SEVEN DECADES OF PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT IN THE LOS ANGELES REGION: SIMON EISNER

Interviewed by Edward A. Holden

Completed under the auspices
of the
Oral History Program
University of California
Los Angeles

COPYRIGHT LAW

RESTRICTIONS ON THIS INTERVIEW

None.

LITERARY RIGHTS AND QUOTATION

CONTENTS

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY

PERSONAL HISTORY:

Born: February 28, 1907, Bayonne, New Jersey.

Education: University of California, Los Angeles; B.A., Architecture, University of California, Berkeley.

Spouse: Isabel Reiter Eisner, two children.

CAREER HISTORY:

Planning:

Planning draftsman and planner of parks and freeways, Los Angeles County Regional Planning Commission, 1938-43.

Planning architect, Los Angeles City Planning Department, 1943-49.

Acting director, Los Angeles City Redevelopment Agency, 1949.

Works on plans for Chávez Ravine with Richard Neutra and Robert E. Alexander, 1949-51.

Private consultant, Eisner and Associates, 1950-75; Eisner-Smith and Associates, 1979-87.

Teaching:

Assistant and associate professor, University of Southern California, 1946-64.

Visiting lecturer, Harvard University, 1951.

Adjunct professor, Graduate School of Architecture and Urban Planning, UCLA, and president, Urban Innovations Group, 1975-79.

AFFILIATIONS:

American Institute of Certified Planners.

AWARDS AND HONORS:

American Planning Association, Southern California chapter, service award, 1974; California chapter distinguished service award, 1981; Planner of the Year award, 1984; Historic Planning Landmark award, 1990.

American Institute of Certified Planners, California Planning Pioneer award, 1990; National Planning Pioneer award, 1991.

PUBLICATIONS:

The Urban Pattern: City Planning and Design. With Arthur B. Gallion, New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold. First edition, 1950; sixth edition, 1992.

INTERVIEW HISTORY

INTERVIEWER:

Edward A. Holden, M.S., Public Administration and City Planning, University of Southern California; Consultant in City and Regional Planning; Director of Planning, Southern California Association of Governments (retired); Principal Regional Planner, Los Angeles County (retired); Chairman, Board of Directors, Los Angeles Regional Planning History Group.

TIME AND SETTING OF INTERVIEW:

Place: Eisner's home, Los Angeles.

Dates, length of sessions: December 9, 1987 (130 minutes); December 10, 1987 (142); September 19, 1989 (17).

Total number of recorded hours: 4.8

Persons present during interview: Eisner, Holden, and occasionally Mrs. Eisner.

CONDUCT OF INTERVIEW:

This interview is one in a series entitled Seven Decades of Planning and Development in the Los Angeles Region, initiated by the Los Angeles Regional Planning History Group and completed in cooperation with the UCLA Oral History Program. The goal of the series is the preservation of recollections of key urban planners in both public and private sectors and of documents critical to the understanding of the events and concepts that have influenced the emergence of Los Angeles as a pacesetting example of urban development. The interviews in this series, along with printed, manuscript, and pictorial sources, will be used by the Los Angeles Regional Planning History Group and others to disseminate the history and impact of planning and development in the Los Angeles region and should be of value as a resource in training future urban planners.

Holden's early contact with Eisner produced a comprehensive résumé of his work history, education, and early family activities. In addition to the résumé, Holden consulted reports and documents prepared by Eisner.

The interview is organized chronologically, beginning with Eisner's boyhood and education and continuing on through his various planning and teaching positions. Major topics discussed include the Los Angeles County Regional Planning Commission, the Los Angeles City Planning Commission, the Los Angeles City Redevelopment Agency, Chávez Ravine, the development of freeways in Southern California, and planning issues in various California communities.

EDITING:

David Gist, editor, edited the interview. He checked the verbatim transcript of the interview against the original tape recordings, edited for punctuation, paragraphing, and spelling, and verified proper names. Words and phrases inserted by the editor have been bracketed.

Eisner reviewed the transcript. He verified proper names and made minor corrections and additions.

Teresa Barnett, senior editor, prepared the table of contents, biographical summary, and interview history. Steven J. Novak, editor, compiled the index.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS:

The original tape recordings of the interview are in the university archives and are available under the regulations governing the use of permanent noncurrent records of the university. Records relating to the interview are located in the office of the UCLA Oral History Program.

TAPE NUMBER: I, SIDE ONE

DECEMBER 9, 1987

HOLDEN: Si, I think perhaps we should start with your telling us a little bit about your roots, your background.

EISNER: I guess the easiest way to do it is to say where I was born and when: on February 28, 1907, in Bayonne, New Jersey. My mother's name was Annie [Press Eisner], and she came to this country just around the turn of the century, from Russia. My father, Max [Eisner], came to the country a few years earlier than that and came from a community on the border between Germany and Poland. They met in the East and were married in Bayonne, New Jersey. I was the only child born to them. We lived in Bayonne until 1920, when we migrated to California due to the fact that my mother had been seriously ill. This was going to be a place for her revitalization. I attended some elementary school in Bayonne before leaving, but then came to California in my twelfth year and went to junior high school here in Los Angeles. Then to high school at Lincoln High School, where I graduated in 1925. I had done fairly well in school and graduated with scholarship grades, but not too good. Following graduation from high school, I worked in various jobs here in Los Angeles, working at all sorts of miscellaneous things, finally with the [Los Angeles City] Department of Water and Power doing clerical

and drafting work until 1928, when I left to enter UCLA.

HOLDEN: Si, can we go back a moment at this point? Let's see, what section of Los Angeles did you live in?

EISNER: I lived in the eastern part of the city in a place known as Boyle Heights. Some of the things that you might want to know about that period and the things that as a really young child I ran into-- We traveled all around the place on bicycle. We went to the Rose Bowl and saw an early game in the Rose Bowl in the 1920s, pedaling over into Pasadena. But the main venture that we took at that time was riding the bike down to the beach. We'd go down to Venice and go swimming in the ocean. We also were tremendous users of the old red car system. We used to take the Pacific Electric [Railway Company] cars to the beach with a nominal amount of money. We took it up to Mount Lowe, up into the mountains. The red car system at that time was a fabulous basis of transportation, taking you practically everywhere in Southern California. As far east as Redlands, Beaumont, and Banning, and up in all the Valley, the San Fernando Valley, out to the western part of the Valley. So we had ways of getting around at very moderate costs. As a young man with limited amounts of money to use, this was a wonderful vehicle for transportation.

HOLDEN: Did you go up the mountain, up to Mount Lowe?

EISNER: Yes, we took the trip up to Mount Lowe. It was a very nice trip. We went out into Pasadena and went up Lake Street up to the foot of Mount Lowe. It had an incline railway for the first part of it, and then when you got up part of the way to the top, they had a rail line, sort of a narrow-gauge thing, that took us up to the hotel and restaurant that were up at the top of the hill. There were no television towers there at that time. It was just a place to go around, hike and walk around, at the top of the mountain.

HOLDEN: They had an inn or something?

EISNER: Yes, they had an inn up there and a restaurant, a place to stay. But we never did that. We would just go up for the day. It was a day trip. We'd go up in the morning, early, and come back late in the afternoon. But it was a wonderful trip, because you saw the whole basin at that time. It was clear as a bell. You could see forever--everywhere. Smog was unknown. Nobody knew that it was ever going to come. The reason people came to California at that time, as with my mother, we thought it was a health resort. People came out here for their health. The air was clean; it was warm in the summers and never got too cool in the winters. So the climatic conditions at that time and the reason my people came here-- It was mainly for health.

Also during that time, we did a little bit of traveling with some friends who had automobiles. We didn't have one, but our friends did, and we went down to Palm Springs, which was a delightful little village at that time. It was just a real spot on the map. Very few people went down there. The commercial aspects of it were quite different from what they are now. So that actually it was-- And again, it was a nice one-day trip. You take a lunch and go out and sit in the desert, enjoy the atmosphere, and then come on back.

Following that, in the latter part of the twenties-- I started high school in 1925. It was Lincoln High School until-- No, in 1921 I started high school. I have a little reminiscence of what happened just before that. Two days before, my Boy Scout troop, of which I was a member, went over to Catalina Island for a three-day camp-out. We camped there and went down to the isthmus. We came back to break camp and get the boat to come back to Avalon, only to watch the boat sailing out into the bay. So the Boy Scout leader just about had a fit. Finally, we rented a small fishing boat that took the group of us back into the harbor. I remember the trip as though it happened yesterday, because it was as rough as can be. The swells were-- You could sometimes see the top of them. I remember that all the kids got sick as the dickens on the way back,

excepting one other guy and myself, and we were up in the prow of the boat where the thing was absolutely the worst and were eating cold hot dogs, dipping them into a bottle of mustard. [laughter] Until we got into the harbor, finally got there at midnight, and anchored this little boat alongside of a scow and started climbing onto this thing with our luggage and all the stuff that we carried. As we were getting the stuff back onto the pier from this scow, we saw the thing beginning to float out into the bay, and we had to throw a line out to these guys and tie it down to try to keep them from leaving town. Anyway, we got home, and just the next thing I remember was going on the streetcar to Lincoln High School and standing up in the auditorium and watching the stage wander around all over the place as the mal de mer finally caught up with me.

Anyway, the high school was a tremendous experience in many ways, because they had a very good school at Lincoln at that time. There were only seven high schools in the area, and this is kind of amazing in terms of the number that are now here. There was Lincoln, where I went to school; there was Polytechnic High School, which was in downtown L.A.; there was Jefferson High School on the southeast side, which was mainly for the black kids. That area was mainly black. There was Manual Arts High School, out on Vermont Avenue, which was again the same general

area, only totally white. There was L.A. [Los Angeles] High School, which was considered at that time to be the "Yale of the West," a high school that people would fight to get their kids to go to, L.A. High. There was Pasadena High School and Franklin High School, and that was about it. No, Hollywood High. Hollywood High School was also here. That was the high school thing. We tried to get a league up, and we had to bring Pasadena High School into the league in order to have an eight-team league. But, anyway, I went to high school, competed in track a little bit and worked with the track team, and left with some basic trainings. I had some drafting courses. But I really was not very well trained for the profession that I was one day to seek.

HOLDEN: How about in liberal arts?

EISNER: I had fairly good courses in liberal arts, excepting that-- Probably one of the greatest things that occurred in my own behalf was that I took a year of Spanish in high school and didn't do very well with it, because, unfortunately, like a lot of other kids, even today, I wasn't very well grounded in English. Basically, the structural aspect of the English language was not very well handled. This haunted me all through college, because I was required to take two years of French in college and did very poorly in it. I just could not get the hang of the

transition, all of the structural aspects of French. What we were learning at that time was the basic structure, all the verbs and pronouns and adjectives and stuff of that kind, which just didn't add up very much to me. Anyway--

HOLDEN: Can I ask one other question before we leave that time? Some of the great recreation things like going up Mount Lowe-- Let's see, you mentioned another one--

EISNER: The beach, going to the beach.

HOLDEN: Well, of course, the beach, still there, and Catalina. These have had their ups and downs in terms of popularity. Why do you think that is, or is it just a matter of planning--?

EISNER: I think Catalina just developed really around Avalon. The facilities that were there were limited, sort of, and some of them not too good. They had the big boats running out there rather early on, and they had it tied in, again, with the Pacific Electric. You took a trip down to the harbor on the red car, Pacific Electric, and it drove right up to the wharf. You got off, you got on the ship, and you went that way. But really, for the most part, it was a one-day venture. People went over, maybe swam; at three o'clock in the afternoon they came back. So the thing was like turning the lights on and off as far as life was concerned down there. The facilities were limited. If you know Catalina Island, it is really rough as the

dickens. Once you leave Avalon, you are in a wilderness. You had to drive from Avalon, for instance, to the isthmus. It was really a rough deal. You had to go by boat at that time, and there you went. You went there for two hours and came back. It was an excursion. But going the route which we took many years later-- My students at USC [University of Southern California] did a study of Catalina, and at that time they took us all through the islands, up through the ranch, beautiful areas. Wild animals there, buffalo there, and goats all over the place. There are colonies of things that exist nowhere else in Southern California, even to this day.

But the reason that went down, along with Mount Lowe and a lot of others, is that, basically, the red car system began failing. The reason why it failed is the automobile. General Motors [Corporation] came in with the buses, and they bought the thing out and eliminated the competition. So, basically, you found a whole changing habit, where the way of living in Southern California for the twenties and early thirties converted to the automobile. The transportation system, because of the personal aspects of it, was just tremendous. You could go anywhere you wanted. Gasoline was fifteen cents a gallon. Then when they had a price war, it went down below that. So you had access, cheap access, to the motor

vehicles. I remember the first automobile I bought was a 1924 Chevrolet. I bought it, I think, in about 1927 for $50. Of course, it wasn't that much of an automobile, but it was still transportation. And that was a way of life. But the reason these things went down was, basically, the changing mode of transportation, which limited your access and the use of the areas. The big boats went out. I don't know when they went out, but they were out for many, many years until they started with the smaller boats. When we did the study at USC of the area, we actually flew over in hydroplanes--not a hydroplane, but one of these things that goes on water and land.

HOLDEN: Yeah, I know--

EISNER: You know what I mean. But that was one of the reasons.

But there were a lot of things that are of interest that happened in the twenties. I learned a lot about the area. We went everywhere. Up until 1928-- When I was in high school, there wasn't a day or a weekend we didn't travel around Southern California. I remember going to Redlands. Redlands, at that time, was considered to be the orange capital of the area. The whole area east of Los Angeles was all citrus, but Redlands was like a perfume factory. In the early spring when flowers were in blossom, it was just one of the delights of Southern California.

But even that has changed.

HOLDEN: All right. I think we are down to UCLA.

EISNER: I entered UCLA in the fall of 1928. My first year--I only went there for a year--I took general studies simply because there was no architecture. They had two years of engineering and one year of everything else. I went there with two of my best friends. Both of them were graduating the following year and both of them going to [University of California] Berkeley. One to study law at Boalt Hall and the other to finish up his engineering studies in electrical engineering. When they were about to leave, I made up my mind that I was going to Berkeley. I had been on the freshman track team at UCLA, and I was a little disappointed in what I was doing there. Track was probably the most interesting and most important thing in my life at that time. So I decided, they were going to go to Berkeley, I was going to go to Berkeley, in part because of the California fabulous track teams of that time. Anyway, I went to Berkeley in 1929 and entered the school of architecture. It was kind of interesting that we met John Galen Howard. He was still the dean of the school at that time, and I remember being welcomed in the little auditorium--not an auditorium, but the exhibit hall. We lined up around the wall as freshmen, lined up around the exhibit hall and met this elderly gentleman who was

instrumental in the basic design of the whole campus at Berkeley. He welcomed us to the school. My first year, my freshman year there, I got a job working in a kitchen at a fraternity house, hashing. I did everything else that I could in order to stay alive. Nineteen twenty-nine was the beginning of the Depression, and my folks were earning very little money. I had saved up enough for my rent and some food.

Oh, I skipped over the years from 1925 to 1928 rather blithely, but I had gotten a job with the Department of Water and Power, first as a clerk in the power department. I worked there for a couple of years and then transferred over to the water department as a draftsman. I had gotten a better job earning $125 a month, which was just a fabulous amount of money at that time. That is where I got the money to go to college. I should never have left that out, because without that there wouldn't have been any college.

HOLDEN: What did your folks--? What were they involved in?

EISNER: Well, my mother was just a housewife, but a very energetic one, and she worked on the side. I think she was a super salesperson of some kind. My dad was just a laborer and came out here and worked for a number of different places, doing janitorial, doing anything to make

a living, keep body and soul together.

HOLDEN: What encouraged you to go to school, and particularly to the university?

EISNER: Basically, to compete in track. This is crazy, but that was the main incentive. I loved the sport so much that I wanted to be able to compete. Even before going to college, we had an industrial track league here in L.A., and we had a track team at the Department of Water and Power. I just loved the sport. I have been a track nut ever since. I haven't ever left it.

HOLDEN: Well, you got a job as a draftsman instead of a pole climber or something else.

EISNER: That's right. I went from clerical into drafting in the water department, and I worked there until I went to college.

HOLDEN: Probably some inclination on your part--

EISNER: Well, I had had drafting in high school, a little bit of it, and I liked it. I wasn't that adept at it. I didn't have any background in it. From my family there was no indication of any interest in the arts. But I became interested in architecture, and I got into it. I had a terrible time for the first couple of years, but things happened, and during my stay in college, I became quite a good watercolorist. I became really an excellent draftsman. This is where it all started. In Berkeley,

during the time I was there, after the first year, my mother passed away, and I dropped out of school. I got back in after doing wonderfully well in all of my studies, excepting the graphic arts, which was beaux arts at that time, you know. All of the stuff was just perfectly horrid stuff that you had to do, and I just was not that much of a classicist. I started wandering away from it, but I stuck with the thing, finally getting through.

They had a course named Arch III, which was descriptive geometry, which was mathematical stuff, and I just didn't catch on. I flunked the course. Well, I got a conditional permit, and I had to take a reexamination. At that time I took it, and whatever happened, the guy that read the exam was a guy with a big heart. His name was Ed Sweeting, and he is still a wonderful friend of ours. He worked with Gruen's offices [Victor Gruen and Associates], one of their prime architects for years afterwards. But he had a little bit of charity on his part, and he gave me a passing grade in that course. Otherwise, I would have been out digging ditches or something, I suppose. But basically, what happened was I passed that course, got on, and began developing. I was just a late bloomer in this area. Finally, as I say, I became quite good at watercoloring, and my drafting became excellent.

Upon graduation, I have one reminiscence: There were

only nine of us that graduated in 1933. It was really the winter of '32 that we had our final classes and finished up our stuff. I remember the farewell speech given by Dean [Warren C.] Perry, who was the head of the school at that time. He met us in the auditorium of the school and talked to us for a while and said, "Well, you are part of the lost generation." I thought, "What a hell of a welcome this was into the world."

Anyway, we got out in the depth of the Depression. There was no work anywhere. I remember coming down into L.A. and coming back and living with my folks. As I say, my mother passed away in 1930, and so my dad and I were living in this little house we had on the east side of town that my mother had bought back in the early twenties. We lived in this place. It was really a shack. But still, it was a place to stay. Anyway, my dad and I lived there. Somehow or another we managed to survive, and I began looking around for jobs. I finally got a job manufacturing lamps.

HOLDEN: Lamps?

EISNER: You know, floor lamps, $10 a week. But it was a job. I worked that and worked diligently at it, made friends with the owner of the place, and I went along pretty good. One day I got home early and-- One of the fortunate things that happened at that time-- I don't know

how I afforded this, but we got a telephone. One evening I got home and the telephone rang, and it was one of my fellow schoolmates. A fellow by the name of Frank Rempel was in town. He says, "Si, I have been working for the Yankee Motor Bodies here, and I am moving on. There is a job there. Do you think you would like to go down and try for it?" So I went down and met Jim [James] Yankee. You wouldn't believe that was his name, a family name, other than just the firm name. But there were three brothers who owned and operated this industrial commercial vehicle body manufacturing plant. I went down there and talked with them, showed them some of my sketches and designs and drafting. So they hired me, and it was $18 a week. To go from $10 to $18 was quite a step. There was one little intervening thing before I got the first job with the American Lamp Company, and that is I got a job with FERA [Federal Emergency Relief Administration], the WPA [Works Progress Administration] thing. I got a job, and I was earning $30 month.

HOLDEN: Was that FWA [Federal Works Agency]?

EISNER: I think it was the Federal Work FWA, something like that. But it became WPA. The job that I got there, believe it or not, was my first introduction to planning.

HOLDEN: Really.

EISNER: And that was to do a land-use inventory at Redondo

Beach. They sent us out there in a car. I had a car at that time, drove down there, and we drove up one street and down the other and put down all the uses that were on the land that we could identify. If we couldn't know what they were, we were to describe clearly what we thought they were so that somebody could interpret. I worked at that thing for a couple of months.

HOLDEN: Why Redondo Beach, by the way?

EISNER: Oh, they sent us out everywhere. You know, we did the land-use survey that became the RPC [Los Angeles County Regional Planning Commission] land-use map, which was finally titled "The Master Plan of Land Use." Anyway, that was in a little intervening period before I got this job making lamps.

HOLDEN: At this point, let's go back to UC Berkeley. At that point in time, did they have anything which suggested planning?

EISNER: Not a thing. The courses that they had that you were required to take were basically your design courses. You took engineering, at which I was really quite proficient; you took mathematics; you took calculus, in which I was very good. As a matter of fact, I took all that stuff with the engineers, to the consternation of the engineers, because I came out with the A's, and they were getting other grades there at that time. I was very good

at it. Philosophy, I took philosophy courses and was a straight A student in that. I loved it.

I took economics courses, and I remember one of the quotations from the professor in economics. As a matter of fact, I repeated it much later in The Urban Pattern: [City Planning and Design]. It was just before the Depression. The stock market was going out through the roof. He said, "You know, there is something about this that you people that are studying economics as well as philosophy ought to know, and that is that everything that goes up ultimately comes down." He really put it right on the nose, because it wasn't but a year or so later that the whole bottom dropped out of the stock market. I remember looking at a paper at that time and seeing some of the great stocks like AT&T being down to $3 a share. It was probably up to $100 not too much earlier. Anyway, it was kind of an interesting thing to have been a witness to this.

