INTERVIEW WITH
DR. JAMES SLATER
BY R. FRANKLIN THOMPSON
on August 31, 1977

T: When we were talking at the Early Alum Picnic, you said you came in 1919.

S: That's right. September, first week.

T: It's James R. Slater. What's the R stand for?

S: Rodenburg.

T: Is that a family name?

S: Yes. Mother's maiden name.

T: Is it a Germanic name?

S: Yes. Both my grandparents on my Mother's side came over from Germany.

T: Was your grandfather a scientist?

S: No. In New York he had a grocery store, or a general store, and then soon after that he went into the coal business--delivered coal. That was the main fuel, and he delivered coal with a one-horse truck. His son took it over after he got through with it. It was located on West 42nd Street and I can remember when he had chickens in his coal yard and they would go right out on West 42nd Street.

T: West 42nd Street - over toward Hoboken.

S: That's right.

T: You went to Rutgers, right?

S: Yes.

T: Was that a private school then?

S: Yes, a church school, Reformed Church of America.

T: And now it's a part of the state university system.
S: They put in enough money so they thought they had better get the name with it, so it's now Rutgers, the State University.

T: A good many of them did that, you know. University of Pittsburg and a good many others, because it was so difficult to operate otherwise.

S: Syracuse just takes a college in once in awhile; forestry college was the first one supported entirely by the state under the direction and supervision of Syracuse.

T: Their law school is the same way and their medical school is the same way. Dr. Tolley was president there for many, many years. He was my mentor at Drew when I was there. He was dean and I worked in his office for awhile. Now, you received a degree in literature from Rutgers, didn't you?

S: Yes. It is misleading because my poorest grades were in German. They had certain rules that if you didn't take an elective in a certain way--we had electives both as sophomores and juniors--and one of the electives you had to continue on the next year. I elected too much in education and psychology, so there wasn't enough science. I was really in a group of courses called General Science, but it didn't have enough pure science in it and they didn't figure education was science, and things like that.

T: Now you got a double master's from Syracuse, one in pedagogy and the other M.A. in zoology.

S: I didn't have enough chemistry to get a master of science, as I was majoring in zoology, really, and then I had to get botany, zoology, etc.

T: After you got your degree at Syracuse, did you go to Florida?

S: No, that was before I came west. I got one just before I went in the army, before
I was drafted from Syracuse, and the second one I got one summer after I got out of
the army.

T: How long were you in the army?

S: For the full time. I was drafted in the second group that went. The first draft
was divided up into different sections—five percent, then fifteen percent, fifteen
percent, and I went in the second section.

T: What branch were you in?

S: Infantry.

T: Where did you serve?

S: Camp Dix, New Jersey, Camp Gordon, Georgia, and Camp Pike, Arkansas.

T: You didn't go across?

S: No, they kept shifting me around. They used me as a teacher really. My last
assignment in Camp Pike, Arkansas, was as battalion adjutant. Camp Pike was right
outside Little Rock. The name has been changed since. From the time when the
battalion was first formed until we got discharged on January 20, 1919.

T: What did you particularly like at Rutgers or at Syracuse?

S: Just a good place to study, and I got interested in track in the Spring of my sopho-
more year, by invitation from the president of the student YMCA. The Fall before I
had won the first cross country race ever held by Rutgers Athletic Association.

T: You were interested in athletics here for many years.

S: Volleyball.

T: Didn't you do some timing on track?

S: Oh, maybe.

T: I remember seeing you with a stopwatch.
S: That was when Seward was helping, too.

T: Also Charlie Robbins.

S: Yes.

T: You came here in 1919 and the school was down at 6th and Sprague. Tell me about the buildings, etc.

S: On the main corner there was the one school building with four nice pillars in front of it. There was a chapel building that had home economics in the basement. Upstairs was the chapel. Then they had a dormitory and a gymnasium. The dormitory is still standing but it has been moved across the street and you can still see it on State Street.

T: What's in there now, do you know?

S: Just apartments. It was a square building, and there are two apartments upstairs and two downstairs now, I believe.

T: Do you remember any of the students at that time?

S: I remember quite a few of them. In fact, one of them is going on field trips with us.

T: Who's that?

S: Mrs. Myhrman—Thelma Bestler Myhrman. Then I called on another one yesterday who was there at the same time, Mrs. Alta Mae Jeffers Hall. She married a school man down there in Oakville, and her husband is dead now but I looked her up for the first time yesterday. I tried the week before when I was through there, but I didn't have the right connections. But I figured it out before I went back this time, and I called on her and she was very young looking and living with one of her son's family. Others were Ernest and Russell Clay, James P. Snyder, Thelma Hastings Erp, and others.

T: That campus was where the Jason Lee Junior High School is now.
S: That's right. The college also owned those three triangles to the east of the campus. You asked me about the sale of the property. Maybe the people had two things in mind; maybe they just had the school buildings, but if they had figured the value of the others, too, it would have been more. But I don't know whether the college or university owns those three triangles yet or not.

T: We own only the one, where the Standard Station is.

S: The one has the church on it and the other has the Kentucky Fried Chicken, something like that.

T: Yes, that's right. Senator Davis used to live in one of those houses.

