

Interview with Russell Magnaghi

November 28, 1989

Northern Michigan University

## START OF INTERVIEW

Interviewer (I): Interview with Dr. Russell Magnaghi, November 28, 1989 at Northern Michigan University. What was your capacity at the time of the beginning of the archives?

Dr. Russell Magnaghi (RM): From what I can recall, a lot of this is kind of sketchy and you're probably catching this at the right time, from what I can recall, and looking back at some notes that I have from the time, back in around 1974, and I was checking the notes and, for instance, on April 16<sup>th</sup>, 1974 I was involved with a meeting of the museum committee. Now, the museum committee was a committee established by the president, President John Jamrich, and there must have been about a half dozen of us who were looking at different buildings on campus, we looked at Longyear Hall, we looked at what is now Lee Hall gallery, we looked at some other space, but those were kind of the two prime places, and we were looking for space in which to put a museum, and I remember there were a number of people on this committee, I think Marla Buckmaster was on the committee representing anthropological interests and archaeology, John Saari was with me representing history, Mike Gorski from art and design was on it, previous interest in museum work, and I think Don Snidgen [spelling?] from biology was on it because he was interested in education and science and education and so on, and I think were a few other people, and it was kind of a strange committee because everybody had their own interest, and I think there was only money for one of these many things, so there were a lot of cross-purposes there. Now, we met and I don't know, I don't think that was the first meeting we had, I think

there were other meetings, but this started around 1974, and President Jamrich wanted to put together a, like a gift for the people of the Upper Peninsula, and it was supposed to some kind of a museum - natural history, historical, fine arts, it was going to be everything in a very limited space, but that was the idea. And we must have had some earlier meetings because this one on the 16<sup>th</sup> of April was with a fellow by the name of Rick Hogg, H-O-G-G, and I remember we, he was into looking at buildings and seeing how they could be utilized, I think we spent, from what I have here we spent most of the day looking at different buildings and discussing them. So that was, that got me interested in museum work, now the details of this museum committee I'm at a loss to, I know that we had other meetings, eventually John Saari and I, and this might be in the archives, put together a report, unfortunately it's not dated, and if I'm not wrong basically that report said that the history we'd like to see, I probably shouldn't say this, but we'd like to see an archives, I know one thing I wanted to see was an oral history office, and given everybody's interests, fine arts, anthropology, archaeology, biology, all these people, I think John Saari and I looked at having an office, a place where we would have something relatively small where we could store tapes, cassette tapes, and we could hold the interviews and have the equipment. That was what we put in this report. After that report was written, or our part of the report was written, if I'm not wrong, and this might also be up in the archives, I think it was, the whole thing was put together in a report that was then sent to Jamrich, ok. Now this, remember, is back in 19- maybe the fall of 1974, maybe 1975. What I think happened was, when the report went to Jamrich, there were just too many concerns and interests involved given the money that was available. And eventually what happens is the art and design department wins out because, well I call it wins out, but they get what becomes Lee Hall Gallery, they also needed, they needed, they still need a lot of work space for photography and baking [?] and all of this stuff, and Lee Hall

Gallery, that area becomes Lee Hall Gallery and kitchens back there and a lot of work area. So it became, ultimately it became the right place to put the art and design department, and subsequently, you might say, as an offshoot of that original idea, you have Lee Hall Gallery, which is, as the years pass here is becoming a major art gallery in the city of Marquette. So that was sort of, that's not telling about the archives, but that's telling you one of the things, one of the components, of this museum committee, so I guess we can say that the museum committee came up with something and it was Lee Hall Gallery. Now, back to the archives. Do you have a question?

I: Yes, on the oral histories that you mentioned, is that oral histories of the U.P. or the school or just general?

RM: At the time we were thinking of oral histories for the Upper Peninsula, of doing them, having a program, doing them and making them available through this office. When you talk about oral histories that way I guess it's a little out of sequence, maybe I'll wait, and just make a note and I'll talk about it later because of what happens with repeated oral histories, that's just where they go.

I: So your development around 1974, would you say that that was the beginning of the interest in establishing the archives?

