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2011

William LaBounty

William P. LaBounty '52
Illinois Wesleyan University

Daniel Maurer 2012
Illinois Wesleyan University

Recommended Citation
LaBounty '52, William P. and Maurer 2012, Daniel, "William LaBounty" (2011). *All oral histories.* Paper 36.
http://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/oral_hist/36

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Oral History Interview with William LaBounty
August 16, 2011

Daniel Maurer: My name is Daniel Maurer. I am a student at Illinois Wesleyan University and the date is August 16th, 2011. If you'd like to give your name and affiliation with Wesleyan.

William LaBounty: William Peary LaBounty, graduated from Wesleyan in June 1952.

Maurer: Okay, and what was your major?

LaBounty: Business Administration.

Maurer: Okay. When you came here as a student, what qualities drew you to Wesleyan?

LaBounty: Well it was interesting. My family mostly went to Illinois State Normal and not being of big means, I presumed I would go there except, "You're going to be trained as a teacher." And that wasn't the direction I wanted to go, so my dad borrowed money to send me to Wesleyan, and I had a scholarship too that's mostly—some kind, and enrolled in Business Administration.

Maurer: Okay. In your time, how were—how close were student-faculty interactions?

LaBounty: Um…had some very good ones. My main professor and most of the Business Administration people was William T. Beadles who taught all of the major courses and also taught all of the Chartered Life Underwriters classes in McLean County for decades and even wrote the test.

[Both laugh]

Maurer: Is he the namesake for Beadles Hall?

LaBounty: Yes.

Maurer: Okay.

LaBounty: He never had a doctor's degree, but he ended up with a doctor's degree, but it was an honorary one, but U of I still tried to hire him away.

[Maurer laughs]

LaBounty: He didn't want to go there.

Maurer: Okay. Are there any students, staff, or faculty that stand out to you?

LaBounty: Him.

Maurer: Him?

LaBounty: Yeah by far. He ended up being the Educational Representative of State Farm Insurance Company.

Maurer: Okay.

LaBounty: Of course they had potentially thousands of kids from Illinois Wesleyan and Illinois State who once worked there now.

Maurer: So he was a mentor to you then.

LaBounty: Yeah.

Maurer: Okay. What stands out to you as the biggest changes has undergone through the years?

LaBounty: Learn how to get money. The biggest change was when they went from religious background people to more business background people, but the first one that did that was Robert S. Eckley and he was from Caterpillar and changed the whole thing around that they had to raise money to survive.

Maurer: Was this the president or—?

LaBounty: I can't remember his name.

Maurer: Oh, Eckley?

LaBounty: Um…yeah, I think it was, yes.

Maurer: Okay. Yeah, I think he was here for twenty years.

LaBounty: Yes.

Maurer: Mhmm.

LaBounty: Yeah.

Maurer: Is there a favorite story or memory that you have when you were a student or when you worked here?

LaBounty: Well, the one thing I know about William T. Beadles, if you wanted an "A" and not a "C"—he sort of skipped "B"—

[Maurer laughs]

LaBounty: You went to class everyday and you participated everyday and that's the way it was.

Maurer: Mhmm.

LaBounty: And you learned to do that.

Maurer: It's kind of like that now with participation grades.

LaBounty: Yeah.

Maurer: Yeah.

LaBounty: Of course I, with Business, I also had Accounting—a man named Ollie Luerssen but he could get sidetracked on his bees and his flying…[laughs]…among other things was his side-life. But I ended up grading Accounting papers for him senior year—the only time I worked on campus—fifty cents an hour.

Maurer: Wow.

LaBounty: I would—and ’52—’51-’52.

Maurer: What traditions have changed since you were at Wesleyan?

LaBounty: Probably the—we had to go to assembly every Wednesday. And, of course, it was much more religious-orientated at that time. And you had to go and they took…[laughs]…they took—knew who was there.

Maurer: Like how—what was the biggest impact that Wesleyan has had on your life?

