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Oral History of

Paul Wolf

Professor *Emeritus* of Biology
Former Faculty Trustee

Date: February 26, 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. Paul Wolf, Professor *Emeritus* of Biology, Former Faculty Trustee—As a long-time chair of the Biology Department, Wolf joined the faculty in 1966. He was instrumental in developing a department of increasing excellence. He also helped plan the construction of the Neidig-Garber Science Center, which was unveiled in 2008. For many years he took students to Sapelo Island, Georgia, to conduct research in marsh ecology.

A: This is Art Ford and I'm here with Paul Wolf, from the Biology Department. We are in Neidig-Garber Center. The date is February 26, 2014. We are going to be talking with Paul about his experiences here at the College. OK, Paul, tell me where you were born.

P: Hopeland-Clay Township, Lancaster County.

A: You aren't too far away, then?

P: No.

A: What were your mother and father doing? Occupation—college education, if any?

P: My father and another man had a small trucking business called the Ephrata Motor Express. My father finished eighth grade; my mother went as far as sixth grade. As a young lady, my mother worked in a cigar factory in Hopeland putting wrappers on cigars. Once children arrived after marriage she gave up that and became a homemaker. I had an older brother who died at age 80, a sister who died at age 81, and a brother and sister who died as infants. I have a sister four years younger than I living in Ephrata.

A: Where did you go to high school?

P: Ephrata High School.

A: When did you graduate from high school?

P: 1950.

A: What was high school like for you?

P: At first it was difficult because I had gone to a two-room school. The Hopeland Elementary School had grades one through four on the first floor; The Hopeland Secondary School had grades five through on the second floor. Students were known as the "uppers and lowers." When you were a "lower," you were kicked around by the "uppers," and when you were an

“upper,” you kicked around the “lowers.” After eighth grade, we had the option of quitting school or going on to high school. I went on to Ephrata High School, where my brother and sister had gone.

A: Did your parents insist that you do that, or insist staying, since your parents didn’t finish?

P: Yes, they were very encouraging. But, going from that situation in a two-room school to a high school with grades nine through twelve was a very difficult adjustment. The first year was especially confusing but the succeeding years were much less traumatic, even pleasant at times, particularly after making the baseball team as a sophomore and on which I played for the rest of my time in high school.

A: Anything else in extracurricular activities?

P: I sang in a mixed chorus.

A: You sang in—?

P: A mixed chorus.

A: Oh yeah?

P: (Laughing)

A: Were you into it?

P: At the time, yes, but I couldn’t do it now! I’ve lost my voice over the years. But, yes. In fact, I did that for four years.

A: After high school, did you go straight to college?

P: No. I went in to work for my dad in the trucking business where I worked on the dock, loading and unloading trucks. Then in February of ’51, I went into the marines.

A: Did you volunteer for that?

P: Yes.

A: How long were you with the marines?

P: Three years.

A: You had to have gone over to Korea, right?

P: Yes. I spent a year in Korea.

A: Where in Korea—just sort of around it?

P: I was in the 1st Marine Division—7th Regiment, located north of Seoul.

A: OK.

P: North of the 38th parallel.

A: So not quite into what is now North Korea?

P: Yes, we were at one time.

A: When you got out of the marines, is that when you went to college?

P: Not at first. I went back to driving a truck. I was 24 when I started college.

A: What made you decide on that late date to start college?

P: Well, (long pause) I wanted to know more. I didn't have a career in mind when I decided to go to college; I just wanted to go to college. My first venture to college was half a semester at Letourneau Tech in Longview, Texas, in mechanical engineering. I didn't like it. So, I packed up one day and drove home. Then, a year later I enrolled at Etown and finished there in 1960.

A: OK. What was that like? What was Etown like in those days?

P: The first semester was difficult. I commuted from Hopeland, 22 miles one way, and remember coming home some days slamming down my books and telling my mother that I'm not going back. She responded by saying, 'Give it one more day.' I followed her advice and

finished the first semester, after which the road through college was less rocky. During my years in college, I drove truck part-time during the academic year and full-time during the summer. I also had the GI Bill, which paid \$900 per year.

