

**INTERVIEW WITH ELWIN STEVENS**  
**DIRECTOR OF PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT, SUNY ARCHITECT**  
**September 22, 1987**

**Dr. Hartzell:** Second interview with Elwin Stevens, Director of Planning and Development, first assistant under Otto Teegen, who was University Architect in the early days. The transfer from the Department of Public Works to the Construction Fund.

**Elwin Stevens:** That took place, of course, in 1962. Stony Brook started long before that, when do you want, what year, the Fund didn't get involved until 1962.

**Dr. Hartzell:** Who was involved from the University side in the earliest buildings, the Library

**Elwin Stevens:** Humanities

**Dr. Hartzell:** Humanities

**Elwin Stevens:** Sciences, housing

**Dr. Hartzell:** Yes, and housing.

**Elwin Stevens:** Well, first of all the first thing we did was to have a Master Plan for the campus that was developed and that was done by Moore and Hutchins, they had done also the Master Plan for the Binghamton campus. And that contract was through the Department of Public Works, and they did, well, to tell you the truth, the principal areas of their involvement in the Master Plan is what it is today. In other words, the general, the location of the Library and the Fine Arts and the central core was established by Moore and Hutchins, what it is today. And the location of the Humanities and the Arts and the Social Sciences were off in one particular way that would be to the south, where it is today, and the Sciences on that one side, Engineering on the other side down the spine ....., the location of the service center, it was where it was determined by the original Master Plan, and the housing and as far as the Loop Road is concerned, so those basic things were done in the Master Plan, and it was initially built that way. But what happened was that the intent of the University at that time was to hire

a series of architectural firms to work on different entities. In other words, we were going to hire one firm and they were going to do the housing; they were going to hire another firm, they were going to do the central core, the Library, Student Activities, Administration, that sort of thing; another firm and do the Arts and the Humanities section and Social Science; another one to do the Engineering; another one to do the Sciences; another one to do the road network and the service buildings -- that type of thing. But, what happened was in those early days, there was all of a sudden a great anxiety to get this particular college going. Well, we thought we were doing very well in the direction we were going in, but quite frankly, politics got involved in the thing.

**Dr. Hartzell:** You mean Rockefeller?

**Elwin Stevens:** No, no, this was pre-Rockefeller.

**Dr. Hartzell:** Oh, Harriman.

**Elwin Stevens:** Yes, this is back in Harriman's; I think the guy's name was, I hate to mention names but I will, because ....., but I think the guy's name was Brill. I mention this only because these things are popping into my head, you've got to understand how things go, and

**Dr. Hartzell:** Was he counselor?

**Elwin Stevens:** No, no, no, Brill was, I think he was appointed as head of the Thruway Authority or something. Well, what his connections were I don't know prior to that time, but anyway he was, what was his thoughts about the way in which this campus could get started and completed quicker. And it came as sort of a shock because we thought we were on a path whereby we were going to do it in a reasonably good and rapid fashion. But his particularly ..... through the Governor's Office and through the political concerns was that we should have, assign the whole project to a single architect, and which was absolutely ..... to what we were planning on at the time. And not only that, but somehow or other, he had had connections with the New York Telephone Company, and the Telephone Company's architect was Voorhees, Walker, Smith, Smith and Haynes at that particular time.

