2011

Ray Wilson

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Illinois Wesleyan University

Daniel Maurer 2012
Illinois Wesleyan University

Oral History Interview with Ray Wilson
The Ames Library, August 2, 2011

Daniel Maurer: Okay. My name is Daniel Maurer. The day is August 2nd, 2011. I'm a member of the Class of 2012 and I'm a History/Psych major and we are interviewing in one of the study rooms of Ames Library. And would you like to give your major and your affiliation with Wesleyan…and year?

Ray Wilson: I'm Ray Wilson and I've been teaching in the Physics Department since 1962 and that's—what more do you need?

Maurer: What year are you?—if you'd like to say.

Wilson: At Wesleyan?

Maurer: Mhmm.

Wilson: Well I retired in '97 but I continue to teach every May for the course called "Problems of Nuclear Disarmament", so '62. I guess next year is my fiftieth year here.

Maurer: Wow. Did you—you went to Wesleyan, right?

Wilson: No, I didn't.

Maurer: Oh, you didn't.

Wilson: I went to University of Illinois—

Maurer: Okay.

Wilson: And the University of Arizona.

Maurer: Okay, okay. What qualities drew you to Illinois Wesleyan as a professor?

Wilson: The qualities?

Maurer: Yeah, of this university.

Wilson: I liked the ability to, well, obviously to teach in the area that I enjoy teaching in, the small size, the small classes, but the opportunity to pursue areas which, in my case, would not ordinarily be handled in a physics department. It was also close to my family who lived up in the Chicago area. They were living out in Berwyn and Glen Ellyn and that's where I grew up. And I came to Wesleyan from Hawaii but when I had gone to Hawaii it was with the intention of only being there for a couple of years, and '62 rolled around and that was the end of what we decided to do, so I came back to Illinois and took this job here.

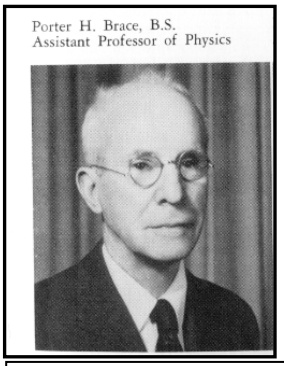
Maurer: Wow.

Wilson: At that time Wesleyan had an enrollment of only about 1,000 to 1,200 students and I thought that might be an appropriate size for me and I didn't realize at the time—obviously

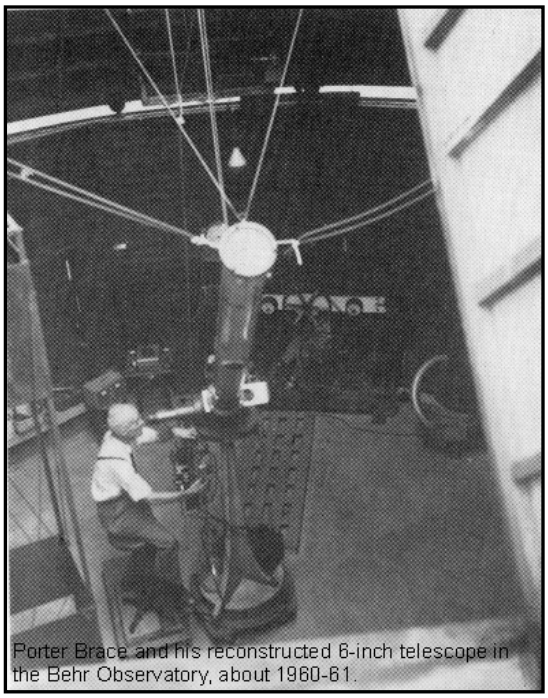
Wesleyan wasn't going to pay my airfare just for an interview here and so in Hawaii, Abraham Akaka who was the pastor of the old Kawaiaha'o Church in Honolulu, did the interview for me and he—and then the Dean of this university, Everett Walker—my recollection is that Everett Walker and Reverend Akaka had been classmates in college somewhere, maybe in seminary, something like that, and so they accepted his interview and I came here. And I didn't realize when I came…[laughs]…that I would be the only one in the Physics Department when I got here. Matt Prastein who had been here had gone on leave and I didn't know anything about that until I got here and so the first three years at Wesleyan were very, very…[laughs]…interesting because I was doing most everything by myself.

Maurer: Okay. Going off your time as a professor, how close were students and faculty at the time that you have taught?

Wilson: Well this was all kind of new to me. I'd only taught two years before I came to Wesleyan and…how close…well I guess I could say somewhat close. There was—some students will look for that and others will not but there were a few students that I've worked closely with. Barry Beaman at that time and I—and Barry, I still see Barry and we still communicate—we worked close, very close together especially in revitalizing the Astronomy program here at Wesleyan. Barry worked on—well one of the first I did when I got here—the person who had been teaching before Matt Prastein was a retired engineer from Westinghouse, Porter Brace, and I think Porter Brace was easily in his eighties when he was teaching at Wesleyan.



1960 Wesleyana, pg. 48
http://collections.carli.illinois.edu/u?/iwu_yearb,6308


Porter Brace and his reconstructed 6-inch telescope in the Behr Observatory, about 1960-61.

1960 Wesleyana, pg. 48
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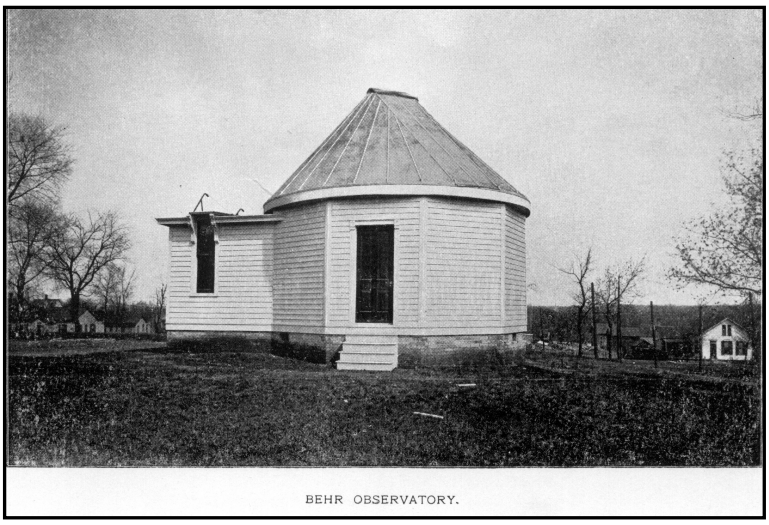
BEHR OBSERVATORY.

