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## Interview with Paul Solon, Professor of History

Paul Solon

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MACALESTER COLLEGE  
Macalester College Archives, DeWitt Wallace Library  
*Oral History Project*

**Interview with:** **Paul Solon**  
Professor of History, 1970-2007

**Date:** **Wednesday, June 6, 2007, 9:00a.m.**

Place: Macalester College DeWitt Wallace Library, Harmon Room  
Interviewer: Laura Zeccardi, Class of 2007

Edited interview run time: 1:48:45 minutes

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Agreement: Signed, on file, no restrictions

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**Interview with Paul Solon**

**Laura Zeccardi, Interviewer**

**Wednesday, June 6, 2007**

**Macalester College**

**DeWitt Wallace Library**

**Harmon Room**

LZ: My name is Laura Zeccardi and I am a new graduate of Macalester College conducting interviews for the Macalester Oral History Project. Today is Wednesday, June 6<sup>th</sup>, 2007, and I am interviewing Paul Solon, Professor of History, in the Harmon Room in the DeWitt Wallace Library.

[Dave Reynolds, Media Technician]: Okay. Ready when you are.

LZ: Alright, well if you can just start by stating your name and your place of birth, and how old you were when you first came to Macalester.

PS: My name is Paul Solon, and I was born in Auburn, New York, in 1942. So I was 28 when I came to Macalester.

LZ: Could you describe your educational background, and then what you had been doing prior to coming to Macalester?

PS: Well I graduated from high school in Oakland, California. Got my B.A. at Berkeley. Got my M.A. at Berkeley in 1966. I got my Ph.D. at Brown in 1970. I spent a year, 1968-69, doing research in Paris, and I was in a graduate seminar at the Sorbonne for that.

[01:07]

LZ: How did you come to hear about Macalester, and describe that hiring process.

PS: Well, to tell you the truth, I never heard of Macalester before I got hired. It wasn't a very well-known school at that time. And I think my hiring sort of represents the sort of best and worst of the old, old world system. The only reason I'm here is because Jim Stewart, who was one of my colleagues for many years, got on an elevator with one of my graduate advisors at the AHA [American Historical Association] convention, in the, in December of—gee, that would have been 1969. And he said, "You don't happen to know a medieval historian, do you?" And my advisor said, "Hey, have I got an historian for you!" And that got me the interview. Then I was eventually hired. I suppose, so it's the old boy network at its best and worst. The irony is that I also represent Macalester's ongoing failure to hire minority faculty, because the reason the search had been hired was so they could hire a minority historian. And the Department, in its wonderful innocence at that time, said, "Well, yeah we'll hire a minority historian but he has to be a Medievalist." And needless to say there weren't any minority Medievalists in 1969.

[02:30]

LZ: Was there any other draw to come to Macalester other than the job offer?

PS: Well, I was lucky enough to have had a lot of interviews. So I guess the draw is I kind of fell in love with it when I came. Not that the other places I was interviewing with were utopia or something like that, but... There was a job at the University of Texas, El Paso, and there was a job at Wellesley, and there was a job at Michigan State that I interviewed for. Kent State. I think of if I'd gone to Kent State that year. But I came here and I just fell in love with the people and they made me an offer and I decided—it was actually the first offer I got. So I had the satisfaction of calling the other places, saying, "Take me off your list."

LZ: Did you have a preference between a liberal arts college, or a larger university, a public university?

PS: Yeah, this was my dream place. And I guess I should—it wasn't a huge factor, but I—it sounds silly now—but it is a Presbyterian college and I'd been born and raised as a Presbyterian. So that was some amusing dimension I guess in my consideration.

[03:46]

LZ: What was your first impression of the Macalester campus, and then kind of more specifically the—

PS: Of the campus?

LZ: —of the campus, and just the general atmosphere of being here.

PS: Well, of course my first impression was when I came for an interview. Which is such an unreal situation. My main impression is cold. I interviewed here—actually there's a kind of amusing family anecdote anyway. I'm a devout football fan. And wherever I go the teams I root for lose. And so I interviewed here the Friday before the first Super Bowl the Vikings were in. And came back and—the Thursday and Friday—and came back and we watched the Super Bowl and the Vikings lost. My wife turned to me and said, "Well I guess that means you got the job." They called me Monday with the offer. That part of my life history remains true ever since. But it was a bitter cold weekend. This was pre-global warming, I guess we'll say. And I remember getting up [unclear] and saying to my wife, "Well it's not so bad, it was only thirty below. And she said, "Oh my god, how can anybody live there? We'll have to get a new car." Because we had a Volkswagen with an air-cooled engine and the heater wouldn't work at all. Cold, dark. The days were very short. And so all my memories are of walking around in dusk or twilight or dark... I mean, obviously the sun must have come up while I was here. But just my memory is of a kind of dark place. Other than that, you don't see much of the place. I liked the people I would have been working with. It was a good department. And it was exciting because it was predominantly a young department. I don't know what else to add. There was a certain anxiety on campus. It was just before Macalester went bankrupt. And nobody officially had any inclination, any inkling of that yet, but everybody just kind of assessed this can't last. And the other thing that was very exciting—this was 1969—is that it was the high point of the EEO program. And there was such a huge minority presence on campus. I'd been a student at Berkeley, I'd been in Paris in 1968, you know, I had all that kind of '60s optimism that something could really be done. And it was very exciting to think about coming to a place that was really trying to do something.

[06:38]

LZ: How large was the History Department in terms of faculty and of majors, or just students in general?

PS: I have no idea about majors, things like that. I think the Department was about the same size it is now. I don't even know, it's not something I discussed as a potential member of it. I mean it was obviously small compared to where I'd been a student. The College was very different. The College was...had maybe twenty-two hundred students and about two hundred faculty all together. So it was a much larger place. And then of course when the crash came in the early '70s... I think when I came it had about a hundred and ninety faculty and about twenty-two hundred students, and by 1975 it had about a hundred faculty and fourteen hundred students. So it was just really—the first few years here were exciting, in all negative ways.

[07:33]

LZ: Could you talk a little bit about your first impression of the students that you encountered at Macalester? Maybe after your initial interview and when you're actually teaching?

PS: Well, actually—two of the most memorable students that—one of the things that made Macalester very... Macalester I think was always more radical then, then it is now, which isn't too surprising. And so there were students on the search committee. And they really played a role there. Students are...I mean bluntly, students on search committees nowadays are rubber stamps. They're too easily manipulated. And these were two students who were...they were,



they **were players** in the search. And I was really impressed with both of them. It's a funny story. Christine Hyerman was one, and she went on to get a Ph.D. and has a, had a brilliant career as a historian. And Gary Mainor was the other, and he's some kind of software guru now, somewhere. But they were really, really impressive students. And that's all—you know the interview process was so different then. I don't, I'm not certain I met any other students. I may have... After I got here...I don't know. The best way to characterize the students, not so much the students, but the whole situation was... And I'd only been here for two days, so I took the job, and we were going to arrive the next...we drove. I finished my degree at Brown, and we spent the summer kind of bumming around the country visiting family. And then in August we drove up here from Texas. And just before we left Texas, through my mother-in-law, I met an elderly Macalester [unclear] who heard, "Oh you're going to Macalester." And then just, he just said, "Oh it's an awful place now. You'll just—you've made a terrible mistake. It's so radical." He was an older man and a [unclear] and he just didn't like what was happening to his alma mater at all. And so I thought, "Oh well, maybe it's kind of more interesting, you know, from my point that sounds good." He says, "It's almost as bad as Berkeley." I thought, "Oh great, I love Berkeley!" So, we get here, and after about, I don't know, twenty-four hours, I thought, "Who are these people kidding? They wouldn't know radicalism if they tripped over it. This is the Midwest. This is not Berkeley." And so the students—it was an exciting time. The students were very active. They had a kind of—it's easy to get nostalgic, and I'll freely admit I'm a nostalgic old fart at this point—but it seems to me that the things that strike me as different between students then and now, one is they were very enthusiastic about their education for its own sake. Not the same kind of careerism and obsession with getting ahead that you see now. That they were much more optimistic and determined about making a difference. Very active. I

mean not perhaps compared to Berkeley, but compared to most of America. It was a really exciting place to be. And third and most important I think, I think the largest single difference—and maybe I didn't understand them as well as I think I do, but I was much closer to students then. I was twenty-eight when I got here, so in some sense I felt more like a, I still felt like a student myself, and was able to pass for one, for lack of a better way to put it, or relate to them kind of as, almost as a peer—is they were glad to be here. I think it's sad but true, you talk to most Macalester graduates now, if they really tell you the truth why are you here, "I'm here because I got the best financial deal," or "I'm here because I didn't get into the Ivy League." You didn't hear that when I first came here. They wanted to be here. Or at least that's the impression I had. And that makes for a very, very different college, when people are happy to be where they are.