**Dr. Hartzell:** .....wasn't he on the Board of Trustees?

**Elwin Stevens:** No, but Phelan didn't come until later. I mean, he became the first Chairman of the Construction Fund, but this is all prior to Phelan's time, all prior to this time, of this stuff took place. And the next thing I know the University more or less, the way things were going in those days, had to accept this particular proposal through the Department of Public Works that this college, we were just told that this college was going to be assigned to Voorhees, Walker. Well, things got to be very, very difficult because at that time Mr. Teegen was the University Architect, Otto Teegen. I was the, I might have been Director of Planning and Development at that time. You got to look up what the dates were, but this is back in, it's got to be back in '57, '56, in that particular area. He had started the campus at Coe Estate. I mean, that part, but then, but Mr. Teegen had worked in Voorhees office, and he was a little bit concerned, although this came as a total surprise to him, quite frankly. He was a little bit chagrined about possible conflict of, I mean, people might think there was conflict. I remember this discussing with him. But, inasmuch as he was totally out of the picture as far as which way they were given the assent, but then all hell broke loose on this project because, and this is very interesting, I mean to me it's a very interesting, because I'm just again, you know what I mean, into the thing, and I was sort of sick about the fact that they were going to give it to the Voorhees office. I knew this office, and they were not, they might be fine in doing a telephone Company building, I mean, in all their expertise and everything, but from a campus architectural point of view they were the pits. They were just not the firm to do this sort of thing. They weren't even the firm, as far as I'm concerned, to do the thing if you were to assign it to one firm and do it ..... Well, I guess the negotiator that did sort of thing that played the political role on the part of Voorhees office was, I think it was Carl Haynes, he was one of the partners. And through this guy Brill, Haynes said that they would take the project, knowing full well that Moore and Hutchins had already had a contract on the project. And nobody even made a call to Moore and Hutchins and; well, this in architectural is the greatest crime, you know what I mean, of

all time, because it's an unethical practice. I mean, you can't go in and sign a contract, even if the owner says so, you can't, knowing full well that there's another architect that has a contract for the work. So, although we had not had other architects assigned, we did have the contract with Moore and Hutchins that was not canceled at all.

**Dr. Hartzell:** That was for site plan?

**Elwin Stevens:** That was for site planning, yeah, and

**Dr. Hartzell:** Any buildings involved?

**Elwin Stevens:** No, there were no buildings involved at that time under the Moore and Hutchins contract, no; but what we had done was, we had explored with Moore and Hutchins and with Carl Larson and the Department of Public Works and ourselves, actually ..... and I had made up a list of the different architectural firms that we thought we get each one of these entered, and some of the ones that we had on the list ironically became some of the architects that did some of the work on the campus. I mean, as it turned out. Well, anyway, they went ahead and started on their own taking information that they had and Moore and Hutchins brought charges against them in the AIA. I don't know if you have any background of this, do you?

**Dr. Hartzell:** I have a little.

**Elwin Stevens:** Well, anyway, the results of the thing was that it went through the American Institute of Architects Unethical Practice Committees and they found in favor of Moore and Hutchins and Voorhees, Walker, the firm was censured, and not only that but here was a firm in which Ralph Walker was the epitome of architects, at one time was President of the national AIA. And, I mean, this is a very prestigious firm, and what happened was that Carl Haynes was ousted from the AIA for two years, and I think Smith was ousted for one year, and Ralph Walker, I mean the other partners were censured. This is a major blow, I mean, to a firm. Well, as far as the initial buildings are concerned, we had written programs, but we were sick about what was going on, because the designers for Voorhees, Walker were marginal, to say the least. And the result was, I know, I mean I can't say, we had some responsibility, maybe we did, but I know I backed

off because I went to meetings in Voorhees office in which they had, their project architect at that time was named Roger Spraut, and I forget who their designer was, and there was a guy who used to have a summer place in Old Lyme, he used to talk about up in Connecticut, well, very poor designers. And the more meetings I went to, the sicker I got, and the buildings were the result of, I mean, all you had to do was take a look and see kind of the thing. But what happened was, there was an influx of what Voorhees office turns out they were trying to do was that they didn't pay any attention to what the hell we were trying to tell them about building a building of this sort, I mean a campus building, they were taking their lead from Melville. He got into the act with them with Voorhee's office. I think he might even been the influential in, I mean one way I can't prove anything, one way or the other that Melville, the fact that they got us in the first place, but Melville's idea was that if he was going to give this land, what he wanted was a sleepy little Ivy League brick covered campus in that little particular site. He didn't want the thing to be very large, and everything had to be small scale and, you know, that kind of an atmosphere. And some of the rationale for the roofs that went on the first dormitory buildings and things like that were the result of this quasi-colonial input of the brick buildings of Melville. Well, you can see the marginal design that occurred from this. I mean, compared to what the hell a major university was going to be in that area. So, there was no stopping them at that point, and they finally let out the buildings that we know that were constructed within the early days of the thing, of the campus, it was the Humanities Building, the Library Building, the two phases of dormitories, the Physics, Chemistry and Biology Buildings.

