Regional Oral History Office
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University of California
Berkeley, California

Jessie Harris Stewart

MEMORIES OF GIRLHOOD AND THE UNIVERSITY

An Interview Conducted by
Suzanne Riess

Copy No. 1

Jessie Harris Stewart

Photographed at home in The Sequoias, Portola Valley. The painting behind Mrs. Stewart is of "Sunshine Hill," the Stewart home in Saratoga, Calif.

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INTRODUCTION

These oral history conversations with Jessie Harris Stewart, conducted for the Regional Oral History Office of The Bancroft Library in January 1978, are a dip deep into a well of memories of growing-up years in California.

Jessie Stewart's father, James T. Harris, coming to San Francisco via New England from pioneer Canadian stock, found work in the carpentry shop of the California Street Cable Car Company in the 1880s and was soon elevated to supervisory and then managerial positions in the company. His own story, reprinted herein, is a look back at a fulfilling career. The first half of his daughter's interview enriches the chronicle of her father's life and times with her memories of childhood along the California Street line, her schools, her friends, vacations, mother and sister, and the exhilarating and tragic days of the earthquake and fire of 1906.

The second half of the interviews is concerned with the springtime of the University of California at Berkeley under President Benjamin Ide Wheeler, champion of the students. In the years from 1910 to 1914 the University was at a high point of campus development: as the Hearst-Bénard building plan was carried out, new faculty and a remarkable generation of students of the second decade of the 1900s came together to build the fine reputation of the institution. In the interview Jessie Stewart recalls Wheeler and her associations with him, as well as the warm feelings of the women students toward Phoebe Apperson Hearst.

Jessie Harris Stewart's faithfulness to campus ideals and to the responsibilities that became hers as an officer of the students are in the best tradition of committment and involvement of women students, articulated further in the Prytanean Oral History Project interview with Mrs. Stewart, also appended herein.

To have been asked to enrich the store of University of California oral history by dipping into Mrs. Stewart's memories as we have here is to make the interviewer and the reader wish to have had an entire life's history. Those who know Jessie Harris Stewart

know that while she lived years away in other communities with her husband and her children she maintained the dedication to YWCA work that is mentioned in these interviews and that her sunny California upbringing and able and generous nature remained undimmed. She returned to the West with her husband Charles in the late 1940s to build "Sunshine Hill" in Saratoga, and her present home in The Sequoias, Portola Valley, is, by her presence there, another sunshine hill

Suzanne B. Riess
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I CABLE CARS AND CHILDHOOD

[Interview 1: January 10, 1978]

James T. Harris in California

Riess: Your father's entire family came out to California following him?

Stewart: Not all; one sister of his remained in Nova Scotia, but the rest of them, his father and mother and five children, I think it was, followed him out.

Riess: They settled in San Francisco?

Stewart: All of them settled in San Francisco around my father.

Riess: What did his father's father do?

Stewart: His father was a ship builder in Nova Scotia and was read out of the church one time for having launched a ship on Sunday. [Laughter] The tide was right and Grandfather just launched the ship!

Riess: This was the Presbyterian?

Stewart: The Nova Scotia Presbyterian. He was born in Pictou, Nova Scotia. But he came to this country when he was sixteen and moved to Fall River.

Riess: Now you're talking about your father?

Stewart: Yes, my father. My grandfather and grandmother settled in San Francisco near my father.

Riess: Your grandfather worked here as a ship builder?

Stewart: No, no. He was retired, he was an older man by the time he came here. He wasn't a young man. I don't remember him much because he was gone before I was born.

Riess: When were you born?

Stewart: In 1892.

Riess: Any brothers and sisters?

Stewart: I had a siater, Martha, who was nine years older than I was. She's gone now. She and I married brothers. She married my husband's brother John. Charlie and I were in college together and then we married oh, quite a number of years later. It was [August 17] 1916 when we were married.

Riess: When your father first came out here, did he start working for the cable cars?

Stewart: He was a carpenter when he went to Fall River, and when he came out here to San Francisco he went to work for the California Cable Car Company as a carpenter in the carpentry shop, and he was working there quite a number of years, I don't know how many years, when the superintendent of the company was fired--he was an irascible old gentleman [chuckles]--and he said to the board of directors, "I'll give you one piece of advice, I'll tell you who to put in my place, and that's Jim Harris down in the carpentry shop," and Dad was elevated from carpenter to superintendent of the company.

Riess: That's good! They took his advice.

Stewart: They did and they never regretted it.

Riess: Who was the man who was fired?

Stewart: His name was Seal. He came down here and settled in Palo Alto and there's a Seal Avenue named after him. We used to visit him. They had a place in Mayfield and he was quite a wealthy old gentleman. But he was very crotchety and the board of directors got a little tired of it. The board of directors was composed of people like the Colemans and a lot of those old family people in San Francisco.

Riess: Did your father talk about California as "the land of opportunity"?

Stewart: Oh, yes, and he was the worst "Californiac" I've ever known.

Stewart: He was so crazy about California, and especially the San Francisco area. He used to not like Los Angeles very much. I remember one time he came down on the train to come to our house [in Glendale] for Christmas and somebody was talking about how wonderful Los Angeles was and he said, "You don't know what you've been through until you've been living in San Francisco." He spoke up when somebody was talking, and not to him at all, but he interrupted the conversation to put in a word for San Francisco. [Laughter] Yes, he was a loyal man.

Riess: What part of the city did you start out in?

Stewart: I don't remember where they first lived because it was before I was born. But when I came into the picture we were living in a flat on California Street, down near Fillmore, down the hill from the place where we moved. Eventually we moved up toward Webster Street on the same block and they bought a house there. I remember hearing about the time when he was appointed to be the superintendent. Mother and Martha, my sister, were at dinner and he came into dinner late. It was the first of April and he said, "Well, I'm late but I just got to be appointed superintendent of the railroad," and they all yelled, "April fool!" He had a terrible time convincing them that he was telling the truth.

Riess: What kind of education did he have?

Stewart: He had very little. Just up until he left, oh, I think about the seventh or eighth grade or something in school. He never had any more education at all.

Riess: Was he a reading man?

Stewart: Oh, a very great reader. One of his favorite magazines was National Geographic. He used to read an awful lot of good books and magazines. I know one time we started to give him Life magazine and he said, "I don't want any picture thing. I want something to read."

Riess: What was your mother's background?

Stewart: Mother was born in San Francisco. Mother and Father were distant cousins. They were quite a long distance apart. But when father came to California he hunted up the Murdock family, which is Mother's family, and he met Mother then. Her father and mother had come around the Horn in a sailing vessel in '49. They settled in San Francisco.

First of all, Grandfather Murdock had something to do with

Stewart: the sulphur mines up around Virginia City and up around there. But then he came back and they settled in San Francisco, back of the Emporium. Mother had us know that that was Rincon Hill and that was a very exclusive neighborhood. But Father always says Mother was born "south of the slot." [Chuckles] Market Street was a slotted cable too at that time and he always tells about how she was born "south of the slot."

The Harris Girls, High School Days

Riess: You were brought up in a house where a college education was expected?

Stewart: Oh, expected for me, for us. My sister had a spinal curvature when she was younger and they took her out of public school for a year to have her lay in bed and take care of that spine, and then she went to private school. She didn't go to college at all,but she graduated from Irving Institute, which was a private school in San Francisco.

Riess: Did that later become some other school?

Stewart: No, I think it went out. There were people named Church who owned it but I think it went out of existence later on.

Riess: Did she take care of that spinal curvature?

Stewart: Yes, she was all right. Oh, there were some treatments along with it I'm sure, but anyway it kept her out of school for a year and her class had gotten ahead of her. We had both gone to Pacific Heights School in San Francisco and so when she was ready for high school, they put her in the Institute.

Riess: Where did you go?

Stewart: I went to Lowell.

Riess: The famous Lowell. Your classmates at Lowell are probably as familiar to you as your classmates from Cal.

Stewart: Oh, many of them, we still keep in touch with each other.

I remember later walking across the Berkeley campus with President Wheeler and he said to me, "Jessie, where did you graduate from high school?" and I said, "Lowell." He said,

Jessie Harris

Stewart: "Oh, those Lowell kids. They make their name in college, no doubt about it."

Well, it was a school that was preparing you for college. There was no sloid or extracurricular things. It was just plain Latin and French and German and mathematics and things that were really imperative for your recommendation in college.

Riess: That means that children in the city who were not intending to go to college--

Stewart: --wouldn't go there because they wouldn't get the shop things and all that sort of stuff that they would need, because it was nothing but really straight curriculum for people going to college.

Riess: What languages did you take?

Stewart: I took German.

Riess: Did you have to have Latin and Greek?

Stewart: I had two years of Latin before you could start a language. That was their prerequisite.

Riess: It's interesting. I noticed in the Prytanean histories that many people took or knew German.* It seemed like German was a more popular language, as French later became.

Stewart: I had another reason for doing it, but that was neither here nor there.

But when I was a senior in high school--at the end of our junior year we had elections for officers for the senior year and I was voted the vice-president of the student body, and Sherman Burns, who is Detective Burns' son, was elected president, and he never came back. Here I was.

I went to Mr. Morton, our principal, and I said, "Well, I just can't go on."

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*The Prytaneans. An Oral History of the Prytanean Society, Its Members and their University, 1901-1920, Berkeley, 1970.

Stewart: He said, "You're going on. You were elected to take the place of the president when the president is not there." For a year I was president of the student body, which meant giving out block letters and all that sort of stuff. [Chuckles] So I really had kind of a weird time of it.

Riess: That certainly stood you in good stead when you got to Berkeley.

You used a word back there that I don't know. You said "sloid." What does that mean?

Stewart: That means working with tools.

Riess: How is it spelled?

Stewart: S-l-o-i-d, I think it is. I don't know if it's a very common word but it was common among us who knew kids who were going to school where they were learning to be carpenters and plumbers and all those things. Other high schools in San Francisco were giving training courses for people who wanted to get into business from high school.

Riess: So what did your parents expect from you? A teaching career or academic career?

Stewart: No. I took only a two-year course at first and took physical ed. Then the family decided that I should go on for more. They were interested in what I was doing so I majored as a bacteriologist. After I got out of college I worked at the YWCA for six months before I was married but I didn't do very much work.

Riess: Do you mean you just told me your entire working career?

Stewart: That's about it. I never did work anymore but around the house. [Chuckles]

Jessie Growing Up in San Francisco

Riess: Let's back up a bit before we get to the college days. I'd like you to describe the look of the city in pre-earthquake times. Do you recall Nob Hill with the great mansions?

Stewart: Well, I can remember those but I don't know if I can describe

Stewart: them because I was only twelve or eleven I guess when the earthquake came along, 1892 to 1906, whatever that is.

Riess: That was always known as Nob Hill?

Stewart: Oh yes, it was always known as Nob Hill and had these beautiful great big houses on it where the Pacific Union Club is and things like that. They were beautiful houses and there weren't so many. The Fairmont was not there. The big hotels came along later. They came along when I was in high school because I remember going to dances at the Fairmont Hotel.

Riess: The cable car line ran right out past the Nob Hill houses, I gather.

Stewart: Sure. It ran right from Market Street, straight up the hill, past the mansions, and up to Presidio Avenue.

Riess: Edgar Kahn's description of Sunday outings on the cable cars really interested me.* Did you do this?

Stewart: No, we didn't do much joy riding because--we rode on a pass. We always had passes for the family but we didn't do much more than just go where we had to go. We didn't take joy rides on the cable because--well, what I did do was to oftentimes go out with my Dad to Presidio Avenue to the end of the line and thentake a steam train that ran out to the Cliff House and that was more fun! I used to love doing that. Dad and I would do that often on Sunday afternoon or something. We'd watch the seals on the cliff there, you know.

Riess: And then have something to eat?

Stewart: Oh, have a waffle! We used to do a lot of that Sunday afternoon stuff.

Riess: You were his travelling companion?

Stewart: We were very, very close. Through the years we were very close. My sister was closer to my mother than I was. Mother wasn't awfully well and she died when I was in the East.

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*Edgar M. Kahn, Cable Car Days in San Francisco, Stanford University Press, 1944.

Riess: Did she have your sister when she was quite young?

Stewart: Yes, she was quite young and then nine years later I came along as an afterthought. [Chuckles]

Riess: I am seven years older than my sister, and I think it's a very big span of time.

Stewart: It's a big span and for awhile it doesn't make for very pleasant surroundings. Martha and I fought terribly when we were younger because Mother would say, "Take Jessie with you when you go out to play" and she hated that! I was a messy little brat! But as we grew older we grew very close together.

