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June A. Steck (December 21, 1971)

C. Richard Arena

Oral History Interview

with

MISS JUNE A. STECK

December 21, 1971
Pasadena, California

By Dr. C. Richard Arena

For the Richard Nixon Oral History Project

ARENA: This is interview #1 with Miss June A. Steck, the initial A stands for Alma, of Pasadena, California, where this interview is being conducted, Arena interviewing, December 21, 1971. May I ask you where you were born and if you were not born in California, how did you find yourself in California now?

STECK: I came here from Colorado on account of my mother's health.

ARENA: Although you came from Colorado, you were not born there?

STECK: No. I was born in Illinois.

ARENA: Would you mind giving a brief summary of your educational background, Miss Steck?

STECK: I graduated from high school in Greeley, Colorado and then I graduated from Colorado College at Colorado Springs [Colorado] with an A.B. [Bachelor of Arts] degree. I have another degree from the State Teachers College in Greeley [Colorado]. Greeley is named for Horace Greeley. He was a great friend of Nathan Meeker. Horace Greeley advised Nathan Meeker with the famous "Go West, young man, go West." So Nathan did and he founded this town of Greeley in 1875. Later he was sent as an Indian agent to the Western slope in Colorado. He was supposed to get the Indians to farm like

white men but they did not like it. They wanted to continue their free life as they always had. For that reason the Indians massacred Nathan Meeker and the town of Meeker on the White River is named for him. This was after he had founded Greeley.

ARENA: To be sure, both Meeker and Greeley are in Colorado. How far from Denver, or near a main city in Colorado?

STECK: Greeley is fifty miles north of Denver. Half way between Denver and Cheyenne.

ARENA: Is there any personal connection between any of the members of your family and Mr. Meeker, by any chance?

STECK: Yes. My mother's maiden name was Meeker. One daughter was still living there and she looked like my mother's people. They were from the New York branch of Meekers and my grandfather was from the New Jersey branch. But there was enough physical resemblance that we know they were distant cousins.

ARENA: Do you have any idea as to whether or not Mr. Meeker left a diary or papers and who might have these in their possession right now?

STECK: Yes, he did. Those papers--a lot of them--are published in a book. The name of the book is The White River Massacre. I used to have a copy, but after I read it I gave it away. I wished now I had kept it.

ARENA: It's possible that by checking with book stores you might still find a copy.

STECK: Yes. I bought this copy at Groman's here in Pasadena.

ARENA: Was there a possibility of your going into history, rather than Latin, as a result of this personal knowledge?

STECK: No. I was too young when I started in with Latin to know anything about all this.

ARENA: Do you mind if I ask you--before we continue with your personal biography which I would like to do so people would have an idea of the background of advisers, since you were the adviser to the Latin Club, people will have an idea of the background of the advisers that the President had in high school--to summarize your direct contact with President Nixon?

STECK: I don't know what you mean.

ARENA: I mean when did you first meet the President, under what circumstances?

STECK: When he came to our meetings of the Latin Club and joined the society.

ARENA: This would be where, this Latin Club?

STECK: We had a Roman room at Whittier High [School]. We held our meetings there.

ARENA: And Roman in this case is named after the Romans. And this would be at Whittier High School.

STECK: Yes. This room was decorated like a Pompeian house with red and black paneling on the walls. The lights were a replica of old Pompeian fixtures. The metal was greenish brass. It had the Roman altar. There was a statue of Minerva and one of Mercury on easels on the walls, and we were quite loyal to that room. It opened into a classroom with folding doors. The classroom was mine. So, when we had meetings and couldn't all get in the Roman room proper, we'd just open the doors and had a bigger auditorium.

ARENA: Was the President a member of this Latin Club the two years that he attended Whittier High School?

STECK: I don't remember just when he joined, but it was early in his junior year.

ARENA: His junior year, just to set the record straight, was 1928-29, and then 1929-30 was his senior year.

STECK: Yes.

ARENA: As far as you know, you never had President Nixon in your actual Latin classes.

STECK: I'm positive on that.

ARENA: Regardless of what anyone else has said.

STECK: Yes.

ARENA: We won't mention the names who have made that error in print.

STECK: No.

ARENA: Do you recall the name of the teacher who did have him as a student in Latin?

STECK: Miss Bertha Wolin.

ARENA: Did you have any contact with the President outside of Whittier High School itself? Did you meet, for example, his parents in any way in their grocery store in East Whittier?

STECK: No. I've been there in later years, when they had the restaurant. He was the kind of boy that the mother didn't have to come to school to find out what was the matter with her son, so I never met his mother.

ARENA: Did you have contact with any relatives of the President, such as the youngest brother Edward [Calvert Nixon]?

STECK: No. I never knew Edward. I knew Harold [Samuel Nixon], I think his name was, but he never took Latin.

ARENA: You were aware that Harold did die while the President was a young man.

STECK: That was an older brother.