Also, while still being at Berkeley, I worked my way through school. Work was in a way, really, what probably took me away from studies more than anything else. I ran the elevator in the Campanile on Sundays. I washed dishes in the student's union and made salads during the lunch hours in order to get food. I set up stage and stuff at the university for performances in the old Harmon Gym, moving chairs around, and just rustling anything that I

could make an honest buck at. I literally worked my way through college, unfortunately, at the risk of my studies.

HOLDEN: Okay, did you have a car?

EISNER: No way.

HOLDEN: You had already sold your 1924--

EISNER: It was home.

HOLDEN: Oh, you left it home?

EISNER: I couldn't afford a car. I used to look around at the kids who came to school with a car and wonder how they did it. Nineteen thirty-three was right in the middle of the Depression, in '32-'33. The kids used to talk about going skiing, and I couldn't figure out how in the heavens-- First of all, I didn't know why they wanted to do it in the first place. But how they did it, how they could get away and do these things-- These were the rich kids in architecture. Most of the people that I associated with in the school had some means of support while they were there.

But there was no planning at all at the school at that time. One of the reminiscences I have of that particular thing is that after I had gotten along pretty well in the profession, my professor at that time in design, Howard Moise, claimed that he taught me everything that I knew about planning. A number of other people made that claim later on, but he was one of the first. But there wasn't even a housing course at that time at the university.

Nothing. It all came after I left. But some of the people that followed me, much later, like T. J. "Jack" Kent [Jr.], Francis J. Violich and Corwin R. Mocine, those people, actually, were the earliest participants in whatever there was in the way of early planning work at Cal.

HOLDEN: Now, back to the fact that you were living with your dad in the East Los Angeles area, generally. Was it a slum, or did you feel it was a slum at that time?

EISNER: No. I didn't feel anything, very frankly. First of all, because I was away a considerable amount of time. And it was shelter. We had a kitchen, we had a bathroom, we had all the service facilities. It was shelter. But it was not a slum in the sense that we know slums to be. It was a very modest residential area. The house itself was very poorly built, and one of the things that I did after I graduated from college, and being out of work, before I had any work, I borrowed $700 of my father's life insurance policy and got one of the first FHA [Federal Housing Administration] home rebuilding loans. I think we got a loan of about a $1,000 dollars from the FHA. With that money, I rebuilt this house, put a foundation-- It had an old wood foundation under it. I had the house lifted, built a real good foundation under it, put in new plumbing, redesigned it and rebuilt it into a very nice living accommodation. It was our home when Isabel [Reiter Eisner]

and I were married. We had a good, nice house. It was a nice neighborhood. It was not shabby, it was not run-down, there was no garbage lying around loose. All of the families living there were nice families. But that is part of the culture of the area, which deteriorated a considerable amount later. First of all-- Again, stepping back into the history of Los Angeles, which I think might be an interesting aside now, into some of the cultural aspects that I later became more aware of than I was earlier. First of all, we lived in a Jewish community, being Jewish. Not religiously so, but actually, the stores, the restaurants, the foods, and the things that we were accustomed to were conveniently close and generally the kind that Jewish people would associate with closely in order to secure--

HOLDEN: To be secure.

EISNER: Yeah, secure the foods. But the house itself came into shape very nicely. Had a nice front lawn, a big front yard. Had to put up a picket fence out in the front of it. All the nice things that go to make living accommodations pleasant. But that all occurred during, really, the period before I got a full-time job.

HOLDEN: What bank did you go to for the loan?

EISNER: Union Bank. They only had one branch, one office at that time, down at Eighth and Hill streets. We made the

loan there. We were one of the first people to take out this rebuilding loan.

HOLDEN: In a recent seminar, I heard the old gentleman, [Fred W.] Marlow by name, talk about the fact that he was appointed the administrator for FHA at about that same time.

EISNER: Yeah. But anyway, this was how we got started in architecture. We built our own little place. To actually use the building structurally, as much of it as we did, without changing the interior arrangements became quite a task. We built onto the front of it, really carried the thing out into new areas there and made an attractive approach to the house and a very nice living room.

HOLDEN: You did all this for $700?

EISNER: Well, it was a little over $1,000. I remember sitting on the roof-- This sounds like Fiddler on the Roof. I sat on the roof one day-- I wanted a fireplace. I love fireplaces. So we got a man to come over and give us a bid on a fireplace. He wanted $75 to build a fireplace. I didn't have it. So we had to put in a little artificial fireplace in the house. Just an aside to give you some sense of how tight money was at that time.

But, anyway, with Yankee Motor, I worked for them for about three and a half years doing body design. That was my main job. I worked on all truck bodies for Cudahy

[Packing Company] for MJB, for the studios. We did dressing room trucks for them when they went out on location. I designed all those things, put a flair to it wherever you could in the styles of that time. But while I was there, I was always looking around. That's where I bought my first good car. Mr. Yankee owned a 1932 Ford, Model A Ford. One of the early Model A's.

HOLDEN: First Model A's, yes.

EISNER: It was not a convertible. It had a cloth top on it, and it had a rumble seat. We negotiated for this. I bought it for $125, and he took it out of my paychecks just a little bit at a time. Now, that was the first good automobile we had. In 1935, which was about a year after I had this nice, good, solid job, Isabel and I decided we were going to get married. The house was there, I had a firm job, I was making $18 a week, and off we went on our honeymoon. At that time, the H. F. Alexander and the Yale and Harvard ships were sailing between Los Angeles and San Francisco, and then on up to Seattle. We got a round trip up on the H. F. Alexander and back on the Yale. I think the total cost was, for each of us, about $28. It was about $14.50 or $14.95 per person. That included this trip. We left the harbor at five o'clock in the evening and sailed up the coast, up through Half Moon Bay, and landed at San Francisco at ten o'clock the next morning.

Then you had dinner, a wonderful dinner, and a wonderful breakfast, all as part of the $14. You had a stateroom and good berths, and this was our honeymoon trip up to San Francisco. We were met at the dock up there by one of my old school buddies, who had a car, and he took us around the Bay Area. We had lunch together and visited with the man who was responsible for my making a living in Berkeley. It was a man by the name of Mr. Brown, who was in charge of the building and grounds department. I got all my work around campus through Mr. Brown. He took a liking to me for some reason or another. A very nice English gentleman.

HOLDEN: And you were only making $125 a month?

EISNER: When I got married? No, that was during my wealthy period. Before we got married, I was making $18 a week. I came back, however-- I want to make this known. When I came back, the bosses raised my salary to $20 a week. That was after my honeymoon. I didn't even take a holiday, just took a Friday off. We got married on Friday, and one of the nice things about the wedding was that it was just my father, Isabel's mother, her sister and her sister's husband, and my friend Martin Gendel, whom I went to Berkeley with, the attorney. He is now a very, very wealthy attorney, lives out in Westwood, been a lifelong friend. We talked last week, and he mentioned the fact

that we have been friends for over seventy years. I am his oldest friend in many ways. He is an attorney, and big. He is the head of a law firm out in Century City. Anyway, Isabel and I came back from our short honeymoon. I worked with the Yankee Motor Bodies for these years. At that time Isabel was working part-time in the May Company as a saleslady. So between Isabel and my earnings at Yankee Motor Bodies and my dad's income, we had a very substantial family income. Now, one of the things that was always a part of our lives is this business of being a family. Always that. My dad's income and my income and Isabel's income all went into one pot.

Anyway, during the last year of my work with Yankee Motor Bodies, I started taking examinations, county and city exams. One exam that I took was for planning draftsmen. I didn't have the faintest idea what it was. Draftsmen I knew, but planning I didn't. I took the exam and I passed it, did fairly well on it. I think I was fourteenth on the list. At that time, when I got the results, I said, "Fourteenth on the list? That is fourteen years before you ever get a job." Anyway, about a year later I got a call from the county to come up and have an interview. I went up and had an interview and met with the people and apparently impressed somebody. I was offered the job as planning draftsman, and I was to report to work

on a Monday morning, but they didn't say where. So I went down to the hall of records, and I saw Bob [Robert] Heur. Do you remember Bob Heur at the [Los Angeles County] Road Department?

HOLDEN: Bob Heur?

EISNER: I think it was at the county road department. He worked under [George W.] Jones at that time, who was the chief engineer. I told him I was looking for the planning draftsman's job, and he said, "Aw, you are in the wrong place." He sent me down to the building at Second [Street] and Broadway. I went up and was interviewed and had a job: $175 a month.

HOLDEN: That was good, yeah.

EISNER: That was tremendous! Anyway, I went to work.

HOLDEN: For whom? Oh, you are getting to that.

EISNER: This is one of the cutest stories of all. I went to work and was assigned to a man by the name of Harry Bergh--you know Harry--who was the head of the subdivision section. I went to work, he gave me a desk, a big flat-topped desk, and a stool, and pretty soon he came over with a pile of maps, put them on the desk. He said, "Take these maps. There is a number on them. Record the number, report the date of entry, and so forth and so on, on this list." You know, I had been working in a place where I had to cut the mustard up until that time. You had an hour,

and if you didn't do your drafting, you went out into the shop and sorted nuts and bolts, because this meant money to these people. So when I was working here, I went to work, boy, with vigor, $175 a month. This was the drive to make a good showing. I finished the work up in about an hour, I guess, all the stuff, recorded all of it. I sat there, Bergh came through, and I gave him the stuff. He said, "Well, that is fine. Thank you." And he went away. "Oh, by the way, is there something else I can do?" He says, "Why don't you read a book?" That threw me for a loop, because you don't do things like that on company time. So I looked at the books, and they didn't mean a darn thing to me. I looked around the room just wanting to do something. I saw a guy sitting at a desk, and it had a glass top. I concluded at that time, anyone who had a desk with a glass top had to be a boss. I walked over to this gentleman, and I said, "Is there anything I can do to help you? I have just run out of work." It was Earl Esse. Earl says, "Sure, I've got a little thing to do that you can help me with."

TAPE NUMBER: I, SIDE TWO

DECEMBER 9, 1987

EISNER: Well, when I told Mr. Bergh that I was working on something for Earl Esse, he kind of grunted and walked away, and came back later and said, "I don't think you can work for me anymore." I was fired! I was just shocked. I was fired for trying to do something. I guess I wasn't supposed to cross a line. Anyway, on my way home, I was still dazed, and I walked through the office. Charlie [Charles D.] Clark was at that time the head of the division in which subdivisions and highways was located. I said, "Mr. Clark, I can't understand what happened. Mr. Bergh told me that I was not working for him anymore. I don't know what--" "Oh," he said, "forget it. Come on in in the morning and we'll take care of things." I told him very briefly what had happened. "Oh," he said, "come on back in. We will fix it up."

I was then assigned to Earl Esse, which was probably, as far as planning was concerned, the most important thing that happened in my planning career. Because at that time, Earl was working on the master plan of highways for L.A. County [Los Angeles County Regional Plan of Highways], and we were assigned the job of preparing all of those huge maps on cloth that constituted the whole vehicular transportation system for the L.A. County area. I began

working with Earl on those maps. We worked day and night on them, preparing them, making the changes on them. There were some little things that you learn as you do things there. One thing I learned which, again, probably affected all of my planning life career: We were working late at night. Working on cloth as we were, we couldn't use any thumbtacks or anything of that kind to hold the thing in place as we were working with ink. We had weights, little weights, iron weights about two inches wide, about eight or nine inches long, and about an inch thick. Quite weighty. We held the cloth down on the table as we did our work. Well, as we were moving along, I was working with a chap by the name of Harry Merideth.

HOLDEN: I remember Harry.

EISNER: Harry and I were working together, and I pulled this cloth and the greatest catastrophe that could happen to anybody happened to me. The weight went through the cloth and to the floor, tore the map. Now, these maps must have been thirty or forty feet long and were treasures. I stood there. "Oh, my God, I have done it again." There is where Harry Merideth taught me this lesson in life. He said, "Come on, let's fix it. Let's fix it. Let's not worry about spilling milk. Let's fix it." We went down and got some of this glue and we put the thing together, tied the thing together, patched it nicely so that it was

usable. Again, things happen in your lifetime that condition your thinking, your whole philosophy of life. Here was one that certainly impacted on me. I have never forgotten Harry for this. It has been just a great part of my education in planning. But as far as planning was concerned at that time, it was compartmentalized.

Let's stop for a minute, I think, and talk about the staff at the regional planning commission. Because that would indicate to you the nature of planning at that time. Bill [William J.] Fox, who was the head of the office, was an engineer, a civil engineer. Very, very powerful man. Since the county was engineering oriented at that time, the planning function was really a spin-off of the engineering. But Bill had begun fashioning this office under the regulations of the state law which had been passed earlier. The '29 act and the other acts that amended it, following that, gave the authority to this organization to function as the regional planning commission, although it did not become a regional planning commission, because it only dealt with the corporate area of the county. The region was a vast area which included everything from the San Gabriel Mountains all the way down through Orange County. Nevertheless, the word "regional planning commission" was the legitimate, legal name of the organization with whom we were associated. The people

there came from everywhere. There were chainmen who came into the office because this was an easier job, and they were all pretty good draftsmen. There was Johnny [John J.] Malone, who was a chainman, who came in from that side. Earle A. Lloyd, who was just a kid, came into the office with no background. He was good with people and he did a public relations job. Ken [A. Kenneth] Sampson was the head of the zoning section at that time. His background was limited, although I think he had some education, formal education, but certainly nothing either in planning or engineering. But they were very good at talking with people. Joe [Joseph A.] Mellon became the chief engineer of the office and was one of the really wonderful guys, but he was dealing with mainly the engineering aspects of planning. Bryant Hall was the statistician, the magician who could write and turn statistics into the miracles of language. Ferd [Ferdinand] E. Gramm was the illustrator. One of the wonderful guys on the staff of course, at that time, was Tom [Thomas D.] Cooke, who was educated at the University of Illinois, who was really a very bright, articulate, hardworking person. He was also writing and doing really long-range planning--probably the one man on the staff who was looking ahead. He was responsible for developing the plan for the marina. The shoreline plan was his baby. He worked with us, did the editing of our report

on freeways for the region. He was just really a major contributor. Of course, there was Earl Esse, who had been an artist, came to the staff as a commercial artist, but he could draft like mad. He was in charge of the highway section of the office. That was part of Joe Mellon's overall function, but Earl Esse was the one person that probably taught me more and was a better friend over the years than almost anyone. He is still alive and active today, living down in Long Beach. Anyway, the staff, other than that, were a few other people who came from other departments: Sheldon Emerich, Harry Merideth, who had only a high school background. But people just came up, really, the hard way. There was no organization that you could actually classify as a planning organization. I remember that I got very interested in housing-- [tape recorder off]

During the time that I worked with Earl Esse and afterwards is the period during which I learned about planning. I had opportunities to work with Earl in the development of the freeway system for the region. In 1939, just a little over a year after I went to work for the planning commission, I decided I was going to take a trip back to the eastern part of the United States to see what they were doing in the development of freeways. I took a little old 8 mm movie camera with me, and Isabel, myself, and two other gentlemen who shared the cost of the trip

started off on a three-week junket to the New York-New Jersey area to see the freeway and parkway systems that were in existence there. During the trip we took pictures on the way, and a lot of them when we saw them for the first time in New York were just so horrible. They jumped around, and I took pictures out of the side of the car as we were going, and it was pretty awful. So I became quite disconcerted. But, actually, I was able to go back and recapture more feet of film while we were back there and saw how things were. I met with the planners in the New York office of the freeway construction--the parkways as they called them there at that time. And [Robert] Moses's office. They gave me literature and assisted me to understand the projects that they were dealing with. The system back there was really a parkway system, because legislatively they could not get the right-of-way for freeways. So they were buying land as strip park and inserting the roadways in the center of the strip to create their parkway system. It is truly a proper name for it, because going through, as it courses through the various areas of New York, it is literally going through a strip park. The details were rather modest, but, nevertheless, they already had cloverleafs and facilities of that kind built into the system, both in New Jersey and in New York, to make them work.

HOLDEN: Were they building into Manhattan, actually, at that time? Or just outside?

EISNER: No, it was outside of the city. The closest thing to Manhattan at that time probably was the West Side Parkway, which went upstate. Once you got out of the center of the city, across the bridges, you did go into the various parkways that went out into Long Island and on up the state in different directions. But they did work on a system. Everyone has a different opinion of Robert Moses as an autocrat, as a dictator, and as just a perfectly horrible person. Nevertheless, in doing this system, as a tribute to his engineering and planning objectives, he created for the state of New York something that will remain a monument to him forever. So the fact that he was a bad politician doesn't diminish his worth as a planner.

HOLDEN: This was before the war, wasn't it?

EISNER: Before the Second World War, right. But anyway, in coming back, we looked at the movies and decided how to cut it. Earl Esse and I then sat down and took all this material, and he did all the explanatory graphic material to go in between the shots of the freeways. We put together a movie which later on we had the opportunity to show to the regional planning commission at one of the regular meetings. There were very interesting comments. The film, this little 8 mm film, still exists in the

archives of the RPC. So it is just one of those things, again, learning about differences and interest in that particular thing.

Following this, I was in charge of developing parks, park plans. The county was in the park planning business, and we had a couple of very, very capable people on the staff who were very good at doing park planning. So I had a small section working under my direction.

HOLDEN: Before we go into that in detail, in 1941 the county adopted the plan of highways, but as I understand it, it didn't have any freeways in it. Did you work on, then, the subsequent freeway plan, which I believe was adopted in '43?

EISNER: Yes. Yes, we worked on a report called "Freeways for the Region." I wrote the report, and a number of us participated in putting it together graphically. It actually contained within it all the justifications for a system. We took traffic counts, showed the distribution system for traffic, actually showing routes, which we felt were diagrammatic simply because they were straight line shots from here to there. We said, "Well, that is diagrammatic. They will find a way to wiggle their way through somehow." Well, they didn't wiggle. Those lines that were in that study in graphic form were the basis for the design of the Hollywood Freeway and many of the

others. I think one of the amusing things while I was working on freeways that occurred was when the Arroyo Seco Parkway was opened, now called the Pasadena Freeway or Parkway. The day that opened, the whole planning commission and the county officials rode through the cutting of the ribbon and drove it into Pasadena. Believe it or not, the first wreck that occurred on that freeway was by Earl Esse running into the back end of one of the cars in front of him and smashing up the rear.

HOLDEN: Now, Earl made some early sketches of the Arroyo Seco.

EISNER: Right. Not only that, but some of the washes and other areas, Eton Wash and areas like that. He did a number of very, very good presentations which later became fact.

HOLDEN: They apparently were in about 1938 or 1939.

EISNER: 'Thirty-eight, '39, or '40, somewhere in that area.

HOLDEN: Yes.

EISNER: But no, they were actually-- Thirty-eight, '39, right.

HOLDEN: Now, who built the parkway? The state?

EISNER: It was built by the state, right. I believe that is true. Because the city didn't have the money. One thing the city had was the right-of-way. The right-of-way

was part of the Arroyo Seco Park, and it actually had been deeded by an Indian tribe, as I understood it, to the city for park purposes. They had to get a concurrence from--I don't know where they did--whatever Indian tribe members remained to allow them to build through this park area. As you know, the right-of-way is still very constricted in places where it has the flood control channel on one side and the Sycamore Grove Park and some of the other parks on the other side. The lanes are absolutely inadequate, and they have prohibited trucks on it for years. No heavy trucking on it because of the fact that there were eight-foot lanes.

HOLDEN: It was essentially one of the very first parkways or freeways.

EISNER: The first. Well, they had a terrible time, to start with, deciding which way to go, because they were afraid of the term "freeway" because it indicated something is free. They cost a lot of money. One of the things that we did in the freeway study was prepare a total map of some six hundred miles of freeways, a huge map. Earl Esse and Joe Mellon and the others sat down and tried to estimate what it would cost to build the system. They estimated at that time $1 million a mile, and it would cost $600 million to build that total system. Well, they have spent probably ten times that amount of money to build one third of the

system.

HOLDEN: Do you know very much about other community interests that were interested in that freeway system?

EISNER: Yes, I think some of the major proponents were people of the downtown area. They felt by building the freeway system, it would be easier for people to come down and use the commercial facilities in the central core. They objected for a long, long time to building something to connect the different directions through the city, because it would have been an easier way to get from the east to the west, where things were developing very rapidly and at a much different level than existed downtown. But basically, I believe one of the driving forces was the downtown realtors, the downtown property owners, the downtown merchants.

HOLDEN: And the Pasadena people?

EISNER: They were never very hot about the freeway at all. There has always been a terminal there, you know.

HOLDEN: They didn't want to come into town, anyway.

EISNER: No, they didn't. They never have. The freeway finally skirted it on the west side, you know. The Arroyo Seco Freeway comes up and dead-ends to this day when it enters Pasadena. As a matter of fact, the Concord Freeway, now called the Long Beach Freeway, was supposed to be constructed to replace the Arroyo Seco Parkway. It was

never completed because South Pasadena wouldn't let them build a leg through their city. So you find the freeway coming down on the east side of the arroyo and dead-ending at California Street, and you've got this block in South Pasadena, where you go down into Alhambra, where it begins again and goes on down to the harbor. It was intended to be the major truck route to bypass the central core. To this day, the city of South Pasadena said they would rather have the noisy trucks going up Fair Oaks Avenue rather than having themselves split up into four parts by these two freeways.

HOLDEN: Right. Then, of course, also a little bit before that, you were working on the last part of the various highway plans that the county prepared. My inclination is to think they were very influential, in the long run, even with the cities.