I remember an old Irishman named Gulliver. When we were going somewhere on the streetcar he leaned over and he said to my mother, "This child has eyes like the statues in the Roman Catholic Church," and that was his idea of a real compliment. Mother happened to be taking me to the doctor at the time, to Dr. A. P. O'Brien, and Mother told him that and he said, "That's a darned unlikely compliment!" [Laughs] He was a Catholic too and he said, "I don't think that's much."

And Grandpa Murdock always used to say, "Jessie has eyes like two holes burnt in a blanket."

Riess: Were you a tomboy?

Stewart: Yes, and my sister wasn't. She was a fussy lady. People would say in grammar school, "You can't be Martha Harris's sister!" because she was such a lady and such a good student and I was awful. I used to get "very poor" in deportment. [Laughter] Father used to get kind of a kick out of it, but Mother didn't like it very much.

Riess: Did you participate in sports?

Stewart: Oh yes, yes, and I rode my bicycle an awful lot in those days and skated a lot. I always had to stay off the line of the road when I did that though because the men would go in and report to Dad that somebody had seen me come down the hill with my hands off the handlebars on the bicycle. They would come in and so I always stayed away from the road as much as possible.

Riess: The "road" is the streetcar bed?

Stewart: Yes. All those California Street streetcar men knew us and knew us well.

My, they were so wonderful to us. When my sister was married they put together and got her a wonderful wedding present, and when Charlie and I were married, they gave us a dining room set.

Riess: That is very generous.

Superintendent Harris and the Earthquake

Stewart: Oh, they were just like a family in those days. Those men would keep their bankbooks in Dad's desk and they would go in and give him a certain amount and he would go down and deposit it to their account in different places, and when anybody died in the family, Dad would always go with them and pick out the coffin and all those things, and they were just like a part of the family.

Riess: They trusted him utterly?

Stewart: Oh, utterly. He was just, to them, their grandfather. I always remember him telling one time that he knew Halstead's very well, which was the undertaker in San Francisco, and he went with one man down there to pick out a coffin when his wife died, and Halstead said, "Name the price," and Dad said, "You ought to be ashamed of yourself to ask that man this much money."

He looked at him and he took a chisel that he had in his hand and he scratched it and he said, "Okay, this is damaged." And he gave it to him for less money, of course. Dad was always out to get what he could for the men.

Riess: I guess that's what happens when you kind of work up from the bottom.

Stewart: Oh yes, and nobody objected to his having stepped up, which I thought was very good. I used to hear Dad say, "Well, he really deserved it more than I did," or something like that, but nobody minded. They all rallied around and were so good with him.

Riess: He was very much involved in the crisis after the earthquake

Riess: and fire when they had to rebuild the line. Do you remember that?

Stewart: Oh, I remember the whole thing because they pulled the cars out onto the tracks and ran them as far as they could that morning when the earthquake came along to get them as far away from the fire. They couldn't climb the hills to go up so they went as far as Van Ness Avenue and the fire came to Van Ness Avenue and they were burned on the tracks. But they felt that if the fire didn't come far, and it didn't look as if it would at first, why then those cars would be saved. Well, they didn't even think the fire was coming as far as Hyde Street when it first started.

Riess: When you think of 1906 do you recall the smell of fire and so on?

Stewart: Oh surely. I can even see the pieces of the paper [burning shreds of ash] when they would bomb a place. They bombed a lot of places, dynamited them to try and start backfires, and we would get big cinders out our way.

We were not burned. We were about four blocks from the fire when the fire came. Father took Mother in and had her pick out what she wanted to save and we were out with some friends on Spruce Street out around the Lake Street area and we stayed there.

I remember one day Dad came out with a horse and buggy that they had and somebody drove him out and I ran out to the car to meet him out there on Spruce Street and he handed me this satchel and I dropped it to the ground. It was full of money. He had gone into the office when the fire was imminent there and opened all the safes and scooped all the money into this satchel and it was twenty-dollar bills. The fire was on Monday and they'd had Saturday and Sunday with no banking and so they had all this cash. When we came back to our house, Father got Mother to get a lot of fruit jars and they put the money in fruit jars up among the jams and jellies. [Laughter] Then the men would come to the house to get their pay.

The Oddfellows

Of course, then Dad had all this money that was sent from the Oddfellows all over the United States for Oddfellows in San

Stewart: Francisco and he would have these checks that would come in. I know once or twice Dad signed them the night before and put then under their mattress until the next day when they could go down and put it in the bank because the banks had moved out to Fillmore Street and places like that.

Riess: This was a generous gesture from the Oddfellows during the fire?

Stewart: Oh, all over the country.

Riess: Before we began, you started to tell me about your father's connection with the Oddfellows.

Stewart: He was grand treasurer of the Grand Lodge of Oddfellows of the whole United States.

Riess: That was an affiliation he had started back in Massachusetts?

Stewart: No, I don't think so. He wasn't even twenty-one when he came to California, and I think he joined the Oddfellows when he came out here.

Riess: What was their function? What purpose did they have?

Stewart: I don't know terribly much about it, but it's a beneficial; they get benefits if they're sick or anything; they pay them money and then they get benefits out. It's a fraternal order like the Elks or the Masons only it's a lower grade because it's more working men that belong to it.

Riess: I wondered if they had their own charities that they supported?

Stewart: Oh sure, I think they do. I don't know much about it but I know that Dad was always interested in it and became on the board of directors of the Oddfellow Home down in Saratoga. There was a place down there where they had their old peoples' homeand he used to go down there for the board of directors meetings.

The Days After the Fire

Riess: Yours was one of the families that didn't try to escape the fire. You went a few blocks--

Stewart: We didn't leave the city at all. Most everybody that could got out of the city and I know we had cousins who had a launch and they packed all of the family in the launch and took them to Benicia, to my aunt out there in Benicia. I had an aunt and uncle that lived up there and they went up there and stayed. She had a great big house and they took care of them all.

But Mother wouldn't go because she felt Dad needed the care at that time because he was working awfully hard. He went back to work then right away to rebuild the carbarn and to do all the rest of it. So we stayed right there and I was always glad I did. I had so many friends who went away and missed it all.

We cooked on the streets, you know. The chimneys were all down and we had to cook out. Dad made kind of a wooden frame and we had a little stove out there burning coal and cooked on the street and everything.

Riess: You could do your marketing out in the other districts?

Stewart: Well, we had to go stand in the bread line for quite a long while. Martha and I used to go up and get bread because there were no bakeries, only just theones that could supply the bread lines. We went and stood in the bread lines along with other people and got them.

Riess: Everyone was there.

Stewart: Oh, everybody was in the bread lines, and I remember the bread line at one time was in Lafayette Square--which was a square in San Francisco, it still is there--we went up there and people were camping up there.

Riess: I guess that experience was a chance for a lot of social work.

Stewart: Oh, yes. Martha did a lot of things. Martha was old enough to do a lot of things.

I was just a kid. We had a neighbor, a man named Richmond who had a candy store down on Fillmore Street, and you know that when people can't get liquor they go for candy. He came to Mother one day and he said, "Can I have Jessie? Can I take her down there and let her wait on customers?"

Mother said, "Why, she isn't worth that."

He said, "Yes, she is, and I'd like to pay her."

Stewart: Mother said, "No, you won't pay her, but she can go and help you if there's any way she can help," and I went down there and worked and had the best time. I learned to fix chocolates, dip chocolates.

Riess: Oh, you were doing that part of it?

Stewart: When there wasn't anybody on the floor I would help out there and I had the best time. Oh, he used to make me take home boxes of chocolates, because I couldn't take any pay, and I had a fine time. All my friends were gone, you see, so I was alone and I had a good time down there in the candy store.

Riess: Where was this store?

Stewart: Down on Fillmore between Pine and California.

Riess: Sounds like a fine place. Not everybody knows how to dip chocolates.

Stewart: Well, I didn't know at first but I had a good time. [Laughter]

Riess: That's a marvelous story. I'm glad you triumphed over your mother in some of these things.

Stewart: Well, Mother wanted me to be a lady. She thought there was reason why a lady should go out with hat and gloves on [laughter] and I was off sailing around on a bicycle.

Riess: When you were talking about "the road" I was interested that you always would refer to it as the road rather than the street. But anything that didn't have cable car tracks would be a street for you?

Stewart: No, the one that I would call the road was the one that had the California Street cable, but there were other cable lines too. There was a Jackson and Washington line that was a cable car, and other ones, but to my way of expressing it the road meant California Street.

Cars and Cable Cars

Riess: And there were no automobiles on it. When you talked about being out on the road with your bike or your skates, I first thought, "how hazardous" but it probably wasn't because—

Stewart: No, it wasn't bad. There were some horses and rigs, horses and buggies. My father had a horse and buggy at his disposal and he went around all the time getting things ready, buying cable and all that stuff, had to go to Union Iron Works to get the cable for the cable car.

Riess: Do you mean on a normal day or do you mean at the time--?

Stewart: Oh, at the time of the earthquake.

Later on they got automobiles, but not right away. I remember the first automobile. We lived next door in San Francisco to the mayor of San Francisco whose name was Edward Robeson Taylor. That was a long time ago. They were one of the first to get an automobile and it was a Stanley Steamer and it was red. You got in the front seat and then you got in the back seat; the middle of the back seat opened and you got in and then you shut the door and sat on that!

Riess: Trapped!

Stewart: [Laughs] Oh dear! Mrs. Taylor was a niece of Leland Stanford, Jr. She was quite active and Martha knew the daughter very well. Ellen Taylor was a friend of my sister's and she used to go to all of the Big Games with her and all that sort of stuff.

Riess: Did they drive their own car?

Stewart: Harry learned, and drove his own car, and the women all wore veils on their hats to keep them on and all that sort of stuff. I did go several times but I was pretty little and I was pretty much of a nuisance around so I didn't go with them very much.

Riess: Did women ever drive their own cars back in those days?

Stewart: No, I don't think so.

Riess: There was always that combination of somebody having to turn the crank in front and somebody had to--

Stewart: Sure, and all that stuff. That's pretty hard for a woman to do.

Riess: In Kahn's book he talks about the gentility and the courteousness of the cable car operators.

Stewart: Oh, they were wonderful. They were really wonderful. I can remember Dad telling about Old Man Coleman who said to the operator, "Stop at Van Ness Avenue" and he stopped at the side of Van Ness near Larkin. Coleman said, "I want to go to the other side," and they started the car and took him over to the other side! Of course, Van Ness was pretty broad. But they stopped and let him out. [Laughter]

Riess: How about the tradition of bell ringing and all of the gaiety that persists now in cable car riding? Did that start then?

Stewart: They didn't do very much of that. They rang it when they needed to get somebody off the track or something of that sort, but they didn't go in for that stuff that they do down on the Powell Street line now.

Riess: Kahn also refers to "cable car Adonises," like it was a profession that a handsome young man--

Stewart: Oh, they were handsome and they dressed beautifully. You see them nowadays with jeans on; but that group of men had an inspection before they went on duty in the morning to see that their suits were clean and pressed and everything was right on them before they went to work.

Riess: That was part of your father's job?

Stewart: Well, yes. He used to have somebody that did that for him, because it was five o'clock in the morning!

Strikes and Other Stoppages

I remember one time there was a strike on the road. The men struck for pay or something. They had joined the union and the union operated it. There was a certain thing in the franchise that said that a car had to run over the road every day or the franchise would be broken, and so my father took the car out and ran it and the men stood by the side of the road looking daggers at him, but they didn't do anything. They let him go by. He ran it over the whole line of the road. He went from Van Ness to Market, from Presidio to Market, and then from Hyde over to the Bay.

Riess: So there was always the threat of the franchise being broken?

Stewart: Well, it was a franchise given by the city, and if a car did not run over that road once a day they could break it.

Riess: In other words, the city would like to get the railroads back themselves?

Stewart: Sure.

Riess: Your father through his strategies in dealing with the city averted their taking over the cable cars, according to Kahn.

Stewart: Sure, although later on it became one company. But at the time Dad was there until a long while afterwards, it still remained a separate company. It was not a member of the Municipal Railroad.

Riess: What was the reason for keeping it out?

Stewart: It was a very well-paying thing and the board of directors didn't want to give it up. (They didn't come to the meetings any more. Dad would vote five or six proxies from those men who wouldn't even go to the meetings.) They wanted to keep that money that they had in it; they invested quite a little bit and they were getting a lot out of it. I think that was the reason. I don't know but I'm pretty sure.

Riess: It sounds like they were offered a hefty sum to sell the railroad.

Stewart: I know when Dad died he still had stock in the railroad, of course. Our broker said, "Sell that stock. It's on its way out." So we sold it. We felt like heretics doing it.

Riess: Did it turn out to be a wise thing to do?

Stewart: It was, because very shortly after that the United Railroads took it over and it wasn't a good paying thing at all.

