

2-2-1984

UA68/8/2 J. David Cole Oral History Part 3

Tom Jones

WKU Oral History Committee

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.wku.edu/dlsc_ua_records

Recommended Citation

Jones, Tom, "UA68/8/2 J. David Cole Oral History Part 3" (1984). *WKU Archives Records*. Paper 692.
http://digitalcommons.wku.edu/dlsc_ua_records/692

This Transcription is brought to you for free and open access by TopSCHOLAR®. It has been accepted for inclusion in WKU Archives Records by an authorized administrator of TopSCHOLAR®. For more information, please contact topscholar@wku.edu.

Produced by Oral History Committee
Department of History
Western Kentucky University

TJ: This interview is conducted by Tom Jones of the English Department at Western Kentucky University in Bowling Green, of David Cole, former Chairman of the Board of Regents. While presidential selection occurred, continuing.

DC: We now have reached a point where the presidential process was concluded. Don Zachary^{is} was selected, and we went forward with the inauguration of a president at Western. It was something that we had not done before. And in preparing for the arrival, I think maybe we should back up a little bit to something that occurred prior to the conclusion of the process. That is we created a committee shared by Carroll Nicely to find and acquire a new home of the university president. With the help of Jerry Parker and Herb Smith and with the financial support and backing of Kelly Thompson and the College Heights Foundation, we were able to require and remodel a home on Chesnut street. Which atleast had been purchased so that those presidential candidates, the four who visited the campus, had an opportunity for their families to see the home and make any suggestions that they might want to make, assuming they were the president. The Presidential selection in terms of remodeling. I think that we also acquired a home recognizing the social responsibilities of the president. Expanding that role, in terms of providing a facility to entertain. This was accomplished during the presidential search so it would not be an inducement to the candidate but also to show the candidate that we would be willing to remodel that home to meet their personal needs, and let them participate in their decor and whatever else. In any event we had completed the process and Don Zachary is president and we go forward with preparing for his arrival and the inauguration.

TJ: A year later?

DC: In this period and time I think there was a great coming together. There was a great deal of support for Don Zacharyis, most significantly Don Zacharyis contributed to that support, Tom as you indicated by immediately setting up lines of communication with the faculty and demonstrating his willingness to meet with and listen to the faculty and students. I recall that in terms of the inauguration, about ten days before the inauguration was scheduled I was thinking about how we were going to do this. We needed some badge of office, so I called Dr. Henry Hardin. I asked Henry's advice and what he might do to help us. About a week before the inauguration Henry assumed the responsibility of coming up with a _____ medallion that we used in the inauguration and I think we changed it subsequently from aluminum to something with a little more worth. But the medallion that was placed around Don Zacharyis's neck was the sole product and ingenuity of Henry Hardin. And it was completed the night before the inauguration.

TJ: Hard to believe its been four and a half years isn't it?

DC: Yes. And I think were now at a point where we can, or I would comment on that I served as chairman 2 years under Don Zacharyis and one remaining year on the board.

TJ: Over Don Zacharyis?

DC: Well I served as Chairman of the Board during the two years that Don Zacharyis served as president. And we had a very good relationship. We would have lunch the week before a board meeting and we would go

over the agenda, and I explained to Don then that as chairman I expected as a board member to express my views and I in no sense felt I had any obligation to always agree with him or he agree with me. And I thought that was and had been the strength of a board relationship. Of having an open and candid type of situation. One particular situation where president felt that we should close Jones-Jaggers School, and I supported the closing of Jones-Jaggers as a matter of economics.

TJ: As a laboratory school?

DC: As a laboratory school. The president supported leasing it or wanted to lease it in Warren County. I did not support that. I felt that that simply gave the city and county school systems an out, because we have in Warren County enough classrooms. They are empty. And what we are involved in is a boundry dispute between the city and county school systemes. And at Western someday its going to need that facility, and if the county leases it, and if the county cannot find means to develop classrooms in the county, we are going to have a very difficult time asking the Warren County School Systems to lease. And I didn't think that was a good kind of situation to be in. I, we, did not support each other on that situation.

TJ: But that was a public and clean, not even dispute, disagreement.

DC: Yes, your right. And we had continued to have a good relationship. I think he had been a very good president, and I think the real mark of his ability as a man is to be an administrator during a period of time where in which there had been continually reductions and state alications for public funds, because we are continually getting less

money from Frankfort.

TJ: A total of 8 million dollars last over a 3 year period.