S: Yes, right by the church. The girls' dormitory, then, was a little further east, on the corner.

T: I know we still have that triangle where the station is. I remember talking to Dr. Todd about it a time or two and he was always a little bit reluctant to talk about it, because Mr. Lister, who was treasurer of the college and on the board of trustees, was also secretary and treasurer of the city school system, and one time when Dr. Todd was away Mr. Lister sold the campus to the city, and Dr. Todd felt that he should have had $15, $20 or $30,000 more for it.

S: You don't know whether, when people try to sell things, they try to get the price up and think it is worth a lot more than it actually is. I thought at the time, though I didn't know anything about the price at all, that the city treated us all right. We got a perfectly good deal; I understand we didn't have to pay much more for the forty acres here than we received for selling the ten acres down there.

T: I think this is probably true. I never knew the reason or inner workings of it. Do you remember when they moved up to the new campus?
S: Oh, yes, very well. We had a moving day--more or less symbolic. We carried the Color Post. That was one of Dr. Todd's favorites.

T: It was a precious thing in its time.

S: We carried two trees, two beech trees and later two holly trees were brought over; and, of course, there might have been some other things that I didn't notice.

T: Didn't the students hitch up to a wagon and pull the rope? Is that how they carried it?

S: They may have; I don't remember that. I was thinking that they carried this Pole on two long poles, so four people could get under it and it wouldn't be very much weight for any one.

T: Did they plant the trees up there?

S: Oh yes.

T: Are they still growing?

S: Yes. The holly trees are the ones at the entrance to Sutton Quadrangle. They keep them trimmed back now. The two beeches are up on the upper level in front of Jones Hall.

T: Are they the white beeches?

S: Yes. They were supposed to be purple beeches but they didn't turn out that way.

I think some nurseryman sold them to the old campus cheap!

T: So those two holly trees were moved from the old campus.

S: Yes, they were. You will notice they don't produce any berries; they were some grown from seed.

T: Dr. Todd was anxious to connect the old locations with the new. Do you know anything about that arch window in the girls' gymnasium and where it came from?
S: No.

T: One of the buildings, you know the university had moved around... and he had that brought up and the arch window in the front of the girls' gymnasium are a part of the things that...

S: You can see for yourself in some of the pictures. But I think it wasn't the one at 6th and Sprague, though.

T: I don't actually know. If I could go back and talk to Dr. Todd, it would be great. Tell me, when you came in 1919, what did you teach?

S: Biology. This is a little secret which hasn't been let out very much. You see, they finally sent me a contract--but, first, Dr. Todd wanted me to come up to New York to meet him and have a talk. I was down in Hampton Rhodes, Virginia, Naval Base and he didn't send me any transportation. I was just out of the army and we didn't collect very much from the army. So, I didn't go up to see him. I didn't know whether I was going to get it or not, but he finally sent me a contract.

T: Did you have any connection with the College of Puget Sound before that?

S: No.

T: You didn't know Senator Davis before that:

S: No, but I always figured how I got the job. The professors at Syracuse, of course, wrote my letters of recommendation, and I didn't know whether C.P.S. would pay much attention to them or not; but the way I figured it out, the lawyer and adviser to Dr. Todd was Dix Rowland and apparently, Dr. Todd took it up to Dix Rowland and said, "Shall I hire this man, sight unseen?" Dix Rowland looked at the letters of recommendation and said, "Well, if Dr. Haroitt said that about him, you better believe it." I think that's
how it was, because I really didn't expect it because I didn't go up to see Dr. Todd.

I had prospects other places.

T: Did you meet Mrs. Slater here?

S: Yes, at First Methodist Church. But going back, before I got here, though, Dr. Todd wrote back to the professors at Syracuse again and wanted to appoint me dean or make a combination: dean and teaching biology. But the professors back there knew better and said, "You'd better try him a year or two and then see if you want him to be dean."

C.P.S. didn't even tell me about that, but Dr. Haroitt told me about it when I departed for the west. I didn't make any claims for it at all. I didn't want it. I wanted to teach biology.

T: You must have been about how old when you started teaching biology?

S: Figure it out, 1890 to 1919--29 years old.

T: And you had been three years in the service.

S: No, I went in the end of September, then I was in all the next year and on January 20 I was out. That was about two full months after the armistice was signed, but we couldn't get papers to discharge a man. As soon as we could get enough papers to discharge the men, they all went the same day, and you had to discharge them, fill out the papers the same day as they got out. There couldn't be any discrepancy--anybody could argue that they needed a little more pay or something.

T: You taught biology then in the old laboratory at 6th and Sprague. Pretty sparse laboratories, weren't they?

S: There were two good-sized rooms up in the two corners. My end faced Sixth Avenue and I had an office between the two rooms. There was a bigger lecture room in the
middle that faced out east. When the classes got too big, I held them in there. I had to hold night classes in that big room. I had one third of the principals of Tacoma in my class for the first one. They made me director of the night classes for one or two years.

T: When did you start the Museum and how did it come about?