IWU Historical Collections, Behr Observatory
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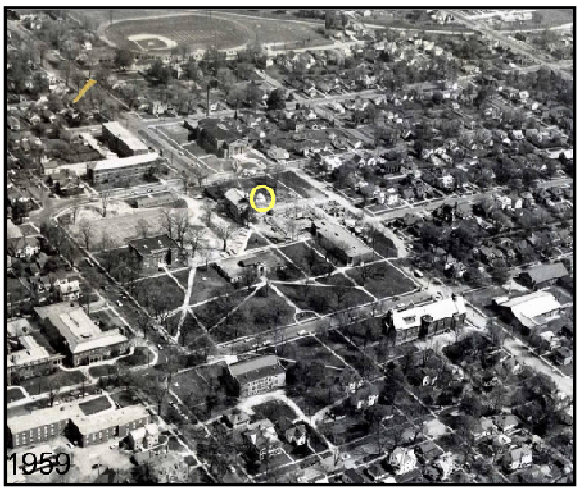
He lived right down Beecher Street, only a block or so away from the campus. And, at that time, I guess there was not much money available at Wesleyan and so he had done the best he could with the old Behr Observatory and he had put together a telescope that he could use. I don't think anybody else would've been qualified to handle the thing. And it was very—it was a strange contraption and so one of the first things Barry and I did was put together a six-inch telescope and get an appropriate telescope mount. When the earth rotates the stars move across the sky and so you

want the telescope to follow those objects across the sky automatically and Porter Brace did not have that and let's say—I think it was—well I don't know, Porter Brace's way of doing things, and as I say, money might've been a little bit tight. This would've been the late fifties, early sixties. So Barry and I got the six-inch telescope back together and then in '65 when Gary Kessler came as Head of the Department—I had been Acting-Head for those three years—we decided to not only use the six-inch telescope but start rebuilding an—the eighteen and a half-inch telescope, which had been destroyed, but we still had the mirror and some eyepieces and that was about it.

IWU Historical Collections, Behr Observatory Telescope
http://collections.carli.illinois.edu/u?/iwu_histph,371

Maurer: How was the telescope destroyed?

Wilson: My understanding from Chet Shiers, who was the Building and Grounds person back then, the old Behr Observatory had been moved. It was somewhat east of where it was when I got here and I think somehow or other its position interfered with the construction of Holmes Hall and Shaw Hall adjacent to it and so they wanted to move it a little bit further west, a little bit closer to Old North, and my understanding was they thought that the old eighteen and a half-inch Newtonian telescope that had been here at the university since about 1895, that they thought it had—was fastened to the floor and it was not, and the building was small enough that a large crane could pick up the entire building and move it. And, according to Chet Shiers, his story was that when they picked up the Observatory to move it, the telescope fell over inside the building onto its concrete floor and it just shattered the—all the mechanical parts, the metal housing and everything, but the mirror was saved. The mirror still worked. And so Barry Beaman and I started working on that and Gary Kessler agreed with us that this would be a good approach to take. The mount that I had purchased—I got Wesleyan—to rebuild the six-inch telescope—a very heavy duty mount with the intention of, if we could rebuild the eighteen-inch or somehow or other get a larger telescope, then we could replace the six-inch telescope with something larger, a twelve or a rebuilt version of this original eighteen and a half, so the mount would've held it. And so in—probably around '65-'66, that period there, work was started on rebuilding the eighteen and a half-inch telescope.



IWU Historical Collections, Campus Aerial Views, 1959
http://collections.carli.illinois.edu/u?/iwu_histph,344

Maurer: Interesting, and is that telescope still in the Mark Evans Observatory?

Wilson: No.

Maurer: Okay.

Wilson: The mirror in that telescope, although we tested it before it was mounted and before we even started rebuilding, it seemed to be okay, but the mirror was made of soft glass—Pyrex had not been invented yet—and soft glass will flow under changing heat conditions and the surface of it, the telescope mirror, has to be as perfect a parabola as you can get it to give you a good image. And there—the mirror had been kept in Sherff Hall and Sherff Hall had some very large excursions in temperature and humidity, especially over the summers when nobody was maintaining the building too well, and the mirror lost its shape being made of soft glass. And although we used it for a few years, I—it had to be replaced. And I was gone from '66 to '68—Gary Kessler was here—and I—Marty MacDonald was hired to replace me. I went on leave to the University of Arizona to work on a doctorate and as I was preparing to go, I talked to Dr. Bertholf, the President of the university then, and he saw what we had done in the Observatory. We completely refurbished the inside, mounted the six-inch telescope, and started teaching Astronomy again, and this was the very beginning of the Space Age. This was in the late fifties, early sixties, planning our travels to the moon and what have you, and Dr. Bertholf thought that it would be a good idea if we planned for the construction of a new observatory, so I—off the top of my head I can't tell you exactly when they started but I have a feeling that while I was down at the University of Arizona in '66 to '68, I believe construction on the Mark Evans Observatory began about that time and along—yeah and the Observatory—so the Behr Observatory was torn down and rebuilt as the Mark Evans Observatory. I think that was—I don't know that I kept those pictures. Here's—you had these here in the library. This is the old Behr Observatory and Porter Brace working on his contraption that he had set up and the Observatory is here and a few years before this it had been farther to the east and here's Holmes Hall being built right in that picture.

Maurer: Okay, so—

[We are now looking at some old photographs of the observatory.]

IWU Historical Collections, Campus Aerial Views 1936
http://collections.carli.illinois.edu/u?/iwu_histph,343

Wilson: And this is what it looked like when it was originally eighteen and a half.

Maurer: Wow.

Wilson: And, as I said, the only thing that was left for us was the mirror.

Maurer: That's interesting. So right there, that's Behr Observatory?

Wilson: This is Old North.

Maurer: Old North, okay.

Wilson: And this little white dome here—

Maurer: Mhmm.

Wilson: White-ish dome, it was actually conical shaped as you can see here.

Maurer: Right.

Wilson: And it originally had a canvas, a wax-impregnated canvas, roof on it to make it waterproof and sometime before I got here the—and, as I say, this is back in 1895 or thereabouts, canvas wax-impregnated—and sometime before I got here the canvas had—was rotting and leaking apparently and they had it replaced with metal and so I'm not sure when—this looks like canvas here. You can see the ripples in the surface here, but in this configuration here and even in here, the roof is now metal. And here's Barry and Dave Williams. Here's the rebuilt six-inch telescope and the heavy duty mount that we bought for it and we've cleaned up the inside, the walls were painted, we'd done repairs on the roof to make sure it wouldn't leak.

