

Lebanon Valley College®



Voices of Lebanon Valley College  
150th Anniversary Oral History Project

---

Lebanon Valley College Archives—Vernon and Doris Bishop Library

Oral History of

**Norman Bucher**

Alumnus, Class of 1950

Date: June 9, 2014

Interviewed by Art Ford

Professor *Emeritus* of English and Alumnus, Class of 1959

Transcribed by Jananne Ferrere

Vernon and Doris Bishop Library Student Worker and Alumna, Class of 2015

**Notice:** This is a transcript of an audio recorded interview conducted for the Lebanon Valley College Archives – Vernon and Doris Bishop Library. A draft of this transcript was edited and some corrections were made; therefore, the reader should remember that this is essentially a transcript of the spoken word, rather than the written word.

**Restrictions:** The oral history transcript may be read, quoted from, cited and reproduced for purposes of research. It may not be published in full except by permission of Lebanon Valley College.

**Rev. Dr. Norman Bucher '50**—Born and raised in Annville, Rev. Bucher came to Lebanon Valley after serving in the U.S. Navy toward the end of WWII. After a distinguished career as a minister, Rev. Bucher retired from the United Church of Christ conference office in Harrisburg.

A: This is Art Ford. It's June 9, 2014. I'm here at the home of Reverend Norman Bucher in Palmyra and we're going to be talking about his background and also his time spent at Lebanon Valley College as a student back in the late '40s it would be. So first of all, Reverend Bucher. Can I just call you Norman?

N: Yes, fine.

A: Where were you born?

N: I was born in Annville, my hometown.

A: Were you really? Is that right?

N: Yes. In fact, I was born on 3 East Sheridan Avenue, the street that goes back between the Mund Center and White Oak Street. That street that goes back there, that was our home. When the new White Oak Street was built and the new bridge was built up over the railroad, they took our house. We were relocated several blocks west to 229 West Sheridan Avenue. I walked from there to the College to class.

A: Well that wasn't very far either.

N: I'm unique in that I'm a hometown person all of the way.

A: Yes. Yes, you are. Now, your mother and father—what were their occupations?

N: My father was a math teacher at Lebanon High School for about 37 years. My mother was a homemaker—never worked outside of the home. That was true for a lot of women in those days.

A: Yes, most of them. Siblings—brothers or sisters?

N: I have one brother, who also is a graduate of Lebanon Valley.

A: Was he before or after you?

N: Same time at LVC. He served a longer time in the service again in the late '40s, and graduated in '49-'50 period also. He was four and a half years older than I.

A: OK. Were you in the service?

N: Yes, I was in the Navy.

A: Were you?

N: I graduated from high school in '45 at Annville High School and went into the service right away. The war was still on with the Japanese in '45. Then with the atomic bomb, the war ended with Japan in the summer of '45. I was in about 18 months, came out in the late '46 and entered college.

A: Were you eligible for the G.I. Bill?

N: Yes. In fact, they were very generous in paying tuition. You also received a monthly amount for living expenses. They were very, very generous.

A: So, when you went into the Navy, did you expect to end up in Japan?

N: No. I didn't. I went into the Atlantic on a destroyer on the Atlantic side.

A: The war with Germany was almost over by then. I know that some of the troops were being sent to Japan before the atomic bomb.

N: I did go around through the Panama Canal up into San Diego and the west coast. That would've been Japan later on probably if the war continued.

A: Did either of your parents have a college education?

N: Yes, both of them graduated from Lebanon Valley. It was interesting that they met at Lebanon Valley, were graduated in 1918, same class, and then got married in 1919. My wife

and I met at Lebanon Valley, graduated in the same class, and got married (laughing). It was very interesting—the background there. My parents were both college graduates.

A: When you were in high school in Annville, were you in any extracurricular activities—anything like that?

N: Yes, I was very active in music—played the clarinet in band and orchestra. I played baseball all four of my years in high school, and then I played baseball at Lebanon Valley.

A: Did you really?

N: Yes.

A: I did, too.

N: Got a varsity letter—played first base and pitching.

A: Did you have a good team then?

N: Yes. We had Rinso Marquette on our team.

A: Oh, OK. He was pretty good.

