



Hallett Smith, 1987

**HALLETT D. SMITH**  
(1907 – 1996)

**INTERVIEWED BY**  
**CAROL BUGÉ**

**April 15 and 20, 1981**

**ARCHIVES**  
**CALIFORNIA INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY**  
**Pasadena, California**



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## **Subject area**

History

## **Abstract**

An interview in two sessions, April 1981, with Hallett D. Smith, professor of English, emeritus, in the Division of Humanities and Social Sciences, which he chaired from 1949 to 1970. In 1970 he became a senior research associate at the Huntington Library but continued teaching part-time at Caltech until 1975, when he became emeritus.

He recalls his teaching career at Williams (1931-49) and Guggenheim Fellowship (1947-48) at the Huntington; invitation from President DuBridge to come to Caltech to replace Clinton Judy as chairman of what was then simply the Humanities Division. Discusses his duties, division's emphasis on teaching vis-à-vis research, course requirements. Recollections of C. Judy and Robert Millikan. Athenaeum lunches; scientific colleagues Morgan Ward, Charles Lauritsen, Robert Bacher. Attempts to bridge gap between sciences and humanities; philosopher Charles Bures; psychologist John Weir. Campus visits of

psychologist Carl Rogers. Humanities faculty as RAs in student houses: Horace Gilbert, Harvey Eagleson. Superb teaching of David Elliot and J. Kent Clark.

Carnegie Corporation funding; instituting Public Affairs Room; Caltech joins American Universities Field Staff. Appointment of geographer Edwin S. Munger; project Capricorn; Robert Huttenback, Frederick Lindvall, Robert Oliver. Beefing up of social sciences; division's name change (1966). Trend toward quantification. Carnegie support for chamber music. Becomes trustee of AUFS. Advanced English option, 1950s. Campus atmosphere during McCarthyism. Excellence in teaching exemplified by Charles Newton, David Elliot. Humanities option (1965); its effect on faculty recruitment. Semi-retirement to Huntington; teaches one course (Shakespeare) at Caltech. Controversy over granting tenure to Jenijoy La Belle. Chairing Athenaeum's Board of Governors and acquiring its liquor license.

## **Administrative information**

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**CALIFORNIA INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY ARCHIVES**

**ORAL HISTORY PROJECT**

**INTERVIEW WITH HALLETT D. SMITH**

**BY CAROL BUGÉ**

**PASADENA, CALIFORNIA**

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**ORAL HISTORY PROJECT**

**Interview with Hallett D. Smith**  
**Pasadena, California**

**by Carol Bugé**

**Session 1                      April 15, 1981**

**Session 2                      April 20, 1981**

**Begin Tape 1, Side 1**

BUGÉ: How about if we begin with your arrival at Caltech in 1949 and talk about your reasons for coming from Williams College?

SMITH: All right. I suppose the reason I left Williams, where I'd been very happy for eighteen years, was that when I first went there, right out of graduate school, I saw a good many elderly professors who once had been brilliant men but whose minds had gone to seed—probably because they had had no stimulus to keep alive. I was conscious of that as a possibility for myself. I had been there eighteen years, and I was afraid I would become a Mr. Chips or that I would go to seed. When I had an opportunity to do something quite different—namely, to teach English to students whose primary interests were in science, mathematics, and engineering—I thought it was an interesting challenge. I was also, of course, very much influenced by the proximity of the Huntington Library. I had been there three times before 1949, to do research and writing. In fact, in '47-'48 I spent the whole year on a Guggenheim Fellowship at the library. During that time, I wrote my book called *Elizabethan Poetry*. So I cannot say that my motives in leaving Williams and going to Caltech were single or simple.

BUGÉ: Had you come to know any of the faculty at Caltech in the time you spent at the Huntington?

SMITH: A little. I gave an Athenaeum lecture in that Guggenheim year. And I had met Clinton Judy, the chairman [1923-1949] of the Humanities Division, and George MacMinn [professor of English; d. 1972]. And I remember that Harvey Eagleson [professor of English; d. 1967] introduced me at that Athenaeum lecture. So I knew a few of them. But my principal contact was Louis B. Wright, who was the most important person at the library—although he was not director of it. He and I had become friends. And when Caltech was looking for a successor to Professor Judy as chairman of the division, they quite naturally asked Louis Wright for his recommendations. And he recommended me. So that, I think, was the most important connection between me and Caltech before I came there. Then, eventually, I got a message from President [Lee A.] DuBridge [Caltech president 1946-1968], asking me if I would meet him at the University Club in New York City on a certain evening, and I did so. And he asked my advice about people to be chairman of the division. I suggested several names, but he finally asked me if I would be interested in it myself, and I said that under certain conditions I thought I would. Those conditions were to have a modest amount of administration to do. I didn't want to become a dean. And he assured me that at Caltech, division chairmen were not overburdened by administrative duties. So when I came, it was my understanding that I would spend a third of my time teaching, a third of my time administering, and a third of my time doing scholarship at the Huntington Library. And this is the way it worked out, at first.

BUGÉ: You say “at first” as if it subsequently changed—or would we be jumping too far ahead?

SMITH: Well, after a while I reduced the amount of teaching I was doing. I finally taught only one course—and for a while that course was one for graduate students and it met in the evening. I should explain, perhaps, that at that time graduate students who were candidates for the master of science degree were required to take a year's course in the Humanities Division and I offered such a course, in English literature. There were courses for the purpose offered in history, in economics, and in philosophy. But the person who had taught such a course before was a visiting professor, Earl Leslie Griggs.

He taught a course in the influence of the Industrial Revolution on literature—that was of course mostly English literature of the nineteenth century, which was his field. But his reason for doing that was that he thought he should proceed from what were already the interests of his students. I took the exact opposite tack—and I think it was successful—not to presume their interests and try to connect with them but to start them on something quite different. So I chose four difficult modern authors—Eliot, Yeats, James Joyce, and Thomas Mann—and taught that course to Caltech students. They were, of course, challenged by the fact that these were difficult authors. They seemed to be very much interested in learning how to read them. Several times I was told by quite alert and interested students at the end, “Now, we’re ready to read those books.” [Laughter]

BUGÉ: Going back to your arrival at Caltech, can you describe what the transition to such a different sort of institution was like for you?