A: Were you interested in biology right from the start?

P: No, I wasn't. I didn't know what I wanted to do except that I liked science. Results of aptitude tests I had taken in high school showed I was suited for science and outdoor work. When I enrolled at Etown, I was asked 'What do you want to major in?' I said, 'science.' They said they didn't have a science major, but suggested I take math and chemistry in my first year along with general education courses. In my sophomore year, I enrolled in a general biology course taught by Dr. Apgar. It was the exposure to his teaching which resulted in my decision to major in biology.

A: Again, were you involved with anything other than the academics?

P: No.

A: Because you were a commuter?

P: Because I was a commuter and working 20 to 30 hours a week.

A: Did you go on to graduate school immediately?

P: No. I went back to driving trucks (laughing).

A: Now that you are retired, don't tell me you're driving trucks.

P: No! (Laughing) I went back to driving trucks, but I took post-graduate courses at Etown—a physiology course and an embryology course. During that year, I applied to graduate school at Delaware for two reasons—my wife is from Wilmington, Delaware, and my father-in-law was a University of Delaware graduate. In addition, it was relatively close to home.

A: So your graduate work was done down there, in Delaware?

P: Yes.

A: When did you finished that? Did you go straight through and get your doctorate?

P: After earning my master's degree in 1963, I considered high school teaching as a career. My wife, who graduated from Etown in 1960, had taken a job teaching elementary school in the Cocalico Union School District. She lived here in Pa. in a two-family house with my parents, and I lived with her parents in Wilmington and commuted to Newark, Delaware. I considered going into high school teaching because I had taken education courses at Etown completing the requirements for certification except student teaching. However, there were openings for teaching with an interim certificate. So I interviewed at Cocalico Union High School to teach advanced biology, physical science, and a basic math course. The principal and superintendent had different views on advanced biology. The principal said a B or better in the first biology course is a requirement for advanced biology. The superintendent insisted that anyone could take advanced biology. That was was one problem. The other problem was that physical science was designed for students who could not get through chemistry or physics. I was told that I did not have to teach; just keep order. I left the building, went to a payphone, and called my advisor at Delaware and asked if he would accept me as a Ph.D. student. He said yes, and I returned to graduate school.

A: When did you finish your Ph.D. then?

P: I left Delaware in 1966 to take a job here, but I had not written my dissertation. I finished that in 1967, and was granted the degree in 1968.

A: Now you were married during this time—any children?

P: Yes. We have two children—Anne, born in 1966, and Matthew, born in 1968.

A: Let's move on to Lebanon Valley College then. This is the first college position that you had?

P: Yes.

A: OK. What brought you here? How did you come to Lebanon Valley?

P: OK. Paul Hess—remember Paul Hess?

A: Yes.

P: Paul was on the staff at LVC, but still working on his Ph.D. at Delaware where we met.

Because our research focused on sharks, we collaborated on several projects. In addition, at the time Paul was captain of the university's research vessel. After finishing his Ph.D. in 1963, Paul continued his research on sharks making weekend trips to the lab in Lewes with Barney Bissinger.

A: Barney was—?

P: Barney was chairman of the Math Department—a character, as you know (laughing). That's all I have to say. In 1965, Hess and Fran Wilson, chairman of the Biology Department, decided that the biology curriculum should include an ecology course. Paul approached me and offered me a position to teach at the College. At the time, I was still conducting research for my dissertation. That summer I had an interview with Fran Wilson in the backyard of his home at the corner of Maple Street and College Avenue. My wife accompanied me. After interviewing with Frank, we went to Carl Erhart's office for another interview. I remember Carl saying that he was more impressed with my wife than with me (both laughing). I accepted the position. My advisor, Frank Daiber, said, 'I would not do it; you need to finish your dissertation first because I did it your way.' He left graduate school before finishing his dissertation, and said it was rough

trying to balance job responsibilities and working on the dissertation. I arrived here thinking I was going to be teaching ecology, which I did, but I was also assigned to teach comparative anatomy, genetics, and embryology. I taught these courses for the first two years. During grad school I had been a research assistant rather than a teaching assistant, so I had very limited teaching experience. The only experience I had was giving two lectures in my advisor's ichthyology course, and seminar presentations every semester during grad school.