N: Can you imagine that (laughing). Hank DiJohnson was the catcher—all almost returning servicemen on the baseball team. Very good baseball team at that time.

A: Yes, I wish I could've seen them play.

N: Good years, very good years.

A: And you said you were involved with some music then?

N: Yes.

A: In high school?

N: Yes.

A: Was that a continued interest of yours?

N: Somewhat. I played a bit in college off and on—mostly with the small groups. German Band, that kind of thing.

A: So you went to the basketball games and played with the band?

N: Yes, very active. I always played at the College. In fact, growing up as a teenager, I not only observed but participated in the murders.

A: Oh yeah?

N: Yes. We helped bring that off—pull that off.

A: Was it always successful?

N: Usually was, yes. In fact, it traumatized the freshmen. They just didn't know what to do.

A: A lot of planning has to go into something like that.

N: Some of them were so upset with that when it happened, that they didn't know what was going on. Some left and went home, called their parents wishing they could go home (laughing).

A: Did they come back?

N: Yes, they came back.

A: So a lot of planning went into that I guess.

N: Oh my, the police knew, everyone was on board. The police came and investigated the so-called murder, and they knew what was happening and pulled it off.

A: Do you have any idea when that started?

N: I don't. That must be somewhere in the archives.

A: Some time before you came, obviously.

N: Yes, Paul Fulmer [LVC chaplain] has been in contact with me a few times with the history of the area, also the College. He has a photograph of Sheridan Avenue where our house was, and I

pinpointed where I was born. I said, "It was in that house." We were on the west side of the double house. By the way, right across the street was then West Hall, the dormitory, and my wife was there. She was a freshmen in that hall.

A: Later on that became a men's dorm.

N: Yes, as well.

A: Let's get back to high school then.

N: OK.

A: Then we will come back to Lebanon Valley. That's where we will spend most of our time. So you said you were involved with music in high school, too. You graduated in '40...

N: '45.

A: '45 you said, yes. And then you went to college. After college, you went to seminary, I guess. Was that straight on?

N: Yes. I went to college and through the second and third year, I was a math major. I was going to be a math teacher. I could have been a math teacher; probably would have enjoyed it. My dad groomed me in that direction, but during my second and third year in college I heard a call to ministry and I took a philosophy and religion major, along with the math. That was for the rest of my time at LVC and graduated then and went to the seminary in Lancaster.

A: Is it Lancaster Lutheran Seminary?

N: No, it was Evangelical Reform.

A: I guess I'm thinking of Gettysburg.

N: Oh, yes, Gettysburg Lutheran.

A: Right. And then you spent the rest of your life as a minister up until now?

N: Yes, right.

A: What all were you serving?

N: We started out in two small churches in Lebanon County, then I went to Manheim—St. Paul's Manheim, and then I went to the conference office in Harrisburg for 20 years. I was on the conference staff as a conference minister.

A: And did you retire from there?

N: Yes, I retired from there in 1993.

A: Have you been doing any substituting?

N: Interning work with churches and visitation pastor-that kind of thing.

A: Obviously, you found this as satisfying work or you wouldn't have continued it.

N: Very much so, yes. I never regretted doing ministry at all. I felt very much a sense of dedication and commitment that stayed with me all of the time.

A: Good. And one other thing then. You said you married?

N: Janet. J-A-N-E-T.

A: What was her name?

N: Janet. J-A-N-E-T. Eppley. E-P-P-L-E-Y. That was her maiden name.

A: Her maiden name, right.

N: And she graduated in '50 with me.

A: With you, OK. Do you have any children?

N: Yes, we had a girl that was born with a birth defect and died. Then we had two boys, Mark and Alan, since then.

A: And I know you have a granddaughter.



N: Yes, two granddaughters. We have four grandchildren. Two boys and two girls. Of course, Rosemary Bucher—she just graduated from Lebanon Valley in the spring of 2014. We have a boy and a girl on both sides—each son has a boy and a girl.

A: OK. Let's come back to Lebanon Valley College then. Talk about some of your time there. You said that you were a commuting student?

N: Yes.

A: You lived practically on campus. What was it like to be a commuting student?