SMITH: Well, I had to learn my way by just feeling. Professor Judy had retired completely. He explained to me about the budget, for which I was responsible. And the then-head of the business side of Caltech, George Green, was also very kind to me and explained about the budget—what happened if you ran over budget and all that sort of thing. But it really was quite simple; I had my own secretary. I had not really done much administration before—I was acting chairman of the department at Williams for a while, but that didn’t involve very much administration. The first year that I was at Caltech, I was given by the Carnegie Corporation a young administrator’s travel grant. So in the spring term of that first year, I went around the country visiting other institutions—both liberal arts institutions, like Amherst College, and institutes of technology, more or less like Caltech. I visited MIT, I visited the Carnegie Institute of Technology, and I visited some major universities that had within them humanities programs. This was for the purpose of giving me perspective on what I might do that was new at Caltech. Now, to get at what was current then, you probably should ask somebody else, somebody who was here under Clinton Judy’s chairmanship. My understanding is that humanities were taught by dedicated teachers; they consisted primarily of requirements in English and in history, with electives in philosophy, economics, and some work in the foreign

languages. These requirements were specific. In freshman year, everyone was required to take freshman English, which was a literature and composition course, and modern European history. In sophomore year, everyone was required to take a course in American history. In junior year, everyone was required to take a course in literature, which was supposed to be more advanced than the freshman course; and senior year, everyone was required to take at least a one-year course—or three term courses—in the Humanities Division. There were a number of electives offered too; they were called electives, but they were in a sense compulsory. You could choose among a wide variety of them, and some of them were quite specialized—or concentrated, I should say. Then, also in the senior year, there was a little course required of all seniors—all three terms—which had been called, I think, Current Topics. And one of the leading members of the faculty then was J. E. Wallace Sterling, who left Caltech to become director of the Huntington Library just before I came, and then left after a brief tenure there to become president of Stanford University. He had been a very successful broadcaster of news programs over the radio during World War II. And he continued this Current Topics course.

One of the things that I found in my trip around the country was an interesting program at Dartmouth College connected with a public affairs room, which was a kind of library providing material from all sources on such matters as foreign policy, domestic politics, economic problems, and so on. So one of the first things I did when I got back was to start the Public Affairs Room at Caltech. It still functions, though now it has been combined with the Judy Library—and I suppose I might as well explain now that the Judy Library came about in this way. Clinton Judy died [1955] a few years after his retirement. And it is a testimony to his great success as a teacher that many alumni remembered him with great affection and contributed funds to the institute in his memory. The trustees decided that the thing to do with that money was to buy from his estate his own library, after his niece had chosen the books she wanted to remember her uncle by. That was done. Finally, we [the division] were able to move into Baxter Hall of the Humanities, where we had room for it. That became the Judy Library.

Clinton Judy was a bachelor. He lived in a very interesting house in San Marino which had a living room two stories high and what one might call a walk-in fireplace.



The bookshelves extended up those two stories; you had to get on a ladder to reach the upper shelves. And I'm told that he often had faculty and students there in his library and they had interesting discussions about books and reports they had read. So this was a memorial to a man, Clinton Judy.

BUGÉ: Did you have any contact with Professor Judy after you came here?

SMITH: Yes. He was a very kind and genial man. I went to see him. He gave me advice whenever I was puzzled about something. I think he was a bit suspicious of me, because he was afraid I would go too far in the direction of technical scholarship. Clinton Judy was an anti-scholar in some ways. He never got a PhD, but he had three master's degrees. And he believed strongly in literature as one of the important parts of a gentleman's life. He himself was a good example of that. And his younger colleagues—Harvey Eagleson, Roger Stanton [professor of English; d. 1976], Winch [L. Winchester] Jones [professor of English; dean of admissions, emeritus; d. 1987]—exemplified the same sort of thing. I believe, also, that there was still a bit of what I would call the Millikan philosophy about the humanities when I came. [Physicist] Robert A. Millikan [Caltech head, 1921-1945] strongly believed that there was no conflict between science and religion. He was a religious man himself. He was a pillar of the Neighborhood Church. He had brought—from Chicago I think—a philosopher who was also a clergyman and who taught philosophy at the institute and was the minister of the Neighborhood Church. Dr. Millikan's notion of the humanities, then, was really as a support for what one might call the ethical training of scientists and engineers. I had some conversations with Dr. Millikan; he was very much interested in what sort of person this new division chairman was. I remember when there was a faculty dinner at the Athenaeum and Robert F. Bacher—the new chairman of the Division of Physics, Mathematics, and Astronomy [1949-1962]—and I gave short speeches, I stressed what I thought the humanities were for in a scientific institution. And Dr. Millikan seemed very pleased. One time later, he was very displeased with me, because at a Christmastime YMCA lunch I was asked to give the program, and I agreed to do some readings from W. H. Auden's Christmas oratorio called *For the Time Being*. Now, Auden was a very

religious person, but he was a modern poet and he expressed himself in terms that were not quite respectable and traditional. And Dr. Millikan, I was told, was shocked by what he heard me read. Mrs. Millikan appealed to Harvey Eagleson because she was so worried about her husband's distress, and Harvey told me. Well, at that time there was a magazine which we took in the Public Affairs Room called *Christianity and Crisis*. There was an article in it by Amos Wilder—a professor in the theological school at the University of Chicago, and the brother of Thornton Wilder—in which he emphasized the close relationship between much modern poetry and Christian faith and mentioned Auden particularly. So I turned this over to Harvey Eagleson, who turned it over to Mrs. Millikan, who turned it over to Dr. Millikan, who was then satisfied. [Laughter]

BUGÉ: When you first came to Caltech, did you have much social contact with people from the other divisions—with the scientists?

