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Lebanon Valley College Archives—Vernon and Doris Bishop Library

Oral History of

David Wallace

Alumnus, Class of 1950

Date: May 12, 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

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Dr. David Wallace '50—Wallace spent most of his career working with the National Park Service in various capacities, becoming an expert in the history of American furniture. Wallace grew up with the LVC family as the son of Paul Wallace, late chair of the English Department and author of the College's centennial history.

A: I'm here in Frederick, Maryland and this is Art Ford with David Wallace, graduate of the College—the son of Paul Wallace who wrote the College history published in 1966?

D: Yes.

A: We're at his apartment in Frederick, Maryland. We're going to talk with him a little bit about his life and his time at Lebanon Valley College. Let me just start with where were you born?

D: I was born in Baltimore, although my parents lived in Annville.

A: You want to explain that? How did that happen? (Both laughing)

D: There was some concern about my mother's pregnancy and there was a family-related doctor in Baltimore so she went down there and stayed before I was born.

A: So you are actually a native of Annville?

D: Yes, a native of Annville. But, I was born in Baltimore.

A: OK. And your parents? We know a little bit about your father—but was your mother also a college graduate?

D: She had a certificate from Oxford in music—it was an extension program in Manchester—in England. It was good enough to get her into the AAUW, but she did not really get a “college education.”

A: How did she come about getting a certificate in England?

D: I don't really know. She was living in the Manchester area in her early '20s. She was taking courses in music and piano, apparently got a certificate.

A: How did your mother and father meet then?

D: Very complicated. My grandfather was dean of theology at Victoria College in Toronto. He had hired a Welsh professor in the department, who married my mother's sister. My mother

came over in 1914 to be with her when she had her baby. On that trip, my mother and my father met each other. She spent time in Toronto and went back to England. He served in the Canadian army and went to visit the Clarke family while he was over there.

A: When was he in the army?

D: It would be 1917–18.

A: The end of World War I.

D: He was a motorcycle despatch rider in the Canadian Army. They fell in love while he was over there in the service.

A: Sounds like Ernest Hemingway or something (laughing) kind of story there. Well tell me about your father a little bit then.

D: Well, he was a graduate, of course, of Victoria College.

A: In Toronto?

D: In Toronto. After he was married, he got a job at the University of Alberta teaching journalism. He was working on his master's in English literature. Came back to Toronto around 1920–21 to do his Ph.D. work, also in English. Got his Ph.D. from University of Toronto. The job market was not very good in Canada. He also wanted to be a creative writer. He wrote short stories and he adapted French Canadian folklore; several things were published, which didn't sell of course. In 1925, he had an army college buddy from Toronto who was teaching at Lebanon Valley College.

A: Oh really?

D: Harold Bennett.

A: What was he teaching?

D: Classics. And his wife taught French and German. Hal Bennett arranged with the College for my father to come down for the summer to teach English, summer of '25, while my mother was in England visiting her mother. I guess they hired him for the permanent position that same year. He taught there from '25 on to '49. I don't know who he replaced in 1926.

A: Was there even an English Department?

D: Well, he had assistants, one of whom was (long pause)—wonderful name—Queeny Bilbo. B-I-L-B-O, niece to Senator Bilbo—a very isolationist, Southern democrat. Queeny Bilbo was one of several assistants my father had. But there was no one over my father—he was the department.

A: Well certainly he is also the department chair if there was no one else there. And I don't know if there was a chair before him or not—was there even a department back then?

D: Yes, and I don't know who held that chair.

A: So he taught until '49 or so and then what did he do after that?

D: Well, I had him for one semester in '47—then he had a leave of absence—he tried to get a sabbatical and they refused. They weren't giving sabbaticals yet. But he did get a leave of absence and he went to work for the Pennsylvania Museum and Historical Commission in Harrisburg, working primarily on the early Indian paths on Pennsylvania, and then various other assignments. Then after two years, he cut his connection with the College and continued with the Commission until 1966—shortly before he died.

A: Do you have siblings?

D: I have an older brother who was born in 1923, so he's 91 now. I think he took one year at The Valley before he enlisted in 1942 in the army. After that, he graduated from Penn in

anthropology. For quite a long time, he was on the anthropology staff at The University of Pennsylvania.

A: Let's stay with you for a little bit then. You were born in what year?

D: I was born in December of '26.

A: In what year?

D: In 1926.

A: Oh, I'm sorry. (Laughing).

D: December 24, 1926.

A: Oh really?