N: Well, there was a unique building there, a frame building, just about on the site of the current library, was a frame building for day-students. It had ping pong, it had pool, and it was a stop-over for students that were there between classes or before and after classes, that was kind of the gathering place for commuting students. And of course I did not have dormitory life, or get to know a lot of students in that way. Most of my contact were through playing baseball and attending different events there. So without being a dormitory student, I missed a lot of the on-campus activity that would have happened.

A: Did you regret that at the time?

N: Not too much. It did not make too much difference. My wife and I met at the May Pole Dance. That was another thing that happened then, that is no longer there. I'm not sure if they would be able to document where the stakes were when that discontinued, but that was one of the activities there. I was president of the YMCA at that time. There were two organizations: there was YWCA and my wife was the president of that.

A: Now are you talking about the YMCA on campus?

N: On campus. This was one of the campus activities. There was a man named David Gockley, who was a minister, and he dealt with all of the campus organizations, the YMCA and the YWCA. We did those activities with him and with each other. I never joined a fraternity, but my wife was in a sorority, Philo, but I never participated in a fraternity. So it was a matter of walking to class, being on campus during class time, and on and off there.

A: Did you ever feel that the students on campus, the dormitory students, looked down on the day-students at all?

N: No, I didn't catch that. But of course again, most of the commuters were returning servicemen. Not many were directly out of high school. Most were returning from military service, and were a few years older than what high school people would be.

A: What was it like to have those returning servicemen back on campus? Did that make a difference on the campus?

N: I think they did because there must have been a maturity there that because some of them were (well my brother was four and a half years older than I was) so he was married and on campus. I was not, but he was married all of the time he was in college. He was in the army before that. So I think that the returning service people contributed to the life of the College with a sense of mission I guess, and there was no question of what you were there for. You're not much fooling around because there was a sense of identity—of being someone who was in the service and is now returning for an education. Very anxious—when I got out of the Navy, I was so anxious to get to college because I had not had that opportunity for a couple of years. I think that was true of many of the servicemen, and so they gave a sense of dedication and

mission—a sense of seriousness about things. No question about what they were doing there and what they wanted to do.

A: So it was a matter of pride in what they accomplished?

N: Yes, very much so. I think it was looked upon by students that were not former service people with a sense of pride in them and looking up to them, really. Because they were out of high school, and younger than the service people. Difference between those groups, really.

A: So when you were in college then, you said you played baseball all four years?

N: Yes.

A: Where did you play the games?

N: The baseball diamond was out along the field between Maple Street and the railroad.

A: OK.

N: East of the College now. The College might even own that land by this time. Back past the current Church of the Brethren, and there is a development back there now. This was beyond that—east of that. That's where they played the games—in that area.

A: Were you involved with any other activities on campus?

N: Not really. Nothing beyond the YMCA. The (laughing)—I smile when I think about the gymnasium—at that time was in the basement of the administration building.

A: Oh, that's right.

N: It was a very small gym. We played handball with Ralph Shay, one of the professors. It was very interesting. There was a small balcony above the lower floor. That was the gym at the time before the Lynch building. The president when I was there was Clyde Lynch—and the

president's home was there on Sheridan Ave., not far from where I was born, and on the other side of the street. So that was about the extent of my activity there.

A: Was there anything like an organization for people that wanted to be ministers?

N: No, and there wasn't anything organized at that time. And of course not being a United Methodist, I was on a different side of that way. I wasn't in on if there were meetings of ministerial students of the United Methodist Church—I would not be a part of that.

A: Oh really?

N: Yes, not being United Methodist.

A: Back then it wasn't United Methodist, it was United Brethren?

N: Yes, and the UB was the United Methodist later on. That was a process that took place. Back then the United Brethren Church on the corner was the College church, and Chapel was held in there, when Chapel was compulsory. You had to make certain number of Chapel attendances and it was held there in that College church. Once Miller Chapel was born, named after one of the presidents, Frederick Miller, and as soon as it was built, the UB at that time was no longer the college church. The Chapel replaced it.

A: Was Chapel hours required for returning service members?

N: Yes, it was. We were all treated the same.

A: Did you like the services?

N: I imagine most of them felt that they put up with them more than they liked them (laughing). The fact that it was something we had to do and keep track of it, but I still think there was some value to it.

