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Heather Zavod

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Interview with Professor Richard (Dick) Buel for the Wesleyan Oral History Project

Heather Zavod

December 9, 2015

HEATHER ZAVOD: It is December 9, 2015, and I am talking with Richard (Dick) Buel who is retired from the History Department at Wesleyan. Professor Buel, I'd like to ask you how you became interested in history and how you came to Wesleyan.

RICHARD BUEL: I got interested in history at my prep school. I had a couple of wonderful teachers, who exposed me to a great many aspects of the subject, including Toynbee's *Study of History*, which was quite a morsel for a youngster to digest. But when I went on to Amherst, I first thought I would do pre-med and actually did advanced courses in all the sciences except biology, before concluding that I really didn't like spending all that time in the lab. So in my junior year I transitioned into political science, taking one history course in the first semester as a supplement. It only took half a semester to revive my former interest in history in preference to politics, which seemed to me to be little more than current events. An honors degree in history from Amherst led directly to enrolling in Harvard's PhD program, where I spent the last four years of a seven-year stint there as a resident tutor in Leverett House, teaching three-fifths of my time for all but the final year when I went down to one-fifth to complete my thesis. Having been in New England since the age of 12, I was very pleased to join the Wesleyan History Department in the autumn of 1962.

HZ: Can I stop you for a second? When you came to Wesleyan were you recruited specifically for subspecialties in the history department?

RB: Well, they had a problem. Three key people had left the department during the preceding academic year, one of whom taught the 19th-century American history survey, which was central to their program. While the 19th-century was not my research specialty, I had read widely in it for my general examinations and found putting together a survey of my own for the first time exciting. In the fall of 1962 Wesleyan still held Saturday classes and more importantly administered comprehensive examinations to seniors completing the concentration, so the students really did need the course. In addition to teaching that survey, I also served as a tutor in American history in the College of Social Studies. It had been established four years before as an experimental interdisciplinary program. Being exposed to so many other disciplines was a new experience for me, but my actual teaching responsibilities were very much like the ones I had performed in Leverett House. And the collegial context also reminded me of the Leverett House common room, where we routinely entertained distinguished guests. One especially memorable speaker during my first Fall in the CSS was Martin Luther King. That was before he was as famous as he would become, but I certainly knew who he was and was very impressed listening to his talk.

HZ: Where was the intersection between the History Department and CSS?

RB: CSS represents three core disciplines: history, government, economics, with an overlay of philosophy, and back then a sprinklings of sociology, although sociology was not a fully established department at the time. The

CSS curriculum was still in a state of flux, but my job was to give a small group of students a quick but intense survey of the American past centered on a selection of weekly readings and the writing of a weekly paper.

HZ: Did you have both kinds of classes, both History Department classes and CSS tutorials?

RB: Yes, a lecture course for the Department and simultaneously a small tutorial seminar for CSS, that was repeated a second time, extending into the second semester. This was a transitional period in Wesleyan's history so it was not clear that the CSS would become as permanent as it since has. During the next couple of years Wesleyan briefly became the most highly endowed institution per capita in the world, which meant it had a great many choices to make about its future direction, particularly as it looked as though it could do anything it wanted. I was too junior to participate in most of these decisions, but I was aware of people thrashing around trying to figure out what the institution should become. The situation was complicated because Victor Butterfield, who had guided Wesleyan's development for over twenty years, was losing control of the situation. Vic wanted to have Wesleyan move beyond a curriculum centered on the traditional disciplines to one that was largely interdisciplinary in focus. And the CSS, along with the College of Letters and a College of Quantitative Studies, all of which had been established in 1958, were thought to be transitional models for the rest of the institution. What emerged instead was an institution far more committed to disciplinary enterprises than perhaps it should be as a liberal arts college, including PhD programs in selective disciplines, mostly in the sciences.

