

An Oral History of

MELVIN J. VOIGT and JOHN PATRICK FORD

On July 9, 1999

1 **FORD:** Oral history with Mel Voigt, the original Head Librarian at the UCSD Central Library.
2 We are at his home in La Jolla, and the date is July 9, 1999. My name is John Patrick Ford. I'm
3 a volunteer in Special Collections, and I'm doing this project as part of the archive for the
4 Friends of the UCSD Library, documenting the history of its activities and the people who have
5 been involved with the founding and ongoing work of the Library at the University—and the
6 support that the Friends have given. So, at this time, I will introduce Mel Voigt, have him tell us a
7 little bit about his personal background, and then we'll proceed with some questions about his
8 involvement at UCSD.

9 **VOIGT:** Yes, my name is Melvin J. Voigt, if you want the whole name. I was born in
10 California—in Upland, forty miles east of Los Angeles—and lived there through the years of
11 junior college; then went to a small Mennonite college in Ohio; Boston College for the final two
12 years. During all of that period, starting actually back when I was in the seventh grade, I worked
13 in libraries—the usual page jobs that one has—all the way through college. And when I finished
14 college in the midst of the Depression, I was very fortunate to get a position as Librarian of a
15 new high school—public high school/public library combination—in the town where the college
16 is—Bluffton, Ohio. This gave me a chance, in the summer, to go to the University of Michigan
17 and begin the graduate work in librarianship, and the chance to do various other things. I not
18 only ran the library, but I taught physics and mathematics, several courses each year. I was
19 there for two years. Then, I was offered a position at the University of Michigan, spent seven
20 years there, finished the two graduate degrees in librarianship. And during the Second World
21 War, was with General Mills in Minnesota, working on the development of foods and also the
22 technical area that they were involved in at the time—taking care of all the library and
23 publication needs of a special research industry. From there, I went to what was then Carnegie
24 Tech in Pittsburgh, which is now Carnegie Mellon, and was the University Librarian there, and
25 taught in the library school at the same time; was there for six years. Then came to the
26 University of California, Berkeley as Associate University Librarian and taught in the library
27 school there during the years there. I spent a year and a half at Kansas State University in a
28 temporary position, trying to rebuild their library activity for a growing campus. And then when I
29 heard about the University of California, San Diego, about to start—I, in fact, had a letter from

30 Roger Revelle, who was the director of Scripps Oceanography, and he invited me to come and
31 to be interviewed for the position as the University Librarian in this new university, which at that
32 time—I'm not sure whether it would just be a technical university or whether it would be a
33 general university, although that was settled fairly soon after I got here. I came here in
34 November 1960 as the University Librarian until I retired in 1976. And I've been active in the
35 library since that time, primarily in editing, about ninety-five books in the field of communication
36 and information science. That's basically my background.

37 **FORD:** Let's return a moment to your original connection. You said Roger Revelle contacted
38 you. Do you think that was from a reputation of your work in the library field, or had you had
39 some personal connections with the people involved with the university here?

40 **VOIGT:** No, not with the university here. I think the recommendation that he investigate my
41 availability came probably from Donald Coney, the University Librarian at Berkeley, and Powell,
42 the Librarian at UCLA—both of whom I knew very well through my activities at Berkeley for a
43 number of years.

44 **FORD:** So you were in Berkeley at the time, or were in Pittsburgh at the time you had the
45 call to come to UCSD?

46 **VOIGT:** No, actually I was in Kansas—

47 **FORD:** You were in Kansas?

48 **VOIGT:** —on a temporary assignment.

49 **FORD:** But you had been in Berkeley and had those university connections?

50 **VOIGT:** Right.

51 **FORD:** So you came directly to San Diego? You were not temporarily at one of the other
52 campuses in getting this started?

53 **VOIGT:** No, actually at that time, it was very difficult to move from one campus to another in
54 any kind of an administrative job. And as a result, I think I was more likely to obtain a position
55 such as the one here by coming from somewhere outside of the system, even though it was just
56 a temporary location.

57 **FORD:** During those early years of the founding of the campus here and the Library being
58 set up, did you work primarily with the top person? Was it Roger Revelle, or when would the first
59 chancellor be appointed that you would have worked under?

60 **VOIGT:** Well, I came in November 1960, and Roger Revelle was still in charge here. I'm not
61 sure exactly when Herb York came, but it was sometime early in the next year, I believe. Herb
62 York came as Chancellor, and I, of course, started working with him.

63 **FORD:** Who were the—. In the early days before the Library was built and the collection was
64 being formed—key people on the campus that were interested and supportive, mostly
65 supportive—for this library project?

