

Interview with

Heber Jones

April 25, 2019

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Heber Jones

Heber Jones was interviewed by Nancy Ross on April 25, 2019 on the 5th floor of the Holland Centennial Commons Building on Dixie State University in St. George, Washington County, Utah. He talked about DSU history about the time the mascot changed from flyers to the rebels.

NR: I just want to get a sense of your own background. Where did you grow up?

HJ: I was born here in St. George. Two months after I was born, my folks moved to Veyo, Utah.

NR: Oh okay

HJ: And I grew up there until I was about sixteen and then I left home, came down here and went to school. And then after I finished here, I went to the University of Utah until I got my Bachelors degree and then I got married. Well, before that I went to work for Titanium Metals Corporation in Nevada. And I was working there when I got married. I had only been married six months and I was drafted. So I spent the next two years in the Army, or nearly two years. After that I went back to the University of Utah with the intention of getting a Masters degree. But that was during the big Eisenhower recession and I couldn't find a job any place. I just had to quit school, there was no GI Bill then. It was later reinstated, but when I got out there wasn't one. I talked a survey crew into taking me out west of Delta to survey. So we moved to Delta. And while I was working out there I found out there was a vacancy or a need for a history teacher at the Delta High School. So I applied for it and they gave it to me and I stayed there two years. And then I transferred down here to the Woodward Junior High School and taught there for, I don't know, till they moved down to the Middle School and then I taught there. Then they asked me to start a advanced placement history program at Dixie High School so I went there. And I was there four years and then I quit.

NR: Very good. My husband is a local and he was at the Woodward school way back when so --

HJ: What was his name?

NR: Russ Ross

HJ: Russ Ross --

NR: He would've been after your time I think.

HJ: He must've been. I don't remember him.

NR: I think he was there when it was the sixth grade center. Okay thank you for sharing that. So I'm particularly interested in the years that you were a student here at Dixie. When was that?

HJ: At the College?

NR: Yeah, here.

HJ: The College at that time consisted of the last two years of High school and the first two years of college. It was in the fall of 1949 that I moved into the eleventh grade at the college building. And then I graduated from the four years there in 1953.

NR: So was that the building that's on the corner right in town, the arts building? --

HJ: Yes.

NR: The Children's Museum building?

HJ: Yes. That's the building.

NR: Oh wow.

HJ: Well there were actually five buildings at that time. That was the main building, and the original building. By the way my grandfather was the Superintendent of construction on that building. There was also, across the street, there was a LDS Seminary. And in those days there was very little difference between the two and there was a girls dorm which was remodeled old home of one of the Cannons. Then there was the building that was a combination of the sciences and auto mechanics. And behind that there was a building that was a machine shop and a carpentry center. And over on the other side there was the old gymnasium. And that was about it.

NR: Can we just go back to something you just said? You said that there was a Seminary building over there, but there wasn't much difference between the school and the Seminary. Can you talk a little bit more about that?

HJ: I can talk quite a lot more about it, I'm just trying to figure out what you want me to say.

NR: Sure. So I should also point out that I am a scholar in Mormon studies. So I am very interested in the kind of religious and political influences on the community.

HJ: Well, you realize my prejudices are exposed here --

NR: We're on the same team.

HJ: Anyway there was very little actual separation of church and state. There were some people who's psychology was that if you were in separate buildings there was a separation. And that was kinda the way things were. And it was a common practice that if somebody was appointed a principal of the school, before you knew it, he was either a bishop or a stake president or somebody in authority in the church, or vice versa. If you needed a new bishop or a new principal, you'd pick the local bishop or superintendent or someone who had been or would be. So that was quite a common practice. Even in the yearbooks the seminaries and the institute teachers were in there and they had the organizations, lambda delta sigma type things were in the yearbook. You can go in the other room there and see them. At that time there was Pearson Corbit and Gladys his wife were the two teachers of the seminary and the institute. I might add in that connection, and this is of course my own prejudices, about the time that Ezra Taft Benson came along, his son Reed was in charge of the John Birch Society. And this was infiltrated all through the seminary system, particularly here. And I felt that these people got way out of bounds on that.

NR: This is something that I'm really interested in. If you were a student how would that have been felt? What kind of messages were you getting that seemed to be echoes more of a kind of John Birch political nature rather than a kind of, whatever you saw the LDS church as being at that time?

