INTERVIEW WITH FRANK ERK

PROFESSOR OF BIOLOGY, FORMER DEPARTMENT CHAIRMAN

August 25 and September 6, 1987

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Dr. Hartzell: This is a continuation of the interview of 08/25 of Frank Erk, Professor of Biological Sciences and former Chairman, Tape 1.

Dr. Erk: What you asked me at the end of last time was that you wanted to hear about the short and unhappy presidency of John Lee.

Dr. Hartzell: Yes, I do want to hear about that.

Dr. Erk: But it's all related. I'll start wherever you want in terms

Dr. Hartzell: All right, I think if you can give your views or your viewpoint of what actually happened at Oyster Bay, you create the situation that I found when I came in September of '62.

Dr. Erk: All right, let me just ramble on and I'll try to provide some kind of context within which we can understand what went on. I think it would be important, first of all, to correct a common misconception which, there have been many errors in fact and concept which have been advanced during this, in the publicity related to the thirtieth anniversary celebrations this year. They range from characterizing the operation at Oyster Bay as being a teachers' college to even having incorrect statistics on numbers of students, date of first classes and all kind of things like that. The College on Long Island was never a teachers' college. It was not in the category of colleges which then, each of which then had a Dean in Albany, and the colleges of education had their own Dean, I think it was Herman Cooper.

Dr. Hartzell: I remember him.

Dr. Erk: And I'm distressed that the publicity often calls it a teachers' college, because it wasn't. And the

Dr. Hartzell: It was not under Herman Cooper.

Dr. Erk: It was not under Herman Cooper, that's right. It was, as a matter of fact, it was in a completely separate category, it was always listed with the professional colleges in the State University. Here, for example, is a listing of the various units by category. Here are the colleges of education, here are the other professional colleges and here's the College on Long Island at Oyster Bay. So from the very first, it was never a teachers' college. And the reason was that it had a function which was far broader than the preparation of teachers. And the Bulletin introduction for those years are very instructive, I think, and from the Bulletin of 1961, for example, which was before our first graduating class completed its four years, it says, "established in 1957 Oyster Bay as the State University College on Long Island, this new university center has built for excellence from its inception starting with programs designed to educate scientists, mathematicians, engineers and teachers of science and mathematics." In other words this was one of the many function which we served from the beginning. Our initial focus was in science and mathematics, but preparation of teachers was one aspect of that.

Dr. Hartzell: That's been singled out in the big listing.

Dr. Erk: Well, it's just been described; we've just been described as opened as teachers' college at Oyster Bay in 1957, and I think that's, the reason I think it's unfortunate is because the teachers colleges in those years, the colleges of education as they were later called, had a reputation which was not along the lines that we were trying to move. They were not liberal, they were not academically distinguished, they were seen as trade schools for the preparation of secondary school teachers, period. And each one of the colleges had a focus, Brockport, for example, specialized in the training of teachers of physical education, that what they were known for; Potsdam for music. If you wanted to become a teacher in one of those fields, you sought out the state teachers college which was appropriate. Well, just let me read on here a bit, " academic programs were based strongly on the liberal arts and sciences and students were required to meet the highest standards of scholarship. It was recognized from the start that preparation of

distinguished professionals in these fields required more than specialized training. It required university education in its best sense." I think that's a good introduction to try to place the role of Leonard Olsen and Allen Austill in the picture, because they started from the premise that in order to train scientists, engineers or any other professionals, that the first job was to establish a good educational foundation in what we considered then and now as liberal education and the liberal arts. And they strove in every way possible to emphasize, stress and reward the development of a curriculum which would help to bring about that result. We aimed to produce educated human beings, literate, able to communicate their ideas to others, and to be able to feel at ease in the humanities and the social sciences, as well as in the natural sciences and mathematics. That is a difficult goal. It was brought about in those days by emphasizing a lot of activities that required the development of those skills, classes were primarily moderate in size and discussion classes. There was a great deal of written work in every class, some of which as I mentioned last time, evaluated by people in more than one division. It is quite distressing to me personally to see how far we have slipped from those early goals in our present situation. It is extremely depressing to have a senior student come in after being asked to write a paper in a course and be told that he had never been asked to write a paper in any course in four years in this institution. I think that's just one index of how far we have slipped from the

Dr. Hartzell: What major was he?

Dr. Erk: These were often science majors but the main point is that never in the humanities, never in the social sciences, even though they had minimum requirements to take in those fields, were they asked to do a paper; and that's one of the penalties you pay by having very large lecture classes and taking multiple choice exams. So when they come to write a paper, they learn to their astonishment they don't know how to write; they don't how to put a sentence together; they don't know how to punctuate; they don't use good grammar; their spelling is atrocious, simply because we have failed miserably in making opportunities available to students to practice these skills. Writing is not

something you take courses in, writing is something you do and you have to do a lot of it; and we did a lot of writing in the early days at Oyster Bay. Now, part of our goal was achieved by the curricular structure, and the curricular structure was one which was developed so that it would be a common experience for all students. And so all students took Humanities 1 and Humanities 2, and all students took Social Sciences 1 and Social Sciences 2 and all students took Natural Sciences 1 and Natural Sciences 2; because regardless of what they plan to go into eventually, the idea was that they have a common core of educational experience. What we call a core today, how hard we are working, we have course called "Core," that is not a core of educational experience. In those days students actually had something to talk about with one another. They had common readings, they had discussions in different sections of the same topics and so they could compare how different instructors approached the same topic. We had open visitation between classes and instructors, so that you could visit any class at any time and see what was going on, not done for assessment of the instructor but done for purposes of self-enlightenment and acquaintance of what was actually going on educationally with the students. That is the best way to find out whether the students are becoming educated or not.

Dr. Hartzell: Access to different points of view.

Dr. Erk: Different points of view and to actually see if, as I did at one time, I attended a Humanities 2 course during an entire semester with Harold Zyskind as instructor, and he was such a skillful teacher; and you can see the minds of the students beginning to encompass difficult and sophisticated ideas. And you could compare where they started at the beginning of the term with where they ended up at the end of the term. And it was for them a magnificent experience, and it certainly was for any of us who sat in and observed as well. The importance of this is that Leonard Olsen and Allen Austill took a personal interest in the nature of the education that the students were getting, not in terms of how many courses they were getting and not in terms of calculating totals of hours, but in terms of what was actually happening to them intellectually. The

examination schedule was, in the early days, quite different too. We had a final examination at the end of year, so that the students were asked not to parrot back facts but to react in written papers on the materials that they had covered over the entire year of

Dr. Hartzell: Was there one at the end of the first semester?

Dr. Erk: There was in some courses. We had them in science and mathematics, but I think in humanities it was at the end of the year and so on. There are certain institutions still in this country that, I believe, do not even examine you at the end of the year but examine you in the fall of the next year so that you have a summer to let things settle and ferment and so that you think in terms of larger concepts and not in terms of a lot of little facts, which you have to memorize. So I think that was a striking difference in the approach, in the educational approach that characterized the early days at Oyster Bay. And as I also think, even though Allen Austill was technically Dean of Students, he took as intense an interest in the academic dimension of what was happening to students as anyone on the faculty. He was fully aware of what was going on and, of course, he perhaps even had a better insight because he talked to students who were in trouble and students who were not and learned a lot about what was going on in classes that way.

Dr. Hartzell: That explains where he is now.

Dr. Erk: He is now retired but he was Dean of the New School in New York City, he is now Chancellor, they created the position just for him upon his retirement, so he's Chancellor. He is Chancellor at New School, but he was Dean of the New School prior to that time. Um, let me turn then to what happened in around 1960 and '61 when our mission began to enlarge. The State University had renamed somewhere around '60 or '61 College on Long Island as Long Island Center, so it was called State University of New York Long Island Center and that was about the time that they decided there should be four university centers around the State.

Dr. Hartzell: The Master Plan is dated, I think, '60.

Dr. Erk: That's probably, yes, well, I don't know when it was actually implemented as far as we are concerned. I have two documents here, both 1960, '61, one

is called College on Long Island, one is called Long Island Center, so that dates it approximately. And I think it was probably handed down not as officially as a news release from Albany or something like that, the way such things sometimes happen. At any rate that expansion of mission began with the addition of an Engineering authorization for Stony Brook. And there was the same kind of concern expressed at that time about engineering education as for other kinds of education. We had a large meeting which was participated in and I guess in a sense sponsored by, although I don't remember the details of this, General Electric. And they came and we had many discussions about the nature of what an engineering curriculum should be in the 1960's, which we were entering. Part of that time Engineering had been classified in the traditional ways into mechanical, electrical, civil and so on. The General Electric men believed that that was an unfortunate way to go, and that teaching engineering students the specifics of civil and mechanical engineering was futile if you didn't end up in a particular kind of engineering company that used those particular applications. They thought instead that students should be very well founded in the basic sciences and mathematics, along with some fundamentals of engineering type courses. Material sciences for example was something that hardly existed in those days. Electronics, their position was that if you give us a student who is well educated in the fundamentals of all of these areas, we can train them in the applications in a period of weeks. You give us a student who is specially trained in a particular area, and we want him for a different area, we have to train him from scratch. And so they proposed essentially a new engineering curriculum at the time, which we endorsed.