EISNER: With one exception. That one exception was Pasadena. The only city that did not at the time adopt the highway plan, the coordinated highway plan, was Pasadena. Politically, they just said, "We'll do our own thing." But I don't see how, to this day, you could assume that any highway would be a highway without having some continuity. Still, in the small towns to the east, the Foothill Freeway has never been completed because of objections from Claremont. Here are two cities right next

to each other, Upland further to the east and Claremont in L.A. County. Claremont would not permit a right-of-way through the north end of that city. Just wouldn't. Upland actually illegally zoned land for the continuation of that freeway, actually zoned it as freeway and got away with it for years. There is an interesting thing, again, that comes with working with cities. But before we get away too far from RPC [Los Angeles County Regional Planning Commission], there was one thing I wanted to mention there.

HOLDEN: You were on parks before.

EISNER: Yeah, well, I was head of the section designing parks in various parts of the county. Prior to that--and this I am sure would be of interest to you--certain large-scale, really large-scale, planning projects were designed by the county RPC, basically by Werner Ruchti. He did the plan for the Montana land area, which was shown in the number four report for the Long Beach Area [Los Angeles County Regional Plan of Highways, Section 4, Long Beach-Redondo area, 1931]. It was an absolutely fabulous stained-glass-window plan, both in land use and the highway systems and in the zoning. It was all done and published, but fortunately not too much of it was ever built that way. All the highways were strip-zoned commercial, but it was a beautiful thing to see, a beautiful plan to see. It

was printed in that section four report in color, which was, in itself, a very strange thing to happen back in the thirties.

HOLDEN: Fox was very proud of that.

EISNER: Oh, he should have been. For that time, Ed, it was outstanding. As a matter of fact, I found a copy of it and I cut out two pages from the report and sent it back to be published in the fifth edition, revised edition, of The Urban Pattern as an example of the early efforts at good community design.

HOLDEN: I was impressed at the time with that, looking at it, that it began first by looking at the relationships of land use.

EISNER: That is right. There was a whole series of pages, starting with the land and then going from that to the highway system, then to the uses of the land, and then ultimately to the zoning. They went through a whole process of carrying out a long-range plan. But it was a complete plan. Since the land at that time was in one ownership, it could have happened. But it didn't.

HOLDEN: Okay, and now--

EISNER: We are going-- The park planning-- We did little neighborhood parks for the unincorporated area in a number of places throughout the county. We did one down in the Watts area; we did the same just every place we could. One

of the things that had to do with recreation planning-- We wanted to do a recreation plan for the whole of that southwest area and to ask that the subdividers at that time provide parks in locations where we wanted. But there was no way to require it. The county was very fearful that if they set aside these areas, the cost of maintaining these properties would be at such a level that it would be too difficult to handle in the county budget. So the county then never required the parks to be inserted. Later on, when they were needed as the land developed in Montana Ranch, they had to be inserted into the area. They had to be as best they could in what was left. Piecemeal planning.

HOLDEN: So the implementation left something to be desired there.

EISNER: That is right. The implementation of the idea of getting parks as part of development was inspired by the RPC at that time. As I say, the economics of the implementation just were beyond them. As a matter of fact, they had all the law that could-- The big developers coming in didn't care. A park was a good selling point. But they wanted the county to take it over, the maintenance and operation, and the county wouldn't accept the parks.

HOLDEN: All right--

EISNER: There was one other thing that I wanted to mention

that probably is a tribute to Bill Fox. I don't know whether anyone else mentioned this or not, but one of the assignments that Bill gave to his limited staff was that every member of that staff be assigned to a community, to go out and attend their planning commission meetings and (1) if they could, to advise them on matters, sort of consulting with them, and (2) if they didn't, to bring the problem back into the office for discussion in the office, so that the office could advise them on proper legal procedures or proper planning procedures. I thought that that was an innovation that was probably as important as anything that has ever happened, and began, really, laying the groundwork for the consulting practices in Southern California. Not that [Gordon G.] Whitnall wasn't in there before.

HOLDEN: All right. You mentioned that you thought that the background of planning was largely from engineering. I am reminded that your initial director at the RPC, going back to 1923, I don't believe was an engineer.

EISNER: Charlie [Charles H.] Diggs?

HOLDEN: Not Diggs, the previous one. [tape recorder off] What we were about to talk about were some of the people at the RPC.

EISNER: The early history of the RPC?

HOLDEN: Yes.

EISNER: Hugh R. Pomeroy was the first director. Hugh was a former minister who brought with him the gift of gab, the likes of which very few people that I have ever met in my life-- He was just a wonderful human being and told some of the worst stories that you could ever hear, especially if he was with a non-mixed group. He wore ties that looked like the worst color clashes, looked like a land-use map turned inside out. But the ability to talk to people and to talk to them about the future was something that he gave to this particular area. He went back to Rye, New York, and became director of planning back there in the East. He used to come out and visit up in Santa Barbara. L. Deming Tilton at that time was the director of planning in Santa Barbara when he came out here, and he was one of the great old-timers out here. L. Deming Tilton was an academic, a guy that looked like he came out of Princeton University, but not anywhere near as severe when you got to know him. But Pomeroy set the groundwork for planning in the area. He was followed by Charlie Diggs, and Gordon Whitnall also was a member of the staff in the formative stages of the office. Gordon later became a consultant, went out in private practice, and also was involved in starting some of the early teaching of planning, which mainly was zoning, at USC. He gave a course in planning there. These were the early people in the staff coming before Bill Fox. It might

be interesting to note, just so we don't miss it, that when Fox went off to war, he was replaced by a gentleman, Art--

HOLDEN: [Arthur H.] Adams.

EISNER: Adams, who was acting director. Art Adams was everything that Bill Fox wasn't. He was a quiet man, soft-spoken, again with no planning experience, to my knowledge. He was basically an administrator, just a wonderful person, but, in a sense, just holding down Bill's seat until Bill came back after the war. But these were the early people in the office, many of them before I got there.

I got to know Pomeroy later and had one wonderful experience with him. I was making a proposal for a plan for Santa Barbara city and county and was awarded the job for both, to do them at the same time, which was some assignment. I wanted Hugh to work with me on it, but the budget was so limited that I had to write to Hugh saying, "Hugh, I'm sorry. They haven't put enough money to afford your coming out here. We just can't do it. But if there is the possibility to get you out here after we get going and there is any money around, I would like to have you come out." He wrote me a wonderful letter in which he said, "Si, I have only one thing to say to you. If you don't do the best job ever done in planning, I'll chase you through hell." I never forgot that in the years of private

practice. And we tried, we really tried. I never did get any kind of a comment on what we did. But anyway, Hugh was that kind of a person.

He also did something for me that I, again, never forgot. I went back to the first planning conference in 1939 of the National Planning Association, back in Boston. I got back there, and the only name I knew was Tilton. I met Tilton in the hall, and I said, "I am Si Eisner from L.A." He said, "Oh, so?" And that was it. A cold brush-off. Then I ran into Pomeroy. I remembered his name and I said who I am, and he just took me around, introduced me to people. I met Alfred Bettman, one of the old-time wonders of history of planning in the East. The difference between the two people was so shocking at the time that it left a terrific mark on me. Later on, as I say, as I knew Tilton, when he became director of planning in San Francisco and I got to know him personally-- As I got to know Dem and he loosened up, he was really a very nice person. But so much for that.

HOLDEN: Okay. Let's see, is there anything else you would like to mention about the RPC?

EISNER: Well, only one thing, that during working there I met with a young man [William Norris] that was working with us on the park planning. He indicated he was going out into private practice. I said, "Gee, that sounds like a

good thing to engage in. These communities out there are really starving for somebody to help them do their planning work," because it was required but never really implemented at all. That again left a mark in my mind that that was something out there to be done in that particular area, which later on I followed up on. I left the-- Oh, there was one little thing that happened here, again, that sort of bridged my work between the county and the city. At that time there was a group in San Francisco that called themselves Telesis. Jack Kent and Violich and that bunch put this group together with the purpose of explaining planning, doing public relations work, exhibits in behalf of planning. They put together a tremendous show up there, and a group of people down here got the idea, "Well, wait a minute. Why don't we try something like that down here?" So a number of us got together and went out to the [Los Angeles] County Museum [of History, Science, and Art] here. We got the county to help us put this together, and we got the [Los Angeles County] Board of Supervisors to put up $6,000.

HOLDEN: What year was this?

EISNER: This was 1940-41.

HOLDEN: 'Forty, yeah.

EISNER: The date sticks in my mind, because there was an event that shows you what happens to things. Anyway, this

Telesis group was formed now. We used to have meetings and arguments about what to show. It involved Bob [Robert E.] Alexander, it involved Richard Neutra, it involved some of the biggest architects in L.A. There was no work at that time. So this was a real way for them to get involved in something. They put together an exhibit down at the county museum that would have cost $100,000, $200,000 in any man's money. They worked day and night putting this thing together. I was in charge of the section on highways and freeways. I had Karel Dekker working with me, and Werner Ruchti came down and was a critic, came down at night and got me so damn mad I just about threw him out of there. He didn't talk to me for three months after that blowup. He came in there-- We were all tired, and he comes in and says he wanted to start changing stuff. Boo!

Anyway, this exhibit was put together at the county [museum] and it opened at about the end of November with a great big party down there. They had all of the officials. Everybody came down. It was a tremendous show. Then, three weeks later came December 7, and everything blew up, including Pearl Harbor. The thing didn't close down, but people didn't go. They didn't drive their automobiles. They were afraid to be out at night. You know, with all the bombing scares, with air raid wardens running around. It was too bad. The show

literally could have had a tremendous impact and was lost by an event that could never have been foreseen.

HOLDEN: Yeah. In the remainder of your time at the RPC, did you talk about what was going to happen after the war? Or by '43, had that idea really not--?

EISNER: Well, there wasn't that much talk. Actually, much of that stuff occurred when I went over to the city [Los Angeles City Planning Department] in '43. Because they were concerned with it. They had a lot of things going on at that time and in the meantime. I said that the Telesis show bridged the gap between the two jobs, because at that time, the city had assigned staff to work on it too. And Charlie [Charles B.] Bennett had come out just about that time, just a little before that. Charlie was involved in getting this thing together, and I met him through this. Milt came out.

HOLDEN: Milton Breivogel, yeah.

EISNER: Milton Breivogel. Now, there again we have got to stop and bring in an insert, because prior to my going to the city, and probably almost concurrent with it, Charlie Bennett had convinced about six of the downtown businessmen, including P. [Percy] G. Winnett, the president of the Bullocks store, and people on the [Los Angeles] Realty Board, that the city ought to have a master plan. He got that group, including the realty people, to put up $50,000 to support the Greater Los Angeles Plans, Inc.

They called them the "GLAPI's." They rallied together a group of absolutely fabulous people to become part of that staff. Karl McElvy was taken over from the [Los Angeles] City Recreation [and Parks] Department to head up recreation planning on the staff there. They brought in Daniel Cherrier, who was a graduate of USC school of architecture, who came on the staff as a planner. They brought in a fellow from the East by the name of [Robert] Deshon to head up the redevelopment section. They later brought in a Klumb, Henry Klumb. Henry Klumb was the chief designer for Frank Lloyd Wright before he tried to sign a plan going out of Wright's office. Wright says, "If you want to sign plans, you get your own office. Good-bye." But Henry Klumb came over in charge of the redevelopment work. A whole series of people of that character were brought onto this staff, including myself and Karel Dekker. He brought Karel in from the city recreation department and brought me in from the county. [When] I went over there, my salary became $306 a month, which was a little bit higher than I was getting at the county. So this was a great advance, and I became the city planning architect.

HOLDEN: Yes. All right, let's stop there for just a second to finish up a couple of items. Did you know of [Theodore G.] Robinson or were you familiar with his book,

or were you familiar with [Los Angeles:] Preface to a Master Plan? Were any of those influential in your early--?

EISNER: Yeah, I have probably got some of the books in my library. I am a great collector of books and reader of books. Sure, I have got stuff that goes back into the thirties, early thirties, that I have assembled during the time. I became very interested in planning and began learning a lot, because now the field was broadening out into areas that I never dreamed existed. I was getting involved in design, I was involved in park planning, I was involved in street and highway planning. The one short area that I had, that I was short of knowledge on, was zoning. I didn't know a lot about it, because I never had anything to do with it. But I began picking up stuff along the line. I found out, for instance, that there were two people writing zoning ordinances. One of them was Gordon Whitnall, and the other was Everett B. Mansur. If you were going to study zoning ordinances, you just study their ordinances. The basic difference between Gordon's ordinance and a Mansur ordinance was that Gordon's ordinance had a requirement in the single family residential areas that they have a three-hundred-gallon oil tank on the property and Mansur's would have a five-hundred-gallon oil tank. In other words, they had copied somebody's ordinances in the East without being very

particular about what they were taking, but it was a way to learn.

Many of the other things that had to do with the period were basically involved in design. I went on with the city, in charge of planning the San Fernando Valley--no small operation. We planned that area for about two years, tried to establish communities. Canoga Park, all of those areas that had a core, we identified them and tried to limit the area to retain the agricultural base that was in that particular section of the county. The area was pretty windblown at that time. It got terribly hot in the summertime. Living out there was not necessarily considered L.A. But we did find all these little areas, enclaves in the Valley, and what we tried to do was plan a series of related communities tied together with a good highway system.

Everything went very well with the planning in the planning department until one of the big developers came in with a project that was contrary to the plan. There was a great big battle over the thing. The [Los Angeles City] Planning Commission, I think, turned it down and then finally approved it. They sent it to the [city] council. The council didn't want to approve it because it was contrary to good planning. Finally, the pressures on Charlie became so great that he indicated, "Oh, what the

hell." And they broke. I understood--and this is one of the things probably you won't want to repeat in the dialogue--that actually the mayor [Fletcher Bowron] was going to veto it, veto the council approval, until Charlie had indicated, "Well, what the hell." They went on and approved it. This broke the plan. It was no longer possible to retain the community-level approach that we had taken in the plan that we were working on. I want to point out that I didn't work on the plan alone. Milt Breivogel was with me much of the time. We went over these things. Charlie went over it. In other words, it was not prepared in a vacuum. But the problem was political again, and the tremendous power of the real estate groups.

HOLDEN: All right.

EISNER: But that got me into planning for the city and handling that.

Well, just about that time, Klumb left. He went over to Puerto Rico and left the opening in that, and I then became the head of the redevelopment section of the office and did redevelopment planning for the remainder of my time with the city. During which time I worked also very closely with the [Los Angeles City] Health Department and the [Los Angeles City] Housing Authority. When the housing authority got their public housing assignment they secured funding for ten thousand units. I worked with one of the

men from their office and with a key sanitarian from the health department to review all of the potential sites that we had located to be possible sites for public housing. We went out and made our recommendations, first through our own offices to Charlie and then to Howard Holtzendorff, who was then head of the housing authority.

TAPE NUMBER: II, SIDE ONE

DECEMBER 9, 1987

HOLDEN: Si, we were talking about Los Angeles city and your experience with the [Los Angeles City] Planning Department.

EISNER: Well, as part of the experience with the planning department I had the opportunity, as I mentioned before, of working closely with the health agency [Los Angeles City Health Department] and the [Los Angeles City] Housing Authority and getting information together for the housing authority to select sites in different areas. Amongst those sites that we recommended and which were selected were the Chávez Ravine site and the Rose Hills site, both of which fell in the later election, which did away with the bulk of housing assignment to the city of L.A. In the process of working with these people on this material, my interest in the redevelopment of the city became known to Howard Holtzendorff, the director of the housing authority, and he asked if I would leave the city planning department and take over and become the first employee of a redevelopment agency for the city of L.A. I would be the acting director until the director was appointed, and then I would become technical director in charge of the planning program. I debated this and talked with Charlie [Charles B.] Bennett and was in quite a difficult position, because

at that very exact time I was offered the position of the director of planning for the city of Berkeley. Charlie Bennett, when I told him of this, said, "Look, what kind of planning can you do for Berkeley?" Knowing Berkeley as well as I do, I sort of wondered what kind of work I could do in an area that was practically-- Well, for all practical purposes, built up. It had some of the most difficult areas that you could possibly deal with in terms of population that was living there and the economic situation. More than that, I was deeply concerned about the power of the university [University of California, Berkeley] in dictating what happens in Berkeley and whether or not you'd be a free agent working in that kind of an atmosphere where the university was really as strong as it was. The decision there went to go with the [Los Angeles City] Redevelopment Agency.

I'd like to take a moment out now to go back and discuss my family, because during this same-- During the last few years, my wife and I had two sons: Stanley [Arthur Eisner], born in 1940, who later went on to graduate from Los Angeles State College [now California State University, Los Angeles] and then with a master's in planning from USC [University of Southern California], and our son Richard [Karl Eisner], born in 1943, who graduated in architecture up at Berkeley and got his master's degree

from that institution in city planning. Both of these sons are still active in planning and city governmental positions and with the state. Richard is the state director for Northern California for the San Francisco Bay Area Regional Earthquake Preparedness Project. At the moment, Stanley, the older son, is the city manager of a city in Northern California. The family has certainly developed quite well over the years, and we are very happy with both of our kids, who are married and have children.

In 1948, the end of '49, when the [Federal] Housing Act of 1949 was passed by Congress, one of the things that I found out later was that the Wagner-Ellender-Taft Bill, which became the Housing Act of '49, was actually based on studies that I had prepared when I was working with the city. They had used the design studies as the basis for calculating some of the formulas that they were using for redevelopment. The act itself was basically a housing act. All the commercial aspects of it, which came into the picture much later in years, were never supposed to be there. It was supposed to provide for the rehousing of people living in the slums and blighted areas of communities. Going to this conference back in Boston in 1949-- I went there under a full head of steam, authorized to go and the trip paid for by the redevelopment agency, to present the Los Angeles redevelopment program. I spoke

very briefly, but what I said at the meeting was that Los Angeles has sixty square miles of blighted area, and we were going to tackle that thing wholesale. After my little presentation was over, one gentlemen came up and introduced himself as being a reporter for the Milwaukee Journal and said, "Sir, do you come from Texas? Nothing that big in the whole world would ever happen." And of course, it hasn't. But I didn't know then. I was naive and thought that once you had a federal law and lots of money, you could do anything. I didn't realize the complications that occur in moving people around and rehousing during a period when you are doing all of this movement.

In any case, I then became the acting director of the Los Angeles City Redevelopment Agency. At that time the agency officers were made up of William [T.] Sesnon, who was a wealthy landowner and a very, very fine man living in the San Fernando Valley; made up of [Milton J.] Brock, who was a builder, a home builder, a major one; and made up of a man by the name of [Philip M.] Rae, who was in real estate; another member was Edward [W.] Carter, the president of the Broadway department store. Here again, you see the influence of the downtown business people and, again, the reconstruction of the central area. The last member, the fifth member, who was the secretary-treasurer, was Howard Holtzendorff. I stayed with the agency for six

months, during which time I don't remember a motion made at a meeting that ever got a second. Rae used to-- When something came up that there had to be a decision on, before he would act on that decision he would call people at the realty board to find out if they would approve his actions. It was at that time a real dead-end street. While I was sitting in the office one day debating what I was going to do next, because I knew I was going to get out of here-- I had gone to Charlie Bennett. I thought of going to Charlie Bennett and did, asking if I could get my job back with the city planning department. When I had left the city I had cut all the ties, and the [Los Angeles County] Civil Service Commission was hard pressed to try to figure out how they could get me back into the job, which was contrary to civil service policy. They were going to give me a retroactive leave of absence, which was kind of new language for them. In any case, as I said, while I was sitting in the office mulling all these things over, Bob [Robert E.] Alexander came in and said, "Si, do you have any objection to working in private enterprise?" I said, "No, not at all." He said, "Well, I'm going to talk to Richard Neutra and see if we can't get you to come with us in the role of the chief site planner on our Chávez Ravine project."

HOLDEN: Let's stop right there just a second and then

we'll go into it. No, I wanted to ask you about another item. Back in your work with the city, a couple of questions. The first one was that you did do work on a number of projects, establishing blight in various areas.

EISNER: Oh, we did a complete study of all the factors listed in the state law dealing with blight. We studied the health problems, we studied juvenile delinquency, we studied the income levels, we studied all the factors--health conditions, everything that we could possibly think of--that would satisfy the requirements, including the conditions of the buildings. Again, we had the city health department sanitarian go from building to building in these areas to determine whether or not they were blighted in terms of endangering the health of the residents. We did everything that we could, including studying the street patterns and the possibilities for street vacations and changes. A thorough, complete background study in conformity with the items listed in the state law, which meant economic dislocation as well as poverty and all the other factors.

HOLDEN: Was this a part of the city planning program?

EISNER: Yes, right. It was not the redevelopment agency. This was the city.

HOLDEN: Pre-redevelopment agency, as a matter of fact.

EISNER: That's right, before the agency was ever formed.

HOLDEN: Do you have any information on how this whole series of studies got initiated?

EISNER: Yeah, by Charlie. He was just following the law. Charlie Bennett. I took it over and I prepared all the studies. As a matter of fact, I can give you my copy of the whole composite of the material that we collected.

HOLDEN: These were all started after the redevelopment act in the state of California?

EISNER: Yes, this was based on California's redevelopment act [the California Community Redevelopement Act], and before the national act [Housing and Redevelopment Act, 1949] was actually accomplished.

HOLDEN: The only problem with the California act was that the state didn't have any money to implement it with.

EISNER: Not at that time.

HOLDEN: Then along came federal law, which did provide some.

