

**INTERVIEW WITH WILLIAM LARSON
FORMER MEMBER OF STONY BROOK COUNCIL**

December 24, 1989

Dr. Hartzell: Interview with William Larson, a former member of the Stony Brook Council, at his home in Delmar, outside of Albany, December 24, 1989. All right, I think we have it. All right, Bill, your name.

William Larson: William Larson.

Dr. Hartzell: And address at the time of your appointment.

William Larson: I believe it was the year in which I moved to Baldwin, Nassau County, on Long Island.

Dr. Hartzell: Your age.

William Larson: 39 at the time, 38 or 39.

Dr. Hartzell: And the date of your appointment.

William Larson: Yes, that was in during the year, but I don't remember what month the appointment took place.

Dr. Hartzell: But it was 1959.

William Larson: Oh, it was, definitely.

Dr. Hartzell: Who appointed you?

William Larson: Governor Harriman.

Dr. Hartzell: Why were you appointed, what was the occasion?

William Larson: Well, I think it's fair to say I was appointed as a result of a political process that probably had it's beginning when I ran unsuccessfully, I could put in parens, for Congress as a Democratic candidate in the old third Congressional District in 1958, when Governor Harriman you will recall was a candidate for reelection as Governor and unsuccessful as well. And I believe that when a vacancy developed on the Council that the Governor's Office made some inquiries of Democratic people on the Island, and you

know as I'm talking I see that I'm creating a problem here on the timing, I'm talking about 1959, but Harriman was out then, wasn't he?

Dr. Hartzell: 1959.

William Larson: Sure. He was in from 1954 to 1958. And he lost in 1958, so he was out in 1959.

Dr. Hartzell: Well, he was still Governor until

William Larson: January, not January 20th, that goes for the Presidential election. I'm beginning to think, Karl, that my appointment must have come through in 1958, in which case it was probably toward the end of 1958, when he was still Governor, and then I would have been living in Levittown at the end of 1958. Now, to your last question, yes, having been the candidate I think that when a vacancy arose and inquiries were put forth to the Democratic chairs of Nassau and Suffolk Counties, I got a call from the then chair of Nassau, Jack English, asking me if I'd be interested in serving on the Council and having had my name brought up earlier on unsuccessfully as a possible candidate for the Regents, my consciousness had been raised in these terms, and I was interested to say yes; and I might say in all candor that this was partly with a view toward whether it might not be helpful in terms of possibly running again for Congress two years later, this is the way I think the process played out.

Dr. Hartzell: And you were connected in some way with education at the time.

William Larson: Well, I had been a School Board member in Levittown from 1950 to 1953 and that would have been the extent of it, I would say, if one is looking for relevant background.

Dr. Hartzell: Which were the most active members of the Council at the time that you joined it?

William Larson: Well, the ones I remember were those who were not necessarily the most active, which, in looking back thirty years, is something that is shrouded in mists of memory. But I was impressed I recall the fact that the Council included such prominent individuals as Ruth Field, Mrs. Marshall; and Harry Van Arsdale, who was head of the

Central Labor Council, a very important labor figure; and there might have been one or two others then but they weren't active and so very little of them, and some of them then resigned from the Board; Ward Melville was Chair. Was anybody conspicuously actively involved in the functioning leadership capacity say, I don't recall now.

Dr. Hartzell: Was Judge Sullivan on it at the time or was he appointed later.

William Larson: He might have come on a little later.

Dr. Hartzell: I know he succeeded Ward Melville as Chairman.

William Larson: Yes, he did, but that was some years later I think. He might have been on it then, he might have been, he was either on it then or came on shortly.

Dr. Hartzell: I see. What did you understand were your functions as a Council member.

William Larson: Okay, well, I didn't have too much understanding at the time of my appointment because there wasn't any extensive explanation of what was involved, what would be involved, forthcoming, it didn't work that way. But having served as School Board member and been accustomed to the policymaking functions of the Board of Education, it was my understanding that pretty much the same thing would obtain with respect to the Stony Brook Center of the State University of New York. Not then but probably during the learning process as a member of the Council, I was caused to gain an understanding of the relationship of the Council to the central Board of Trustees and Central Administration, local administration and find out, indeed, that the power and authority of the Council is quite limited in terms of major decisions.

Dr. Hartzell: Selection of the President.

William Larson: To be recommended to the Board of Trustees, which theoretically has the veto power, so even that is a limited power, and approving a budget which also has to be approved in Albany. So, it was from those who put the structure of the State University of New York together the Council was probably envisioned as a local group that would be helpful in the development of that particular branch of the University.

Dr. Hartzell: How much understanding do you think the other members of the Council of the nature of a university?

William Larson: Well, it's hard to generalize because I couldn't begin to tell you who were the eight or nine when we had the full complement, or fewer at the time, who they were, much less what their backgrounds were that would give rise to some sense of their understanding of the functions of a university;, but backing up a minute, Karl, to my answer to your question of the process by which my appointment took place and considering that not atypical, it would seem to me that people were brought onto the Council without a great regard for what kind of understanding they were going to bring along with them in terms of the way a public institution of higher education would be expected to operate.

Dr. Hartzell: All right. Did the Council have a hand in the appointment of John Lee, Karl Hartzell, John Toll?

William Larson: Yes.

Dr. Hartzell: All right, in the case of Lee.