Dr. Hartzell: Hardware free.

Dr. Erk: Well, that original goal has been compromised, of course, in the succeeding years but there are still some vestiges of that around. Now,

Dr. Hartzell: Who brought in GE?

Dr. Erk: Well, I think Leonard did. I don't know what the chain of events was there, I still have it somewhere; they put out a beautiful brochure just for this meeting

where they indicated the outline for discussion that we would all engage in. And it was so harmonious with what we were trying to do that, of course, we endorsed this principle for the organization of an engineering curriculum. The next job was to recruit a Dean of Engineering. And through a series of events, and I have no personal knowledge of, the man from North Carolina State by the name of John F. Lee appeared on the scene to be interviewed as a candidate for the Dean of Engineering position. Now, John Lee was a very charming, verbal person, and in his interview with the Council, who was involved at that time, and with the faculty, he made a very good impression.

Dr. Hartzell: Let's see now, was Judge Sullivan Chairman then?

Dr. Erk: Yes.

Dr. Hartzell: Or was Ward Melville

Dr. Erk: No, Ward Melville was Honorary Chairman and William J. Sullivan was Chairman of the Board. And I, to be honest, don't think that, well, let's see. Here is the 1959-60 Bulletin and Melville was still Chairman at that time, but I think that was about the time when he became Honorary Chairman and Judge Sullivan became Chairman, actual Chairman of the Council. At any rate such appointments as that were, for the upper positions, were actually recommended by the Council to

Dr. Hartzell: Even the Deans then?

Dr. Erk: Oh, yes. And along the way, as I say, I was not involved in this, he made, John F. Lee made such a good impression that some people began to ask why don't we, since we are also looking for a President, why don't we consider him as President? And that, I suppose, that fell upon sympathetic ears since it was, I'm not sure just what the presidential, what stage the presidential search was in at that time. It was about the time we wanted to recruit a President before the move to Stony Brook, and so it was in its early stages. Now

Dr. Hartzell: Let me stop you there just a second, because and here I don't remember who, but somewhere in the interviews somebody said that Leonard Olsen made such an

impressive set of recommendations for Lee as Dean of Engineering that people began to say, well, why don't we make him President?

Dr. Erk: Quite possible. He was a very impressive guy, no question about it. In any case, however it came about, he was recommended for the presidency and was approved by the Council and was approved by the Board of Trustees in Albany. Now that must have been some time in the Fall of 1960 so far as, I mean no one, I don't know the exact time frame there. At any rate, he was due to arrive on campus at the beginning of the second semester. So in the '60-61 academic year he arrived on campus.

Dr. Hartzell: Early in '61.

Dr. Erk: Early in '61. I think to be precise it was in February, early February of 1961. Now about two weeks after he arrived on campus, he called a special meeting of the faculty, to be precise it was called on Tuesday, February 28, at 3:30 in the afternoon in the Great Hall, which is in Coe mansion. The business of this is a notice from the Secretary of the Faculty who was Bill Lister at that time, the business of the meeting will consist exclusively of an address by the President. So we all gathered in the Great Hall and were addressed by President Lee. He later distributed a detailed copy of his remarks and they run to, well, I'm not sure how many pages here, but 15, 20 odd double spaced pages, and there is no question about it, it was *tour de force*, it was setting out the goals for the institution, presenting the challenges of a new President, talking about the mission of Stony Brook, dramatizing C. P. Snow's two cultures and the scientific revolution, saying such things as the scientific and humanistic cultures must be joined -- those were his words -- stressing the quality of the faculty and the need for distinguished faculty and teacher scholars, addressed the question of the responsibility of the faculty in some detail, kinds of committees and so on, how the faculty would be organized in terms of departmentalization, he provided tables of organization at that time, talked about the challenges of the move between, from Oyster Bay to Stony Brook, he applauded the fact that we had an absence of the evils of big-time intercollegiate sports, he called them flamboyant sideshows, he said all of the right things. And then he went into

administrative organization and took up the whole question of communication between administration, faculty and students, "communication is a lifeblood which nourishes and purifies both bones and flesh." Then he talked about the, what his administrative structure would look like, and he first addressed the post of Dean of Faculty; and this was the post that Leonard Olsen was then going to occupy. It was always, he was never intended to be President, he was at the start of the institution and then he would stay on as Dean, he was always Dean, he was never called President. And he says that he should be the President's alter ego, but should be unreluctant to play the Devil's advocate on behalf of the faculty. He must have the moral power to keep uppermost in the President's mind what is truly best for the primary mission of the University, he is in a very real sense the President's chief advisor and confidante. Then he talked about the Dean of Students, Academic Senate, student government, all of which well in place at that time. He talked about the academic divisions and he had a concept of

Dr. Hartzell: He had four?

Dr. Erk: He did, I'll get to that in just a minute. He talked about the graduate [interruption in taping]

As I was saying, in this initial address that he made to the faculty on February 28, 1961, he was outlining his ideas for the organization of the institution and its future, and he addressed the question of the graduate faculty, and then turned to the question of the College of Arts and Sciences. I hadn't remembered this, "the loose and unbalanced confederation of divisions should be joined and strengthened under the leadership, under imaginative academician. The humanities division is comparatively strong, followed by the division of social sciences which however lacks a diversity of viewpoint due probably to its small size." And then he points out that the division of science and mathematics is weak, particularly in the biological sciences, I assume that's why he thought there should be a separate division of biological sciences so it could be diversified and increased in size. At any rate, he did propose a Dean of Arts and Sciences as soon as possible, with four divisions: physical sciences and mathematics, biological sciences, social sciences

and humanities, “new and bold departmental structures should be evolved within these divisions.” Then he went on to the College of Engineering and actually endorsed the report which I referred to earlier, which is called “Suggested Engineering Curriculum for State University on Long Island,” and supported the elimination of what he called “the anachronistic and meaningless departmental specializations, such as mechanical engineering, civil engineering, *ad infinitum*, is long over due at many colleges of engineering.” And proposed the elimination of departmental structures along the lines proposed there. Then he went on to talk about some of his ideas, including the naming or establishment of three distinguished professorships in each college with salaries on the order of $25,000, which was big money in those day. These professorships could be financed entirely from endowments or from a combination of basic university salary and endowment. Comment on research, that it should be conducted by the faculty, in all cases should involve the participation of students. And then enunciate the principle that no faculty member basic salary, whether in whole or part, should be contingent upon the availability of external grants or research. He talked a little bit about consulting responsibilities, and then finally commented upon Sunwood, which he calls a beautiful faculty club presented by Mr. Ward Melville, and refers to his gift of $25,000 for annum for six years for the operation of the faculty club. He keeps talking about a first-class club. President Lee certainly liked things first-class. He would only go to the finest restaurants. I remember I once went to lunch with him at an elegant Italian restaurant in Glen Cove, the name of which escapes me after all these years, but it was, I must say, one of the fanciest lunches I’d ever had. But he certainly took that as a matter of course. He tells some of the posts that he hopes to fill. I see there’s an interesting statement here, “any University that starves either the humanities or the sciences or technology is a medievalist institution not having the intelligence to know it is dead or dying.” And he talks about a number of other posts which he hopes to fill. And then points out that four degrees, the A. B., the A. M., the S. M. and the Ph. D. degrees have been approved by the Board of Trustees and have also been approved by the Committee on Higher Education

of the Board of Regents, " formal approval of the Board of Regents is expected in the very near future." Those were, as I recall, general authorizations for those degrees and did not involve any particular subject matter or focus. Double the Library staff. New Admissions Director. Launch a number of fund drives and so on. And then closes by saying, "during the past few months, your administration has made a Herculean effort to provide you with the type and level of support you will need to create a University to stand with the finest in the nation."

Dr. Hartzell: That's a quote from the Heald Report.

Dr. Erk: I see, yes. "Only the faculty through its genius and effort can make the dream of a distinguished University come true. You have an exciting and demanding task to perform." Now, I think it's fair to say, sorry

Dr. Hartzell: You said that was saying all the right things.