ARENA: Actually, there were two brothers that died. The older brother, the first-born who is Harold, and the brother born before the youngest brother, who was Arthur [Burdg Nixon]. Harold was the boy who was treated for tuberculosis and the mother went with him to Arizona.

STECK: To my knowledge it wasn't Harold, but I may be wrong.

ARENA: Now, you say you do recall him, or you do not recall Harold?

STECK: No. I never met the one who died.

ARENA: There were two who died.

STECK: The one I call Harold carried on the grocery store when Richard entered politics.

ARENA: That was definitely Donald [Francis Donald Nixon].

STECK: That's right.

ARENA: Donald was one year younger than the President.

STECK: Yes, he was younger.

ARENA: You did meet him.

STECK: I had been there to eat and talked with him. I remember he said he never took Latin, he wasn't that kind.

- ARENA: Do you recall ever attending any debates or oratorical addresses delivered by the President as a student?
- STECK: I know he did it, but I can't remember. I suppose I heard. We always had these contests and everybody went, so I suppose I was there, but I can't remember exactly.
- ARENA: Do you recall attending any theatrical plays in which the President participated?
- STECK: Yes, I helped train one. The year that was Virgil's two thousandth birthday anniversary and we put on a three act play. The Latin Department did this. The name of the play was "Dido." Richard was the hero Aeneas. The girl who played Dido was his best girl for a long time.
- ARENA: Would you mind giving her name?
- STECK: I don't know whether she would want me to.
- ARENA: I see. Is there anything else about that play that you recall? Was it a humorous play, was it serious, did it stick to history pretty well?
- STECK: It was pretty serious, yes.
- ARENA: Was this done in the school or in the town?
- STECK: In the school for the whole student body and that was something. We divided up. One teacher took one act to train and another, another. At that time we had five people teaching Latin.
- ARENA: What did you think of the President as an actor?
- STECK: He was very good, we all thought. Of course, he enjoyed doing it because later he worked with the Community Players. He must have sort of gotten his start with us.
- ARENA: Just to make sure now, in this play the lines weren't spoken in Latin.
- STECK: No, it was all English.
- ARENA: I also want to be sure about the point of your role in the play. You said you helped to prepare it. Did that mean you wrote it?

- STECK: No. We sent away to some classical place and got the copies, because everybody was celebrating his two thousandth anniversary. That's the way we did it.
- ARENA: Was the play the result of the Latin Club's sponsorship, though? Was that the connection?
- STECK: Yes. All the leading characters belonged to the Latin Club, of course.
- ARENA: Did you get to see the President perform in any of the community plays of Whittier?
- STECK: No, I never did. We lived in San Gabriel [California] and I went back and forth to school, so it did not happen. I've been to some of their plays since that, but not during his time.
- ARENA: Did you meet the President under any circumstances after he graduated from high school? I'm thinking of the college years in Whittier, 1930 to 1934, and then of course, the Duke University years, '34 through '37 for law. Then the practice of law, '37 through '42.
- STECK: The last time I ever talked to him he was practicing law, I think at that time. We had a scholarship dinner and I was on the Scholarship Committee of the faculty and he was the speaker. That was the last time that I met up with him, personally. I was in Washington once and told him where I would be. When I came back to my hotel in the evening there was a notice there that he would like to have me have lunch with him the next noon where all the senators and so on ate. I was leaving on the train at daylight the next morning so I didn't get to go.
- ARENA: Just to make sure, would this have been the period when he was a senator, do you recall? About what year was it, then I could tell you what position he held?
- STECK: I believe it was the year I went East in 1960. That would be just before he ran for Vice President, no, for President.
- ARENA: For President. He ran in 1960, that's right. This was during that year. Then he would have been Vice President at the time.
- STECK: Yes, he was. No, that's wrong. It must have been 1942.

ARENA: 1942 would have been during the war. Maybe '52 when he was running for Vice President with President [Dwight D.] Eisenhower.

STECK: No. I went on to Boston [Massachusetts] in '60 and it must have been the year, so he was still Vice President. I went to visit the Senate and I had gotten a ticket from Senator [Thomas H.] Kuchel. He was our senior senator. So I went to visit the Senate in the afternoon before I was to leave. I may be mixed up in this.

ARENA: Well, that's not that important, what year. The experience is the main thing, your recollecting that he did invite you. When you receive this typewritten copy if you want to check that more carefully, please do so.

STECK: All right. Maybe I can get my wits collected.

ARENA: How about meeting him when he was practicing law, before he was in politics?

STECK: That's the last time I met him then, was when he came to the scholarship dinner.

ARENA: He actually was practicing law at the time.

STECK: Yes, I'm sure he was.

ARENA: Did you ever meet any of his other relatives, and I might mention a few, and you might not be aware that they were? But some of the relatives had an indirect contact with the community, including Whittier High School. For example, Oscar O. Marshburn.

STECK: Yes, he was on the school board for several years.

ARENA: Were you aware that he was the President's uncle?

STECK: No, I didn't know it then. I think Oscar Marshburn's wife was the one. He's the uncle-in-law.

