really made up my mind about the title.

It often struck me in Europe how you were in a place where you don't speak the language, and maybe

*"Beyond the River," or "Failure of Communication"

Stewart: the radio would be going, and something terrific might happen and you wouldn't know what it was at all. So that's really what I tried to work out there. I thought that worked out pretty well.

The thing that stymied me for a long time was, I thought I'd have to have a bilingual audience. Then I figured you could just cut that bridge entirely, you see. Just have them all speaking English, but the stage convention is that they don't understand. I think that gets across all right.

Riess: There was another play, "Where is Mr. Winkleton?" that seemed to involve poltergeists. Can you sum up "Where is Mr. Winkleton?"

Stewart: Well, I think that's the least successful of the plays. It's just an old idea I had there, about a visit from some other world. Of course there was another play done on that theme, not so very long before I wrote that. I waited around too long before I wrote it. The other wasn't a very good play, but it got peoples' minds on that subject. As I say, I don't think my play comes off so well.

Playwriting is a difficult field. There are only a few plays produced in any year, and then of course a few amateur attempts. Whereas a novel doesn't cost very much to publish. There are, I guess, a couple of thousand novels published every year. So, even though novels are hard enough to break into, at least you have a chance.

I never was able to come across in writing plays really, although I liked to do it. I wrote a play in 1940 on General Grant. My agent took that quite seriously and she tried to place it, but couldn't get it across. I thought particularly on account of the war, and the situation about the war, the thing might have some possibility. That's the only serious play I ever wrote, really. The others I always think of in terms of comedy.

I wrote one, which Ted helped with some too. We thought about it together when we were in Italy. We put it out under two names--the only time I ever did that. That was the one called "I Wish I Might." They produced that in the University. It all went

Stewart: pretty well, although I didn't see it there; we were in Greece about then. Then I wrote the Mr. Winkleton play. Then I wrote that one act play "Beyond the River," which I think has the best possibility of any of those.

I wouldn't recommend your reading them particularly. I like writing plays tremendously. I'm sorry that I never was able to establish myself so I could learn more about it. The whole sense of the stage and that kind of thing as I said doesn't bother me at all. I took to it, I thought, very naturally. Expressing the thing through conversation and through action, together. Always knowing where you are and having a visual sense which I think I have very strongly. Knowing what you can do, what point of view you can express, all that. I did those things very rapidly.

Riess: How well would drama have worked for getting across some of your themes, like environment, or simplification?

Stewart: Well, it just never occurred to me, or appealed to me, to write in that vein. As I say I wrote mostly comedies. I don't know why. I think the stage always struck me as an opportunity for being funny, and then I wasn't funny enough. But that's the way it worked. Maybe if I'd done a heroic play or something like that, I'd have gotten away with it. "General Grant" was, to a certain extent.

Riess: Plays aren't about things like environment, ecology, anyway.

Stewart: Oh, they could be. Novels aren't either, generally.

Riess: I noticed in your files a parody of the Drama Section Club.

Stewart: Oh yes. That was lots of fun. That was really lots of fun. That was with Born Yesterday. Of course, Born Yesterday was the real play. Oh, I'll never forget some of those things. Ed Strong was playing the lead there. I had it all fixed up with him. He was going to get shaved, you see. That gave him an excuse to take off his shirt. And underneath there was a great big tattoo. [laughing] It said "Gertie."

Stewart: His wife's Gertrude! I forget what it was--you know, a lot of hearts and a naked woman and what not. [laughter] That was under it when he took off his shirt. I had that really staked out that time. I don't think that comes out in the text.

Riess: It was a drama reading club?

Stewart: Well, we act these things, you see. It's not a reading. We read the parts, but we also act the whole thing. It's a very remarkable group. It's been going for over forty years now, and it's very unusual to keep a group like that going so long. It's really been quite amazing.

Riess: Nobody memorizes their part?

Stewart: No, we don't memorize parts at all. That's what makes it so much better, because you don't have the strain of remembering your part, and you can really throw yourself into the acting. Then of course you get all sorts of funny situations, where people should be doing something and have to stop and look at the book. But it's really lots of fun. That was one of the best things we ever had, really, because it really came off in a big way.

Riess: Were you in it for forty years? Are you still in it?

Stewart: We're still in it, yes. I'm pretty much inactive now. We've put on a lot of plays in that time. In fact the first plays we ever gave were at our house. We even re-wrote some of the original plays as we went along in there. I had one very good line--the heroine just gets mixed up. First she starts declaiming about this country and its institutions, the people who inhabit it--and I got the other ones in, about the people who inhibit it, and the people who cohabit it. [laughter] I thought they were very good variations.

Riess: Did you ever go on with your idea of the story of the deceased member of the club whose history ends with his birth? A member of a club dies, and in a kind of "in memoriam" speech they never mention anything of his life but only what happened prior to it, because it is the events prior to a person's life that make the life.

Stewart: Yes. No, I never did anything with that. The thing there is you get tagged every now and then around the University to do somebody's obituary, which is always kind of a lugubrious matter, some friend of yours has died, you know, and I think that's what got me thinking about that. You see, you have only a short piece to write anyway, you've got very strict space limitations. If you really were going to do it, you'd exhaust your space before you got to the time a man was born. But I never did anything more with that.

Riess: Being yourself an action man, that doesn't seem a fair way to approach people's biographies.

Stewart: Oh, no. It would be a gimmick.

Riess: I wonder really how much you believe in the idea.

Stewart: Well, it's just a little slight projection of the fact that people say, "If you give me a child that's five years old, he's all fixed by that time." This just puts it back a little bit farther. The heredity and the prenatal influence might be thought as determining that. Actually I think heredity determines a great deal of people anyway. There's no question about that. I don't know how much the prenatal does. I don't think anybody knows enough about that.

Riess: Except that in There Was Light you said that Joel Hildebrand had said that if he'd gotten hold of you earlier he could have made you into a great chemist.* And I've understood from our earlier interviews that if things had gone differently in the University that you might have become a great administrator rather than a great--

Stewart: [laughing] Well, keep that "great" out of it! I don't think I said that! No, I don't think I would however, actually. Those are just interesting speculations.

*p. 148, There Was Light.

Riess: In an interview you gave after Fire, I saw your comment that you felt terrible at the end of writing it, and you say, "one of the reasons that I felt terrible at the end of writing Fire may have been that in some sense I was repeating myself, and I knew most of the tricks which I was playing." Would you comment on that now?

Stewart: Well, I don't remember particularly about the way I felt at that time now. But that's a general idea that I've been very sensitive about, doing the same thing twice. It bothers me. Of course that's what a great many writers do all the time. It's their stock in trade. They learn a few tricks, and they keep on using them. I never liked that. In lecturing it always bothered me. I hated getting around to the same point the next year. [laughing] Of course you can't help yourself there, because you do go around. In particular, I would think, well now maybe somebody's repeating this course! [laughter]

So I did have that feeling about writing Fire. I think in a way it was the least interesting book for me to do, because in a sense I was using the same tricks, and I knew the results I could get out of certain things. That failed to stimulate me the way other books have done. Although I think the book came off all right.

Riess: Is it possible that your closeness to the actual fire made it seem a real tragedy?

Stewart: Well, that might be true.

Riess: I had a little speculation: In Earth Abides, one feels your acceptance of devastation, and of survival. I wonder whether the ideas of Earth Abides were with you at all back in Fire?

Stewart: Well, I think they were. I thought about that book for quite a while before I wrote it. It must have been in my mind when I was writing Fire, but I'm not sure that there is such a great difference between the two books in their attitudes. Because they both are of natural phenomena, a thing you can't argue about, although they tried to argue with Fire certainly. I don't think the two books are so very different in their attitudes, no. If that's what you're interested in.

Riess: In Fire there's the idea that fire is senseless and we should do everything to stop fire, and that fire is a terrible force. And yet when there's finally the fire in Earth Abides, the reader is surprised that it hasn't happened earlier, and people just go someplace else, and the fire has more rights than the people, kind of.

Stewart: Yes. Well, actually in Fire, as I wrote the book, I got into a certain amount of divided feeling about this, because fire is a natural force. The landscape, the forests, and everything else in the world have been formed against the background of fire, so that a lot of these things are not necessarily bad. I got more of that feeling. But I didn't really change the attitude of the book, which was that this fire was bad. I got into a little bit of psychological difficulty there.

You know, the one man in Fire who is not emotional about the whole thing, the Super, he came to represent my attitude more than anybody else. I'm still that way, as a matter of fact. I don't mind cutting down trees. It's part of the cycle. I think small trees are just as beautiful as big trees, as long as you give them a chance to grow. Just preserving all these forests doesn't strike me as so important, so long as you don't wreck things by bad cutting of the trees and destroying the land, and all that. That was the attitude of that man, you see. He saw it in the larger pattern. The other fellow got emotional about it. And of course he made mistakes partially because he got emotional about it. He tried to save the wrong things.

Riess: How long was Earth Abides in the back of your mind?

Stewart: I don't know when the idea first came to me. I suppose it was probably five or ten years in my mind.

Riess: Was there ever any question about who would survive? About whether Joey would survive?

Stewart: I rewrote the middle part of that book more severely than I ever rewrote any other book, novel or otherwise. Right now, offhand, I can't tell you all the details that got shifted around in there. I think Joey's death was always part of it, though. As I say, that was the part that gave me the most trouble. How do

Stewart: you think it stands up to the rest of the book now?

Riess: I don't find weak parts in it, but I wondered whether the Joey thing was something that you hashed around at all in your mind, whether in thinking about the book over ten years your thoughts were growing and changing in ways that would affect the outcome of the book.

Stewart: I wish I could tell you more precisely, because as I say, I have a hard enough time keeping all my books in mind, much less keeping in mind the books they might have been if they had been some other way. [laughing] I'm a little bit vague about what it was. I remember the first part carried right through. That was fine. I really didn't pause on that. Then the middle of a novel, I think, generally speaking, is the hardest part to write. You realize that?

You start out fresh, with a strong idea, or you shouldn't be writing at all. And that rush carries you through maybe a third of the way. Then you get more and more complications in the middle and it gets difficult. Then, after a certain part, you see the light at the end of the tunnel, and you come through. And in Earth Abides the middle part would about end with the death of Joey. After that, you see, things were laid out. They are laid out in the writer's mind, anyway. He can work from there more easily.

The whole business in the middle there--the first part of the Second Book, or whatever it's called there--that was the difficult part.

Riess: The book has two sections that are called the "Quick Years" and then in between them--

Stewart: There are three parts, you see. The third part is quite short. The third part was fine to do too. That went very well just as the first part did. The middle part was the difficult one. I'm just glad that it got good enough so that you don't think about it as being the weak part.

Riess: Who did you model Ish in old age on?

Stewart: I don't know. I've always liked doing old people. There are quite a few old people in my books, and I

Stewart: wrote them before I was old, too! But there's something that has always appealed to me with writing about them. I don't know why.

Did I tell you about the boy who came up from Stanford to talk about Earth Abides a few months ago? I asked him what his favorite part of it was, or what he thought of it, just to make conversation. He picked out immediately--he said the part he thought was the great part was the conversation of Ish and Jack at the first part of the last book. He said, "Oh, that's just right."

I don't know how much of it was he reflecting his own relationship with his father or something. But I think that's a good part too. That's a very successful part, where he talks about the Americans.

Riess: Was this anything like what your father was as you remember?

Stewart: I don't think particularly. I didn't have that consciously in mind anyway.

Riess: What's that pinching of Ish all about?

Stewart: Well, that's just the way some people do with their gods, you know. They have that curious attitude. They have great respect and fear for them in some ways, but the gods have got to behave too! I don't know exactly where that comes from, but I'm sure there are things I've read about.

Riess: When Man was coming out, you wanted to do it under a different name.

Stewart: Yes. I wanted it to have no name at all. After all, it's called Man, an Autobiography. I just wanted to put it out that way, but they wanted to use my name. It's kind of silly the way it is now.

Riess: But you could have prevailed, couldn't you?

Stewart: Oh, I suppose, yes, but I don't know. I never like to fight too much with my publishers. After all, they've got to think of it in terms of how they can promote the book and so forth.

- Riess: Then also in the early notes and things on Man, it sounds like it was thought of as a novel.
- Stewart: In a sense it is, I suppose. It depends on what you mean by a novel. "Novel" is a very vague term.
- Riess: Fiction.
- Stewart: Yes. Well, it still is difficult. Because after all, it obviously is a kind of fictionalized scheme, this personification of man. (If you can call it personification.) And in a sense, using the form of "I," for instance, is a novelistic device. What I don't like is having Ordeal by Hunger called a novel. I guess I've spoken about that already. I don't mind it in Man because in a sense it is.
- Riess: I wonder if the decision to sell it through that newly formed nonfiction book club helped sales.
- Stewart: Well, that didn't amount to much, I think, one way or the other. Apparently it was one of the times when they were trying to start a lot of book clubs and that was another one. I don't think it ever got anywhere very much. I don't think that made much difference.
- Riess: Did you do much revision of Man?
- Stewart: No, not much. You can probably find some of the manuscript in there. No, I wrote that very fast.
- Riess: Did any of the readers at Random House give you any warning of the furor there would be about the book?
- Stewart: No, I don't think they did. That was probably mostly a result of the fact that part of it was published in Reader's Digest. That took it to a group of people that would be stirred up about a problem like that. You mean the religious?
- Riess: Yes, and the evolutionary things.
- Stewart: Yes, that surprised me. Then you see, even more surprising was the fact that the Norwegian publisher wouldn't publish it. He got a contract on it, and then wanted to revise it, to take that part out. I wouldn't let him. That was one time I did stand on my rights. And he never published it. That surprised

Stewart: me very much, because Norway's a pretty advanced country, after all.

Riess: Yes. Do you think it was the way the synopsis was handled that got to the people in Reader's Digest, or do you just think it was the readership of Reader's Digest?

Stewart: Well, I never studied the way it was presented particularly. I don't like those condensations anyway. I think it was probably mostly the type of people it got to.

Riess: Do you have any kind of control over the condensations?

Stewart: No, you don't have, really, and it's a bad system. I wouldn't want to have anything to do with the condensation of my own book. You just let it go, and the publisher always likes to sell it. They pay pretty well. People get some idea of the book. I don't know. I'm inclined to think that the best thing for an author to do would be not to allow any condensations at all. They're not satisfactory things.

Riess: Fire, condensed in Ladies Home Journal, became a tale for women, and in Reader's Digest, Judith was left out completely.

Stewart: Well, you've studied it more than I have! But that's natural, I suppose, that that would be the difference in the two. That is funny, though.

Riess: Judith does come mostly in the beginning and the end of Fire, as parentheses, kind of.

Stewart: Well, she could be left out.

- Riess: As I went through stuff in Bancroft Library, a lot of it was ideas written on one side of paper, and on the back would be an old exam paper from one of your classes.
- Stewart: Yes, I recycled even in those days!
- Riess: One of the exams was to write an essay on Thoreau's attitudes--based on the philosophy in Walden--what they might consistently be at the present toward price regulation, jet travel, fascism, strikes, etc. And then you warned the student not to make it "an imaginative orgy, but a reasonable argument." Now I wonder, actually, what kind of a teacher you were. If you had gotten back a really good imaginative orgy, wouldn't that have been the one that you would have liked?
- Stewart: Yes, if it were really good. But then the trouble is that if the student hasn't read the book and doesn't know anything about Thoreau and just tries to write a romance which doesn't--you don't want to give them much credit. You aren't going to get a really good thing, you know.
- Riess: In that period of time?
- Stewart: No. It's very very rare that you get an examination which has any real literary quality to it, naturally. Occasionally you do.
- Riess: How did your students approach you as an author? What did your being an author do?
- Stewart: Well, I wouldn't say that most of them knew anything about it in the first place. [laughter] You'd be surprised at how much students keep their professors in compartments, you know. "This man's a professor, and he doesn't do anything else." They're always very much amazed to see that you may be married or have a family or something like that. I think that was particularly true in my case. Lots of them didn't know I wrote books at all. Sometimes they'd come around and be surprised, you know, when they found out.
- I know there were a lot who did know about it, and did like my books and very possibly took some courses because I was a writer, but I was, on the

Stewart: whole, very little conscious of it. They didn't do much about it. They didn't come in and "ooh and ah" about it.

Riess: Did they bring you a bunch of their writing?

Stewart: No, not very much. Most students are too diffident to do that sort of thing. Except for the students, of course, to whom I was giving a writing course. I didn't encourage it either, because in the first place almost all the writing would be bad, and in the second place, you can't do much about it. At least I was never able to do very much about it. You'd have to have just exactly the right student in the right circumstances where you could say, "Go on and do something," and that doesn't work out very well. So I never really encouraged them to hand in a lot of stuff, except again the students I had in the writing course.

Riess: Did you have some good ones there?

Stewart: Oh yes. I've kept up with some of them. Over a long period of time you maybe have some influence on them. Of course the attitude toward the teaching of writing is a strange one really. A student takes a three hour course and then wonders why he isn't a novelist. But if he were going to be, say, a concert pianist, he would expect to take years and years of lessons to get the technique. But some way or other, writing is--the idea is that anybody can write, if you just have a little bit of facility. They don't work hard enough at it.

Riess: A little passion--

Stewart: Sometimes it's true. There are people who don't need any more than that, but the other analogy holds to some extent--again, if you're trying to be an artist, you would take years and years of expensive lessons, and all sorts of training.

Riess: Once. I think it has changed.

Stewart: It has changed a good deal I suppose now. Just to look at some things it has, anyway.

A lot comes with natural ability in all those things. That used to be my answer when people would

Stewart: ask me, "Why don't they teach people to write better? Why can't you train authors in the university?" I would say, "Well, we could if you would give them to us for five or ten years. Then we could make something out of them. But you can't do it in one semester."

Riess: What writers do you like these days?

Stewart: Well, I've read so much, of course, it's hard for me to pick out what I really like or approve of at the present time. A lot of things I don't like. I could tell you something about that.

For instance, I don't like these vague and uncertain things that you don't know whether to take as allegory or symbolism or whether it's a real story. I sometimes think when you can't tell a good story you call it symbolism. That sort of thing I don't like. I like good clean-cut writing, something that goes ahead and does not confuse the issue by its style.

Take a thing like Faulkner's Absalom--most of Faulkner, not all of Faulkner. But to try and get into that book and try to get down what it really tells, it's a quite impossible kind of melodrama, and yet it's so difficult to follow what's happening that some way or other it seems very important. I can't see that it really is, when you get right down to it. That's one thing.

I like Hemingway tremendously, good Hemingway. I think he has in some respects the best approach from my point of view. I don't go for all his hooey on certain ideas, but I like his approach, his writing.

Riess: You mean like his thing about courage, and manliness?

Stewart: I like courage. No, the courage idea I take pretty well. I think that's what counts too. I don't go for his super-manhood necessarily, no. I'm not so much for that.

Oh, I don't know. Ask me another question. I don't seem to be perking on that one.

Riess: Well, that was related to the idea that I don't see how a person can teach writing anyway.

Stewart: Well, one thing about a writing course in a university, is that it gives the person a certain amount of time to work at it. You work at that, and you can get three units credit, so that justifies spending some time from the point of view of the university on it. I think that's probably what's most important. The student can get the association with some other students who are writing too, and that has some importance. And he can get something out of the professor. I've influenced some people, I know-- Milton Lott did very well on the novel he started in that class, but he wasn't particularly complimentary to me because he says what I really accomplished was I told him to get started writing, and-- [laughing] he'd been fussing around, "should I do it this way or should I do it that way?" and that kind of thing. So I finally just shoved him into it and when he got going he was fine. Something like that is probably important. After all, he wrote beautifully, that part of that book. Then he never really got going on another one. I think he published three books.

Riess: You have said that every author needs three books.

Stewart: Yes. The first novel's hard, and the second novel is harder, and the third novel is hardest. If you get by the third novel, then you're probably all right. Lots of people never get beyond the first novel of course.

Riess: I noted that Man was used as a textbook by some teachers.

Stewart: It was used to some extent that way, yes.

Riess: What do you think of that idea?

Stewart: I thought it was fine. It was a good textbook. [laughing] It never really went too far, though. It's oversimplified, I guess. Didn't appeal to the academic mind too much.

Riess: Did you ever do any additional material for Man?

Stewart: No. There never was any call for it.

Riess: There was a point where you were thinking of doing "Man in the Atomic Age." Maybe it was being reissued?

- Stewart: I don't think so, but I did a little introduction for it, not so long ago, for a French edition. There are so many of these reprints, I can't remember them all. I'm not sure that I've ever got a copy of that French edition. It may not be published yet.
- Riess: I wondered whether you had ever had the occasion to update American Ways of Life?
- Stewart: I thought about that very definitely. I tried to get the publisher to reissue it, and they thought it ought to be brought up to date. At the time I didn't think there was much sense in that. About the only part that would have to be changed very much would be the one on sex. I think there has been a considerable shift in that.
- Riess: Did you read the Greening of America, by Charles Reich? [Random House, 1970]
- Stewart: Yes.
- Riess: What did you think of that?
- Stewart: It didn't impress me very much. I didn't think that he was critical enough. His classes--he took all the best possible examples in each one. His young person was just a wonderful young person, and his old conservative was just a wonderful old conservative. You don't get those people in too large numbers. I didn't think too much of it for that reason.

I would think it's the kind of book that has been read a great deal, and probably has had a considerable amount of influence, but I think it's going to be a book that will be forgotten very fast. I think that people are snatching at straws around here now. He was about the only optimistic thing that you could lay your hands on. I don't think it will be a book which has a very long lasting influence.

Riess: I was interested in some other ideas in your files [Carton 6, The Bancroft Library]. One was to write the story of a god.

Stewart: Yes, that's an idea that has intrigued me. I never did it, and don't think I ever shall. It's been done to some extent by various people. That would fit in, you see, very well with the kind of thing that I work with at times, the history of an idea put into a story. That was to have the god talking, you see, himself. His career, how he starts as a small god and works up to be the god of a powerful people. After a while, of course, he fades out. When he gets to the end, all that is left of him now is the fact that when we say "Eeny, meeny, miney, moe," that's the remnant of his ritual. As long as children say, "Eeny, meeny, miney, moe," he still has a little bit of life.

As I remember it, it would have worked out that these other gods tell him, "You're gone. You have nothing left." And he has to hunt around until he finds children saying this, so that he can still keep on going.

Riess: In notes from 1949 you mention your satires. What were your satires?

Stewart: Well, those were some little things I wrote, which my agents never were able to do anything with. They probably weren't marketable, but I liked them. They were three little pieces, just the usual trick--at least it's rather usual for me--of just changing the rules of something and seeing the way it would work. This is the old device of the visitor from another world, you know. One section was the question of what if they had reversed our situation. With us the intake of food is a social occasion, but you see, the elimination of food is obscene, or semi-obscene, a thing that you do in privacy. I just reversed it the other way. You went into a separate compartment to eat your food, but you got together when you were eliminating it. That was the idea that one was worked out on. The others--I don't remember exactly how they worked out, but that was the general idea.

Riess: I would like to know what the other two would have been! You can't say to me that they were in a similar vein and just leave it at that! [laughter]

- Stewart: Well, one of them had something to do with sex, I remember that. I can't remember exactly how I handled that one. I've still got copies of those things around somewhere. They're probably in the Bancroft Library. I'm not absolutely sure. I've got a little bit of stuff up in my office. I'd be glad to have you read it. I've got several things that you might be interested in.
- Riess: Oh. And I wanted to find out what happened to the unfinished murder, the detective story. [Carton 5]
- Stewart: Isn't it all there?
- Riess: Well, the files are labeled "unfinished" and so I took you at your word that it was unfinished.
- Stewart: I think it's probably unfinished in the sense that I never sent it for publication. I think the ending is there. It's unfinished in a qualitative sense.
- Riess: Because that would seem like really kind of a different writing for you.
- Stewart: Oh, yes, I did that very early on. That must have been done in the early thirties, before I had ever published a novel.

I have another partial manuscript also, that fits in with those things. Oh, I got sort of tired of working on this. It's not a bad idea, though. This was again the change in the rules idea. How you work out, for instance, if the laws of gravity suddenly changed, what would happen? Which you can work out pretty well. Of course you don't know all the side effects.

And then another one--of course a great deal depends upon what angle the earth's axis tips at, and there are lots of theories that it has changed its position. You see, if you consider, say, that it changed and went straight up, that would make absolutely appalling differences in the world. It would change the climatic cycles completely. Or if you changed the rate of the spin of the earth, that would do all sorts of things that you don't think of offhand.

Stewart: I was going to carry that on into less physical and more social matters. The idea has always intrigued me, for instance, that if all the males in the world should die, it would be a very interesting situation. All the men, say, except the unborn babies. Then, you, see, the race would carry on all right, but you would have just terrific social problems. There would be no men, and carrying on the mere physical set-up of the world would be extremely difficult for women. There's no doubt they could do it, but there are so many jobs there are no women trained for, really at all. There are some women doctors. They would be tremendously outnumbered of course. They could hardly carry on. But there are very few women engineers. They are perfectly capable of doing these things, but they just wouldn't know how. They'd have an awful time keeping up any going concern.

Then of course you'd have the social problem. Here would be these babies born, and here they'd be growing up in a wholly feminine world, all these older women eyeing them speculatively as they approach puberty. And of course, whether they would have any interest in the older women, whether they wouldn't be much interested in their contemporaries, the girls that were growing up. So you've got really a whole set-up there. That's a fantasy that's intriguing.

I had another book I was figuring on. I did some work on it too, but I gave that up because it faced too many of the same problems as Earth Abides. I wanted to have a book in which you had the atomic destruction, with a certain number of people surviving. I'll bet right now there are bombproofs in Texas or someplace where people are stocked to live for years. If you had as much money as some of these people in Texas, wouldn't you do that? You could live through almost indefinitely. It would be difficult to work out, but you'd get yourself a pretty good hideout I'd think, stocked with enough food, and air-purifying equipment. If you have enough energy you can do anything like that. I talked that over with chemists and so forth. There are a lot of interesting ideas, but I felt I was repeating myself too much.

Riess: And how would you stand on the whole question of what kind of life to repeat when it became possible to come above ground? You had done the whole fantasy of Earth Abides.

Stewart: Well, that was part of the trouble. I didn't want to start the whole thing over again. My idea on this one though, was not to deal with the reconstruction. In fact I was rather going to end with a ship coming in from Australia or something like that. It turned out in the end that it had not covered the whole earth; there was still a sufficient amount of the earth left habitable. That way I got out of the problem of the reconstruction. Things were just as bad as ever, in other words.

Riess: One of the things, of course, about Earth Abides, is that the earth isn't devastated.

Stewart: That was definite from the very beginning. Of course that was conceived before the time of the atomic bomb. In a way it's curious people were interested as much in it as they were, because they were thinking so much in terms of the atomic bomb--as they still are. But that was inherent in the book from the very beginning, the fact that it was only man who was removed.

INTERVIEW IV, Some other writers and poets:
Hemingway, H.L. Davis, Carl Sandburg, Robert Frost;
"stages" of writing a book (maybe); the collected
work in retrospect. (Recorded September 21, 1971)

Stewart: My wife said you have a lot of questions for me, and I can just lie back and answer them.

Riess: When we were on vacation, I read the Paris Review interviews. Do you know the series?

Stewart: Yes. I have never read them though.

Riess: I thought that I would come to this interview with you more or less as if I had never been here before, and treat you strictly as a writer. I think I've been taking you on your word as a university person who also did a lot of writing, and now I want to think of you as just a writer.

Did you subscribe to the Paris Review?

Stewart: No.

Riess: Did you know anybody that did?

Stewart: I don't remember anybody. There may have been, though.

Riess: In what way, in the twenties and thirties, would you have been following contemporary writing?

Stewart: In the twenties I did not follow it very much. In the thirties I worked around to it more. I read reviews like the New York Times--I always kept in touch with that--which gives you the best general coverage. And I saw other reviews too, like the

- Stewart: Saturday Review and the Herald Tribune Books. I never got into the more esoteric reviews, very much.
- Riess: Was there a group of people in Berkeley who were interested in this kind of expatriate movement?
- Stewart: I don't think so very much. Howard Baker and Dorothy Baker were in that to some extent. Howard was over there during the twenties, and knew Gertrude Stein and some of the other people. He was about the only one I can think of really, around Berkeley.
- Riess: Was there anybody who would have been teaching anything so contemporary on campus?
- Stewart: I don't think we went in much for contemporary at that time. Of course, T. K. Whipple was doing his writing then, and he was probably doing something on that in his courses. Do you know his work? He did a book or two on contemporary authors. But it wasn't the expatriate particularly. He was not much interested in that. He wrote more on people like Sinclair Lewis, and Willa Cather. A more American group.
- Riess: Would the students at that point have been modelling themselves on--for instance, what was the effect on writers of Hemingway's The Sun Also Rises?
- Stewart: Oh. Well, that had quite a big effect. The other Hemingway books too. Farewell to Arms. They had a big effect, I think, on students and everybody else. There was a whole Hemingway wave of writing at that time. It never affected me directly, I never started writing about that kind of thing, but I think his whole general attitude affected me considerably.
- Riess: What was his whole general attitude? How would you sum it up?
- Stewart: I opened myself up on that one! Well, in the first place, his style, that marvelously clean-cut style with which he wrote, which seems to me so far removed from Gertrude Stein, who was supposed to have had an influence on him. They seem to me to be completely opposite types. And I think that certainly had its influence on me, although I never directly imitated it.

- Stewart: And I think his ideas had an influence too. That is, his liking to get close to the subject, and really experience what he was writing about, which I think is a trait with Hemingway.
- Riess: To experience it in the process of writing about it?
- Stewart: No, I think before he wrote about it.
- Riess: I wanted to ask you about literary round-table things.
- Stewart: We had very little of that, as far as I was in contact with it, anyway. I think not enough. I remember Louis Simpson, the poet, was out here in the department for five years or so, and one reason he left was he didn't think we had enough of that sort of thing. He put it in terms of street cafes.
- Riess: And when was it that he was here?
- Stewart: He was here about 1955 to '62, something like that.
- Riess: And there wasn't anything here then?
- Stewart: Well, I don't know that it's particularly characteristic in the United States in general, is it?
- Riess: I have the image, correct or not, of places like the Algonquin.
- Stewart: Yes, there is some of that. The Southern Review group, also.
- Riess: I guess the New York Algonquin kind of people were humorists mostly.
- Stewart: I think they were more than that. They were critics.
- Riess: It opens up a consideration of why people write. It seems almost, for some of the people who write, that if there were that sort of round table thing, it would take a lot of the steam off. I mean, if the point of writing is communication, once you've done it, you've done it.
- Stewart: I would rather go along with that opinion, that all this talking about it isn't particularly good. There tend to be people who talk about writing, and people

Stewart: who write. I would rather tend to go along with that idea. Which is what you were suggesting.

Riess: I know that you--having seen one end of it--have had a very long correspondence with H. L. Davis, and I wondered if he was somebody with whom, for instance in your letters, you would develop ideas--or whether there was anybody with whom in correspondence you would develop ideas for a book.

Stewart: No, I don't think there was. I don't think I ever developed very many ideas with him. There are a fair number of letters there, but of course it's spread over a good many years too. It was not a very active back and forth conversation.

Riess: It's so vivid when a letter comes.

Stewart: Yes, he was a marvelous writer. Now he, during most of that time, you know, had a fairly frustrating career as a writer. Do you know his work?

Riess: No.

Stewart: Well, he did one wonderful book, Honey in the Horn.* He never really got together with himself again. He didn't do anything for quite a while after that. Then he did write. He didn't do it very well. And he had--he even had a lot of financial troubles, because he couldn't keep writing very well.

He wrote a wonderful letter! I was very fond of him. He was a very curious man, as so many writers are of course, but he was a little more so than usual. He had sort of started out as a kind of hillbilly singer, as they went in those days. He did it with a guitar. One of the great evenings in my life was when we had, over at the house on San Luis Road, let's see, Carl Sandburg and Bud Bronson** and Harold Davis all there singing.

*H.L. Davis, Honey in the Horn, William Morrow Co., N.Y., 1935.

**Bertrand H. Bronson.

Stewart: You don't know Bronson? He's a professor at Berkeley, retired now. He could play the guitar all around them. He's a much better guitar player than either of the others. But he's not a born performer, you see. They were performers. It was wonderful. They'd pass the thing back and forth, and sing different songs. That was a wonderful night.

Riess: Did you have your accordion at that point?

Stewart: No, I kept out of it. I'm not in that class! [laughter]

Riess: How did you meet Davis?

Stewart: Well, he used to live up on Buena Vista, where it goes up the hill, after he'd written Honey in the Horn. I don't know exactly how I first met him, but through some neighbor up there. Then he had a house up in Napa Valley, up in the hills, before people went to Napa Valley much. We used to go up there and see him. He was married to his first wife then. They were fighting some of the time. They got divorced before too long. He never had any children. He never really was a very house-broken man, if you know what I mean. He was always living in a mess and drinking coffee all the time, at all hours of the day, thick black coffee, keeping a horse practically in the house. That was the general style of life that he led.

Riess: A Bohemian?

Stewart: Well, he would have scorned that title. [laughter] I wouldn't call him a Bohemian. He was a natural, really, kind of a natural backwoodsman. Always plenty of guns around. Not much of a drinker. He drank hardly any alcohol. He had terrible teeth. His teeth were always going to kill him, according to his wife, and I guess eventually they did.

He got married again and lived down in Mexico, largely because it was cheaper, but also because he liked it down there. He'd been down there a lot, and Betty, his second wife, had been too. We saw them some also. And they'd come back up here occasionally. He had quite an interesting career.

Then he got gradually sicker and sicker and poorer and poorer. They had a little house down in Oaxaca.

Stewart: They managed to live one way or another. I suppose she picked up a few jobs, acting as a guide. She spoke very good Spanish. She'd acted as a guide for tourists, and I suppose they kept going one way or another. He got sicker and sicker. Finally he had to have a leg amputated. I don't know exactly what he died of, but I think it was his teeth or something like that. He never took any care of himself.

Riess: Did he have an attitude about it? Did he make it a thing of principle?

Stewart: No, I don't think so. I think he just liked to live that way, and he did it. "I have paid my price to live with myself on the terms that I willed." Ever hear that?

Riess: No. You say it like you're quoting it.

Stewart: I am. That's from Kipling, a part of Kipling nobody ever knows.* I always appreciated the line. I think it applied to Harold too.

After he died, everybody started worrying about his wife, how she was going to live, on what. It seemed to me she could probably take care of herself better without him than with him, because he wasn't bringing in much money. But just about the time they started worrying about her, why, she married a millionaire. [laughter] In fact, she married Harold's publisher. She was quite a person too, his second wife.

According to legend, at least, Harold was her fourth husband, and her other husband was the fifth. I'm not sure about that--she's been married at least three times I know, but I wouldn't guarantee the five. I always said she was a professional wife. That is, she had to be married to somebody, taking care of them. She is a very nice person. When we last heard, he was in Australia raising goats.

Riess: Sandburg was here then too. Was he a friend of yours?

*Kipling, "Epitaphs," Vol. 28, Scribners, 1919.

Stewart: He became quite a good friend toward the end of his life. It happened accidentally. He came out here one time to lecture, and he expected to be put up. The person who was handling him for the University asked if we wanted to have him for a guest, and we said sure. So he came out to see us, and then he stayed with us several times after that. We got to know him very well.

He was with us the last time when he came out, and he'd really gone to pieces. He should have stayed at home. That was a terrible thing. He was just gone.

Riess: Was he sick?

Stewart: He was senile. He shouldn't possibly have been trying to put on a show. He couldn't remember the words of his own songs. He just hung on too long. He brought his wife along that time, to take care of him. She did what she could, but she couldn't help him out on the platform.

Riess: When you knew him earlier, was he the kind of person you could talk to about what he was doing?

Stewart: Oh yes, he was, very much. He was always talking about his songs, singing with his guitar. He was a very pleasant fellow. I liked him. And of course, Frost came out in those years too, you know. We never had them together. They were an interesting contrast in many ways. Of course they hated each other. It wouldn't have been a good idea to have them together, though it might have been fun.

Riess: Why did they hate each other?

Stewart: They were very different types. I can see why they didn't get along at all. They were both great actors. People don't realize that, about Frost particularly. Frost was a great actor. He played his part very well. Sandburg was a great actor too! They played different parts.

I think Robert always rather liked me, because he realized I saw through his part. Most people didn't, you know. Most people thought he was really this great humanist, and so forth. He was actually something different from that. He was a great

Stewart: conservative, you see, really. Almost reactionary. Sandburg was a real liberal.

I always thought one of the most interesting times we ever had with that pair was the time when Frost talked at the Inaugural. Do you remember that? The Kennedy Inaugural? And Sandburg happened to be staying with us at that time. He never got up till late, ordinarily, but he came padding up the stairs early that morning to hear the ceremonies. He never carried any clothes with him. He carried one suit, and I don't think he had a pair of slippers. He came padding up in some kind of old bathrobe I think we'd probably lent him [laughing]. He came up to hear this. He was delighted when Robert forgot his part. I never believed that at all, I always believed --

Riess: You didn't believe he'd forgotten his part?

Stewart: No. No. I'm a complete cynic. That was a beautiful piece of acting. One of the best things he ever did. Of course my wife was always telling him to get some glasses. He never could see anything. [laughter]

In the first place, he was supposed to write a poem for the Inaugural, which he shouldn't have done, because he didn't support Kennedy. He didn't like Kennedy. Of course, Carl should have had the job really, because he'd been an out and out supporter of Kennedy way back. But the Kennedys of course asked Frost, probably never even thought of Sandburg. But he would have put on a good show.

Well, you see this is my interpretation. In the first place, Frost couldn't write a very good poem for the Inaugural, because his heart wasn't in it, you see. He just couldn't turn out a poem on something he didn't want; so he wrote this terrible thing. Then he started to read it. Either he broke down, or else he'd planned to break down. So he said he couldn't see it, and everybody thought, "Oh, the poor man, the poor man." There wasn't a dry eye in the audience.

Then he said, "Well, let me recite this other poem." He'd never been a patriot, you see, at all. He'd been an expatriate part of his life, and he never supported the New Deal or anything. He was kind of reactionary. The only poem he'd ever written

Stewart: in his whole life which had any possible application to a thing of this sort was, you know, "The land was ours before we were the land's."* That's the way it starts. So he recited that. And that was close enough to it that he got by with it.

Then the platform started to burn up! Do you remember that?

Riess: Yes! The platform smoking and everybody looking down around their feet.

Stewart: Yes. And there was Carl Sandburg watching this [laughing] in our house.

Riess: That's very funny.

Stewart: Well, that's heresy of me to say that, but that's how it looked to me.

Frost--did I tell you about the time we took him up to Nicasio once? Well, he was out here and he wanted to go to a place he called Nicasha. We'd never heard of it. Finally, Ted figured out it was this place called Nicasio [Spanish pronunciation]. So we got him into the car and drove him up there. It's a nice little place.

The reason he wanted to go there was that he'd spent a summer there on vacation with his family, with his mother, when he was, I think--either three or five years old. He was very young anyway. And he was nostalgic. He wanted to see the place, and see what it was like. So we drove him up there. It was a lovely day. He thought he recognized the general location, but otherwise he couldn't recognize anything. The old hotel where he'd stayed which he thought he might remember, had burned down, so he didn't see that. He went all around trying to find something. He couldn't find anything. We had a nice time. The chief thing he remembered, when he was up there, was playing croquet with a little girl and she hit him on the head with a mallet, practically killed him. I suppose that's in the biographies, but maybe not.

*From The Gift Outright.

Stewart: Then coming back, along the Embarcadero down there, he said, "Another boy and I stole a pig down here one time, and carried it off. It was mostly the other boy. He was older, but I went along." He was a boy in San Francisco, you remember.

Riess: Yes.

You said Frost was an expatriate?

Stewart: He was for a while, literally. He was an uninvolved man. He didn't tie in very much with what was going on.

Riess: In this country, you mean?

Stewart: Yes. Well, you know that poem, "Two Tramps in Mud Time." That's sort of his platform.

Riess: It's funny that the Kennedys chose him, as probably the essence of what they think of as New England.

Stewart: I think it was natural enough they chose him, because he's a great poet. He was the best figure to tie the old and the new together. He was better than Sandburg that way, at least if you look at it from the outside.

Riess: Archibald MacLeish?

Stewart: Well, Archibald MacLeish is my man. I would rather have his poetry than almost any of them. But not so many feel that way.

Riess: I'm using this word expatriate, and I'm really not sure in what sense it's meant. For instance, when you went to Mexico to write, were you then an expatriate?

Stewart: Well, it's a vague term. It means a person who lives outside the country, particularly the United States. I don't know that it's referred to in other countries particularly. I wouldn't say being away for a year would put you in that class. Although the state of mind rather than the length of time would be what determines it.

Riess: Well, what's the state of mind? That America's an impossible place to get anything done in?

Stewart: Yes.

Riess: Did you know Scott Fitzgerald or Edmuond Wilson at Princeton?

Stewart: I knew Scott Fitzgerald. I never met Edmuond Wilson, until later. He was in the class ahead of me, and the place was big enough even then that you didn't know people so much outside of your own class. I knew Scott Fitzgerald. Not well at all. We were very different types. We wouldn't have known each other particularly. I remember being in a couple of small classes with him. He was a very brilliant fellow. Of course he flunked out, along about halfway, because he never did any work. But he came back and got his degree, I think.

I think if I ever write my chapter on Princeton for my autobiography, I'm going to give it the title, "Oh Yes, I Once Saw Scotty Plain."

Riess: You once saw Scotty what?

Stewart: Plain. That's Browning's poem, "Did you once see Shelley plain?"

Riess: In his introduction to the first series of the Paris Review interviews, Malcolm Cowley points out that the idea of these interviews is new. I thought it was surprising that it didn't begin until the fifties.

Stewart: Well, it's partly mechanical. It becomes so easy to talk with people when you've got a machine like this, you see. That's one big thing. So much of our life is determined by mechanical reasons when you come down to it. But there certainly was a lot of interest, say, in Henry James and his craft. Nobody could have been more interested, and written more about it, really, than he did.

Riess: Cowley looked at all the writers interviewed and compared them at four stages in writing. First, getting the "germ" of the story--

Stewart: Yes. I think you have to do that, sometimes.

Riess: Now, don't be difficult about all this! [laughter]

Then there's the meditation period, and then there's the first draft, and then there's the revision.

Stewart: I don't know what he means by meditation; maybe I would change some things about that second one.

Riess: Meditation is going about your normal business and yet your mind is working and working on the idea.

Stewart: Well, that certainly is true. You certainly have to do that. In a sense you're appraising the idea. After all, you put a pretty big investment in a book, and you don't want to do it unless you think this is the book you want to do. I think that's largely it. It's appraising. You're seeing what the difficulties are, what the weaknesses of the whole thing are, what its advantages are, whether it's a book you want to do.

And then, in most of my books, I would have to put in another phase. After meditation comes--well, I hate to use the term research, but that's probably the term you'd have to use. It isn't so much research as it is getting your material together, which may not attain the level of actual research. It may, of course. You can't tell. That was always a big stage with me. Of course the meditation is an indefinite length or period. That might run into years as far as that's concerned. You're not really doing any work, so that doesn't count very much, as time goes.

But the research, or the background work, on Storm and Fire, took more time than the writing of the book. And the same with some of my other books too, I should say. So I would have to say that there's a period when you have to gather information, gather material. I should think that would be true of a great many writers, even if they're not writing books which are like my books. I suppose you could count that in as the meditation, but for almost any

Stewart: story, you've got to work up something. You don't know everything about it. You want to know whether they have balconies on the rooms of a hotel, or something like that, or how the balconies are made. Something like that, some kind of technical point you get into. You don't want to stop--at least you shouldn't have to stop--in the middle of writing a book and go out and find out about things like that. They ought to be with you already. So I say that you would have that.

And then, of course, obviously you've got to write the first draft. The chief differences among writers, as you say, would come in how you go about that. I always did a fast first draft. I wrote one very rapidly, particularly after I got dictating equipment. I could tear through--I've done, occasionally as many as five, maybe six thousand words in a day, which is very fast. At that rate you get a first draft in a very short time, a book of ordinary length. Because a hundred thousand words is a fairly long novel. That's only about sixteen days at that rate!

Riess: When do you stop? Do you stop at a point where you know exactly what the next word will be? Do you stop at an up point or a down point?

Stewart: I would usually stop when I get tired. You get to the point where you start skipping, and think, "Oh, that isn't worth writing about." Then you realize you're tired, and you quit. I never have any trouble picking up the thread again. I pick it up immediately, and go on. But I couldn't take more than so much, just from the matter of either physical or mental weariness. As I say, if you get to the point where it doesn't seem worthwhile, then you quit fast. That would usually come, say, in about--when I was really going strong I would dictate in the morning maybe two hours and a half, and then maybe do an hour in the afternoon. That would be working hard. Usually I'd do less than that.

When I say five or six thousand words, that would be a very occasional day. That's probably too much to do, because you would be getting tired, at least I would be getting tired. It's better to figure that you can do two or three thousand. You get through a book fast enough that way. And then it makes a difference--some people don't write that

Stewart: way. Some people write very slowly and finish it off completely. There's only one draft. I think Cowley* oversimplified a little on that, because I think there's more variety in the way people work.

Riess: He was noting the variety. For instance, Hemingway went back to the start each day.

Stewart: Yes, I've heard that. I don't see how he could do that literally. What he said was, I think, that he read the whole manuscript over before he started again. I don't see how he could do that literally in a book of any length. Just wouldn't have time, and I think you'd wear yourself out reading it over before you picked up on the story. But that's Hemingway, and you'd have to take his word, I suppose.

Talking about myself, I would say that I didn't read it over very much. I'd dictate it and get the typing back from the secretary, then I'd usually read it over and just correct all the gross mistakes, the places where the secretary didn't hear the right word and that kind of thing. I wouldn't do much more with it, till I got the whole thing done. Then I'd go back and do it over very carefully, several times. I figured I would read it five times, go through it five times, counting the first draft.

Riess: Would you pencil in changes or did you dictate again?

Stewart: I usually would not dictate again. I would get it transcribed triple space, to leave a lot of space to work with. I also worked at the mechanical problem, the most difficult one, of inserting something in the middle. I had a paper-cutter. I'd just cut the page straight across and then staple it with a stapling machine. Cut the whole thing through, put a sentence in and go on. You see. Otherwise, you'd begin to think again, oh, it's just too much trouble. I can't be bothered. How can I get that sentence in? [laughing]

You ought to take a look at some of those first draft manuscripts in the Bancroft. Each one got to be

*I should call him Malcolm since we're good friends.

Stewart: a mess before I got through. Then I would work at different things.

In the second draft, of course, I established the story. That's what it's going to be, when you get through the second draft. If there are any large things to do, you do them then. You put in a whole page or two at one place, then you cut out a couple of things somewhere else. You do all the big work-- new incidents, perhaps. By the time you get through the second draft you have a pretty good set-up.

Then the third time, I went through it primarily for details of style, wording, and details. I learned something about myself eventually which I hadn't realized before. My focus is not upon words but upon structure. I will go to any pains to get the word order properly. I don't care nearly so much about the mot juste. I discovered that about myself after many years. That comes in the third and fourth times through.

Riess: What do you mean by word order "proper?" What's "proper?"

Stewart: Well, "proper" essentially is so that the person reads it through without a break, so that you don't skip back and say "What was that attached to?" The whole thing goes right straight through.

Riess: You read your things aloud, don't you?

Stewart: The fifth time I read it aloud. That was largely focused on rhythm and the way it sounded.

Riess: Isn't that quite unusual?

Stewart: I think it is. I don't know anybody else that ever did that. Actually, I suppose people do.

Riess: I should think a lot of books wouldn't see the light of day, if the author had to read them aloud.

Stewart: Well, that might be a good thing.

Riess: That seems like a hard test.

Stewart: Well, it's very interesting. You get things you don't catch otherwise, you see. Usually I read it aloud to

Stewart: myself, because if you're reading to somebody else you don't want to stop and figure it out and make changes.

And of course another thing you have to watch is that you can carry a great deal with your voice. You've got to realize that this may sound all right, but it won't go to the reader. Of course that's pretty well worked out in the third and fourth times over.

I found I didn't pause for words very much. Maybe that was the reason I wasn't so much concerned with them. But I had a good vocabulary and I was at home in my own vocabulary. I think that's the great thing. This person who sweats over a word doesn't really know what he wants to say.

About that vocabulary business, I suppose I have a very large vocabulary from my natural background, my profession. People think I have a wonderful memory. I'm not sure that that's the point. What I would say about my memory is that it's under control. It gives me what I want when I want it, a very nice thing. I think that worked out in the vocabulary also.

What amuses me is that every now and then, even yet, I'll use a word and realize that I never used that word in my life before! Where do these things come from? That's not only with me, but people in general. You're carrying this word somewhere, and all of a sudden it happens to be the word you want. And you never used it before.