Photo by Dr. Ray Wilson

And while I was gone, work was—Barry continued work on rebuilding the eighteen and a half-inch. We had some aircraft tubing, lightweight tubing and these rings were made out, the eighteen-inch mirrors here, and this is still the old Behr Observatory, you can see from the structure of it. And, let's see, this is Gary Kessler and Lew Detweiler who are—were in the Department then. And I think this was carried out into the old Behr Observatory by these people you see here. These fellows all look older, they don't look like college age.

[Both laugh]

Wilson: There was a Master of Science teaching program that went on during the summer and apparently this telescope was completed during one of the summers that I was gone, probably the second summer, which was summer of '68, and these fellows helped carry it out and get it in here and get it mounted in the Behr Observatory.

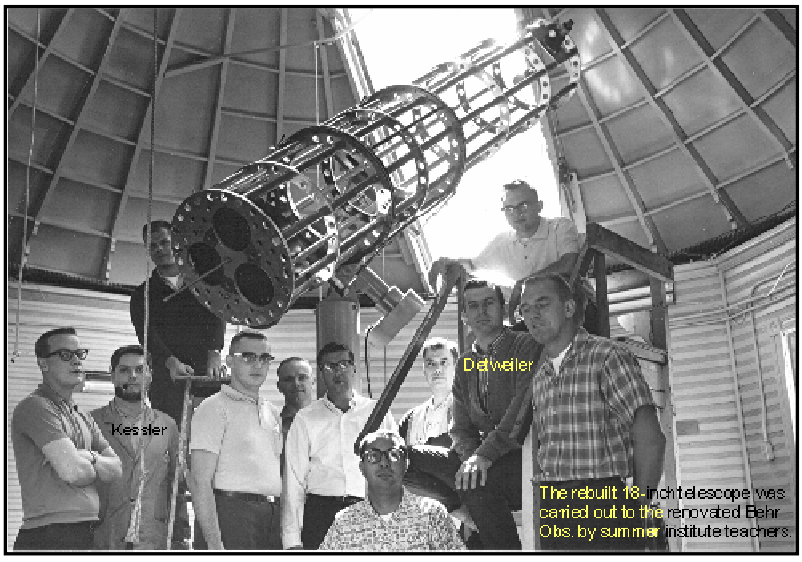


Photo by Dr. Ray Wilson

Maurer: Wow, they carried it inside the building?

Wilson: Yeah.

Maurer: Wow.

Wilson: Well this was the ground level—Behr Observatory

Maurer: Okay.

Wilson: So you could just open the door and walk in—and carried it in there and lift it up and get it fastened to the mount here.

It's a Newtonian telescope and the eyepiece is way up here at the top and so behind where they're sitting here is a moveable staircase that was in the Observatory and people would have to walk up to the top and look in the eyepiece from up there.

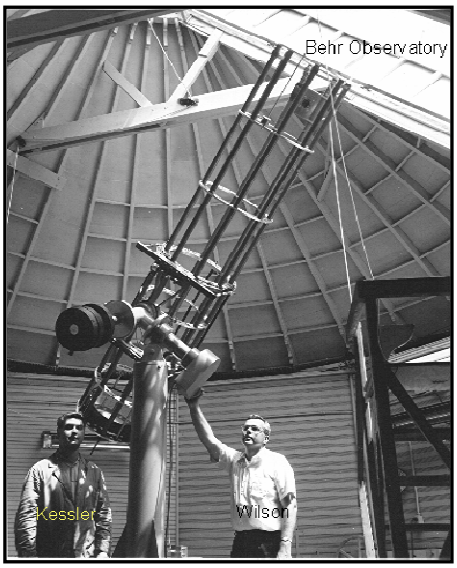
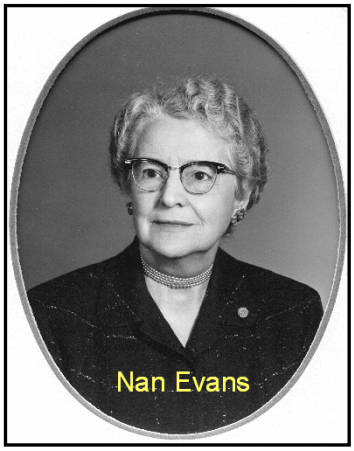


Photo by University Communications

Maurer: Wow.

Wilson: And Dr. Bertholf did go ahead and get funding for a new observatory. This is Nan Evans who was the wife of Mark Evans who had been a trustee at Wesleyan and Mark Evans was responsible for Wesleyan staying in Bloomington. Some people wanted to move it to Springfield, I think it was, and he was instrumental in raising enough money to keep Wesleyan here. And this is the laying of the cornerstone and a time capsule. There's Frank Borman, one of the first astronauts. He was on campus to do that. And then I think—yeah and we, even Nan, she was in her eighties when we did this—we weren't sure she would want to but now we're in the Mark Evans Observatory with its rotating dome that you can see now, and this time the telescope could not be carried up, this eighteen—

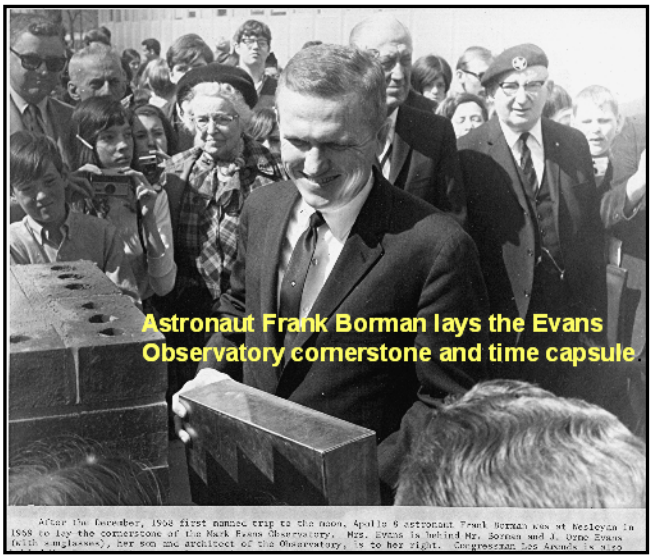


Photos hanging in Observatory, by University Communications

[Maurer laughs]

Wilson: Eighteen and a half-inch. It had to be lifted by a crane and put in through the slot in the dome of the Observatory. And there was a grand opening of the Observatory and—have you ever been up in the Observatory?