I remember our dining room was on the back of our house. There was a living room and a back parlor--a front parlor and a back parlor--before we got to the dining room. We'd be sitting at a meal and Dad would say, "Hush," and we would stop, and the cable had stopped. He could hear it way back there. There would be a silence that was noticeable to him. Not to us.

He would dash for the phone right away and find out what was the matter. It was maybe something that was only temporary,

Stewart: or something with a strand like they're having up there now. My, those strands! A cable would snap in spots but not altogether and it would snap and go way back and they had to go way back under to get to the place where it had happened.

Riess: They don't just furl it all in, they have to crawl--

Stewart: Sometimes they had to crawl along places in the slot to get it out.

Riess: He didn't do any of that?

Stewart: Oh, no. Oh, no.

Riess: But he knew all about the construction because he had been in on the construction.

Stewart: Oh yes, he knew every bit of it, all those great big "shivs," as he called them, those big wheels and all that stuff. He knew all about it. He used to take us down once in awhile and show us through just for the fun of walking through the place. There were walks where you could walk between the machinery.

Riess: Did it seem like a dangerous place?

Stewart: Oh, it seemed awful to me but it didn't to him. [Laughter]

I remember once or twice going down with Dad in the middle of the night when they brought the cable from the Union Iron Works and brought it with teams of, oh, thirty or forty horses, to bring the cable up before they just put it in. It would be done in the middle of the night because then there would be no traffic around to bother.

Riess: That's quite a vision--thirty or forty horses!

Stewart: Oh, I don't know, there were an awful lot of horses.

Riess: Where was the Union Iron Works?

Stewart: It was down in South San Francisco. I think it's still around somewhere down there.

Riess: Were there any dreadful accidents that you recall from the cable cars?

Stewart: Once or twice they'd let loose on the hill going down from the Fairmont down there, but nothing very bad. I don't know. I

Stewart: don't remember that.

I do remember that Dad invented a "sand-box" which went under the grip and would be used to let out sand on a rainy day. A lot of people wanted him to patent it--Mother was so mad that he didn't--but then someone somewhere else saw and copied it and did patent it.

The Chinese and Japanese in San Francisco

Riess: What were your contacts with the Chinese in San Francisco?

Stewart: We had a Chinaman that used to come to our house. We had a dining room set that had woven reed seats, and this man used to come around with a long pole over his shoulder and chairs hanging down and he would come to the door and say, "Chair fixee, chair fixee?" And Mother would let him take a couple of them to have fixed so that they would all be in good shape all the time.

Riess: Golly, now that's a service that you wouldn't find these days.

Stewart: Oh, no. No, not at all. [Chuckles]

Riess: Was Chinatown a place you set foot in?

Stewart: Oh, yes. I used to go down to Chinatown a lot. We used to go down there and buy firecrackers. Dad used to take me down there and we would get them and then come home and undo them so they would all be separated and Dad would throw a couple out of the window to see whether they worked or not. [Laughter]

Riess: For what sort of events?

Stewart: For the Fourth of July.

Riess: Oh, the Fourth of July.

Stewart: I've always loved Chinatown and I've always loved Chinese people. I think they're awfully nice people, and Japanese people too.

When I went to high school there were five or six Japanese in our class and they went on to college and they were just awfully nice. I remember Mother telling me one day that--she had a Japanese man who cleaned for her. He came a couple of

Stewart: times a week to clean--and he was in my room and he said, "That's your daughter up there?" It was a strip picture of the Tri Delts or something.

Mother said, "Yes," and he said, "My son knows her. He likes her very well. She no baby doll." [Laughter]

I didn't think that was very complimentary at all!

Riess: That's interesting. What do you think he meant?

Stewart: Well, he meant that I was sensible enough to talk to them and things like that, not put my nose in the air. I think that that was what he meant. I hope that's what he meant--"she no baby doll."

Riess: A baby doll would be like some superior creature.

Stewart: Blushing over the boys and such.

Riess: What other kinds of contact would you have with the Chinese?

Stewart: Nothing very much in our class. In high school we knew them very well, the Japanese, but not the Chinese so much. I don't think there were many Chinese enrolled. The Japanese went to college. The Japanese were ambitious to want to go on the college.

Riess: They've always had that reputation.

Stewart: Yes. They're really a race of people that want to get along in the world.

Riess: Other ethnic groups--there were a number of Russians that came to San Francisco around 1916, 1917, after the revolution.

Stewart: Yes, I know, because I had some friends, Gordon and Betsy Wagonette, who used to teach down there at night and the Russian people would come and lean to speak English and grammar.

Jewish Friends

Riess: Then there was a Jewish population. What was your memory of that?

Stewart: I knew a lot of Jewish people very well. They went to Pacific Heights School and then on to Lowell, a lot of them. But I had two different families that were very great friends. The [Isaac] Wormser family. He was Sussman and Wormser, S&W. They were Jewish people and they were just wonderful people. They lived just around the corner from us on Webster Street just beyond California. They were the ones that turned Unitarian. Mr. Wormser, I don't think he ever did. But Mrs. Wormser did. She was a very fine artist. She drew portraits of the children and things like that. Elsie and Dorothy and Paul were the children.

Riess: Oh, Dorothy Wormser was an architect and worked with Julia Morgan.

Stewart: Sure. Elsie was the older girl. Elsie and Dorie. We used to call her Dorie. The Jacobs lived next door to them. They were Jewish too and they were just awfully nice people.

I had another friend, Hilda Brandenstein. They were the MJB coffee people. They had a Catholic maid and the family didn't like fish at all but they always had fish on Friday on account of Mary. [Laughter] Mrs. Brandenstein was one of the finest women. I can always remember her going out the door with a coup of soup or something for somebody who was sick somewhere. She was just a very kind woman.

Riess: Did your mother know them, or was it more your generation?

Stewart: It was more my generation. Mother was a little bit stodgy. She was a little bit stuffy when it came to--well, she didn't mind my doing it at all or anything of that sort but she didn't make many friends outside of her own group of friends. But our group went to school together and got acquainted there, and I used to love to go to their houses.

Riess: Well, I know that you're an adventurous character anyway.

Stewart: [Laughs] I make myself sound terrible. But I really enjoyed the Wormser children. They were very, very great friends of mine during the early years of our lives. I don't know where they went to high school. I guess that they went to Girls' High School.

Riess: Why wouldn't you have gone to Girls' High School?

Stewart: Because Girls' High met in the afternoon. It was after the earthquake. At the time of the earthquake I graduated from grammar school and Lowell High met in the morning. Girls'

Stewart: High met in Lowell High School in the afternoon and I didn't want to go in the afternoon. I wanted to go in the morning and get it done with. So that's how I had to go to Lowell in the first place. But then, of course, I got interested and stayed on there. Girls' High was pretty badly damaged by the earthquake and they couldn't meet there so they met [at Lowell] in the afternoon. We went to school at 8:00 and we got out I think at 12:30 and they came on right after that and stayed until 4:30 or something like that. It was a long day there but they got their schoolwork in all right.

More Growing-up Memories

Riess: How soon after the earthquake did school resume normally?

Stewart: Oh, for about a year and a half or so I think there were two sessions in the school. I don't know for sure about that, but I think it was about a year and a half.

Riess: When you said that your father told your mother to gather up her favorite possessions as they were leaving the house, what sort of things did she take?

Stewart: They had gotten pictures of Martha and myself, large pictures on easels, and Mother took both of those pictures, and it took up so much room! Father took the dishes, our best set, and put then all in a tin box and took them out into the back yard and dug a hole and buried them.. Then to be careful that it wasn't known he stamped all over it and broke most of the dishes. [Laughter] He had to get Mother a whole new set of dishes. But she brought out, oh, I don't know what. I always remember those two pictures coming out there. Martha and I were at the Kellys' house on Spruce Street at the time and we just nearly died when those things arrived because we thought, oh, it would be the last of those things.

Riess: I hope you have them still.

Stewart: No. We got rid of them--well, when Mother was gone we didn't--but after Father died we got rid of all those things, sold them to somebody for the frames because they had lovely gold frames around them, gold gingerbread work on them. We sold them or gave them to welfare or something, got rid of them anyway, took the pictures out of them and threw them away.

Riess: Did your mother do the cooking and sewing?

Stewart: Yes, she did all the cooking. No sewing. We had a sewing woman that came, a Miss Cheeseman, I always remember. She used to come once a month, I think, and stay for two or three days. She didn't stay; she came and went. She lived in the Mission and she came and went but she would "sew us up" as Mother said.

Riess: Did she have dashing new designs or was it always the same thing?

Stewart: Oh, it was just the most awful plain stuff you ever saw!

Mother used to buy our clothes at Hastings, of all places, which had a girls' department then that was very good, and I remember Mother used to buy quite a few of our clothes there, but Miss Cheeseman would do the other things.

I remember one day Miss Cheeseman was there and Mother was out, and she got sewed out. She had nothing to do, and she said, "What can we do?"

I said, "Let's make me a dress." So I went into Mother's room and she had a drawer that she kept material in and I got out this piece of white material.

Miss Cheeseman said, "This will make a nice dress," and we went ahead and made the dress and found out we made it out of Mother's kitchen curtains! [Laughter] She came home and she was furious with me because I had taken that material. She had gotten it and it was very nice material, just summer material, and Miss Cheeseman had made a nice dress for me out of it and I loved it. Everybody would say something about my dress and I'd say, "It's made out of my mother's kitchen curtains."

Riess: You were the kind of child that would always tell the truth.

Stewart: Mother was so embarassed when I'd say that.

Riess: Things were usually white, weren't they?

Stewart: Yes.

Riess: So much trouble to take care of.

Stewart: Mother always wore lovely tailor-made suits. She used to come home from downtown or wherever she was, and she'd go up and take off that suit and put on a white dress and white shoes. They were like nurse's uniforms. They were plain white and she used to send them to the laundry and they would come home just stiff and starchy. She wore three or four of them a week.

Stewart: She'd come down and go in the kitchen and put on a kitchen apron and make the supper, because she was not one for having a maid around or anything of that sort.

Riess: Was she a good cook?

Stewart: Oh, a very good cook, very good, an excellent cook.

Riess: In what tradition?

Stewart: Oh, pies and cakes and roasts, fried chicken. I always remember she used to make one fried chicken: she'd fry the chicken and then fry another pan of fried onions, cut up kind of thin fried onions, and then just for the last twenty minutes she'd turn the onions over the chicken. She called that "Chicken Smothered In Onion," and oh, it was good.

Riess: Yes, it sounds very good. I can see why your father didn't want her to go running away during the earthquake and fire.*

Stewart: We had a couple of uncles who had gone up to Benicia with the family and they would come back and stay with us on the week and then go back to Benicia on Sunday after the transportation got better. They would always bring back rolls and cakes and things from up there because we couldn't bake.

I had one brother-in-law whose name was Jim Harris and when he came out here to California--he had two sisters that married two brothers and they never changed their names, which was worse. This Uncle Jim Harris came out, Aunt Ella and Uncle Jim, and they couldn't distinguish between the two Jim Harrises, so they called him Jim Cooper. His father had been a cooper, so he was Uncle Jim Cooper to us but his name was really Harris. [Laughter]

Cable Car Etiquette

Riess: Was the Golden Gate Park one of your childhood memories?

Stewart: I can remember going out there to play on the lovely playground there. It had merry-go-rounds and you could buy apple pie a la mode.

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*Lucy Murdock Harris' obituary said of her that "her chief interest in life was always her home."

Stewart: At the time of the earthquake in San Francisco the schools all closed and in June they had a mass graduation of all the classes--high school and the grammar school--in Golden Gate Park. We sat in our class and they handed around the diplomas. It was down there where the bandstand is, there in that group, and we were all gathered there--oh, thousands, because there were so many schools and they all had graduating classes.

Riess: When you went to parties or dances later would the boys pick you up in buggies or would you all just hop on the--?

Stewart: We'd go on the streetcar. I always remember we used to wear long white kid gloves and one time four of us went together, Hilda and her beau and me and my beau. We got on the streetcar and the streetcar gave a jerk, and Hilda put her hands like this [crosses hands over her arms] and somebody caught her because she wasn't going to grab onto any stanchion with her white kid gloves on. She was going to save her gloves in all events.

Riess: Was it safe to be on the cable cars at night?

Stewart: Oh, I wouldn't be on there by myself. I'd be with somebody generally.

Riess: But if you were by yourself would that be considered to be all right?

Stewart: Well, I don't think it would be considered to be all right. I think young women stayed at home or went out with an escort. You didn't do much alone.

When I was in college I had a beau who came and had breakfast with me and then we went down on the streetcar together to the ferry and then we'd go across on the 7:00 ferry and get to Berkeley for an 8:00 class.

Riess: Your mother fed him breakfast?

Stewart: No, she didn't get up. I would get breakfast. We would just have coffee and rolls or something.