S: Just about when I got a car, I started to study the amphibians of the State of Washington—a little later, the reptiles. It is simply an accumulation of the evidence, so that I could say that a certain frog was living in Benton County, and so on for all the rest of the specimens. The specimens are evidence that research has been done, and anybody can come and check me, see. If I just said they were there, that doesn’t go in science. Sight records are no good on the animals that are not entirely familiar. Anybody can say whether they saw a bear, but not so with a frog or a lizard.

T: You have a phenomenal record of locating species and recording them and giving the dates when you saw them. Is there some special word?

S: For example, yesterday afternoon, I went for a ride and there was one species that I didn't have for Kitsap County. I figured out ahead of time—if I go to a certain place, I'll find it. That was a certain point in the northeast county of Kitsap, just before the channel goes into Bremerton. I hadn't found it before even though I'd been through the County and in the County three or four different times before this year and hadn't found it. So, I thought, if I go there, I'll find it. So I did!

T: That's because you know their habitats and...

S: Oh, yes, where to expect them. Every plant has a difference in preference of where it is going to live. Same way with the animals.
T: You first started in amphibians and then mammals?
S: No, reptiles.

T: Sooner or later, you started a department of herpetology.
S: No, this herpetology is a fancy word for the study of amphibians and reptiles. That's just a section in the Museum now. If others wanted to do the same kind of work that I was doing, I would say sure, go ahead.

T: Don't I remember that some of your students sent you specimens when they were in the service in the Near East?
S: Not very much, but some. I didn't get very many. I might have picked up one or two. Oscar Anderson was stationed a long time in England during second World War, waiting to go over, when they took so many soldiers over; and he sent me oh, maybe, six or eight species from England. I received most of my foreign stuff by trade. When people found out that I could really find ascaphus truei and that I could go out and get it, they wanted some of them, especially after I was the first one to see them mate. They suspected that this little tail had something to do with mating but nobody was sure until they actually saw them use it. I and Morton Johnson were on the field trip up on the Carbon River, and we were getting so many that night (and many is more than two) and we only had the pound coffee can to keep them in, so after I got back to the car I thought I had better look at them to see if they were all right and not too crowded and not getting heated, and two of them were mated.

T: What kind of amphibian are ascaphus truei?
S: Small mountain frog. They live in the mountain streams and they have special
adaptation to live in those mountain streams. Of course, when they are tadpoles, if they didn't have this adaptation, they would have been washed out of the stream right away. But they have in their head a suction cup and there are teeth inside, the jaws are inside of it and they scrape off algea and diatomes for their food. They can get through a moderate stream of water, but not very swift, and they have to keep in this stream or little pool until they grow up.

T: What other collections have you helped with in the Museum?

S: All of them. Maybe not very much, but Kitchin asked to have his collection moved to the fireproof building when Dr. Alcorn was over in Idaho.

T: You knew him for many years, didn't you?

S: Oh, yes. He had been in the Pacific Northwest Bird and Mammal Society and I had taken him to meetings. He didn't have a car, never drove a car, and I took Dr. Alcorn when he was a student. Dr. Alcorn joined the Society two years before I did. I think he joined in 1928 and I joined in 1930. But he had been out with Kitchin and Bowles on field trips around South Tacoma prairie when he was in high school. He knew them and that was one reason that I ended up in the Society.

T: Dr. Alcorn was one of your students.

S: Yes, full four years.

T: Do you remember him very well as a student?

S: Yes, yes.

T: He had a great interest then, in collecting, didn't he?

S: No, not so much but some. In all the trips he took with me as a student he would
never take a gun along to collect any of his birds, for some reason or other. I think it was quite a while, maybe after I came back from Florida, he took his gun along with him on one trip. I guess he didn't want to interfere; if you get interested in one thing you neglect something else. Since he was going with me, I guess he wanted to put all his time in on learning amphibians and reptiles.

T: You mentioned the fact that you belonged to this Society. You belong to a good many societies, don't you?

S: Yes.

T: Can you remember which ones?

S: Well, there was the insect society here for a number of years--Puget Sound Entomological Society. In fact, they elected me president one year. I attended, more or less, to get acquainted with the country out here and they could get together and you can always exchange a little information and hear the talks that are made.

T: What other societies?

S: The latest one is the Washington Native Plant Society, started by the head of the Botany Department over at the University of Washington, and it is so big it is starting sections around the State. This area South of Seattle and the southwest is known as the South Sound section of the Washington Native Plant Society. This is only the second year of it. When I got the letter last fall about it, I took it to our new botany teacher, Dr. Yorks, and asked if she would care to join and she said sure, so I have been taking her to the meetings, not quite all of them because she gets busy sometimes but most of them. She offered to give the first paper when they had a meeting for papers in Olympia. After that, they elected her vice chairman of that section down here so she has to arrange the meetings now.
T: Didn't you belong to a fern society?

S: That is a national society. I have been to only one or two of their meetings. Very few of them are held here. The last one in this region at all was just a field trip, and I was invited to help plan the field trip, but it didn't go through with the rest of the committee, so I figured I wasn't quite welcome. There were three on the committee already, and one of them figured that he knew enough places to take a four or five day field trip, to go to a hotel or camp and go around other places. But I didn't mind; that was all right. I still know where the ferns are. I still have good relations with all three members of that committee and with the Fern Society.