[12:06]

LZ: How did the Vietnam War play out among the student body and even—

PS: Oh my god.

LZ: —how that involved faculty?

PS: Are you kid—the only thing I can say is are you kidding [laughter]? I mean it was 1969. So it was, well actually I came in the Fall of 1970. So—I lose dates here—but the Cambodia incursion, Kent State, all that kind of stuff was going on my first year here. In local terms, the big issue was that Hubert Humphrey was on the faculty. And I hated Hubert Humphrey. I hated

him then, I hate him now. You know, you either—for my generation you're either a Gene McCarthy person or you're a Hubert Humphrey person. You know, I put Humphrey right up there with Ganelon and Judas as a person who betrayed everything he believed in, in search of a false god. And I wasn't alone in that feeling. I mean the students just made life an unbearable hell for him here. They would—he had this kind of luxurious suite, and they would put barbed wire across the doors and sit in so he couldn't get in his office. And so, I mean, the war... all my early... you know right through 1975... the war was a—Watergate, and all that kind of stuff—was the dominant political issue of the day. And it's a time when students were still very active and wanted to make a difference. So it just didn't feel—and then the domestic radicalism, because of the EEO program and the crisis over that. You know, politics was a part of Macalester academic life in a way that it just isn't now, for better or worse.

[13:57]

LZ: Given that there were so many faculty hired in the mid- and the late-'60s, what was that like with a younger faculty, and how did they become involved with...

PS: Well I don't know that they were that much younger. I mean, they hired a lot—I mean one of the things about the '60s is that they hired a lot of middle-aged, mid-career faculty. A lot of the new faculty were mid-career. So those of us, I mean as a young faculty member, I didn't feel that I knew a lot of young people. Maybe it's because at 28 I still thought people in their 30s were old. But it wasn't a sense of a young faculty so much as a committed faculty. In terms of faculty life, once I got here, I mean I came just exactly at the point that the college went bankrupt. I assume you've talked to enough people to have heard various versions of that. But,

essentially, the college literally went bankrupt. There was a lot of, there was both, there was very little direct corruption, although there was probably a little of that. But it was just plain malfeasance and incompetence. And that, the very first faculty meeting—you know there's always an opening faculty meeting of the year—and that was the meeting, where DeWitt Wallace's representative came, and he said, "No more, party's over, you guys are..." It was the most interesting remark, because...he really hated liberal arts education. I remember he said that, "I won't support educating a bunch of kids who are all going to wind up working in gas stations anyway." So it was really...quite a moment. And it was clear that the college was going to have to cut drastically. It was such a chaotic [situation], it took years for I think everybody to figure out just how bad it was. But...I remember the people I met immediately were the other—there were 14 faculty members hired my year. And there had been a kind of an orientation for new faculty. So I met them immediately and they were sort of our first social contact. And I remember coming back out of that faculty meeting with a couple of them and we had agreed, three couples were going to go out—they were all married—and we were going to go out to dinner. And we were just as depressed as hell, you know, kind of talking about, "Why didn't somebody tell me" You know, I could have gone somewhere else. Fortunately, one of the things I'm eternally grateful for is that Jerry Fisher, who had been hired the year before me, says, "Come here." He had been very honest with me there and he said, "Come here if you want to be taking a chance." He was smart enough to see what was coming and he said, "Take an awful chance that things are going to go south." So I hadn't been shocked, whereas my two close friends were people in the English Department, and man, they hadn't had a clue. They had no idea what they were getting into, and they realized they made a terrible mistake.

[17:13]

Anyway, it quickly became, within a matter of weeks, it was announced that everybody who had been hired by [unclear] would be fired. Because of the way faculty contracts are written, they have to give you notice, considerably in advance, so you can start looking for another job. So we were all told, “Hey, this is your first year here, this is your last year here.” Which gives you a very different attitude, to put it mildly. It also meant that...you know the movie *Dead Man Walking*? I mean, for those fourteen of us, it was kind of like we were dead. And I didn’t establish any relation, hardly any relationship with any other faculty, because it was like I had a fatal disease and maybe it was catching. Of the fourteen of us that were fired, eleven of us left that year and never came back. In a few cases, what was also going on is that everybody who could get out did get out. And you know, there were a couple of senior economists that had national reputations. They were gone, they announced their—that they were going to greener pastures pretty quickly. And in my case, somebody got a job and said he was leaving, and so they got to keep me for—in other words the department contracted by one but I got to stay because somebody else left. And that happened to me two years in a row—somebody leaving. In other cases, like Cal Roetzel was fired. And one of the senior people in his Department went in to the Provost and asked if he could...he’d be willing to retire early if they promised to keep Cal Roetzel. So that’s how Cal Roetzel got to stay. But in terms of—I’ve kind of lost track of your question of how did I relate to the faculty. But the first few years there, it was just very strange because the gradual contraction of the college was underway. But then, with passage, with every passing year, if you were still here, then there was a kind of cohesion amongst the faculty, that “We better do something, we better work together.” Because it was truly, it was generally...united we stand, divided we fall. Just plain...it was either...you know we gotta lift ourselves up by our own bootstraps. So there was a kind of, in a bizarre way, a kind of decline in

faculty politics because we just realized we had a common venture of survival. And it really changed the place. And the other thing in terms of faculty is that the, I mean bluntly, the administration of those years was so buffoonishly incompetent. So laughably inept, that...presidents and provosts came and went with bewildering rapidity. And you know, with each new catastrophe, essentially the faculty wound up running the place by default, for all practical purposes.

[20:49]

LZ: What were some of the major factors that contributed to just, I mean, the huge bankruptcy that occurred.

PS: Well, I mean, everybody has their own narrative. I mean I think I have a pretty good handle on it, but... As I understand, Macalester was a very small, very marginal college through the early '60s. But a fabulously wealthy man, DeWitt Wallace, the founder of the *Reader's Digest*, had been born and raised here. And as he, at a certain point in his career, he and his wife were not going to have children. So they had this enormous fortune to leave. And although we weren't his only charity, we were his primary one. And beginning in the 1960s he just poured money into the place. And that's what turned it around. I mean I guess that started about '62, '63, something like that. And the college changed drastically in those years. Very exciting story I think. I think a good history of Macalester could be written. I don't know if anybody will actually write an honest one. I know the official one is, they won't release it because the person was a little too candid about the place. But my understanding is that the money flowed and the college gradually turned itself into a true liberal arts college. Apparently in the early '60s we

were a sort of halfway college, halfway secretarial school. We had typing classes and things like that. We weren't a real college. By the late '60s we were a real college. And then they hired a new president named Arthur Flemming, who was probably the highest status president we ever had. He was a former Cabinet member, a man of great distinction politically, who was deeply committed to—he was a liberal Republican type. And he was deeply committed to making this—the identity of this college would be that it would be one of those colleges that was going to address the issue of race and social justice in American society. And so under his—in the first year as President, they launched this incredibly ambitious Expanded Educational Oppor—EEO program—Expanded Educational Opportunities program. Which was admirable in its ambitions. You know, it was just exciting. As I said, it's one of the reasons I came. I just thought, “Wow, they're really trying to do something.” But again, as I...you know it was really predicated—it was a tremendously expensive program. And it was predicated on the idea that if we do it well enough, more money will be given to us. And that didn't happen. And we made huge financial commitments that just weren't sustainable. And then they tried to, they tried to buy some more time, essentially by borrowing against the endowment, which was very small at that time. And you know, technically, you can't sell the endowment, but you can use it as collateral, which has the same effect. And by the mid-'70s, we had wiped out the endowment. And this is clearly illegal, as I understand it. I mean, the man who really saved the place is John B. Davis, because he managed to persuade Wallace to forgive it. There was a point, at least by—I don't know all this for absolute fact—but the main version that I have been told many times, is that Wallace threatened to get his money, you know sue to get his money back, or threatened to sue to get his money back. That they had...he had given tens of millions of dollars and it had been misused and not been used for the purposes for which he'd given it. And he probably would have won

the suit. I don't know how...what that would have meant in financial terms. But it would have literally killed the college. And you know, Davis persuaded him to forgive that. So that by the mid-'70s, we were staggering along. Although in some ways that was a more—I mean the late '70s is...my favorite memories of Macalester are from the late '70s to early '80s when we were really making it on our own. But that's neither here nor there, I guess as my dad would say. You know, basically we overcommitted and spent all the money.

[25:41]

LZ: You had said that the administration at the time was kind of incapable of running things and I'm curious how that affected the relationship not only with faculty but also with the students.