Riess: I was wondering about the first writing, whether you can describe the sensation of where the words do come from.

Stewart: Oh, well, that's just the same way they come when you talk. It's no different from that. I tried in my first draft, particularly with dictating, to think of it as talking. I didn't worry whether I got it the way I wanted it particularly, the way I wanted it exactly. Of course, the better you can get it the first time, the better, but I didn't stop to do it all that carefully. The thing is to get it out, get it on paper, essentially.

Riess: Well, some writers have described the sensation of almost being dictated to themselves, as if they were the medium.

Stewart: Yes. I don't think I'd ever say that. I guess it's a figure of speech.

What is a nice feeling is when you come back to your dictation that's been transcribed and you realize, "It wasn't as bad as I thought it was!" You feel that it really came out pretty well. That's nice.

As far as getting the ideas, if you're a writer, naturally you're looking for things to write about. Even if you're only trying to be a writer, naturally you're looking for things. You get probably a good many ideas. I don't think they're as rare as all that, but you can't use them all. Some of them you test out. This meditation, for instance, results in throwing a good many ideas away.

Riess: This "germ" seems to be the point that organizes a whole lot of disorganized material that's already been around.

Stewart: Yes. I think it's quite an interesting mental process, because it does seem to come with all its parts put together. Your mind works so fast on it that you see the thing, a very large part of it, very quickly.

That goes back at least to Henry James. Henry James wrote about that, about what he called I think "the prick of the virus," whatever he meant by that.

Riess: Implying that your body has to be ready and waiting to accept the disease?

Stewart: Well, "I could write a story about that."

Riess: What do you mean by that?

Stewart: I mean that's when you get the idea. "I could do something on that. Yes."

Riess: Oh, I see what you mean.

Stewart: "I could do that. That might be kind of good." As I say, a great many of them get left by the wayside,

Stewart: because you don't have enough time to write them all.

Riess: In an interview once you were quoted as saying, "I think with Emerson that a man just has to watch for those flashes which sometimes come to him."

Stewart: Yes. I agree with that. There is a certain point at which these ideas come. I don't record it, because I don't keep a diary. If I had kept a diary I would have written down things like that. "I had this idea today." That's the sort of thing that Emerson does.

Riess: You didn't put them in your book of dates and events.

Stewart: No.

Take a thing like Man, now, that must have come, obviously, as an idea, one of those flashes. That's the only way it could come. But I don't remember when that came.

Riess: And in the writing, do ideas come up that you have to put aside, because they're not clearly part of whatever it is that you're working on?

Stewart: That's very difficult to answer for me. I've wondered about that in the general way. Just what is the difference between an idea and a finished work of art, say? There is a difference, but just what makes it is hard to say.

Of course most writers put in a lot that they shouldn't put in, as a matter of fact; to cover up a small amount of essential material there's a lot of lighting the cigarette and description of the hero's hair and eyes. That's one of the big tests of course, whether as a writer you can transform the germ into something that stands up on itself, which is a story or a work of art--whatever you want to call it.

Have I used my phrase, "Don't state, demonstrate" with you? That used to be one of my slogans when I taught writing. That's very important. Never, theoretically at least, never make a statement about a character. Always show the character in action. I think that's one of the basic things about writing fiction. If you write, for instance, "he was a great wit," that's useless. If you can't show him making a

Stewart: joke, you'd better leave it out. You'd better make him something else.

In the same way, stories about poets are not very good, unless you can write the poetry for them which you probably can't. Stories about painters are all right. Nobody expects you to give the drawing, or painting. There are some things you can't help yourself on. You've got to describe the heroine. But after all, there's nothing duller than to describe a beautiful girl. That doesn't get you anywhere. You have to show her in action. You have to show the effect she has on people. That goes clear back to the Iliad. You know that magnificent section in the third book there where Helen comes out on the wall and even the old men are impressed. That's a wonderful passage. I don't think Helen's ever described. But you know she's there, when she comes out.

Something that has interested me is the question of what I call the motive power of a novel. That is, what makes one thing more important than another? You have the whole world before you. Why should you choose to write about some things and not about others?*

Of course, I'm a plot man. I still stick by the plot idea. The microcosm. You start from a point of rest. (I'm getting into my course again, here.) You pass through a period of uncertainty, and you end on a point of rest. And there you've got a plot. That's the way all good plotted stories, including dramas, have to be conceived. You have to choose the things that determine this movement, this uncertainty, so that eventually you eliminate what is not getting there, and you arrive at a point of rest.

*[additional material dictated in response to a request for expansion of this discussion, 15 March 1972]

You suggest that I have not answered the question that I have raised about the "motive power of a novel." I think that I really have answered it fairly well in what I say about the plot. That is, the motive power then becomes anything which moves the story in the direction of the final point of rest. In a historical novel the problem is simpler. In East of the Giants, for instance, I placed Judith in a historical situation, and as the known history of the period changed, she had to adjust with it.

Stewart: For example, it's the old "boy meets girl" theme. In "Romeo and Juliet," until the two of them meet, nothing starts. It's a point of rest, with respect to the central pair. Of course it gets fouled up a little bit because there's the other girl there, but nothing happens with that. Then when he sees Juliet, off it goes. Then you don't know what's going to happen. It goes from point to point of uncertainty, works up, and then it works down again. At the end everybody's dead, and that's it! You've got your point of rest. [laughter] That's it.

Sometime I ought to start in with the first of my novels and go right straight through.

Riess: I'd like to have you do that, yes.

There's a kind of an agreement on these Review interviews that every author has one or two ideas that they're trying to get across in the whole collective works, an ideal shelf of writing.

Stewart: I wasn't thinking quite so much in those terms. I was thinking of the technical approach. You can see I shy off from this idea approach in a sense. This idea of "what I was trying to do"--I don't like that either. I think I spoke about that. I think if I didn't do it, there's no use telling what I was trying to do.

The problem is more difficult with a non-historical novel. There you are obviously manipulating the story all the time. You start with something--say, boy meets girl. That doesn't raise any difficulties. But everything after that, unless you are following a sequence of real events, becomes essentially contrived, though that is a dirty word in writing fiction. Good fiction merely gives the impression that the series of events was not contrived. And it may do that extremely well, so well indeed that you can break down and weep over the trials of the characters. I still may not make myself altogether clear about motive power, but I'm not setting out right here to write a book on the theory of fiction. [G.R.S.]

Riess: Okay, well, right. I won't pursue that.

Stewart: Oh, if there's anything definite you want to ask, ask me. That's all right.

Riess: Would you agree that in your writing there are one or two main ideas, and that everything is part of a big package? And, is there more to the package, in your mind, of your collective works? Or, as far as getting your idea across, is your "shelf" full?

Stewart: Well, I've been thinking a little bit about that since I've been talking with you. I think I said here earlier that the idea of simplicity was a big idea in my books. And you brought up the idea of the ecology, and that certainly is true. I'd go along with you on that. That's been very important.

I think, in a sense, the weakness of my work, looked upon as a whole, is that it doesn't lead from one thing to another. The books tend to be very much discrete. That's the way I like them, though, that's what gave me vigor and energy to go ahead. I couldn't possibly have done the sort of thing that some authors have done--a series of linked novels over the years. I would have bored myself sick.

Riess: What about Faulkner?

Stewart: Well, Faulkner. He didn't tie up so much--he had a center, but he didn't tie the books up together too much. There have been others of course that stuck to the same topic. Many writers have stuck to at least a style. I mean, when you talk about Hardy, oh, you think about a certain type of writing. His works stick together. Even Dickens sticks together after a sense. You know pretty much what a Dickens novel is going to be. They are variations on a theme. And the Forsythe Saga. That sort of thing, where you get at least a large number of volumes tied up in one theme.

Riess: And you admire this?

Stewart: Not tremendously, no. Obviously there have been some great works done that way.

Riess: You did say in the beginning that that was what you did enjoy about writing. Each thing was discrete.

Stewart: It was.

Riess: So your regret must not be too intense!

Stewart: No, no. My regret is not intense. In fact, I wouldn't say it's a regret at all. As I said, it's a weakness in the picture. Again, "I have paid my price...."

Riess: I see. That's your critical self that's looking.

Stewart: Well, perhaps I'm looking from other people's point of view more than that, because it's very hard for a reader to follow me all the way through. I lose them someplace.

Riess: A lot of your fan mail is people discovering that "you are the same George Stewart who wrote..."

Stewart: That's amusing, pleasing, as a matter of fact. I like being all sorts of things. Most people do.

Riess: One of the writers interviewed (Simenon) said that he wrote essentially for himself and to live through the excitement of the writing. If nobody ever read the book it wouldn't matter.

Stewart: Yes. Well, there are all kinds of people.

Riess: You write books for people to read.

Stewart: Yes. I don't think I would be much interested in writing them merely for myself. And I don't quite see how he writes a book without knowing how it's going to turn out. It seems to me that he's cheating himself in there somewhere.

Riess: Shall I go on with this, or is it annoying to have all these quotes?

Stewart: Oh, go ahead. I'm interested in seeing what you have.

Riess: Well, Cowley talked about the tricks to start off work, pencil sharpening, walking, reading the Bible [laughter]. I know you sharpen pencils. Do you have other kinds of things to get the motor going?

Stewart: I didn't have any of that, actually. (You don't use pencils for dictating.) I just sat down and started. I guess sitting down was the preparation [laughing].

Stewart: Even lying down. I like to dictate lying down, or at least reclining, like this. I find it easier. I didn't need to go through any of those things. I always started out right away on the novel. Self-starter.

Again, it was partly the fact that writing was always a kind of escape for me, because I had so much university work to do. Writing was a way of getting away from it.

Riess: These people felt that a lot is luck. If they don't do the right things, the luck won't come.

Stewart: Do some of them have that idea?

Riess: Truman Capote sounded like he was under some sort of mounting apprehension, that if he didn't have his desk arranged just so, etc...

Stewart: Yes, he might well be. I think probably a good many writers have little quirks like that. C. S. Forester, for instance. He wrote on the same kind of paper, lined paper, every time. He was the kind who "hated to write." At least he always said he did. I'm never quite sure about people like that. But he was a thoroughly professional writer. Absolutely professional. The way he fooled himself was he'd have this paper, the same size always, the same number of lines, and he had to fill a certain number of pages every day. Then he wouldn't do any more. He'd come to the end of a page, in the middle of a sentence, and stop right there. He didn't allow any paragraphs. He would put a sign in for a paragraph, not a space, so that it didn't make any difference. He found that otherwise he cheated on paragraphs. He would put in too many paragraphs. That got to be a kind of fetish I suppose. That was the way he worked it.

Riess: Hemingway, after one of his accidents, where there was a possibility he would lose the use of his arm, didn't think he'd be able to write any more, because for him it was such a manual activity.

Stewart: I don't think that would apply to me. I always like to have as little barrier as possible between myself and what was on the page. The way I could get it there with the least expenditure of time and energy was what I wanted.

Riess: What about the idea of the "demon" that's in charge, and about people who felt that they were sort of a medium?

Stewart: Well, I don't think I would go for that. But of course, as I say, it's always a question of what makes you write at all.

Riess: If you hadn't written, what would you have done that would have used that same part of you that writes?

Stewart: I'd have done research.

(Interruption)

[Apropos of comments on Paris Review interview with Thornton Wilder]

Stewart: I was writing this chapter about my high school time, when I played on the tennis team. This is written up in the high school annual, you know the kind of thing they have, that little thing about the tennis season. It turns out, as I remember very well, I went to a tournament at the Thatcher School. After beating one man, I was eliminated by the second man to come up--I wasn't a very good player--and his name was Wilder. That was undoubtedly Thornton Wilder, who was at Thatcher School at that time. I haven't checked up to see whether it possibly could have been another Wilder, but I don't think it was. That's quite a nice little story, at least it amused me.

His name just happened to be preserved in this annual. Obviously I wouldn't have remember it. I had no reason to remember his name way back then. It tickles me, because there's a literary contact! That's why I put that in my autobiography. [laughter]

I like Wilder's work very much, too. He has also the quality I have had of not writing about the same things. His collected works don't make any kind of unification at all, as far as I can see.

INTERVIEW V, Bret Harte, Ordeal by Hunger, John Phoenix, East of the Giants, Doctor's Oral, Take Your Bible in Your Hand, Storm; some comments about publishers interspersed. (Recorded September 28, 1971)

- Riess: I read the latest two chapters of your autobiography and in them you check mark a couple of questions.
- Stewart: Yes, places where I hadn't really got finished, or hadn't checked something out.
- Riess: You put a question mark next to the comment, "Stewart as second man is a sure and steady player, while not at all spectacular."
- Stewart: Yes, I just wanted to check the reference. I didn't have it with me when I was dictating that, and I just put that in as I remembered it. So that's just to check a reference.
- Riess: Do you think that was a pretty intuitive remark of whoever the editor was, of that yearbook?
- Stewart: No, I don't know if it was. I had probably written that myself! [laughter] You know the way student things are written up? I don't really know, but I have a suspicion I may have written that, or given the idea at least. It's the picture I might have presented of myself.
- Riess: You suggested going through all of your work and talking about what you were trying to do. Are you ready to start on that?
- Stewart: Yes. I might as well say something about that, if you think that's a good idea.

Stewart: It will take me quite a while, probably, although I'll talk pretty fast and not too much in detail. I'll pass over my thesis and the little book I did on versification. The Bret Harte book I think you'd call my first book. I'd worked several years getting material on that, and it went into shape pretty easily. That was a period that was going in for biography. Strachey had popularized biography as a form of writing in the twenties.

There was a type of biography into which mine falls to some extent. I don't mean the debunking kind particularly. That was another pattern of the time, the debunking biography, in which there were no more heroes left. I didn't take a hero apart, but at least I tried to give him a place as a human being. I think I did that too.

I wrote the book mostly in France, the year we were there. I wrote it in longhand, in pencil, the first draft of it. It gave me no particular trouble, I might say. Before I left the United States I had read several biographies with the idea of seeing how people handled them, what you could do, and what you couldn't do. I had no particular difficulty. I kept a chronological development, which I think is the right thing to keep if you possibly can when you're writing, because it gives you a pattern. It gives a natural pattern, because reading itself follows ahead on a line, and chronology does the same thing. It's the easiest of all structures and I think the most effective.

Of course chronology can be mixed up a great deal, and complicated, but I think the simpler form has a lot of it.

Riess: You're talking about biography?

Stewart: No, novels too, as far as that's concerned. On the whole, I think the Bret Harte biography came out all right. It had very good reviews. I think it surprised a lot of people that I was able to do so well. That was my first book, although I was not so very young when I wrote it. I was about 35. You see, I didn't get off to a particularly young start. I've done a lot of writing, but it's come late.

Stewart: I read some of the book a while ago. I do that every now and then with my books, get started on them for some reason or other and re-read parts of them. Usually I'm rather pleased that they read as well as they do. That one also. That one's not badly written, and not badly constructed, either. I think it shows a good deal of maturity of mind, really, to be able to treat a man like that sympathetically, a man who had been attacked very badly, and had certain weaknesses of character, no question about that. But still, I think I hit the line pretty well between heroism and anti-heroism. I think I showed him as a human being, which of course he was.

Riess: Why did you pick him? Did you write it because you wished to change the image somewhat?

Stewart: No, not particularly. I should say it was largely, I suppose, academic opportunism, to use that term. [laughing] After all, you want to write something. I had done a lot of work on the California background, and I had planned on doing a very big job on a kind of social-cultural history of the Gold Rush period. That seemed to be getting too big for me, and taking me too far away, so I finally scrapped that and saved Bret Harte out of it.

I'd written an article on Bret Harte a long time before that, so I had worked into him that way. It seemed an interesting thing to work on, and not too big. It could be handled. And he was a man who needed doing; there was no biography of him that was good, and hasn't been one since mine. I've held the field so far. That is largely because nobody is much interested in Bret Harte any more.

If you have any question, you just--I don't like to stop and say "question, please" or anything. [laughing]

Riess: When you say that you had gotten "too far away" in the other writing project, what do you mean?

Stewart: It was too big a job, and I just didn't want to spend all my life doing that particular job--especially because it was rather peripheral to literature.

Riess: How does the phrase "publish or perish" fit into this?

- Stewart: Oh yes. Yes, that had something to do with it. Although that phrase is not so much an absolute. Quite a few people have neither published nor perished when you come right down to it.
- Riess: When the reviews came in, they were very favorable.
- Stewart: They were very good, yes. Extremely good. They surprised me very much as a matter of fact--how much attention the book got, and how good the reviews were. Of course my bad luck held. I hit the very worst of the depression, when the book came out; it sold very little. The publishers wanted to renege on the contract at the last moment, they were so close to being broke apparently. I insisted on going ahead with the contract, because after all it meant a great deal to me to get the book out.
- Riess: You were a good businessman in these ventures, it seems to me.
- Stewart: No, I don't think so, particularly.
- Riess: It didn't seem like you gave your publishers any quarter, in your letters.
- Stewart: Are you referring to a particular letter?
- Riess: Not any particular letter, but you were dealing pretty strongly for yourself and at times when I might imagine your saying, "Oh well, let so and so take care of it," you were always involved.
- Stewart: Well, I wouldn't say I was particularly a good businessman in dealing with publishers. I had several fights. I think any author does.
- Riess: But you fought the fights. Isn't it easier just to give in?
- Stewart: Well, it might be. That isn't necessarily good business though. It might be better business to go ahead and play it the other way.
- Riess: The involvement with publishers is interesting. I'm thinking of some authors' relations with Maxwell Perkins and Scribners.

Stewart: Did I tell you about my relationship with Maxwell Perkins?

Riess: No. I know from your letters he was interested in you.

Stewart: Yes, in about 1938, '39. That's an interesting story.

I think this relationship between author and publisher has changed very much with time. I don't think there is such a thing much any more. Of course I'm not active enough in writing to know too much about it. But I think it's almost disappeared. I think it probably was even stronger before my time.

Perkins was one of the famous examples. In fact, I'd call him an editor more than a publisher. There's a difference there. Of course he must have been very powerful with the publishers too. I think that editorship is largely dead now too. They don't have the same kind of relationship with their authors, I should judge. Of course if a man's making a lot of money they'll pay much more attention to him than they will to the ordinary person. I think there's much less taking a young author and bringing him along than there used to be.

Perkins got interested in my first novel, East of the Giants. He wanted to take me over, almost literally. I wasn't under contract to any publisher. In fact he sent a man all the way out here from New York, which impressed me no end, in those days! I can't remember the man's name, but I think he's still with Scribners. He must be a very senior man by now. In fact, he must be retired.

Anyway, he came all the way out to see me, just trying to get me to go in with them. I would work with Perkins and then he would bring me along. If I'd been a good businessman that's what I would have done. That's exactly a business relationship. He would have probably handled it all right. He wanted me to write Western novels, like East of the Giants, Western novels at the literary level. And that was a very smart thing to do probably, probably have been a lot of money in that. I could have written a whole series, and had my life work laid out for me. I

- Stewart: would have been Maxwell Perkins' boy, and he would have brought me along. He would undoubtedly have taught me a lot. It might have been quite an experience.
- Riess: Taught you a lot--how?
- Stewart: Taught me how to write Western novels. That was his forte, you see, getting somebody like that who was fairly young and who had possibilities.
- Riess: I think of people like Hemingway and Fitzgerald, prima donnas, being handled by Perkins.
- Stewart: I don't know how he handled them. You might say he didn't make a very good job with either of them, because they both were very temperamental writers. Fitzgerald particularly went to pieces, you see. He went out of the picture. He didn't live very long. He threw himself away pretty much.

I don't know whether that's what Perkins had in mind or not. I rejected this in high dudgeon. I went to see him when I was in New York later and had a very nice talk with him. I told him I thought that was a bad idea to do that sort of thing, and he said, "Let's not talk about that." So we had a nice talk about other things. I was very glad to have met him. At that time, you see, I was getting started on Storm, and while it might be called a Western novel in some respects, it is something rather different on the whole. I didn't want to stop working on that.

I couldn't have done it anyway. I just couldn't have that relationship to a man. If I had been a very young man, I might have done it. After all, it wouldn't mean that I tied up for the rest of my life necessarily. If I had been very young and inexperienced but I'd written say one good book, it might have been a good thing to do. Because a relationship with an older man who really knew the business would have been very--well, profitable in money and useful to the development of whatever you had in you. But that never happened.

Another piece of bad luck that I had, that was really, I think, major bad luck--

Riess: Why do you say another? You're actually considering that your decision--

Stewart: No, I guess I shouldn't say that. (I was thinking about bad luck. I raised the question I had bad luck in my autobiography, bad luck professionally speaking. I was referring to that, not to the Perkins business.)

Now I can't think what the bad luck was that I had! What I was talking about. I don't very often have a lapse like that, but I can't think of it right now. I'll go on to something else.

Well, I know now. That was the fact--you see, I was going to work on Ordeal by Hunger, which is another book I can take up. That was definitely a revolt against the University, because I had done quite a lot of work, publication of all sorts, and I hadn't gotten a promotion. I was still assistant professor. And I was getting pretty sore. I figured, well, what's the difference. There's no use publishing any more scholarly works. I might as well do something that would be fun to do. Here's a great story. I knew enough about it, as a matter of fact I thought it would be a much easier job than it was, because I thought the material had all been pretty well collected, in a previous book or two, and that I could work out from that.

But I found that was wrong. I had to do the work really from the bottom up, which now I would know I would have to do, but then I thought I could do it in an easier way. Anyway, I did the work, I collected the material. That book came out very well too. That's been a quite well-sustained book ever since. It's been in print most of that time (first published in 1936), and that's pretty hard to do. Where I had my bad luck was in this. I thought I should work with an agent, so I did. I tied up with a good agent, Brandt and Brandt. They're still going. They've been leading agents for many years. I was quite pleased they wanted to take the book.

Well, they sent it around to six different publishers, all of whom turned it down. And they were good publishers. That's very discouraging when that happens. I couldn't see why, because I thought

Stewart: it was a safe book at least. I didn't see how a publisher could help but make some money out of it, but they couldn't see it that way. Of course the depression was on.

So the agents sent it back to me. I sent it out to Henry Holt. The first publisher I sent it to took it, which has made me very sour on agents ever since. If they couldn't do better than that...

Where I had the back luck was really in this, that neither the agents nor I sent that book to Alfred Knopf. It was a book made to order for Alfred Knopf. He told me later he would have been very glad to take it. In my period, Knopf has been about the greatest publisher there is. If I could have tied up with Knopf at that time, I think it would have been a very fine relationship. He's a difficult character, you know, but he's a great publisher. He could respect good writing, in a way that very few people can. He could maintain a literary standard--as very few people have ever done in this country.

Well, they didn't send it to him. I don't know why. They might have disliked him personally. I think it sometimes works that way.

Riess: Would he have directed you in the way that Perkins might have?

Stewart: No, I don't think, at all. I think he would have been very good for general advice and that sort of thing. I don't think he would have tried to direct an author too much. That would be my feeling. I've met him several times. He can be a disagreeable man, but a great publisher. Of course his wife was a great character too, you know. She's dead now. She was probably as great a publisher as he was.

Riess: Was she a publisher in her own right?

Stewart: No, her name wasn't on the masthead anywhere, I don't believe, but everybody knew about her in the book business.

Riess: When you talk about him being a great publisher, that means a great discoverer, or something?

Stewart: Well, that's part of it, certainly, and maybe being a man of high ideals who at the same time can keep going. I mean, after all, a publisher's got to keep going. He's got to make money or he's dead. There's no use being impractical about this thing. Knopf can do that. He can do both sides.

For instance, he brought up the standard of the physical nature of the book tremendously in this country, for one thing. That shows--you compare what a book looked like before, say, 1920, with what it gradually came to look like. Beautifully designed books, well put together. I think there is more owed to Alfred Knopf than anybody else for that. But I missed that connection.

Riess: Books got nicer. Why?

Stewart: I think it was perhaps Knopf's realization that after all a good-looking well-designed book doesn't cost much more than a sloppy book. All you have to do is get an intelligent designer working on it. What you pay the designer isn't a very big item in bringing a book out.

Riess: When you realized that you had missed the boat on that, was it possible to get back with him?

Stewart: Well, no. It was quite a while before I realized that. And I didn't know too much about the whole set-up in those days, or I would have sent the book to him at that time. No, it was quite a while, and I had gone too far in other directions to switch around. I may be idealizing that situation, but that's the way it seems to me.

Riess: Did you use original sources, and interview people, for the Bret Harte book?

Stewart: Many original sources and a few people. His sister was still living, living in Berkeley as a matter of fact. She was a lovely old lady. I didn't get much out of her. She gave me a diary, though, which I made use of, very important use of. And I interviewed Ina Coolbrith, the poet. I didn't get much out of her either.

I met his daughter once, but that was after I'd written the biography. I didn't particularly like to

Stewart: team up with the family. Unless you do a real family biography, my instinct is to keep away from the family. I think that's a good instinct.

Riess: How about in Ordeal by Hunger?

Stewart: I didn't get any interviews there. There was only one survivor left, and again--that's a kind of a family matter, and if you go to somebody like that, sometimes what they tell you you know isn't right, but you can't very well dispute them. I kept away from the families too. I missed out on some little things there, but I kept my freedom of action, which is very important in that story, because each family had its own version of it afterward, you know, that was sort of entrenched. If you got what a granddaughter was telling you, why, you wouldn't know what you had. I missed out on some small documents.

There's been quite a bit come to light on the Donner Party since I worked on it, but I've incorporated most of that in my revised edition.

Riess: You said you thought you would be able to find most of the material in published work. Was there very much on the actual trails and maps of routes, or was that what you had to develop yourself?

Stewart: I developed most of that myself. I did go over a lot of that territory on foot, so I knew about where they went, and where they could go and where they couldn't.

Yes. I worked out practically all of that, the geographical background. Of course that's where I got interested in the trail. I've still got that interest.

I actually located a couple of the old trees up there which were cut in the snow and they were still standing. They're still up there, by the way. I saved them, finally, because the road was re-located and here were these old stumps standing right beside the highway. It would be just a matter of time before somebody went and knocked them over, just for fun. So I told the Donner Park people they ought to go out and retrieve these stumps, because they're the size you could get on a truck with a few men lifting them. They've got them up there in the museum now. I don't think they have them on exhibition yet, but they've

Stewart: got them. And that's quite a find to have. These were cut off about ten feet high, about when the snow was deepest. They came from the Prosser Creek camp.

My destiny tied me up to Donner Pass. I kept going back to that for one thing after another. Finally they had a ceremony up there when they were dedicating the new museum, and they gave me Donner Pass! They decided to give me Donner Pass, that would be my property from now on. [laughter] But I said it would just get me on the tax rolls, I wouldn't take it. They said, "Well, we'll grant it tax free." I said, "Then I'll take it."

I found out they hadn't given me anything, because Donner Pass is really a hole in the wall. What did I get? Just what? Something where nothing was.

Riess: How about the "germ of the idea" on Ordeal?

Stewart: A long time back, about 1920, I read McGlasham's book on the Donner Party. It was a good story, but badly told. I was interested ever since that. Of course I didn't think of myself as a historian. It wasn't until I branched out and got away from the work in literature a little and, as I told you, got the feeling that I might as well do something in another line since I'd done enough in that one line already.

One thing about that book that most people don't realize is just what a complicated story it is. It's a much more complicated story than you'd ever try to do in a novel, because you've got as many as five or six strands running parallel, and you have to keep shifting back from one to another, or carrying one through--that's the most difficult thing there is to write, you know. When things are happening at the same time, and you have to keep the whole thing in the reader's mind some way or another. That called for a terrific amount of work.

Riess: How did you plot that before you wrote it?

Stewart: I drew lines on paper.

Riess: You really plotted it?

Stewart: Oh yes, sort of figuring how to get back, onto the other, how to bridge something across, and work the

- Stewart: reader's mind around until he gets to thinking about the other thing, and then in the next chapter you're back on to another thing, you know, but you've got him already thinking about it.
- Riess: It sounds like you're talking about keeping the reader's attention in a way that wouldn't be usual in nonfiction.
- Stewart: That's all right in nonfiction. I don't see any reason why you shouldn't keep the reader's attention in nonfiction. [laughing]
- Riess: It seems as if in nonfiction you would assume that the reader would work harder than in fiction.
- Stewart: Well, probably he does, but even so you can't count on him working very hard. I don't see why you should make him work hard anyway, if you can do the work yourself.
- Riess: When you realized what a difficult thing it was going to be, did you at any point feel like, "Well, let's scrap the idea."
- Stewart: No, I never thought of it that way. I knew where the material was by that time. Well, that was an interesting thing to do.
- Riess: Did you get much editing help on that from your publishers?
- Stewart: Holt published that and I don't think there was any editing at all.
- Riess: At the point at which you would read something aloud, for instance to your wife or to yourself, were there apt to be any changes happening then?
- Stewart: Oh yes, yes, if there was something that didn't go right, and if I read it to myself I would fix it right there. If I was reading to somebody else, I might just mark it in the margin and go on.
- Riess: Did you have really beautiful sentences that would occur to you that you would put down, or did beautiful sentences develop slowly?

Stewart: Oh, I think that lying in bed at night, why you may write up something, might do a little writing. I don't think of beautiful sentences in isolation though. I think the whole thing has to tie in. A sentence is beautiful because it stands in relationship to other things. You want to watch that kind of thing--that's what lead you into purple passages, when you start thinking of some particular sentence.

I know when I was writing my first novel, East of the Giants, I used to lie in bed at night and really be all excited because I was thinking about how things would go, what I could do. Sometimes a particular word. And every now and then, of course, you do get a particular sentence or idea. Sometimes it works. I can't think of an example right now, but I know I have had that sort of thing.

Another funny thing is when you get to quoting yourself in later books. That's a danger, of course, that you start imitating yourself. I wanted to use this quotation in California Trail, and it was a fine quotation. I could quote it all right and I knew it was in one of my books somewhere. [laughing] I had to hunt all around before I could find it. I finally found it in Fire. "All this, too, was part of the price of the taking-over of the land." It's a nice sentence. That's got rhythm too.*

One great test of whether you're writing purple, or whether you're not, is whether you're saying something, whether you're saying exactly what you want. If you find you're throwing in adjectives or something and you're not really saying anything then you've got to watch out. That's when you're getting bad.

But you know, that sentence I just quoted is very exactly worded. It doesn't say it was the price. It was "part of the price." That kind of thing, you see, that says something quite exactly.

Riess: What was the response of the public to Ordeal? Who were you writing for at this point? Who was your public?

*But be sure that you keep the hyphen in "taking-over." It makes a big difference. [G.S.]

Stewart: Well, my public has always been the intelligent lay person, I suppose you could say. My books are not written for specialists. Don't you think that describes pretty much what my books are written for?

Riess: Ordeal by Hunger wasn't necessarily for people who were just getting interested in California and California things?

Stewart: Well, it's partly that, of course. Any book has an area of specialization. A book about young people will sell more to young people than it will to older people. That doesn't mean it's really exclusively for young people. Any book has a certain degree of specialization.

For instance, Ordeal by Hunger sells well every year in Reno. I suppose mostly to tourists going through. The jobber up there in Reno was in tears when it wasn't in print. He wrote to the publisher and told him it would sell, I think, 30,000 copies a year. That's a lot of books, paperbacks of course.

Riess: After Ordeal came your decision to do the novel.

Stewart: Well, we might mention John Phoenix in there. He gets passed over too much. That was a mistake in some ways, of course, but I'd done a biography, and I felt, "I've done a biography, I'd like to do another." I was interested in Phoenix for a long time. I thought he wrote pretty funny, humorous stuff about California. The way it was a mistake is it's a mistake always to follow up a thing you've done, really, with something that's the same. I think, that's my general philosophy.

And then also, Phoenix was not a man of enough importance. It's just about as much work to write a biography of an unimportant man as it is with a big man, and you're wasting your time pretty much. I was, on him. Although it's a good book. It's a readable book. It certainly hasn't ever sold very much, although it's back in print now. Everything's in print now, practically, so that doesn't mean so much.

And then I got magnificent family support on that. They sent me all the family papers, which were extraordinary, including a whole album of drawings he made. That was fun to work at. But that's the

Stewart: only time I ever got close to getting in trouble with a family. That's always a danger, but it blew over. It wasn't any real trouble. There was one sentence in the book that they objected to. Fortunately, I guess it was fortunately, the publisher changed it without even telling me. It didn't make any great difference. That is a good little book. It's not a book I'm ashamed of at all, although it wasn't very earth-shaking in its topic.

Then I did decide to write the novel. People asked me why I wrote a novel, but after all, it's a great American ambition. Everybody wants to write a novel, and so I did too. I already knew something about early California, because I'd been interested in that--it's a very colorful era, and that was a period of historical novels. Historical novels are always popular, but they're more popular at some times. This was the period of Anthony Adverse and Gone With the Wind. And the influence of those books is in there of course, to some extent. It was, in a sense, a period piece.

I learned a lot out of writing East of the Giants. It came out very well. I had learned about point of view, and about continuity and things like that from working on books I had already done, particularly Ordeal by Hunger. So I didn't have much trouble with writing a novel. My imagination worked tremendously well on that, I suppose because it was my first novel, and I was eager.

The book worked all right. Structurally, the novel is in three books. I used the device of inter-chapters, which I've used a lot, starting with Ordeal by Hunger. It trademarks my work, almost. I don't know any older writer who even uses the term. I think maybe I invented the term. So East of the Giants was three books.

The books were in a comparatively brief period of time; then the inter-chapters filled in the gaps. The first book began in 1837, the second, in 1844, and the third in 1856.

You see, you have the problem of scene and summary in writing almost anything. There are certain places you have to develop in detail: they are your scenes. And of course, if you can't write good scenes,

Stewart: you can't write a good novel. You've got to come to grips with your material at some point or other.

I always used to teach that, about scene flinching. It's a curious phenomenon. You'll find it time and again. Inexperienced writers will work up to a big scene, and then they won't write it! They flinch. They realize it's going to be hard to write, and subconsciously they don't want to write it. And of course that ruins your book. When you get up to a big scene, you've got to tackle it, you've got to do it.

Writing good summary is difficult too. But I solved the problem--somewhat mechanically, I grant you, in East of the Giants, because I wasn't too skilled. That is a little stiff. Each chapter is written from one person's point of view, though the same person may have more than one chapter. Each chapter is a scene, really. That is, it means a very restricted time basis, often just a matter of a few hours, and sometimes a few days, but just about like that.

It's built up around the heroine, and she has about half the scenes, that is, chapters. And of course her two husbands, because she's married twice, have chapters. Once or twice her children have chapters, and other times incidental characters, who give a different point of view on the main characters. It worked out pretty well.

Curiously, Josephine Miles was a great admirer of that book. It doesn't seem like her book, somehow or other, but she always liked it. And some of the inter-chapters are very good. I've got an inter-chapter in there, which, if I ever collected my anthology, I'd certainly take. It's one of the best things I ever did.

Riess: Tell me which.

Stewart: Well, it's the one between the first and second books. It's the rhythm of the year at the ranch where she lived. "This was the cycle of the year at Rancho

- Stewart: Amarillo," I think it reads, and just goes through the year.* I haven't read it in a long time, but I think it's very good.
- Riess: Your heroine, Judith, was much admired by readers.
- Stewart: I don't know where she came from particularly. My wife thinks she's got a lot of my mother in her. That may well be. I didn't have anybody really definitely in mind, though I never have, on any major character in my books.
- Riess: She changed so and grew, in the book.
- Stewart: Well, she grew against a background, too. The background changed and she changed, partly from maturity, and partly because she had to change to adjust to new situations, as people had to in that generation.
- Riess: Did you work with a chronological outline there?
- Stewart: Well, I had some kind of outline, yes. I knew pretty well where I was going. The third part gave me some trouble. The first two parts ran beautifully from the original impulse. The third part gave me some trouble to develop.
- Riess: The third part being the last part. You did, in speaking of Earth Abides, say that the beginning and the end are usually--

*"This was the cycle of the year at Rancho Amarillo. By July, after killing-time, the grass was dry and brown. That was a good time to dry adobe bricks in the sun and to build, for the cattle needed little care. By August the cattle were eating the brown grass close down to the ground, and were getting thin. The creek shrank to a series of muddy water-holes. In September came hot, dazzling, sunny weather, with sweeping dry winds from the north, making the lips crack and wearing the nerves thin too. That was a dangerous time, and there might be quarrels and knifings among the vaqueros. By now the hides were cured, and great high-loaded bullock-carts creaked slowly off toward the boat-landing on the bay-shore; later they would return with the winter supplies, corn and beans, chiles and onions, from San Jose.

Stewart: They're usually easier, yes. But it wasn't that way in that particular book. Well, I wouldn't say the third book gave me very great difficulty. You see, it's the breakdown of the primitive paradise. I didn't think of it in terms as self-conscious as that, but that's pretty much what it is. That required a readjustment. You had to bring in evil in the last part. There wasn't much real evil in the first part.

Riess: After East of the Giants, you were a "novelist." How were you received around campus? You told in the autobiography about being carried on the shoulders of the crowd in high school. Now were you back up on the shoulders?

Stewart: Yes, I think that partly describes it, all right. There was a good deal of that, but it came to me by steps. I got quite a good deal out of Bret Harte that way. And I got quite a good deal out of Ordeal by Hunger. It seemed to move on to another step. And then East of the Giants was another step. And then I suppose Storm was the final step. Simplifying the matter. But that's about the way it went, I guess.

Riess: If there had been a real lack of interest in you as a writer, would you have been motivated to go on anyway?

"In October or November came the first good rain. The tension of the dry weather eased and you slept better. Within two weeks afterwards you would look out one morning and see, faint and delicate, the first green of the new grass. In December and on until March came the great storms, sweeping in over the southern hills beneath immeasurable thickness of murky gray cloud, low-lying and wind-driven. The creek rose till you could hear it roaring in the night. Between the great storms came fine weeks of sunny weather, warm in the day, crisp cold at night. Once in a while you would look out in the morning to see the whole valley aglitter like silver with frost, and the cattle standing out darkly, steaming in the newly risen sun. With the cold and the wet, and the new grass not yet having much nourishment, the cattle were still thinner."

Stewart: I don't know. I think it would have been doubtful, yes. Because I think that what psychologists sometimes term as feedback is very important to a writer, as I've already mentioned. I think that lack of it leads many writers into frustration. They start out and they don't get anything coming back in, and then they just...of course in the first place they almost immediately hit a very bad problem about publishing. If they can't get some kind of reaction from somebody, then pretty soon they develop the idea that they're misunderstood geniuses and so forth, and that's bad.

I knew one man. I think he's dead now. He wrote nine novels and piled them up one after the other. He had published a novel way back about 1925, which was fairly successful. Then he couldn't ever hit it. Nine different novels, and he didn't publish any of them. Then finally some publisher took another one or two of them years later. But that was all he ever did. I don't know how many more novels he's written in his time. But that's a very curious kind of person. And he was a very curious kind of person. I think writing novels that way would be too much for me.

Riess: Yes. That's like Simenon's need to write, and experience his own life through writing.

Stewart: Well, I can conceive that taking place, but it's certainly not very common.

I think there has to be some kind of compromise on this. I think if you start writing entirely for other people that's pretty bad too. That gives you the hack writer, who can be a skillful writer, but I think that's not good either. You have to have some kind of compromise between writing to please yourself and writing for an audience.

Riess: By then, on campus, was it, "There goes George Stewart, the novelist"?

Stewart: Oh, I wasn't conscious of that very much. I suppose there was some of that. Every now and then I would meet somebody who said, "Oh, I took a class from you because I read your books" and so forth. But I was never very conscious of that. Berkeley is a very

Stewart: sophisticated place. We've had a lot of books published around Berkeley. They don't go into swoons about a writer too easily.

You get quiet pieces of appreciation which are worth more to you than the other thing. I don't know whether you knew the Tolmans or not. Kathleen Tolman said that reading East of the Giants opened up a whole world for her. That's nice to get from a very fine person you've known for years, somebody like that. That's nice.

Riess: Did you ever develop a character again as you did in East of the Giants?

Stewart: Well, yes. I think I did some other good characters. Of course Storm and Fire don't go in for human characters particularly, but I think that I've got some good characters in Earth Abides. People generally recognize those. There are good characters in the Years of the City too, but nobody ever reads that, so nobody knows about that. I think the Founder in there is a very good character. That again breaks up--that's four different periods, you see, connected through the family chronologically, so in a sense you don't get the same chance to--there are four main characters. Well, let's go on chronologically before we get into that.

Riess: How did you get started on Doctor's Oral?

Stewart: In a way, that was a kind of in-between book. It was down in Mexico, and I wrote East of the Giants so fast I got finished with it about March and we were all fixed up to stay down in Mexico until about May, and here was all this nice time available down there with nothing to fill me up particularly. I had this idea, kind of an obvious thing--oh, I don't know whether it's obvious or not, nobody else has done it, I think--the idea of a contest, a struggle, in an examination. Have you read that one?

Riess: Yes, I have.

Stewart: Well there, you see, I went at the question of scene differently. That's all handled in scenes. The whole thing takes place in about eighteen hours. You can run through it, and it's all in scene.

Riess: Scene means, then, a lot of dialog.

Stewart: Yes, a lot of dialog, and the thing done in detail. It might be put on the stage. Of course the drama is all done in scene. It has to be. And the great difficulty with stage drame is getting these transitions in. They have to use all sorts of devices to let the audience know what happened between this scene and that scene. In the novel you have the advantage of working both ways. So, by scene, you mean something which could be put on the stage without too much difficulty.

As a matter of fact, two people have dramatized Doctor's Oral. I've got one of their versions in the Bancroft collection.

Riess: "The Gods and Joe Grantland."

Stewart: Yes. It wasn't a good job at all.

Riess: So the theme, when I asked you where you had gotten that idea, somehow I didn't expect you to define the idea as the contest. I think a lot of people saw it as more the exposé.

Stewart: Yes, they did, and more so than I wanted. Of course the whole idea of a Ph.D. examination is so fantastic to the ordinary person that he doesn't understand what it's about anyway. A lot of university life is fantastic to people like Governor Reagan, for instance. So they looked upon this as an exposé, which I wasn't trying to make it, particularly. It's interesting. The people who appreciated Doctor's Oral the most, as a class, I could really classify them. They were people who were in and near a university, but not of it. The people who were really in the university, faculty people particularly, didn't care too much for Doctor's Oral. People who were clear out of the university didn't care the slightest for it. They didn't know what it was about.

But the people who had been around universities, had maybe done a little teaching, and gone out into engineering or something like that, that kind of person, they really enjoyed it. It was their book.

Riess: People who were close to the University, what do you think they thought?

Stewart: I think it probably seemed somewhat shallow to them. I don't know. Of course, it's funny, but that was considered quite an immoral book by some people. The young couple living in sin. One old lady we knew pretty well in Berkeley was very nasty about that, that I should write about such a subject.

Riess: Yes, why did you write such an immoral book? [laughter]

Stewart: Even in those days, that sort of thing was happening.

That's kind of corny in some ways. I mean piling the thing up all in one day. But that's what made the book. I've often thought about how in oral examinations, any kind of examination, you don't know what the background of the person involved is. All sorts of things may be happening, just as they're happening to the people giving the examination too. So I think it was all right in that respect.

I think Joe Grantland was a pretty good character too, actually. He's a very common type; at least he was in those days. That miserable kind you can't either fail or pass with a good heart. Those are the ones that bother you, and make life bad for a professor.

Riess: I have a little summary by some reviewer: "Stewart has been around, and I'd like to know how he gets away with it. He sees people and they amuse him, and a few move him, but not really too deeply."

Stewart: Well, I don't know about that. I think the book really is a kind of comedy. You wouldn't expect in that particular book too great depth of moving. Although I tried to bring out a little difference in the prologue and the epilogue there. Which again, I think, are some of the best things I ever wrote.

Hugh Richmond, a professor in the English department now, much younger than I am, used for his epigraph in a book he just published what I quoted about "the love of knowledge and the knowledge of love."*

*"Let the love of knowledge be spread abroad," and "Let the knowledge of love be spread abroad."

Riess: That was your own quote?

Stewart: I made that one up as far as I know. It seems like the obvious thing. You just know that students would translate it that way if they got a chance.

So, it was, as I say, a kind of in-between book. I wrote some of it in Mexico, about half of it, and then wrote the rest of it after I got back here. I remember looking it over again to see if it was worth finishing up, and I decided it was going to be no great job to finish it up. I was getting started to work on Storm then anyway, but I figured I could get this out of the way, so I did.

You see, Henry Holt got into a financial jam, and they reorganized. They didn't handle East of the Giants very well. That was some more of my bad luck, to get into a thing of that sort.

Riess: If you had had good luck, you would have been overwhelmed! [laughter]

Stewart: Wouldn't that have been something!

They had a new manager come in, and he tried to revive East of the Giants. He spent a lot of money on it, but it's very difficult to do that. He got out a new jacket, and he spent some money advertising, and tried to push it to get it started again. But he couldn't get it going again. It sold fairly well; it sold better in England than it sold here, and I guess it sold better in Italy than it sold in England. I don't know. It's had a funny kind of career. It has enough of a romantic touch about it, you see, that it's a kind of general least common denominator of humanity or something.

Anyway, that was the time Henry Holt almost broke up, and I got another agent then. They didn't want to give this new book to Holt. Although Doctor's Oral wasn't likely to be really a very profitable book, Holt would have taken it, largely on the success of East of the Giants, I think. (In fact their editor, Bill Sloan, came out to see me. Again I was much impressed, having a man come out from New York to see me about a book. This was just about the time the other fellow did too.)

Stewart: Well, Holt would have taken Doctor's Oral and given me a good advance on it too, but my agents decided it was better not to go into Holt, because that company was in a bad situation. They sent it to Random House, and Random House took it. That was how I got my connection with Random House. They put out a very nice little book. Random House did beautiful books too. They were an important factor in the manufacture of books. But they learned the trick from Knopf, I think. The two were pretty close in their way of thinking. So it had a good enough sale, but didn't do anything very much. It couldn't be expected to. I got one of my first really nasty reviews out of that one. Did you ever see that review? It was in Saturday Review, I think. They didn't like it at all.

That's about all there is to report about that book.

Riess: Had there ever been any insider books like it written?

Stewart: Well, now that's interesting, because there's a man named Brace who did a book that I just read called The Department. He taught in Boston University and other places as a professor of English and then took up writing novels, apparently quite late in life, because he's about seventy now. This book called The Department has a scene from a doctor's oral in it.

He had a funny business in that. About the birds. All his characters have the names of birds. Which I think is not a good practice! But he was obviously having a little fun. I've had a few keys like that in my books too, but not quite so formalistic as this one. They're very unusual birds. I read on and I thought, "That's funny." "There's a bird called a Fulmar, and one man is named Partridge." Pretty soon I became more and more suspicious, and started going to the dictionary and looking up some of these names. They were all birds. Rare birds, that you didn't know about.

Riess: Well, that's a man who's calling for feedback.

Stewart: I don't know if he is or not. He's likely to get bad feedback on that. It's so artificial. It gets in people's way. I'd be willing to bet, though I might

Stewart: lose, that I'm the first man that's spotted it-- of a cold reader. He'd probably tell his friends and they'd pass the word around. I just bet you that almost nobody would pick that out. These two friends of ours read it before they passed the book on to me, and I told them about this. That was news to them. They hadn't the slightest idea.

Riess: I hope you told the author that you spotted it.

Stewart: I wrote, "As I read, it seemed to me that your department consisted entirely of odd birds." I figured if he can't get that, why! I'll probably hear from him.

Another great admirer of Doctor's Oral was Jacques Barzun. In fact, he wanted to get it reprinted. He thought it was very good for graduate students. He was dean then at Columbia. Well, I would have to say that--some professors have taken it that way. The chemistry department here has a copy in their library, which they say their graduate students read.

Riess: As preparation for the experience?

Stewart: More or less, yes. I don't know whether they do any more or not. All these things have changed so much recently.

You didn't ask me what that was based on though, what the real background was. Most people try to work that as a roman a clef, different characters representing different people around Berkeley.

Riess: Yes, when we talked about that it didn't seem to me that you were about to come out and give me a one to one --

Stewart: No, I certainly am not! For various reasons. In the first place, it doesn't work that way. I did have a certain background feeling about some of those people, but I wouldn't say they were really characterized, or there was any attempt to satirize people in there.

Some of those things were real, though. I was thinking more of the nature of the examination, the "Blessed Damsel" business. And I always thought I

Stewart: passed my own doctor's oral in the first half minute because Professor Krapp asked me that question about the Vierhebungstheorie in German, as I've already told you. I wish that I'd had a chance to talk about that with him some time after I grew up (so to speak), but he died quite a long time ago. I had a letter then I spotted as being from his son. I wrote and asked him, "Was your father George Phillip Krapp?" He said he was. It's always nice to make those contacts.

