

Oral History Interview
with
Selmer O. (Sam) Wake

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California Department of Education
Adult Education Oral History Project

Oral History Interview

with

Selmer O. (Sam) Wake

Director of Adult Education, Santa Barbara City College, 1958-72

Director of Adult Education, Santa Barbara HSD, 1947-58

Teacher, Santa Barbara High School District, 1939-47

May 6, 1995

Santa Barbara , California

By Linda L. West

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PREFACE

Adult education in California has a proud history of helping its citizens to meet the challenges of life in a huge, complex, multicultural state. Through the years, California adult educators have provided leadership to the nation in the development of innovative instructional practices and creative educational solutions.

The California Adult Education Oral History Project began in 1992 as a companion to a print history of adult education commissioned by the California Department of Education. As the century draws to a close, the growth and energy of California adult education in the sixties, the institutionalization of competency based education in response to the influx of refugees and immigrants in the seventies and eighties, and the innovative uses of technology of the nineties will be recorded.

The oral history project started with a small group leaders whose careers began in the 1950's and 1960's and who witnessed and influenced important events in the development of the nation's largest adult education program. Seven interviews were added in 1994 - 95.

Significant assistance to the new project was provided by the staffs of both the California State Archives and the Oral History Program, History Department, California State University, Fullerton. This project could not have begun without the vision of Raymond G. Eberhard, Administrator, Adult Education Policy and Planning Unit, California Department of Education, and the support of the late Lynda T. Smith, Consultant, Adult Education Policy and Planning Unit.

Linda L. West
June 30, 1995

INTERVIEW HISTORY

Interviewer

Linda L. West

Interview Time and Place

One interview was conducted in Santa Barbara, California, on May 6, 1995.

Editing

The interviewee reviewed and edited the transcript. When the tape was inaudible or when necessary for clarification, some information was added and is indicated by brackets [].

Tapes

The original cassette tapes were transferred to reel to reel format at California State University, Fullerton and deposited with the California State Archives.

CALIFORNIA ADULT EDUCATION ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEWEE: SELMER (SAM) O. WAKE

INTERVIEWER: Linda L. West

[Session 1, May 6, 1995]

[Begin Tape 1, Side A]

WEST: This is Linda West interviewing Selmer O. Wake in Santa Barbara, California, on May 6, 1995. I'm interviewing Sam to record his recollections of significant events and trends in California adult education during his career. Sam was the director/administrative dean of the adult education program in Santa Barbara from 1947 until his retirement in 1972. Since then he has continued to be an active supporter of adult education.

Santa Barbara has recently celebrated the seventy-fifth anniversary of its adult education program. There seems to be an extraordinary community support for adult education in Santa Barbara. What can you tell me about the origins and accomplishments of the Santa Barbara Citizens' Adult Education Advisory Council?

WAKE: Well, Linda, the Adult Education Advisory Council was organized in 1951. In the '40s, there was a lot of legislation put forth to somehow curtail the increasing expense of adult education to the state educational budget. Following the war, there was just a tremendous

increase in enrollments, and it bothered the legislators that this increase was taking more of the state's school budget. After the adult administrators had defeated many, many bills trying to restrict adult ed, the state legislature bypassed the state office and hired its own consultant, who was requested to select twelve programs in the state and interview the citizens participating in them and make a report back to the legislature.

Well, when this man came to Santa Barbara, we selected six men and six women who were enrolled in the program, and we were not permitted to participate in the discussion, but we could sit in and be present. We were a little terrified, not knowing exactly what these people were going to say about the program, but were wonderfully surprised with the tremendous support and the good things they had to say about their participation in the program. Even the man that was hired by the state legislature was quite impressed with the group, and in the report he made to the state he ranked the Santa Barbara program fifth or sixth out of the twelve that he visited.

We followed up on that, and when we discovered the tremendous support these people gave of the program, I approached my boss [Roy L. Soules] and suggested that we organize this group into a formal adult education advisory council. We did so, and from that beginning in 1951 we increased it to a membership of twenty, then to

thirty, and finally to forty—twenty men and twenty women—and we set up some guidelines that they could serve a limited term and be reelected once, and then we would add new people to the advisory council, twenty every two years. And that gave a turnover and a good participation of all the people in the program.

The advisory council was patterned a little bit after the first one in the state at San Jose High School [San Jose Adult School, San Jose High School District] Adult Education Program. We were the second, and the third in the state was Stockton College. And not many more general adult education advisory councils were organized in the state, although they did have special committees for different trades and that sort of thing, but not overall adult education advisory councils. But the state office, the State Bureau of Adult Education, George [C.] Mann, Stan [Stanley E.] Sworder, and Gene [Eugene M.] DeGabriele all supported and admired the kind of work we did in Santa Barbara because the group was so enthusiastic, they traveled to San Diego to attend an Adult Education Administrators' conference, they traveled to San Francisco, they went down to L.A., and I think the whole state was quite impressed with the fact that these people were interested enough to travel on their own. We even had the president on several occasions travel back East to national adult education conferences.

So the Adult Education Advisory Council in our town really saved our program during the bitter struggles against the great criticism of the John Birch Society. The John Birch Society was against any kind of extra monies out of the state school funds for adult education, and it got so severe that the Birch Society forced the board of education to hold special meetings to investigate adult education. And thankfully we had a strong president of the advisory council, a strong vice president, a curriculum chairman. They all appeared before the group and made a resounding support for the program and pretty much put the John Birch Society out of business, as far as criticizing the adult education program. So we're very proud of that group of citizens.

