

Transcription of Oral History Interview with  
**John G. Gabbert**  
March 6, 1998

This oral history interview is being conducted on Friday, March 6, 1998, with retired Justice John G. Gabbert who was part of a group of civic leaders who were responsible for leading the initiative to form a University of California campus in Riverside. In 1947, the Legislature created a joint committee to report on the issues and needs of higher education in the state. A special study committee headed by Dr. George Strayer was formed to survey and report back to the Legislature.

My name is Jan Erickson. I work in Chancellor Raymond L. Orbach's office. He is the eighth chief campus officer of the Riverside campus.

Erickson: John, I know you are a Riverside native. Would you mind starting this interview by telling us a little about your mother, father and sister?

Gabbert: Well, I am not a native.

Erickson: You're not?

Gabbert: No, I was born in Ventura County in Oxnard in 1909. Then we came to Riverside when my father purchased a half interest in the Enterprise newspaper in 1912, so I was three years old when we arrived. So, it makes me almost a native. My father was John R. Gabbert; nearly everyone called him Ray. My mother was Elizabeth Gordon Gabbert. My father was born in Iowa and came to California in 1883 when he was two years old with his family. I had a great grandfather, Anson Maxwell Peters, who came to California in the Gold Rush. He was a sailor, and he sailed around the Horn, and like so many others abandoned ship in San Francisco Bay. He hiked up to the Sierra

Gabbert: where he mined for a couple of years on the American River. He and his partner made a good stake, so he was able to leave with \$30,000 in gold in 1853. That was quite a bit of money in those days. He went back to Iowa by boat down toward Panama. He was going to try to cross the Isthmus, but the boat sank. They actually tried to beach it. He was the one who had discovered the problem and told the captain about it. They were on the beach for a few days and were picked up by a boat from the same shipping line. He hiked across the Isthmus of Panama, got a boat, went up the Mississippi and then went back to Iowa where he became a farmer in Madison County, Iowa, between Winterset and DeSoto. With his little stake of gold, he built the best house in the county. He married then, and he and his wife raised ten children. My grandmother was their first child. Her name was Ella. She married Thomas Gavin Gabbert in Iowa. My grandfather was a farmer, as everyone was. In 1883, my great grandfather, who had bought land in San Diego County, had looked all around California and thought the greatest place would be down in Fallbrook. He was about 120 years ahead of his time. He bought land before he went back to Iowa and paid the taxes. I don't think they amounted to much, but he made arrangements with the bank in San Diego to pay taxes on the land. He continued to pay taxes on it for thirty years until he came back in 1883.

They came in what they called "the emigrant train." My great grandfather and various members of his family, married sons and daughters, and others who were coming to California brought their equipment on the train. I don't think they brought animals. They arrived in Los Angeles Christmas Eve of 1883. They went to services at the Methodist Church. Then they went up to Ventura County where my grandfather rented land which became the Lemoneira Ranch, a big agricultural land holding. He was a tenant on that property. Others in the family did other things. My grandfather was around the Santa Paula area. That is where my father was raised as a youngster.

A couple years later, my great grandfather decided he did not like the climate up there, it was too cold. So he came down to his land in Fallbrook. All male adults in the family spent about a year in Fallbrook building houses and barns and breaking in his land. Those who had gone other places came back as my grandfather did to his

Gabbert: ranching efforts. My grandfather was a successful rancher and later became supervisor in Ventura County for about thirty five years. He was Chairman of the County Board of Supervisors for many years. He also served a term in the legislature.

My father is one of six boys, the second in birth order. The family moved from the Santa Paula area when he was in high school to a little community on the Santa Clara River called El Rio. Actually, it wasn't El Rio when they moved there, it was called New Jerusalem, but later it became El Rio. My dad went to Ventura High School which was about ten miles away. He boarded in town as they often did in those days and came home on weekends. Weekends he worked getting subscriptions for the Oxnard Courier Newspaper riding his

Gabbert: bicycle around through the county. When he was a little older, he became a correspondent for the community of the weekly Oxnard paper, called the Oxnard Courier. His best friend was the son of the editor. In his senior year in high school, the owner of the paper died, and the son was his sole heir. At that time, I think he was an orphan. He inherited the paper. He had planned to go to Stanford, so he made a deal with my father. If he went to Stanford and my father ran the paper for four years, he would help my father go to college. So my dad, at the age of eighteen, became the editor and operator of the Courier which he did for four years. He learned a lot, the hard way. When the four years was up and the owner's son came back, he honored his arrangements with my dad and helped my dad go to Berkeley. My father was four years older and had a little basic newspaper experience, so he was really into publications. He was editor of the Daily Cal and he was editor of the Blue and Gold, the annual, and the senior record.

My father's graduating class was 1907. He had graduated from high school in 1899, then four years out and then back. The editorship of the Blue and Gold annual was in the junior year—the juniors brought out the annual. The day that the annual was being printed, he went over from Berkeley to San Francisco to the print shop. He spent the evening there looking at the first printed proofs. About midnight, he gathered up a bunch of spoiled proof sheets off the floor to read on the ferry going back to Berkeley. Well, early that morning was the

Gabbert: earthquake and fire and the printing plant was one of the first places that burned down. So that annual was never printed. The only bits and pieces of it were the spoiled proof sheets that my dad had collected. When I was at Boalt Hall in the 30's, they had a glass case in the entryway of the Morrison Library with these proof sheets displayed and a story about them. They were called the "missing link" because they never were duplicated in any way. Most of it was lost, but in any event, that was one of the interesting things. Then when my dad graduated, he went back down to Oxnard, and with his father's assistance, bought the Courier. He operated that until 1912 when he came to Riverside. So that gets me to Riverside by a long indirect path.

Erickson: You have a sister?

Gabbert: Yes, I have only one sibling, my sister Jane. She is Jane Sanders, that is her married name. Her husband is deceased. He was Dr. Edward Sanders and was a dean of faculty at Pomona College for many years. She is still living and is in Claremont.

Erickson: John, could you tell us your recollections of what Riverside looked like. I know you were very young.