SMITH: Oh, yes. Yes, a lot. The faculty contained a number of people who were interested in some branch of the humanities. I think, for example, of Morgan Ward, who was a distinguished mathematician but who was very, very much interested in modern poetry, and especially in Wallace Stevens. I was one of the first professors in the United States to teach Wallace Stevens, which I did at Williams; and I was fascinated to find a mathematician at Caltech who had read Stevens thoroughly—who was even prepared to give a lecture on him, and did at the Athenaeum. There were others—almost too numerous to mention—who in one way or another were cordial toward the humanities. Then, I had lunch at the Athenaeum every day and ate at one of the big tables where the luncheon companions would be people from engineering, from science, from humanities. I have known people in English departments in great universities who never exchanged a word with a physicist. Well, of course, Caltech was small. And that's one of its great attractions and was one of its great attractions to me. It was no bigger than Williams. And there was, of course, no such thing as a departmental boundary. Caltech was divided into divisions, not into departments. And there was a good deal of interplay between people in the various branches of science. Sometimes it was hard to tell whether someone was in science or in engineering. And it was not at all unusual for us, in that

senior course in required world affairs, to call on somebody like Charlie [Charles C.] Lauritsen [professor of physics; d. 1968], who'd played such an important part in World War II, or Bob Bacher, who was the first scientist on the Atomic Energy Commission, to talk about things that were essentially national policy, not technical science. So, as far as friendship was concerned, as far as social contact was concerned, I'd say, Yes, I had an unparalleled opportunity to get to know and be friends with scientists and engineers.

BUGÉ: Did you make some attempt to keep up in their fields?

SMITH: Well, I subscribed to *Scientific American* and read it insofar as I could. I attended lectures; I knew perfectly well that there is much in science that will remain a closed door to me because I did not have the mathematics, which is the language of science. I'd never taken calculus, so I would have to be illiterate about a great deal of science. But at Caltech there is every encouragement for the scientists to explain to an intelligent layman, insofar as they can, what they're doing. And I found them very ready to do that. I did my best to inform myself. But I remember that one Christmas vacation I was taking a book out of the humanities library. A student of mine saw me there; he was taking out a Faulkner novel, and he saw that I was taking out a book by President [James Bryant] Conant of Harvard on science. Conant, of course, had made a tremendous attempt to educate non-scientists in science—a much harder job than mine, which was to educate scientists in the humanities. But this student of mine said, "Well, what are you taking that out for?" And I said, "Well, I like to learn something about science." He said, "Well, that's not the way to do it. You just learn about science by doing science, not reading about it." Well, I couldn't do that. I would have broken everything in the laboratory, anyway. So in answer to your question, I did what I could, but I realize that wasn't very much.

BUGÉ: Did you find that the students you were dealing with were quite different at Caltech?

SMITH: Yes. And I'll put it this way—this is an exaggeration: The students at Williams were very often students who had come from the best prep schools—like Andover,

Exeter, Deerfield, and so on—and they had had literature courses all their lives. If you said something about Keats, they would say, “Oh, yeah, Keats,” as if they knew all about it. If you introduced a Caltech class, a small class, to one of the odes of John Keats, it was a totally new experience to them. And they were fascinated by the way in which that poet’s imagination worked. What is there about a Grecian urn that is permanent and deathless? This is a hard idea for them to grasp. And they found getting really absorbed in that was fascinating. It was later, I think, when I had two interesting papers from a Caltech student, a mathematician, on the deformation of metaphor. Well, that was going far beyond anything that current literary critics were into at the time. [Laughter] But I think that’s right; I think that the very bright student is capable of, and interested in, anything, if it’s well taught to him. It has to be well taught.

BUGÉ: I’ve read that you tried very hard in the time you were at Caltech to close the perceived gap between science and the humanities. In doing that, did you encourage even further interaction than you have already described between students and faculty from the different disciplines, and how did you go about that?

SMITH: Well, there are some fields that are both science and humanities. Anthropology, I take it, is one—cultural anthropology certainly is. Another is psychology. We had Chuck [Charles E.] Bures, a philosopher, formerly a mathematician, who was teaching some psychology [1949-1974]; he also taught symbolic logic. I got a clinical psychologist, John Weir [professor of psychology], appointed to the campus [1951], and he formed a bridge in a very curious way. One of the things that was soon discovered was that very little was known about our procedure of admitting students. Winch Jones was in charge of it, and he was a very good dean of admissions. But John Weir introduced notions that very much advanced the sophistication of the process of selecting students—measuring abilities, keeping track of not only purely intellectual things but also attitudes, and of course it is in this respect that humanities are relevant to the whole process. We carried this on for quite a while. Finally, because Bob Bacher, who was then provost, was interested, we brought the eminent Carl Rogers—one of the great men in contemporary psychology—to Caltech for a series of conferences with students, with

faculty, and so on. This was something in which I was very much interested. And I think it was an attempt to bring humanities and the scientists closer together.

BUGÉ: Do you believe that a greater emphasis was placed on teaching in the Division of the Humanities than in other divisions?



**Hallett Smith lecturing on the Shakespearean theatre, Fall 1960.**

SMITH: Yes, there was. And the reason is obvious: that Caltech, in the science and engineering divisions, was as much research as anything else. In fact, as I understand it, one of the primary educational doctrines of the institute was to get, as soon as possible, students involved in research, even as undergraduates. But there were no graduate students in the humanities. There was really not much emphasis on research on the part of faculty members in the Humanities Division. Some of us did it. I was determined to continue mine. Rod [Rodman W.] Paul was a historian, who went to the Huntington Library and pursued his researches. But in general, there was not much research done by people in the humanities. Teaching is sometimes closely connected with research, particularly at more advanced levels. But sometimes it's not. And the faculty members

in the humanities were generally popular as teachers. I think every time the *California Tech* had a poll—they were informal polls in those days; not like this evaluation system that’s grown up lately—every time they had one of these informal polls, it was clear that students thought that by far the best teaching was done in the Division of the Humanities. Now, that’s necessarily so, obviously so, because we were all professional teachers. And many of the section courses, sections in science and engineering, were taught by teaching assistants—graduate students who’d had little experience and who were primarily interested in their own futures as researchers. So I think it is very clear that the emphasis was on teaching and that the students profited from that. Some of the faculty members in the Humanities Division had also been faculty residents in the student houses. Harvey Eagleson was a notable example of that. Horace Gilbert [professor of economics, emeritus; d. 1990] had once been, I believe, a resident in one of the student houses. Sometimes student houses would invite faculty members to become members of that house. I know Harvey Eagleson was a member of a house and used to wear the blazer of that house. It was easier, I think, for members of the Humanities Division to become close friends of undergraduates than it was for the permanent members of the faculty in science and engineering—because they had their graduate students, they had postdoctoral fellows, they had all that sort of thing.

BUGÉ: Did you have many close social ties with your students yourself?