The Panama Pacific International Exposition, YWCA Building

Riess: And was the Exposition a great moment?

Stewart: It was the most beautiful I've ever seen, and I've been to a

Stewart: good many. I've been to the New York one and the Chicago one and another one in San Francisco and different things when we've been to other places, but I tell you that nothing ever came up to that one. It was simply beautiful. There was one court there that was all pink hyacinths and oh, the smell of those hyacinths at night was simply beautiful.

Riess: Was there a lot of anticipation of the whole thing on the part of the people in San Francisco?

Stewart: Oh, yes. Everybody bought season tickets. They bought them early so they had the money to spend on the things there.

When I got out of college I worked in the YWCA there at the Exposition after the Exposition closed. The girls, saleswho were finishing up and closing up their exhibits, had to have some place to go and it was so rainy and the buildings all leaked, it was a terrible mess. So we kept the YWCA open and the fire going in the living room and those girls would come in there and buy a lunch and sit by the fire.

Riess: Which Y was this?

Stewart: Well, it was run by the San Francisco Y on Sutter. They ran this YWCA building throughout the Exposition, and afterwards for awhile they kept it open with a cook and a busboy and me.

I had the best time. I remember one day I was going to a luncheon downtown and I came pretty much dressed up that day, and somebody said, "Where are you going?" I said, "I'm going downtown, and look at the rain! It's just pouring buckets and I've got to go out to the streetcar and get on that car."

Pretty soon somebody drove up in front and the busboy ran out and said, "Here's your transportation," and it was the patrol car. They came and took me over to the streetcar!

Riess: You made a lot of friends in that place.

Stewart: Well, we had a lot of good times there. I learned more about cooking from that man because he showed me how to make things stretch and how to make things go, stuffed eggs--to put some mashed potatoes in them or something to make them go further.

Riess: How did you get that job?

Stewart: I was working down at the main Y on Sutter Street, and I knew Mrs. Merrill very well. She suggested that I maybe could go out there and do that while it lasted. It was only about a

Stewart: month or so that it lasted.

Riess: What kind of job was it though that you had been hired to do at the main Y?

Stewart: I was assistant to the general secretary. I was one of her slavies, I didn't have a very good job. [Laughter]

Riess: You were living at home then?

Stewart: Yes, I was living at home, and Father said, "Now, you're going to get a salary, and you're not going to have any expenses, so you can put the money in the bank and save it, and I'll start you off with a couple of hundred dollars," or something like that. I've forgotten now what it was.

And when we were to get married, which was in August, he said to me, "I want to go down and straighten that out and put some more money in the bank for you." We went down and we met Mortimer Fleishhacker at the door. He was the president of the bank at that time and he walked over with us because he knew Dad well and he was talking to Dad.

Dad stuck my bank book through the window at a certain young teller and the man came back looking pretty worried and Dad turned around and said, "Yes, young man, what's the matter?"

He said, "This account has been overdrawn." I had never had a checkbook in my life and I was having the best time!

Mortimer Fleishhacker just busted. He just roared and walked away. Dad turned to me and he said, "That poor boy!" He was feeling sorry for my husband. [Laughter] Well, it didn't last long. I got down to business right away when I had to do it.

Summer Vacations

Riess: Where did your family take vacations?

Stewart: When I was young we went up to Calistoga Hot Springs. Mother was raised in Clear Lake County and she used to love to go back there.

But when I got to high school we rented a house in

Stewart: Larkspur, which is near Mill Valley, not too far away, in Marin County. Dad didn't think there was any point to buying a house. He'd rather rent a house. So we rented for the whole summer and every year we went back to that same house each year and I used to have the best time because I used to have people over all the time from San Francisco to stay a week or so with me and we could do things. We'd go down and row on the slough, down there near San Quentin, and we did a lot of those kinds of things. We had a very good time. Mother was a good cook and she would supply the meals and we used to help her a little bit, of course, around the edges, but we had a wonderful time in that great big old house there in Larkspur.

It had porches all over it, and we had beds all over the place, outdoors under the trees. It was lovely.

Father would sometimes come in the middle of the week, but mostly he came on Friday nights and stayed until Monday morning.

Transplanted Californians

Riess: You were such a Californian. How did you survive the move East?

Stewart: Well, we loved it. We went there in '29. We had never known what it was to see snow or anything of that sort and we just loved it. We were really very popular people because we didn't rub California into them all the time. They were so afraid we were going to do that!

We didn't have any friends back there at all, we just went back there absolutely without neighbors or friends or relatives or anybody. We had never been East before, and we walked into this new place. We took a nephew with us to live too at the same time. Charlie's sister was a missionary in India and this boy of hers had a couple more years of high school, and so we took him with us. Our son Jim and he were very close, although he was older than Jim. They had good times together.

Riess: Had you always as a Californian or as a Westerner thought of the East as a place where people were more sophisticated or more cultured?

Stewart: Oh, I thought so. When Charlie had a chance to move there--he had a chance to choose between Baltimore and Boston--I said I thought I'd rather go to Boston on account of the educational

Stewart: facilities. There's more colleges and more places to be there, and I didn't convince him completely, but he thought so too.

We went to Boston and we got an apartment for awhile while we house-hunted, because we couldn't stay in a hotel, and the company wasn't very crazy about having that kind of bills. So I went out with a man and found an apartment that was big enough for all five of us, and then started house-hunting.

I got hold of a real estate man; I had heard that Newton was an awfully good place to live around Boston, so we went out through there and I found this great big flat, four bedrooms and two baths and we lived in that for a couple of years. That was in Newtonville, and that was where the kids went to school and Jimmy went to junior high.

Then we moved up to another great big house and we lived there. Then we had to move to Providence, Rhode Island, and we lived there in a couple of places, and then we moved to Washington, D.C.

Riess: That sounds so frantic. Weren't you always having your fingers crossed that California would be your next assignment or wereyou really ready to be free of it?

Stewart: When we went there they told us it would be two or three years and we were nineteen years in the East and we didn't mind it at all. We really got along beautifully and had a wonderful time there.

Charlie went there as a manager of a company in Boston. It was American Bitumuls Company, a paving company connected with the Standard Oil Company--so you didn't lose your Standard Oil seniority at all.

He went there and in the process he brought people back with him. Shortly after he got there he sent for this one and that one and the other. So we ended up with a bunch of people from California coming back there to live and we used to have Thanksgiving and Christmas dinners with all of them there. We'd have as many as twenty-eight or thirty for Christmas dinner and Thanksgiving dinner in our house. They'd come and bring their children and stay all day and stay until after supper at night when they'd clean the turkeys. [Laughter]

Riess: So you got down to making the turkey soup.

Stewart: No, I wasn't ever much for turkey soup. I don't like turkey soup very much. But when we cleaned it up we cleaned it up pretty well!

Riess: Did you have regular expeditions back to see your family?

Stewart: Oh, yes. I used to come about every year or so. They came to visit us, too. Mother didn't, Mother was very sick toward the end, but Dad came a couple of times for Christmas back there with us in the East, and I would come out and bring the children. Charlie couldn't come because it was a busy time for him. Paving was a summertime job; in the winter it was more a promotional job. So he would stay home and I would come. I drove out two or three times with the children.

Riess: What is bitumuls?

Stewart: It's bituminous asphalt.

Riess: Is that what we call macadam, or black top?

Stewart: It's the black top. It's the kind you see on the road that goes down dry.

One time we were riding along the road and Jim saw this pile of stuff by the road and he says, "Oh, isn't that awful!" and Charlie turned to him and he said, "That's your bread and butter!"

II THE UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

[Interview 2: January 24, 1978]

The Gymnasium Course

Riess: Why did you think you would stay only two years at Cal?

Stewart: Well, I just felt that I would have had enough by that time. [Chuckles] I wasn't a student very much and I just thought, oh dear, I think I'll go for a couple of years and then I'll quit. That's why I took the two year physical education course under Professor and Mrs. Magee. You could get a certificate at the end of two years in the gymnasium.

Riess: Did you have classes with the great Galey?

Stewart: No, but I had Henry Morse Stephens, some classes with him. I took German too. I took a regular course, but most of my work was in the gymnasium.

We learned to get up and instruct in gymnastics and that's why I never know which is my right hand or my left, because I used to be up in front of the class and I would say, "Your right hand," and it would be your left, of course, because you would be doing the opposite. We did have some anatomy courses with other people, but the Magees, they taught the gymnasium part.

Riess: You were equipped then to teach gymnastics to girls?

Stewart: Yes, physical ed.

Riess: How about group sports?

Stewart: I did play basketball in college. But there wasn't any of that in the course. There was just the part of it that was

Stewart: physical.

Riess: How about dance?

Stewart: We had square dancing.

Riess: Gymnastics today is an art.

Stewart: Oh yes, we used to have the rings and the bars and things like that. But it was mostly classwork in a large class, a class of about thirty, I guess, that were taking it at that time.

Riess: All with the intention of being PE teachers?

Stewart: Yes.

Riess: A two-year degree was all they needed?

Stewart: Well, they got a certificate for these two years.

Riess: What did you wear?

Stewart: I think we wore white middy blouses and black bloomers and tennis shoes.

Riess: Was it just girls in this class?

Stewart: Yes. It was held in the girls' gymnasium in Hearst Hall.

Riess: What was that building like?

Stewart: It was a high dome kind of place. It had lots of dressing rooms and showers and things of that sort. There was one room in the back where the girls would go and have their lunch there.

Riess: You mean lunch that they brought?

Stewart: Yes, lunch that they brought, and Mrs. Hearst always supplied tea and cream and sugar and the girls could make a tea for themselves. She used to do such lovely things. At the time of the Big Game, she used to send up boxes of chrysanthemums for the girls to wear, the ones that had beaux or were going out with somebody, they could go there and get a chrysanthemum and go to the game.

Phoebe Apperson Hearst

Stewart: I used to take Mrs. Hearst to Mrs. [Winifred] Rieber's for her sittings when she had the portrait done that was hung in Hearst Hall.* The Riebers lived up on the hill, back somewhere, not too far from the campus.

Riess: You used to take her?

Stewart: I used to walk up with her oftentimes, yes. She'd come down to campus to Hearst Hall, and we'd go together.

Riess: Why were you assigned that?

Stewart: Well, I don't know. [Chuckles] It just happened to be. Then, of course, I was AWS [Associated Women Students] president when the picture was hung and when it was dedicated I helped to do that.

Riess: So how many sittings would you say she had?

Stewart: Oh, she had lots. I didn't go to all of them but I used to go to some of them, and Mrs. Rieber would come to her for some.

Riess: But the two of you would walk up, and discuss what?

Stewart: Oh, just discuss the time of day.

Riess: Was she interested in you personally?

Stewart: She was interested in <u>everybody</u> personally. She was just so interested in the girls in the gym there.

Riess: Who had commissioned the portrait? Had she herself?

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*For more on Professor and Mrs. Charles H. Rieber see Pepper, Stephen C., <u>Art and Philosophy at the University of California, 1919 to 1962</u>, ROHO, Berkeley, 1963, pp. 96-101.

JESSIE HARRIS

1914

Stewart: No, no, I think the University most likely.

Riess: Did she dress very elegantly for that?

Stewart: She had a lovely lavendery purple stiff dress on and I just remember it was kind of lavender purple.

Riess: Did she walk up in it or did she take it with her and then change?

Stewart: She'd take it with her, yes.

Riess: Can you describe Mrs. Rieber's studio?

Stewart: No, I can't. I never went into the studio. I would just go up and leave her there. I never was in there.

Riess: Then did you wait and walk back with her?

Stewart: Yes, some of the times, or somebody would come for her, her chauffeur would come for her.

Riess: How much contact did the girls have with Dean Lucy Stebbins?

Stewart: Well, she had a little house in Berkeley and she used to have a great many of us there for Sunday night suppers and things like that. She was a very nice person in kind of a stiff, stern way because she was, I think, from Boston or somewhere. But she was always nice to the girls.

Riess: She stood for stiff upper lip, or moral—

Stewart: Oh, yes, moral turpitude [chuckles], whatever that is. She was very interested in things that went on.

Riess: What kind of contact with her did you have in your various positions?

Stewart: Well, I had quite a bit the last couple of years. I used to see her a lot because there would be problems that would come up; or she'd send for me and I'd go; and I'd go to her for advice and things. She was very nice.

Pledging Delta Delta Delta

Riess: I guess we ought to go back and describe your meteoric rise

Riess: from little Miss Harris to the president of AWS. In your first two years were you involved in University affairs?

Stewart: No, not very much because I commuted from San Francisco and I didn't get involved in very much campus activities aside from the gymnasium and I knew the girls in the gymnasium so well. They were from all walks of life. A good many of them were not sorority girls and I got to know them so well and liked them so well. I used to stay over there for lunch half the time instead of going home to the house for lunch.