Gabbert: Yes, like any ancient person, I can think better about the old days than the current days. When we first moved to Riverside, we lived up near First Street on Chestnut. There is a little hill there, and we had a house there. I remember that quite distinctly because we stayed there for a couple of years. When I was about five, we moved to a place on Brockton Avenue. It is now at the intersection of Larchwood and Brockton, but in those days, Larchwood was not cut through from Magnolia to Brockton. The name of the street then was Beverly Court. They have now named a street a couple of miles farther south Beverly Court. But we lived there at that corner until 1925 (for ten years). We moved to South Pasadena for two years which interrupted my high school here in Riverside, so I graduated from South Pasadena. I spent my last two years of high school at South Pasadena. Then we returned to Riverside in 1927.

Erickson: What was your family life like? Did you all find time to gather together at dinnertime?

Gabbert: Oh, yes. I think I probably had the ideal family life. I had two marvelous parents. I think they were too good to us if anything. They were very supportive. My father, of course, was the editor of the paper and very active in community affairs. He used to take me to various events, much more so than many parents would do simply because he was in the field of public affairs. I used to get to go to meetings and events that took place, many at the Mission Inn such as the World Affairs council-type of event that was held every Christmas put on by the University of Southern California. Dr. Von Kleinschmidt was the Chancellor there and the leader of this, and my dad always took me there. So I went to most of those meetings, which was a great, great experience.

The family were great campers and many, many weekends we would go out camping in the desert or the mountains. In the summer, nearly always, we would stay all summer up in the mountains. My dad would have to be working, but my mother and my mother's mother (grandmother) and Jane and I would do this. We did this when we were just little kids, five and six years old. We had a kind of permanent camp up in Kuffle Canyon first and then later in Blue Jay Canyon up in San Bernardino Mountains. After that we had a camp above Idyllwild in Fern Valley. We were the only people up there, because my dad knew the folks who owned that area, and they did not allow people in there. But they permitted my father to set up a kind of permanent camp there. We spent several summers there. About 1923, we built a cabin at Idyllwild and had that until some time in the '30s. We spent a lot of time in the mountains.

My mother loved horses and so did my sister. They always had a horse. We had a burro, and we would pack the burro and go up in the upper country for a week or ten days at a time. We really enjoyed it.

Erickson: Back in Riverside, did you remember the skies were very clear?

Gabbert: Yes, on Brockton Avenue in an old kind of two story house, on the upper floor on the west side was a screened porch. That is where I slept. I could look and see the mountains through the screens. Almost any time you could not see the mountains clearly, there was a

Gabbert: north wind with some dust blowing, or it was foggy or rainy. I those days the skies were clear and blue. The Santa Ana River ran all the time.

Erickson: It is dry now most of the time.

Gabbert: Yes, of course, it wasn't a big river, but most of the year there was a good flow going down the Santa Ana River.

Erickson: Do you remember the aroma of all the orange groves?

Gabbert: Yes, in the whole community. We even had orange groves around our house on Brockton Avenue which is now entirely all subdivision housing. Riverside was a very beautiful city, as you know the layout. But there were lots of trees in Riverside. They had a tree warden, and he was very active in making sure that people kept their trees up for the city.

The Mission Inn was a big attraction in those days and was really a wonderful place to go on special occasions. I remember going there many times whenever we had family members who came from a distance. My dad would always take them to the Mission Inn for dinner or lunch. I was always captivated by the table cloths, napkins, finger bowls and nice silverware. It had a wonderful cachet to it that was very impressive to a youngster. When the older folks were sitting around in the patio or the lobby talking after a meal, we kids would run around in what they called the catacombs down below where they had the Pope's Court and all the wax figures. There were lots of little hidden passageways where we would play hide and seek.

Erickson: You had great adventures there, I am sure.

Gabbert: Riverside was really a relatively small town. I am not exactly sure what the population was. I am sure I am mistaken in the memory of the numbers, but I remember one time when I was sitting eating breakfast and my dad was looking at the paper and said, "John, do you know that Riverside now has more than 12,000 people?" Well, I am sure it was more than 12,000, probably more like 15,000 but still it was a little town. Today, you can go out to Grand Terrace and it is larger than Riverside was when I was a kid. There was nothing in

Gabbert: Moreno Valley except dry farming and maybe 200 to 300 people lived there scattered around in little ranches.

Riverside had a very good trolley system. It came from Pacific Electric from Los Angeles by way of Rialto to Riverside. Then there was a line that went to San Bernardino and Redlands. There was a line that went directly from Riverside to Corona and Arlington. There was a line that went down Main and continued on to branch off Fourteenth and went down Brockton Avenue to Jurupa. There was a line that went up Seventh Street to Mt. Rubidoux and a line that went down Cridge Street to Victoria, then out Victoria Avenue to Victoria Hill.

Erickson: And those were all electric cars?

Gabbert: All electric cars. There was a line that went down to Fairmount Park. You could ride all over Riverside for a nickel on Pacific Electric. You could go to San Bernardino. Normally, you would go by way of Rialto and then pick up another train from San Bernardino and go right in to Los Angeles. For a number of years, when I was in about the fourth grade until I was in high school, I was having orthodontia work done and so was my sister. There was only about one orthodontist in Southern California, and he was in Claremont. We would ride, my sister and I, often times together and often times separately, to Claremont on the Pacific Electric and come home that way. Nobody thought any thing of it.

Erickson: It was safe.

Gabbert: Very safe, and there were enough trains so that it was a big time saver.

Erickson: I was going to talk about your school days. John, I know you went to RCC.

Gabbert: I went to all Riverside schools. I went to Magnolia School. I started there in 1915. My mother had been a school teacher. She came from New York state and was a school teacher in Oxnard. That is where she met my dad. I don't know why, but she did not believe in kindergarten, so she wouldn't let me or my sister go to kindergarten.

Erickson: Was she teaching you at home, John?

Gabbert: No, because I remember from my first day in the first grade, all the kids who had been to kindergarten could write their names. I could not write my name. So, I came home with tears in my eyes, and my mother sat me down during the noon hour and taught me how to write my name. For some reason I don't know, she thought kids were too little to go to kindergarten. My father and mother were very supportive of the schools, so I went to Magnolia School through the sixth grade. Then I went to Grant School which still exists, but it is not the same building. Grant School was a huge brick building which was built to be the high school at the corner of Fourteenth and Brockton. I think it was probably built in the 1890s. It was a huge baronial building with towers.

Erickson: Is it still there?