ARENA: That's right. It's his wife who is the President's aunt, his mother's sister. Her full name is Rose Olive Milhous Marshburn.

STECK: Yes.

ARENA: Other relatives include aunts who fulfilled different professional functions. One was a nurse, Mrs. Martha Gibbons. Her maiden name is also Milhous. I don't know if that rings a bell.

STECK: I didn't know her.

ARENA: Another name is Mrs. Jane Beeson, who after she married spent a great number of years in Lindsay, California. She is the lady who taught the President music, especially the piano.

STECK: Yes, I've read that, but I never knew her.

ARENA: You did not meet her. How about the President's grandparents? Did you ever meet them, such as Franklin Milhous and Almira Milhous?

STECK: No.

ARENA: You don't recall coming into contact with them at all. Do you recall the President's grandfather's brother, [Charles Wright] C. W. Milhous, who was on the Board of Education for the Lowell [School] District. I don't know if you had any contact with the Lowell District at all.

STECK: No.

ARENA: So that doesn't ring a bell to you.

STECK: No.

ARENA: Now that we've established this general contact with the President, I'd like to ask you again to think back to the period when he was an actual member of the Latin Club. Going from your own recollections, how would you describe him as you knew him then, a student member of the Latin Club?

STECK: He was always cooperative. I remember one time, we had the Roman banquet every spring, a few weeks before school would be out. The janitors made us the reclining affairs such as the wealthy Romans used when they reclined at the feast. They did not sit on chairs. So we allowed the officers of our club to recline. Everyone was always very anxious to be an officer so he could recline at this banquet. They wore their togas and the girls had Roman dresses on. Of course, they had some kind of entertainment when they had a dinner, it lasted for hours. Between each course would be something to entertain. So I remember one time when we were planning our program. I said, "I think we need someone to give us some music, play the piano or something," and Richard quickly volunteered and said, "I'll play, Miss Steck." And he did. He was always ready to do things if you needed some help.

ARENA: What do you recall of his ability as a pianist, if you can?

STECK: It suited us all right.

ARENA: Do you recall the songs that he played, possibly, or the tunes?

STECK: No.

ARENA: Are you aware of the melody known as the "Rustle of Spring"?

STECK: Yes, I've heard that lots of times.

ARENA: You don't recall him playing that, by any chance, one way or the other?

STECK: No. I have no idea what he played. I suppose I knew at the time, but not now.

ARENA: About how many students--especially when the President was a member--were members of the Roman Club?

STECK: As near as I can remember, I think we had about fifty. They had to have certain grades to get into this club.

ARENA: An overall grade, or just in Latin?

STECK: Their Latin grades. We didn't want any poor ones. The freshmen were always the slaves and waited on the tables at banquets. We had this hollow square and all of this entertainment would go on in the square.

ARENA: Did the students themselves do any special research to set the historical accuracy of, say, the banquet and the conducting of the meetings, the atmosphere of the Pompeian room that you mentioned, and so on?

STECK: No, I think the teachers did that part.

ARENA: Do you mind if I ask you if you have been to Pompei yourself, especially before this motif of the Roman Club?

STECK: No. That room, that building had just been finished when I went to Whittier [High School] to teach. Our Vice Principal, who was a classical student and had taught Latin in Whittier High School, had attended to all the arrangements, the decorating and everything of this room. I sort of inherited that.

ARENA: Do you mind giving the name of the Vice Principal?

- STECK: When I went to Whittier she was R. Pearl Ellis.
- ARENA: Do you know if she might still be living?
- STECK: Oh, yes. She lives in Whittier. She later married a man named Simpson.
- ARENA: Was it unusual, do you think, in any way that a rural community such as Whittier, especially when the President was a student, had so many students taking Latin? And of those many students, fifty were good students as they had to be to belong to the club. Was that unusual, do you think?
- STECK: It was sort of an unusual community because of its Quaker background. So many of those good students were Quakers. So it was different from the other communities in Southern California.
- ARENA: Is there any particular reason why you decided to teach in Whittier yourself?
- STECK: I had taught up in the San Joaquin Valley [California] and my folks moved down here, so I wanted to be nearer home. Miss Ellis was looking for a Latin teacher and she found me and that's how it happened that I went to Whittier. I was there twenty-two years.
- ARENA: Do you mind if I ask you if you enjoyed living in the community and why?
- STECK: It was the kind of people that live there that made it very attractive.
- ARENA: Did you find the strictness of code--if that's the correct word--no drinking, no card playing, no dancing, which was enforced around those years, restrictive to you in any way? Did you find that uncomfortable in any way?
- STECK: No. They were my kind of people.
- ARENA: Do you recall other teachers coming and leaving--and you need not mention any names--who found the situation otherwise? Did you find that was a common thing?
- STECK: No. I didn't know anything at the time.
- ARENA: Did it appear to you that the students were in any way unhappy or protesting such regulations, especially the idea in the 1930's of frowning upon dancing on the campus, the high school campus?