HJ: I think what it did is it built up a prejudice in the kids early. And it affected the parents more than it did the kids. The kid would go home and tell the parent, well so-and-so said this and the parent would say well I don't like that and they may come and start quoting President Benson or Reed or Welch from the Birch literature or something of that nature. In fact it got so bad at one time, I had one student, and she was a really good student too, but she came in with a book written by Cleon Skousen on American history and insisted that I use it in the class. I brought it up here, it's in the archives.

NR: I'm familiar with Cleon Skousen.

HJ: The book's here. I brought a lot of John Birch stuff in here by the way, if you wanna go check. --

NR: I didn't know that, thank you.

HJ: The Blue Book's in here. In fact I did a paper for Utah State on the impeachment of Earl Warren. It's in here too. -- I dropped my thought.

NR: That's okay. So let's go back. If I can clarify just a little bit, so when you were a teacher here at Dixie College --

HJ: Not when I was teaching—

NR: Not when you were teaching. When you were a student?

HJ: It's when I was teaching in the Woodward.

NR: When you were teaching in the Woodward.

HJ: Yes.

NR: You felt that you were getting pressure from the students and their parents. --

HJ: Definitely.

NR: To teach materials that seemed to come from a kind of John Birch perspective. Like the Cleon Scousen book.

HJ: Without a doubt.

NR: Were there particular issues? I know that the John Birch Society were interested in a range of political issues. Were there particular issues that were pushed locally?

HJ: At that time it was the impeachment of Earl Warren. And they had a big sign out here on the freeway. By the way, the freeway was at that time, only came to St. George. It hadn't gone through yet. But they [had] one of these great big street signs right over here at Middleton. Something of "Impeach Earl Warren, join the John Birch Society" or vice versa or something to that effect.

NR: Why did the locals, if you could just reiterate this, want to impeach Earl Warren?

HJ: I think if you'd ask nine out of ten of 'em they'd've said "because he's a communist".

NR: What did that mean exactly?

HJ: Well that depends on to whom you're speaking when it comes to what it means. To be a communist was the same as being a devil or anything that was wrong, bad.

NR: Was that connected to the Brown vs The Board of Education decision?

HJ: I think there was some overflow there, yes.

NR: Was there as sense that the Civil Rights movement was also a kind of communist

—

HJ: Definitely. In fact it was common literature and gossip that Martin Luther King was a communist and so forth, yes.

NR: If people were particularly concerned about communism or Earl Warren being a communist, were they speaking to communism specifically? Or was that a code word for Civil Rights?

HJ: I don't think it was so much the 'code word' for Civil Rights, but I think it was – how do we want to put this? – It's a symbol of everything you don't want.

NR: Okay so communist was a symbol of all the bad stuff.

HJ: Yes.

NR: Where all the bad stuff would include things like the Civil Rights Movement.

HJ: Exactly.

NR: What else would be included in that umbrella term of communist at that time?

HJ: Well, [chuckle] being Anti-Mormon.

NR: Being Anti-Mormon.

HJ: Yes. Or perceived as being Anti-Mormon.

NR: Would Juanita Brooks have fallen into that category?

HJ: With some people, yes.

NR: Would Fawn Brodie have --

HJ: Definitely. However, there were very few who would know who Fawn Brodie was.

NR: Fair enough.

HJ: There would be a handful of fairly well educated people that would know and some of those would be "she was the devil".

NR: I'm just curious because I'm trying to kind of understand what some of these terms mean in this context.

HJ: You realize that I would be considered an extreme liberal around here.

NR: Yeah.

HJ: I don't consider myself an extreme liberal but in this vicinity, I'm clear out on the end of the scale.

NR: Sure.

HJ: So we'll go from there.

NR: We're good. If under this umbrella of communism we've got Civil Rights and we've got Ant-Mormonism, or perceived Anti-Mormonism, is there any other kind of sub-category that would be particularly relevant that people would have understood in the community at this time in the 1950's and the 1960's that if you said "Oh they're a communist" then they would take on a particular label?

HJ: I can't think of any right off the head specifically, but I could say generally almost anyone that opposed something that was popular with the community would fit into that category.

NR: That's very helpful thank you. I would like to kind of change tracks just a little bit and ask you that when you started at Dixie, the mascot was the Flyers, is that right?

HJ: That's correct.

NR: And then at some point it changed to the Rebel.

HJ: Yes.

NR: Were you part of the college at that time?

HJ: Yes.

NR: What was your role at the college at that time?