A: Let's talk a little bit about the classes you had, the professors you had, that sort of thing. Do you remember your freshmen year classes?

N: Yes. I started in mathematics. I had Dr. [Amos] Black—the mathematics professor at that time. I had Dr. [Chester] Feig, later on I had S-O-G Grimm, "Soggy" Grimm for physics.

A: Let's stay with him for a moment because he's an interesting character that keeps coming up. What was it like to be in his class?

N: I liked him very much. He was a matter-of-fact, pretty straight forward, all business, no fooling around—very capable person. You had the feeling he knew what he was doing, and he was a teacher professor that not only knew what he was doing, but could get it across to different people. He was a good teacher in that sense.

A: He was up in years by that point, too.

N: Yes, he was old then. He retired not too long after that, actually. Those were good years and I liked math very much and I took all of the math that I could get, for those first two years.

A: Did you like it in part that you were good at it?

N: Yes, I—for example, Calculus—that was unusual at that time because you didn't have calculus in high school, but now you do. Not those days, you didn't have that. I took it in college and all of the different math courses like differential equations, and all that I could possibly get a hold of.

A: You mentioned a couple teachers back then. Were they the math teachers—before "Soggy" Grimm—you mentioned two or three—were they your math teachers back then?

N: Yes.

A: So there were how many people in the department—three?

N: At least three.

A: What about other classes you had as a freshman. Like freshman English?

N: Yes, freshman English. There was a Mrs. [Lucille Shenk] Mumper at that time. My wife had Dr. [Paul] Wallace. I didn't have him, but I knew him. In fact, his son was in my college class. David Wallace—he's still living in Frederick, Maryland and I see him every once in a while.

A: Oh really?

N: We were very close friends. Both growing up in Annville—all through high school, and all through college. I knew David very, very well. We all respected Dr. Wallace because he was a great historian, as well as an English professor.

A: Though you never had him, you said?

N: I never had him in class, no.

A: But did you know him outside of class since you lived in town?

N: Yes. I visited in their home many times where the Wallace's lived on Maple Street. I remember the place. So, we got to know the family. They were from Canada—the Wallace's. I'm thinking Toronto area, and they came from that area. Very well respected and looked up to, even to this day.

A: Yes. Did you know "Soggy" Grimm outside of class since you lived in town?

N: No, I didn't know him as a personal friend. Only in class. I knew his children—yes, several of his children I knew pretty well. In fact, I think at least one of his children graduated from Lebanon Valley.

A: Yes. You mentioned the freshmen English class. Mrs. Mumper?

N: Mumper, yes.

A: Mumper?

N: M-U-M-P-E-R.

A: Mumper, OK. What was freshmen English like?

N: It was very difficult because I think I experienced the same adjustment from high school to college. It's a different ballgame all of the way. College—you have to learn a different way to study than in high school. In English, I struggled with theme writing. Almost every class or every week, we had themes to write and I wasn't used to that. A lot of grammar and compositions to write and to read before the class, outside. So, I struggled with freshmen English in a way that some people didn't.

A: You struggled with it, but did you learn as well?

N: Yes, very much so. I was very grateful for that English and I took Greek in college with Dr. [Alvin] Stonecipher. He was a great professor at that time. But it was a good time. The classes were very beneficial. I can look back and when we would sing the alma mater, full well we know the debt we owe to "Good Ol' LVC," I think the classes were a big part of that.

A: What other classes do you remember? You said you turned to religion and philosophy your junior year.

N: Yes, the biggest influence on my life and towards the ministry was Dr. Carl Ehrhart. I had him for philosophy and logic, and all of those classes. As a person, he made a great impact on my life, which I think is one of the reasons why I went into the ministry.

A: Can you expand on that just a bit?

N: He was a very sharp, intellectual person, yet great sense of humor and could engage you in dialogue and conversation in a way that was just remarkable. Outside of class, I got to know him as a friend, visited with him, got to know his family, I was very fond of Carl Ehrhart.

A: He was a minister too, wasn't he?

N: Yes, he was.

A: As well as a Ph.D.?

N: Yes.

A: Practically everything else.

