William Barber Oral History Interview, Jan. 15, 2014

Nancy Smith

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Interview with Professor William Barber

January 15, 2014; recorded in the Barber residence.

Smith: Would you like to start talking about what Wesleyan was like in terms of atmosphere and political excitement—or not—and the general comportment of the faculty, starting when you started in 1957? I know Mr. Butterfield hired you.

Barber: Yes. I arrived in September of 1957, Vic Butterfield was president, and very much a hands-on president. I found him an intriguing person. One of the things that was starting to come to the boil when I arrived was Butterfield’s idea of doing something different in a Liberal Arts college. The argument was that we have hundreds of liberal arts colleges around the country, and most of them essentially do the same thing. At Wesleyan he now wanted to be a pathbreaker in doing something novel and different.

This was a time when Wesleyan thought of itself as being rich. And rich for the first time. Its endowment had not been particularly noteworthy until early in the Butterfield administration, when several wealthy alumni left very substantial sums to the endowment. This windfall then led the trustees to purchase what became part of the Wesleyan Press. That was the “My Weekly Reader” publication that went into practically every primary and secondary school room in the country. It was an enormously successful enterprise which generated a lot of income.

I remember the day in 1960 when the Internal Revenue Service acted favorably on a Wesleyan request to exempt the Wesleyan income from “My Weekly Reader” from corporate tax, on the ground that the funds were used for a nonprofit charitable enterprise. This case was pending for a number of years; meanwhile, the Trustees properly were setting aside in escrow funds to cover corporate tax if the appeal went against them. When the appeal turned out favorably, this turned out to be a huge nest-egg too.

Smith: Of course, because they’d been prudent.

Barber: Yes, so Wesleyan felt very rich and--now, What to do with this? There were lots of ideas floating around. And the one that Butterfield had a great personal attachment to was the idea of the “College Plan,” which was an attempt to replicate part of the Oxford-Cambridge tutorial system at Wesleyan. This was quite an exciting idea. It didn’t win
overwhelming enthusiasm from all of the faculty; the foot-draggers were the people in the sciences. The sciences were determined to try to take this great fiscal windfall and to mount PhD programs. That was their priority, the College Plan was not.

The result of this was that when the initial phase of the College Plan was launched in 1959, there were three units: the College of Social Studies, which was a joint venture of History, Government, Economics, and Philosophy; the College of Letters, which was a kind of Comparative Literature Program in which the language departments were involved; and then there was the College of Quantitative Studies, which was an attempt to bring the sciences into this--but the laboratory sciences were not buying in. Instead, this was an enterprise mounted mainly with Mathematics.

The Quantitative Studies really exempted Biology, Chemistry, Physics. When the original program was started in 1959, it was made subject to review after a trial period of 5 or 6 years. It would be determined then whether it would become a permanent part of the institution. The College of Social Studies and the College of Letters became part of the establishment, but the College of Quantitative Studies, which never had any great support, died.

Butterfield was disappointed that he didn’t have more success in reaching out to the sciences. But as Willie Kerr, long-time Provost, used to put it: Butterfield was never enthusiastic, and in fact was fairly hostile, to the PhD programs in the sciences. But to get enough votes from the sciences in the faculty meetings to approve permanence for the other colleges, that was the price he paid.

Smith: So that is why we have advanced programs in Astronomy, for instance?

Barber: We’ve had a program in Astronomy for a very long time, but not a doctoral program. But the doctoral programs came in first with Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry, Biology. There was an attempt to differentiate the doctoral programs in some ways from the standard model of PhD programs in the sciences. I say attempt: There were discussions that the PhD candidates ought to be exposed to more general issues than those that were specific to the particular lab projects they had in mind then. Seminars in the History of Science, for example.

The History of Science faculty member Stu Gillmor was recruited for that purpose, but it turned that he had more of an audience from the historians than he had from the scientists.