HJ: I'm not able to pinpoint exactly when all this occurred. Generally speaking what happened was it became quite apparent that the college was going to have to split from the high school. That's when this issue came up. They'd had an issue earlier about did the 'D' belong to the college or did it belong to the high school. Did the 'Dixie' on the red hill belong to the college or did it belong to the high school. They'd had fights over these issues earlier and had generally decided the 'D' would belong to the college and the 'Dixie' would belong to the high school. Then the issue came up "well if you split off who's going to be what?" And everybody at that time was a Flier. Naturally we had an assembly. By the way, there was a couple of students that debated the issue of whether they should even change the mascot. In one of the papers down in the archives there's a little

synopsis of that debate between Jack Seitz and Willa Brooks over this particular issue. But there were suggestions made in this assembly and the term Rebel came up and it was not unanimous, there were some who spoke and brought up the issues that eventually caused it to be changed. But the general consensus at that time was it was nobody else's business – I mean there wasn't any big public consensus of what was considered appropriate or not appropriate. The general feeling at that time as I saw it was that, well what difference does it make? If we want it to be Rebels it's to be Rebels. And so that's basically what it was voted in was the Rebels.

NR: Thank you, some of this is new information to me that the split happened when there was a need to separate the high school. Looking through old newspapers and yearbooks and things, I didn't necessarily get that piece of the story. What did the Flyers mean at that time?

HJ: Well, the story is something like this – don't quote me as detailed or anything- in the 1920's we had a very good basketball team in high school and it went back to Chicago and competed on a national basis. Some writer in one of the papers said "those Dixie boys went flying up the field like"...something. Anyway flying got into the statement. And it caught on. The Dixie Flyers. And it got back here and it became official.

NR: Really? So it didn't have to do anything with aviation-

HJ: Not to start with.

NR: It was simply there was a sports writer and said that they flew up and that was very flattering to the team.

HJ: Yes. Something to that effect.

NR: Okay so-

HJ: Don't hold me to details.

NR: No, no I do appreciate the story. So it was really to speak to the character of the team. So Flyers wasn't aviation-

HJ: No airplane come flying down, no.

NR: It was just like those kids were just flying up the court and that was a complement.-

HJ: Yes.

NR: Okay.

HJ: And then they adopted the airplane as the symbol.

NR: Right. You know I have my nieces and nephews graduated from Dixie so I've seen that on plenty of T-shirts. And I had assumed that airplanes came first. Okay so thank you. Then if that's what Flyers meant, within the kind of common understanding of the community at that time. What did the Rebel mean?

HJ: Well, they just kind of adapted it from the Dixie thing.

NR: So can you explain that a little bit more? As someone who is very interested in this question, is very interested in like whether slavery was or was not practiced in Southern Utah, I've seen people make claims on kind of both sides of that. Can you tell me more? This is such an issue that really, I find very confusing.

HJ: In my opinion, slavery had absolutely nothing to do with the term Dixie or with the term Rebel. When it was adopted here.

NR: Okay.

HJ: Now as time went on, symbols were grabbed and used by students and the public. But when the first use of Dixie, as you find in your Utah history studies, was people were sent south to grow cotton. Well, originally to make iron, then to grow cotton. But then as people were headed south and gossip came back and forth, and this went quickly, I'm not talking about a long period of time. I'm talking about in the 1850's. People began to referring to, well he went to – the cotton mission. He went to Dixie. And that's how it started.

NR: So it became a kind of colloquial term, so the area became associated with cotton and then going down south to Dixie just became part of the--

HJ: An add up to that. When they sent people down here to grow cotton, they chose people who came from the south. The group that first came to Washington, nearly all of them were southerners. They'd either grown cotton or seen cotton growing and had some association with cotton. So these people too were, I mean, kind of Dixie-ites. So the two terms, being in southern Utah, being from the south, being able to grow products that grew in the south, all of these things gelled into Utah's Dixie.

NR: So Rebels is just an extension of that?

HJ: I think so.

NR: How was that kind of expressed then, like on campus. How was that Rebel identity?

HJ: Well they first got a Confederate soldier and made a uniform and put him on and a kind of a comic book type thing. Well, kind of a mascot that you would see in a comic book or something like that. A little guy with a little hat --

NR: So like a drawing or kind of a graphic or something?

HJ: Yeah. Yes. A graphic. That would be a good way to put it. It just went from there. And sometimes they did go overboard. Once in a while you'd see a group with black faces in the yearbooks. At that time the Lion's Club here put on a minstrel show every year to raise money. Nobody knew they were being obnoxious to anybody. But they did it, and everybody laughed, and they raised their money and they did it for several years in a row. And once in a while, the people here at the college that were in charge of the yearbook kind of went overboard and put some of that stuff in the yearbook.