Riess: Home to the house?

Stewart: I was at the Tri Delt house.

Riess: When did you become a Tri Delt?

Stewart: When I first entered college.

Riess: Did you know some girls that were there?

Stewart: I knew the Frisbie family, two girls ahead of me, and Edith was one of my bridesmaids and she was a friend of mine from high school days and we were rushed before we went to college even and went in there very shortly after we entered college.

Riess: You mean some of the girls from Lowell were rushed?

Stewart: Yes. Edith Frisbie and Marianne Bell and I were three that went in together into the Tri Delt house from Lowell.

Riess: So if you were living off campus what sort of things did you do with the Tri Delts?

Stewart: Oh, I'd stay over a lot for dances and things like that and Monday night I'd stay over for our fraternity meeting, but I always would have to come home the next day, get over back to San Francisco after school was out, so that made kind of a--I didn't have as much contact as I would have liked on campus.

Riess: Did you start taking a role in fraternity organization or government of the Tri Delts?

Stewart: I was a very poor Tri Delt, I'll tell you. [Chuckles] I was good, I mean I paid attention to business, but I stayed away an awful lot because I was at gym all during my freshman and sophomore year. I'd stay over there and eat lunch.

Riess: So you're saying really that as much as your social life took place in the gym as it--

Stewart: Well, no, we had a lot of social life there, of course, at the house. But it would be weekends. I'd stay over on weekends.

Riess: When you say girls from all walks of life--

Stewart: A lot of them were not sorority people at all.

Riess: That would mean then that they were from a lower class?

Stewart: No, some of them just didn't want to join. They called them "plebes."

Riess: Were there places in the sororities for everyone if they wanted to join?

Stewart: Sure, not if they wanted to join, but if they were asked to join. There were a lot of sororities in those days and a lot of clubs, a lot of very nice clubs.

Riess: I do think the University probably did draw people from all walks of life, people you might never have met, people from farms or from southern California?

Stewart: Or from Fresno or Bakersfield or places like that where their folks had a ranch or something, but they were very nice girls. I got to know them very well and I really think that was one of the reasons I was elected as AWS president. There were four of us who ran at the time we ran, three other sorority girls and myself, and I won because of that vote. I got to know those girls so well and they got to know me well and they didn't know the others at all.

Riess: The others just didn't have that contact outside of the sorority house?

Stewart: Not outside of the sorority house. They used to say afterwards, "Well, no wonder you stayed away." It never would have entered my head to be doing any politicking or anything like that. I just liked to be there.

Moving Over to Berkeley

Riess: Tell me again, please, how you finally came to live on campus?

Stewart: I met Dr. O'Brien on the street in San Francisco one day, and he said, "How's everything going?"

I said, "Well, going all right, but they don't let me live over there. They want me home." (My sister had been married and they wanted me to be at home.)

Riess: To help out or just because they were lonely?

Stewart: Oh, they were lonely. They wanted somebody at home to bring them the news and all that sort of stuff.

So he said, "I'll fix that." About a week later he met my mother on the street and he said, "How's Jessie? I saw her the other day and she didn't look awfully well."

Mother said, "Oh, my, what's the matter?" and she took me down to him right away. He went through all the rigmarole of taking a blood count and all that stuff and he said, "Well, I think she'd doing a little too much. I think she'd better quit college." Of course, by that time they didn't want me to quit and he said, "Either that or she's got to live over there."

So right from then I lived over there at college.

I met him one time on the street later on and I said, "How was that blood count?" and I knew it was all right because I was majoring in bacteriology.

He said, "If it had been any better you'd have been sick." [Laughter]

Riess: That's a good story. He was a good friend.

Stewart: Ah, he was a good friend.

Well, Mother got to be very proud of the fact that I was doing well and everything, but she hadn't realized she was cramping my style terribly keeping me home.

Riess: Was that your second year?

Bacteriology Studies

Stewart: That was the end of my second year when I went into the regular work of bacteriology. I went over there for the last two years, '12 to '14.

Riess: How did you make that decision?

Stewart: I was interested, of course, in that sort of thing. The anatomy brought those things into line and I kind of went into it pretty naturally. I don't know whether there was any--there were several professors that I had that were very, very close to me and very near to me. Dr. John Neverson Force was head of the bacteriology department and he was awfully good to me.

Riess: Were some of the people in bacteriology--the women--then going into medicine?

Stewart: Yes, yes. Some of them went into medicine and some of them went into being bacteriologists in hospitals. One of them is still working at the blood bank in San Mateo, but she does it on a basis of volunteer service. She doesn't get paid or anything. She doesn't want to work that hard but she works pretty hard.

Riess: Did you have classmates among the women who became doctors?

Stewart: I don't know whether I did or not. I don't know.

Riess: Did the sorority place any emphasis on academics? Was there any competition among the sororities, for instance, to have a group of really academically top girls?

Stewart: Well, we had to keep our grades up. There was that about it. There was a house senior going after you when you didn't keep your grades up. But I don't think there was any competition between the sororities at all.

Riess: Were some of them known to be the places where the "best brains" were?

Stewart: No, I don't think so.

Riess: How would the house senior know what everybody's grades were?

Stewart: Well, the senior in our house would see your grades and say, "You've got to pick them up now. You've got to do better than you're doing," or something like that.

Riess: Other than the senior at the house you must have had a resident house mother. Was she a very important person in your life?

Stewart: No; she was there; she was a chaperone; she was important because we all loved her, but she kept in the background a good deal. She was just there and saw that things were properly handled and that there were no escapades of any sort around. [Chuckles]

Riess: Did there tend to be escapades?

Stewart: No, no.

Riess: There wasn't any attempt to sneak the boys in?

Stewart: Oh, no, nothing of that sort in those days.

Riess: How about cigarettes and liquor?

Stewart: Oh, nothing of that sort. There was nothing of that sort in the house at all in those days. I don't know about cigarettes. Maybe there might have been a few. I don't know. But they were very secretive about it. [Chuckles]

A Friendship With President Wheeler

Riess: Where was the Tri Delt house?

Stewart: We first lived on College Avenue and Dwight Way on the corner there. It was just a regular plain old house, but it was a good big house. It's now a service station on that corner. We rented it and it was sold, then we moved over to Arch Street on the other side of campus and that was when I got to know President Wheeler so well because it was right up the hill--outside the campus, but right up the hill from the president's house. I used to come over in the mornings so often and he'd come out of his front door and come down the steps and I'd be

Stewart: going by and I'd stop and wait for him or he'd stop and wait for me and we'd walk across together. Oh, he was a nice man.

Riess: What did the two of you talk about?

Stewart: Oh, we talked about--he'd ask me all kinds of questions about where I went to school and what I did and one morning I remember he picked up the corner of my sweater and said, "Is that silk?"

I said, "No, that's not silk. That's just cotton."

"Well," he said, "I'm glad of it. There's too much silk around this campus!" [Laughter]

Riess: Was he getting the pulse of the people in talking to you?

Stewart: Oh, yes. One morning he came out of there. I remember he was so mad because they had discontinued a course that Benjamin Jr. wanted to take [chuckles], and it was discontinued. That was the first year and Benjamin Jr. was wanting to take the course, and it was discontinued.

Riess: I've never heard of Benjamin Jr.

Stewart: I don't know whether he's still alive or not.

Riess: Do you recall whether he was a success in life?

Stewart: No, I don't think he was. He wasn't very successful socially in college. He was kind of a queer kind of a boy, kind of a stick.

Riess: How about Mrs. Wheeler? Did you know her?

Stewart: I did but I wasn't very fond of her. [Chuckles] I always remember one time the Wheelers came to the house for a Tri Delt faculty dinner. We had gas logs in the living room, and President Wheeler stood there and was talking to one of the girls, and Mrs. Wheeler said, "Benjie, look out, you'll burn your coattails!"

After they left for home, one of the girls got up and stood by the fireplace and said, "Benjie, look out, you'll burn your coattails" and she looked up and there he was, standing in the door. He had forgotten his rubbers! He just roared, he laughed about it! It was funny, but, oh,

Stewart: Gwen felt terrible!

She [Mrs. Wheeler] kept very much in the background. She was very much like Bess Truman in that sort of thing, kept in the background a very great deal of the time. Of course, she went to receptions and things, she'd be there. But she was very stiff and starchy.

Riess: And it sounds like Wheeler did better in his student contacts than in his faculty contacts.

Stewart: Oh, I think he did, although I don't know.

Riess: I've read that he was a paternal sort of a president who really didn't want the students to overdo it in the academics, wanted them to have fun.

Stewart: Yes, he was very nice that way. I always remember one morning when he said to me, "Where did you go to high school?" I said, "I went to Lowell." He said, "Those Lowell children, they certainly get along in the world after they get over here!" [Laughter]

Riess: Do you remember the university meetings?

Stewart: Yes, he was a wonderful speaker. I have a book--I gave it to Roger [Samuelsen]--I had a book of Benjamin Ide's speeches. They were compiled in a book and one of them was our graduating talk and it happened to be one of the ones that was a good one. When the 1914 class graduated he gave it at the Greek Theater and, oh, it was a wonderful speech. He used to be a minister, you know. He graduated from Brown University, I think it was, and went on into the clergy before he became a president.

Presidents Wheeler and Barrows

Stewart: Of course, then they left the campus and David Prescott Barrows was the president for my last year, 1914.

Riess: That's because Wheeler went to Europe?

Stewart: I don't know where he went, but he disappeared.

Riess: I think he did go to Europe and that was the time he met the

Riess: Kaiser.

Stewart: Oh yes, I remember that. There was some talk about that. But he was a very nice man. I liked him very much.

Riess: Did you have any contact with Barrows?

Stewart: Oh yes, my senior year I saw a great deal of President Barrows.

Riess: How would you contrast him with Wheeler?

Stewart: [Psuses] Well, I don't know. He was a very pleasant man. He was a very jovial man, and he wasn't stiff at all or anything like that, but he was very interested in college and the university as a university and I think he was very popular with the faculty.

Riess: When I hear about those days so many meetings could only happen because people walked instead of drove and they had a chance to talk.

Stewart: Oh, yes. There were just several cars. I remember we had one girl in our class who had a little red roadster and she used to drive. But there were very few cars. You walked.

Riess: You got to know people because you had a chance to talk to them.

Stewart: Oh, sure.

Riess: Was the president's house a place where student events took place?

Stewart: They had some events there. I remember going to a luncheon there one time after a University meeting; he invited the speakers to lunch afterwards.

Riess: That must have been in your AWS years.

Stewart: Yes.

University YWCA

Riess: How did you broaden your contacts on campus during your

Riess: junior year? What were your activities then?

Stewart: Well, I was quite active in the YWCA there. The girls on campus would go there a lot. We had a very nice scretary; Lily Margaret Sherman her name was. They had a building there on Telegraph.

Riess: What kinds of things did you do? Did you work off campus?

Stewart: No, no, we worked on campus.

Riess: Doing what?

Stewart: Having meetings and doing things there for the Y. People, the girls, would come in in quantities.

Riess: You mean girls from the town?

Stewart: No, from the campus. It was the campus YWCA. She was the general secretary of the University of California.

Riess: Yes, it's just that I'm used to the kinds of activities of the University Y today, like going out and doing social work in the community.

Stewart: They didn't do much of that sort in those days. It was just giving girls a Christian attitude towards life. That was their goal, I think, as much as anything. She did an awful lot to help girls that were lonely or in trouble or something of that sort. She was very good.*

Riess: Would you be assigned a "little sister" or somebody to work with?

Stewart: Oh, no. I don't think so. I never was.

Riess: When you say a "Christian attitude," what does that mean?

Stewart: Prayer meetings and things like that.

Riess: So the Y was one of your activities in your junior year, and in your sophomore year you were class vice-president.

Stewart: Was I? I'd forgotten that.

Riess: Yes.

Stewart: Well, when we went over there to college we went over eighty strong from Lowell High School and, of course, when we'd run

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*Mrs. Stewart continued to work with the YWCA in Glendale, California and in the towns in the east where she and her family lived

Stewart: for office we'd get elected because there was a large majority of people that knew other people and would say "well, he is a fine person," or "she is--" or something.

Campus Offices and Torch and Shield

I know when we had our freshman class meeting, somebody nominated a man, who was really a nice man, in fact he was Milton Marks' father, [State] Senator Milton Marks' father. He got up and said he couldn't do anything now, but later on he might be interested, and everybody just howled because everybody was saving their steam for later on. [Laughter]

Riess: Was it difficult to combine the academic with all of this class activity? Did you have to burn the midnight oil?

Stewart: Sometimes if I had a speech I had to burn the midnight oil a little bit because I wasn't a speech-maker.

