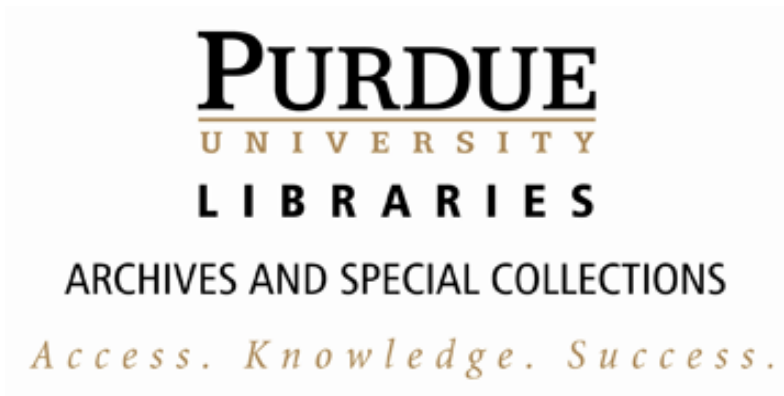


John E. Christian Interview

Conducted by Katherine Markee on November 28, 2006



The following interview was conducted with Professor John E Christian (JC) for the Purdue University Library Oral History Project. It took place on Tuesday, November 28, 2006 at his home 1301 Woodland Avenue, West Lafayette, Indiana. The interviewer is Katherine M. Markee (KM) the Oral History Librarian.

This is Part II.

KM: Let's talk a little bit about diversity at the school – how has that changed through the years – the demographics, the enrollment.

JC: Well, I came here to Purdue in 1935 as an undergraduate and there were about 2500 students and it increased each year up to about '46 [or] '47. After the war, there was a big expansion. It went from probably 10,000 up to 20,000+. I don't know the exact figures. But that was a tremendous jump. When the boys came home, they had the privilege of going to school. Schools were all overcrowded. We had students sleeping in the gymnasium. We didn't have enough housing. A lot of temporary structures went up to accommodate that big influx. Then it steadily increased since that time. We have about 39,000 students here on the campus now, so significant change and also the physical plant. The new buildings that have come on campus since 1935 are almost unbelievable.

KM: All different look.

JC: Yes, all whole different look [smiles]. Whole different objective. Research emphasized now and of course, teaching has expanded. Lots of new professors and so on for students. So, been tremendous change in the

university, even the athletic facilities have expanded over that period of time.

KM: Yes, Let's talk a little bit about the Pharmacy School, established in 1884 though the efforts of President J H Smart and an Indianapolis physician Dr. John Hurty. You served under three Deans: Dr. Glenn L Jenkins, Dr. Varro E Tyler and Dr. Charles Rutledge. Tell us about curriculum, their management style, students, anything contrasting their eras.

JC: Yes. Well I started in 1935 and I think probably there were six Professors. Dean Jordan was Dean of the School, and he was very much student oriented, interacted with the students very well, but he had a heart attack. Well I'm getting a little bit ahead of myself. I finished in 1939 and went to Upjohn Company in Kalamazoo Michigan. My first position in research, analytical and I came back then one year later in 1940 as a graduate student. Dean Jordan was to be my major Professor – but he passed away, had a heart attack. That's when they brought in Jenkins. Glenn Jenkins became the Dean and I, of course, had to transfer major professors and Jenkins became my major professor. During that period under Dean Jenkins, the research aspects of Pharmacy were accelerated very rapidly and became the top School in the United States in pharmaceutical and analytical research. He was primarily responsible for that, his major objective. Of course, I progressed, and finished my graduate work in 1944, and stayed on the faculty and I progressed with Jenkins right along with that growth. And in that period I was appointed

5:00

Assistant Professor in 1945, Associate Professor in 1948 and full Professor in 1950. In the interim I started the Bionucleonics Department. I started the radiological control and as late as 1978, 1979 I started the new School of Health Sciences and finished my administrative work and then I retired in 1988.

KM: Was Dean Jenkins someone who was on the faculty at that time or was he someone new to the University?

JC: He was new to the University, came from University of Wisconsin, very outstanding man

KM: He came as Dean.

JC: As Dean of the Schools of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences, and he did the Pharmaceutical Sciences part that was the new expansion. We had 2 or 3 graduate students when I started but that expanded after the war started expanded to 70 graduate students in the School of Pharmacy. Quite a significant expansion.

KM: He was Dean. Dean Tyler came after him.