D: Christmas Eve. My father was not there—he had been down to see my mother and nothing was happening so he went back to be with my brother on Christmas morning. I was born Christmas Eve and Christmas morning my father gave Tony his presents and slipped in one paper that said “one baby brother” (laughing). He asked my brother if he would like to give his baby brother a present. And he picked out the slip of paper and said to give him that (laughing).

A: Did you go to the public schools in Annville?

D: I went to public schools, yes.

A: OK. So you graduated from Annville High School in?

D: In 1945.

A: OK. Then you went to Lebanon Valley College right away?

D: I had a year and a half in the army right after high school.

A: OK.

D: In the Signal Corp. I was on the last week of basic training when V.J. Day came and they didn't need any more radio operators so my training stopped with that and I became what they called "training cadre"—we trained basic trainees—and I became the company mail clerk. Did that for approximately a year and a half in Missouri, Louisiana, and New Jersey. Then I came back in December of '46 and started at Lebanon Valley in January of '47. I graduated in 1950.

A: That's not quite four years—so you graduated in three years?

D: Three and a half.

A: Three and a half—OK.

D: And I went to summer school.

A: What was your major?

D: English and history. Double major.

A: And when you graduated from The Valley, where did you go at that point?

D: I went straight to Columbia to get my master's—I went intending to do English history because I had been one of Maud Laughlin's boys. I was fascinated by English legal history, but I very quickly realized that wasn't what I wanted to do. I really was more interested in American history. So I did get my master's—well I did the coursework in one year and then I took a summer course in history at Edinburgh University. I fell in love with Edinburgh—I was on the GI Bill and I stayed for the entire year at the University of Edinburgh without intending to take a degree. Then came back to Columbia to work on my Ph.D. and I was—when I came back to Columbia, I had taken none of the exams at Edinboro, but I had certificates of attendance at half a dozen courses. I handed this to the people at Columbia and they gave me 21 hours of graduate credit, which seemed like a blessing—turned out not to be a blessing because I didn't

take the courses I should have. I failed half of my orals because I knew practically nothing post-Civil War, although, I was able to make it up and got my Ph.D. in 1961. At the same time that I was at Columbia, I was working as assistant editor at the New York Historical Society on Central Park West, where my principal function was to pull together and edit a massive dictionary of early American artists—biographical dictionary. In the course of three years, I had to do a lot of additional research—most of it right there in the Society library. When it came time to publish, the original author very graciously allowed my name to go on the title page with his—Groce and Wallace, *The New York Historical Society's Dictionary of Artists in America 1564–1860*.

A: Then you finished your degree there?

D: Yes. That was published by Yale University Press in '57. By that time, I had left the Historical Society and joined the National Park Service in 1957 as a ranger historian at Independence National Historical Park in Philadelphia. A year into that I became curator at Independence Park, mainly on the strength of my research in American art because of the 18th and early 19th century portraits in the park collection, although I never did get to do the catalogue, which is why they made me curator.

A: What did you do there as a curator over the years?

D: I came to supervise half a dozen experts in the field of historical furnishings because we were in the process of furnishing Independence Hall, Congress Hall, Bishop White House—several other buildings in Philadelphia. So I was basically simply supervising them, no longer doing research myself.

A: Did you end up doing that for the rest of your career there?

D: For 11 years there. Then I was transferred to Harper's Ferry as the assistant (long pause) to the chief of (long pause) the Museum Division of the Park Service, the Division of Museum Operations of the National Park Service where our field was nationwide. My boss there retired three years later, and I became the chief of the division. One of my main functions was hiring and supervising historical furnishings specialists working on historic structures in various parts of the United States. I also initiated the library for the Harper's Ferry Center over there, which was a reference library for the use of exhibit planners, audio people, exhibit designers, and the furnishings planners. We also started the collection of historical materials relating to the history of the National Park Service—kind of a National Park Service archives, more of a historical collection, which is still ongoing, for which I have been interviewed as its "father." Then I retired the first time in 1980 when my first wife was dying of cancer, when I became a part-time caregiver and part-time worker at Learmont's Bookstore in town. Shortly after my wife died in 1981, the people at Harper's Ferry asked me if I would consider doing the historical furnishings plan for Carl Sandburg's home in North Carolina. So, I took that on as a freelance job. I enjoyed it very much because I was working with material from the 1940s, '50s, and '60s, which did not require a Winterthur Museum background in furniture. Then, I went back to work for the Park Service full-time doing historical furnishing planning. I continued to do that from 1984 to 1994.

A: That's when you retired the second time?