PS: [Laugh] Well...I mean I really... I'm one of those typical persons of my age group who has very fond memories of all the excitement of the late '60s and early '70s. And there were demonstrations and upset all the time. I just loved it. I mean, and we were probably the last college in America where the students shut down with a sit-in. Essentially the administrators got out of here as quickly as they could. Flemming was fired in 1971. Well he was fired the year I was here, my first year here, and then the person who came in after that, James Robinson, was so inept that he just, he took a bad situation and made it worse. And...I lose track of dates here. I guess it was '74 but maybe it was '75. He had announced the latest round of budget cuts and the students—you know most of the budget cuts involved cutting back on all these ambitious programs. Not the only budget cuts, but the most—when you're firing faculty nobody cares about it, you know they'll go away. But if you cut student aid to minority students, or you know things like that, then people are going to do something about it. So I remember at Orientation



Week, you know the week the freshmen get here in the Fall, I think of '74, but maybe '75. The students sat-in and shut down the administration building. And you know stormed and took over the first meeting where all the freshmen and their parents are here—went around, urging students, “Don’t come here, it’s a terrible...” I mean, you know, a large number of freshmen just packed up and left that day. Their parents said, “Well we’re not sending our kid here, this is, we’ve made a bad mistake, and there are other colleges.” So...this was sort of typical administration—the President was gone. Nobody knew where he was. He was literally—for two weeks nobody knew where the President of the College was. Then he came back, he finally reappeared. And he had been in—he’d been out interviewing for jobs. And he got a job as the president of some place in Florida, and announced he was leaving. He left—I mean this is pretty amazing for colleges—he left with I think two weeks notice, as a college president. And you know that sort of epitomizes... You can imagine the rest of us didn’t have a lot of affection for him, or much appreciation for that kind of governance style. And probably the most important faculty contribution was that in the aftermath of that, the Trustees finally realized, “We got to get an outside opinion here, we can’t really trust the people running this place.” And they turned to somebody who was a junior faculty member at that time, Paul Aslanian, who you probably know. He taught Accounting in the Economics Department. He had actually left and had come back on one year just for the fun of it, and happened to be on campus that year. So they said, “Will you take a look at the books?” So that’s how Paul got into academic administration. He sort of started reviewing the finances of the place, the financial records, and of course discovered...just huge discrepancies and every time he’d find more he would report out, “It’s worse than we think, it’s worse than it looks”—at least a year of that. And gradually he became the de facto financial administrator of the college. Eventually he was appointed to the position.

So I don't know if you call that faculty governing, but it's a good example. And we had an acting president named McLarnan for a year. And Truman Schwartz became the Provost. And then after about a year of this utter chaos, John Davis came in, which was a miracle, in retrospect. At the time we were all humiliated. Somehow having a former superintendent of public schools become a college president seemed very demeaning to faculty members—you know somebody with a Doctorate in Education is about as low as it gets. I remember we were all...we sunk that low. And in fact we had to. He was apparently the only person who even considered taking the job. But he took it. And he was a miracle worker. I think maybe that answers your questions, maybe more than you want.

[30:47]

LZ: What types of things did Macalester then do in the years following that pulled them out of that crisis?

PS: Well, I don't fully know as to what we did. I think we just... If you just stop making the bad mistakes, you're halfway there. By then we were a very small, very modest, a very different institution. Much smaller, and we became much more economically efficient. And by certain measures, I suppose we weren't as good a college. I think probably, certainly the average SAT scores were down, and things like that. But we had—the students that were here were probably happier to be here. And of course the main thing is we just squeezed it out of the faculty and staff. I, for example, I've always tried to do a little financial planning in my life. So every year I take my own salary as an example. I take whatever salary and correct it for inflation to see what I'm making in constant dollars. And my salary fell every year from 1970 to 1982. And this,

obviously you're not old enough to remember, but the '70s were a period of hyper inflation. So there were several years of just flat pay cuts. At a time when inflation was 15, 18, 15%. So for example I started at \$10,500. And in 1974 I was making \$10,000. And by 1982 I was making \$16,000. But that was less in constant dollars than \$10,000 in 1970. So...and I'm not looking for sympathy. I mean that was true of all of us. Basically the college cut costs, drastically. And there was of course a lot of deferred maintenance. The place was a wreck physically. I remember our main classrooms at that time were on the second floor of Old Main. Second floor—you know, so there are two floors above us. But during the Spring, it leaked so much that you literally—I had to go to class I had to take an umbrella to class because I would have to stand where I was—I'd stand with an umbrella to teach class. If you're a student you could kind of move out of the drips. But if you're a faculty member and you want to move around a little you gotta have an umbrella with you. I'm not kidding. I literally...it was just kind of raining in the classroom. The place was, it looked pretty bad. So there was just a decade... An institution can save a lot of money if it just doesn't do any repairs for a long time. So cutting costs and deferring costs in every possible way. And staying small. No expansion. I was hired in 1970 and only three of us survived the first year. The other two are Karl Egge and Robert Warde. Who you probably either have talked to, or are going to talk to. And essentially between 1970 and...there was virtually nobody hired. If you look at the faculty age distribution, or hiring curve, you have a lot of people hired in the '60s, a lot of people hired in the '80s, nobody hired in the '70s. So no expansion. Whenever somebody left you just kind of closed out that line. Kind of continued contraction for a long time. People only got hired if there was a compelling necessity and they could be hired inexpensively.

[34:41]

LZ: Did you ever consider leaving during those years?

PS: Oh yeah, I mean out of necessity. For the first few years, just because I was sort of being fired every year, then hired—rehired—miraculously at the last minute. The second year is probably the funniest. In 1970-71, I was rehired. It became clear relatively early that somebody was going to leave and that would create a slot that would make room for me. But the next year I got fired again, or I knew I was going to be fired. And we...so my wife and I said, “Well, we have to get real about this, what are we going to do with the rest of our lives. I’m going to turn 30.” That was kind of hanging over me. It’s time to grow up. So we started making contingency plans. And my two main contingency plans were going to law school, of course—that’s what every liberal arts major does when he can’t think of anything better to do. So I applied to law schools, and—this is a fantasy that your generation will escape. This still was a time in America when moving west was the thing to do. And it turns out that through the early ‘70s, Australia would still pay people to move to Australia. So, you had to apply. But if you applied to Australia, and they accepted your application, then they would pay your way to Australia because they were still trying to increase the population. So we applied to the University of Australia. And I still remember the Spring of 1972, I guess it was. One Monday morning, Monday noon, I came home and said, “Has any mail come?” “Well yeah, we’ve heard from—you heard from the law schools you’ve applied to, well one of the, the main law school you applied to. And we got a letter from Australia, too!” So we sit down that night, and say, “Oh, well, I could go to law school.” And I still wonder whether I should have done that. I’m obnoxious enough to have been a good lawyer, too. And Australia... So Kay and I kind of talk

about it. And I still remember Kay kind of bursting into tears and saying, “But I don’t want to move to Australia, it’s too far from home!” And I kind of teared up and said, “But I can’t go back to school, I couldn’t stand any more school!” So we agreed to think it over for a day or so, to see which of us had to make the sacrifice. And then the very next day, somebody announced that he was leaving Macalester, and that I would be rehired again. So that was the...that was kind of what it was like to be a young faculty member at that time. And then the only other time that really came close is I got a, essentially got a job offer from Lewis and Clark in Oregon, which is a comparable school. You know, it’s got a similar kind of situation. And I don’t remember, that was some time a little later. I can’t remember exactly when. But by then—and we talked about it—but by then my wife had a job, too. So we both had jobs. And lord knows we weren’t getting rich, but we were surviving. And we just decided, “Nah, this is it. We’ll stay here.” And that’s the last time I ever thought about moving.

[38:16]

LZ: To kind of shift gears, and talk more about your teaching specifically, I’m curious what classes you started off teaching, and did that change as you stayed here? What courses specifically in the History Department—you were hired as a medieval historian...

PS: Well, I was hired as a kind of everything, because they didn’t have anybody who taught anything before about 1800. So...I remember Chuck Green used to have a snide note he would send out to his colleagues, “What are you calling your course this year?” On the grounds that we never really changed, we just re-label it to get a new market. And so...it’s actually hard for me to remember what I was teaching forty years ago. Although probably pretty much what I was

teaching last year, if I were honest with myself. But I think my teaching has changed drastically of course. That's bound to happen. I remember that I taught a very basic Western Civ course, you know a kind of introductory soup, entry level, "There was this place that was called Rome" kind of course, you know? And I think I taught a straight-forward Medieval History course, and a Renaissance course, and a Reformation course, and a Social and Economic History of Europe course. But all very traditional. What graduate school prepared me for. I mean the first few years, you learn so much your first few years of teaching. I mean, you're kind of one night ahead of the students, if you're lucky. And every night I'd stay up late reading Encyclopedia Britannica, trying to find something to say the next day. Because all they teach you in graduate school is bibliography. I could talk about everybody's historical theories, I didn't know shit about history. And it was, man, it was fun. I loved it. But very traditional, kind of old-fashioned narrative, largely past politics and history.