JC: Yes.

KM: He was not on the staff at that time.

JC: No he came from the University of Washington, Seattle, don't know the exact year but in the 1980's he became Vice President of Academic Services.

KM: Now Dr. Rutledge was Dean. Were you here or had you retired?

JC: I had retired about that time. I don't recall what year he came, must have been late 80's.

KM: Did you notice that Dean Jenkins was student oriented. Was that true of the others?

JC: Yes were all very much student oriented, but Jenkins was more scientific than the other two. That whole period of expansion.

KM: Sure.

JC: Others were really interested in research but Jenkins really developed it.

KM: Was the graduate enrollment? One of the changes was the five-year graduate program. Did that take place during that time?

JC: Yes, that took place officially after Jenkins retired.

KM: Oh.

JC: Do you have it there, the year Jenkins retired?

KM: No, I don't have it here.

JC: But I had kind of forgotten.

KM: Doing some research these were about the times when you would have been there. Jenkins was the earliest one.

JC: Yes.

KM: You were talking earlier about buildings and Pharmacy School had several buildings and then in 1970 dedicated the current building. That was a big event.

JC: Yes, big event you bet.

KM: They built a brand new facility, didn't they?

JC: Oh, yes.

KM: Then where was it before?

JC: That became the student affairs building.

KM: Schleman Hall?

JC: Yes, Schleman Hall now. That was the old Pharmacy Building.

KM: Right. Were you involved at all in the planning for the new building?

JC: Oh yes, very closely. What happened there during the expansion of the undergraduate program after the war, the University brought in a number of temporary buildings. They were old army barracks and just north of the old pharmacy building was a temporary building.

KM: Where the Armstrong Engineering building is being built?

JC: Yes.

KM: Was that about the time they were being built?

JC: Yes and during that period Jenkins started it but the next Dean.

KM: Tyler

10:00 **JC:** Tyler was Dean when it was being built. And all of the faculty were deeply involved in the design of that building.

KM: Where was it located? Was it in the same area that the original building was?

JC: Yes adjacent actually. The old Pharmacy building, south is the temporary structure, and next is the new Pharmacy Building and the hospital.

KM: Oh, you were involved in all of that. Another milestone was your [Pharmacy School] Centennial [1984]. What was the nature of the celebration? I learned also that President Reagan sent his best wishes.

JC: [Laughs] Yes.

KM: Tell us a little bit about the Centennial. That's kind of neat.

JC: Well, yes it was a gala year lots of prominent speakers came in.

KM: Was it sort of yearlong?

JC: Yes. Yearlong celebration. I remember Reagan sending a letter of recognition.

KM: Several years after he visited Purdue [1987].

JC: Yes.

KM: Did you interact with him, when he was here?

JC: No, I didn't.

KM: Well you had served on a committee, in earlier years that energy committee.

JC: That was later on, he appointed me to the Energy Committee but I wasn't involved early on, but I did hear him speak in the football field.

KM: I thought that was in Mackey arena where he spoke.

JC: Was football field, Mackey arena wasn't available. I don't think. [Laughs]

KM: Well the School of Health Sciences, what departments comprises that school at this particular moment?

JC: As I said, the School of Health Sciences was started by myself, Provost Haas, and President Hansen. Was mainly what we call Health Physics; was safe use of ionizing radiation including x-rays. Primarily the safe use of radioactive materials, which had just become available in that period in the 40's and that was a big expansion countrywide and was a very big problem about how to handle radioactive materials. Was big hazard if not handled properly and that was a big segment of the new School of Health Sciences, which was called bionucleonics. Before that, we had the Department of Bionucleonics. When the school was formed, bionucleonics became a part of the new school and we added industrial hygiene, hospital practitioners and there are some new areas, which have been

added that I'm not really up to date on. I've been retired for 20 years. Lots of changes.

KM: That's a short time, really is.

JC: [Laughs]

KM: Put into perspective. When the school was first started was it primarily graduate students or did it have undergraduates?

JC: Undergraduates, but there again it was primarily graduate students. Bionucleonics Department was all graduate students. At one time, we had 55 graduate students in Bionucleonics, which was part of the School of Pharmacy.

KM: Now there are undergraduates in the school as well, as graduate students.

JC: Yes, the undergraduate enrollment has grown more than the graduate students.

KM: What are some of the placement, where do some of these people go?