T: You said you met Mrs. Slater at First Methodist Church, Tacoma. Was she a native of this section.

S: No, she was from Fort Wayne, Indiana.

T: Was she a teacher?

S: No, back there she was a secretary for Browser Manufacturing Company. They manufactured about half of the gasoline pumps in those days.

T: As I recall, in her latter years, she was arthritic.

S: Yes.

T: She was in a wheelchair a good many years.

S: That was because she broke her hip and it didn't heal. They put a pin in but the bones didn't heal even though the pin was through. Then the pin started to poke out and the doctors figured they had to take it out.

T: She was in a wheelchair when you moved to Florida?

S: Oh, yes, from 1944 to 1958. We made two round trips to Florida, and one from Florida to Ontario and back and when we were in Florida we went down to Key West and that's a two-day trip.
T: Who were some of the outstanding students that you remember?

S: Oh, I guess Oscar Anderson. He got a master's degree and studied the reptiles of Oregon. He was over in Europe a long time in the second World War. Then there was Walter C. Brown. He got his doctor's degree from Stanford, but he also studied some of the time at Harvard and at the University of Rochester. He could study at any university he wanted to, because they didn't have everything at Stanford as he was interested in reptiles and amphibians of the South Pacific when he was in the service. After he got his doctor's degree, he got a teaching job at a little college right along side of Stanford; after a few years, they made him dean and then that was too much, to carry some courses and be dean, too, so now he is teaching full time again. But he was dean about five years.

T: Do you remember other students particularly? Was Irwin one of your students?

S: No, strangest thing, but he asked to go on field trips with me. A number of trips he went with me. When he got the top job in the N.Y. Botanical Gardens, he had his wife send me a letter and gave me quite a bit of credit.

T: I know he had the highest regard and affection for you. Wherever I go to attend alumni meetings, everyone asks, "Well, how's Prof--how's Prof?" You live in the hearts of hundreds of students.

S: He went to Texas to get his doctor's degree and then he took a Fulbright Scholarship and taught in British Guiana two or three years.

T: You said that you had a letter from Dr. Todd when he was in New York. Can you characterize Dr. Todd's administration a little bit?

S: As far as I know, good administrator. He just called me on the carpet once! (laughter)
T: What was that for?

S: Because the dean and I had a little difference, but we had open speeches in chapel and professors took turns, and the dean who was hired the same time as I was made two speeches; some parts I didn't agree with and I asked Professor Hanawalt, Chairman of the Chapel Committee, if I could take a chapel soon. He said, "The next one."

T: What dean was that?

S: Dean A. B. Cunningham. I think I was lucky that one hour before chapel I wrote my speech down and read it in chapel. Of course, the speech was only about five or ten minutes, and Dr. Todd wanted to know what I had said, and I told him, "Well, you can read it yourself." He read it and said, 'Well, we like to do these things in administration." The Dean left C.P.S. after his fifth year.

T: I understood he didn't stay very long.

S: There were five young men hired when I came and I was one of them. I was the only one that stayed more than five years. All four others had left. You have heard of the Peck Field up there? He was the coach.

T: Roger Peck.

S: Yes, Roger Peck. I guess he got a better job with a bank. He didn't go in the bank right away. He always said, "I really don't love money; just love where money is." (laughter)

T: In general, your association with Dr. Todd was very congenial?

S: Oh, yes, I am still good friends of the family. I see his granddaughter every so often and talk with her. Have been casket bearer three times for the family.

T: The granddaughter, Mrs. Ruth Rockwood?

S: Yes.
T: Do you remember the planning for the new science building? Were you involved?
S: Not in Thompson Hall, they didn't ask me. But when I came back from Florida, they asked me to draw plans for what was to be the new science building and the only big specification was that there had to be a lecture room to hold 400. The one in Howarth Hall holds only about 210 or something like that and they wanted one that would hold about 400. I figured out just where it should be and where every seat would be, and the four exits so they could get in and out without any waiting in lines. When the plans were changed to get a bigger building, they didn't ask me anything more after that, for some reason or other.
T: Let's see, was that building planned while you were in Florida--the new science building?
S: No, I was back here--had been back for three or four years. See, I was to have that building the same size as Howarth but over on the other side of Sutton Quadrangle.
T: That's right.
S: You remember that? I had that pretty well planned and then I guess it was the chemistry professor persuaded you that we needed a bigger building.
T: We had a lot of pressure from the Federal Government to build that underground for a bomb shelter, and if we had done that, they would have practically picked up the tab.
S: Between the two buildings, Howarth Hall and the one I was planning, they had for awhile the physics and chemistry under ground there.
T: It just didn't look like it was feasible at all. We would have had to raise all the liquids 46 feet to get them into the sewer and that sort of thing, you know. Tell me about your time in Florida, the time you went to Lakeland, where Florida Southern is.
S: Yes. You sent a letter down there ahead of time and told me that you had sent it and for me to go and see the president when I got there, which I did on a Friday afternoon. President Spiry said, "Well, we don't have anything now but stick around and if anything turns up, I'll call you." I felt if he was that much interested I'd go over Monday morning and look around the campus to see where the different buildings were located. This I did and before I got half way across the campus he came out of his office and hollered to me to come over and see him. I went over and he said he had found out that morning that he needed another teacher and he told me about what it was. I said, "That's not my subject. I'm biology and that is sociology." "Oh," he said, "You can teach it all right. Go and talk with our sociology professor, because he doesn't know about this yet, and see what he says." I went over and talked with Dr. Chapman for about five minutes. He said, "Sure you can teach it," and that evening I taught my first class at McDill Airforce Base near Tampa. It turned out that the first semester in sociology, with the textbook that they had, was more biology than it was sociology and one-half of that quarter was genetics and I had been teaching genetics here for five or six years, anyway. So everything worked out fine. I taught the sociology professor genetics!