D: I retired a second time and became primary caregiver to my second wife. But during those 11 years, which I consider my best years as a laborer, I did the furnishing plans for Sagamore Hill—Teddy Roosevelt's home in Long Island, Martin Luther King's birth home in Atlanta, a couple of lighthouse keeper's quarters, an old resort hotel along Lake Superior, a lifesaving

station at Cape Hatteras. One of my favorites was (long pause) Faraway Ranch in southeastern Arizona which was a very early dude ranch and working ranch run by a blind woman—they had guests during the 1940s and '50s—and the furnishings. This is a natural area, not a historic area. But when the place closed down, they simply packed everything up and put it away in storage—practically everything they owned is still in existence. It was a fascinating exercise because there are living people that were a part of the operation. As it turned out (laughing), the wife of this woman's brother, Ethel Keller Erickson, was a graduate of Lebanon Valley College and had been an English major under my father. I went to visit her and her sister out near Pittsburgh during the course of my research. I walked in the door and over the mantelpiece was a painting and I said, "That's the Gid Kreider mansion swimming pool, isn't it?" (Laughing) It was!

A: Let's go back to the beginning of your career at Lebanon Valley College. I'm interested in what kinds of things you remember during that period.

D: Of course I remember well before my time in College.

A: That's true.

D: Well, I was fairly sick very often as a small child. There weren't many babysitters in those days, and my mother used to take me to meetings of the Auxiliary, of which I think she was the founder.

A: Yes.

D: And my father—the one thing about his teaching that I remember is the plays that he directed. I think he founded the Wig and Buckle Club.

A: Oh really?

D: I don't think he founded La Vie Collegienne and the Green Blotter Club—I'm not sure if he founded them, but I'm sure the Wig and Buckle Club was his. I remember going to rehearsals of the Devil's Disciple—he did a lot of Shaw, some Shakespeare, and Everyman. There are photographs of most of those plays, including Cyrano de Bergerac, in the College archives—his photo albums are still there I believe. I participated as a small child as a page at May Day—Dr. [Samuel] Derickson in biology and Miss Ethel Myers, the librarian, were two of the people that got me involved with bird watching, which I still do. Dr. Derickson I remember gave me a jar filled with some deadly gas that they used to kill rats—this is if you caught them (insects). And Miss Helen Ethel gave me her brother's World War I gas mask bag to put over my shoulder to carry my bird books in. I used to go for walks with her up to what we called "Violet Hill," near the cemetery, what they call "Pansy Hill." During the Second World War when I was in high school, I worked part-time at the College library moving books up to the top floor—stuff like that—helping with the book drive, collecting books for the military men.

A: That was in the Carnegie Library?

D: Yes, the Carnegie Library.

A: Do you remember any of the other faculty from before you were a student?

D: The Strubles particularly because Dr. Struble was my father's assistant. My father had no interest in American literature and I don't think he even approved of teaching remedial English to freshmen. As far as I'm aware, they probably did do that, but I think that was George Struble's role.

A: Now, when you say remedial English, do you mean "Freshmen English?"

D: Yes. So my father did nothing but teach literature—English literature. Dr. Struble was interested in American literature, and Mrs. Struble was a very “steel magnolia” type who managed to get sewers for Annville. She started the Annville Free Library in her garage, with 10 kids and 10 books. After that summer, she asked the Boy Scouts if they would provide someone to help and they volunteered me as their “book worm”—so I became her assistant and ultimately the first librarian all through high school.

A: You did that?

D: I did that, yes.

A: Still out of her garage?

D: Yes. Eventually it grew from donations and we got books from the State Library and that sort of thing. We moved around downtown in various temporary quarters—the building that they are in now was built after I had graduated from high school. But at the time I graduated, I was earning 35 cents an hour working six hours a week. I enjoyed that.

A: Did you consider going somewhere other than Lebanon Valley College?

D: No. Partly a matter of money. As you know, during the Depression, salaries were cut and I remember my mother saying that the cut in my father’s salary equaled the cost of the furnishings for one of the rooms in our new house. I don’t think that they ever got out of debt actually.

A: Where did you live in town?

D: Well, first we lived downtown on East Main Street for three or four years, but then we built a house on East Maple Street. The first of the faculty houses out there. After us the Benders, the Rutledges...

A: And the Miller's were out there.

D: Yes, the Miller's. And the Stoneciphers. But we were the first. My grandfather died in 1930 and I think whatever my father got went into that house. We moved in January of '31. So, we of course walked back and forth in those days, even to school.

A: I have to ask you this question. You mentioned this earlier—that you took one course from your father, in English literature I suppose?

D: Shakespeare, actually.