Maurer: No, not yet.



Wilson: There's a spiral staircase from the second floor up that goes up into the dome and we weren't sure that Nan would be able to make it up the spiral staircase but her son was with her there and me and we talked about it and she said she would like to go up and so we did and there are some nice pictures of her up there. And then, as I say, the eighteen and a half-inch mirror lost its shape and after we were in this situation with the new Observatory, the Science Division at Wesleyan had put together a proposal to the National Science Foundation and part of the proposal was a new telescope, so this is the new telescope and this is the one that's still in the Observatory now.

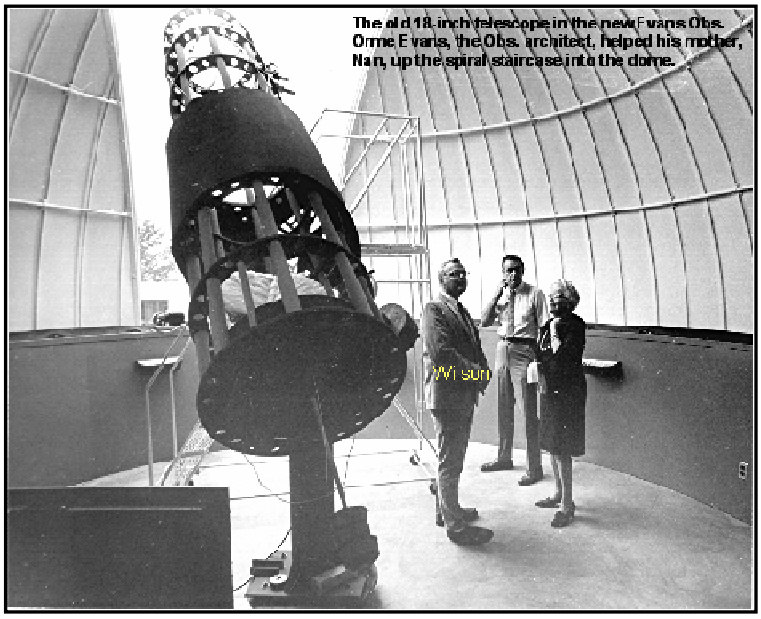


Photo by University Communications

Maurer: Wow.

Wilson: And this is a group of summer high school students who are taking Astronomy as college credit in escrow. They're still high school students. I think all of them had finished probably at least their junior year. Maybe there is one here who had finished—just finished the sophomore year but was qualified enough to take Astronomy. And I did that for a number of years, taught the college credit escrow course. And…and then the university would hold the credit for that course in escrow for them and then when they started in at their own university, they could have that credit transferred to their program at that university. These two got married—Carol Calhoun and Scott Williams. Although not as a result of this—

Photo by Dr. Ray Wilson

[Maurer laughs]

Wilson: But as a result of later on, so I—Carol went to Wesleyan, Scott went to the University of Illinois, and Scott came over to visit and this was a couple of years later and they—the two of them had gotten together during this college credit in escrow. They'd rent one of the double-seater bicycles—what do you call bicycle built for two?

Maurer: Uhh.

Wilson: They would borrow one of those from, I guess, Physical Plant or something had them down there.

Maurer: Like a tandem bike?

Wilson: Yeah—

Maurer: Okay.

Wilson: A bicycle built for two.

Maurer: Mhmm.

Wilson: And when they had free time from our summer program here the two of them would hop on a bike and travel around town.

[Maurer laughs]

Wilson: So they became friends but that was it and a couple of years later, Scott was at the U of I and Carol was here doing Biology studies and Pre-med—she became a pediatrician and she is located somewhere here in central Illinois not too far away—and Scott came up to the Observatory and—to visit a little bit and I had just been over in Sherff Hall next door and I had been down in the Physics lab and I noticed, casually I was looking around—who was in the Physics lab—and Carol was in the lab doing a lab course for Physics at the lab section and I knew that Scott and she had become good friends during the college credit in escrow, so we walked over to the Physics lab, didn't say anything, we just walked in, and he was standing around to see how long it would take her to recognize him,—that he'd come back.

[Maurer laughs]

Wilson: And she did and one thing led to another and they eventually got married.

Maurer: Who would have ever known that so many stories would be associated with the Observatory.

[Wilson laughs]

Maurer: Wow.

Wilson: Oh yes.

Maurer: I'm sure you know a lot more than the ones you just said.

Wilson: Well, yeah, I don't know them in as much detail as that though, but it was nice working in the Observatory, especially in the winter. The best skies are those that—when the sky is very cold and in the middle of winter we used to offer our Astronomy course as a short term course. Short term used to be in January.

Maurer: Is that the same as January Term?

Wilson: Well it's May Term now.

Maurer: Yeah, I mean—okay.

Wilson: But the short term, the three-week term used to be in January. One of the advantages of this was they still like to do a lot of travel and travel was much cheaper in January than it is in May and so that's the way the short term program began, as a January short term. And so we taught a three-week—a short term course in January where students were just taking the one course and so we'd work with them in the morning, a little bit in the afternoon, and then, you know, you go home and show up here at eight o'clock at night…[laughs]…on a bitter cold January night. And so we—very often if it was really cold we'd have a hotpot with cocoa down in the second floor and people could go back down there and get warm and then when they were warmed up they'd come back up into the dome and continue their observing sessions and we'd go until midnight, sometimes later if something was going to show up a little bit later—you

know, you have to wait for things to rise above the horizon—and if it got too late, you know, there'd be an order for pizza, go out—

[Maurer laughs]

Wilson: The truck would drive up the driveway and we'd have pizza up in the dome or downstairs on the level just below it. So, yeah, it's a nice program when you work that closely with a small group. Yeah, one student was a Drama major and she took the January Astronomy course and became a Physics major…[laughs].

Maurer: Oh wow…[laughs]. So ever since you've been a professor here, what have been some of the most profound changes at this university?