RM: Ok, part of it was also connected with, this whole idea of the archives tied in with this museum committee, and then also at about that same time, I was involved with the United States Ski Hall of Fame and the operation up in Ishpeming. And at that time they were just getting, they were talking about putting together an archives of their own, and I was on, at that time they had asked me, I think around 1973, they asked me to be on the board. So I was on the board, and we were discussing, and this would go on for maybe another four years, we were, I was discussing

with them archives, how they were going to gather things, so on. And one of the, I know at one point, and this happened on September 19<sup>th</sup>, 1974, I had met with the U.S. Ski Association, I guess they had some people in down, and we talked about this archives and kind of got a feeling for what they wanted, what they were looking for, and at that time they were thinking possibly establishing an archives, ski archives, on Northern's campus, and at the time the Ski Hall of Fame had not gone through its renovation, they didn't have, they really didn't have any room for an archives, and they were looking for a place, and after I had a meeting with the U.S. Ski Association I talked to Dr. Robert Glenn who I think at that time was a provost or what would be the academic vice president now, and we talked about how Northern might get into putting together an archives. I continued working with the Ski Hall of Fame and, at this point things get a little hazy there, 1974-75. I guess what happened was I was still working with the Ski Hall of Fame, but we started getting to money and cost and so on, and this didn't, you know, there's never any money available, especially for an archives, and then I think at about the same time the Ski Hall of Fame, as these years were passing, was in the process of developing their own space at their headquarters up in Ishpeming, so it became a moot point of establishing a U.S. Ski Association archives on Northern's campus. Some of the problems that we ran into when we talked about archives was, and this happened in these early years, and it would be a recurrent problem, and you can discuss it with Dr. Maier, and that is space, and I remember at some point here, '74, '75 – I should also point out that another thing that stimulated some of this talk about archives was the bicentennial, and also checking records there I found that I was on the bicentennial committee and on the subcommittee, the transportation committee, and so that bicentennial of the Declaration of Independence stirred a lot of interest in history and I think these various ideas, the Ski Hall of Fame, the museum committee, the bicentennial, got me

thinking about getting something on campus, and in, so during those years we kind of talked about it, but there was no particular interest in the department, there was no one I could talk to, there was no one to give me really any encouragement, and, you know, you're teaching courses, you're doing other things, you're doing your research, so some of that got sidetracked. Getting back to, and I forgot about this, back in, or, kind of moving ahead in April, April 3<sup>rd</sup> 1975, I see we did have a, we did have a meeting of that museum committee that I mentioned earlier and I see nothing really was accomplished at the meeting, that was a note I put down, so this really didn't do too much at that point. But then moving along here in, later on 1975 I did meet with the Ski Hall of Fame and we did talk about, specifically talked about starting an archives, however by that time they were looking at the archives, they decided to put the archives in the, in their building up there. And after that I think the whole thing went dormant for a period of time. I do know that at some point I wrote to Dr. Glenn, sent him a memo, and I had an idea of maybe organizing a space in the university library, in the Olson Library. Librarians are not excited about an archives, librarians are interested in published books. And when you bring in paper, when you bring in articles, the articles they can deal with in a vertical file, but if you bring in paper, you bring in artifacts, you bring in tapes, they don't know where to put that stuff. Later on I found out I had a series of oral interviews that students had done. And they're quite good, they're now in the university archives, but students had done these on a variety of topics for class, and, I don't know, we had maybe two dozen interviews, and I gave them to the library. And some time passed, like maybe a year or two passed, and I went up to look for them and they had just thrown them into boxes and they were uncatalogued, they were just in a corner, so I asked them if I could have them back, they were more than delighted to return the interviews, and I got them back, and held them and I didn't keep them in very good order, I mean they were saved but we

didn't have a lot of fancy forms and files and so on, but they were safe, but what began to happen was, as you started to talk about, as I started to talk about archives to the people in the library, they were repelled by it, this was not something they wanted to deal with. However, at some point there, '76, '77, sometime around there, Dr. Glenn did come up with, I think it was about 360 dollars for some file cabinets, I think he bought two file cabinets, and he gave them to the library and this was supposed to be the start of the university archives. I should point out that the library, over the years, had saved various things related to the university, programs and different bits and pieces of university history, they had, they still have, all of the catalogs going back to year one, and so they did have a little nucleus to start an archives, and Helvy [?] Walkinen [?], who was the librarian at the time, Helvy [?] had saved, not only she had saved various bits and pieces, programs and different things, graduation programs, she had saved those, and I think the library still has them and they haven't been transferred to the archives, so they had a collection, they also had a rare book room and eventually I found in that rare book room were some materials from a famous history professor, to Lew Allen Chase, they had some of his stuff. So, the library had bits and pieces of what could become an archives, but they weren't really interested in starting it, and I wasn't really getting any support except for what Bob Glenn gave me, getting these two file cabinets, which by the way the library absorbed and that was sort of the end of it. They still have the file cabinets. And so then things kind of went dormant for a while. Then in the, I guess it was in the fall on 1977, I was still working very closely with the Ski Hall of Fame, and I remember I went up there and picked up a bunch of mail, and they would give me, they would save all the mail from publishers and various associations and whatnot. And it was my job kind of on a monthly basis then to go through all of this stuff and see if there was anything in the mail that was going to be useful to the Ski Hall of Fame. So I got this collection