SMITH: Yes. Well, I wouldn’t say as many as I had in Williamstown. I had some. We used to particularly invite freshmen to come over for Sunday night supper. Caltech students then were not very much at ease under such circumstances. But I remember one Sunday evening particularly. At that time, since all freshmen were taking both modern European history and freshman English, we thought it might be a good idea to have a paper assigned which would be graded by both the English instructor and the history instructor. We called this somewhat jocularly a “double jeopardy” paper. And I remember asking these freshmen that Sunday evening how they felt about it. And one boy said, “Sir, if you’re at all bright, you know when you take a course that the first thing you’ve got to do is to figure out what the instructor wants. And that isn’t very hard to do,

and then you just dish it out to him. That's easy. But if you have two different people, very different, and in different subjects, and then you have to write a paper that will satisfy both, then you really have to work at it."

BUGÉ: One more question on this topic: Do you think the faculty in your division were under less pressure to publish and to do their independent research because they were expected to be better teachers?

SMITH: Yes. There was never any pressure at all to publish. In fact there was no such pressure at Williams, either. One of the things that gave me satisfaction was that I had done my research and publishing because I wanted to, not because I had to at all. And I think some of the results—at least in the humanities—of this publish-or-perish thing are that a lot of trash gets published. Now, there was no pressure on faculty members in the Humanities Division at all. All I needed to do to get someone promoted to full professor stage by stage was to just demonstrate that he was regarded as a superb teacher. David Elliot [professor of history; d. 2008], for example, who came to us the year after I came, was a remarkable teacher, and he went right up to the top without any question ever being raised. There are others about whom I can say the same thing. One of the younger men who made a great career as a teacher and is greatly loved by students is [J.] Kent Clark [professor of literature; d. 2008]. Kent is and was a great wit. He is the author of a series of famous musical shows celebrating a Caltech worthy. His show about Linus Pauling when he won his first Nobel Prize was called *The Road to Stockholm* [1954]—and one on Lee DuBridge was called *Lee and Sympathy* [1966]. And those became great occasions. Kent is known, I suppose, to the general faculty mostly for those. But he's known to undergraduates as a very gifted teacher who took a special interest in his students as individuals.

### **Begin Tape 1, Side 2**

BUGÉ: Starting at about 1950, and possibly before, the Carnegie Institute gave Caltech quite a lot of money that was earmarked for the humanities. Could you discuss some of the programs that were instituted with that money?

SMITH: Yes. First of all, it's the Carnegie Corporation, not the Carnegie Institute. That name is about as confusing as the name Huntington, when we have the Huntington Library, the Huntington Hotel, Huntington Hospital, Huntington Beach, Huntington Drive. You have the Carnegie Corporation, which is the main big one; the Carnegie Institution of Washington, which jointly with Caltech has run astronomical observatories; the Carnegie Institute of Technology, in Pittsburgh; and the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. So it's the Carnegie Corporation that supported us. One of the officials—I think he was then vice-president—was John Gardner, who later became secretary of health, education, and welfare and the founder of Common Cause. John Gardner was very much interested in the possibility of making significant advances in the liberal education of scientists and engineers. I remember his telling me after that first trip I took around the country, financed by his organization, that what he suggested I do is to keel-haul those senior elective courses that I mentioned. I tried to do that, but it was a bit difficult because the senior electives depended so much upon the personality of the professor giving them. They were essentially individual courses. I tried to beef them up—to use a different figure of speech—and I tried to get people who could offer new and different things.

Well, I'll tell you specifically, I've mentioned already the Public Affairs Room. I instituted that with Carnegie money. I also got Caltech to join the American Universities Field Staff, which was an organization designed to utilize the resources that already existed in a training program called the Institute of Current World Affairs, where area specialists—or area generalists, I think they would rather be called—were trained by being put into the field in Africa, Asia, Middle East, a number of places, even sometimes in what we now call western or developed countries, but usually in underdeveloped countries. They would spend, say, two years in the field and then come and tour the member colleges and universities, teaching and lecturing and bringing back information about these areas. That turned out to be a very popular innovation at Caltech. It was after the war, and America had become, I think, much more world-conscious than it had been before. It used to be in my youth that information about such places was brought back by missionaries. That had almost ceased to exist. A few major newspapers, like the *New York Times*, would maintain correspondents in the field, but their purpose was to



report events rather than study the background to events. Well, the membership in the American Universities Field Staff enabled us to give a senior elective which would be taught by these people. Only a few of the staff would be on circuit in any given year. But in every year there would be some. Now, one of the consequences of that is that one of the most dynamic area people of the AUFS decided he wanted to settle down, and we persuaded him to join the Caltech faculty. He is Ned [Edwin S.] Munger [professor of geography; d. 2010]. He had a degree in political geography from the University of Chicago. He had taught at various places—a natural-born teacher and enthusiast. And when he came to us [1961], he brought with him his library of Africana, which is the largest and best library of African material in an individual's possession anywhere. So Ned has developed here a field of study. The only reason we have a significant position in African studies is that we had the right man at the right time who was willing to come. And, of course, when we were planning the architecture of Baxter Hall, we made sure there would be room there for his great library and for his activities. He's created almost his own field. Now, Caltech has a way of wanting to add new fields but finding it very difficult to get rid of old ones. Fortunately, we didn't have to get rid of anything when we brought Ned Munger here. But that was done by the support of the Carnegie Corporation.

At a later time, we got some Carnegie money to try to provide some research opportunities for people in the division. This was when we were moving toward the change from just a Division of Humanities to the Division of Humanities and Social Sciences [1966]—and I can say something about that later on. What we decided to do was to have a project—and this, now, is mostly Ned Munger's idea—called Capricorn, in which people from various elements in the institute would study Africa south of the Sahara. Bob [Robert A.] Huttenback [professor of history; chairman, Humanities and Social Sciences Division, 1972-1977] for example, who was interested in India and its modern history, knew that Gandhi had spent some time in South Africa, so he went there and wrote a book on Gandhi in South Africa. We at this time had an anthropologist, Thayer [Ted] Scudder [professor of anthropology, emeritus], who was primarily interested in displacement of tribes by the building of dams and things of that sort that altered the physical landscape. Fred [Frederick C.] Lindvall [professor of engineering,

emeritus; d. 1989] was interested in engineering education in southern Africa. And Bob [Robert W.] Oliver [professor of economics; d. 1998], who has been interested in international economics for a long time, was interested in the economics of some of these areas. So, with that money, we sent those people out and, with varying degrees of success, they pursued their things in the field. Now, this is not the kind of thing that could be continued. And it was a way in which what you might call social sciences began at Caltech.