Gabbert: Oh, no. It was a brick building and various earthquakes came along and made big cracks. They put iron bars in which did not do any good, I guess. Finally, it was condemned. There is another school on the site now, still called Grant, but it is not the original building. My sister and I both went to Grant for the seventh and eighth grades. Then they started the junior high school. They built the junior high school on Magnolia at Tequesquite. They call it Central. Then I went two years to Poly High School and two years to South Pasadena High School. I came back here and went two years to Riverside Junior College and two years at Occidental College.

Erickson: Was that typical that most of your friends from Riverside would have gone to RCC?

Gabbert: I went two years to Poly High and then there was a gap of two years, but I came back to junior college, and they were all the same people, all my friends. In those days, I would say that the great majority of kids who went to junior college went on to the university or to some other college. Most of them seemed to go to the University of California. I would say the majority of them went to Cal who went on to college, more than any other institution. Let's say it that way, because it would probably be a majority. The junior college had a very good reputation. Some of the best teachers, instructors and

Gabbert: professors I ever had in school were here at city college. It is now called city college, but in those days, it was a junior college. When I graduated from there in 1929, I think the entire student body was something like 300. Now of course, they have something like 25,000.

Erickson: Yes, and they have many campuses now.

Gabbert: They also had an interesting program there called a Co-op Program in which students would go six weeks to school and then work six weeks in the field in which they were studying. If they were studying nursing or biology, they would work as nurses or work in labs. If they were studying physics, they would work for power or chemical companies. It was a very successful program. I don't know how long it ran, but I would say probably twenty per cent of the students were in Co-op.

Erickson: From there you went to Occidental?

Gabbert: I went to Occidental College and went one year to Duke University Law School and then two years at Berkeley, Cal, Boalt Hall.

Erickson: Now why did you make the transfer from Duke to Boalt?

Gabbert: I had a scholarship at Duke and it was reassigned after the first year. During college and law school, I worked up at Sequoia National Park for Howard Hays's company.

Erickson: Which was what, John? What did they do? Was it a concession company?

Gabbert: That was the Sequoia General Grants National Parks Company. They were the concession company. They had the lodge and the Kaweah camps and the auto camp and the store. All those matters were owned by that company, and I was the general dog body. Like all other kids, we worked up there seven days a week all summer for \$60.00 a month and thought we were lucky. Anyway, after I finished my first year at Duke, I went right up to Sequoia. During the summer, I don't recall just when, my dad came up and spent a couple of days up in Sequoia. He was a great Cal booster. No one ever went to the university that had enjoyed it more and got more out of it than my father. He was

Gabbert: absolutely the greatest Cal booster I ever knew. The fact that he lived in Riverside and not in the Bay region is the only thing that kept him from being around the university all the time. He said he felt that I ought to go to Berkeley if I was going to practice law in California. He felt I should go to the university here, and he thought I would meet friends professionally here. For that reason, he thought I ought to go to Berkeley. I did not have any strong feelings to say no, so I made application and transferred. In the fall, I went to Berkeley and started my second year of law school and graduated from there in 1934.

Erickson: Do you remember what it was that attracted you to that profession? Had you ever considered the newspaper business that your father was in?

Gabbert: Yes. When I was just a kid, I worked in a newspaper office as a printer's devil. When I was in the sixth grade, I had a little hand press, so I "piddled around" with that and got the idea I would start a newspaper at Magnolia School. I started out with one page. No, it was never more than one page. Later my sister continued it and increased it, but I got the linotype operator down at the office to set me up a first edition. I gave him the news and he filled it out, pretty simple stuff. Then I printed it on a proof press. It was called The New Magnolia Item, and I sold it for a penny. I think I made 87 cents as near as I remember.

Thereafter, I continued working as a kid around the print shop and learned to do a certain amount of printing. I played around and had a press as a hobby which I kept up until about 1970. When we moved, we had no place to put the equipment. As a matter of fact, I just gave the hand press to Mr. Berger.

Erickson: To Sid Berger (at the Special Collections Library of Rivera Library).

Gabbert: Yes, I have a lot of other equipment still which he is deciding whether he wants to use it or not. My sister picked up the printing the next year and she did it for two more years at Grant. She printed The New Magnolia Item for a year and then The Grant Item for two years.

When I got to high school, I started writing sports covering high school football games and such. I got a little writing there, and I did

Gabbert: that when I went to junior college. I did not know if that was what I wanted to do or not. But the reason I went into the law was that I got very interested in debating in college. From that, it became a natural. Most of the guys who were interested in that were planning to go to law school.

When I was a small lad, my father was sued for libel by the Mayor of Riverside. It was quite a big case. It created such an interest at the time that they took over the Elks Club to hold court because of the number of people who wanted to attend the court. My father had an attorney who went in and in about twenty minutes got the case thrown out because legally the guy did not have a leg to stand on. I remember my dad at the breakfast table telling my mother when she asked how much it cost, he said it cost a thousand dollars. Well, a thousand dollars was quite a bit of money in those days. I asked how long was he in court, and my dad said about twenty minutes. I thought to myself, "Gee, he only goes in court for twenty minutes and gets a thousand dollars." I thought, "Gee, that's a good deal." And I think that silly little, crazy thought impinged on my mind to such an extent that I thought I would consider being a lawyer. That was the principal reason I started thinking about it. And then debating was my fun, and I enjoyed it greatly. That was the reason I decided to go to law school. Neither were very good reasons.

Erickson: I was going to ask about Kay and your three children.

Gabbert: I met Kay when I was working up in Sequoia. She and some friends were there. A friend had her mother as a chaperone for the half a dozen gals all from the Tulare High School. This was the summer after Kay's first year in college at Stanford. I was running the dance at Sequoia and I recognized her sorority pin. So I got talking to her, and that was the beginning of a romance which had its ups and downs for several years. We were finally married in 1938, and we have three children.

Our oldest daughter, Sarah, lives in Tucson, Arizona. She married Robert Schmerl who was a mathematician and researcher for IBM. They lived in Palo Alto for many years. Sarah actually taught. She got her master's in Art at Stanford and taught art at Palo Alto schools.