N: I guess that was in the '60s when I was a pastor in Manheim—I was an adjunct professor of religion for a short time, a couple years. I worked with Elbert Wethington, Perry Troutman, who is still around. Perry Troutman still maintains an office, I guess he still has a connection with the College because I see him around campus a bit. He was one of the religion professors at that time. I enjoyed that, I had a great time with that. Led me to make a decision in my life—Do I want to be a college professor? Which I was—I went to Temple for a master's, did my Ph.D. work at Temple, and thought maybe I would be a college teacher. But, I've felt the difference was—I felt that I wanted to be a generalist and deal with people from the cradle to the grave, rather than the four years of college. So instead of being a professor, I went to ministry, and stayed in ministry then for that reason. I just wanted to be with people their entire life rather than only college. That's fascinating to me that I look back on it.

A: You did say that you felt a calling as early as your sophomore or junior year.

N: Yes, between sophomore and junior year.

A: But you still went on to do graduate work?



N: I continued the math thing.

A: Why didn't you go into ministry right away?

N: Well, I don't know. That was interesting. It's hard to tell how that happens. I had no idea in high school that I was going to be a minister. No idea at all. Some people felt called their whole life, but I did not. So, I not only came about it while in college.

A: So you waited until after graduate work?

N: Yes.

A: You went to seminary. Is that how it worked?

N: Yes, well I took seminary work for three years out of Lebanon Valley—did graduate work at Temple while I was in ministry.

A: Oh, I see. You did seminary work and graduate work.

N: That's right.

A: Some indecision or weren't quite sure?

N: Not too sure what I wanted to do.

A: Maybe you just liked to do math (laughing).

N: Yes (laughing). I probably would have liked to be a math teacher. I would have liked it. My father (laughing) was a very strict person and he taught me the times tables up to twelve before I was in first grade.

A: (laughing) is that right?

N: And that impressed upon me. I was headed in that direction. No doubt about it.

A: So by the time you finished the Ph.D., you were out of school 15 years?

N: Yes, by that time it was the late '60s.

A: Yes, and did you have any children during that time?

N: Yes, we had the children by that time. All of the children.

A: What did your wife think of what you were doing here?

N: Pardon?

A: What did she think of not really having your direction, changing your mind, that sort of thing, through this whole time period?

N: She told people very frankly that she would never marry a minister.

A: (laughing) OK.

N: But she did.

A: Maybe that's why you went on for a Ph.D. in mathematics (laughing).

N: I'm not sure that my family really understood what the ministry was. I don't think they really ever caught on to why I did that. It was very interesting. I think my father was just disappointed I wasn't a math teacher. That might have been part of the reason (laughing). But, I went that direction. It's amazing how that turned out.

A: What other classes do you remember from those days? Favorite classes?

N: My favorite classes became the math classes, and the philosophy and religion classes. Dr. [Gustavus] Richie was the religion professor at that time. His classes were very dull, and difficult.

A: He taught just religion?

N: Yes, just religion. But I enjoyed Greek. I wish I would have pursued farther with that, but I didn't. Elementary, Introduction to Greek. Didn't go much further than that. But I enjoyed those

classes, and focused particularly on religion and philosophy at that time. I enjoyed physics. That was the one science that I took. Never took biology or chemistry, but I took physics.

A: Was one course required?

N: Yes, one science course was required. I liked physics. I think it was because “Soggy” Grimm was very helpful and I related the course to math at that time. Physics and math were interrelated. That was good.

A: So, these two post-graduate pursuits, did you feel that the College prepared you well for graduate school and ministry?

N: Definitely. I would think so. I pursued graduate work in religion and took an STM at Temple and later Ph.D. work in the field of History of Christianity—was my major in graduate work.

A: What would you say about the—I guess the atmosphere on campus at that time—what was it like to be a student at Lebanon Valley College? What did they think? What did they care about?

N: I think it was very upbeat at that time—the groups that were on campus—whether that’s sports or music—were very well done. The Conservatory was very active at that time and we had very capable music groups. It was a joy just to be a student with that and enjoy the groups, even though I wasn’t singing or participating—it was nice to be a part of that scene. It was well done on campus. I think you mentioned earlier it was an upbeat time all of the way for the College. I think it was a time when the atmosphere was very congenial—everyone got along very well—it’s amazing how the returning servicemen of all backgrounds and conditions got along so well. There really was camaraderie. A very tight men’s dormitory—very tight organization there—well treated with each other. I think the students got along very well. No

problems with that. Again, it was probably because everyone kind of knew what they wanted to do and where they were going, saying “let’s get on with it.” Because they didn’t want to waste any time.