I watched this happening from the sidelines because I had a special problem at the beginning of my career, stemming from my thesis advisor publishing a Pulitzer Prize-winning book shortly after I left Harvard, on the topic of my PhD thesis. That meant that I had to develop an entirely new topic for my first book. Fortunately, I managed to extract an article from my PhD thesis before my advisor's book appeared. It was republished five or six times in the next couple of years in anthologies. And then my advisor helped me get two fellowships—an ACLS fellowship and a Charles Warren fellowship, which enabled me to extend my first sabbatical to a full year. It still proved to be a major challenge to identify a new topic and then produce a publishable book from scratch for my tenure. But my wife, Joy, gave me invaluable assistance and I managed to produce a publishable manuscript at the end of my sixth year and was awarded tenure in 1969.

HZ: What was the topic of the article?

RB: "Democracy in the American Revolution." And it looks a little antique in retrospect. I wouldn't say it was my best work, but it bought me some time. I had also married a remarkable English woman, Joy [Day], who, thanks to the German blitz, had grown up in East London with very little formal education. But she was bright enough to have educated herself and she was also a born writer. Her help proved to be an indispensable aid to me in sorting out my thoughts and making them presentable in prose.

While I am still on those early years, I would like to mention the esprit de corps that developed among junior faculty members during the 1960s. I remember particularly having great fun with the Nells and Bartholomews, neither of whom stayed at Wesleyan, joined later by the Butlers and Pompers. We would eat out at an inexpensive restaurant and then take in a movie. We particularly enjoyed James Bond films, because we could return from them to someone's place and uproariously reenact scenes from the film. There were also less frivolous by-products from these early associations. One was to persuade the History Department to sponsor an

interdisciplinary seminar that met during the last weeks before spring break, in other words during the dog days of the winter. This seminar met three times in that period of the year and featured at least two papers at each meeting. In addition to drawing on all the departments in division two, and sometimes on those beyond it, it was very well attended. Wesleyan also felt flush enough in those years to bring in some distinguished outsiders, like the English radical historian, Eric Hobsbawm.

Several other factors besides the sale of the primary and secondary school division of the University Press to Xerox contributed to the sense of institutional upheaval that I associate with the 1960s. One was Wesleyan's decision in the mid-decade to commit to minority education. That led to racial tensions on the campus as minority enrollments expanded. In addition, the Vietnam War was very unpopular among the student body, and developments like the student strike in the spring of 1970, brought on by the shootings at Kent State, were impossible to ignore. I was critical of the war from the beginning and helped with a program we called "Vietnam Summer" in 1968. I also participated in demonstrations against the war in New York City and Washington. Unfortunately that whole scene was colored to some extent by the advent of the drug culture on campus. I had had the good fortune to go to college before the drug culture became prevalent. But it was hard to ignore the way it affected the student body of that era and well into the 1970s.

But there were other, more positive developments taking place in the '70s and the biggest one was the re-introduction of the women to the student body. Though almost all of the quality colleges were going coed at the time, Wesleyan's decision was to some extent driven by the economic problems the institution had encountered as a result of following the Ford Foundation's recommendation at the end of the '60s to invest a good percentage of its endowment in equities. When the market subsequently tanked, the commitment during the comparative riches of the 1960s to five Ph.D. programs created financial stringency in the 1970s.

HZ: Did the money from AEP [American Educational Publications] or Xerox come just before that? Is that why they were so flush and then they invested that money and the market tanked?

RB: That was the core of the problem, but there was another dimension to it. Vic had retired and been replaced by Ted Etherington, who was more interested in using the institution as a springboard to a political career in the Senate than in Wesleyan's future. That is my explanation for why Wesleyan ended up repudiating Vic's vision for the University, though the CSS and COL have survived largely as institutional counter cultures—to the present, and they have recently been joined by a College of Environmental Studies. In retrospect I think we would have done better to invest in residential living that supported Vic's interdisciplinary colleges. That might have made us a one-of-a-kind undergraduate institution as well as the preeminent one in the country. We certainly had the financial resources to do so, but the majority of the faculty wasn't interested in that, and since the character of the faculty in turn affects the character of the student body, we took another course and adding women to the student body helped keep us afloat after our endowment started to shrink. Bringing women to the institution was looked upon as a way of expanding enrollment and therefore revenue without diluting the quality of the student body. But there were costs to doing so because we also had to expand certain facilities like the art center, athletic facilities, and the dorms. Wesleyan also had very few woman faculty when I first joined the faculty. In the History Department only Rosalie Colie, who left shortly after I came. In the '70s we started

hiring women faculty to redress that situation. I must confess to a certain disappointment with the first generation of women who came into my department, though there were notable exceptions. As a minority coming into an institution that had previously been mostly male, some of them developed a defend-the-fort attitude that consumed their best energies and let academic politics compromise, and in some cases, completely suppress their scholarly identities.