DC: Thats right. And where it is very difficult ot provide faculty salary increases, to meet the demands of faculty in terms of research, to meet the needs of students. Its easy to be a president when you have a great deal of money to give, but when you have to cut back and lead its a much more difficult situation. And he did that.

TJ: David, I might point out at this juncture that I pointed out at the meeting I mentioned earlier at the State Wide Higher Education meeting yesterday. That when someone was a faculty president, a Senate president was attacking administations loosly in generally. And I pointed out that Western faculty had gone in four short years, from being seventh in a system of eight universities in terms of general income, to number three. And obviously we couldn't hardly expect to do better than three because were not _____ as U of K and U of L.did.

DC: I think Don Zacharyis's first of all recognized that you cannot run a university on public money. He brought in John Sweeney and he worked very hard himself to encourage private donations, private funding and grants for the university. Progress is being made in that area when we had our so called Blue Grass Plan Proposal, where I probably said to much. Having served on the Pritchard committee I was placed in the inevitable position of criticizing Ed Pritchard. But I did so because the Blue Grass Plan as promoted by the Counsel on Higher Education, under the direction of Harry Snyder. I don't think the counsel members understood the proposal, I think it re-

flected far to much the feeling of staff. And it provided for the University of Kentucky and the University of Lousiville, leaving Western out. With the advice and concern and support of President Zacharyis we met with the Counsel of Higher Education. And took issue with it. Following that meeting we met at Kentucky State, with the presidents of Eastern, Murray, and Moorehead to try and further opposition and the legislature to it. And at that time my board membership expired and Joe Bill Campbell was elected Chairman and Joe Bill took what we had started and had a meeting of the University Board Chairman, including U of L and U of K and went to the legislature, and the legislature modified the plan to be more fair. And I would say that I think the arbitrariness of the so called Blue Grass Plan is best illustrated by what took place 2 years ago, with a counsel on Higher Education broadened I think to be more responsible. Where the counsel confirmed with and saw input from all the universities, and came up with a formuler that was fair to all the universities. And for the first time in many, many years it was a legislative pack- age which had the endorsements of all the universities.

TJ: So a unity entered Higher Education in Kentucky, and that had been for 2 years atleast, quite absent.

DC: And I think Don Zacharyis was a very able advocate for Western and for Higher Education in Kentucky with the counsel. And I think he deserves a great deal of credit for that. I would conclude my, well I have probably talked to long as sometimes lawyers do. One of the things I am very, very proud of in terms of accomplishments during my term, Carrolll Nicely, for example spearheaded, you know in terms of having accredited Journalism departments. Which for a period of time under the leadership of Dave Whittaker, was the only

accredited Journalism department in Kentucky.

TJ: And remains the best.

DC: I think it is the best, to the extent that I have the ability to judge such a thing. Carroll Nicely, also took leadership in it. With Carroll's leadership the board set aside Journalism and Business to get the accredited, that's been done. And there were those that you well know who opposed accreditation. Bill Keagle who has been _____ of the Governor was able to accomplish Western's last news structure, which is the arena of the farm out there. Which I think is very good because it is a facility not only used by the university but also is used by the 4-H Clubs, by the FFA, it is a people type structure. And I think Western is in the business of service, of doing things for the area, and that's a good example and Bill Keagle did that. Mike Harold was instrumental in setting the stage in what took place at yesterday's board meeting and that is that the university reacquired the operation of the book store and the laundry. We have sorta delegated this for the College Heights Foundation, and it was a serious question whether the board could delegate the control of public money. Since the income from that money came back as scholarships there's obviously no problem with it, in terms of no problem in fact, but as a matter of procedure. I think it's good that the board has that control. But Mike Harold started the board yesterday concluding my personal project, that I guess we all have projects in life, was the FM station.

TJ: Over and over Dr. Hardin said he wanted an FM station.

DC: Am I going to do a Christmas Carol or am I going to do the

Easter Parade? But Henry Hardin worked long and hard, and deserves a great deal of credit. And it became a reality and I think public radio is a very good thing. I remember as a child listening to the radio, and I think it opens up a whole new world for the listening audience and if you can incite and tap the mind of a small number of individuals who want to go out and go to school, and to question, and to learn, what a good thing you have done. And thats being carried forward, and now were expanding in the Somerset area, and I think it is likely that we will expand the program in Owensboro and Christian County, or perhaps Trigg County. And I think it is responding to a need, and I think its something good. I leave a legacy, besides a board well I think I had some participation in changing the direction of the university. That I suppose is philosophical, and thats something that history, or Lowell Harrison will judge us as to weither what we did was worthwhile. I think it was and I guess the practical thing and I lacked _____ . Hopefully weve made Western a better place. Tom I sincerely hope so.