Wilson: Well I—one of the things I noticed when I came back from Arizona in '68, in the fall of '68, I noticed that the…that the minority population of the students had gone up and primarily African American students. I—you know I never saw too many of them over in the science building. I—there, perhaps, were not too many African American students on campus prior to my time here, 1962, and I was here from '62 to '66, so I was here four years and there were one or two maybe that took Physics classes during that time but there were not too many African American students on campus and I noticed when I got back in '68 that that had increased somewhat. I also noticed that, in those two years that I was gone, Bloomington-Normal seemed to have made some large economic advancements and one of the things you could tell by this was that the *Pantagraph* had much more in the way of advertising going on now. In the first four years here the *Pantagraph* was just a black and white *Pantagraph* and when I got back there were all these inserts. I could probably—as it is now, every Thursday and every Sunday, just tons of stuff, so the city was really growing at that particular point. It—I remarked to some people the other—last week that it's rather—I feel a little bit strange to have been here when Sheean Library was built.

[Maurer laughs]

Wilson: And to still be here…[laughs]—

Maurer: Right.

Wilson: To watch it being torn down.

Maurer: I'm sure that feels really surreal to you.

Wilson: Yes.

Maurer: Yeah.

Wilson: And it was during that time that we—when I first came the Physics Department was in the basement of Stevenson Hall. In fact, the whole Science Department Division was in the old science hall, which is Stevenson Hall now, where Nursing is. Physics was on the—in the lower level in the basement and Biology was on the second floor and Chemistry was on the third floor. And we made a move to Sherff Hall, which is now—

Maurer: CLA.

Wilson: CLA, yes. That move—yeah, that move had been made in—at least by '66, '65-'66 because Gary Kessler never had an office in the basement of the old science building, so when he came that must've been the same time roughly that we moved over, yeah, into Sherff Hall of Science, so that building had been put up also and then, of course, the—on campus I guess the largest things that struck me were the rebuilding of the science—CNS, the new science building—that's huge—and then the Shirk Center also. And I remember my first time in the Shirk Center I thought to myself upon leaving, I said, "What on earth is a structure like this doing at Illinois Wesleyan?"

[Maurer laughs]

Wilson: "This is something that belongs at the University of Illinois or the University of Wisconsin—a structure this large." Because prior to that everything was done—this is before your time I guess—

[Maurer laughs]

Wilson: Just east of the stadium was a large Quonset type structure and I think if you look in the history of that that probably had something to do with the Illinois Agricultural Association also or State Farm or somebody might have put that up as a temporary building. You know the history of the Sherff Hall. The Illinois Agricultural Association needed some office space before they built their offices out on IAA Drive and so they made an arrangement with Wesleyan and they built Sherff Hall—it wasn't called that then—they built that structure, three-story structure—with no wall separations inside. They built it as a shell and they would use it for several years and then when their new structure was built on IAA Drive, they would move out there and apparently give the building to Wesleyan. So during those first three years that I was here, there were many meetings about the interior design. IAA had moved out and it was just an empty shell now and so it was Wesleyan's turn to move in now and build all the classrooms and offices in that building and I think that may have been what had happened earlier with the old (the Quonset structure)—I don't even remember what they called the building. I think it was named after a Wesleyan grad who was a sports writer for Wesleyan, but it was a large Quonset structure, large enough for a descent size basketball court with seating and enough room for a locker room and shower facilities at the other end and it also served—that was—you know I've never been under the stands, so I don't know about the locker rooms under the stands. Are they there for the football team?

Maurer: In Shirk?

Wilson: Oh in—okay, no, right now in the football stands. Is there anything under them?

Maurer: I don't really know. I haven't been to too many football games.

Wilson: Okay.

Maurer: I've only been to one.

Wilson: Well that's okay—

Maurer: Yeah.

Wilson: I haven't been to many either.

[Maurer laughs]

Wilson: But I didn't know that that was a—and to have the Shirk Center built the way it was—my first one or two years here I lived right next to the—to this Quonset structure, the basketball court at Wesleyan. There was a private house that Wesleyan owned and so when I first came here we rented that house and it was right next to the basketball Quonset house, whatever we called that building, I forget now. Yeah and the Sheean Library structure—I'd been used to Buck for years and years and when Sheean went up that was a nice structure. We were spoiled in the Science Division at that time. Yeah, when we—when the sciences moved to Sherff Hall. We had our own library over there on the second floor. There was a very large room and the entire science collection was there and I think many of us in the sciences were a little bit upset that when the Sheean Library went up that all our science books, Chemistry, Physics, Mathematics, Biology, everything would be moved from our building—

[Both laugh]

Wilson: Sherff Hall, over into the new library but, you know, we adapted to that. There was no problem with that.

Maurer: What is the biggest impact the school has had on your life in general?

Wilson: It…it somehow worked in. As I say, one of the things I liked about it was that you had the opportunity, you did your coursework and fulfilled those responsibilities, but where your research went, that was your own business and you could decide what you wanted to do with that. And even before I got here at Wesleyan, I had studied nuclear physics over at U of Illinois and in the late fifties there had been saber-rattling going on and I had learned some things over there, at U of IL, about Hiroshima and Nagasaki. And even as early as 1959, before I came to Wesleyan, I had done some teaching about nuclear war and the problems associated with that and what it does to people and you saw that in the *Black Rain* film, —and so when I came to Wesleyan—well, from '59 on, when I was teaching general physics and we would get to the chapter on nuclear physics, I thought here was one way that we could—that I could—if there was one way that would clearly show the kind of energy available in nuclear processes, it was to show them what happened to two cities in Japan, the destruction that took place there. And so I'd been doing that whenever I teach general physics up until 1979—this was the end of the Carter Administration—and Jimmy Carter had come out with a policy about the—one of the things the United States should be doing should somehow be protecting human rights and so his idea about human rights, that humans were…were people who deserved to have their human rights. And so in January of '79, the January short term, the faculty had decided that there would be an emphasis in 1979's January—did an emphasis on courses that dealt with this question of human rights, what they are, who's entitled to them. And I had thought at that time that it ought to be—I hope I got those—yeah, I got that name right—that I had thought it ought to be a human right, even if it wasn't at the present time, that it ought to be a human right not to have to live in the shadow of being vaporized and completely annihilated by nuclear weapons and so we started a course called—in January, it was an experimental course—a course called—the original title was "Toward Nuclear Disarmament" and then when that was proposed by—to the faculty, the general faculty, it was accepted, but Emily Dale, a sociologist, had pointed out that the title was biased, that "Toward Nuclear Disarmament" showed a bias on—I guess on my part, I put the title on it, and so the title was changed to "Problems of Nuclear Disarmament". And I've taught that course—it went so well in '79 that the Physics Department, Gary Kessler, Detweiler, and I at the time decided that we could add that in as a regular offering for the May Term. I had been