HZ: Rather than academic scholarship?

RB: To my way of thinking, always with distinguished exception, it was a wasted generation. Now what's interesting to me is that the second generation of women faculty no longer seem obliged to fight these battles. The younger women who have come into the department are very impressive, so I'm optimistic that we have gotten over that hump.

To continue with the 1970s, these years were professionally very important to me. I published my first two books with the help of several foundation grants, I joined the editorial board of *History and Theory*, and I identified a historical problem which I would devote fifteen years to exploring. Perhaps I should say something more about *History and Theory*. When I was a graduate student at Harvard, I had become acquainted with George Nadel. He was an associate professor of history, but without tenure. In addition to developing a popular introductory social science course with another faculty member, he had established a journal that served a niche, which no other publication at that time did. A tennis partner of mine, Bruce Mazlish, was a close friend of George's, and through him I learned George wanted an institutional home for *History and Theory*, now that his Harvard appointment was coming to an end. After I got to Wesleyan and I realized that the institution was looking for ways to employ its new wealth, I was able to initiate the process that eventuated in *History and Theory* being taken over by that portion of the University Press that remained after the sale to Xerox. There were problems that had to be surmounted before this transpired, but finance wasn't one of them as the journal was only expected to cost the University annually about \$40,000. Instead the problem was who on the faculty would take charge of the journal. There was a senior man who would have been more than happy to take it over, but he clearly would not have been acceptable to George. We were fortunate in being able to hire Dick Vann, whom George had known at Harvard, just as *History and Theory* became a possibility. Dick assumed the role of executive editor under George's oversight, while Louie Mink from the Philosophy Department, who had published in the journal, agreed to assist Dick as associate editor. Then after my first book was finally about to appear in 1971, they invited me to join them as an additional associate editor, and I stayed on in that capacity for 20 years, until 1992.

HZ: What were your first two books?

RB: *Securing the Revolution, Ideology in American Politics 1789-1815*, in 1972, and *Dear Liberty, Connecticut's Mobilization for the Revolutionary War*, in 1980. One thing about my scholarly career that I think is a bit unusual is that each book led me to questions that I was able to address in the next book. Before I was through, I had explored quite a few different aspects of the revolutionary period, broadly construed as the era between 1730 and 1830. I consider myself fortunate in actually having had a chance over the span of forty years to address most of the questions each of my previous books raised.

HZ: Do you feel that the university gave you the freedom to pursue your writing?

RB: Very definitely. I have produced 10 books in all during 40 years on the teaching staff and 10 years of retirement. Wesleyan's sabbatical policy of one semester off after every seven of teaching, together with being very fortunate in winning fellowships, enabled me to take five years off of the forty years I was on staff. Of course, there is a disadvantage to that because it interrupted my connection with the students. But I found it very exciting to participate in helping to shape a field of knowledge, and I am grateful to Wesleyan for enabling me to do that.

Getting back to the 1970s, I should also say something about being chair of the department at the end of the '70s because, though it was a contentious three years with the department split over such issues as a secretarial strike and unionizing the faculty, we nonetheless managed to do some constructive things despite our divisions. The one I am most proud of is our redesign of the history department curriculum from one focused essentially on Europe and the United States to one that embraced the history of the world. The process was a gradual one and began incrementally in the '60s with the hiring of specialists in Asia and Africa, followed in the seventies by specialists in China, Japan, and Latin America. But this proceeded largely without a curricular revision. In 1980 we actually managed to redesign our concentration so that Asia and the third world became specialty tracks available for our students to pursue in addition to Europe and the United States. We also during my chairmanship instituted a research requirement for the concentration and created an honors colloquium for our undergraduates undertaking a senior thesis.

HZ: How about the tenure process? Were you involved in that?