LaBounty: Primarily the business background. I ended up getting a master’s at ISU but that was more in discretion. And, of course, the accounting was from day one and I had cost accounting in the old basement where Duration Hall was. That’s where the administration was but the comptroller taught cost accounting, so I had him my senior year. And I used that both in a family business and my job at Illinois State.

Maurer: When you came here what reputation did Wesleyan have and how has that changed?

LaBounty: I don’t know that they’ve ever had a bad one…[laughs]…but just by going around you can see they’re extremely successful. Of course I’m well aware of the money-raising and probably more aware of Chuck Ames than any other person around. He’s a fraternity brother.

Maurer: He is?

LaBounty: Yeah.

Maurer: What fraternity were you in?

LaBounty: Theta Chi.

Maurer: Theta Chi, okay.

LaBounty: He was a G.I. so he was older, but graduated just two years ahead of me.

Maurer: How did current events—like how did the current events outside the campus bubble affect your life at the university?

LaBounty: Well my problem is I was a townie and—but my dad insisted I join in a fraternity and he probably realized that as a townie you wouldn’t participate in campus events as much if you didn’t belong to an organization, and that proved to be true. Although my first three years I didn’t spend a lot of nighttime out here except for fraternity meetings and such, so senior year I didn’t have many hours and we participated at some of the local places downtown Bloomington.

Maurer: Is there anything else you'd like to add about your personal experiences at Wesleyan when you were a student?

LaBounty: Um…the fraternity thing is probably the only reason I knew any people on campus except for the Business classes and—but most of them were, you know, our fraternity and that but my senior year I was Social Chair, so I had to work a lot with the fraternity. But I still have a few couple close friends. One of them lived in Washington, Illinois so I visited him several times over the years since. Even when I was in the service in Japan I was in contact with two or three of the fraternity brothers.

Maurer: What was your interaction or opinion pertaining to fraternity life while you were in Theta Chi?

LaBounty: Um…of course the pledging was a whole new experience…[laughs]. I went through pledging and I joined Theta Chi primarily because they didn't push the drinking part as much and I'd find a couple of them, that's all they talked about. I don't know if they still do that or not but that—not that the Theta Chis didn't participate but—and some of them may have been—we had quite a few G.I.s and they were—already been through the war and all of this stuff and they were more educationally-headed than us kids who were still having fun—

[Maurer laughs]

LaBounty: And learning.

Maurer: What was dormitory life like for you?

LaBounty: Never had any.

Maurer: Never had?

LaBounty: Airforce was my first life away from Bloomington-Normal and I lived in a dorm.

[Both laugh]

Maurer: Were there any other professors who stuck out to you while you were here?

[LaBounty laughs]

LaBounty: Yeah, my Psych professor. I can't remember his name now. I should. And he ended up going to Illinois State later but…[laughs]…we liked him, we learned, but we used to count how many "Uh's" uttered during any given class. He'd be lecturing, "Uh, uh..." [laughs]…but we did learn. There was a sort of transitional, of course, Wesleyan was transitional, trans—going from the wartime to the peacetime but still having G.I. and the other mix, so there was a lot of transitions for Wesleyan at that—during that period.

Maurer: Mhmm. When you were a freshman how did you attitude—work ethic change?

LaBounty: Well, fortunately or unfortunately I had my grandfather on my mother's side owned a business and he started me—and during the war—it was a bookbinding business setting type like you see on the magazines, but I was thirteen because all the men were off to the war and so that meant I worked from thirteen on during the summers. When I was at Wesleyan I worked almost

every day that I had open periods and used me on Saturday. Of course that's what helped put me through Wesleyan, and so that kept me away from the campus more than most people and a lot of the activities, so that was not the best part but it got me through.

Maurer: And it kept you busy.

LaBounty: It kept me busy and as it turns out, when I returned from the Air Force, the day I returned my grandfather retired from the business, so I had that job open.

Maurer: What was your—what was the transition like from high school to college?