Another part of this largesse initiative was the launching of the Center for Advanced Studies. This was directed by a very interesting guy, Sigmund Neumann, a
political scientist of some international note in the Government Department. He was an academic refugee in the 1930s from Nazi Germany. And the idea here was to bring noteworthy scholars to the campus who were not given any particular duties, but were expected to give a public lecture or two during their stay. And also, say, if there were undergraduates writing honors theses in their discipline, they would counsel them if there was a fit. But, from the Trustees’ point of view, I always thought this enterprise was one we could use as a vehicle for giving much greater visibility to Wesleyan.

Which in fact it did. For example: going back to Oxford on sabbaticals—which Sheila and I did. The first time we did that, pre-Center for Advanced Studies, nobody had ever heard of Wesleyan. Three or four years later, everybody in Oxford had heard of Wesleyan and the Center for Advanced Studies, and asked “how do you get a fellowship?” So that part of it accomplished what it really was intended to achieve.

It never really made complete connection with the rest of the faculty, and the joke was that there are two centers at Wesleyan. There is the Center for Advanced Studies, where there were people who were brought in to do scholarship but don’t teach, and the Center for Retarded Studies, which was the regular faculty, where people are brought in to teach but don’t really have time for scholarship. That was a bit cruel.

Smith: They didn’t really call it “retarded”?

Barber: No no. This was just the in-house attempt at witticism. But people liked the individuals who were brought there. For example, at the College of Social Studies, which was thriving, one of its regular activities was to have a Monday luncheon series with an outside speaker. All of the people who were at the Center for Advanced Studies ended up giving one or possibly two talks at the Monday luncheons at the CSS, and that was a real success. They were always interesting, and that meant that the faculty associated with the CSS actually made contact with the people at the Center, and most of the rest of the faculty did not. But it also gave the Trustees an opportunity to buy some time before making long-term commitments, because this could be terminated. When the hard times came, it was folded back and became the Center for Humanities.

Butterfield’s real passion was trying to do something that was innovative in the undergraduate program. And what he would like to be remembered for was the two successful Colleges, the CSS and the COL. He was never really comfortable with the graduate programs in the sciences, but he did become an enthusiastic supporter of the PhD program in Ethno-Musicology.
That, he thought, could be reasonably integrated into a program that was primarily dedicated to undergraduate teaching, whereas I think he saw the PhD programs in the sciences as diluting the undergraduate experience.

Smith: And he was certainly right about the Ethno-Musicology. That was known very far and wide.

Barber; Oh, yes, and at the time it was the only example of a PhD program in a field like this. One of its stars, Jon Higgins, was an undergraduate who went on to do a PhD in Ethno-Musicology, with a specialization in South Indian music.

I recall in 1968, when I spent some time in India, most of the public in India knew Wesleyan because of Jon Higgins. He became a star at Indian music, and was a recording sensation.

Butterfield also--and I think this was something that made Wesleyan a very congenial place--had a great tolerance for, and in fact attraction to, recruiting faculty members who were in some ways slightly eccentric. This was the Wesleyan that I came to in 1957, which consisted of about 100 faculty and 800 or so undergraduates. I think I mentioned in my previous interview that the faculty met in the President’s office with folding chairs brought in. It was expected that everyone would attend, and if you were not there, it would be noticed. The chairman of your department would say, “I missed you at the faculty meeting yesterday.”

This was a vehicle for making sure that everyone was acquainted. Butterfield recruited quite a number of people who gave a sense of spice and variety to the place. One who was noteworthy was Nobby Brown, technically a Classicist but really interested in Freudian psychology. He came to national prominence. And Carl Schorske, in European History--who was in my judgment, one of the real stars. Then there were people who certainly added a dimension of variety. One was a refugee from Franco spain, a man named Juan Ruora Parella. He was a distinct character. He really thought of himself as a philosopher and had some training in that in European universities. Not the kind of philosophy that was such that the Wesleyan Philosophy Department wanted to adopt him. But he was quite active in the Humanities program. The number of stories about his eccentricities are legion.

I recall--this would have been about 1958--the students put together what was billed as a “confidential guide” to courses. This was a really a spoof on the descriptions published in the regular course catalogue. It contained an unusually lengthy piece on a course offered by Ruora Parella entitled “Mystics, Knights and Lovers,” about classical
Spanish Literature. The last line reported that the course would conclude by addressing the question: “What is Man?” This was, in fact, the text Ruora Parella had written for the official announcement of courses. In a publication built around parodies, the genuine article was the most hilarious in the bunch.