A: So it was overwhelming in the beginning?

P: Understated (laughing). Writing lectures and prepping for labs was very challenging. However, there was a bright spot which was working with students and the manner in which they accepted me. I remember receiving a stack of get-well cards from the students after being hospitalized for minor surgery at the end of the first semester. During the first semester, work on my dissertation practically ceased as I concentrated on teaching. I went to Fran and said, 'I know I am supposed to be working on my dissertation, but I have a choice—I either concentrate on my courses and set aside the dissertation for a while' or whereupon he interrupted me and said, 'Don't worry about the dissertation; just teach your courses.' I finished the dissertation in the summer of 1967 and received the doctorate in June, 1968.

A: So, until you retired, how many years were you here full-time?

P: 42.

A: 42 years? Let's focus on that, the whole "evolution"—let's use a biological term here (laughing), starting with the Biology Department itself. What was it like back then when you started and how has it changed over the years?

P: When I arrived in 1966, the Biology Department staff members were Fran Wilson, Paul Hess, O.P. Bollinger, Sylvia Mahm, adjunct professor, and V. Earl Light who taught geology. When Fran retired in 1968, Al Wolfe joined the staff and picked up the embryology course, which left me with comparative anatomy, ecology, and genetics. I was fairly comfortable with comparative anatomy and ecology because I had a year of anatomy at Etown and a sound background in ecology during grad school. Genetics was the problem, because I had only one course in genetics in grad school but I managed to teach it for five years. Hess became the department chairman after Fran retired. After one year in that position, he left LVC to take a position at Hershey Foods as director of environmental management. The question of how Hess was to be replaced was controversial, because in advertising the position, it wasn't clear if the position was for the chairmanship and teaching or teaching only. On one occasion when interviewing a man for the position I asked, 'Are you here for the position teaching Dr. Hess's courses, or are you here for the chairmanship?' He said, 'I understand I am here for the chairmanship.' Then I said, 'Well, I'm your competition.' (Art Ford laughing). But then, Al, Pass Bollinger, and Sylvia Mahm wrote a letter to Carl Erhart recommending me for the chair. So in 1969, I became the chairman in my fourth year at LVC, and Jeannie Argot was hired to teach Paul's courses. In the summer of 1969, I began my marsh research at the University of Georgia Marine Institute on Sapelo Island, Georgia. I continued my research as a visiting marine scientist for 12 years, working during the summers and on a one-year sabbatical during the 1977-1978 academic year. Going back to 1966, when I first arrived at LVC, I received a grant from the Research Corporation to conduct research in flooded limestone quarries in Hershey. And again, Paul Hess had a lot to do with that. The representative from the Research Corporation was on

campus, probably downstairs talking to Tony Neidig, because I know chemistry received money from the Research Corporation. Anyway, Paul introduced us and we got to talking and we ended up getting money from them. So Paul did a lot for me, and Fran Wilson was a lot of help. Tony Neidig was a great help when I first became chairman. He blessed me with turning over the advising of the Knights to me.

A: So, you were an advisor to the Knights of The Valley?

P: Yes.

A: How long did you do that?

P: I don't know exactly, maybe eight or nine years. It was a time when a lot of chemistry and biology majors were in the Knights. They had a very high GPA for a social organization at that time. In the spring of 1970, we celebrated the first Earth Day. Biology students organized seminars and made an Earth Day flag, which was hung from the window of my office in the shoe factory. I remember Alan Guttmacher came on campus. You know him?

A: No.

P: Well, Dr. Guttmacher gave a few talks in the department and then in the chapel to the entire college community and to the public—at the time, he was the president of World Planned Parenthood at that time. Then in 1971, I was able to hire a staff member, Dave Gring, to come on campus and teach genetics. Dave stayed five years and ended up as president of Roanoke College in Virginia. I don't know what he is doing now. Let's see what else. Well then I think it was 1970 when I was first asked to prepare sketches for Garber. I remember getting a call in Georgia saying that I needed to get back here as soon as I could to start working on plans for Garber. I don't know what it was called. It wasn't Garber then. I think it was just the science

building. That was one of my most challenging chores. I had never done anything like that and neither had anyone else in the department. In my first set of plans for the faculty offices, the rooms were as large as a lecture hall, and the lecture hall I designed was as large as the gymnasium (laughing). But we worked together and finally we moved into the building in 1983.