- STECK: No. I didn't know anything about it, if it existed. A class of youngsters then was different from the kind now, it seems to me.
- ARENA: Did the proximity of the big city, such as Los Angeles [California], create any problems of any type, do you know?
- STECK: No.
- ARENA: Was it an advantage, do you think, that you were not in the big city and yet were close to it?
- STECK: I always said I wouldn't teach in Los Angeles for anything.
- ARENA: Do you mind if I ask you if you were reluctant to bid your Latin teaching years goodbye, or is this something you were looking forward to as a breather after those twenty-two years?
- STECK: Yes. I hated to quit, but the doctor thought it would be better.
- ARENA: Do you mind if I ask why?
- STECK: I was having the start of this arthritis. They thought it would be better for me to do it.
- ARENA: Do you mind if I ask you what the average student was like during the President's time, the 1930's, and to what extent he was different? By different, take it any way you wish, academically, extracurricularwise, personality-wise. To what extent was he normal as far as the average student was concerned? To what extent was he distinctive, unusual?
- STECK: We all thought he was a good student, but we had no idea that he would do what he has done, get so high in politics. We didn't even think about politics, or at least I didn't. I always thought he was a good boy and interested in his work, one that we liked to have around. We had a lot of others who were--they weren't politically inclined, apparently, but they were substantial. One queer thing about our Latin Club, we had dues in those days. It was all right to pay quite a little money out for the privilege of belonging to the Latin Club. Then the treasurer had to take our money to the office and they kept it for us. When we needed, we'd get it from them. They'd always tell the treasurer, the boy who was it, "Well, why don't you spend this money. You have so much money." They'd say, "Well, we're not ready to do it yet," or something like that. They prided themselves that they were the richest club in school.

ARENA: Do you recall on what occasion they did spend money and for what purpose?

STECK: When we wanted to have a party we had it. We'd have ice cream. We had an initiation when new members came and we always did that just before Christmas. This party was planned by those who had been former members. They blindfolded the prospective members and went around and put lipstick crosses on their foreheads, then they concocted some terrible mix which they had to drink--red pepper and cat-sup, and I don't know what all. Each time they tried to make it worse. As they went around giving them this dope, they'd tell them that they were drinking the blood of an ox. [Laughter] So, it was a great event for the upper classmen. The freshmen always had to be the slaves at the banquet and wait on us. They would be ordered around in grand style.

ARENA: Do you recall any other features of the initiation?

STECK: No, that was the main one. If they got through with it they did well. I knew it wasn't anything that would hurt them, finally, but it was unpleasant at the time.

ARENA: Do you recall that the President ever served as the president of the club?

STECK: I don't believe he was. We had a senior consul from the senior class and then the junior consul. The two consuls reigned together, of course. I'm sure he never was senior consul. He probably had one of the offices, but he was not treasurer, I'm sure, because that boy always had to come and tell me how they wanted to spend their money.

ARENA: You would have recalled if he were.

STECK: Yes, I would.

ARENA: Did the club, in your view, have a definite bearing on the academic side of the subject? In other words, did you find that it did heighten interest in the study of Latin appreciably?

STECK: Yes, I think it did. They knew they had to work for it, because they had to have a certain grade to get into the club. It was sort of exclusive. We didn't take in "C" students.

ARENA: How often did they meet?

STECK: Once a month.

- ARENA: Was this play that was performed in honor of Virgil the only play during the President's connection with the club?
- STECK: Yes.
- ARENA: A play was not an annual event, it was the banquet that was the annual event.
- STECK: Yes, that was the big celebration.
- ARENA: Do you recall that other members of the community shared in this interest in Virgil outside of the high school community, say, the college for example? Was there any tie-in with Whittier College at that time?
- STECK: No, we didn't have anything to do with them.
- ARENA: From your own personal recollection, did the graduates, the college bound students--and I imagine that a large percentage of those who did go to college were members of the Latin Club. . . .
- STECK: Yes, practically all of them went to college.
- ARENA: Do you recall what percentage went, say, to Whittier College or to other local colleges and out-of-state colleges, as rough estimate?
- STECK: I don't know. Of course, the greater number of them went to Whittier College because it was near.
- ARENA: From your overall experience in teaching and being aware of students--not only at Whittier High School but at other high schools--how did the Whittier student measure up to the average student, we'll say, of surrounding high schools of California and of the nation as a whole, in your estimation?
- STECK: Of course, I didn't know much about the other schools, but we always thought ours were tops.
- ARENA: One side, of course, would be the rate in which they were accepted by colleges. As far as you know, was there any real difficulty for a good student from Whittier in being accepted to any college?
- STECK: I never heard of it if there was.
- ARENA: To what extent was homework a part of the life of the students? I'm thinking in terms of how many hours at home do you think would a pre-college student have to spend doing his homework every day?

STECK: I felt that they should spend at least an hour.

ARENA: That would be on your subject alone.

STECK: Yes.