But you got a real sense of community then. And it was a community in another sense, too. Most of the faculty and the administration at that time still lived within walking distance of the campus. The main source of entertainment in Middletown was what was going on in the music, theatre, arts and public lectures on the campus. Not many people in the town attended, unfortunately, but there was real support campus-wide.

In Butterfield’s last year, maybe two years, Wesleyan still thought of itself as rich, though it had been spending a whole lot of money on these other activities. But the new pressure that was building up from within the faculty and was funneled through the Educational Policy Committee (of which I was a member in the mid-’60s for a couple of years), was a push for Co-education.

This was something that Butterfield didn’t want to take on. He wanted to do more experimenting, and enriching the undergraduate experience. And also he was in support of bringing in a more diverse undergraduate population. So when Wesleyan went out actively recruiting black candidates in the mid-’60s, we were more or less ahead of the pack in terms of recruiting as far as the big and little Ivies were concerned. And then the “My Weekly Reader” contacts meant that there was a network for identifying and finding promising black candidates from around the country. This initiative was welcomed and very successful in terms of recruiting some quite talented people. And after Wesleyan got into this, two or three years later, the competition for candidates changed. The first couple of years, when we still had required Humanities, required Western Civ, required English, and distribution requirements, the first cohorts of black candidates might take a semester more than the average undergraduate to adapt to this environment.

But they were doing it very well, after a semester’s lag or so. And when everybody else got into the recruiting act, in order to maintain what was the implicit target of 10% of the entering class, the Admissions Office had to let in some bright but knowingly higher-risk candidates. And some of them had difficulty with going through the Western Civ/ Humanities program. And that’s when the black activists began starting to rebel about all of this. Anyhow, to its credit, Wesleyan did not retreat in any of this and kept the racial integration commitment steady. I think that is something the institution can be very proud of.
That initiative put us among the national leaders in doing this. Butterfield was in favor of and supported it all, but he balked at Co-education. He said this really was an issue that should be left to his successor. It was going to be a fundamental change, and somebody who had a longer-term perspective than he would have to make the decision on it.

But there was a lot of ferment about that and a certain amount of faculty disappointment that the Co-education initiative was essentially stalled for about three or four years.

The last year or two, so far as Vic Butterfield was concerned personally, I don’t think were very happy ones. He was being pressured to do some things he didn’t want to do--and didn’t do. But then Etherington came in.

Smith: Did Vic Butterfield retire?

Barber: Yes, he retired after 25 years. I think he personally attached a certain amount of importance to making it through a quarter-century.

Smith: Was Bob Rosenbaum Acting President between Butterfield and Etherington?

Barber: No, he was Acting President after Etherington resigned and Colin Campbell came in.

Etherington had been a sort of prodigy and great success on Wall Street. And very much so far as anyone could tell, the favorite candidate for the bulk of the Trustees.

There were some things he wanted to do before he took office. He commissioned a series of studies, all of which were oriented toward the question of “What is Wesleyan going to do creatively with its wealth?” One of those studies contained a paragraph that I recall very distinctly. It stated that, within a specified timeframe--I think two or three years--“every department that did not have a doctoral program should explain why it is incompetent to do so.”

Now the doctoral program came in as what the new administration was going to push for. There were a lot of departments, including Economics, where I was, that did not share that objective. Our view was (and I think I’m speaking for practically all my colleagues in Economics at the time), we like to think that we were the best small department in the country (and some outside observers thought that, too). We could
compete successfully for talented undergraduates with the Big Ivies, but no start-up doctoral program could do so. We had no interest in working with graduate students less able than our own undergraduates.

So the idea of universalizing doctoral programs was anything but winning overall support in the faculty. It had enthusiastic support among the lab scientists, and, of course in the Ethno-Music program. In the other disciplines, this remained a very controversial issue. And in fact, none of these programs were launched.

I think I remember hearing Ted Etherington say that Wesleyan at that time was the richest institution per student in the world. There was thus a sense of the sky’s the limit.