JC: Well a large part of them go to federal agencies, like the nuclear laboratories where they do research - research on weapons of mass destruction, and atomic energy. Undergraduates go into hospitals, as hospital technicians, handling radioactive materials and x-rays - responsible for that whole health safety area. Several of them for example are in Rochester, Mayo Clinic, in control of the safety of radiation.

15:00

KM: What about the graduate students. Do some of them go on for the PhD?

JC: Oh, most of them did, still do.

KM: Do they go into teaching or more research?

JC: A lot of them go into teaching, government agencies, and industry. We have a number of them at Eli Lilly, for example, Mallinckrodt Chemical and the general pharmaceutical industry hire PhD graduates.

KM: I see and the program in Pharmacy, in school, pretty good size.

JC: Yes.

KM: Enrollment increased over time

JC: Yes.

KM: Let's talk a bit about another one of your favorite things SAMARA. Tell us a little bit. I know you have given some interviews but share some reminiscences about it for our researchers that may or may not have a chance to visit.

JC: About what, SAMARA?

KM: SAMARA, your house.

JC: SAMARA OK. It's a long story but...

KM: Just some general reminiscences, as you reflect.

JC: Well my wife and I were married in 1948 and we both worked at the University and had a lot of students and my wife was socially oriented. She was the Social Director for the University and one of the things we decided we wanted in our married life was something different in our home, a place where we could entertain students. Knowing that we knew we had to have an architect, so we started looking. Interviewed some in Chicago and finally ran across Frank Lloyd Wright. A house he had built in Pleasantville, New York. While I attended a meeting my wife could see it, and she liked it so well she insisted I visit and I too liked it. [Laugh] So we decided we wanted Frank Lloyd Wright as our architect. So we did research. We found out in 1950 Frank Lloyd Wright is 83 years old. Already 83 - it was the busiest time of his professional career. He is doing the Guggenheim in New York, doing a Jewish synagogue in Philadelphia, Price tower in Oklahoma, Marin County, California Civic Center, very busy. Lots of residences. He was even doing a palace for the Princess of Iraq. Well, here we were a young couple in West Lafayette with limited resources, which means we didn't have any money wanting to hire this now world famous architect. How do we do that? Was very frustrating. So one day out of sheer frustration, I picked up the phone and called his office and a very fortunate thing happened, he answered the phone. Normally one of his secretaries or one of the 55 apprentices working for him would have answered. They told me later that if I would have gotten one of them, they would have said forget it, no way. As busy as Mr. Wright

is, he would not design a small home in West Lafayette for a young couple without any money. Well it turned out Wright was very gracious. We had a nice conversation. He invited us up to his home, Taliesin [Spring Green, Wisconsin], and nothing happened at that first meeting. But another fortunate thing happened he invited us back. Six months later, we went back. Halfway through that conversation, I simply blurted out, "Well Mr. Wright, would you design a home for us?" He hesitated, looked around the room, cleared his throat, as if to say no - too busy or what not. Instead, he said, "Of course. I'll design your home." But then with a gleam in his eye, he turned to my wife and said, "Mrs. Christian, how much money you got." We knew he was pulling our leg. My wife recovered more quickly than I did. She said, "Well Mr. Wright", [she] had a gleam in her eye, smiled; "we don't have any money." We all laughed like it was a joke. It wasn't a joke. He knew that. But irrespective, he built our house.

20:00

KM: Had respect for each other.

JC: Yes. We had a good rapport. He liked us, we liked him and it just worked out. Very fortunate.

KM: But he never came here, never saw the house?

JC: No, before or after, never saw the house. Kay invited him on more the one occasion. The last time she invited him he was giving a lecture in Indianapolis. He was 90 years old – and he was still very active – and she called him and again very graciously, he declined. He was much too busy.

But then he said, which is typical, “Mrs. Christian I don’t need to see your house. I know what it looks like.” And he did. No question.

KM: Did you already have the property, before?

JC: Yes we did and interesting.

KM: Oh, it coincided with wanting Wright to build your home.

JC: Yes, we purchased this lot in 1948 before we knew anything about Wright.

It’s interesting to point out there are seven acres here east of US 52 highway and that was owned in 1948 by Purdue Research Foundation. And the plans were to build the President’s new home here on this site. But President Hovde didn’t want to live on the West Side. He wanted to live over in Lafayette, away from the students, I guess. Anyway, he had a home on Seventh Street. And so the University decided to sell seven one-acre lots. And my wife and I were fortunate to get this one acre. And Mr. Wright liked the lot.