teaching Astronomy every short term whether it was in January or May, and we decided—because Gary Kessler felt strongly about it also—he was Head of the Department—and so I, from '79 until the present time, I've been teaching that course. And that opened up all sorts of things. I had been receiving help from both the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki; they had been sending me information and answering the letters that I would write. And I began that thorough course in '79 and then I felt a little uncomfortable about continuing with it and then as 1983 was coming up, I had decided that (my kids at that point were all either out of college or away in college) and that—I decided that the best thing for me to do if I was going to continue teaching that—would actually go to Japan, go to Hiroshima and Nagasaki. There was this, I don't know, this inner feeling that I had that I had to be there if I was going to continue teaching about that subject. I really needed to be in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and so I had to arrange my life in such a way that I could, at the end of the spring semester in '83, I could just clear the table off and everything would handle itself here okay and I just—okay, and two and a half months for summer vacation and off I went to Japan and…[laughs]…with not too many things figured out in advance but spent the whole summer, it turned out, in Hiroshima. I never got to Nagasaki that summer. That had to wait until '86, and I have been going there essentially every three years since then and I was there in 2004 and I was supposed to go in 2007 but there were things here that kept me from going in 2007 and I didn't get back there until 2009 and then I was there earlier this summer six weeks, in this year 2011, back again. And so I've learned a lot about—all these years and there's something about being in Hiroshima and being in Nagasaki that just kind of impels you to do the writing and the studying and learning more and putting ideas together, so I'm working on a book right now. The working title is *Hiroshima, Nagasaki, and a Workable Moral Strategy for Achieving and Preserving World Peace*.

Maurer: Okay, really interesting.

Wilson: Yeah I'm putting everything I've used in the last fifty years of teaching about this and that will go into the book. And so in answer to your original question, which was—how did we phrase that again?

Maurer: Oh, like how—like what major affect has this university had—

Wilson: Yeah.

Maurer: On your being a professor?

Wilson: See I'm sure that some faculty at this university probably don't think that a physicist should be working in the area of nuclear war and disarmament questions. Many people would think that these are not physics questions; these are political science questions or government questions.

Maurer: Mhmm.

Wilson: And yet if you leave it that way, the United States government never fully revealed what happened in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. They told what happened to the cities but they never really revealed what happened to the people.

Maurer: Right.

Wilson: And to this day they have not—the United States Government has not done that. Other people have but there's still a lot of knowledge missing, particularly in your age of people. I've

gone over what most of you were faced with in high school. I've looked through more than a dozen history books from high school, world history books, and usually the ending of the Second World War is usually covered in about a page if that, sometimes just a paragraph, and there might be a picture but typically it's going to be a picture of the destroyed city and not a picture of what happens to the people. I can understand why they don't want to do that but—well, so I have been able to tie that in and the course I teach has a great deal of physics in it. It's the physics and technology of nuclear weapons and nuclear war and I pick up the physics from the very beginning and we do sufficient classical physics in the course to lead us into atomic physics and then from the atomic over to the nuclear physics and the results of its use, and so I like that freedom, but I also did research in optical physics which is the area that I did my doctorate in and I spent about, oh, about a dozen years working on that and wrote a book about that research. Wiley published that book. And so I—even when I was in Japan the first time in '83, I was exploring Hiroshima, but I took a week off and went to an optical physics meeting in Kobe, Japan —so I was working on two things at the same time. You can't help but—

[Maurer laughs]

Wilson: Work on nuclear stuff when you're in Hiroshima.

Maurer: Right. And you said before that while you were a professor here there were several structural additions to the campus. Were there any other construction projects going on since you've been a professor here?

Wilson: Yeah, I think McPherson Theater Building—I was talked to Jared Brown the other day, you know, and I don't recall them actually building McPherson Theater at that time, but I do know that the Drama Department had something called Spotlight Theater, which I think was located where—behind the Memorial Center—I…[laughs]…I—and behind your house. Isn't there a brick—one-story brick structure just on the east side of I House?

Maurer: I think they use that building now to store computers.

Wilson: Okay.

Maurer: I think it used to be—

Wilson: It used to be the bookstore.

Maurer: Yeah, it used to be the bookstore.

Wilson: Yeah—

Maurer: Right, that building.

Wilson: But prior to that it was—I think it was the Spotlight Theater, which was kind of…[laughter]…as I recall, a garage or a structure and it was a small structure and it's—I think that's where theater went on unless they could manage the stage at Presser Hall but the stage at Presser Hall is not set up for—it's set up for music okay but it's—it doesn't have the wings on it enough so that you can move scenery on and off—

Maurer: Mhmm.

Wilson: Like McPherson needs. And McPherson should be increased in size or something or a new theater building should be built. So McPherson was built and, as I say, Sheean Library—all the structures were new—and the Shirk Center. Those are the large structures—and the new Observatory. That was a nice building. It turned out the original design—Mark Evans who's the son—I'm sorry, Orme Evans who is the son of Mark Evans, Mark and Nan, Orme did the—Orme was an architect in town and I think he designed other buildings for Wesleyan but he designed the Observatory but his first design—my understanding was the first design he came up with was something perhaps beyond what contractors in this town could build. I—apparently either the costs were too high or the kind of structure that he wanted was perhaps beyond our capabilities or they didn't trust themselves to be able to do it and so the Mark Evans Observatory now has a simpler form to it and, of course, it was the first observatory he ever built and it was the first one that we, the Physics Department, had ever planned on and we did the best we could and it's a very serviceable building. It's seen many changes inside and outside.

Maurer: Yeah, I really do want to take Fundamental Astronomy before I graduate. I really want to go in there and use the telescope.

Wilson: Yeah.

Maurer: I've always liked studying about space.

Wilson: Well they do have open houses at night so you can get in there. There is a Mark Evans Observatory Facebook page and he usually announces—I looked at it the other night and I swear somebody's opening it up during the summer. I don't know who that would be—

Maurer: I'll have to check that out.

Wilson: It's not one of the faculty members. They've trained Physics students to operate the telescope and open up the building and have these open houses and during a regular semester they're open, I think, for students who are taking Astronomy courses several nights during the week and even on weekends and the way he lets you know is through Facebook. He'll say, "The Observatory is going to be open tonight from nine to midnight or—" it depends on when the sun goes down. And, yes, I taught that course for many years, the beginning Astronomy course, and Detweiler did also. Let's go on with—what do we have next?