A: You started in 1970—

P: We went through at least four generations of plans—Tony, Jake, Bob Davidson, and I visited science buildings at Juniata and Susquehanna. We also went to Hollins College, which was in Roanoke, Virginia. Fred, Carl, Bob, and I made the five-hour drive to Roanoke on a Sunday afternoon with Fred driving. Jake and Tony had planned to fly down Monday morning, but the flight was cancelled because of weather conditions. Hollins College was very different—open classrooms; the greenhouse on the roof. We were told never to do that. One of the benefits of that visit occurred on the drive home. Fred and I had a very lengthy discussion on the design of the science building. Fred's concept was that faculty offices should be in a cluster so that secretarial services could be conducted more efficiently. I preferred the unit concept where faculty offices are located adjacent to the labs. Finally, the unit concept was adopted.

A: So is that one of the turning points for the science? The new science building?

P: Well, not really because back in 1975–76–77, unknown to most people on campus, we were the largest group on campus, in terms of student enrollment. We were larger than music, but we weren't recognized as being the largest for some reason. The department included pre-med, pre-dent, pre-vet, pre-forestry, biology, med-tech, and nursing majors, but were never combined for the total number of majors in the department. But, yes, when we moved in to the department, the facilities were 200 percent better and were an asset in recruiting. Interestingly,

Dan Yocum, class of '74, who eventually became chair of biology at Millersville University, enrolled at LVC and majored in biology because he liked the old building in which the department was located. As he said, 'We didn't put our money into bricks and mortar, we put it into educating students.'

A: So after the new building was built, you moved in. What was it like to be in the biology department after that point—in the '08s and the '90s?

P: In the old building, we were like a family living together in a limited space, but having a lot of fun. When we moved into the new building, the advantage was that each faculty member had his/her area. When we finally got around to completing the plans, I said, 'Al, this is your space; fill it any way you want. Ann Henniger for physiology, you fill it. Steven Williams and Susan Verhoek, here's your area,' so on and so forth. That's how we came up with the facilities. Each faculty member had what he/she really wanted up to a certain point. That made a big difference in the teaching.

A: Over the years—probably would you say—that it was a harmonious kind of grouping of people?

P: Oh, yes. We were like a family. We sat together at faculty meetings, and every spring, we had our senior party and it was one big, happy family. Of course, we had some, what I call misfits, but during my 29 years as chairman of the department, we had only two staff members who did not fit in and left the College.

A: What kind of research were you doing down on Sapelo Island?

P: Marsh ecology. The first two summers, I worked on the population dynamics of fiddler crabs—species of crabs, number of crabs, and distributional patterns. In succeeding years, my work was related to marsh grass productivity.

A: What got you interested in that?

P: A friend from grad school joined the staff at the University of Georgia Institute and invited me to join a team of ecologists involved in an extensive research project. The project was a massive study of energy flow through the marsh ecosystem. One of the first steps in constructing a model of energy flow is the identification of the plant and animal species present and estimating the size—numbers—or the mass of each species. I was assigned the task of developing a reliable estimate of the number of fiddler crabs on the marsh. Fiddler crabs are one of the most abundant animals in the salt marsh ecosystem and a very important component of the food chain. I spent two summers collecting crabs and doing the associated lab work and another two years analyzing the data and preparing a paper for publication.

A: What were you doing with the quarries up in the Hershey area?

P: Basic limnology—looking at temperature and oxygen profiles, light penetration, nutrition concentrations, and plankton populations. During mid-summer, in a quarry, 120 feet deep, the temperature profile was a classic example of a thermocline. A thermocline is an area of sharp temperature decreases about 20 to 30 feet beneath the surface which creates a barrier between warmer surface water and cooler bottom water. This barrier prevents the mixing of the two bodies of water, resulting in the accumulation of nutrients in the lower depths. During the spring turnover, nutrients are transported to surface waters where, in adequate sunlight, a bloom of algae occurs.