KM: Show him pictures, photographs?

JC: Oh, yes. All the details, pictures, photographs, terrain, maps, trees, drawings.

KM: You had it surveyed and all that?

JC: Oh, yes. All the details. He took that, liked it and asked us how large it was. Told him little over an acre and he [Wright] said, “Good thing,

anything less than that, I wouldn't design your house." But he was demanding at least an acre.

KM: The furnishings that come with the house, did you get some of them originally? Have you added to them? Tell us a little bit about how they came about.

JC: Well. We had an agreement with Mr. Wright, since we had limited funds that he would do all the plans for everything and then we would add to the house as we lived in it, using those plans. So at the beginning this room, [looks to his right toward fireplace] there were lots of built in. See all those built in seats over there, most of the furniture that you see here, hassock, these tables, high fidelity, and the center see over there, were built before we moved in. But then as we were able, we added his design plans were made specifically for this house from his plan and we never altered that. He did. There were all these plans, about 150 plans, drawings, sketches – great detail – every year we added. And I'm still, after 50 years, still adding.

KM: But you added some of the furnishings, over time, haven't you?

JC: Oh, yes. For example, this lamp here [points] made about 1995.

KM: Is it difficult to get furnishings today versus years ago?

25:00 **JC:** Well it is difficult in the sense he specified Philippine mahogany throughout, everything had to be one wood and it's difficult to get the

wood, Philippine mahogany. But we had that all made according to his drawings. Still doing it. He had devised a theme for the house based on winged seeds. That's what SAMARA means - winged seeds. There are winged seeds in pinecones. He picked up on that. He said going to have winged seeds and he named the house SAMARA. He made a motif from his concept of what a winged seed would look like. Obviously, see it in the rug, right here [looks at carpet]. Those are winged seeds as he depicted them in pinecones. Then he used that theme throughout and you see that motif many places in the house. Couple of pieces of furniture right here [lamp]. The base has the theme: the dining room chairs, designed the stationery, my business card, bedspread, bathroom linens, tablecloths all with SAMARA motif. [Wright] Tied everything together.

KM: Wonderful. Now you really enjoy it. Do you still give tours?

JC: Oh yes, last night. I should have invited you to come.

KM: I would appreciate that.

JC: I'm inviting you now to come.

KM: You commented on that some of the items are on permanent display at the West Lafayette Library.

JC: Not permanent. We had a major display that ran from April 2nd to July 30th

KM: Of this year?

JC: We had lots of educational programs around the exhibit and lots of invitations. I had miniature replica of all the furniture made [picks one up from the table in front of couch where he is sitting]. This miniature is a replica of triangular tables and these were on display until last week in one of the cases there at the Library [West Lafayette Public Library]. But they took it down because they had another display. These are in storage at the moment.

KM: I think you mentioned [there's] going to be an exhibit in Cincinnati.

JC: We are still working on that and we hope to start that next spring, March or April. The exhibit has already been in twelve different locations and four different states.

KM: Same exhibit In the Midwest?

JC: Yes, it moved around in the Midwest.

KM: And you've stored things then? Yes, that makes it easier.

JC: Yes makes it easier. Wonderful to have the library basement where can store things.

KM: Couple of things before we rap up. One thing, there was a quote I read: "Pharmacy is more than running corner drug store." Have any comments on that?

JC: Of course. The corner drug store is still very important as pharmaceutical and health information. You have the whole area of the production of

30:00

pharmaceuticals. I don't know how many pharmaceutical companies maybe 50 or 60 who make specific pharmaceuticals. Eli Lilly you're familiar with, Make many different pharmaceutical products which are then distributed out to the hospitals and pharmacies. And that's a big area of pharmacy responsibility because pharmacists have to formulate dosage forms to produce it - have to put sugar coating on the pills, that sort of thing, fill the capsules, that's a big area and of course the research component that's part of the pharmaceutical industry. They are doing continuous research trying to find new medicinal substances to treat diseases. And then, of course, we have the whole field of education. Schools of Pharmacy about 60 of those. Then pharmacists branch off into areas like government positions and food and drug administration. We have a lot of our people in federal agencies.

KM: In the years since your retirement, what has there been meaningful and enjoyable? If I asked you about an outstanding event, would you recollect?