Anyway, after I answered that question I figured I'd pretty well passed my oral. At least I figured that in retrospect. I didn't figure it at the moment, but I thought I was pretty good at that point. Then about the middle of the examination, Professor Trent had to go to a class and couldn't stay. As he went out, I saw him nod at the chairman. [laughing] So far so good! I got one vote.

Riess: It sounds like doctor's orals are not a test of knowledge, so much, as a test of sophistication or maturity, or sense of humor or character.

Stewart: Well, it's very hard to say what they are or what they ought to be. I think they are a pretty good test of knowledge, if they're conducted properly, because in a written examination you can always cover up, and you can open up allusions that sound as if you knew a lot. There's an art to taking any kind of examination. That's what I wrote Doctor's Oral about really. But you see, in an oral examination, you can't get away with that sort of thing. The moment you open up on Lucretius or somebody, a professor will ask you, "Now tell us about Lucretius. Just what do you mean?" If you just have heard the name Lucretius, you're lost.

Then, you can really cover a tremendous amount of territory in an examination very rapidly by the oral method. Of course it has its weaknesses, like any kind of system.

I think there's something to the whole idea of examinations actually, either written or oral. It is a test of character in a sense. I mean, if you can't rise to an examination, why, you're not too good. You should be able to muster yourself and do something.

Riess: In an oral way? Anybody should be able to?

Stewart: Well, anybody who you'd want to pass for the degree should be able to do it, yes. You're going to meet crises all through your life, and if you can't meet a crisis... And there are people who can't, as far as that's concerned. Maybe sometimes it's unjust. But if a person is good enough outside the examination, then they usually manage to get him through sooner or later.

They had failed six people in a row before I came up. Did I tell you that? It made it even a worse strain, but I figured I had a tradition of victory; I had always got through. I'd try it.

Riess: After Doctor's Oral you wrote, Take Your Bible in Your Hand?

Stewart: That was just a little thing. The Dictionary of American Biography asked me to do a short piece on this man (William Henry) Thomes, and I got interested in him, and did this little thing. It came out as one of these private publications, very beautifully printed. Did you ever see it? It's a very nice thing.

Riess: Yes. Colt Press. [1939]

Stewart: That was Jane Grobhorn. It's the sort of thing that takes you about three-quarters of an hour to read. Again, I spent a great deal more time on that book than it really warranted, but it was fun to do it, anyway.

Riess: I guess there are certain parallels between the audience for that book and for John Phoenix.

Stewart: Oh, I don't know, I may have given you more of an idea than is right about doing something for an audience. As I look back, I've done a lot just because the thing interested me. The puzzle, or the pleasure, of working it out became fascinating to me as such. Some of these things I knew wouldn't ever get anywhere very much. So maybe I've exaggerated the other side.

Stewart:* You wanted to know if there was ever any time when I wanted to change my life-style and become a writer exclusively. Of course, that thought occurred to me, but not too strongly. As a matter of fact, I never made any great money by my books in a regular way. I was not a professional writer who could turn out a job to specifications. I never did learn that trick. I can't say I ever tried too hard at it. So I didn't get involved too much in the idea of quitting my teaching. I felt I was in a stronger position with the teaching.

Later on, as you probably know, I was only teaching half time. I began my half-time service with the University on July 1, 1947. It was not worked out with Ben Lehman, who was chairman of the English Department, so much as it was directly with Sproul, as president. As it turned out it was a very unusual situation. I am about the only person who had enjoyed that particular arrangement.

The idea for Storm, as I tell in the introduction to the Modern Library edition, came to me while I was in Mexico, in the early months of 1938. To repeat here, there were some big storms in California which were reported in the Mexican newspapers. It seemed to me that anything which was so interesting as to be reported to people clear off in Mexico, should have a story in it. So I thought I would write the story of what happened when the storm hit California. When I got into the subject, I found it was a very much greater subject than I had had in mind to start with. I had not known much about meteorology at that point, and I didn't realize that a storm really has a life and growth and death of itself. That was a very interesting idea to me when I struck it. I saw very soon that it had tremendous implications in the book.

You suggest that this was the investigative side of my nature which took over at this point. That certainly is true. There's no question about that, that I have a tremendous, well, you can say curiosity, about all sorts of things. I really went to town on

*Because we had run out of tape, George Stewart dictated the following in a handheld mic, pausing for my questions, which can be deduced. [S.R.]

Stewart: that matter, in connection with Storm. I did a lot of work on meteorology. I got introduced to the Weather Bureau in San Francisco. I used to visit over there at times, especially when there were big storms on. I got a lot out of that. I got to be very friendly with some of those people, who are all gone now.

I also had an arrangement with the University on that. That was with Monroe Deutsch. I think he held the title of vice-president at that time. He said, "Well, you can consider it just as if you were a scientist at work on something, and if you have to take some time off to go to see something, why, that's all right." He was a very fine man in that and other respects.

So when a big storm came up, and we knew it was coming, Ted and I would cut off and go someplace, most often up to Donner Pass to see what was happening there. Gradually, I got more and more idea of the possibilities. I would pick up stories and incidents. I picked up the story of Johnnie Martley going into the dam. That actually happened. And the animal that rolled down into the culvert was not a pig in the original story. It was a bull. But anyway it made a story. I shifted it to a boar because somehow or other it made better sense. You could imagine a boar being carried away more easily than a bull, which has longer legs. Obviously the other could happen, but it's not so easy to write about.

Then I went with the railroads. The Western Pacific took me up on a little kind of flatcar all through the Feather River Canyon. That's where I got the story of the bull. It had nothing to do with what I saw, but I got the story there.

Then the Southern Pacific took me through the snow sheds. I rode in the engine of a snowplow there. Of course it was before the streamliner was stuck in the snow. That was an incident I did not use, because it had not happened yet.

PG & E gave me very good cooperation. They took me up to Grass Valley one day when there had been a little storm, and there was damage around. And of course the story of the dam--that was a PG & E dam, too.

Stewart:

And a lot happened along the U.S. 40, as it was then. I went up one day--I was by myself this time--and I came to a place where there was a telephone truck parked by the road, and a man getting out, fooling around with equipment. So I stopped and asked if I could go in with him to see what he was going to do. He said, "Yes." I remember he gave me some snowshoes. We went in, and here was a wire gone bad up on a pole. He put on his climbers and climbed up the pole. I watched him from down below as he was working at it. As he was working there, this tree, a fir tree I think it was, right close to him--I guess it wasn't a fir tree, it was a cedar--it leaned over. The snow was falling all the time. It just started leaning over. It leaned over right against the pole. I didn't say anything, because I thought he saw what was happening. He started to climb down, and when he hit this tree he fell, right down into the snow.

He wasn't hurt, but he got up and he said, "I was afraid I would fall on my ski poles," which were stuck in the snow right at the bottom of the pole. So I used that incident--do you remember that?--almost as it happened.

And then the incident of the two people and the coyote. The two people went off the road and they found them because of the coyote tracks. I used that incident. It was funny on that one, because I talked to the man who had something to do with finding them--I think he was the superintendent up there. I said something about, "That was very dramatic about the coyote tracks." He said, "Aw, hell, there were tracks all over everywhere. We didn't find them by the coyote tracks! I put that in because it sounded kind of good." [laughter] I thought if it sounded pretty good for him, it ought to sound pretty good for me too, so I kept it!

It was strictly research, yes. I didn't do any writing until I had the thing all organized. I went through two winters, doing that kind of work. Then of course, when the spring came, after the second winter, there wasn't any more work I could do on research that amounted to anything, so I began writing then.

In answer to your question, I can say that Random House was very much interested in this. In fact, I

Stewart: think that was an important factor in their publishing Doctor's Oral, that they knew I had the other book on the way. Doctor's Oral, as I said, was not a particularly attractive book financially, but a good publisher is always willing to string along with an author when he sees something that has possibilities coming along in the future. Of course they didn't know if I could do that book or not. It still was pretty vague, but that's part of publishing. Storm hadn't developed very much at the time I wrote the contract for Doctor's Oral.

I'll say something about Storm too on the technical side. You see, I already had two novels besides the Ordeal by Hunger, which some people like to call a novel (anyway, the technique had something the same). I'd been experimenting. I've spoken already about the point of view, and the question of scene and summary, in those books. So I came to Storm, and I still had the same problem. You always have that problem. But here I had a great many themes, a great many strands. I plotted this book too. I'm a great visual person. I like to see things where you can look at them. Storm has about a dozen threads running through it. It has the general background, objectively, of the storm itself. It has the weather bureau. And then it has a great many other themes, some of which run for only a short part of the book; others run all the way through. Some disappear because--well, in one instance, the man gets killed, and that's done.

By this time I had had enough experience to do that sort of thing, which is pretty difficult, and to run these themes in parallel, I guess you'd call it. It was very lucky that I did two novels before I did Storm, before I got the idea of Storm. Because if I'd got the idea of Storm, say, right after I'd written Ordeal by Hunger, before I'd written any novels, I probably would not have had the skill to master it. I was very lucky (that was one case where I was lucky in my career) that I got that bigger theme when I was developed enough that I was able to handle it.



Sven R. Stewart + Theodora, at 100 Codrington Road, ca. 1955

INTERVIEW VI, Storm, Fire, Names on the Land, Man; beginnings and endings of books; work for the Navy; a story; marriage to Theodosia Burton; the Faculty Club; loyalty oath crisis. (Recorded October 12, 1971)

[continuing discussion of Storm]

Stewart: When I started out I didn't know what I had hold of at all, because I didn't know much about meteorology. I had just envisioned the story in the format which had been done before, for instance in Grand Hotel, in which you have a certain number of characters tied up around some unity. In this case it would have been the storm. That would have made a good enough book too. But as I got into it, I saw the storm itself had this life and death structure, so that the book shifted to the storm, and the people became auxiliary to the storm. I think that was the biggest stroke I made in shaping the book up. As far as I know, nobody's ever done that before. You can only do it with a certain type of subject.

It came almost entirely as a sudden insight, when I started working on the meteorology. I saw that there was this evolution of a storm, something which was really discovered in the year 1917, not so very far back, with the researches of the great Norwegian meteorologist, Vilhelm Bjerknes, who really transformed all of meteorology. Of course it's developed a good deal and changed a good deal, but it still remains the basic conception.

His conception was of a storm which began and grew and had a powerful period and then died off. That was just made for my purposes--once I saw that there was a cycle there. You have to see it first,

Stewart: of course. So I began studying that particular type of storm, which was the kind I would have to deal with in California. (There are several types of storms. That's not the only one. But this is the one I had to deal with on account of my geographical background.)

I found that quotation which I used in the front of Storm, from Sir Napier Shaw, about the story of any natural event being a kind of fairy tale.* That was made for my purposes also. I took that up, and that helped shape my thinking.

Then I had to determine how long a time this was going to cover. Of course I had always envisioned it as a short time span. I'm terribly interested in the problem of time. I would certainly go along with Thornton Wilder on that.** I'd had two experiments already, you see. I spoke about that in connection with the other two novels. This was still another way of handling time.

Then I started drawing maps--that's the simplest way to represent a storm--and going over to the weather bureau, talking with the weather bureau people over there. Then drawing more maps. Then I'd scrap them all and start in again, and figure out how long I needed to work out all these things. Gradually the twelve worked out. I'm not sure how much the idea of the magical number twelve had to do with that. It probably had something to do with it, because twelve is a famous number.

Riess: What's it famous for?

Stewart: Oh, twelve apostles [laughing] and the twelve days of Christmas. Twelve, you see, is the place where the

*"Every theory of the course of events in nature is necessarily based on some process of simplification of the phenomena and is to some extent therefore a fairy tale." Sir Napier Shaw, Manual of Meteorology: I, 123.

**"...an unrelenting preoccupation with the surprise of the gulf between each tiny occasion of the daily life and the vast stretches of time and place in which every individual plays his role." Writers at Work, Viking Press, 1958, Thornton Wilder, p. 113.

Stewart: teens begin. It's the baker's dozen. You buy eggs by the dozen. It's all tied up, and it's a magical number, along with seven. But I don't know how important that was. It probably had some influence, because it's very neat to have things work out that way. It was the right length of time.

You see, I had time to develop the storm, which then was very small. And that gave me a chance to work up all of my exposition. Get the characters established in a period of rest, and introduce things like the electric company, and the highway patrol and the snow-sweeping people. I got them all introduced in a period of quiet, and then as the storm grew up, everything got going harder, you see. That worked out very nicely.

If the storm had started all at once, bang! you see, I would have had a big storm going and no people, nothing for the storm to fit into.

Riess: It's a matter of building up tension?

Stewart: Yes, yes. Getting people interested in these things. Of course the people begin to think, "Well, something's going to happen about that." "This fellow's riding up the highway, and all that, and it's going to come in," you see. That worked out very well.

I did some writing on Storm which I junked because it didn't fit in well together. It was partly the suggestion of the publishers, the editor there, Saxe Commins. I did quite a little revision on Storm.

Riess: What sort of material did you junk?

Stewart: Oh, I had a couple who went up the road to get away for a weekend, an unmarried couple. That was a story I'd heard of, with a twist at the end. It wasn't a bad episode. They sent out word that she was having a baby, and the highway patrol fought their way in through the snow to get them out of there. She walked out with obviously no baby. It was a good enough episode, but the publishers thought the sex theme sort of disturbed the book, as a whole. I think they were right. It's nice to have a book without any sex in it for a change.

- Riess: How did it feel to have part of the book rejected?
- Stewart: Well, that didn't bother me, because I don't think I had much heart in it myself. I don't think I really thought that was too good. They didn't reject it. I could have kept it if I'd wanted to, but I didn't. I agreed with them on it.
- Riess: I had the idea that once it was thought out, it was all so much of a piece.
- Stewart: Well, no. Storm in a sense is not that all together. Those different threads could be picked out, you see, rather easily. You couldn't pick out very many of them, or you wouldn't have any book left. [laughing] You could pick out one or two all right. They disentangle very easily. Actually, they weren't connected crosswise. They were connected centrally on the storm theme, but there were almost no cross-connections between them. Each one could come right out.
- Riess: Has anybody used that pattern, now that you've done it? Did anything come out like this, after Storm?
- Stewart: No, not much. There have been places where people have taken over some part of the technique. It's not an easy thing to do, you know. It's not easy to get a theme that will carry it. Most people are not interested in the natural background, at least not most novelists. They want to emphasize the connection of people all the time. I wouldn't say that there's been anything which has directly imitated it, except that fellow in Holland that plagiarized it pretty much. I've read books where I could say, "Oh, there's something of Storm in that." You can see that every now and then. But nothing which really used that technique.
- Riess: There was quite an advertising campaign that went with Storm. That whole treatment, the autograph parties, etc., was that the first of your books to receive that kind of promotion from the publishers?
- Stewart: Oh, I think I had a little of that thing before that.
- Riess: With East of the Giants did you go around to autograph?

Stewart: What's-his-name, the man who had the bookstore, the father of the man who just retired, Elder, he used to have little parties pretty regularly, and one thing or another, I've done things like that.

Riess: With Storm, did you tour the country?

Stewart: Well, of course, there again, I imagine I would have done more if it hadn't been for Pearl Harbor. That cut out that sort of thing. I had offers to do lectures, but I didn't take them up.

That book had a big circulation, though. I don't know how many copies of Storm have circulated. People ask me that every now and then. I'm getting now to say, "About a million," which might be true at the present time. I'm not at all sure, because you lose track of these things, particularly paperbacks. Publishers never give you any real breakdown on how many copies, and they sell them by the hundreds of thousands. I don't think they keep very good track themselves. If they get too many in a warehouse, they just pulp them and start all over again. I don't think they ever count them carefully. So, just figuring the Book of the Month Club and the various reprints, including all the paperbacks and so forth, and the Modern Library going on for twenty years or more, I estimated it ten years or so ago and I came up with 800,000, so I figure maybe it's gone to a million--I don't know. That might not be a long way off. Of course that would count the translations too.

Riess: Were you a changed man after all of the success of this?

Stewart: I suppose, to some extent, yes. I had much more confidence in myself. The additional money was very useful too. It gave me more to come and go on, and do some things that I wouldn't have been able to afford doing before that time. That made a difference.

Riess: Is there anything else that you would like to say about Storm?

Stewart: Well, I would like to say something sometime about beginnings and endings. Have I talked about that yet?

Stewart: Storm has a remarkably good beginning and ending, and that's not an accident. I worked that out very carefully in both cases. I consider myself a specialist on beginnings! I more or less felt, why throw away your first sentence? That's the sentence that you catch a person with. If you can catch a person with the first sentence, well, catch them and don't let them get away. That's my attitude.

I know I've had people tell me that. A man said that starting one of my books was like eating the first peanut. You can't stop, because something goes on. If you look at my books, you will see that most of them start with--all with a careful sentence, and I think most of them with a striking sentence. Of course Earth Abides is the most remarkable one. It always took my breath away, and it does other people too.

Also I'm very particular about the ending, because that's what leaves the last taste in a person's mouth, the ending of the story, the very wording and everything. So I want to be careful with the beginning and ending.

Riess: Do your endings sum up in some way?

Stewart: Oh yes. I try to sum up and to call up the rest of the story one way or another. That's the old trick of swinging back to the beginning. That's always a good trick. I did that a good deal.

Riess: I will go back and fill in some beginnings and endings for the manuscript. But why don't you quote some favorites?

Stewart: Well, the first sentence--I can't quote them all, I'm very sorry, but I know what they're like. The first sentence of Storm, you see, has one word in there which is of great importance, which nobody would notice probably.* Yet I have had people speak of it. That is, the fact that it's in the past tense. "The earth

*Storm: "Enveloped in the gaseous film of the atmosphere, half-covered by a skim of water forming the oceans--the great sphere of the earth spun upon its axis and moved inflexibly in its course around the sun."

Stewart: spun upon its axis." That catches people's attention immediately. I don't know whether you see that or not.

But the point is, we think of the earth as a continuous process, and when you say "the earth spun," it means that this is one particular moment of time. And the whole book goes on that. This is what's happening right now. It's a natural phenomenon, it's a recurrent phenomenon, but you're dealing with this particular instant.

Here's where my study of Russian came in, and the aspects of the verb. English has aspects too, really. We call them tenses in English, but they really are aspects. I learned that when I studied Russian, from my professor. Well, a little theoretical background. I knew perfectly well what I was doing when I wrote that past tense there.

Earth Abides starts out about the United States being dissolved, "By order of the Acting President. God save the people of the United States..." That's a very startling sentence. You must make a first sentence do as much work as you can, too. Establish everything you possibly can. In two of my nonfiction books, I tried to establish the authenticity of the story in the first sentence. "'Tamsen Donner was sad as the wagons turned aside,' Mr. Thornton noted in his diary." I gave the authority for it right there. And the same in Pickett's Charge. The sentence I worked over tremendously was the first sentence of Sheep Rock. I can't quote it to you, but I remember a funny little incident about that, speaking about editorial work. I was going to bring this up when we came to Sheep Rock, but I can mention it now just as well.

I went to New York. I had sent the manuscript on some time before, and Saxe Commins had read it, and he said, "Well, there isn't much I would suggest doing with that manuscript, but we might take a look at it." So he got it out and he said, "You know, I think we ought to cut that comma out of that first sentence." I looked at it and I didn't really think so. I thought we'd better keep it. But that was the only suggestion that was made, and I thought, politely, "Well, maybe he's right." [laughter] So I said, "All right. Cut it out."

Stewart: I went back to the hotel, and I got to thinking about it, "I'm right. That comma ought to be there." So I called up the next morning and said, "Hey, Saxe. Would you mind putting that comma back in?" He said, "Well, no. I wouldn't mind. That's all right if you want it there. I'll put it back in." So that was the editorial work on Sheep Rock. I wanted that comma there to slow the movement a little bit. That was really why I wanted it.

Some time I'd better give a reading of first and last--openings and closings of my books. I'd like to read them some time.

Most novelists, you know, don't go in for striking first sentences. One of the really famous ones, of course, is the one from Moby Dick. "Call me Ishmael." That's a sentence that catches your attention, right off. Then you've got Dickens, "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times," and so forth. That's a famous one. But there are not very many famous first sentences.

Riess: What was the first sentence of Fire?

Stewart: That was about the thundercloud, the storm sweeping north over the crests of the mountains, with all its lightning striking here and there.* That's a good sentence.

Riess: I think your first sentences tend then to have a touch of the ominous.

Stewart: Well, that's often been said about my work, that I was a chronicler of catastrophe. That's not altogether true, because after all I'm a chronicler of the ecology, and in ecology there isn't any good or bad, really. It's how it plays into the whole scheme of things. So Storm, as I always try to emphasize, both in the book and out of it, is not a disaster. The storm, after all, is a necessary part--you've got to get the rain. California would be dead without the rain and the snow that comes. So it's not a disaster.

*"Suddenly ablaze with lightnings, the piled-up thundercloud swept northwards across the tops of the mountains."

Riess: That's what the book tells, but for somebody who doesn't know as much as you do--

Stewart: Yes. They were always melodramatizing Storm, and building up the action--"this is the greatest storm of the century," and that sort of thing. I kept saying all the time, "This is what happens every year." Nobody ever paid any attention to that.

If I were writing Fire now, I would change the approach of it a little bit. I've come to realize, better than I did at the time, that fire too is an ecological phenomenon. Fire is not necessarily a bad thing in itself, it's only if it gets in the wrong place. It is part of the cycle, really. Of course, it's been disturbed by man, because it's mostly burning in second growth stuff already. But not altogether. It destroys something here and--of course the deer come back. There are a great many more deer after a fire, you see, than there are before. So as far as the deer are concerned, it really builds them up.

Riess: Why is that?

Stewart: Well, they live on brush. A big forest is almost barren. That's what most people don't realize. All this sentiment about big trees is really a love of the desert, in a way, because nothing much lives in big trees. A few squirrels and some martens to eat them, that's about all. When you get the second growth, that's when the animals come in. You get rich life that comes after a fire. There's something of that in the book, but not too much. I would shift that a little if I were writing it again.

Riess: Do you think that people feel what's lacking in a big forest in that way?

Stewart: No, they just get sentimental about the big trees,

*Ed's Note: Fire ends: "Moist and clean, the north-west wind from the ocean blew steadily across the long ridges, and from high-swinging cones, opened by the fiery heat, the winged seeds drifted downward to the earth."

Stewart: which give them a sense of awe to look at, I guess. I've never been a big tree man myself. I think the young forest is often much more beautiful than the old forest, fresher and greener and growing so fast. It's youth, whereas the big trees are just the old men. They're just standing there, waiting to fall over someday!

Riess: The thing about going to big trees is the experience of looking up through the tops.

Stewart: It's partly that. It's partly the sentiment which has been built up over a hundred years or so. I've often argued about that, that the young trees are really more beautiful.

Riess: Do the last sentences come round from the first sentence? In the case of Storm, does the last sentence say something about the spinning earth?

Stewart: Oh, yes, it does. That's a nice sentence, the last sentence there. "It gave no sign that storms or man disturbed its tranquil round. Bright against the black of midnight, or yellow at the dawn, it hung in the sky--unflickering and serene." It's a nice sentence. It does give you the earth in space again. You're drawn off from it. You're so far away that you don't have any impression of storms or anything.

Maybe we should have a few books in here so I could read you some of the sentences.

Riess: Some writers include significant quotes, like your's from Sir Napier Shaw. And there are sometimes other clues and prefatory material in a book.

Stewart: All my books start right off. I mean, after all, that one little sentence by Sir Napier Shaw is not enough to do much. I keep away from prefaces. You noticed that. Practically never. I hit the first sentence and go. I can't see the point of having a lot of stuff in front of your book. You might as well get it going. If you want to have an introduction, put it at the end. That's what I've done. And acknowledgements and that kind of thing.

Riess: In Doctor's Oral, then, it's all part of the book.

Stewart: I would call that part of the book, yes. That might be called a kind of introduction, but I haven't even had that much mostly. I've got about a paragraph in The Years of the City. But mostly not.

Why throw it away? Take it from an advertiser's point of view--that's the best position you have, the very first page. That's your point of emphasis. You see, all those devices like paragraphs and chapters should be used for points of emphasis. Anybody is bound to be affected by all that white space.

Riess: Do chapters tend to end at a time--in your writing--a time where you would halt for the day?

Stewart: Oh, partly. If I were somewhere near the end of my day, and I came to the end of a chapter, I would quit, yes. But I generally conceived a chapter as a kind of unit which creates an effect--in some books more important than others. In East of the Giants, for instance, the chapter was very important. But a chapter never can be conceived as a complete unit, because you don't want the person to quit reading. After all, the chapter should lean upon the next chapter, so that they go right on.

Riess: What about the ending sentences in chapters? Do they have a certain value that you calculate, also?

Stewart: The paragraph has, certainly, and the last sentence of a chapter is important. The first sentence too. But it shouldn't have quite the same importance, because it isn't a thing in itself. It leads on to the next one. So it should be leading ahead, not giving too great a sense of "this is the end," you see. Because you never know--you never have the perfect reader. You always imagine the perfect reader, but--

Riess: Oh, tell me what the perfect reader would be!

Stewart: Well, the perfect reader is the one who would always have good conditions under which to read. The doorbell and telephone wouldn't ring, and so forth, so you would have control of him. He would understand what you were doing, would have a similar background. Not the same background, of course, but a similar background. In my books, particularly, I had to explain certain things as I go along, juggle two or three balls

Stewart: at once. This reader would follow right along. You would be attuned to your reader, you see.

Then of course he would always stop reading at the end of a chapter. He would never stop reading in the middle of a chapter. He would also stop at the proper places otherwise too. That's something you can't really do. I don't think you want a reader to read the whole book at once. Most of my books are too long for that. Sometimes people write me that they have, but I don't think reading up till three o'clock in the morning really gives a book a very good chance, because I think the reader gets too tired. So to have the perfect reader, you would have the one who would break off his reading at just the proper time. Not just one chapter, but say he read four or five chapters, or something like that. So you see, you could have a perfect reader.

Riess: Do you think the perfect reader wouldn't have to go back and check material?

Stewart: No, he wouldn't ever. He'd remember. That's asking a good deal of a reader!

Riess: That's asking a good deal of a writer, too!

Stewart: Well, you see, unless you wrote for a perfect, or a special reader, you wouldn't ever know. Because you never know when you're saying things too often. For instance, how often should you repeat a character's name? I think several times, because the ordinary reader is going to forget it, and then if you bring it out all of a sudden, he won't pick up who the person is. So you string along, you give him the name two or three times, maybe even oftener. But that may be an insult to a really good reader. [laughing] He'd say, "Why are they giving me this so much for?" You don't know.

A really keen reader--well, sometimes, of course, it can go the other way. Sometimes they read too fast also. I think you get one of these really high-powered, high IQ readers, they sometimes will read too fast. They don't savor what's going on. As I say, you're up against an impossibility. You just hit a certain average in there, with a shotgun method, and you hope that you get people who will be able to read it well enough. If they can't remember the character's

Stewart: name, they won't worry about it, or else they'll go back and look it up again, or something like that. But you can't be absolutely sure.

Riess: I think that someday you should play with the idea of writing the same story for the limping, lame reader and for your perfect reader.

Stewart: That would be fun, wouldn't it? I don't know that I even write for the perfect reader. I think I look upon my reader as needing some help. I need help when I read a book. I have trouble picking up character's names. I hate these books that throw so many characters at you so fast, and don't give you much clue to remembering who is tied up with which name, that kind of thing.

I read this book on the San Francisco earthquake, just finished it, and every time they mention Funston, they referred to him as Brigadier General Funston. I got sick of reading that Brigadier General Funston. I knew him by that time, you see! And every time they referred to the mayor, they called him Mayor Schmitz. They could have just called him Schmitz, once they got him introduced. But I thought that was a very funny book in that respect.

No, I can see my reader as a person that has to be snared, and then held. He's always trying to get away. Something's always taking him away from my book! [laughing] And so that's really my attitude towards the reader. I make every effort to hold him, once-- I get him in the first sentence and then don't let him get away. And I must have been fairly successful.

I had a club meeting last night, and here was Frank Gerbode, who is one of the big surgeons of the city. He was sitting beside me. He started talking about Earth Abides. It turned out that his wife Martha was critically ill (she has since died), and they'd got the house full of nurses. He said it was the second time round on Earth Abides. All the family read it once before and now they're reading it again. He said the nurses are reading it. So that's very nice.

Actually I think that's probably a good book to die by. It's not religious, and yet it has a certain feeling in the last part there. I know when Mrs.

Stewart: Stewart had her stroke I got out Earth Abides and read all the last part of it. It was very comforting.

Riess: It's nice that you like your books.

Stewart: Well, I don't read them very often. When a book comes out in a reprint, I sometimes do read it, because people start asking me questions every now and then, and you forget. You don't remember all the details of a book forever. I often read something that way, and I'm usually happy.

Let's talk about Names on the Land. That book has, in many ways, been my favorite of all the books I've done. I don't know if I would say that as an absolute, but one reason is that it's the most difficult book I ever did. It came out so that it pleased me quite well in the end. That's important, because after all, something you worked terribly hard at and had a terrific struggle trying to master, naturally, you're impressed when you're able to do something with it.

Riess: When did you start on it?

Stewart: I started on that immediately after I finished Storm. I worked very hard on it. Of course I had a good background on it before I started, because I'm interested in names. And I had a pretty well vacant year at Princeton there, on that fellowship, so I did a lot of work there. The greatest trouble, though, was not the research in the ordinary sense, although that was a big job, a hard job also. But the greatest job was trying to shape the material into something that you could do. There's no model for that book at all. It is absolutely on its own. And I was able to do that. That naturally pleased me very much that I got it that way.

It's written in a somewhat unusual style, too. Possibly a little too self-consciously. For instance-- I don't think there's a single use of the do or did, paraprastic negative, you know?

Riess: No, I don't know.

Stewart: Well, when you say "I did not," or "he did not." That's avoided, I think all the way through there. I don't think I ever used that. At that time I decided I didn't

Stewart: like it. You can always avoid it--I may have made a few slips. I don't think so, though.

And another thing, I used the relative pronoun "which" all the time instead of "that." I'm not sure that's too good, always, but that was my style. I was doing that.

Riess: Why did you?

Stewart: Well, the "did" business is not graceful, really. It's a roundabout way of saying something. It's one of these--it's a kind of a box that the English language got itself caught up in. I didn't like it at that time. I don't like it now. I keep away from it pretty much. Even so, that was doctrinaire in Names on the Land.

Riess: Would one notice it in reading it?

Stewart: No, I don't think you would. I don't think anybody ever knows it. I've never told anybody except you. That isn't the point. I think the style of the book--that's one reason I like it, it's probably the best I ever did, or one of the best. There are passages in that book which have always been very moving to me. Have you read that one?

Riess: I skipped through it, looking up places I knew.

Stewart: Well, it's not for everybody, that book, although it's appealed to a pretty good number of people. But as I say, it's been in many ways my favorite book of all of them.

Riess: You were mentioning some of the favorite passages.

Stewart: Yes. Well, I like the opening of that book, and the ending.* They're both very good. I hope you don't mind my being so complimentary to my own books!

*Names on the Land: "Once, from eastern ocean to western ocean, the land stretched away without names. Nameless headlands split the surf...Men came at last, tribe following tribe..."

"After all else has passed, the names may yet remain."

Riess: No, and I hope you don't mind the fact that I can't quote them to you.

Stewart: Well, I can't quote them either, as a matter of fact. I know both the beginning and ending of that book. I hit off all right. It starts off with a passage about when there were no names, and then it ends at the--one thing I was never quite happy about was that when they put out the new edition of that book they covered up my original ending. I didn't like that. One of those jams you get into. At least I know just how it should be.

The way they did it--well, it was a mechanical problem, partly my fault. I didn't realize what they were going to do. They just covered up the original ending. They added some more chapters to it, you see.

Riess: And tried to use the original plates?

Stewart: Yes, they used the original plates. The book was badly set up. Or not badly set up, but it was set up during war time, and it didn't have whole pages blank at the end of chapters. It's an interesting example of the problem you can get into with a mechanical problem like that. Again, a thing most people wouldn't think of.

Riess: How is Names on the Land organized?

Stewart: It's organized chronologically, that's all. As well as it can be. Of course very few things can be organized absolutely chronologically.

But here, you see, you have to have the general scheme in chronological order, but you have to package it up in one way. For instance, there will come along a chapter where you have to get in the French influence, and of course you put that in where it more or less belongs chronologically, but it may extend over a good many years itself, you see. So you have to package it in. It gets to be somewhat difficult at times to handle that. You do the best you can.

Riess: You always saw it as a history, rather than a dictionary?

Stewart: Oh yes, that's the whole point, the story of how the names are given, how the names came to the United States, how they filled in the map. There's never

- Stewart: been anything like that really, I don't think even yet. You can't do it in most countries, because you don't have the data. In the United States you've got pretty good data.
- Riess: Did you do maps with it, or include them?
- Stewart: Well, I didn't need to do maps particularly with that, no. You could have done maps. I had printed some maps in the revised edition, the new edition. But the maps are chiefly statistical. They weren't very useful to me.
- Riess: I was thinking of something like layering of the colors of the different influences of countries, maybe.
- Stewart: Oh yes. There's been a great deal of that done in European name study mostly. But that was really not the sort of thing I wanted to do in this book. I wasn't approaching it from a mass statistical approach.
- Riess: At this point, was Random House just taking everything you wrote, or did you have to sell them on this idea?
- Stewart: They took everything. At least, I wrote a contract for that as soon as I had finished--well, when I was in New York, the time that Storm came out.
- Names on the Land sold fairly well. I can't remember exactly. It got the front page of the New York Herald Tribune, which was one of the big reviews in those times. And it got very good reviews, some of the best reviews I ever got.
- Riess: [Having turned over tape...] You were going to read some beginning and ending sentences.
- Stewart: Well, here's Earth Abides, of course. "And the government of the United States of America is herewith suspended, except in the District of Columbia, as of the emergency." I think that's a good sentence.
- Riess: Yes, that is!
- Stewart: And here's the last of that book, the last paragraph, two or three little sentences. "Then, though his sight was now very dim, he looked again at the young man. 'They will commit me to the earth,' he thought, 'yet I also commit them to the earth. There's nothing

Stewart: else by which men live. Men go and come, but earth abides.'" That's actually the first time, I think, "earth abides" is mentioned, given as so many words, in the book.

Here's Sheep Rock, the sentence I was talking about before. "A thousand years and more, by then, had passed--since the silty waters of the dwindling lake, withdrawing, had let the spring once more begin to bubble out beneath the open sky."

The comma that we argued about was the one after "then." "A thousand years and more, by then,..." I wanted a little pause in there. It wasn't necessary grammatically, but it's all right grammatically to put a comma there, and it slows down the action. There again, you see, was the idea of time. "A thousand years and more, by then, had passed..." It isn't a definition of when "then" is, but you've arrived at some point, you see, dated by being a thousand years and more from some other point.

A lot of this book dealt with long periods of time. I coined words in there. There was no unit of time longer than a millennium in ordinary usage, which doesn't do at all. So I coined "decimillennium" and "centimillennium," and I used "millennium" for a million years. I doubt if you'd find those anywhere else, but it's pretty obvious what they mean. I really needed them in this book, because I was dealing in periods very much longer than a thousand years. Let's see what the ending of that is. I don't remember exactly.

This is about the mountain sheep that they saw: "The two men sat up, and after a few minutes the ram reappeared, as he went up across one of the old beaches and around the shoulder of the high black rock. Still watching, they saw him again far off and little, as he climbed the red slope of the mountain, till at the crest he suddenly faded out into the brightness of the sky."

Riess: There's a lot that's very poetic about your writing.

Stewart: I always thought of myself that way. I don't exactly know what a poet is, but I always wrote with that in mind. Sheep Rock is probably my most poetic book, I

Stewart: suppose people would say, the way it's put together.

Riess: That's just the way it came out? Or did you work over the passage?

Stewart: Well, I worked over it plenty. [laughing] It came out somewhere. I'd have to look at my manuscript to find that out. You'd find a lot of erasing on that.

Riess: When you finished Names on the Land, did you have any of the subsequent names books in mind?

Stewart: No. It was a long time before I took them up. I didn't see much else I could do along that line at the time. Oh, I did think about it a little bit as I remember, too, but I decided not to do anything more about it, then. I'd done a good job on that one, and it's a good idea to quit when you've done a good job.

About Man--that I suppose is the most "tour de force" thing I ever did. I'm not sure what a tour de force is. Most of my books have been so called. I don't like the term particularly well. It always implies something superficial or artificial. But Man is my greatest example of simplification, and turned out to be over-simplification. People didn't like the thing being made so easy. It had a pretty good reception. It got some big reviews, surprisingly so.

I still think it's a good book, but it's over-simplified, probably. At least that seems to be the general opinion.

Riess: You mention simplification as one of the things you were working at as a writer.

Stewart: Oh yes. I don't think you can get things too simple, myself. But other people don't look at it that way. It seems to me that the story of man, seen that way, is a very simple thing in many ways, if you look at it with big enough perspective. It gets completely fouled up by people putting "whereases" and "possibly's" and one thing and another. But if you get far enough away to look at it, it becomes a very simple and very fascinating story, and a moving story. That's really what I tried to do, tell it in as simple as possible terms, using the device of having man speaking in his

Stewart: own person, which of course raised a lot of obvious impossibilities. There's where the tour de force comes in.

At times you have a problem whether it's a man or a woman speaking, and that kind of thing. But it worked out I think all right. It had a pretty good success at the time it came out, but it hasn't held up as well as it really ought to, I think. It's almost what you'd call a young adult book, I think. It's almost in some ways a juvenile.

There's one sentence in it which has been picked out and apparently it's becoming a classic sentence. I've seen it quoted in two or three different books. I think they quote from each other now. I don't think they get it from Man! [laughter] But it's very nice to see the old sentence coming out about the scraper.

The general idea was that a scraper was a little piece of partly shaped stone, and it's not a very inspiring thing to just look at it that way, but if you think what it stands for, "it means not only a scraper, but a thing to be scraped, most likely a hide,..." It means leisure to do some scraping; and it means the confidence that you'll have enough future to enjoy what you've worked at. It stands for a whole civilization, a whole culture, you might say, to figure just what the scraper means. I've seen it quoted several times.

Riess: You said at one point that one of your general themes was "the great human love for the simple, which is forced to yield in the end tragically to the complex."

Stewart: Yes, that is more or less the theme of Man I suppose, the fact that things get more and more complicated as you go along. One thing I did was to tie the archaeology into the history too. Very few books ever try to do that. They're archaeological or historical. I tried to tie the two things together, showing how the same threads went right on through.

Riess: But you were saying that it was important for you to make the book simplified. I was trying to sort out the simplified book from the idea of this being one of your themes in writing a book, where the simple things yield to the complicated. It seems like they

Riess: are two different things you're talking about, a theme and a method.

Stewart: Yes. The only time I tried to adjust a book stylistically was The Years of the City, which has the four different parts. You see, it has the four generations. It starts with the first man as just a boy, and the last man is a very old man, so you get a spread of about a hundred years in there, and about two hundred years altogether. You get the four generations spread out over two hundred years. It goes along with the life of the city, which is founded on the first day of the story, with this boy. He's a young boy. And it ends with the destruction of the city two hundred years later when the very old man dies at the end of the story.

Now I forget what I was going to illustrate by that. Oh, the way the style adjusted. I tried to write the first part more or less like a juvenile, because it was being written about the boy. Then the third section was written in a quite complicated style, because this was a very sophisticated third generation rich man. I even tried to do a little parody of Henry James as part of it. Then on the last, it peters out again to a poverty-stricken old, old man, with almost no faculties left. So I tried to get the adjustment of style in that book. There's not too much though. You can't overplay that sort of thing, because it gets too mannered if you do, but there is a slight suggestion in places there. The second part is a young man, so the style is sort of vigorous and clean cut. There's a difference all the way through it.

Riess: Had the idea for Fire been lurking for a while?

Stewart: For a while, yes. After I did Storm, this man from the New York Times--whose name I don't remember now, he was a well-known book man--he came to interview me there in New York. He did not like the book terribly well. Then he said he thought it would be easy to do another one like it. I said, "What would you do it on?" He couldn't think--he thought possibly an insect plague or something of that sort, but he couldn't come up with anything. I know I couldn't either at the time. People still talk about doing an earthquake or a volcanic eruption. I just don't see how you can do it, because the time element is too involved, for

Stewart: one thing. And they don't have the sense of life that either the storm or the fire does. Hundreds of people said that to me at one time or another, but I said, "I don't see how I could do it." I never have done it.

But I read a couple of books about forest fire. In fact, I reviewed one for the Times and that gave me the idea that you could do it with a forest fire, and so I did it. I guess that's it. I started work on that in 1945. The war was still on. I made contact with the Forest Service. Of course, they were very pleased to have me doing a book like that. They gave me very good cooperation. I was the department collaborator, which had a nasty sound during the war, [laughing] but that was my official title. That meant I didn't have any salary, but I had the privileges and courtesies.

Then I was going to--let's get this timing worked out. I started working in '44, not '45, only I didn't get much done in '44 because I just sort of started out and then Parker Trask turned up and wanted me to go on this Navy job.

Riess: Please explain what that was.

Stewart: It was a pro-submarine job. Most of our submarine work was anti-submarine, of course, because that was the big problem, but we also had a big submarine fleet. This was a project really for undersea mapping. It's pretty complicated but the question of navigating a submarine and evading your enemies and so forth is all tied up with the conditions of the water. Not too much was known about it at that time, because the basic scientific work was only partly done. So they recruited me to write the stuff up.

It was a pretty unsatisfactory job, as lots of those war jobs are, because, oh--you know, they're all full of SNAFU one way or another. I got terribly disgusted. But eventually I got the work done, as far as I was supposed to do it. I had to get in a good deal deeper than I thought at first. I had one or two great moments of at least personal triumph, that didn't ever get anywhere, but I like to remember them. The great oceanographer for our side was Sverdrup, a Norwegian, about my age. He was Director of Scripps Institution of Oceanography. He checked

Stewart: everything we put out. I used to take my work out to him to have him look it over. He was always very nice, and would come out and make suggestions where I could do something better.

I had this one idea all by myself, about oceanography and submarines, and I just wrote it up. I hadn't gotten it out of any book or anything, I just figured it out myself. So I wrote it up and took it out, the whole section, the whole thing, to him. Not just that one paragraph. He was reading it, turning over the leaves. He came to this page, and I was watching. He was reading down through it, and he did a double-take on this, went back and read it through very carefully. He said, "You know, I never thought of that myself, and it's right."

That's a nice thing to have happen, you know. Just a little thing like that. They wouldn't publish that though. The commander who was in charge of it and had the naval say on it, wouldn't publish it, because it hadn't ever been demonstrated by experience. But it would have worked all right.

I had a few other interesting experiences. I made one contribution to submarine tactics and one contribution to submarine strategy. I don't think anybody has ever put it into actual practice. The question, you see, if you're in an ocean current and you are located by an enemy sub-chaser, should you evade down-current or up-current? I figured out, well, you ought to evade down-current, because there are certain technical reasons. I talked this over with one submarine man, and he agreed with me. So, if you ever get that situation, remember to evade down-current.

I also suggested that they launch a big submarine attack when the Chinese rivers flood, because that's what the Germans had done to us off the Amazon. That played hell with our merchant marine down there, because somebody was sending these ships through the place where the Amazon runs out to the ocean, and that gave submarines a tremendous advantage, to get the fresh water on top of the salt water. Which again is a technical matter, so I made the suggestion that we ought to do this when the Chinese rivers overflowed. It would have worked, too, but by that time the war

Stewart: was nearly over. I don't think they ever put it into effect, so I don't think I have the blood of any Japanese on my hands at all, so far as I know.

Riess: It sounds like you really fell right in with that task.

Stewart: Well, there were some very interesting things about it. Parker Trask became a very good friend of mine. He died about ten years ago. He was in Berkeley after that. I used to see him a good deal. A very nice guy. He went to Alaska with me on the trip when I wrote N.A. I.

Riess: You went on that job in 1944 and you had started on Fire, but you stopped.

Stewart: I stopped. I did a little bit of research in San Diego. The Forest Service there took me out one day, but it didn't amount to anything. Then I came back. I did some work on reading in the winter. It wasn't quite like Storm. There wasn't the same technical problem. A fire's a fire. It doesn't make so much difference.

And then the next summer, the war was still on, but I wasn't on that job. I was back in Berkeley for the summer. I went out with the Forest Service then. They shipped me up to Portland. There was a terrific fire outside Portland. I didn't get too much out of that, but you learn slowly. Then I was in various jobs in Northern California, around several fires. I saw some paratroopers jump at a fire. Then I wanted to get some experience on look-out, so they assigned Sierra Buttes to me. Do you know where that is?

Riess: No, but that's now your favorite vacation spot, isn't it?

Stewart: Yes. Right below that.

Riess: Did your wife come with you?

Stewart: No, my son did. He was seventeen then. That was very nice. There's a needle up there at the top, and you sit right on top of the thing. You had to climb up a ladder. We figured we could throw our olive pits about 2000 feet. We had to come down at night. That was too bad. Now they have a permanent look-out where

Stewart: you can spend the night and everything.

I learned a lot up there. I didn't discover any big fires. Actually, they gave me a look-out which wasn't a very critical point, up there in the high mountains. That was all right. I made my reports and laid out my distances and my angles on smokes and talked to the other lookouts occasionally. So I could handle the girl lookout all right, doing the story. I knew my stuff on that.

Something interesting happened there. They came up to get me at the end of the week, and put a regular lookout back on. I came down and got in the truck and started going down to the town. We'd gone down the road about ten miles, and the driver said, "Say, did you know we dropped an atomic bomb on the Japanese?" No, I hadn't heard about it! I think I was about the last man in the world to hear about the atomic bomb.

Riess: That's a good test of your powers of ESP, if you thought you had any. You didn't sense anything strange had happened?

Stewart: No. I was too busy dodging lightning and that sort of thing.

That winter I didn't do too much on Fire. The next year I went out again in the summer, and had some more experience on fires. That's the summer I got-- they lost me, I didn't get lost. And the time the tree almost fell on me. Did I tell you about when I almost got killed in a fire?

That's a good story. I think we ought to get a story in occasionally. I was on this fire detail, a terribly disorganized fire. I'd been up most of the night, and I was tired. I was walking along a fire trail, with the fire burning on the right hand, over here. (You see how oriented I am?) The way I was walking, the fire was on the right hand side. And here was a big old snag, about a hundred feet tall, burning, a very dry old snag. It was right about twenty feet over in the fire. I knew it was dangerous. I knew enough about things to keep an eye on it. I walked along, I was up almost even with the tree, and there was a little trickle of water coming down from a spring. People had been walking along here, and it was

Stewart: all muddled up. I went to take a long step, to get across. It wasn't really a jump. And I was tired. As I went to do this step, my left foot, which is my jumping foot, slipped in the mud, and I went right down flat on my face in the mud, and right then I heard the tree go over. Bang! I heard it crack. I couldn't move, you know, I couldn't possibly get up in time. Otherwise I could have run. The tree hit just about fifteen feet ahead of me.

That's the funny thing about life, though, you see. If I hadn't fallen, I might have been just about where the tree hit! But then there would have been a chance to get out of the road, if I could have seen what was happening fast enough. It really didn't bother me in the slightest though. I didn't even think about it at the time very much. Then I realized later that I was close to it.

Riess: Yes. That reminds me of Ben Lehman telling me about Professor Utter struck down by the eucalyptus.

Stewart: Yes! I told him about this, and he said, "You're carrying insurance, because there couldn't possibly be two people in the English department killed by trees falling on them."

Riess: His story involved Utter stopping and getting a light for his cigarette, or something, which was the fatal act.

Stewart: I don't know about that. It might be true. I was at that dinner with Utter. It was a windy night, a dinner at the Faculty Club. I went out the front door and he went out the back door. Again, that's a thing I've thought of often, just the way how your fate is determined. You go out one door and the other guy goes out the other door. That's it.

I didn't know about it of course until the next day. I didn't know the tree went over. I don't know about stopping to light a cigarette either. I never heard that before. The thing I liked about the Utter story is that he put his arm up to protect his head, when he heard the tree go. And he was a good outdoors man. He would have reacted quickly.

Riess: How fast does a tree go over?

Stewart: It doesn't go as fast as all that, but of course a eucalyptus tree has branches on it, and he may not have got hit by the main trunk. Besides, he was in the dark. He couldn't have told what was happening. That would have been my trouble too, if I had been there on my feet. You wouldn't know which way to jump. You might run right into the thing. Funny, I can still remember that was a windy night. Poor Mrs. Utter had cancer at the time. She said, "Why can't there be trees for both of us?"

Well, by the end of that summer I knew pretty much what I wanted to do with the story. It wasn't too hard to write.

I sent it over to the Forest Service to check the technical details, and I was very happy that they only found two minute points which they thought I ought to change. One of them was the business about the two men working at the saw. They said that tree was too small, and wasn't a test for anybody. You had to have a bigger tree. The other one--oh, the top of a sugar pine wasn't quite the way I said it was. I changed that. I thought that was very nice that I got into it far enough so I could really write to please the technical people.