Dr. Erk: All the right things. I think everyone who attended that meeting was very pleased by what they heard, they thought that they had chosen the right man and that the future was bright. President Lee addressed a group of that size in a, what I would consider, rather imperious or pompous manner. It was just his nature, but he really put on quite an elegant appearance and certainly said the right things. Well, as a part of this administrative reorganization, the Division of Biological Sciences was created, removed from the Division of Science and Mathematics, and I was appointed Chairman of that Division. We were not consulted about that at all, though we took it on as a challenge, and as an opportunity to expand the role of biological sciences. We made this announcement in Science magazine and other national media, and I think we attracted quite a bit of attention to the fact that the Division had been created and that we were planning to expand rather quickly in a number of areas. The honeymoon with President Lee did not last very long, however. The divisional chairmen ran into problems almost immediately. The President behaved in a very autocratic way; he almost completely ignored faculty governance. He made decisions unilaterally, which were then announced. It was very difficult to know exactly where you stood as a divisional chairmen in charge

of certain component of the academic program. It also turned out that he was, could be quite vindictive and did not hesitate to ridicule or punish those who did not fall into line with his ideas. He also had great and unrealistic ideas about a lot of things. He had big dreams apparently; one of the things he wanted to do was establish a helicopter link between the Oyster Bay campus and the Stony Brook campus, so that people could be shuttled back and forth with great ease, and he also had envisioned the size of the Stony Brook campus as being one which warranted the building of a circular railroad around the campus so that people could move from building to building in an expeditious way. These ideas and others, I suspect, began to, certainly attracted a lot of attention in Albany, and although I can't know for sure what budget he submitted in the spring of 1961, I can almost guess that it was far beyond what the coffers of State University at that time could afford. We tried over the months of March and April to accommodate to the President and in particular to follow his suggestions. I'll just put aside a bit of a chapter with one of the examples in biological sciences for the moment to give you the main outline of what happened. The Divisional Chairmen, who at that time were Harold Zyskind in Humanities, and Jay Williams in the Social Sciences, Bill Lister in Physical Sciences and Mathematics, and myself in the Biological Sciences, at about the same time came to the conclusion that it was really impossible to serve as the academic link between the administration and our own faculty members. And we had a number of meetings and eventually decided that in good conscience we could not continue in those positions of administrative responsibility. So we decided that we would resign our posts. We didn't start out to make this any kind of a concerted effort, but the more we talked about it, the more we realized that the problems were very widespread on the campus, not only in our own divisions, as we had thought. We requested a meeting with President Hamilton, Divisional Chairmen did, and we received a memo addressed to Dean Olsen, Dean Irvine, Professor Lister, Professor Jay Williams, Professor Erk, Professor Zyskind from President Lee, "Subject: Meeting in New York City with President Hamilton and President Lee. President Hamilton and I request your presence at a meeting to be held at

the offices of the State University of New York in Manhattan at 10:30 A. M. on Saturday, May the 27th. A station wagon will be available in front of Coe Hall to transport us to Manhattan. It is scheduled to leave at 9:20 A. M. The purpose of the meeting is to afford President Hamilton an opportunity to outline the responsibilities of this administration, the changed character of the institution, and to offer his encouragement to all of us in this trying period of adjustment." Well, we all converged upon Manhattan. I can't remember truthfully whether we rode in in the station wagon or not. But at any rate, we all converged upon Manhattan and met with President Tom Hamilton and President Lee. President Lee asked us, one by one, to indicate our reactions to the first several months of President Lee's administration. Bill Lister, I think, did the best job, he was Secretary of the Faculty, the best in detailing what we found problematical in terms of faculty governance: not being able to communicate with the President; having numerous instances of decisions made without any kind of faculty involvement, decisions which dramatically effected the academic program and the members of the faculty; and ended by submitting his resignation in writing. And then the rest of us followed along and gave our own versions and verified what, in fact, had been said. And we all submitted our resignations around the table at that day. President Lee and, so far as I can remember, Dean Irvine said nothing at that time. And Tom Hamilton listened impassively during all of this presentation and at the end, he said, this is the saddest day of my life. And he stood up and we stood up and the meeting was clearly over.

Dr. Hartzell: Any discussion back and forth after that?

Dr. Erk: No discussion. As a matter of fact we rode down, we happened to ride down in the elevator with Tom Irvine, I think Lee stayed behind if I remember, we rode down the elevator with Tom Irvine and there wasn't a work spoken all the way down, and I don't remember what floor it's on, but a very high floor. And so we parted. The, my letter of resignation was dated on that day, I suppose, May 27th. And it was not until in July some time that I got a response, and the response came not from Hamilton but from John Lee, who said, "July 28th, 1961. President Hamilton has approved my

recommendation that your resignation as Chairman of the Division of Biological Sciences be accepted. Please consider the effective date of your resignation to be the date of this letter. My hope is that we can now move forward towards the solution of the many problems with which we are confronted. I shall work to this end." His response to the resignation of the Divisional Chairmen was to abolish the academic divisions of the College and to adopt a wholly departmental structure, and it wasn't until later, I don't know when, that the divisional structure was re-instituted. Now, I want to return to an interesting set of events, which had to do with the then Division of Biological Sciences and later the Department of Biological Sciences. It has to do with a name that President Lee sent down to me as Chairman of the Division of Biological Sciences from a man who was working as an Associate Program Director, Advanced Science Programs, Special Projects in Science Education Section of the National Science Foundation. The, it appears that President Lee had called this man, whose name is Willis Pequino, to tell him about his plans for the Long Island Center and to solicit his interest in becoming a candidate for a faculty position. Now the date on the letter from Pequino to John Lee is March the 16th, so Pequino was obviously contacted some time before then. And in this letter he says to, in this letter to Dr. Lee, he says, "I appreciate your call very much." So that Pequino did not initiate the contact. The plans that you sketch are of considerable interest to me. The possibility of sharing in the development of the distinguished institution that you envisage has fanned intellectual fires and screened off somewhat a rather provincial desire to return to California." Then he tells about preparing a hasty biographical sketch and so on. And he sent along a page or two of biological information; his main interest was in developing electronic instruments for submarine turbulence studies. He taught, he got his Ph. D. from UCLA and taught at Pomona College for twenty years before going to the NSF and then from there, that's where we contacted him. By his transmission of this letter, President Lee said, "I'm sending this material to you from Dr. Pequino for (1) consideration of Dr. Pequino as a possible advisor to your group and/or (2) a possible candidate for appointment to the faculty. I

should like to discuss with you at the earliest opportunity what plans you may have for Dr. Pequino's coming here either for an interview or in some other capacity. The reason I ask this information is not in an effort to press his appointment with you but simply because if it turns out that you are not interested in his services in the Division of Biological Sciences, I might very well be interested in him for the Institute of Oceanographic Sciences." So I invited Pequino to come, he visited us on April the 25th, and gave a seminar. On May the 29th there was scheduled a meeting by President Lee with the Council of Division Biological Sciences, included myself, Bob Smolker and George Williams, "to discuss general questions of submitting a proposal relating to an oceanographic congress and to discuss the various possible candidates for a position relating to such a proposal." And Ralph Johnson and Pequino were to be discussed, among others. Well, eventually, for reasons of the resignations that took place two days before, that meeting was then canceled and the discussion of oceanography was postponed until the fall. I requested a reimbursement, an honorarium for Pequino for his presentation at Oyster Bay, and it eventually came through and was forwarded to me in Boulder, Colorado, where I was for the summer working on a BSCS project.

Dr. Hartzell: BSCS?

Dr. Erk: Biological Sciences Curriculum Study, which started in '60 and I've been working on it lo these many years, including just last, two summers ago when I worked on another book for them. I forwarded to him in Washington and he, this was under date of 26th of June. Now he acknowledged that under date of July 3rd, 1961, "thank you for your pleasant letters and the voucher. I trust that your BSCS work at Boulder will progress to the full extent of the hopes for it that you expressed to me in April. Early in August I leave for the Pacific coast where I shall visit universities from Seattle to San Diego before leaving for Hawaii and the Pacific Science Congress. One of the valuable features of working with the Foundation is the opportunity to meet a very generous sample of the academic community under favorable conditions. I send my best wishes for a profitable summer." Now, he did not once mention in that letter that he had been

appointed Chairman of the Biological Sciences at Stony Brook, not a word, and in of July 14th the Bulletin of Long Island Center, Volume 1, Number 2 announces Pequino's appointment as Chairman of the Department of Biological Sciences effective September the 1st. And on July 17th I sent him congratulations and told him I had learned of his appointment in the Bulletin. Well, Willis Pequino was, I guess it's fair to say that his heart was never in that position because he spent very little time on campus, he told us that he was trying to phase out his position in the Foundation; therefore, he could not teach any courses at Oyster Bay, and he had one or two faculty meetings, which were really quite dreadful. And it became clear, I have notes on one of them, it became quite clear that he (a) had no interest in the Department and (b) that he had no idea how to go about organizing or administering a department. We, in the department, got increasingly agitated by his lack of attention to the details. A couple of times when I met with him in his office, our meetings were always interrupted with calls from his stockbroker in California, what stocks to buy, what stocks to sell, what's the price range ratio on this stock and so on. And clearly he was much more interested in that. In the meanwhile there had been a lot of agitation on campus and there had been disruption and student demonstrations on campus before the end of the year, mainly in support of Leonard Olsen and Allen Austill and

Dr. Hartzell: Let's see, were they under attack by that time?

Dr. Erk: They were under attack; I can't remember the details of that but one day the students all went out on strike and refused to attend classes, I think after one of these, I can't actually remember what stimulated that, but it may well have been the success in getting Olsen removed and transferred to Albany again or something like that. At any rate both Leonard and Allen Austill felt they could not remain at Stony Brook and they became part of a task force to advise the King of Jordan on the question of establishing a university in Jordan. And this was an international body, if I remember, which involved quite a bit of travel around the world and lasted for three or four months and terminated

in a large report to the King of Jordan. So I don't remember whether it led to the establishment of a university or not. At any rate Allen became a Dean

Dr. Hartzell: They were off campus?