This is slightly out of school, but it comes from a good friend of mine who was with the National Endowment for the Humanities at the time and later became director of the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Presidential Library. Etherington was thinking of hiring divisional deans, which we did not have at that time. He was looking for a divisional dean for the Humanities and my friend, who was then in Washington, was being courted by Etherington to take that job. One of the questions the candidate asked was, ‘What are the budget constraints?’ And, according to the candidate, Etherington responded, ‘But you don’t understand: at Wesleyan there are no constraints.’

That world didn’t last that long, but Etherington did make some very considerable capital commitments. One was the new Science Tower, and the other was for the 10 or 11 buildings in the Center for the Arts.

I think some National Science Foundation support was found for part of the new Science Tower, but it was still a big drain on the Wesleyan endowment. So these spending commitments were out there, premised on the idea that there were no budget constraints. And then the recession and hard times hit, and the budget constraints became real. Meanwhile, Etherington was very much the victim of bad luck in terms of coming into office just before the racial tensions of the late ‘60s and early ‘70s began to get out of control. This was not an easy time for anybody, and Etherington made a lot of commitments that cost some money: The Afro-American House, the Malcolm X House, and a commitment to a new program in Afro-American Studies. Some of these things ended up being quite worthwhile, but at the time they were launched, there was a lot of sorting out that needed to be done.

We might as well mention one other commitment that was a reflection of the "no budget constraints" mentality. That was the Wesleyan Hills project.

Smith: And that was huge.
Barber: This was supposed to be Wesleyan’s contribution to upgrading the housing stock of Middletown, and making Middletown a more attractive place for faculty to live. And this becomes another big drain on the endowment.

Smith: Was he autocratic about this? Was he exerting unwanted control? A lot of you must have begun to realize that the pot wasn’t bottomless.

Barber: Many of the faculty began to be very very skeptical about a lot of this. Here was a guy who was spending a great deal of money, and the contrast between his style and Butterfield’s was—well, Butterfield was interested in solid, innovative curricular initiatives when he could handle them, and that was quite alien to Etherington’s style. And I always felt that Etherington was probably the wrong man for the place at the time, but I tend to think of him as a rather tragic figure. He came in without any prior academic experience in administration. But people who had long-standing academic credentials at other places didn’t look too good either. It was just a tough time.

What must have happened was that, having been this child prodigy success story in everything he had done up to that point, he was certainly bright enough to know that things were not going well for him at Wesleyan, and it was time to pull out.

And that led to the unsuccessful run for a seat in the Senate. His opponent in the Republican convention was [Lowell] Weicker. You genuinely felt sorry for him, because there were threats against his family (they were living on the campus in the President’s House) from some of the more militant black students, and what he did was to move out. He and his family moved down to the shore, Stonington, I think it was. From the point of view of some faculty who had begun to be disillusioned with Etherington, this was—probably unjustly—regarded as a lack of leadership. It was seen as a time when direction from the top was increasingly necessary.

Smith: One of the things I heard as gossip, and long after the fact, was that he tried to negotiate with the Board that he could take a leave of absence in order to run, but that if he were not elected, he could return. And that that was clearly rejected.

Barber: Yes, it was. That’s the story I heard, too. It was clear he had to make a choice; if he wanted to run for the Senate, he would have to burn his bridges at Wesleyan. And all of this happened within a period of two-and-a-half years. And it was then that Bob Rosenbaum came in as Acting President.
Smith: Do you know the dates? I can look them up but.....

Barber: Etherington came in ’67, then he resigned in January 1970, I think. A total elapsed time was about two-and-a-half years. I think he genuinely thought he could run and win. But he got into the race late. The Republican Party officials had already marked Weicker as the main candidate, but Etherington thought he would have more popular appeal--if he could get into the primary. It is still true that a candidate who gets 20% of the votes of delegates at the party’s nominating convention can challenge the official nominee in a primary. With a late start, he didn’t expect to get the official nomination, but he thought he could win it in a primary. When he didn’t, he was really crushed.