66 **VOIGT:** Well, they were primarily Scripps Institution of Oceanography people. I could name
67 some of them, but they were the major people in Scripps. I formed closed associations with
68 them, and with some of the people in chemistry and physics who had come in the past year or
69 two to take over the graduate programs that were just beginning at that time.

70 **FORD:** As I recall, the university was only graduate programs for several years before there
71 was any undergraduate curriculum here?

72 **VOIGT:** Yes, that is correct. I think it was about four years before we had any
73 undergraduates. And that made obtaining a library for the use of graduate students a much
74 more difficult task than if you had started just with undergraduate students, because the
75 graduate students immediately need research materials. And our first job here was to build up
76 the back files of journals in chemistry, physics, and very soon thereafter, biology, until the first
77 people in the humanities came when the pressure was even greater.

78 **FORD:** That requires probably a broader spectrum of the collection when you're into the
79 humanities than in the specialized scientific departments? Or is the challenge about the same
80 for all the colleges?

81 **VOIGT:** In the sciences, you can build up a collection rather quickly. In fact, you wouldn't
82 even do it today because today you can get these materials so easily by electronic means that
83 you don't really need to have the journals at hand to the degree that it was necessary when you
84 were trying to do a background in some area that you wanted to do research in the sciences. So
85 it was essential to do this. And it wasn't too bad a job at that time to build up a science
86 collection. In fact, I had done much the same thing at Carnegie Tech in Pittsburgh, which had

87 not had its own library, but I had used the public library. And we were able, at that time, to
88 obtain back files of the important journals that you needed. They were available many times
89 from Europe—scientists who had disappeared during the war or had decided to get rid of their
90 libraries because they needed funds—that kind of thing. So they were generally available, and it
91 was just a question of knowing which journals you needed to buy, and to get the important ones.

92 **FORD:** When you arrived here to start, what library materials were here? I know Scripps
93 Institute always had a very fine library—it is still considered quite remarkable. Was there more
94 than the library down there in the old quarters? And then also—second part of that question—
95 when you were getting underway, did the other campuses of the University of California, were
96 they able to provide you any basic stock, shall we say, from any duplicates or materials that
97 they had, that they could furnish for the new library here?

98 **VOIGT:** Well, to answer the last question, very little came from other campuses.
99 Occasionally, we were able to get some materials which were duplicates; but, to a large degree,
100 we had to get them on our own.

101 **FORD:** Would these come from private collections, auctions, book dealers in technical
102 books? Or just a great variety wherever you could find them?

103 **VOIGT:** Well, a large part of the early collections were collections that belonged to scientists,
104 and very soon thereafter, some humanists who were retiring or had passed away, and their
105 collections were available for sale. And we were able to pick up collections that way. During the
106 early years, when we had so very little, you could buy a basic general collection and find 75
107 percent of the books were ones you wanted, and we could get them that way very cheaply; and
108 were able to start building a collection pretty rapidly.

109 **FORD:** With the new campus here—and a number of very notable scientists and engineers
110 and so on—coming here for this campus and also affiliated with the university, did you have an
111 opportunity to have people donate—actually donate—to the new library their personal
112 collections? Or did you usually have to purchase these from estates and so on?

113 **VOIGT:** A large amount of them were purchased. There were a number of very valuable gifts
114 that came from some of the local people, as well as some from the other campuses—faculty
115 members from the other campuses that were giving up their collections—and from other
116 institutions in California. But the majority of collections that were purchased, both in the

117 humanities and the sciences, were purchased either directly from an individual who owned them
118 or from, in some cases, a dealer who had purchased them and was offering them for sale at
119 some increase in price.

120 **FORD:** We didn't quite touch on what was here when you arrived. Besides the SIO—the
121 Scripps Library—were there any other collections available either in boxes or in use when you
122 came to the new campus?

123 **VOIGT:** No, when I came here, the only library collections were those of Scripps. There were
124 about 30,000 volumes. I was surprised how weak they were, actually. They were strong in the
125 immediate fields of oceanography, but there was really very little available in biology and other
126 fields that are equally important to the people working in oceanography.

127 **FORD:** You had prior experience in building collections for new libraries. Do I understand
128 that when you did this work for building the collection here at UCSD, it was also used as a
129 model for some of the other new campuses, like Irvine, Santa Barbara, and so on? Did you
130 consult them or provide some kind of a—let's say—an extended bibliography of what a general
131 university library should contain as their basic materials?