EISNER: That's right. There were two areas of economic support for the program. The city had to do certain things in the redevelopment area. They had to work on the streets, take care of the utilities. All of the infrastructure in the project was the city's responsibility. The federal government gave the money for the demolition and for the housing redevelopment. And the rehousing, too.

HOLDEN: Did they give money in the first couple of appropriations for the infrastructure?

EISNER: The city?

HOLDEN: The federal government.

EISNER: No, that was the city's contribution to it. The federal law was so written that the city had to make a contribution either in money or in actions taken on site by public agencies, such as providing schools, providing parks. All of these things, which are part of the local public obligation normally, were the city's responsibility.

HOLDEN: Apparently, the city of Los Angeles at that time supported very strongly the passage of the 1949 act. Do you have any idea where this support in the city came from?

EISNER: I don't think the city entered into it, in my opinion. I think actually after it passed, it became less and less a public housing activity. When they began seeing this as an opportunity to acquire land and reconstruct the economic value of it, write down the costs and make it available to private enterprise to do private work, then the city council became interested in this, because then they were actually giving private enterprise a great big plum.

Let me give you an example of how this reacted in other places. On coming back from the national conference

in Boston, I was really high as a kite about what we had gone through there. A gentleman sitting next to me asked me what profession I was in.

I said, "I'm the redevelopment director of the city of L.A."

He said, "What's that?"

I said, "Well, we are charged with the responsibility of gathering land and clearing sites and making those blighted area sites available to private enterprise for redevelopment to do housing and commerce and whatnot."

He says, "You mean that somebody is going to be able to buy property in downtown Los Angeles for half the price that I have to pay for it out in Westwood?" He says, "That is absolute communism at its worst."

You know, I had never thought of it in those terms. Not that it was communism, but the fact that this is what they were actually doing. They were taking private property, paying the price of it as substandard property, clearing the land, putting new utilities in, and then turning around and practically giving it to private developers if they would take the property and develop it. That in our society probably has been done, but it's always been done under the rug. You didn't do it out in the open.

HOLDEN: In the studies that you did earlier with Charlie

Bennett, the studies did involve more than housing, though, didn't they? They were really planning studies for all kinds of uses.

EISNER: Yes. Most of them had very limited introduction of industry. The housing act, as passed, and the studies that I did under the state law still could be classified as housing studies. They did have some commerce to support the local needs, you know, shopping centers to support local people. You had to have that, because housing needs access to stores and shops. But it did not line the streets with it, nor did it set up great big areas for commercial development to the exclusion of housing. The '49 act was a housing act! It's all been lost, you know.

HOLDEN: Okay, now we are back to housing, basically, and your experience with [Robert E.] Alexander and Chávez Ravine, among others.

EISNER: Well, I left the city redevelopment agency and went with Bob Alexander and Richard Neutra. We had used Neutra's garage in his home as our planning workshop. We set up some drafting tables out there and had a small staff of people besides myself who were brought together for the purposes of preparing plans for Chávez Ravine. I was charged, first of all, with the preparation of the site plan. Bob and Richard had drawn a very sketchy plan where they had disposed of--and that's probably the best language

I can use--some 3,360 units on the site. It was a flat piece of paper with a flat land layout with a whole bunch of matchsticks scattered around there in some kind of a pattern that didn't really add up to anything, didn't relate to anything. When I first looked at the site and went over it, I came back to the office and suggested to Bob and to Richard that what we needed more than anything else was good topography, which we did not have. We had to use the city engineer's engineering maps, where the topography could have been off fifty feet in one direction or another. It wasn't that close, their sewer maps and stuff of that kind that were put together. It just wasn't a good base for this kind of planning.

So the topography was a real problem, but more than that the soil conditions. One of the real challenges of that particular site was the differences between the valleys and the high points. It was a very, very rugged site. What I proposed to do in order to make it possible to develop from the valley up to the higher plateaus that we would create was to remove about, oh, thirty or forty feet off the top of these hills and place that earth in the valley, therefore raising the floor of the valley and lowering the top, which was a sixty-foot difference in elevation. I could then develop a roadway system along the way that would make access easier.

The schoolchildren-- The only school we had in the area at that time was the existing elementary school, which is part of the story of the development of the area, and that was it. This was an area that must be described in terms of people as well as topography. It was an area largely housing Mexican-American people--a few Chinese, but mainly Mexican-American people.

The area itself has a long planning history, in that many, many years ago, before there was real solid zoning in the city of L.A., the Chávez Ravine area housed a brick-manufacturing kiln. The people moved into the area and then claimed that the smoke and dust from the kilns were injuring their health and went to trial. They sued the brickyards. I can't recall the name of the case, but it's--

HOLDEN: Was it the Hadacheck v. Sebastian?

EISNER: Good, your memory's better than mine. The Hadacheck case went to court, and the court held that since the people's health was being injured, it didn't matter who was there first. The problem was their health, and therefore Hadacheck had to cease and desist from making bricks in that area. Hadacheck claimed in the case that there were other brickyards where they were doing this that were not compelled to shut down, and the court held that the conditions were different in these other areas and the Hadacheck case had to go on its own. This became one of

the real classics where nuisance was the basis for judgment as to whether the area could be used for one purpose or another. But this just describes two of the things.

One of the other little gems of this particular area was the elementary school. The principal of the school was a Mrs. Slavin. She ran probably one of the most interesting schools in the elementary school system in the city of L.A. It was multicultural. In the spring of the year they used to have festivals up there that would bring the Chinese community as well as the Spanish-American community in to put on one of the greatest exhibits of Spanish-American/Chinese/Filipino culture in this particular little setting. They would have the fair out on the school grounds. In addition to this, there was the Catholic church. I never learned the name of the padre, but he too was at the cultural hub of this particular area. These two people were the most influential in the development of the whole Chávez Ravine area. There was one other person, who had a house on the top of the hill. He was a movie actor, a Mexican-American movie actor. I don't know his name, can't remember it, but he used to be the lord of the valley. He had some influence, but never participated in the planning process. Mrs. Slavin did. Neutra was so concerned about her that he invited her up to the house and invited me to be there. I sat there and

listened to him explain what he was going to do for the local residents, how he was going to do these wonderful things. I sat there thinking in the back of my mind of those twenty-four thirteen-story buildings and didn't know whether to choke or what. But that was one of the interesting parts. He actually convinced this woman that he was going to actually save the culture of these people in that valley, but, again, that never happened.

Actually, I went to work on the site. I prepared a plan for it based on the basic assignments that Richard had given and upon the sketches that he himself did. Richard was wonderful this way. He would go down-- The Arroyo Seco Freeway was just about built at that time. He would go down in the valley and look up at the site, and he would picture how these buildings would be sited on the hill and make them monuments, literally, part of the landscape. He did a beautiful job, and his sketching was fabulous, fabulous sketching. Anyway, I had prepared a plan to show how these buildings would be located. On the lower areas, I placed the two-story dwellings, and basically they were structures about two hundred feet long each, in order to get the units together into little building pads. Well, at that time they got the soil tests approved. It came back, and everything that I did was wrong. Buildings were in the wrong location. Putting thirty foot of fill in the valley

would have caused the valley to break down, because it was uncompacted fill below it and putting this load on top of it would have caused the whole thing to fall. My two-hundred-foot-long buildings were spanning over cut and fill areas. In other words, part of it was on cut and part of it was on fill. I was faced with an absolute disaster. I came to Bob and I told him, "Bob, we've got to do something with this." After preparing a new plan and having to rethink it based on the soil conditions, we had to do a lot of moving around of the buildings to move them off the areas where fractures would occur.

Into the picture came one other element which could not have been foreseen. The property owner whose property was being condemned, one of the largest-- He was one of the people fighting the hardest against the housing project, one of the realty people. He turned around and gave about fourteen acres of land in a critical location to the Catholic church! For a church presumably. The only problem with that was that I had designed a road for that location that was going to put that thing in about a forty-foot hole, because I had to get down from the top of the hill down to the bottom. We went down to the archdiocese--oh, God, it was the funniest damn thing--to discuss this with the archbishop, myself and Neutra and Alexander. Of course they said, "Well, look, if you can

replace this somewhere else, we'll trade with you." We told them what the problem was. I said, "Look, if we go ahead with the project, all you've got is nothing. You'll never be able to get to your land." They said, "Well, you'll have to condemn it." I said, "Well, you know the federal government's using it. And the city is using the right of eminent domain." They said, "Yes, but we're the Catholic church!" Talk about difficult things that aren't resolvable.

Well, we had the plans pretty well along, and Richard and Bob were negotiating with the guys back in Washington. Just at that time I got a call from Bill [William L. C.] Wheaton, who was the head of the graduate school of planning at Harvard [University]--this was in the fall of 1951--asking if I would come back there that fall and handle a class in planning in the graduate school. Now, I already mentioned that I had been brought into the picture and was teaching a course at USC, and I had as my assistant at that time Lyle Stewart, who was a former student of mine. Lyle then took over my classes at 'SC while I went back to Harvard with my family in the fall of 1951.

HOLDEN: In that case, Si, let's go just a little bit more back to the Chávez Ravine problem. There were a couple more items--

EISNER: Yes, there were at least two more that I overlooked. First of all, during the course of my working on the project, two of my very, very good friends--Clarence Stein, the architect and planner of Radburn and many housing projects with Henry Wright back in the New York-New Jersey area came out to California and invited me out to his mother-in-law's home in Beverly Hills, where he confronted me with severe objections to the kind of work that was being proposed on the site. He asked me straightforwardly how I could justify in my own mind working on a project which was going to take people who are accustomed to living on the ground, having their gardens, having chickens and their little animals in their yards, having space around them, having flowers, to have these people living in these twenty-four thirteen-story-high buildings. That the way of life for these people just was never meant to be accommodated to this kind of living environment. How could I justify morally and ethically working on a project of this kind in the face of knowing that this was true? Along with Mr. Stein, my good friend Catherine Bauer, the wonderful person in the housing program fighting for housing at every level, came into the picture and raised the same issues. Both of these people strongly opposed what was being planned for the area. They felt that the program was wrong; there were too many units

being placed on the land, and that this was where the problem lay. But that the assignment of units was based on economic conditions meant something both to Neutra and Alexander, as well as to the housing agency, and this conditioned how many units were to be proposed on the site. It was not a good sort of development for the kinds of people that were intended to be living there. These were going to be clients of public housing. This was not community redevelopment. This was not for another economic sector. So this, it seems to me, was one of the real unhappy things that I faced in this problem in dealing with these people.

When I left the project, it was in back in Washington. All the material had been sent back there when the vote came which caused both projects, both this and Rose Hills, to be abandoned. The rest of the story also goes up to the supreme court of the state of California, in that the housing authority now owned this land. It had been acquired with public funds. It was publicly owned property. The housing authority, of course, couldn't do anything to it. So they went to the city and said, "It's right next to Elysian Park. We will deed this property to the city of Los Angeles to be developed for park purposes." The city accepted the title to the land from the housing authority as public land to be developed for

park and recreational purposes.

Now, at that particular time the city was negotiating with the Dodger baseball team and Mr. [Walter F.] O'Malley to try to get him to bring his baseball team out to Los Angeles. They brought them out here and they played ball in the [Los Angeles Memorial] Coliseum, which was not a very good baseball stadium. Anyway, the city of Los Angeles, through one of its councilwomen, a Mrs. [Rosalind] Wyman, and this mayor, whose name I don't particularly recall at the moment [Fletcher Bowron], agreed that they would negotiate with O'Malley for a ten-acre site that he had acquired. It was the old Los Angeles Angels baseball stadium down on Avalon Boulevard. They would trade this site for that ten-acre site down on Avalon Boulevard, with the understanding that the baseball stadium would be built there [at Chávez Ravine] and that a thirty-three-acre or thirty-acre public recreation area would be created on the land as part of the recreational development of the city of L.A. Well, this went all the way to the supreme court, being challenged on the grounds that the city had no right to give away public land for private use. But it was held as a valid contract ultimately by the state supreme court, and that was the end of Chávez Ravine as a viable subject.

HOLDEN: Yes. Now, what was the vote that you mentioned earlier? That was the one--

EISNER: This was a public vote of the whole state of California on public housing. I think it was Proposition 14. There was a vote on additional public housing in the state of California.

HOLDEN: To eliminate--

EISNER: To eliminate any additional public housing other than those that had already been-- There were projects that were already under way and where there had been some efforts made, and those were allowed.

HOLDEN: So that ended your service with Alexander--

EISNER: Well, I took a leave of absence. I didn't sever my relationship. I went back to Harvard for the teaching stint. However, there's where a different facet of my planning interests also changed. Prior to going back to Harvard and while I was still with Neutra and Alexander, a man by the name of Harold [F.] Wise gave a talk down at Town Hall on the economics of housing, after which I got up and just casually said to Hal, "Gee, it would be wonderful if you as an economist and I as a planner could get together and do private consulting work." That was just like that. No sooner had he gone out of the room than he went over and talked to Richard and Bob to ask them if it would be all right with them if I would join him in some of this kind of planning work, unbeknownst to me. I found out about it later, and I was really chagrined by it. But he

said, "I've got a job that we can line up up in Northern California, and we can work on it together." That was really where my private work began. When I left Neutra and then came back, we already had a job in Northern California.

HOLDEN: You came back from your year at Harvard?

EISNER: Before I had gone to Harvard, we had gone out and talked with the city of San Bernardino, and we'd gotten a contract to do the first general plan and update the zoning ordinance for the city of San Bernardino. That's where the two of us began. But after some rather unhappy experiences with Hal in San Bernardino and elsewhere, we decided that was the end of that partnership. I said that I would never go into another one.

HOLDEN: To finish up on the Harvard thing, was that a learning experience?

EISNER: Harvard was without a doubt the most interesting learning experience that I ever had. First of all, it was the first time I was working in a graduate school where the guys there were smarter than the professors. Second, Wheaton never let go of the course himself, so when I came to class Wheaton was always there too. Bill was a very bright guy. Oh, he was top in the eastern hierarchy, really tops.

The interesting thing that happened there was a little

aside. There was a chap by the name of [G. Holmes] Perkins who was head of the graduate school of planning at Harvard. Perkins heard that there was going to be a change: the head of the graduate school was going to leave. He was an elderly gentleman. He was going to leave and they were going to get a new dean for the graduate school.

HOLDEN: Of planning.

EISNER: Of planning. Well, it was planning and architecture. No, it was a graduate school of planning. It had architecture in it, too, but-- Yeah, planning and architecture, okay. Perkins also found out through the scuttlebutt that they were not going to appoint anybody from the faculty at Harvard, and so he rustled up a job as the head of a planning school at the University of Pennsylvania and got Bill Wheaton to hold his chair open at the graduate school at Harvard. So when I came back, there Bill Wheaton was in Perkins's seat and the dean was still there. So this time that I was at Harvard was under Bill Wheaton. But I learned that the people coming into the field came from such a variety of backgrounds. You know who Fermi is? I was introduced to Fermi. Enrico. I was introduced to him at the faculty club. I joined the faculty club back there and was introduced as the outstanding urban planner in the United States. That's why

I was back at Harvard. I came home and mulled that over, because I had never thought of myself in those terms. But that was learned by going to lunch with the faculty. Oh, the people on the faculty there at that time! Walter Gropius. I can't remember all the names of all the famous people teaching in the school of architecture. But that's Harvard! That's the only thing that you could say about it.

At the school there was so much around you of culture. Every evening there was something going on of cultural value. We used to go to debates. They would bring in great debaters, justices of the Supreme Court. [It was] always an honored position to come and lecture at Harvard. And the people like that. We went to a concert there where Aaron Copland spoke on art and the craft of music and the creative mind. It was a lecture on planning, about how music has to be coordinated. You have to see through a total picture. You don't do piecemeal stuff. You have to relate things, relate, relate, relate.

HOLDEN: That was Wheaton, I suppose, too.

EISNER: No, that was Copland.

HOLDEN: I mean, Wheaton had somewhat the same idea, maybe.

EISNER: I don't know. Wheaton I always thought was a little bit of a blowhard, a political planner. I shouldn't say this. He was very nice to us.

HOLDEN: It takes all kinds to make up the planning--

EISNER: Oh, yes. But he was really a nice, intellectual guy and a real power, a really strong person in the field of planning through the years through the institute. He and one other chap [Louis Wetmore] from the University of Illinois were the AIP [American Institute of Planners]--running it like it was their private domain.

TAPE NUMBER: II, SIDE TWO

DECEMBER 10, 1987

HOLDEN: Si, you wanted to bring up a couple of items omitted yesterday.

EISNER: Okay. One of the items is what I consider one of the major accomplishments of the [Los Angeles County] Regional Planning Commission [RPC] in the 1940s. Actually, in 1940-41 a project was started in developing an overall plan for the [Los Angeles] civic center. Buildings were already well established in the center, and the plan was conceived in bringing some eight or nine of the major architects of the community together to form a team that was to conceive the plan. They brought in an architect by the name of Whittlesey, who drafted the plan, put the plan into meaning. They worked on this plan for a year, more or less. Following that, it was reviewed by the city, a participant in the study, and by the state, likewise a participant, and by the federal government, all of whom were party to the plan for the city of L.A.

The plan was based on developing up the Bunker Hill heights and creating a great mall centering on the city hall. It actually extended south of the city hall to include a police administration building between Main and Los Angeles streets, but did not extend much further south than that. Going north, it went up to the top of the hill,

and the concept was to place the water and power building as the crown of the hill facing the city hall, since water was such an important element in the development of Southern California. This was considered to be the major element or feature of the plan. Coming east, from the water and power building down the mall was to be a major waterfall tumbling down the hill into the major portion of the mall. Some of the streets below the top of the hill were to be closed. This, however, in reality has never happened.

Many other things happened there that were not even conceived of at the time, mainly the cultural elements: the Music Center [of Los Angeles County] and all the other things that were part of new ideas and new places. The cultural element, then, became really the major feature of the plan, the water and power building being west of the Music Center. Since the completion of the plan, additional thinking has gone on recently in expanding some of the cultural elements to the south to join up with some of the cultural features already being developed on Bunker Hill. But the plan was signed by all the parties and has largely been adhered to insofar as the maintenance of the mall is concerned. However, no consideration was given at that time to taking care of the parking. One must know, however, that now the underside of the whole mall is all

parking, along with some peripheral parking on top of the land. But the mall was preserved, and the county buildings were generally located where they were proposed to be located. Some of the buildings to the south, mainly a huge, elliptical building that was to be built around and surrounding the plaza church, were never built. Based on that part of the plan, it probably was just as well, because they tried to recapture the piazza in Rome and created a colonnade somewhat like that outside Saint Peter's done by Bernini. The building itself was to be a five-story building, which was not quite what you find in Rome. But it has never been built, although buildings have been built into the area where it had been proposed. But that was a major accomplishment by the RPC, working cooperatively with the city, state, and federal government.

HOLDEN: Were you there at the time?

EISNER: I was there at the time. As a matter of fact, Harry Merideth and I were in charge of the preparation of the model for the development. We secured some of the people that were then working up in the city hall on this gigantic model of the whole downtown area of Los Angeles. These were wood carvers and wonderful technicians, and we got about three or four of those people to come over to the county and prepare the model under my supervision, working

together with Harry Merideth and, again, the architects supervising the overall job. That was a major thing that stands on the grounds today as not only a record of planning but actually of doing.

HOLDEN: Right. The freeway was planned into that at the time, was it not?

EISNER: The freeway was planned into the model, yes. At that time I made a suggestion, which I'm sure had it been taken would have been quite an improvement in the freeway system. I proposed widening the freeway and having mass transit go down the central core of the freeway, bringing mass transit into the city on the freeway, using the Union [Station] terminal as a major intermodel terminal for all transit facilities. But at that time the state of California could not take excess land for anything but the roadways for the freeway, and that killed any thought of carrying it out. Basically, the thought today is that they wish that they had it.

HOLDEN: This, of course, was only about two years after completion of the Pasadena Freeway.

EISNER: Actually, the model was completed at the time just when the Pasadena Freeway was opened. It was 1941. Just about the same time. That was a very important feature of our work that I was involved in every inch of the way. I actually carried the plans over to the Federal Building,

carried them over to the [Los Angeles County] Board of Supervisors, and actually got them signed so that we would have a plan which had all the stuff. Then we made up a print, a photostat of the signed copy, which became the copy of the formal plan.

HOLDEN: I remember later there were some efforts to make changes, including moving the courthouse further south, which in our previous discussion at one time you suggested you thought might be a good idea.

EISNER: I had the idea--this still persists in my mind today--that the civic center and the business center ought to be intimately related, since a number of buildings already used in the area south of the civic center--mainly the building at Second [Street] and Broadway, one at Third [Street] and Main [Street]--were being fully occupied by public offices, the state building was going in that direction, and a lot of things were happening in that direction. But I made the mistake of mentioning that to Bill [William J.] Fox. I had gone over-- I think I had to ask him to sign something. I said, "Bill, I have an idea that maybe the civic center ought to move south and tie together with where the restaurants are and where the activity is." I had a great feeling that the civic center should not only be a daylight feature but ought to be a cultural thing and something that people could go downtown,

go to the restaurants, go shopping. I mentioned that to Bill, and all his comment was, "Oh, you goddamned architects!" Which terminated the discussion.

HOLDEN: And the courthouse switched places with the administration building from one side to the other of the mall.

EISNER: Yes, that was really important, because all the law offices at that time were down at Fifth [Street] and Sixth [Street] and Spring [Street], and to tie these things together to make it a working thing seemed common sense. Anyway, it didn't work.