BUGÉ: What year was that project?

SMITH: I have to look it up; I don't know. Soon after I came to the Institute, I became a great friend of Ruth Tolman, the widow of Richard Tolman [professor of physical chemistry and mathematical physics], who died the year before I came here. Ruth was herself a psychologist. She is the one who told me about John Weir—recommended me to him. She was also loved and admired by many of the senior people on the faculty who had known both her and her late husband. We tried to get the people at the top of the administration interested in doing something in the social sciences, way back in the fifties. I remember a meeting in President DuBridge's office, with Ruth Tolman, Charlie Lauritsen, Bob Bacher, I've forgotten who else was there—and the whole thing was discussed, just how far we should go in this. Was it not possible that at Caltech we could make a sort of synthesis of the social sciences in an environment in which rigorous standards such as those in science would be applied? Well, nothing came of that, really, because of the fact that some people felt that there was no reason why we could do it at Caltech any better than they could do it at some other institution. And everybody was fully convinced that Caltech shouldn't do anything unless it could do it at the very top, at the very best highest quality. So that wasn't done.

Now, more recently, of course, there have been a lot of appointments in social sciences and the present chairman of the division [Roger G. Noll; division chairman 1978-1982] is an economist, a social scientist. I would say that the big difference that has taken place in the last thirty years is this: When the division was the Division of the Humanities, the focus was on subjects and disciplines in which value judgments

constitute the heart of the matter—value judgments in literature, in history, in philosophy. And it was my belief then, and it is my belief now, that people are likely to make wise value judgments if they have had some training and exercise in making value judgments. It was clear to me then, and it's still clear now, that technically and scientifically trained people are increasingly going to have to make value judgments. So they should be trained in making value judgments—or “exercised” maybe is a better word than “trained.” I don't mean that somebody should dictate to them how to make value judgments; they should have practice in it.

Now, in the social sciences, what I observe has been going on is that the social sciences try to make themselves as much like the physical sciences as they can. They're trying to justify the word “science” there. And to them that means quantification, that means reducing everything that you can to mathematical terms. I don't think this fulfills the ideal of training in value judgments. Something that's quantified may be very useful, but that's very different from something being put in terms of quality rather than quantity. So, that is a big change. And I suppose I'll be accused of being nostalgic and old-fashioned—and I don't mind being called those things—if I say that I look with only languid enthusiasm on quantified social studies, and I would look with great enthusiasm on social studies that involve qualitative judgments and qualitative decisions. If you ask me to cite a social scientist who is humanistic in my terms, I would cite [Columbia sociologist] Robert Nisbet. I remember Harold Brown [Caltech president 1969-1977] asking me to cite such a person. I went to the library and got out one of Robert Nisbet's books and took it around to President Brown's office. And, of course, he read it over the weekend, and he said he agreed with me that that was really humanistic social science.

BUGÉ: This might be a good time to discuss the story about Theodore Roosevelt visiting the old institute, and how that relates to what you're commenting on.

SMITH: Well, one time Lee DuBridges, in a division chairmen's meeting, asked me if I would write the history of the institute that went into the catalog. He didn't like the one that was in there. I said, “Well, I don't know anything about history. Lots of people have been around Caltech longer than I have.” He said, “Well, you can write.” So, after some

prodding, I got busy with it, looked up a bunch of old catalogs and yearbooks—got as far into the Archives as I could get—but that was before Judy Goodstein’s time [Institute Archivist 1968-2009], and the Archives were kind of chaotic. But I did find that when the place was still called Throop Institute Teddy Roosevelt came and gave a speech—I think it was outdoors and the whole student body assembled. He said, if I remember, something like, “I would like ninety-nine out of a hundred young men trained to do the things we’re doing in the Panama Canal now.” And he said, “The hundredth man I would like to have a cultural and scientific education.” Well, I thought this was interesting, and I wrote the sentence—it may still be there— “It would have surprised Roosevelt to find that little Throop Institute, which he had addressed, had, after World War I, decided to concentrate its efforts on that hundredth man.” And that’s what we have been doing. Well, sometime later, when there was a fund-raising campaign going on, they got out quite an elaborate booklet with the title *Caltech and the Hundredth Man*. In a way, it is a little symbol of the tremendous focus and concentration that Caltech has. You talk about spread, and covering things under the subject matter, and so on; Caltech doesn’t cover everything. It has thrown out some enterprises that it had—like industrial design and climatology. It focuses, I think, on what Roosevelt called the “hundredth man.”

BUGÉ: Do you think that some of that quality has been sacrificed in the orientation toward the social sciences and their quantitative aspect?

SMITH: Well, I don’t know, really. It’s probably not for me to judge. Now there’s a great deal of emphasis on the study of decision making and that sort of thing. I think one of the Nobel Prize winners in economics was chiefly known not for his study of economics but for his studies of decision making. Now, this is beyond me; I don’t really know much about it. I suspect it is very different from those value judgments that I was talking about earlier. I am certainly not opposed to the growth and development of the social sciences—I think that’s very important. I think, though, that if they confine themselves to what can be quantified they are squeezing a very significant and important human element out of it. Even the census, which I suppose starts by being mere

enumeration, gets more and more complex when it tries to arrive at consequences. Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier thesis, of course one of the most significant things in modern American history, came from his study of the census. And now, I think, the census people ask questions that elude even the computer in some ways. I don't think that's a bad thing.

BUGÉ: Let's go back to Carnegie Corporation's money. There were some other programs that were started early in the fifties, such as the chamber music program and at one time the rental of art reproductions for students.

SMITH: Yes, we did that for a while. The chamber music series was not really very heavily supported by Carnegie money. We did allocate some of it to the free Sunday evening chamber music series in Dabney Lounge. Those had started before I came, but they were record concerts. And when we had some funds, we were able to contribute to paying local chamber groups—not a very large sum—to play; and there's no admission for these concerts. The other part of that was contributed very significantly by the Los Angeles local of the musicians' union. They supported that very loyally for some time. And it was interesting, in that the players often said that Dabney Lounge was the ideal place to play chamber music. Its sound was good; its size was just right. And I'm glad that those concerts still go on.