132 **VOIGT:** Well, you're approaching the subject of what we called the New Campus Program.
133 We knew that we needed a general collection. At the same time, there was a great deal of
134 pressure for advanced research materials, very shortly, in the social sciences and the
135 humanities, as well as the physical and biological sciences. As a result, there was a problem of
136 where we would find funds for this, because the funds were meager, and while Chancellor York,
137 particularly, did a great deal to increase funds for the Library—found extra funds when we
138 needed them—but still there was not nearly enough to build up a basic collection, which we
139 sometimes called an undergraduate collection, but which is the basic collection that every user
140 of the library has to have, and which is especially valuable for undergraduate students—the
141 general materials in every field. It occurred to me that with the two new campuses being started
142 just after UCSD—that is, UC Irvine and UC Santa Cruz—that if we could get some funds to do
143 all three basic collections we could save money in doing them simultaneously. And as a result,
144 the New Campus Program was started. I made a proposal to the Chancellor, and the Chancellor
145 passed it on to the Regents or the President of the Regents. And in this, I proposed an amount
146 of approximately \$2 million, both for purchase and processing of the collections. With a saving
147 of—I estimated—\$400,000, the Regents bought this, and it made it possible for us to have an

148 undergraduate collection, as we called it, as well as the other campuses. At that time, the
149 librarians at Santa Cruz and Irvine had not been appointed, but the Chancellors had, and they
150 were quite willing to go along with this, that they would have a collection available. And so this
151 program was started under a separate group in the Library. Joe Treyz, who had been Associate
152 Librarian at Yale, came to run the program for us, and over the next three or four years we
153 purchased the 75,000 volume collections—three of them identical, as far as we could make
154 them identical. And when it was completed, there had not been any standard list of books for
155 college libraries, and that's basically what we were doing—it would be a college library rather
156 than a university library. So I proposed to the Council on Library Resources in Washington that
157 if they would provide us some funds, we could edit and put together a list of books for college
158 libraries. This was done. We got some support from the Council to do this; and after the
159 program here was finished, we were able to edit the list of books that we had selected for the
160 collection; and published it as *Books for College Libraries*, which became a standard list that
161 was used all over the world. It included a good many out-of-print books, as well as in-print
162 books. The out-of-print books, we searched for dealers—they searched for us—to obtain three
163 copies. In most cases, they were able to do so. It turned out that book publishers—reprint
164 publishers—grabbed hold of all of these unavailable books and reissued them, so that virtually
165 every book that was in the *Books for College Libraries* became available in many, many
166 libraries; college libraries, particularly—all over the world—based their basic collections on this
167 list.

168 **FORD:** Well, that gives me a much better understanding of why I've heard for years that you
169 were such a pioneer in this type of work of building a new important library. Since there were so
170 many campuses coming on around that time for the University, besides the basic collections
171 that you referred to, were there good efforts University-wide to avoid duplications in specialized
172 books where there could be an exchange? Has that worked well within the inter-campus thing,
173 so that not every university, basically, has too many duplicates found on other campuses or in
174 other libraries?

175 **VOIGT:** Oh, we're talking here, basically, of research materials; materials—when the new
176 campuses—are needed in any college library or any university library. But, beyond that,
177 collections are built largely on the basis of the specialties that are underway in the various
178 universities, so there is naturally is a great deal of specialization because of these differences.
179 Even if you take a field such as history: it gets divided, of course, by every area of the world and
180 every period of _____ [*inaudible*]. And there were a good many occasions where there were not

181 formal agreements, but it just naturally occurred that we would buy in a certain field and others
182 would not. It's true that there was some duplication this way, but I think it's duplication that was
183 necessary. It's very difficult to go into a new field, for example, and have to depend on
184 borrowing books from UCLA or Berkeley. Even if you don't know whether you need the books or
185 not, you've got to look at them to see whether they're going to be valuable for what you're going
186 to do. And so in the fields that are strong in the university, you do have to have some
187 duplication, although we avoided a good deal by working together.

188 **FORD:** Since you were instrumental in building these specialized collections within our
189 library, which ones can you pinpoint as being the most significant in the broad academic
190 field? A lot of people know that UCSD is very specialized in science and engineering and a lot of
191 the graduate fields, but from your viewpoint, which collections do you think were particularly
192 significant and important for this campus to have?

193 **VOIGT:** Well, there were a number of them. As I said, we started with acquisition of scientific
194 journals, and we obtained them from a number of places. Then, along with the New Campus
195 Program, we were adding other collections as they became available. One of the most
196 important, for example, was the Castro Collection, which is a collection—he was a very famous
197 author and professor in Spain, and he was enticed to come here and did come here for a
198 number of years. And we obtained his collection, which, for a while, he kept in his own house
199 here in La Jolla. But eventually we had all of that, and it was one of the really basic collections
200 for anybody doing any studying in Spanish Literature and History. That was one of the first
201 collections which we obtained, which was particularly valuable, and which we obtained really at
202 very low cost. There were smaller collections. For example, we obtained a very fine D.H.
203 Lawrence Collection—not particularly large, some two hundred volumes—but it was a fine
204 collection of mostly first editions and so on, which the people in the Literature Department were
205 much interested in. We obtained one very famous collection, which turned out not to be the
206 most important for UCSD—this was the Della Vida Collection from Rome. Again, a professor of
207 Near Eastern studies and Arabic materials, and at the time we had an Arabic professor here,
208 and the intent was to go strongly in that area both by language and by literature. And we were
209 able to obtain this. I visited with Della Vida several times in Rome, and he agreed that he would
210 have liked to have come to a university like this, and agreed that when he passed away we
211 could have most of his collection at a then very small amount of money. It wasn't a formal
212 agreement, but he died shortly after the last time I visited him, unexpectedly. And I received a
213 letter from one of his daughters saying that they found this letter of agreement, and they were