HOLDEN: All right.

EISNER: Onward. I guess we ought to get into the activities that I was involved in following my leaving Neutra and Alexander. When I came back from Harvard, I never went back into the office. I had just taken a leave of absence when I left, but I just never went back, because first of all, I had a pretty good inkling that the project was stymied and there was no purpose in it. We [Eisner and Harold F. Wise] also had the San Bernardino job that opened up, and we were well on our way starting our consulting practice.

The years between 1951, 1952, when we opened our first office here in Los Angeles-- As a matter of fact, it was in the back bedroom of my house. We stayed there until I was

concerned about the people in the neighborhood protesting against it, motorcycle deliveries of blueprints. So we got an office down on Colorado Boulevard and built up a staff of about seven or eight people at that time. We spent about three or four years on Colorado Boulevard and then moved over into South Pasadena, where we opened our offices with architects, landscape architects, in a complex that we thought was going to be an overall planning and architectural center, a cooperative thing, which never did work. But in the ensuing years of private practice, I did plans for more than forty cities, for two entire counties--Naturally not Los Angeles County or here [Los Angeles city]. I did Santa Barbara, both the city and county, and did Clark County in Nevada, which included a tremendous area encompassing the city of Las Vegas as its major element, Henderson, Boulder, and a number of smaller towns up to the north.

In those years I found that I had to do a lot more than just comprehensive planning. I mentioned earlier that I had had no experience in zoning, which it suddenly dawned on me I'd better learn something about. I took some courses with some attorneys down at the USC school of government and learned from them some of the legal background for zoning and then began studying ordinances and found that for the most part they were kind of mixed

up. All the things-- I found standards mixed up with uses, found all kinds of breaks in the ordinance that had no continuity, that had conditional uses built right into the use section rather than being separate. I think one of the major accomplishments that I made in the field of zoning was codifying the ordinances, actually setting the ordinances into a form where you started out with the philosophy for the sections you were dealing with, then going to the uses, then the conditions set forth in those uses, and then to the standards for those uses, and then to any of the other qualifications that were a part of that kind of section in the ordinance. It gave an orderly form and it was consistent throughout the ordinance. You never had to look for things. You knew where they were. There was a uniformity, almost a musical rhythm to the ordinance as you went through it. This has now been adopted rather generally by most of the other people that have done ordinances. That was an overall contribution to the field that I worked on, and I felt that, to this day, is a very important part.

In the dealing with cities in L.A. County, I think the springboard for this I mentioned earlier was Bill Fox sent us out into the communities. There's a little aside here about my experience with Bill Fox's idea. I was sent to Arcadia. Arcadia had a city hall in a room over a

drugstore on Foothill Boulevard. I used to go to meetings there. They were always at night. I found out that by attending these meetings I learned something about what goes on in government. In Arcadia at that time, the principal concern of the planning commission was how to keep the Jewish people out of Arcadia. To this day I mention it, they weren't very successful. But it just impressed me, being Jewish: "This is a hell of a thing for me to walk into." I did not bring this back to the planning commission for resolution.

In working with these communities-- It started with Monrovia, then Arcadia-- No, Monrovia-- Well, I'll mention the cities in the area that I dealt with: Monrovia, Arcadia, Duarte, Claremont, Pomona. Then coming back down to the southern part, South Pasadena, Santa Monica. My goodness, I can't even remember all of them, but they were practically all of the-- Oh, Covina, West Covina, La Habra--well, that's in Orange County, isn't it?--and Brea, which is also in Orange County. All of these cities around here were part of the planning that I was involved in.

I had built up a firm of some very, very capable young people. Mainly people from USC and Cal Poly [California State Polytechnic University, Pomona]. These were energetic people. They knew how to work on plans. Of course, I brought Lyle Stewart into the office as my

partner, and we worked together for some fifteen years. Lyle graduated from USC. Earlier than that he was my teaching assistant in my courses. Following his graduation, he went to England on a Fulbright [fellowship]. Again, I was partly responsible for his getting it, simply because you couldn't say enough good things about Lyle in writing a recommendation. He was a tremendous student, a tremendous devotee to planning, and since that time has been practicing up in Medford, Oregon, as a consultant up in Oregon and Washington and many other parts of the country.

My own experiences expanded only slightly into Nevada. I did some work up in Rock Springs, Wyoming, locating a community college. I went down and for a number of years was a consultant to the planning staff in El Paso, Texas. I made a very good friend of the director [John Cunningham], and I became almost a part of his staff down there for about five or six years. As a result of this, I was invited to do a study down in Corpus Christi, Texas, and later on was invited to give a lecture down in the eastern part of Texas, being a part of an APA [American Planning Association] meeting of the Texas group. This was a really interesting thing.

One other experience in Texas was in preparing a plan for the town of Levelland, which is close to Lubbock. This

was a very rapid-fire plan prepared under the auspices of a university there, Texas Tech [University]. They had a professor there [Robert J. Lima] who was interested in planning. He pulled a staff together, and we did a plan in seven days for this town of Levelland. It was a relatively small town, and we did all the research. With a staff of university people working their computers, we got all the research done and all the conclusions out and all the presentations done within the seven-day period. It was not the greatest plan in the world, but at least it gave the people in Levelland some concept of planning and how it works. All during this period I had my own office; I was also teaching at USC.

HOLDEN: Before we get to that, could I ask you a few things, questions about your consulting and the results? Number one perhaps would be that there were a number of things that developed over this period of time. For example, the growth limitation effort, to mention one. The whole change in the nature of the zone classifications and so on. Were you on the creative side there? How did you respond--?

EISNER: Well, the response was in several directions. First of all, each of the plans that we prepared was for an individual community. We had no format, but we had a basic approach. We wanted to know something about the land

uses. We wanted to know about the local philosophy. We had citizens committees established at every level in these communities. We got economic data. We always hired economic consultants to come in. We had a physical examination of the physical structure and the social structure of these communities. We gathered all this data and then presented the comprehensive plan dealing with a full spectrum of the elements. Now, this has never changed. The comprehensive plan is still a comprehensive plan based on the fact that all these elements were taken into account. One of the things that we did not take into account and which in many cases has still not been taken into account-- That was the implementation of how you were going to get these things done, what the economics were in the communities. But we laid the groundwork. I think the plans that we did laid a groundwork. The accomplishments are hard to measure now, because you don't know just exactly how much of your planning has survived over these years. But in many instances, I hear people telling me, "Your plan is still being used. It's still the basis for the community's decision making."

Now, that, for instance, is true for-- One of the best examples that I know of for looking to the future was in Claremont. We did the plan for Claremont, which is in L.A. County. We did a thorough plan and we expanded the area

around it. We brought in the area of influence, which was something never conceived of among the earlier plans. In this area of influence, we developed the property development standards and the general plan and we located six brand-new neighborhood parks. Well, first of all, the city of Claremont had no authority in these external areas. There was no provision for getting these things accomplished. It was still in the county. However, the professors at the universities in Claremont were a brave lot. They went out and voted $250,000 in bonds and bought five of those six parcels of land that we identified in the county. Now they are city of Claremont city parks, built in the right place. The city bought it at a price of $5,000 an acre. You couldn't touch it for a $100,000 an acre today, or more. This was one area of accomplishment.

The other areas of accomplishment are the areas of zoning, where we did modernize the ordinances at that time. The approach that we took in industrial planning, using all the performance standards for industry, things of that kind, were new to those ordinances. We actually dug them up in national studies that we did research on, and these things have lasted-- They are still good. They are still meaningful.

The other things that we did, of course, were the development of major downtown area plans where we did plans

for the malls. We did one in Santa Monica which is now there. We prepared a mall plan for Burbank which was executed in our office. Actually, the working details were done by Lyle Stewart in our office. The thing was put on line. We also did the mall plan for Pomona, and that was put in place. These were accomplishments of our planning work.

As far as growth management is concerned, we got involved in that at a very strange period in the history-- That period was "Go, go, go! Everything has got to grow. Tell me what to put on the land, and we'll double it." I mean, that was the approach. Everybody wanted to be the biggest. All the beautiful orange groves out to the east-- Where Covina, for instance, was a little, bitty, tiny town in orange groves, you can't find an orange in Covina now. On the other hand, we proposed an open space plan for the city of Riverside, and one of the areas that we set aside in Riverside for a great big community park and a reserve for the citrus has been acquired by the city and is now in place.

So things did happen as a result of the planning efforts. Not as many as you would have hoped, because plans generally at that time were considered-- "We'll make a plan because we have to under the state law, and if we want to get any federal funds to do projects in our cities,

we are going to have to have something to satisfy the feds that we have a plan." So the plans were prepared. I remember a wonderful quotation from one of the councilmen in Riverside, who at the public hearing was honest to say, "Hell, let's adopt a plan. We won't follow it anyway." But this gives you some kind of an inkling.

On growth management-- That came into the picture somewhat later in the game. We had actually prepared a growth management plan in our office for the city of Rancho Mirage out in Riverside County. I also prepared a growth management plan, long before it was known as that, for the city of San Luis Obispo. What we did was study the ability to provide water for people, and we tied growth into the ability to provide water for them. In the private-practice end of my operation, doing a plan for the Tenneco [Corporation] people up in Bakersfield, I tied growth in the area and around there and the ability to take care of the sewage disposal. So basically, growth management was related to the capability to provide for that growth and taking care of the facilities that they needed to sustain that growth. So we were involved in it. We didn't always call it the thing that you said, but we were involved where it was possible to do it. Philosophically, it wasn't possible everywhere.

HOLDEN: Of course, all the background you were providing

in more detail than existed before for all these cities.

EISNER: Oh, yes, it was a matter of gathering much of this together and putting it into graphic form. One of the things that we left as a record of our efforts always was great, big, wonderful colored maps.

HOLDEN: In working here, what kind of professional or what kind of person were you working with most? The professional planners or the elected officials or the advisory commissions, and so on?

EISNER: It was a combination. For instance, when we started on the plan for Santa Barbara, we worked with the county. At that time there was a vendetta going on between the [Santa Barbara County] Board of Supervisors and the director of planning. When we got the job, we were told to keep away from Dick [Richard] Whitehead. We did that as best we could, because we were using the county staff in this case. We used the county and city staff as the operating vehicle for getting the job done, because it was on a very tight budget. They didn't give us money. They just paid us for monthly services and directing the work. But we were walking down State Street in Santa Barbara one day and we were behind two people that I recognized as being planning commissioners. One of the guys said to the other, "Who the hell is this guy Eisner?" I thought, well, it was about time that we got together a little bit more

closely with the planning commission and the director of planning. Of course, from there on in Dick Whitehead was a part of the picture all the way down the line. But we worked with the staff during the formative stages. We constantly had meetings, citizens committee meetings. Santa Barbara was a wonderful example. They had committee meetings all over the place. They had a citizens committee operating up there on a professional basis and a paid director of the citizens committee. We worked with Pearl Chase, who was Miss Santa Barbara, the woman who set the architectural character of the city all through the process.

Then we had public meetings throughout the whole area as we prepared the plan. That's a wonderful experience, especially in county planning. And Los Angeles County is a wonderful example of this. When I went to work for the county, the word around there was they wanted to make a plan for the Antelope Valley. The fellows would go up into the valley and were run out of there, threatened with shotguns. When they went up there, they always used to say they left their motors and automobiles running when they held their meetings up there. That was the antagonism of the outside county people toward the metropolitan area. In Santa Barbara County the same thing persisted, but I just had a wonderful experience. There was a man up there,

Chamberlain, who had originally been the owner of the Montana Ranch. No, he owned the Bixby Ranch down in the harbor. He owned one of the big land holdings near Long Beach. He went up to Santa Barbara County and bought a tremendous ranch out in the country, north of the city of Santa Barbara. I started having meetings up there with these people. I would go out in the fields and meet key people that were just plowing up the soil, go out and talk to them about what they foresaw for their particular area. Theirs was different than the urban approach to planning. They wanted fifty-acre minimum lot sizes. Five acres was urban. So I went up there one night for a public meeting. I got to this meeting out there in one of these small churches in one of the small communities, I think Los Olivos, and I met with a group there. One of the people from Santa Barbara staff was supposed to come up. And these guys were standing outside the building. I met with them, walked up to them, talked to them. They said, "Anybody from Santa Barbara coming up?" I said, "I don't know." He [Chamberlain] said, "Well, if they come up we are going to leave and go home. But it's okay with you." Because I had talked to them first and I tried to find out from every one of them what their interests were. I went out to their ranches. I had no problem at all making myself known around the place. And the plan was totally

successful, totally successful.

One of the interesting things that happened in Santa Barbara County, which I had also gotten to be known for, was my antagonism toward billboards. Santa Barbara County had an ordinance which amortized all of the billboards. They were all given a period of time, ten years, in which to complete their activities and get off the land. This resulted in a court case. The county of Santa Barbara was taken to court by the billboard people. I was asked to represent the county on the planning matters related to it. I did a lot of work in the field, took a lot of photographs, and represented the county as to what its attitude was towards its own way of life.

Interestingly, in the hearing the planner sitting across the table from me with the billboard people was Gordon [G.] Whitnall. Brycis [Whitnall] used to come to these meetings. She hated my you know what, but I sat there and gave my testimony, was cross-examined. Gordon was constantly passing notes to the attorney for the billboard people. I thought, "God, he's going to crucify me in this thing." Because he was the grand old man of planning. He shouldn't have been there, but he was. I thought he could take me apart.

One of the most interesting questions that came up in the court case was, why doesn't Santa Barbara want

billboards? I said, "Well, it's a part of their economic base." Boy, that was it. The economics of Santa Barbara County is recreation, the appearance of the area. The attorney says to me, "Mr. Eisner, do you think that the quality of the appearance of this area compares with the Grand Tetons?" I said, "No, but it's different, it's different. It has its own character, its own quality, its own reputation."

The thing went through the courts, and the judge took it under advisement. Listening to the radio one night, I heard the judge commented on as saying the county of Santa Barbara has a place for everything, including billboards. Only you have to place them on the top of mountains, out of sight. I said, "Oh-oh, there goes the case." Then he turns right around and rules in favor of the county. Today, you drive up through the county on [Highway] 101, there isn't a billboard in the unincorporated area. There is in Carpenteria. I don't think there are any in the city of Santa Barbara. There are some in Santa Maria, but other than that, the rest of the county is completely free of anything that changes the quality of the scenery.

Following that, in Burbank we got into-- This is going back into some of the case studies, but dealing with billboards. Lyle and I did the plan for Burbank. Never for a plan that we prepared did we get a better reception

then we did for that one. From the council, from the people of the community, and with a major citizens committee that was there at the time. In reporting to the council, the citizens committee said they were all for the plan, with one exception (this was the chairman of the committee talking): they objected to the fact that we had set aside a park in a place on city-owned land where there was now an abandoned power station. It was a nice piece of property on a good location. This man said, "We object to keeping the property off the tax roll. It should be sold for private use." When he was through, another member of the committee got up and said, "Mr. Mayor, we would like to make this point, that the committee vote on this was fifty to one. The chairman is the only person in favor of his proposal." And the city adopted the plan with our recommendations.

We also had provisions doing away with billboards on the approaches to the city. Again, we tied it into the economic base, that they had just spent all this money on the mall, and the approaches to this mall were as much a part of the mall as the mall itself. There shouldn't be any billboards there. Well, we were taken to court again by the billboard people. We weren't, the city was. Sam Gorlick, the city attorney, asked Lyle and me to represent the city in the court case. When the billboard people

found out we were involved in it, they called off the protest and backed off. It never came to a trial. Anyway, that was our attitude on billboards.

Again, another thing that conditions my position in planning and in the overall community are freeways. We were involved in two major freeway cases. One was in Santa Barbara, where at that time the Santa Barbara people did not want that freeway to go through the city. They didn't want it, and they said, "Look, if the people have to slow down on 101 going through the city, so be it. But we don't want a raised freeway going through our city. The noise from it, knowing how freeway noise acts-- If we raise something, it goes on up to the hills." Well, the people in Montecito wanted no part of that, so the protests were tremendous. We were instrumental in fighting on the side of the city to maintain it.

Then Lyle, more than I, got involved-- We did the plan for South Pasadena. South Pasadena did not want another freeway going through its city. It already had the Arroyo Seco going through there, the Pasadena Freeway going through now. They felt that another freeway would quarter the city, would not only take land off the tax roll, but would be a terrible thing for the city. They were confronted with another problem, which persists today. Fair Oaks Avenue is a truck route. The Concord Freeway,

which was to go on through the city to the north, was to be the major truck bypass of the central traffic system. They didn't want that, so right today all the trucks go roaring up Fair Oaks Avenue. It's a hard thing to measure one set of values against another, but we were involved in that. I was invited later by the state Division of Highways to go down and meet with them to discuss a routing in Orange County, and when I met with the committee, they said, "Hey, you are the guy from Santa Barbara and South Pasadena. Thank you very much for coming!" [laughter]

HOLDEN: Associated with a point of view!

EISNER: Well, so much for these little asides.

HOLDEN: I think that they're important. I have a feeling that students today don't get much information. In terms of the basic activities of the planning commissions, they get very little exposure to it.

EISNER: Well, I think that's true, and I've done something and put it in the record. I've written a description of the things that happened to me during my work in these various communities as we went from one to another. There was never one that didn't have something that went out of left field. You just couldn't believe the kinds of things that crop up when you are dealing with somebody else's land or somebody else's right to develop. Just absolutely unbelievable. Starting in Monrovia, just a terrible series

of events. Anyway, that has taken up many typed pages that I gave to my son Stan, and we are going to try to write a book stemming from a comment made in Monrovia by the mayor. I was complaining about the terrible ordeal I was going through in taking this plan through there. It was the height of the [John] Birch Society, the height of the anticommunist activities, and Monrovia was right in the midst of it. I met him and I said, "Mr. Mayor, this has been a terrible ordeal for me." He said, "Mr. Eisner, there's nothing happening here that ten good funerals wouldn't clean up!"

HOLDEN: As long as it was the right group!

EISNER: He said, "Good funerals." No, he was picking the right guys. Well, onward.

HOLDEN: Now, I'd like to get your comments on the work that you did, which was substantially for cities--and not all for the small cities--and relating what those cities did to the surrounding area and to the metropolitan area or the region.

EISNER: Well, again, we always took into account the regional plan of highways. This was the core of things from which you really started. We also took into account an area of influence, which always got us into another community, dealing with other people in other communities and coordinating land uses with other communities. One

very special example of this is when we had completed the plan for Claremont and we were working in Pomona. Both of these are in L.A. County, of course. The standards for land use in Claremont were high. When we got into Pomona, there was a subdivision that had been filed. The tentative had been approved, but the final maps had not. They had a year at that time within which time to prepare the final map and submit it. The proposed 5,000-square-foot-lot subdivision was right next to 10,000-square-foot-lot developments in Claremont. We called this to the attention of the people in Pomona and said, "There ought to be some coordination here, because the standards for development are going to be so different, it's going to have an adverse impact on Claremont because of the reduced size of the parcels. Who wants to buy--?" You know, the difference in development standards was so great between one side of the line and the other that it would be poor planning. I talked to the [Pomona City] Planning Commission. Well, the planning commission then had the need to do something about this subdivision, because the tentative had been filed.

Strangely and fortunately, the subdivision time ran out. And they came in all of a sudden about a month or three weeks after it had run out and applied for a variance to do away with the time limitation: it was so short, their final maps were done, etc, etc. Hearings were held

by the planning commission on this matter. The planning commission split right down the middle, three to three. The chairman of the planning commission was a former student of ours at 'SC, Dick Tozier. I don't know whether you remember Dick or not. He is now a practicing architect in Pomona. Here he was looking down the gun barrel. Which way do I go? Which way do I go? He voted to approve the variance. However, variances in Pomona are only a recommendation to the council, quite unlike how they are in most ordinances, where the planning commission acts on variances or a special committee acts on variances. In Pomona it goes to the [city] council, a public hearing before the council, and naturally people present all their stuff and planning commission approval. However, about a year before, the applicant had given the council hell, refused to concede anything to them on a proposal that they had at that time, and the council remembered it. They just sat right down on top of these guys and said, "You are going to redesign the area adjacent to the city of Claremont and make an adjustment in the land uses and your subdivision."

Well, that really caused the developer, who happened to be Mark Taper-- Well, sitting in the office, I got a call from Mark Taper: "Mr. Eisner, what happened?" I explained as best I could. I said, "I explained to your

representative how he could probably lose two lots and solve the problem by putting a row of higher standard housing up against the city of Claremont, abutting it. You could keep your street design. You could keep your utilities and have a fair subdivision."

TAPE NUMBER: III, SIDE ONE

DECEMBER 10, 1987

EISNER: Well, to conclude the story on the Pomona/Claremont experience, I told Mr. [Mark] Taper that I had a way to solve the problem with very little loss to him in terms of any possibility of land development and satisfy the city's requirements. And he said, "Well, what happened?" I said, "Well, I talked to this man in your office, and he just absolutely was adamant. He wouldn't move." So he said, "Who did you talk to?" I mentioned the chap's name, and I found out later it was his son-in-law. But it was at the end of a conversation with Mr. Taper, and the city, of course, prevailed in the thing.