Riess: I wondered if that came easily to you?

Stewart: It didn't come so easily. I even took a public speaking course, a couple of them.

Riess: As soon as you were elected president of AWS that also meant that you became a member of Prytanean?

Stewart: I was Prytanean in my junior year.

Riess: What was that for then?

Stewart: Well, I had mixed in a lot of things around campus. I can't remember exactly what all, but I was busy around campus.

Riess: What was Torch and Shield? Was that a great honor, and a secret one?

Stewart: Yes, you weren't supposed to tell anyone the whole year, and then at the Pilgrimage time at the graduation you wore your ring, and I thought that was terrible.

Riess: Whose idea was this whole Torch and Shield thing?

Stewart: I think this emanated from the dean's office. She needed some

Stewart: help with problems and she asked several people and they joined this little group, I think; I may be wrong about it.

Riess: I think you're right. I think it was the other dean, though. I think Lucy Sprague Mitchell was the dean who thought that one out.* How were you asked?

Stewart: I don't remember that.

Riess: Did they explain to you what your job would be?

Stewart: It was as an advisory capacity. We were to help the dean in any way we could and bring to her things that needed her attention, and things of that sort. But we didn't do very much.

Riess: Because if you were not known in this role, then things might not even come to your attention.

Stewart: They were more liable to come to your attention than if they knew you were a member. They'd keep things from you if they knew you were a member of that.

It really was hard on me. I was very upset about the whole thing because one of my very best friends who was a Tri Delt and became senior vice-president of the class, she and I led the procession at the Pilgrimage, and it really hurt her terribly to feel that I had been there all year and had never said anything about it because I couldn't, and I felt very guilty about the whole thing.

Riess: Of course you couldn't, you were on your honor.

Stewart: I know I couldn't, but she didn't—I know it made a little difference in her feelings. All year I had been doing this kind of thing and not saying anything about it. I felt very badly.

Riess: How difficult. It sounds like you were really spies.

Stewart: I don't think we were spies exactly, but we were to bring to the dean's attention things that needed correction.

Riess: On what order? Give an example.

Stewart: I didn't do any of it. [Chuckles] I was no good as a Torch and Shield member. I was really no good at all because I didn't

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*See The Prytaneans oral history, page 77.

Stewart: see that there was much that needed attention that we couldn't take care of ourselves.

Riess: Would these be matters of honor? Of cheating?

Stewart: No, no, nothing of that sort. I mean more social things. Girls getting too friendly with boys and that sort of stuff that she had problems over.

Riess: As AWS president what kind of liaison role had you? Were you the spokeswoman for women?

Stewart: Well, I would go to the president about different things, I can't remember what for instance, but I would go to him just once in a very great while when I needed some advice on something or other. He would give it gladly.

Riess: Were feminism and the vote issues for women?

Stewart: No.

Riess: So you weren't doing battle for women?

Stewart: No, nothing of that sort, no.

The Campanile Cornerstore Ceremony

Riess: The years that you were there many buildings went up on campus. In that period of time under John Galen Howard, Durant Hall was finished, the Agriculture Hall was finished, Sather Gate and the bridge, and Sather Tower.

Stewart: I think a little part more of the Chemistry Building was added on. The Doe Library I think was built around that time.

Riess: That's right. It was just finished in 1911 too. But it is striking to think of how many things were completed just then.

Stewart: The population of the campus grew quite a little bit and I think they needed more buildings.

Riess: What is in the cornerstone of the Campanile that you helped to dedicate? [March 18, 1914]

Stewart: Oh, I don't know what all, a Daily Cal for that day and, oh,

Stewart: I don't know, a lot of stuff.

Riess: Who selected it?

Stewart: President Wheeler did.

Riess: Was there a great gathering for that?

Stewart: Oh, yes. We gathered around right down near the foundation of it. I don't think they had loudspeakers. The crowd was close enough so they could hear most of the talk.

Riess: Was that a speech that you had to rehearse ahead of time?

Stewart: [Laughter] Yes. I think, as I remember, that I took the topic of the bells. We all chose a different thing to talk about and I talked about the chimes.

Women Leaders and Classmates

Riess: When you were rehearsing your speeches would you do it in front of your Tri Delt sisters?

Stewart: No, I don't know where I would do it. I would try to get off somewhere by myself.

Riess: Do you recall anything of Jessica Peixotto?

Stewart: I knew her but I don't remember anything much about her.

Riess: There were some accomplished women at Cal then. I was thinking about what women expected that they might do with themselves, and who they could look to among their professors to see that there were no limits.

Stewart: Grace Bird, for instance, was the dean of women in Bakersfield, and Marjorie [McIntosh] Sutherland was a dean of women somewhere down there.

Riess: Are these girls who you would have guessed would become--?

Stewart: No, I never would have guessed that Grace Bird would, but Grace Bird I think still is quite active.

Riess: Yes.

Stewart: She was an awfully nice person, and I don't mean but well, yes, she could have been a leader very easily.

Riess: How about some of the others who were just really outstanding in your recollection? Grunsky?

Stewart: Clotilde Grunsky [Taylor], yes. She's still active in the Alumni Association. She writes a little bit about the 1914 class in the alumni bulletin.

Riess: Any of them you would have expected to go places who just disappeared from view completely?

Stewart: Deborah Dyer. I don't know whatever became of her. Deborah Dyer and Minerva Halprin. Oh, there were quite a number of girls who were very good people.

Riess: Deborah Dyer was one of the speakers in that Campanile cornerstone laying.

Stewart: Yes.

Riess: And J.L. Schoolcraft--who was he?

Stewart: He was our senior president, I think.

Riess: Aubrey Drury. Do you recall him?

Stewart: Yes. He became something quite famous in the state of California, in Save-The-Redwoods.

Riess: That was Newton Drury.

Stewart: Newton Drury, that's right. Aubrey was pretty good too. [He was a writer and like Newton, a conservationist. S.R.]

Riess: Donald McLaughlin was in your class too.

Stewart: He was a tennis player, wasn't he?

Riess: I know that his mother was close to Mrs. Hearst.

Stewart: Maybe Donald McLaughlin's mother was her secretary and that was why Mrs. Hearst sent a special train up to Oakland and took us all down to Pleasanton for the day, the whole class, on account of him.

Riess: And served you lunch?

Stewart: Yes, a beautiful sit-down lunch.*

Life in The Sequoias: Retirement

The first day The Sequoias was open I moved in: June 1, 1961.

Riess: How had you heard about it?

Stewart: I heard about it through our church in Saratoga. There was a notice sent that there was to be a meeting in the Los Gatos Presbyterian Church.

Our minister spoke to me about it because I was at loose ends. My husband was gone and this great big house that we lived in up there on the hill was too big for me alone, and the children didn't like me to be alone, and all that stuff.** So I went to listen to this man and I was so fascinated by it that I came home and wrote a check and applied right then for coming in.

I felt that it was just near enough to my daughter, who lived in Saratoga. My son didn't disapprove. He approved of it heartily. He said, "Mother, you won't live with either one of us and we don't want you living alone and I think that's the best thing you can do." My daughter didn't feel that way. She felt I should have stayed in Saratoga and maybe get a smaller house with a white picket fence and give cookies to the children. [Laughter]

Riess: Have you found it to be what you expected?

Stewart: Oh, absolutely. I haven't one criticism to make of this place in all that time. Of course, there are times when the food

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*For more, see McLaughlin, Donald, Careers in Mining Geology and Managment, University Governance and Teaching, ROHO, 1975, p. 14.

**"Sunshine Hill" in Saratoga was designed by Hugh Comstock in 1948. Thomas D. Church was the landscape architect.

Stewart: maybe isn't quite as good--but it's never good at home all the time.

Riess: How about the population of people?

Stewart: Oh, the people are wonderful. There were about fifty of us who came in the first day and we became very close friends, that fifty. It was two weeks or so before some more came in; they let us get settled and then they added some more. Of course, the furniture trucks that came in here were just terrific! They had to wait in line outside to come in. And, of course, the place wasn't finished. I mean the buildings were all finished, but the paths weren't in and oh, it was muddy!

Riess: You were discovering familiar faces among the people?

Stewart: Oh, yes. I knew several people very well. I knew a Mrs. Reese very well, who's a friend of mine, and Alice Porterfield and Sue Love who were both at Cal before my day. I had a couple of friends from Saratoga who came in at the same time I did and a couple of old friends that came in later. So it wasn't a new venture completely. The part of it that I loved was the fact of getting acquainted with so many people my own age and my own walk of life really. They were just not wealthy but they were not poor. Of course, now you have to be wealthy to come in. [Laughter]

Riess: It's gone up so?

Stewart: Oh my, it's gone up in price. When I came in, this place was $16,000, this two-room, and now it's $32,000.

Riess: When you said you applied, was there a committee who decided who could and who couldn't come in?

Stewart: Oh yes, you had to make out an application and you had to have recommendations. For instance, I had one from my minister and my doctor and a couple of other people who recommended me. It was kind of a thing to do to become a member here. Well, they still have to go through quite a little bit. You have to have a medical exam before you come in so they know you're perfectly safe for awhile to come.

Riess: I'm curious about how much focus there is on the problems of illness and aging and so on among the residents? Is that a topic of conversation?

Stewart: Oh, no, no, and when there's a death, there's just a little notice in The Sequoia which is our magazine which simply says, "In memoriam, So-and-So." Of course people have died, quite a lot of them, because a lot of them were, well--of course, now they're limiting it so you can't come in after you're 75, but before that there wasn't any age limit so some people came in here fairly old when they came in. But there is a health center here and they do a very fine job, and the nurses come around and you can have food in your room, and when you're sick they have tray service. All in all, they take awfully good care of you.

There's very little talk about ailments. I know the other day I met another woman in the hall over there. She said, "Hello, Jessie."

I said, "Hello, how are you?"

She said, "Do you really want to know?" and I said, "No!" and we both laughed and went on our way. [Laughter]

You say, "How are you?" so easily. "Do you really want to know? I could give you an organ recital if you wanted it!"

Riess: It seems a very independent life. It could be lonely.

Stewart: Well, it isn't though because you have activities. There's square dancing every Wednesday night; they have a caller and sometimes they have eight squares. They have current events on Wednesday mornings; a man comes from the school and we pay for that lecture. Then they have Friday night entertainment and they have Monday night bingo, so consequently if you wanted to you could be busy all the time.

There are eighteen buildings here and one hostess in each building and when a newcomer comes in they generally go to meals with them for a time or two and show them what to do and how to go about wrapping your garbage and things like that. They have it all organized.

They have a council here of twelve people.

Riess: Did you get involved with that?

Stewart: I was president one year. [Chuckles] I didn't want to be. The president died and I took over for the rest of his year, which was only two months, and then I made a little speech and I said, "Now, I want it definitely understood that I am

Stewart: not to go on another year. I did this, and I filled in for Wes, and I was glad to do it. But I don't want to go on."

So when they took the vote there were eleven for me, and one for somebody that I voted for. [Laughter] They just thought it was a good thing and they'd keep me on instead of trying to change in the middle of the stream.

Riess: And because the tape is about to end, this seems like a good stopping-place. Thank you very much, Mrs. Stewart.

Transcriber: Michelle Stafford

Final Typist: Leslie Goodman-Malamuth

THE FAMILY OF JESSIE W. HARRIS AND CHARLES W. STEWART

Jessie W. Harris

m.

Charles W. Stewart

Barbara Murdock

m.

Colin F. Bell

James Angus

m.

Carolyn Everts

Janet Stewart m. Donald G. Sather

Curtis

Colin Ferguson, Jr.

Allen Harris

Jeane m. Roger Samuelsen

Robert
Jamie

John Tower m. Lynda Allen

Rebecca
Joshua
Ethan

Ann m. Barry Reder

Elizabeth

APPENDICES

A. James W. Harris, The Cable Car Reaches Maturity, from Edgar M. Kahn, Cable Car Days in San Francisco.

B. Jessie Harris Stewart Interview, from The Prytaneans, an Oral History of The Prytanean Society, Its Members and Their University 1901-1920.

Chapter IX

JAMES W. HARRIS

THE CABLE CAR REACHES MATURITY

THERE STANDS on the southwest corner of California and Hyde streets a two-story, out-of-date, wooden building. The old-fashioned bay windows command an excellent view of the busy intersection. From the basement rises the monotonous hum of drive shafts, wheels, and motors. From the slots in the middle of Hyde and California streets emanates the song of the cables, suggesting the pulse beat of a metropolis. This building, which was reconstructed after the fire, is divided into two parts. The wooden portion houses the California Street Cable Railroad Company's executive offices. The brick structure houses its cars and the power plant for its cables. The interior of the building has remained virtually unchanged since 1906. Groups of blue-uniformed conductors and gripmen, waiting to relieve platform men on duty, are often found standing around the entrance.