[40:28]

And my teaching changed in two ways. One—and I think it's probably typical of all of us in the Department—our curriculum changed in response to cultural shift. In my own case that meant obviously looking more at issues of race, class, and gender—the sacred Macalester trinity—that entered into my courses in a way that hadn't been part of my graduate education. I think for me the other thing was...oh the other thing that sort of reflects that for me I think is world history. You know, the kind of—I mean for the first half of my career, my kind of bread and butter course, the one I always had students in, because students wanted to take it, was just a straight-forward narrative European history course. And I haven't taught that, I don't think I taught that for the last fifteen years of my career. But what gradually replaced it is a kind of entry level world history course that was popular. You know sort of a feeder course for everything else I

did. And that also reflects cultural shift. Europe isn't enough anymore. World history is very—it's sort of really only taught in the United States—but it's part of American culture. And then the other way is just to reflect my own... What I love about Macalester, that I think is the greatest strength of the History Department, is that we're all very independent people and we do what we want to do. And what I love about Macalester is that the College will let you do what you want to do. So I think the only time I was ever criticized for what I taught was Truman Schwartz once expressed, when he was Provost, expressed disapproval because I was having my students read *Tarzan*, in my European history course. He just didn't get it, you know, he's a scientist, what does he know. You know, but we could do whatever we wanted. And so gradually I developed this course on war that was probably my most popular course in my later career—it just had a steady clientele—that was across fields. It did ancient history, medieval history, modern history, in a way that at a traditional place it just wouldn't have been done. And a course that focused just on law, in a way that kind of poached on various fields. It did a little American history, a little European history, which used to not be allowed. Or the seminar I taught on war films. Certainly, probably the biggest shift, is the use of popular culture in my teaching. I don't know what my career would have been like without the VCR and the slide projector. And that was revolutionary in the early '70s, to talk about popular culture. It was just unthinkable. You know you were supposed to teach high culture. I mean it's a field that Norm kind of took over when he arrived, but really Ernie Sandeen and I had sort of started. We taught the first kind of popular culture course, history of popular culture course, I think in 1973, when it was really a kind of radical idea. That's the way my teaching has evolved, to allow me to do what I want to do personally and to break away from...change.

[44:10]

LZ: How did the advent of technology in the classroom transform...you said in the videos that you showed, but also just as computers became more standard, and...

PS: I don't think it changed the classroom all that much. I mean, it just meant you could... I mean I went to a large state university—a very good one, Berkeley—but you know, where classes were typically in the hundreds and the teaching format was lecture. And here, I never broke away from it. It was a style that fitted me best. I tried to engender discussion in class, but it was a lecture format. But being able to bring more media into the classroom I think—I'm not a mesmerizing speaker—but pictures can be entertaining. And so I think the combination of pictures and sound...made the classroom experience more productive. But I don't think it fundamentally transformed it. I'm certain there are other disciplines where it did. But I don't think so in history.

[45:21]

LZ: I was—

PS: Except, well let me change that in one way. It really meant that you could assign whatever you wanted to read. I mean, when I came through college, when I was first teaching, your primary concern as a faculty member was, "I have to build a course around a certain number of books the students are going to have to buy, and those books are going to be expensive, so I can't have them read much." Because it's really before paperbacks, even. And so you'd have to get these sets of readers and things like that. Now, there isn't anything I can't, I couldn't, say, think



about it tonight and say by tomorrow it's available. It might not be legal but everybody does it.

So thank god for that.

[46:03]

LZ: I was reading about this program called Faculty Renewal, and I guess nobody has really talked about that. And I don't know if you remember what, it—

PS: Oh heavens yeah.

LZ: —it was in the '70s—

PS: That's always been a big part of Macalester.

LZ: Oh, ok.

PS: I mean, was there one in particular?

LZ: No, just kind of what that program was and how that got started.

PS: Oh well, I don't know that it's a program per se. Maybe it's been labeled. You know I mean we're always reinventing the wheel around here. I mean I'm one of these people who doesn't think much of the, what is it, the Center for Cosmic [*sic*] Citizenship, or whatever. You know it's just re-labeling what we already do. But a big part of... Actually let me go back and

say one more thing about that. The single thing I like best about Macalester—that we were able to do because we were so chaotic that we could do what we wanted and there was no administration to stop us—is the amount of joint teaching that we do. My best teaching experiences have always been in joint-taught courses. I've probably taught over the years with, I don't know, somewhere between twenty and thirty courses with people in... I've co-taught with people in the Biology Department, the Chemistry Department, multiple different kinds of courses with people in Poli Sci, and Philosophy and Religion and English, Geography. You know those kind of co-teaching programs. Just so... It kept me alive and it gradually transformed my teaching. I think they say imitation or plagiarism is the sincerest form of flattery. And boy have I flattered my colleagues over the years! I've stolen every idea I could from every one of them, and am deeply in their debt. And maybe that relates to faculty development. I think maybe we became more self— It's always been the idea of course that a professional at this level is supposed to be continuing to grow and develop in his field or her field. So that's a given. But I think what probably changed in the '70s is we became very self-conscious as an institution. The traditional way to really renew a faculty is to go out and hire new people. But in the '70s that was out of the question. So people here have got to do something new. They've got to grow. And we've got to help them. And what limited resources we have will be devoted to helping them develop new areas of expertise, and be able to teach things that they previously wouldn't have been able to teach very well. And we were able to generate—you know it's one thing it's easy to find soft money for. So, gee, I don't know when the first formal program was. It probably was early in the mid-'70s, somewhere in there that we got the first series of grants. But I think from at least the mid-'70s on, there's always, I mean there's always some soft money

program going on all the time. And it also became a way of supplementing your income.

Basically these are programs that would give you extra money over the summer.

[49:24]

LZ: Moving kind of our time frame into the '80s now and the early '90s, how did you, or did you see the campus start to change in certain ways, or issues that students kind of replaced the Vietnam War with, were there now issues that they took up?

PS: Students? I think that the one given on every college campus, including this one, is every Fall at some point, some senior is going to come into your office and say, "Boy, the freshman really aren't very good this year, are they? They're not as good as we were." It's just human nature. So I think there's a tendency to want to— I don't believe, despite everything, that the students have changed all that much over the years. This is in no way disparaging them. They're still American adolescents. It's a stage of life, and they change as the culture changes. But I don't think students at Macalester, per se, have changed radically. They are certainly more politically passive now than they used to be. And they're certainly more career-oriented here than they used to be. And that is a perfectly understandable response to external realities. Anybody your age comes through life knowing that it's a tough world out there, in a way that people didn't thirty years ago. There's anxieties—I was just reading an essay, some story about how, some new study about how much less men in their mid-thirties make now than their parents did a generation previously. Yours is the first generation that's going to experience social mobility in a bad way. That is, on the average, your generation is not going to be as well off as your parents' generation. There's an understandable set of concerns, that inescapably have an

impact on college education. Other than that, I don't see any real change. I think Macalester has been amazingly resistant to change in some ways. I think Macalester changed less than most colleges did. There's still a kind of Macalester-quasiness and scruffiness that is very, very much the real Macalester. You know, if you go down to Carleton, you don't have to be on campus very long to realize how different a place you're at. For good or ill. And let's say the only other thing is, let's say the '80s, that's when the money hit. Sometime in the mid-'80s. Suddenly the money started to flow and everything changed at the college. And the most significant change I think in terms of students is that essentially what we did—I don't know the financial statistics on this—but I would presume that proportionally the net tuition revenue fell drastically in the '80s. That is, from about '75 to 1985 the only way we survived was by bringing students who would pay their own way. I mean there was financial aid to be sure, but most students who were coming had to pay their freight. Well, beginning in the '80s, we had more money and a lot of it went into financial aid. Which is great—I'm all for it in principle. But it also meant that we were getting more and more, a lot more students were coming here because the financial aid had become a decisive factor in their decision. I love teaching freshman, I always taught a freshman seminar. I think it's the best kind of teaching that Macalester has available to it. I love meeting, working with—I like it because they're not Macalester students yet. They still do work and are optimistic and haven't become cynics yet. But one question I always ask when I meet them the first time because you're all of a sudden their advisor, is, "Why are you here? Tell me the truth. Why are you here?" And, you know, it'll always be, "My parents said I had to go here because we got better financial aid" or "I didn't get into x." And that's a reality. That's the biggest change I think from the early or mid-'80s on, as the increase of that kind of vague undercurrent of, "I'm here but I'm not entirely happy about it."