T: How long did you teach down there?

S: About four years. I taught at different places. I taught some right on the campus, evening classes, but most of it was over at the air force base. That's where this big class turned up and so many signed up for it that they couldn't get them all in one room, so they telephoned over to the president and said we have to have another teacher because we can't get them all in one room, none big enough for them. That's the way I happened to go. I was over there teaching and it didn't bother me at all.
T: Were many of them G.I.'s.

S: They were drafted men, I think, but they were all in the air force--big air base, between Tampa and St. Petersburg. We'd go over there and we'd have one course that lasted three hours in the evening; not Monday, Wednesday, Friday for one hour each. We did it all in one evening. When we had another course, we went over another evening. Generally, two or three teachers went over together to teach their courses, all went in one car so we shared the transportation expense.

T: President Spiry was President of the Methodist Association after I was and I remember him. You retired here in 1951, but you have been teaching ever since, haven't you?

S: Up to 1968, and then they cut out the recitations in biology and it didn't leave much teaching for us, and there are more teachers all the time. We really have too many teachers, to my way of thinking--not according to yours.

T: Well, I had a lot of pressure to put them on.

S: But I taught what they wanted me to, anything that came along. I went down there (Florida) and taught all kinds of courses, but the craziest one was a year course in accounting! Pres. Spiry would give me anything! Accounting was a junior course and I had more officers in it than I had enlisted men. They stayed longer than enlisted men. Enlisted men might be transferred out tomorrow, you never know. But the officers stay longer so the course continued for the full year and they completed it. Earth science and things like that I taught.

T: You retired in 1951 and then we gave you the Honorary Doctor of Science in 1954, didn't we?

S: That's right.
T: I always felt that was one of the nicest things that ever happened in my administration.

S: Oh yes, to me, too.

T: Had you done anything toward a doctor's degree?

S: Oh, yes, I had it all worked out with some professors over at the University but I don't think they wanted CPS to have any more doctors, so they posed impossible questions in the preliminary exam. That was just before the second World War was coming on, and you gave me permission to work down in the Tacoma shipyards, so I just gave it up. I was getting along, I didn't need it.

T: Was this all for admission to the degree or in defense of the thesis?

S: This was about a year before when I had all the courses. The Zoology Department advised me they didn't have any courses for me; that I had to take some up at Friday Harbor where the Marine biology station was located. I elected courses I thought might supplement biology. I took a course in water, Northwest Indians, things like that. I had enough credits but of course these professors, as I say, didn't want another doctorate and didn't want UPS getting a bigger percent of Ph.D.'s than they had. Concerning these impossible questions, I went after the exam to one of the zoology professors and told him, "Sir, there were impossible questions." He said, "Well, go to the dean and tell him about it." I went to the dean and he said, "Just forget that. It's all past now. You present your thesis when you get it ready and that will be it."

T: Then the war came.

S: Yes.

T: You said you worked in the shipyard. What did you do there?
S: I was working for the stores. The stores had to receive everything from outside and have it ready, know right where it was, so if anybody wanted to put it into the ship, there would be no delays. There were five big warehouses over there.

T: You were here then when World War II came. Didn't they draft an awful lot of our students at the very beginning?

S: I think so. Lots of them went to work, too.

T: Were you at the faculty meeting where Dr. Todd said, "We are losing our students to the service and many of you are young enough so that you are going to be in the service, and it would be better if you went, too." Were you at that meeting?

S: No, I didn't hear that, I don't think so. That must have been the first world war. There was one thing that came up. We had a lot of students come to study that the army sent us. They took short courses in American history and things like that. They for two sections shifted me on to that. Not out of biology, I taught all the biology necessary, but I taught a course (two sections) in American history under Dr. Tomlinson.

T: That was the Army Specialized Training Unit. Most of those young people came from East of the Hudson. They were supposed to be training for special electronics. Most of them were captured and shot by the Germans in the Bulge and it was a great tragedy.

You have published a number of papers. Tell me about the occasional papers?

S: I published first in Copeia, that's an international magazine that just deals with amphibian reptiles and fish--cold-blooded vertebra. Copeia magazine is named after our first bignaturalist in the U.S., Edward Cope. Then I also published in another magazine that just specialized in amphibian reptiles, called Herpetologica. I published in
both of those -- a number of papers (10). And then, as things were getting kind of backed up so you had to wait for quite awhile to publish, I thought why can't I do the same kind of thing they are doing down in San Diego--publish our own occasional papers and get all the information--information that is principally for the State of Washington anyway--so why send it back there and get it printed and they have control of who it will go to, but when it is published ourselves, we can send it to anyone and use it in anyway we see fit. So that's the way we started in 1939.