Gabbert: They moved here to Riverside briefly when he was doing some work for a company IBM had assigned him to at Norton Air Force Base on mathematics of rockets. Then they went to live at Morgan Hill for a number of years and he was working in San Jose for IBM. He was then transferred to their research program at Tucson. He passed away about two years ago, unfortunately, sadly. Sarah has always been very active in art and has her own studio. She started out principally in design of stained glass and got some pretty big commissions, churches and synagogues. The lead fumes began to affect her health, so she largely gave it up, although she still does a little here and there. She has gone into water colors and teaching. She teaches at an art school in Italy each summer. Next year, she will be the director. It is at a place called Trento, north of Rome. Last summer, she taught a session in an art school program near Nice, France, and will go back to do that this summer. She is very, very busy and has just done a big decoration of a big, new retirement program in Yuma, Arizona. She has done all the murals and is finishing there this week. Sarah went to Riverside schools and from here went to Scripps College in Claremont and got her master's from Stanford.

My daughter Katie went to Pomona College and then went in to court reporting. Actually, she did something in between. She worked for a sporting goods outfit in San Francisco for two or three years and was head of the women's sports buying. Then I convinced her that she ought to have something more as a back up, widow's insurance or otherwise. I suggested several things which she did not want to do, but she finally thought she might like to be a court reporter, so she went to school in San Francisco and became a court reporter in San Benito County at Hollister. She was married to a fellow who was going to Santa Clara Law School. When he finished law school, they came to Riverside to practice. For several years, she did odds and ends of reporting because she was busy with two children. I think she has been a court reporter for some twenty five years, and for the last several years she has been supervising reporter. She has to cover all the courts and has to have reporters in all forty eight courts every day. She also carries her own court and the grand jury herself. She has been very busy and has two children, a son and daughter. (My daughter Sarah has two boys).

Gabbert: My son Scott lives in Seattle. He graduated from the University of Redlands and was in the Army. He went to work for Ross Perot back in Camp Hill, Pennsylvania. He came out here for the company he worked for in San Francisco, but he did not like the arrangements where they worked and the night work, so he went to work for an outfit in Redwood, City. He was with them for several years and then moved to Seattle. He has two children, a daughter and son, who live in Seattle.

Erickson: Hasn't Scott inherited your love of the outdoors, too?

Gabbert: Yes, well all the kids did, I think. Not too long after the war, my court reporter was very active in the Boy Scouts. I had bought some sleeping bags and other outdoor equipment from an outfit in Scotland. They were really good, quality stuff. I had loaned gear to my reporter, Tom Nolan and his son, and they had a group of scouts who were very active in outdoor activities: camping, backpacking, winter camping, mountaineering, etc. So, the kids saw this and decided they would like to get this kind of equipment. I got in touch with the company in Scotland to see if they wanted to have someone handle their line as a kind of moonlighting operation. They agreed, and we outfitted this scout troop with this gear.

We took a trip up in the San Jacinto mountains for a few days and all the kids had their gear: lightweight tents and lightweight down bags, etc. There was a little rain, things got a little damp, so we spread them all out on the bushes. (I went along with my son, Scott). Another couple of scout groups came through and saw this gear being dried and were captivated by it and inquired where they could get some. So, that is when we started a little business called Highland Outfitters. We had that for a number of years. Both Scott and Katie worked at Highland Outfitters, so they were in to all this kind of mountaineering and camping equipment. Finally, we found we could not compete with the big outfits. We were as big as a lot of them that have now developed, but we did not have the financial acumen to throw more money into it. We finally terminated the business, but it was a lot of fun while it lasted, and it kept us busy.

Gabbert: From that, my son became a very good mountaineer, rock climber, and has climbed some of the big mountains. He is now into kayaking and is going to kayak the Yellowstone River this summer with his gal friend.

Erickson: That is interesting. John, I was going to move on to the special relationship you had with Rupert Costo.

Gabbert: I met Rupert when we were both at junior college. Rupert lived in the YMCA. The YMCA had an arrangement with the junior college that they would rent rooms to students for \$15.00 a month. The school, when they could give a scholarship, would pay that \$15.00. Rupert came on an athletic scholarship in which they could legally, at that time, pay that \$15.00. I worked nights and afternoons when I did not have classes until 10:00 p.m. at the Y at the desk. There were a number of guys going to the junior college who lived at the Y, and I knew them and got acquainted. They came around the desk and we would talk. That is when I got well acquainted with Rupert. Rupert and I were taking a class in Logic together. Class met on Saturday morning. I worked Saturday morning at the Y, but I got a deal so I could take time out to go to class. I had a book, but Rupert did not have enough money to have a book. So, I would try to use the book before Saturday, and then I would let him have the book either early Saturday morning for an hour or two before class or on Friday evening. We shared the book and became pretty well acquainted. Rupert was an amazing guy. He had that gruff, “aw shucks” manner, always trying to make you think he did not know what was going on. He was very, very bright and had a wonderful personality. He was very active in athletics, which I was not. He was captain of the football team, the baseball team, played basketball and ran track, too. He went on through various other schools as kind of a “tramp” athlete for several years. He went to the University of Nevada, Northern Arizona, Haskell Indian Institute. Later he worked for the House of David in Benton Harbor, Michigan. It was a kind of religious outfit. One of their means of gaining publicity was a professional basketball team, kind of like the Harlem Globetrotters. To be a member of the House of David, you had to wear a beard. Well, Rupert, being a Native American, had a difficult time raising a beard, so he played with a false beard. He played basketball for the House of David for some time.

Erickson: Did he glue it on?

Gabbert: I don't know. He never said. Thereafter, he came back to the DeAnza area, the reservation of the Cahuilla Indians and was a rancher up there, a stockman. He was also a surveyor, and through his efforts, he got the Rural Electrification Commission to bring electricity to the DeAnza area. For a couple of years, he represented the tribes of California in Washington as their lobbyist. Thereafter, he went to work for the state of California as a Right-of-Way Engineer for the Highway Department. He worked at that until he retired. But along with that, he started with his wife, the American Indian Historical Society and the various publications, books, magazines and newspapers they put out. They worked at that for fifteen or twenty years and made it an active and worthwhile organization. I kept up contact with Rupert, not constantly, but every once in a while I would see him, or he would see me. We wrote letters occasionally.

He approached me at the time they were thinking of getting rid of the library when they were going to retire. That is when I got interested in the library to try to get it for the benefit of UCR. When he called me, he asked if I would come up to see him and that they wanted to do something with their library. So I went up to San Francisco. What they wanted to do at that time was to give it to the Riverside City College. I said to him, "Rupert, you ought to think about doing something other than that for this reason." They felt students of Indian History, particularly of treaties, (they had a very good collection of treaties) would want to come to use them for research purposes. I said, "Well, they are not going to do that at a junior institution. City College at that time was not set up for this, I felt even though I was an alumnus and was a strong supporter. I felt it ought to go to an established university, so that is when I suggested that perhaps they ought to do that and come here (to UCR). That began a process that took six years to work out.