William Larson: I can't remember specifically, Karl, how the role of the Council may have differed in regard to the appointments of the three people you are mentioning. As I said a moment ago, one of the Council's functions was to recruit, identify, decide upon and recommend to the Board of Trustees an individual for its approval as President of Stony Brook, and it seems to me that we went through that process with Lee and Toll; but in your own case my memory suggests to me that there was some other procedure possibly followed because you were interim, I think, but if I'm wrong it shows you how fuzzy my recollection is.

Dr. Hartzell: Well, I know that I joined the system as Executive Dean in the Albany Office immediately on detail down to Stony Brook, and that Harry Porter brought me down and introduced me to a group of the faculty. And from what I can understand nobody knew much about me and that the group of faculty had no veto power over that decision. I was simply brought in.

William Larson: That, of course, pretty well is what I would recall to be the situation because as I said a moment ago, I do not remember that the Council was involved in your selection. So I don't remember too much about the individual situations except that I do remember the process taking place whereby Toll was brought in and I believe it was similar with respect to Lee, but I'm not sure that I was present for the vote at that time. It might have been done at a meeting I was unable to attend.

Dr. Hartzell: Let's take the Oyster Bay situation first. What do you remember about the Oyster Bay situation and about John Lee?

William Larson: Well, a very interesting thing developed that opened my mind to a lot that was going on at Oyster Bay that did not come to the attention of the Council, and it happened in this way, that John Lee and his wife invited my wife and me to dinner, and I thought it was probably going to be a social affair with others present. There were no others present and, whether it was attended to be a social with matters of no consequence to the University being discussed, it didn't work out that way because, as I remember, John Lee spent practically the whole time, with his wife contributing to the discussion, in telling me what an untenable situation he had at Oyster Bay because of his confrontation with Dean Olsen and how Olsen was doing everything he could to sabotage the Lee presidency, and he detailed this in a fashion that, without some prompting, it's a little hard for me to reconstruct. But let me jump ahead to tell you the counterpart which was extraordinary, it wasn't very long after that dinner that I had occasion to fly from downstate up to maybe Syracuse; and when I got on the plane and sat down, who should I be sitting next to but Leonard Olsen, and you can see what's coming, during that whole flight I heard from Leonard Olsen about what a sorry situation it was at Oyster Bay and how John Lee had done this and done that and how Leonard Olsen should have been the President, if I remember it correctly,

Dr. Hartzell: How Leonard Olsen should have been

William Larson: I'm saying that but if I remember correctly, I have to put a *caveat* on that, and I'm not sure in these two sessions or whether it was later that this tension was

expressed to me not just only in terms of the individual but in terms of the Chicago influence *vis a vis* the Columbia influence, two schools of thought which, if not diametrically opposed, were sharply at odds in terms of the way the university should be structured and operated. So we had these individuals personifying this conflict and this tension, and I was getting all the ear at the dinner, a whole skewed view of things, and over here the oppositely skewed view of things, very self-servingly positions. I thought it was very interesting to hear this just as it happened coincidentally. Now, that's partly the answer to your question. Beyond that I can remember being a little concerned that some of the prominent people on the Council stepped off the Council. Perhaps it seemed to me, although it is in retrospect, that they came onto the Council expecting there be more substance to the role than there proved to be. Maybe some of them felt they were wasting their time, okay, and they learned, as I did, when they got onto the Council what you could do, what you couldn't do and maybe found it not sufficiently fulfilling to hang in there for a term which, as you know, a full term was nine years, I think, which is a long time. So, then others came on and

Dr. Hartzell: Mrs. Field, for instance, got off?

William Larson: Well, she did get off, I don't think she served a full term, but she didn't, she was on a for a while, a year or two maybe.

Dr. Hartzell: What kind of people were they?

William Larson: Well, there were some, what kind of people were who?

Dr. Hartzell: The Council members, were they able, intelligent?

William Larson: I think there was a trend over the years to a level gesturing now on the high side down. In the course of my years from 1959 to 1969, which involved a holdover, not to anticipate other questions, but a holdover when I was not offered a re-appointment by Rockefeller, understandably, that I thought the quality of the Council members deteriorated significantly and as happens in a political process, but not necessarily, you have appointments made for purely political reasons that have, if anything, just a coincidental connection to quality or potential to contribute and so forth.

To some extent it's a payoff for some political contribution or whatever somebody made previously, and I think we had some of that, and so I answer you that way, kind of globally, that I saw a less impressive collection of people than there were at the beginning.

Dr. Hartzell: Did you have any close relations with some members of the faculty during the Oyster Bay days, Tom Irvine?

William Larson: Ed Fiess, I knew Ed Fiess when his wife was very active in my campaign for Congress in 1958, I got acquainted with Ed, and I remember over at Oyster Bay that Ed was a very prominent guy, he was a mace there during one of the first two commencements there, had the title that goes with it, you know, and it seemed to me that Ed was certainly, he was a plank over there at Stony Brook, one of the originals. And consequently it was, having a relationship with Ed, it was always interesting to me to talk with Ed about things that were going on there. I think that that's the only relationship that I had going into it, and I don't recall that I formed any relationship with other faculty people, except as you would normally get to know some in the course of various events and functions, going to commencements and so forth and so on.

Dr. Hartzell: All right. What were the principal matters of concern during the Oyster Bay days?