214 going honor it; and that we could have the collection shipped, and we would pay the estate the
215 small amount that we agreed to pay. Turned out not to be a wise one because the Arabic
216 studies folded here, and most of the books in that collection eventually landed at UCLA where
217 they're much more useful than they would have been here. But there a number of collections in
218 a variety of fields, a number of them in the Spanish field—the Spanish Literature field. One
219 interesting collection was the O'Neill Collection—this was an engineer in Boston who had
220 decided—he and his wife—that they would form a bookselling business when he retired. And
221 they had been collecting books. They had a three-story house jammed with books—something
222 like 14,000 volumes. And he had written—I'm not sure where he's got it—to Andy Wright here,
223 Professor Wright here at UCSD, and I followed up on it and went to see him. We bought the
224 collection at something like \$1.00-\$1.50 a volume. Again, at that time—this was in 1964—there
225 was a great deal of material in this collection that was useful to us; some of the rest was sold
226 and gotten rid of in one way or another. But it was a marvelous collection to pick up. But there
227 were others—the European History journal collection. There were a good many others that are
228 described in a collection acquisition 1961-76 document that I wrote some years ago.

229 **FORD:** Were you involved with acquiring the Southworth on the Spanish Civil War, or was
230 that a later acquisition?

231 **VOIGT:** I should have mentioned that before because the Southworth Collection was one of
232 the very important collections we obtained. Here again, the impetus for this came from a faculty
233 member—Professor [Gabriel] Jackson—who was a very famous Spanish History specialist. And
234 he knew of this collection on the Spanish Civil War that had been collected by a man in France,
235 actually, and we were able to purchase this collection from him. Very much of the material is
236 original copies that are copies that—that is, that there are no other known existing copies—so it
237 became a very important document collection both for use here and then for use all over the
238 country.

239 **FORD:** Did you have a chance to meet Mr. Southworth or know very much about him?
240 Because I've always been curious how he collected so much on what would be somewhat
241 considered a fairly limited subject.

242 **VOIGT:** No, personally, I never met him. I understand, or understood, that he had also—after
243 he sold us the collection—he went right back to work to duplicate it as much as he could, and
244 got another collection which he sold, I think—I don't remember now to which university.

245 **FORD:** Did the famous wonderful collection of posters come with that, or were they were
246 acquired separately? Were his books just the—his collection just the books, or did he include
247 those wonderful posters?

248 **VOIGT:** No, they were included, I think, in the collection—or at least most of them.

249 **FORD:** They're wonderful pieces of art. I happen to enjoy graphic arts, and particularly that
250 period. Let's jump ahead to the Friends—this being for their archive. The Friends must have
251 been formed around 1964 when the new Central Library Building was either constructed or
252 under construction. Could you tell us a little bit about your early affiliation, and who was involved
253 in getting a library support going? Is this something that most libraries have? Do the university
254 libraries or the large private libraries usually have a group such as our Friends, who provide
255 financial support for acquisitions? And how did we get one started here?

256 **VOIGT:** Well, we got started with the Friends group much earlier than I would have expected
257 that we would, than perhaps we would have wanted to. The reason is that there was one person
258 who was particularly strong in wanting to have a Friends group, and this was Mrs. Helen Raitt -
259 the wife of Professor Raitt, Scripps Oceanography. And she came to me many, many times. I
260 looked in my date book, and I found that between January 1963—oh, wait a minute, I have to go
261 back—between October 1961 and the end of 1962, she appears in my date book twelve times;
262 and there were other times when she just walked in. But she was very enthusiastic about a
263 Friends group. I think I would not have started that soon—there were too many other things to
264 be doing at that particular time. We had the New Campus Program, and we had the beginning
265 of computerization of library procedures and all of that, as well as collection development. But
266 she was very enthusiastic. She came to my office on July 5, 1961 with a Dr. Bailey [?] and a
267 Miss Baker [?]
268 that we start a Friends of the Library group, and we kept talking about it. In April '62, there was a
269 special meeting held on the Friends of the Library with a fairly well—a group of a dozen or so
270 people who were interested at that time. And there were several other Friends meetings in '62
271 and in '63. The first meeting actually was held on February 19, 1963, when Professor Jim Hart
272 from Berkeley came down at my request to give a talk. He was, at that time, the Director of the
273 Bancroft Library. I had known him at Berkeley very well when he was Assistant Vice
274 Chancellor—was the Vice-Chancellor of the Berkeley campus—and he came down and gave us
275 a splendid talk back in February 1963. So we were started really very, very early. The Friends
276 Council met two weeks later, and so there was activity beginning in 1963—Friends meetings at