Before you go on with that, there was one other experience in the Claremont area that goes through a process that I think you should be aware of, because it touches on an aspect of planning that very few people in the planning field really get to know about, and that is some of the legal problems. In Claremont a man owned a Chevrolet agency located in the center of town. He wanted to move to a new site, and he bought a piece of property on Foothill Boulevard right adjacent to some of the best, highest-quality houses in the city of Claremont. Across the street were orange groves and ranches, but still the potential for development there was pretty high. He wanted

to put his auto agency on Foothill Boulevard. Well, the area was zoned residential, and he came in for a change of zone.

The city of Claremont has been known historically that if anybody says, "Today is Thursday," you can get a petition before the council with four hundred names on it the following day saying, "No, it isn't." As soon as this application for a change of zone took place, the town was in an uproar. The hearings before the council were absolutely in turmoil. The thing resolved itself around the protests of the people and the applicant being a good guy, having been in Claremont a long time, being an important economic feature of the city, that after all he was a buddy and so forth. The council split three to three on the thing, and the chairman of the council, acting mayor, sat there in the middle and said, "Look, I'm just a member of the council. Unfortunately, I have to vote last, and I'm going to be the person that's the fall guy." But he said, "Look, I think this is a good idea. I vote in favor of it." Well, immediately upon that, one of the people in the audience got up and said, "Wait a minute, Mr. Mayor! You're making a decision without the recommendations of your planning commission." Ah, procedure. So the council said, "Oh, wait a minute, yeah, we can't do that, can we? No, it's against the law." So

they said, "We refer this back to the planning commission to report to us in thirty days."

Within about two weeks later the planning commission holds its hearing, and the same thing occurs. All the people in the community come in droves and are against it, and the applicants are there with all their legal staff in favor of it. And the commission sits there and it doesn't know what to do. Finally, as all good commissions will do in a case of this kind, they say, "Let's lay it over to the next meeting." Unfortunately, the next meeting was after the period that they had within which to make their recommendation to the council. Here again, a procedural thing. So it goes back to the council without a recommendation, and the council goes through the same thing again and takes the same action, again approving it.

Then immediately a petition comes up asking that there be a referendum on this. Well, then there's the referendum. People in the community were absolutely divided on the thing, and you wouldn't-- No one would believe the story, but the vote came out dead even! They had about a hundred absentee ballots that had to be counted. They went up to the high school, and they had a community meeting in which they counted the absentee ballots. Naturally, as usual, absentee ballots are negative. The absentee ballots swung the vote against the

approval and approved the referendum against it.

So then came the question of whether the referendum was a legal device to be used in the case of zoning. It went to the superior court. At the superior court hearing, I was told to stay out of it, because I was just learning about the town--we were just gathering information and had no knowledge of their local zoning. I said fine. But the attorneys wanted me to talk about planning, so I said to them, "Okay, but don't ask me questions on zoning."

So I'm on the stand, and guess what, the first question the city attorney says is, "What's your opinion about this zoning?" [laughter] I said, "I have no opinion on it," just like that. And Ev [Everett B.] Mansur, who was consultant to the applicant, just went, "Wow! This guy just struck out." I was through, because I had just actually eliminated myself. At that time the judge called time-out for lunch. So we went back to the attorneys' office--we didn't eat--and the attorneys went through books trying to figure out how the hell they could get me to be reintroduced into the evidence. I came back from lunch and I go back onto the stand, because I was still there. And the judge says to the applicant, "You want to cross-examine?" The dumb bunny, all he had to say was, "No." But he was running for the U.S. Supreme Court. He was going to make a case. "Yes," and he asked me a couple of

dumb questions. I stayed on the stand, and then the city attorneys asked me the questions that they wanted on behalf of the ultimate land use of the city and so forth. They wanted to get my opinion of the character that I observed in the city. They then asked about my background knowledge in general about zoning, and based on just good common sense, would the proposal be a good use in that critical location?

HOLDEN: So it was a redirected examination.

EISNER: See, the street to the east was backed up against Foothill Boulevard, with walls and shrubbery planting. The opposite side of the street was orange groves. This was not the place for a commercial establishment. Anyway, this didn't end there. It goes from the trial court to the appellate court. In the appellate court they tested the question of whether the referendum was a reasonable device. The appellate court set back fifty years of law in saying that it was not an appropriate action. So the city took it to the [California] Supreme Court, and the supreme court just looked at the thing and said, "Ah, hell, what's the matter with those guys?" They just completely reversed it. Today there's an elementary school on the site. I mean, these were the kinds of things that a student never gets in school, the things that you are confronted with in the field of planning.

HOLDEN: Now, as a consultant, then, on some of the cities, were you able to get into other areas that the profession--particularly in the form of the American Planning Association--thinks are part of the planning, particularly the social and the economic aspects of planning?

EISNER: Let me take the last one first, and then we can get back to the social. The economic aspects of the plan we always took into account, but not from the terms of the economics of the operation of the city. In other words, we did not get into the economics of management or budget. We did study the economy of the city insofar as what its commercial establishment could support. We studied the economic levels of the people in the community, the relationship of the quality of the city and its life to the economic conditions which fashioned it. We studied the importance of the industry, of whatever industry they might have, and how this impacted on the city and what part of the city life that would tie in with. In the Santa Barbara plan, we had an economist on staff who actually projected city growth based on the economics of the city's income. In other words, he did a study of the export and income capital: the money that was coming into the city, the sources of that money, and how this economy was supporting the community affairs and life. We didn't get into taxation, which is another facet. Again, this was a field

all in its own, although now there are people in the planning field that do get into this in a lot more detail. I know that UCLA, for instance, emphasizes the social and economic factors of planning very, very heavily. As a matter of fact, it really has taken over the school, taken over the planning profession largely. I also remember an economist up at an AIP [American Institute of Planners] meeting that was up in Portland, Oregon, where he said, "You guys are dead. You're not talking about the realities of life. Planning is not a profession. It's a bunch of paper making." That was a condemnation of the profession as being unrealistic, of making paper plans.

But again, one other instance of this: We did the plan for Beverly Hills. I mention so few of these things. One of the major proposals that we made in Beverly Hills was the treatment of several triangular blocks that faced on Wilshire Boulevard which had very, very low-intensity uses on them. We felt that those triangles probably should be acquired by the city--clearly, these low-intensity uses--and the area turned into a great big underground parking area to serve the whole central core by building not only on these triangles but under Wilshire Boulevard. Just actually creating a great underground parking complex, and then opening up the two sides of the triangle that came onto Wilshire and building high-building

blocks along the park created in those triangles. In other words, creating additional Wilshire frontage that would have great economic value. But we didn't get anywhere, because one of the [Beverly Hills] Planning Commission members said, "Where are you going to get the money, Mr. Eisner, with which to do this?" I said, "This is not our question. Our question is, is this a good idea? I believe it's a good idea. Money will be found with which to do this. Time is a factor in this." But he said, "Mr. Eisner, if you can't justify this today, we will not have it as a part of our plan." Now, that is again the realities of the economics, as it goes.

The other thing that you suffer in dealing with communities from the standpoint of studying the economy of the city is their very, very limited economic capabilities in their own right. Many of them have very poor if any economic base. They have very little industry. They depend on commerce for the bulk of their taxes, and they add whatever they get of the ad valorem taxes on land in the city. So that in many of the communities in which we worked, to talk about economics in the broader sense is really fanning the breeze, because there is nothing that you can really talk about. There is nothing that they could tie into that would bring economic support for anything they want to do, excepting that which could be

generated by recent tax-increment bonding. This is a recent device that allows cities to put a tax freeze on property in a defined area, and any new growth that takes place can siphon off the additional taxes from that growth to pay for the bonds for the improvements that the city makes.

HOLDEN: Used in conjunction with renewal or redevelopment.

EISNER: Oh, yeah. That's right. Sometimes they've set aside areas that weren't necessarily renewal but just areas that were open, where they could say, "If you build a house on that thing, we're going to get additional taxes with which to pay off the bonds."

HOLDEN: And the social, the housing--

EISNER: Housing is the principal social element. In every one of our plans in the more recent times we had a thoroughgoing housing element, which was a study of the economic base of the community, the economics of the community in terms of the earning power of the people. What kind of a community were you dealing with in terms of who could afford what? In other words, affordable housing is affordable to who and under what conditions? So we began studying the income data. We went to the various state agencies and found out everything we could about that. We also got data on other elements which let us know what was the housing need. We did a study of the blighted

conditions. There always was a section dealing with blight, where it existed, identified house by house where the conditions were undermining the strength of the community. Even in a city like little old El Centro down in the Coachella Valley or the Indio area, both in Imperial County. We actually went in there and did a house-by-house analysis of the structure of the things. We brought sanitarians into the picture, people that would go into the house and study the sanitary conditions to find out whether or not the people were subjecting themselves to health dangers. All of that was gathered, and we had to submit that stuff. The later studies that we did under [Title] 701--and we haven't talked about 701, the [Federal Housing Act [of 1954], section 701--they began requesting major elements dealing with housing. The state housing agency [California Office of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Planning and Research] participated in this study.

HOLDEN: Of course, there were other additions to the requirements, including the environmental.

EISNER: That's right. The environmental thing has always been part of it, because in studying the character of the community you were studying all the things which had an environmental impact. If you had, for instance, an industry that was kicking up smoke or you had an area where there was heavy manufacturing creating objectionable

noise. We had to do a noise element. In other words, we would study the environmental impact of the highway noises on the city. So we did go into all these things. It's just difficult for me always to remember these details that we went into as we passed through the whole process.

HOLDEN: Obviously, as a consultant, you had a set number of things that you had to look at.

EISNER: Well, we complied with the law--let's put it this way--and went beyond it as best we could.

HOLDEN: The last question relative to the planning in the many cities around the region is the fact that you were attempting to carry out comprehensive planning. In view of the many incidents of the intervention of individuals, according to their own goals, and of various other factors in the community, how great was the ability to plan comprehensively?

EISNER: I would say it probably was limited to the extent that you were able to bring the two communities together to agree on what was to happen. I mentioned earlier when we were talking about highways where [Los Angeles] County tried to be comprehensive in the [Los Angeles] County [Regional] Plan of Highways, and they couldn't get Pasadena to agree. How could the plan be comprehensive without finding a way through Pasadena? The same is true with small communities. In many instances you have local

jealousies where a community would put a major shopping center right on its boundary in an effort to siphon off trade from the surrounding community. Actually, in this rivalry, there again, you are into economics where the business people in the community look at taxes, the city looks at taxes, and then the property owners look at income. They were looking for a site with the biggest support, biggest economic service area. So the area of influence came into the picture when they did a study. When you worked for a major outlet looking for a site, you would draw a circle around an area that they were considering, and you didn't give a damn what city it was in or whether it was on the boundary or where. So you would pick a site that was best suited to the needs of that outlet. You'd come into the city, wherever it was, and you'd ask for the zoning of that property to be adjusted to that particular end. When there are city rivalries, as there are all over everyplace you have two cities coming next to each other, there's a rivalry of what occurs at the boundaries. So coordination at that level has in many cases been very, very difficult if not impossible. But overall, the elements of coordination had to be somehow or another secured at another level. In other words, in my opinion, there should be a major planning entity with power to make decisions that affect all cities within that

area. Air pollution control is where it is supposed to happen. But in most other areas, the power of the majority, the giant, overwhelms all of the little ones as best the little ones will allow it to happen. Coordination is really at a minimum.

When I did Santa Barbara city and county, I had difficulty in coordinating the two plans. Because the city at the city boundaries wanted something, and the county had a completely different set of interests--they were agricultural interests. They were rural interests, and they wanted to maintain the life-style of the people in Montecito. We tried to put a little shopping center up on the hill, because the roads up and down from the top there, the high areas of Montecito, were terrible. They were just narrow, winding. I said, "We could put a little three-acre shopping center up here, and the people would be able to find their basic, everyday needs without going down off the hill." The people up there were incensed. They said, "We don't want it! We are willing to go down the hill. We don't want good planning. We want to maintain what we've got!"

So that, actually, comprehensiveness, Ed, has got to be in terms of those things which can be determined comprehensively. When you get down to the small minutia you get together, you are dealing with small-minded

people. This becomes another question of what is the government entity that makes decisions. The people in the decision-making role almost always are small shopkeepers with local mentalities. They don't have the big picture. Even this man who in Beverly Hills made the planning commission decision on those little areas that we wanted to create was a big businessman. He was the president and owner of the largest egg-producing industry in western America--wealthy beyond description, but no imagination, had no idea of what it meant to project beyond production of eggs. So this is what you deal with. I think the word comprehensiveness, as we know it, means that when you're studying an entity you take into account everything that is possible to apprehend and reference that entity and its immediate surroundings: the area of influence. Then, in the area of influence, try to represent to the budding authority that this is what they ought to do.

HOLDEN: Yes. And finally, is a plan forever?

EISNER: I would hope that the plan would last until the ink was dry. It's important to realize that planning is a step. It is not a final note. What you try to determine in a plan is what is a good direction. You recognize, just as we did with the civic center and downtown area, L.A., that changes were going to take place, modifications, additions, extensions, and changes in political power and

attitudes. Changes in needs were constantly going to come in. But in making the changes, it should always be done on an overall comprehensive plan, to recognize that those changes have an impact far beyond the change itself and to recognize that those changes when they are made always be done in context. That is the essence of good planning.

HOLDEN: It took us a long time to get that kind of thing into state law, that kind of principle, I should say. But it appears to be now ready to be argued about at the local level.

EISNER: I hope. See, local autonomy is a very, very strange and wonderful thing. It gives people a sense of pride, but it also sets up some wonderful barriers. You think we are having problems with the Russians? You ought to get together with Claremont and Pomona sometime!

HOLDEN: How true! Yet the little cities have, I think, sometimes more ability to draw people in, particularly into the advisory and decision-making practices than larger cities.

EISNER: It's probably true, because you contact fewer people. In a city of 2 million, who do you contact? I remember Charlie [Charles B.] Bennett going to a meeting in the San Fernando Valley when-- He was giving a public talk on the plan for the Valley, and some woman got up and said, "Mr. Bennett, you didn't come to talk to me about this!"

Bennett, in his usual way, said, "Madame, if I knew you wanted me to talk to you, I would have been delighted!"

HOLDEN: I have also noted that small cities sometimes are able to establish more detailed, often more stringent, regulations sometimes than the larger jurisdictions.

EISNER: Probably true.

HOLDEN: And the experimental--

EISNER: But I would say that that has to be conditioned on what the community is, what its background is. There are some communities where you can do this. I would say that, for instance, Dick [Richard] Weaver down in his city [Santa Fe Springs] where he works has no problems. Because 95 percent of the city is zoned for industry, and so his problems are not very intense. It's just a question of keeping industry in line. They are doing a very good job of it. But, I mean, here is a planning director of a city where they have rather uniform development. Other cities are not like that at all. Sometimes you can get people to get together and agree on a lot of things, and sometimes they agree on nothing.

HOLDEN: All right. Let's proceed on. The next subject is basically education and your experience as a teacher and in other aspects of educating the public.

EISNER: The teaching profession, of course, changed with the changes that were taking place in the planning

profession. Actually, when I entered teaching at USC [University of Southern California]--I think I mentioned earlier that I was invited down there by the dean [Arthur B. Gallion]--and met with students who were in a sense just coming back from the war. They were more mature, and they had a tremendous drive toward seeing a better world.

HOLDEN: This was 1946?

EISNER: This was 1946. These were students who were interested in architecture, but architecture all of a sudden began to look very, very narrow and limited to them. I came in there and opened up-- I made a statement probably early on, "There will never be great architecture until there is a great plan for a city." That caught their imagination, and it's true, of course, still today. Until there is a good plan, the architecture is always piecemeal, stuck away on a single parcel of land where you can't actually-- In doing the thing, it may be the greatest piece of monumentality that you could do, but you can't change the city structure, you can't widen a city street one inch beyond the subject property, you can't do anything to accommodate the off-site problems that you are creating with that building. So again, this was the way that I brought about and got these young people to think about the city as a total entity.

We did plans all over the place during the sixteen

years that I taught. We worked with cities, did wonderful jobs for them, basically in providing for the first time in their lives at least a picture of what they were. We did a land-use plan of every city and did colored maps presenting the structure of the city. We did the study of the economic base, did research in this. These kids got off in a corner, and we got some people from the school of economics to come over and talk to them. We got Art [Arthur] Grey, who was teaching economics at Caltech [California Institute of Technology] at that time, to come over and lecture once in a while. He's now a key person in the planning program at the University of Washington. We got Art Grey to come over, and he talked to them on the economics of cities, how they came to making decisions on how much commerce they could support and things of that kind which could be calculated, things that were capable of calculation.

They also studied the health conditions in the community, which brings me to a point where-- This is probably going to get "x"ed, out but it's still one of the funniest things that ever happened in all the years that I was teaching planning. We did a job for Manhattan Beach, and as we did the study down there each one of the students had a particular assignment as part of a group, three students for one subject, three students for another. One

of the groups had health, studying the health conditions in the community. During the presentation--we had it in the auditorium at the architecture complex--we invited the city council and the planning commission to come up and hear about their community. One of the final presentations was done by a chap named [Howard] Martin. He went through the statistics on health that he had collected, and finally he says, "And now I'll give you syphilis." And one of the councilmen said, "The hell you will!" [laughter] And just broke up! [laughter]

HOLDEN: These were not a part of your paid consultant work, were they?

EISNER: Oh, no.

HOLDEN: These were projects for the students.

EISNER: I had a principle that I maintained completely throughout my whole teaching profession. We would never, even after we finished a job with the students, ever go back into that community to do a professional job. In other words, the danger of having the students think that you were using them as a vehicle for getting professional work was something I could not accept and never did. As a matter of fact, I was invited out to San Gabriel to make a pitch there, and some of the competition told the city of San Gabriel that I was going to use students to do the work. They brought proceedings against me before the AIP

on the grounds that I was using students to do professional work, which of course was completely false. I never did the work there, and the charges were thrown out, that's all.

HOLDEN: AIP is the American Institute of Planners.

EISNER: Right.

HOLDEN: Now American Planning Association.

EISNER: Among other things. Now the AICP.

HOLDEN: American Institute of Certified Planners.

EISNER: Yes. Anyway, the teaching job at USC became one of involving two things: of starting studies of communities, of carrying through these studies to making proposals, and then executing the studies in the form of graphics and models and things of that kind to depict what they could visualize would be the end product of the plan that they were preparing. The one thing that we said to them was, "Look, you are never going to be in college again. No limitations on your thinking. You go as far as you can in thinking what you can do with this city. Now that you know it, what can you do to make it the most wonderful city ever invented?" All throughout the process the students used that vehicle and used all the skills and imagination that they had to create a way of solving problems in a community. One of the best examples of difficult problems is the study that we did of Catalina

Island, where the studies went beyond Avalon, down to the isthmus. The question is, how do you get from Avalon to the isthmus and create an opportunity for development there? You should have seen the study: create these gondola things on wires going all the way. They built models showing how this would all work! They did all kinds of imaginative things other than just staying with what was in existence at the time. This was the exercise at the university. I never thought of it as doing professional work, but doing work to create imaginative approaches to them to understand community. I practice this consistently.

There's one other element that I want to talk about very briefly that has to do with the ethics of doing this kind of work. One other ethical position that I took: I would never in any way buy property in any community in which I worked, either before or after. So that there never could be an accusation that I was using my decision-making recommendations as a basis for accumulating wealth, personal wealth. To this day, I own one piece of property right where this house stands. I could have taken advantage in Upland and Claremont as we were doing a plan. The land was there: $5,000 an acre. I could have bought ten acres, put down a down payment. I never wanted to allow myself as a professional to have it implied that I

was using my professional position for self-benefit. It never backfired. Never backfired.

HOLDEN: Yes. Back to the USC school of architecture, eventually a planning school developed there.

EISNER: Evolved.

HOLDEN: Evolved. Did you teach in the planning school?

EISNER: Let me give you the approach to that. When I was there, in the beginning I was in the school of architecture teaching these planning ideas to young architects, students of architecture. I brought Art Grey in at that time to help teach the course. Later on Art Grey left Caltech and joined the economics department at USC. I think it was business administration, something like that. He went over. At that time I asked him if he would join with me once a week, come down there and give a lecture on planning. First of all, we had no budget. The University of Southern California had given us nothing. We were supported in the beginning only by my being a professor at that time, associate professor in the school of architecture. This was the only money given by the university. They provided us with drafting rooms to hold the classes. Period. All the materials that we used in these classes came from contributions from the cities where we worked. They gave us money for the maps, they gave us money to print the reports, they gave us money to pay the

kids for their mileage and running around. But that was all the money that we ever got. Later on, as things progressed, I got to know Dean [Henry] Reining very well and Frank Sherwood. With the advent of Grey joining the faculty, he became a part, joined it [the planning program], and at that time Reining was involved in the thing. They were trying to figure a way to give a degree in planning. It was finally agreed upon that Reining and [Arthur] Gallion, the dean of the school of architecture, would both sign the degree. You could get a degree in architecture and a degree in planning with both Reining and Gallion signing the diploma. That was the beginning of the school. No budget excepting that which was generated within the two schools themselves.

HOLDEN: About what year was that, do you remember?

EISNER: Well, it was probably around '56, '57, '58, somewhere in there, that this began to be, because it went on with this premise until after I left. There was no school of planning. At that time the planning that was taught at USC was by myself; by Art Grey; the contributions that Frank Sherwood would make by coming over and lecturing on public administration, part of it; and by [Gordon G.] Whitnall and [Milton] Breivogel lecturing over in public administration. They did mostly administration and zoning, things of that kind. I think all the so-called

comprehensive planning, where we dealt with real live communities as the object, was done under my supervision at the school. It might be well to point out that during the course of my teaching there, the first assistant that I had was Al Boeke, Alfred Boeke, who's now quite a well-known architect. The other one was Lyle Stewart, of course, now, a consultant in Oregon and Washington.