A: Oh, Shakespeare?

D: Yes.

A: What did you think of him as a teacher?

D: (laughing) Every time people ask me about that I say, "I had heard it all at the dinner table before when my father was talking to my mother." (Both laughing)

A: So you didn't even have to take notes?

D: Actually, I got put down one day by my father in class. Nicely, but, I was passing a note to a girl making a date and I had written something in the margin. He said, "Mr. Wallace." That's probably all he said. He was an excellent lecturer and every year he would prepare new lectures. I can remember he also taught at an extension division in Harrisburg.

A: Oh really?

D: And my father used to have poached egg and what he called "Cambric Tea," which was mostly milk, because I guess he got—even with all of the experience—he got worked up.

A: He needed a light meal for that.

D: Yes.

A: Was his class mostly lecturing?

D: Absolutely.

A: No discussion and questions from the student?

D: I suppose there was, but I don't remember. Another thing that I remember was that in those days, my father destroyed his used exam books. They never got out for use the next year (laughing). I had to burn his exam books and stand out by the hour by the curbside with a wire incinerator basket trying to get these bloody things to burn. Mrs. Struble was frugal and very determined, and she saved her husband's blue book covers and made card pockets for the books in the library. That was one of my jobs was to fold them and glue them.

A: They kept you busy, didn't they? (Both laughing) Well, what about other teachers that you had during that time? You remember anything about them?

D: Well, of course my major was Fritz Miller; English was Florence Houtz, who I guess filled in right after my father left. She was only there for a couple of years I think. Fritz Miller was my principal professor and I was actually his paid assistant my senior year. I used to go into the Lebanon County Historical Society with Fritz. We salvaged some of the records of the Cornwall Furnace Company, I remember.

A: What sort of teacher was he?

D: Well, he was primarily a lecturer. I can remember one time when I guess he was not in a good mood and he asked—this was a senior class and I guess history majors—he asked one of them to name the presidents in succession. He got as far as Thomas Jefferson. Fritz got angry with the whole lot of them. I think the student was an athlete because they tended to take

economics or history because Fritz Miller was sympathetic with them—but not all of them were “first class students.” (Laughing)

A: You mentioned Maud Laughlin, too.

D: She was probably the best teacher I ever had other than my father. I wasn't originally particularly interested in political science, but I was in English history mostly because of my mother's background. So I became one of “Maud's boys,” and they were mostly veterans—there were a couple of girls—but Maud had taught at the Hershey Industrial School and she was the only girl in a family of eight children, I think she was used to young men. She was a fascinating lecturer, very good. I remember going to the United Nations assembly when it was out on Long Island, with her and...

A: at the Sperry Gyroscope plant?

D: Yes, it was the Sperry Gyroscope plant on Long Island. She fell in the entrance hall. She was a pretty stocky woman and she had her bag under her arm. She was like a football player and just went down without injuring herself. Got up and said, “Nothing hurt but my dignity.” (Both laughing) She was a fascinating person—my father did not like her—she was like Miss [Mary] Gillespie in the Music Department: rather domineering, and my father was not. There was always a bit of a battle in the faculty every year about the requirement that the Conservatory students had to take English two years.

A: The Conservatory students had other requirements, didn't they? Because they were separate?

D: Yes, it was quite separate, but they had to take two years of English, if I remember correctly. Miss Gillespie was always fighting over that. I don't know what my father's disagreement was

with Maud Laughlin, but it was probably that he didn't like her style—pretty bossy, very masculine. The other one was Miss Helen Ethel Myers, the librarian, who was not that way at all, but she was a talker. I can still see my father backing his way slowly out of Carnegie Library not wanting to offend her by turning his back on her (laughing).

A: I guess he had heard enough.

D: (laughing still) Yes, he had heard enough.

A: Did you have to go to Chapel back then? Do you remember; was it required?

D: I don't think so. And physical education was not required if you were a veteran. A lot of things, with the arrival of the veterans, were casualties; May Day, the Murder. Actually, May Day may have survived a few years as kind of a rowdy act.

A: Were you involved with any extra-curricular activities while you were there?

D: I joined Philo, although I don't remember anything about it except that we had Philo and Delphian dances. I was also in the play. I was in Blithe Spirit; it was a Philo and Delphian play. I belonged to the Poli-Sci Club; it was called Pi Gamma Mu—a poli-sci fraternity. (Long pause) I didn't join the chorus; I don't know why because I had some experience in high school. I don't remember other particular activities.

A: Do you recall any incidents or experiences that you were involved in or witnessed during that period? Anything come back—when I say anything happen during that time other than what you already said?