**Dr. Hartzell:** Boy, you have a good memory.

**Elwin Stevens:** Then there was the initial Engineering Building, and also the initial heating plant and the service center, oh, I know them all, I know them all. That was the original buildings of, oh, and plus the Infirmary. The Infirmary was one of those initial buildings, that was the beginning stages of the first buildings that were built under Voorhees office, but then, by that time, you know, quite frankly, this was used as a

classic example by State University, once Rockefeller came in, as to how to not to do something. And I know, when I had the opportunity to review with Ronan of Rockefeller's Office and George Douglas, in the early days when we were trying to get things straightened out for State University, you know, one of the greatest examples that you could use for the direction not to go was what the hell happened to us under DPW, well, it really wasn't DPW's fault, but we were getting out from underneath DPW, so we blamed everybody. But it was used as the, as a prime example of, hey, for Christ's sake, you know, you don't build a university this way. So, I mean, that brings you up to the point where additional buildings had to be built and so on; by this time

**Dr. Hartzell:** Student Union.

**Elwin Stevens:** No, no, no, that's an interesting story in itself, and I'll give you that one, but, because that had something to do with Voorhees firm, but by this time we are up to 1960, '61 and we're in the process, I mean by the time these things are built, you see, we are in the process of working out a whole different arrangement and what came out of this was the law that created the State University Construction Fund, which came into being in April of 1962. So, Voorhees office at that particular time had a contract for an Administration Building and Student Union, they still had a contract, and in the meantime, we were out getting other architectural firms to get involved in housing, and one of the first that we did was, we got the Gruzen firm to do the first Earth Science Center Building. That was one of the next ones to go at the end of the spine down there.

**Dr. Hartzell:** That got an award.

**Elwin Stevens:** Oh, yeah, that, well, to tell you the truth, Gruzen was one of the firms that we were going to select for one of the buildings that we were going to do as part of that five or six different architectural firms, the way we were going to do it in the first place. So the Voorhees office had this particular, they had not finished this up when the Construction Fund started. I was then given the assignment to be the liaison between the University and the Construction Fund and worked in that capacity for a long time. Mr. Teegen, he didn't retire until 1964, but I was going to act as liaison. He was handling

mostly community colleges at that particular time, because he had a big expansion program in that area too. So, we went down, and we all agreed that this wasn't the kind of architecture that we really should be doing, and we got other firms started on new projects under the Fund. But the Fund thought that they could work with Voorhees office, inasmuch as they had contracts to do an Administration and Student Union Building. So, this is a very interesting part of it, that they didn't want, they wanted to uphold that contract with Voorhees, I wanted to cancel it because I wanted to immediately take a different tack on it. Everything got going awfully fast. And Voorhees office was sort of slow, but we got other buildings going there ahead of the buildings that they were doing, which was the Administration and Student Union Buildings. All of a sudden, now within the way in which the thing was set up, I had the responsibility of representing the University to approve the architectural concept for all buildings that were going through. The next thing I know that there was an advertisement in the paper for bids for two projects, which were the Voorhees office projects for Administration and Student Union Buildings, and somebody brought it to my attention, and I said I had never approved the architectural concept for those buildings. And I said I don't know what the hell they're like. Well, I called up Tony Adinolfi, and I said something got off the track; but we worked very well together at that particular time. And he said, well, let's see what the hell is going on. And in everyone's anxiety, and it wasn't really anybody's fault, they thought that everything was going all right, and they went ahead and advertised these two projects. Voorhees office had finished the working drawings, and they were ready, they were out for bid. So, I took a look at them, and I said I think we better have a meeting on this, and so we got George Dudley, Frank Maskey, Tony Adinolfi, myself, other people involved, in the early days in the Fund we went down into a meeting, and it was the first time that I exercised the disapproval of the architectural concept. I looked at both buildings and I said this is not what we are, we always did this kind of thing, we all agreed that we weren't going to do it again. I said the architectural concept of these buildings are disapproved. At that point, they rolled up

the working drawers, sent a letter to Voorhees office, paid them off, and reassigned the Administration and Student Union Building to Damaz, Pokorney and Weigel. So, the buildings that are up there today, I mean, it's just an interesting story as the result that we ended our association at that point. But it was a tough way to end it, you know what I mean, to do it, with the ..... of Voorhees firm. And so then we did the major sciences buildings.