There was a party for him in June 1970, when he didn’t get enough votes in the Convention to qualify for a primary challenge. This was sort of his official farewell. I talked to him and he told me that when he went into the convention he had more than enough commitments to get over the 20% hurdle. And then they did the roll call, and the commitments started fading away. He thought somehow he had been double-crossed.

Smith: And he might have been.

Barber: Indeed. But, sadly, after this he never got established in a leadership career. He was on lots of boards, and he was given a couple of semi-political assignments--one was a study on how to save money in the Connecticut public institutions, which was a kind of sop from the Republican establishment. That wasn’t going to go anywhere, but the commission he headed had suggested closing down the Long Lane School and consolidating that facility with another juvenile men’s facility. But he had a strong sense of being unfulfilled after he left. He had some very serious heart problems at an early age, which limited still further what he could do.

Smith; But he did start the Etherington Scholarships, didn’t he?

Barber: No, that was established after he left. Whose idea that was originally, I'm not sure, but it was certainly after he left. It could possibly have been Bob Rosenbaum. It was felt there ought to be some kind of recognition of Etherington, whose administration in other ways looked like a complete failure. They set up the Etherington Scholarships, which in my judgment was a very successful program.
Smith: In the very short time I worked at Wesleyan, I met quite a few of them, and was highly impressed with them and what I learned of the program.

Barber: Not everybody knows what it is, but these were Community College students who could then transfer their Associates degree and come to Wesleyan on scholarship. I had quite a number of them, and they were all outstanding. As a teacher, you always want to feel that your marginal product has value and that you are actually making a difference. One is never quite sure, but with the Etherington scholars, their response, and what it did for them, and what they achieved after, was a great part of my experience.

Smith: Many of them were older.

Barber: Many were Vietnam veterans, or young women who got married too young and it didn’t work out, but they were all such satisfying and appreciative people to work with. And this I found a very nice gesture to keep the Etherington name going in a very positive way. I think this meant a lot to him, too. After it had been going for about 10 years or so, there was a dinner to which all of the Etherington Scholars, past and present, were invited, plus Etherington, of course, and faculty members who had worked with the scholars. It was a splendid occasion and Etherington spoke very movingly, and almost broke down more than once. He spoke about how much he appreciated this program, and I thought that that was really very nice.

Then Colin Campbell came in....

Smith: How long was Bob Rosenbaum in place?

Barber: He was in place--and again, you’ll have to check me on this--

Smith: He was a place-holder, wasn’t he? I know he was not a candidate, but he didn’t make any significant changes while he was there? He was important in many other ways.

Barber: Yes, he left the University in a very stable condition; he had the confidence of the faculty, and was just full of energy to try to rebuild things. He moved back into the President’s House on the campus. It was partly place-holding and partly stabilizing. But
it wasn’t a time for any great new initiatives because the pot of gold had evaporated by that time.

Smith: And they were looking for a new president at that time.

Barber: Yes, and the search committee for a new president that produced Colin in some ways could be looked at as rather curious. Here was Colin, who had been the protege of Etherington throughout his professional career. He was a protege of Etherington’s at the American Stock Exchange, and then he came to Wesleyan as vice President for Business Affairs. But even though the outside world expected him to be a sort of Second Coming of Etherington, the people on the inside knew Colin differently. He was one of the channels of communication between the late Etherington administration and its turbulence. Channels of communication with faculty. He had an understanding of faculty that Etherington didn’t have and probably couldn’t have. He came from an academic family and understood more about how these institutions worked. And he had genuine discomfort with some of the things that were going on with the late phases of the Etherington administration, and didn’t disguise that. He knew how faculty felt, and he came in with some solid credentials, though some faculty were disappointed that he was not a PhD type. They recognized—as far as I can determine—that Colin’s talents as an administrator would be very valuable in cleaning up some of these financial problems that he had inherited.

So that became the story of Wesleyan for the next eighteen years.

Smith: Colin always struck me as the right man in the right spot, with his combination of calmness and an inner bounciness (that’s a bad description), but it seemed to me that he knew everything that was going on—in my office [Public Information], in classrooms, in dorms, and he listened to the drivers and the cleaning ladies and the students.

But I know he didn’t start out that way. He was young. And untested.