William Larson: Well, this turnover, Karl, that we had there, you know, there were a lot of problems which I think in retrospect you could probably attribute to this Olsen-Lee clash, you see. And I know in terms of organizational dynamics that you can bring somebody in at the top there, but if you have somebody in key positions one level down who is going to try and submarine that person, it is going to be very difficult to be effective as a number one leader if you don't have a dependable secondary support guy. It's happened in the New York City school system time and again when they brought somebody from the outside who has been shot down because you can't move that bureaucracy. Well, we didn't have that kind of bureaucracy because it was too new and too small, but nevertheless if you get a key person like a Dean Olsen who thinks that the

President shouldn't be there, he can certainly do a lot to make sure that presidency isn't going to succeed. And I think that we must have had some problems on the Council as a result of this kind of a situation that existed, otherwise, we had the practical problems attendant upon a growing institution in a limited physical facility; we had the problem of trying to get the crank turning to pave the way for the move to the permanent campus because the first shovelful wasn't turned over, I don't think, until 1962.

Dr. Hartzell: No, it was earlier than that, I think the groundbreaking, the actual groundbreaking was 1960.

William Larson: 1960. I can recall when Rockefeller was out there sitting on the big bulldozer, and we had a luncheon meeting over at the Three Village Inn there too in conjunction with that ceremony; I'm saying it's 1962 but it could have been 1960, sure.

Dr. Hartzell: I remember a luncheon at the, I think Rockefeller was out there twice, but I know that there was a speech that he gave in 1960 that I'm trying to locate. Norman Hurd was trying to help me find it but thus far we haven't found it. Do you have any idea why Ward Melville gave the land?

William Larson: No, but I do know that he gave it with a view toward something being done with it quite different from what was being done with it, because in 1958 we had enacted by the Congress the National Defense Education Act, which in the wake of Sputnik was the Congressional response to give our science and mathematics education a shot in the arm, and the focus then was to get an emphasis on that kind of training. And my recollection is that Stony Brook originally was envisioned to be a relatively small college of science and engineering, and I think that when Ward Melville was persuaded, if he was persuaded, I don't suppose he just walked up to somebody and said, hey, I want to give you some land for the University, he was probably approached and he was approached on that basis. And I think Ward Melville had some problems with it when it turned out it was going to be quite a different situation than originally had been envisioned by him. I think the problems he had, of course, was that related to his role as the principal father of Stony Brook, and this was going to cause quite a change in the

Stony Brook scene, quite a much greater change than had ever been envisioned in the first place. So, I think that Ward Melville probably was asked, I don't know

Dr. Hartzell: That I don't know, whether

William Larson: You don't know either.

Dr. Hartzell: No, because the first offer from him came in 1956 and in 1957, early in 1957 Olsen, who was in the Central Office, was selected as the man to start the Long Island Center that fall. He had very short lead time.

William Larson: That's before he became DEA in 1958 obviously, so Melville, but I don't think it negates my suggestion to you, because I do have some recollection about this, that what developed was a surprise to him and maybe a lot of other people including those who originally put the Long Island Center on the drawing board. I think this idea of making a major center that kind of evolved during the course of our Oyster Bay period.

Dr. Hartzell: Yes.

William Larson: I think so.

Dr. Hartzell: Do you remember anything about the Heald Report? Heald was

William Larson: I remember, when you mention the name, I remember there was such a report, he was a NYU Chancellor, was he?

Dr. Hartzell: He was, no, he was chairman of the Ford Foundation, President of the Ford Foundation at that time. I think he was probably selected by Rockefeller, it was 1959.

William Larson: By the way, one of the reasons some of the people who were on the Council got off the Council is they might have thought this was not going to be any big deal out there in Stony Brook. Had they known this was going to be a major research institution, they might have been more interested in remaining involved, this is speculation.

Dr. Hartzell: Do you have any feeling for the extent to which the Governors, Harriman and Rockefeller personally involved themselves in the development of this institution?

William Larson: Well, I was not myself mindful of what was going on in terms of the Long Island Center, as you referred to it a moment ago, prior to my appointment to the Council that was when Harriman was practically out the door, so his involvement I would only have been made aware of kind of retrospectively, and I don't have any remembrance now that he was notably concerned as an individual but that's a just vague feeling on my part, whereas it seems to me that Rockefeller maybe demonstrated a more aggressive interest in the development of the institution.

Dr. Hartzell: Did you know Carlino?

William Larson: Acquainted. Certainly knew him to be a, until he was defeated in 1964, one of the major Republican powers in the State Legislature majority speaker, why do you ask?

Dr. Hartzell: He's a shadowy figure, very few people mention him and yet he was a powerful individual during the Oyster Bay days.

William Larson: Yes, he was.

Dr. Hartzell: But he doesn't seem to play much of a role.

William Larson: No, I have no recollection in the way of his role at that time, I think there was one.

Dr. Hartzell: Okay, did you have any contact with, besides Olsen and Lee, Hamilton?

William Larson: Who's Hamilton?

Dr. Hartzell: Hamilton was the then called President of the SUNY system; Tom Hamilton was the one who appointed me actually and who put Porter in charge of the campus after Lee's resignation.

William Larson: So Hamilton was head of the administration centrally. Was it the first?

Dr. Hartzell: No, no, he had a man who was one of the top administrators of the Ford Foundation, his name slips my mind, Carlson was one prior to Hamilton, then Hamilton, then Porter was sent down, Hamilton thought that he could run Stony Brook from Albany.

William Larson: I see, with his man in charge.

Dr. Hartzell: Yes, with Porter.

William Larson: I don't recall contact with Hamilton.

Dr. Hartzell: Remember any contact with Porter, with Harry Porter?

William Larson: No,

Dr. Hartzell: He was Provost in the Central Office.