HOLDEN: Though that wasn't until 1964.

EISNER: Well, actually it was about 1962 when Gallion left. The school was then run by a committee of faculty, and I think most of them resented me because I really did not stay at the school or participate in the community affairs of the school. I had my office. I would leave my office, go down, teach my courses, come on back and go to work in my office. I had the two things going at once. The other contacts I had: we used to have almost monthly meetings in my home. The students of my class, group after group, would come up, and we would sit around and talk about all sorts of things: world affairs and how to change the school of architecture to make it a more viable school. But I was never a part of the clique down there. When Gallion left, it was very untenable for me down there. I could see no purpose in staying. At that time I maintained my role as a member of the faculty, but I taught down in the civic center at nights. I didn't go back out

to USC during the last two years at all. After that I just got tired, and I didn't go back into teaching until back in 1975 when I went to UCLA as an adjunct professor.

HOLDEN: Mentioning Arthur Gallion brings us to your experience with him and also to writing your book The Urban Pattern: [City Planning and Design].

EISNER: Arthur Gallion was the dean of the school of architecture at the University of Southern California. He came there in the mid-1940s, I'd say 1944, '45, somewhere in there, and started in the process of giving a course in city planning as he saw it in the school of architecture. He was a very active man. Public housing was his field. Apparently as a result of his many years of experience with the Federal Public Housing Authority, he wanted to write a book on housing. But apparently there were many books that were written at that time about the field, and the publishers dissuaded him from that. Somewhere along the line in the discussions, they said, "Well, gee, there isn't a good modern book on city planning. Why don't you put a book together on planning cities?" And Gallion says, "Yeah, that's a great idea." One day he called me into the office and said, "Si, how would you like to participate with me in the writing of this book on city planning and architecture?" I said, "Gee, that's great, Art. I'd like to. I think that's just wonderful." It was a

compliment. I was getting a very close friendship with Dean Gallion at the time, but this--no matter what kind of friendship you have--was a real tribute to join him in writing a book. So I began writing all kinds of material on things that I was concerned about and sending them over to Gallion. He would rewrite the stuff and rephrase it and put it into his own language, because in my opinion--this is as true today as it is anytime--only one person can write a book. It can't be done by a team of different people unless you are writing a book that is done for a team of people. I mean a team of subjects. So I just kept on sending him stuff and stuff and stuff, and lo and behold, the stuff came back to me as it was folded into the book. They sent it in to [D.] Van Nostrand [Company] back in New York, and in 1950 it was published. I was given credit as a cowriter or something, cooperator, I don't know what the language is. I didn't care. I was in.

The book went very well and sold a lot of copies, and a few years later they thought it was time to revise it and update it. So I went about it. At that time I did a lot of work, [using] things that I picked up in the field. I was free of the university now somewhat, and I brought in things from private practice and expanded zoning stuff and the comprehensive plan and all those things, which were relatively new to the field at that time. Well, this again

was welded together, and at that time I was listed as a coauthor with him.

HOLDEN: So the second edition?

EISNER: Yes, the second edition. Following that came the third edition. The third edition, Gallion became ill and was hospitalized. I went to him and told him that I had gotten a letter from the publishers indicating that they'd appreciate it if we would prepare a third edition. He said, "Aw, Si, what the hell? We just did the thing just a few years ago. You know, why don't you just see what you can do with it? I just don't have any feeling for doing that kind of work." He was really a pretty sick guy at that time. So I went to work on the third edition and sent it in, worked it over, worked it over. When it was published, the first printing of it was a catastrophe. They were so mixed up. They must have pied the type. They did everything-- They had headings in the wrong places. Everything was just really in terrible shape. I wrote a three-page single-spaced letter identifying all of the errors and violations of good printing that were involved in the book, and the second printing came out and it was good. It was clean.

HOLDEN: Of the third edition?

EISNER: Yes, the second printing of the third edition. Well, it came a time when things again changed. New things

came into the field, growth management took place. Gallion had passed away at that time, but I was still contacted by the publishers. So when it came time to do the fourth edition, I really did a major job on the book and had a wonderful person doing the editing. Oh, gosh, just a fantastic editor on the thing, and it turned out to be a fairly good book. That went on, and the fifth edition followed on top of that. Here again, there was some elderly woman that was the editor back in New York and knew a hell of a lot about planning, and she made major contributions in the editing of the book. Excepting that when, again, the thing was printed, not a whole bunch, but a number, of errors appeared in it. So I've just completed and submitted to the publishers a revised fifth edition. One of the things that happened in the meantime which was really very interesting-- There was a review--

TAPE NUMBER: III, SIDE TWO

DECEMBER 10, 1987

EISNER: As mentioned in the review of the fifth edition, the APA [Journal of the American Planning Association] senior editor indicated a number of things that she felt were missing from the earlier editions. She felt that some of the illustrations were missing. There were a number of better illustrations, more illustrations, in the earlier editions. She felt that that lessened the interest in the book, because it lacked some of these graphics. She indicated that one of the things that she found most grievous was the fact that I didn't discuss anything about the use of computers in transportation, about which I knew very little. She also indicated that it was still a good book for certain purposes, but, basically, I thought it was a rather critical analysis. It was wonderfully fortunate that in the revisions that I submitted recently-- I found an article in the publication by the transportation organization, the Eno Foundation [for Transportation]'s publication on transportation [Transportation Quarterly]. I found an article dealing with the use of computers in transportation, and therefore there is now going to be a section in the book dealing with that subject.

In addition to that, I found a number of illustrations in the first and second editions which could be inserted

into the book. Here is where some of my difficulties arose with the illustrations: If they were photographic, it meant that they were reproduced in the book with a series of dots. To rephotograph that often caused what they call a moiré, an overlay or pattern forming of the dots that distorts the pictures. So I was up against some of these things not being able to be used, and Gallion-- Heaven knows what's happened to the stuff that Gallion did. It was sent back to him by the publishers. It was either that, or I told the publisher if they could find something back in their files somewhere in the morgue back there that they could use to replace this, fine. I also had a number of pictures of my own that I'd taken recently back in New York and our other trips that were welcome additions to places, just livened the book up, gave it a little more pictorial depth.

Another thing, one other source of information. I found a box of photographs in the garage that apparently had been loaned or given to me by a chap, an architectural student, by the name of Davis, Don Davis. Don was in the air force. He was an aviator. When he was in the air force he had these pictures taken of these various subjects. They were not war pictures. These were pictures of cathedrals, of Hamlet's castle, and of all the harbors of Marseilles. All wonderful pictures that illustrated

parts of the book and gave additional depth to it. So I was able to use this. He had also one picture taken of Genoa showing the pattern of the city as it was layed out around a great, lineal central park, at the head of which were--in flowers, pictorially--pictures of the boats in which Columbus came to America: Nina, Pinta, and Santa Maria. So here was this great lineal park in the center of town, and the pattern of the city regular, regular--block, block, block, block, block, block, block, block. And I thought, well, here again is a good illustration of what was historically the urban pattern. So little things like that were added to the book, and I think now that I've answered several of her questions that there are going to be more illustrations. Oh, yeah, and there were a lot of line drawings also in the earlier editions. Line drawings give you no problems, because they can rephotograph those and they can reproduce fine. So those line drawings are going to be in there.

So the problem was I couldn't figure out how to get them in the book. When we were back at the conference in New York, I went up and met with the senior editor. She said, "Well, I just take pages and insert them where you want them. But always create-- If you want this, there's going to have to be something here--there's two pages--something here, and you insert it. Don't number it,

because you disrupt the numbering of the book, the whole numbering pages of the book. Insert it, because you'll go to many books, you open it up, and where they have an illustration or a series of photographs there are no numbers." So here she opened up the whole avenue of how to get it done. This again was a coordination, because here was a person who was really a friend of mine. She was working for the book.

Anyway, so much for that. The book, I have heard, has sold over sixty thousand copies in its existence over the period of years, not only in the United States but in foreign countries. It has been reprinted in Spanish and in Japanese. Not recently. It was the second edition, I think. The second edition was reprinted in those two languages and distributed throughout Latin countries and through Japan.

HOLDEN: Did they generate any trips for you, particularly?

EISNER: No, I never got anything other than whatever royalties came out of them, which basically were minimal. Maybe a couple of hundred dollars a year. There was one year where there was a real demand for it, and I think I got-- By the way, the royalties were one-third for me and two-thirds for Gallion, because he did the bulk of the work in the book. I didn't have any of the dirty work to do. I thought that that was very fair. But when I took it over,

Gallion had passed away at that time, and I talked to his son [Allan Gallion], who was the heir. I said, "Now that I'm doing all this work, I think really there ought to be a fifty-fifty split." So now the royalties are split fifty to Allan and his sister and the other to me. One year I got $5,000 in royalties. This last year on this fourth edition it amounted to $2,400. But it's not much.

HOLDEN: But very satisfying I would think.

EISNER: Oh, yes. The satisfying thing is that the book is being used. They send me a statement at the end of the year of how many books were sold, and I found out for instance that-- I was talking about making these corrections in the next printing of the book, and I was told that the thing was already in a second printing.

HOLDEN: The fifth edition?

EISNER: The fifth edition is in its second printing. They sold out the first printing.

HOLDEN: Now, the last edition was in paperback.

EISNER: Yes, and that came about on the part of this woman back in New York who became a senior editor of Van Nostrand Reinhold. She was from Reinhold. When she called me and asked if I would object to it coming out in paperback, I said, "Oh my, Art Gallion would give his heart to see it come out in paperback," simply because it would mean that the students would be able to buy it for less cost than it

would be with hardcover. The first year it came out in paperback it was less costly, but the next year-- Last year when it came out in the fifth edition, the darn thing was up to $30 again. So that-- But when I told somebody $30 for a text, they said, "That's cheap! Inexpensive." Texts cost a fortune these days. Anyway.

HOLDEN: You remarked the other day that the book seemed to be going to undergraduate students more than the graduate students.

EISNER: Yes. Well, my experience is limited in this sense, that I don't know really where they go. But I know that UCLA doesn't use them. I don't know what they do at USC, because they have an undergraduate program there, as I understand it. Cal [University of California, Berkeley] has a graduate program, so the chances are that the guys are pretty sophisticated for this sort of thing. When [T. J.] "Jack" Kent [Jr.] was the head of the school up there, they used the book, because Jack Kent knew that what I was treading on down here and what he was treading on up there were the same path.

HOLDEN: Jack Kent, of course, then wrote a book on the general plan himself a few years ago.

EISNER: That's right. [tape recorder off]

My next experience in planning was much later, beginning in 1974, when I became a member of the dean's

council [in the Graduate School of Architecture and Urban Planning] at UCLA, being invited there by Dean Harvey [S.] Perloff, whom I had known some years before while he was at the University of Chicago teaching planning in the graduate school back there. At that time he invited me back to Chicago to become the campus planner for the university and to also give some courses in planning, so that the university would pick up half the salary and the administration would pick up half and his school of planning would pick up the rest. I went back to Chicago, met with him, looked over the situation, met with Walter Blucher, the executive director of the American Society of Planning Officials, and talked to Walter about the possibility of my doing a good, creditable job in the program at the University of Chicago. Walter said, "There is only one thing that you want to be sure of, that you get an adequate salary here. Because the only thing they respect in this community is money." So loaded with that, I met with the president of the university and with Perloff, sat and discussed my qualifications, and then came the sixty-four-dollar question of what I expected as a salary. I had no area to think about, and I said--it sounded like an awful lot of money at the time--I thought about $20,000 a year, which I found out later was more than President [Lawrence A.] Kimpton was getting at the university. Of course, it

didn't add to my getting the job.

HOLDEN: Let's see, were you in private practice at that time?

EISNER: I was in private practice at that time. But I had no idea just exactly what a job at this university would pay. I met Perloff at that time and became very fond of him, and apparently he remembered me. When he invited me out to become a member of the advisory committee at UCLA, I jumped at the chance. Then he went to Europe. He took a year of absence I think on a leave, and I was invited to a meeting in which Mr. [Samuel] Aroni, who was the acting dean at the time, asked if I would be interested in joining them at UCLA. He told me that they had established at the school a private-practice arm called the Urban Innovations Group. It was located off campus, but two faculty members were assigned to the project, and the idea was to give the students in the graduate school some practical experience as they were in their final year of training at the university. It sounded like a good thing to me, and business in the office was getting a little slow at that time. So I turned the office over to my son Stan [Stanley Arthur Eisner], who went on with the private practice for a while, and I joined UCLA as an adjunct professor. I kind of laughingly have always called myself a "junk professor," because the people on the faculty, recognizing that I had

no doctorate degree, never did recognize me as a full member of their family. I was an outsider. The adjunct professor was still a full professor but not-- It was a clinical rating. In other words, you came on to teach from a professional standpoint. Anyhow, I accepted the assignment and brought the planning programs that I had generated over the years into the university. I didn't realize at the time what I was doing, because the university wanted the students to have real jobs and not just student-training jobs, because they wanted the money from those jobs to go toward the training of these students and to pay for the expenses of operating the office. The money they got from the university at that time was some $30,000 a year. Remembering that we were paying the students a nominal amount of money, that that amount of money was very, very tight, and so I had to bring in work. Now, I've never really been a guy to go out and flush the bushes for work, but I began finding the jobs did come in there.

We did a very creditable job working on the [Salt River-Pima] Indian reservation over in Arizona, which I had planned as a part of my office planning about three years before. I'd been working in Scottsdale, and after the Scottsdale job was finished-- The Pima-Maricopa Indian community was immediately to the east of Scottsdale. They

had the same common borderline on the east. Well, the eastern boundary of the Indian reservation was a common borderline with Scottsdale. Of course, the Indian reservation was practically free of population. It was an agricultural community, and Scottsdale was built up intensively right across the line. I thought, "Well, this is kind of an interesting sort of a program from a planning standpoint. What an opportunity here that--" People were really poverty-stricken. They had the land. They had a hundred square miles of land. The westerly half of it, most of it was used for agriculture. But they leased the land to California agribusiness, whose employees would come over, plant the crops, raise the cotton, raise the lettuce, reap the harvests, and pay the Indians $50 an acre a year for the use of the land. Now, this sounds like a great thing, but they had ten acres that they could lease from a family. So the Indian families were getting $500 a year for the use of their ten acres of property, and that was pretty close to a survival thing for them.

I began looking at the economics of the situation there, not fully conversant with the Indian philosophy. I had that to learn. But we prepared a plan for the hundred square miles where the westerly half of the reservation would be where the Indians would reside on their own land, because that was one of the premises--they did not want to

get off of their allotted land. But that they would lease the stuff out as best as they could for whatever use they could put the land for agricultural purposes. Possibly along Pima Road we would find some places to locate some commercial establishments which might reap some of the harvest from the population concentration across the street in Scottsdale. So we prepared this plan for them. On the easterly half I proposed a great university city and recreation facilities and housing. I figured they would lease the land for all these purposes, and some industrial uses also. The Salt River ran as the easterly boundary of the reservation. Along the river and a great big wonderful series of mountain peaks right close to it called Red Mountain we would have a major recreational community, a major one with the water from the river being there and all that which is so foreign to this particular part of Arizona most of the year.

They accepted the plan, but never really-- I went through the motions with them. There was no objection, but two years later when I was at the university, they had come to the opinion that this plan was not what they wanted. You talk about change. So we got the university and the 701 program to set up for this, and I went out there and I began asking what they did want, what they objected to in the first plan. First of all, their objection was that

they didn't want white men living on the reservation. They felt that if that area to the east was developed for communities similar to Scottsdale, they would lose jurisdiction over their own land even though the land was leased, that people would be living there and want the right to self-determination. The one thing they prized above everything else was the right of jurisdiction. There were police problems. The Indians have their own police force. This right to arrest anyone on their reservation-- If it's a white person, they would bring him into the county and turn him over to the county authorities, but if they were Indians, they would punish them and imprison them and all the rest on their own land. So they could discipline their own people. They could not discipline the white. They did not want to have ten thousand white people running all over their land and having the problem of having the ownership of the land and having to discipline them.

So the plan changed radically. The eastern end remained pretty much what it had been originally with some additional commercial stuff scattered along the edges. Some industrial stuff on the south end, which was just exactly where it belonged, along the river. The river doesn't flow except in the wintertime. The rest of it, they currently live on their own property. The easterly

area was to remain as an agricultural reserve. A simple plan. No university. I wanted a university there for the education of the Indian people. I felt that if they had their university on their land, they'd have the pride in it and have everything to get out of it something that would be theirs. *[A community college has been built on the northwest corner of the land and now serves the Indian families.] I wanted this land developed only for one reason, that it was going to bring income to the community, because on every ten-acre parcel not every income came to the individual family. The guy that didn't get a lease, he got nothing. So I was looking for a way of creating an economic base at the community level that would support all the Indian families.

This was my idealism in this thing, trying to do something for these people, who really were wonderful people. I really enjoyed-- I worked with them, I guess, about four years, five years. They're just wonderful people. I used to go down there, used to have dinners down there. I'd go out there and eat some of the stuff that they eat. They were sickly people. They had problems with alcoholism. They prohibited alcohol on the reservation.

---

* Mr. Eisner added the following bracketed section during his review of the transcript.

They actually had absolute prohibition, except that many Indians were drunkards. What else do they have, you know? They'd eat fatty foods, and diabetes was rampant.

It was something, you know, that once you are in, Ed, if you have any social conscience at all, you want to do something. Apparently, I just had no way of comprehending the depth of their concern for their autonomy. You talk about planning, here's how you learn planning. You don't learn it by a book. Each community has a heart and a soul and effort and attitudes, and in it somewhere you can find the essence of preparing some kind of a plan to help them better themselves. This is the heart of good planning.

Anyway, we did this job at UCLA and did a number of others while I was out there for the three and a half years that I taught in the Urban Innovations Group. We had offices down on Gayley [Avenue] in town, in the heart of Westwood. But I had my class-- I used to go up and lecture once a week on campus and have classes come down and I'd lecture in our offices. We'd split it up that way, so that the kids had ways of getting down, and I had a bus system that would take me up part of the way up to campus. That was the way we operated. But during that three and a half year's time, I took an outfit that was absolutely dead broke when I went into it, bankrupt, and put it on its feet. Now it is a really viable outfit.

HOLDEN: Is it now?

EISNER: Yes. Ed [Edgardo] Contini was the head of it after I left. Ed stayed there for three, four years, and then someone else has taken it over since Ed left. But the educational processes at UCLA-- As I mentioned, they were very academic on campus, they were computer oriented, they had every social scientist that you could think of there, they were concerned with people. And I think this is good. There's got to be this. I had no criticism of this, but they did not have the way to see how this is manifest on land. And this is where things happen. Everything that we do every day of the week is on land and the relationships that exist on land. That's why the land-planning aspect of planning, and the relationships that exist there, is critical to the whole profession. You can't throw it away. I guess that's about all the educational stuff I had to deal with. By the way, the reason I left UCLA was that they found out after I was there that I was over the retirement age. Three and a half years later, Perloff said they had raised the retirement age and I was still over it, and they just couldn't renew my contract! [laughter]

I was invited up to give a talk at the University of Oregon in Eugene. There was a fellow with an [American] Indian name on the program who was from L.A., and he was

supposed to be a psychiatrist, I thought, of some kind. But I didn't realize he was black. Unfortunately, I spoke first. When I gave my talk, I said, "I plan for people. I don't try to determine whether the people are black, white, or any other nationality or ethnic group or religion. I'm concerned about the welfare of people." And I went on in that vein. Well, this guy got up there and tore me to shreds. Literally. I mean, this guy was vicious. He tied it into me. He said, "You can't plan for people. You've got to plan for specific kinds of people. You got to take care of the blacks, you got to take care of the minority groups. You can't plan for people." I learned something then, too. The guy's name was Hiawatha something.

HOLDEN: Yes, that reminded me that this idea of having to look at people and the various groups of people even goes back, possibly further, but to Patrick Geddes.

EISNER: Well, there was one other instance that I remember with people. I was working with some developers at that time that had some land south of the city of Bakersfield. I prepared a subdivision plan for the land and submitted it through the [Bakersfield] Planning Commission. Everything just went hunky-dory. It got up to the [city] council, and this was a great big council hearing. I had no problems there, because everything was worked out in advance. But before me there was a hearing on something else, and there

were a number of black people in the black community who came up to speak before the council on a specific subject. Some young black woman got up there and made a very fine presentation. And the council chairman made this terrible blunder of saying, "Madam, you are a very articulate person." And this black gal looked at him with fire in her eyes. She said, "Sir, didn't you expect me to be articulate?" [laughter]

HOLDEN: That depends on the point of view.

MRS. EISNER: Well, I think she was very sensitive, because she didn't have to take it that way.

EISNER: Oh, she took it that way because she was black and because this was an issue. She was a well-educated--

MRS. EISNER: A lot of blacks at that time were carrying their black on their shoulders.

EISNER: Well, she took it. Anyway, onward and upward.

HOLDEN: All right. The next subject that we want to go into, I think, is some of your memberships and relationships with the professional organizations of planners and the fact that there has been a great deal of interchange of ideas between the various sections of this country--in fact, around the world--in terms of planning and planning techniques and ideas.