NR: Yeah. We've seen that.

HJ: Now that's after I left here.

NR: When did you leave?

HJ: In 1953.

NR: And that was after, we've seen that. Okay.

HJ: There was none of this Anti-Rebel stuff when I was going to school here.

NR: Right, because it seemed like a natural expression of the way in which the community described its heritage.

HJ: Yes.

NR: I am curious then, and if you don't have anything more to add we'll just kind of move on to the next question. How did people feel about the Civil Rights Movement, locally?

HJ: Well it's hard to get into other people's minds. If you see how they vote you're gonna see about three fourths of them will be opposed to some parts of the Civil Rights thing and about a fourth or maybe a third to a fourth will be for it.

NR: Did the community see itself as a segregated community?

HJ: Well, I don't think anybody thought much about it. There wasn't anything really to segregate about, there was a handful of black people came here to college. But as long as there wasn't a area in town with blacks, I don't think it was really a conscious thing.

NR: Okay.

HJ: I would tell ya, I used to run the visitors center down here. I can remember two or three occasions where a person came in, I remember one of 'em came in, he was a black man and he said, he come up and whispered to me, he looked 'round like 'is anybody listening' y'know. And he said "Where can I find my people in your town?" I thought about it for a minute, kind of took me off guard and I said "Well, I don't think there is any particular place." And I told him, I says "There's a handful of black folks that are going to Dixie College but I don't think they're congregating in any one place. You might be able to find out there where they live." That kind of thing. He came through. I had one guy come and he was a black man too and he, I think he was testing me. He started asking me a lot of questions about how people felt about black people around here and whatnot. I don't really know what he was up to.

NR: Okay. You have mentioned the John Birch Society. You've mentioned the billboard and that they were local and you were getting the pressure to use their materials or affiliated materials to teach. Was that a formal organization in the town?

HJ: Oh yes, yes.

NR: Tell me more--

HJ: There were two dentists that were pushing all this, along with there was one Bud Iverson, I don't know what he did for a living, and his wife were both organizing. The college has got a lot of stuff on this in there.

NR: Okay. I haven't seen it but I'm very keen to take a look.

HJ: My wife's got a bushel basket full of cuttings from newspapers down there on it. Well, on various things. But these two dentists, Hamilton and -- what was his name Stanford or Sanford -- Sanford I believe it is. They were kind of the pushers of the thing. Bud Iverson and his wife, they lived right here where the campus is now, down somewhere near the football field. Who ran that bookstore over there? The John Birch bookstore. [The Iversons' did not run the bookstore, it was run by Richard Cooper. Added by Heber Jones at review.]

NR: There was a bookstore?

HJ: Oh yes. And they had a lot of fights over it because he started to extend it and he refused to get a city permit. He started building the bookstore out on the sidewalk sort of--

NR: [laughter]

HJ: The city said he couldn't do it, it was a zone that was not for a bookstore or something else, I don't remember all the details, but anyway they took him to court. He eventually left and went down to Littlefield, Arizona area and created what he called the, oh gosh my mind is not with me today.

NR: No that's alright.

HJ: The temple bar. And it was a Birch thing – designed to teach other people to be Birch people.—

NR: Bircherites or whatever they're called, yeah.

HJ: In addition to that, Walter Mann was going around the country associated with the Birchers. To tell people they didn't have to pay their income tax. And he'd held semi-official income tax meetings to teach people associated with the Birch things too, how not to pay their income tax. Eventually he went to jail.

NR: Right.

HJ: And he divorced... his wife divorced him, I think she did, she still lives here by the way, so you might interview her, I don't know what response you'd get but she still lives here. He went to jail, he was quite an intelligent fellow too, but he's so dogmatic about this stuff. I don't know why I can't think of the bookstore guy's name, --

NR: That's fine.

HJ: It'll come to me tomorrow when I don't need to know it. He was taken to court. Do you remember the judge we had in here? Do you remember him at all? – Anyway he tried two or three of these cases with these guys and it's all in the records down here. We have all that information here. Those were the main characters in this, but they had quite a following all over town. And it gelled with Benson and Benson. And it got into the local seminaries. My kids would come home and tell me "Well so-and-so says this" I'd get mad and tell 'em "You get back and tell 'em" ...