T: How many of those occasional papers have you printed?

S: I really haven't counted them up but the number of the last one that was printed was number 50, but I hadn't authored all of them, you know. There were a few others. From the first, I encouraged other people to write short ones, page or two, to get them used to producing something. Put it down in black and white so others can read it. Later, I didn't have any students any more to encourage them to produce short ones, so I wrote them myself. Dr. Alcorn produced three, #41, 42, and 44, more or less clerical work here--bibliography of the birds of Washington--check lists of birds and eggs and nests. Those three came in about two years ago.

T: You have really done, then, practically 50 of these papers.

S: Well, say 40.

T: What would be the range. Was it all herpetology and mammals?

S: No, after I produced the amphibian and reptile papers, then I went into the plants because nobody was studying plants in particular. They were studying in general and would take a field trip once in awhile and go up into Canada or somewhere else,
but I wanted to specialize and know just what was in each county. Nobody was studying the ferns so I started on them. Dr. Fry, over at the University of Washington, produced a book on ferns of the Northwest but it was produced in an awful hurry and it was poor work. So after that was out, in 1934, and when I started in 1962, he didn't anywhere near cover the state of Washington, most of it was right here in Western Washington, but he made the book appear to cover the whole northwest. Of course, he got quite a bit of information from other people and he wanted a good strong title to it. But it was really not as good as the paper they put out later from British Columbia on the ferns of British Columbia. The man up there, Dr. T. M. C. Taylor, at the University of British Columbia finally enlarged it to The Ferns of the Northwest and I helped him with that quite a bit. After I had saved fern specimens for two or three years, I shared it with others. That's why we publish—the information we get we like to share with others.

T: That's the true scientific spirit, really.

S: That's what I thought—I understood it. Just to go out and study and keep it for yourself, that's too narrow for me.

T: I was very grateful to you for establishing a series of annuities with the University through the years. That was very nice. It was a wonderful gift, your last one, given for scholarships. Are those to be endowed scholarships?

S: Yes, they are endowed. They just use the income from it and I expect to add to that, too.

T: That's really wonderful.

S: Of course, I am getting the income from those annuities, both here and at
Syracuse, and I think I have enough to live on, and I am not expensive, you know. T: As I recall, you had no children and you told me you had a niece. Is that right? S: Yes. T: Where does she live? S: Fort Plain, New York. T: What is her name? S: Emily Schrell. T: How old is she? S: She must be about 22. In another year, she will have a degree and be an executive nurse. T: Is she a brother's daughter or a sister's daughter? S: My brother adopted a girl (Mother of Emily). Emily is a niece in the true sense. T: What did your brother do? S: He was an M.D. Really, a country doctor even though he had offices in town, Fort Plain, New York, right on the old Erie Canal (Canal Street). T: As you look back on your career at the University, what are some of the outstanding moments? S: I really haven't measured them. I just go ahead and do the work. T: They tell me that you can keep ahead of anybody on a field trip today. S: That is actually kind of a legend— they all repeat it. I don't know any special one. Of course, one thing we didn't mention when we were talking earlier, in my first five years they also came to me— the president asked the dean to come to me—
to see if I would shift from biology to education, but I was prepared, after two
years and three summers at Syracuse and two years of high school teaching to teach
biology. Why should I go over to education? I had good students and I had just as
many as any in the college, so why go and try something else?

T: Well, they probably looked at that degree in pedagogy and thought, you know, here's . . .

S: They knew I knew something about it and I was doing good teaching and that's
what the Education Department is supposed to be for, but I turned them down on it,
thanked them and said no.

T: Let's talk about some of your colleagues and professors. Do you remember a
Professor Henry? Tell me about him.

S: He and I are the ones who drew the plans for Howarth Hall. I did most of it but
he was there. He wasn't even acting dean then. After that he was acting dean. Before
they put the upper floors on, he became acting dean.

T: Didn't they build the basement first?

S: Yes, we had that four years. The basement was built the same time that they
moved into Jones Hall. It just had a roof on it. I had one room for biology lab—that
was the long one on the East end; physics had one side and chemistry had the other
side. The other corner was used by the eating department.

T: That was in the N.W. corner. I remember when I came for the 50th anniversary,
they had a food service there. I sat at the corner with Arthur Frederick in 1938,
I think it was.

S: Was it there then?
T: I think it was.

S: It may have been.

T: I am not sure, but I think I sat at the counter and we had a cup of coffee. I was here representing Drew University and Willamette.

Were you at all involved and do you know about the political situation when Mr. Howarth left the $150,000 to Tacoma and, theoretically, it was to be used for the "best usage", and I'll bet I have had a hundred people tell me that they got that money for the college so that we could finish Howarth Hall.

S: Todd didn't take the faculty into his confidence, but he did take the faculty into his confidence before he selected that site. He took us around to three or four different sites in Tacoma to see which we thought would be the best one.

T: You mean for the location of the College?

S: Yes.

T: What other sites were considered?