WEST: Was this council associated with other political entities?

WAKE: No, it was independent. It was independent of the high school board when the program was under the high schools; it was independent of the college board of trustees. Although after they had shown such vigorous support of the program, the superintendent [Dr. Norman B. Scharer] one time called me in and said, "Sam, you know, those people represent education. I kind of think I ought to have a part in appointing members to that advisory council." And I said, "Well, we have a nominating committee, and they're the ones that search out and get members for the advisory council, but I'll express this to the

committee." Well, the committee didn't like it at all because they didn't think the superintendent should come in after the program had been going for many, many years and all of a sudden want to appoint his own members to the advisory council. So I had them appoint the daughter of the editor of the paper, who was a strong figure in our community, and she loved adult education, and she was the chairman of the nominating committee.

So when they presented the names to me for the new members of the advisory council, I said, "Well, I'll have to take that over to the superintendent now because he wanted to appoint some members." And they didn't like that, but working for the superintendent I had to do it. So I walked into his office and handed him the nominating papers, and he looked down and saw the signature of Jean Storke Menzies, who is a daughter of the publisher and owner of the paper, and he looked up at me and he said, "Okay, go ahead." [Chuckling] He didn't want to challenge the group to kind of load the committee with some of his own members. So the Advisory Council carries a lot of weight in our community. People request to serve on the Advisory Council. So we're proud of that group.

WEST: Can you say something about the diversity of that organization?

WAKE: Yes, we always saw to it that we'd have a judge from the court system, we always had a minister representing the ministerial union, we always

had minority groups represented, we always saw to it we had it equally divided between the men and women, and we had a member of the high school board of trustees on the [council] since the program was once in that [high school] district, and we also had the chancellor of the university [Dr. Samuel Gould] on the Advisory Council. I had several different chancellors of the university on the Advisory Council. So that carried a lot of weight in the community.

WEST: Okay. In Santa Barbara, the adult education program is a part of the community college district, but that has not always been true. What can you tell me about the changes in governance of the adult education program?

WAKE: Yes, I'd like to clear up something about that. Many of my colleagues up and down the state, when they discovered that the program was switched from the high school district to the college district, they were quite angry about it because the program was rather prominent in the state and they thought well of it. But the situation is different in Santa Barbara. There are only two school districts, I believe, in the state of California that have our kind of administrative structure. That is, at the high school district, the board of education which governs the high school district and the elementary district, they'll do all the work for the high school district and then adjourn and reorganize as a group to govern the elementary district.

So the adult education program was in the high school district for twelve years under my administration, and the high school at that time could organize community colleges—they called them junior college at that time. So the high school wanted to develop a junior college in Santa Barbara again, and that gave them the opportunity to assess 35 cents on the tax rate. They needed the money. So one of the real reasons they developed the junior college to begin with was it was a revenue source for them. So they organized the junior college in 1946, and I was hired in the spring of 1947 as the first administrator in the new college, the first one to be employed, and [it] was a part of a community institute. When they organized the junior college, they had the big adult education program, they had the university extension of UCSB [University of California, Santa Barbara], and they had the [small] junior college.

The junior college was very small, and so they said, "Well, gee, to justify some of this tax money, we'd better move that [apprenticeship] program over to the junior college to give it some base." So the largest program of the junior college the first couple years was the big apprenticeship program because of all the soldiers coming back from the war [World War II] joining the apprenticeship programs. And I was administering that. And when they wanted to transfer the entire apprenticeship program to the junior college to

boost its enrollment, I felt sorry for the lady that was in charge of the program, Grace Ruth Southwick, because she had subsidized real small [apprenticeship] classes for all these years, and now that it had built up, then they wanted to take it away from adult education and put it in the junior college. So that happened for a few years, and then they decided that. . . . They hired their first new president of the college after a couple of years, and he thought that he'd like to have the total adult education program in the junior college.

Now, remember the junior college was still in the high school district, and that's the way it was according to state law at that time. And I opposed it, the Advisory Council opposed it, but we were under the direction of the board of education and the superintendent and the president of the college. So I invited the superintendent to address the Advisory Council. He was quite nervous about it because he knew the opposition, but he promised that the adult education program would take over the evening college program for adults and that there would be absolutely no change in what we had been doing in past years. So the Advisory Council pretty much relaxed, I agreed to do it, and then they brought me in and made me the administrative dean of the adult education [and evening college] program.

And we continued to function that way until . . . I think it was 1965, when the state mandated that all junior colleges must separate

from the high school district by 1965 [1967]. And so they elected a new board of trustees. And I became quite a political animal to defend the adult education program against such likes of John Birch Society, the taxpayers' association, and some others that didn't like the program. I personally selected three or four of the members to run for the board of trustees of the college, and then a group of us got together, [and of the] thirty-eight people [who] filed for the board, we selected seven. We made a coalition of a group of people to support those seven; and we elected six of the seven. And two or three of them had worked in adult ed, so they were great supporters of adult ed. So I was off to a good running start with support from the college for adult education.

And I must add here that over the years, the Advisory Council and adult education, have co-sponsored, with over 400 organizations, different courses, forums, and all. We included them, and all they really had to do was publicize. Sometimes we had a moderator from their organization for a forum or a course, or a teacher that they thought well of and we approved. And so we joined hands with the community that way, and over the years it's been a great success.