Erickson: That was with Chancellor Rivera initially, was it not?

Gabbert: Chancellor Hinderaker, I think originally, and then Chancellor Rivera. Is that the right order?

Erickson: Yes.

Gabbert: He was very supportive of the idea. But it waffled along and finally, the Costos were importuned by Humboldt State University and later by Stanford. They were on the brink; they were fed up with the fact that there was a certain amount of inaction in Riverside. They were ready to give it to Stanford. There was one day when they were set to give it to Stanford that afternoon. We got that staved off, and they then made arrangements to come here, as you know.

Erickson: Let's switch to another topic. All your friends identify you as being the distinguished judge who rides a motorcycle—rode a motorcycle. Do you remember what it was that attracted you to motorcycle riding?

Gabbert: What attracted me to motorcycles was the milieu at the time. I came before the hot rod era, you see. A few years after I was into motorcycles, most kids were into hot rods as today they are into computers. Before the motorcycles, we were all crazy over radio. Kids follow these trends, you know. The trend when I was about twelve years was motorcycles. Two printers who worked for my dad rode motorcycles. One of them was a Dutchman named Adrian Brumuler, and he lived in Redlands. He worked at the print shop here in Riverside and rode an old single cylinder belt drive Harley Davidson from Redlands to Riverside every day. He is the first guy who to let me ride a motorcycle. He taught me how to operate it and sent me off on his bike. That was a big thrill. There was another printer who worked for my dad, Mr. Moody, an Irishman, and he lived about two blocks from us. He had been a motorcycle dealer. As a matter of fact, he named one of his sons Harley Davidson Moody, and that son, I believe, is still living in Riverside. He had several old motorcycles in his garage, and he subscribed (this is amazing) to two English motorcycle magazines, each of which was published weekly. So every week, he got two motorcycle magazines from Britain. And they weren't little tiny magazines, they were pretty substantial magazines. It was incredible. One was called by the Brits, the "Blu Un" and the other was the "Green Un." One had a blue cover and the other had a green cover. They were rivals. These things piled up, and I used to go over to look at his old motorcycles, and one day he asked if I wanted some of these magazines. So, I hauled off a bunch of magazines and thereafter he kept me supplied as he discarded these

Gabbert: old magazines. I became a rabid motorcycle fan simply by reading these motorcycle magazines. I really had quite a background in early English motorcycle magazines. This would have been from about 1921 or 1922. Then my friend Fred Oldendorf's dad had an old 1910 motorcycle he wanted to sell for \$10.00, so I bought that. It did not have any tires, so I rode it down the street on the rims to get it home. My dad saw me doing that and said I had to have tires to be safe, so he bought tires. The tires cost far more than the motorcycle. I rode that motorcycle, but I pushed it more than I rode it. It was a 1910 Wagner made in St. Paul, Minnesota. The motorcycle was an antique almost in those days, an old single cylinder, belt drive. In the summer of 1924, I rode it up to Fresno. I was going to spend the summer with one of my uncles who had a little store and garage and gas station in a place called O'Neals, California, which is just at the southern end of the Mother Lode. I had a wonderful summer up there, but I never could get the darn motorcycle to start so I abandoned it in a barn. I bought a cycle car in Fresno, and my dad came up with a car and we brought that back. So, I left that Wagner in that barn, In 1972, my very good friend from England, who was a great authority on antique motors and cars and motorcycles, came over here for a month. We went all over, up to the automotive museum that Harrah's had in Sparks, Nevada. We went in first thing in the morning and paid our entry fee, and they had next to the entry a room where they showed their latest restoration, a car or whatever. It just so happened, it was a 1909 Wagner. Mine was a 1910. They were exactly the same except the 1909 had a slightly different front fork. It was just like it came from the factory. I just practically wept. I knew every nut and bolt and screw and it was absolutely perfect. I went to the fellow and said, "I used to have a 1910 Wagner, and it is really a thrill to see this." "Where did you get it, and how much did you have to pay for it?" He said they weren't supposed to tell those things, but "in view of your interest," they bought it when it was just a bunch of junk in boxes. They spent \$7,000 for it and put more than \$14,000 into rebuilding it. And, I was thinking I left that one in the barn in Fresno! Later I found out at an antique motorcycle meeting that there are only six of them in existence and some are now worth \$30 or 40,000, which is interesting. My dad had a cousin who lived in Rialto, and he was a motorcycle rider. He had a couple of Harley Davidsons he wasn't going to ride

Gabbert: anymore, so I bought the two of those for \$35.00. They were 1913 and 1914 Harleys. I sold one and kept one. A little later, I got another machine and since then, I have had too many. But, I have had a wonderful time. I rode for seventy five years.

Erickson: You just recently gave that up, didn't you?

Gabbert: Yes, because I felt my eyesight isn't as clear as it used to be; my hearing isn't as good, my reaction times are slower, and I have been lucky. I have never had any serious accidents.

Erickson: But you had some wonderful trips with some special friends.

Gabbert: Oh, yes, and I am sure that I rode at least 300,000 miles. I went to Europe, and we have been all over the western states from Colorado, the west, north and south and western Canada and it just killed me to quit.

Erickson: I understand that you served on the school board here. Do you remember those years?

Gabbert: Well, I got off in 1949. That is when I got on the bench, so I had to resign.

Erickson: Were your children in school then?

Gabbert: Yes, I think that I probably was on the Board from 1946 to 1949.

Erickson: Do you remember any of the issues you were confronted with?

Gabbert: We did not have the racial issues and segregation issues at that time. They came on later when Art Littleworth was Chairman and President of the Board which he handled so superbly. We were in a building mode for several years before the war and after, before I was on the board, during and after, we had four or five bond issues for schools. The population was burgeoning, and we needed more schools. I headed up a number of those drives, and we won every one of them. Then the question of the university began popping up.

Erickson: When was that, John?

Gabbert: That had gone on for a number of years. For twenty years, they had talked every once in a while in Riverside why they don't we get part of the university here. We had the Citrus Experiment Station.