The story's in the Ponderosa Forest, you know. I invented the Ponderosa Forest. I shoved the Plumas Forest and Tahoe Forest apart and put the Ponderosa in between. The wife of one of the rangers up there in the Plumas Forest came to see me one day, and she said that people are always driving in there and saying, "What became of the Ponderosa Forest?" [laughter] "We were driving up and it said 'Tahoe Forest' and all of a sudden it changed to 'Plumas Forest.' We thought the Ponderosa Forest was in between."

I want to show you something over here. I think I know where it is. It's my relief map. That's one of the few things I haven't given to the Bancroft Library.

[Can't find it.] Maybe I can show it to you when you come over again. It's just a small relief map of the area. My son is very good at that sort of thing. It's based on the topographical map that I drew with all the lines. It's the same thing as a topographical

Stewart: map put into actual relief. I probably should give it to The Bancroft. The interesting thing about this is that David Park did the coloring for me. So it's a David Park original.

Riess: What is it made out of?

Stewart: Just plaster. It's painted. It's more or less the color which you would get, you see, with the different kind of trees and so forth.

Riess: In Fire you were using the name Judith Godoy a second time, weren't you?

Stewart: Yes.

Riess: Why?

Stewart: Oh, I don't know. Lots of authors have used the same character name. She was supposed to be the descendant, the great-great-granddaughter or something, of Judith in East of the Giants.

Riess: Did you ever say anything about her grand-parentage?

Stewart: Yes, just in kind of a slanting way. She told him, [Dave] after he carried her off from the tower, she told him that this had happened to her ancestress who had been carried away on a horse.

Actually, some of those people in Fire, the professor she worked with at the university, for instance, were friends of mine. I've done that several times. It's a dangerous thing. Sometimes people don't like it.

For instance, the Hart's rugs get spoiled in Earth Abides. Nobody is there to take care of the overflow of water. Now, they're always talking about their rugs! Oh, these have been very small things actually. I did more in Fire than in any other book. There's a character out of Storm in Fire, too, Johnny Martley. And then I used myself in Fire too, the one who was collecting information on it. I just told all of the different kind of people who got sucked into the fire business and there was this man who was collecting material on the fire.

Riess: The connective things seem to remind the reader that the author is there and really in charge of the whole story. I wonder how you respond to that idea.

Stewart: Well, I don't think that in my books, at least, the author is there or not. The only time that I really stepped out from behind the mask was in Sheep Rock, and that was just at the very end.

I've gone through several stages in that sort of thing. In my early novels I kept very strictly out of the picture, completely out. In East of the Giants for instance. Then as I went along, I moved rather in the other direction. In Storm and Fire the author is pretty strictly out of it I should say. Then as I worked along, I gradually came to feel more and more, this is a sort of convention. After all, the reader knew you were there all the time, and you weren't really fooling anybody. So I sometimes made use of it in the other direction.

Riess: I mean the sense of the work being under somebody's control, that there's nothing that's accidental, in the sense that life flows along in an accidental fashion. ©

Stewart: Well, don't a lot of writers like to give the other impression, that this is outside their control, that they are not in control of the book, don't you think?

Riess: I felt that you just decided to tell a little bit about what you knew, which was probably everything.

Stewart: Yes. Well, in a sense that's true. In a sense I knew a great deal more about the situation than I wrote down. I had all these images of what the place was like, and all that, and could have gone into any amount of detail. Partly, those were memories, of course, of places I've been, in fires, and so forth.

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- Stewart: Do you want to bring this up short and put in some direction now?
- Riess: Well, we can go on with the sort of chronological thing with your books, or we could break from that and I could ask you ten out of maybe a hundred idle questions that I have.
- Stewart: All right, it would give us a little change.
- Riess: [laughing] Idle questions department. Tell me about Hollywood in 1947. What was that experience like, and what did you do there?
- Stewart: I guess that was the time I went down to Disney's. I'd been down to Hollywood a couple of times. I think that was the only extended time I went down there--I stayed a week that time. I never knew what they wanted out of me, and I don't think they did either. It was a typical Hollywood experience. I sat in a nice office there and read a book most of the time, and once in a while somebody would talk to me. I never did find out what they wanted. It was just the same old line, you know. They could pick somebody's brain and that sort of thing, and I think they were probably pleased enough with what they got from me. They didn't pay me too much money anyway.
- Riess: Were you working on a script for Storm?
- Stewart: No. No. I don't know what it had to do with, whether I didn't show them what they wanted, or what they were looking for, and they just sent me back home again. It was pleasant enough.
- Riess: You weren't there long enough to accumulate all the bad feelings about Hollywood that some writers have?
- Stewart: No. I can see how you would very rapidly, though. I had great respect for Walt Disney. I remember having lunch with him, the two of us, one day. I can't remember whether it was that trip, or another time I was down there. But I never had any special contacts with Hollywood. It's never meant anything to me particularly.
- Riess: Did you do much Sunday book reviewing, or reviewing in general?

Stewart: I've never done a great deal of reviewing. The New York Times had me on their list for a while, and I did a certain number of books, nonfiction. I told them I wasn't very much interested in reviewing novels. I never did any very big reviews. That only went on for five years or so, then like so many things, you know, personality changes, or something like that, they forget about that reviewer and they go on to another reviewer. I just sort of eased out of it. It never meant anything very much to me. It was a nice connection to have.

Then I reviewed for the Chronicle occasionally. Joe Jackson would give me some kind of special book. He, of course, was a very close friend of mine, and I think he handled me very smartly on that sort of thing. He didn't just give me routine reviews. It would be some unusual type of thing, to do, just occasionally. It worked out very well.

Riess: That's a funny thing to say, that somebody handled you "smartly."

Stewart: Well, I am difficult to handle. No, I think that's essentially modesty on my part, isn't it, to say that he handled me well? I wasn't such a good prospect that he couldn't help handling me well.

One book I did was the first biography of Scott Fitzgerald. He knew I knew Fitzgerald, or had known him. I did a good review on that, too. Then he gave me the Century Dictionary of Names, a great big three-volume work which I still have, sitting right here. It's one of the few books I brought along in the move over here.

I did other miscellaneous reviews here and there, but I was never really a regular reviewer.

Riess: I have in capital letters to ask you about a quote that I think you used in the English department history, "No man is as simple as his legend." Would you apply that to yourself?

Stewart: Well, I can't say I know what my legend is, or whether I have one, or how much of one I have. So I don't see what I can say about that.

Riess: You said once that you felt that people expected certain things of you.

Stewart: Well, they may, but I don't know exactly what they expect from me. I can imagine things that I might like to have them expect of me, but I don't know that that would be of much pertinency. I think every man likes to think of himself as a strange and wonderful character.

Riess: In 1922 you went to Michigan to teach. What was your year in Michigan like?

Stewart: I got a lot of experience there. That was my first real full teaching year. So I learned a lot, accomplished quite a lot that year. Nothing like so much, though, as that master's year at Berkeley where so much was opened up. Of course, being my first teaching year my nose was pretty well to the grindstone. I wasn't doing much experimentation. I was getting engaged.

Riess: Would you tell how you met your wife?

Stewart: Well, I remember where I met her. The president's wife gave a tea, and--I think it was pretty good that I went to it. I don't remember exactly how or why I did. I went with another instructor.

The wife of one of the English professors whom I had met, and who was being nice to me, said, "I'd like you to meet--" (I don't know what she said, "Miss Burton," or whatever she said.) So I looked across the room and there she was, and I went over and was introduced. I can't say that I fell in love at that moment, or she with me, but that was the time we met. I think she had a pink dress on. She might have had.

She remembers about it too.* She thought I was awful stiff. I think this lady introduced me as "Dr. Stewart," because I wasn't a professor. Ted has never been able to stand that title for some reason. To this day, she hates anybody introducing me as "Dr."

*The lady had said to her, "There's a new instructor in the English Department. I want you to be nice to him." (She has been, for a good many years.) [G.S.]

Stewart: I don't prefer it, but I don't get irritated about it.

Riess: So, you married the president's daughter?

Stewart: The boss's daughter. She was home for a year then. She hadn't been very well. She had gone to Vassar for a year. She was everywhere, started out at the University of Minnesota, and when her father came to Michigan she came down then, and went to Vassar for a year. Then she didn't go back to Vassar. She spent this year--I don't think she went to college at all, she was helping her mother around the place, running the social events.

That was a year in between for her, and that's when she got engaged. We were engaged for a year. She went on and finished up her work at the University of Michigan. I don't think we have anything very startling to recount about that.

Riess: Did you go back to marry her?

Stewart: Yes, and we had a big do with the wedding. It was really a Roman holiday. We were married in the Clemens Library. It's like the Bancroft Library. It was a nice new building, the way The Bancroft may be a year or so from now. It happened to be just next to the president's house, so they had a canopy across. They invited practically everybody. Among the celebrities came Henry Ford, out from Detroit. And we had the ceremony in the library. That was very fitting after all, for me. [laughing] Then we went back to the house and had a reception in the big president's house.

And as I say, Henry Ford was the chief notable, even more so than the groom. [laughter] He had his social secretary send us a set of Conrad as a wedding present, very beautifully bound, which was signed by Conrad in the first volume. And so we had one of the bridesmaids staked out to get Henry Ford to sign it too, and he did. It looked like the signature on the old Model T, exactly. We had that in our house there in Berkeley. We collected two or three more signatures on it. Carl Sandburg signed it once. We sold that, when we broke the library up. David McGee, the bookseller, bought it, and I don't know what he did with it.

- Stewart: As I say, we had a great big wedding, and a lot of wedding presents, some of which we still have, as a matter of fact.
- Riess: Where did you go on your honeymoon?
- Stewart: Well, we came to California. We had a wild trip in an old Studebaker car. There were some terrible roads. We came out to Glacier Park. From there we swung north into Canada to get across the mountains, and then ended up with some terrible roads in Oregon, and a trip down the then fairly rudimentary Redwood Highway. There we broke a differential, and had to spend three days camped out near a primitive roadside garage while they sent in to Eureka or some place for a new part. We finally made it through to Berkeley, and to Pasadena, where my parents lived then.
- Riess: Were your parents living then?
- Stewart: Yes. They came back for the wedding. My father was about seventy-five then. He lived till he was ninety.
- Riess: Well, it sounds like quite a do!
- Stewart: Oh, it was, they made 700 chicken salads or something like that. It could have set us up in housekeeping very nicely with what that wedding cost, couldn't it?
- Riess: Especially if you had saved all the chicken salad.
- Stewart: Yes, we would have eaten that for about a year!
[laughter]
- Riess: Do you, or did you, belong to social or professional clubs much?
- Stewart: I was never a very great joiner of things. I belong to more things right now than I ever have.
- Riess: What about the American Names Society?
- Stewart: There I think I'm down as one of the charter members. I didn't have much to do with actually organizing it. I didn't think it was a very good time for it, as a matter of fact. That was just about the time of the Korean War, and I think it had a hard time getting going. It did get organized. I proved to have not enough faith in the thing.

Stewart: I was one of the early presidents of it, and I did a good job I think on that, because I rescued it from bankruptcy. I tried my hand at working up a little bit of money, and I got it all right. I figured that I hated to take over an organization that fell down on its obligations. You see, we were taking the money, the subscriptions for the year. I figured it wouldn't amount to an awful lot of money, a few hundred dollars, and if necessary I could get stuck with that, it wouldn't ruin me. So I enjoyed working it up. I got a lot of people to join as associate members, and give \$25. I got a lot more subscriptions one place and another by a little publicity. I got it back on its feet. I was very happy about that. It's still going.

Riess: Do people who have just a hobby or curiosity about names join?

Stewart: There are a good many of those I think, yes. I keep getting letters from people about names, on account of my books, and when I reply I always send an invitation to join the society. I get a certain amount of them but I don't know for how long--maybe they just join for one year. I never follow up or find out. After all, that's the way an organization lives, by getting new people in.

Riess: Did you belong to University groups such as the Arts Club and the English Club?

Stewart: I never belonged to the Arts Club. I never really belonged to the English Club. I was taken into it just about the time it folded up, so I can't say that I ever did anything with that. It had quite a long, good career, and then, like all those student organizations, something happened to it. It got out of step with the times or something and it just folded up. That didn't mean anything to me.

Riess: How about the Bohemian Club? Are you a Bohemian?

Stewart: No, I'm not, but they've got me up for membership now. I think I'll join it if I get a chance, because living over here now it's right down the street here and I know a lot of people in it.* I was approached

*Joined, December, 1971, G.S.

Stewart: before, years ago, but I didn't take it up, because when we lived in Berkeley there wasn't any point in belonging to it.

Actually, I haven't belonged to anything very much. The Faculty Club was, again, a professional business. [Like the Modern Language Association.] One day I was eating there and Bob Brode stuck his head in the door, to see who was in that room. He came around and said, "Could I nominate you for the board of the Faculty Club?" I said, "Well, what's it mean?" And so forth. I said, "All right. I won't be elected, anyway." So I was elected. I got interested in that.

I did a good job on that, I think. I was on the board for three years, vice-president or something. Then they elected me president and I was president for three years. I really devoted myself to trying to build up a little morale and spirit in the Faculty Club, which was very much run down at that time. I think people appreciated what I did, because there are still people who call me Mr. President. [laughing] That's very nice. I appreciated that. That was a nice time, being president. I worked pretty hard at it. Actually, that was all when I was emeritus, when I was president.

Riess: It seemed to be about 1963 to 1967.

Stewart: Yes, that, I guess, was it.

Riess: Do you think it's growing as an influence?

Stewart: I think it's come over it's hardest years. It seems to be doing better now. I think it's going all right.

Riess: Did it have an old Golden Age?

Stewart: Yes, it did.

Riess: When was that?

Stewart: Oh, I think around--it began in 1902 I think, in a small way, and it came along. I think it was a great institution for the faculty. Then about 1930 it kind of began to go downhill, I think. I don't know. Anyway, along after the fifties it was in not such good shape. The great question now is whether you can

Stewart: get the younger men to join it. The younger men simply don't go into it. It's become an old men's club, which is very bad. I worked on that quite a bit, but didn't get very far, trying to get some interest among the younger men. Now they are amalgamating with the Women's Faculty Club and they are still working on their problem with the younger men. One problem of course is the fact that the faculty of the campus has become so big, it's hard to focus on any one part, one point.

Riess: You mean there are departmental clubs that people are going to?

Stewart: I don't think clubs exactly. A lot of them eat out of bags, which of course is cheaper, and they can get together as a group in an office. And you have the Golden Bear restaurant at North Gate. That seems to be something of a problem.

In what you wanted to call the "Golden Days" there, after lunch there would be a big gathering of people in that room which is now the Howard Room. They'd be playing cards and cursing and reading magazines and playing chess, and the next room was full of billiard players. There was a real gathering of spirits there, after lunch.

When they remodeled the club, they got that room all shifted around, and the only lounge is upstairs. The thing just went absolutely dead. It was a curious kind of failure in the people who remodeled the club. They didn't realize they were killing the spirit of the place at the same time they were remodeling it. Now, they are going to remodel it again, and I think they have that in mind. They're going to try to get a gathering place.

Riess: Speaking of the faculty doing things together, do you think crises help bring the University together?

Stewart: Well, yes and no. You take a thing like the oath controversy. It brought certain people together and other people apart. There were a lot of enmities developed. In my own person I know that. I think on the whole I came out of the oath controversy in a better way than most people did. I didn't suffer any great tragedy out of it. The oath really broke a

Stewart: certain number of people, put them under terrific strain. They never reconstituted themselves, I think. I could name names, but I don't need to.

On the other hand, I came out of it in pretty good shape. Doing the Year of the Oath was a very fine thing. I worked with about seventy people on that. That gives me ties around the campus you wouldn't ever imagine. I was the man they were following there at that one point. You don't forget it. I don't.

Riess: So people may draw together around an issue, or come to life around an issue.

Stewart: That was one thing I had in mind when I undertook to write that book. It was a therapeutic thing. It gave people something to work at. Whether it was a good thing or not was really not so much the problem. They gave themselves up to this, and I think it was very good for the people who got involved in that.

It was a very interesting thing. I worked terribly hard on that, just terribly hard, because I did the whole thing in sixty days, and kept my teaching going at the same time. I had a whole organization--chief of staff, and a sort of inner council of five people who met to plan the higher strategy of it. I had little groups scattered around campus working on this or that. Sometimes they didn't do anything that amounted to anything, but at least they were working at something.

Riess: That's interesting. I hadn't realized it was happening so simultaneously. When did it start, exactly, in terms of your sixty days?

Stewart: Well, it started about the middle of April that year. ¹⁹⁵ I probably have the date down somewhere (April 4, 1960). I handed the manuscript in in sixty days and then made arrangements for publication. I had some luck on that.

Riess: Did you have to get it cleared with anybody?

Stewart: No. Only my own group.

Then there was a question of who was going to sign it. I didn't want to sign it by myself. I thought it would be better if somebody else signed it

Stewart: with me, but I couldn't find anybody who would sign it with me. I had written nearly all of it, so in a way I didn't blame them, signing something they hadn't written. But after all, it was a kind of joint effort. I couldn't get anybody to sign it, so I just went and signed it myself.

It's an interesting story about the publication of that in a way. It's a long, continued story. Howard Cady was out here then. I knew him slightly. He was the West Coast representative for Doubleday. Random House wouldn't take it. That was one of the things I got sore at Random House about. So I got in touch with Howard Cady. As I say, I knew him just slightly.

Riess: It was too hot a thing for them?

Stewart: Oh, they couldn't make any money out of it. They thought they couldn't. Then Howard said he thought Doubleday would do it. He'd recommend it. He fixed it up. So Doubleday published it. It was an unsatisfactory book in many ways, because it had to be done right in the middle of things. We couldn't really write an ending to it. The controversy was still going on.

Then years later I was able to repay that to Howard Cady, because I saved his neck on one occasion. That was interesting: One day I got a letter from the International Nickel Company, from a local general manager or something on the West Coast, and he said, "Would you be willing to have a talk with Mr. So-and-So, our vice-president?" Well, it was nothing to me. I said, "Sure. I don't mind having a talk with the vice-president of International Nickel. I don't know what I can do for him, but...." [laughter]

So pretty soon they fixed it up, and the vice-president came to see me in my office down in Dwinelle. Turned out they wanted a book written about the company. They didn't offer it to me to write it, but they wanted some advice on this. Would I see the president? "Yes. I don't mind seeing the president." This was the vice-president, who came all the way to ask me if I would see the president. I said, "I don't mind seeing the president." He said, "We'll pay your expenses back to New York."

Stewart: I said, "Well, as a matter of fact, I'm going to be in New York in about a month. I don't need any expenses." They said, "Well, what fee would you charge?" I said, "Oh, I don't know." He said, "How about two hundred dollars?" I said, "Oh sure, that's enough."

I thought I'd get lunch out of it too, he would take me to lunch. So we went to New York, and I saw the president. It was a hot day down there and he took me to lunch, and I got two hundred dollars. I recommended Howard Cady as the man they should see. (I guess it happened at that time that Howard got fired. He really got a very tough deal.) Howard got himself in a good break with International Nickel. They took him on for a temporary job to rewrite all the manuals, and Howard said it saved his neck. He had four children and he was in a bad way, temporarily. So it was a very nice thing to happen ten years later. You never can tell when you're going to get a chance to repay a debt.

I kept in touch with that vice-president of International Nickel for a long time. [laughter] In fact, he used to come out here and take my wife and me to dinner. I haven't seen him in a long time. I don't know what's happened to him.

They would have given me that book to write if I'd made any gesture about it at all. Howard said they wanted me to do it, but I didn't want to do it. I could have made \$50,000. They paid the man \$50,000 who wrote it. There's money in those corporation books. Because in a corporation's budget that's nothing, you see.

Riess: You probably would have gotten interested in it, too.

Stewart: I probably would, yes.

INTERVIEW VII, Earth Abides, Year of the Oath, Sheep Rock, U.S. 40, American Ways of Life, Years of the City, Pickett's Charge, California Trail, Good Lives; premonitions, clubs, aging. (Recorded October 26, 1971)

Riess: What was the genesis for Earth Abides?

Stewart: I don't know exactly what gave me the original idea, but I'd had it for a long time before I wrote it. After I finished Fire I very soon started in to work on that.

I don't know whether I told you about going around to interview various people around the University. That was one way I got my information about what would happen. I would go to see a man who knew about sheep, and ask what would happen to PG&E and all those things. It was very interesting. Most of these people were very skilled people, but they were generally not very imaginative people. They knew what they knew, and when you asked them to project this into the future, it was very startling to them. They had never thought of things like that, you know, "What would happen if there weren't any men around?"

They usually were interested in it, and they'd come right back. I got used to the formula. I'd ask them, "What would happen in that case? Without any men?" They'd say, "Oh, yes, we'll tell you about that." Then they'd start out and say, "This would happen." Then they'd go on talking for about two minutes, and then they'd say, "Well, maybe not. Because there would be a secondary effect there. Maybe something else would happen." And they'd get on to thinking, and in a minute something else would come up, and in another five minutes they'd say, "Well, we really don't know what would happen."

Stewart: That was rather nice for me, because it gave me a free hand, in some respects. Sometimes I differed with them, actually. This man on sheep thought that sheep would survive in spite of being such helpless creatures, because he said there were so many sheep that before the coyotes could get in and kill them all off, there would be some more lambs bred, and in the course of a few generations, they would adapt and become wild again, so you really would have sheep going on. I took it the other way, that the sheep would not survive.

I went to see the same man in PG&E with whom I had worked in Storm quite a bit. He was their chief engineer, I think. He's a very fine specialist. Again, not a man of imagination, particularly. I asked him, "What would happen to your system if there were no men around?" He gave me a long look and said, "You know, I thought I'd considered everything possible to this company, but I never considered what would happen if there weren't any men around." [laughter]

He gave a long breath, and said, "Well, it would be about this way: it would run for about a month. Parts of it for longer." He knew it so well he could tell. Then he said, "It wouldn't all go out at once, Bang! It would go out in different sections, shut off. Every section that shut off would give more power to the ones that were left. Parts of it would keep going for quite a while, until at the end it would fade out."

I pretty much used that in the book, although I heightened the effect in the end, and had it going out just while Ish was looking at it. Obviously, because that's the way I had to express it in a novel.

Of course I started out with Wendell Stanley's quotation there, and that gave me something to work on.*

*"If a killing type of virus strain should suddenly arise by mutation...it could, because of the rapid transportation in which we indulge nowadays, be carried to the far corners of the earth and cause the deaths of millions of people." W.M. Stanley, in Chemical and Engineering News, Dec. 22, 1949.

Stewart: I had the idea before I had read that passage, but that gave me a fine quotation for the beginning.

Riess: This was a pretty new kind of thinking for those people.

Stewart: Well, yes. They've done more of it now. There have been whole organizations, you know, that have given themselves up to speculating what's going to happen in the future. It was much newer then. It was a rather new skill for most people. Their feelings-- they can't think that way.

I talked to the people at the bridge too. They were quite interesting, the bridge authorities. They knew exactly where the bridge was going to wear out. They said the place where the water splashes on it rusts already. It's a very slow business and it's not a serious matter. It can be fixed up. But if there were no men around, it eventually would go to pieces, down there. But even so, it would be a very long time before it went. A matter of many years.

Riess: This was after the atomic bomb, but this isn't the way people had been thinking?

Stewart: Well, of course I had got the idea a long time before the atomic bomb. And I didn't want the atomic bomb in my story, for obvious reasons, because this would just blow everything up, the animals along with everything else. This isn't that story, my story.

Riess: Maybe that accounts for people not having thought of isolated things carrying on. If they had thought in those years of devastation, they would have thought in terms of total devastation.

Stewart: That would have been true, but actually, you see, I was working on this such a short time after the atomic bomb, they should have been thinking of these things before that. You see, the atomic bomb was 1945 and I was working on this in 1948. Practically the same time.

I think, as I said before, the story becomes really the story of the rehabilitation, so to me it is not a particularly depressing story, not a disaster story.

Riess: You certainly went easy on what happened to the people.

Stewart: Yes. Well, it's one of my feelings anyway that all this talk, people expressing concern over what's going to happen to the human race--I don't think they really care. The human race as an abstraction is not really interesting, you see. It's the individual human beings you're attached to, and if you consider, they'll all be dead in a hundred years anyway. I don't think most people really know what they're thinking about when they talk about the human race. Faceless thing, really. It's the individual people that matter. Maybe I'm just not idealistic enough.

One of the ideas I like to play with is that there may have been a superior human race in the past. There's no reason why there shouldn't have been. There's no reason why we should be the best there ever was. When you look at some of the achievements, like the development of language--that's just an incredible thing. It strikes me that there were some real genius types somewhere along the line there that did a lot of things.

Riess: Within our history?

Stewart: Not within our history, no, but within the range of, say, anthropology, the skeletons we get, and so forth. Although we may not have found the right ones.

Riess: Oh. That sounds like you.

Stewart: Well, I'm not talking in mystical terms. I don't mean something that existed a million, ten million years ago. I mean, say, in the range of a 100,000 years, something like that.

Riess: What did Ish and Em, in Earth Abides, stand for?

Stewart: Well, I really explained that pretty well in the book, the fact that we had to have an observer, and Ish was the observer, with that curious intellect, and Em is the figure of courage that holds them all together. I have a tremendous fixation on courage, as you may have noticed. I believe that's the basic virtue. If you don't have courage, you don't have anything.

- Riess: So courage has nothing to do with intellect?
- Stewart: No.
- Riess: But the conflict, in the book, had to do with which would survive.
- Stewart: Yes. It was very important there. It wasn't so much intellect as the mechanisms through which intellect is working. Intellect would be there just the same, you know. You wouldn't breed that out very well. It's the tools of intellect that can't be preserved, and become useless. At least I think that's the way it is.
- Riess: In terms of a "good life"--do you think Ish had what you later were thinking of when you wrote Good Lives?
- Stewart: I think he did, pretty well, yes. I really do. I never thought of it exactly in those terms, but I think he did. He had disappointments, as everybody has, and failures, as everybody has. My people in Good Lives had failures, all of them, nearly all of them, and hard times, but they came through. I think Ish has that. Yes. And he dies, I think, rather contented.
- Riess: Reviewers wrote comments such as "Stewart's faith in man's destiny" and "a lesson for the human race." I wonder what the lesson for the human race was that they were talking about?
- Stewart: I think courage, probably. To keep going even under the threat of the atomic bomb. Which had nothing to do with the book, but which was inherent in the times, obviously.

There were one or two bad reviews of Earth Abides. Did you come across them? There was one woman who thought it was terrible, and I was trying to make it out. In the first place, I think she was a Catholic. I think that situation bothered her somewhat, that the Catholic Church hadn't survived. Once you broke the apostolic succession, you couldn't go ahead! [laughter] I think the present church probably could, but the church back in those days couldn't have done that. I don't quite see why she did. She said, "Where are all those wonderful engineers and men that went out and fought the storm?" Well, obviously they were

Stewart: dead, that's where they were!

I don't think it was a very important review. I just thought you might be interested to come across it.

Riess: I should think people might have wished for more detail in the book.

Stewart: The trouble there is a book can only stand so much detail. You smother a novel if you start putting everything in. You've got these things you can't follow up. It gets to be an encyclopedia.

Riess: Actually, here's one sort of querulous review. "Ish was confronted with moral and psychological problems, on the elementary level, and George Stewart is not altogether happy in dealing with them...happier with natural processes."

Stewart: Yes. Well, that's probably true enough. It was a harder book to write, in some ways.

Riess: What has been done about filming it?

Stewart: Well, it's under contract with an option, right now. [see p. 45] Lots of people have played around with it, yes. Then On the Beach came out, and that, in a way, killed off that idea of that kind of book. That was a big movie, you remember. That killed it off for a long time, but it has come back, and it's actually under option. I had an inquiry about picture rights on Ordeal by Hunger too, just the other day. Called from Los Angeles. I referred them to Houghton-Mifflin. They buy up these options pretty cheaply and pretty readily, you know, and that doesn't mean too much. I wouldn't be surprised if they sold the option on that.

Riess: The next thing you got into was the oath, and the book, Year of the Oath.

Stewart: I could tell you something about that whole experience from my personal participation, though I'm sure the project has a tremendous amount of testimony on that oath.

Riess: Well, nobody seems to be able to agree on what happened. Why is there so much confusion, from that

Riess: very time down to the present?

Stewart: Probably the reason there was so much confusion is that it was a highly charged, emotional issue, and it became more and more so. Starting out rather simply, it became more and more complicated, as if some bad genius were directing the whole thing. It developed into personal antipathies, some of which never died out. It went on that way.

I was not, at the beginning, or even any place, nearly as deeply involved emotionally as a lot of people were. People like Loewenburg, for instance, were tremendously stirred by the whole thing. I think Caldwell was never the same man afterwards. I knew him extremely well. And there were quite a few of them, some of whom remained as non-signers; others signed, eventually.

Of course I considered the question of whether I should not sign it. I finally decided that it wasn't my bag, as they would say these days, that I was really not enough committed on the matter to hang out as a non-signer. I made that decision, and it's very good to make a decision, I think. Then I decided I would do my part. I would do this book. And so I did. As I said last time, I consciously realized this book was a very good therapeutic project, not only for me, but for other people involved in it. I think it worked out that way. It helped people out a lot.

If some people had come in and worked on it, instead of sitting around, they might have been better off too. Anyway, it went through. It was one of the most concentrated jobs I've ever worked on. I think I've told a little about that. So, I did manage to get it across. And as I have to say, it's not much of a book, because it was written before the thing was over. We didn't know if it was over or not. I suppose in some ways it's an even better book for that reason, because it's very much involved. It was written right in that time, and there are very few examples of books like that that are written right at the time.

Riess: I guess people felt comfortable working on that, getting that objectivity.

Stewart: Yes. Yes, I think they did. I still have that personal relationship to a lot of the people.

Riess: So they must have decided that they could trust you. These are people you hadn't known particularly, before?

Stewart: Most of them I had known, yes, but not necessarily very well. The English department was very heavily involved, as you would expect.

Riess: Yes, why is that?

Stewart: It's the same old phrase, "the spearhead of the humanities," they are that group. They're the ones who see things from a humanistic point of view, I think, more than any other department.

Riess: More than history?

Stewart: Oh yes. Much more than history. History has tended more to go over to the social sciences, and in a sense has lost the humanistic touch. I shouldn't say that out loud, I suppose, but it seems to be true. Philosophy has got into a specialty, and the foreign languages of course are linguistic, primarily, rather than humanistic.

You get lots of individual people where that doesn't apply, but to take the mass, I think the English department supplies far more than its share, and, interestingly enough, the speech department is somewhat the same.

Riess: Had people been spending any time thinking about academic freedom before 1949?

Stewart: No, not very much. I think that's interesting, because in a sense you don't have academic freedom when you start thinking about it. You've got to be in a state of innocence, so to speak, to have it, because when you begin thinking, "This is my academic freedom, I'm going to have to save it," well, then of course you don't have academic freedom. You're fighting for it, perhaps, but you don't really have it.

No, we didn't have much problem about that, before. I don't think we were particularly radical. I don't think we said things that we might have said at times. There was one matter, you know, in 1940, I think when the regents put in their anti-communist

Stewart: rule. That went down with scarcely a murmur, whereas now that would be a big issue. I know I was worried about it, and I made some gestures, talking to some of the older men, but I remember they didn't get tied up in it. It seemed to me a bad thing at the time. I don't know how many other people felt that way, but I didn't get anywhere on it.

Riess: What was the issue that got you involved at the University of Nevada?

Stewart: Well, one thing that I did undertake when I did not sign the oath--I more or less propagated the saying about "Sign, stay, and fight," which was a good slogan, you see, at that time. Because once you don't sign, and get thrown out, why, you're dead. And you can't do anything. If all the men who objected more or less to the oath had gone out of the university, you would have had a conservative, dead University left. And so I was rather quick to take up something else which could be done.

This University of Nevada business: some particular person got me interested in it, and it seemed a place where we could do something. So I got this petition, or letter, circulated. We got it signed pretty well. I knew how to organize one of these things now, so I had the thing worked out pretty well. We got quite a good lot of signatures, and we mobilized Stanford, and Pomona, and, I think, UCLA. We got quite a movement going, and I thought it had some influence. I think it bucked up the people at Nevada considerably, which of course was the reason for doing it.

It didn't last very long. It was just, so to speak, a quickie. But it was useful, I think.

Riess: You say you know how to do one of these things. That means you know how to mobilize signatures?

Stewart: Well, sort of organize things, get people working for it. And of course I knew the campus. I knew where you could get things done. Incidentally, the most trouble we had on that petition, or letter, was the zoology department. It was their man who was in trouble up there. He was actually a Ph.D. from their department. And we couldn't get any signatures out of zoology. I think, just because they were, at that time at least, an extremely conservative, non-

Stewart: committed group. I remember saying to the man (Jim Lynch) who was working as my chief of staff on it, "We've got to get somebody from zoology."

He, being a very good man, went down and had to do a regular secret service job. He came back and said, "First I got in touch with the secretary and asked her. She said, 'Well this department won't sign anything, but you might get this man, and if you get him you might get this other fellow.'" So he went around to these offices and he got this man. He got a couple of signatures, so it didn't look too bad. It went up to Nevada.

Riess: Chief of staff?

Stewart: Yes, somebody who can do the leg work and is willing to do it. You have to have one man who is able to sit and think about the thing a little.

Riess: Do you think if you hadn't done the oath book that anybody else would have?

Stewart: I don't think anybody else would have. There was one man who started to, a student. In fact he had been working on the Year of the Oath. We didn't have students generally on that, but this fellow wanted to do things so much that we said, "Sure, you can do something." He got discontented with working on this job too. He pulled out and said he was going to do his own book, but he never got anything done.

We sent out a questionnaire to the faculty that had some interesting responses on it. I had all those questionnaires. And one reason I have a scunner on David Gardner was that he didn't bring back all that stuff he borrowed when he was doing his book.*

Riess: "Scunner?"

Stewart: That's an old saying. S-c-u-n-n-e-r, I suppose, though I never saw it spelled. It means I'm slightly irritated.

*David P. Gardner, The California Oath Controversy, Berkeley, 1967.

- Riess: I remember case histories at the back. Were they from the questionnaire?
- Stewart: Yes. I tried to do the book to keep it on a kind of personal basis. It was a good idea to get away from the social science approach, and try to put it in a personal manner. You get accused of being sentimental in a case of that sort, but maybe you are.
- Riess: Speaking of issues, was your interest in the Vigilantes all of a piece with this?
- Stewart: No, I don't think so. The interest in the Vigilantes went back a long, long, way, clear to 1920. I had done a course with Chauncey Wells--that composition course--in which I had the general background of California to work on, and I got into the Vigilantes at that time, particularly the newspaper reports of 1851, which are terribly fascinating things to me still. And way back in early 1930 I had tried to do a book on the Vigilantes of 1851. I tried to do it just from newspaper clippings. Actually some publisher was going to publish that, but he never did. I think he went broke or something. Some second-string publisher.
- The thing still kept with me. I had this big pile of stuff on it, and finally I used it. I'm not sure it was a good idea. It wasn't a book that interested people a great deal. But that was a long time in the background. It didn't have anything to do with the oath. [Committee of Vigilance, 1964]
- Riess: After the oath book you wrote Sheep Rock, which seemed different from all your other things.
- Stewart: Well, it is and it isn't. It's different in some respects, but it still has the theme of ecology--I mean ecology in the older sense, that is, all the things that go to make up a place.
- Riess: But now there's a sort of troubled soul, it seems to me, in the middle of all that. A real sense of a man--
- Stewart: Yes. Yes. A man trying to understand it. I don't think that I'm that man, though. I think that's pretty objectively conceived. I'm the other man in the book, you know, the man who goes out across the flats in the car.

Stewart: The other fellow is the observer, who is a character all right. His soul is troubled, no question about that. But I don't think it's my soul.

Riess: How was that book planned?

Stewart: For a long time I had the place pretty much in my mind, and it's a small place. I didn't need to work out so very much. Of course, it's a complicated structure of a book, I suppose. It's sort of three times round and three times round. I'm not sure it all comes off.

I went out there, in 1941, with Charlie Camp. And I think I got the idea of a book almost immediately, while I was there. The story of our going out there is pretty much what happened, except that there weren't any sheep. That was an imaginative part there. There could have been, because that's sheep country, undoubtedly.

Riess: And what is the name of the real place?

Stewart: Black Rock. It's very much as described there.

Riess: But you never lived there for any extended period of time?

Stewart: No, I never lived there for more than a few days at a time. It used to scare me to death. I suppose that's why it fascinated me so much. It's a grim place. You're isolated. If you had any accident, you'd never get out.

It's a place of extremes. I've been shivering at a little campfire just before the sun was up over the ridge there. The sun didn't get up very early, because you were under the ridge. I was just shivering, with all the clothes on I could get. The sun comes up, and it's just like standing in front of a fire. Just Bang! You start taking your sweater off, and then it's hot! The temperature must jump fifty degrees or something, just in that time. It's just the pitiless cold and the pitiless heat, coming on like that.

I got into that place a lot more when I worked on The California Trail. (I mean, I got into the knowledge. I wasn't out there.) A lot of the

- Stewart: Forty-niners went around that way. I hadn't realized how many of them there were when I first worked on it.
- Riess: Did you first work on it in 1941?
- Stewart: No, I didn't do any work on that book at all until not so long before I published it. I did collect some information as I went along. I was out there quite a few times, after the war was over, you see. I couldn't go during the war, because there was no gasoline. But then after that I got out there several times with different people. So I got different points of view on it. This Parker Trask went with me, and worked out the whole geology for me, about what was there and what had happened. Carl Sauer, the geographer, and Starker Leopold, the wild-life expert, were also along, but I remember that trip largely for car-trouble. I took a couple of young anthropologists out there once, and they were very interesting.
- Riess: Is it a place that brings out the same kind of things in other people as it did in you?
- Stewart: Well, it does, yes, if you're a certain type, if you're sensitive to that sort of thing. Kenneth Carpenter and his wife, at Reno--I think I told you that they were fascinated with the place. He's the man who sent me the picture of it there.
- Riess: Was it an easy book to write?
- Stewart: It was rather hard to write. I'm making it sound as if all my books are hard to write. I can also give the impression that they were easy to write! It was hard to get it the way I wanted it, anyway.
- Riess: You said something about point of view being difficult there.
- Stewart: Well, I was trying to get as many as possible points of view, as you can see. The point of view is very various. A lot of it is objective point of view, though. But there are also the other people that are involved.
- Riess: What about all those objects that figure in your books? Where is the blue pitcher from Sheep Rock?

Stewart: The Carpenters have that. I gave that to them. I thought they'd give it a good home. [laughing] The hammer (Earth Abides) is right over there. I guess you saw that. I don't have anything much from Black Rock now, except I've got a nice obsidian point that a man gave me at a cocktail party, a great big cocktail party down at the Palace, as a matter of fact. The Historical Society gave this big cocktail party, and this guy came over through the midst of about two hundred people, and he told me his name. He said, "I've got something for you." And he gave me this thing. A very funny business. It's a nice thing to have a man who comes to cocktail parties and gives you something. [laughing]

Here it is, a projectile point of some kind. There used to be lots of them around Black Rock. Now, they've been pretty well picked up. I picked up some of them, myself.

Riess: How did you choose sheep for renaming Black Rock?

Stewart: Well, I didn't want to use the Black Rock name for it, because I wanted to keep the book a novel. Sheep Rock is a common term and occurs various places in the Western states. Usually for wild sheep, for mountain sheep, and sometimes for domestic sheep. It's a nice, solid name. I liked it. A good straightforward name. And it tied in with the theme of the sheep, which I used in the book.

To talk about Sheep Rock as one in a series of novels, I may say that it represents a kind of end point. The series starts with Storm, runs on through Fire and Earth Abides, and in a way comes to an end in Sheep Rock, although the Years of the City in a way carry some of the ideas on. These might be called my ecological novels. They came very swiftly one after the other, especially when you consider that I was writing nonfiction books during that period also. These books I had in mind clearly long before I wrote them, and was just waiting to get a chance to get at them. On the other hand, I thought a great deal about what I was going to do next before I decided to write the Years of the City.

Riess: What did you get into after Sheep Rock?

Stewart: In 1951 we took a six-month trip to Europe. We hadn't been there in a long time. We got a car in England, and we drove around the British Isles, and then down clear to Sicily. Then we drove around back over the Ionian Coast to Brindisi, and took a boat to Greece, which was almost pioneering in those days. You see, there was little traffic to Greece then, on account of the civil war just being over. We spent a month in Athens. So I was out of circulation, and I wasn't doing any writing at that time.

Then, of course, I had done the work on U.S. 40, pretty much, by that time. We came back to the United States in January, and along about July I got a call from Washington about whether I would take the Fulbright Professorship at Athens. I hadn't had any intention of that. I hadn't been in negotiation or anything. I said I could take it for half a year. I wouldn't take it for a year, because in the arrangement I had with the University I couldn't afford to take a whole year off. I took every half a year off anyway, and if I took the other half a year off, I lost all the salary. So it was just too much. They were hard up for somebody, so they took me for half a year.

Having come back from Greece in January, I thus went back again in August, though I hadn't expected to, and spent that time in Athens. So that took me again away from doing my writing. U.S. 40 actually came out while I was in Athens that second time.

Riess: I thought that was the sort of thing people applied for, Fulbrights.

Stewart: I don't know how it is at the professorial level. I rather think they would be asked, in most cases. At the graduate student level, I think you'd apply. They naturally wouldn't know about graduate students. I don't know how I was picked out. Of course, I'd been in Athens, and it might have been through Morris Bishop, who was the previous professor. I had met him there. He might have passed my name on. I never asked him.

Riess: Were you to lecture on "American Ways of Life?"

Stewart: That was the topic I chose, with the idea of doing that book, eventually, out of it. I'd had that book in mind

Stewart: for quite a long time. A great deal of it I did do, as lectures in Athens, not all of it.

Riess: You had been working on U.S. 40 then too? Amazing!

Stewart: Well, I practice superfetation. Do you know what that is?

Riess: No.

Stewart: Superfetation is what a rabbit does. She starts one litter before she finishes the last. [laughter] You could probably find that out in this book here. Those are the kind of dates I put in. I know I did the one trip for U.S. 40 just at the time I'd finished doing the work on Year of the Oath. I was in daily communication with Berkeley, because I'd have to telephone back.

You'll get a lot out of this book. [date book] Here are where the Black Rock trips are marked. On August 10 I left Berkeley for the U.S. 40 trip, 1950. I got back on September 20. It will tell you that kind of thing. That was the big trip I took there. I'd done some work on it before. Oh, if I get to reading in this, I won't do anything else. I'll put it down here.

So I did the work on U.S. 40. What I was trying to do there--these picture books were just becoming popular, you see, and I knew I was an anachronism doing this, because I believe a picture should tell a story, which is the last thing any of these people think. So I told the story of each picture, what really was in it. I think there's still a lot to be said for that theory, because all these books of pictures, people just turn the pages, and they get an aesthetic appreciation, a fine moment, from them. But they don't really know what's in the picture. I think that's too bad. If you've looked at that book you know I try to hold a person on the page as long as you can, to see what's going on.

What I tried to work out in that book was just exactly what everything was. In the fine old pictures of the Civil War--they send me this Civil War magazine--you can't tell what's happening half the time, what those people are doing, whether they're officers or men, that kind of thing.

Riess: So, did you propose this book to Houghton-Mifflin?

Stewart: I proposed it to Random House first. They didn't like the idea. That's one of my quarrels with Random House. So I took it to Houghton-Mifflin who did like the idea. Of course, I think a publisher is always more receptive to a man who isn't his author already than he is to somebody who is, because he likes to get somebody who's with another publisher.

Anyway, they took it. That book went over quite well. It had a short life because the new idea on freeways killed old U.S. 40. Remember my mentioning the sudden flurry about the pictures from that?

Riess: Oh, the Metropolitan Museum? Are they still calling you?

Stewart: No, they were finally satisfied with a picture of the White Owl truck. Why they wanted the White Owl truck, I'll never know. Actually, you see, the pictures that they picked out seemed to me to be among the poorer pictures. I had the terrible feeling they were going to use it for a horrible example, or something.

Riess: Did you ever find out just what they were putting together?

Stewart: Not exactly. It was some exhibition about America, I think to send around to schools. One thing I gathered was--they said it's very difficult to get pictures with descriptions of them, which is of course exactly what I was doing.

A couple of young fellows got a hold of that book, and wanted to make a movie out of that. They did quite a bit of work on it for a documentary. But they didn't come across, finally. They couldn't get anybody to back them.

Riess: Was much of the American Ways of Life written in response to the questions people in a foreign country have about America?

Stewart: I got something out of that, yes. Of course I'd spent a good deal of time abroad just recently, before that. But the idea went back a good deal farther than that. You see, when I say that my books have been a long time on the back of the stove, that's pretty true,

Stewart: when you mention various ones. Some of the things, of course, I got from Greece. People's horror, for instance, at the idea of drinking milk.

I always felt strange that the book didn't do better, actually, because I think it's a good book. Now it's a little bit out of date. Things do move, and there are a few chapters that ought to be done over, but I don't want to do them over. The book has possibilities, though. The anthropologists have not taken it up as much as I expected. I think it must have been, again, oversimplification. That seems to be one of my difficulties.

Riess: By taking it up, do you mean acclaim it, or take issue with it?

Stewart: Well, no, to maybe use it in courses, or that sort of thing. Because it really is the anthropology of a large modern country. It could be called anthropology.

Riess: Did you do much consulting with people in writing it?

Stewart: Well, I did some. I did most of that myself, though, and largely from my own background.

One of the reasons why it may not have been more successful was that it represented, in the end, as it worked out, a rather strong point of view which now would be called "Wasp"-ish. I didn't set out to do it that way. But as I came to sum matters up, I could come to the conclusion only that a tremendous amount of what we now think of as being American was originally English. This is now an unpopular interpretation. It is especially unpopular among the people who do book-reviewing and who do a great deal of teaching. You are supposed, I think, to emphasize more the contributions of all the various minorities and more recent emigrants.

I might as well say something about the Wasp here since when this may be dug out of the files a generation in the future people may be interested in just that point.* I think it very strange in one particular. People who would never think of using what is known as an ethnic derogatory such as "nigger," or "Wop," or even "Jew," will go right ahead and use "Wasp" though that is obviously another ethnic derogatory. The Wasp is pictured as stick-in-the-mud,

*"Wasp" means White Anglo-Saxon Protestant.

Stewart: hopelessly reactionary, un-artistic, and living on peanut butter sandwiches. I am one hundred percent Wasp myself, and yet I don't particularly fit into that stereotype. Of course, the whole thing is breaking down pretty rapidly in any case. In my old Wasp family, two people, for instance, are married to Americans of Italian extraction.

The book had good reviews, but never really caught on. There was a translation into Japanese, and perhaps one or two others.

I wrote a good deal of the book while I was in Athens as Fulbright professor at the University of Athens. That was in 1952-53. One of my duties was to give a series of public lectures, and I gave them on this topic. I worked out about six of the chapters as lectures delivered in Athens.

The State Department took about 1500 copies for foreign distribution. There was also a paperback edition, which was usually for sale at airports.

Riess: Three books came out that year. The Opening of the California Trail was one.

Stewart: Well, that's not really a book, that's that narrative of Schallenger plus a rather exhaustive introduction I wrote for it, and notes. Then there was U.S. 40, and what else?