ARENA: And if they were taking maybe five majors or so, would something like three to five hours a day--if a student wanted to get good grades--be out of the ordinary?

STECK: I think so.

ARENA: Is there any way of your knowing how much time the President spent at home?

STECK: No, I have no idea.

ARENA: You did not have him personally?

STECK: It's been told since--we didn't hear about it when he was in school--he did so much work for the father and mother in the store outside of school hours.

ARENA: Did the fact that he lived in East Whittier create any problems, as far as you can recollect? He did not live within walking distance. Did you ever hear of him being late to school or any problems of that type?

STECK: No, never heard of the like.

ARENA: Was there any special problem stemming from his being a transfer student from Fullerton High School?

STECK: Not that I know of.

ARENA: What he had done at Fullerton [High School] was pretty well incorporated right into his regular program and did not put him behind in any way, as some transfers might.

STECK: No. He wasn't the kind that would have that happen.

ARENA: Did you ever attend any sporting events and see the President engaging in any sporting activities while you were there?

STECK: No. Of course, I went to the games. He may have been the manager of the football team. I don't believe he ever played, but I'm not sure.

ARENA: He was called a business manager for these events, which put him and other students in charge of the treasury.

STECK: Yes.

ARENA: As a matter of fact, how much responsibility and, let me say, power did the students actually have concerning this financial duty of handling money? Were they really in complete charge of handling the budget?

STECK: No. I think they were supervised by some member of the faculty. Of course, I didn't have any direct knowledge of it.

ARENA: To what extent did they have responsibility right in your own club? For example, was it their responsibility to see that the dues were collected? Were they the ones who checked on the academic standard?

STECK: You mean, outside of the club?

ARENA: Now, I'm thinking for the club itself. How much responsibility would the students have, especially the officers, in running the club where you were the adviser?

STECK: They collected the dues all right.

ARENA: Did you find that that was a burdensome, extra duty on your part, the fact that you did have to do that?

STECK: No, I always enjoyed the Latin Club. They had never had one at Whittier High when I went. The Vice Principal and head of the department asked me if I would found the Latin Club. I had done it up in San Joaquin Valley where I taught. So I was the founder of it.

ARENA: She was aware at the time you were hired that you had been an adviser before. She approached you with the possibility first.

STECK: Yes, that's right.

ARENA: And you could have said yes or no, and you said yes.

STECK: Yes, I did.

ARENA: As a matter of fact, do you recollect--again, about the time the President was a student at Whittier High--which language held the most number of students?

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STECK: You mean the number of pupils who took Spanish or French or Latin?

ARENA: And would they be all the languages that were available--Spanish, French, Latin?

STECK: And German, which came back a little later. I think there were always more in the Spanish Club because so many more people took it. But, I'm not sure how many they had, of course.

ARENA: Would Latin be second, do you think, or would French also be a high number?

STECK: French didn't have very many. But I think the Latin had more because its closeness to Mexico and so on. They always do in this Southern California.

ARENA: Excuse me. You said the Latin, or do you mean the Spanish?

STECK: Spanish, I mean. And then, everybody told them it was easier than Latin, too. That's another reason. The ones that took Latin and then took Spanish later found out it helped them in their Spanish.

ARENA: Was Italian taught at any time, do you recall?

STECK: No.

ARENA: How many--just to be sure--periods a week did the student take Latin and how long was each period at that time, when the President was attending?

STECK: They took it five times a week. I think the periods were forty-five minutes when he was in school. Later they made the periods a little longer so that we could have supervised study. But that wasn't during his time, I'm sure.

ARENA: To be sure, as far as you know, what was the extent of his other language study, if any besides Latin?

STECK: Will you repeat that?

ARENA: I'm just asking did he take any languages besides Latin, that you know?

STECK: I don't know that he did.

ARENA: Was there one particular area in Latin--would it be possible to make the distinction--where he excelled? For example, Latin has its memory retentive side, I'm thinking of learning vocabulary. Another side would be the ability to translate, which my own feeling and recollection is that it's more than just memorization. There is certain skill in choosing the right English word, because every word does not have an exact English counterpart. There is a certain skill in getting the sense. And we might say there is still another area of study, the ability to give a good translation, not a mere translation. Still another ability might be putting your English into Latin. Possibly there are some other areas. I'm just going by my own experience. The ability to memorize such things as the vocabulary. The ability to translate Latin into English. The ability to write Latin, your thoughts as well as the printed word, putting them into Latin. Do you recall that the President--again, you would only have his participation in the club--but is there any recollection that he excelled in one of these areas?

STECK: No, because that would be in class, and I never had him in class.

ARENA: The meetings, themselves, were conducted in English.

STECK: Yes.

ARENA: But the fact that he was a member, of course, meant that he had to have a good scholastic average.

STECK: I think he always had "A's" as far as I know. Of course, I didn't grade them in the club. They couldn't be in it if they didn't pass with certain grades.