S: There was one out on South Tacoma Way, just where the road turns to Steilacoom—the road goes on and there was a big vineyard in there. We could have gotten that. That was way south—too close to PLU. We didn't want to set up camp right along side PLU. Most of the faculty voted for the one we now occupy.

T: Were there other sites?

S: Yes, and I was trying to think of them when you asked me to come down here, but I don't remember just where they were, but I do remember that vineyard. It was quite a large area.

T: That must not be far from where our law school is now.
S: It was just beyond that--just south, up on the little raise.

T: Was there any discussion of going out by Epworth Heights?

S: I don't think we went out there. Pres. Todd furnished cars to take us around.

T: I know that when I came I found, for instance, that they had purchased that site from 16 different people.

S: The one we have now?

T: Yes, and some of the boundaries weren't finished and we had to go to court to get the boundaries finished, as there would be five feet here that wasn't clear, etc.

S: All I heard about was that one block, and then he got permission from Lou Rader, after he bought that, to put up the gymnasium which was outside of the 40 acres, which was allowed by law in those days.

T: Wasn't there an old YMCA track in there?

S: Yes, right down on the southeast corner. That was leveled off and filled in and that's why the redwood tree tilted a little bit in the earthquake. It tilted just a few degrees but then it started to grow up straight again. For a long time, I used that for a demonstration--that is, to my laboratory assistants, I didn't take out the whole class.

T: Which tree is that?

S: It's the one out there by the old bus station. It tilted just a small bit on one side and you can judge from the time when the earthquake was as to how long it has been growing straight up again. Redwood trees grow straight up, no matter where the wind is.
T: That earthquake would be 15 or 20 years ago.

S: More than that, it was before I went to Florida--1949.

T: Almost 30 years ago.

S: It might have been 1950 because I know we were over on 11th street then, and that was before we sold out to go to Florida in 1951.

T: Henry was in chemistry and then he was in acting dean until they found one. Do you remember who followed him?

S: Let's see...

T: Do you remember Weir?

S: Oh, yes. He was in education. He retired before they had this trouble in the Education Department, when they wanted me to come in.

T: What trouble was that?

S: Oh, I don't know. I guess the professors they had in there didn't conduct the courses the way the president wanted.

T: That was quite awhile before Ray Powell, wasn't it?

S: Yes.

T: Do you remember Ray Powell very well?

S: Oh, yes. Sure.

T: Do you remember Fehlandt?

S: Oh yes, he was in chemistry. He worked right along...

T: He had a reputation of having a number of explosions in his classes.

S: He did that on purpose to get them excited. He had them under control, as far as he was concerned. But he soon got interested in the orchids and he actually
came down to the biology department and wanted to know how we mixed up those nutritive cultures that grow things in a pure state. When you start these tiny orchids, you can't have any fungus grow over them, and he wanted to know how we mixed those and got the food for plants to start on.

T: I watched him and he would take a pair of tweezers and put a seed in this culture and let it grow so long and then move it and move it again, etc.

S: Each time, the plant got a little bigger—he had his hands and arms all covered—and those were inside of sterile chambers.

T: I used to tell him that he took more care of his orchids than most people took of their children.

S: They are pretty delicate things. But he knew how to do it, you see. You might say that some in the field didn't take such good care of their "children" because they didn't know how yet.

T: You were under Dean Regester for quite awhile. Do you remember when he came?

S: About 1925 or 1926, just about the same time as Dr. Seward came.

T: He was professor of philosophy first, wasn't he?

S: That's right.

T: How many years was he professor of philosophy, do you think?

S: I'd have to look that up on the record.

T: Do you recall when Seward came?

S: Oh, yes, sure. Olive went to work the same time I did. She was secretary to the president from the time I came; in fact, his former secretary was the one who wrote me the letter that I had been accepted here.
T: Do you remember who that secretary was?

S: Grace and I think her name was Fuller, then. That was President Todd's secretary just before Olive went to work.

T: Mrs. Seward was a great help to me. She is a great person, a very great person. Then Dean Regester. You weren't there when Thomas was there, were you?

S: He was really acting dean--oh yes. Maybe he went in while I was in Florida but he was around when I came back from Florida.

T: Do you recall the move from Howarth to the new science building?

S: No. I know when it took place, but there is a peculiar thing about that. Dr. Alcorn had three people, besides secretaries in our office, and he was always hollering so much that he had to have more help to get moved over. I said as far as the herp material goes, I will take care of every bit of it--just let me know what day they are going to move and I'll take it over there. And he never let me know when he was going to move, so I didn't have a thing to do with it. He wanted to get help so they would be under him, I guess.

T: We had a young professor by the name of Karlstrom come here from Berkeley. Did he have a degree in herpetology from there?

S: No, he had his Ph.D. degree but he had majored in herpetology more than any thing else. Wrote his thesis on a toad which lives in the high Sierras.

T: I think he is a little inordinately ambitious. Didn't he want to move in and take over on your study of herpetology?