RB: All tenured professors were, and there were some controversial cases. During my chairmanship the most controversial one involved Henry Abelove. The History Department was divided, but on balance decided not to support his tenure. He then appealed to the Academic Council and I had to manage that situation as chair of a divided department. It was a very difficult position not made easier by some questionable student politicking that was going on. The debate over Henry's tenure more or less replicated divisions in the Department that had previously arisen over a secretarial strike followed the next year by an attempt to unionize the teaching staff. Henry had enthusiastically supported the secretarial union and faculty unionization, while many of his critics opposed it, fearing that it would lead many of our more distinguished colleagues to leave the University.

HZ: Were Richard Slotkin or Allan Berling involved in that?

RB: I would guess Slotkin supported unionization because he had endorsed that kind of activity when we were both part of a junior faculty organization earlier in our careers. But I don't fully recall and don't have any recollection of where [Allan] Berling stood on the issue. However, the conflict over unionization ended farcically when its proponents brought in someone from another institution where the faculty had unionized. That person proved to be very unimpressive, or to put it another way, a complete jerk. I couldn't believe what we were looking at since anyone who was on the borderline would have shied away from unionization on the basis of his performance. The unionizers subsequently decisively lost a faculty vote on the issue, I think largely on the basis of having sponsored that event. But to get back to the Abelove tenure case, he eventually won his appeal, but moved to the English Department when the full professors in the History Department subsequently

balked at promoting him to full professor. He certainly had more in common with the people in literature than people in history.

HZ: Was the faculty able to achieve what it would have had through unionization? Salaries and benefits and so forth?

RB: Wesleyan always paid good money on time and I don't think anyone in the academic world expected to get rich teaching. And a semester off after every seven teaching is as good as you can find in the industry. We did lose good people, who went on to have distinguished careers elsewhere, but that happens everywhere and usually is more a function of personal preferences about colleagues and places than wages and benefits. Wesleyan has also done very well recruiting recent younger faculty, and I'm really pleased with the next generation in my department.

I want to turn now to the '80s, which coincided with my finishing being chair of the department. This decade began with enormous personal promise, but brought with it several life-changing surprises. The enormous promise involved the success of a book Joy and I published at the beginning of 1984, *The Way of Duty*. It was widely reviewed, became a Book-of-the-Month Club dividend, and was the subject of an AP article that appeared all over the country, leading to our being approached about participating in making a film of it. We naively agreed to join in that enterprise, which eventually became a 94-minute television movie entitled *Mary Silliman's War* that was released on national cable in 1994. But the project was eight years in coming to fruition and did not prove to be a commercial success. However, the film was widely adopted in academic courses, so it reinforced the book. The book also brought me two major fellowships—one was an NEH [National Endowment for the Humanities], and the other a Guggenheim, which enabled me with Wesleyan's generous leave policy to take a full year and a half off. Under normal circumstances I'm not sure one should do this, but I had embarked on a very complicated project that involved traveling all over the country and to Europe, and that wouldn't come to fruition until 1998 when Yale published *In Irons*. The book is about how Britain's naval supremacy shaped the American Revolutionary economy and I think it is my most important contribution to the field. But I had just returned to teaching after that year and a half of research when Joy died, leaving me with my 16-year-old daughter to care for. That slowed considerably progress on both the film and the book. And matters were not helped by my being elected to the EPC in 1988 and becoming chair of that committee in 1989-90 at a time when the institution was going through another crisis.

A Lebanese student named Nick [Haddad] decided Wesleyan was an agent of racist oppression to the nonwhite underclasses of the world in the way it was educating its students and should be destroyed. When I received a threatening note holding me personally responsible for this crime as chair of the EPC and describing me as "pink and gray," a racial category in his thinking that we might render as "better dead, white male." I thought it was a joke. But the police said it wasn't a joke, though they failed to tell me that Haddad had been purchasing arms locally and was suspected of firebombing the president's office. My response to their caution was to have all my research notes packed up and put in a safe place. I didn't learn about the arms and the drug ring he was running to finance their purchase until after some of his lieutenants murdered him in June 1990. But I did realize he had the campus terrorized, including some of the student members of the EPC, and this did not

contribute to one's concentration on either teaching or scholarship. I remember going to a student hearing about curricular matters and Haddad coming in with a squad of bodyguards that looked and acted in a spooky way and how that changed the mood of the occasion dramatically.