WEST: During your career, the Bureau of Adult Education operated in the California State Department of Education. What can you tell me about state policies and how they impacted the local level?

WAKE: Well, George Mann was . . . Dr. Mann was the chief of the Bureau of Adult Education when I came into the program in 1947. Dr. Mann came in under duress. There was a legislative fight again to cut down adult education. He agreed to go in and look at all the policies that were in force, and he had conferences and that sort of thing. So they developed policies cooperatively with the other administrators, so it was accepted by the [legislature]. He was a great leader.

Stan Sworder followed him, and it was during Stan Sworder's regime in the '60s and the '70s that we had the tremendous battles with the legislature which still wanted to cut down on adult education. In fact, it was Dr. Mann, George Mann, and Stan Sworder, his assistant, who helped organize the workshops that were held here in Santa Barbara, and they invited all the administrators up and down the state to come to Santa Barbara and participate in a two-week-long workshop. And those workshops had different subject areas in which they met and discussed state policies, what they should do and all. So the Bureau of Adult Education, bless them, cooperatively collaborated with the administrators up and down the state in developing policies for the operation of adult education in California.

As you remember, in the late '60s they attempted to restrict the curriculum in adult education because the pressure from the legislature was getting more intense all the time, because the enrollments were

expanding—over a million adults were enrolled in the program—and so they decided to put out a state-mandated curriculum. Well, this, you know, just absolutely violated the spirit of adult education because it was supposed to be a curriculum that grows out of the community; but here the state was going to impose on all of us a state-mandated curriculum. There were going to be traditional subject areas, like history and psychology and citizenship and all the trite titles that the legislators understood. They understood psychology and English and foreign-born, that sort of thing, and we had a curriculum that was just the opposite of that. We didn't title any of our courses with those traditional courses. We tried to give them real attractive titles that would invite people to participate.

In fact, Stan Sworder was so concerned about our program and having a state curriculum that he even came to Santa Barbara and met with me, because I voiced some concern about it and I said, "I can't support that. I just can't support a state-mandated curriculum in adult education. We're supposed to serve the needs of the community. A fishing community is different than our community, and an industrial community is different from our community, and we're serving the needs of the community." "Well, you know, we've got this terrific legislative fight, and we've got to mollify these people somehow." I said, "We should do it a different way."

Well, anyway, they had a state conference—I remember this so vividly. Dalton Howatt, who was the Director of Adult Education for the San Francisco City Schools was president [at the meeting of CAAEA], and they wanted to have a voice vote to support this mandated curriculum from Sacramento, and I stood up and opposed it. I was the only one who opposed it. But they said, "Well, they could understand and all, but for the good of the whole program we're going to have to mandate the curriculum."

So I didn't know how I was going to. . . . How was I going to do that with our varied curriculum? So I hit upon the idea of giving it a popular title that the state didn't like, but in parentheses I would put "Psychology": "What You Should Know About Parenting," then I'd put in parentheses "Psychology." So when I submitted it to the state, I submitted it the reverse. I submitted it to the state as "Psychology," then I'd put "Parenting for . . ." you know? But in my publications here I reversed it and used all the popular titles, then I'd search for some academic title to put in parentheses. [Chuckling] And that's the way I got by. So I had to be creative to meet the state standards and still do what . . . continue doing what we did. So that restrictive curriculum even got worse later, to where now today they have only approved ten curriculum areas for state support, and anything that you want to do outside of that has got to be based on fees or support from

the local district. And of course that violated the very premise of [adult] education, of [not] basing [access to] education on ability to pay.

And we had fees. I inherited a board of education directive: "Mr. Wake, when you become in charge of adult education, we still want you to charge a fee." So I had no choice. We were the first program in the state of California to have a fee for adult education. And it was a terrible thing.

So what did I do? I said, "Well, we'll charge a dollar. We'll charge a dollar for as many courses as they want to take." [Chuckling] So we did that for about a year. But then when we went in to collect the fees, they all said, "Well, I paid that dollar in that other course," so we had no way of checking on it. [Chuckling] So we thought, well, let's charge a dollar per course, per term. And so we had that fee for quite a number of years, and it was just a modest fee.

But then a new superintendent [Dr. Robert C. Rockwell] came along [to head] the college—[the program] was in the college then—and he thought we should charge more. And so I argued with him and he said, "Well, the board of trustees thinks you should charge more, too. You better charge more." I said, "Well, I'll meet with the Advisory Council." So we [had] a special fee committee of the Advisory Council. The president [Richard Buffman] was the editor of

a paper in Goleta [*Goleta Gazette*]; the vice president was a prominent person, a prominent Republican in town [Gertrude Calden]; I had a black man on the committee [Bill Downey]; and myself and my assistant [Dr. Martin Bobgan]. We had a committee of five or six.