I've forgotten whatever happened to the business of renting art objects for the students' rooms. But for many years, of course, there's been an attempt to do something to improve the quality of undergraduate student life. There was a time when David Riesman, the eminent sociologist from Harvard, was brought here for a while, and he lived in a guest suite in the student houses. His final report was that existence in Caltech student houses was no more civilized than boot camp. There have been many, many efforts to improve that situation. I don't know what the current situation is.

BUGÉ: Could you discuss some more your role in the American Universities Field Staff? I know you were a trustee for at least some of the time.

SMITH: Yes, I was a trustee because Lee DuBridge found he was too busy to do it. Mostly the trustees of that organization were the presidents of the universities that belonged. Franklin Murphy, who was then chancellor of the University of Kansas, was a trustee; Barnaby Keeney, president of Brown University, was then a trustee. The member institutions were deliberately chosen to represent a variety. Some of them were big state universities—Michigan State, for example; others were small colleges; Carleton College was a member. Caltech was the only specifically science and engineering institution. There was also geographical distribution. The trouble with the AUFS was that it was always very difficult to see how it could support itself. It was originally supported by foundation grants; the Ford Foundation, I think, supported it for a long time. But foundations dread permanent involvement. Their philosophy is to provide what we used to call “seed money.” You plant the seed, then it grows up, and then you find some way to support it without us. And the AUFS had a lot of difficulty that way. They published their reports, and the reports, when we belonged to AUFS, were available in the Public Affairs Room. They were sent to various influential faculty members so that they could keep up with it. And there are quite a few faculty members not in the humanities division who found the AUFS reports very significant. One of the people who most strongly believed in the AUFS was the late Albert Ruddock, who was a trustee, and for a while chairman of the Board of Trustees. He had himself been a diplomat and thought it was very important for influential citizens to know about other parts of the world.

BUGÉ: I think it was in 1965 that the Ford Foundation decided to stop funding the AUFS. I found some correspondence between you and President DuBridge discussing just what to do at that time. What did you decide to do?

SMITH: Well, I remember that George Beadle [research fellow and instructor in biology, 1930-1936; Nobel laureate, 1958] was one who believed that even if it had to be taken out of our own salaries we ought to continue to pay our membership fee.

BUGÉ: Your membership fee at that point was about the same as a professor’s salary, as I remember.

SMITH: Right, right, yes. So we did continue it for a long time. I think until I retired in 1970 as division chairman. But I was aware of the fact that some people did not think that it was worth that anymore. For one thing, coverage of those parts of the world was much better done by newspapers than it had been, and by news magazines like *Newsweek* and *Time*. So when my successor, Bob Huttenback, decided to use that money in a different way, I was not surprised. But I was regretful, and I think many people who had been close to the AUFS were also regretful.

BUGÉ: Did you get any student feedback at that time?

SMITH: Well, I can't remember. Students were interested in these visitors. They would ask them questions. The members of the staff would often have dinner in student houses; they would talk with them. I don't remember—I just was in no position to know, because this was after I had relinquished the chairmanship.

**HALLETT D. SMITH****SESSION 2****April 20, 1981****Begin Tape 2, Side 1**

BUGÉ: During the middle fifties, two national trends had a direct impact on Caltech. One was the growing student-age population, the other a growing awareness of a shortage of engineers and scientists in the country. How did this affect the institute, from your perspective?

SMITH: I don't think the increasing number of students affected the institute very much, because the decision had been made to keep the institute small in comparison with other places. And the various branches of the University of California were growing so rapidly that it wasn't felt that Caltech needed to expand significantly. The increasing demand for engineers and scientists, of course, turned more students in the direction of Caltech. I don't know the figures, but I assume that the undergraduate applications for admission increased. But even if they increased, that didn't mean that Caltech was going to increase its size any. When, finally, women were admitted to the undergraduate part of the institute [1970], a certain increase in the size of the class was made so that the fact that women were now admitted would not deprive the same number of boys from admission. But otherwise, from my point of view, I don't see that there was any great difference.

It was in the middle fifties that Caltech got some important publicity. Lee DuBridge's picture was on the cover of *Time* magazine, with quite a big story about the institute. And very good recognition was given to the importance of the humanities in the curriculum of Caltech. There was also a story about us in *Fortune* magazine—again, which emphasized the pure science aspect to the institute, the fact that it is not an institute of technology but a university concentrating on science. And again, there was what I think is adequate emphasis on the humanities.



BUGÉ: It was about this time that the Division of the Humanities began to offer an advanced option in English and an advanced class for entering freshmen.

SMITH: Yes. We had tried to improve our senior electives in English and in other subjects from the time I started to work at the institute. We were aware, also, that some students thought they wanted to be scientists, but when they got to Caltech they changed their minds and would transfer elsewhere. We thought this was a great loss, and so we tried to do everything we could to allow those students to stay on at Caltech. They would still be required to have a sufficient grounding in mathematics and science, but they could devote their major effort to work in English or history or economics. This did something to keep students from transferring, but others transferred anyway. The change in interest, I think, is related to what the great philosopher and mathematician [Alfred North] Whitehead described as the three stages of scientific education. The first stage, he said, is the stage of romance, the second stage is the stage of precision, and the third stage is the stage of generalization. Well, the students were in the stage of romance when they were in high school and thought how glamorous it would be to be a scientist. At Caltech, they encountered a stage of precision, which was not what they expected and which some of them found unattractive. I was told by people who judged admission of graduate students in science that that was a very hard job, because you couldn't tell from a student's undergraduate performance whether he would successfully reach that stage of generalization. That would be the research stage, the stage of graduate students. I don't know if that directly answers your question, but that's what I recall of the change in emphasis in the middle fifties.

BUGÉ: At about the same time, the Army-McCarthy hearings were gearing up [1954]. Do you feel that they had any effect at Caltech on the Division of the Humanities?

SMITH: No, I don't think so. I think the institute as a whole, and certainly the Humanities Division, believed in academic freedom, in freedom of speech. There was an almost unanimous feeling that the McCarthy hearings were disastrous, were dangerous, were bad from every point of view. We hoped, as academic people hope whenever one of these attacks is launched, that it will fail and it will blow over and we will get back to

what seems to me to be a normal situation. And indeed, that was the case. But it was an uncomfortable time; it was more uncomfortable at many places than it was at Caltech. I must say, also, that we had on our Board of Trustees some very wise and prudent men who saw to it that the faculty was protected from invasion by political or other forces that would distort or try to suppress the free pursuit of truth.