Barber: I think the first thing he did was move his family into the President’s House. And he made it clear that he had an open-door policy, they could always get in to see him. He listened to faculty initiatives.

Etherington bought into the Co-education, but I think Colin was not only supportive of that but also did a very good job of making Co-education a success, getting more faculty women recruited, and so on. I think this is one of those things that
Wesleyan did very well. I looked around at Amherst, which started that about 5 years later, and they didn’t do it very well.

   Anyhow, Colin’s administration was--well, in the first instance, he came in as a crisis manager and handled that in a way that gave the institution some stability again. We never fully recovered fiscally from some of the capital projects initiated by Etherington, but things were beginning to be turned around there. I was on the Hill Development Corporation Board for quite a long time. Etherington had invited me to serve on it.

Smith: Did you think you were successful?

Barber: One interesting thing about the Hill Development Corporation involved successes that you really couldn’t talk about. There was a low-income project that had some support from the Catholic diocese--that housing project adjacent to the Snow School. It needed help, and Hill went in with some backup support that made it possible for them to apply for some federal grants. This came off, but the Hill contribution to that--which was crucial at one point--we really couldn’t talk about because we didn’t want to take away any of the credit from the Catholic diocese. In some of the projects in Middletown--where Hill became a kind of catalyst in managing the Wesleyan Hills estate for example--an atmosphere developed in which it was not possible to do anything creative but was possible to try to undo some things that had been done poorly.

Smith: Was it a large board?

Barber: About six or seven people. Colin was on it, and there were a couple of alumni who were professionally interested in housing development projects (I’ve forgotten their names), and John Baird who was a Trustee and also had experience in housing development projects, and that was about it.

Smith: Eighteen years of Colin’s tenure is a lot of territory to cover. I don’t remember when his service came to an end, but you were Acting President between the terms.

Barber: It was 1988 that Colin left. And Bill Chace came in in the end of October of ’88. And there was a three-month period that Sheila and I called “The Episode.”

Smith: Was it only three months that you were in that office?
Barber: Yes. When I was asked to do this, I said there are a couple of things that I would like to see accomplished. I’d spoken to Colin over the years about this, and when he announced his resignation, I reminded him of it. One was getting students off the Personnel portion of the Education Committee of the Board of Trustees. The student members of the Board had access to all the confidential information about tenure and letters of recommendation for candidates for tenure and promotion. Colin told me he would kick them off before he left. He didn’t. The other thing was to change the leadership of the Wesleyan Press.

Smith: Colin was just scared of her!

Barber: Colin told me he would fire her, and he didn’t. It was left up to me to handle that.

One of the things I said when I was asked to take this job was that I didn’t want to make any decisions that involved long-term commitments that were irreversible unless my successor approved. So I explained matters to Chace on these two points, and he said: “Oh, boy, you go do it!” Which I did.

Getting the students off the personnel portion of the Education Committee required a By-law change. There were various restrictions regarding how you do that: One, you have to give written notice to the Trustees at least 30 days in advance, and it has to be carried by a vote of three-quarters of the voting Trustees. You can have only the vote of Trustees who are present. You can’t send in a proxy. So I had to spend a lot of time on the telephone talking to Trustees. I’d sent out a notice containing the proposed change in the By-law language, explaining why I thought it ought to be done and why this was the time to do it, and Chace went along as well. But it stirred up a lot of agitation among the students, about this high-handedness. Do you remember this?

Smith: I don’t remember the agitation. I do remember you were in charge, and that the issue was taking students off a committee.

Barber: So, there was a lot of student protest, and one of the guys who would have been kicked off, and one whom personally I liked very much, was very articulate and very bright. He thought this was a breach of faith, and got up before the full Board meeting and said that I was guilty of “UnWesleyan” behavior. So there was a certain amount of unease about that.
The vote was at the beginning of the academic year, at the end of September. Usually not much happens in the first meeting of the year, and there were seven Trustees who couldn’t be present, out of a total Trustee body of 28. You could get down to a minimum of 21 votes. Anyway, I had to have a unanimous vote of those Trustees present. I had a special briefing for the Trustees before they formally convened, explaining once again why I thought this was necessary and how we were being dishonest with the people we solicit letters from. I said that if the rest of the world learns about this, we’re going to be in big trouble.