Erickson: It was the Citrus Experiment Station that gave the impetus to this?

Gabbert: Yes, they had the land. "Why don't they come here?" The Cal Alumni would bring up this matter and talk about it. There would be an editorial in the paper. And that went on for a number of years. My dad, when he was editor of the Enterprise, was very active in getting the Experiment station to move from the old campus by Mt. Rubidoux to the new area out here. He was always talking about getting a branch of the university. After WWII, there was a real need for higher education facilities. The returning veterans and the growth in population was demanding that there be more facilities, and the university was eager to grow with the general growth. Everyone was talking about it. There was a feeling that there should be a branch of the university in the Southern California area in addition to UCLA. There were a lot of different groups that were talking about this, pushing Riverside, and writing letters to the Regents and Legislators. The Chamber of Commerce had an education committee that was headed by Cleo Thomas. They were active. The Cal Alumni local leader, Harold Butterfield, was a staunch Cal supporter, a probation officer. The alumni were active in trying to do something. Then the Strayer Committee was appointed or created by Legislative action by The Regents and the State Board of Education as you pointed out here. I didn't know that, because I had forgotten it.

Erickson: I found some Regents' Minutes where that was listed.

Gabbert: Dr. George Strayer, who had been the head of the Department of Education at Columbia University, retired, headed that committee. A very fine man. I remember Dr. Monroe Deutsch, but I don't remember Dr. Douglass. My memory is slipping in a lot of things. Anyway, that committee started making investigations around the state as to needs and possibilities for development of branches of the university. Everyone was writing letters to them. There was quite a bit of one group doing this, one group doing that. There was a

Gabbert: tendency, we thought, that they might work against each other. Marie Bonnett of the school board suggested we call a meeting to see if we could unify all the groups into one committee. I made the motion at the school board, and it was passed. The newspaper gave me the credit for it, and that has always bothered me that Marie did not get more credit for it. None of us were looking for special credit, but I felt like the headline yesterday, I did not like it. It made me feel very bad because there were a lot of other people and it kind of implied that I was the guy...

Erickson: I think they were just trying to point out that you were instrumental in that.

Gabbert: Anyway, I felt that many other people have been neglected in that. (Editor's note: Gabbert is referring to an article in The Press-Enterprise announcing that he has been selected Citizen of the Year).

As a result of that, The Press Enterprise wrote an editorial urging a single committee be formed and Howard Hays, Sr. called a group together. They decided they would just go ahead and organize one. I think the names are listed in this unofficial biography I wrote in 1983. Yes, this is the best that my memory was in 1983, and it was better then than it is today. In the article I mentioned Howard Hays, Sr.; Tim Hays (Howard Hays, Jr.); Phil Boyd; Chauncey L. MacFarland, one of the old time lawyers in Riverside; V. W. Grubbs, who was very active in civic matters; Dave Bell, who was also active; C.W. Dutton, who was a big automotive dealer; Harold Backstrand, who worked for Food Machinery; John Babbage, practicing law; Chuck O'Neill, who was working for the Chamber of Commerce, (I think that the General Manager/Director of the Chamber was Stanley Bates. But I am not sure, it might have been O'Neill. Later, Chuck O'Neill became a paid lobbyist for the committee in Sacramento. He is still living); Fred Younglove of Rouse's store.

Erickson: Was Rouse's a department store, John?

Gabbert: It was a big department store. It was right next to where the Museum of Photography is now. The Tamale Factory is now in what used to be a part of Rouse's store. There might have been others. I said back

Gabbert: in 1983, I hoped that if there were others, they would be identified. But no one every identified themselves to me as having been one of them. That group set up a nominating committee. I remember we met out at the Victoria Country Club. Howard Hays, Sr. was there, Fred Younglove, Harold Backstrand, and I was there. Whether Tim Hays was there or not, I am not sure. I think he was not, but I think in here (the biography) I said he was. In any event, we nominated Judge O.K. Morton as Chairman, so he became the first chairman of CUC.

Erickson: And did you establish the name at that time? The CUC?

Gabbert: I think so. Donald Adams was Vice Chairman; Glenn Gurtner, was Treasurer for a number of years; Howard Hays, Jr. was Secretary; and Charles O'Neill was Recording Secretary. The Executive Committee was created and on it were Harold Backstrand; Dave Bell; Marie Bonnett; Phil Boyd; Harold Butterfield; William (everyone called him Bill) Evans, long-time mayor at various times in Riverside. Whether he was mayor at that time, I am not sure. I think he was not. He was one of the original Evans family of Riverside. I was on it; V. W. Grubbs; Fred Younglove; John Babbage; Nelson Dilsworth and C. L. McFarland. Then we held a large public meeting. The first one was held on March 13, 1948, at the Mission Inn. Senator Dilworth and Assemblyman Boyd both spoke as to what they needed from the community to help foster the growth or campaign for the university branch in Riverside. At that time, everybody was simply talking about wanting to get a little college here, a small college, a high grade four year institution. No one had in mind the growth of a big university with various schools. They were thinking of a small, high-grade liberal arts college. People were talking about having the Swarthmore of the West or the Oberlin of the West. We were all thinking of the small liberal arts college. That thinking, I believe, continued on in to the early thinking of The Regents. Certainly, I think it was the belief of the first Chancellor, first Provost that that is what it would be. I think that continued for some time. It wasn't until later that the shift began to see that the need became clear that we needed to get larger.

Erickson: I think that was about a five or six year period where it was a liberal arts college.

## Short Break

Erickson: We were talking about the public meeting.

Gabbert: Yes. Most of our public meetings were held at the Mission Inn, frequently for lunch. Then, on occasion, we would have a special evening meeting and dinner when we might have university people there or political folks who were interested in contacting us.

Erickson: Did you get quite a turnout of community people in addition to the CUC people?

Gabbert: Yes. I think that almost immediately after the bill was signed for the beginning of the work here, our membership grew rapidly. The Governor signed the budget bill for commencing work and planning it in April of 1948. By May, we had 152 individuals and businesses signed up. From then on, it grew very rapidly. I would say that within six months, we probably had a couple of hundred. So, we had a viable group, and the people were willing to support the program.

Erickson: Support in what ways, John. Writing letters or monetary?

Gabbert: Yes, but mainly working in Sacramento to support appropriations and development of this campus. That is when Chuck O'Neill went up as a lobbyist. He did a lot of good work in Sacramento. Actually, he was there before the bill was signed and then continued at various times after.