277 several times along that time. Again, Mrs. Raitt was very interested in everything we were doing.
278 She had her own ideas of how such an organization might be organized and operate. She
279 wanted immediately to have special groups in the Friends—one on Baja California, others on
280 other aspects of local and other history. Many of these actually were started, and, as a result,
281 there was a good deal of material that came to the University from the Friends from the very
282 beginning. And it certainly was fine thing for the University to have this; and it was a very
283 splendid thing that we had someone like Mrs. Raitt, who was willing to spend the time and the
284 effort on putting the collections together.

285 **FORD:** From the very beginning, they—as you mentioned—were active in recruiting new
286 members and getting materials for the Library. I assume they promoted this through a lot of
287 lectures and programs and so on. And I know a few years after they founded, they used to have
288 a fundraising event called the Book Fair. They sold the books out in front of the Library—that
289 was before my time. These were things that had been talked about renewing a lot more activity
290 from the Friends. Was that generally their format? They seemed to have been quite an active
291 group when I first knew them—they were doing a lot of programs. And then my other question
292 is—was Helen Raitt the original President?

293 **VOIGT:** Yes, Helen Raitt was the original President. Yes, there were a good many programs
294 of various sorts, and they were tied in with other Library activities. The book sales were done
295 basically jointly with the Friends and the Library staff. The books that were sold were often—
296 many of them—were gifts from the Friends that were not useful in the collection and from other
297 collections. As I mentioned, we would keep the best part of it or the ones that we needed, and
298 the others would be sold. We had some really very good materials, so that we had book dealers
299 from all over Southern California come for these sales.

300 **FORD:** There's been discussion when I was on the Board—and I still attend as Advisory
301 Director—there's been discussion of doing that again, particularly among the broad membership
302 of the Friends to get donated book materials through the year to have this sort of springtime on-
303 campus book sale. Do you think that's complicated to do these days with, I suppose, most of the
304 duplicates going out through book dealers or sold in bulk rather than trying to handle it on a
305 public sale basis?

306 **VOIGT:** Well, actually, this was stopped at about the time I retired in 1976. And I think the
307 primary reason was that it was such a job to sort them out and to keep them and to organize the

308 sale, which most of the work fell on members of the staff—although there were members of the
309 Friends that helped a good deal, too. As a result, I think they decided to stop doing it; and also,
310 because we were not buying collections anymore, and so there were not the duplicates that
311 came through collection _____ [*inaudible*]. At least if we bought collections, they were very
312 specialized, and you bought them because you wanted every book in the collection—or almost
313 every one.

314 **FORD:** With the years that you were closely involved with the Friends activities, do any—
315 beyond Helen Raitt and some of the other names—do you recall some key people through the
316 years that have been very helpful to the Library while you were on campus that were affiliated
317 with the Friends that were community volunteers, either as Director or donors or people
318 interested in the Library collection, that you can recall?

319 **VOIGT:** Well, I don't have a memory of most of these. There were a number who were active
320 on the Friends Council or officers of the Friends. Unfortunately, I don't have it, the archives of
321 the Friends, in which I could pick up these names—which I know but have basically forgotten at
322 this point. Too many years have gone by, I guess. So, I don't have a lot of that until later years
323 when—well, the last years, of course, there were a number of people who were particularly
324 active. And, of course, one of the collections that I didn't mention earlier was the Hill Collection,
325 which came along somewhat later, but was still part of the acquisition program that was related
326 to the Friends, although it wasn't a gift to or through the Friends. But I think Kenneth Hill [has
327 been one of the people who has been most prominent ever since in the Friends activity. There
328 have been others—at the moment, I can't say the names.

329 **FORD:** Well, we all have that problem. I can get the first name and usually not the last name.
330 The Chancellors—you must have been Librarian under, what—three or four, maybe four or five
331 Chancellors?

332 **VOIGT:** I guess its four altogether. I started with York, and then Galbraith, and McGill, and
333 then York again for a short time; and—the name has almost escaped me now -

334 **FORD:** You mentioned McElroy.

335 **VOIGT:** McElroy, that was the name.