A: Let's stay with your experience for a bit here, not just in the department but with the College as a whole. What changes have you seen with Lebanon Valley College over the time that you were here?

P: Oh, boy (laughing). Oh, my. I must confess I never got too much involved in the College as a whole. I devoted my energies to the department.

A: You were more of a witness to what was going on than of someone that would be more involved?

P: Yes. I'm trying to think—

A: Were you satisfied with how the College seemed to be going?

P: Yes! I know that there were some rough times financially. When I came here, I thought that this was a good place to start (laughing); I did look at some other places in 1968–69. I liked the College, but I wanted to get back to marine biology research. I interviewed at the University of West Florida in Pensacola. In 1968 and 1969, I interviewed at Citadel in Charleston. I also interviewed at Boston University for a position combining teaching in the biology department and conducting research at the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute. That didn't work out because at the time we were in the process of adopting Matthew. If I had shipped out, the transaction may not have been completed. But, then I became the chairman, and I decided to stay. I was very pleased with the College, particularly with the kinds of students we were bringing in, at least in biology. I'm trying to think of what I may have not liked or disapproved of, in terms of where the College was going, but I can't think of anything.

A: Were you on any committees?

P: I served on the Board of Trustees for three years, the Student Affairs Committee, the Judicial Affairs Committee, and the Central Committee. I should mention the Graham Biology Scholarship Fund, which was a blessing for the department because it allowed us to recruit some very good students, and it still does.

A: Do you just get one student a year?

P: I don't know how many students are funded now, but when we first started we granted scholarships to three or four students every year.

A: Were they pretty much full rides, tuition, or partial—something to make it more possible for them to come here?

P: No, it wasn't full. Initially I think it was \$3,500 a year for four years, now it's much higher than that.

A: Let me ask you another question—again on a broader scope—of the faculty here, not just in biology, but it can be biology as well, who were the outstanding teachers over the years that come to mind?

P: (long pause) Oh, my.

A: Is that because there are so many, or you just can't think of anyone? (Laughing)

P: I can't think of any, but Jean Love, Betty Geffen, and that whole crew are some I remember.

A: That particular generation?

P: Yes.

A: That would have involved people like those two, Jake Rhodes would be in that category, too.

P: Joe Tom?

A: That was a pretty good group, wasn't it? When we first came, they were sort of the leaders of the faculty.

P: Now you came in what, '64?

A: '65.

P: Oh, OK.

A: Same time.

P: Well, yes, George Struble, and I remember the faculty—I said how easily the students accepted me, but I would say the faculty did as well. Not just the biology faculty, but the entire campus. They just seemed like a nice family.

A: So you're saying that not only in biology, but that it was true in general? The kindness over the years?

P: Yes. Oh, definitely. Ralph Shay and Jean Love, and of course the Dames, the Ladies Auxiliary.

A: And Marty was involved with the Auxiliary, I think?

P: Yes, and the Dames.

A: What was your feelings toward to the administration over the years?

P: (long pause) Well—

A: It's true that you had to work pretty closely with them, I guess?

P: Yes. I liked working with Carl Ehrhart and I had no problems with Fred; we had our discussions (laughing). One day I went to Fred's office probably for a discussion on the budget. As I talked, I noticed I had his undivided attention, he was listening to every word. I thought, 'Wow, I have him now!' At the end of the conversation as I got up from the chair and turned to leave, he very gently adjusted the collar of my coat. My collar was turned up through the entire

conversation which was probably driving him crazy; you know Fred (both laughing). After being recommended for the chairmanship, Erhart offered to increase my salary by \$200. I said, 'That's not enough.' He said, 'How much more?' I said, 'A thousand dollars.' This was not acceptable to Carl, so I asked permission to see the president. I believed in going through the appropriate channels before seeing him. Fred increased my salary by \$900. I remember Ralph Shay as the registrar issuing dress codes for Commencement and placing our names on chapel classroom chairs to indicate our positions in the line of march. I have pleasant memories of Bob Smith in music. Well there's—what's his name; who followed Sample?