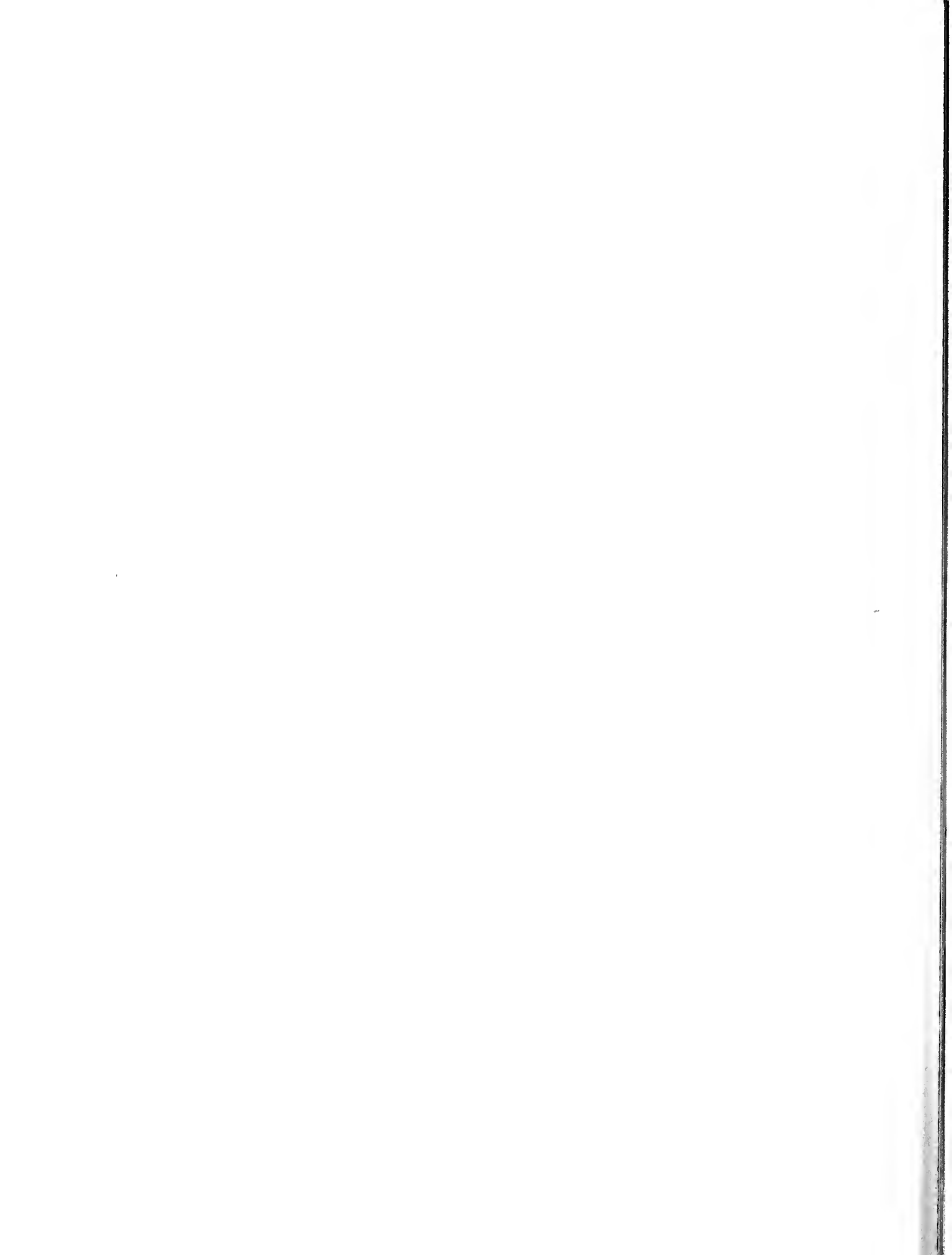
Riess: To California by Covered Wagon.

Stewart: That's a juvenile, and the same story as the one on the California Trail. I worked that story to death. [laughing] I've written it four or five times. That little juvenile is still going.

Riess: And nobody else had written it before?

Stewart: It escaped the historians, you see. The manuscript came to Bancroft too late. So all he has on it is long notes. Nobody else ever worked the story out. People knew it. But it had never been put out in any form for people to read.

Riess: I finally got a copy of the Years of the City, though I'm afraid that by the time I read it--



Stewart: It will take you a while.

Riess: "Once again, in his always incalculable fashion, George Stewart has selected an ordinary subject and invested it with pity and terror, and fired it to incandescence in the crucible of his imagination."

Stewart: I think I remember that.

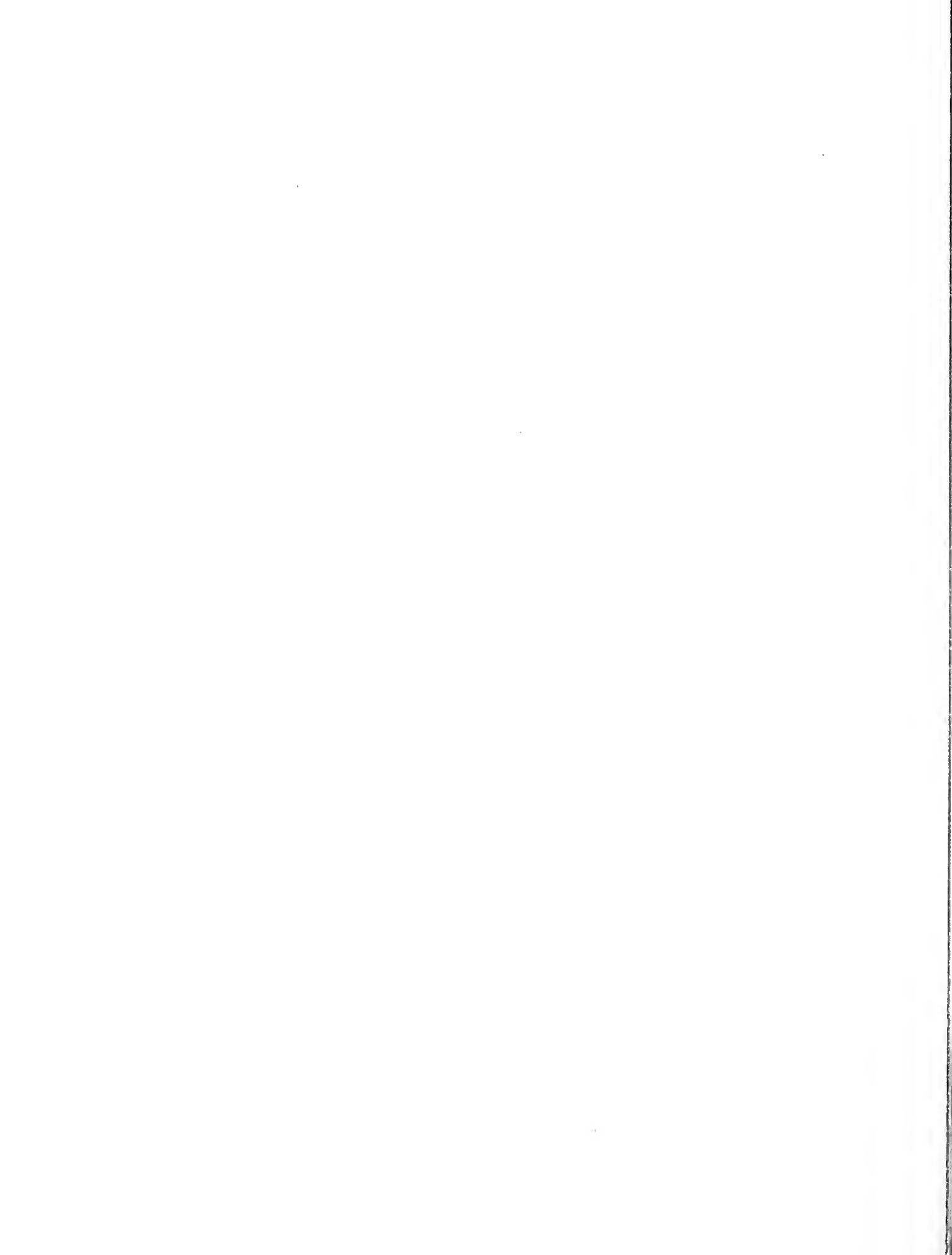
Riess: How much of Years of the City is true?

Stewart: Well, I tried not to tie it to any place too particularly. As I say in the little introductory note, it's obviously Greek, because it has Greek names in it. It's a Greek colony. That's a period that interests me very much. I didn't date it in the story. There's a reference to only one historical event in the whole thing. So if you spot that, and date it, why, you'll get the date. But it actually runs from about 700 to 500 B.C.

I was trying to do that whole sweep of the novel, covering that length of time. I guess I told you the device by which I spread out the time? The different characters? With the inter-chapters used again to skip over the time that lies in-between.

There's something about the tragedy of those Greek colonies. They started out so finely, so many of them, and they just seemed to grow old, and the situation changed. They couldn't meet it, and they were engulfed by the Carthaginians, or the Romans, or somebody else. They were lovely places--I suppose a little provincial, but they must have been quite fine places. One of them developed the Eleatic philosophers. Pythagoras was there. Plato visited some of the colonies. Herodotus settled in one of them. It's really a very great tragedy.

Yet I don't want to use the word tragedy, because in a sense they lived their lives. They're a bit like human beings. Two hundred years to run is a very common length, between the founding and the ending. They're like human beings also in that they have a definite founding, a definite birth. They kept that record. In fact, it's my personal theory that the Roman dating of Urbe Condita is really the founding of Cumae, which is the first Greek colony in Italy, and would have established some dating.



Stewart: They started out, they had a founder, you see, an official founder. They were founded under the auspices of the Delphic Oracle, most of them. There are a lot of analogies with the United States, too. They had many of the same problems. They had the natives to contend with. I'd like to write a book on the Greek colonies, but it's too much of a job. I've got a lot of ideas that nobody has ever used.

They had to have military superiority. This is what the colonists in America had. They had it through gunpowder largely. I think the Greeks had it through the invention of the phalanx, heavily armed men that allowed them to defeat these hill people without much difficulty. They got some bad defeats themselves, sometimes. It wasn't always their way.

So I took this city and I started on the day they land, when the first ship comes ashore. There is an uninhabited coast there, because the people have been driven out of the coastal plain by piracy, which actually happened sometimes. They were living back in the hills, so the plain was open for anybody who could take it and hold it. That's where the Greeks moved in, practically all around the Mediterranean. Then they built their wall. Until they got their wall built, they were vulnerable. That was another thing they did, almost immediately.

Then I traced out the first part, the founding, as seen through the eyes of the boy. I think on the whole the book came out pretty well. Of course, it's never been a popular book, and never will be. It's too long for most people, for one thing. It doesn't in an obvious way touch the great ideas of the present time. Although in a more basic way I think it does. The question of civilization.

Riess: Did you make those speculations in the book, or is it up to the reader to see the parallels?

Stewart: No, I didn't express them. They'd have to be seen, inside.

Riess: Do you think that the present-day Greeks have a sense of this history, themselves?

Stewart: Oh, some of them do. They're very patriotic, and very much into that sort of thing. And terribly bored

Stewart: with it, too, the younger people, because they're made to take ancient Greek. They look upon that as a great hardship. They don't want to read Homer. That's what you would expect, after all.

There's very little record of the Greek colonies. Thucydides says something about them. On some of the later colonies, like Syracuse, there's a good deal. You see, this was a fairly early period I was working with. There's almost no record of Greeks when you get back to 700 B.C.

But I worked in some anecdotes that are preserved by one person or another--I just made use of them--which a classical scholar might recognize, although they're pretty obscure. There was a very good book called The Western Greeks by a man named Dunbabin whom I met at Oxford. That book really did more to give me ideas and data than any other thing I read. It's a very moving period. I carried Dunbabin's book through Sicily.

And of course I'm a great man on Homer, too. I get a lot out of Homer. (I read him pretty well in the original.) I got something out of Homer for this book.

I also think there's been a lot of nonsense written about the ancient Greeks. I took that attitude to some extent in Man. I didn't give the Greeks nearly as good a hand as most people do. I tried to bring that out in this book too. Most of the ancient Greeks were just ordinary people like us. There were a few philosophers and poets, but there probably weren't so very many more than we have, either.

Riess: You don't suggest that they were once a really great race?

Stewart: Well, they were a great race, but they had their weaknesses. The very fact that they couldn't survive, see, was one thing. I suppose in the military sense they were in an impossible situation, scattered all around the edge. I think it was Plato who said their cities were like frogs on the edge of a pool. That's about the way it was. They had no means of defense, and they couldn't ever agree among themselves. They fought each other all the time.

Stewart: In the end I had my city overthrown by another city, plus the people from the hills, who start moving down again. They were more or less like the Romans. That's an old story. This city, although I didn't spot it in the book, would be on the Ionian coast of Italy. I drove along there a couple of times and placed it in there.

Riess: What are the parallels to the United States?

Stewart: Well, you have a lot of parallels. There's such a thing as the problem of domestic animals--where do you get your animals from? That was a big problem, tremendous problem. I dealt with that in American Ways of Life in the United States. Greece must have had the same problem. You couldn't bring very many animals on the little ships they had in those days. They could get them from the hill people, probably. That's what I had them doing in this story. After they fight their first battle, they make up a treaty with the hill people, and then they're able to buy animals from them to get started.

Then the question of the intrusion into a country where people are living already. You have the military superiority, but not so much that you can be too careless about it. You have to defend yourself and be ready at all times.

And then the general idea of whether a country does grow old or not, and just what period we're in right now, which in a way looks like my third period coming up.

Riess: It's not that two hundred years is a suggestive period of time?

Stewart: No, I don't think you could make any comparison there, as closely as that. I'm not too much convinced of this idea of a circular pattern of history, anyway. I don't think that has too much to go on. It happens sometimes. It did happen in those Greek colonies pretty often.

Riess: When this book came out, did you have response from historians?

Stewart: Very little. The book didn't make much impression, no. The book re-reads very well. I like certain parts of

Stewart: it very much, although I find myself avoiding the third book. I think that the fourth book comes off very well.

Riess: As we move chronologically through your career in writing, I wonder if you ever had a fallow period. There doesn't seem to be one.

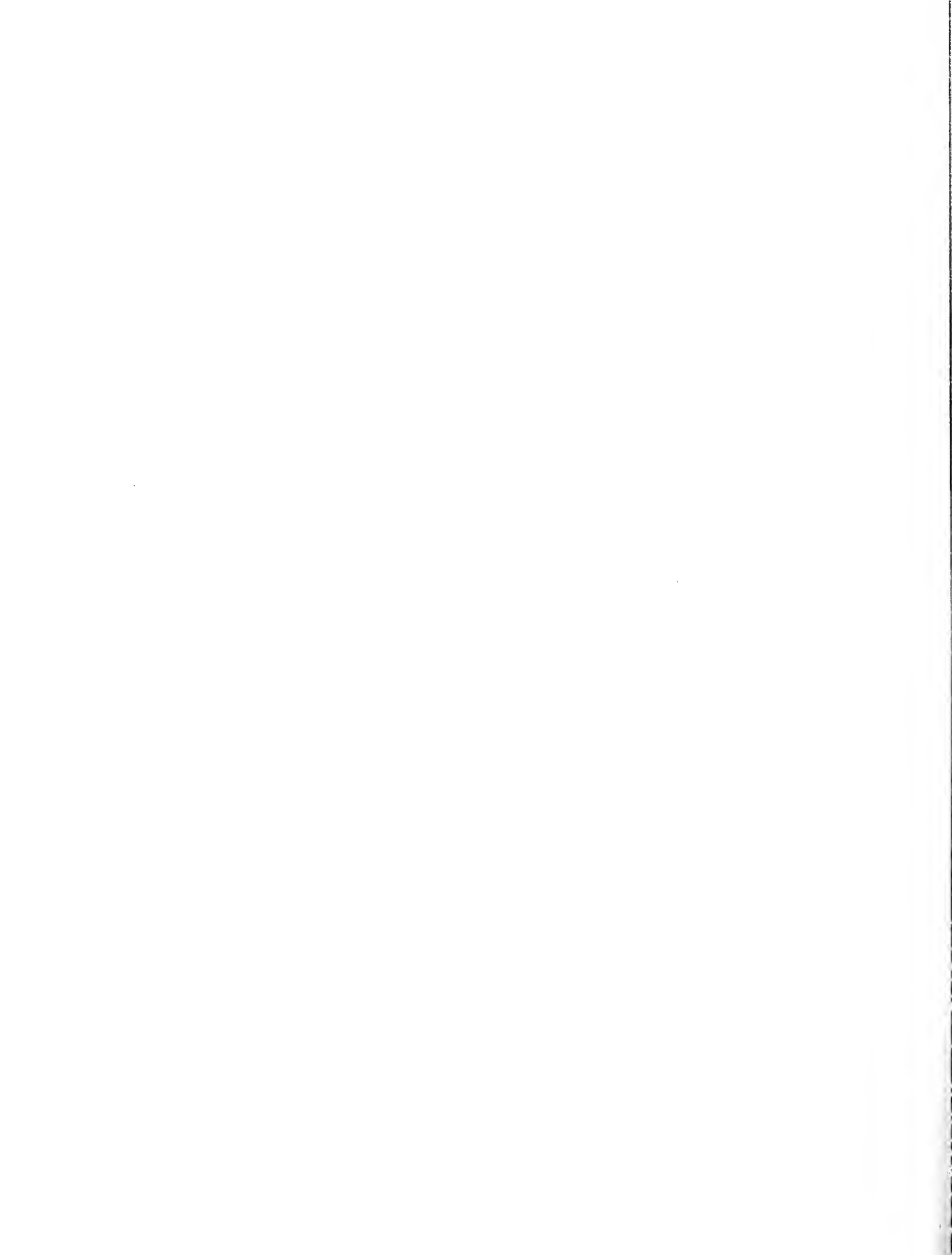
Stewart: No, there wasn't very much. I ran a terrific run, oh, you might say from the beginning of writing novels up until I wrote Sheep Rock. I never was at a loss for which way to turn. I always had them sort of stacked up waiting to get into production. I would carry one in my mind, saying, "Gee, when can I get at that? That would be good to work on that one, but I can't start that one yet, because I've got to finish this one."

And then, about at Sheep Rock, I came to a sort of end. It wasn't the same after that. And it hasn't been, since that time. Of course, U.S. 40 was a different type of thing. I wanted to do that. I'd wanted to do it for a long time, but it was a kind of different thing. It led to N.A. I but that didn't get anywhere farther than that.

I was very doubtful before I wrote the Years of the City. I did a lot of thinking about that. I was very doubtful about taking it up, whether it was the book I wanted to do. But that was something I hadn't experienced before.

Also, in Sheep Rock just a little, and then in Years of the City, I had a certain sense of a flagging imagination, a little bit. Things didn't come as richly as it had at times before. I think that's basically the reason why I haven't written any more novels after that. I think a novelist is likely to reach that stage, and just putting stuff out to put it out, well, I didn't want to do it. You may feel that in the Years of the City. Perhaps other people did too. The whole scheme of the thing I think is very good, very great, really. But I'm not sure that the manipulation of it works out all right. There are some good things in it, but there was that problem.

And as I went along--you'll notice perhaps after this, of course, there were no more novels. And also--I think the books have plenty of vigor in them, but



Stewart: I don't quite have the feeling of one leading into the other. One reason, I think, is I had a definite feeling I was getting older. That had a curious effect on me; I think in one way, that my years are individually much more valuable. There aren't so many of them to waste. So I want to feel very sure that I want to do this book. It made me a little more almost hesitant to begin writing a book, although you wouldn't think that particularly from the number of titles that have come out since. [laughing]

Well, the Gettysburg business was something that interested me for a long time, again. I had played with the idea way back in 1938 when I went to teach at Duke. I stopped off at Gettysburg, and spent a day wandering around there. I focused on Pickett's charge, with the idea of doing what I call "micro-history." That's something that's not been done very much.

I was trying to get all the information I could possibly get on that small bit of history. Of course, when you get close to it, it doesn't look so small, because there are a lot of men involved in it, and all that. But I think I did what I set out to do all right there. I think it's a good book.

I had something like 400 testimonies when I did that, which I think is perfectly amazing when you think about it. To think there were 400 different people who wrote--I don't mean they wrote complete stories of the charge, but there were 400 people's reports that you could use, to bear out events one way or another. I went through them all, and tried to work out what really happened. Because it's amazing when you think what's in the books about that charge, and how much of it's wrong. It's absolutely incredible. You begin to think, "Well, if the whole Civil War is as bad as that, we don't know anything about it." And you begin to think, "What if all history's as bad as that?"

For instance, I more or less started out with the naive idea, "Well, now, I'll get a good account to start with, and I'll work on that." Expand it, you see, and build it up where it needs to be built up. But where could I get a good account? I couldn't get any good account to start with at all. There was

Stewart: nothing I could trust. None of the established histories. It's very disconcerting.

Take a thing like what time was Pickett's charge; you'd think that would be a simple thing. But you have any number--oh, I forget the exact figures, but the times given range over something like four hours. It seems just incredible. I finally came to the conclusion that the time--what are you talking about, with time? Because there wasn't any standard time involved. I think the watches in the Confederate Army were twenty minutes off the watches in the Union Army, or something like that. [laughter] And then there was local Gettysburg time. They could actually hear the town hall clock ring out, on the battlefield, when they weren't shooting. You'd think that would tie it up.

I finally got--you just couldn't take these things and average them. You had to decide who would know best. Here some of them were generals, and they wouldn't agree with the other generals. You would think they would know a thing like that. I finally did the best I could. There was a man in Gettysburg who kept a running account of the battle from what he could hear, and I went by him finally, because he knew when the bombardment started. He noted that.

Riess: Did that sort of thing frustrate you or were you just finally amused?

Stewart: Oh, it's fascinating. It isn't frustrating, no. It's fascinating. You know that there's an answer in there somewhere.

Another thing is the number of men involved. It's all off. It's interesting when you find out why it's off. Because everybody says the Confederates advanced with 15,000 men. I know where they got that figure, but it's all wrong. It's what Longstreet says, "That will give me 15,000 men." Only he says it in another connection. What he really said was, "If we do this, I will have 15,000 men;" then they did something quite different. [laughing] So, the figure has no significance at all. Actually, in action there were about 10,500 men. I can pretty well prove it, because I've got every regiment lined up, and know just about how many men they had, and I can prove it. Try to see how much difference it makes. The books will go on

Stewart: saying 15,000. This "truth crushed to earth will rise again," is just absolutely wrong! Nothing has the vitality of a well-told lie. [laughing]

Riess: I would think this incorrect history would be maddening!

Stewart: It's a little bit irritating. You do a lot of good work on something, and you find nobody paying any attention to it, keeping on in the same old ruts. I did the same thing in other books too. In The California Trail, I took up the question of cholera in the 1849 migration. There was some cholera, no question about that. Bancroft estimates 5000 dead. That's absolutely ridiculous, and yet I came across that figure in a new book just the other day. I had figured out there might have been 250, something on that order. Again, if you get down closely--really, if there had been 5000 dead, I don't think the migration would have continued. Those are casualties you just couldn't stand. Everybody would have been losing friends and family.

Another thing, in the case of the Donner Party, was the question where Snyder was killed. Everybody says he was killed at Gravelly Ford. Gravelly Ford's a well-known place. And I can tell there too, how that idea originated, and it's altogether wrong. He wasn't killed there at all. He couldn't have been, because if you put the distance they were traveling, and so forth, and the date he was killed, one thing and another together, you can pinpoint pretty well where he was killed, about four or five day's journey west of Gravelly Ford. Everybody goes on the same way.*

Riess: That's interesting.

For Pickett's Charge did you do anything like write to Saturday Review and say, "I am writing a book on Pickett's charge--"

Stewart: No, I didn't do that. Maybe I should have. Of course, I played the official records very carefully. You

*See "Truth Crushed to Earth at Gravelly Ford, Nevada," Pacific Spectator, Winter, 1950, IV, 1. pp. 46-48.

Stewart: know that 200-volume set, big volumes, the records of The War of the Rebellion? That's wonderful, because, you see, they collected and published all these reports, and they wrote reports down to the grade of colonel, and for most of the branches clear down to captain. Lots of the captains in the artillery had to send in reports. When you put these all together, you get a pretty good record. Then there are the big things, like Haskell, who wrote this long account, the famous account of Pickett's charge, in which he was involved very much. The official records give you the Confederate accounts also, although some of them are destroyed. Pickett's own account was destroyed, at Lee's request, because he thought it would create bad morale in the army. Apparently Pickett blamed the North Carolina troops. Pickett wasn't much of a man.

Then there's a lot of miscellaneous stuff. The regimental histories, for instance. They've published a great many of them. Sometimes they're very good for Gettysburg, particularly the history of the 13th Vermont. They only fought in one battle, so the historian went to town on it [laughing], and they happened to be right in the middle of Pickett's charge. So that's wonderful. And then I went back to Gettysburg, and worked in Huntington Library also, and got a great deal out of both of those places. Huntington Library had bought the big Gettysburg collection that one of the park superintendents had put together.

Back at the park itself they have a lot of newspaper accounts, some of them very good, which I photographed. I set up my own camera and photographed the stuff. I didn't do a very good job, but I got it so I could read it, anyway. That turned up certain things which you wouldn't ever expect. Like an account of Sergeant Easley of one of the Virginia regiments who went over the wall with Armistead. He told all about it in a very nice fashion. He must have been a wonderful man. And you can get all sorts of things. It's very miscellaneous.

The most remarkable thing of all is the trial, in which the 72nd Pennsylvania Veterans Association brought suit against somebody or other, against the National Park Service I guess, about where the monument should stand. This was years later, but nonetheless

Stewart: you got marvelous, marvelous, testimony on what happened, what the individual men went through. Apparently they didn't keep the laws of evidence very carefully, but let these old fellows talk, about what they remembered about the charge. I had an awful time getting hold of it, but I finally got it.

Riess: Had you been a Civil War buff, so to speak?

Stewart: Well, to some extent, I suppose. Right now they send me this Civil War magazine, because I'm on the board or something. I do read it. I've read a good deal. I read a lot of the old generals' memoirs many years ago. They're very interesting.

Riess: Are there people actually working on straightening out some of the history?

Stewart: Well, I don't know. You see, most of them work on too big lumps, some way or other.

Another thing I discovered, in working on Pickett's Charge, is that Pickett's letters are a fabrication, and they're quoted all the time. His wife wrote them. He was supposed to have written them to her, but I'm sure she wrote them and published them.

She was hard up, and then I think also, it was the glory. She lived on being Pickett's widow, she lived almost literally on it. She wrote this sentimental thing called Letters of a Soldier, which purported to be written by Pickett, during the Gettysburg campaign. Some of them were supposed to be written on the battlefield waiting for the order to charge, which is ridiculous, because he wouldn't have had any opportunity to write these sentimental letters. And they're full of all sorts of mistakes. They just couldn't be Pickett's.

There are a few of Pickett's letters preserved, which seem to be genuine. They're entirely different in style of writing and everything. That's another reason you can spot the difference.

Riess: Is the handwriting the same?

Stewart: We don't have the originals of any of them. That's another suspicious feature. If she had these letters, they would probably be preserved somewhere.

Stewart: The confusion of an event like the charge is something that you just can't realize. The troops were all mixed up. You don't know where they were, and nobody ever will know, I'm sure. I came across an account by a Virginia captain of what had happened to him, and I said, "Oh, the poor guy. He really got mixed up." [laughter] "No wonder," I said. "There was a lot of smoke and everything and he didn't know what was happening."

And then I came across an account by another Virginia captain who told the same story, of what had happened to him. They'd been in the same regiment, and they got isolated, and they got off by themselves. They didn't know where they were. They thought they'd won the battle. They couldn't find any Yankees to fight any more. [laughter] So I finally just said, "Well, after all, the two of them must have been right." I just had to adjust my ideas to what they said. I just worked it out the best I could, what had happened to them. You can't be too glib yourself, about what's going to be right.

Riess: Putting together history from oral histories--

Stewart: Well, my theory on this oral history and all these events recollected so long afterwards, is that they're pretty good for vivid details, and they're very little good for ordered accounts, what came after what, and when, and where, and all those things. They're not worth much. I've gone through a lot of them, for one book or another.

I notice in my own case, when I don't tell about something, when it sits in my own mind, I think it remains pretty accurate. As soon as I tell about it, what I remember then is what I told, not what the original was. What I've written down in my Autobiography, I find is lost now, because what I think of it is what I've written down.

Riess: But the autobiographical stuff you haven't written before?

Stewart: No, I hadn't written it, but I say, once I wrote it down, then what I think about is not the original experience but what I wrote, the words I wrote it down in pretty much.

Stewart: When you think how much history is dependent upon the memories of elderly men, who were interviewed or wrote things down years later, again you just throw up your hands. What possibility do we have of these things being correct?

Riess: But how do you feel when you throw up your hands. That this isn't important anyway?

Stewart: Well, I think it's important in a sense. Yes.

Riess: Exact history.

Stewart: Well, if it isn't exact, it isn't history, really. I'm with Harry Truman. I think these things are important.

Riess: What does Harry Truman say?

Stewart: Well, the reason he figured he was a good president was that he'd read history. He was a great reader of history. He said that made all the difference in the world. And he was one of the greater presidents. Little man from Kansas City.

Riess: I should think it's important to know history, to have some history.

Stewart: Well, your ideal should certainly be to have it exact. When it gets as far off as the difference between 10,500 men and 15,000, that's a big gap.

Riess: In any case, researching Pickett's charge was something that you really enjoyed.

Stewart: Yes, that was done with great enthusiasm. I had a lot of fun. And the micro-history is nice to work on.

Then I was approached to do this book on the California Trail.* I guess I said something about that the other day. McGraw-Hill was doing this series. The only book I ever did for a publisher, but it was my book to start with, anyway. It was a book for which I had the background. It worked out very well. That

*The California Trail, 1962, The American Trails Series, McGraw Hill Book Co., Inc.

Stewart: book has sold quite well. Still is doing very nicely. It's the best-selling book in that whole series. Of course that's largely because it deals with California, and it's a good book for a Christmas present.

Riess: Your inter-chapters on "how they did it," "where they went,"--getting the oxen around corners, had anyone worked that out before?

Stewart: No, nobody had worked that out. Nobody had worked out much about the covered wagon, just what it was like. I did some work on that. That chapter on the covered wagon, that inter-chapter, I published originally in American Heritage, and that got some award, from somebody or other. I was going to go back to Oklahoma City in a tuxedo to get the medal or something, but I got sick and I didn't go. But I got the--whatever it was--some kind of little statuette.

You see, the trouble with that subject was, it was as though you did the same thing every year. So the way I got out of that, I just told "where they went" once, you see; after that, I worked out the varieties of where they went.

Because of my dislike of doing a book in a series and for a publisher, I might never have done this book at all if it had not been for Howard Cady, whom I have mentioned before. He happened to come through when I was mulling the thing over, and he said, "Well, George, you'd better do it. Otherwise somebody else will do it, and you will be awfully mad at what he did."

I had actually been working on the Trail ever since the time of Ordeal by Hunger, piecing it out here and there. Of course other people had been working at it too, and there had been quite a little published in the interval. Still, the actual routes and the method of their being opened up was not well known, and I had a fairly free hand.

Joe Backus (the graduate student with whom I collaborated on the article on Faulkner), went with me on an exploring trip over the Trail to see some parts I had not seen before. We went as far east as Scott's Bluff, Nebraska.

This book was a very pleasant one to write, because I was dealing with so much material about

Stewart: which I had had a great deal of information for a long time. These people with whom I was dealing, for instance, were often men and women with whom I had been acquainted for many years. I had a problem with the Donner Party, because I did not want to write that story again at length. So I gave a reference to Ordeal by Hunger, and a very short summary. I developed a considerable admiration for Joseph Chiles, and I at first intended to do him as one of the men in Good Lives. There were difficulties, however, in getting the materials free to work on. So I shifted to Bidwell, who was, I think, really, a much better choice.

I have been particularly pleased with the way I managed to handle the very complicated story of 1849. That is plenty big enough for a book by itself, and it has at least one book on it.

I have seriously considered doing another book on the Trail, or at least on the process of getting across that part of the world. This would carry the story from 1859 to 1869, with the completion of the railroad. I don't think, however, that I will ever do that book. I have never developed quite a strong enough desire to do so. The publishers are interested in it all right.

Riess: You mentioned your feeling about writing beginning to flag, and you becoming dubious. It seems that happens to other writers. In the Paris Review interviews I noted people's careers stopped in some cases very early. Do you think it's the fiction writer who has this problem particularly? Do poets have it as much?

Stewart: Poets have it even more. Poets are characteristically young men. Fiction writers are middle-aged men. A few of them last through indefinitely, but, no, I think you'll find that's true.

There are a lot of great poets that are very young, that died young. You don't find novelists like that, very many. An occasional one like Stephen Crane. It's a rare novelist who does much before the age of thirty. Of course, that's hardly middle age, but lots of poets are finished by that time.

Riess: And then what time was it that you would say you were finished?

Stewart: Well, I would have been about fifty-five. I wouldn't say, however, I was finished.

Riess: I mean in terms of wanting to write fiction. Isn't that what you were saying? I felt that you meant the imagination that applies to fiction and doesn't apply to other forms of writing.

Stewart: Well, I was speaking about fiction, yes. I think one thing I can illustrate this with is that you have a certain bag of tricks that you're born with, I suppose. You develop it to some extent by experience, and then you start writing, and you use up those ideas. Then you start repeating yourself, or something like that. I'm not interested in repeating myself. A lot of people seem to be able to do it.

One thing that's always fascinated me is the idea, in modern civilization, if you disappear. People do every day, of course. What mechanism works? How are you discovered? How is it discovered that you are missing. I used that in Storm, you see. There's an idea which I had in mind for a long time. I didn't use it in either of those two early novels, but I used it in Storm, and now I can't go and use it again very well. That's the sort of thing I mean.

Riess: Your novels are all so well planned. Did you plan your own life?

Stewart: No, I didn't. I suppose it might have been a good thing if I had, or could have. But, as I say, I was so busy with two or three novels stacked up beyond there that I hadn't had a chance to write yet, that I didn't plan any farther than that. There are people, of course, who apparently can plan a great long series of books, like Snow for instance, and Proust. But I don't think there are so many who can do that.

That would bore me to death, too. I don't think I could possibly do a whole long series of novels like Snow. I want to do something different. You would get so sick of that, I think, before you got through. You'd say, "Why did I ever do this?" It would be like Trollope, who up and killed Mrs. Prouty. He suddenly realized he was through with her.

Riess: Sometimes one reads of a book being the first of a trilogy, and then the rest of the trilogy doesn't get completed.

Stewart: Well, that's often true. You take C.S. Forester, who of course was captured by Captain Hornblower and had to keep on writing things about Hornblower for twenty or thirty years, and at least always used to say he hated Hornblower. I don't think he did exactly. He even wrote a poem about it once. He liked to write poetry. He wrote this ballade about Hornblower, with the refrain line, "Because you've been my friend for twenty years."

But he started to write another series. He wrote the first book called Randall and the River of Time. He never wrote a single other book about Randall. He wasn't very successful, I guess, and Forester said, "The hell with it. I'm not going to...." But that was planned originally as a big series. Captain Hornblower kept on.

Riess: I certainly remember him in the Saturday Evening Post, and I don't know why I never read them.

Stewart: I think he's mostly a man's writer. There aren't very many of them, you know. But he was certainly popular. He was really read all over the world.

Riess: In asking these questions, I guess I am making the assumption that this was a sad moment when you stopped writing fiction.

Stewart: No, it wasn't. I didn't come to it that way. When I finished Years of the City, I still expected to write more novels. I did try one, a little--it wasn't exactly a novel. Well, it was too. I never wrote any of it. I did some work on it. It was too much like Earth Abides, and I said, "I don't want to do this. While it's a good story, and it is not the same story as Earth Abides, still it's much the same situation involved in it." So I didn't write that one. But don't write me off entirely.*

Riess: I won't write you off entirely! You just have such a big project going in the other room.

*Within a very short time (about two weeks) I suddenly started dictating what I called The Shakespeare Crisis, but I had not decided to do so at this time. [G.S.]

- Stewart: Yes, I do. Maybe that's a mistake. But it's nice to have some big thing to work on.
- Riess: You have another room where you could work on a little project.
- Stewart: I might take it up sometime. There are a couple of ideas I have in mind, but this isn't the time to talk about it, really.
- Riess: Okay. Going through your works, we're up to Committee of Vigilance, and Not So Rich, and Good Lives.
- Stewart: Well, I was terribly sick of course right in the middle of writing Pickett's Charge. I almost died. And I think that makes a difference in a man, too. You have a feeling you've got to keep the chips sort of picked up a bit. I got over that all right. I had an operation afterward. A very serious operation. I got over that, and so I went ahead and finished Pickett's Charge.
- Then I had the California Trail stacked up, and that was quite a big job, too. I had a lot of work to do on that. That, much more than the Years of the City, is the time where I came to taking stock, again, you see. About the time I finished the California Trail. I knew I was getting old. I was approaching retirement. This business of the years being worth more as you go along was working on me a bit.
- I did begin to think, "Well, how many more books am I going to do here?"
- Riess: Did you have thoughts while you were sick, visionary thoughts?
- Stewart: Oh, not very much. I began to wonder if there was enough of Pickett's Charge done so it could be published or not, and I decided there wasn't, so I didn't worry about that. Let's see, as long as we've got this book here -- [looking in date book] -- oh, these years in here are so filled. I was writing in lots of notes here at this time. California Trail was 1962. Well, you see, I was just on the edge of retirement then. I guess I was retired before that book came out. And I was already working on Good Lives by that time.

Stewart: In a sense Good Lives was an attempt to sum up my life, I suppose, and see whether I had been able to do anything that way, or what was it that the good life was? These were people who had interested me for a long time, all of them. That was not a book that had great commercial possibilities. It's a bad kind of book to do in many respects, because it means a lot of work for each man. You do enough work on one man to write a full length biography, really, and then all you get out of him is a sixth of a biography. You never should advise a man to do a book like that.

Riess: You've just been saying that you did it for yourself, more or less, it seems.

Stewart: Yes. I did. Yes. So, I did that one. That's a very satisfactory book to have done. A very nice book to look back on and read occasionally. I read a section of it every now and then. And I think it goes all right. I tried to rescue two or three people from oblivion that should have been rescued. I don't think I succeeded very well in rescuing them from oblivion, because nobody ever reads the book, but there they are, anyway. It's nice to try to capture a person in a fairly short space.

They are nice people, most of them, though I think Schliemann was kind of a stinker, probably. There again, even what I got out of Schliemann doesn't correspond to the legend at all. This idea of Schliemann, the facts are all off in the ordinary belief about him.

Riess: Who is the legend designed by, then?

Stewart: He designed it for himself. It's mostly his creation. As far as I know, he was honest in his archaeology, though I wondered at times. But he was not honest in his writing about himself, because you can get contemporary letters that don't coincide at all with his autobiography. The whole thing was just wrong. This business about making money and rushing down to dig up Troy is all wrong. He spent about fifteen years just fooling around, and he had lots of money long before he ever went near Troy. Just the mere dates show that.

I had to try to work out what he was, through that legend. He was a very lucky man. He knew it.

Stewart: He admitted it. He believed in that. Luck's a very interesting thing. Did we take that up?

Riess: No, we didn't. That is an interesting thing.

Stewart: I don't know anything about it! [laughter] But I know that both Schliemann, and Bidwell, two men out of six, actually talked about their luck. They believed in it. And they both are very remarkable men. Bidwell at least was an extremely stable, good man. But two out of six is quite a good ratio. I don't know what it means.

Riess: Does it sound like it means fate?

Stewart: Well, that doesn't help you any, because you don't know what fate is. And I'm not sure that I believe in it, actually, at all. I might use the phrase, but I think I have a pretty careful apology for it in that Autobiography. I say, "This just might be true," or something of that sort, but I don't think I stick my neck out.

Oh, I don't know about these things. We had an interesting talk in our dinner club one night. There were about eight or ten men there. The conversation got around to the question of premonitions, and whether anybody among us had ever had a premonition. We went around the group, and several people talked about quite amazing things they'd had happen, but they'd say, "It wasn't a premonition, it was just a coincidence. I wouldn't say that I had a premonition."

Except one man. What's fascinating about this is that he's a Highland Scot, and they are supposed to have second sight, you know. Also this ran in his family. He quoted things from his mother and grandmother. He had had two premonitions, which he could not explain any other way. They both saved his life. That's a very fascinating thing. I don't know what to make of that.

Riess: But people are so quick to disbelieve.

Stewart: Well, I think they should be. I don't believe in premonitions myself.

Riess: I read your interesting report in one of the cartoons about the strange happenings in your house.

Stewart: Oh, the poltergeist? Yes, that was un-nerving.
[laughter] The thing that got us down, we were looking
for things to happen.

Riess: After that, you mean.

Stewart: Yes. It was un-nerving. But I'm the last person in
the world to believe in that sort of thing. I'm glad
you read that. I was going to mention that.

Riess: You say you're the last person in the world.

Stewart: Yes. I'm a Lowland Scot, you know. They don't have
it. [laughing]

Riess: What is the dinner club you mentioned?

Stewart: That's a group that was formed about twenty-five years
ago. I haven't been in it quite that long. It's
just one of these men's clubs, you know, you get
together and eat dinner, and then somebody reads a
paper and you talk about it for a while, and you talk
about a few other things for a while, and then you go
home for the next month. It was largely formed by
lawyers. Haynes, who was dean of the law school at
Berkeley, was one of the original members--he's been
dead for a long time. Ted Meyer, the former regent,
is in it. Several other lawyers. Two others of the
men are from the University; one of them is Charlie
Camp, and the other is Bill Keeler, who was in the Law
School. There are some businessmen, too. It's a
very nice group. I am in three of those things now.

[laughing] One of the ways I'm insuring my
future here is that these will keep on. As you get
older you don't have any more friends after a while,
so if you keep on with something that is continuing,
that's the good life, you see. I'm in the Cosmos Club
on the University campus. That's a very nice group,
quite a large group. They have about seventy members,
I suppose, and those are men that I've known for
years and years, all University people.

Riess: It keeps adding new members?

Stewart: Yes, it does, although they are mostly older people.
There are not many that are really young. I suppose
they are nearly all full professors. And recently,
since I came to the city, I was asked to join this

Stewart: Chit-Chat Club. It's been going for almost a hundred years, which is pretty remarkable. It's had some famous members from the University. It's got Joel Hildebrand as a member now, and Walter Morris Hart was a long-time member. It's got a very notable group of men in it, really, some of them from Stanford, most of them from San Francisco. I haven't been in that very long, just about a year.

These clubs are all the same type. They represent-- I won't say the non-intellectual, but the man who's not in an intellectual business--they represent his attempt to express himself intellectually, and I think it's very good. These lawyers, you know, they certainly use their brains, but they have to work at a different kind of thing, they don't get any kind of really free intellectual work. I think that's what these groups represent, more than the social. The social is very pleasant that way, but it's not social primarily, as the Bohemian Club is for instance. In the Kosmos Club you hardly ever have to read a paper, because there are so many people in it; in this other group I'm in there are only about eleven or twelve, so your number comes up about once a year.

Riess: What have some of your papers been?

Stewart: Well, as a matter of fact I read a lot of selections out of my books as they came along. The first thing I ever read was the article on names which I published in the Encyclopedia Britannica. I read stuff out of the Vigilante book, and out of the N.A.1, Pickett's Charge, practically every book that came along I read a selection out of. It was pretty easy for me, after all. I didn't have to get involved much in writing anything special.

Riess: It sounds pleasant, and very much a men's thing.

Stewart: Yes, it is. I think it's a characteristic men's activity in this country, and I think a study of it would be fascinating, a sort of sociological study. J.P. Marquand has a very amusing chapter on a meeting of a men's club in one of his books, and it sounds like all the rest of them. I may be wrong, but I think there are a lot of them scattered around. I think you would find one in every university in the country, and probably one or several in every good-sized city. This one here that's been going on for

Stewart: just about a hundred years is remarkable. Usually they have a certain life, then they degenerate, like a city.

Riess: That is remarkable. Do they have a history?

Stewart: The Chit-Chat Club is going to have something in relation to the 100th anniversary, which is coming up.

Riess: Do they have minutes?

Stewart: I don't know how much they have, because I'm just a newcomer in that club. One formerly well-known figure in the University lost the minutes of the Kosmos Club and was persona non grata ever after. Some people take these things very seriously. Even this little group I belong to has saved all its papers. They've got an archivist. Charlie Camp is the archivist; he's a natural archivist. I guess they've got a couple of hundred pounds of papers now, I would say, just in physical mass. They'll probably leave it to the Bancroft Library someday.

The funniest group I ever belonged to, though, was the Armchair Strategists. We used to meet during the war. That had some interesting people in it, Cecil Forester, Joe Jackson, and Charlie Camp were in that. I organized that one. We used to meet once a month, in the usual fashion. That was during the war, you couldn't do much, we'd usually get a little beer to drink, or something like that. We had only half a dozen in that, and the idea of this was to indulge in prophecy. One man had to write a prophecy each month and deposit it, prophesying what was going to happen in the war the next month. Then when the month had rolled away we'd have the meeting and we'd read the prophecy and see what happened, and we'd have a lot of discussion on war. It was obviously a war club, and we had a very good time with that. And it was interesting, the thing just died out after the war was over. We didn't make any effort to keep it going.*

*We started with six members: J.H. Osmer (Standard Oil, a Princeton classmate), C.D. Brenner (professor of French), Charlie Camp (professor of palaeontology, historian), Joseph Henry Jackson (book-editor, S.F. Chronicle), C.S. Forester (novelist), G.R.S. We added later, Reid Railton (engineer), Ronald Walpole (professor of French). [G.S.]

- Stewart: There is Stewart's Law about clubs and organizations, and that is that they always degenerate, and the reason they degenerate is that they started out with a good group, you see, or you wouldn't start at all, and then eventually they got bores in them-- somebody wants a friend in and this friend's a bore, or something like that, or disagreeable--and eventually the bores take over. The good men gradually get to doing something else and drop out, and eventually there's nothing left but a lot of bores, and they can't stand each other, and so the thing disappears. Natural progression.
- Riess: I would never have thought of you having yourself so spread out.
- Stewart: Well, I'm spread a little bit more now; this is all in the latter part of my life, really, although I belonged to two others of these, which became extinct, I think for the reasons that I outlined there. But this is the first time I ever started doubling or tripling on the matter. I organized two of these discussion groups when I was president of the Faculty Club, but neither of them took on permanently. I thought there was a chance for them; they both started out boldly, but neither of them took on, for some reason or other.
- Riess: We have often spoken of old age as a topic for interviewing, and I have a hard time putting together questions for you about it. It's almost as if old age is unspeakable.
- Stewart: It isn't at all for me. [laughing] You could say "aging," that's the euphemism for it. "Aging." I really laugh at that one around here. [The Sequoias]
- Riess: Is it a subject that is talked about, for instance at your clubs?
- Stewart: No, I don't think it is. I think it's shunned generally. I think it is, and I think that's too bad, really, because I think you ought to be able to play old age as you can play any other part of life. There ought to be some way you can handle it, things you can do, things you can't.
- I'm getting along very well, on the whole. I think it's partly that I have looked ahead. I don't

Stewart: think you can ignore the years. On the other hand, you shouldn't give in to them either. I learned that quite a while ago, because there were several times when I didn't feel well for some reason or other, and I thought, "Oh, well, I'm getting old." But then I'd go to the doctor sooner or later, and he'd always find something the matter with me; I wasn't old at all. [laughter] There was really something the matter with me. So that taught me something. You shouldn't just say, "Well, I'm getting old," you should do something about it.

Of course eventually you will get old. I did go to a doctor another time. I had a neck which bothered me because I couldn't look around easily to see whether a car was coming from the side or not, dangerous. I went to the doctor, and told him about it, and said, "Can I can get some exercises that will give me more play in my neck?" And he said, "No, you can't. You start doing that, and you will create more problems than you have. You'll throw something off if you start taking exercises, so all you can do is just get old." So now I use the rear-view mirror more.

Riess: If you proposed old-age as the topic of conversation in these groups, what do you think people's feeling would be.

Stewart: I think it would be fine. I think they'd be interested in discussing the matter. And I think it might be an interesting thing to do. There is very little writing about old age, surprisingly little, and there aren't very many old characters in works of literature, really. King Lear, of course, but he doesn't make a very good case for it. There is an essay by Cicero, which I've never read--Cicero has always bored me--but I will have to read him sometime and see what he says about it. So there isn't much to turn to.

Of course the situation at the present time is a somewhat curious one because there are too many old people. That is, they've become too common. They've lost their rarity value. They used to be cherished, to some extent, but they are not cherished anymore. And I think it is because there are too many of them. You have to make ninety now before anybody considers you really old, which is good in a way, and bad in another way.

Stewart: Did you see the write-up of Joel Hildebrand this morning? [San Francisco Chronicle, Oct. 26, 1971] I'm swinging a birthday party for Joel at the Faculty Club at luncheon on his birthday, the 16th of November. I've become quite a swinger of parties lately. We're going to have some champagne--just a moment's pause in a busy day. Now, he's a remarkable man. He's the one who never really has grown old. Of course you can't always do that. He's had the reliable body combined with the reliable mind, and that's not too easy, that's luck if you get them both that way.

Riess: Do you think the reason it is not talked about much is that it would mean facing unpleasant things, or what?

Stewart: I think it's a throw-back from a fear of death. I think when people say old age, then the next thing is death, and they don't like to talk about death, and what that means, and I think old age gets in under the same heading. Don't you think that's a possibility? People talk about their complaints a lot; they talk about all their diseases and operations and troubles, but they never talk about that in relation to death.

Riess: Because that's life.

Stewart: And yet it's also death in many instances, because what they have is probably going to kill them eventually.

I think that's one of the reasons I don't mind being here. I think a lot of people think this [The Sequoias] is a kind of a stopping-station on the way to death, but then so is every place else. You get to be my age, you get deaths all the time. It's very disconcerting, and it's disconcerting also in thinking of the future, because you get more and more lonely as you go along.