LaBounty: Actually I didn't have a hard time. Of course I had taken—always remember taking all the math courses in high school including trig and solid geometry and solid was probably my worst but—algebra, I always got "A's" in advanced algebra and all those, so that transition was fairly easy. I—so I really didn't have a big transition problem, got fairly good grades, usually "A's" and "B's".

Maurer: Did you ever switch your major?

LaBounty: No. Well I was mixed. I came in—I—in high school I did like chemistry and so instead of taking a natural science survey or whatever they had at that time—it was a series of courses that would take care of your science section unless you majored in it. Well I had taken chemistry then, ended up not having to take that group, but then when I decided I was definitely all Business I had to take biology to fill that science obligation.

Maurer: What was the class process—or the class selection process like when you were here?

LaBounty: Well, of course, your freshman year you—because they had the natural survey or your—the one you filled in. It had another one that—what did they call that, that covered the fine arts?

Maurer: General education requirements?

LaBounty: Yeah. And they had a series of courses that covered that, which I took. Some of those were interesting. They brought in—I still remember they brought in a Northwestern professor that spoke one time. I can't remember the subject now but, you know, compared to what we had he was really good…[laughs]. Maybe that's why I remember him.

Maurer: Did you have a favorite class?

LaBounty: Accounting.

Maurer: Accounting.

LaBounty: Yeah.

Maurer: A least favorite class?

LaBounty: Least favorite? English probably but I just don't remember others. I did like Chemistry and had a really good professor and he ended up going to Illinois State too…[laughs]. But Accounting was always my favorite so that ended up being my most used subjects.

Maurer: What were the classes like and what were the buildings like?

[LaBounty laughs]

LaBounty: Um…over here on the east edge of campus they had the old barracks that were, you know, retired G.I. thing that they moved in. Literally—

Maurer: Yeah.

LaBounty: Made classrooms out of. They could be very cold and very warm depending on the season. But we had a lot of classes. Of course we had—the only class I had in Duration Hall was the cost accounting. Then we had the first building on campus besides the administration building and it was so—that made it—you know, it was a hundred years old when we used it, so it was a hundred year old building in not very good condition. But, like, we all survived and it worked.

Maurer: Mhmm. Were there any structural modifications while you were here? And did you—

LaBounty: They had just built the Student Center and, of course, so all the main activities went through there. I had an aunt and uncle on campus. My aunt was the—was at the desk when you came in the Student Center and Uncle Leon took—he was a piano tuner but he took—he did the loudspeakers and all that for, you know, the sports and the—so he was everywhere on campus and, of course, that was always a plus for me. He lived to 99.9.

[Maurer laughs]

LaBounty: But I can't think of any other buildings at that time.

Maurer: What do you make of the current modifications to campus now?

LaBounty: Fantastic, fantastic.

Maurer: Mhmm.

LaBounty: And, yeah, the whole money-raising thing and, of course, Chuck Ames helped—really helped change it because he's still—he's upfronted I think twenty-eight million on the current campaign, so I have followed his career from day one. And who's our president out here?

Maurer: President Wilson? Oh no—President Minor Myers jr.

LaBounty: Yeah, Minor Myers jr. I got to go to the Associates' Luncheon when they honored Chuck Ames who had never been on campus since he—and hadn't given any money. And Minor Myers proved the best thing he ever did when he was here on a single person because it had to go far beyond its fondest dreams to have what we have here—

Maurer: Mhmm.

LaBounty: And now beyond. So he's probably accounting for like fifty mil. He's in venture capital.

Maurer: Venture capital. What was homecoming like when you were here?

LaBounty: Ah! Do they have Greek sings?

Maurer: They typically have events.

LaBounty: Yeah. In those days they had a formal Greek sing where you competed against the other fraternities.

Maurer: I think we still have that.

LaBounty: Yeah.

Maurer: Yeah.