So I describe the '80s personally as a lost decade for a variety of reasons noted above. But the '90s turned out to be entirely different. I attribute that change largely to marrying the love of my life, Marilyn [Ellman]. Since neither of us wanted to live in the other's house, we settled in Essex. I withdrew from *History and Theory* and turned to wrapping up that big project on the Revolutionary economy. Marilyn created the ideal working environment for me, and Yale accepted the manuscript and brought out the book in 1998. Then at the end of the decade I was invited to inaugurate the recently established Ray Allen Billington Chair at Occidental College in Los Angeles and the Huntington Library in San Marino. Marilyn had grown up in Beverly Hills and was not especially fond of the West Coast, but she urged me to take the position and we had a wonderful year, the best of my career. I attribute that to a variety of things, but the Huntington turned out to be a ideal place to work and because Occidental didn't really expect very much besides my teaching two courses, I was able to spend most of my time researching my next book, *America on the Brink*, about New England Federalism and the War of 1812. It may sound a bit crazy to go to LA to research a New England subject, but the Huntington has an extraordinary collection and scholars come there from all over the world to pursue projects that have nothing to do with California. I wouldn't have spent as much time as I did there if I hadn't been offered that chair, but I still would have had to go out there for this project, as I had previously for *In Irons*, because some of their holdings are unique.

HZ: What unique things do they have?

RB: They have bought up all sorts of things, especially manuscript collections in addition to the newspaper files, though I could have read those latter here. But the Huntington had them all in one place and to be freed of committees and to have all this material at one's fingertips for a full academic year was an enormous privilege. And when we came back in 2000, I went on reduced time with an eye to retiring in 2002. The book *America on the Brink* came out in 2005 and was selected by the History Book Club as a dividend, while I still occupied my old office in the PAC. Then Wesleyan nominated me for the humanities fellowship the Mellon Foundation had recently established for retired faculty, which I was fortunate to win. So I stayed on in my old office, which was fifty yards away from the Olin stacks until 2010, when my biography of Joel Barlow was accepted by Johns Hopkins University Press. In the downtime between books and waiting for proofs, I also did a reference book that bears the title *Historical Dictionary of the Early Republic*, and two books for the Acorn Club. That is a club that republishes materials bearing on Connecticut history and for which I served as editor for about a decade. For all the projects I did for them—there had been a previous one, making three in all—I employed Wesleyan students to help me. Before I finished these projects up in 2011, I moved to the Wasch Center in 2010 and spent a year and a half there. And in the spring of 2011 I taught a course in Wesleyan's Prison Education Program at the Cheshire state correctional institution, which is a maximum security prison. I had never been exposed to convicts before, let alone a class of them, but Marilyn encouraged me to take on the task and it turned out to be

a wonderful experience for all involved. Marilyn brought several adventures into my life, and I am sure she would have gone on doing so in subsequent years had she not learned she had AML in November 2011.

So in summary, I had a very rewarding scholarly career and I'm very grateful for that. And I think part of my productivity was due to not having to worry about graduate students. Finding research projects for them would not have been a problem, but I am glad I was spared having to nurse them and market them. There are a couple of other factors I haven't mentioned that supported my scholarship. Wesleyan nominated me for two of the six major fellowships I won. Then, Olin Library's collection proved to be a wonderful resource and a donor interested in my field bought all sorts of things that I needed. All I had to do was approach the librarian, and usually the item, often the microfilm of a manuscript collection, would be added to the library's holdings if there was any prospect that it might become relevant to student research. The result is we have a very strong collection of microfilms covering newspapers and historical manuscripts, including the papers of the Continental Congress, George Washington papers, etc. Much of this material is now digitized, but I had access to it before it was digitized, as well as everything published in America before the 1830s and early American newspapers on microfilm. Finally, a research fund was established in the late '60s, called the Return Jonathan Meigs Fund, dedicated primarily to supporting American historical scholarship, although other people could tap into it if the Americanists didn't need it. I tried to use it sparingly, but I did take one semester off on it after my chairmanship and reduced my teaching load during one academic year in the 1990s so I could wrap up *In Irons*. Beyond that, I used it to employ the students who helped me with the three Acorn volumes.