This year has been an extremely bad year for us; we lost a whole group of people. Not family and not people we knew very intimately, but people we've known for a long time. It's bound to happen. It won't always be as bad a year as this--the last three or four months, actually. These things come in waves. You can't do anything about it. I was impressed with Walter Morris Hart in that respect, whom I used to go

Stewart: see occasionally when he was past ninety. And he didn't have anybody left, you know. His wife was dead, his sister was dead, and his friends were all dead, and he had had no children. It wasn't that he had changed; he had just lived, that's all he'd done. And nobody was left. I've been very fortunate in some respects. Most of my friends are younger than I am--not really young, but a good deal younger than I am.

Riess: You said in writing about Hart in the department history that although he had the friends and the social life and the luxurious existence, that "there was no center to it." What did you mean by that phrase?

Stewart: I suppose what I would say is that he didn't have any dominating passion any more, that old phrase.

INTERVIEW VIII, The Shakespeare Crisis; influences of California and the West; the Bancroft Library; oral history; literary influences; Not So Rich as You Think; presses; "a good life"; the Book.
(Recorded February 2, 1972)

(continuing a conversation about George Stewart's work in progress)

Riess: When you can't go to sleep at night, because you're so preoccupied, do you get up in the morning and write something down quickly?

Stewart: No, I don't. I figure if I can't remember it, it probably isn't worth remembering. I've always worked on that principle. I don't think I've ever lost anything of great importance.

I had an invasion of the library last night.*
(This is right in your line.) A bunch of rioters tried to get in and destroy the card catalog. All the catalogers came up from the bowels of the earth, and fought them off. I had a wonderful scene going there. I think I'll use that.

Riess: That sounds timely.

Stewart: Well, not exactly. Things have been pretty quiet lately. But I like the idea of the catalogers turning into furies, and defending their sacred realm.

Riess: I think I'll get into my odd lot of questions. They probably are not "where you're at," as the expression goes, at all.

*By now G.R.S. was dictating The Shakespeare Crisis.

Stewart: Well, I can probably adjust.

Riess: Do you think there are parallels between research, as you do it for your books, and the excitement of discovery?

Stewart: Yes, I think so. Very strongly.

Riess: [laughing] That question shouldn't just end there.

Stewart: You should say, "In what way do you think so?" Well, it is the interest of discovery. I think it's pretty much the same thing, uncovering certain materials which at least were not known to the person doing them. It may not be original. I mean, somebody else may have known these things before. Still, from the point of view of the person doing it, it's something new. Some of those things that I have discovered in working with my books would have that for me, the same as an actual research problem might have.

I've got some examples here right now. I've been doing a research job on the organization of this retirement home. [The Sequoias] I guess I told you about that. Maybe I didn't.

Riess: You said you'd been going into the financial matters.

Stewart: Yes, I've gone through all that. That's a discovery, of research.

And then in this book I've been working on now, the novel, I've had an interesting time, because I've made a few discoveries of my own in connection with the fact that Shakespeare was written by Marlowe. That's the way the book starts out, you know. A man working on that. And I discovered some wonderful arguments in reading the Taming of the Shrew, which I decided was the key work for this job. Of course, I don't believe any of this, but this is just what would be a nice argument if you were believing it.

Riess: But I was speculating that discovery through library and research materials was the only kind of discovery that was possible now in the West.

Stewart: Well, if you take it in the sense of the older West, that's obviously true. Because nobody is left to get it

Stewart: from orally. There's not very much tradition left around.

Riess: What if you really had trailbreaking blood in your veins, where would you go, if you really were an adventurer?

Stewart: I suppose you'd have to go into Outer Space.

Riess: If you settled in another part of the United States, what do you think you might have done with--

Stewart: I think every part of the United States has a good deal of the same sort of thing we work with in the West. If one had any reason why he was bound to work upon local history, I think he could get pretty good material anywhere. It's still a fairly open field. Take any state, and I think you'd find something of that sort.

Riess: I think of living in the heart of New York City. You can't even see grass and have that sense of digging.

Stewart: Oh, New York City has a magnificent background. A good deal of documentary material too. There are all sorts of things in New York City which you could make use of.

You know, there was one of the worst--I can't say exactly witchcraft scares, but it was the same sort of thing--in New York City. It was a place where you had hysteria and they hanged a lot of people. A most colorful, horrible story, actually. How many people know about that? New York is full of fascinating material. And you can still see the same locations. Of course, they're all covered with high buildings, and asphalt, but it's there just the same. The whole line of Broadway, you know, is just the old road that went up to the farms in the north of the island. The very street pattern of New York is interesting.

Riess: Yes. I was thinking of really the westward expansion thing, the blue Pacific, and more the environmental thing.

Stewart: Well, you get that in the East too, very much.

Riess: But would one still?

Stewart: I think so. It's not exhausted. The idea I've had for a long time, that I'll never do, is in connection with the Leather-stocking Tales. Writing the background of that, as part of the biography of Natty Bumppo. Working out the background--assuming that Cooper just tried to develop a fictional story about this actual man. You could work out a marvelous story of Natty Bumppo.

But I've never been in that area, you see, except as a child, and if I'd lived back in New York or Pennsylvania I could have done that.

Riess: Yes, I think you could have. How about Seelye's comment, that he thinks you believe, as he does, that "as California goes, for better or worse, soon enough will go the nation."*

Stewart: Yes, I think so. But the same thing could be said about practically any state in the Union. [laughing] They're all going to go to hell together.

Riess: I see! Okay. You know what I was getting at in all these questions, and you're saying it isn't true; that there's not something special about California.

Stewart: Yes, I think I was saying that. Yes, I think you can get it anywhere. What is it that Stevenson said, you know, it's a marvelous line when he came West: "Not Troy but Homer is lacking." That's not an exact quotation but that's the idea of it. The story was there, but nobody had written it yet.

Riess: How did your involvement with the Regional Cultural History Project start? You were on a committee back in 1955.

Stewart: Well, I was, way back before that. In 1945 I was chairman of the library committee at Berkeley, and I raised the question then, and had this idea we should do this. Then I didn't push it through. The library didn't actually do anything. But I guess when Jim Hart was chairman of the library committee he revived

*John Seelye, "Placing Names and Naming Places," New Republic, Feb. 13, 1971.

Stewart: this idea of oral history. So in that sense I am a father or grandfather or something of the whole movement, because my proposal actually preceded the whole activity at Columbia. I did take an action, and I suppose you'll find it in the minutes of the committee. I know Don Coney investigated once, and he thought that we at Berkeley had a kind of priority on the basis of that action.

Really, you see, my idea was a kind of revival of Bancroft. Hubert Howe Bancroft was one of the few people in history who created his documents. And that's what we're really doing here, creating our documents. We aren't creating history but we are creating a record of it.

Riess: Actually we were interested in putting together some of the history of the Bancroft Library. Would you have some comments on working with the staff and the library over the years?

Stewart: I first used the Bancroft Library in 1919-20 when I was working on my master's thesis. I had discovered that Stevenson had written something for the local Monterey paper, and I was surprised to find that the Bancroft had a file of that paper. I remember that Professor Bolton himself told me so. I don't know why he was concerned with it, except that I was taking a course with him, and probably I asked him or commented about it. That was the first discovery of this kind I ever made, and I was delighted to demonstrate the authorship of the article, even though it was not signed, by work on internal evidence. It was the article with the title "San Carlos Day," which I re-published in the Scribner's magazine. Although I had sold a few humorous verses to magazines, this was the first what you might call serious publication that I did in a professional way.

The Bancroft at that time was where the map room now is. I came back to the campus in 1923 and immediately started working on that big cultural history of California of which I have already spoken here somewhere. I used the Bancroft a great deal from that time on for several years. By 1923 it had moved to the fourth floor of the library, and Priestley had taken over as director, although Bolton was still very much in evidence. I always had extremely pleasant relationships with both of them. Other old-time members of the

Stewart: staff, with whom I was friendly, were Hill, Eleanor Bancroft, and Edna Martin, who has been Mrs. Parrott for a long time. I continued working a good deal at the Bancroft for a number of years, while I was working on Bret Harte, Phoenix, and Ordeal by Hunger. I even used the Bancroft a good deal in connection with East of the Giants. After that my connection with the library became spotty. In writing my novels, except for Sheep Rock, I was not very much in the field of the Bancroft, and there would be months when I was not near the place. But I found myself always coming back for something or other, as when I worked on The Opening of the California Trail. (From my bibliography you can spot just about when I would have been working there.)

I also had other connections with the library. I was on several committees that dealt with it, including the one that recommended George Hammond for director.

One of these committees turned out to be rather crucial for the library. The professors who were interested in Latin-American affairs wanted to extend the field of the Bancroft to cover all of Latin America. On the other hand, others of us felt that this would be a dilution, and would not allow the Bancroft to be good in its field. This turned into a very hot argument for several months, but in the end, and I think wisely, the field was not extended.

I was also on a committee which dealt with the Oral History Project in its early stages. As for the Friends of the Bancroft Library, I was at the original luncheon where it or they were started. As I seem to remember, Francis Farquhar had a little money from the Bender estate which he put into getting the thing going. I was not a member of the Friends of the Library, however, for a long time, because I felt that it was not really an organization which included professors. I joined it finally, and I have served two terms on the Council.

My active participation in the library now is confined to binding books one hour and a half a week with Harry Roberts. I also bring some of the not-too-valuable books home with me and repair them in my bindery here.

Stewart: As you should be able to see from this account, my relationship with the Bancroft over many years has been a very happy one. I am unlikely, now, to take up a topic of research which will lead me to spend much time in the Bancroft. I have, however, said just about that several other times, and have always ended by coming back on some subject. So, possibly, it may happen again.

By the way, I had an interesting comment about this oral history project, which I think I should get down somewhere, from Ewald Grether. (He's a retired dean of business administration.) He had read the record of Ira Cross, in economics, past ninety years old. Grether said, "What's the use of all this stuff, anyway, because there are so many errors in Ira's record that there's no use having it?" I pointed out to him that that in a sense is what's important. Getting the opinions. Nobody in his right mind will take these things as factual records of history, unless he's just forced, with nothing else to work on. Because anybody knows that reminiscences taken thirty or forty years after the event are not really trustworthy. What they are useful for, is to give attitudes, and things that never get into the record. A documentary record of times and places just isn't very good. You certainly want to be as correct as you can, but I don't think that's the criterion. Particularly in a man like Ira Cross, who is a man of quite violent opinions.

Riess: Sometimes the interviewer ends up being the historian.

Stewart: Well, it depends of course what kind of life the person being interviewed has lived, what his contribution to the world has been, naturally.

Riess: Whether it's their attitudes that are going to be important--

Stewart: Or just what they're going to say and what's important in their lives. I don't think it should be the second time recording of stuff which is already in the record. I think that's just a waste of time. The original record is much more complete.

Riess: Very often it's, "Why did you vote for something-or-other in 1945?"

Stewart: That's all right, because that's probably not in the record.

Riess: But your 1970 attitude may be different about it anyway.

Stewart: Oh yes, indeed.

Riess: I have dipped into the question with you of what books were favorites, what books were influences. You didn't really indulge me very much in that. I thought I'd try again; maybe a way of looking at it would be, what books did you insist that your children read?

Stewart: I didn't push my children around very much that way. My daughter read a good deal. My son didn't read at all, until he got to college. He didn't read much then. He never has been a great reader. I couldn't push him at all. I don't know that I gave my daughter enough direction, but she was a reader, and she chose a good deal on herself. I didn't worry about what she was doing.

I find it difficult to answer a question like that, because of course I have read so tremendously. Naturally, it was my profession. And since I was a reader anyway, to try to pick out what books have influenced me is difficult, because of the tremendous number.

Riess: I thought if I just asked you enough times, all of a sudden some books would just pop to the top.

Stewart: I did answer to some extent didn't I?

Riess: Yes, you named Herodotus and older histories, and

Riess: said that you liked certain kinds of current histories, like the Titanic.*

Stewart: Yes. Yes. That's partly technical interest in the way it's done. I mentioned Hardy's Dynasts, didn't I?

Riess: No, but Jim Hart did.

Stewart: Well, actually I think that's mentioned in that introduction to Storm that I wrote for Modern Libraries.

I haven't read it for years, but it has an influence on Storm. And of course the King James Bible has had a tremendous influence on me. Tremendous. Even in this present novel I'm working on now, I suddenly found myself talking about somebody walking up and down and I realize that's out of the Book of Job. It's what Satan does, you see. The Lord asks him what he's been doing, and he says that he's been walking "to and fro in the earth." [laughing] Then I realized this character I've been working with was a Satanic character. That's quite an interesting psychological point there. And I found him later on, having made an agreement with somebody, he says, "Of course it isn't necessary to sign this in blood." That isn't out of the Bible, but that's the tradition of Satan anyway.

Shakespeare has had a good deal of influence on me, for instance, in Fire. A friend of mind, a Shakespearean authority (Bert Evans, who retired recently) said, "Well, you've got a whole series of

*"I would start with Herodotus, I think. I really like Herodotus. He had real charm...I like these modern things, like Lord, you know. His one on the Titanic and the one on Midway, and books of that sort. That's a kind of genre which has grown up in the last twenty-five years or so, to which I have contributed myself to some extent. But I like that kind of story. And I've read practically everything that was ever written on the Battle of the Bulge, among other things. That's an interesting, complicated story, an ecological unit in itself, with everything tying in together." G.S.-- earlier interview.

Stewart: things out of Shakespeare in that book." I couldn't think of anything very much. He couldn't pinpoint it, but he is a man who knows his Shakespeare very well, and he said there was a whole series. The only thing he mentioned was the fact that the fire boss goes around and visits the camps after dark. He said, "That's right out of Henry V." [laughing] But I think that's carrying the influences too far. I said, "Oh, that's crazy. That's just what any good fire boss would do."

Riess: So it's not an influence of style, it's an influence of material?

Stewart: I think more influence of material. There's a good deal of Shakespeare in a good many of my books. This one I'm working on now is really tied up with Shakespeare very much.

I spoke of Kipling didn't I? And G.A. Henty, as a child.

Riess: You spoke of him, and I wondered whether that was just a childhood influence.

Stewart: Well, I don't think you ever get over your childhood influences, do you?

Riess: I hope I've gotten over the Bobbsey Twins. [laughing]

Stewart: I rejected Horatio Alger. I noticed in Newsweek he's just been shown to be a homosexual, so I used good judgement. [laughter] There's a lot of interest in boys that run through his novels, that has apparently a double sense to it. Anyway I never got interested in him very much, compared with Henty.

You take other things. As I say, I've read too many things. I pick up something here probably, something there probably, but if you take people-- Dickens, for instance--Dickens never had much influence on me. I've read nearly all of Dickens, some of it two or three times, but I don't think it's had any serious influence on me.

The contemporary poet that had the most influence upon me is Archibald MacLeish, who fascinates me. I don't think you'd probably find very much direct

Stewart: influence on my writing, but there's something about his style which may have influenced me a good deal.

Riess: What was it about The Dynasts?

Stewart: I think it was in the first place the idea of withdrawing into the sky, seeing things in the big sense, which I used in the opening of Ordeal by Hunger. I actually referred to Hardy at that point, but somebody told me that's foolish to do that. I think he was right, so I cut it out. That influence is also very strongly evidenced in Storm, I think spread over that, to show not only that you could take in vast amounts of space, but also that you could take in vast amounts of time, if you tried. Space and time are infinitely expandable and contractable.

Riess: What was Hardy's attitude when he did it?

Stewart: Well, I'm hardly ready to pass an examination on Hardy because I haven't read The Dynasts recently enough. But he's dealing with the Napoleonic campaigns, and he'll describe the whole army, you'll see the whole army on the march along the road. He's drawing far enough away so that he sees the whole thing at one glance.

Riess: But this was a play, wasn't it?

Stewart: It was a theoretical play. It was never enacted as a play. There are lots of things that would be quite impossible to represent on the stage. I must read that again, as a matter of fact. It's a book which has not held its place. It isn't read much any more, I don't think.

It's funny, you see, when I wrote that passage in Ordeal by Hunger, back in the middle thirties, nobody had ever done that. Now, of course, being up two or three hundred miles in the air is quite commonplace. That's an interesting point.

Riess: Yes, how could you have known what it was like?

Stewart: I didn't. I'm not sure I was right, but it was a good literary device, to describe the whole trail, you see. To see it as the only mark upon the land at that time.

Riess: Are there any books of your own that you wish you hadn't written?

Stewart: Well, not exactly. There are some books which were hardly worth while writing. I mean they haven't circulated enough to be of any interest to people much. I don't think there's any book I wish I hadn't written in the sense that I think it's a bad book, that it's a vicious book, or anything like that.

Riess: Or that you wish no one would associate with your name.

Stewart: No, no, some of the books that are read least I appreciate very much when somebody does read them. Every now and then somebody does and likes one of those books very much, which is nice.

Riess: Some people--me--when they see their writing, or hear it read aloud, experience great distress, sort of mal de mer. Do you know that feeling?

Stewart: Well, no, I'm usually pleased with my books when I reread them. I don't often hear anybody read them aloud.

Riess: Can you remember when you were just starting?

Stewart: No, no, I really can't. I read a lot of my Bret Harte book here the other night. I had some reason to get started reading it. And that was the first real book I did and I thought that went all right.

Riess: How about reading old letters?

Stewart: Oh, they are terrible. I never was a letter-writer. I would probably be very embarrassed at some of them. But that's a little different. And I'm going to have to reread a lot. I've got a whole stack of postcards that I sent back to my father and mother when I was bicycling over Europe. More or less to keep a record, I usually wrote them a postcard every day. And they kept them, so I have a pretty good record of the whole trip. I'll have to take a look at them sometime. I don't have very many letters that I wrote, I'm happy to say.

Riess: Of course postcards are an exercise in condensation.

- Stewart: Yes, they don't say very much, but you can send back a picture of something you saw, and that's a record in itself.
- Riess: Do you have any old poetry that you wish you hadn't written?
- Stewart: No, I don't know whether I have a file of poetry of mine anymore. I had, for a long time, some poems. I don't think there was anything I would be really ashamed of now.
- Riess: Oh, not shame. I was thinking that this feeling might be the difference between the way the professional relates to what he's written, and the amateur.
- Stewart: Well, I was really surprised at that Bret Harte book. As I say, I read maybe 75 pages of it, and it was all right. I don't know how I learned to do it that well that soon. I remember somebody saying at the time, somebody I didn't know at all, who had read the book, saying, that I was a man to watch. And that intrigued me very much--of course it pleased me very much. How she had that insight, I don't know. Maybe it was better written than most books. It isn't perfectly written; I mean, I would change certain things about it if I did it today. But it wouldn't necessarily be right, of course. That's another thing you have to remember. Sometimes you're better when you're young than when you're old, although you always think you're better when you're old.
- Riess: What if East of the Giants had been your first book? Do you think it might have been a more difficult first book, and the one that might have shown the novice?
- Stewart: I don't know exactly how to answer. That in a sense was a documentary book, too, because it was written against the background of that time, the way a person of that character would have reacted to the situation at that time. That's a thoroughly objective book, and of course I think it was a very good idea to make it about a woman, because that makes you get out of your own personality.
- Riess: So you never did the traditional first novel, about one's own life experiences.

- Stewart: No. There's a lot of my life tied up in various of those books, but there's nothing definitely autobiographical. I suppose Ish in Earth Abides is the most autobiographical character. I think there's a good deal of autobiographical reference there. I used it more or less consciously. I mean, "How would I react to something like that?"
- Riess: You would have enjoyed the opportunity to start the world over again.
- Stewart: Oh, probably. That's a very common fantasy. I wasn't thinking of that so much, though, as I was thinking of the way he goes about things, and a certain sense of his own incapacities which I think is pretty common. A lot of people have that feeling.
- Riess: How about in your current book? Are you there?
- Stewart: I have one character in this book who has some qualities of mine. I wouldn't say he was particularly autobiographical. In fact I'm actually thinking of another man I once knew very much in this character, although he isn't too much like that man either. My characters get worked out; they're all sorts of different people strung together.
- Riess: To complete our running account of your books, we need to talk about Not So Rich.
- Stewart: That was a book where I jumped the gun. I came out with that before people were really interested in the subject. The book, in a sense, misfired, because people were not much interested in the topic yet. If it had come out about two years later I'd have done just fine. But that's one of the disadvantages of being ahead of your time. I think I said in the introduction to that book, or somewhere, that it worked out of the influence of two people, both of them engineers. One was Professor Boelter at UCLA, who wrote me a letter and gave me a suggestion about doing it. The other was George Maslach, who's the dean of the College of Engineering at Berkeley, who definitely suggested that I do that book, and gave me the very important document, the report of the commission on which he's worked for the President, which was my chief source book, and which was new at that time, and a very valuable piece of work. And of course it's

- Stewart: been a thing I've been interested in for a long time, and I apparently saw the crisis a little bit ahead of other people in general.
- Riess: These men thought that a book such as this would stir the public.
- Stewart: Yes, I think so, and of course it did to some extent. I can remember one reference to it by a reviewer who said it was minor muckraking, which it seems to me is an amazing thing that couldn't possibly be said a year or two later.
- Riess: Since then how involved have you been in the ecology movement and issues?
- Stewart: I really haven't been very much. I send a little bit of money to a lot of these things, you know, but I'm not really a man who works with committees and movements and that sort of thing. I don't get into that very much.
- Riess: You say that book was two years too early. What do you think finally rouses people?
- Stewart: Oh, I don't know in that particular case. Of course, things were getting worse and worse and they did arrive at the--well, you can't say crisis, because we may not be at the crisis yet--but they got to the point where people became interested. And then it got to be an emotional campaign, particularly among the young. And it's a very good thing too. But I can't say just what caused it.
- Riess: How about population control? Has that been something you've thought about?
- Stewart: I've been very much interested in that for many years, too, yes.
- Riess: Have you ever thought of doing any writing about it?
- Stewart: Not seriously. It's a pretty technical problem, and there has been a good deal written about it.
- Riess: I mean in your special fictional vein.
- Stewart: I never had any inspiration, so to speak, on that subject. I've never seen anything I could do to

Stewart: approach it, although I have been interested for a long time. It's always seemed to me to be the basic problem of modern civilization, even more than pollution, because of course the population problem is one of the chief factors of pollution.

Riess: You might write about what happens on the day of the real crisis.

Stewart: Well, you get into science fiction there, and I never got into that very much.

Riess: I'd like to know what your experience with private presses has been.

Stewart: I've really have very little experience with private presses. I've published two or three things that way, usually with the Book Club of California, which handles all the press work and that sort of thing anyway.

Riess: You had something printed by the Grabhorns, the Colt Press.

Stewart: Yes, the Colt Press. That was Jane Grabhorn who had that, and it wasn't published under the Grabhorn imprint. I wasn't really involved with it very much. They just took it and printed it. Incidentally, they printed too many, and it's been a kind of drug on the market for a good many years, although now I think it's a book which has some value because the supply has been exhausted. But I really had almost no direct experience with any kind of private press. In fact, on the whole I've kept away from them, perhaps again being something of a professional.

Riess: How does that follow?

Stewart: Generally speaking, you don't publish with a private press if you can get a national publication. Private

- Stewart: presses publish specialized kinds of material, usually short things and in small editions. They have their place, but it was not the sort of thing that I was ever primarily interested in, as Jim Hart, for instance, has a tremendous interest in it.
- Riess: What about the pleasure of seeing your words printed in such a fancy fashion?
- Stewart: I don't feel that very much. I think it's the other way around, really. Of course some books can be so badly printed that they are a pain to read. On the other hand, when the printing itself becomes the chief way of judging the book, I don't like it. It seems to me it takes away from what I've written.
- Riess: We've talked about the importance of significant divisions of chapters, etc. It seems to me a private press could really do this up. When you are dealing with a commercial publisher, can you indicate that you want this?
- Stewart: Well, you might, if there was something that you wanted very badly, yes, and if you had a good relationship with your publisher. Generally speaking, you can trust the modern American publishers pretty well, since about the 1920s, when Alfred Knopf made the business over, and Random House followed. You get a very nice book done by commercial publishers, almost without exception. Even the second-string publishers do very nice books.
- Riess: The person who designs a book, does he read it through to know it?
- Stewart: I think sometimes he does and sometimes he doesn't. I don't know. Sometimes you can't tell. They can make bad mistakes. I think, on the other hand, there are good ones and bad ones. Book design--you're probably thinking of the jacket, rather than the design.
- Riess: I was thinking then of initial letters in chapters, and how far down the chapter begins, and so on.
- Stewart: Well, of course, I don't think that's important at all. It's the content, it's the style, it's not the printing.

Riess: I had thought that certain kinds of emphasis, like beginning a chapter on a new page, would be important to you.

Stewart: Well, that might be, yes, I could see that. But I think it's a very minor factor. For instance, Names on the Land came out during a wartime paper restriction, so it's fixed up this way, you see. [Chapters end and begin in same page.] Without any blank pages. That's a reprint, but of course they kept the same format because they just reprint from offset. I think that's the only book of mine that was done that way, but I don't mind it at all.

Riess: I thought also that your interest in bookbinding might have brought you closer to the private presses.

Stewart: That's very recent, and private presses don't go in for handbinding anyway. I don't know any private press work that is done by handbinding; it's just too expensive, it's always a special job. I don't know where they get them bound--someplace around here.

There are one or two things that bother me about a book. They bother me more as I get older. I suppose my eyes aren't so good. You can't have a book with too small print, that makes it difficult to read. But that's pretty unusual. You get it in old reprints of Trollope, and things of that sort, that very small type. Another thing is too broad a line, which I sometimes find difficult. But that's unusual too. It's usually in some book that is chiefly pictures.

Riess: What is it difficult?

Stewart: It's just one of the things that gets in your road, and I think it does slow comprehension, and tires the eyes physically, too. But most books are pretty well printed. Whether you have a big capital letter and that sort of thing doesn't bother me. It's not the essential.

Riess: It's not the medium, it's the message. Could you have been a bookbinder and been a happy man?

Stewart: I don't know. I don't think so. I don't think that would have enough scope. I might have been all right in some kind of trade. I think I probably could have been. I would have had some kind of hobby of another

Stewart: sort. But it's pretty nearly impossible to tell what you might be.

As I look back on my ancestry, for instance, of which there's a pretty good record, they never did anything very much, and yet they must have had pretty much the same mental characteristics that I have. They were farmers. Everybody ~~was~~ was a farmer in those days. And all kinds of tradespeople. I suppose some of them must have had very much the same mental set-up that I have.

Riess: Mental characteristics, mental set-up? How do you sum up your mental set-up?

Stewart: Well, I don't know exactly. I mean I suppose a combination of your emotional and your intellectual endowment, which develops into your environment. The opening of my second chapter of my autobiography deals with that a little bit, I guess.

Riess: I don't remember your ancestors being farmers. I thought they were more scholarly.

Stewart: Well, I like to imagine they were scholars, some of them, but I don't really know. [laughing] There isn't a very good record of it until you get down to the time of a couple of my uncles, who did scholarly work.

Riess: It seems like it would be more fun to imagine yourself as having sprung out of farming stock.

Stewart: I can imagine that, because as I say, everybody was a farmer in those days, practically. Some of them had other jobs too, of one kind or another. They were storekeepers or tavern-keepers. One of my grandfathers was a doctor. He must have been a pretty lousy doctor.

Riess: Why do you think he was a lousy doctor?

Stewart: Because he always lived in very, very small towns, and didn't apparently succeed very well at his doctoring. Oh, my great-grandfather on my mother's side is the one that I can think of as a scholar. He seems to have been such a badly-adjusted, unhappy man, an unsuccessful man, and yet you have a feeling that behind him there was something that he wasn't doing. He had some education, as things went in those days. You imagine

Stewart: things about a man.

Riess: When you wrote Good Lives I think that you said in that book, or someplace, that they had solved the problem of living. Do you think that any of them would have agreed with that assessment, or is that just yours?

Stewart: I think they probably would have agreed that they had led good lives, yes. You don't know how a man's going to react to himself, but I think they well might have felt that.

Riess: Other people's assessment at some point along the way might be enlightening. It's hard to get objectivity about the quality of your own life.

Stewart: Well, since I wrote that book, several people have told me that I was an example of a man who had led a good life.

Riess: That's nice to hear, too, I'll bet.

Stewart: It's very nice to hear, yes. A professor over at Berkeley, not long ago, a man I don't know very well, said to me, for no particular reason, "You know, George, you've led a good life. You've done exactly what you wanted to do." Which is partly, I suppose, a phase of a good life.

And after the Christmas dinner at the Faculty Club this year, a few men gathered upstairs where we had some more drinks, and they asked me. I was sitting here, and one of the men from the other side of the table, a man (again) I don't know very well, got up and walked all the way around the table, and spoke to me, "George, I just wanted to say that I think you're wonderful." That's very nice. I don't know what he was thinking about, but that's sort of-- you feel that in some way you have lived a good life.

Riess: For somebody to say that you've lived a good life implies some kind of objective knowledge. To say "You're wonderful," that's different, because that's a subjective thing.

Stewart: Well, I don't think that, particularly. I don't think the two statements are comparable in that way. They reinforce one another. They both made me feel very good. Particularly, since these were men I don't

Stewart: know too well. It was completely uncalled for. I mean, it wasn't in the course of conversation.

Riess: There's an article that I haven't read, and wish I had, in your bibliography, from the Pacific Spectator, called "the Twilight of the Printed Book." What were you saying in 1949 about the twilight of the printed book?

Stewart: I was a little premature. But things are moving that way, gradually. My idea was that the book as we know it was not the last or permanent word in the transmittal of information and art. Such things as microfilm, microcards, and reproductions of that sort offered tremendous possibilities and might easily replace the printed book. There are signs that that is happening.

Riess: You were ahead of your time. That's what's happening now.

Stewart: Slowly. I didn't give it enough time. That's one of the great faults of prophecy. You should always give it about twice as much time as you think, to start with.

Riess: You mean you had said within twenty years?

Stewart: Twenty-five years or something like that. It isn't making out that way. The codex is a very convenient thing. My idea was that you could sit here, for instance, and have your book thrown on the wall there, in letters four inches high. Just sit here and read it, and you could press a button and move it, and so forth. You wouldn't need to hold the book.

Riess: You wouldn't even have to have a book. It could be just beamed from headquarters.

Stewart: That would be possible too. Or you could have a projector right here. It's working that way. There's

Stewart: a tremendous project now, of a whole library, 29,000 volumes or so, on one shelf. That kind of mini-print.

Of course I was conceiving it not merely as a way of preserving material efficiently, but actually as a way of transmitting it to the reader. The emphasis has all been on the preserving of material, and it hasn't been on making it available. But actually, most people think of microfilm, which was an invention of the devil. Reading microfilm is just awful.

But that's so primitive. There's no reason why they couldn't have something vastly better. You could have oral books, too. As I pointed out in this article, you could have a machine under your pillow, instead of now, as you try to read in bed, you have to put something around you, and sit up, and when you want to go to sleep you have to take all this stuff off, and turn out the light and throw the pillow away somewhere, and it's a terrible nuisance. [laughter] I never do it. If you could just have this thing reading to you, lie on the pillow and have it reading to you, then when you went to sleep, your heartbeat would change, and it would turn off.

The possibilities have nothing to do with this old-fashioned codex, which was invented in about the fifth century, you know. And it was a very useful invention. But it isn't necessarily the last word.

Now, of course, they're emphasizing the comfort to the reader in some of these new ones they're putting out. There's a picture of a girl sitting in a chair reading this thing. It looks terribly uncomfortable to me. She's curled up. But some people like to read that way.

Riess: Seelye, in the same review, said that you informed the reader of "the nature and origins of our institutions, celebrating them where possible, condemning them where necessary." What condemning do you think he's referring to?

Stewart: Well, Not So Rich As You Think is the obvious example. There's certainly criticism of institutions, I suppose, implicit in Earth Abides, that there are other solutions to this type of thing. There's not one necessarily proper one. I haven't done much of that sort of thing, though, really.

Riess: In Doctor's Oral too?

Stewart: No, I don't think so. That's not really much of a criticism of the system. I never meant it to be, at least. I don't know exactly what he had in mind there. There is something in Man, which could be cited on that. I didn't think that was characteristic of my work particularly.

Riess: When you were writing Committee of Vigilance and Pickett's Charge and Ordeal by Hunger, I think particularly, what did you do about the matter of taking sides or passing judgment? At what point did you take sides, if you took sides?

Stewart: In Ordeal by Hunger, I don't think I took sides much at all. I couldn't actually get very enthusiastic about a man like Keseberg, but I don't think that I took sides particularly. And then I don't think I did in the other books very much either; of course, I find my sympathies extremely with the Union side in Pickett's Charge. I couldn't get away from that. But I don't think that's very obvious in the book. And as far as Committee of Vigilance goes, that was a difficult one to work on at the time. One reviewer accused me of defending the principle of the Committee of Vigilance. But I tried not to, really. I tried to show why they did it, and in that sense it is a kind of defense of it, I suppose. But on the whole, not.

I think that is one thing which has given a good deal of strength to my books, that kind of nonjudgmental approach.

Riess: Is it the same as the withdrawing into the sky? Once you get enough distance?

Stewart: I suppose so. I find that in this present book I'm working on very much, the fact that it's very difficult for me to condemn any of these people, in spite of the awful thing they get into, and the stupidity they show. In one case, this even rather satanic character is in many ways the most amusing and interesting character in the book, he's by far the smartest one of the whole crowd; a real genius type. It's very hard for me to try to make a moral judgment on that kind of thing.

Riess: Do you think that it's harder in books than it is in life? If you were discussing a specific current event with a friend, you would find yourself more prone to render judgment?

Stewart: Oh, I think so, yes. In a book you tend to see it perhaps in the round more; when you come up against a particular case, you have to make a judgment in a particular case.

Actually I'm going to have to have a kind of rejection scene in this book, like the Falstaff rejection scene. I'm not quite sure how to handle that.

Riess: You say you've got it more or less mapped out. Have you gotten to the real writing?

Stewart: I've written at least half the book, but I was feeling my way along, perhaps too much so. On the theory that the thing doesn't exist until it's more or less whole. But today I sat down and I went through the last three days of the book. It's a six-day book. And I got it mapped out now pretty well, got the causation of the book. What I had before were certain things I knew were going to happen, but just how one got from one to the other, what mechanism brought it into focus, I hadn't sat down and worked out. I knew it would happen some way or other but I hadn't really worked out just how. There are still a few things I don't know, but I'm sure they'll come out as I go along.

I plot a book like that a great deal more schematically and causally than is commonly done now anyway.

Riess: When did you start thinking of this book? We've been interviewing for a long time. Has your mind been on this book?

Stewart: No, it hasn't been. I haven't held anything out on you here. [laughing] I had the idea, in fact I talked about it--not about writing a book about it particularly--I may even have talked to you about it, I don't know--about the dramatic problem that would come if some senior member of an English department took up one of the Shakespeare heresies. Finally, I think it must have been just about the time you quit coming to see me regularly, I did get this idea: "Well, that could be written as a book." I could write it. And I was getting tired of this other job I was working on. So I started doing this, and I did a little bit of reading to find out something more about the Shakespeare business, and decided I wanted to take up the Marlowe phase of it.

Then I got to work, and the first part went very rapidly, just poured out. It was very fine. It showed I had a lot of things on my mind, a lot of incidents and ideas that poured out very nicely, and shaped up about ten characters. Then, of course, I eventually reached the middle part, which as I keep telling you is a hard part to get through. Now I'm about through with that, and I'm seeing the end of it a little more clearly now.

It's a book that starts out as a comedy, and ends as a tragedy. A comi-tragedy.

Riess: When you say there a lot of incidents and ideas, how do you mean that? Descriptions of characters and things?

Stewart: Yes. Incidents that could be brought in. The whole book practically is in scene. You see, it occurs only in six days. There's not very much about the backgrounds of these characters, which may be a certain weakness. You don't see them very whole. One or two of them are worked out a little more fully.

Riess: You've been accumulating lots of details in you.

Stewart: Yes, I think there's something in that. I know I spilled out one incident in the opening chapter, and then I got to thinking, "Well, that's much too good.

Stewart: I've got to save that." [laughter] I cut it out of that chapter completely, and I've put it in the real action of the book. It's almost a climactic moment. I couldn't waste it.

I guess I told you the reason I quit writing novels for a while, one reason, was that I felt that I was having to dig too hard to get details out. They weren't coming spontaneously any more. Now it's changed in this book, very much. I think if the book's any good, it will largely be that it has a lot of vitality to it.



"Life set out to do a story on C.S. Forester...probably 1945, and (to judge from the daffodils) spring. We staged a meeting of the Armchair Strategists [see page 219] at Cecil's house, to get a picture. (The article never came off.) His house was on Keeler, now owned by Jack Raleigh. Present [left to right]: C.D. Brenner; C.S. Forester; GRS; John Forester; Joseph Henry Jackson (deceased); Lewis (deceased), who was a friend and neighbor, not a member; Ronald Walpole; Reid Railton; with hands behind head, J.H. Osmer (deceased). The other man we think was a stand-in for Life; neither Brenner nor I recognize him. Charlie Camp was a member, but not present." GRS

[Mailed Questions, 23 February 1972, answered by
taped dictation by George Stewart]

- Riess:
1. What has your outdoor life, the fishing trips, meant to you? Is it a chance to get away and think, or to get away and stop thinking? Can you think of times when that change of environment was very significant?
 2. The 1937 Mexico sojourn: you worked on East of the Giants and Doctor's Oral, and even Storm while you were there. Why there? What about being in Mexico rather than here? A matter of being away from teaching and responsibilities, or are there other factors in Going Away to Work?
 3. Do you do your best thinking away from home?
 4. Did you choose to teach at Duke in 1939 to "get away from Berkeley"?
 5. What were you doing in Pearl Harbor in November 1944? Part of your work for Trask?
 6. Why is October 1, 1946, Albuquerque, NYC, designated the "Earth Abides trip" in your diary? Did you do it as Ish did?
 7. You went back to Mexico to write? in February, March 1949. Again in Fall 1955.

Stewart: You ask, "What has your outdoor life, the fishing trips, meant to you? A chance to think or not to think?"

I should say that I am likely to do a lot of thinking at any time. I don't think that my environment influences it particularly, aside from the fact of being definitely uncomfortable from heat or cold or something of that sort. I don't know exactly why my fishing trips mean so much to me. I think, on the whole, they get to mean more as I get older and have fewer definite outlets. I start thinking, "How long can I keep up these trips, physically?" I have, for instance, developed a bad knee in the last year, and I am wondering how much I am going to be able to take on the river. Certainly, the chance to get away on a

Stewart: lovely stream in good mountain country means a great deal to me. I don't know exactly why. These trips, of course, furnish a change from my ordinary urban environment. I get more exercise, and usually manage to lose a little weight, which I put back in the next winter.

You ask about the Mexican visit of 1937-8. We went there because I had a Sabbatical coming up at that time. We were very short of money, and we knew that we could live quite cheaply in Mexico. This actually proved to be the case. As for going to Mexico at all, it was very "in" at that time. The actual shooting revolution had quieted down, and there was a good deal of experiment in social change. It was a very interesting place to be at that time. It was perhaps the most optimistic time that Mexico has had. There was tremendous interest in education, and schools were springing up in all the villages.

Another, but slight reason for going to Mexico was that I was writing East of the Giants, and I thought that getting a Mexican background would help me on that. It did, but not to a very significant degree.

I look back to the six months that we spent in Cuernavaca as one of the most idyllic times of my life. Our regular paycheck from the University during that period was about \$180 a month, and we had very little money besides that. But we got along finely, and had three servants and a swimming pool with our little house in Cuernavaca. Our health was good and the family was happy, and my writing was coming along well.

To show a little about the finances of that time, towards the end of that period I got a check from Holt for \$500 as an advance on a novel. With that money, when we left Mexico we drove all the way to New York with the family, and then back across the country. We were completely broke when we got home, but we went a long way on that \$500.

You ask, what is really a repetition, "Do you do your best thinking away from home?" As I have already said, "I do my best thinking anywhere, anytime." I may paraphrase what I wrote of a character in the Shakespeare Crisis, "My mind is like some great machine

Stewart: or meatgrinder, of which the wheels keep grinding on continuously. I throw something into it to keep it from getting too hot. I do a lot of thinking, and sometimes I have to cool the machine by doing a crossword puzzle or something of that sort which supplies a sort of artificial fodder to keep the gears from getting hot. I suppose that fishing, or binding books, is a device to keep the machine satisfied."

You ask about my teaching at Duke. In those years I taught summer session pretty regularly, for the simple reason that I needed to make a little more money to have the budget balance for the year. When we drove back from Mexico, we stopped at Durham where I knew a few people in the English department, and at that time they asked me to teach there for the summer session. I took the job to make the usual bit of money, and also because teaching at another university yields a slight prestige. I spent a rather unpleasant summer at Durham, by myself, the family having gone off somewhere. It was hard work, and the heat was terrific. About the only pleasant features I remember were the dinners. There were several other men there teaching without their families, and we had a foursome that got together every evening, very pleasantly.

You ask about Pearl Harbor in 1944. That was part of my work with Trask on the Navy project. The idea that I should fly out there and get a little closer contact with submarine operations was at least no more crazy an idea than lots of others that happened in those war years. I had to get up a kind of halfway uniform, without any insignia, and since I had served in the Army before, being without any insignia always made me feel only half-dressed. The Navy didn't give such people much status. I rated about just below ensign.

Curiously, I did accomplish a few things. If the war had gone on (though that would have been a high price to pay) I think something might possibly have come out of that trip. I flew out in a DC-4 with a lot of young fellows who were going out as replacements on carriers. They were pretty sober. I flew back on a big Coronado flying boat, very slow. It lumbered across the Pacific for hours and hours. On that trip I made the acquaintance of a young officer, Victor Moiteret, with whom I have kept in touch ever

Stewart: since. He had read Storm, and was interested in meeting me.

You ask about the Earth Abides trip. When I came to write that book in 1948, or whenever it was, I looked back, just for convenience, to that trip across the country that I took in 1946. I sent Ish by the same route, although that is not of any very great significance. That is why I have sometimes called that the Earth Abides trip.

You ask about my later contacts with Mexico. My wife and I went there in 1949, without the children, who were on their own by this time. It was largely a sightseeing and vacation trip. I settled down however in Lake Chapala for about a month, and during that time worked on the final finishing of Earth Abides. The trip to Mexico in 1955 was in connection with N.A.1. I went clear on to Costa Rica at that time. My wife drove with me down as far as Oaxaca and from there on and all the way back I was with Hal O'Flaherty, a good friend, former editor of the Chicago Daily News. I was also in Mexico, although for a shorter time, in 1962-63. I spent most of the time in La Paz. Some work on that trip, however, was gathering material on Tresguerras, in the vicinity of Querétaro and Celaya. We stayed in that area for about a week, and I rented a car to drive around in. The opening of the section on Tresguerras in Good Lives (although I do not hold it up as an especially notable passage) came to me when I was driving around that country.

As a result of these trips my wife and I have covered Mexico pretty thoroughly, except for Yucatan. We have really not much more desire to go back to Mexico, with that exception. The great population growth, and the environmental strain, has made Mexico a less pleasant place than it was in the thirties. Also a great deal of the hope that was then in evidence has disappeared.

INTERVIEW IX, with George R. Stewart and Charles L. Camp. First meetings, almost; "the history of life"; folklore, and the Drake Plate; hoaxmakers; sideways to history; Herbert Bolton; adventures with Charlie and George; off the road; the house at Black Rock; later trips, other companions; "...write the way George does"; clubs; the library, then; the library, in transition; the Bancroft Library; pleasures and pains of writing. (Recorded March 15, 1972)

First meetings, almost

Riess: When did you first meet Charles Camp, Mr. Stewart?

Stewart: The first time I can remember we met was in that group called the Folio Club. And that would have been not terribly early in either of our careers around Berkeley. That was, I imagine, about 1934. Is that what you had in mind?

Camp: When were you writing the Donner Party book?

Stewart: Just at that time.

Camp: Well, that was the time I met you, because you came up and you wanted to know something about what did I think of the men on the Donner Party? That's what you asked me, "Why didn't they have better men?" and I said, "Well, they did have some pretty good men. One of them was Stanton."

I remember how interested you were in the Donner Party, and I thought, "Well, it seems curious to me. You're not a Californian, and yet you"--you'd just come out from Princeton or somewhere--"and yet you seem to be tremendously interested in this episode in California history."

- Stewart: Actually, it's rather interesting we did not meet until such a late date, because we were interested in the same things, and we'd run along parallel lines. In fact, we both went to school in Pasadena when we were in high school.
- Camp: But you were probably after the time I was.
- Stewart: I was just a little bit after, yes, but we were very close to having tied up a long time before and never did. Just worked out that way. After all, I'd been in Berkeley for ten years or so at that time when I remember meeting you, and you had been there about the same length of time.
- Riess: In 1919 George Stewart was hitch-hiking across the country and you were going, I think, probably in just the other direction.
- Camp: Yes, I was going back. I had just arrived here in 1919 from Europe from the war, and I was going back to New York to spend another two years getting my degree. Trying to finish up my thesis and all that.
- Riess: What happened to that hitch-hiking venture? Why did it end in Kansas?
- Stewart: I got kind of sick, and I had had that bad pneumonia a year or so before, which I never recovered from, which I still, in a sense, have. And it took the push out of me. I had gone a long way already, and I just didn't feel I could go any farther on it, so I took the train there from Garden City, Kansas, in the western part of Kansas. I'd hitch-hiked all the way from New York City.
- Camp: Oh! Did you have any difficulties getting a ride?
- Stewart: Oh, no serious difficulties. Of course in those days there weren't very many cars. If you made a hundred miles in one car that was a Big Ride. You rarely did that. I wrote that up. I tried to publish it, but I could never get anyone to publish it, and I threw it away eventually. So you can't see that one. [laughter] When I get to my autobiography, that section will have to have a chapter on hitch-hiking.
- Riess: When you met Charlie Camp, he was an expert on California history?

Stewart: Yes.

Camp: I was an amateur. [laughing] I was never an expert. But like Bolton used to say to me--I was riding with him one time to the California Historical Society meeting, and he says, "Camp, what are you doing dabbling around in California history?"

"Well," I said--I was a little bit peeved about this, you know--and I said, "Well, Professor Bolton, paleontology is a part of history. You ought to learn your field."

Stewart: Yes, very good reply.

"The history of life"

Camp: That's true, too. Paleontology is a part of history. It's kind of an extension, and a big extension. You can link them up very nicely. It's a good thing to do. It's a good thing to forget that there are boundaries between paleontology, geology, anthropology, and all that. Just forget the boundaries and think of the whole thing as a great sweep of history. You know?

Riess: Was that radical thinking for a paleontologist in those days?

Camp: I don't think so. I think that in our way of thinking, the way we were trained in zoology and paleontology was to confine yourself very strictly to your specialty and not try to branch out. That was one idea, sort of a doctrine. They tried to get you to stick to your subject and not fool around. Well, I did a lot of fooling around. I did a lot of branching out. And I'm not sorry that I did, because it makes life much more interesting.

I wrote a book called Earth Song in which I tried to bring in this idea of the whole business being put

Camp: together without any boundary lines.* And when I submitted it, I told Sam Farquhar, who was then manager of the [U.C.] Press, that I would give him a book at the time of the Centennial. (They were publishing some books at the time of the Centennial of the Gold Discovery.) I told him I'd give him a book, and I did. Of course, he'd died in the meantime, but I went to the Press with this book, and then they objected because it contained history as well as paleontology, and they didn't think we ought to be mixing the two things up. Well, I said, "Read it, and see what you think." So finally they decided to let it go through the way it was, sort of protesting about it. But I think that was proper.

Stewart: My book Man is a little bit like that. I don't get back into the paleontology particularly, but I tried to run all the anthropology right into the history.

Camp: Sure.

Riess: In a statement in There Was Light, you said, Mr. Camp, something about "the obscure origin of mankind" and "the long, painfully slow progress of humankind."** And I wanted to understand what you meant in that distinction between mankind and humankind.

Camp: Well. I don't know exactly what I did mean, but I think that there is probably a difficulty in distinguishing at the beginning, at the very beginning. We're having difficulties to know just what they mean by "man." When man first comes on the scene, what is the distinguishing characteristic, or what are the distinguishing characteristics? I used to ask people that question, just for the fun of it to see what they'd say, and I asked a priest down in Africa. I was studying bones down in Africa, going through the caves, and this man came around. I asked him, this priest, I said, "What do you regard as the criterion of man? If you found ancient remains how would you

*Charles Camp, Earth Song, A Prologue to History, U.C. Press, 1952.

**Irving Stone, There Was Light, Doubleday & Co., 1970, p. 273.

Camp: know? How would you know whether or not it was man? What criterion would you apply to this object to know whether it was man?"

"Well," he said, "man is to be regarded as having faith." When you first have faith.

I said, "All right. That's wonderful, but how do you know that, when you're dealing with bones, and dealing with these things in the rocks? Digging things up? You can't tell. You have to have something more practical in the way of a criterion. You have to know whether it was--for instance, you know if it was making stone tools. Perhaps you have the stone tools there, and if it was making stone tools or had fire, maybe you could use something like that as a criterion, instead of the question of faith or something, whether it had religion."