And we had done such a good job combatting the people locally who wanted to cut down on the program by using a bar chart showing the total taxes collected, then we'd [show] just a little bit [of the taxes] that went for adult education. And when people would see, well, they were paying all this money for education but only a sliver of it going for adult education, it kind of put out the fire. But then when I went in to this committee and said that [the Board] wanted to increase the fee, they said, "Well, Mr. Wake, we're not using much money already. We're only using a penny or so out of a dollar of every tax. We vote against it." Well, that put me on the spot with the superintendent and the board. So I went up to the superintendent and I said, "Well, they don't want to increase it because they're already paying taxes, and they think they are entitled to a penny or two out of each [tax] dollar for adult education." And he said, "You better go back and tell that committee that if they don't approve it I'm going to [increase the] fee and get the board to approve it, and you'll just have to live by it." Well, I didn't want that to happen, so I went back to the committee and I said to the committee, "You're putting me between a rock and a

hard place here. Listen, why don't we increase it just one more dollar?" Well, they reluctantly agreed to go along to increase the fee one more dollar per course, per term, and we had three terms a year. So I went back, and in my presentation to the board of trustees, I kind of dramatically said, "The committee met and agreed to increase the fees 100 percent." [Laughter] That put out the fire for awhile, and so we didn't have any more fee increases all the time I was in charge of the program, although there were some attempts.

And then when Prop. 13 passed and took away all the support, you know, everything went to the state. Then the state set up just these ten areas for the curriculum and you had to charge fees. So what's happened now: for instance, ceramics, they have to pay up to \$60 for the course by the time they pay the materials fees and that sort of thing. I'm in the woodcarving class. I've been in woodcarving ever since I retired, but they're only charging \$5 per person. And the local district thinks so highly of the [adult ed] program that they put in some support for it, too. So now we have a big curriculum based pretty much on the ability to pay, although, you know, you wouldn't say \$5 is too much for a course. But three times a year, that's \$15, plus your supplies, your tools, and all that sort of thing. It adds up. And I've never been happy about the fee system, but that's happened in the

community colleges, at the state colleges, the university. It just seems that we're basing it all on the ability to pay.

[End Tape 1, Side A]

[Begin Tape 1, Side B]

WEST: During your career, the Bureau of Adult Education had three chiefs, George Mann, Stan Sworder, and Gene DeGabriele, all of whom have passed on now. What do you remember about these influential individuals, and any other people from the department that you would like to share your memories of?

WAKE: Well, I remember all of those men. I've already mentioned how well I thought of George Mann, the first bureau chief we brought in to quell the uprising of the legislature in trying to restrict adult education. And under George Mann's leadership they started holding workshops here in Santa Barbara. And, of course, being the local man, I felt it my responsibility to organize and make arrangements for the workshops. We held the workshops out in Montecito at the. . . . We had a Montecito School for Girls, a private school in a beautiful, large estate, an ideal place to hold a summer conference. And Stan Sworder followed up and continued to have those workshops, and it was a real help to him and to the adult administrators [California Association of Adult Education Administrators, CAAEA] to come together to formulate policies collectively and collaboratively, so that we worked

out our problems together and developed state policies together so we all understood them and the reasons for them.

And I remember, since the workshops were held here in Santa Barbara, I took advantage of some of the general sessions to invite some of my adult education teachers out to participate. And I remember one time Stan Sworder was handling the meeting, and he was quite happy to see some teachers present, because, you know, teachers couldn't come from other parts of the state, but he saw some of my teachers. And so he said, "How many teachers are here?" Some hands went up and he. . . . One was a girl by the name of Helen Strain. She was teaching physical education classes. And he asked her, "What are you teaching?" and she said, "Oh, I'm teaching a physical education class." And she told some of the activities and all and he said, "How many are participating?" "Oh, I have sixty, sixty-five people." And I jumped up and I said, "Helen, we have never had more than forty-five," because that was the state limit. [Laughter] "Oh, yeah, I guess so. I guess there are only forty-five." [Laughter] The crowd just roared because they knew what the limit was, you know. [Chuckling] So we had fun that way.

For instance, the great criticism of the crafts program, arts and crafts. And so I was on a committee. Stan appointed, I think, four or five of us on a crafts committee, and we all got together and decided,

well, now, how many hours can they participate in woodcarving? How many in ceramics? How many in various crafts? And we came up with the idea we'd have a beginning course in ceramics, we'd have an intermediate course in ceramics, and we'd have an advanced course in ceramics. So it gave them about three years, you know, that they could participate. Well, that wasn't enough, but we had to enforce that. And we had many older people whose life was fulfilled creatively by doing ceramics or woodcarving or whatnot. And the three years would come up and they just got up to a level of some proficiency, and they actually would come to the office and break down and cry, you know, because they'd have to leave the program.

And just to show a personal touch, the president of the board of trustee's father was in the ceramics class and it came up where he'd have to give it up. And it was his whole life. He was a widower. And so the president of the board of trustees came down to see me. He said, "Why did my dad have to get out of this course? It's his whole life, he lives it and everything." I said, "Well, it's the law, it's a regulation, but," I said, "let me see if I can work out something." So I called the instructor in and I said, "Look, this man has been in the class three years, and, you know, he's the father of the president of the board of trustees. Can't we work out something? Can't we make him an assistant?" "Yeah, let's make him an assistant." [Laughter] So we

made him an assistant. So we had several assistants. [Laughter]

People that we felt really, really needed it.

WEST: Good solution.

WAKE: So we had to be creative again. But the arts and the crafts bothered me. The board of trustees, when I'd come up with a big program and they'd see all these [crafts], they'd say, "Mr. Wake, you've got these arts and crafts courses, these people playing around with dough and clay and whatnot. You know, do you have to have so many of those?" And, you know, I discovered that Dr. [James Bryant] Conant of Harvard University had written a small book on education after the war, and in it I discovered a phrase that he said: "Because the creative arts were the warmth and color of the senses, they're perhaps the most deeply productive of all the educative forces." So after I'd get some questions about [crafts from] an attorney or a businessman or a banker [on the Board] about these, then I said, "Well, you remember what I said about Dr. Conant at Harvard University? He thinks that. . . ." "Oh yeah, that's right." [Chuckling] So I kind of put out the fire. I don't know how many times I've used that quote about the creative arts and crafts.