of mail and I remember going through it and it was the usual junk mail that you get. However there was one letter, it was kind of a form letter, so it didn't impress me when I opened it up and all, but it was from the American Society of Archivists, I think that's the name, and they have summer programs, a weeklong program for aspiring archivists. And one of the locations was going to be at the University of California-Berkeley sometime like in mid-July, 1978. And this kind of got me thinking, and I thought, now if I went to this and part of it was paid for the U.S. Ski Association and Hall of Fame, and then also I was getting, at that time I had applied for a research grant. Well, by the first of the year, 1978, I realized I had gotten the grant, I guess at some point I applied to go to this workshop out at Berkeley, which meant the grant was paying for my trip to the West Coast, and the Ski Hall of Fame I think paid, I forget what it was, but maybe 100, 150 dollars for my entrance to go to the workshop, and so by using the grant money and by using the money from the Ski Hall of Fame, I was covered to go to this workshop. So, in the summer of 1978 then I went out to Berkeley, spent a week there, and went to this workshop and learned, you know, what you would learn in a week. So what we basically got were a lot of handouts and we got a lot of information on how-to archives, and the idea was you go home and do it. When I came back, I guess other things interfered, I really didn't put what I, you know, what I had learned really to work for the Ski Hall of Fame, I probably shouldn't say that. But, you know, there were so many things happening, I had a regular teaching schedule and there was activity up there and so on, and what, oh, by the way, I should point out that I did help the Ski Hall of Fame get their archives organized, I did get some work study people, or, not work study but some students to go up there and work for them and so on, so kind of got that going, but then I didn't \_\_\_\_\_ that last little extra bit. Meantime, by the way, they did build, I might have mentioned it earlier, they did built their archiving room, which is quite nice, they have a good

collection of, they have the Palmetto [?] Library that they got subsequently and a lot of books on skiing, it's really quite a good collection. But anyway then we come back to campus, and that is in 1978. As, you know, as the years pass, there's '78, '79, '80, the whole idea of the archives has kind of, you know, died because there was really no, I wasn't getting any help from the library, they weren't interested in the archives, their problem was there wasn't any room, where are we going to do this and so on. And I probably wasn't thinking realistically, because the archives does demand a lot of room and I thought if we had some little space, I guess my idea was that if we could get some little space going this would grow and develop and things would expand. Not too realistic because then we talk about money and growth process and where does that come from. So anyway, after that I just kind of left the little idea of the archives kind of laid away, and really didn't do anything with it after that. It literally just kind of, you know, just died, I can't, looking back at that time I can't think of any involvement. I should point out that some other things did occur in 1980. Late in 1979 the Marquette County Historical Society was looking for a director, and I applied for the position and I guess what we're getting at is I then transferred that interest in developing an archives where there wasn't really any support on campus, I was able to go through some other agency, and so I applied for the job as director of the Marquette County Historical Society late in the fall of 1979, and by December or so they made me, I asked them to make me, if they were going to make me the director, to be an interim director to see if I could balance their job with my teaching and my duties on campus. So that worked out, so between January 1<sup>st</sup> and June 1<sup>st</sup> 1980 I was the acting director of the Marquette County Historical Society. It proved too much work for me, I had two different jobs and I was running from class down there and it wasn't working out so when the end of the probationary period came I asked them to be let out of the, well I guess there wasn't really a contract or anything, I just said I



wasn't going to do be able it and they subsequently got Mr. [sounds like Frank Paul?] to act as their director. And so after that then, we're talking about 1980, and I'm still interested in local history but the whole archives thing had kind of passed away, I \_\_\_\_\_, I was enthusiastic and going for it and the thing just, you know, slipped away, and that, that was kind of the end of my active involvement in the archives, then, I don't know if you can really, you know, I'd have to honestly say I don't know what affect that my early involvement was, is nothing more, maybe, than some historical trivia or if you want the entire story you're getting this early interest because except what I'm saying I can't d\_\_\_\_\_ that Cliff Maier or Ruth Roebke-Berens or any of those people really know of that early involvement, and except for my, you know, my support that I gave to these people when they, you know, revived the idea at a later date, that's probably the only real, significant interaction from that earlier period, but I, you know, my enthusiasm and, I guess the promotion that I didn't get I gave to these people when they revived the idea in, I believe it was 1983 or so, thereabouts.