BUGÉ: There was one incident that showed up in correspondence between you and President DuBridge that involved some so-called liberal views expressed by Professor Peter Fay [professor of history; d. 2004] when he was giving a public lecture. Someone from the community wrote an irate letter to President DuBridge about which he apparently asked your opinion and your advice. You responded that he should write the woman back, which he did, supporting the faculty. Do you recall anything else about that incident?

SMITH: No, I had forgotten about it entirely. It is characteristic, however, that President DuBridge would have defended his faculty. And it's amusing to me now to think that anybody who is so far from being radical as Peter Fay is would have offended somebody in the public.

BUGÉ: There was another controversy on a somewhat different topic, but along the same lines, over economic philosophy and the use of certain textbooks in economics classes. And you were again involved in correspondence that was sparked by something written by William F. Buckley.

SMITH: Oh, Buckley wrote a book called *God and Man at Yale*, in which he, a recent graduate of Yale, denounced what seemed to him to be the excessive liberalism of the faculty at that university. I did my graduate work at that university. And I think I reviewed Buckley's book for *Engineering and Science* when it came out. Buckley was then what he is now—a very sharp, witty, extremely conservative spokesman. He, I think, never really tried to attack academic freedom as McCarthy did. But he, like other people, wanted to see more agreement with his own political and economic views on the part of university faculties. That is a recurrent phenomenon. It is always true that there

are some people who find themselves, or feel themselves, to be outnumbered—and they think that’s wrong. They think that more people should agree with their point of view. I think myself that we had, in the economics staff of the institute, representatives of Keynesian economics and representatives of what you might call Adam Smith economics. So I don’t think that it could be said that Caltech was skewed in one direction or the other.

BUGÉ: In 1957 the Russians sent off the first *Sputnik*. Did that have any impact on the Division of the Humanities? Was there—temporarily, at least—a feeling that that division should play a more supportive role and be de-emphasized?

SMITH: No, I don’t know that there’s any direct connection of that sort. From time to time, members of other divisions would occasionally say that they would like more requirements in their particular field and the only way they could get them was to cut down on the requirements in the humanities. I don’t remember that there was any connection with that sort of request and *Sputnik*. *Sputnik* aroused the general public and I’m sure had beneficial results, particularly in the teaching of mathematics and science at the secondary level.

Last time I said maybe we should talk some more about teaching. And I want to include in this interview comments on the way one judges teachers—particularly if he is a chairman of a division and has primary responsibility for the hiring and letting go of teachers.

One of the most successful teachers in our division during my time was a man who had no graduate training at all. He had had a distinguished undergraduate career, then gone into advertising, and had become an administrator. President DuBridge brought him to Caltech from the Radiation Lab at MIT after the war. His name is Charles Newton [lecturer in English, 1948-1975; d. 1994]. He was an assistant to the president, largely engaged in fund-raising and in activities with the trustees. I knew that he was capable of being a fine teacher. He had led discussion groups in the Great Books Program that came out of the University of Chicago. He was a genuine intellectual, interested in ideas. And I told him that if at any time he wanted to teach part-time, I

would be glad to have him teach freshman English—which he did and with great enthusiasm. And he was different from the rest of us, in that he didn't have preconceived ideas about teaching. He would experiment. He was genuinely interested in students, and he was very effective. Finally, he became a full-time teacher of English. Because he didn't have an advanced degree, he was called a lecturer rather than a professor. But he was a great ornament to our division. And he retired at the same time I did. And I'm sure that many, many students look back on Chuck Newton's teaching as one of their great experiences at Caltech.

I might also mention, without mentioning names, a case that distressed me very much. It was after I stopped being chairman of the division. The very best teacher in the division had tenure, but it was made known to him that now the emphasis was going to be on research and publication and that sort of thing. That he probably would not do any of that was evident to him. So he left. And after a couple of years of working at a much more highly paid job in industry, he returned to teaching elsewhere in the country. I think it was a great mistake to let a man like that go. I believe, myself, in research and publication; I've done quite a bit of it. I do not think, however, that a great teacher necessarily has to do that. Many of them do. But I would like a system in which brilliant teaching was rewarded for its own sake.

BUGÉ: I'm glad you put that into the record. Going back to more mundane details: In 1959 to '60, the Carnegie Corporation again awarded the division a great amount of money—in this case, \$330,000, which you co-administered with Dean Earnest Watson and which was earmarked for stressing the humanities for graduate students. How was this money used, and what programs were developed?

SMITH: Well, I think I mentioned last time that we had a project, Capricorn, which allowed some faculty members to do research in Africa. What we were trying to do was to show ways in which research, particularly in the social sciences, could be done, and graduate students who wished to could get involved in this. I don't think we were very successful, but at least we made the effort to show the relevance of studies of this sort to scientific and technological personnel.

BUGÉ: Was the Carnegie program on science and government, which Dave Elliot directed, related to this grant?

SMITH: Yes, yes. David Elliot was, of course, a very able and very wise and informed student of modern history. He still is active in that field. He recently had a fellowship from the United Nations to go around and interview the leaders of the NATO countries. He is an example of a very gifted teacher who developed a little specialty of studies in arms control, defense policy, and that sort of thing. He was also engaged with President Harold Brown in arms-limitation studies. A group met—people from the RAND Corporation, in Santa Monica, and Caltech and other universities. I believe David was the secretary of that group.

BUGÉ: In 1965, the division did offer an option in the humanities—in English, history, or economics—which received quite positive response from alumni. Could you talk a little bit about the change in the division then?

SMITH: Well, I have already talked about it from the point of view of trying to save students for Caltech who would otherwise transfer. I think it meant, also, that we purposely strengthened our curriculum in those three fields. We wanted this to be a major that would withstand comparison with the major curricula in English, history, and economics of any good liberal arts college in the country. We chose our faculty with that in mind, too. Before that, we'd chosen faculty, really, on their ability to teach. But if you offer a major in English, you have to have someone whose special interest is, say, the novel; someone whose special interest is in American literature; someone whose special interest is in Shakespeare, and so on. You have to cover the fields, so you pay attention to that in your recruiting of staff.