William Larson: Yeah, but something might come back if we work this over for a while because when you mention these names, these are names that have long since slipped out of my mind and little bells begin to tinkle, but it's not easy to bring it back because we are talking about thirty, twenty-five years ago. Harry Porter, sure I remember Harry Porter. I think the Council would have had contact with him if he's down there filling in after Lee. But you know the sequence eludes me a little bit, you know, in terms of the heads of Stony Brook from Lee to Toll we've got a space in there with several people coming into play.

Dr. Hartzell: Well, about me; I came September of 1962, which was the year of the move to Stony Brook. And the only department that stayed that year in Oyster Bay was Biology. Do you have any feeling for what I did, the way I handled things for three years?

William Larson: My feeling is that you were a calming influence in a situation where there had been a great deal of turbulence prior to your arrival. I don't recall that we had on the Council any controversy involving your function.

Dr. Hartzell: Yes, I know you didn't. I know that Ward Melville at times wished that I would stay in charge because I got along with Bill Sullivan, he was a very good person to have on the Council.

William Larson: I used to see something of him because we commuted a little bit, we traveled together so back and forth to the meetings, he was coming from Rockville Centre next door to Baldwin, so while I didn't know Sullivan, even though his appointment was presumably comparable to mine in terms of the Democratic political big D process there, he was

Dr. Hartzell: He was chairman of the Council.

William Larson: Well, he was when Melville left, but I am just talking about how we got on the Council in the first place. I don't know what his background was that would have necessarily made him a logical candidate. But, mind you, I don't think you need professional education experience to qualify for the Council any more than you do for a school board, I don't believe that; we are talking about a lay body of people who can think, be objective, apply some intelligence to arrive at a decision, go through a decisionmaking process, do other things related to having an institution that works. Sullivan was a

Dr. Hartzell: You have no idea who appointed me or how I happened to get there?

William Larson: I probably knew it at the time.

Dr. Hartzell: But you can't remember?

William Larson: No. I think it was a process that took place up in Albany. I don't think that the Council was involved, as I said earlier. I said I thought of it as an interim kind of thing, maybe the Council was given to understand that between president here and president somewhere down the road, we now have an acting head of Stony Brook, namely Karl Hartzell, coming down from Albany.

Dr. Hartzell: Until they could find a President.

William Larson: Yeah, had to have somebody who was handling the tiller.

Dr. Hartzell: It was supposed to be a one year appointment. I was supposed to go back to Albany.

William Larson: Okay, that squares with what I recall about the situation.

Dr. Hartzell: Do you have any impression of my strong points or weak points? Try and be as objective as possible on this because one of my problems is

William Larson: Sure, it's a problem, when you're being interviewed by somebody, it's very difficult to be objective, you know, but my greater difficulty is recall. I referred earlier to a calming influence, you know, I think we had been going through a difficult period there, and I think, I don't even remember the circumstances of Lee's ouster, I don't recall that the Council decided Lee had to go.

Dr. Hartzell: No, I'm sure it didn't.

William Larson: Right, I think it

Dr. Hartzell: It was Tom Hamilton.

William Larson: Yeah, and maybe that's related to the Olsen-Lee

Dr. Hartzell: And the Board of Trustees.

William Larson: And the Board of Trustees.

Dr. Hartzell: Did you know anybody on the Board?

William Larson: No, I think not.

Dr. Hartzell: Frank Moore or Warren?

William Larson: Who?

Dr. Hartzell: Warren was Vice Chair.

William Larson: I don't think I would have known anybody, Board members, I don't recall knowing any at that time. No, I can't give you detail, Karl. I'm not fudging it in terms of your strong and weak points, but I don't remember that the Council passed a resolution. They may have done it, I don't remember that the Council passed a resolution urging the Board of Trustees to, or urging you in the first place to accept a permanent appointment and then urging the Board in the second place to make it. But I don't know why they wouldn't have, I think one thing the fact that you were there for a second and a third and a fourth year was not because you know the Board was unable, the Council was unable to avoid that, I think that the Council was pleased. It was a, the situation was

significantly improved over what it had been, which isn't to say that I think that Lee was all bad and Olsen was all good or vice versa, but it wasn't healthy.

Dr. Hartzell: Right. Well, now let's talk about the problems that the Stony Brook administration faced. Architecture, construction, community relations, student life on a construction site, dormitories, the social background of the students, their behavior, faculty and curriculum divisions and so on. You indicated some unhappiness with the architecture.

William Larson: I did.

Dr. Hartzell: I think Ward Melville's hand in with the architecture.

William Larson: Well, I wouldn't have some sense about that but I didn't refer to that earlier, I referred to Ward Melville's perhaps being quite surprised to have a tiger by the tail instead of a doe, instead of a little Stony Brook, it was going to be who knows how big a Stony Brook. But when it comes to architecture, I think Ward was caught between a rock and a hard place, after all he is the one who was credited with having fashioned the village of Stony Brook into its uniquely whatever it is, colonial style, and I think he would have envisioned something that was compatible with that. And instead of that we have something that looked like typically like an institution in New York, whether it was a prison or a university, very severe, brick.

Dr. Hartzell: Public works.

William Larson: Public works and with no control locally, the impotence of the Council; here's Ward Melville gives them the property, without which they wouldn't be there and nevertheless has to come to terms with the fact that he didn't have a damn thing to say about what's going to be done with it.

Dr. Hartzell: The architects, Voorhees Walker Smith Smith and Haynes, were the architects for the Telephone Company.

William Larson: Their claim to fame. I understand your reason why you can't have enough flexibility and imagination and common sense in the administration of the State University to be able to do something over here and something over here, if you could do

this style which you have in Albany here, notably different from Binghamton or Buffalo or Stony Brook, I don't see why Stony Brook couldn't have been designed to plenty of models around.