On the second floor one finds a dark office on the door of

from Edgar M. Kahn, Cable Car Days in San Francisco, Stanford University Press, 1944.

Cable Car Days in San Francisco

which is inscribed the word "President." Here, facing the window, sits an aging man. When one approaches him he has probably just completed the sale of a book of school tickets and is waving a bewildered child out of the office. A sparkle is in his eyes and a kindly smile plays about his lips as he remarks: "The selling of weekly tickets to school kids is one of the functions of the president of this company."

From his out-of-date desk with its crowded pigeonholes and with papers relating to pending business piled on its top, President Harris is able to look down on the cable crossing, from which, for over half a century, the cars have kept moving over the hills. He is the one man who, because of his close connection with the company since its inception, is in an excellent position to discuss its history. He is probably the only living man who has been affiliated uninterruptedly for sixty years with the same streetcar company.

Harris tells the following story:

I was born at Pictou, Nova Scotia, on December 28, 1854. There were nine children in our family. I left my place of birth for the United States when I was seventeen years old, worked for a while in Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Illinois, and then moved on to California, the land of unlimited opportunities.

The train took eleven days to cross the continent. The trip over the prairies, at twenty-five miles an hour, was rough, dusty and monotonous. George Pullman's new palaces on wheels were operating in the East, but only day coaches were supplied to Western travel. At night I would adjust the seat in an attempt to secure some comfort and sleep. A considerable part of the food I needed on the journey I took with me. A stove in the car was used to prepare some simple dishes and to make coffee. There were frequent shifts along the line, as there were several independent railroads interconnecting; engines had to be changed, and delays were the rule rather than the exception.

Somewhere in Utah our progress was blocked by a landslide. The conductor informed us that it would be days before a train could pass. I had the alternative of either returning with the train to the last station or walking ahead three miles to where the conductor could tele-

graph for an "extra" to take us on. I decided to walk ahead, and shall never forget that adventure. The rain poured down pitilessly, and fitful gusts of wind drove sheets of water into our faces. Our feet sank deep into the mud, and we had to push through brush and wade shallow streams before we finally arrived at the next depot, which was nothing but a slab shanty. The only sign of life was a scraggy, half-drowned chicken wandering aimlessly about. After a while a woman appeared wearing a calico bonnet and holding her scanty skirts. She was willing enough to make us comfortable; but not a mouthful of anything in the way of food, not even a cracker, was to be had, and we saw the dinner hour come and go, in a state of melancholy depression. After six hours of waiting an "extra" arrived and we resumed our journey. The eager discussion of this last adventure drew us closer together, leading to a pleasant companionship among the passengers, who turned out to be quite a congenial lot. I was then about twenty years old, but looked rather mature for my age. Of course I was a total stranger in the West, and while I had a sister living in San Francisco I did not even know her address.

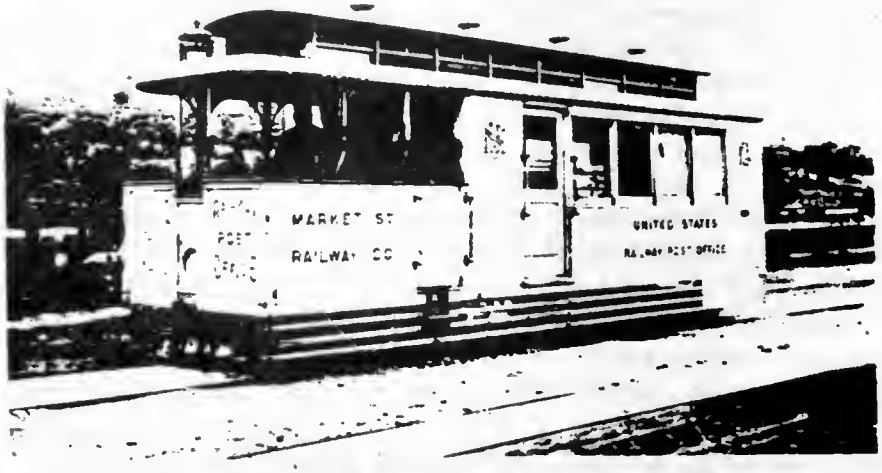
As we neared our destination, a fellow came through the train offering information and assistance. He introduced himself as a Wells Fargo agent, and he looked the part—tall, strong, and of the true Western type. Prefacing his statements with the remark that he was not allowed to do any soliciting, he emphatically recommended the American Exchange as the best place at which to put up. Whether Wells Fargo and Company had an interest in that particular hostelry or the hotel gave the agent a commission for drumming up business, I never knew nor cared. Those were the days when the hotels had their horse carriages at the Broadway Depot and the driver with the loudest voice had the best chance at the business.

My first impression of San Francisco was favorable, and I remember quite distinctly saying to a young fellow who traveled with me: "Here is where I am going to stay." And I made a resolution then and there to make good in this promising community.

San Francisco was a young city; everything looked new; everybody seemed to have something to do—life was free. The town was renowned for men of wealth and accomplishment and for its beautiful women. It was the westernmost outpost of civilization, and the heart of the West.

My interest in cable cars began when I first saw a little vehicle tugging its way up the Clay Street hill without being pushed or pulled

Western terminus Sutter Street branch, United Railroad, 1900



Market Street Railway Company mail car, 1888

James W. Harris

by any visible mechanism. I shall never forget the thrill of seeing the car moving along without any engine or horse propelling it.

I had hardly any money left, but easily secured my first job, which paid me a few dollars a day. For eighteen months I was employed at a quicksilver mine in Lake County, at an unattractive, barren, God-forsaken place. When the carpentry work for which I was hired was completed, I was overjoyed to return to San Francisco and determined to be more discriminating in the future as to the jobs I would accept.

My next employment was with James B. Haggin and Lloyd Tevis in Kern County on a 90,000-acre ranch. While working there I made one of my periodic trips to make purchases at a grocery store in one of the communities near by. There I was confronted with the spectacle of five Mexicans being hanged in a courtyard. I shall never forget that gruesome sight. Their offense was horse stealing, which had become so commonplace that law-abiding men had to take justice in their own hands.

A short time later I heard of a job and was advised to call regarding it on Henry Root in the three-story brick building on the corner of Fourth and Townsend streets. This building housed the offices of the Central Pacific Railroad Company. Henry Root was connected with the Pacific Improvement Company, a construction subsidiary of the Central Pacific. He engaged me as a carpenter with the California Street Railroad at $2.50 a day. The Pacific Improvement Company had constructed the cable system for Leland Stanford. I started to work in April 1879, when the line was being extended from Fillmore Street to Presidio Avenue. The date was approximately a year after the company had begun operations. It was my duty to repair the cars. I soon became shop foreman and later master mechanic. In 1889 I had charge of the extension work along Hyde, Jones, and O'Farrell streets and also of the extension from Kearny to Drumm Street, where S. H. Holmes was employed as engineer. In 1909 I became vice-president and general manager and was given a place on the Board of Directors. Upon the death of J. Henry Meyer in 1922 I was elected to succeed him as president and also retained my former title of General Manager.

Previous to my taking charge of the road, our cables were purchased from various companies, including Roebling's and some English and German concerns. I came to the conclusion that it would be more satisfactory to have the cables made locally, although the price

might be somewhat higher. The California Wire Works, with whom Hallidie was connected, was in a position to meet our needs.

In the early days of the California Street Cable Railroad Company, I became acquainted with Governor Leland Stanford, whom, of course, I had known by reputation. I can remember his silk hat, his gold cane, his long-tailed coat, low vest, black tie, and turned-down collar. He was a large burly man with a ruddy complexion, and his gray-blue eyes were deep-set. He spoke with a low and melodious voice. He enjoyed a high degree of popularity, which was well deserved because of his vigorous and resourceful character. On the street when they met the "old man," all who knew him would take off their hats, and the Governor would courteously return the salutation. He was credited with being the father of the Republican Party in California. Before coming to the Coast, he practiced law in Wisconsin and this qualification and experience was of great value to him in many ways in his subsequent career. It is a mistaken idea that Leland Stanford's influence rested wholly on his wealth. He was a born leader and made his influence felt in every community where he lived. The private life of this pioneer was simplicity itself. He was slow spoken, direct and earnest in conversation, and religious at heart. His educational ideals were inspired by a conception of teaching and training for usefulness in life.

One of the best stories I heard Leland Stanford tell was during the gay 'nineties when gentlemen wore expensive diamond and pearl studs in their shirt fronts. In later days, the diamond studs were worn only by gamblers and saloon men. When Charles Crocker returned from his European trip, he showed his friends his pearl studs bought in Paris. He was proud of them and showed them to the Governor.

"Rather expensive?" asked Stanford.

"Yes, but I like them," replied Crocker.

Next day when the two met at a directors' meeting, the Governor asked Crocker to see him for a moment.

"Charlie, what do you think of my pearl studs?" asked Stanford.

"My golly! they are beautiful. Really, they are better than mine. Where did you get them?"

"Oh, well, I bought them in San Francisco."

"Rather expensive?"

The Governor chuckled: "Charlie, I discovered them in a store on Market Street. I gave the man three dollars for them."

James W. Harris

I recall another prank played by Stanford of which Crocker was the target. In those days these two bosom friends would drive their fast horses through Golden Gate Park with such speed that one day a park policeman lost his patience and stopped Stanford to remonstrate with him. The Governor was always suave and pleasant.

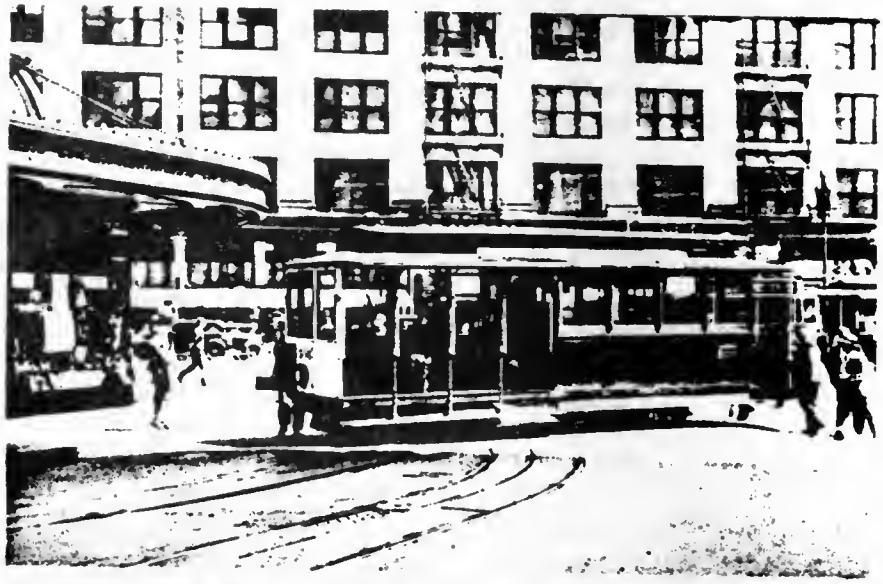
"Officer, you are right," he said; "but don't stop me this time. Charles Crocker is right behind me going just as fast as myself, pinch him instead of me."

Whereupon, with a smile, he lightly tapped his animal with the reins and the horse raced away. Looking back he saw that Crocker had been stopped by the same policeman, as had been suggested.

The earthquake marked the passing of the time-honored institution of the livery stable, which was in some respects the prototype of today's garage. A good part of the livery stable's income was derived from the Sunday buggy rides through Golden Gate Park to the Cliff House. When the horses were returned on Sunday night, the stable-keeper never failed to make the same comment: "You've druv this hoss purty hard, young man." In those days it required no license to drive a horse, and almost every male knew how to handle the ribbons. Patient Dobbin in his time served his task faithfully, and today when one sees a "nag" carrying on instead of being in the pasture to enjoy his few remaining years, one might be reminded of those bygone days when the prominent Nob Hill dwellers considered it important to maintain their own stables.

From this bay window overlooking California Street I have observed the different ways women use to stop the cable cars. Their attitudes and facial expressions are characteristic and seem to offer a clue to their individuality. For example, there is a severe, long-faced, old-maid type. She raises her arm almost as soon as she can distinguish the figure of a gripman and with her forefinger takes deadly aim at his eyes. The workings of her mind are written all over her face. Her countenance speaks, saying, "Pass me at your peril." The fear that a car may not stop is latent in the majority of women's minds. This accounts for their extraordinary earnestness and energy in halting it. They frequently overlook the fact that the management has a service to perform and depends upon its patrons' fares to pay wages. Some women gesticulate with both arms, much as if they were signaling a locomotive to prevent an accident. Anxiety is registered all over their faces. When the car stops they probably feel convinced that a single

James W. Harris, with cable-car grips



Market Street Railway Company, Powell and Market streets, 1942

gesture less on their part would have failed to bring it to a halt. The fact that the gripman is employed for the purpose to stop for passengers, and is particularly instructed to do so, apparently does not enter their minds. Very often young and pretty women who have faith in the power of their personal appeal merely incline their heads gracefully toward the gripman, certain that he and all the world are eager to serve them. There is also the humble woman, with her baskets and bundles. She knows by reason of her parcels that she will be unwelcome to passengers and conductor, and the knowledge makes her shy or defiant in proportion to the sweetness or bitterness of her nature.

