

The History of the  
Pitzer History and Archives Project  
1968-1998

May 1998

The beginnings of the Pitzer History and Archives Project date back to the spring of 1968, when Professor Werner Warmbrunn, one of the founding members of the Pitzer College faculty, realized that the members of the pioneer class of the College, students who had entered in the fall of 1964, would soon depart and would never be gathered again in their entirety. Therefore, he decided that it would be worthwhile to interview this unique group of students about their experiences at Pitzer College. He organized a seminar class in the spring of 1968 in order to draw up a questionnaire, and in order to get help interviewing the departing senior class. Five students enrolled in the seminar and developed the basic protocol, which has been used over a thirty-year period. The students in the class and Mr. Warmbrunn interviewed 65 members of the senior class, out of a group of perhaps 100 students in the target categories.

Since that time, for nearly thirty years, the Pitzer History and Archives Project has preserved the history of the College, capturing through documentation and oral histories the lives of those who have shaped the institution and who have, in turn, been shaped by it.

What began in 1968 as a series of interviews of graduating seniors has evolved into a unique collection of archival materials documenting not only our history but also providing insights into a critical period of higher education in America.

Starting in 1968, the Project began to assemble documentation about the business of the College on a somewhat systematic basis. In addition, students of the senior classes graduating in 1969, 1970, and 1971 were interviewed on a random basis in an attempt to reach approximately 10 percent of the graduating class. The interviewing program lapsed from 1972 to 1977, due to a variety of circumstances. In 1978, however, the interviewing program was resumed using the Seminar in History (History 199) as a basis for interviewing graduating seniors. Each student in the history seminar received some training in oral history methods and subsequently interviewed a number of seniors following the suggestions made by the instructors and using the protocol that has been mentioned.

In 1982, Professor Warmbrunn began a series of interviews with early faculty members about their intellectual background prior to joining Pitzer College. Virtually all early faculty members have been interviewed on that score. Subsequently, some of the older faculty also recorded their experiences at Pitzer and some staff and faculty were interviewed at the point of their departure from the College. Most of the faculty interviews have been transcribed.

As a result of these efforts over a thirty-year period, the Project by 1998 had accumulated 867 tapes, 507 of which have been transcribed. Almost 500 of the tapes are student interviews, about 150 are interviews with faculty, and the remainder deal with special topics and events. In addition, we have accumulated approximately 82 linear feet of documentation. The Project also has acquired more than

2000 photographs, all of which are listed in a finding guide prepared by Joyce Greene in the spring and summer of 1997.

As has been suggested above, in mid-1970s oral history and utilization of the Pitzer Archives were incorporated into the required history seminar. During these years, students used oral history documents in the Project as research tools to produce papers on various aspects of Pitzer History. After 1991, when Professor Warmbrunn had become an emeritus and no longer taught the history seminar, the involvement of Pitzer history concentrators in the Project decreased and students no longer conducted interviews of departing seniors. During the 1990s, Mr. Warmbrunn himself conducted a variety of interviews but necessarily their number was limited. He has tended, in these years, to concentrate on students who occupied positions of leadership within the College rather than attempting to get a random sample of the graduating class. Therefore, the interviews in 1990s probably are significantly different in character from those given earlier.

For most of its history, the Pitzer History and Archives Project did not receive separate financing but was conducted on the side by Professor Warmbrunn using resources normally available to a Pitzer faculty member. However, in connection with the 25th anniversary celebration of the College in 1988, the College granted \$15,000 to the Pitzer History Project for its part in the proceedings. Upon retirement of Professor Warmbrunn in 1991, Professor Allen Greenberger conducted a campaign among history graduates to raise funds for the Pitzer History and Archives Project. Approximately \$2,000 was raised in that manner. Subsequently, in the early 1990s, two large grants were received for the Project: approximately \$8,000 from Judy Avery-Newkirk and \$5,000 from Sara Love Dowling in honor of her graduating daughter, Olivia Burr. Other smaller grants were also received during that period sufficient to allow the Project to employ a part-time secretary during the 1990s.

These funds also made it possible to employ Sandra Corbett, a Pitzer history graduate engaged in a M.A. program which included oral history on a full-time basis for one and one half years. Ms. Corbett organized the Project on a systematic basis with the help of a computer which we had purchased. Much of the work done in the 1990s and the condition of the Project in 1998 is due to the fundamental organization of the Project for which Ms. Corbett is primarily responsible.

In 1998, when Professor Warmbrunn prepared for his full retirement, it was decided to terminate the Pitzer History Project, which meant terminating the interviewing of faculty, staff, and students and the collection of new documents and photographs. In order to preserve the resources that have been created over a period of thirty years, it was decided to transfer the Archives to Special Collections in Honnold Library. The Special Collections division in the Honnold Library has general responsibility for the archives of the Claremont Colleges and has generously welcomed the transfer of the Pitzer collection. Finding guides to the collection will be available in the Office of the Dean of Faculty at Pitzer College and in Special Collections at Honnold. In 1998, Pamela Zeiser provided invaluable services in the termination of the Project and the transfer of the

Archives. For the time being, Professor Warmbrunn expects to be able to assist any researcher in the use of the Archives.

It is hoped that the Pitzer Archives now deposited in Special Collections at Honnold Library will serve for a long time to come as a research tool for individuals interested in the history of Pitzer College, the Claremont Colleges, and in American higher education over three decades.

W. Warmbrunn  
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Amendment  
to the History of the  
Pitzer History Project

September 2014

In June of 2012 an archivist was hired at Pitzer College. The following year the Pitzer History Project was revived with the addition of two faculty interviews and 6 senior student interviews to the collection. In 2014 nine student interviews were conducted and a proposal was made to the History Field group to add a two-part course on archives and oral histories, with special emphasis on the Pitzer History Project and the Pitzer College Archives, to the curriculum. This proposal was accepted by the field group and as a way to initiate the process of adding these courses into the curriculum it was decided that an independent study in archives would be offered in the fall semester with the goal of offering the oral history practicum course in the spring. The intention is that the full two-part course will be available to students starting fall 2015.