[53:42]

LZ: Can you recall what national, global issues became prominent on campus during that time?

PS: I think the same issues that are always...but I don't think of them as being on campus. I don't have a... I suppose this shows a lapse of memory, but I just can't remember...politics... I can't remember the last time politics really made a difference on this campus. I think the only kind of cultural moment that I really remember, and I don't even remember what year that was, is the day the O.J. Simpson verdict was announced. It was quite a day. The campus kind of came to a halt. It must have been in the '90s. I can't even...it's all a blur. But by then there was a Lounge on the 4<sup>th</sup> floor of Old Main. And I remember we had one of those rolling televisions, I remember we rolled out the television set and all the Department and every student we knew crowded in the room because they'd heard it was going to be announced on television. It was just quite a cultural moment. But that's... I mean I'm certain there were crises that I'm forgetting. Certainly this is a liberal campus. For people, for the Macalester mainstream, the Reagan era was a hard era for them. But I don't remember demonstrations or anything.

[55:28]

LZ: In 1990 you became the Vice-Provost of the college, and I was wondering how you came to that position, and what that entailed for you?

PS: Well...I don't have short answers to questions. I think the only answer to that question is to look back at the administrative and political history of the college. During the '80s, the '70s and

early '80s, it isn't just the faculty and student body that contracted, the administration contracted. So we had a really lean administrative structure going into the early '80s. The Provost, who at that time was Jack Rossmann. As I remember his staff was him, and two secretaries, and maybe a faculty member was hired in the summer to run summer programs or something like that. But I'm pretty sure that was the extent of his administrative domain. Whereas you go over there now, and, I don't know—the Provost knows how many people report to her—but it's a huge empire now. Gee, there's a Provost, and, how many Deans do we have on this campus? We didn't have any Deans. And secretaries. I'm not knocking it, but it's just a different world entirely. There's got to be at least a tenfold increase in the size of the academic administration on this campus. And so the creation of my job fits into that general trend. But anyway, when Jack Rossmann—in terms of politics on campus in the '80s, the politics become campus politics. When President Gavin came, President Gavin was supposed to come in and be the president that made this place great. And whatever his strengths were, his political skills were minimal. And when he came in, he understandably said, "I think it's time for change. Jack Rossmann has been Provost for ten years." I think probably most people agreed, maybe Jack did, too. Ten years is a long time to be Provost. And then there's the new top gun in town. So Jack was squeezed out, or retired from that job.

[58:25]

A new Provost was hired, and there was just a series of disasters. Gavin very quickly alienated a significant fraction of the faculty. On the issue of... Gavin is reported to have said, "Well I need to take, to make this place great, is to get rid of about half the faculty, because they're just not good enough." And I'm not going to argue with him, maybe he was right. I'm probably on his list. Maybe he should have fired them. But he can't do that. And it's pretty bad

administrative form to come in and alienate people you're going to have to work with because they ain't going away—they've got tenure. And so essentially, very quickly, Gavin was at open war with the faculty. And it just only got worse and worse and worse until he finally had to leave. But initially [unclear] a new Provost and that Provost will help me reform the institution and build its greatness. And there was a national search, and we hired somebody. I think his name was Peter Conn, although I can't remember for certain. But I think his name was Peter Conn. And he came out here, oh I don't remember exactly what year it was, but probably 1985, something like that. He came out to start being Provost in—he must have arrived in the summer. He didn't last 6 weeks, I don't think. He clearly came and spent a matter of weeks here, and realized, "Oh my god, this is terrible, I can't work in this situation." And he quit. I mean, he just quit, and went back to where he came from. He had not resigned tenure at his previous institution, unbeknownst to Gavin. And so he just quit on a couple of weeks notice and disappeared. And so here we go again. And Gavin had to make an emergency appointment and a search for an Acting Provost, and it had to come from out of the faculty. And my colleague Jim Stewart was hired for the job. And so Jim Stewart I think was Provost from '85 to '87 or '86 to '88. I don't remember exactly. And Jim shared a lot of Gavin's values and assumptions, and so he had a lot of great successes I think as Provost. But in the end, he made a lot of enemies, too, on the faculty, because Jim made it very clear who he respected, and who he didn't, who he's going to reward and who he's not going to reward. And that tends to divide a faculty pretty fast. So at the end of two years, Gavin—I don't quite understand why—but Gavin pulled the plug on him and said, "We'll another national search." And Betty Ivey was... a woman by the name of Betty Ivey, who had a lot of administrativeship was brought in from outside to become Provost. And she, I think, started in 1989. I may be wrong about the dates here again, but

anyway, during her first year here, she concluded, and I think correctly, that as an outsider, she didn't quite—she needed somebody inside her office she could talk to who was from inside and knew the place.

[1:02:30]

OK, so I was just talking about Betty Ivey. So she became Provost. And she was very well-intentioned and wanted to work with the faculty, not push it around. And she concluded, and I think correctly—I had a lot of friends on the FAC, Faculty Advisory Council at that time, and I think they advised her—“You know we could afford to expand your office a little further and it might be nice if there were a full-time”—the idea was to create a job where a series of faculty members would rotate through. That instead of having, in addition to the Provost, you'd have a kind of second banana in the office, who would undertake some of the administrative tasks, and also provide a kind of liaison, and frankly a kind of source of information—on how does it look from the faculty perspective—to her. And that people would take that job for a couple of years at a time, and then go back to the faculty. So, I was the first person hired under those circumstances. There wasn't...I don't know exactly how the process went. It was essentially Betty's hire. I mean, I was interviewed both by Betty and by Bob Gavin, so it was **their** decision, obviously. They wouldn't have hired someone without the approval of FAC. But I don't...since it was not—it wasn't like it was a major decision, in a certain sense. The whole idea was somebody would go and then go back to their career. This was not supposed to be an entrance into a career shift for people. And so I took the job first, and then Jim Laine took it after me, and there was another person after that. And then I think in its current iteration, what Jan Serie does as the Center for Teaching and Learning or whatever it's called, is where the job position continued to develop. So my job was to hire, to do the things where a faculty member's



experience is most important. I sort of became the...I mean the final decision is the Provost's, but I managed all the tenure and promotion cases, and I helped administer hiring searches, and I ran all the faculty development programs, and was sort of an ex officio member of the Curriculum Committee and things like that. And then, as it turns out, I think you had this on your list, it wasn't formally put to me this way when I was being hired, but that was the point where it was clear the money was coming from Gavin and it would be a large amount, and that the time had come to do a formal, long-range "what are we going to do when we become a radically different place?" So this process was launched, and it was going to be a year of academic planning that would talk about how the curriculum was going to change and then a year of overall planning, where a strategic plan was developed. And I became sort of the point, administrative point person on that.

[1:05:57]

LZ: Were you teaching classes during this time?

PS: No. That was the idea. That it really would be a break. It would be a full year appointment, as opposed to a nine year [month] appointment. And it was...strictly administration. Moved over to the administration building. And kind of cut my—I didn't go to any department meetings, I didn't teach any classes. I gave up most of my advisees, except the ones I was really close to. I really did kind of, not burn my bridges, but kind of say it's like I'm away for two years. Which is what they wanted, and I think made the most sense. But it was a real...I mean I have to tell you a couple of anecdotes that kind of... [Laugh] Both happened the very first day. I was appointed to start June 1<sup>st</sup>. And so I come in the first day, go into my office

and slap my briefcase down at my desk. Actually I have three anecdotes that tell you what it means to be—how your life has changed. I boot up my computer. They give me a spiffy new computer, of course, because I'm an administrator. And a luxurious printer, which I'd never had before. Had a wonderful laser printer, which in 1990, was quite a luxury. And it lasted me—it just died last year—so it's the most lasting benefit I got out of the job. But I booted it up, and I was trying to do something which I couldn't do. Some problem. So I called the Help Desk, or whatever it was called at that time. I'm certain in 1990 it wasn't called—I called Computing Services, "I have a little problem over here." And I was kind of...you know as a faculty member, I'm certain as a student you call the Help Desk and they say, "Well you know, I'm really sorry to hear that. Sometime in the next year, maybe if you're lucky, we'll get around to you." But I called from the administration, "This is Paul Solon, in the Vice-Provost's Office." And they said, "We'll be right over." I thought, "Wow, I'm going to like this!" [Laughter] You know, I don't think I'd hung up before somebody had rushed through the door to fix my computer. I really miss that [laughter]! And then, I remember at the first—I had an appointment with the Provost for the first time while I was on duty at ten. So I—you've been upstairs in the administration building, where Ellen Guyer and Dan Balik are? If you know any of that? One of those was my office, that's where I was officed. So the other side of the building is where the Provost and her two secretaries are. So I trundle down to the other side of the building. I walk in.