BUGÉ: Now, the following year, in 1966, the name of the division was changed to Humanities and Social Sciences.

SMITH: Yes. One reason for that is that in recruiting faculty—say, in political science, economics, anthropology, whatever—they might feel more at home if the name of the division included the field they were interested in.

BUGÉ: Do you think that tended to minimize the traditional humanities?

SMITH: Not in itself, I don't think so. But, as I think I may have said before, it seems to me that there have been many, many more appointments in social sciences than in humanities. I think that at present social science has very much overshadowed the humanities in that division.

BUGÉ: While you were division chairman, did you resist this change in any way?

SMITH: Well, I tried to keep it balanced. I tried to see to it that the humanities and social sciences remained in balance. It has been since that time, of course, that a doctoral degree has been offered in social sciences. There were talks many times about the possibility of offering a doctoral degree in the humanities, but nothing ever came of it—I think, primarily because the science faculty felt that this would dilute or weaken the institute. It was easier to persuade them that a few doctoral candidates in social science, particularly related to engineering or science, would be less harmful from their point of view.

BUGÉ: I think it was in 1967 that you named David Elliot as executive officer of the division. Could you talk about that?

SMITH: Well, the other divisions had an executive officer as well as a chairman, I have never been very fond of purely administrative work myself. I found that it took time that I could otherwise give to scholarship and writing. I knew David was a very skillful administrator; I had complete confidence in him. So this seemed to be a good thing to do.

BUGÉ: And then in 1970 you resigned as chairman and continued teaching. Could you talk about the transition which began at that time and ended with your retirement in 1975?

SMITH: Well, I retired as division chairman at the same time that Bob Bacher retired as provost. We came to Caltech together as administrators, and we retired at the same time. I was offered at that time a position as a senior research associate, a member of the permanent research group at the Huntington Library. And I thought this was an ideal situation, because I would continue teaching one course at Caltech until I retired completely as a professor. The institute had had, for some time, a sort of gradual retiring process. This was an ideal one for me. And so it was a perfectly natural thing that I'd go on teaching until I retired completely; and then I was full-time at the library. Many people have said to me that this is an enviable situation. I realize that it is. It combines my interests and my abilities, and makes the whole process of retiring—which is difficult for some people—easy and delightful.

BUGÉ: Did you select a favorite course to teach in those years in between?

SMITH: Well, yes. I taught a Shakespeare course, because I enjoyed that most. But, I remember when I was teaching the course in four major modern authors—which I spoke about last time—that I enjoyed that also. But I preferred the Shakespeare course because it's closer to my own research.

BUGÉ: You mentioned last time that you wanted to say something about technical report writing.

SMITH: Oh, yes. For obvious reasons, every once in a while an English department will get a request, a demand, from other departments for a service course. And this is particularly true in the engineering side of Caltech. Engineering students are going to have to write technical reports, and they wanted us to give a course in technical report writing. Well, for a while we had a faculty member named Henry Dan Piper [associate professor of English, 1952-1962], who had himself been a chemist as an undergraduate

and had later decided to go on and get a degree in American literature. He was perfectly competent to teach a course in technical report writing, and did it. But I had been told by students that the most successful technical report writing ever at the institute was taught by [an associate] professor of mechanical engineering—Peter Kyropoulos—who left the institute [1974] to go to General Motors. But I had many testimonies that he made his students write clear, concise, crisp, unambiguous reports. And he worked over every detail with them. Now, of course, that's the ideal situation if you can find somebody who does it himself. No professor of English, whatever his background, spends his life writing technical reports. And certainly it would seem best to get somebody to teach technical report writing who does it.

BUGÉ: Just before you retired, you appointed a woman [Jenijoy La Belle, professor of English, emeritus] to the faculty of the English department, who later caused quite a bit of controversy after you had left as division chairman. Do you have any reflections on that episode?

SMITH: Well, it was a bitter episode, and I regret its bitterness. The situation is quite simple. She came up for the tenure decision. And the people with tenure in English, who were the proper ones to judge, unanimously said that she should be promoted to tenure. But there was at that time in the division a committee on promotions, which had only one member from English on it. There were four people not in English. That committee voted four to one that she not be given tenure. I told the chairman that I would appeal that decision, and he said it was my perfect right to. It was appealed to the institute council—whatever it's called; it used to be called the Faculty Board—and there was considerable ruckus about it.

In 1977, when I was away as a visiting professor at New York University, the professor in question agreed to let the federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, which had been after her for a long time, represent her in the case—possibly take it to court. At this time, as I understand it, the then-provost saw that there was quite a bit of danger for the institute. The institute gets a great deal of money from the federal government, and the federal government tries to see to it that the institutions



that get that abide by fair practices of employment. This was patently unfair. And finally a decision was reached between legal counsel representing the professor and the administration. She was reimbursed for the year when she had not been allowed to teach; she was reimbursed the amount that would have been paid to a man holding the same qualifications. After she got back, she was, after a slight delay, granted tenure [1979], and is now happily teaching at Caltech.

BUGÉ: Do you think she's been instrumental in liberalizing the policies at Caltech, even though she did not sue?

SMITH: I couldn't say, but I think it's a fair guess that anyone could make that the institute has been much more concerned with what's called affirmative action now than it was then. I think the institute found that in terms of affirmative action it was really over a barrel.

BUGÉ: Is there anything you'd like to add?

SMITH: I don't know. I think we've covered everything pretty well. One of the things I have done at the institute that was not directly or systematically connected with my job was that I was for many years chairman of the Board of Governors of the Athenaeum. The Athenaeum during most of those years had quite a lot of problems. One was the continuing rise in costs, and you can't always pass those on. If you raise the price of meals, people sometimes don't buy as many meals. I was in charge twice of going through the process of getting a liquor license for the Athenaeum. The first time we proposed it, one of the trustees strongly objected, because he thought Dr. Millikan wouldn't have liked it. Well, he died after a while, and we went through the process again, and finally got a liquor license for the Athenaeum. [Laughter] This made it a much more popular place. And since then, of course, it's become tremendously popular. And the food and service and everything has gone up. I rejoice at this. But one of the service things I did was to be chairman of the [Athenaeum's] Board of Governors. I did this pretty much in the way that I ran the division. I didn't have a lot of meetings, and I wasn't very systematic. But then it was a quieter time than it is now.