Dr. Erk: They were off campus during the fall semester. Allen became Dean at the New School upon his return. And Leonard Olsen became Assistant to the President of University of Chicago. His name was Levy, I believe. We don't know exactly, those of us in the trenches, so to speak, don't know exactly what was happening between July and November, but the situation became increasingly tense and especially between the President and Albany. And through a set of events that I have no knowledge of, John Lee was fired from his post as President probably in November of 1961, early November of 1961. And his total tenure in office then had been about 10 months from February to November, nine or ten months. And President Hamilton of the Central Office took over as, took over the administration of the campus personally, came down, met with the faculty, he distributed a memo to the faculty under date of November 13, 1961, so the termination of President Lee's office, term in office, took place some time before that. And it's interesting, it says, "To the faculty of the Long Island Center. We have been through some difficult times. No one has been more troubled by them than I have. While for some time the only possible eventual resolution has been evident to me, I had hoped that it would come about in a different manner." That's an interesting paragraph, and I read into it that he had hoped that Lee would resign, that they wouldn't have to fire him.

Dr. Hartzell: I think they offered to let him resign.

Dr. Erk: Did they?

Dr. Hartzell: He refused.

Dr. Erk: Yes, he refused. I didn't know that but that's what one would conclude from this [end of tape]

Dr. Hartzell: All right, go ahead.

Dr. Erk: Well, I was reading from the memorandum from Tom Hamilton to the faculty, "one thing however must be made clear, there has never been on the part of the

Central Administration or the Board of Trustees any question whatsoever about the mission of the Long Island Center. It is to become a great public university center with all that this implies. The Master Plan recently published by the Trustees and approved by both the Governor and the Regents leaves no question in this regard. This is a commitment which will not be compromised. It has been said that there is among you some disagreement as to educational policy. I should be most surprised if such were not the case. Faculties seldom are in complete agreement on such matters, but it has always seemed to me that the very dialogue of a university provides the best means for accommodation and resolution. In order to keep communications between the administration and the faculty open, I shall for the present confer with the Committee on Faculty Governance, which the faculty elected last spring. I should like to meet with that Committee tomorrow, and I plan to have a meeting of the entire faculty just as soon as possible. I know that for some time you have been carrying on your scholarly duties under great stress, and I hope that we now can join in working towards establishment of that kind of an environment conducive to the best performance of these tasks. I ask your cooperation, not in my name, but in the name of the University and the students." Signed Thomas H. Hamilton. Now under the same, on the same date the Secretary of the Faculty, who was Jim Raz, sent a letter on behalf of the faculty to President Hamilton. This was done

Dr. Hartzell: They crossed?

Dr. Erk: Well, no, I actually think that, they may have crossed, I'm not sure about that, but Hamilton was on campus so.

Dr. Hartzell: I see.

Dr. Erk: Jim Raz was Secretary of the Faculty at that time, and he put together this letter, and I think consulted with a few people, and he apologizes for not having a chance to consult with everyone; but I think they wanted to express how happy they were that Hamilton was on the scene. "Dear President Hamilton: On behalf of the faculty I would like cordially to welcome you to Long Island Center. Last May the faculty elected a

Committee on Faculty Government to formulate new by-laws. For the past few weeks the members of the Committee and myself, who are at present the only elected representatives of this faculty, have been informally exploring these problems in order to present a tentative plan to the administration. We would welcome an early opportunity to discuss with you what we regard as the urgent problem of re-establishing communication with the administration by means of a functioning faculty government at Long Island Center." That sentence says more than it appears to. "The members of the Committee on Faculty Government are Richard L. Levin, English Chairman; Leonard Eisenbud, Physics; Leonard Gardner, Education; William G. Lister, Mathematics; and William T. Snyder, Engineering. Sincerely yours, B. James Raz, Associate Professor and Secretary of the Faculty." Now Hamilton was here for a short time and he then appointed or designated, I suppose, Harry Porter, who was, what was he Dean of

Dr. Hartzell: He was Provost.

Dr. Erk: Provost of the University, well, he assigned

Dr. Hartzell: He had formerly been President of Fredonia.

Dr. Erk: That's right. He assigned Harry Porter as full-time, on-site administrator at Oyster Bay. And the people in Biology were getting increasingly upset by Willis Pequino and a complete inability to administer or to lead the Department of Biological Sciences, and we put together a long letter to Harry Porter of six pages detailing our objections and some time after that, we don't exactly what motivated this, but I think within the month, one morning we came in and Pequino's office was bare to the walls. And he had disappeared overnight, because he had been there the day before, disappeared overnight and was never heard from again by anyone that I know of. He probably went back to the National Science Foundation, or something like that, which he had never cut his ties. And we had a wonderful older lady as secretary, Mrs. Remsen, who just could not get over Pequino disappearing in the middle of the night. She would always say, "And like the Arabs, folded his tent and stole away into the night." So, then that left us without a Chairman, and I was under a lot of pressure to resume the Chairmanship, and I

met with Harry on this, and Harry said I want to appoint you as Acting Chairman of the Department of Biological Sciences. I said no, I have no desire to be an Acting Chairman, because at this time you have full chairmen in physics and chemistry and mathematics, and if I am going to represent the interests of the Biological Sciences, I want to be a full Chairman as well. So he was reluctant to do that and things dragged on and on and on, and even though I didn't have the post, I was organizing the meetings, and so on, during that time. And finally, after a couple of requests of that kind, Tom Hamilton appeared on the campus, and he called me in. And there was no discussion, I came in, he said "I would like to have you be Chairman of the Department." I said I accept. So I resumed the Chairmanship then and held it from then until for another six years, 1967, when I resigned. So Hamilton was able to grasp the situation in a way which I don't think Harry ever did. Harry was trying to pour a lot of oil on troubled waters, but I don't think he acted positively enough in order to bring order back into the chaos which had occurred. So then you know the rest of the story. I guess you

Dr. Hartzell: Let me ask a couple of questions.

Dr. Erk: When did you actually come?

Dr. Hartzell: September 4th, 1962.

Dr. Erk: So Harry was on until that time, just until that time, okay, I didn't have, because I was, you see, I left the campus in June of '62 for what amounted to about a nine months' leave; we were putting this BSCS book into its final hard cover form at Stamford, so I was away from campus, let's say June until January '63. So I wasn't actually on campus when you came.

Dr. Hartzell: Who took your place?

Dr. Erk: I think that Bernie Tunik was Acting Chairman at that time. He served as Acting Chairman a couple of times when I had to be away. Well, yes, your questions.

Dr. Hartzell: When I came, I had the impression that the faculty was split and that there were Lee people and there were people who were Olsen people and that I know that I had to deal with some of the reporters from Newsday about inquiries which they made

as to what was going on because some people in the faculty had written to Newsday and, the whole thing is vague now, but there were editorials in Newsday about a strife-torn campus and I'm not sure exactly why the thing continued into the fall of '62. I had to field a variety of ....., and in some of the committees, committee meetings, Ben Nelson was one, but there were two sides and if one person on one side proposed something, the other people would knock it down.

Dr. Erk: Yes, I can understand that.

Dr. Hartzell: There was one day when a member of the Philosophy Department came in, sat down, he said, "Dr. Hartzell, this place is going to go to the dogs unless you fire that person and that person." There were two people and they were chairmen of departments.

Dr. Erk: Well, I think that feelings were running very high. There is no doubt that there was a number of faculty members who supported President Lee.

Dr. Hartzell: Do you know for what reasons?

Dr. Erk: Well, certainly those to whom he gave appointments in his administration were his supporters, and there were people who received either appointments or acting appointments, Acting Dean of the Graduate School or maybe Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences.

Dr. Hartzell: No, wait a minute, I don't know, but when I came, I came as Acting Chief Administrative Officer and Dean of Arts and Sciences. In other words, and it took me about less than a semester to realize that I couldn't do justice to both hats. That's when I appointed Stan Ross because I enjoyed working with him on the selection of faculty in the History Department.

Dr. Erk: Right, well, Sidney Gelber had occupied that post in Lee's administration.

Dr. Hartzell: As Dean of Arts and Sciences.

Dr. Erk: Yes, I think that was his post.

Dr. Hartzell: We had a line for the Dean of the Graduate School that was not filled.

Dr. Erk: There was an Acting, Arnold Feingold was filling that post and so these people I think for good reason were supporters of President Lee. I don't whether any of these posts are indicated in here or not. At this time 1961 Olsen is still Dean of the Faculty, Austill was still Dean of Students, Reuben Weltsch is Librarian, David Tilley was Director of Admissions, he was here when you came.

Dr. Hartzell: Dean of Students.

Dr. Erk: Terry Lunsford was Assistant to the Dean of Faculty. Donald Cook was Assistant Librarian and so on. So that was the administration. I don't have a 1962 catalog so I can't tell.

Dr. Hartzell: I don't think I'd be in it.

Dr. Erk: You are in, let's see, the first one that I have, I guess, is '63 where you are listed as Administrative Office and Stan Ross as Acting Dean, College of Arts and Sciences, and David Fox is Acting Dean of the Graduate School and Tom Irvine is Dean of the College of Engineering. Those are the four high administrative officers.

Dr. Hartzell: Okay, well, that's quite a saga.