[1:08:54]

And the Provost had had a long term, there was— If you really want to know who runs this place, of course, it's the secretaries. Presidents and Provosts, they come and go. Some of the secretaries, they've been at that desk—they've broken in so many Presidents and Provosts that

they'd make your head spin. So there had been this long term secretary. Everybody on faculty knew she was kind of our contact with reality. And she isn't there. There's a new person there. And I came, and I said, "Where's X?" And there's this kind of pained silence. And I realize suddenly that everybody in the room is tense. And Betty says, "Paul, come on in." So I come in, and she closes the door. She says, "You need to know that I just fired [this woman]." And not just fired her, but said, "You're fired, clear out your desk, I want you out of the building by noon." She just blew up and fired this woman. And that was quite a moment for me. And suddenly I realize—I mean here's this huge building. Well, huge, but you know a sizable building. Lots of people work in it. I'm the only person in that building that can't be fired. You know? I mean they can say, "You're no longer Vice-Provost." But I've still got a job. It was just tremendously empowering and a sobering experience. Suddenly I felt sorry for everybody in that building. It didn't matter how good, how bad they were. If they piss off their boss, they're out of there. So it was a really revealing moment what it means to be a faculty member. And it's one I've never forgotten. And the third one is much more mundane. So I go back down to my office. I'm in one of those offices that looks out over Macalester Street. And noon comes. It's June, kind of a day like today, a beautiful summer day. And so I'm there doing some kind of trivial paper shuffling. And I look out my window. And I see all my best friends kind of ambling over to lunch. Cal Roetzel, David Itzkowitz, and a bunch of other people. They're all in tee-shirts and shorts and flip-flops and things like that. I'm sitting here with a tie on. And I know they're—it's summer, and it's going to be a long lunch [laughter]. It's not going to be any quick lunch, it's going to be a long lunch. And I think, "Shit, what have I done?" [Laughter]. Just really depressing. But, for two years... I've probably forgotten—what was the question?

[1:11:37]

LZ: No, you were just talking about your experience as Vice-Provost.

PS: Well anyway, so that's how I...I got the job. I think it was a well-designed idea. Apropos of...Macalester, I think maybe one of the interesting things about that is that the only thing that proved difficult was what title to give me. Actually, I'll show you, because that's the last time I got a Macalester id. Because they didn't want to call me a Dean, because there had been a... One thing I forgot to say about Betty Ivey is—one of these hare-brained schemes. When they hired...no I guess it was Jim Stewart's last year. I can't remember exactly what it was, but for two years, we had, in addition to a Provost, we had a Dean of the Faculty. Who was also hired from outside. And that turned out to be a disaster, because she—the lines of authority between the Dean of the Faculty and the Provost were unclear. The Dean felt that she didn't report to the Provost, but the Provost felt that she did. So that position had been eliminated, and that's why the budget was there for my slot. And also, it had been said, "What we need is a faculty member, not another outside administrator." But she, the Dean of Faculty, had been in charge of faculty development and things like that. And so they didn't want to call me the Dean of the Faculty. Even though it was being made very...I reported to Betty and I did report to the Provost. We went around for hours about what to call me. Because they wanted to make it clear that it wasn't a non-job—they didn't want to call me Assistant to the Provost or something like that. They wanted it to have a certain status, because I was supposed to represent that they cared about—I was a symbol of "We care about the faculty. It doesn't seem that way, but we do." That was my chief function, I think, was to make a gesture towards the faculty. But they didn't want to...so we talked about Vice-Provost and Assistant Provost, and I don't know, Grand High

Poobah. And lord know what else, and what they finally came up with, I guess my title was Vice-Provost. Was it? But on my—I have to show you—on my... This is what I looked like in 1990. You can see my title is Academic Dean. So they never changed, they never told the computer. And I keep it because it makes it easier for me to get into archives in Europe if I'm a Dean, instead of a faculty member [laughter]. And also I looked better in 1990 than I do now.

[1:14:43]

LZ: Going back to that year of academic planning, what kind of vision, future vision, came out of that for Macalester, that was kind of carried out through the mid-'90s?

PS: Well I'm sure you know this, it must be in the Archives. I kept copies of it. One of the reasons I was excited about the job is that one of the courses I taught for many years—starting in the '70s, I think the last time I taught it was the year 2000—was a course called The Future is History, where I talked about the similarities between the way we study the past and the way we plan for the future, or anticipate the future. Used a lot of science fiction and various social science models that go into future planning. So I was then and I remain very interested in how does an institution change and how does it prepare for the change, circumstances that the future will inevitably beget. Even my research, my Ph.D. dissertation, was on governmental reform and how a particularly successful governmental reform in late Medieval France had been conducted. So I'm very interested in that subject. And of course everybody knew Macalester's future was going to change. We talked a lot about—I'm not certain precisely how to answer your question—but in every way they could think of, we could think of, they could think of, a lot of careful planning was done, building models of what Macalester would look like in the future.

The one frustrating thing to me which was made very clear to me was that I couldn't participate. I could play a role in gathering up plans and collating them and stuff like that, but I couldn't submit one myself. I had written one. Everyone was encouraged to draw up proposals, and I had written up a pretty radical proposal. And the President personally told me, "You can't show that to anybody, because it's not appropriate." I still think my plan was a better plan than they came up with, but that's water under the bridge, now.

[1:17:08]

But anyway, the end result was this very formal strategic plan for Macalester, which... They had these glossy brochures. I still have 10 copies of it. The academic dimension was only part of it. Part of the planning was how many buildings do we need, blah blah blah. We were—my immediate function was on the curriculum side and the faculty side. You know, what size faculty should we have, how should we allocate it among fields, what should the curriculum look like, things like that. And the end result was probably the most—I mean there only have been two periods of really radical change in the curriculum in the history of the college. I suppose the first was in the '60s, the '68 plan that did away with all the traditional graduation requirements, and introduced Interim and things like that. And the other was in the '90s, the early '90s, when we put back some graduation requirements back in and changed the— The big changes of the early '90s were to eliminate the J-Term and to put the foreign language requirement back in. We'd gone twenty years without a foreign language requirement. And require freshman seminars. And probably the most [unclear] restoration of credit hours. It used to be all Macalester courses were equivalent, a course was a course was a course. But we put back in so you could have a two-unit course, a three-unit course, a four-unit course. And also we put in the domestic diversity requirement, the international diversity requirement, those things. And also

that's when the decision was made to hire, to create the Samatar empire, the International Studies. Hire a Dean of International Studies, and all that kind of stuff, as the sort of flagship of the new Macalester.

[1:19:24]

LZ: What were kind of the background issues or just discussion for some of these changes? Was that just part of—

PS: You mean the process?

LZ: —maybe the process, but I guess reason why Interim was dropped or it was felt that the foreign language requirement needed to come back. Was that just a changing of the times, or was there issues that had come up...

PS: These questions never go away. I suppose in some ways, the—the foreign language requirement is sort of like the academic version of the abortion debate. I mean people are never going to agree. But I think there have always been divisions. This was the heyday of the so-called “Culture Wars” in the United States. I’m trying to think of national versions of it. I have some books about cultural literacy... It’s a national debate, too. But at Macalester, I think what made it vital was that everybody felt, “Gee, we got to...we can’t change as much as we’re going to change and not look seriously about what we’re doing.” Our coactivity is education and what do we want to do? So that made the subject immediate. And then that provides the occasion for revitalization of eternal debates about what a college education is and what it should be, and

what a Macalester education is, and what it should be. With predictable positions. And, as to what led to the particular attitudes of people, I mean it's always a combination of conviction and interest. I mean, obviously, if you're a foreign language teacher, you certainly believe in the value of a foreign language requirement. And you also know that it's in your best interest that there be a foreign language requirement. You know, if you think about the education requirements that we put back in, I think the one decision that's been made that has been both a blessing and a limitation, I think, is that if Macalester has something distinctive about it—I think, personally I think this was mistaken—I think the decision was made that if Macalester has something distinctive, it's its emphasis on internationalism. So we're going to run with that. We're going to hire a Dean, we're going to put a ton of money into public displays of our internationalism. You know, the new flag poles, the Taj Mahal that is being built for Ahmed [Samatar], all that kind of stuff, to kind of make our distinctiveness more tangible. And so that made it very easy to argue for a foreign language requirement. If we're going to have, if we're going to be international, we shouldn't be an English-only—we shouldn't delude ourselves with thinking that everybody in the world speaks English.