**Dr. Hartzell:** How did Damaz, Pokorney and Weigel work out?

**Elwin Stevens:** Well, they were three architects that were put together sort of as a firm, I would say the strength of that particular firm was John Pokorney. I always felt that he was, there was Paul Damaz; they were good architects, Weigel was simply an administrative architect, I mean he wasn't, he didn't, he then showed up with Max Urban. At that particular time I think that the Administration and Student Union that they did was fairly good. I mean, it was all right, after what happened. But they did some master planning for us at that particular time too, and then did those two buildings. But other than that we got several other firms involved doing other building, especially we had a firm out of Chicago doing the, let's see, the one just behind the Library, that's Chemistry, yeah.

**Dr. Hartzell:** The Graduate Chemistry.

**Elwin Stevens:** Yeah, the Graduate Chemistry, that's a firm out of Chicago, and then we had Gruzen doing the Physics and Math Building down at the end. And then, of course, we had finally Goldberg do the Biology there, and we had some other people do the Lecture Hall Center and the Social Science, I forget who did that one. Plus the fact that at the meantime we started working on all those satellite housing, we had Roth and Tabler and then we had Gruzen do a couple of other housing projects, the ones up under ..... The architectural development of the thing had quite a history in theory, but it had a lot of pitfalls.



**Dr. Hartzell:** The location, the early location of the two science buildings closest to the Library was, I think, a mistake because they are less dependent on a library than English and Fine Arts.

**Elwin Stevens:** Well, there were some problems with that in the early days, and I'll tell you what they were. Melville, everyone thought he was a great philanthropist, you see, in this property, but actually the property was given to the State in sections, in parcels of 60 acres, and it only could be 60 acres per year because he was writing this off as he was going on. And this was an agreement that had been made that I found about it after I found out that we had to restrict what we were doing so that it would fit within the 60, or else we had to make the description of the property such a strange thing in order to encompass because we had to own, once we let out a building for contract we had to own the land, you see, it had to be transferred to us, so that some of these things got pushed up a little bit too close because of that original 60 acres that was carved out in the center of the great big site that we were doing, so it was a strange way to go about doing things. For building a new campus, I think we should have done a lot better than we did, and I think we would have had we kept on our original tack. Plus the fact that some of the people that came there, well, John Toll and even people prior to that, you know, their expertise was in the academic and in the development of the program, but they always interjected themselves into the physical development, and so, regardless of what you say, you always have a tendency, you don't want to offend anybody, you always have a tendency to try to at least accommodate them to some extent in terms of what their thoughts are and some of the things that were then, I was talking to the people there at Stony Brook today, and this particular, with the President, with Marburger and with administrative people, with the Provost and with the Hanes and with the people who've been there, they were chagrined about the fact that ENCON built the building that they did down at the end of the dormitory complex. And I said, you know what, don't you, I said, we were bludgeoned by the campus to have ENCON build that building. We, State

University of New York Central were opposed to having ENCON come in and build that building on our campus.

**Dr. Hartzell:** ENCON?

**Elwin Stevens:** ENCON owns the building down at the end of the G and H Dormitories.

**Dr. Hartzell:** Oh, yes, the Environmental Conservation.

**Elwin Stevens:** That's right, that's ENCON. And they now want to put an addition on that, and we're not sure we want them to put an addition on it; they have a ..... permit down there but it's one of these things where this had been worked out by ENCON and the campus, and quite frankly, from a central planning standpoint we said, no, we don't want ENCON to be building down in this particular neck of the woods, you know what I mean. It was

**Dr. Hartzell:** At the same it seemed a long way off.

**Elwin Stevens:** Absolutely, a long way off, but it isn't so far now, is it. And so here's a classic example where now you have an administration that are almost looking to us to say why the hell did you ever let them build it there; and the reason, the truth of the matter is, we were dead set against having them build it there; it was the campus that worked out the arrangement, but it was a previous administration, that worked out the arrangement to have ENCON come in. And it happened all the time, all the time. I think it probably in every university something like this could occur. I can give you long stories on the Medical Center, but yet we made it.