ARENA: To what extent does the fact that the community was a Quaker community--in your estimation--have any bearing on the ability of the Quakers, such as the President, to obtain a command of the study of Latin, the mother of the Romance languages, if you will? I'm thinking, did you find that they had a kind of minority disadvantage in reverse, in that those of Spanish-speaking ability or Italian or Portuguese, was there a noticeable superiority on the part of those students who were non-Quakers and whose parentage was--I understand Basque was an important minority in Whittier--the Basques, those who were of Portuguese background, Spanish, and of course, Mexican? Did you find that there was a noticeable difference in that regard, that the Quakers were not as adept in Latin as those who were of the Romance language background?

STECK: Not many of those minority people came to Latin. They went to Spanish, so I don't know.

- ARENA: Do you recall any personal conversations with the President, especially as to what use he thought Latin was to him?
- STECK: No.
- ARENA: Anywhere along the line?
- STECK: He was always all business and didn't hang around.
- ARENA: Do you recall to what extent any of the other students brought that up, the usefulness of "The Dead Language," the usefulness of Latin as they saw it?
- STECK: Yes, they used to discuss it with me, tell me how much it helped them in their English and other subjects.
- ARENA: Over the years did the size of the Latin classes dwindle more and more, as it has in some schools including my own where it virtually dwindled down--on the college level as well, I might say--not only Latin but Greek as well?
- STECK: It began to, but there has been a much greater loss since I retired.
- ARENA: How can you account for that, because here we are in the twentieth century and obviously Latin is still going strong in the twentieth century? Now all of a sudden in schools--whether college or high school level--the Latin courses have dwindled away. Do you think this is a part of a passing phase where the interest in Latin comes and goes, right now it is going and will some day pick up again, or do you think this is the final out for Latin?
- STECK: Well, I don't know. Some people think it will come back. This age that we're living in now is so materialistic and they are leaving the cultural things go, is what it seems to me.
- ARENA: I don't know to what extent, Miss Steck, you had first-hand contact with rural people in a rural setting, growing up on a farm yourself, or as it is said in California, a ranch. But the fact that Whittier High School did have Latin, and again, Whittier was such an overwhelming rural community, especially in the President's time where Latin was quite popular. Did it seem surprising, or how could you account for the fact that this rural community would support, would spend tax money to hire Latin teachers rather than subjects that would be of more seemingly immediate value than Latin?
- STECK: At the time I went to Whittier it was as it had been for years and the East Whittier community, the pupils coming from it, we always felt were the cream of the crop be-

cause they had such a good grammar school out in East Whittier. He didn't attend that.

ARENA: If I'm not mistaken he attended the elementary school in Yorba Linda where he was born, and then he did attend the East Whittier Elementary School when the family moved in 1922. However, not all of the brothers did, which might confuse you. For example, brother Donald and brother Edward attended the Lowell District school. But he, for some reason, did attend the East Whittier Elementary School.

STECK: I didn't know.

ARENA: You said, without realizing it, they did have a good school system.

STECK: Yes. We always thought when some boy or girl came in from East Whittier he knew some grammar and that was more than the ones coming from the city schools.

ARENA: As a matter of fact, while you were teaching Latin, especially while the President was attending high school, was there a controversy or dispute among both professional educators and citizen educators, for example, members of the school board? Was there any type of feeling aboard that Latin should be done away with during that period?

STECK: Not that I know of.

ARENA: If Latin is to come back, what arguments do you think would have to be raised to accomplish that, and have people, of course, supported these arguments? What is the justification, anytime, for maintaining Latin on either a high school or college curriculum?

STECK: Most of my boys in Latin classes were preparing for the professions: doctors, lawyers, preachers and so on. I've followed them up and they went into these professions. So if they don't have that background, I don't know. And they always came back telling me how much good it did them to have that training in Latin for their profession. I don't know how they'll get it if Latin goes out altogether.

ARENA: As I recall, some of the advantages for the study of Latin--add to this when you will--the advantages were: one, it would serve as a basis for a better comprehension of English and Romance languages, that would be one basic argument; another was that you will learn good study habits if you learn Latin, because in the study of Latin success demands that. Would you say that was the case in the President's time as well, that those arguments would have held true?

STECK: Yes, they would. That's why they were taking it.

ARENA: Let me ask you is there anything regarding the Latin Club and your direct contact with the President that I have not raised in the form of a question or any subject that you think that I should have raised that you would like to raise now yourself? Is there anything that you would like to say, or anything that has come to mind since we started this interview that you would like to bring up at this point?

STECK: I figured out that date when I was in Washington. It was 1948 that I made the trip. I was there in '60 but I think I went to his office in '60. He wasn't presiding in the Senate. The woman that sat with me apparently went there often and I told her that I had known him, and so on. So she said, "Maybe he's be in his office, even though he is not here today. You could go and see." I said, "I don't hardly dare go home without making the effort." She said, "Well, you go on." So I did, but he wasn't there. The secretary was very sad and knew he would be very sad that he had missed me, and so on, but I lost out on that.