Erickson: Did he report back to the CUC then?

Gabbert: Oh, yes.

Erickson: We talked about the Citrus Experiment Station. Were the faculty members and staff supportive of a UC campus here?

Gabbert: Well, I think some were and some were not. Dr. Batchelor, who was the Director, was quite supportive. Among others who were supportive was Al Boyce. However, there was a worry by many of the people that it would impinge on their research. I think it took

Gabbert: some years for that to dissipate. Probably when you pursue oral histories with members of the faculty, the few who are still around, who were here in the early days, on both sides, the liberal arts versus the scientific folks at the Citrus Experiment Station, you will find that there is probably a division of viewpoint. I know we had some of that, but by and large, there was no overt obstructionism.

Erickson: We know there was a competition taking place. Do you know what the other cities were in the southern portion of the state?

Gabbert: I noticed that question when you submitted it to me. I can't remember, except we thought that San Diego and maybe Fresno might be. But the peculiar thing was that we were successful, I believe, because from the very beginning we presented a united front. These other outfits were doing as we were when we started. Their Chamber of Commerce might write a letter to somebody, or their assemblyman might get up and say something in the Assembly, or the Board of Supervisors might say they think somebody ought to do something. But Riverside had a focused direction. If you will permit me to go back in the little article I wrote, I think I mentioned that here. I quote in here an article that appeared in The Press Enterprise when UCR opened for students in 1954. The article mentioned the first public meeting of the Strayer Committee which was held in Los Angeles, October 16, 1947. The delegation from Riverside attended that meeting. The Press said: "The Riversiders were: State Senator Nelson Dilworth, the man who first aroused local interest and hope in the University project here; Stanley Bates, then secretary of the Riverside Chamber of Commerce; and Cleo Thomas, chairman of the Education Committee of the Chamber of Commerce; and Tom Patterson, reporter for the Press-Enterprise..." And then I comment on that in this little article. "One rather noticeable feature in the meeting--almost amazing when you consider how many chambers of commerce there are in Southern California,--was that only Riverside was there to present the story of its virtues as a possible education center...No community other than Riverside offered any case before that forum."

Gabbert: There were a whole series of Strayer Committee meetings from Eureka to San Diego, from Redding, Fresno, Bakersfield, San Luis Obispo, Santa Maria, Santa Barbara, Los Angeles and all around, we had somebody at every darn meeting. We might have missed a meeting in Eureka or missed one in Redding, but I know I went to several meetings that were in Southern California.

Erickson: So you were always present. And then, didn't you tell ...

Gabbert: We would go with a group of four or five people, and we got to know and remember that committee. We would sit in the front row, and if they gave us a chance, we would say something. But, it was amazing how little was done by anybody else.

Erickson: Didn't you also...don't you have a cute story about bringing citrus with you when you went to these meetings?

Gabbert: Well, yes. But the main thing with the citrus was that Dave Bell, Harvey Lynn, and Don Stevning from Redlands, who later became chairman of the committee, sent boxes of oranges and grapefruit to virtually everybody in the Legislature. It was sort of stupid and sort of silly.

Erickson: But it worked.

Gabbert: It worked, yes. At least we were always seeking attention. Whenever the committee met here, and they here met two or three times because we were leading and they came and checked, checked, checked, we would have a very nice dinner for them. I mentioned in my little article that we had several, I think as many as six, up at Roy Hunt's Sky Room. The Hunts: he was the owner of the Riverside theatres, and a wonderfully civic-minded guy; and his wife Blodwin was just as civic minded as he was. Their hearts were big as could be. They had this lovely, special kind of dining room with a barbecue arrangement and a bar on Pachappa. It looked out over the whole valley. On these occasions, Roy would grill the steaks up there, and we would treat these folks to steaks and orange juice and everything else. I think it wasn't a misplaced effort, because by the time we were through, they knew everybody in Riverside. And everybody in Riverside thought that they knew them. And it certainly paid off.

Erickson: What was the reaction in the community?

Gabbert: Great excitement. There was a period in there--I don't know if you read this (article)--when they played a trick on John Babbage. They passed the thing one day and rescinded it the next. It was a trick! The headlines read In and Out. Finally, we were in and everyone was happy as could be.

Erickson: Good. About that time, they asked Provost Watkins to come from UCLA to start working on establishing the campus, right?

Gabbert: Was that about 1949. I am not sure.

Erickson: Yes, I think it was. Did the Citizens University Committee have a relationship with Provost Watkins? Did he solicit your support?

Gabbert: Oh, Yes. He was a buddy, buddy of everybody. He was a dynamic, dynamic fellow. He loved everybody and everybody loved him. He was the perfect person to start this program. Everybody loved him and he loved everybody. He worked... You were his buddy and he would take you by the arms and he'd tell you to do this, we needed to do that, and we did it.

Erickson: Do you remember anything he asked you to do, John?

Gabbert: Principally, it was to get materials when the building programs were going on, because of the war, the Korean War effort. We were held up getting the steel. We got Floyd Odlum, through Phil Boyd, and he got Henry Kaiser to get the steel. Then on cement, (Dr. Coman mentions that)...We were stopped because we did not have enough points to get cement, and here were two big cement plants right next to us. We finally got that. And then later they wanted to get the housing development, now called Married Student Housing, I think. Those were temporary buildings put up for WWII for war workers, and the Federal Government owned those. They were supposed to be torn down when the bureaucrats wanted them torn down, but we did not want this. We worked like the devil and then we finally got those, got the right for the University to keep them.

Gabbert: The land acquisition, there were little pieces of property, little pieces of landlocked stuff here and there. We were getting into deals with the city all the time for public utilities.

Erickson: Was this land owned by the city up to the Experiment Station?

Gabbert: No, the state. The University owned most of it, but there were little pieces that they wanted to piece in to fill out. So there was some land acquisition and some roadway rights of way and water and power. We were always being asked to contact the city or the talk to the council or the board of supervisors or the power companies.

Erickson: Was that an easy process for you? Were they cooperative for the most part?

Gabbert: Sometimes yes and sometimes no. Mainly yes, of course.

Erickson: As you look around some fifty years later, are there some surprises on the campus?

Gabbert: Oh, yes. I don't think anybody, anybody in the beginning had any conception of what we see today. This is like walking to the top of the mountain and suddenly seeing a great city in front of your eyes.