Now perhaps I should say something in summary about the institution. During my years with Wesleyan, I served on a number of faculty committees besides the EPC. They included the FPC in the early '70s, the Committee on Rights and Responsibilities in the early 1980s, and a presidential advisory committee on commencements, also in the early 1980s. I was also a member of the junior faculty organization in the late 1960s and helped organize the faculty group that resisted unionization in the late '70s. For the most part these experiences did not reassure me about the governance of Wesleyan. I think this had more to do with some members of the faculty, who had political objectives they wanted to impose on the institution, than the intentions of those in the administration. But it always struck me that too much was up for grabs at Wesleyan and that there was a perpetual political struggle going on that had very little to do with my ambitions and objectives, which left me feeling alienated from the institution.

HZ: Both the student body and the administration?

RB: Well, regarding the student body I had a funny experience. When I was a young faculty member, the students had no trouble relating to me and I had no trouble relating to them. Then when I began to look like their parents, I started running into an undercurrent of hostility that I didn't understand until it occurred to me Wesleyan was attracting the kinds of students who were rebelling against their parents. I don't know if that is correct, but it seemed to receive confirmation after I began to look like their grandparents, because then that hostility faded. That is only part of the alienation I'm talking about, though. A more important part is that the institution didn't really seem to know what it was doing, where it was going, or what it represented, at least as far as I could discern. Others undoubtedly thought they knew where they were going, but I was definitely

somewhere else. So at a certain point I just turned inward and decided to focus on extracting what I could in the way of scholarly achievement out of the situation. I'm glad I had a chance to address my scholarly agenda, write my books, and figure out the body of knowledge I was trying to teach.

HZ: Do you think there's been a change in the capability of the students or the quality of the students over the years?

RB: There have always been some awfully bright people at Wesleyan. There is a problem with the range of students, with the guys in the Prison Education Program leading the pack in that respect. But I've always been impressed by how smart Wesleyan students could be. And the women haven't hurt that in the least because they have a facility in writing that most men don't. So that was never a problem for me. It's just that I was working awfully hard and not understanding where the institution thought it was going.

HZ: Do you think that each president brought his own, except for Joanne Creighton, his own sort of agenda?

RB: I never had a sense that any of them was in control, except for about five years of Colin's presidency. Vic [Butterfield] thought he had a vision, but my experience with him was that he had lost control of the situation by the time I had arrived. Etherington was hopeless since he was more interested in using Wesleyan than serving it, leaving Colin to pick up the pieces. Colin had to spend his best energies on tidying up the mess and then for about five years in the late seventies and early eighties he seemed to be leading Wesleyan in a desirable direction. But by then he had already stayed longer than it is healthy for one person to be in charge of any institution. And so despite his many virtues and infectious enthusiasm for the institution, he ended up making Wesleyan a place that was difficult for someone else to manage. Chace was a disaster, since he seemed to relish destroying careers rather than nurturing them, and his commitment to Wesleyan was limited. Doug Bennet understood organizations and I think saw what needed to be done. But aside from successfully addressing the appearance of the campus and supervising a building program that provided appropriately for the future, I was never persuaded that he had made much headway in redressing the budgetary imbalances that our graduate programs in the sciences had created. I also had the impression that the institution's debt was increasing by almost as much as the capital it claimed it have raised for the endowment. The current president, Michael Roth, is the president who has impressed me most with his capacity to make tough decisions and run the place. So if I were to identify a president who actually had a vision for Wesleyan and was capable of implementing it, he would be my choice at the moment. He is also very articulate about the virtues of a liberal arts education and speaks eloquently to that point. But I know many faculty feel uncomfortable with Michael just because he is in charge, and perhaps I under-appreciate the others.

HZ: When you were on the EPC, were there challenges?

RB: As I recall, my term was between 1988 and 1990, and I was chair during 1989-90, a period I would describe as a time of troubles.