A: The president?

P: Yes.

A: Peterson.

P: Former Marine also—Korean Marine—lieutenant, platoon leader.

A: I never knew that.

P: Yes, he was a platoon leader. Served in Korea—

A: And then Synodinos was after him.

P: Yes, I never spent that much time with Synodinos. Who followed Carl as the dean?

A: Richard Reed.

P: It wasn't Richard... Maybe it was McGill. Synodinos, Dick Charles, McGill, Bob Hamilton, and I drove to a town in Franklin County to look at property which had been proposed as a gift to LVC. I was asked to make the trip to assess the possibility of using the area for ecological projects by students. That's about the only time I spoke to Synodinos at length. I didn't know

him. He was energetic and loyal to the College. Frankly, I didn't work very closely with presidents other than Fred.

A: Let me sort of draw this to an end then and let me ask an even more general question, a more personal question, too because you spent all of these years at Lebanon Valley with piles and piles of students. How would you like to be remembered to your students after all of these years?

P: Well, I have some anecdotes that I was going to share with you from some students (laughing). Those were the best days, working with the students. I just want to be remembered as a friends of the students and hopefully have helped them. I should mention that one of the happiest times were the field trips with the students—weekend trips to Delaware marshes, and the spring break trips to Georgia and South Carolina. Usually, about 12 students made the trips during spring breaks. We traveled in a 15-passenger van pulling a U-Haul trailer carrying our gear. Some years, we camped out in state parks going to and from our destination using two large tents—one for males; the other for females, and a small tent for my wife and me. Students, assisted by my wife, prepared the meals. In the spring of 1990, we spent two days at the Stephen Foster State Park in Georgia where the Okefenokee Swamp is located. We then drove across the state to the University of Georgia Marine Institute on Sapelo Island where we worked and relaxed for another five days. Those were good days.

A: You had a lot of those good days.

P: The (long pause)—I think that I'm Facebook friends with about 12 students. I'm on Facebook because my kids put me on there; I didn't opt to do it (laughing). I have a real sense of satisfaction in seeing students going on and doing well; whether it was in biology or law or

whatever. I am very proud of what I call “B students” who have gone on to grad school and successful careers in their chosen fields. Lyle Trumbull, a Milton Hershey boy, left LVC with a B average, went on to Clarion for a master’s, and then went to work for the Army Corps of Engineers in Illinois. While there, he was assigned the task of conducting an environmental impact study at Fort Leonard Wood in Missouri. He hired three LVC biology majors to assist him on the project during the summer. Lyle went on to earn a Ph.D. in ecology at the University of Illinois, one of the most prestigious institutions for ecology in the United States. Following grad school he had a two-year post-doc at Harvard.

A: A “B student.” (Laughing)

P: Yes!

A: You just never know.

P: I know! And every year, he returns to Milton Hershey for alumni day, and invariably stops in for a chat during lunch or dinner. This past year, he stopped in at the Biology Department, where he visited several staff members. Joe Meyers, class of ’70, from the Dallastown area, is another student who has done well after an average performance at LVC. Joe, a wrestler until he injured his knee, was a pre-dental student advised by Al. After losing interest in dentistry, he decided to go into teaching. After a year of high school teaching and coaching he left the profession to work at the Peach Bottom Nuclear Power Plant, and also had a part-time position with a local ecological consulting firm. However, he asked me to keep him posted on the availability of jobs in biology. About a year later, in March, I had a call from Sheryl Shannholtzer, a biologist I had worked with in Georgia, saying she needed a BS type person immediately. She and her husband had a position with Dames and Moore, an environmental consulting firm. I

said, 'Well, it's March, they don't graduate until May.' Sheryl insisted they needed someone now. I called Joe. He was hired and ultimately sent to the University of Georgia for a master's degree. He continued his studies, earned a Ph.D., and went on to have a great career with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Joe was a close friend of the late Eugene Odum, one of the world's foremost ecologists.

A: That's unbelievable.

P: Over the years, Joe has contributed financially to the College.

A: That's a nice note to end on, I think. Positive reinforcement of these ideas. So, thanks very much.