336 **FORD:** John Galbraith, I know, was very much a book man. I've seen him in the Library
337 many times in his retirement doing research. And then our immediate past Chancellor—Dick

338 Atkinson—I worked on a committee as part of the Thirtieth Anniversary Capital Fund, and he
339 certainly gave me an indication that he had great interest in the Library, and attended many of
340 the Friends events. So we have been lucky that we've had Chancellors in the past who had a bit
341 of a priority on making this Library as famous as it is.

342 **VOIGT:** Yes, that's very true. I was very fortunate in having a Chancellor's strong support—
343 every Chancellor that came along. Herb York was particularly good at finding money for
344 collections when we needed it, either from his funds, or if we were getting from the Regents or
345 from private individuals, in some cases. He was particularly good at that. John Galbraith's
346 story—everybody knows he said he would not be inaugurated as Chancellor until he had a
347 promise of a major library at UCSD. I think everyone knows that story. And this has been true of
348 all the Chancellors who have been very, very supportive of the Library. And when funds were
349 needed or special activities were proposed, they were always supportive.

350 **FORD:** Let's talk a bit about the Central Library—now the Geisel Library—it's an incredible
351 building. It's become kind of the logo for the University in many different ways. It's always
352 admired, extensively photographed. How involved were you in the planning process for that
353 Library, since you were the head Librarian at the time? And I would hope that the architect and
354 others involved in the construction would want to have your input to build what would be suitable
355 for a major structure for our collection here.

356 **VOIGT:** Yes, I was totally involved with it. Even though it's now the Geisel Library, I still claim
357 it as my library. It started back in about '66, I guess, in which we started doing some basic
358 planning and programs for a building, which were approved by a local administration. We got to
359 the point of picking an architect, and it was suggested to me that Pereira—who was the Chief
360 Architect at the Irvine campus, and is well-known all over Southern California—would like to do
361 a building here at UCSD, and perhaps he would do the library building. And I was I willing to go
362 ahead with it. I knew something of his reputation, and I said, "Certainly, it would be fine." It's an
363 interesting story in itself, the story of the construction of the building. We started by going over
364 the plans—that is, the program for the building without any plans at all—and sharing what we
365 needed in the way of relationships and space for this and the other thing: space for books,
366 readers, and so on. And I decided to visit some libraries in the east that had been recently
367 constructed, so that the architects could get an idea of the kind of thing that was feasible and
368 what was not; what was working and what wasn't working. And so we visited some new
369 libraries: the National Library, the medical library at Rutgers, the University of Delaware. We

370 were going to go on to several others—the problem was that the architect that they had
371 assigned was a young architect who apparently knew little or nothing about universities, and
372 certainly nothing about libraries. And it was really embarrassing having him along. Leonard
373 Newmark of the Linguistics Department, who was chairman of the Library Committee at the
374 time, was alone on this trip, and we decided when we were three quarters through that we
375 weren't going to get anymore with the person we had. And through telephone conversations, we
376 decided to call it off. And Pereira was told of this—that if he couldn't give us someone who could
377 really work on developing the kind of building that we would need, we'd have to go somewhere
378 else. Well, Pereira immediately assigned one of his senior men to it, and we had no more
379 trouble of that sort all the way through. But he started doing the planning of it after a number of
380 discussions. And he called me one day and asked me to come to his Los Angeles office. He
381 said he had plans for several buildings, and I could look at them and see which I liked. And I did
382 this with an assistant that I had at the time. And we looked at the three buildings which he had
383 outlined—which he had drawn in considerable detail on two or three walls of this big room
384 where they were. And he said to us, "Well, you look at them for an hour or two, and then tell me
385 which one you want." And it was obvious that the one he wanted to do was the one we now
386 have, or at least the predecessor of it. When I first looked at it, I thought, "My God, that can
387 never be a library." But the more we looked at it, the more we thought, "Yes, it will work, and it
388 will do what we want it to do." And we had said beforehand we wanted a library that would make
389 a statement. We wanted a statement particularly related to the humanities since this was still
390 known pretty much as a science campus in those days. So I said, "Yes, that's what we want. If
391 you can do that building for us that would be great." Then he said, "I think your problem is going
392 to be to sell it to your campus, and to sell it to the Regents of the University." The problem of
393 selling it to the campus was easy. Chancellor Galbraith was the Chancellor at that time, and he
394 immediately liked the plan and so did the Library Committee and the building committee that
395 had been formed. So that part was taken care of. We then had to present it to the Regents. At
396 that time, the Regents were looking at every building at every campus. I think they thought of
397 themselves as architectural experts—they didn't have anything else to do at that time. But, at
398 any rate, that was the situation. Well, we planned a meeting with the Finance Committee very
399 carefully, and went up to San Francisco for a meeting with them and with the other Regents as
400 well. I presented the idea of this library, and tried to present it in a way that would show that it
401 would do what we wanted it to do, and would be a statement that we would like to develop here
402 on campus. This was followed by presentations with slides by the architects and so on. And we
403 had our fingers crossed, but several of the men on the Regents looked at it and said, "You