Dr. Hartzell: I think one of the reasons is that the concept of Stony Brook evolved during the period when they had to build something, and they had to build buildings, and the concept of the nature of the institution was not fully formed at that time.

William Larson: Fair enough, it certainly wasn't fully formed, it just kept evolving and evolving; it was growing like Topsy without a clear conception of where you're going in terms of its size, in terms of its research focus.

Dr. Hartzell: Do you remember anything about the actual appointment of John Toll, was the Council making a decision that Toll was going to be the person to recommend to Gould?

William Larson: I think I missed the meeting when the Council decided upon Toll; I think I was maybe in the meeting when they interviewed Toll. The minutes would show that obviously, so I don't really remember much about,

Dr. Hartzell: As far as I know they never did interview Toll.

William Larson: That's interesting, maybe I didn't miss any meetings. Oh, my goodness, how could that be, because we had a search committee who had interviewed 85 people and recommended him to the Council and then we just looked at his credentials, and we already knew that the Board of Trustees was going to appoint him whether we wanted him or not, right.

Dr. Hartzell: Well, I remember Bill Sullivan asking me if I thought Toll would make a good president, and I said I thought so, yes. And then he asked me would you go down and interview him to see if he is interested in the job. And I said all right, so I went down and interviewed him; stayed overnight in his home, and then he asked me why aren't you interested in the job or he asked me if I was interested in the job. And I said I was not because after three years I had had enough of administrative problems that did not relate to the teaching curricular aspects, my experience was for ten years as Dean of a

college and Dean of a university. And at Stony Brook I was involved across the board with financing, police, student, all the rest.

William Larson: All the logistical stuff.

Dr. Hartzell: I wasn't interested in it.

William Larson: I can understand that. That would be response that would be fairly neutral, not to turn off a prospective candidate like saying I can't stand the Council or I can't stand the faculty or something like that. But why did Sullivan, what made him know that, what made him interested in Toll as a possible candidate?

Dr. Hartzell: We had interviewed him on the recommendation of Alec Pond for the Dean of the Graduate School, we had a line that was vacant. We had in the past a couple of deans who quit, at the time I was there I wanted to get somebody in. But I think John Toll was not interested in that job.

William Larson: That's how he came to our attention, yes.

Dr. Hartzell: His name came up gradually.

William Larson: I think it's very interesting, by the way, that Sullivan would have undertaken to arrange an interview with Toll, and I have no recollection whatsoever of having ever been aware of his having done that, and I would raise any question which would go to Council operations as to whether it was appropriate of the Chair of the Council to undertake unilaterally to do something like this, if indeed it was done unilaterally without reference to the Council for a green light, a questionable procedure.

Dr. Hartzell: As far as I know, I attended very meeting of the Council; I don't think there was anything done which was behind my back. I think Bill wanted to make sure that I was not going to sabotage anything. And the key question was, would you go down and interview him.

William Larson: Not a bad idea, I just think the Council should have been tuned into it, maybe it was.

Dr. Hartzell: That I don't know.

William Larson: You weren't.

Dr. Hartzell: I haven't interviewed anybody else on the Council, so I

William Larson: The minutes should show whether or not the Council authorized the Chair to have a representative go down and interview Toll.

Dr. Hartzell: I don't know where the minutes of the Council are. So that's one thing I've got to find out.

William Larson: I should think so, that would be a load of history there. That's the legal record of

Dr. Hartzell: Johnny came up, started with Ann and me at Planting Fields, and I briefed him for eight hours on the kind of people he was going to find in the Central Office, on the structure of the state system, and the nature of Stony Brook.

William Larson: It was his job to hear that, I would say. You need to know those things.

Dr. Hartzell: Yes. Gould hadn't been Sullivan wrote a letter to Gould saying don't look elsewhere until you have met John Toll. And Johnny went up and they talked. I guess Johnny was all right as far as Gould was concerned.

William Larson: That was that.

Dr. Hartzell: That was that.

William Larson: I remember being surprised that we had a physicist coming in to head up the institution. It was probably a personal bias of mine, I suppose.

Dr. Hartzell: Well, I think he and Alec were very good friends and had known each other a long time.

William Larson: I think so. And it was not inconsistent with what came to be the direction in which the focus of the University was going.

[end of side 1]

Let me just take on to what we were saying when you turned the tape over that it was along about that time that the image of Stony Brook being the Berkeley of the East began to take shape, which wouldn't necessarily mean you were going to get an emphasis on the physical sciences, but definitely going to be a big research institution.

Dr. Hartzell: Who was responsible for creating the image?

William Larson: I don't know who was responsible, it didn't come out of the Council, I don't think. It might have come out of the aspirations of the professionals who were employed in key positions and it might have been conceived by somebody as an aid to the recruitment of outstanding faculty members to join us, we were going to be the Berkeley of the East, that's pretty high, that's pretty tough, that's heavy stuff.

Dr. Hartzell: Well, Johnny talked that way, Johnny thought that way. And also I think Roger Reveille was a model for Alec Pond. And Reveille was the Director of Scripps Oceanographic Institute and one of the founders of the University at San Diego. Okay, let's see.

William Larson: Here, you have a whole bunch of stuff in that one question there about architecture and students and dormitories, and so forth.

Dr. Hartzell: Can you say anything about community relations, was the Council helpful, for instance, in getting the recommendations of the Muir Commission on locating the first new health science center at Stony Brook.