Maurer: Oh, what do you think of the current construction projects now such as the Art Atrium and the—?

Wilson: The Joslin Atrium?

Maurer: Well, yeah, what do you think of all those going on right now? What's your opinion?

Wilson: We do need more classroom space. And so I hated to see Sheean torn down but I understand that Sheean could've been a fire problem—

Maurer: Mhmm.

Wilson: They were concerned about fires in the basement going right up the stairwell, which leads right up to the second floor, and although there are—I'm trying to remember whether if you were on the basement level whether there are other ways of getting out other than that stairwell. And I know there are two exits, one on each of the east and west sides, but I don't

remember whether they had access from the basement, whether you could get out from the basement there, and I guess it was a pain to heat that building. It had a flat roof, of course, and flat roofs are notorious for leaking. I don't know whether there were too many leaks there. Yeah, they'll be able to—they can always use more classrooms—see, the university has grown so much. We're now at 2,100 students and,—and the faculty is greatly enlarged now. There are many more than we had when I got here and so there is a need for more classrooms and more office space. My wife is an adjunct instructor of Japanese language here and she's always moving around from one office to another depending on what's available. Right now she's waiting to find out—well, for the last two years she's had her office in Buck.

Maurer: Oh, is your wife Akiko Wilson?

Wilson: Yeah.

Maurer: I didn't know that.

[Wilson laughs]

Maurer: Oh she's so nice. She actually dressed me in a kimono once I—

Wilson: Okay…[laughs].

Maurer: At International House. Okay.

Wilson: And Hiroko Furo, who was the Professor of Japanese, has been on leave for two years and so they put Akiko in her office for these two years that she was gone and there's a gentleman coming in now, he'll be taking over Hiroko Furo's position and so we just—Akiko gathered up all of her stuff—we just took her six boxes home and we would've preferred to deliver them to her new office but she doesn't know where her new office is yet. Apparently some of the renovations in Presser Hall and the art building I guess, all these kind of temporary offices are occupied right now by Music and Drama faculty. Maybe people have been temporarily shifted out of the building—and so we're not sure where her office will be, so we brought all of her stuff home and so probably when she gets an office she'll just take the minimum of stuff there because it may turn out to be a shared office with a couple other faculty, at least one or maybe two other faculty, so it's hard to move all of your stuff that you want to use to teach with—

[Maurer laughs]

Wilson: Into there. She'll be doing a lot of work at home.

Maurer: Right. I think we've already addressed this issue, but it's interrelated to it—how has kind of the gender stratification of the university changed over time since you've taught here?

Wilson: I haven't noticed that so much. Kind of related to that, as—I wrote some notes, these papers that I brought with me. They're not for you, they're for me—

[Maurer laughs]

Wilson: To remember. We just recently celebrated the fortieth anniversary of the Evans Observatory and I had put together some notes of what I remembered from when I got here from '62 on and I wanted to go back in the Physics Department as far as I could and keep track of

what was going on there too and so I'd been going through old Wesleyanas to just see what was going on and one of the things I noticed—I came away with the impression that it, in the 1950s and 1960s, that Wesleyan almost seemed like a music conservatory. There was so much going on within the music building and musical activities on campus that it had seemed that way, and I was kind of tracing what was going on in the Physics Department and when you realize that in the fifties and the sixties—the Second World War is over and so here's all this economic growth, this boom time in the United States—all the G.I.s had come back, now here's this huge labor force, and we're building our own cars and electronics and TVs and everything we need and so…where was I going with this? I wanted to see what the Physics Department was doing because many of the engineers and scientists would be coming out of Physics and the sciences and I don't understand how they were doing it because for many years, in the fifties and the sixties, there was only one faculty member in Physics and you can't have a Physics program with one faculty member. In the fifties, Harold Stephenson was here. He was—he had a PhD from Duke University and for some reason or other he left Wesleyan and went down to Pfeiffer College in Misenheimer, either North or South Carolina, and I met him at a physics meeting some years after I got here and we talked about his time at Wesleyan and I guess Gary Kessler was with us at that time, Detweiler might have been here also, and he had remarked that he somewhat regretted leaving Wesleyan at that time, but his family was from Misenheimer and so I think that was part of the reason that he went back there. But I noticed that, in Pfeiffer College, apparently they had some difficulties that Wesleyan did not have and that Pfeiffer College now seems to be almost a two-year community college, so it didn't grow either, but Wesleyan did. And after Harold Stephenson left there was a fellow here from South America, I don't know, maybe Argentina or Brazil or something and I don't know anything about his teaching, and then Porter Brace, as I say, an eighty-year-old man, and I don't know how much Physics he knew. He was at Westinghouse—been a Westinghouse engineer. And so the Physics program needed a lot of work. And Matt Prastein, as I say, had been here and Matt was very sharp but he, by himself, he couldn't do it all either and so when I came I thought it was—would be me and Matt working together and when I got to Wesleyan I found out that Matt had gone on leave to Illinois Institute of Technology to work on a doctorate and after the first year he had requested a second year of leave of absence to continue his work and after the second year leave of absence there had been some rumblings on campus and I really didn't get involved with them because I was new here and I had enough on my plate already. And Dr. Bertholf had written a—it was always referred to as a "white paper"—and it apparently had something to do with what the philosophy behind teaching at Wesleyan would be with the background, the Judeo-Christian background, of it and apparently something in that paper offended Matt's sensitivities and so toward the end of the second year that I was here, Matt had written back to the university releasing them from the obligation of rehiring him and so Matt would be gone for a third year and that left me by myself again for a third year. We—some of our upper-level Physics students—there weren't many of them—we would send to ISU to take Physics classes there, junior/senior level classes there, because I had my hands full with General Physics for everybody. I was teaching Astronomy, I had Experimental Physics to do, and other Physics courses. And there was a large enrollment in General Physics because all the Bio. students had to take a year worth of Physics also.

Maurer: I'm sure you were very busy.

Wilson: Yeah, very busy. It's—well, when Gary Kessler got here—now when I had been teaching in Hawaii for the two years before I came here, I was teaching six courses a day.

Maurer: Wow.