[1:22:40]

So, on that particular issue... But there was a lot of log rolling. In the final—that's the one time where I actually became very politically active. I remember before the faculty were going to vote on it, I got all the kind of leading spokesmen on either sides together. They came over to my house and I gave them lunch and we hacked it out right there, "This is what we're going to agree on. This is the deal." And the initial restoration was just for two semesters, that we'd have a two semester language requirement. Which I was prepared to live with, but I think the current four semester requirement is a travesty. That's me. But that's where interests group came in.



Once we put the language requirement back in, then the number of faculty members in the languages rose, and then there was a bigger constituency to vote for an even greater requirement. On the others, it's values and ideology. The domestic diversity requirement remains a contentious issue on campus. International diversity, nobody knows what it is, and everybody—there are a million courses you can take to qualify that. But domestic diversity is intensely political and ideological. The selection process is vicious and basically it's a political—in my view—it's a political correctness requirement. But the initial motivation was certainly honorable. We wanted people to realize that white Anglo-Saxon Protestant isn't the only kind of American there is. Which no one—I was one of the creators of the requirement, I was strongly for it. But I didn't like the way it worked out.

[1:24:21]

LZ: Do those changes have any effect in the History Department in terms of what types of courses were offered?

PS: You mean the requirements?

LZ: Yeah, the requirements...

PS: Well, no, the requirements had no impact on us at all because we could easily—I mean everything I teach is international in some sense. And everything Peter Rachleff teaches is domestic in some sense. So we had no—that made no difference to us at all. What did make a huge difference—if you look at how Macalester has changed since 1990, probably the biggest

single change has been the declining numbers of the History Department. And not that they're terrible, but in 1990 we were probably the largest and most influential department on campus. Jim Stewart had been Provost, I was Vice-Provost. A lot of my colleagues were always being elected to major committees, things like that. And our enrollments were huge. Our enrollments and our majors have fallen about fifty percent since 1990, even though the size of the college has gone up. And the reason—maybe the reason is we all got old. I won't argue that point. But the other reason is that other departments got better. We were strong because other departments were weak. And since the late '80s, a lot of good people have been hired in other departments that used to be very weak. The other way it changed is that Macalester—the History Department used to be the major for people who didn't know what they wanted to do. Or that wanted kind of cross-discipline...we were sort of cross-disciplinary—or undisciplined, depending on how you look at it—in a way that...a lot of other departments were pretty narrow. But think of all the Studies programs. You know, it's the Studies programs that are also cross-disciplinary, that didn't exist in 1990. The Communications Studies, or Communications, Media, that didn't exist in 1990. We created that department—I think it's great we did—we created that department and that kind of chipped away at what Norm Rosenberg and Ernie Sandeen and I did with popular culture. Women's Studies. Women's Studies didn't exist in 1990. And now the Women's—what is it? Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies, or something like that. We used to be the de facto Women's Studies, or us and Anthropology. Suddenly there's a program there. American Studies didn't exist in 1990. So, and not surprising, Peter Rachleff and the Rosenbergs and Jim Stewart, everything they taught in some sense was American Studies. Well now there's a program over there. So if you really want to concentrate on the issues of what is now American Studies, you don't need to work through the History Department. And biggest of

all, International Studies. There was no specific department of International Studies. And there was no dedicated faculty for International studies. I can't—I mean I'd been the director of international studies at one program back at an earlier point. And of course the creation of that program has had a huge impact on all the other departments. I mean there are a lot of—it may be the largest major on campus. But it's certainly one of them. So those things have all chipped away at the History Department in particular. And I'd say the other thing that's changed the History Department is that the increasing careerism—I mean that's hit all of the Humanities majors—rightly or wrongly, students think a Political Science major is more saleable than a History major, or something like that. So that's how the changes impacted on my field.

[1:28:17]

LZ: To round out this section of questions, we haven't gotten to talk about your personal work as a historian and what kind of research that you did, and if that research involved students along the way.

PS: Well this is...I'd be curious to know who put that question in, since as you know it's very ideologically charged, about the nature of the enterprise here. My research has always been irrelevant to my teaching, for all practical purposes. Every time I've tried to teach my research field, I've failed miserably. There's just not a lot of market for the Hundred Years' War on this campus. I think twice in my thirty-five years here I've taught a course on my research field, military legal history of late Medieval France. And not surprisingly, I had a great time and a few good students had a good time with me, but it never turned out to be a growth industry for Macalester students. My research—just to answer the question directly—is on the legal and

military history of late Medieval, early Modern France. More specifically, I study the region of the city of Toulouse from about 1440 to about 1560. And to do that field involves a series of languages and expertises—paleography, diplomatics—that for all practical purposes, there's no way I can integrate my students into that research. I can't take those students to the archives, and if I could take them to the archives, I wouldn't have a student—I'd have to spend all my time teaching them how to read the handwriting, to begin with. So there's not a lot of overlap between my research, in that way. Now to the extent, the kind of research I do to develop new courses—I mean you and I've worked together—and in those ways I think I've had many experiences, wonderful ones working with students, where I want to develop a new course. Together we can build something that I couldn't build by myself. And I love those kinds of opportunities. So I've had a lot of—we had various grants that hire students to work with faculty on research. Or on general research. There's a general field of historical study, or expertise, called the military revolution—essentially the modernization of warfare, with the coming of gun powder. And I had a summer grant student, with somebody who was just great and who did a lot of bibliographic research with me. That was a great experience and I think it probably worked well for her. After she graduated, she worked in the National Archives in the Public Record Office for two years, and is now completing a Ph.D. in history. So I've had limited experiences like that. But there aren't that many students at Macalester who are going to go on to get a Ph.D. in European History, or are really interested in developing their expertise in late Medieval, early Modern History. It's not a big part of, it's never been a big part of my teaching. I don't see...I think that model fits the sciences perfectly. You always—I'm certain the biologists always need one more person to wash test tubes or something like that. As a practical matter, research for me means flying to—it's a nice job if you can get it—research for me means flying to Paris. I mean

I just spent four weeks in Paris this Spring. A very productive time in the archives, reading dusty old documents or microfilm. And I'm certain it would be fun some day to have students come along. But they couldn't do the kind of research I do. It's as simple as that.

[1:32:18]

LZ: Well we've talked a lot about changes already, so I don't know if there's really a need to go back and rehash all that, but one thing I am curious about is as, especially in the last maybe even year or two, as Macalester's reputation has kind of grown maybe just nationally and its ranking, do you see that having an impact on Macalester's mission or the types of students that are going to apply in the future? It seems we've kind of become this Harvard or, you know, "Don't go the Ivies, because"—

PS: You think so? You shouldn't believe...you know it's one thing—

LZ: —Well, I think that's more what's being talked about, about Macalester.

PS: Well yeah, it's important for us to say that about ourselves, but I think the evidence doesn't sustain it at all. In terms of our national ranking, I happen to be a believer in the *U.S. News and World Report* system. I know that's [unclear]. Those of us who criticize—people who criticize just don't like where they are in the system, as far as I can see. Our ranking hasn't changed at all since about 1992, right? I mean, we broke into the so-called Top 25 the year Gavin left, which I think is '92, maybe '93, but somewhere in there. And you know, we drift up to 24, sink back down to tie with ten other places for 25, but I don't think our prestige has changed much at all in

the last 15 years. That's one of the real sad things about Macalester, is how little it's... You know, given that we got 500 million dollars, how little we've changed in a very long time now. In terms of our enrollments, again, I think it's clear that a lot more kids apply to Macalester. But whether they do proportionally or not, I have my doubts. I mean Admissions always says, "Oh look, they've come [unclear]. Isn't this great? We've got more applicants than we had last year." But as you guys well know, part of that is simply kids apply to more schools now. The average—I was just reading the statistics in the *Times* a couple of weeks ago I think—you know fifteen years ago the average student applied to four colleges and now they apply to thirty or something like that. So I mean, more applications doesn't mean that there are really, that we're doing any better. And our acceptances are up. But, you know, whether our acceptances are up relative to... Before I'd be confident that we're doing relatively— We're doing better. But whether we're doing relatively better, I think it's in one of the Lewis Carroll Alice stories—you know, the red queen says you have to run twice as fast just to stay in place. I think we're running twice as fast just to stay in place. I don't think we're doing... I mean look, we're talking about raising one hundred and fifty million dollars right now. We're talking about it, but we keep delaying the announcement officially, because we're not certain we can do it. Carleton just announced a three hundred million dollar fundraising program this week. That tells you everything you really need to know about the relative stature of the schools.