TJ: David I know that you sincerely do hope so and I want to say as one who had known you well and observed you closely, and has observed Western closely for the last six years, you have indeed left us a legacy. And a very positive one. I don't think many people, not many at all would say otherwise. I think that probably an oral interview like this should have something a little more personal than board votes, for the future, for the sake of history. And I know David Cole to be at bottom in a lot of ways and insecure then, thrusts into the forefront and into power. By a time and accident and your own doings and so fourth. Could you speak more personally about what being Chairman of the Board of a significant university, if not a major one, did to you and for you at that period of time.

DC: I don't know if I would see myself as insecure. I pry lawyer and I pry a number of cases and I still get scared in the morning, still get frightened when that jury comes back. I am very much of an advocate, I am very much in my own mind an over achiever. I think that a person who deserves as much credit as I do, for whatever I've done is my wife Kay. She is very supportive and of course giving time to Western. You know you take time from your wife and you take time from three boys. Now they are sixteen, thirteen and eight so back then of course they were younger. And without Kay, you know I would not have done it. Her feelings, her perceptions, judgements, are certainly equal enough for exceeding my own.

TJ: Well there were months and months when virtually all you could think of was Western. And yet you had to carry out the role of father, husband, citizen, lawyer.

DC: And I was involved then in the Beverly Hills supper club in Cinninnatti. And the _____ Blue Diamond coal mine disaster in eastern Kentucky. It was a very demanding time, but I think sometimes the more demanding the situation is the more it calls upon you to respond to it.

TJ: Rise to the occasion.

DC: I would like to be, you know I think its one thing to be chairman now, where you have a much different situation. Joe Bills situation is much different than mine and whoever will follow Joe Bill. I think its a much different situation now. Were talking about eight years, four or five of which were falitle. I hope that I will be remembered as someone who has the ability to lead a board. During the time

President Downing resigned until Don Zacharyis was selected John Minton served as ...

TJ: Fifth president.

DC: Thats right, Im glad you said that. Because when John was selected he called me one day and said Dave, "Now should I put _____ under my name? And I said don't you dare. I said you are the president of this university your not the _____ of anything.

TJ: And you made that perfectly clear at the board meeting.

DC: Yes sir. And in terms of those who write the history of Western, John Minton was the president of Western Kentucky University, as was Kelly Thompson, as was Dero Downing, as is Don Zacharyis. And there is no doubt about it. And John Minton held it together. But there was a vacuum of power there, and it fell on my shoulders to exercise that power or to leave those in the exercise of it.

TJ: David speaking of that, I told you earlier I would like to ask you a question that I thought might be to controversial to be taped and you said it would be fine.

DC: Alright go for it.

TJ: I have been told, and as I told you I cannot remember now who, but that's in material. That Curn Alexander chose among other reasons not to come to Western because he did not want to be president of a university where the chairman of the board thinks he's president. Now it seems to me that could be taken as a perception of you as a very,

very strong board chairman. Because it seems to me ordinarily Board chairman sorta rubber stamp their president. There to busy for one thing. They have their private, professional lives as a rule. And if they have a functioning State Agency, whatever it happens to be, then their not likely to want to interfere in the operation of it because if it functions well it functions well. What, how would you respond to that perception of you during that one year period.

DC: During the one year period as I said in many ways there was the _____ because there was an uncertainty on the part of the university and people sometimes dock you from positions. And John Minton did an outstanding job, but he was known of course by John's own admission. John was not a candidate for the presidency, and John was only going to serve until one was elected. So in many instances the mantle of decision making fell on the board and on me to the extent that I was chairman and could lead the board and develop a consensus among the board. I emphasize the board. I had not heard that before. If ^{K=XX} ~~Curn~~ Alexander felt that way then that was a gross misconception on his part.

TJ: And let me emphasize that this is simply gossip. That's the level of my having heard it.