Dr. Erk: Yes, it is. At any rate I think that's, the Oyster Bay transition was difficult by orderly, the transition from Oyster Bay to Stony Brook. Buildings were opened in the fall of 1962, Humanities and Chemistry Buildings and some dormitories, G Quad, and they were immediately vandalized and trashed. I can remember coming back in February of '63, going into the main men's room upstairs in G Quad finding five of the six basins ripped off the wall and finding five of the six mirror missing, except the mirror that was still there wasn't over the basin that was still there and the big glass doors that connected the upper lounge to the hallways had been kicked out. All the glass had been kicked, those were brand new buildings now, they had been kicked out. We had Chinese reed wallpaper put along the halls there that had just been torn off in huge sheets, very expensive paper at that time and it was quite depressing to come to a new campus and find that it had been partly demolished already in just a period of six months, that's all it took or less, five months, I guess. I came back, the Biology Building had not yet been

completed and I took an office in the Humanities Building, and we were holding laboratories in the Chemistry Building at that time, biology laboratories and I was working very hard to get the Biology Building opened and we occupied during the summer and officially in the fall of '63, if I remember correctly. I occupied an office in the Humanities Building that some instructor in History had had before, and he had been teaching a course in medieval history and on the shelf there was a stack of blue books from the semester that had just ended and so I took down this stack of books, the blue books, exams, and I found in ten papers medieval spelled in six different ways for a course in medieval history. So I thought they might have learned medieval history, but they didn't learn how to spell the words. So then

Dr. Hartzell: I was surprised, disgusted, astonished at the kind of upbringing that our students had. We were trying to educate other people's children, and we were getting people who were not yet housebroken.

Dr. Erk: Absolutely true.

Dr. Hartzell: And I think Dave Tilley with all his good intentions was not able to influence the students.

Dr. Erk: Incidentally, perhaps it should be noted that we were operating on two campuses for a while; the biology labs in the Butler building were still active and most of the biologists, and I guess some other people as well, but mainly biologists, since our building wasn't ready, would spend perhaps three days at Oyster Bay and two at Stony Brook, something like that. And the first and the second commencements were held at Oyster Bay. The first one, of course, was held at Oyster Bay, and that was the one where I think it referred to it weeks ago, where I conducted the first choir outside of the commencement ceremony and we sang "Pioneers, O Pioneers." The second one, even though the campus had moved, we came back to Oyster Bay to have the commencement at Oyster Bay; the class wanted to have it at Oyster Bay.

Dr. Hartzell: The class wanted to do it and I was quite willing.

Dr. Erk: That's right. And you were still living at Oyster Bay as well, is that right?

Dr. Hartzell: And I was late getting a speaker, I finally got the British Consulate General in New York to come out as the speaker, and then the third one was there also, it was there.

Dr. Erk: The students who entered at Oyster Bay had a special fondness for that campus, and even today the reunions for those early classes are always held at Oyster Bay; and they don't really feel that they are a part of the Stony Brook operation. They always associate their undergraduate years with the Oyster Bay campus.

Dr. Hartzell: Well, they have the mental image of the Coe Estate, which is a beautiful, beautiful campus.

Dr. Erk: Absolutely.

Dr. Hartzell: We have a lot to do yet, but I think we're making some progress. Well, thanks very much.

Dr. Erk: You're very welcome.

Dr. Hartzell: Do you have any input on the Flax Pond situation, on the acquisition of Flax Pond.

Dr. Erk: Yes.

Dr. Hartzell: Can you say a few words about that?

Dr. Erk: I could, well, let me say a few words about that, what I can remember. We were very interested in developing the marine sciences as a part of Biology.

Dr. Hartzell: Right from the beginning.

Dr. Erk: From the time that George Williams joined us, which was, I think, two years after the beginning. He was a marine biologist and he actually bought a piece of land that fronted on Flax Pond, they were going to build on it. And that land was not expensive in those days. And then there was, at Flax Pond, there was this large deserted mansion, I guess you would call it, I can't even remember who

Dr. Hartzell: Childs.

Dr. Erk: The Childs Mansion, right. And at that time we were in contact with the New York State Department of Marine Resources.

Dr. Hartzell: Well, it was within the Department of Conservation, I think.

Dr. Erk: It was within the Department of Conservation, and the person in charge of that Division was named David Wallace. And it was interesting because David Wallace had been an alumnus of Washington College from which I had come to come up to Oyster Bay. And David was an expert in oyster culture and he had worked in the Chesapeake on culturing oysters, and he had a number of experimental plots going under the auspices of New York State Department of Conservation. And so we put in a proposal, I think we put it in as early as the '59 or '1960 budget from the Biology Department to purchase Flax Pond as a wetlands conservation area, which we would then develop as a Long Island Sound biological station. But the cost, I can't remember how many acres was involved, but the costs

Dr. Hartzell: 180.

Dr. Erk: Yes, and the cost was out of sight as far as the State University was concerned, and so we were able to work out an arrangement whereby the New York State Department of Conservation would contribute to the purchase of Flax Pond. And in return for that we would allocate a piece of the campus land for them to build a central headquarters building on. And that was at a time when the campus had very few buildings on and they said they didn't have any tremendous desire to be right in the main heart of the campus and so they chose the plot of land upon which the building was constructed, which is near the north entrance to the campus, where it is today. And we had great plans

Dr. Hartzell: That's the Conservation Department.

Dr. Erk: That's right. Now that was part of the entire deal that we would cede to them a certain amount of campus land in return for their contributing to the purchase of Flax Pond.

Dr. Hartzell: I see, I didn't realize that.

Dr. Erk: Because they wanted to be, they were down in the center of the Island somewhere, and they wanted to be close to a university campus, and they particularly wanted to be close to the north shore and to the University here; and so our relations when Dave was head of that were very close. We had a boat, we had seawater tanks set up in the Childs mansion, we occasionally would have graduate students living in the Childs mansion and take care of that property and we repaired the boardwalk out to the end. Did all sorts of, all of us were involved in working on the Childs mansion. I think maybe Charlie Walcott lived in the Childs mansion for a while.

Dr. Hartzell: I think so, because I was instrumental in his getting the house that he had down on

Dr. Erk: I think maybe that, I don't know whether that was immediate or not. At any rate, after the building was built we had great plans for sharing the library resources with the Conservation Department and they with us and so on. And then some time later, see, we actually, the Marine Sciences Research Center began as a Department of Biology operation. And then, we spent a lot of time recruiting a Director for that Center. In fact, in this long letter to Porter we attacked the idea that Pequino was any kind of a marine scientist to head up that Center. And then I think the year that I was on leave, that Center was transferred from campus funding to State funding, and the Director that we had recruited, I wish I could recall his name offhand, moved from Stony Brook to Albany to direct the State Marine Sciences Research Center, and he was coordinating marine activities at other campuses of the State University too, but it started on our campus.

Dr. Hartzell: Can you remember his first name?

Dr. Erk: Oh, I'm sure I can find his name, I just don't remember what his, I'm just drawing a blank on his name.

Dr. Hartzell: He actually built a home on Crane Neck Road.

Dr. Erk: On Crane Neck, did he? Another dimension of that interest in Marine Sciences was the establishment of relationships with the University of the West Indies, which was a relationship between the Department of Biological Sciences and the

University of West Indies through a man by the name of Tom Goreau. And Tom was an adjunct member of our faculty and a regular member of the University of West Indies in Kingston, Jamaica. And he had a primitive station organized in Discovery Bay on the north shore of Jamaica, and we wanted to have a coral reef environment -- and that was a very, very good one -- to which our graduate students could go to study marine biology. Discovery Bay has what is called a vertical reef, it's very flat, goes out for quite a long ways and then it drops off very severely. Vertical reefs are not common and this was an ideal study site, and Tom Goreau was the leader in that study. Tom used to work with scuba equipment and was several times suffered the bends from staying under water or decompressing too quickly; and they had a decompression chamber built on the beach at Discovery Bay in a little tiny shanty, which served as kind of primitive building for storing supplies in. I went to Jamaica to further develop, help further develop that station at Discovery Bay under Tom Goreau's sponsorship. We had this relationship for some years and then Tom Goreau died rather suddenly and our link to the University of West Indies collapsed, and the financial situation got very restricted and we had to give up that relationship. It was a beautiful site. I still remember even though I was only there about three days or so, I still remember very fondly that visit to Jamaica and helping to establish that marine station in Jamaica. So the Marine Sciences, the present Marine Sciences Research Center and the Center as it moved to Albany and became the Sea Grant program actually began at Flax Pond. We used to have our own boat and so on as part of that, and George Williams originally was a member of the Marine Sciences Research Center when it returned to Stony Brook, and then he transferred to the Department of Ecology and Evolution later on. So that's a little bit of the history of our acquisition of Flax Pond. We had a lot of problems with the people who lived around Flax Pond in determining what the coastal rights were going to be and how far the land acquisition was to go off to the East and so on.

Dr. Hartzell: Well, let me tell you just one thing. One of the first times that I met Ward Melville was when I was asked to come to a luncheon at Dan Fuller's and Ward

Melville and Peter Snyder, his counsel in the firm of Pelletreau and Pelletreau were there, and Bickman who owned the Pond at the time, President of the sand and gravel company, had apparently introduced a barge into the Pond. And the Village was up in arms. He was going to dredge the sand and gravel and sell it.

Dr. Erk: I remember that now.

Dr. Hartzell: Sell it and he was going to build a marina around the edge and have houses around the edge of the marina, that was the plan. And they were distraught; could the University do something. And they didn't want the Pond disturbed.

Dr. Erk: Nor did we.