We had a big conference out at City College [Santa Barbara Community College] a week ago today on the arts and the humanities, and the first time the university has given some leadership to bring all

the instructors of the arts and the humanities together where they shared their beliefs and activities and their various programs. And at the end when they were summarizing this, I got up and I made the statement about . . . the Harvard University statement about the arts and crafts, and I got a big hand. [Chuckling] Because it's so true.

You know, it's so true.

WEST: And today those programs are not supported by state apportionment.

WAKE: That's right.

WEST: So they're fee-based and there's no [restrictions on] people continuing to take them, but there is an issue of them being able to afford them.

WAKE: Yeah. You see, a lady [Mrs. Max Schott] in town gave us a downtown center, and it was called the Alhecama Center. She gave it to the high school district, and the high school district used that for a new Community Institute, where the new junior college, the adult education program, and the University of California Extension all came together under the general title of the Community Institute under one director.

And I don't know if I've mentioned this or not, but that's [where] the junior college had its [first] home. And after the war, with the enrollments expanding, we all had to find new locations, but they let the adult education program stay at this downtown center. And the downtown center had a beautiful little theater, it had. . . . [Mrs. Schott] had redecorated and reorganized the whole downtown center,

which used to be the Community Art Center which went bankrupt. And she bought it, she and her husband bought it for their four daughters. And their four daughters' names were Alice, Helen, Catherine, and Marie, and so they named the theater the Alhecama Theater. They took the first two letters of the girls' names: Alice, A-L, Helen, H-E, Catherine, and so on to make the name Alhecama, and it was called the Alhecama Center.

And when everyone else moved out, I changed the name to the Santa Barbara Adult Education Center. And it was right downtown, and that's where the great growth of the program took place. And [later], when the elementary enrollments dropped, both [in] Santa Barbara and in Goleta, we were able to purchase those two centers, so now we have two adult education centers in Santa Barbara devoted exclusively to adult education classes. And we have, plus those two centers, we have over a hundred other locations in Santa Barbara where adult education classes are held.

So, getting back to some of those men, Stan Sworder was a great leader [as was Gene DeGabriele]. He held [adult education staff development] workshops in Santa Barbara for a number of years. Gene DeGabriele came in, and I think [there were budgetary cutbacks], and I don't remember DeGabriele having a workshop here in Santa Barbara. [To mention] some of the consultants: Milt [Milton]

Babitz, whose specialty was in parent education and psychology, was a great leader; and Roy [W.] Steeves also was an administrator and visited our program from time to time, and I understand both of those moved up the ladder to other responsibilities.

WEST: Okay, let's talk a little bit about the California Association for Adult Education Administrators, and that was active for forty years, from 1932 until 1971. What can you tell me about the activities of this organization?

WAKE: Well, that organization really was organized by Dr. Mann. He brought the administrators together into this organization, and he needed that organization to help fight the attempts in the legislature to cut back adult education. And it brought together all these administrators for a state conference. He brought them together for workshops, and they were invaluable to the support of adult education in the state and support for the Bureau of Adult Education.

We had some of those . . . they broke down into several committees. They had a liaison committee on public relations. I was in charge of the legislation committee [on] the Central Coast here, and half a dozen of us always got together, so we all kept [up] on the latest bills that were introduced in the legislature so we could organize everyone.

And one time, the year before I retired, we had a rural legislator who just couldn't stand to see this money going for adult education in L.A. and some of the big cities and all, and he entered a bill that would virtually wipe out adult education. It was the severest bill ever entered in the legislature. So we organized all our citizens in all our programs and we just flooded the state capital with letters. And I was asked by the adult education group to prepare a [position] statement to . . . and appear before the senate committee—this happened to be in the senate—and I prepared this "white paper" and we went up there. And the room was just crowded with adult educators and teachers from all over, and [from] the communities close by, they [also] had a number of teachers there, so the hearing room was just loaded with people. I was sitting in the front row because I was going to make a presentation. And they called the meeting to order, and the man who had presented the bill got up, walked up to the microphone and said, in effect, "I withdraw my bill." So it was quite a dramatic thing that happened. I walked into our representative's [Republican, Don MacGilvray] office in Sacramento, and I had Republicans and Democrats all writing to him, and when I walked into his office, he got up from out behind his desk and walked around and put his arm around me and said, "Sam Wake, what the hell kind of a committee you got down there anyway?" [Laughter] Because

he didn't expect to get that kind of a reaction, you know, from some of his dear . . . he was a Republican, from some of his dearest Republican friends. And so we'd done a pretty good job selling adult education in the community.

WEST: Sam, are there any other people who worked in adult education in the department that you'd like to tell some of your remembrances of?

WAKE: Well, they had quite a number of consultants. I remember Milt Babitz, who I think I mentioned before. His field was psychology and parent education. And then there was Warren [W.] Brenner, who was over here at Lompoc, just forty miles north of Santa Barbara. He was in charge of the adult ed program over there and he visited our program many, many times. He joined the bureau as a consultant. Robert [C.] Calvo [Consultant] with the L.A. schools. Then there's Larry [Lawrence E.] Koehler. Larry Koehler was also a consultant to the Bureau of Adult Education and visited our program a number of times. All of these men were very active in leading groups in the workshops that were held here during the summers. And the last one I remember is William J. J. Smith, who was also a consultant.