There were a couple of recent alumni-elected Trustees present who were personally sympathetic to the Student Power Movement. I knew them; one I had had as a student. Very bright young woman. Very left wing in her views. I had to have every vote. Technically, I could lose one vote because, as President, I was automatically a member of the Board. But I didn’t want the motion to pass because of my casting vote.

In this briefing session, this Trustee said, “You mean that a faculty member could be denied tenure because of a student vote?” I said, “Well, technically, yes.” And she said, “Oh, no, that’s terrible.” I think she was not thinking so much of Wesleyan as she was thinking of her own situation. She was then teaching at Dartmouth, which was on the prowl for left-wingers. I remember a delightful student named Jordan Rau. He’d been on the search committee for Chase, and I think he’d also been a student Trustee on the Education Committee for a couple of years. At the Board meeting before the vote, he got up and made a speech attacking me and the proposal. He said it was being done highhandedly by an administration that was supposed to be just “caretakers.” I thanked him afterward and said yes, it is a care-taking administration, but I like to think of this as an act of Taking Care.

Smith: Well done!

Barber: And we got all 21 votes.

Smith: I think it helped having that young woman who saw that it was not something that was being taken away from students, but something that could be detrimental to faculty as well.

Barber: Exactly. She’s now teaching at Harvard.

Then I had to try to make a change in the leadership of the Wesleyan Press. I had to try to save the Press because there were some very influential Trustees who
wanted to Deep Six the Press altogether. I regarded my job as trying to explain to
Jeannette [Hopkins, director of the Wesleyan Press] that we were trying to set up
retirement arrangements for her that were going to be reasonably attractive, but if she
wanted to dig in on this, the deal she might get could be decidedly less attractive, and it
would be best to get out now. That worked.

Smith: And you saved the Press.

Barber: Yes. The only other things that are of note from my three months tenure had
nothing to do with altering the structure of things. Sheila and I wanted to break down
some of the divisiveness that had characterized the campus at the end of the Campbell
administration. It became very fragmented, and you may recall in his last year before he
announced his forthcoming resignation, the Educational Policy Committee got a motion
through the faculty to suspend further faculty meetings except for the purpose of voting
degrees. The unhappiness was about progress on the subject of salary negotiations.
Some of the hotheads were talking about having the faculty go on strike for a
while. It was not a happy ending. We [Mr. and Mrs. Barber] wanted to make the place a
little more congenial, so we started having dinners in the President’s House. Every
week we’d have a dinner that was a mix of faculty, administrators, and librarians.

Smith: They were wonderful. People met people they’d never met before.

Barber: Exactly. Every time we had them, someone would say, in effect: “I’ve been here
for 15 years and I just me this delightful person/teacher/editor I’ve never laid eyes on
before!”

I think a certain amount of un-demonizing went on as a result of that. The other
thing was bringing music into the various functions in the President’s House. It had
always struck me as unfortunate that we didn’t have music at these receptions. So we
changed that. At the president’s reception for faculty, the music was by the star pianist
of the Music Department. He was playing in the front room. There was a receiving line
coming through, including Max Tischler, a retired professor of Chemistry. He was not
very well, but Max and Betty came to the reception; he had his oxygen tank with him.
They went into the front parlor and stayed, just listening to the piano.

At the end of the evening, I asked the performer what we owed him (we hadn’t
fixed this beforehand) and he said it would be $300. My body language told him that I
wasn’t prepared for that, so he said, “But you have to remember, I spent an entire
month preparing for this evening.” I said OK, and asked Bob Taylor to send a $300 check to him. Bob, asked, “What is this guy? A lawyer?” But he paid him.

A couple of weeks later, we learned that the Tischlers had given that grand piano to the President’s House, and this was the first time they had heard it played. It turned out that this was the last public appearance Max made; he died about three months later. So we ended up doing the right thing without even knowing it.

Smith: That is a wonderful story.

It’s getting late, and we haven’t yet moved on to talk about Mr. Chace. I propose we stop now, and begin next time with him.

Barber: Let’s do that.