ARENA: As a matter of fact, in 1948 his office was that of Representative.

STECK: Yes.

ARENA: He had won that in an upset campaign against--you might recall--Jerry Voorhis.

STECK: Yes.

ARENA: When you say you dare not go back, were you thinking of other friends, your own friends who had advised you that you should do that, since they knew you were going to Washington? You were, in a way, afraid to face them?

STECK: Yes, some of my family had that idea.

ARENA: Although we're not interested in politics as such, does this mean that even though the President had gone into politics he had that type of a reputation, and that type of a position in the community that people wanted to see him as a local boy who made good? Would that be an accurate way of putting it? Is that why you, personally, wanted to see him too?

STECK: Yes, I suppose it was.

ARENA: When he did run for politics--again, without going into politics as such--were you aware of the campaign, was this something that a person who lived in Whittier could not avoid knowing about? Were you following what was going on when he was running?

STECK: Oh, yes. Everybody did, his friends.

ARENA: Again, without going into politics as such, did you find that some friendships were broken, that some hard feelings were made as results of this new position that the President had, when he had gone into active politics? Was that very noticeable, that maybe some members of the faculty took an active role for him and an active role against him, without mentioning any names? I'm just wondering the reaction of those who had had him as a student, and if this became a noticeable change among the faculty members of the school? Was there in effect any bitterness as a result of that?

STECK: Of course, I retired in 1945. I wasn't just on the scene but I heard from my friends that some of the Democrats were pretty obnoxious. These were people who were on the faculty.

ARENA: As a matter of fact, he was selected I believe to run in 1945 and a campaign took place in 1946. So you were not actually a member of the faculty, but you kept in touch and heard.

STECK: No, but I heard a lot.

ARENA: Knowing him as you did, as a student--as an extra-curricular student, he was not actually a formal student--but nevertheless you knew him as a member of the student body, and knowing him as we all know him today as our President, what changes or what similarities in his personality, in his temperament, in his speech? What similarities and what differences do you find in Nixon the high school student and Nixon the President of the United States--without going into politics, as I say? It's really the personality of the man, and people certainly would like to know what a person in your position--someone who knew him, so to speak, before and after--would be interested in knowing just what changes you see in such a person who goes from a small rural high school to the highest office and one of the most important in the nation and the world.

STECK: He always gave the impression that he was all business and didn't have time for any--I don't know hardly what to call it--much fun, I suppose it would be called then. I think from what I read about him now that he's even more intent as the years have gone by. He didn't have time to waste time. He always had something either to study or to do at home.

- ARENA: In that respect then, you see no change in him today as he was in his high school period.
- STECK: Yes.
- ARENA: You say that he appears that equally serious to you today.
- STECK: Either that or more so.
- ARENA: Did he seem at that time mature beyond his years, or did he seem just quite serious, but there were other students who were equally quite serious?
- STECK: Yes, I had so many of that kind.
- ARENA: You did find other students the same.
- STECK: Yes.
- ARENA: Would you say that that seriousness came from the fact that the way of life was different then, that the students had more responsibilities, that the hard times of America then, that these all played a role in not only the President, but other students of that era being so serious.
- STECK: Yes, I think it did. It was depression times you know. They realized the seriousness of things more than they do now.
- ARENA: Would you temper in any way your view that he had no time for fun when I remind you about the fact that he did have a girl friend? I was just wondering to what extent did he attend social functions with girls and dates-- was this below average, average or above average in his case, as far as dating is concerned, from your knowledge and experience?
- STECK: I don't know. I don't believe he. . . . He was a senior when he did this play and got acquainted with that girl friend.
- ARENA: Do you think, possibly, it was that play in which Richard became . . .
- STECK: That got them together in the first place.
- ARENA: I see. And you're sure about that. They had not met before that play. That came after.

STECK: I think maybe they'd been in the same class, but they had never gotten acquainted with each other, really. They both then went to Whittier College. She was a very fine girl, a beautiful girl. I think it was a year ago last summer they ran so many stories in the newspapers about her because she'd been Richard's girl. I wondered why they had to do it. I suppose it was publicity.

ARENA: Can you recall that his personality noticeably changed in any way following his making this new acquaintance? Do you find that he became any less serious, for example?

STECK: No, I don't think so. He was always serious.

ARENA: From the standpoint of his social and sociable contact with this young lady, and knowing that he was not the only one, of course, but also noting that some youngsters kind of go overboard and in public, was there demonstrative affection shown between these two during your observation?

STECK: No. The play wasn't given till the latter part of their senior year. I didn't have much chance to observe such things. Then, I know it wasn't public, knowing both of them.

ARENA: Would it be accurate to say that as far as his association with this girl, or girls, he was in control of himself, or would it be more accurate to say he was shy, do you think? Would there be a better word than I'm using, I'm trying to describe his contact with girls? As you know, he is described as being a loner, he's described as being shy and reserved and uncomfortable with people, including girls? But, from your observation. . . .

