The fall 2007 issue of The Emeritimes contained a substantial article by Prof. Judson Grenier, the current CSU-ERFA archivist, on the donation by Emeritus Professor Sidney Albert of a large collection of documents on the foundation and early history of CSU-ERFA, as well as on the California State University Los Angeles Emeriti Association, which preceded the statewide organization by seven years.

Subsequent to our mutual receipt of these important additions to our respective archives, Judd and I agreed to tape an interview with Sid, who was eager to elaborate in a very personal way on the events in which he played so large a role.

Our interview took place on August 1, 2007, at my home in Altadena and lasted about three hours, with a short break for the taking of pictures of the three of us by my wife Jeanne (see photo). The interview was very informal, with Judd starting it out by asking Sid about his background in academia and how it contributed to his passion for organizing emeriti.

It was obvious from the start that his experiences as an aspiring young professor gave him a sense that the academic life was a calling with a grand role to play in the cultural and intellectual life of the nation and that justice demanded that those engaged in it be accorded the institutional respect they deserved.

After graduating from Syracuse University with B.A. and M.A. degrees in philosophy and a Ph.D. from Yale just before the outbreak of World War II and a stint of almost five years in the U.S. Army, Sid spent ten years in mostly temporary teaching jobs at five different universities in Connecticut, New York, and Illinois before being hired by the Los Angeles State College Philosophy Department. At L.A. State, he found Professor Robert Kully, an old friend from the University of Illinois, where, with his special interest in and doctoral dissertation on *Esthetics and Drama*, Sid had been a colleague for one year in the Speech Department.

Sid taught philosophy at our university from 1956 to 1979, but, as he approached his retirement, he reflected on situations he encountered among university colleagues that to him were symptomatic of an attitude toward retired professors – even the most distinguished – that needed changing. Typical, in his eyes, was the case of Professor Emeritus Solomon Diamond, one of the four earliest recipients of our Outstanding Professor Award (1964-1965), whose request of the use of the university copying service for a professional paper he was scheduled to deliver was refused on the grounds that retired faculty had no further right to university services.

Sid Albert had been a member of the AAUP for many years and had become President of the California Conference of AAUP. Imbued with the AAUP’s goal of advancing the status of the professoriate and having interacted with AAUP members from around the nation, Sid began to investigate the treatment of retired faculty at other universities,
especially at three local institutions: Cal Tech, UCLA, and USC. He found the models at UCLA and USC particularly noteworthy.

Although by November 1977 the CSULA Academic Senate had passed a policy statement granting recognition and certain perquisites to our emeriti, there was as yet no emeriti organization either on our campus or on any other campus in the CSU system. It was at this period that Sid began to recruit a cadre of interested faculty and retirees.

Sid’s account is spiced with ironic and amusing stories, such as one regarding President Greenlee’s conversion. When, toward the end of 1977, Sid approached the President about whether he would sign on to the Senate’s proposed emeriti policy, the latter replied in the negative, adding that, “When you retire you should get as far away from the University as possible.” Apprising Bob Kully of the bad news of the President’s rebuff, he was advised to “sit tight.” And Kully added, “He’ll sign one day.” Not only did he sign, although it was not until the following summer, but, shortly after the CSULA Emeriti Association was formed and President Greenlee himself retired, he joined the association and became an active member of the Executive Committee!

Judd and I were interested in some of the major issues that confronted the association founders. One such concerned the model to be used for membership eligibility. Would it be the traditional model as it existed at UCLA and USC, limiting eligibility to emeriti only, or a broader model such as existed at the University of Washington that included all retired faculty as well as retired staff? I knew that Sid had held out for the traditional model, which prevailed at the outset. I also knew that it was subsequently modified to include an “auxiliary” (later “associate” membership category) that Sid had strongly opposed, and I wanted him to explain his position. Sid made reference to the AAUP ideal of the professoriate’s unique identity and he feared that an association combining emeriti and staff could present the problem of conflicting priorities. Citing the case of the statewide organization, which had begin as the Association of Emeritus Professors, Sid lamented that when it later became the CSU-ERFA and opened its membership to staff “the organization almost broke up,” but he did not elaborate on the issue of the non-emeriti retired faculty other than referring again to his admiration for the UCLA and USC examples and advocating that, as in the cases of those prestigious universities, all the separate retirement associations cooperate to advance their common causes.