NR: So I'm interested in the gelling of like John Birch and LDS teaching in seminary. What would be the kinds of things that your children would come home and say? Can you just give me an example?

HJ: I'll give you a couple of good examples that has nothing to do with home. When President Kennedy was shot. It came over the intercom, one of the kids in class jumped up and says "It's about time!" Well what's that tell ya? You see this was the psychology I'm trying to tell you. I had a picture of Kennedy and Jimmy Carter at my room and I could not keep them there, they would punch holes in

them with their pencils and pens and this sort of thing. I had two little books I had that were written by Howard Fast.

NR: I'm not aware of who Howard Fast is.

HJ: Well, Howard Fast was at one time a member of the communist party. But he wrote several little American history books that were really good. And I had these books I'd have these kids read. Well, I had two little girls that stole the books. And I'd replace 'em and they'd steal 'em! I just could not keep those books in the library. They'd steal 'em, take 'em all, wouldn't bring 'em back. Specific things, they were really down on the President, I mean Kennedy up through Carter, they just, I mean, you couldn't keep anything even when I tried to teach 'em something they'd yell at me "You know that's not so!" "Robert Welch says" such-and-such. This is the way it is. I guess his name is Robert wasn't it?

NR: Yeah that sounds right to me.

HJ: Anyway. They questioned all kinds of, I mean, simple things. If the Birchers were against it, you couldn't talk negative about it or else it was --

NR: Kind of blow up in your face.

HJ: Right!

NR: And did that --

HJ: Well, there was only a handful of kids that would do that, I think most kids didn't know whether John Birch was here or there and didn't care.

NR: But there was a vocal minority then --

HJ: Yes.

NR: Who were very dedicated to these ideals.

HJ: Yes, definitely.

NR: Okay. Thank you. -- You've covered some of the stuff, I'm just looking through my questions. You had mentioned in your interview with Doug, that when it came time for the schools to separate and for the college to take on the Rebel mascot, you made some side reference that Juanita Books thought that was bad idea or was against it. Can you tell me a little bit more of that discussion, like how that change seemed to play out there.

HJ: I don't remember exactly what happened there. All I can remember vaguely is that she'd raised the question. I'm not trying to say she was for it or against it, but

she raised the question, would it be a problem. And that's basically all I can remember about it.

NR: That's fair. So people then embraced the new mascot?

HJ: Yes. -- And I don't think there was any prejudice involved with it at all at the time. I don't think there was anybody really against it or there was any really discussion about whether it was something wrong with it.

NR: But the Birchers embraced that?

HJ: I don't remember of any issue with the Birchers over it. I don't know.

NR: I think we have touched on most of the things that -- the questions I have written. Do you have any other comments, thoughts, stories in this kind of arena of John Birchers and their influence in the community or responses to the Civil Rights Movement or anything else that you can --

HJ: Well I think it all has led up to one of the problems that we have today is a good many of the people if you were [to] go out on the street, in my judgement, and ask somebody some kind of a question like "What has Hillary Clinton done wrong?" Because she was not elected "Why wasn't she elected?" I think most of 'em would parrot something Trump has said. If you go just beyond the surface of that they would know nothing about it. It's a tribal mentality. I think it's, in this area particularly, it's somewhere in the neighborhood of two-thirds to a third, in that category.

NR: Do you feel like you hear echoes of the Birchers in the things Trump says?

HJ: Oh yeah, yeah. I don't think that's where he got it, but I think the echoes are there.

NR: Like, there were some ideas and then what he spouts have been through some filters or some different --

HJ: Well, the whole thing heads into a psychology of authoritarianism is where it's going. I was thinking every high school student today ought to go back and read English history from the Tudors through the Stuarts. And then come home after they've finished reading this, be required to take the weeks history of the US Constitution, including the Bill of Rights, and relate why freedom of speech would be associated with what went on with the Stuarts or the Tudors. That sort of thing we *need*. Or another thing they should do is require every high school student to see a documentary on the rise of Mussolini. Or the rise of Hitler. And then come home and discuss Donald Trump. These kinds of things would have, well we don't think this, there're so few who know anything about it. And they vote as a tribe. What do you do?

NR: Try to educate against it. I guess.

HJ: Well I spent twenty-eight years trying to and mostly got run out. [chuckles] But it's a problem.

NR: Do you feel like these things haunt you a bit?

HJ: Every day.

NR: Thank you.

HJ: Welcome.

[END OF RECORDING. END OF INTERVIEW.]