

From the Oral History of
EDGAR A. JONES, JR.

EDGAR A. (“TED”) JONES, JR. (1921–2013), professor at the UCLA School of Law from 1951 until he retired in 1991, was one of the eight dissident faculty members who petitioned the UCLA administration for removal of the first dean. He later served as assistant dean of the law school and as president of the National Academy of Arbitrators.¹

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BERNARD GALM (UCLA ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEWER): Professor Jones, you were talking about the meeting of the Association of American Law Schools that you attended in Chicago [in December 1950], and this is where the position at UCLA was —

¹ For further information, see the Editor-in-Chief’s introduction on page 1 of this volume: 11 CAL. LEGAL HIST. 1 (2016).

JONES: Came in view. The meeting was from something like Wednesday through Saturday morning. By Saturday morning I had gone up to the suite of the dean of the University of North Dakota at 2:00 A.M. in the morning. There I met Richard C. Maxwell, who had spent his first year in law teaching at the University of North Dakota. That was [when] I first met Dick Maxwell. The dean — I can't spell it for you, but his name was [Olaf H.] Thormodsgard. I take that to be Norwegian, not Swedish. But in any event, it became very obvious that the people looking for employment were the top law review types, and they were swarming around Dean Thormodsgard, too, to Dick Maxwell's great amusement, because he had spent one year there and he had a very warm affectionate feeling for the dean, but he didn't have warm affectionate recollections of weather at North Dakota.

GALM: Was he just present in the room? Was he part of — ?

JONES: No, he came up there just to say, "Hello, this is my mentor," and so on. That was how I met him. We chatted, as a matter of fact, at some length even, but that was that.

Periodically I would see [University of Chicago School of Law Dean Albert J.] Harno in the hall or something, and he'd say, puff, puff, puff — I was looking pretty dim right now — "Wait and see. Wait and see." So Saturday morning the thing was over by noon. About nine o'clock in the morning I was standing up — they had a main ballroom. Leading down to it were some stairs and an intermediate landing area, and [UCLA School of Law Dean L. Dale] Coffman was standing there by himself watching the thing. And over on the side as I came into the area were Dean Harno and Dean [Alfred] Gausewitz [of New Mexico]. So I went over there and they greeted me, "How's it going?" — very paternal about it. Harno says, "We've got to get a job for this young man and that marvelous family." I said nothing. He said, "Have you talked to Coffman yet?" — pointed at him with his pipe. I said, "No, I haven't had a chance to get near him." Harno looked at me with this sort of quizzical little grin. He says, "There he is."

So I went over to Coffman and I said, "Dean Coffman — ." And he turned around, sort of down his nose at me, as well he might. He had been pestered by dozens and dozens of these young guys. He said, "Yes?" I didn't tell you this: After the communists took over in China, Roscoe Pound left China, of course, and came to UCLA. Coffman offered him a job here.

He was about eighty-three, eighty-two or eighty-three years old, but he joined the faculty here. I knew this. I was aware of this. So I said to Coffman, “How is Dean Pound?” Now he turned around more and he said, “Do you know Dean Pound?” The ball came right across the plate! I [replied], “I don’t know him personally except I have corresponded with him from China and I have a handwritten manuscript that he sent me at my request.” Lock-in — lock-in conversation. [laughter]

Now, this is just at the end of the whole meeting there. We talked no more than fifteen or twenty minutes more. He went back out here. They were in a temporary structure over behind Royce Hall, an area where the parking structure is now I think. It was a wooden building, the type that the Army was building out in California during the war. It had an aisle going down the middle and offices off on each side. He went down to Pound’s office. As was recounted to me later, he said, “Do you know a young man named Edgar Jones?” “Oh, sound fellow, sound fellow.” [laughter]. That was the dialogue!

I got an offer to come out here. They were looking for somebody. Basically it was L. Dale Coffman who did these things. He was looking for a young law professor that would come out and sort of start things here. He wanted a moot court and he wanted things done. So this newspaper venture sounded more interesting to him than if I had been the editor of a law review. Plus Harno. I had referred to Harno, and I think even there — although I left the area there around ten o’clock that morning, I think that Harno and he talked after I had gotten off the scene. But in any event, there came a telephone call back to Virginia to Charlie Gregory from Coffman, who wanted to know about me, and Charlie told him about me.

GALM: Had you given Gregory as a reference?

JONES: Oh, yeah. He was —

GALM: Rather than the dean? Or did he talk with the dean, too?

JONES: I stayed an extra year. This was during that extra year. I had graduated. I neglected to say that. I had graduated, but I stayed an extra year to work with Gregory in labor law. I went around with him to arbitration hearings that he conducted. I drove him, as a matter of fact. He didn’t like driving, so I made a deal with him. I’d drive if he’d take me. He was the one that got me interested in law teaching. So he gave me a very high

recommendation, and then I ended up getting the offer to come out here. This was how it happened.

GALM: What was your initial impression of Coffman at that meeting?

JONES: Very favorable, very favorable. He was a very genial, friendly person. He was stilted. He had this way of talking with a sort of an exaggerated voice. But he was a genuinely very charming man. I liked him. I never ceased to like him, actually. I came to understand that he had some very serious problems which really meant that he couldn't function as the dean of this law school. But I never ceased to think he was a very charming person. I have to say, when I say that, he was charming to those whom he liked. He was not charming, you know, to those whom he didn't like, whom he thought for any reason were people that were any of the catalog of negative adjectives. And he was very much a product of that era of intense fear of communism. The fact that I was a practicing Catholic was a number one asset on the pro side. There were many, many university contexts in which that would have been a negative that I would have had to have overcome. I don't know how many, outside of those universities that were Catholic in their structure, in which I have never had any interest in being present —

GALM: So as a Catholic, he saw you as a staunch anti-communist?

JONES: Yeah, without question. That was to him an important thing. He had already become embroiled here with Brainerd Currie. I've got to find the correspondence on that. I know I rooted around and found it. I told you about it. I did dig it out when I was talking with Ken [Kenneth] Graham's class. But Brainerd Currie had — this is probably what we should do next time just as a preface, as it were, an epilogue preface. He had really thought through the business of the oath within the university. And he wrote a superb set of memoranda, just totally persuasive and right on target. He was certainly not in any way a communist dupe or anything along that line. He was a constitutional law scholar. That wasn't his specialty. I say he was a constitutional law scholar who profoundly understood what was at issue. And Dale Coffman didn't. He just didn't. He had the most simplistic ideas about communism and the threat of communism to the United States and to the university, to the faculty of the law school. It was really a form of paranoia which a lot of people had at that time, though. He was not alone. He had the chairman of the Board of Regents, Mr. Dickson — What was his name?