Wilson: And I was teaching two Physics courses and four Chemistry courses, I was trained in both. And when I—when Gary Kessler got here I showed him what I had planned for the fall and he looked at the schedule and he said, "Well you take this half and I'll take this half," and that's the way it went because I had been doing apparently twice as much as a regular college professor would have been asked to do. And then—as I say, when I went on leave '66 to '68, I had a replacement, Marty MacDonald came and then when I returned in '68 Lew Detweiler who had been part of the MST program, Master of Science Teaching program, had been hired half-time in Physics and half-time in Mathematics, so we were two and a half men at that time—

[Maurer laughs]

Wilson: Okay? When I got back here in the fall of '68 and then—and so Lou was teaching some math and some physics courses and then our needs became so great that Lou became a full-time Physics member. And that's the way we went for many years, just the three of us, which is not a good idea.

[Maurer laughs]

Wilson: Just the three of us, all the way up until when Narendra Jaggi got here, which would have been in the early nineties and so when Narendra came we were now four. And Gary Kessler had been having heart problems and he wanted to be replaced. He was looking forward to retirement eventually and so it was his idea that his position as Head of the Department should be replaced with somebody and that a fourth person should come in and so Narendra did that and that was one of the best steps that we'd ever made in the sciences, to have Narendra come in. And then I guess…well Gary had his heart problems and he died over in the—in CNS. He had a heart attack over there and he couldn't—and they were not able to bring him out of it. Your original question was—I—I didn't—you meant gender, I didn't notice. I'm pretty sure there was this tendency perhaps for there to be too many women on campus and not enough men, but I think that—I didn't notice it too much because in my classes it was mostly guys. I often wondered why it was so easy to remember in the Physics classes—to quickly learn the women's names and I discovered that the reason it was so easy to do it because there were so few of them—

[Maurer laughs]

Wilson: In the Physics classes. And so I didn't notice—I was aware that there were perhaps more women than—I don't know whether this is true or not—more women than men and that the number of men should be increased and I think that has happened over the years as Wesleyan's reputation in the sciences and in Business and Biology—those three areas, the sciences in general, but very often Wesleyan was thought of as a—that Biology and Business were the two main carriers for the university and I suppose people in the School of Music would feel differently about that, but the desired enrollment in the pre-med program in Biology, that was always high and Wesleyan has always had a large enrollment in Business also and that was attractive to many guys, I guess. So I—that was one of the things that I noticed and, of course, then the increase in the number of faculty. There weren't too many African American faculty on campus. One of the first was Frank Starkey who came in and became Head of the Chemistry Department and then there was a fellow that—I don't remember whether he was History or Sociology or something—he came in and he was with us for a while. And, like I say, I retired in '97, so I haven't really kept track of the new faculty who've come in, so I don't—that kind of distribution, I'm not really aware of that anymore. Next question…[laughs].

Maurer: Oh, the next question. How was the diversity of the student body and even of the professors changed over time?

Wilson: The diversity?

Maurer: Mhmm, like racial diversity, gender diversity.

Wilson: Well we talked about the African American component to it—

Maurer: Mhmm.

Wilson: But when I came here I don't think there was anybody who was Asian, had an Asian origin or ethnic background. And, of course—and things changed and to a large extent I think that was due to Minor Myers encouraging that. I had been on the Asian Studies Committee for many years from its beginning and the Asian Studies Committee always thought that we should be—that Wesleyan should start looking, well, looking to the East, which is actually to the West, but looking toward Asia—

[Maurer laughs]

Wilson: Because in those first twenty years that I was here, all the focus always used to be, it seems to me, on Europe and perhaps some to South America depending on the faculty, but there's much more interest in that now. Mike Weis and his specialty in South American affairs and of course Spanish had always been a large language component on campus and the curriculum where a large number spent. I suppose that's because that's what many students took in high school and felt happy with that. But Minor, by himself, started the Japanese language program at Wesleyan and the Asian Studies Committee people were very happy with that. He got a grant from the Japan Foundation in New York, which apparently covered salaries for a Japanese language instructor and the first one was (Mutsuko Motoyama) and she was very good and…and my wife, Akiko, even—she asked for an additional person, so my wife came in, I think, first year here, first or second year, I'm not sure, and Akiko taught a 300-level course in Japanese language at that time and Akiko's been—it was off and on—if she wasn't giving birth. We have two children. They would sometimes interfere with what she would want to do in terms of teaching and, as you know, recently we've added Chinese language and now—the travel courses now not only go to Europe but they go to China and I'm not sure where else they go to. They go to Japan and China and I don't know. Are there any going—

Maurer: There's one, I think, Business or Economics course, it's by Professor Hoyt. He brings—

Wilson: Yeah.

Maurer: Students like to Malaysia, Vietnam, China—

Wilson: Okay, I knew he was going to China.

Maurer: I think maybe Singapore.

Wilson: Yeah.

Maurer: Mhmm.

Wilson: So there's that much focus. And, as I say now, I've—I retired in '97, so I'm not aware of everybody. Teddy Amoloza is originally from the Philippines and, of course, in the languages there are faculty, obviously, who have some sort of Hispanic background. In Mathematics now, Professor He, is originally from China and I think there may be one, two others maybe, in Mathematics from either China or Korea perhaps; in the Physics Department—Narendra's origin is India and Thushara Perera is from Sri Lanka. And I think pretty much scattered around campus there are—the faculty has expanded more wide now. I don't have—I don't know if there were inhibitions on the campus in the fifties, sixties, and even before that in the seventies about branching out that far, but it's been a—it's internationalized the campus. Jim Barbour, when he was Registrar, wanted to add a hundred international students, students from outside the United States, foreign students, I don't know how you want to call them, but the problem was a lot of the Asian countries were, at that time, if they weren't third world countries, they were near being third world countries and so many of them couldn't afford to come here and so Jim had to find ways to finance their tuition and what have you while they were here. And so he wanted the program to grow to, as I say, at least a hundred, which would be, I guess, one-twentieth of the students on campus, roughly something like that. And I—there were financial problems back in the eighties or so and that—he never reached his goal and he left, but there is now that same plan. I don't know how many international students we do have but I think there is that desire. I don't know that they'll set a limit on it but I think what has happened also is that the students we attract from overseas come from families who can afford to send their kids here and—because I know we have—in Japanese we had a couple students who have come for—sometimes they just come for a year and they're originally students at Keio University in Tokyo and they can afford to make it here to Wesleyan. And we've had some Indian students and students from Pakistan and Bangladesh in Physics that I know, so the whole complexion of the university has changed over these years and this has only occurred really within the last twenty years.

Maurer: Okay. Is there anything you would like to add to what we've been discussing?

Wilson: No, I don't think so. I think we covered just about everything.

Maurer: Okay. Well thank you so much for coming in today.

Wilson: You're welcome.