During the years that I have been connected with the company I have trained myself to give careful attention to the details of my work. As a mechanic in the company's shop I gathered a great deal of experience which later proved valuable to me as superintendent. Many and varied were the episodes I witnessed.

One of them, which I particularly like to relate, happened one morning in connection with my difficulty in opening the office safe. I was compelled to send for an expert locksmith. He came and tried the combination, but for some reason it did not release the bolts of the lock. He listened to the sounds made in turning the dial, and as he could not get satisfactorily by ear the sounds that he wanted, he placed one end of a straight-grained piece of wood between his teeth and rested the other end on the rim of a disk containing the dial. By this means the sounds were conducted to his brain, enabling him to make the mechanism click; and, presto, the lock yielded and the safe was opened. The operation took about twenty minutes. I asked him what his charge was, and he told me it amounted to fifteen dollars.

I pointed out that it took him only twenty minutes to do the work and that forty minutes would cover the time of the absence from his shop and insisted that he render me an itemized bill. The safe-opener complied with my request, and this was his bill:

Cable carfare to and from shop	$ .10
Time absent—40 minutes	1.00
Knowing how	13.90
	$15.00

I appreciated the force of logic contained in the last item and paid the bill without further comment.

Cable Car Days in San Francisco

I have always enjoyed good relations with our platform men. For the past fifty-two years I have conscientiously endeavored to be fair in my dealings with them and helpful to our employees whenever I could. Perhaps the confidence the men had in me was a contributing factor inducing the Market Street Railway people to make me an offer to work for them. That was in 1902, when Charles Holbrook was president. Their strike had just been settled, and the management wanted me as superintendent. The offer did not attract me because I was satisfied where I was. In 1913 I was invited by Supervisors Vogelsang and Hayden to accept the superintendency of the Municipal Railway. Although I had the assurance of the fullest confidence of Mayor James Rolph, Jr., the Board of Supervisors, and the Department of Public Works, I could not persuade myself to make a change. The California Street Cable Railroad Company was my pet, and no other system could have the same appeal.

I remember the consolidation of the principal railways of the city in 1893. At that time it appeared as if too much capital stock had been issued for the various lines. The Market Street Railway people received $13,500,000 in shares for their system, the Omnibus Company $3,000,000 for their property, and the Ferries and Cliff House owners $1,500,000 for their franchise, rolling stock, and real estate. With that amalgamation, the Market Street Cable Company, Market and Fairmont, Park and Ocean, Potrero and Bayview, Southern Heights and Visitacion Valley, City Railway Company, Central Railway Company, Omnibus Railway, North Beach and Mission, and Ferries and Cliff House systems ceased to exist. In 1902 the United Railroads took over the operation of the Market Street, Sutter, Sutro, and San Mateo Lines.

In 1907 the Market Street Railway Company, under the presidency of Patrick Calhoun, acquired one thousand shares of the California Street Cable Company's capital stock. The shares were purchased from the Fireman's Fund Insurance Company, with the intention of eliminating further competition. These plans were changed subsequently and the investment was liquidated in 1917. This abandonment was ill-advised, when one considers the excellent earnings of the California Street Cable Railroad Company through the years. The record of the profits under Stanford's stewardship is not available, but it is a known fact that the investment was a lucrative one. Up to 1940 the company had paid approximately six hundred dollars a share in dividends upon the original per share investment of sixty dollars. In addition, the earnings

were sufficient to replace the rails in 1908, to retire $960,000 of the First Mortgage Six Per Cent Bonds which were issued to finance the construction of the Hyde Street Line, to build a new power plant, and to defray the cost of the extension from Kearny Street to Drumm Street—all this on the basis of the five-cent fare which was instituted over sixty-five years ago. The policy of the company is to maintain this five-cent fare upon the twelve miles of track it now operates, in spite of the fact that seven and one-half cents is the average prevailing rate throughout the United States.

Furthermore, the properties, as carried on the books, have been written down to the maximum extent allowed by the California Railroad Commission and a high-grade investment portfolio has been accumulated through the years, available as a reserve against losses due to accidents and other unforeseen contingencies.

One must not overlook the rapid changes that are taking place in mass transportation. The recent improvement in streamlined trolley cars, the developments in the field of diesel power and super busses have been noteworthy. I hesitate to prophesy what the future holds for the remaining cable-car lines in San Francisco. The history of this company has been so closely interwoven with the growth of this city that its future arouses considerable interest with sentimental-minded citizens.

Mr. Harris finished. A satisfied smile conveyed the thought that he had nothing further to say. His eyes seemed to moisten a trifle as he turned in his chair and resumed reading the correspondence awaiting his attention.

CLASS OF 1914

Jessie Harris Stewart

Interviewer: Margaret Marshall

Date: April, 1969
Portola Valley, California

Int.: I'm Margaret Marshall, class of 1955, and I have four lovely alumnae of Prytanean from the Berkeley campus here at The Sequoias today. We have Alice Porterfield, class of 1908 (q.v.); Jessie Harris Stewart, class of 1914; Josephine Miller Powell, class of 1916 (q.v.); and Leila Berry Thornburg, class of 1917 (q.v.).

Mrs. Stewart, what do you remember about how you became a Prytanean?

JHS: Well, I was just searching my mind, and I don't understand how I ever made Prytanean because I can't remember anything I did in my junior year. I was a little bit more prominent in my senior year [laugh]. I was in the YWCA and just general roustabout around the campus. But in pinpointing it to any one thing, I don't know; I don't think I deserved to be in it.

Int.: What did you do the night that you were initiated into Prytanean?

JHS: Well, I was rushing chairman at our house that night, and they were having a big dinner party and I was helping in the kitchen. And I dumped a whole can of cayenne pepper in the salad [laughing], which was a terrific thing and set me off in a very queer mood for the Prytanean initiation because I was exhausted and completely upset. So I got the giggles during the initiation, which is a beautiful initiation, and I was mightily ashamed of myself [laughing].

Int.: What influence did your experiences at Cal, including Prytanean, have on your later life?

JHS: I don't know that Prytanean did any more for me than any fine organization would have in making me have some ideals that I didn't have before. Because as I look back on that initiation and listened to it many times afterwards (after I'd gotten over the giggles), I realized that it was a very beautiful ceremony and that it couldn't help but make us better people for it. But I don't know that it ever exerted any influence on my life in the world, aside from making me better, maybe.

Int.: I think that's important! What have you done since you graduated?

JHS: I married a Standard Oil man, as Leila [Berry Thornburg] did, but we stayed in this country. Most of our married life was spent on the East coast. I was in Boston and Rhode Island and Washington, D. C.

LBT: How many times did you move?

JHS: We moved about 23 times [laughing] in the time that we were married. But I managed to do little things in the town that I'd be in, like work on YWCA and Girl Scouts and take turns along with my children and do church work.

Int.: Those are all important things anyway.

JHS: That's right.

Int.: Back to the campus, would you like to comment on the relationship between Prytanean and Torch and Shield? Alice Porterfield said that Torch and Shield was formed in 1908 to help the first Dean of Women, and it was characterized by extreme secrecy.

JHS: Some of the girls resented it, because all year long you were right with these girls and they were not members and you were.

Int.: Right. And you were aware of everything that was going on. That was its purpose really; our membership was composed of people from several different activities on the campus.

JHS: I always felt that it wouldn't have hurt for them never to have known. Really, from the point of view of doing some good and making no enemies, it would have been better if we could have left college not having anybody know we'd ever been in that small group. If we were wanting to serve the University and serve the Dean, it wasn't necessary to wear our rings at Commencement time.

Int.: No. Well, actually we wore our rings the whole senior year. They knew who we were, but they didn't know what our purposes were. Mortar Board had an investigation of all women's groups on the campus and wondered who they all were and wanted to know what Torch and Shield was. Our group got together and wrote a poem. I forget the details except that the end of it was "Are we in heaven, are we in hell? You'll never find out, and we'll never tell!" [All laugh.]

JHS: But you see in our year, and I don't know how long it lasted, we didn't wear our rings until Commencement, and that created a great deal of bad feeling among the other women who really were as eligible as we were.

Int.: It's just a very small group, and it's hard to include everyone.

JHS: I think it's better to wear the ring all year.

Int.: Yes, everyone knew who we were. Now are there any things that you can remember especially that are real highlights of your four years at the University?

JHS: Well, I remember one thing. During my senior year in 1914, the Campanile was completed. And I was one of the speakers when it was dedicated. And our names went in the cornerstone, you know.

Int.: Your name is there now then!

JHS: Yes, it's gone into the box that went into the cornerstone. That was a real event in our lives, when the Campanile was built.

Int.: That's interesting. Do you remember what you said?

JHS: Oh, no! Some time I could show you a picture of what I wore, the most terrible-looking suit that came to the ground. It was a blue suit, and I had a hat that looked like a coal scuttle. I was very well-dressed, in 1914 style.

Int.: What did you wear for just every day to campus? This is something that students now might be interested in.

LBT: Middy blouses!

JHS: These Peter Pan sailor navy blue suits with the cuffs. And we also wore skirts and sweaters.

JMP: I can't remember anything except the middy blouses.

AWP: We had a man tailor in San Francisco who made the suits.

JHS: We bought ours at Hastings. But remember the little old gentleman down on the waterfront named Joe Harris who sold middy blouses? We used to get them there. That was my [maiden] name, and I was always getting kidded about my father who sold the middy blouses [laughs].

Int.: What do you remember most about the Earthquake and Fire of 1906, Mrs. Stewart?

JHS: The most vivid memory I have of the whole thing is dashing to my family's front window on California Street and seeing one of the two complete steeples of St. Dominic's Church come crashing down. It just skimmed right off the roof. It was four or five blocks away but we had a very good view of it from our upper windows. And I just got there in time to see the thing go whoosh, like that.

Int.: Would you like to add to the recollections of Mrs. Hearst?

JHS: Yes, I would. During my senior year in college, the son of her secretary was graduating. No one really had known the boy, but she knew him and she was very fond of her secretary. She invited our whole class to Pleasanton for the whole day, on a special train from Oakland, and we went down there. He was the honored guest. She was a wonderful person.

Int.: What about President Wheeler?

JHS: Our house was on Arch Street then. I'd come out for, I think it was a 9 o'clock class, and bump into him coming down the steps, and we'd walk across the campus many a morning. I remember one morning I had a sweater on, and he reached over and he pinched it sort of and he said, "Is that silk?" And I said, "No, that's not silk; that's cotton." "I'm glad of it. There's too much silk around this campus!" He was all for the simple life [laughing].

Int.: What do you remember about the Partheneia?

LBT: It was pretty!

JMP: It was a money-making affair.

Int.: Did everybody come?

JMP: They hoped to have them all. I don't know how much money they made.

Int.: Did you have it in Faculty Glade?

JHS: No, not Faculty Glade. The first ones were held down there as you come in from what is now Oxford Street. There was a lovely glade. I suppose it's gone now, but that was where the first ones were.

JMP: Near the Life Sciences Building.

JHS: All those are built up now, but there was a lovely glade in there, and that was where the first one was held.

Int.: Have you been back on the campus in recent years?

JHS: I have, not too long ago. My niece drove me around. We drove our children around one time when we were out here from the East. We couldn't find a way to get out, and my son tactfully said, "Father, did you say you got out of this school?" [Laughs] We'd come on a barricade every time we'd try to get through.

Int.: The campus has changed a lot; a lot more buildings than there were. What did you do for recreation mostly?

JHS: I think the same everybody else does now. We had dances and house parties.

JMP: Recreation was all centered around the house, as far as I can remember.

JHS: I remember we had a very nice time!

INDEX

Jessie H. Stewart

Suzanne Bassett Riess

Grew up in Bucks County, Pennsylvania.
Graduated from Goucher College, B.A. in English, 1957.
Post-graduate work, University of London and the University of California, Berkeley, in English and history of art.

Feature writing and assistant woman's page editor, Globe-Times, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania.
Free-lance writing and editing in Berkeley.
Volunteer work on starting a new Berkeley newspaper.
Natural science docent at the Oakland Museum.

Editor in the Regional Oral History Office since 1960, interviewing in the fields of art, cultural history, environmental design, photography, Berkeley and University history.