STECK: I think that would be my observation, too.

ARENA: What would it be, your observation?

STECK: That he was shy and sort of kept to himself. He didn't have time for any frivolity, I know. I think they say that before he came to school he went into Los Angeles to the market every day to bring back things for their store.

ARENA: Did he ever appear to you physically tired because of these extra chores, including the early market trips?

STECK: No. I never observed anything of the kind.

ARENA: Would you say the opposite was true, that he seemed to be full of life and pep?

- STECK: Oh, yes. He was full of life, all right. But he didn't let it get away with the seriousness of life either.
- ARENA: What was the attitude, from your own observations, of the other students in the Latin Club toward him? Do you recall, for example, that an election for consuls did take place and how was it conducted, and why he did not win?
- STECK: I don't think he ever ran. They just considered him one of them. They didn't realize that they were hobnobbing with a future President.
- ARENA: Did his playing of the piano have any appreciable affect on the attitude of the other students toward him? Did it make him seem like a regular guy, for example?
- STECK: I don't know. I know it made a hit with me because that helped us on the program.
- ARENA: Were you aware that he had taken music lessons seriously, and that he had played at recitals? Did he ever mention that to you?
- STECK: I don't know that I knew he could play till he told me he'd do it. He volunteered that.
- ARENA: As a matter of fact, speaking about his shyness and reserved personality, was he one to attempt to make up to the teacher? And you would know, because you're the teacher in this case, even though you were not giving him a grade. Did he appear to try to flatter you, or to in any get your goodwill?
- STECK: No, nothing of the kind. We were just all common people.
- ARENA: Now, I believe we didn't mention--and I want to be sure that we did discuss all that could be discussed--on your meeting with him during the Scholastic Society program. That was mentioned earlier. I believe you said he was on the program. Was he a speaker on the program, or was it just a meeting of that Scholastic Society and he was one of the invited guests?
- STECK: No, he was a member, so he belonged there.
- ARENA: And this was after he had graduated.
- STECK: Oh, no.
- ARENA: Then, this is while he was still a student.

- STECK: Yes, he was still a senior in high school.
- ARENA: Again, on this occasion, was he not the president of that society?
- STECK: No, I don't know what office he was holding.
- ARENA: But he did hold some office.
- STECK: I'm sure he did. He was the kind that the others would want to have in office.
- ARENA: If he was not outgoing with his fellow students, if he gave the impression of not being aggressive, if he gave the impression of being shy, do you mind if I ask you what was it that made him earn the votes of these students for, if not the Latin Club, for these other offices, such as manager and so forth?
- STECK: You mean Manager of Athletics.
- ARENA: Manager of Athletics and things of that type.
- STECK: I imagine the coaches out there knew what they were doing when they appointed him to such a position. Of course, I didn't have anything to do with that.
- ARENA: Did he give you the impression in any way of being a natural leader among the other students, or did he give you the impression of working at being a leader among the other students?
- STECK: I don't think he worked for it. He was just the kind they would want to have do such things.
- ARENA: All the time that you knew him, was there ever any criticism--again, you need not mention any names--concerning his character? I'm thinking here of the traditional sense of character: honesty, integrity, not being devious and all of that. Was there ever any criticism regarding his character in that sense?
- STECK: I never heard it.
- ARENA: Would you mind explaining the functions as you knew them of the Scholarship Society of which he was a member?
- STECK: The Scholarship Society?
- ARENA: Yes, of which he was a member.

- STECK: They had to have certain grades to get into the Scholarship Society.
- ARENA: Would these be, do you think, higher or lower, or about the same as the Latin Club itself?
- STECK: Yes.
- ARENA: Would generally the students of the Latin Club also be members of the Scholarship Society?
- STECK: Yes, they would.
- ARENA: It was composed really of the best students.
- STECK: Yes, that were in the school.
- ARENA: If I'm not mistaken, was not the Scholarship Society linked with a statewide society of that type, which would not be the case of the Latin Club.
- STECK: That's right. We were just local. But the Scholarship Society, people belonged to it all over the state, of course.
- ARENA: Do you have any recollection that he had any post--if students could have posts--in the statewide organization of the Scholastic Society?
- STECK: Not that I knew of.
- ARENA: Do you know if the Scholarship Society ever held or attended any statewide meetings, or they might have been called conferences where he was sent as a representative?
- STECK: I don't know anything about that.
- ARENA: Is there any question or any point not taken up so far that you would like to bring up in this interview? Anything that comes to mind that you think would be of interest to students of history regarding the President's years at Whittier College from your personal knowledge.
- STECK: No. I knew nothing particularly about him after he left high school.
- ARENA: As far as his residency at the high school and his conduct there that I have tried to raise, there is nothing further.
- STECK: That's right.

ARENA: Then, I really can't thank you enough for giving me all this time, being patient and cooperative and very, very helpful.

STECK: You are welcome, but I'm afraid I haven't told you very much.

ARENA: That's for historians to judge, not you or I. Thank you.