Of course, you might say, "Well, a person had faith if they buried their dead in a certain way, and had certain objects buried with the person, funeral ceremonies of certain types. Then you could say they had faith. In other words, the Egyptians might have had a faith of some sort, or other people of ancient times had faith. Well, then, they could say that. But with these very ancient people, when you're going back thousands and thousands of years, why you can't very well say whether or not they had faith. So that's not a very practical criterion as to whether or not we're dealing with man as such.

So humankind, mankind, humankind--humankind would be something very ancient, and mankind might be something a little more recent. Mankind might be something that's involved in the present type of man. I suppose. I'm not sure that I understand too much about that either.

Riess: Could you describe each other in 1934?

Stewart: I can remember quite definitely that meeting of the Folio Club, because I made an effort to get to sit beside you, Charlie, and talk to you, because I knew you had this interest in California history, and I did too. It may have been then that we talked about the Donner Party, actually. But I don't remember what you looked like, except you looked somewhat the way

Stewart: you do now. That's all. I don't think either of us is probably a very striking type physically. [laughing]

I remember having a very good conversation with you that evening. And then I don't remember many other contacts with you for quite a while. There was a meeting up at the International House one time. I think you and Lesley Simpson, or possibly Paul Taylor, went out and had a cup of coffee or something afterwards. But that was not very important. I gradually got to know you at one time or another.

Folklore, and the Drake Plate

Stewart: Really I think the big jump that our friendship took was on that trip to Nevada.

Camp: Yes, or that club we had.

Stewart: "E clampus vitus." Yes, you took me over to that meeting we had in Tuolumne along with Vanderhoof. And we had a very nice trip on that. That was an interesting situation.

Riess: What was that?

Stewart: Well, this "E clampus vitus"--I guess it's still going--but it was supposed to be a parody of Masonry, wasn't it?

Camp: Yes, and it was supposed to resurrect some of the folklore of California from the early days.

Stewart: I think it's still going, but it's been run into the ground a little bit.

Camp: Oh, yes, it's going. It's spread all over the country--all over California.

Stewart: This was back, I suppose, about--when would you say? That trip? 1938 maybe?

Camp: Oh, gosh, I don't remember. Wagner was there, and Priestley was there, and the Great Hi-O Chief Fuller

- Camp: of the Tuolomne Tribe, was there. When the deuce could that have been? It was shortly after the plaque was discovered, this Drake plaque, because we had an imitation Drake plaque that we put out on that boulder, you know. Vanderhoof fixed up this plaque that was a parody on the Drake plaque, and the Indians were supposed to take care of it. And they did. It's still there. The Indians are taking care of it. Yes. "Returning the land to the Indians" because of the fact that England didn't do anything about the occupancy of the country. You see, they didn't occupy the country after all.
- Stewart: Why don't we say a word about that Drake plate anyway? What about that, Charlie? Do you have anything to say about the Drake plate?
- Camp: Oh, I don't know anything about it. It seems to me as though it was settled--
- Stewart: Well, let's come clean here, now. We've got a real opportunity here to say your say about the Drake plate.
- Camp: [laughter] Yes. Well, of course, there are so many things about the Drake plaque that are peculiar. The whole discovery was mixed up because it was picked up by somebody and thrown in a car, and was all covered with grease when I first saw it. It looked as though it had been hammered by somebody recently. Maybe not recently, but anyway it looked as though it had been. Oh, it was the most peculiar situation.
- And then the story came out that it was picked up over here on San Quentin--near San Quentin Point instead of over at Drake's Bay. Oh, I don't know, I suppose we have to say that it was genuine. That's what we have to say now. It's like sort of a canon. It's like some--
- Stewart: We don't have to say that here. She won't tell what we say about it.
- Camp: Like the Ten Commandments or something, that was dug up, that's got to be genuine? Is that it? The book of Mormon, or something.
- Riess: Has there always been a controversy surrounding it?

- Camp: Well, there is a big controversy now as to whether it was found at Drake's Bay or whether it was found over here at Point San Quentin. That seems to be the controversy now. Nobody ever questions the fact of the plaque itself.
- Stewart: Well, there has been always some question about it, of course.
- Camp: Oh, at the beginning there was a big question as to whether the plaque was genuine.
- Stewart: Bolton said it was, and he really put it across.
- Camp: Well, Bolton danced around and didn't make any real scientific investigation of it. Then Wagner got busy and advised him to get it analyzed or something. I wrote a little book about it myself. I just wrote a parody on the whole deal. Then they sent it to an expert and the expert decided that there was some reason to think that the brass was ancient, or something of that sort.
- Riess: Can't something like that be given the Carbon-14 dating sort of thing?
- Camp: I don't think they could date it, no, but they had some reason to think it was ancient.
- Stewart: I know something about that. At least I heard of it at the time. You see, it came into the possession of the University somehow or other, and Sproul appointed a committee to investigate it. In the first place, Bolton was one of the committee. Well, that was no investigation at all, because Bolton had already stuck out his neck a hundred miles on it, so all he could say was yes.

The second man was Joel Hildebrand. Well, Joel Hildebrand had it analyzed chemically, and I think he did a proper job on it. And it has all sorts of impurities in it, such as you would not get in modern bronze, or brass, whichever it is. And so it is an old piece of brass, no question about that. But that

Stewart: doesn't mean that a faker couldn't have got hold of an old piece of brass.

The third man was Jimmy Cline of the English department, who was supposed to investigate the language of it, to see if it was Elizabethan language. Jim was never a scholar, and he was not a good man at all for that job. So I never thought that the committee did an awful lot except to prove that it was an old piece of brass. If it is a fake, it's an extremely clever fake, you've got to say that for it. You see, you can never prove that a thing like that is so. You can prove that it's not so. But there's no way of proving that it is so.

What I always objected to (although nobody ever asked my opinion about it, I kept out of it), was that it was not handled according to really scholarly standards. It was accepted as being what it was, and it became a matter of faith, as Charlie had said, from the very beginning.

Camp: Yes. It was \$3500 worth of brass. [laughter]

Riess: How did \$3500 enter into it?

Camp: Well, that's what they paid this fellow for it.

Stewart: Somebody paid it and gave it to the University, I think.

Camp: They paid this man that found it, and then it was given to the Historical Society, and [Allen L.] Chickering I guess--I don't know just what happened after that. I don't know just how it got into the University.

Stewart: I think Chickering gave it to the University. And it's down there still.

Camp: Oh, yes. Yes. It looks pretty good.

Stewart: Well, it may be all right. All I say is it just wasn't a good way to go about the thing.

Camp: Oh, no. The announcement of it was very bad, of course. The whole thing was very badly announced. Very bad. And I think that's what Wagner objected to more than anything else, the fact that it was

Camp: announced in such an abrupt way without proper--

Stewart: Wagner--what position did he take on it?

Camp: Well, doubtful.

Stewart: Doubtful. Yes?

Camp: Oh, yes. He was sceptical. Of course, he had seen all the documents regarding the voyage, and written a treatise on the voyage, and looked over the situation pretty thoroughly. I think that he was really sceptical about the whole darn thing.

Stewart: According to Jim Cline, there's one interesting objection made to it from the English point of view. I think he spoke to people in the British Museum about it, and they said, "Why, Francis Drake wouldn't put up a bunch of stuff like that for Queen Elizabeth." It looks as if you or I took a hammer and a cold chisel and put those letters in there.

Camp: That's what it was done with. A cold chisel.

Stewart: You see, Francis Drake would have had an armorer on board, and if he was going to put up a plaque for Queen Elizabeth, he would have done a right good job on it.

Camp: Yes. This was just a crude job.

Stewart: Just exactly what I would have done if I had done a thing like that. [laughter]

Camp: Sure. Yes. What we'd have done down in our cellar in our amateur way.

Stewart: Did you have any idea of anybody who might have--

Camp: Oh, no, except there was an outfit called the Tamalpais Show or something. Every year they used to have sort of a show over on Mt. Tamalpais, a kind of a pageant. I was wondering if they could have put up something in the way of a plaque, you know, at the time they had this pageant. [laughter] I don't know. Of course, that's where it was found. It was found right there at the base of Tamalpais. Well, anyway, nobody will ever know, I don't suppose.

- Riess: Does this really amount to a real controversy? Was there a lot of passion on both sides?
- Camp: Yes, there was quite a bit of passion, quite a bit of argument, and there was quite a bit of feeling around the whole thing, I think more than it deserved. Bolton was a pretty steady sort of a man, and I don't think that Bolton got himself worked up over it very much. I wrote a parody on it which was supposed to be humorous, you know, and Lawton [Kennedy] printed it. "Ye preposterous book of brass," or something like that, we called it. And we had a lot of fun with that thing. I gave a copy to Bolton. I thought, "I'll see what the old boy says about it." And Bolton said, "Oh, that's good fun," you know. He didn't get sore about it in the least. He's a good sport.
- Stewart: Well, he was a man of great self-confidence, I think.
- Camp: Oh, yes. He didn't need to worry about little things like that.
- Stewart: If he had decided that was Drake's plate, why, it didn't make any difference what anybody else said about it! [laughing]
- Camp: Yes. Of course Bolton was a great enthusiast. And he got a little too enthusiastic when this thing showed up. He thought, "Well, here it is at last!" and so on.
- Stewart: You remember George Ezra Dane, don't you?
- Camp: Oh, yes, I knew George very well.
- Stewart: Yes. He loved a hoax.
- Camp: Oh! Well, George, he loved to put over some sort of a hoax. Yes. Of course. But I don't think George had anything to do with this plaque business.

Hoaxmaking

Riess: Are you really suggesting that this was a hoax within our time?

Stewart: The world is full of hoaxes like that.

Riess: But hoaxes that aren't revealed aren't hoaxes?

Stewart: Oh, well, sometimes it gets so a man doesn't dare reveal it! Nobody will believe him! [laughing]

Camp: The Piltdown skull. That was one where the guy that put it over didn't dare to confess. It was so successful, the hoax was so successful, and so many people were taken in, that he didn't dare to confess.

Old George Ezra was always cooking up some kind of a deal. He wanted me to write a story about a monster that they'd found up at Pedro Point. You see, he had a cabin down at Pedro Point, and he was going to write this stuff for the newspapers, you know. He'd started it. He'd already gotten a couple of articles in the newspapers about this great monster that came ashore there or something.

Stewart: [laughing] Well, now, if you have a man like that right at hand, a very clever man, why do you say offhand that he had nothing to do with the Drake plate?

Camp: Oh, you mean, why do I say that George Ezra had nothing to do with it? I never even thought of him in that connection. Hmm! Well, now you've got me. Of course, I'll say this, that when Vanderhoof went to work and made a copy of it, he made a beautiful replica for the tribe up there at Tuolomne, the Miwoks, and it didn't take him very long to make a duplicate of it. Took a piece of brass, and he hammered it out, and made the letters and everything, and put the lettering on, and everything was very clever. He could have done it of course, but--

Stewart: You would have had to get hold of a piece of old brass, because I think the brass is old.

Camp: Well, that wouldn't be so difficult.

- Stewart: But that could have been done too. There are some very interesting things about it, that is the fact that the sixpence, the hole for the sixpence, is the right size for Elizabethan sixpence, and not for a modern sixpence. But after all, if you're going to go in for a hoax, that's the thing you do, you know. You do that kind of thing.
- Camp: They looked for the sixpence. They went out there and dug around, expecting to find it, but they didn't. Well, what would the Indians do if they had a piece of brass of that sort? Would they just leave it there?
- Stewart: I don't know what they--I wondered about that.
- Camp: I wondered myself. I was wondering here, if they had a piece of brass attached to a post, and the post rotted down eventually, after a hundred years or so, wouldn't they use that thing as a frying pan, or something? They'd make some sort of use out of it.
- Stewart: You'd think so, yes.
- Camp: Indians are pretty clever at using things like pieces of metal. They'd chop it up for pieces--
- Stewart: Arrow points, or something like that.
- Camp: Metal. I don't know. Something fishy about it.
- Stewart: Well, we're on record now. You've got us in there somewhere.
- Riess: You both seem to be able to imagine the hoax frame of mind. I should think a hoax-doer would eventually want his hoax exposed.
- Stewart: No, no. I don't think that holds at all.
- Riess: Well, what kind of mentality?
- Stewart: I don't know exactly what it is, but you take--I brought up Mrs. Pickett's letters in my reminiscences there, you see. There's another case. And the world is full of those things. I think there's a type of mind that likes to do that kind of thing, and they'll sometimes go to immense trouble.

Camp: Yes, an enormous amount of trouble. Remember at the time that the Drake plaque was found, there were a series of plaques that were distributed down through the desert. Well, I don't know if they were plaques. They were some kind of metal objects that were secreted in various places, and were supposed to be found by clairvoyance.

Stewart: Yes? What were they about?

Camp: Oh, they were supposed to demonstrate that this man had a certain power of clairvoyance, and he could tell you where these things were located. He knew beforehand where they were secreted, under rocks, and out in toward Death Valley and everything. And so, he'd say, "Go to this place and you'll find a certain piece of metal with a certain inscription on it." And they did, and they found of course just as he said. In other words, he was demonstrating his power as a--

Stewart: He'd been around and planted these things before!

Camp: Oh, yes. Yes, he'd planted them.

Stewart: Well, look at the Kensington Stone, for instance, about the Norse people in America. That's never been exposed at all. I mean, it's undoubtedly a hoax, or a fake of some kind, but it's never been exposed by anybody who did it.

Camp: What about that plaque that was found at Fort Pierre in South Dakota?

Stewart: Well, I think that one may have been true. They have found some of them of course. They found these lead plates in Pennsylvania, and various things. They turn up occasionally. Because some explorers did bury that kind of stuff. And it's perfectly reasonable some of it should be found.

Camp: That was another thing. Wagner thought they should be using lead. They used lead so often. He didn't think they used brass so often. They put up lead plaques to make it much easier to handle.

Stewart: Yes, and they had lead with them, for bullets, whereas they didn't usually carry brass so much.

- Camp: I'm not sure but that Drake did put up a lead plaque somewhere down around the Straits of Magellan.
- Stewart: Of course, I always figured if it was genuine, we had to give California back to the British, didn't you?
- Camp: Well, that's what we did up at Tuolomne, you know. We gave it back to the Indians.
- Stewart: We gave it to the Indians there. That's stretching a point. I think it should really go to the British.

Sideways to history

- Riess: Was George a writer when you met him? Did you see him as a writer, or as a dabbler?
- Camp: Well, I don't know. George had already written some things, but I don't know that I'd ever read anything that George had written. I thought of George as a very interested sort of an enthusiast. You know, you can tell right away whether a person is interested, when they begin talking about a subject, the questions asked, and the way they talk about it. And it was perfectly obvious that he was thoroughly interested in this subject that he was writing about. I remember that part of it. He was very enthusiastic about the whole deal, and had particular questions that he wanted to know about the Donner Party. Whether or not I could answer them I don't remember, but I know that he had certain definite points that he was interested in, and seemed to me to be well taken. This is the thing that impressed me at the time, that he was a man who was really getting into the heart of his subject, you know, getting immersed in his subject.
- Stewart: That was probably right when I was in the middle of the Donner Party research, about 1934, I guess.
- Camp: I wouldn't be surprised. I think that was just about the time. I know it was in the Faculty Club. I remember that part very distinctly.

Stewart: Well, have you got another question to throw at us?

Riess: Yes, I was thinking about coming at California history sideways; if you just come at it directly, it's what you always wanted to do, does that make you a sort of plodding kind of pedestrian historian?

Camp: I came into history by a side door, you might say. I studied history in high school, English history, and successions of the Popes and everything, and the kings and everything. Oh, it never took with me. And I came up here and I took Henry Morse Stephen's History-I for two semesters, and boy, I didn't care much for that. And I certainly didn't get interested in history through taking courses, through the courses.

I got interested in history because I began reading the narratives, by the side door, you might say. I was interested in finding out where certain people got certain things, in the way of natural history objects mostly. Say, on the Long expedition, for instance, in 1820, in the front range of the Rockies. I'd get hold of the narrative and read the narrative. Getting these narratives, reading the narratives, why, I got interested in the history. I think that was inevitable.

Herbert Bolton

Stewart: My history is pretty much the same as that, really, except perhaps I had more interest in history from the beginning. I read a lot of history when I was pretty young, and I took history in high school, but I enjoyed it tremendously. In college, I didn't take any course in history at all, till I came out here, that graduate year I spent in Berkeley. I took a course with Bolton, who got me very much interested in Western history. So I came into it from another side door. And I think it's quite interesting it happened that way, because I would say--I don't know whether I got your question straight there, but I would think there has certainly been an example of,

Stewart: the two of us, of people who came in unorthodoxly who have pursued it with a great deal of enthusiasm. Whereas if you take Bolton's Ph.D.'s, they don't have, it seems to me, nearly the enthusiasm or the flair, you might say, that the two of us have shown. Now, that's a pretty big generalization.

Camp: Well, I think that you may be overstating it, because a man like Leroy Hafen, who was one of Bolton's students, has put out a tremendous lot of research.

Stewart: Yes, he has, but at the same time, it never seemed to me that his stuff had very much flair to it. It's pretty dull writing in my opinion.

Camp: Not everybody can be the writer that you are, George. They don't have it in them. There has to be a certain number of weeders and hoers in the garden as well as Burbanks, I suppose. Some ordinary gardeners.

Stewart: Yes. I think it is an interesting fact, though, that Bolton didn't breed anybody that came up to himself at all.

Camp: That is peculiar, isn't it?

Stewart: Yes. I suppose of these dozens of people that he trained, none of them came anywhere near to attaining his own stature.

Camp: Of course, George Hammond comes pretty close.

Bolton had a tremendous vigor. You know he used to pile books alongside his bed and read till three o'clock in the morning, even when he was an old man.

Stewart: He not only read, but he could do stuff with it after he read it. I always loved the story, you know, about Bolton in the library one night. He used to work in his office until all hours, and when he tried to go home one night he got in the wrong section, and a door slammed behind him and locked him in. [laughter] Did you hear that story, Charlie?

Camp: No, I didn't hear that.

Stewart: And he couldn't get out. Well, he was a man of great resource, and of course he was used to roughing it, you know, camping, so he went into the women's restroom. He figured there was going to be a cot in there. Someway or other he was too modest to sleep in the ladies' restroom, so he took the mattress off the cot and put it out in the hall, and lay down and went to sleep! Had a good sleep until the watchman came around in the morning and found the professor lying on a mattress outside the ladies' restroom. He woke him up, and Bolton got up and went home. That's a very nice story.

Riess: Did he tell that story happily, or was he embarrassed about it?

Stewart: I don't think he ever told me, I think the librarian told me that story.

Camp: No, I don't think he'd tell you that story. He was just a little bit sensitive about himself. He's say, "Now don't tell that. Don't say..." I remember one time Carl Wheat and I were figuring on writing up a deal for the Historical Quarterly on the Russians in California. So I went around to Essig and Du Four, and Miss Mahoney and some others, and said "Give me some articles." I knew Du Four had written this thing, and he said, "Well, if you can get this thing from Bolton, you can have it, but I've never been able to get the manuscript back from Bolton."

So I went to Bolton. "What about Du Four's manuscript?" "Oh," he says, "yes, that's right," he says. "I've got that manuscript, Camp, I'll get it for you." Six weeks went by, and I saw Bolton on the campus. I said, "What about Du Four's manuscript?" "Oh," he says, "by gosh, I forgot about that. Come on over to my office and we'll get it now."

Well, of course, his office was stacked high with manuscripts from the floor to ceiling, and we started in. I started in at one corner, and went on through the stack. And when I got to the floor, why, there was Du Four's manuscript. Meanwhile, Bolton was busy over in the other corner of the room. So I said, "Well, here, I guess this must be it." "Oh," he says, "don't tell anybody that. The old professor, forgetting these things. Pretty bad." He said, "I didn't realize it was down there, so far down, buried

Camp: so far down." [laughing] I said, "I don't blame you any!"

He never answered letters, you know. You could write him a dozen letters, and he'd have them stacked up in his mailbox for six weeks. He'd never answer any letters. Never bothered.

Stewart: Oh, he was really a unified man. I spoke about him, just in passing, in my dictation there, but I remember, every time you'd go in to talk with Bolton, maybe you'd want to talk with him about the Donner Party or something, and he'd say, "What are you working on these days?" "I'm working on the Donner Party." "Oh," he'd say, "that's fine. That's just fine." Then I'd want to ask him a question or something, but no use. By the time I got to that, he was talking about what he was doing. And the rest of the time he talked about what he was doing. He was always very friendly, though, and just so enthusiastic about what he was doing, that he was really a very lovely man.

Riess: You're answering your speculation about why he could never breed an historian as fine as himself. I mean, you could have gone on, free of this influence, but you're describing somebody that's so fantastically bent on what he was doing himself that his students--

Stewart: That might have had something to do with it.

Camp: Well, historians that can write don't come every day in the week, you know. Bolton could do pretty well as a writer.

Stewart: Yes, he could. And he developed as an older man. He did much his best writing after he was a comparatively old man.

Camp: He told me one time, "You know the secret of this writing?" I said, "No, how do you do it?" He says, "I never write more than one paragraph on a page. I just write off the paragraph, throw that page aside, and then if I have to correct it, why I don't have much to do, much to throw away or much to change." [laughter] "One paragraph to a page!" That's the way he did it.

Adventures with Charlie and George

Riess: Was Charles Camp interesting to you as a paleontologist when you first met him? Did you talk about things like that?

Stewart: No, I didn't. I didn't know much about paleontology, and I don't think I ever talked to him very much about that until we went on that trip up in Nevada and he was crawling down holes and things of that sort. I was waiting for him to come back and wondering whether he was coming back, in some instances. I guess Charlie was wondering the same thing.

Camp: Well, they had some mines in conglomerate, you know, and the stuff was just hanging loose from the ceiling. You could just reach up and pick off a big chunk if you wanted to, or it would drop to the floor. So it was kind of a funny-looking mine. I asked this guy who was down there, "How often do you get buried down in here? It's a dangerous place." He says, "I got to watch." Another place we went in--there at Rabbit Hole Springs--we went in and got a drink that evening, didn't we? And then we came out the next morning and looked at the door and there was a sign on the door that said--what was it? "The County Health--"

Stewart: "This water is contaminated with typhoid fever and arsenic." [laughter] If the one didn't get you, the other would!

Of course, I never believed that! I thought that was another hoax!

Camp: We went up to the Rosebud and they said, "Oh, if you stay there six weeks you'll get some kind of kidney trouble or something, from that water." Well, we didn't say there six weeks, so we didn't have to worry.

Riess: The trip in 1941 was the first Black Rock trip?

Stewart: Yes, July, 1941, just before Pearl Harbor, you see.

Riess: How did that all come to pass?

Stewart: Well, Charlie had just come back from China not long before, hadn't you Charlie?

Camp: I had come back from China about four years before that, but I might have just come back from some place in Utah or someplace. At any rate, you were the one that organized this trip. You had it all arranged. I mean, you had it all outlined what you wanted to do. And I didn't have much of any idea of what the country was like up there. I'd never been up there before.

Stewart: Well, I hadn't either. I remember saying to you, "Charlie, let's take a trip to northwestern Nevada," and you said, "Sure." So we went to northwestern Nevada. That was a great trip. We went up first to Hasaklas Creek, do you remember? You had a geological job to do up there. Then we cut across, went out to Reno, and went up in the desert.

We had a copy of Delano's book along with us, one of those reprints. I also had a saw, and I had some tools in the back of the car. (It was my car we took along that time.) And this was a main library book, which I shouldn't have taken out of the state. The saw got against the book, and there are some little saw-marks in that book, which I think is still in the main library; if you want a reminiscence, why, go and look up Alonzo Delano's reprint and see if it doesn't have some saw-marks. Maybe they've rebound it by this time.

Camp: Oh, that's just the reprint. It didn't do any harm.

Riess: What were you after?

Stewart: I had Delano along and I was sort of following him, like a guidebook. It was very interesting, because he wrote a very good narrative, in 1839, and you could tell where he went pretty well by driving over the road. I didn't have any very definite ideas of doing anything about that. I just wanted to get off for a while.

Riess: And you, Charlie, you were just going out on one of your summer expeditions anyway?

Camp: Oh, I wanted to go out with George. I had never been out with him, and I thought it would be an interesting place to see, and I would sort of like to travel with him. It was a good chance to see a part of the country that I had never seen before. I didn't think there

Camp: would be much chance of finding fossils up there. There are a few. Nevada's full of fossils, but they're scattered. Little pockets here and little pockets there. They don't usually amount to much. But you never know what you're going to run into next in Nevada.

Off the road

Riess: What kind of car were you driving, and what kind of campers were you?

Stewart: It was a 1937 Chevrolet. It was a good car, too. It wasn't very new by that time, and I just marvel at the chances we took on that car.

Camp: Yes, there were two or three places there we shouldn't have gone. We shouldn't have gone across that mud flat, and we shouldn't have gone across that ditch that day.

Riess: And the mud flat?

Stewart: Well, the mud flat happened to be all right. We got across very easily--

Camp: It happened to be, yes, but--

Stewart: But we didn't really know.

Camp: We'd have been there yet, if we'd gotten stuck out in the middle of that thing!

Stewart: Yes, it was thirty-five miles to walk back.

Camp: Oh, boy, I'll say it was.

Stewart: And then the next day we were going north from Black Rock up those next springs there, and we got down into a kind of thing like a great big ditch about ten feet wide at the bottom--

Camp: Just about as deep as this room.

- Stewart: Steep sides on both sides of it! [laughing]
- Camp: We got down into it, all right. Next question was, how do you get out?
- Stewart: We went out and did a little spade work, I think, and then I took the old Chevrolet on the run, and Woop! the wheels spinning round--
- Camp: Moved out of there, all right.
- Stewart: And got her out. Oh, we went on beyond that. We took chances all the time. I just wouldn't have nerve to do that any more at all!
- Riess: You camped out all along the way?
- Camp: Oh, yes. We didn't have anyplace to stay. We had all our own camping stuff, though.
- Stewart: I don't think we had a tent. We had a pressure-cooker, though. That's what we used to cook in.
- Camp: Oh, yes, we had a pressure-cooker. You betcha. Everything went into the pressure-cooker. I think George said something to Ted about how terrible my cooking was, and Ted was talking about it afterwards, she was talking to some woman about it, and she said, "Oh, George got so sick of Charlie's tomatoes. He put tomatoes in everything!"
- Stewart: I don't remember that. I remember you being a very good cook, except you cooked too much, and I couldn't face so much stuff to eat. Charlie's got a much more hearty appetite than I have.
- Camp: Well, I may have had then, but I don't now.
- Stewart: I had this stuff to drink. You know, if you taste this desert water, it's terrible, but if you take a gallon of wine along and put about one third wine in the water, it makes it quite palatable. And we did a lot of drinking on that.

We went to Black Rock, and then the next spring up is called Casey's Place. We went up there. And then we went on up to Double Hot. There are two very hot springs that come out. Then from there we cut across some land without any road at all, if I remember.

Camp: Mud springs.

Stewart: Came to a little ranch up there. There were some people working out in the hay field. That was the first people we'd seen.

Camp: Soldier's Meadows.

Stewart: Went on to Soldier's Meadows and then across by another terrible road into High Rock Canyon. And then finally we got up into that antelope reservation. Just full of antelope. Remember? We slept one night up there in the middle of all the antelope.

Riess: Was it an emigrant trail that you were following?

Stewart: More or less, yes. We couldn't follow it all the way through, but from Rabbit Hole Springs to--well, way up to High Rock Canyon we were more or less following it, yes.

Camp: We went out to the middle of the Black Rock Desert and found this thing full of water, this old watercourse.

Stewart: The old Quinn River Slough, yes.

Camp: Yes. We couldn't cross that, so we had to go back and go clear on around, and then we came back to that point, didn't we? From Black Rock. We really covered it pretty well. Yes.

Stewart: At that time the place up there was full of obsidian points and clippings. Hardly anybody had been up in there. It's pretty well picked up now. I told you [in the interviews] about the guy at the cocktail party bringing me this thing.

Riess: Did he [George Stewart] really, the next morning, say that he could write a book about it?

Camp: Well, I think he did. Yes, I think he was figuring on a book at that time, but I didn't know--of course, he didn't know either just exactly how he was going to handle it.

The house at Sheep Rock

Camp: There was this old house there, and it was entirely out of place, because it was a pretty well-built old house. It wasn't exactly a cabin, it was a well-constructed house.

Stewart: Built of railroad ties, mostly, Charlie.

Camp: Full of old rats, you know--the rats had been in there and built nests in the shelves, all through the shelves. And the pipes leading out from the spring were all covered with this encrusted stuff from the spring, this lime that came out of the hot water. They had a place out on the porch with the bathtub where the water had come, they pumped the water out of this hot spring and out to the bathtub. Evidently he was some kind of a crank or a sick man or something, and he had this place out there to take this hot bath. I guess he'd probably gone out there for his health, from the looks of things. And then that place burnt down later, didn't it? Well, that was a very interesting-looking place.

Stewart: I found that fellow later, Charlie.

Camp: Oh, you did?

Stewart: Yes, he was over in Susanville, and I had a talk with him. He had gone out there in the Depression to get himself through. He had a wife and at least one child.

Camp: Was he sick or something? To go out there?

Stewart: No, he wasn't sick. There are a lot of self-reliant fellows around, particularly in those days.

Camp: Did he build that house?

Stewart: Yes, I think he did. He carted railroad ties over the railroad, and got that house up there. He had all these ingenious things, like that hot water business you were talking about. He was a very ingenious chap.

I found the old water pitcher up there later. I didn't find that on our trip, Charlie. I pieced the pitcher together.

Camp: Oh, yes, I know. Looks like something that came out of an old hotel.

Riess: How do you think the place burned down?

Stewart: Oh, I found out about that. Somebody up there started to burn the meadow off when it got dry, and it got over and got into the house, and just burned it up. The place had, I guess, a hundred old records in it, and I always meant to pick them up and bring them back, just for interest. They were mostly records of the twenties and thirties, phonograph records. They might have been worth quite a bit of money if I'd ever got them out of there. But by the time I went up and really decided I was going to get them, why, the house had burned down, and of course they'd all burned with it.

Yes, I found that fellow and had a talk with him.

Camp: How'd you find him?

Stewart: Oh, somebody up there, one of those ranchers one place or another, said, "Oh, he's over in Susanville, and his name's such and such." When I went over there he was cutting meat in a butcher shop. He talked to me, and he was quite interested. It seemed to me he had a pretty poor job, but he said, "Oh, you should have seen me when I was over at that place. I didn't have anything at all. Now I've got a fine job here." So here he was cutting his meat.

Riess: Did that place get to him at all?

Stewart: Well, not at his present stage. No, he was glad to get away from it. That was his exile, I think.

Camp: One of the funniest things, most curious things, on that trip was when we stopped at Gerlach, and we went around to all the different saloons and everything, to ask the directions out to Black Rock. Not a soul knew, until one, we finally found one guy that could tell us. And of all the people that we met at Gerlach, of all the little bits of towns you know, right in the middle of nowhere out there, and within forty miles of the place we wanted to go to, none of them could tell us where the road was that went out there. Don't you remember that?

Stewart: Yes, sure I do. Yes.

Camp: Remember the fellow that said you kicked him all night? [laughter] He claimed that George had been sleeping with him the night before and kicked him all night. [laughter] I thought that was real funny! Oh, you know, those fellows--after they drink a little they--never know what they're doing.

Stewart: I think the guy was drunk. [laughter] I think the dream had come from outside.

Riess: Did that give you some kind of indication that you were going to a strange place?

Stewart: It certainly did. Yes. Driving up there was like steering a boat. You see, we drove up along the west side of the desert there. There were little car tracks going along, and we could see the Black Rock across the desert. We knew that was where we were trying to get to. And it was anything from, say, five to eight miles across there. And finally we decided we'd gone far enough, and we just turned, and went right across this, just steering for the Black Rock.

Camp: [laughing] "Let's head out for it!" We didn't realize the darned thing would be muddy in the middle. That was the last thing we thought of. Of course we know now that the water gets onto those flats and blows around. The wind'll come and it'll blow the water five or six miles in some places. And you know, it'll go to a low place and stay there and make mud. If you get into that mud, with your car, why, you might have to kiss your car goodbye.

Stewart: I'm amazed we ever got that car back! We did.

Camp: I guess Ted didn't think it was in such good shape when we got it back.

Stewart: Probably didn't, no. They were tough cars they made in those days, though.

Camp: Yes, it was a pretty nice little car. That's the way to travel. These people who go out with trailers and everything, never get anywhere like that.

Later trips, other companions

Riess: Speaking of Ted, where were the wives and children on these expeditions? Did they have any interest in going, or was that inconceivable?

Camp: Oh, we used to take--I used to take Jessie and the kids. Oh, sure. We used to go out to New Mexico and go out, you know, into the badlands of New Mexico. I'd go down to the second-hand lots and get an old limousine of some sort, a seven-passenger car, buy it for about \$100, get an old Cadillac or something like that, take the cylinder heads off and put in a new gasket, chip out the carbon and put in a new gasket, and the thing would go for six thousand miles and never have any trouble. I had two of them. I had two Cadillacs on one trip. Both of them were these big limousines. And another time I got the last of the Pierce-Arrows. By gosh, I wish I had that car today! I could get twenty-thousand dollars for it! Gee, it was a wonderful car. My gosh, it would roar down the line like a bull elephant.

Riess: You sound very resourceful. You sound like a good person to go camping with.

Camp: I've been camping a lot. Yes, I've done a lot of that.

Stewart: Without having a good man like Charlie along, I would never have dared go into those places I did on that trip.

Camp: Well, perhaps I could get foolish. I don't know, I think--

Stewart: We were foolish. I don't know if we got that way or not.

Riess: Did you talk about what the place really meant that first night, or was it only subsequently that you got into thinking about it? [See Sheep Rock]

Stewart: I don't remember particularly, do you Charlie?

Camp: No.

- Stewart: We were a little bit nervous about how we were going to get out of the place.
- Camp: Yes, I know. That's the thing that we worried about sometimes. Yes. I don't know.
- Riess: That was your only joint trip to Black Rock?
- Stewart: Yes. Then Parker Trask and Carl Sauer and Starker Leopold went there in one trip. And of course they could tell you practically everything there was to be known about the place between them. Then, in 1947 and 1948, I was up there with Jack, my boy, a couple of times, and I was up there with a couple of young anthropologists Carl lent me from his department.
- Camp: Oh, well, didn't you find a better road to get in there?
- Stewart: The road was all right. It just goes right across the salt flats, that was all.
- Camp: Oh, you went across there? The last time you went in you went across the mud flat.
- Stewart: Yes, just the way we did except by that time we knew we could get there. The last time I was up there I was with John Edwards and Jim Holiday. Jim wanted to see the place because his emigrating party went through there, and John had read Sheep Rock and he was interested in it, so the three of us went up there. We didn't stay very long that time. In fact the road was so heavy we didn't drive quite to the spring. We had to leave the car down a couple of hundred yards and walk up. We didn't spend the night that time.
- Riess: Your trips have been at different seasons too?
- Stewart: Yes. I was never up there in the winter, really. I have some regard for my safety! I started up once from Reno. I was going to drive up as far as Gerlach anyway. The road was absolutely lonely, and covered with snow. I got up about halfway, and I said, "This is crazy," because I had my wife and my daughter and one of her friends along. I said, "This is crazy." So I turned around and came back.

Camp: I should think it would be a little bit chilly up there in the wintertime.

Stewart: And then another time, I started in with my wife from the other side, Susanville, and drove over part way. And then we heard that the whole desert was under water. This was early in the season. And so we didn't get there that time. That's the reason I dedicated that book to my wife, you know, who I said was very close to it. Which has a double meaning, because she was close to it twice and never got there. We could look across the desert and see the rock. No closer.

Riess: Gerlach is the equivalent of Harlan in the book?

Stewart: Yes, I guess so. I don't remember. Gerlach's a little town on the railroad down there, near a cement mill. Pretty abandoned little town. There really is not much there.

Camp: Oh, it's just a rough little town.

Stewart: Yes. Parker Trask was a lot of help on all that country. He wrote me a whole report on the geology of that country.

Camp: Oh, he did? Well, what's the Black Rock? Sort of a volcanic mountain, isn't it?

Stewart: Oh, yes, it's volcanic. That was a mere detail for him. He was clear back way beyond that.

My son is doing the map for all Nevada now, editing the U.S. Geological Survey map. He'll be two or three more years on it, I guess. He goes back every summer. But he's not much interested in that corner of Nevada. I guess somebody else has done all the work on it.

Camp: I don't think that that's so interesting to the geologists as this big overthrust. There's a hundred mile overthrust, you know, that goes out towards the Roberts Mountains. Part of California is supposed to have been pushed over into Nevada, like a moving sidewalk. Geologists seem to be interested in this phenomenon.

Stewart: Oh, yes, he's interested in a lot of that stuff. They've had some very eminent men working on the geology of Nevada. Jack just has to coordinate all this stuff, which is a big job.

Camp: Yes. Well, there are a hundred mountain ranges in Nevada, some of which haven't been worked on very much. But that little place of mine out there-- Muller's student, Silberling, had a thesis on that area. He published it, and so that's all taken care of.

Stewart: Well, are you going to ask us another question now?

"...write the way George does"

Riess: I'd like to have you talk of the ways you've influenced each other, calling George the Poet, and you the Scientist, or some such.

Stewart: Well, he's a poet too. That book of his, Earth Song. But I don't know that we influenced each other very much.

Camp: No, I don't think so. I think that there's always been in the back of my head the wish that I could write the way George does. You know, he can sit down with a dictaphone and just spiel it off. And then get somebody to type it for him and then he's got a book, you see.

Stewart: Well, I do a lot of work after that too.

Camp: Do you?

Stewart: But still, I can make a start.

Camp: Boy, it takes me hours and hours to get anything done. Days and days and all that, frightfully slow.

Clubs

- Riess: You've been members of some interesting clubs.
- Stewart: Yes, we first met in that Folio Club, which folded.
- Camp: And then we had this Armchair Strategists group. [See Stewart interview.] And now we've got this other club that we're in.
- Riess: This third club is the one you refer to as your dinner club. Does it have a name?
- Stewart: Yes, dinner club.
- Camp: It's a dinner club. We've had several names for it but we don't stick to any name. There is always an objection. If they call it the East Bay Club, why the west bay people don't like the idea, and so on and so forth. So, there has never been a permanent name.
- Riess: What was the Folio Club?
- Camp: Oh, that was a book club. It was organized by Sam Farquhar originally. And I think Harold Leupp had something to do with it. I think the idea was to get people that are interested in old books, or bookbinding, illustrating. See, Sam was the head of the University Press. And he was interested in meeting the people in the University that were interested in printing, and having printing done. Sam was a very convivial sort of a guy, and he was a genius for meeting people and getting people together. He was Francis Farquhar's brother, you know. So, he organized this group, and I think he had something to do with organizing the Roxburghe Club in San Francisco too. That was another book club.

The Folio Club was interesting for a while, but when you have a group that's confined to a certain interest, why that interest sort of dies out after a while. You wear it out; interest just in books or bookmaking tends to wear out. I may be mistaken about that, but to me you certainly can overdo it a little bit. It seemed to me that there was a little difficulty in getting papers and so on for the meetings.

- Camp: I was president of it for a while, then Harold Leupp took it over. I was away, and when I came back it sort of disintegrated. The whole thing went to pieces.
- Stewart: Yes, that's about it, the way it went.
- Riess: In a group like that the interest isn't so much in the material in the book but in the thing, the object?
- Camp: Well, I think in the people too, to find out what they're doing. I think my interest in the beginning was to find out what different people in the University were doing and what they're interested in. Like Harold Small and people like that. There were a lot of people I didn't know very well.
- I think you could say the same thing for the Cosmos. Well, you're in the Cosmos Club too. In the Cosmos Club you've got a group there that has a wide spread of interests, varied interests. I think that's part of the attraction of the group, the fact that there are so many different things that people are interested in, and you're sometimes surprised to find out what people are interested in, besides their specialties. I like to go to the Cosmos Club. I'm usually sitting across from Heizer or somebody like that, that I can usually carry on a pretty good conversation with. I see them once a month. I don't go out so much as I used to but I certainly used to go to the Cosmos Club frequently.
- Stewart: I go to it pretty regularly because it gives me a good tie with the University, which I don't have so much any more, living across the bay.
- Camp: Well, I'm going to try to get out to it more now. I haven't been going out quite so much lately.
- Riess: The men in the club are more interested in their hobbies than their specialties?
- Stewart: No, most of the papers are about the men's own work, the serious work. And a good many of them are too specialized, really.
- Camp: I don't think the papers are the thing that interests me so much in the Cosmos Club, at least usually they're

Camp: not; it's the conversation at the table. Used to be some pretty lively conversation when you had people like Gilbert Lewis, people like that there.

Stewart: It's a group that includes members from all over the University, that's what's interesting about it.

Camp: Ernest Lawrence used to belong to that. I remember one meeting along just about the time the war started, when he said, "If I had a lump of this stuff, as big as my fist, it would be too dangerous to handle. It might blow up the whole East Bay." I thought, "Now what in the devil is he talking about?" Well, it was the beginning of atomic fission. And he'd gotten started on it here.

I talked to Latimer one day about it and he said, "They're scared that the Germans are going to get it before we do." Soon they shut up, everybody clammed up about it, nobody would talk about it any more. It was very serious business.

The library, then

Riess: Any comments on the library, changes in it?

Camp: Yes, that's another subject where we'd probably come together quite a bit. On the library committee too; you see, George took over just after I was chairman, didn't you?

Stewart: Yes, we were on the committee together, I think.

Camp: I think so, and then you took over. I think there was some criticism of me because I didn't call enough of the subjects to the attention of the committee. But there was one reason for that; you know, at the time I was there they were just starting this thing down at Alamo in New Mexico. And that had to be kept quiet. And so Oppenheimer came to me one day and he said, "I want all the physics library moved down to the desert, and nobody's to know about this. Your library committee is not to know about it. The

Camp: only man to know is the librarian, and he can have his people working on it."

So I said, "All right, you're the boss." I went over to the physics department to find out how much duplication there was on the physics books. (You know, I didn't want to take the whole business, naturally.) I found out that there was a good deal of duplication, that they could get along pretty well if we rooted out most of the things that they needed in the desert, or wherever--I didn't know where this place was. I know now where it was of course, but at that time, I had no idea where this place was.

So I didn't say anything to the library committee, because I was asked not to. But that was done just the same, they did the job and sent the books down. It was the beginning of Los Alamos.

Stewart: It's very interesting that they consulted with you on that, as the chairman of the library committee. There are very few universities where they would have done that.

Camp: That might be true.

Stewart: That shows the prestige of the senate.

Camp: Possibly so. It might have been a piece of courtesy on the part of Oppenheimer.

Stewart: It might have. But even so, I think that it's rather significant.

Camp: I think he was essentially a courteous man, you know. It might have been that he had a certain idea of protocol or courtesy or something. I don't know. I never did know just exactly why he did that.

Stewart: In most universities I think that would have been handled right from the president's office right straight down. Oh, they probably would have told the librarian, because they'd have to tell him. Under war conditions I think an organization like the senate committee would not have been consulted. I think that's interesting.

Stewart: I was chairman just the year after you were, Charlie. I had a very uneventful year, I can't remember much of anything that happened.

Camp: Weren't they moving the library then? I had quite an eventful year, or two years, because they were planning the extension, the annex and everything, ripping down north hall and putting in the annex, the Bancroft Library and everything.

Stewart: I didn't have much to do with that. I can't remember much of anything I did in my year, except I sort of broke Don Coney into the job. I was chairman of the committee when he came as a librarian. And also, George Hammond came in then.

Camp: Yes, I was on the committee that brought George Hammond in.

Stewart: I was too, we were on about the same, or at least we were probably on it successively.

Camp: That was the one good thing that we did, I thought. Of course there was a great problem then, and I don't know but that the problem is still with the library: The question is, how many branch libraries should they establish in order to relieve the main library of a great deal of encumbrance in the way of stack space. We used to meet with the architects quite often because they were planning, or trying to develop plans as to whether to go into the botanical garden part or the sunken places across from the library building, or to take over Wheeler Hall, or to do this, or something else, in order to make an annex. Now what they did eventually was to put in the annex, and I think they did the right thing.

But they were worried because of the enormous amount of stack space that is required for all the additions that are made every year. Every year there are several miles of stack space required, that is if you count every tier. Several hundred thousand volumes a year, perhaps three hundred thousand volumes. They had it all figured out that they'd need a bewildering, astonishing amount of new space every year. Our prediction for the future was something terrible (predictions were made as to what would happen). Of course, eventually they went up to Richmond and they put in a storage space up there. They had the big

Camp: storage space that they have now up in Richmond, and they can move things back and forth, clumsy way to do it.

Riess: I think a lot of time with those problems would tend to make you kind of anti-collecting and anti-library, eventually. I should think it would be hard to be chairman of a library committee for long.

Camp: Well, I'll tell you frankly that the thing that discouraged me more than anything else was seeing the mutilation of books in the library, to go through the library and pick up a book like, say, Whitman or Melville, or any of the standard books that students use, and see the tremendous amount of damage that's done to the books. It's just awful. It's just sickening to see that. And it makes you wonder whether it's worthwhile, and what is the answer to this.

And of course now I was interested in the Matthew library. I helped build that up. That's the geology branch library and I put a lot of my own books in there. I'd go around and try to find one of my own books and I couldn't find it, and I'd find out it's been missing for a long time. Somebody stole it, you know. That's kind of discouraging too. I found out that they lost seventy books out of that little library last year, several the year before, and the year before that. Now they've got a little better system. They've got a desk so that you have to walk between a narrow space in going out and in. But even so, there will be some missing numbers, and that's pretty bad.

The library, in transition

Stewart: I think the library is in a big transitional stage right now, and it's in a very bad stage because it is transitional. I don't think that there will be any more scholars of my type, probably, because you can't do it in the library now. That moving the books out to Richmond has made them so they are no longer available. And this terrific proliferation of knowledge as expressed in books has temporarily gotten out of hand. You've got to go through and get some other way

Stewart: of handling things. And I think it's going to come through the miniaturization of all that stuff.

Camp: Oh yes, it's coming, the miniaturization, the micro-cards and the micro-film. Of course they're a little awkward to handle, but still. One difficulty right now is that you have to go up to the newspaper room to read the micro-cards. Micro-cards are nice little things. You can handle a whole volume on one card. But it's difficult to get the machine to read them, and Lord knows you can't read them without a machine. The damn things are so small you can hardly see them.

Riess: Your article, Mr. Stewart, about the decline of books, must have been written about then, when you got into your library chairmanship.

Stewart: Just a little after that, about the same time, yes.

Camp: What was that article?

Stewart: I wrote an article called "The Twilight of the Printed Book."

Camp: Oh, yes. I remember. That may be like the twilight of the horse and carriage, but actually there will be some printed books I suppose, even though it might be troublesome handling them.

Stewart: Charles Jones is very interesting on this subject. You know Chuck Jones? He works back there in the early middle ages, and he says there's going to be a period of great restriction. Things are going to be destroyed sometime as they were in the fifth century, when the Alexandrian library went all to pieces, because the papyrus only lasts a hundred years; after a while it just wasn't there. They had a library there of I think he says five hundred thousand volumes. A couple of hundred years later the largest library in the world was maybe thirty thousand.

Camp: Do any insects attack papyrus?

Stewart: I don't know about that but it doesn't last very long under ordinary conditions.

Camp: Is it kind of a mold that attacks it, or what?

Stewart: I don't know what the organism is.

Camp: Does it go to pieces like old paper?

Stewart: Yes, it does. It just goes to pieces. It will only last around a hundred years under ordinary conditions. Of course in Egypt it lasts longer than that because it's drier country.

Camp: Or wherever it's in a dry cave it will last indefinitely, won't it?

Stewart: Yes.

Camp: Well, I suppose that this paper we've got, most of it will disappear in a short time. It doesn't cost too much to put things onto micro-cards or micro-film. The fact is, you can Xerox the stuff for four cents a page or much less if you're doing it wholesale.

Riess: You're suggesting that people won't do the kind of research that you've done just because it's awkward?

Stewart: I don't see how they can. Browsing through a library and looking at the books, you can cover so much that way. I think that it's going to be much more a joint operation. It is already, of course. I'm already an anachronism, you see, they don't do that sort of thing any more. They always figure out they're going to get a certain amount of money to do this job. I never figured in terms of money at all. I just went out and did it. Even that place-name dictionary I did myself.

Camp: That's more or less true with me, I never figured much on money. Of course I did make arrangements with Fred, Fred Rosenstock. He'd always say, "Well, I'll give you a certain amount if you'll edit this manuscript, or something." Never gave me very much but it was enough to make it interesting you know, not wasting your time.