Dr. Hartzell: I knew just enough because it had been mentioned in the sessions I'd had with Harry Porter, the four heads of the institutions, Albany, Binghamton, and Buffalo met with Harry occasionally. I knew that Buffalo was to have limnology and we were to have marine sciences, so it seemed to me that this was an excellent research facility. So I got on the phone to Harry and told him what the story was and urged the purchase of the Pond. They had to condemn it and then pay something like $400,000 for it to Bickman. And the Department of Conservation, I think, had to take the title so that they paid 51%, the University 49%

Dr. Erk: I think that's right.

Dr. Hartzell: And got an easement, the University got an easement so that they could do whatever they liked with the Pond.

Dr. Erk: Yes, that's right. I remember the 51% figure now. And of course the entire village of Old Field was behind us on this in order to, because they did not want a marina going in there; and we didn't want that lovely saltwater disturbed.

Dr. Hartzell: Right. That was one of the ways that we could ingratiate ourselves with local residents. I think it helped.

Dr. Erk: Oh, I'm sure it did. Well, okay. [end of tape]

Dr. Hartzell: An interview with Professor Frank Erk, a former student of Bentley Glass and former Chairman at Stony Brook of the Department of Biology on September 6, 1987, at the home of Karl Hartzell in Old Field.

Dr. Erk: .....want to interrupt from time to time. Should I just start talking.

Dr. Hartzell: Talking with the questions, but don't confine yourself to the questions, in other words, I want to get some structure.

Dr. Erk: Well, I'm likely to ramble and if we don't get today, we might have to have another session because there are some interesting little tangents along the way which are not at all developed in these questions.

Dr. Hartzell: Right.

Dr. Erk: And probably which no one else would even comment on, that would be my guess. Okay, are we starting, are we ready to start.

Dr. Hartzell: We're starting.

Dr. Erk: My name is Frank C. Erk, I am presently a Professor in the Department of Biochemistry and I am one of the initial members of the faculty of this institution. The institution, which was given the somewhat unwieldy name of the State University College on Long Island, was officially opened in 1957, thirty years ago, and at that time I was 32 years of age. I had finished graduate school at Johns Hopkins and I had always had as a goal obtaining a position teaching at a small liberal arts college. Consequently, I took a position at Washington College in Chestertown, Maryland, which is on the eastern shore and is the tenth oldest institution of higher learning in the country; it was founded in 1782. I went as a member of the Biology Department, in fact, head of the Biology Department and taught most of the courses in biology, as well as being the Director of the College Choir. I bring that point up because when I came to Oyster Bay there was no person on the faculty who was interested in or qualified to direct the college choir. I volunteered to do this in addition to everything else we were doing the first year; and we organized a choir from the small student body that we had.

Dr. Hartzell: In other words, you came in ‘57?

Dr. Erk: I came in ‘57, right. I was the first biologist to come to the institution and the second scientist. Dick Mould was here just before me.

Dr. Hartzell: Dick Mould, I tried to get him at Bucknell.

Dr. Erk: Bucknell? Oh, to come to Bucknell, you mean. Oh, yes, I see, right. When I was in the middle of my service at Washington College, I got an opportunity to apply for a fellowship at the University of Chicago; and I wanted and became a Carnegie Intern in General Education at the University of Chicago. They had a program then which involved several universities across the country; and if I remember correctly, I think Francis Bonner was in the same program at Harvard at that time. At any rate, I had always been interested in the problems and challenges of general education; and going to the University of Chicago gave me an opportunity to see how general education was dealt with at one institution. And I know that Harvard dealt with it in a different way. And actually some very important books appeared which dealt with these programs and those that were being offered at other institutions as well. At any rate I taught within the natural science courses at the University of Chicago and I sat in on a large number of other general education courses, as many as I could, because I wanted to see how the issues were treated in the humanities and social sciences, as well as in the sciences. I sat in on math, I sat in on the physical sciences, I sat in on humanities course, which was a section that was given by the son of Raymond Brown Sling, the commentator at that time, he was a cellist and led one of the humanities sections. I sat in David Lee’s in social sciences and so on. And I stayed on during the summer at the invitation of the University and taught an advanced course, still in the general education program, in natural sciences; it was called Natural Sciences 3, very intense, to say the least, to give that course in the summer. Then I went back to Washington College and I was very eager to try to transmit some of my enthusiasm and some of my ideas to the faculty at Washington College, because I thought that a small college was the ideal way to try to get some of these ideas implemented. Washington at that time had a, I guess one would say, rather traditional

organization for its academic programs. While it was also a very traditional faculty in a way, and they did not move easily or quickly to new ideas. However, I did get started a committee and some proposals, which led to a great simplification of the curriculum and a concentration upon fewer courses, and we instituted what was then called the 'Four Course Plan,' which tried to, which insisted that students take courses in larger units and not have so many different kinds of food on the plate at the same time, so that they could concentrate more on fewer courses; and that's a plan which has survived the test of time and it's still in use. I had been at the College for five years, when I got a letter from a friend of mine, whom I had met at the University of Chicago three years before. He was in charge of the physical sciences there at the college, natural sciences 1 and 3. He said, I had been in touch with him over the years, and he said "I don't know if you're interested or not but there's a brand new college that's going to open as part of the State University system of New York, and I was going as head of science and mathematics, but I decided at the last minute that I can't do it and I suggested your name for this position." Well, I had no inclination of any kind to change my employment at that time; I was tenured, I had a very successful choral group, even though still young, I had attained a kind of position of leadership in the faculty, I had just obtained one of the first National Science Foundation grants, and given to someone who is in a very small college especially, and I was not interested in any move. However, in order to be courteous and to respond to what I figures was a kind recommendation, I did write to Leonard Olsen, who was the Dean of this new College, and said that I had a letter from Aaron and say that although I wasn't interested in moving this year, I would like to learn more about the college, because Aaron had told me some things that intrigued me very much; and I thought it's certainly something that I should learn more about. And so in, I don't know exactly when it was, but perhaps late July or early August I drove up to Long Island, to Oyster Bay and brought along Ruth, my wife, and my daughter of less than one year, and we drove onto the estate outside of Oyster Bay called Planting Fields, and this was the former estate of William R. Coe and I must say that when I drove onto that estate I

thought it's just one of the most striking and beautiful locations I had ever seen in my life, absolutely stunning. I parked down way away from the mansion house, I didn't even know where it was at the time, left Ruth there and said "well, I'll be back." I think my appointment was at 1:30 in the afternoon, something like that. So I went up to the mansion house and I found Leonard's office and we left and walked out onto the grounds to chat, I thought. And we talked without stopping for six hours.

Dr. Hartzell: My goodness.

Dr. Erk: Without even a drink of water during that period of time. We never stopped talking for six hours. And I had completely forgotten that I had a wife and a little girl somewhere out there in the woods because I was absolutely fascinated by Olsen and what he had to say about the new College, what his goals were, what his positions were on matters of education. I think it would be fair to say that I had never been so influenced so deeply by one person before as I was upon that encounter. So by the end of the time, he had offered me a position essentially, and he grilled me very severely during that time, of course, about where I was coming from and I had a very difficult decision to make to leave an academic position of trust in the middle of the summer with heavy responsibilities the following fall, leaving an administration that I admired was in itself almost enough to reject the offer out of hand.

Dr. Hartzell: Right.

Dr. Erk: But, as we talked about it and as the potential of this new position became clearer, we both decided that we should do it. Well, I won't go through all of the turmoil that went on during the next few weeks; but I had to resign, I had to arrange for moving all of our possessions; I had to obtain rental housing in the area, which turned out to be Bayville that first year; and I had to make at least one and perhaps two trips up to Oyster Bay to hold preliminary meetings with the science faculty. So that was indeed a very intense time for us. But we did find a house in Bayville, we had to move not only the usual furniture, but we had a grand piano and we had to find room for that in a rental house which was fully furnished on the Sound, and by the time August came to an end

and September began, we were, we had moved to Oyster Bay. I even had to find a replacement for myself at Washington College, which was not easy, who turned out not to be very good in the long run, but nevertheless, I did the best that I could under the circumstances. So I would say that the person primarily responsible, solely responsible for my coming to Oyster Bay was Leonard Olsen. The vision that he had for this new college was one which embodied, I thought, the best of both general education, which would be common possession who would come to the college, and specialized education, which would be appropriate for training students in science and mathematics. The mission at that time as defined by the I presume the Board of Trustees

Dr. Hartzell: Central Office.