A: Another question—Since you lived off campus, you lived in town, I’m interested in the relationship between the campus and the community.

N: That has always been a problem for me. I don’t understand why Annville treats the College the way they do. Some people say it’s a tax issue. The College doesn’t pay as much real estate tax and they say they are getting by with that. But, even to this day, I think it’s improving. I think President McDonald had a lot to do with the relationship with the College. It’s continuing on with the president and the administration. I think it’s always that sense of tension. I don’t know why people in Annville didn’t like the College there. I don’t know—I never fully understood that.

A: Was that true back when you were a student?

N: Yes, very much so. As I grew up as a child in town, I was aware of that all of the time. There as this feeling of discord and almost feeling as though the town was happy if the College not even being there. That’s so foolish, from my standpoint. It was a foolish thing because of all of the advantages the College brought the town they just didn’t seem to appreciate. So that struggle continues to the present day, in some form at least. It might be taxation issue, with the College being exempt from some things, but it’s always hard to understand. That always bothered me and I felt bad about it. I still feel bad about it. That the College was never appreciated the way it should have been.

A: Let me broaden this out a bit and ask you a question about your feelings about the College, your reaction to the College, what the College means to you at this point in your life?

N: It means a great deal to me. I felt as though it was a great education, a great solid education, and there was a foundation for what I did later on in graduate school and ministry. I felt that the things that I was learning in college were equipping me for what I wanted to do. I felt a good bond there. So that was easy for me. Maybe not everybody feels that way, but I always respected the College. We joined the Vickroy Society and the Walter Society—John Walter. We're part of that, and that's a sign for me that I want to support the College and we do support the College every year. That will continue to go through. I felt a good spot for the College always. I never felt bad about that at all.

A: Since you are living so close to it now, what are your feelings on the College at the present time?

N: We feel that being this close from Palmyra to Annville that we can attend events there, and to me that's an opportunity. To go to concerts, sporting events, and all we have to do is go a short distance, while other people commute a long distance to get back to the College and don't get there as often as we do. We're there often on campus and we enjoy the events on campus all of the time now. We participate in as much as we can. It's wonderful to be a part of this community and I feel we're a part of the college now, living as close as we are. As part of the campus, at the present time. Of course now with our granddaughter just graduated and we had been there again four more years with her. Interesting, my wife, if she didn't talk about this, had over five generations at Lebanon Valley over the years. Augustus Crone in the first decade of the twentieth century, his daughter, her daughter, her daughter, right down the line.

And they have all been college, Lebanon Valley College, graduates. Well, that has been that soft spot feeling toward the College because it has been a part of our lives. My brother graduated there—my parents, my brother, and I all graduated from Lebanon Valley College.

A: Do you ever think back to what the College looked like in 1946? What did it look like, compared to now?

N: It was so different then. We had so little on the north side of the railroad. Very little contact over there, in fact, there were no buildings over there at all at that time. Lynch was the biggest building project shortly after that. That was—you had the feeling of being very compact at that time—you didn't have a sprawling feeling of branching out to the area. We had no idea that the College would develop the way that it did north of the railroad. The (?) a small area that you could walk very easily to everything. As a commuting student, I could walk from home to school in a short amount of time. That was in a sense continuing, but also a sense that it was easy to get to everything. That classes were accessible.

A: Good. Let's wrap this up now.

N: OK.

A: I'll give you one last chance. Is there anything that you feel that you have to say about Lebanon Valley College, especially back in that time period, that I didn't ask you?

N: (long pause) no, I guess not. The locations, the sports, the music, the classes, Chapel, mathematics and religion majors—I don't know of anything we haven't touched on.

A: OK. Well, that's good. So we'll wrap it up.

N: Fine.

A: Thank you very much. It was a pleasure talking with you. I appreciate it.

N: You're welcome. Glad to be in an interview. Well, thank you.