DC: It was not a perception that was shared by Bullard, by Brennen, or Zacharyis, or the man from California. So if in fact he felt that way it was a misconception. And since he never met me, I don't know if he could really make that kind of judgement. Had he met with me for breakfast as the others did, had he met with the board as I presided, and saw my manner of operation. Which I always hope I had a good sense of humor about it. I always try to have a good sense of

humor in terms of the board, I feel its better to laugh than frown. And I think in this world if you do not have a sense of humor it will drive you crazy. I would discount that, I don't believe Curr Alexander really felt that. And in my opinion that was not proof. I hope that if history will say anything of me, they will say that I cared about Western and I continue to care. I care most about the students, because were there to educate them, and the responsibility of the university to the faculty or the administration or anything else. So I hope they remember me as a person who cared and still cares for students.

TJ: I can't say how you can say otherwise David. Anything you want to say to add to the record?

DC: That I was a person of vision. Now wether I had correct vision or not is something we'll have to let history judge. I think that Don Zacharyis, his success indicates the aciton that afternoon about 8 to 2. Finally I hope that I will be remembered as a person who exercised power. And I had power, for the period of a year or so. But I exercised power with fairness with reasons and with a good sense of humor.

TJ: David you told me when I was chairperson of the Faculty Senate, I asked you by phone one night, I recall, and I wanna say something about two conversations we had. I said can you assure me that this race for the presidency at Western is open? That it is not set up? And you knew, Im not sure if I said because of the speculation that it might be set up for Eric Snyder. And you said, I give you my word of honor it si an open race. And I perceeded in so far that I dealt with the Search Committee and the Faculty and so fourth on that belief.

I took your word for it that it was an open race, and in fact that's what it turned out to be, though it neared disaster it never became disaster. The other thing I wanted to say about a phone conversation and to clarify what I said earlier about you being in some ways a part insecure, there's no reason to go into deep personal conversation about it like a parakeet or something. But I remember talking to you, I believe the night after Dero Downing announced his resignation effective January 7. And your voice was kind of dragged out, a tired voice. It had been a day to remember, but you said, "I don't know but I can't help but wonder whether we've done the right thing, I don't know how much Dero Downing may have been hurt." Damaged you meant. I'm just saying that your decision to request the results of the Faculty Senate evaluation was a hard decision to make and to carry out and again I don't know how much it had to do with his decision to resign. But I know your own self-questionings, to some degree was expressed to me over the phone that night. You were in a kind of agony about whether or not you had acted ethically and morally correctly.

DC: Well as I told you before Dero Downing and I disagreed on many, many issues. But one thing that we always agreed about was what was best for Western. He demonstrated that, I hope I did. If I had not, well no matter what I had done I think there were other board members, if I had spoken up that day, there were other board members that were going to request a copy of the poll or evaluations. And I know that to be true. So it would be a misconception to those...

TJ: Well Steve Clark requested them all.

DC: You know it would be a misconception to say that I was you know

being a loner, because I knew what the majority of the board was going to request. So when I requested I requested for behalf of myself and other individuals who I knew would make the same request. And I guess to be totally frank with you in terms of leadership, in terms of the exercise of power to lead the university through a very difficult situation and to absolute avoid what took place with Dino at Murray and the fiasco down there. Had I not done this the faculty reaction justified or not, most certainly justified in there minds wether then to go forward in a totally independent direction. I would have created a situation where in my mind Tom the Faculty Senate, the faculty 73% who had participated in it, might go a different direction other than what I felt was the role of the board in providing leadership. And I wasn't going to take that chance. I recall our conversation and I think I had flown to Cincinnatti and back that day, a pretty bumby flight because we flew in a single engine plane up there, and you and I both had some tired nights. Had we not done that we might have permitted a situation. We might have not been able to prevent a situation where the faculty went independently and in the direction of inconsistently had what I had flown to see occur. I might have lost control of the situation and I was not going to lose control and I did not ever lose control of the situation.

TJ: I couldn't agree more and perhaps thats a good note to conclude on. Let it be known for the historical record that Western in my opinion, as a faculty member, somewhat in touch with faculty at Western, has not in my twenty years tenure there, the moral been higher than it is now. Dispite declining revenues and declining programs and so fourth. Those of us still there feel that we have very, very able leadership under your tenure.

1
DC: Well Tom I would be remised if I didn't thank you, Phil Constance, and the other individuals that supported leadership and I think responsible leadership. Sometimes frustrated leadership but I can assure you that I shared those frustrations. Maybe we were frustrated over different things but certainly at a level of frustration. And I think that the faculty acted responsibly and I think that the faculty joined ranks and that were prepared to go down the road.

End of Tape 3