And then I'd like to mention too, you know, the largest adult education program in the United States at the time was the program in Los Angeles. And [E.] Manfred Evans was the first assistant superintendent in charge of adult education. And his assistant was Bill

[William J.] Johnston, [LAUSD, Adult School Principal, Assistant Superintendent, Superintendent, 1957-81]. Bill Johnston was first a principal of an adult school and became Manfred Evans' assistant. And when Manfred retired, Bill Johnston became the assistant superintendent in charge of adult education, and then became superintendent, and was superintendent for, I believe, almost the second longest term of any superintendent that served in L.A.

Bill Johnston brought half a dozen of his principals to Santa Barbara one time to kind of see how we were promoting the program locally. At that time, we had just put our schedule together as a newspaper format and had it as a part of the paper. So when the paper went out to 40,000 to 50,000 people, well, this supplement went along with it. And the way I happened to get that supplement was, again, the daughter of the publisher of the paper was on my advisory council. I called her in one day and I said, "Don't you think it would be a good idea if we did something like this, and have it as a part of a . . . just a supplement to the paper?" And she said, "Well, let's go talk to the city editor." So she took me in, we talked to the city editor, and of course the city editor was talking to the daughter of the publisher, and he said, "Well, yeah, let's go ahead." So we went ahead with it, and it was a terrific move on our part, and I sent copies up and down the state to all my colleagues. And a few of them, I notice, adopted

that style. And that's when Bill Johnston came in and we discussed our program and the advisory council and that sort of thing. And I found him to be a great leader. He was an excellent leader, and I count him as a friend to this day.

WEST: Okay, shall we move into characteristics and changes in adult education?

WAKE: Well, when I first started in adult education in 1947, as I indicated, the war had just ended and the people were all coming back to their old jobs. The soldiers were coming back to Santa Barbara, they were enrolling in the various classes, and the enrollments just skyrocketed during the '40s. And I've alluded to the fact that it expanded so rapidly that it was a concern of the legislature, and we had many fights on our hands to save the program. I remember in the '50s we had over a million adults in California enrolled in adult education classes.

I might say in the '40s one thing happened: folk dancing became a great program all through the state. People came back from the war years where they were suppressed and working hard in the war [industries], and they loved to get out and do folk dancing. Well, folk dancing had spread so [rapidly] that we got attendance, a.d.a. for it. And that cost the state, so we had to cancel. No more folk dancing in adult education. [Chuckling] You could have folk dancing in the

elementary schools, you know, but not in adult education. So some of those . . . well, they're termed excesses, occurred right after the war, and continued somewhat into the '50s.

And into the '60s, President [Lyndon Baines] Johnson came into office and we had the poverty programs [Manpower Development & Training Act, MDTA 1962] called the Johnson Poverty Programs. And we had a \$650,000 grant to [a social agency] in Santa Barbara, and adult education was to be in charge of the education aspects of it, the vocational training.

And we had another lady who happened to head up the Catholic Welfare Bureau, Ida Cordero was her name, and she was to be in charge of the general administration and a counseling program and a testing program and the placement of these people after they'd been in the vocational training program. We had a lot of trouble with that program because a lot of people didn't believe in the poverty program. In that program, the objective was to take people off welfare, give them education and training so they could be productive citizens. And we discovered in our basic education classes that 40 percent of them were dyslexic. They couldn't read, they couldn't fill out a form, and they couldn't take the little tests that they had. So we had basic education, just a number of classes, and we had to have them [attend] longer, and pretty soon I was sending to Sacramento more

requests for basic education classes. And pretty soon they sent down a vocational man from Sacramento, and he walked into my office one day and he said, "Mr. Wake," he said, "tell me, why are all the dyslexics in the state of California here in Santa Barbara?" [Chuckling] And I said, "Well, I'll tell you, let me take you down to the counselor and let him tell you about it." So I took him down to the place where we were holding the basic education classes, and of course he sat there with his arms folded as [if], you know, kind of, "Convince me against my will," you know? And so he went back.

And I had an assistant [George Montgomery] that was assigned to me—I didn't [s]elect him—in this program, and one day I got something from the state saying "How come you're signing these permits for the welfare people to receive monies to go into training when you have a man [for that purpose]?" And so I called the man in and I said, "Say, how come you're signing my name to these permits?" He said, "Well, you know, those guys, they'll never learn anything. They're no good." He had a terrible attitude.

WEST: I guess so.