EISNER: Well, my first introduction to the planning organization was back in 1939, when there was a group in

California at that time called the California Planners Institute [CPI]. It was made up of people in the field of practice, mainly land use and highway planning. We met in Riverside that year, and at the meeting I made some kind of a comment. I was just a neophyte, but I made some kind of a comment. Isabel [Eisner] and I left to go home, and I found out later that I had been elected secretary-treasurer of the California Planners Institute. We had a dues structure at that time, $3 a year, which I had very great difficulty in collecting. But the organization was mainly concerned about the status of planning in the state of California and in the communities that are part of the state.

We had one specific item that came up in the forties prior to the enactment of the highway legislation that would have permitted freeways. At that time there was a recommendation which I made, because I was involved with Earl Esse at the time in freeway planning. I made a resolution that we support the Automobile Club [of Southern California] and the other organizations that were fighting to get the bill enacted by the legislature. Earl Esse seconded my motion, and to show you how provincial some of these people were, the director of planning of Kern County got up and said, "Look, we have no business getting into this thing as an organization. I don't want to have to

tell my board of supervisors that I voted for the people to pressure the legislature to do anything." And Earl Esse then withdrew his second, and I lost the motion! So the support of the bill, as far as the CPI at that time, went down the drain. That gave you a little bit of an inkling of the sensitivity of the relationship of the individual planners at that time to their governing bodies, to their organizations that they were working with. In other words, they could get together and they could discuss things that were not controversial.

Most of the stuff that was discussed in 1939 actually had to do with the changes that entered the thinking about the state planning law, where people like [Hugh R.] Pomeroy and [Gordon G.] Whitnall were great presenters of arguments for the changes in the law to make it a better law. There were all kinds of conflicts in the law at that time that had to do with who was required to do the planning, because cities were required and counties were not. So that, actually, up until recently, there has been the discussion as to whether counties had to comply with the state law. Kern County, for instance, never adopted a general plan. They did away with their planning commission in order not to have-- Their board of supervisors became the planning commission. All of these things are frictions that occur in the state over such a simple thing as having a uniform

law affecting planning throughout the state. But discussions then were over the contents of the law, the elements, the mandatory elements as compared with the ones that were not mandatory. See, it was very easy to say that a land-use plan or map or whatever at that time was a mandatory part of the plan, because this was easy. This was noncontroversial. But a housing plan was not mandatory. Maybe you'd do it. All the other plans, recreation plans, all the rest of that was not mandatory. You could do it if you had a heart to do it and not if you didn't. So basically, the discussions of these elements that they felt should be mandatory or not were all at the heart of this. One of the great speakers at that time before the groups was Bill [William J.] Fox. He was a very strong participant in it, because he saw the engineering aspects of some of these things that were being discussed. And not only this, but in the subdivision map act that he was also concerned with. The stories that sometimes arose at these meetings gave you an insight as to how the state government acted. For instance, Gordon Whitnall in a presentation down at USC stated one time to a group of one of our planning meetings that the U.S. Highway 99, which is now I-5, was built down in Piru Canyon, which in his mind was one of the best water resource areas in the state of California, Piru Creek coming down into this

canyon. He said the state highway built their highway right down in that canyon, just eliminating it as a water resource. He said here was the story: There was a lack of coordination within the state government itself, because the water resources agency was at one end of the stream and the highway builders were in another. They didn't even talk to each other at a state level. We know the history of this, that it [the highway] has been removed out of that canyon, and it is now one of the great reservoirs in the state of California.

HOLDEN: That's part of the aqueduct system.

EISNER: Part of the aqueduct and a great recreational source, among other things. We used to drive there all the time going up to Bakersfield and north. Now you just remember that the road leads down there and goes right down to the river, to the lake, and good-bye. But they rebuilt that route at least three times in my lifetime. When first I traveled it, it was in 1924 when I went to the state track meet held up in the Bakersfield area. It took us five hours to get across the ridge, and the car froze up part of the time. We went over in a Ford, and the darn Ford wouldn't make the hills. But that gives you an idea of the changes that have taken place in the planning profession. Still there are things that don't show coordination as necessary at the state level that you can

run into in planning. When I was invited to speak--actually, to lecture--to all the division managers of the [United States] Bureau of Land Management [BLM] in the state of California, I met Mr. [Russel] Penny, who was the state director when he was over in Arizona. And when I was there in Arizona, in doing the plan for Clark County, I went to the Bureau of Land Management to discuss my work in Clark County, where I set aside land for all the schools and parks in the whole county area that was about to be urbanized and got the Bureau of Land Management to reserve these sites for public use, so that when these areas developed, if they developed, there would be public land for schools and parks all over Clark County. And it's there today. But anyway, meeting with Penny and his people, they were in charge of 9 million acres of public land in the state of California. This gives you an idea what BLM is. The people who were in charge of that land didn't know anything about planning. I spent a year with these people, once a month for three days, giving them some kind of an idea of what they had to look for. I was up against other things: national policy on the use of land and what they could do with it and what they could not do with it. I was told by them that in many cases because of pressure of public officials, they gave land away to private use, which blocked off access to major recreational

areas. Because they had no plan. Anyway, that's just an aside of the meaning of some of the work that you do in the field of planning.

Anyway, the California Planners Institute grew slowly. More people became members in it, but it was still a very small organization until 1946 after Charlie Bennett and Milt [Milton] Breivogel came out here, and the City of L.A. hired an eastern consultant to come out and help form the zoning ordinance of 1946.

HOLDEN: That was probably Mills.

EISNER: Earl [O.] Mills, right. Earl came out here, and he at that time was president of the American Institute of Planners in the east.

HOLDEN: I didn't realize that.

EISNER: He convinced Charlie and Milt that the California Planners Institute ought to be part of the national organization. There was tremendous opposition out here. We wanted our local autonomy. We didn't want those easterners, the Harvard [University], Yale [University], Penn [University of Pennsylvania], Princeton [University] guys, telling us how to run our affairs in California. No question, we wanted no part of it. One of the strongest advocates of local autonomy was Harry Bergh. Harry just wanted-- He said, "We don't want to have those easterners making our rules for us. We got a good thing going here.

It's a simple organization. Let's keep it that way." On the other hand, the people up in the northern area, Jack Kent and his group, the northern area was far more progressive than they were down here. When it came to a vote as to whether or not to join, the vote went to join, and guess who became the first president of the California chapter? Harry Bergh. [laughter] Anyway, I was still very active in it, and I was elected the second president of the statewide organization and was president for a year. I don't remember exactly what the year was, but it was somewhere around '48, '49.

HOLDEN: 'Forty-eight, it says here.

EISNER: 'Forty-eight?

HOLDEN: Yes. I remember sitting in Fresno with you making up the agenda for the meeting, so that's how I remember. [laughter] It was not really too formal either.

EISNER: No, we had a loose organization. But basically, the California Planners Institute and the AIP, as it became, really to a large extent was a social organization. The meetings were very simple. They dealt with some matters of interest to planners, some controversial matters, but basically it was an interchange of information between the north and the south and the different attitudes that existed in these two areas. The people in Northern California and Jack Kent maintained the

attitude that I found to exist when I first went to Berkeley, that there was Northern California--the San Francisco Bay Area--and the desert. Everything in the desert was nothing, and Southern California was the desert. That attitude has persisted over the years on the part of the people in the Bay Area toward the south, maybe not as strongly now. Maybe they resent us even more now that we have so much economic power and political power.

HOLDEN: It is interesting that various attempts to break up the organization did not succeed.

EISNER: I was at the center of that battle, because I fought with all my power against Jack Kent and Fran [Francis J.] Violich. As a matter of fact, I went up to Fran's house one evening when I was in Berkeley, and we had the damnedest fight that you ever heard in your life, me and-- I think Violich's wife became frightened that I was going to hit somebody, I was so excited about this. My argument was very simple. We need one organization in California that can speak for planners in California. It has to be at a statewide level, because the only influence that you can have in this state is at the state level. All the legislative actions had to be unified through one element, and that of course was before we even had divisions. It was just at that time the AIP, no northern section, southern section, and all the rest of that.

That's happened since that time. Apparently the division hasn't done that much harm, because the organization has really grown much too cumbersome for all the people to travel to all parts of the state. We still have a statewide meeting each year somewhere in the state, where some three or four hundred people come together.

But the organization grew, and then again within the organization there was a split. AIP was one organization, and alongside of it was ASPO, the American Society of Planning Officials. Of course, in Southern California we had the [Southern California] Planning Congress. But the Planning Congress was made up mainly of public officials and the hangers-on, the consultants and some of the staff of some of the cities. The AIP was the professional planners, theoretically, and the ASPO was the peripheral groups who were interested in planning. Financial, real estate, the academic stuff--these were the ASPO members.

Now they joined. ASPO and AIP became one as APA, the American Planning Association. That went on for a couple of years until there was a split in the membership, wanting somehow or another for the professional planners to have their own particular organization. Because they felt that the things that they were discussing, the things they or we were interested in really had nothing to do with the people interested in the broader, maybe the philosophic aspects of

planning or some of the socioeconomic aspects of it. I mean, people who were not in the actual working in the planning. So they created the American Institute of Certified Planners as the adjunct, and I got into trouble there. I always get into trouble with things. First of all, when we published the last issue of the Urban Pattern, on the front cover it said my name, APA and AICP. When I met Is [Israel] Stollman, the national director of APA, he told me that I couldn't do this. I could only say AICP, because-- But I said, "Look, I'm a member. I've been a member of APA. Why can't I do that? It's legitimate." He says, "No, but it's against our policy." So in this revision of the thing that I sent in, I had to lop off the APA and just leave AICP.

Now, I don't know why all this, but the thing, power, probably indicates a tremendous change that's taken place in this very, very large organization that now exists. Because it is now really deeply concerned with the socioeconomic aspects of planning, much more deeply than they ever thought it could happen. All the fears of getting involved in the socioeconomic things seem to have left the planning profession, and more and more of the planners have now become either socioeconomic planners themselves or now bring in the socioeconomic people to become part of their planning programs everywhere.

HOLDEN: Do you think that partly relates to the rise of a number of important planning schools that have perhaps a different attitude than the practicing planners who are out there in the trenches administering planning?

EISNER: I think that's true. This, of course, adds one of the real problems to the picture, and that is that it can get so academic that it loses contact with the world in which people have to do their planning. Now, this is the thing that I feel about it, the good thing about it. The guy that's being trained as a planner, if he gets a good spectrum of training, no matter where he goes and in what profession he finally winds up, as an adviser to a council, an adviser to a corporation, adviser to anybody who is concerned with any aspect of urban or rural living, he'll have a context at least behind him of some education with which to measure action and the things that might occur as they affect people.

TAPE NUMBER: IV, SIDE ONE

DECEMBER 10, 1987

EISNER: Well, I just would like to make a concluding statement in reference to the responsibilities of a planner in society, and that is that deep concern about the welfare of all people. A deep concern about not only making paper plans or long-range theories, but to look at what is happening today and to actually, within the frame of reference of the world in which we live, understand our responsibility as dealing with the welfare and dealing with the happiness and freedoms of people everywhere. To travel all over the world has been one of the major educational features of my own particular life. I've had the good fortune to be able to travel to many parts of the world: Asia, Africa, South America, North America, and in the South Pacific, everywhere, and to observe how people live and how they accommodate themselves to the environment and see how similarities exist. How easy it is to see how the people in Caracas, Venezuela, tore down, destroyed the high-rise public housing buildings, because they were always used to living on the land, to see their rejection of a false way of providing provided by the do-gooders who had no idea whose problems they were solving. To understand the needs of people. And to actually participate at all levels within your community and within

the areas of government in an effort to improve the quality of life. I think this is the major charge to all planners.

HOLDEN: As a final item, I would like to add to the record that Mr. Eisner has been, among other things, president of the California chapter, AIP [American Institute of Planners]; member of the board of governors, national AIP; member of the national committee on planning ethics, AIP. He has received the southern section California chapter APA [American Planning Association] service award, 1974; the California chapter APA distinguished service award, 1981; and the California chapter APA Planner of the Year award, 1984. I would like to ask Si to add a comment on one of these honors.

EISNER: Well, just the one that came last, in 1986, at the state conference at Yosemite National Park, when I was honored by getting a booklet with letters from many governors, senators, congressmen, and also the president of the United States congratulating me for the years of service that I've given to communities and for the fact that I've survived for eighty years.

HOLDEN: It was richly deserved!

TAPE NUMBER: V, SIDE ONE

SEPTEMBER 19, 1989

HOLDEN: We are addressing special items which Mr. Eisner believes were not included in the early tapes. He will address two or three subjects which we believe either may be appended as a supplement or incorporated appropriately in the tapes. All right, Si, you're on.

EISNER: Some of the additional subjects that I don't believe we covered in the initial processes include the role that the 701 programs played in the years between 1960 and 1980. These funds were granted by the federal government under Title 701 of the [Federal] Housing Act [of 1954] to assist cities and counties in their process of preparing plans. General plans mainly, but it included zoning plans and subdivision ordinances and many other elements in the technical field of planning. It also included a requirement that a housing program be included in the general plan. The general plans, of course, were expanded to include many, many other important factors that are part of the overall city development process. The 701 programs were instrumental literally in getting many of the smaller cities with no staff and no ability to make plans into the planning process.

The unfortunate thing about so many of the ones that were prepared at considerable expense to the community in

terms of time and to efforts on the part of the consultants and finances on the part of the federal government [is that the plans] were not followed in the ensuing years. The reason why they were not followed, of course, even when they were very well supported during the planning process was the fact that it was so easy to make political decisions and not to adhere to anything, not to see the plan. This is one of the failings in most communities. They didn't ever post the plans anywhere where they could be seen during the decision-making process.

But under this funding process, because the money was free, the communities indulged in preparing plans and became conscious of the process. During the key portions of it, many young people came into the field to administer the programs, administer the zoning. Through the process of doing the plan these young people were educated in what planning was. Since most of the smaller communities, when they did employ someone, had to hire lower-salaried employees, they took people from engineering, they took people from secretarial work. They became overnight planners.

It's kind of a strange and unfortunate thing that after all of the effort literally very few of the plans were ever followed. One of the remembrances that I have occurred in the city of Riverside, where when the plan was

presented to the [city] council, one of the councilmen said, "Well, let's adopt it. We won't follow it anyway." And that was the terminal of the plan. However, it must be said for the plans that since one of the truly critical agricultural areas, citrus areas, an orange grove, has been identified as an historical monument, that the city had acquired the citrus grove. It is still in process as a part of the city's environment. So not all is lost there.

HOLDEN: Si, we might just mention as kind of a postscript that the California law was subsequently changed to give the general plan a greater position, a position even more than ordinances which established zoning and so on. Were you in any way responsible for that or do you have any comments on those subsequent laws? They did seem to help and to have some method of getting people to follow the plans.

EISNER: Well, it is true I helped a little bit. I was working on it and tried to make the [Los Angeles City] Council and the [Los Angeles County Regional Planning] Commission conscious of the planning process and its significance as a basis for making zoning decisions. Los Angeles County, of course, never did get many of their works accomplished until they adopted a really comprehensive general plan. Other communities, on the other hand, adopted things

and just didn't pay any attention to them. For instance, operating out of the city of Bakersfield, the Kern County Board of Supervisors became the planning commission and took over the role of doing both of the jobs and therefore eliminated the most important function in the planning process, which was the hearings and the opening of the public's interest in the planning process and in the events that were taking place. But it is true, Ed, the fact that it is now more critical in the eyes of the law that these zoning and all other activities be in conformity with the general plan. Many, many activities have been challenged in the courts, and wherever there was a challenge, the court held that the more interesting and more important project was the general plan and that all other things must be based on and adhere to the proposals of that plan.

But it must be said that as in one instance that I was witness to, or part of, down in the city of Torrance-- There was a great struggle on the part of the city in terms of the appeal by an oil drilling company to come in and sink wells in an area that was not zoned to permit that type of activity. The general plan showed that the area was part of the central business district, and it was also zoned for commerce. The [city] council and [Torrance City Planning] Commission started and held hearings to change the zoning. I called attention to them that they couldn't

do this without violating their own general plan, and so they just merely delayed the hearings and changed the general plan to accommodate the zoning. So here is another example of what is the wrong way to do things, because the plan was originally correct. It had every reason to protect the great investment that was already involved in the commercial developments in the so-called central business district. They shut their eyes to that and disregarded it and permitted the site that was to be drilled on to put in about sixty wells on a relatively small parcel of ground. They slant drilled all over the place. But I do believe the general plan is the most important document that can be amended. It has been amended, but it should be amended for a reason and not as merely a matter to accommodate some developer. I think that would take care of that particular subject.

I wanted to dwell a bit more on the educational processes, at early stages particularly. Before there were any real substantial educational systems going in the colleges, either in UCLA or USC [University of Southern California], which was the earlier of the colleges to have such a program, the only education for the young people coming into the field was through experience in the offices themselves. And with one additional addendum to that, and that addendum was to come from the planning associations.

In California there was the [Southern California] Planning Congress, which became the place where both laypeople and planners would go to hear the subjects of planning presented and discussed. In addition to that, the AIP [American Institute of Planners] at that time also had conferences, which exposed both planners and laypeople to subjects of planning, being led by people from many parts of the country and the world.

HOLDEN: Were you thinking about ASPO? The American Society of Planning Officials?

EISNER: In addition to that, there was ASPO, which, like the Planning Congress, was more a group of laypeople to which the planning technicians attended sort of as guests. Many of the people who were in AIP were also members of ASPO. That's American Society of Planning Officials. But this was, in fact, more or less an effort to bring the city council, the mayors, the real estate people, the financiers, and others who were interested in land development together in forums where the principles of planning were discussed and presented in an educational manner. But I think that the two most important elements in the early days were the offices in which planning was being practiced-- Because most of the people that came into the field were without any planning background, and they became the planners through people like Charles [H.] Diggs and

[Hugh R.] Pomeroy and Bill [William J.] Fox and others. They were the people who were the teachers. Werner Ruchti likewise was one of the really dedicated people helping the younger people coming into the field learn about the practices of good planning. But it must be remembered that at that time planning was a much simpler field. It was land-use planning. Basically, the land-use planning was zoning, because there were only two really major plans that were evident in the early days, and they were the highway plan and the zoning plan. Then came the freeway plans, and other elements were added to the field. It is very, very important to understand the role that the Planning Congress and the AIP and the California Planners Institute played in the educational process in the early days. But most of it occurred with people working on the job and learning as they went along.

In the areas of citizen support, this was called for with great emphasis in the 701 programs. It was mandatory to have citizens committees formed who would first be involved in the educational process, educating themselves about the planning programs that were to be adopted. Then if there was anything that they could contribute to the plan, it was their job to contribute in the discussions and public hearings and other avenues in the press. So that, actually, along with the other elements-- I don't know if

this was mentioned anywhere, but the press certainly had a very important role in both the planning process and as an adversary to the planning process. They could have been more effective perhaps if there had been some more constructive people working in the reporting end or if the editorial policies of the paper were not antiplanning, which in many cases was true.

One other subject I'd like to mention dealing with the early history of planning is the role of the people who were consultants. Both in Northern California and in Southern California there were a limited number of people who through education and experience became planning consultants. Some of them had offices with people that they employed. Others were lone wolves operating simply by themselves. In Northern California there was [Walter] Hahn [Jr.] and Wise, Larry [Lawrence] Wise, and in central California there was another Wise [Harold F. Wise] and another planner whose name I don't recall, who was very, very active in the San Joaquin Valley. Northern California had two men whose names were [James M. and Ronald] Campbell. They worked north of San Francisco mainly. As a matter of fact, it was sort of interesting that when they talked about Northern California they used to call it "Campbell country." In central California, Hal Wise and I, Si Eisner, became planners for several cities in the

central part of the state and the coastal area, mainly in Los Altos.

HOLDEN: Is that Harold?

EISNER: Yes, Harold F. Wise, yes. In Southern California there were very few people in the field. Gordon [G.] Whitnall and Ev [Everett B.] Mansur, Fritz Iwasco, and Charles Eliot III were active in the smaller cities of Southern California. Si Eisner, joining with Hal Wise, began our practice by work in San Bernardino and expanded throughout Southern California and then went up and worked in Monterey and several other places in the northern part of the state, then expanded into Arizona and Nevada. These were people who were the pioneers in the field of consulting, and today they are a very, very small minority in comparison with a great number of people who call themselves planning consultants. As a matter of fact, one of the features of many architectural offices and engineering offices is that they list planning as one of their subjects. They will do many of the things that planners do in addition to the engineering and architectural work for which they are trained most capably.

There have been a great number of discussions about licensing of planning or planners. There was a split, a very, very strong split, in the state of California. Many of the people up in the northern part of the state felt

very strongly that you could not license a man's imagination or the field of planning, because the planner was seldom responsible for the end product that was adopted by the cities. Through the process of public hearings and adjustment by the commission and the council, the plans sometimes didn't resemble what the planners presented and recommended, so that actually licensing the field became very nebulous. They felt that the most important factor in licensing was the competence and the ethical attitudes of the planners who were in the field and not by some mechanical process where you were evaluated, possibly on a computer, to determine if you have the right number of points so that you could be qualified to practice in the field. Up until this time, only New Jersey and one or two other states had gone through the process of licensing planners. In California this has not been a recent issue. I personally was very neutral in the situation, because I felt that in both instances there was a certain amount of merit, but I guess that I felt more strongly that it should not be a licensing process and that you should prove yourself on the basis of your competence in what you were doing.

HOLDEN: This concludes this session on the reminiscences of Simon Eisner.

INDEX