William Larson: I doubt it. I can't remember the Muir Commission, and you mentioned the Heald Report earlier, but you didn't refresh me on what that was all about, not that I want you to back up to it, but Heald I can remember that rang a bell, but Muir doesn't even ring a bell. I think that what probably happened, Karl, as time went on that you had a Council here, okay, which didn't have a whole lot to say about things in the first place, but what it had to say about was a nice tidy operation, and all of a sudden we have something that is expanding, you see, enormously here, and obviously Albany has a very specific interest in it because this is one of the four major centers of this vast State University of New York, and I think this Council here was not heavily involved in major decisions having to do with whether we are going to zig or zag or add a new department or do this or that or the other. I think we were just rocking along there, and we could do a public relations kind of thing, and when the Stony Brook Foundation came into being, we could try and be a little helpful in that respect and try to just keep things perking along in

the community a little bit, you know. It's *pro forma* on budget and the presidential thing did not come up very often, and when it did come up, it didn't mean a whole lot anyway. It makes you wonder why I stayed on all that time, it couldn't have been too bad, could it.

Dr. Hartzell: I remember certain meetings of the Council that, this was after Johnny came in, when we had problems with students.

William Larson: Well, I remember those very well too, because I was the acting chair of the Council, you see, after Sullivan left and that was one of the reasons I didn't get out at the end of nine, and Johnny didn't want me to anyway, so that was a holdover period for me.

Dr. Hartzell: Can you be more detailed about that because I don't have any information on that.

William Larson: Well, I think the term I was appointed to might have begun a little earlier and so my nine year, that full term might have ended in 1967, or early 1968 or something, and I didn't get off until I resigned in 1969. And so there was a period of a year to two, I think, that I was acting chair of the Council and Vice President of the Foundation at the same time. And, of course, in 1969 everything was hitting the fan as far as the students were concerned. We had the issue of the Sheriff coming in with his drug busts and we had student occupation of the buildings, and I would get calls at various hours of the day and night from John Toll, who kept me fully informed of what was happening and what he was doing about it, and he was clearing with me, and when it was appropriate, I would be clearing with Council one way or the other, and wheeling out there at his request to try to assist in any way that I could with keeping the place from figuratively going up in flames.

Dr. Hartzell: One of the functions of the Council was supervising the life of the students, I think that was one of the legal responsibilities of the Council.

William Larson: Really, I don't remember the phraseology, and I'm not sure what that would mean. I think we need to be concerned about the welfare of the students, okay, because as I said to people trying to describe what it was, I said the Council was like the

local Board of Trustees, but with more limited powers than the Trustees would have, say, of a private institution of similar size, because you've got to look to Albany to get the parallel there in terms of exercising policymaking functions we might have. So, sure except for those policymaking, which are big enough, we had all those other kind of things that a Board of Trustees would have, you know, at a Wesleyan, for example, or a Dartmouth or a Pennsylvania. And I know we had problems on the Council then, we had

Dr. Hartzell: What were some of them?

William Larson: Well, this is an evolving situation now and we got people on the Council there with whom I was having a very hard time, Kevin Murphy comes to mind most significantly. We had a couple of Murphys on there, we had the concrete Murphy, sand and gravel Murphy, and then we had this Republican wheeler-dealer businessman Murphy who ran this messenger service, whatever it was called. A businessman, a successful businessman, I think an important Republican contributor, I think a man who had important Republican political connections, which I experienced somewhat later on when I was off the Council, which is a story that isn't necessarily germane to what we are here about. But on the Council, for example, we had those who were very hard line and thought, by all means, whatever the police are going to do, that's just fine, because the worst thing in the world here is what the students are doing, we can't tolerate any of this, if they've got any marijuana going here, we've got to, Murphy used to refer to that as 'dope,' that was his term the 'dope.' He didn't distinguish between, as he talked about it, he didn't normally distinguish between marijuana or heroin or whatever, and of course cocaine and crack, which is something on the agenda. And there were maybe some others of us who took a little bit more a tolerant view, a little bit more sensitive to the civil libertarian aspects of things here, privacy and freedom of expression. I mean, after all, you know, I was not one of those who were distressed by the free speech movement out at Berkeley as a long time civil libertarian, you know, I would have a little bit more trouble with what I might see to be the raw exercise of the police authority, okay, we can strike some balances here on the Council; we're acting in a parliamentary way, by

majority rule when things had to be voted on, but there was this schism there among us in the Council, I think, and we had some meetings, didn't we, we had a meeting with Dennison and with the police talking about the situation, trying to get some kind of harmony between the community and its police forces and County government and the institution.

Dr. Hartzell: Did you ever have any feel for Dennison and the way he looked at the University? H. Lee Dennison was County Executive of Suffolk County.

William Larson: Yeah, that's right. I have no negative reflections about that.

Dr. Hartzell: He was, I think, one of the people responsible for our getting the health science center after the Muir Commission report had come out recommending that we get it. There was competition from Meadowbrook, Meadowbrook Hospital, and we had good support from Lee Koppelman, do you remember

William Larson: Sure, he was the Bi-County Planning Commission Executive Director.

Dr. Hartzell: He was very helpful.

William Larson: Yeah, I remember being on a panel with him. But I do remember now that you talk more about the health sciences, I think it was kind of controversial issue whether you should, because it was a huge extension of what we were about up to that point.

Dr. Hartzell: Meadowbrook didn't have the University.

William Larson: Right, so the University could have a teaching hospital, but a teaching hospital couldn't collect a university. Although you have extraordinary relationships there like Mt. Sinai and City College, you know, that kind of thing.