WAKE: And I said, "Listen, I don't want you to be forging my name anymore, and I want you to continue to refer these people." Well, he turned me in to the state for public fraud because he said we were permitting people who weren't eligible or qualified for training to get state

reimbursement for training, and so I got notice one day that four people from Sacramento were coming to Santa Barbara to investigate me for public fraud. And I was called into the Employment Department, because we were working with the Employment Department, you see, on these training programs. And I had the president of the advisory group, who was the editor of the [Goleta] paper, I had the vice president, who was the vice president of the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions, I had the counselor, myself, and we had four people from the state. I think they all thought it would be a chance to come to Santa Barbara. But, anyway, the man in charge of these programs for the federal government through the Bureau of [Vocational] Education, [Wesley P.] Smith was the director of vocational education up there, and he had this man come down, and he chairmanned [a hearing]. And the president of the advisory group to this big work project said, "Well, why don't you let Mr. Wake tell you about it and about the program? You've been talking here for fifteen minutes." He was very nervous. I was more nervous than anyone. I stayed up all . . . most of the night before, all night the night before just to memorize the handbook [on MDTA], because I was very careful to follow it. And one of the men from Sacramento was the head of the payment division of the welfare office. He was the one that signed the checks, and I knew the important man in that trio—or four of

them, I think—so I developed the idea I'd only ask questions that I knew he could answer yes to. I said, "If I had a surplus in so and so, I could transfer it according to the manual [on MDTA] . . . so and so. Is that true?" "Yes." "So and so and so and so. Isn't that true?" "Well, yes." "Well, I did so and so and so. . . ." "Well, yes." He answered yes so many times that he turned to his colleague and said, "This man hasn't done anything wrong." [Chuckling] They all got up. And the president [Robert C. Rockwell] of the college was there because he didn't—he thought I was in trouble too—he got up and left the office. And the two men, prominent citizens, after that went over to what we called the El Paseo, it's a restaurant on State Street, [they] had a cocktail, and [one] told me later, he said, "You know what we talked about?" He said, "How do you fire or get rid of a college president?" [Laughter] Because [he was not] supporting the program that they were, you know, involved in. So that was in the '60s, Johnson's poverty program.

Finally, we had tremendous support in the community for it. The paper wrote editorials in support of it, so I wasn't alone. I wasn't fighting anything. We had great community support of that program. But finally, when I requested more basic education classes, [the state] turned them down. And it was at the end of the program anyway.

We'd about used up our allotment of [funds]. But that happened during the '60s.

In the '70s, I retired in '72 so I can only report for a couple of years. We just consolidated all our programs. We didn't have any more fights in the legislature after we won the big battle with that rural legislator. And I said to my wife, "You know, here I've had two or three years of no fights and all," I said, "I think it's time to retire." So I retired in 1972.

WEST: Okay.

[End Tape 1, Side B]

[Begin Tape 2, Side A]

WEST: Sam, I understand there's a center named after you in town. Can you tell me a little bit about how that happened?

WAKE: Well, yes. When I retired, the superintendent [Dr. Glenn Gooder] asked me to be a consultant part-time, and so I agreed to work part-time as a consultant to the superintendent. And then they decided to have a big bond issue. They needed expansion and they wanted to buy what is now called the West Campus. So they put on the ballot a \$3.8 million bond issue, and they asked me to be in charge of it and promote it, and so I had to get a group. So I named a prominent Democrat and a prominent Republican as co-chairmen of the bond campaign. And so we promoted it, and it was the last bond issue that

passed in the state of California before Prop. 13. We passed it with about a 70-plus plurality.

And I used some unusual promotion techniques. You know, usually when they have a bond issue they have a full-page ad with all the names, you know, supporting it, and people, you know, they look down to see if they recognize them, it's small type. And I decided that we'd had two or three bond elections, and we'd lost several of them, and they'd used that technique. And so I decided I was only going to have small ads and I'd have [pictures of] prominent people in the ads, and I'd have physicians for the bond issue, attorneys for the bond issue, and dentists for the bond issue, and I'd get the developers, you know? And take pictures of them, you know? And just small ads.

And the superintendent and the business manager [Donald Sorsabal] came back one time after they had talked to a group, and they were very much concerned about the parking and the traffic and all, and they were disheartened. And I was present and they said, "If we pass this bond issue, we're going to be awfully lucky." And so I worked especially hard [with] a committee, and after we passed it we . . . they decided to buy that whole West Campus. And now the West Campus is full of brand-new buildings and everything.

So [a new] superintendent called me in one day and he said, "Sam, the board wants to kind of have some big city function [in your

honor]." I said, "Forget about it." I said, "I don't want . . . You know, I'm no good at that sort of thing. Let's forget it." So a couple months later he called me in a second time and he said, "Now, Sam, I don't want you to turn me down this time." I said, "Well, what have you got up your sleeve this time?" He said, "We want to name the Goleta Valley Adult School after you." I said, "Well, I don't know how I can turn that down."

So, anyway, I was involved in getting the two centers, and since I was involved, this one man [Eli Luria] who was a co-chairman of the bond issue, he was also president of the Adult Education Advisory Council, a good friend, and he said, "You've got all these classes downtown here in these makeshift buildings and everything, and we ought to . . ." you know, and the elementary school enrollment had fallen off, and so there were three elementary schools that were vacant. So we had quite a surplus in the adult education budget. How that happened, I don't know. But anyway we got a new business manager [Donald Sorsabal], and he did things right for us, and we got the [Garfield Elementary] School [and] called [it] the Schott Center. It was built during the Depression, and [had thick] walls and everything. It was just a tremendous building, and we bought that. And the daughter [Helen Peddoti] of the lady who gave us the original center downtown worked with us and put up some money and all until the

organization she was with could buy the old downtown center for historic reasons, and so we purchased that center.

And I was asked after the [passage of the] bond issue to be the executive director of the Foundation for Santa Barbara City College [Santa Barbara Community College]. I organized the Foundation for City College, I appointed the first directors, and the first fund raising we had was [for] an adult education fund. [Chuckling] All the people who had been taking adult education were their clients. You know, they knew people had the money for the foundation. So I served as the executive director of the foundation for seven years and, you know, I said, "Look, you know, this is forty-some-odd years I've been in adult ed. It's time for me to quit." So I resigned, and then after I resigned, then they named a school [one of the adult centers] after me.