404 know, it doesn't look a library. I don't think you want to build that, do you? It must be very
405 expensive to build." But very shortly, there were three women on the Regents at the time--Mrs.
406 Fannie Hearst [?] and, oh—I've forgotten the other names now—prominent women in the state
407 of California and policy and so on. And they immediately chimed in with, "oh, we think it's a
408 wonderful idea"—all three of them. And with their enthusiasm, the rest of the Regents fell along
409 with it and decided that it was OK. So from there on, it was to build the building.

410 **FORD:** In light of the addition, which is now about 6-7 years old, being virtually underground,
411 and museums and libraries favoring into the ground for temperature control, light control, and so
412 on—it was rather a curiosity that a library would be literally up on stilts and the engineering for
413 that must have been tremendous. I know a lot of people have said that it's a very strange
414 building for a library, to have it so much up into the air because of the weight of the books. Was
415 that a detriment in getting this through approval? Besides the general contemporary look, was it
416 the fact it was so propped up with the great cement foundation there that was a problem for
417 people or was it just the appearance of it?

418 **VOIGT:** I think people were concerned about that generally—certainly the Regents and
419 people here on campus were. But Pereira's people insisted that there would be no problem.
420 Originally it was planned that there would be steel supports within the building itself to hold up
421 the extensions on the 6th and 5th and 7th floors.

[END OF SIDE ONE, BEGIN SIDE TWO]

422 **FORD:** This is the second side of the tape recording of the oral history with Mel Voigt on July
423 9th, 1999. We were just finishing up a discussion about the Central Library construction. I think
424 that not all of it got on the tape, so I'll ask Mel to repeat just the last part about the
425 construction—the unique construction of the building, being so high up in the air—and then we
426 will go into another subject.

427 **VOIGT:** Yes, I can just add that the construction was finally done with reinforced concrete.
428 There seemed to be no problems with it. One of the major concerns that we had, that hasn't
429 been mentioned, was that we were concerned about additions to the library. I had seen too
430 many libraries in which the additions made a mess of what had originally been a nice building.
431 Pereira had developed a plan for going down in the back of the present library several layers
432 down and connecting that with the building. I thought this was a very good plan. When the
433 present administration of the library and the university came to putting on the addition they

434 decided instead to go around the building and the underground plan, which did some harm, I
435 think to the looks of the Central Library in terms of the loss of the eucalyptus trees and so on. In
436 general, it has, I'm sure, worked out extremely well. And I think it's important to add that point.

437 **FORD:** Very good. We're going to go to an all new subject and that's the electronic
438 libraries—the movement towards putting, particularly, scientific journals and current material
439 and so on, online, and not having print pieces in the library. It also makes it easier for various
440 libraries – campuses—to use the same basic program without duplicating that material. So
441 we're going to launch into something. As a longtime book man, how do you feel about perhaps
442 less and less publishing of materials, and having them just available through electronic access?
443 And particularly with the new technology and the so-called digital libraries, which seem to be
444 coming on very strong now. What are your feelings as a book person from a generation or two
445 before this mass technology and communication?

446 **VOIGT:** Well, I'd like to go back just a little bit, because the beginnings of mechanization of
447 the libraries, as we called it at that time, goes back into the early years here at UCSD. One of
448 the first things that we did was to obtain funds to put our periodicals, all of these, on to the
449 computer. We were the first library in the world to do this of any size, and many people came
450 here to see the operation, which has continued since that time, starting in 1962; and it's
451 continued on to the present day. When we did the New Campus Program, which we talked
452 about earlier, I had considered seriously the possibility of making a computerized catalog for
453 those collections rather than a card catalog. I suspect that if it had been just been UCSD, I
454 would have done so, or at least tried to do it. It happened that the Santa Cruz Library decided to
455 computerize that collection, when they received it from us; and put out book catalogs, which
456 was the thing that was being done in many libraries at that time. It didn't work—they had to re-
457 catalog everything. So, it's probably wise that we didn't try to do it as soon as that time—it was
458 actually too bad. It could have been a very good start toward computerizing of catalogs and
459 putting them online. The Library here, I think, has been a forerunner. Certainly, a good deal of it
460 since I retired, in terms of utilization of the computers and working with other institutions and so
461 on. And much of what you're talking about, I really know little about because I have not been
462 involved in it, and I've not really tried to follow what was being done in the last ten, twelve
463 years—although I know great progress has been made. My feeling has always been that as
464 soon as you could make these materials easily available—materials easily available from print—
465 you could decrease the need for duplication of materials. I don't think you can ever get away
466 from having collections—maybe I'm wrong—but it seems to me that it is something that

467 somehow can't quite be superseded by electronic means. I'm in favor of everything that's being
468 done, and the faster they can move in that direction, the better. But again, as I said, I can't give
469 you much information about where they're going or what they should be doing, because I have
470 not been involved in it for quite a long time now.