LaBounty: Then we had the parade. Every—we built a float all four years for the parade, each fraternity did. Of course they had intramurals where we competed against each other in sports. That was probably my—do they have P.E. classes anymore?

Maurer: Yeah, we still have P.E. classes.

LaBounty: Okay.

Maurer: It's part of our general education—

LaBounty: Ah.

Maurer: Program. You have to take, I think, two semesters of physical education.

LaBounty: We had four years of it and I remember our—the coach—the football coach one time was our—one of the years he played for the Chicago Bears at that time and he was about that wide.

[Maurer laughs]

LaBounty: We'd be playing basketball over at the old gym there and he would participate in some of the games and you couldn't get around him with a tank.

[Both laugh]

LaBounty: So I remember those kinds of things. My dad and I had talked about, before I came—because I liked sports. I participated in football four years and baseball and track four years, basketball one year—of how to associate with that—Dad and I talked about maybe being a manager, you know, of a sport but I ended up—because of my working I didn't do that.

Maurer: What P.E. classes did you take when you were here?

LaBounty: P.E.?

Maurer: Mhmm.

LaBounty: Well they were prescribed and they varied in what they did but nothing very serious—

[Both laugh]

LaBounty: In those days.

Maurer: Yeah.

LaBounty: More playing games and such.

Maurer: Like football and basketball?

LaBounty: Yeah.

Maurer: Okay.

LaBounty: Basketball.

Maurer: Now we have like a wide variety of P.E. classes like scuba diving—

LaBounty: Ah.

Maurer: Weightlifting—

LaBounty: Yeah.

Maurer: Karate…[laughs].

LaBounty: There was nothing but the general course available.

Maurer: Okay.

LaBounty: Yeah.

Maurer: When you were here was there any sort of gender stratification?

LaBounty: What do you mean?

Maurer: Like what was the gender like—the gender makeup of—

LaBounty: Oh.

Maurer: Your class?

LaBounty: Well the Business classes were almost all male and, of course, the general courses they were pretty well mixed as to what—that's the way it was in the campus itself but I just remember very, very few females in the Business courses.

Maurer: Mhmm. Has that—have you noticed a change in that over time?

LaBounty: I'm not sure how it's doing now but, as well all know, the ladies are doing—going in all fields—

Maurer: Mhmm.

LaBounty: And certainly outside what their original fields—what the fields were back then in my day, so I know we have State Farmers. And one of the ladies I do remember was science-orientated and her father was in a fraternity, of course, much—year—earlier years. He was a Theta Chi. But she ended up with NASA doing quite well.

[Both laugh]

LaBounty: So that one I remember.

Maurer: What was the racial makeup when you were here?

LaBounty: We had Afro-Americans but not many. We had foreign students but not near what we have today.

Maurer: Mhmm.

LaBounty: I don't…I just don't remember many.

Maurer: Okay. Do you think the campus has gotten more diverse over time?

LaBounty: Oh I'm sure it has, I'm sure it has, as every campus now.

Maurer: Yeah. How did you keep in touch with your family?

LaBounty: Well, since I was in town I went home.

[Both laugh]

LaBounty: I did use my Air Force once, wrote in code, because we didn't have email and all that stuff that I use. I have an iPhone in my pocket.

Maurer: I don't even have an iPhone…[laughs].

LaBounty: But I'm a computer nut, so…

[Maurer laughs]

Maurer: Right. What kind of background did you come from?