**Dr. Hartzell:** If you've got the time and energy.

**Elwin Stevens:** Well, I haven't got too much time, but you go where you want to do

**Dr. Hartzell:** When I'm here in Albany, I can come back again, but the Medical Center, Pellegrino I don't that he had any input on the architect selected, did he?

**Elwin Stevens:** No, no, he didn't. He came after the fact. He didn't have any input on that. That was in some ways too bad. I don't think I have time enough right now to give it to you, except to say that I think that has a story in and of itself. What occurred there,

what was finally constructed there with the enormous megastructure was again one that was not part of the planned process of which we wanted to proceed with the Medical Center.

**Dr. Hartzell:** Why not?

**Elwin Stevens:** Mort Gassman and I, Mort being in the program and myself and the University had, we even examined at one time the possibility of, we were asked to examine the possibility of placing the Medical Center at another location, not too far away. We had bought that property across Nicolls Road for the intended purpose of building a Medical Center. Johnny Toll never wanted it there, he wanted it right on the main campus; but we examined the possibility of putting the thing at, what the hell was the name of it, there was another facility, and I would have to look it to see, beautiful site, beautiful site, now where the hell was that? Anyway, they had some initial facilities involved that we could use as a nucleus so he could build a major, he had a golf course on the site and everything else, but it was too far away.

**Dr. Hartzell:** Yes, the golf course is right across Nicolls Road.

**Elwin Stevens:** No, no, not that, that's St. George's, I don't mean that. I mean this other site that had the other hospital on it that was located

**Dr. Hartzell:** Meadowbrook and

**Elwin Stevens:** No, no, no. I'll have to, it was VA, it was run by the VA.

**Dr. Hartzell:** Oh, that would be in Kings Park.

**Elwin Stevens:** No,

**Dr. Hartzell:** There was a site, a 40 acre site.

**Elwin Stevens:** No, no, no. Well, anyway, what happened to the medical building, just to give you an initial rundown on it, we started programming on the Medical Center and we programmed things in such a way that we wanted to get started with a basic science facilities, and we thought that the Master Plan for the Medical Center should go on a building by building, unit by unit connected complex in which you had an opportunity to build, to construct a building and occupy it as you went on and built the rest of the

Medical Center based on an overall campus plan. When we ended up with Goldberg as the architect, which was sort of strange in itself, we had turned down a couple of firms for that particular project, and Goldberg came in and sold himself to the Construction Fund based on the Peter Bent Brigham facility that he was affiliated with in Harvard, over in Boston. And the next thing we know, he came up with the megastructure complex, and Mort and I were both opposed to it because we felt that this was, I mean, you couldn't really occupy a building until you occupied everything, except for the Hospital, you know what I mean. And that's about the way it turned out. And it was not the intended way in which we felt we were going to proceed with it, and so it did come out a little bit different than, I never did really fully accept that as an architectural statement of medical service, I mean personally I never did.

**Dr. Hartzell:** You've got to run.

**Elwin Stevens:** I've got a lot to do. I've had my knee operated on.

**Dr. Hartzell:** An old .....

**Elwin Stevens:** Yeah, it was years ago, I've had knee problems for years, but I had this one operated on July, but he cut me up pretty good, July 21st, and now he fixed my knee pretty good, I've got to a new metal piece, just the surface of the top of the tibia, I got a new metal surface for the top, the other part was all eroded, and they fixed my knee, but now I'm trying to get over the operation. Well, Karl, you let me know, come back and we'll go on, we can go on with this for quite a while, I enjoy doing this.

**Dr. Hartzell:** Well, I do too.

[end of tape]