Other major issues were recognition of the emeriti associations by the Chancellor’s Office and Trustees and representation in the statewide and local Academic Senates. Sid spoke of his many advocacy trips to the Chancellor’s Office and credited Bill Lloyd, our campus’s news service and publications director in those days, with helping him on those missions. Keith Snyder, our association’s first president, was also a strong campaigner for emeriti causes, especially in our Academic Senate. When a respected Chair of our Senate argued against Emeriti Association Representation in that body because he feared that other campus interest groups would want in, Sid, Keith, and their allies – especially Professor Donald Moore – countered that the emeriti, as a distinguished group of former professors, were not to be treated like other “interest groups” and had earned the right to a continuing, if diminished, role in academic affairs.
A similar campaign was conducted for emeriti representation in the CSU Academic Senate, and an AAUP document entitled “Recommendations of the California Conference on Emeriti” that was composed by a committee chaired by Professor June Pollack and with members from UCLA and USC, was presented to our Statewide Senate. Another document, entitled “Emeriti Bill of Rights,” drafted by Sid Albert for the AAUP, was presented by him personally to the same body with the help of Bob Kully, who was then the Senate chair. This campaign had begun in 1978, but it was not until 1987 that the Senate finally added a representative of the emeriti, in spite of some opposition from Chancellor Ann Reynolds, opposition that was finally overcome, said Sid, with the help of Joy Phillips, the Chancellor’s secretary.

A third campaign Sid remembered was for the university funding of emeriti research. He lays claim to having been the first to file a formal application for such but was unsuccessful. “I lost the battle but won the war,” quipped Sid, who applied later for another research grant and got it.

The cause of parking rights for emeriti was yet another that Sid took up on our behalf and he personally approached Cesar Naples, who was then Vice-Chancellor, to plead it. Although the V-C refused to respond directly to Sid’s plea, it was, as we know, eventually approved.

Asked about the relationship in 1985 between the statewide association (then AEP) and ours, Sid stated that our constitution was the original model for the new organization and then after the latter’s first meeting, which was held at Northridge, the next several meetings were held at our campus, with Sid as president.

Although, as noted, the AEP Constitution was modeled on ours, its provision that the vice-president automatically become the next president was, according to Sid, an imminent problem, for, if the V-P turned out to be unpromising, as seemed to be the case with Sid’s V-P, the association could face a serious problem. Sid felt the strong need for a revision of that provision in the constitution, but, not wanting to offend his own V-P, he agonized over how best to handle the matter and finally solved it by offering the chairmanship of a committee to review that portion of the constitution to the vice-president himself, a devilishly clever solution, for he was convinced that the gentleman did not really want the presidency. The ploy worked and the automatic succession was jettisoned.

After serving as the first president of the statewide association for two and a half years, Sid had a hard time finding anyone to succeed him. Luckily he got around to calling Jack Byrom, who accepted and was able to get the President of CSU Northridge to give the association a permanent office, a perk that it had not previously had.

Judd then asked Sid to assess the success of the two associations he had pioneered. Had they performed up to his expectations and hopes? Sid responded that the statewide association had performed beyond expectations, but that our local organization, while
generally good, did not have all its priorities in the right place in relation to each other, citing our emphasis on fund-raising for emeriti scholarships, on which he felt we “expended more energy” than on issues regarding the welfare of the faculty and emeriti, one such, as made specific toward the end of our interview, being the shrinking funding of the university library, a major issue to that avid, nonagenarian reader and researcher.

The question regarding Sid’s active participation in so many faculty and retired organizations – AAUP, CFA, CSU-ERFA, our association, and others – intrigued both Judd and me, for his donated papers were full of clippings, notes, and letters he wrote on the issues facing retired academicians and the elderly in general. In response to my question about the connection between his presidency of our association and then of the statewide association that immediately followed it, he confirmed that they were directly related. “So L.A. can claim to be the father of AEP?” queried Judd. “Yes,” said Sid.

Asked about other members of our local association he wished to mention for the key roles they played in the early years of emeriti struggles for recognition and rights, he named Len Mathy, whom he credited with being “the most responsible” for faculty breaking a twenty-year absence of emeriti representation in the Statewide Academic Senate and becoming its first emeritus member.

In concluding our interview I congratulated Sid for his unique role in the early history of the two associations, a man “at the heart of everything and a great advocate.”

Sid did not want the interview to end without some further comments on emeriti organizations and how the retired in general need to engage all the power players in our society, including the members of Congress. In regard to the latter, he told of a visit he paid to the offices of our two Democratic senators in Washington while attending an AAUP meeting in our nation’s capital. His purpose was to urge an end to age discrimination – in the case of professors, the seventy-year old age barrier. Although he was received cordially by the administrative assistants of both senators, he was particularly touched by the warm solicitousness of Senator Boxer’s aides.

Sid again paid tribute to the UCLA and USC emeriti associations. He admired them for hewing closely to the AAUP ideal of an academic community with great interaction and cooperation among the various segments and their many university supported activities. “One of the biggest problems,” said Sid, “of this nation and the world is what to do with the elderly. The solution must be national in scope.”

Although it was at this point that Sid brought up his concern over the CSULA association’s need to pay attention to its library problem, he praised our association’s trail-blazing and in particular our old brochure, “which set an example” for emeriti organizations and was a national leader, and he again praised our statewide association, “the largest such organization in the nation.”
Judd ended the interview by commending Sid for his many years of leadership and thanked him for his large donation of archival papers to CSU-ERFA and the CSULA Emeriti Association, both of which will conserve audio copies of this interview.

-- Leon Schwartz

* This is a summary, not a transcript.