D: Well, I have kind of a half memory of being involved with—I think my senior year—in something. There was a split of some sort politically in Maud's boys. Ray Kline, he became the assistant manager of GSA—Government Services. Ray Kline and several others, including

myself, we put together a version of Julius Caesar in which we parodied—critical of some other members of the club—I just cannot remember how it arose—but I know Miss [Florence] Houtz, the English professor, was horrified at the bad taste that we had shown. It must have been at the end of the year (long pause). I remember dating girls from South Hall, which is no longer there, the old Academy building. Miss Sutton was the chaperone. There were three women's dorms: West Hall, North Hall, and South Hall. They were kind of cliquish. Somehow, I wound up dating girls from South Hall, which is one reason I was sorry to see it go.

A: It was a history building. I remember people protesting that—that decision was made. (Long pause) Well, let me broaden this out a little bit. I'm always interested in asking people this question. Because you grew up there, you spent time academically at the College—I don't know, have you been back a lot since then?

D: I go back every year, for the last 20 years. We used to go to the five-year reunions of my class. I have been going back to Annville every year because the high school alumni association has a dinner on Friday night and the College has an open house that Saturday.

A: So you have seen the changes at the College over the years?

D: Yes. My parents moved away in 1957—same time I moved to Philadelphia, so I didn't see the changes then. I had participated in the cornerstone laying of Lynch Gymnasium in 1950. Dr. [Clyde] Lynch died shortly after I graduated.

A: That's true.

D: That summer. So, I didn't see the demolition of Engle Hall, and North Hall, and the men's dorm—none of that business, but I knew it was happening. Back in '66, I guess when my father's history of LVC came out—certainly then—and when I got an honorary degree in 1976.

A: Let me ask you the last question then. What has Lebanon Valley College meant to you?

D: Well, it probably didn't mean a great deal to me initially, but I have been so impressed by how it has pulled itself together in the last 20–25 years. I often wish that my father could see how it turned out because when he left in '49, he was very dissatisfied—particularly he and Lynch didn't get along. My father tended to have a persecution complex. There was always someone out to get him. Dr. Lynch was one of them. He didn't have any close friends on the faculty—early on when Dr. Wagner and Dr. Stevenson, he was very close to, but they both died. After that, he just didn't have any close friends on the faculty. Of course, the Bennetts had left long before. So, it's been to me a great source of pleasure to see the College become a really good college. I'm sorry none of my kids were interested.

A: It must have been really good when you were there because you went on to Columbia University and did well. Did you feel prepared for that college?

D: I didn't feel underprepared, no. Some of the other people have done well, too. I also felt that way about Annville High School. It was not a world-class institution, but it was good enough. Of course, we had a house full of books. It was a backwater in the '40s and '30s. It's amazing that those small colleges survived.

A: And finally flourished.

D: Yes, it now seems to be flourishing. I would be happy to send children there, but I never got any to do it.

A: I think that is a good note to end on. I thank you very much for your time. I appreciate it.

D: My pleasure.

Addendum

Interviewee David Wallace would like the following information included in this document:

One thing I didn't make clear was that as a "day student" living off campus, I missed most of what went on outside of classes on campus. Along with a lot of the local veterans, my on-campus hangout was Washington Hall, a temporary building between the library and the men's dorm where we relaxed between classes talking and playing cards (Bridge, and for me, Canasta). Probably my most active time was my junior year, when I was editor of *The Quittie*, which involved lots of time working with other students and photographing people and places on and off campus.

Another thing I forgot to mention was the tennis courts, which were, before the war, a very lively center of community activity. They were located where the Lynch Gym went up in 1950. As a teenager, I used to spend many a day from breakfast to supper playing there with other local kids, especially the Thomases, who lived next to President Lynch. For several years, the courts were maintained by my brother, Tony. Lots of grown-ups also used the courts, so many that at times you weren't allowed to play single matches—only doubles—and you had to wait in line to get a court.

I also forgot to mention taking beginning Greek from Dr. Adolphus Ritchie; Medieval Latin from Dean Stonecipher (I was the only student); biology from Dr. V. Earl Light, Sr.; German from Fraulein Dr. Huth (from Hamburg, who complained about the difficulty of getting Pennsylvania Germans to pronounce German correctly); and philosophy from a very young Dr. Carl Ehrhardt, who discoursed to us on Plato under a tree in mid-campus. From the faculty's

point of view, it must have been a very exciting time when the first wave of returning GIs brought new life to what had been a pretty subdued war-time campus.