LaBounty: My grandparents—I had two interesting things and they're somewhat related. They—I told you about the bookbinding, the Stappenbeck Bookbinding. He had started with Pantagraph Printing and Stationery, which before 1900 was a part of the newspaper. All newspapers had their printing division and a separate division that did binding and took in stuff from other people. And my grandfather started as a bookbinder in 1902 and stayed with Pantagraph Printing and Stationery, which is still in business, which only prints State Farm policies and related material and that's where—that's what put me through high school, college in fourteen years

after the service. The other side was the LaBounty side and that grandfather ended up with only a seventh grade education and his father put him to work in a newspaper and he became a union member in 1903. My other grandfather was a bookbinding member in 1902, so we had parallel things going and the LaBounty one ended up being a linotype operator. Linotype was setting lines. Ottmar Mergenthaler started revolutionizing from handset type to lead strips in 1885. So my grandfather, Perry J. LaBounty, learned to do that and he—his wife—they, in later years, would have hellacious scrabble games. Grandma had a full high school education, very intelligent, and was on school boards and everything, grandpa with a seventh grade education, but running a linotype for like twenty years they knew how to split every word. They knew words and so from the—by vocabulary standpoint they were on equal footing in spite of the education thing. And then he ended up in a—as an advertising manager for forty-four years at the Pantagraph so—but here we got sort of—printing and newspaper is all related on both sides of my background.

Maurer: What kind of freshman orientation programs were in place at the time?

LaBounty: Not much.

[Both laugh]

LaBounty: I don't really remember—

[Maurer laughs]

LaBounty: What they were but—which would mean there was—

[Maurer laughs]

LaBounty: Not a lot of formal programs set up for freshmen if I remember right. And I know, you know, all schools now—in fact that's what you're going through right now—

Maurer: Right. It just started today.

LaBounty: Yeah. So—because now they get involved parents at least at Illinois State, which is certainly helpful for both sides, both the kids and the parents.

Maurer: You may have already mentioned this but how long did you work at Wesleyan?

LaBounty: Just that one year, '51-'52.

Maurer: Okay.

LaBounty: Yeah.

Maurer: Just one year.

LaBounty: Yeah. And that would have been my senior year, but it was stuff—I could take it home. I was just grading papers so I could take them home—he would let me take them home and bring them back the next day.

Maurer: Okay.

LaBounty: So I didn't actually work on campus except when we first started.

Maurer: Okay. Is there anything else you'd like to add before we conclude this interview?

LaBounty: No, just the Ames connection that, you know, I just—I've seen from day one and I watch his career. He started out as President of GTE New York and then I had—I got an old *Fortune* magazine with his picture in it and then in his current life he—they bought Goodyear when Goodyear was down and they put him in as chairman, so he built it up and then sold it so that was how it—of course that's how venture capitalists make their money.

Maurer: Mhmm.

LaBounty: And apparently he was extremely successful.

Maurer: Mhmm. Are you still relatively close to Mr. Ames?

LaBounty: No, not really, but I did get to come to that luncheon and his brother, John who farmed over—had the family farm over in Sibley, Illinois, which is just west of here—then I got to come to the dedication, so—

Maurer: Of this library?

LaBounty: Of this library—

Maurer: Okay.

LaBounty: Yeah. And, of course, met his family. Of course I already knew his brother, John, because he was also a fraternity brother.

Maurer: Mhmm.

LaBounty: And he graduated a year later than his brother.

Maurer: And most likely you know his wife as well.

LaBounty: Yeah.

Maurer: Mhmm. She was in the School of Art I think…or the School of Fine Arts.

LaBounty: Yeah, I—actually if I met her it would have been at dedication.

Maurer: Okay.

LaBounty: Yeah.

Maurer: Yeah.

LaBounty: But I did—had met the—his brother John and she taught over in Sibley and she taught History and, of course, I'm interested in history because I'm a volunteer with the McLean County Museum of History, eighteen years.

Maurer: Okay. And did you also know that the Ames family donated a million dollars to the atrium being built right now?

LaBounty: Yes.

Maurer: Okay.

LaBounty: Of course I get all the literature and I actually read both. I got a master's at ISU, so I read both and I'm participating in scholarships at ISU right now.

Maurer: Oh.

LaBounty: For my home department.

[Maurer laughs]

Maurer: Yeah.

LaBounty: I was Director of Printing at ISU, so…

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

LaBounty: Mhhm, you're welcome.

Maurer: Yeah. It was an honor to talk with you.

LaBounty: Very good.