[1:35:35]

And the other thing is that the next year is the peak of eighteen year olds. So much of college enrollments has to do with demographics. And the number of eighteen year olds, as the Echo Boomers come through, has been going up for approximately... I think the number of eighteen year olds bottomed in 197...no, bottomed in, sometime in the early '90s. And has been going up

steadily ever since. Next year is the peak. Let's see how we do when the number of eighteen year olds is dropping. And it isn't as hard to get into the schools. There's a great Woody Allen line in *Play It Again Sam* where he's—you know Woody Allen's characters has a little difficulty with women—and so one of his friends say, "Well how are you doing?" And Woody Allen replies, "Oh really great. I'm striking out with a better class of woman now." And that's kind of where we are, I think, as a college. You know, we're comparing ourselves to a better class of colleges now, but whether we're really gaining on them, I have my doubts. I would like to, I would certainly... You can't stay at a college thirty-five years, thirty-six years, and not care about it. But I think there's a lot more talk than reality, about how much we're changing. And it doesn't... But how we're doing relatively, it is true that our students are better qualified now. Well, even there, as a faculty member, I've always wondered. As I said I always teach freshman seminars, and so that's my lead into what the college class looks like. And I...I don't believe in all the, I don't care about all the other factors. I just want to know their SAT scores, and all that other stuff is bullshit as far as I'm concerned. That tells you everything you need to know. And the scores are up. But I realize I don't know how to convert that, because as you know they've changed the scoring system. There are a lot more high scores now than there used to be, too. So I don't even know there how we **really**, how much better we're really doing. But I'll accept the premise that right now the students are... My impression is that the students academically here now are about as strong as they were in the early '70s, before the college went bust. Until we finally caught back up to where we were thirty-five years ago academically. Does it make any difference? I don't think so. I don't see the... I care more about how much—for me as a teacher, what I most want are students who want to be here, want to be in my classroom studying what I teach, and who are enthusiastic about what they do. And I don't see that as much as I

used to. They may be better qualified, but you know, if they're going to take their better qualifications and work harder to get a good econ major, it doesn't make any difference to me as a history teach at all. So I don't see any change at all. Didn't see any change at all.

[1:38:56]

LZ: You're now in the MSFEO part of your career—

PS: Yes, I guess so.

LZ: Where along are you with that, and then kind of what is your—

PS: I just started. I guess June 1<sup>st</sup>, or maybe officially I don't start until— To put it crudely, I get paychecks through August. I guess officially I am in the program September 1<sup>st</sup>.

LZ: Will you be teaching any longer?

PS: I don't expect to. I mean...you know I say I want to teach with colleagues, so, there are a certain number of colleagues that ask me to come do guest spots. And I do that. And I'm still close enough that I... Well like last Fall David Itzkowitz had to leave town for a couple of days on short notice, so I said I'd cover for him, that sort of thing. And Clay Steinman and I love to teach history of film courses, so I'd do something like that just for the fun of it, if we could work out the timing. But I don't anticipate doing regular teaching.



LZ: Do you have plans for how you'll spend your retirement?

PS: Writing.

LZ: Writing?

PS: That's my official answer. But my unofficial answer is I spent yesterday fixing the electric wiring on my roof and a leak in my kitchen sink. And then I went downstairs and wrote for maybe ten minutes, so you know, how it really works... But I'm moving out of my office right now, and it's a very painful process when you've been in an office for as long as I have, because I never threw anything away for thirty-five years. I think maybe the nicest thing to say about Macalester and teaching here is that throwing stuff away, I found it very easy to throw away books. You know some books, I'll never use this again. I've given away maybe fifty boxes of books. And the other books, well I'm going to use that because of what I'm writing. So I've taken that home, and I have an office at home now that I'm setting up. But I just—this just happened to me this weekend—I was cleaning out some of my file cabinets.

[1:41:02]

And over the years, you have a certain number of students who you really—it's a miracle when it happens but it does happen occasionally—you know you just get really close to them. I don't know why, it just works. It's what this place is about at its best, it can happen here. And well they write something really good, and I'll set that paper aside. An honors paper or some paper they wrote for me for a particular class. And I looked at those, and I can't throw those away. I took those home. I want to reread them. And you know, just for example, I had a student named

Walt Kirn, who is now a regular writer, a novelist, a regular writer for the *New York Times*. He wrote one of the—when he was a freshman here, he wrote a paper for me, one of the best papers I’ve ever had. And I just...”This is great. I got to keep this, I can’t give this one away.” And I was just...”Oh yeah, that’s Walt. He’s working for the *Times*. Yeah, I guess I was right, he is a pretty good writer.” Or Patty Hurley, who, you know, graduated from Macalester and went to Harvard Law School and just joined the Board of Trustees this year. You know, she wrote a wonderful paper on calligraphy, fifteenth-century calligraphy, and how printing influenced it. It was a great paper twenty-five years ago. And she came out for alumni weekend because her son is a freshman here. And then she went to the—she was elected to the Board of Trustees—so she went to the Board of Trustees meeting. And I was able to say, “I kept your paper.” She stayed at my house. I mean we’re close enough that when she comes to town she stays overnight with me. I mean, that’s Macalester. To me, that’s what this place is really all about. The fact that Macalester has made it possible, that’s what makes it seem like a worthwhile endeavor.

[1:42:50]

LZ: In closing, and I know this is a tough question, do you have a favorite memory, or just kind of favorite time at Macalester that you can look back on...

PS: Well I’m sure I have a lot. But I’ll tell you one anecdote that kind of goes back to the hard times and what could be good about them. I had no desire to be broke again. I have loved every penny of the extra money that has come in. Enjoyed it immensely [laughs]. But...a kind of Macalester that’s gone forever, or I hope it’s gone forever, is—there was talk about when the buildings were so run down that you had to take an umbrella to class. So this would have been

in the late '70s. And Ernie Sandeen and I were teaching this new course on pop culture. This is before modern high-tech. We decided what we wanted was a room that was really set up for audio-visual, by 1970s standards. So, the College was so great but it couldn't afford to do something like that. So what we did was we met as a department. And we agreed that we would save enough money out of our budget, by not doing other things—we would Xerox less—that we could pay for it ourselves. And it wasn't a lot of money, I mean it was probably altogether less than a thousand dollars that we needed. And what we did is we got, we bought two slide projectors. And an amplifier—a tuner/amplifier—and some speakers. And some two by fours. And some four by eights. And some paint. And we got permission. And we built a little—it was in Room 207. And so we tore everything off the front wall, we tore everything off. And got a special high gloss paint so the whole wall was a reflective surface for the projectors. And then in the back of the room we built a little room. You know, I think it was—you remember right?—maybe six feet by fourteen feet, with a door that could lock, and had holes cut in it, kind of like a projection booth. And also the tuner was in there. And we got a—shows you how long ago it was—we got a turntable so we could play music. And put the speakers in the walls. And you know, we got all the equipment, we designed it ourselves. And then everybody, the whole department—I think the whole department—all of us, came in on a Saturday. And together we put it up. Sawed the two by fours by hand, nailed them up, hung the door, painted the wall, wired the—completely do-it-yourself. It was tacky as hell. You know, it was—they probably, you know, PFs [Prospective First Years] came to campus, “Stay away from that room, you don't want to see it.” It was great! We kept all our slides in there, our LPs. And for years, it was the only... I don't want to romanticize it, but I miss a place where the faculty cares enough to save its own money and take its Saturday—we all treasure Saturdays. We were all young enough that

we had family and kids at home. But we all came in, and it was kind of like a 19<sup>th</sup> century barn raising or something like that. So if I have to have a favorite memory, I guess that's my favorite memory.

[1:46:48]

LZ: Well, we've covered all my questions. Is there anything that you feel you want to add that we haven't talked about?

PS: Well, not as optimistic as the anecdote I just told you, I think I came here because there was... What's always haunted me about Macalester is how much better it could be. And I still feel that way. I mean I just think there's so much potential in this place that I don't think we begin to achieve. I can't escape feeling right now that we're kind of settling in, hunkering down, and saying "Well, we've come far enough." And it is. It's a very comfortable place now. It's a great place to teach, if you're lucky enough to get a job here. You can come here and know that you won't be rich but you'll be financially secure. You'll have to work hard, but not too hard. I'm just fearful that we're starting to settle. I don't want—I'd like to keep asking, "How can we be better?" But I hope that we'll have another period of optimism when we still say, "Yeah we could really be..." You know there's a line—I'm certain you've all seen it, the movie *On the Waterfront*, where Marlon Brando turns to his brother and says, "I could've been a contender." And that's kind of the way I leave this place in—we could've been contenders, and we still are... I would like us to threaten Grinnell and Carleton, rather than accept the fact that we're striking out with a better class of college.

LZ: Well thank you. This has been very fun, a very fun interview for me. So...

PS: Well, it's always fun to talk.

[End of interview 1:48:45]