## Second Tape

Gabbert: You asked if the growth at UCR had met our expectations. Yes, of course. I don't know of anyone who was active in the early days and who is still around (there are not too many) who would not say the same thing. It just boggles our mind, really. When we started, truly, I think everybody thought that we would have a liberal arts college here of about 600 or 700 students, a very fine high grade, high quality school something on the order of a Pomona, but even on a higher level because of the University.

Erickson: I think we are at about 10,000 students right now.

Gabbert: Right. I think that persisted, that idea of a small school persisted up to and through Provost Watkins' administration, because I think that was the direction that The Regents wanted to go, and I think that maybe originally if somebody thought we ought to have a whole big branch of the university here with veterinary schools and medicine, etc., they figured they could never get it if they did not start small. So, they said let's have a little college. Get our nose in the tent, you know. And, then I think, too, that in a sense (maybe I am thinking of something that is not correct), that those in the Experiment Station would be less opposed if they felt it was going to be a strictly liberal arts college, that it would not impinge too much on the scientific and research developments. It would not interfere with the work they were doing on campus with plantings, etc. That is my own thought at the moment.

Erickson: You held an appointment as an adjunct professor in the Political Science Department.

Gabbert: Chuckling. Yes, for three years.

Erickson: Was that after you were a judge?

Gabbert: It was after I retired.

Erickson: Did you teach classes?

Gabbert: Well, I had a seminar. It was a seminar in legal research and writing. Then I promoted a moot court competition as part of that. Loved it and had a wonderful time. Wish I had continued doing it for a while. I quit too soon, I think.

Erickson: Did you decide to do something different?

Gabbert: Well, Kay thought maybe we ought to do a few more things together like travel, etc. For that reason, principally, I quit, and I am sorry I did.

Erickson: Did you have some special students you remember?

Gabbert: They were all honor students. They were third and fourth year students. And most of them were students planning to go to law school. Not all, but seventy-five per cent were.

Erickson: Your office was in Watkins?

Gabbert: Yes, in Poly Sci.

Erickson: Well, you have certainly been involved in the university from those early days. You have been a lecturer, you have been a trustee on the Foundation Board and the president of CUC. What do you think was the attraction, John, for you all those years? Did you love being around educational institutions?

Gabbert: I was always interested in educational processes and felt that we ought to back it all the way in the community. But, there was something in my father's background and interest in the university, too. I had been brought up at home with my dad's tales of the University of California. Even though I did not go to Berkeley, which was a great disappointment, I think, to my father, I went to Occidental because I had a scholarship there and because I was greatly interested in the debate program. And I got recruited by Occidental. One of my very good friends who had been my debate partner at Poly High School went there, and he worked on me. And, then, too, since we had gone to South Pasadena, a large number of South Pasadena students went to Occidental if they were going to a liberal arts college nearby. A lot of them could live at home. I had a number of friends there. Two of the guys I debated with in South Pasadena went there. They had a real good professor, well known, named Charles Frederick Lindsley. ... Are we on tape?

Erickson: Yes, but we can turn it off.

Gabbert: Well, I did not know if you wanted to go into all this. I felt a debt to the university. I went there to law school, my family were Cal people, and I also feel a debt to the other schools I went to, but Occidental and Berkeley holds most. My big trouble is that I never went to any school more than two years, except for grammar school where I went six years. But after grammar school, I never went to any institution more than two years. So, I have a lot of divided loyalties.

Erickson: We are glad your loyalty is in Riverside. One extra little comment, John. As an addendum: John Gabbert was just named Riverside Citizen of the Year for 1998 by the Chambers of Commerce. Do you have some comments you would like to share about this award?

Gabbert: Well, I think they got the wrong John Gabbert. I think they really meant my father. My father was John R. Gabbert. He was president of the chamber of commerce. He was editor of the Enterprise from 1912 to 1930. He was state Real Estate Commissioner, he was on the State Board of Education, he was one of the principal boosters to get March Field developed, he was one of the principal boosters to get the movement of the Citrus Experiment Station to this location, and he was in every civic organization, and a booster for everything, that he could be. The thing about my father that I am very proud of was that my father could speak Chinese. He thought he wanted to go into the Foreign Service, and so he studied Chinese, and he could speak Mandarin and read a little. He was not an advanced linguist. The local Chinese here were Cantonese, but he could get by in talking to them.

Erickson: We had quite a few Chinese residents, didn't we?

Gabbert: Yes, we had several hundred. They were doing much of the work in the citrus industry and in the packinghouses. They had vegetable gardens down in the river bottom that supplied Riverside with vegetables. The Chinese had these vegetable wagons that went all over town delivering vegetables. But in the late teens and very early twenties, the Ku Klux Klan got after the Chinese, the Blacks and others. They burned out the Chinese who were living up on Tenth Street in town in Riverside. They burned them out. The Chinese then went to the Tequesquite/Arroyo area and built another little China Town, but they built it out of brick. Then the Ku Klux Klan became a very, very active organization in Riverside. They elected the mayor, they elected some members of the city council, and they were really flexing their muscles in a very regressive way. They were threatening to burn down the Chinamen in town again. My father became the proponent for and protagonist for the Chinese—give them a fair

Gabbert: chance, etc. They looked upon my father as their benefactor. And this was at considerable risk to himself, physically and in a business way and otherwise.

Erickson: Did he write editorials?

Gabbert: Yes, and that lawsuit that I told you about was a result of it. The Ku Klux Klan started a lawsuit against him. They threatened him, and I know my mother was very worried about it. Well, they were put down. As a result, I would say this in jest: There was no American family who got more lychee nuts for holidays than we did. They showered us. They brought dolls and glass bracelets to my sister. They would bring me these little expanding trees. You remember, those little things you would drop in water and they would make flowers?

Erickson: Yes, yes.

Gabbert: I had boxes, the little secret boxes that you could open up, and no one could find how to open them up. And lychee nuts, I remember. Because they really wanted to reward my father. That is why I say they got the wrong John Gabbert. My dad deserved it. And I am glad I got it.

Erickson: That is a very nice thing to say, John. I know your father would be proud. I thank you for participating in this interview.

Gabbert: Well, I am sorry. As you get older—and Kay keeps reminding me that I am getting older—you get too darned loquacious!

Erickson: No, no, not at all.