Dr. Hartzell: Do you have any feel for the kind of students we were getting?

William Larson: Yeah, I have a feel for it, I think I would have expected the Berkeley of the East to be drawing students from the top of the class all over the place, but it turned out that we were getting a preponderance of students from Long Island, New York, northern New Jersey and lower Westchester; it was a very regional kind of an institution in terms of its student body. In due course, you know, you would be able to lay claim to

having students from 85 different countries and whole bunch of states and so forth, but if you do it in terms of percentage of the student body, we had a very heavy preponderance from downstate and ethnically I would suppose that we probably had a proportion of students of Jewish background which was maybe unusually large compared to the State University as a whole.

Dr. Hartzell: That has gone down, that proportion.

William Larson: So, it was to my mind, as I recall, a surprising development and a disappointment to me that this institution, which was essentially a bellwether of the New York State system, was not proving to be more attractive on a wide geographical basis.

Dr. Hartzell: I don't know.

William Larson: Good enough student, mind you, talented top 15%, I didn't

Dr. Hartzell: I think one of the reasons that we didn't maintain the level of quality was that, unlike a private institution, very little money went into actual recruiting. There was no going out and trying to get in touch with

William Larson: Except for a fellow like Yang from Princeton, I bet he was recruited up to his ears.

Dr. Hartzell: Yang? I was talking about student recruitment.

William Larson: Oh, pardon me, pardon me. Okay, I was

Dr. Hartzell: The recruitment of students. Johnny certainly went after Yang and

William Larson: Recruited faculty, and you got good faculty, but the thing of it is I think also, Karl, that as time went by, year by year, and this is particularly now in the Toll period, you had more and more focus on how what an outstanding collection of research scientists we were bringing here, so if I'm a student now, and I'm into Chemistry or Physics or Molecular Biology or something of that nature, Stony Brook's going to have a pull. But on the other hand, increasingly in the shadow is the humanitarian side, the social sciences, the languages, I think that was cast into a very, perceived very secondary role in terms of the hierarchical importance of departments at the University, and those who would prize excellence in teaching as much as excellence in research, they had a

real problem. I remember going out to Washington University, one of the places I visited in St. Louis in connection with my own daughter's interest in colleges here and there, and I was so impressed to learn that the most senior faculty out there were teaching freshmen, the most senior, there were research assistants who were shuffling around in the first year, but that big leap from high school into college, university, give them the best you've got, I was impressed by that; I don't think we were doing that at Stony Brook.

Dr. Hartzell: Well, there are some, I have a couple staying with me, he's a full professor in the Physics Department, and he is teaching undergraduates, and he said just the end of this course, they gave me a standing ovation.

William Larson: It's great. I'm pleased to hear that and I'm not surprised, a lot of time has gone by and I would think there is a definite trend that way now.

Dr. Hartzell: It's more of trend in favor of the humanities. There's a recognition you've got to be brought up.

William Larson: Good, if you really want to take pride in all aspects of your university operations, you can't have any big glaring weaknesses, you know.

Dr. Hartzell: I think one of problems also has been the fact that many of the students are first generation college, and while some of the parents know the value, other parents are not supportive and the culture of the home leaves something to be desired in terms of the way the students behave in the dormitories, we have problems there.

William Larson: Fair enough. Yes, problems there, I think more in the '70's and '80's when I've been off the Council than we had maybe then, because I read about what's going on here and there and I'm mindful of the fact that we have increasing incidents of, not necessarily at Stony Brook, but including Stony Brook, vandalism, crime, date rape, and other kind of violence that, and yes, that is reflection of the fact that you kind of have a little microcosm of the larger society, you know, especially if you take a huge Stony Brook and you drop it out in the boonies there, you know, where is your outlet, you're going to go to New York City at least, or else you're trying to do it all within the confines of that entity and it can be pretty upsetting.

Dr. Hartzell: Well, let's see, you yourself did not have any dealings with the Governor's Office or the Legislature?

William Larson: I don't recall that Johnny ever did any more than tell me what he was doing on his many trips to Albany; I don't think I was asked to bear a hand as a lobbyist, I don't recall, I don't recall that the Council either, I sort of by myself individually when I was Acting Chair, I don't recall we adopted any resolutions, we may have from time to time sent resolutions of support up, you know, in favor of something we wanted to do. We should have done that. I think the minutes would show that, you know, that we fired off communications to different people trying to be supportive. Our role was to support, you know, if we liked what the President wanted to do, we should certainly support him as much as we could, and that means muscle collectively or individual contacts pulling the strings. I think John Toll had the support of the Council too while I was there.

Dr. Hartzell: What do you think his contribution was to the University?

William Larson: Well, I think he was a man of enormous energy, he was a man that had very clear thinking head on his shoulders, and you had a man who had a vision of where the University ought to be going, and he was a man who was politically astute, he knew how to get the job done, so that if it required going to Albany for 50% of his time, he's go to Albany for 50% of his time, and he'd get things done that a lot of people wouldn't have gotten done because they wouldn't have put so much muscle into it and they wouldn't have been as smart as he was. He had street smarts when it came to the political operation of the University. He brought some of that with him when he came and he learned some of it on the job, so that I think that as a driving force to bring Stony Brook to where it is today, or where it was when he left, good or bad, depending upon how you view it, I give him credit for it. I think that he had more to do with taking it from it was when he started and where when he finished than anybody else, I don't think he presided over something that was being moved ahead by somebody else.

