

Spring 2008

Interview of Caroline Wistar

Caroline Wistar
La Salle University

Meredith Valts
La Salle University

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FIELD NOTES:

Interviewee: Caroline Wistar

Interviewer: Meredith Valts

Dates: 1st Interview – February 9, 2008 at 11 am
2nd Interview – February 16, 2008 at 1 pm

Location: Philadelphia

Caroline Wistar was the LaSalle Art Museum curator since 1976. The LaSalle Art Museum is located in the basement of the Olney building at the main campus of LaSalle.

Caroline Wistar and I spoke previously to schedule our interviews and to explain briefly my Oral History project. The purpose of my early contact via phone and email was to determine if she was interested in talking about herself and her roles at the museum.

The first interview almost did not happen. I awoke at 7:30 am and it was snowing. I called Caroline Wistar at 9:30 and told her that the roads in Bucks County were slippery. She informed me that it was not snowing there. At 10:00 I left for her house. Thirty-five minutes later I had arrived.

Caroline Wistar is of average height with a slim exterior. She was eager to discuss the LaSalle Art Museum but limiting the information about her and her family legacy. She was caring, patient and attentive. We enjoyed the danishes that I had brought as a suggestion of thanks for her time. The first interview lasted a little over an hour. The second interview was just shy of one hour.

Caroline Wistar was impressed with the amount of data I had collected about her, her family and the Museum. She was awed that I had obtained an interoffice memo that asked people to convince Caroline to go to her own retirement party. Something she claimed was not interested in. I spared no expense in getting information for my interviews.

Her living room was stunning. We were surrounded by art. Some of which her father actually painted.

We were visited by her cat, which seemed less interested in us than watching out the window.

As we got settled and began the interview I turned on the recorder an Olympus DVR WS-300M and she was shocked by how little technology was. This recorder worked

miracles. It captured all words and ambient sounds perfectly. Technically leaving the recorder on the table set between us worked wonderfully. The only interruption, like I stated before, was a brief interlude with her cat.

One week later, I met Caroline Wistar again at her cozy home. The weather was beautiful and I was lucky enough to find a parking space right in front of her home.

The set-up was the same. I sat on the couch and her across the room on a comfortable chair.

The recorder went off without a hitch again. The interview felt a little rushed because she has afternoon plans.

Overall, both interviews were entertaining and elegant.

After both interviews I thanked her for her time and efforts. Caroline stated that we covered everything and she could not think of anything else. She was willing to sign off on the legal forms to give rights to everyone interested in her interviews.

Finally, we hugged and I smiled at her as she waved goodbye.

Oral history has taught me three lessons:

1. Transcribing takes time and can be outsourced for future interviews
2. Preparation is essential for interviews
3. The importance of getting interviews is essential to learning history