S: He wanted to take over the whole collection, and I had a national reputation with several professors in the East and I traded these specimens, which I collected, all over
the world, on every continent; that is the way we built up our international collection and exhibit. There was one man in South Africa who did very well by me, and I never asked for any money when I sent them a specimen but if they had some native animals that weren't in use, not part of their collections, they could send me some of those. But I told the fellow in South Africa that if, by any chance, he had a primate skull other than man or a small monkey, he could send one of those, and he sent me a baboon skull and that fills in a big gap in our skull collection. That wasn't enough, he sent me copies of the theses that was worked on the specimens that I sent him. They sent me three perfectly fine masters' theses printed and published.

T: On the material you had sent to them.

S: Yes, in just a little bottle I sent them all the stages in the life history of that animal and they worked on it and as I said, I know a thesis when I see it, whether it is good or bad, as I have seen quite a few.

T: Didn't you tell me that the professor of herpetology at Berkeley came and spent some time with you?

S: Oh, yes. A number of them did. He wasn't the only one. He wanted to get all the latest details on where to find certain ones here, as he had never worked in Washington at all, but he wanted to publish a book on British Columbia to Southern California, so he came here with one of graduate students and I helped him all I could. His name is Robert C. Stebbins.

T: Has Karlstrom helped you any in your collection?

S: As far as I know, not any. I give him a chance, I give him all the information,
charts that I had, showing the county distribution, but he never brought in a single county record. So I don't know, he is disappointing, but I will just have to say that's the way it is.

T: Did you expect when he came that he would help you?

S: I thought he would work into it, yes, because I knew he was coming. His professor and a graduate student had spent time with me; and as I said, he wasn't the only one that came--two very big professors from Cornell and one from the University of Rochester had spent time with me. The one from the University of Rochester got in here one time on a Monday or Tuesday evening. He had already written ahead of time but I didn't know exactly when he was coming. He wanted to know if we could go on a field trip. I said I couldn't do it right then because it was examination week, and I had promised to give a paper over at the University of Washington on some herps on Thursday. Then I wanted to stay on Friday to hear some other papers on herps, because that's when the American Society of Ichthyologists and Herpetologists was holding a meeting at the University of Washington, and he said, "All right, let's go on Saturday then." And he waited around until Saturday to go on a field trip with me. After that two-day field trip around the Olympic Peninsula, he went to Alaska for awhile and then he came back and I went with him up to Paradise Valley and around there to actually see the animals in their living conditions. He had never seen things out here in the living conditions. He had seen them before because I had shipped them to him. The other two persons were from Cornell University and he was producing a book on frogs and toads and he wanted to see all of them and get more information. In fact, his wife was also a Ph.D. and a teacher and she spent all the time with my collection. I turned her loose with the collection and she measured
and looked things over. There were only two small trips that the professor wanted—he hadn't see the Rana bretiosa and he said, "Where is the closest place you have ever taken a Rana bretiosa?" I said, "Spanaway swamp." So we went out to Spanaway swamp at 3:00 or 4:00 o'clock in the afternoon. We strolled along and I knew right where I had been before and one jumped and he had a net in his hand but he didn't use that net—he jumped right in and grabbed it in his hand, just as quick as the frog could jump! The other frog that he wanted to see was the Ascaphus Truei. He hadn't seen that in its natural habitat, so we went up to the Carbon River and we were able to see them up there. Those were the only two he hadn't seen in their habitat. The Rana which I had actually described he had collected when he came across the mountains in Oregon. He brought those in and checked with me to see if those were actually the right ones, called by the right names, that I had taken here in the State of Washington. One frog I had named and the other was a salamander that I had named. That was one we had found over in Idaho, at Wolf Lodge Bay at Coeur d'Alene Lake. That was new, not only for Idaho, but it was new for the whole Rocky Mountain system. That was the first Plethodon salamander described in the Rocky Mountain system.

T: Are any of the species named for you?

S: No, I just pick out the name and then when anybody mentions that in the paper the first time they put (Slater) after that, but after it is mentioned once, Rana cascadae or this one from Idaho, they have to put Slater after it, and in all the official check lists the describer's name goes after it. A man wanted to name a variety of tiger salamanders after me but I didn't agree with him. He gave me two choices and I didn't take either one of them.
T: I take it that the Peninsula and the rain forest and all of that are ideal spots for collecting.

S: This professor from Rochester thought maybe he'd see something new because I had mentioned that we had some salamanders that had some yellow in it and ordinarily we don't see yellow in this species. He thought maybe he'd get some of that and maybe find enough change in it to call it another variety but he didn't. That is, he got some of them but we didn't get very many because when we got up to Deer Lake it was dark and our flashlight had gone dim, there was pollen on the water and the light doesn't go down in, so we couldn't see the salamanders in the pond very well.

T: That was too bad. Doctor, this has been wonderful to have you on tape. We will transcribe this and I wish you would think about some of the things we haven't covered and maybe in three or four weeks we can sit down again. You are really one of the most valued people we have for the primary sources for a history.

S: You remember that Dr. Alcorn and I made up a list of famous students, just before I left, and I think there were a hundred on it—that had doctors' degree of some kind—M.D.'s, Ph.D's or some doctor's degree.

T: If you have that list, bring it with you next time.

S: I didn't keep a copy—you're the one that has it.

T: Okay. I'm sure we do, then.

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