JC: Well the general outstanding event is this house, that is what I have devoted my energies too since I retired and that has worked out very well. We have a program where we bring in 50 people at a time. This room seats 50 people and was designed for that and we lecture to them about Frank Lloyd Wright, about the architecture of the house, and we tour the house, the outside as well. Questions and answers, they come back here [inside the house] questions and answers, and demonstrations, and it

takes about two hours and we think that's important. We don't encourage people just to come and walk thru the house. Don't get much out of it and don't understand it. We almost religiously require, that if want to learn about Frank Lloyd Wright and this house you have to come here and spend about two hours. Last year we had over 2500 people. Most of them were elementary students, 50-mile radius. We have classes of all kinds coming in and that has built up over the last 12 years since they come back each year. That's a big group. In addition, there are Women's Clubs, professional organizations, etc.

KM: Is this primarily local or outside?

JC: Oh outside. Want to come December 7th at 7 pm. We'll have 50 people from Wichita, Kansas. There is a Frank Lloyd Wright home in Wichita and thus the interest.

KM: They're coming on a tour?

JC: On a tour, a bus load of them. Yes, I have many more visitors. They come from all over the world.

KM: Hope they give you some advance notice.

JC: Oh yes, we require advance notice. I require a reservation. I have people coming to the door but I'd be spending my time – two to three hours – touring a few people. I can't do that anymore.

KM: This is a special thing should be treated accordingly, special event.

JC: Well I have 30 volunteers to help as speakers and tour guides.

KM: Got a couple things. Any questions that I failed to ask or any comments that you want to comment on... anything special?

JC: Well, let's see. You mentioned the last time, the possibility of brief discussion, of my relationship with the Presidents [of Purdue University]. You saw this article in the *Journal & Courier*, on all the presidents. There were ten, have been ten Presidents, and I was fortunate to work under five of those Presidents during my 48 years. The first one was Edward Elliott. Elliott was an elegant, fluid speaker, very dynamic, and he was a good student person, interested in students. Then he retired in '46. That's about 35:00 the time I became an Assistant Professor and he was appointed, after he retired, as Director of a United States wide pharmaceutical survey, surveying the industry including the schools. And as part of that, it was his responsibility that he visit the schools to see if they met accreditation standards set up by the American Foundation for Pharmaceutical Education. Fortunately as a young Assistant Professor, I was asked to join him to work with him on four of those visits. What an experience for a young Assistant Professor. So I got to know him. We traveled together. It was great. Hovde [Frederick L. Hovde] followed him. Hovde was more research oriented. He was interested in nuclear physics. In fact, he was in the nuclear industry before he became Professor and President here, and he was the one that got the idea of starting the Bionucleonics Department. He coined that phrase – 'bio' means biology, 'nucleonics' means nuclear

physics – nuclear physics applied to biology. That was his doing and he appointed me as Coordinator of bionucleonics research. And later I became the Head of Bionucleonics Department. So that was his main forte. And then Hansen. Hansen was much, much more student oriented than any of the others and he spent most of his time in that direction. Although, he was the one, along with Provost Haas that worked with me in starting the new School of Health Sciences. He was interested in the health aspect. And then, following that we had Beering. Beering was kind of in between research and students. Very fluent speaker, an outstanding man. Students were very fortunate to have all these outstanding men as our Presidents at Purdue. I got to know him very well but we didn't have anything specific in my area of interest. Most of what I did had already been done. And then, of course, Martin Jischke. [He] put his attention on financing for funds. He was responsible however for appointing me Distinguished Professor of Bionucleonics Health Sciences Emeritus. Well that was my main relationship with Jischke. They were a wonderful group of men

KM: One thing, you know the transcript is going to become part of the Libraries Archives & Special collections. Any comment on archives or preservation, anything you think about?

JC: At Purdue?

KM: Just in general because I think today more people realize about preservation, the value of it and this is a question I try to ask. It's going to be for the researchers to use.

JC: Well I think it's extremely important what you are doing and there has been a big surge of interest of archival records and one big area is this area that you are doing conducting interviews - person to person interviews. There has been one or two that I know of. For example, the Frank Lloyd Wright Building Conservancy and the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation have all made recordings of clients, outstanding people associated with those organizations. I presume other universities are also doing same thing, although I haven't heard specifically, if that's the case. But I think it's very important along with collecting information like bio sketches. That's part of the preservation of the history of the university.

40:00

KM: Right, I think that's it. Is there anything in closing that you'd like to make a comment on?

JC: Well, no I think you've covered it very well. Very fine.

[End of Interview]

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