Dr. Erk: Central Office was definitely to create an institution of high quality under public auspices that would fill a very desperate need for education in the sciences and mathematics. There was an agonizing reappraisal going on nationwide at that time about the quality of our teaching in the sciences and in fact the quality of our research in the sciences. And it was perhaps symbolic that two or three weeks after classes began that Sputnik was launched by the Soviet Union. Also, two days after classes began, the first underground nuclear test was done at Los Alamos. So, we were at a time in history when our ability at speaking of our ability to go to the world to control the proliferation of nuclear weapons was severely in doubt. So, on the one hand we had to improve our technical expertise, on the other hand we had to somehow impose a kind of sensitivity and humanity upon people so that they understood what the crisis was that the entire world was facing up to. I was in, in looking through my papers, I came upon the notes that I made almost exactly thirty years ago today. These are dated 4th of September 1957, and this was the faculty meeting that was held prior to the, one of the faculty meetings held prior to the opening of classes. And I have, just happen to have in this meeting all of the dates of that first month, we met on Tuesday, the tenth of September, 9:30 in the morning; we scheduled a faculty meeting for the 13th of September, also at 9:30; and I have the minutes of most of these meetings. We had registration of students

on the 17th of September, and classes began on Wednesday the 18th of September. Classes began at 8:30 in the morning, and I taught the very first class to be taught at this institution. It was the natural sciences one class and no other classes met until 9 o'clock. So, by a hair, I taught the very first class. Now, the program that we had worked out did not include any biology in the first year. So even though I served as head of the Division of Science and Mathematics, there was no biology to teach the first year. So I taught Natural Sciences 1, which was physical science, and I taught Mathematics 1, and also served as course chairman to those two courses, convened the meetings, worked out the syllabus and so on. We had, first year we had a biologist, a chemist, - it was Barry Gordon -- a physicist, Cliff Swartz was only the part-time, because he was part-time at Brookhaven; and Bob Kalatotske, who was a mathematician. So we were all doing somewhat double duty that first year teaching these courses. It was extremely difficult to recruit people in the sciences at that time; there just weren't enough to go around. Every university and every college was expanding, still having a very large veterans load after the second World War, and education was just in a very explosive state. And trying to attract scientists and mathematicians to a small unknown, new institution was extremely difficult. A lot of my energies that first year were devoted to recruiting new staff.

Dr. Hartzell: You recruited outside of biology then?

Dr. Erk: I recruited in the whole area of science and mathematics, so in that way recruited Francis Bonner, who came the second year, and William Lister who came the second year. I'll tell you a little story about how William Lister happened to come to Stony Brook. I had looked everywhere for mathematicians and I could not find any. Now in those days faculty members in mathematics were so scarce that at Washington College we had taken on a retired mathematician from Brown University by the name of Ray Gilman A wonderful man and I came to know him quite well, it just happened he was a stamp collector, he had a daughter-in-law who was an Erk before she was married, and we had interesting little links together, thoughtful man, had a serious heart condition and had hesitated very much before entering retired professors registry, which was a big

thing then, because colleges all over the country were using retired faculty to staff their courses.

Dr. Hartzell: I remember.

Dr. Erk: He would work very hard, I'm afraid, but he took it in good grace. S when I came to Oyster Bay and had the job of finding mathematicians, I remembered Dr. Gilman, who was still back at Washington; and I wrote to him, I said, "do you know of any mathematicians that we might be able to recruit for this new college?" And I told him a little bit about it, what our goals were and so on. And he gave me two names at Brown University; I actually came across that little slip that I had written in 1957, I don't know if I have it here just now but one of the names was Bill Lister, since the Dean. So I have all the notes that I made in trying to, I guess I talked with him by telephone in the end, when he called. At any rate we, one mathematician was older than Bill, who was at Brown; I could come up with his name, but it's not really important at the moment. So Len Olsen and I decided to go to Brown to talk with these people. So we called up, we made appointments, and Bill was then Assistant Dean of the College at Brown and wore a crew cut and so on. And when I met both of these men actually, when I saw Bill I liked him immediately; he had a very outgoing and forthright way of speaking. And so we talked with him for a long time and finally Len offered him a position in Mathematics. Now Bill had been an Assistant Professor of Mathematics at Brown, and I'm trying to remember some of the details here but my, one day Len called me at the office and he said, "we've lost Lister." And I said, "why, I thought he was ready to come." And well, he said, Lister wants a professorship here and we only offered him an Associate Professor. So we had a crisis meeting of everyone at the time, and I took the decision. I said, first of all, he's a very good man; secondly, we need mathematicians desperately, and therefore, I recommend that we offer him a professorship in Mathematics. I wanted to check the second catalog just to make sure I was right on that recollection. So that implied a little bit more money, and he agreed to come. So that was a tremendous boost to get Bill Lister to come at that time. And he organized the mathematics program.

Kalatotske, willing though he was, was, only had a bachelor's degree from City College, and he was a very, very good person, I think, in general, but of course he didn't have the experience and stature to develop the mathematics program, so Bill Lister took charge of that.

Dr. Hartzell: Just hold it a second.

Dr. Erk: Okay, coming through all right?

Dr. Hartzell: Yep, all right.

Dr. Erk: Do you transcribe these after they

Dr. Hartzell: They are copied first.

Dr. Erk: Yes, in fact I'd like to have a copy, could be some errors in the fact that I didn't know what I said. I should say just a word about the first year of the college. The total faculty that first year consists of 14 members, plus Don Cook as full-time Librarian. The two most important administrative people were Len Olsen, who was Dean, and Allen Austill, who was Dean of Students. That title for Austill only reflects faintly all of the responsibilities he had and all of the activities that he participated in. He was very intellectual, he wanted to participate in as many academic activities as he could. He felt that he could best serve as the contact with the students if he knew what they were doing in class, and he took his responsibilities extremely seriously. He also had come from St. John's College, that a strong tradition in the great books and liberal education and brought many of the insights that he had gained there to the initiation of similar activities at Oyster Bay, so he was an extremely important person. The College really really moved about those two very strong people -- Leonard Olsen and Allen Austill -- they were the positive persons in the administration at that time. We eventually recruited from Hofstra, I think it was, during that first year, a Director of Admissions, I think he is listed Coordinator of Field Searches here, David Tilley. Now David Tilley was, I first met actually at Hofstra or Adelphia, I can't remember which he came from. And he would go out and visit the high schools and tell students about the College on Long Island. He would attend College Days and attempted to recruit student body for the following year.

We started out with 148 students the first years, and I have papers here which gives a projected second year class which was 200. The faculty decided early on that we would meet every week and that we would meet at night because there was no time when everyone could meet during the day, so we met every Thursday evening. We had during that first year something like 29 faculty meetings; and most of those were at least three hours in length. I know that we had 29 recorded meetings of the faculty that year. And at one of the items of business, it was decided that faculty meetings should endeavor to be over by 10 o'clock, but under certain circumstances they would have to go beyond that time. So we met around a large card table in the Library of Coe mansion. And in those early days just after classes had begun, there was no electricity yet in the Coe mansion anywhere, so we met by candlelight. So these night faculty meetings were all conducted by candlelight, candles on the table of this long table around which the entire faculty could gather.

Dr. Hartzell: How did you take notes?

Dr. Erk: By candlelight. So we had two morning meetings early on before classes opened, of course, but all the later meetings were held at night; well, we eventually got electricity before winter came on, but I think it was three weeks or four weeks before we got electricity probably.

Dr. Hartzell: That explains the large fireplaces.

Dr. Erk: I don't know if it explains them, but what I remember we sat, the table was arranged in front of one of those fireplaces, and there was a portrait watching over us which is alleged to have been a Van Dyck, but I don't whether, everyone called it a Van Dyck, so it may well

Dr. Hartzell: That was in the Great Hall then.

Dr. Erk: No, it was in the room just before you come to the Great Hall. That's what we used as the Library. And so the Great Hall was for our small number really too great, but we did use the Great Hall for other purposes. We used the Great Hall, for example, for our first convocation, which was held in November of that year. And

President Carlson came to be President and to speak. He, I believe, was the second President of State University; Al Eurich being the first. And he just died within the past year, I believe.

Dr. Hartzell: Al Eurich.

Dr. Erk: Yeah.

Dr. Hartzell: Is that right.

Dr. Erk: He, I suppose people in Central Administration told a little about this moratorium that had been put on the development of new units within the State University after the University was founded in 1948.

Dr. Hartzell: No, go ahead.

Dr. Erk: New York was the last state to get a State University, although they had a number of teachers colleges and specialized colleges and agricultural and technical institutes, which were scattered around the State. Prior to 1948 each of these was a little fiefdom of its own. Each legislator from the County where the college was housed was the one who'd submit the budgetary requests for that particular unit. And so there were all these separate budgetary bills coming in to the State Legislature for years and years.

Dr. Hartzell: It didn't go through the Associate Commissioner for Higher Education?

Dr. Erk: Well, I don't know, that could be true because this was before 1948 now, before the University was founded. And the Legislatures were returned to office on the basis of how much money they could extract for their own branch or college in their own county, so that's clearly a bad system. And so the University actually dates from 1948, and it was resisted strongly by the private institutions in New York State; Cornell, Columbia, Fordham, Buffalo at that time was a private institution, RPI, plus Colgate and all of the smaller colleges as well were violently opposed to having a State University. They feared it; they feared that a well funded State University would be in competition with them for getting student. Then there were some studies which showed very clearly that given the demand for places in higher education among upcoming students, that there was no way, given the most optimistic projections, that every private institution in the

State of meeting these demands. They far exceeded what the private institutions could take care of, but

Dr. Hartzell: That was Young's Commission.

Dr. Erk: I see, I probably knew it them, but I long since have forgotten it. So one of the tradeoffs was to the private institutions was that if we go along, because after all this had to be voted by a Legislature which was made of wholly graduates of private institutions, and it still is, and the tradeoff was that there was agreement, whether this was in writing or not, but there was an agreement there would be a ten year moratorium on the opening of new units within State University. The last unit to be opened was at that time called Harpur College at Binghamton, which grew out of a, I guess, of a program which was operated during the second World War up there.