471 **FORD:** So many people more of our generation feel that you need to hold the book in your
472 hand to read it and leaf through it, and they don't find scrolling down the pages for similar
473 materials on the computer screen very, very handy. But I seem to feel that for the young people
474 coming up that are so computer-oriented these days, that's the customary thing to do. And
475 although it's nice to hold a beautifully bound leather book in your hand and to browse through it,
476 for just the pure information access, that perhaps the digital-type library will probably have a
477 great a deal of use. But I still think a lot of materials have to be in print form, and I personally
478 don't think the community library or the university or lower school libraries are just going to be
479 out of business entirely and just all on computers. Do you have any views on the mixture or the
480 libraries becoming the center for people to access electronically, but there would still be
481 collections, shall we say, particularly of the older materials that are available on that site?

482 **VOIGT:** Well, as you say, the young people today are so use to using screens that you don't
483 have the problems that we had back in the seventies, sixties—late sixties and seventies—when
484 many of the large sets and materials and newspapers were put on to microcards, as we called
485 them at that time. And people objected to using them because they had to look at screens; and
486 they weren't as readable and easily manipulatable as the ones today. But we still had to get
487 them—we still had to buy these things—and they were used to a considerable degree. But there
488 was a good deal of resistance to it. I think that resistance continues to some degree, but to a
489 lesser degree. And now anything that can be brought, particularly to somebody's screen in their
490 own office without having to sit in an uncomfortable spot in the library in the dark looking at a
491 screen, is going to be much more amenable to that kind of library use.

492 **FORD:** I was not aware that UCSD had been so early on the electronic catalog. I assume
493 Melvyl came first, and about the same time Roger was set up just for our campus. Was that
494 during your time as Librarian, when Roger was done? And how were you involved with that?

495 **VOIGT:** No, this came basically after I was through. I was in on some of the early planning
496 statewide that was being done on "what are we going to do about this? Are we going to do it
497 statewide or are we going to do it on individual campuses? How do we coordinate this whole

498 operation?" There was an office formed—statewide office—on the mechanization of libraries,
499 computerization of libraries, which did a great deal to coordinate what was being done on the
500 various campuses, which was in existence during the latter years as I was involved with the
501 library.

502 **FORD:** I'm going to add—I think we've probably covered that subject—and I'm going to add
503 for archival purposes. Mel has been kind enough to furnish me copies from his file, which I will
504 locate at the Special Collections, and make sure we have copies in the Friends archive. You've
505 prepared a number of papers here. One of them is a form of an autobiography which really talks
506 about your early times of coming here and setting up the Library. We have two sections on that.
507 I also have—this is just for the record here—a paper prepared on collection acquisition, to which
508 we've referred to several times in this interview, which Mel was instrumental in setting up and
509 has been used as a guide many other places. And then the—I actually have four documents.
510 The fourth one is the planning of the Central Library Building 1965 to 1970, and I just want to
511 acknowledge that we appreciate having these also in our archive, particularly for the Friends
512 archive. I'm sure they're in the oral history you did recently for the University. So do we have
513 anything else you'd like to add, looking ahead to the future? Or anything that you could give as
514 words of wisdom to the Friends for their activities, and to continue on their support to the Library
515 before we wrap up?

516 **VOIGT:** Well, I perhaps have not stated strongly enough the value of the Friends to the
517 UCSD Library from the very beginning with Helen Raitt's efforts. Even though I may not have
518 been as enthusiastic as she would have liked, we moved along pretty rapidly in developing an
519 organization. I think it was a very short time, and we had more members in the Friends of the
520 Library here than at any other campus. And it's been an extremely important activity for the
521 Library, and I know that every University Librarian who has followed me has profited by the
522 Friends of the Library and the work that they have done, and continue to do regularly.

523 **FORD:** Thank you, Mel. This has been a wonderful opportunity to have this early history, and
524 very valuable. We, as always, appreciate your continuing interest and support. And we do see
525 you at several of our meetings, and we hope you'll stay in touch with us as long as you can. You
526 certainly bring a very valuable resource and inspiration to all of us. So I thank you very much for
527 this opportunity, and for lending us this material for our archive.

[END OF INTERVIEW]