Riess: Getting back to the idea of browsing through a library and letting the subjects sort of happen to you as you walk into them...

Stewart: You can't do it when the books are out in Richmond. It's as simple as that. I often think of the Civil

Stewart: War for instance. They moved the official records out to Richmond. Well, gee, they're gone. They don't even have the index volumes in the main library. With those index volumes on the Civil War you could do a lot if you were working on a Civil War subject. But now it's just gone.

The Bancroft Library

Camp: Well, I think the Bancroft Library has been a godsend for me. Especially this last job that I'm doing.

Stewart: It has been for me too. The stuff is always there.

Camp: Yes, it's always there and it's handy so that you can get at it. If I have to look up the title page of a book, why it doesn't take but a few minutes to get the thing out and look it up and check it up if I get the imprint out. I've had to do a lot of that lately with this new edition of the Plains and Rockies, you know. Oh, the Bancroft's been a godsend, just wonderful. In fact, you know Streeter was going to give his whole collection to the Bancroft at one time. And he told me that he thought the Bancroft was one of the great collections in the country, of course, and he thought of it as a wonderful place to work and he had been very favorably impressed with it because he'd been working here a little bit, he knew the Bancroft pretty well. You know, he's a great collector, and it was a terrible thing that his collection wasn't, that he wasn't, handled correctly.

Riess: The Bancroft has always been run by scholars rather than librarians, or is that not a distinction?

Camp: Well partly so, I think they ought to be a combination of both.

Stewart: It was the librarians and not the scholars that lost that Streeter collection though, as I understand.

Camp: I think it was the president himself that lost the Streeter collection, as far as I can figure it out.

Camp: I was there in Streeter's house at the time that he decided against it. He told us. And I was there at the time he decided to give it to the Bancroft. He had George Harding and me down to lunch that day. I came back from Africa or someplace and had this telephone call and we came down to lunch. He said, "I'm going to give my collection to the Bancroft Library." And we thought that was great, and congratulated him and everything, and didn't hear anything more about it. (Because I didn't think it was my business and I thought that would all be taken care of. I didn't think there would be any more trouble about it.)

And then I was back at Streeter's house, I was staying there for two or three days, I guess maybe more than that. And one time we were sitting at the table and he said, "You know, I didn't get an answer to my letter to President Sproul." I said, "Well, it's awful strange, I think something must have slipped up. I don't think that President Sproul would have failed to answer your letter. Something funny."

I tried to find out afterwards what went on and I never really found out. Except that I think maybe Streeter's proposition was turned down, and I don't know just what happened. I don't really want to know. But they made a big error, I think, in not taking that collection. It was one of the great collections. I guess next to the one at Yale, it was the greatest one ever formed of western Americana. Not only western Americana, my gosh, it included the whole eastern seaboard way back to the time of Columbus.

Riess: Where did it go, what happened to it?

Camp: It was dispersed at public auction. Must have spent about a year going through auctions and brought about three million dollars at auction. Those books. So the next time I saw Tom he said, "Well, I'm going to sell my books at auction." He has a big family and lots of grandchildren and so on, his widow and everything.

Pleasures and pains of writing

Stewart: Well, we're going to have to get moving pretty soon, I'm afraid. Are you through?

Riess: No, I haven't let you ask enough questions.

Stewart: I don't know that I have so many questions.

Camp: Well, I want to know what George's secret is, but I don't think I'll ever find out.

Riess: Please ask him.

Camp: Maybe he won't tell us, maybe he can't tell us. I don't think he can tell us.

Stewart: I have no secrets at all, just hard work, a little native ability. [laughter]

Camp: Well, that's probably true.

Riess: You've finished your book, haven't you?

Stewart: In a sense, yes.

Camp: Your novel? [The Shakespeare Crisis]

Stewart: Yes.

Camp: Come out the way you said it was going to come out?

Stewart: Well, yes, it did. I've got to go back and change a few things in it, though.

Camp: It's too bad to have him assassinate himself that way. Hope I'm not spilling the beans.

Stewart: I just finished the first draft, and I've been letting it wait around a while.

Riess: You're not satisfied with what you have?

Stewart: You're never satisfied completely, I suppose.

Camp: That's my opinion.

Stewart: Maybe on a particular sentence or a particular passage you may be satisfied especially. But you're not really satisfied with the whole thing.

Camp: I thought that probably was the case. But of course that's the natural thing. You just can't keep working over it forever.

Riess: Did you go about your writings in paleontology differently from your writings in history?

Camp: Oh, yes. They were much more stilted. I mean, much more cut and dried. You get a training under these scientific men, these scientific professors. They give you a pretty cold-blooded training in writing. Everything has to be just so. You've got a telegraphic style for certain parts of the thing. The papers have got to be all organized in a certain way, and all that, otherwise they don't pass them. So there was a tendency to squeeze the juice out of everything at the beginning.

All the papers that I wrote I felt afterwards they'd sort of had the life squeezed out of them. The whole subject became then a dried-up subject. And I got a little bit fed up with that sort of thing. So that's one reason that I branched out.

Grinnell used to say, "There are a lot of friends of mine that are in science that think more highly of some foolish little popular article that they've written, than they do of all their scientific work." He seemed to think that was a big mistake, but I know how they felt. They felt that they had really blossomed out sometimes if they put something into a magazine or some little poem or something that they had written. They felt more human about that than they did about their dry-as-dust scientific writings.

You take a lizard and you count the scales on his stomach and the length of the tail and the length of the head and write a description. And you take the bones of the skull and compare them with the bones of the skull of some other critter and you make a diagram of whether they're related and just what way they're related and so on.

Well, I did that in my thesis and apparently it was of some use to some people because that thesis

Camp: was published fifty years ago and they reprinted it the other day back at Notre Dame. They reprinted it and charged \$17 a copy for it and they told me they'd sold more of that than any of the other reprints that they had now. I thought that was very strange. I told them I was somewhat embarrassed to see my thesis coming out because there are so many things that would be changed now. After fifty years there are a lot of changes.

But anyway, I felt kind of elated about the whole thing, the fact that it could still be of enough use that people could still use it. I asked one of the boys down at the museum, "What do you think of this deal of reprinting that thing?" "Oh," he says, "That's just fine. There are a lot of people that want that thesis and they haven't been able to get it." So, it's all right.

Riess: Was there room for real speculation in that type of writing?

Camp: Oh, yes, there is room for speculation, I should say so. Yes, that's the core of it, that's the main thing in that scientific work. It's not exactly the speculation but the conclusions that you come to, the new things that you find out. It's the new discoveries that are exciting. Of course scientific work in itself is probably just as exciting as anything you could possibly do.

But the results, as they're published, are not necessarily very exciting to anybody, unless you're very deeply immersed in the subject yourself. If you know enough about the subject so that you can get in there and figure--the theory of relativity at the beginning must have been very exciting to people that knew what they were doing. But it certainly wasn't to people who didn't know anything about the subject, because it was too abstruse, too far away from everything that they experienced. But it's much that way with any kind of original work.

In science, you've got to have a little background in the subject in order to appreciate it or to make it interesting or exciting.

Riess: Now, I know you have to be leaving.

Stewart: Yes, I think we'd better haul off now.

Riess: All right. Thank you both.

Transcribers: Jane West and Lavinia Limon
Final Typist: Keiko Sugimoto

APPENDIX A

On Awarding Honors

At one point I spoke about Bob Brode sticking his head in at the door and then asking me to run for the Board of the Faculty Club [p. 174]. That's a good example of what might be called luck. It led to a good deal in my life, and even, I may say, had some influence upon the history of the University.

I became president of the Faculty Club, and I have already said something about that. On December 8, 1966, I performed my last duty as president, when I presided at the big annual Christmas dinner, which has been the chief celebration of the Faculty Club since its foundation in 1902. Governor Brown, at my invitation, came down from Sacramento to the dinner, and gave a little fillip to it. The reorganized Monks' Chorus sang magnificently, and Cyril Birch and his players presented some excellent skits. Since I had had a good deal to do with all of this, I could feel very happy that I was going out in a slight blaze of glory. At this point, rather more than at my actual retirement, I felt that I had finished my active work.

Then, as it happened, after about a year (I went fishing in Chile and did other things in the meantime) I was tapped to be chairman of the Centennial Honors Committee--my club service being, I imagine, a chief recommendation. Professor Garff Wilson, Chairman of Public Ceremonies and much involved in the Centennial of the University, was the one, I think, who picked me, really. Officially, my appointment came from the Chancellor.

The point was that the University (this campus, in particular) wanted to establish some method or methods by which worthy people could be honored during the Centennial Year. About all that we had already was the honorary degree. Such degrees cannot be given in large numbers, and they are controlled by the Regents on a statewide basis. My job, with my committee, was to work out ways in which honors could be invented and bestowed.

By the time that I went into the job the idea of the Citation had already been developed. Garff says that I am wrong, that I went in from the beginning. Usually, I am considered to be the inventor of the Citation. That is the way legends develop. Probably there is no use my fighting against it. When you have

something like the Citation, you have to have some name to tie it up with. I am the name.

At least, I had a good deal to do with the way in which it was given, and working out how and for whom.

The Citation, as far as I know, was a new idea. It has proved, I think, to be a good one.

During the Centennial Year we handed out citations liberally--about a hundred of them altogether. They were given to a few active faculty and people in the University itself, and to a good many emeriti. They were also given to alumni who had worked hard for the University, particularly in connection with the celebrations of that year.

Gradually we worked out the standards which still are guidelines. Not only must the person receiving the Citation have eminence in some way or other, but also he must have an intimate connection with the campus. Coming to the campus to deliver a lecture is considered to give this intimate connection. In addition, the Citation must be awarded on a formal occasion. You cannot just mail it to somebody. Furthermore, the recipient has to be there to receive it. These regulations insure that the recipient should at least have his moment of glory.

There was to be created, as part of the Centennial Celebration, by the Chancellor, an honorific body to be known as the Berkeley Fellows. Their number was to be one hundred, and it was to be a permanent organization. It was to have no particular duties, and we were very careful to establish that it was not going to be a money-raising organization. Its membership was to be from outstanding people, with some connection with the University, although the intimacy of relationship was not emphasized, as it was with the awarding of citations. The Chancellor would give a dinner once a year, and perhaps use this opportunity to make a kind of State-of-the-University speech and get reactions from a large group of interested people.

The Chancellor sent out a letter to a considerable number of prominent people who were connected with the University. I think he sent to all the honorary degree holders from this campus, who over the course of the years make up a fairly large body of people. These were expected to send in nominations to the Fellows, and they did. We got about three hundred nominations, each including a brief statement as to why the person was being nominated. Then we had a committee, of which I was chairman, who put in a lot of work winnowing things out.

A comparatively small number of the three hundred were easily eliminated, since they seemed to have been nominated out of personal friendship or for some other not very good reason. The great majority, however, were real candidates. We had to spend a lot of work on the subject. It was particularly hard, because this was an unusual and one might say unprecedented situation, and there were no guidelines laid. Gradually we came to see that there were two partially conflicting principles. Should we consider these people as representatives of groups? Or should we consider them entirely on their own preeminence? The only veto that we laid down was that no active member of the University (whether student, faculty, administrator or regent) should be included. Gradually we came to see that there were two big recruiting areas. There were the emeritus faculty, and we finally took about fifteen or twenty of them. Second, there were the prominent alumni, especially those who took an active interest in University affairs. There was, to my mind unfortunately, a strong and natural tendency to include people who had given generously to the University. There was also a natural, but again to my mind unfortunate, tendency to make this an occasion to pile honor upon honor. That is, if a man had an honorary degree already, that seemed to make him a good candidate for the Fellows. That meant that you didn't really widen the base. Besides, if somebody had an honorary degree, appointment to the Fellows really meant less to him.

There was a certain group that we called the super-stars, upon whom everybody naturally agreed. That is, people like Warren and Sproul.

We never really did solve the question of representation versus eminence. I thought, for instance, that the University should get someone from the labor movement, but the man that I nominated did not get by. I had the feeling that we were going to end up with a lot of backward-looking alumni, and I even talked to Heyns directly about that problem.

In the end, I think we didn't do too badly. The committee winnowed things down and sent in about 125 names. The Chancellor selected the one hundred and we were off.

The functioning of the Fellows has been just about what we expected, and the organization now shows good prospects of being permanent. The new Chancellor has taken it over.

As to my own part in it, I remained as chairman of the advisory committee appointed by the Chancellor, its duty being chiefly to nominate people for the vacancies. Vacancies, naturally, occur only with a death. In that case, the new

appointee succeeds to the number of the old one.

We had, according to my way of thinking, a slight foul-up at the first meeting, that is, the dinner at the Chancellor's house. I had it all arranged that we would draw for numbers, so that we would be an association of equals. That is, number 1 would not have any precedence over number 45. At the last moment, however, Donald McLaughlin, who was a member of the committee, suddenly had a brainstorm. He rose, and moved (blast him!) that Bob Sproul and Mrs. Sproul should be respectively given the numbers 1 and 2. This threw the whole thing off. Of course, when a motion like that is made (Mrs. Sproul was present) you can't oppose it.

Obviously, you should not make a motion which does not really allow for any choice.

At this time, not only did I have the appointment as chairman of the committees on the Citation and the Fellows, but also I received the appointments to be on the committee for the Clark Kerr medal and for honorary degrees.

All this is an illustration of the old adage that success breeds success, but it is also an exemplification of Stewart's Law of Honors and Prizes. That is, roughly speaking, that the more honors a person has the more honors you give him. A child, let us say, gets some kind of prize in nursery school. In kindergarten he is thus a little outstanding, and so is a "safe" person to receive the Kindergarten Prize. So it goes, onward and upward. At every stage you give him the prize, because he is "safe." After a while, he gets a Nobel Prize, and a whole roster of honorary degrees. During the same years, the fellow who missed out in nursery school keeps missing out on all the other things as they come along.

I served on the Committee on Honorary Degrees only for a short time, and got little feeling for it. I cannot say that I made any contribution to it. I got off it because I exercised my emeritus prerogative, and went to New Zealand.

As for the Kerr Medal, I probably contributed something. I wrote out a long communication which we published in the Bulletin of the American Association of University Professors, establishing some guidelines for the awarding of the Medal. I never got very deeply involved in the matter, however. When I was rotated off the committee after a few years, it made little difference to me.

I think that all this matter of honors in the University deserves a little comment. On the whole, I approve of the matter, though there are obvious corruptions that creep in. When I was chairman, I was likely to tell my committee, "Remember, when you give someone an honor, there's also someone else to whom you do not give an honor." You have to be particularly careful not to fall into the trap of Stewart's Law.

We worked pretty hard at that point when making up the list for the Fellows. We nominated a considerable number of people who had not had honorary degrees, at the same time passing over some people who had them. But there was one agency of the University that raised objections. This was the Public Relations Bureau. They even persuaded the Chancellor not to publish the list of the Fellows, and that organization has never really been announced to the public or had any publicity. On the other hand, of course, some of the people who had been appointed Fellows came around to me and said, "Here, the Chancellor appoints me to this body with the note that it is a high honor, and then they never even put it in the papers. What gives?"

I've always trembled a little about my association with the honors during these last few years. I have been afraid I would end up the most unpopular man on the campus in the minds of the great majority, those who had not received honors, even though the few who had received honors might think that I was all right. There is no evidence that it has worked out in this way. Obviously, there must be individuals who think that they have been passed over unjustly. I questioned my committee several times as to whether they were, individually, conscious of any adverse criticism of what we were doing. They have always replied that they have not sensed any such objection, and that there was much approval. I hope so.

Some universities, like Stanford, avoid this problem by giving no honorary degrees at all. This seems to me too bad. To refrain from giving honors to someone who deserves them just for the fear that you are missing somebody who may deserve them equally, seems to me to represent a certain pusillanimity. Something of the vigor of a civilization can be reflected in its willingness to make decisions, even though they may be difficult ones.

George R. Stewart

APPENDIX B

On Dishonesty, Seeming and Real

If there is one thing more than another which disturbs me about the present-day university, it is not the occasional triumph of brashness over experience or the breaking of windows, but it is the apparent breakdown of common honesty in the student's relation to his work. I find this evidenced particularly by the open advertisements of term-papers and even of graduate theses for sale. Violence and arson may be said to work upon a university system from the outside, but the breakdown of honesty eats at the very core. Moreover, I am afraid, as people who have cheated as undergraduates move on, they eventually become professors and carry with them this attitude.

I want to talk here a little about some experiences in my teaching career, and a little more about some of my experience with dishonesty in various forms over a long career as a writer.

When I was at Princeton, we had an honor system which was, I believe, strictly observed. One man in my class was, I believe, dismissed for dishonesty, and he was, as it happens, from a foreign country. Such an honor system could be observed, and largely policed by the students themselves, in a place like Princeton of that period, which was comparatively small, and preserved the tradition of the gentleman. (Don't ask me to define that world gentleman.)

When I came to Berkeley, we had an honor system too. It did not work very well, and it was abolished after a few years, largely, as I remember, at the insistence of some of the scientific departments.

I had one interesting experience with it. In English 1b, a large course with many sections, I was teaching two sections. One of them had the examination in a room with only people of that section there. The other one had an examination in a room with a section taught by some other instructor. As it happened, through a misunderstanding, a brief identification question had been put upon the examination from a poem which had not been in the regular assignments and which I had not assigned, though many instructors had. The professor in charge of the course told me just to ignore that question as far as my students were concerned.

Among the students who took the examination in a room by themselves, no one at all answered that question. In the other section, about a third of my students answered it, obviously having copied the answer from the students of the other section with whom they were mingled. With one exception, all of my students who answered this question were on the edge of failing the course, or getting a D, at least. The one exception was the best student in the section, and I would suppose that she had done a little extra reading.

I gave my results to the professor in charge of the course, but he really suppressed the whole matter, as not being anything that he wanted to stir up.

From my experience at writing I can give you an example of my theory that professors who have cheated as undergraduates will continue to carry the thing on after they are professors. About three years ago the California Historical Society Quarterly published an article on Bret Harte. Since I still keep up on Bret Harte, I started to read the article, and was astonished to find that it was cribbed, sentence after sentence, from my biography of Harte. It was by a professor in one of the local colleges.

I reported the matter to the editor of the Quarterly, saying that it made no great difference to me but that I thought he should be very much perturbed. He was. Obviously, in such a case, there should be a quick and full apology published in the journal, with an explanation. But the society took what was, to me, a strange position. At one point I was astounded to find them suggesting that they didn't want to take any action in the matter because then the professor might sue them. I replied that I could sue them on my side, definitely. Eventually they published a partial, I should say, explanation of the matter, with a letter from the professor, who pusillanimously blamed matters on his stenographer, who had just copied things out, he said. Obviously this is no explanation.

I have suffered other plagiarisms too. Some Dutchman published what was apparently nothing much more than a translation of Storm into Dutch. He would probably have got away with that except for some bad luck. At just the time of the appearance of his book, an authorized translation of Storm came out in Dutch, and of course the similarity was noted. The authorized publishers, naturally, raised the case. Parallel columns were published in some Dutch journal, and there was a scandal.

At the opening of the war a somewhat hysterical book called Before I Die was published, with large extracts from Storm included in it.

Of course, there have probably been a great many other instances of plagiarism which have never even come to my attention. Plagiarism, however, is a term that should not be used too freely. Writers naturally borrow terms and twists of speech from one another, sometimes without even realizing it. Mark Twain tells a long story about a case of this kind. Such minor borrowings should be taken as compliments.

I have never got into trouble that way, although once I put myself into a position which might have caused trouble. At that time I was seeing a great deal of C.S. Forrester, and we were both writing novels. Such a situation is likely to lead to trouble. He was working on the Good Shepherd, and I was working on Fire. If you examine those books, you will see that the same device is used in them, of having a man quote the Bible for the terms of the story. It would seem very likely that at some point one or the other of us had had the idea and had transmitted it to the other one. The one receiving it may not have been conscious of getting it in that way. In my own defense I would say that the Bible figures much more in my writings than it does in his, so that the likelihood should be that I originated the idea, and I am sure that I did. He, of course, may also have originated it independently.

I did not discuss the matter with him after the books came out, and the incident never made any difference in our relationship. I have never had any threats of legal action in this connection. I have spoken already of the slight difficulty in the Phoenix book. In another instance I got into a personal tangle about my use of a name. I was absolutely flabbergasted when a person whom I knew quite well took a very serious offense at my having used his family name for a character. His name was, incidentally, not one which would call attention to itself. Moreover, the character to whom I had applied it was a very sympathetic one. There was nothing about the character that in any way, as far as I could ever see, suggested the man himself.

There wasn't much that I could do, except to say that no one has a copyright to his own name, and that no ordinary person would make any connection in this case.

I think that he got over it, and we have remained on good terms. I must say, however, that I've always kept my guard up about him since that time.

Actually, you always take a chance in using any kind of name, because somebody may turn up who wants to make a fuss about it.

I have had several cases of piracy--a Brazilian edition of some book (Storm I think) was one example. In 1961 I was in Uppsala. A friend suggested that we look in the university library and see how many copies of my books were there. Among them was the Swedish translation of Earth Abides. I had never heard of it, or seen a copy of it to this day. The Swedes have a great reputation for being meticulous, but apparently this publisher did not bother to get a contract with the author.

When U.S. 40 was coming out, I received the galley proofs when I was in Boston. I took a look at them, and decided that I could not have that book published in my name. The editor had made changes all over the place, and some of them quite unwarranted and incorrect. The publishers (Houghton-Mifflin) looked at the text, and decided that I was right. They had the whole book reset. Something of the same thing (though with a different ending) happened with a juvenile that I wrote once. I said that it had been changed so much that it was no longer my book, and I refused to have it published under my name.

I got into a rather curious jam with a Norwegian publisher about a translation of Man. He must have been some kind of fundamentalist, and he objected to some of the statements about religion in the book. He wanted to expurgate it, and I would not let him. As far as I know, the translation never appeared.

Saxe Commins was unduly sensitive, it seems to me, about the use of the word Jew, or Jewish. I took it out, in manuscript, a couple of times out of deference to him and in the name of friendship.

I should also like to get into the record a case in which I myself was accused of plagiarism, or at least of bad faith. It is also of some interest in that it involved the Bancroft Library and a man who became something of a legend around there. This was Willard F. Morse. This story goes back to the time when I was working on Bret Harte.

Morse was a retired mining engineer, who had laid by a nice amount of money. His great and overwhelming hobby in his retirement was that of collecting items by and about various writers, mostly American, in whom he had become interested. He was not much of a reader, I think, and the collection itself was what interested him. One of his first-line collections was Harte.

Morse would show up at the Bancroft Library, once in a while. He lived in Santa Monica, but he would come up for a few days or a week, and spend his time hunting through the files. He would spend any amount of time running something down. He went beyond the ordinary collector, by making the thing more readily available. He put all his clippings on standard-size paper and arranged them carefully, so it was a delight to work with them. I went to his place in Santa Monica several times and worked there, and he was very generous with all his materials.

Morse was a collector, not a scholar, and there is a lot of difference. As I have said Morse would go to any amount of trouble to run down an item but the item had to be identified for him first. That was what I was pretty good at. From some kind of evidence (internal or external) I would discover an article that Harte had written, and either run it down myself or give the reference to Morse to work on.

After a while I had collected, with his help too, a fairly good bibliography of the writings of Harte in magazines and newspapers. (On second thoughts, I take out that word "with his help" above. His help always came afterwards, not in the identification of the material itself.) I had this material typed up, with the idea of publishing it sometime. At this point Morse asked me for a copy of it, and I gave it to him, since he had always been very helpful to me, and I was glad to repay some of that debt. Morse also worked at the Huntington Library, and he showed the people there this bibliography. My name was not on it. The Huntington Library people wanted a copy of it, and Morse gave them one. They put it in their files, apparently as his work. I kept on working on Harte, and increased the bibliography substantially after I had given him the copy. Eventually I published it, and I dedicated it to Morse. I did not, however, make any acknowledgement to him, in a scholarly way, because he had not actually identified any of the material for me.

Before long the publisher (The University Press) had a letter from somebody who had worked in the Huntington Library. He accused me of having pirated Morse's work, without acknowledgement. He gave as his evidence the fact that this bibliography of Morse's was in the Huntington Library.

I suppose that a lot of morals can be drawn from such a case. Chiefly, I should say, it demonstrates that things are not always just what they seem.

I had Sproul meet Morse on one occasion, and Sproul made a trip to Santa Monica to look at the materials. On Morse's death, in the mid-thirties, the family decided to sell the material, and it has been split up, mostly, I think, in libraries in Southern California.

Morse once told me an interesting story, which I used as a passing reference in Doctor's Oral. As a very young man he had worked for some mining company on the Comstock Lode in Virginia City. He was apparently a bookkeeper and worked with some kind of a ledger. Everything broke up, and the companies went bankrupt, and Morse took his ledger and laid it on a shelf there. Thirty or forty years later he came back and looked in through the window where he had worked, and there was the ledger still lying on the shelf in just the position he had left it.

On the whole, having written so much over the course of so many years, I think that I must have handled myself quite circumspectly, not to have got into any more trouble than I have.

George R. Stewart

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA

Personal Biography

Born to George Rippey Stewart and Ella May Wilson
 Stewart, May 31, 1895, Sewickly, Pennsylvania
 Married to Theodosia Burton, May 17, 1924
 Children: Jill Burton - 1925
 John Harris - 1928

Education and Degrees

A.B. Princeton, 1917
 M.A. University of California, Berkeley, 1920
 Ph.D. Columbia, 1922

Positions Held

1920 Assistant in English, U.S.
 1921 Lecturer in English, Columbia
 1922-23 Instructor in English, Michigan
 1923-25 Instructor in English, U.C.
 1925-35 Assistant Professor of English, U.C.
 1935-42 Associate Professor of English, U.C.
 1942-62 Professor of English, U.C.
 1962- Emeritus Professor of English, U.C.

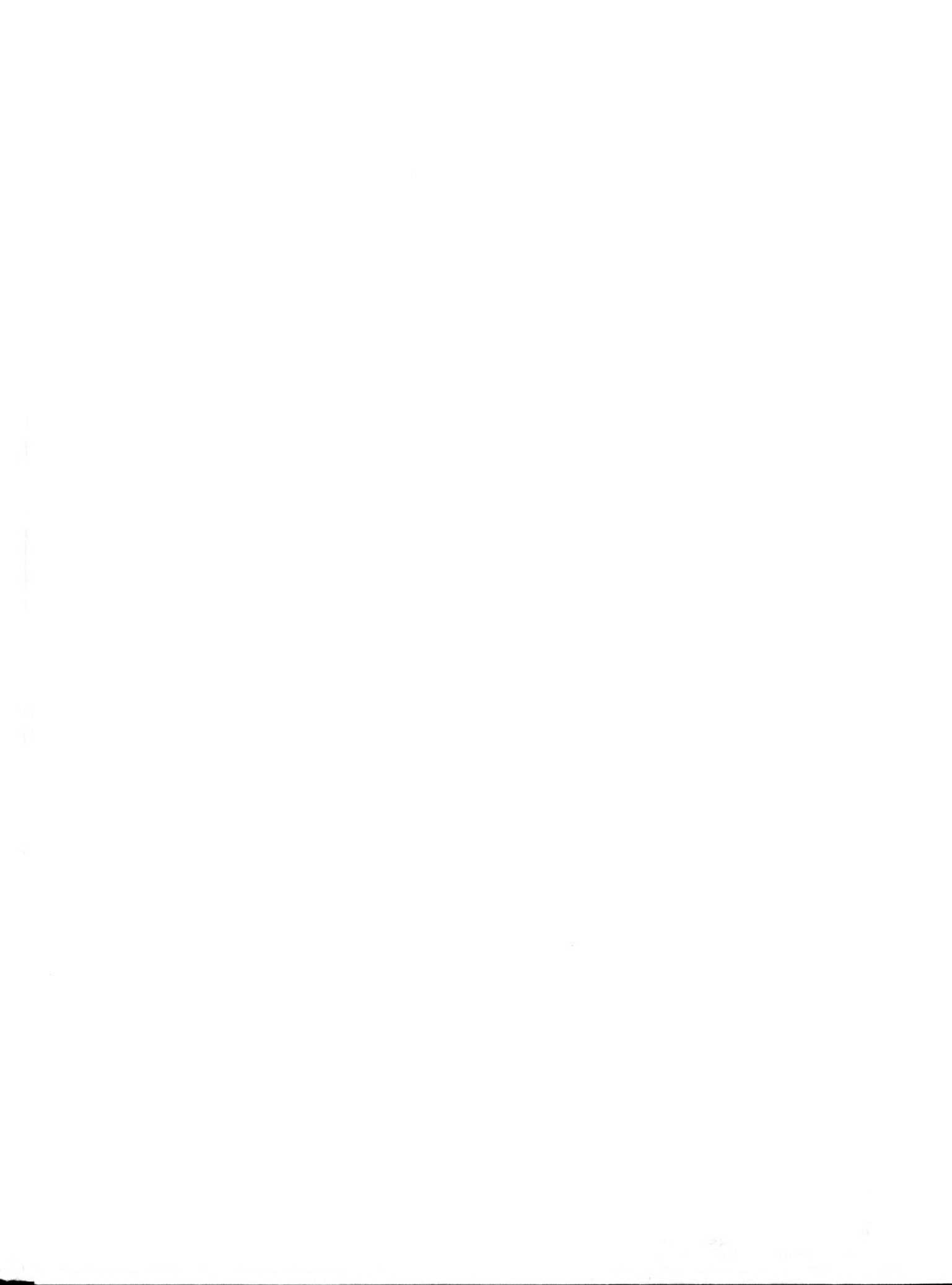
1952-53 Fulbright Professor of American Literature and
 Civilization, Athens, Greece
 1926 summer, University of Michigan
 1939 summer, Duke University
 1942-43 Resident fellow in Creative Writing, Princeton

U.S. Army, 1917-19
 Civilian technician, U.S. Navy, 1944
 Editor, U.C. Division of War Research, July-Dec. 1944
 Chairman, advisory committee of California Place-Names
 Project, 1944-47
 Collaborator, U.S. Forest Service, 1945-46

MAJOR WRITINGS

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John Phoenix 1937
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Doctor's Oral 1939
Storm 1941
Names on the Land 1945
Man: An Autobiography 1946
Fire 1948
Earth Abides 1949
The Year of the Oath (in collaboration) 1950
Sheep Rock 1951
US 40 1953
American Ways of Life 1954
Years of the City 1955
NA 1 1957
Pickett's Charge 1960
The California Trail 1963
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N.A. 1 Two volumes: Looking North, and Looking South, Boston 1957.

Campus Report

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A "good life" has dedication, fulfillment, growth



Professor Stewart

A retired English professor with a list of 25 books to his credit "probably wouldn't have become a novelist at all" if the Berkeley of the 1930's had been the busy, fermenting place it is today.

George R. Stewart, who describes himself as "a happy writer with a passion for research," is probably best known for his *Storm*, *Earth Abides*, and *Fire*. At the age of 72, he is "more productive than he's ever been," at work simultaneously on a history of the English Department, a dictionary of American place names to be published by Oxford University Press, and *Not So Rich as You Think*, which will deal with waste disposal.

His newest book, scheduled to be published June 15, is *Good Lives*, a biographical study of six men who, for Stewart, "satisfied the potential in themselves."

William the Marshal, Joab ben-Zeruijah, Heinrich Schliemann, Prince Henry the Navigator, Francisco Eduardo Tresguerras and John Bidwell, though they lived during different historical periods in different societies under different stresses, were each able to "make a good life in dangerous, restricted times."

What is the good life?

For Author Stewart it is fulfillment, dedication, intellectual growth. His six shared, he believes, "a great striving to do something." They were "not necessarily happy or pleasant people, but neither were they egotists."

Continued on page 4

For the academics and the "non-academic," a miscellany of notes

Judging from the answers to a recent *Campus Report* query, "non-academic" is not an objectionable terminology to Berkeley employees in that category, though a few commented that it was a "somewhat negative approach." Remarks ranged from "all that matters is that we be considered a part of the University" to "I don't care on particle about my title so long as it doesn't affect my pay scale, vacation, or fringe benefits."

Others suggested *operational staff*, but "we don't mind being called non-academic—in fact we feel it helps identify us as part of the University community," and "It's a clearly descriptive term when applied to employees in a university set-up."

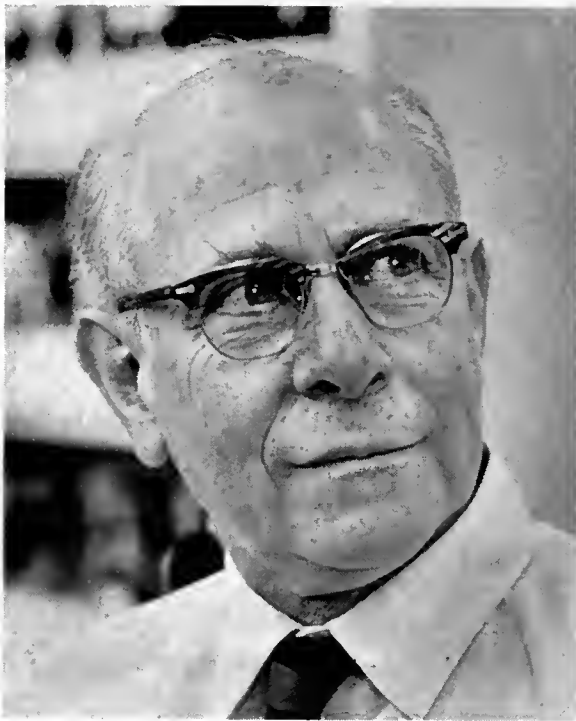
Berkeley personnel interested in teacher education advising and other civilian professional positions in the

Vietnam technical assistance program can talk with recruiters from the State Department's Agency for International Development during the week of June 19-24.

Interviews will be held on the second floor of the Old Mint Building in San Francisco and can be scheduled by calling 556-4300. Application forms also will be available at all post offices.

- Courtesy discounts on hospital and clinic service charges, and on materials which have been available under limited circumstances at the UC San Francisco Medical Center will be discontinued as of July 1. Discounts, said officials, in effect reduced the funds available for teaching and other services.

Dental (San Francisco) and optometric (Berkeley) services, however, will continue to be available.



Professor Stern

In the expression of the genetic factors, environment plays an important role

... research is identifying some of the reasons for congenital defects and medical treatment may neutralize the damage either before or after it occurs. Many potential genetic cripples will become completely functional

What Genetics' Curt Stern has called "the narrow hereditary bridge" is formed when a microscopic fish-like creature (the sperm cell) collides with the ripe, waiting egg and the evolutionary past of two organisms is joined.

In man, the newly fertilized cell, if normal, contains 46 threadlike chromosomes (23 from each parent) strung with thousands upon thousands of genes—the units of inheritance—reproduced as the cell divides and redivides until the organism is complete.

In chemical terms, the gene consists of a substance called DNA (deoxyribonucleic acid), and it is DNA and its messenger, RNA (ribonucleic acid), which governs the infinitely complex chemistry of the cell and its activities.

The discovery in 1944 that DNA is the genetic substance and the resulting development of molecular genetics research are probably "the great contribution of our age," says Dr. Stern. But for the man who calls himself a "classical geneticist," an organism "is more than just a bunch of chemicals. It is a highly regulated, coordinated organic system. Genes do not act in isolation. They are embedded in an interrelated harmonious whole."

It is this "whole" with which Dr. Stern is most intimately concerned.

The Berkeley geneticist, who studied under Nobelist T. H. Morgan and is the author of one of the basic texts on human genetics, is interested in two aspects of research: human genetics (transmission of dominant or recessive traits), and developmental genetics. For the latter, he works with the tiny *Drosophila* fruit fly, whose mutation rate and 10-day reproduction cycle enable investigators to observe both natural and induced genetic change through hundreds of generations.

What he learns from his work with the famous little fly often gives him clues to man's genetic problems. "Mosaic" flies, produced in his laboratory, have both male and female characteristics, and "there are rare human beings who are human mosaics," he says, with similar bi-sexual,

conflicting characteristics. Recognition of the very real problems of the "transsexual" and possible surgical and psychological correction have recently been of increasing interest to medical researchers.

The human mosaic is only one of the potential genetic cripples. Missing or mutated (changed) genes, too many or too few chromosomes, and inbreeding which often increases recessive traits are among some of the many factors which can result in mental or physical defectives.

The 15–20% early abortion rate, says Dr. Stern, means that there "has already been a culling," that the "born" are a selected sample of more or less viable fetuses.

The so-called "bad" gene is not necessarily always a negative factor, he points out. Research is identifying some of the reasons for congenital defects and medical treatment may neutralize the damage either before or after it occurs. Many potential genetic cripples will become completely functional and the "bad" gene will have little or no real effect on the quality of the human gene pool.

In addition, what may be a "bad" characteristic in one situation may be "good" in another.

The sickle-cell syndrome, caused by an amino acid substitution affecting the hemoglobin molecule, produces anemia under certain circumstances, but in malaria-infested country the same genetic trait acts as a protective device. The syndrome often disappears from the genetic inheritance when its protective properties are no longer needed.

In the United States, inbreeding among humans has almost ceased to be a problem as community isolation disappears. On the other hand, large population groups separated geographically for long periods of time have evolved certain genetic characteristics of their own.

But although racial groups do have different genetic endowments, "which are 'better' or 'poorer' depends on variables of conditioning, opportunity and motivation in a given situation."

Dr. Stern cites Berkeley anthropologist Sherwood Washburn, who has said, "If one looks at the degree of social discrimination against Negroes (in America) and their lack of education, and also takes into account the tremendous amount of overlapping between the observed IQ's of both, one can make an equally good case that, given a comparable chance to that of Whites, their IQ's would test out ahead."

Whatever the genetic inheritance, Dr. Stern comments, "environment plays an important role in the expression of the genetic factors."

Geneticists are also turning up evidence that genes may play a part in some forms of mental illness, long considered to be a purely social phenomenon. In a recent Oregon study of children separated at birth from hospitalized schizophrenic mothers, 5 out of 47 later developed the same psychosis although they had been placed in normal homes, and 8 out of 21 were either rejected or discharged from the Armed Forces for psychiatric or behavioral reasons.

Although evidence of genetic influence on other mental illnesses so far is scanty, Dr. Stern has written that "it would be strange indeed if the genetic control of brain function in man were fundamentally different from the genetic control of innumerable functions in other organisms, including brain function in non-human mammals."

Recent reports have indicated, too, that personality traits and better-than-average intelligence levels are sometimes linked with genetic abnormalities.

Has man influenced his own evolution? "Only haphazardly and without really knowing it," says Dr. Stern.

"In general terms, mutations are the evolutionary raw material and selection is the mechanism for evolving genes and gene combinations. So far, selection has not been deliberate. We *could* make any changes we want in any direction by 'throwing away' certain people—not allowing them to reproduce. But if you select for one thing, you may be throwing something else out of balance."

Has the effect of nuclear explosions and fall-out been as damaging to the genes as geneticists expected?

Although they are sure that damage has been done, "it appears to be not so serious as we used to think. Most mutations are negative rather than positive, but the Japanese population shows no more abnormalities than the usual.

"However," he adds, "although we would expect the worst damage to occur in the first generation of children, perhaps the number of people we are dealing with is too small and we just can't see the tiny percentage of difference."

Present nuclear devices with their tremendous radiation potential would undoubtedly be more damaging.

"But," points out Dr. Stern, "those with the heaviest dosage would die. Survivors would be those with the least damage, and though they would presumably have large proportions of abnormal children, they would also have some normal offspring. Society and civilization will be the real casualties. The naked human race would survive."

Nutrition has no effect on genetic structure other than to fulfill a potential, but whether or not drugs may permanently affect the chemistry of the gene is in doubt.

"Experiments with tissue cultures outside the body show changes. But we don't know whether any action occurs

With this issue, CAMPUS REPORT completes its first year of publication. It will not appear during the summer quarter. The editor has been Saxon Stern—the photographer, Dennis Galloway.

To assist in evaluating CAMPUS REPORT, we ask that you comment on the following questions:

Should CAMPUS REPORT be continued next fall?

Did you read CAMPUS REPORT regularly? Why?

Please include the name of your department or office and whether you are faculty or non-faculty. Send your comments to Editor, Campus Report, 101 Sproul Hall.

inside the body, where there may be counter-balancing forces."

And finally, what about the population explosion?

Although Dr. Stern shares the general worry about overpopulation and foresees a time when "you can't have more people," he is less concerned about its genetic effects. However, "people who have very large families today may be depriving some future families of any children at all."

For the present, "we must educate ourselves to accept the many-faceted inequalities of man. Changes in our inequalities are going on incessantly, often independent of our conscious actions and dependent on the social system under which we live.

"But culture and social organization are not the ultimate forces which form us. They themselves are made possible by our genes."

Survivors of a nuclear war "would be those with the least damage, and though they would presumably have large numbers of abnormal children, they would also have some normal offspring. Society and civilization will be the real casualties. The naked human race would survive."

“ . . . in a University it's taken for granted you'll be productive”

Continued from page 1

Good Lives, he says, is “obviously an old man's book.” It seems equally obvious that it is the result of the author's concern with an evaluation of his own life and its many contributions.

Has George Stewart's been a “good life?”

The professor who was awarded one of UC's prized honorary degrees in 1963 doesn't know “if I fulfilled my potential. I might have done more. Our hopes are always more than our achievements.”

Stewart was born in Pennsylvania and came to California at the age of 12 when his father's health forced a move to a sunnier, milder climate. The family settled in Pasadena, then a comparatively small town of 40,000.

He had “a good mother and father,” a stable home life as a boy. There was a strong religious influence—his father was an elder in his church, two maternal uncles were ministers. Although he moved away from formal religion as he grew older, the beliefs of his family endowed him with “strong values,” he says.

For a while, the boy wasn't sure what he wanted to do. He went east to Princeton, where he received his A.B. in English in 1917, came back to Berkeley for his M.A., crossed the country again to work for his doctorate at Columbia. A year later he joined the Berkeley faculty as an instructor, and became a full professor in 1942, Emeritus in 1962.

During his teaching years, Stewart taught creative writing and a wide variety of courses, especially in American Literature.

He credits his writing not only to the doldrums of the 30's, but also partly to Berkeley historian H. L. Bolton, who made the American West, its history and literature so exciting for a young graduate student that nearly all of his books have been somehow related to it in one way

or another. His interest in ecological problems—“why all these things got together, the little parts making the whole”—is partially an outgrowth of his concern for California's past and future.

He wrote his first general book, about the Donner Party, “because it was such an awfully good story and it hadn't ever been presented properly.” Subsequently, he walked the California emigrant trail through Nevada, over the Sierra and across the desert. From this experience came *The California Trail*.

His study is filled with mementos he has picked up in his wanderings: a patched-together blue and white pitcher he believes was “tossed out of some wagon train” which he found in pieces beside the famous old trail; a 4-pound single jack mining hammer discovered at the bottom of the American River Canyon, “probably dating back to 1880 or older.”

The hammer is familiar to his readers. It was used as a symbol in *Earth Abides*, a book which has turned out to be a very enduring work. “It keeps a remarkable vitality.” *Storm*, published as a paperback and included in the Modern Library series, is probably his most popular book.

Although he “started too late, so I'm not really very good at it,” he has fished in New Zealand, Australia, Japan, several countries in Europe, and only recently returned from a two-months trip to Chile.

For the past three years, in addition to writing and travel, he has been president of the Berkeley Faculty Club and “it is the University that's really been my life.”

“It gives a man freedom intellectually, and opportunities to do what you want. It's taken for granted that you'll be productive. It's a good place,” he says, “to try to live the ‘good life.’”

Employee promotions

Employees recently promoted include *Herbert Blechman*, Administrative Analyst III for the Campus Research Office; *Paul Duffey*, Laboratory Mechanician at the Space Sciences Laboratory; *Rosemary Fagg*, Principal Clerk for University Extension/Continuing Education of the Bar; *Vernon Hawthorne*, Laboratory Technician III in Zoology/Fisheries; *Alberta Marengo*, Senior Clerk for the Accounting Office; *Geraldine Peabody*, Principal Clerk in Social Welfare; *Eloy Pena*, Senior Offset Duplication Machine Operator for the Central Stenographic Bureau; and

Diane Quinn, Principal Clerk at the Survey Research Center.

Others are *Betty Robinson*, Principal Clerk for University Extension/Business Administration; *Patricia Romeo*, Principal Clerk in the Graduate Division; *Ellen Schelstraete*, Secretary-Stenographer in the Graduate Division; *Margaret Thoene*, Principal Clerk for University Extension/Program Processing; *Mary Lee Widener*, Administrative Assistant for Gifts and Endowments; and *Lawrence Young*, Laboratory Technician III at the Cancer Research Genetics Laboratory.

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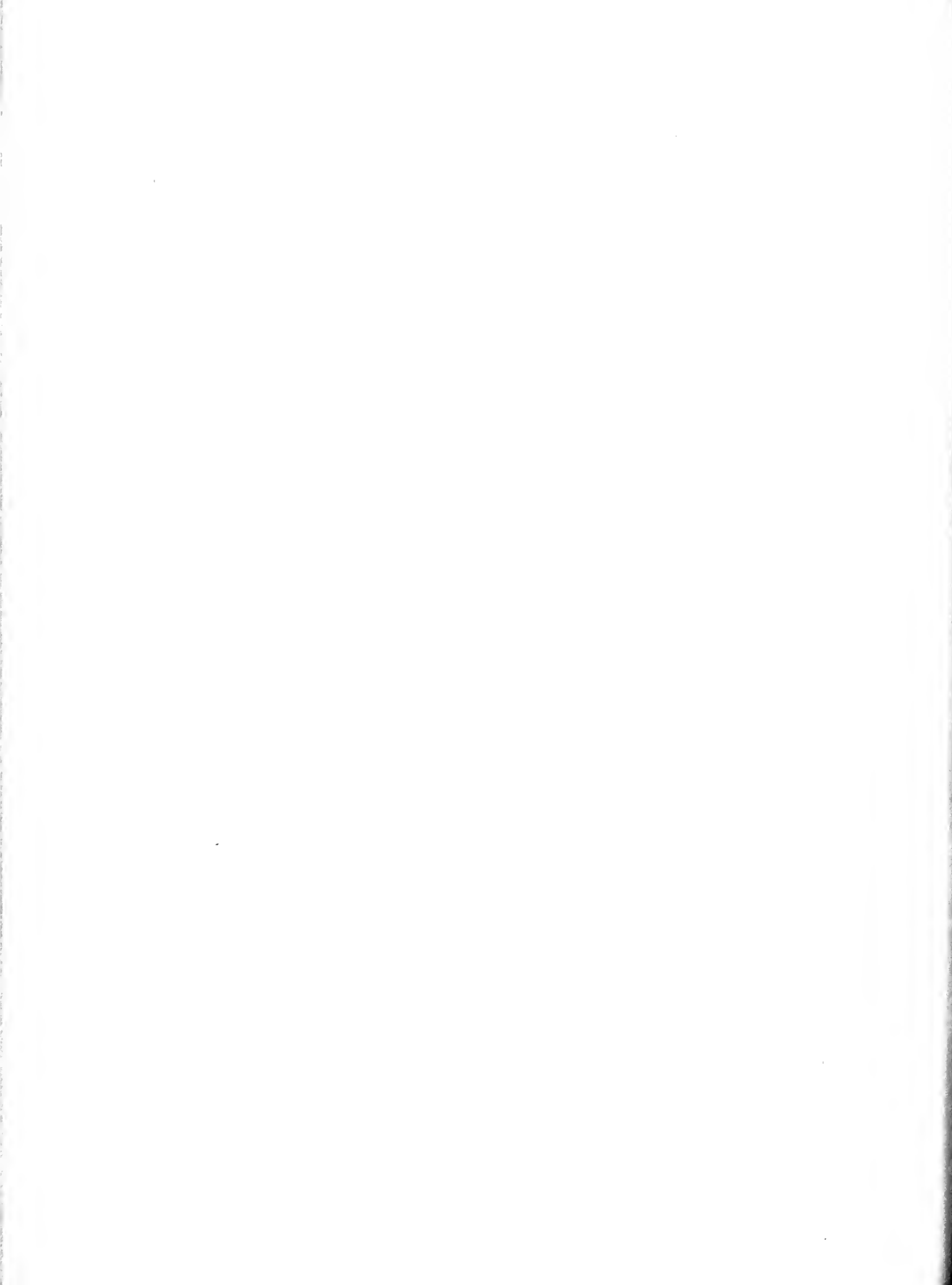
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Suzanne Bassett Riess

Grew up in Bucks County, Pennsylvania. Graduated from Goucher College with a B.A. in English in 1957. Post-graduate work at the University of London and the University of California, Berkeley, in English and art history.

Feature writing and assistant woman's page editor, Bethlehem, Pa., Globe-Times. Free-lance writing and editing in Berkeley and volunteer work on starting a new Berkeley newspaper.

Editor in Regional Oral History Office since 1960, interviewing in the fields of art, cultural history, environmental design, photography, and University history.