Dr. Hartzell: Yes, an offshoot of Syracuse.

Dr. Erk: Okay. So they were in existence and so they were brought into the fold, as it were, in 1948. So when the State University was formed, altogether all the teachers colleges, specialized colleges at Cornell and Alfred and other places, and the ag and techs and Harpur College and the medical centers I guess were included, initially Downstate and Upstate only, at that time, and that's what comprised the State University of New York in 1948. Now the College on Long Island then, when the moratorium was about to be up, it was, they began to put together planning committees for this new institution, partly as a result of a donation of land that Mr. Melville had made in Stony Brook.

Dr. Hartzell: You know why he made it?

Dr. Erk: Not, well, I have ideas but I'm not sure of the official reason.

Dr. Hartzell: Well, let's have them.

Dr. Erk: I was told that Mr. Melville, as a part of his restoration of Stony Brook as a colonial community, thought that a small liberal arts college near the town of Stony Brook would be an adjunct that would complement the restoration of Stony Brook and which he thought would add an intellectual dimension to the village. And 400 acres is certainly enough to build such a college on. And that gift motivated the Central

Administration to set up committees of consultants from over the country, not only to talk about programs, but to talk about buildings and so on. And there is a lot of preliminary planning being done in the middle '50's for the Stony Brook operation. And then somewhere along the way, during 1957 they were then going to recruit the first members of a faculty group whose only function would be planning for the Stony Brook operation; that was the initial purpose. And when I came up for my interview, I was shown a lot of these early recommendations and even some building plans for Stony Brook that had been part of these specifications that had been put together before then. Well, sometime before April of 1957 the Central Administration decided that they should not only have faculty who would serve as planners for the new institution, but that it would be more useful in developing a curriculum if they had students to work with at the same time. Now, that was a late decision. And that was presuming what led to Leonard being selected as Dean. He came down to Oyster Bay, moved into one wing of the mansion, and was given the task of recruiting a student body of indeterminate size, since no one, almost all the college decisions had been made by that time and where was one going to get a student body in May and June to open in September? Where was one going to get a faculty? And so that was the task that Len Olsen undertook and which he executed successfully. Students who made up the first class at Oyster Bay were not typical incoming college students by any means. They were in many cases older students, they were mature women with families, they were students who were undecided about whether or not they should go to college at all, and we ended up with a very heterogeneous and very interesting group of students. Much more so, I believe, than if we had been working a whole year to recruit that first student body. Now, there were a lot of students taken in who found the college was not for them. The curriculum was rigorous, demanding and four years later only about, I think, 21 students graduated out of the 148 who entered.

Dr. Hartzell: Is that right, the first commencement.

Dr. Erk: That's right. Well, I think I, I'm not sure where I am here but I was looking through the notes of the faculty meetings for the first year and it's just amazing how many committees I found myself on. I mean there weren't many people and so everyone served on a lot of committees. And just to give you an example, well, I must make a little digression here just to show you that things haven't changed in thirty years. One of the notes I have from thirty years ago is "keep record of toll calls." So they had real financial concerns. I also have a note that the Liberia was open Monday through Friday from 9 to 5, and Monday through Thursday 7 to 9 at night. This was already at Oyster Bay. I might say that our Library in August of 1957 consisted of a bookshelf not more than 6 feet long, all books having been on loan from New York State Library in Albany; they loaned us these books to start the Library off. So it was not until later that we began to acquire our own books. But at any rate Faculty Meeting September 13, 1957, everyone present. Point 4, Degree Requirements, Mr. Erk distributed copies of an outline of proposed degree requirements. After lengthy discussion the question of degree requirements was postponed pending the acquisition of relevant factual material and the holding of discussions providing better basis for judgment. Now that had been a committee made up of Ralph Bowen, who was a social scientist, myself, Hal Zyskind and Leonard Gardner; that we had recorded in, earlier we recorded in at the first faculty meeting.

Dr. Hartzell: Do you have anywhere the name of the 14 faculty member?

Dr. Erk: Oh, sure. I've given Dr. Marburger a copy of, my only copy of the first catalog. Do you have a copy of that?

Dr. Hartzell: I don't think so.

Dr. Erk: You don't. He has what I call a 'virgin' copy, it had never been used or opened, so he would have that in his files. Although I have a copy of the second catalog here, which includes all of the members of the first faculty, as well as those who were added the second year.

Dr. Hartzell: Sooner or later I hope you will let this material go to the Archives.

Dr. Erk: I think most of it's already there, except perhaps the minutes of the first. This is something I put together immediately after that year, so this is probably as complete a record as we are likely to find. I did make for you, I just didn't have the resources to make more, but I made for you a summary of the faculty meetings of the first year. I think that was probably by Harold Zyskind, if I'm not mistaken. And then here are the degree requirements for the class entering in September 1957. And here is the recommendations submitted to the Dean April 1958 with an Addendum from Ralph Bowen about what the required courses would be. So we worked most of the year getting the requirements together. Here's the freshman class of the Fall of 1958 and what their expressions of interest are.

Dr. Hartzell: I see. Well, you had eight valedictorians.

Dr. Erk: I wonder if we do better than that even now?

Dr. Hartzell: I don't know.

Dr. Erk: I thought that was pretty good at the time. Well, let's see. I wanted to talk a little bit about the faculty meetings of that first year. There were two kinds of faculty meetings: one kind of meeting was held to take care of what I would call academic business, matters of probation, academic standards that had to be met and such things as that. Here, I have it in the third meeting: "Mr. Olsen stated there will be two types of faculty meetings: one, concerned with administrative problems relevant to the total program; two, concerned with intellectual discussions, which would be reflected in administrative decisions." I don't think that reads correctly, but nevertheless, we held every other meeting more or less devoted to the reading of texts and a discussion by all members of the faculty, and people would prepare position papers on these various documents. We used them as models to see what a course should actually try to do with a particular subject matter, because the initial problem that we had was to, if you can imagine, here is a group of 14 faculty with a tremendous opportunity, a blank slate, no curriculum. ..... was unique because how often can you sit down and say, now if we can do anything we wanted to in the development of a college

curriculum, what would we do; and we took nothing for granted, every proposal was thoroughly examined and discussed in the light of the varying experiences of the members of faculty who came that first year and deliberated on at great length. Nothing was assumed and the problem is never as great in the area of specialization, it's never as great a problem to know what a biology major should include in his or her program as what should the common educational experience be that all students, biologist, chemists, physics, mathematics, humanists, social scientists have. And we took the position that the first job of the College was to give all students a broad basis in the major areas of academic disciplines, not with regard to subject matter but with regard to the kinds of intellectual skills that should be developed. Everyone agreed, I believe, that the way to develop these skills was not to try to encompass large amounts of factual information, but rather to focus upon a limited number of excellent texts, which would then be discussed thoroughly in class, and this was the principle that was followed in all of the disciplinary areas. Although, of course, it was implemented in different ways in the different disciplines. At any rate we also used some secondary sources, and we wanted to find out what the experience of other institutions had been. And the first book that we all read was the Harvard report, which I think must have come out around '46 or '47. Anyhow it's called <u>General Education and Free Society</u> and so we were all assigned to read the first four chapters in that and that provided the discussion for our faculty meeting. Something that would absolutely be astounding at faculty meetings today, wouldn't it?

Dr. Hartzell: Right.

Dr. Erk: Then we went on and looked at the Columbia program, a college program in action and reconstruction in the liberal arts, we reviewed those two.

Dr. Hartzell: Who wrote that, Dean somebody?

Dr. Erk: I don't have the authors here any more, but we, at the end of our year in these varied programs when I was a Carnegie Intern in General Education at Chicago, we all converged upon Columbia. That's right, it was Columbia, Chicago and Harvard that

participated in this program. It was a Carnegie grant. And we all met for about two days or three days at Harriman House which, you know where it is, north on the Hudson,

Dr. Hartzell: That was a nice place to meet.

Dr. Erk: Oh, marvelous, just a marvelous place. I think that's where I first met Francis Bonner, as a matter of fact. I think he had come from Harvard, I'd come from Scotland, there were people who had come, there were three interns at each institution as I remember, so it was not a large program. Let me tell you some of the other things we looked into. We looked into Joseph Schwab's The Nature and Extent of Knowledge as Related to Liberal Education; Joe Schwab was a faculty member at Chicago. I didn't know him then, but I came to know him very well later on when I worked with the biological sciences curriculum study, and he was sort of the father figure who gave us a philosophical basis for what we were doing, trying to assist in secondary education.

Dr. Hartzell: Those early years are very important in the formation of an institution.

Dr. Erk: One of the papers that we discussed, I'm sure at my suggestion, was a couple of chapters from Darwin's book on the domestication of plants and animals, which dealt with this theory of pangenesis. And this was viewed as a kind of paper which showed how a model was proposed in the biological sciences for phenomena that no one had any idea how to explain at the time. And the kind of requirements that Darwin established for a satisfactory theory of inheritance that were outlined, I think about 1871 or so, were almost, were most comprehensive and almost ideal for illustrating what the problems were working on the theory of heredity. Mendel's rules only attack a very, very small part of the requirement that he would put on such a theory. And I would say that it's not until the last few years [end of tape - unfinished]