And my neighbor over here, we live on a hillside, and they had the story in the paper about naming the school after me. I was out one Sunday morning in the driveway and she happened to [be] coming up her driveway, and she looked up and she said, "Oh, you *are* still alive." [Laughter] So that still happens.

I was in a woodcarving class one time and an older lady. . . . Somehow word got around that I was in the woodcarving . . . and the school that was named after me. She walked up to me and she said . . . looked at me. I said, "Can I help you?" She said, "I just want to

look at you." I blushed, I think, all over, you know. [Laughter] So that happens all the time to me. So that's how it happened that they named the school after me. I was instrumental in getting them to name the first school after Mrs. Max Schott who gave us the downtown center, and then they named the other center after me. So I've been blessed.

WEST: You titled your book on the history of adult education in Santa Barbara *The Joy of Learning*. How does that title represent your philosophy of adult education?

WAKE: Well, it's interesting that you mention that. While writing the history of the college, since I was the only remaining administrator who was still alive of the original administrative group of the junior college, I was asked by the man in charge of the archives for the college to write the history of the college. And then he said, "When you finish that," he said, "write the history of adult education for us." So, when I finished the first history, I started writing the second history. And I discovered in writing the first history that this seventy-fifth anniversary was going to be the next fall, or the next year. So I got in touch with my successor [Martin B. Bobgan], who had been my assistant for ten years, and I said, "Martin, do you know that it's going to be the seventy-fifth anniversary of adult education next fall?" And I said, "I'm going to write the history of adult ed, at the request of the archivist at

the college." And so we had a meeting. And when I was in charge of adult education it happened that I was [chairman] for the fiftieth anniversary, so I organized the fiftieth anniversary. So he turned around and appointed me chairman of the seventy-fifth anniversary. [Laughter] So I organized the seventy-fifth anniversary of adult education in 1993. And in writing it, I got to thinking about this and I decided . . . I said, "I'm going to call it *The Joy of Learning*." Why? Because I just . . . going around to all the classes, I saw all these people out during the breaks or . . . expressing the great joy of learning. They were just happy about being there and everything, and the good feeling of learning something they always wanted to learn something about. And I contrasted that with the regular college program where they have to take this course, to require this course, to get this grade, this degree for this diploma. There's a certain aura of pressure there, anxiety that hangs over—you know, all the tests and the programs they have to take. Where in adult education, you know, there's a certain freedom: you go because you want it. No grades, no degrees, no credits.

I went through college. I worked my way through college as a printer, a linotype operator. I worked nights and went to school in the daytime. And I said, "What's the shortest way out of this institution?" You know?

WEST: [Chuckling] Yes.

WEST: And I crammed like everyone else. You learned a profession. I went to the fraternity houses where they had the exams of all the [professors] we'd know. We'd study the exams, you know, and it was cram, get it. Six months later, if they gave me the test, I'd flunk it, you know, because it was that kind of education. So I kind of went through college. I majored in industrial engineering, and when I got into all the calculus and all these [courses], you couldn't fake that, you know? And so I said. . . . My desire was to be a newspaper editor because I grew up on a paper.

And anyway, to make a long story short, I switched my major from industrial engineering to industrial administration. And I took a lot of administrative courses and all, but I had [taken] industrial education. When they found I had this printing background, they had me develop a curriculum. They didn't have a curriculum at Oregon State University [then Oregon State College] in printing, and they always wanted one, so I first developed one for a local high school. Well, anyway, the placement secretary got in touch with me and said, "Say, Santa Barbara needs someone to teach journalism [and] printing. And [it's] a beautiful town, you'll just. . . . They've got a highway all along the beach . . ." and she just. . . . [Chuckling] She said, "You've got to take that."

So I said, "Well. . . ." I'd been working nights all through college and so I took the job and came to Santa Barbara, got into adult education, and found out that this freedom . . . I had this full freedom to put any kind of course I wanted into the curriculum. I had the advisory council, they fed in ideas, I had more ideas than the advisory council had ideas, and it was so fulfilling an experience to organize things that people really wanted, where there were no grades, credits, or degrees, and there was just the plain fulfillment of a desire to learn and become a better human being. And I think that speaks a little bit of my philosophy of adult education.

WEST: Thank you, Sam. This concludes the questions I have. Is there anything you would like to add?

WAKE: No, I think I've talked perhaps too much already. [Chuckling]

WEST: Thanks, Sam. This interview was done as a part of the California Adult Education Oral History Project.

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SELMER O. WAKE

PROFESSIONAL EMPLOYMENT

- 1947-72 Director of Adult Education,
 Santa Barbara Community College District
- 1947-48 Coordinator, Apprenticeship Program, Counselor, Adult
 Education, Santa Barbara High School District
- 1939-47 Teacher, Santa Barbara High School District

MAJOR PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITIES

Santa Barbara City College. Organized a Foundation and served as Executive Director for seven years after raising first million dollars. Later organized successful campaign to buy land for a West Campus for 3.8 million in 1973.

PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS

- 1947-72 California Association of Adult Education Administrators
- 1947-72 California Council for Adult Education
- 1947-72 Adult Education Association of USA

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DATE 5/6/95

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Oral History Project)