HZ: Did that involve departments that wanted to expand?

RB: There were some problems like that, but they were routine. What made those particular years difficult was the student radicalism led by Nick Haddad, that I have mentioned before. Aside from terrorizing the campus, he staged an incident at the Malcolm X house, a housing unit he had gotten access to by pretending his mother was

Sudanese, by painting a swastika on a basement wall. That stunt brought the whole campus to a standstill for a full day. He also inspired some South African students on full scholarship to approach Bishop Tutu, who was getting an honorary degree and was supposed to give the Commencement address, to plead with Tutu to boycott the ceremony because they alleged Wesleyan was a racist institution. This happened the evening before graduation, and though I wasn't involved, I heard that it took the administration into the wee hours of the morning to persuade the Bishop that the radical students were trying to use him.

HZ: In the '80s?

RB: No, that was in the spring of '90 as I recall. Haddad succeeded in intimidating so much of the student body that many of our students tried to transfer that spring. But I was told the other colleges got wind of our difficulties and few succeeded. The only thing that finally defused the situation was Haddad's tragic death. He had sent two henchmen out to sell drugs for money to finance his arms purchases and threatened to kill them if they screwed up. So when they came up short on the money he expected, they killed him. After he died, his mother arrived from Paris, where she was living, and turned out not to be Sudanese but a Mariat Christian and quite white. I gather the poor woman was startled to learn all the things he had been saying about her. It was a terrible tragedy, but his death saved the institution from further disruption, and he was headed toward a violent end one way or another, given his temperament and the arms he had been purchasing from local stores and stockpiling, something it turned out the police had been watching for some time.

HZ: Are there adjunct people in your department?

RB: A few, but usually only to fill in for an instructor teaching a core course who is on leave. The vast majority of the teaching staff are tenured or on a tenure track. That in principle makes them more committed to the institution. But there is one development that is a bit disturbing. Many of the tenured faculty are living quite a distance from campus, so they are only available during a few days of the week. I don't think it is a bad thing to live in another town, and I spent the majority of my career at Wesleyan in Haddam and Essex. But I was on campus usually five and often seven days a week.

I did most of my work in my PAC office and people could come in anytime.

HZ: It's more difficult if someone is teaching one course here and two courses there and then another course at a third institution, which is happening with adjuncts.

RB: Yes, that's what adjuncts have to do because they don't get paid very much. But most of the adjuncts in the History Department were graduate students finishing up their PhDs at Yale and assuming that their adjunct status would be only temporary.

HZ: Over the years, do you think there was a change in the way you were able to walk into the president's office or throw ideas around with the president or the higher levels of the administration?

RB: I was never close to Vic. Colin had a style of making himself available and I had a sense of collaborating with Colin, particularly in the late '70s and very early '80s when I thought he had established control over the institution. After the early eighties I never really had much rapport with the presidents, though circumstances forced me to work with Chace, whom I neither liked nor admired. He relished making difficulties for people. And he had no sense of self-irony; he actually had the gall to lecture us in his departing speech to the faculty

about how “someone has got to love Wesleyan.” It was clearly not Chace. Colin loved the place and did a lot for it. But you didn’t have to go to him; he came to you instead if he needed something.

HZ: Some people I’ve spoken to have said that over the years they found it increasingly difficult to knock on the president’s door and say, I have an idea about something.

RB: Well, the president has a difficult enough job and I never thought I had any ideas that might make it easier for him, so I never wanted to knock on the door and make suggestions. For instance, Doug’s principal contribution was to improve campus facilities through bricks, mortar, and landscaping, but that sort of thing is best left to someone who is in touch with potential donors.

HZ: It really does look good now.

RB: Well, yes, it does have its appeal. I recently found myself taking one of Marilyn’s nieces on a campus tour because it was a March Saturday during spring break and there was no visitor’s tour available. Most of my days on campus had been spent in the PAC, the library, and eventually the Wasch Center, so this walk around actually served to reacquaint me with the campus as a whole and I was surprised but pleased by how impressive it appeared even in that season of the year.

HZ: Thank you very much, Professor Buel. It has been a pleasure to talk with you.