Dr. Hartzell: Right, there's a period or a gradual evolution from a period when the leadership was in Albany with the ideas coming from Albany to a period when the ideas

largely came from Stony Brook and Stony Brook was having a hard time to educate the people in Albany as to what it wanted to do.

William Larson: What it wanted to do and why it should be allowed to do it, and have its support. Of course, it was not a smooth road in any respect. I would have a hard time giving the specifics of that, but it seems to me that when the health science center and things on your list, Ed Pellegrino, a very strong personality in his own right, I think a little tension developed between John Toll and Ed Pellegrino as to who was running the show, you know, it was the tail wagging the dog there, which is very interesting dynamics, you know, a very human interest story coming to play what was going on there. And of course, it had implications for the University. But I agree with you, yes, I certainly do have a sense of things really took charge of our own destiny as we could in Stony Brook rather than just dancing to the piper, sort of blowing our whistle on our own, which is as it should be, I think, as long as you're consistent with the overall University's goals.

Dr. Hartzell: Do you have any feel for either Gould or Boyer?

William Larson: Well, Samuel Gould I had very favorable regard for, I think partly as a result of having attended his inauguration in New York City and listening to what he had to say and being mindful of what he was doing from that time on, but Boyer, he comes into what time frame was Boyer?

Dr. Hartzell: He succeeded Sam.

William Larson: Yes, that's after I'm off.

Dr. Hartzell: Yes, right. Okay.

William Larson: So, my regard for Boyer would be with a different hat on.

Dr. Hartzell: Do you, I think I may have asked you this question previously, how much understanding and assistance in the mission of the institution, Stony Brook, came from the Governor's office, and has there been any, was there any change, let's say, from Harriman to Rockefeller and then to Carey and then

William Larson: Carey is beyond my time, so I would be again responding with one hat on as a Council member and another hat on without it. You did earlier ask me about Harriman and Rockefeller and I responded to that. This question is a little different, I guess, but it seems to me that there wasn't a whole lot coming out of the Governor's Office to the Council. I think the Governor contented himself with his connection to the central Board of Trustees and the Central Administration, and he couldn't reasonably be expected to be directly communicating with four Councils, four Centers, much less all the other Councils for those 50, 60, 70 units of the University.

Dr. Hartzell: What about, how long have you been up here and away from the Island?

William Larson: Three years.

Dr. Hartzell: So you have some impression of the direction that the University has been going and how it's regarded on the Island, can you say anything about, let's say, the business community, what people, how they regard the University?

William Larson: The Long Island business community?

Dr. Hartzell: Yes.

William Larson: As of, how many years ago, when I was on the Council or years after that?

Dr. Hartzell: When you were on the Council, let's say up to 1970, '71, whatever.

William Larson: I don't remember right off the top that the business community was incensed or overjoyed. I don't have anything coming back to me.

Dr. Hartzell: Then, any different now. Ward was for a while chairman of the Industrial Commission of Suffolk County. And when I came, I think it was after, well anyway, he put me on it. I don't remember whether it was after Johnny came that I was on that. What I know Alec Pond had back in his mind Route 128 and it's lineup of offshoots of MIT and Harvard and that kind of thing as something that should have happened.

William Larson: Should have evolved.

Dr. Hartzell: Yes.

William Larson: Didn't though, did it?

Dr. Hartzell: It's evolving.

William Larson: Is it.

Dr. Hartzell: Yes, it is.

William Larson: Well, you know, Karl, when we talk in 1989, almost 1990, about what was going from '59 to '69, we are talking about 1/3 of the period of three decades and twenty years since I packed it in as a Council member is a long time, twice the period I was on there, and a lot of change has taken place, including my daughter becoming a tenured member of the History Department, so you know I'm not really privy to what is going on on Long Island these days except as it might find its way into the Sunday *The New York Times*, and I don't have a Long Island section either in the *Times* that they send up to Albany, but I thought you were going to ask me about what I might, and I'm glad you didn't because I wouldn't have had a good answer for it if you had asked me about what's going on with the University up here in Albany, all I could tell you is shortly after I came up here I learned that they were casting over at SUNY for a production of "Taming of the Shrew" and that's the kind of play where you look for some help from the community to fill some of the rolls that are unsuitable for the students, so I auditioned and wound up playing the part of Baptista, the father of the Shrew, so I had a nice introduction, a re-introduction to the University in Albany. I had a lot of fun with that, that was in 1987.

Dr. Hartzell: Well, is one of the members of the Pro Musica and

William Larson: Pro Musica, good, well, I'm certainly going to remember that and maybe I'll have a chance to meet him along about the time you're looking at Brooke Larson.

Dr. Hartzell: All right. He's as tall as you are.

William Larson: Good, I'm not surprised. You're a rangy guy, and as I remember your wife, she was of little more than average height. And I don't have to tell you again I was sorry to learn over the phone about your lives and the illness that she had.

Dr. Hartzell: It was a surprise that she would go that way. I wished that were easier.

William Larson: Of course, I know you get into that question when you contemplate the mortality of our experience as part of the human condition, whether it's better to have all your buttons working and experience the decay of your body, in other words, let you down, or vice versa but I don't think there's really much question about getting old if you've got your wits about you, you can pretty well cope. The travail, whatever it is, my father was a case in point. I mean he was sharp as a button up till he died at 87, but his legs had let him down and other parts of his body with arthritic conditions were severe, not happy years. Anyway, we should not end the Christmas Eve meeting on such a dour note here, should we.

Dr. Hartzell: Well, thanks very much.

[end of interview]