INT: [Speaks too softly to hear]

RM: So there was kind of, yeah, there was a break, but if you want the, you know, the whole story and my involvement in it was at least a part of it, and I guess you could say that that museum committee and that certain interest, the bicentennial, I'd say probably the enthusiasm and support that I did carry with me did come into this later date because a lot of times if you kind of look at things like the bicentennial and then you say, "Well, what impact did that have on the community?" and so on, and I would say, ultimately, you know, what, 7-8 years later, ultimately we did see the establishment of the archives, so there was probably some connection when we draw the conclusions.

INT: Were you specifically involved in any of the development of the archives in recent years?

RM: Back when they were, they were kind of talking about it I remember talking to Ruth about it, she kind of got the idea going, and we'd have long conversations about, you know, what direction should we go in, as I said, the things that were missing when I was talking about it earlier now I was helping out and I did tell her, I remember at one point there she was trying to decide who was going to be the archivist, we were kind of juggling the idea of the archives with the history program and who would do this and so on, and I guess Gene Jones decided not to, though he went to this workshop in Washington, he decided not to, and then there was a question about, you know, did Cliff want to do it and he was a little, I think a little apprehensive, this was something new and it was going to be similar to a career change, and so I told him at one point, I said I would, you know, if she was looking for somebody, needed somebody, I said I would do that kind of work and she said, "No, we need you in the classroom, we don't need you in the archives," and so on. So I did, in some of the early discussions there I was involved. And I would say afterwards I encouraged, you know, I was sort of a person, you know, a shoulder they could lean on in terms of talking about or getting ideas or having worked in university archives in different places for my own research I was familiar with things, and so there'd be different technical things that they would ask about, she might ask about an archives, how do they do it here, how do they do it there and so on, and I would, you know, I'd provide them with information, I think another thing I was concerned about in seeing this thing grow was not only to preserve, you know, our heritage on campus, but also that possibly the archives might be a training center for students, students that might be interested in that type of work, that they could get some kind of experience, that it would be kind of a hands-on training component to their education. The other thing that comes into this was that at about this same time, the early 1980s, and now we're coming to the end of the decade so we're doing some reminiscing here, we had

talked, Ruth had brought up this idea, this was into the archival component, had brought up the idea of developing a, I think it was a master's degree in public history, and public history gets into, you know, how you utilize history on the state level, the national level, local history, and so on. And so I think we were thinking to put together an archives, this would be kind of, this would be a public component to a public history program that would involve archives and records management and so on. Subsequently we found that we didn't have the personnel, there was no funding to hire more faculty for specifically public history, and this would be a very costly thing, other people were doing it. I think we kind of thought, well, we're not going to get into that, and then I remember we had a former student who by this time was the director of the Montana State Historical Society, Robert Archibald, and he visited campus and talked to students on careers in history, and privately we talked about a public history program and he kind of cautioned against it, he said, "It's gonna be costly, we don't have the funds," and so on and he recommended we do a minor in public history, or possibly just a course and then send students to another institution for graduate work. So we did eventually put a public history course in the catalog, but there was always that idea that maybe like Ruth would pick up historic preservation of buildings and offer that as a course, Cliff Maier would do an archival course, and so the archives is being discussed around this context of public history, of me just coming out of this idea of archives at the Ski Hall of Fame and the bicentennial, all of this stuff is kind of swirling around together, and I was, I guess in terms of all of that I was just kind of, you know, pushing them and encouraging them to do this, I was really quite excited that finally, after, you know, these various attempts at what I had tried, something was coming together. Then when they did get the archives, you know, the archives, once it got started there I offered encouragement to Cliff Maier, you know, to get the thing going and I've given him my, you know, as I go through my

files, I don't know if I can say cleaning my files out, but instead of throwing the material out I sent it up to the archives, and there were a lot of things like this letter I think, or memo I had sent to Jamrich about this earlier thing that would give you a date, this stuff has been preserved, and so a lot of the stuff that I have in my files that covers not just, you know, my correspondence, but involves some of these other projects, museum projects and whatnot, a lot of that has gone into the archives, and, well, I tried to get other faculty members to give papers and things, a lot of people are adamant, they want get them and throw them out, but that's the way we're going to preserve the record, so a student like yourself who's doing some research or something can go to the archives and find the information. So I've kind of been a big promotor of, you know, of the archives, and gave them, for instance we had 100, 150 tapes on Italian, Italian-American heritage in the Upper Peninsula so that became part of the archives, these tapes that the library didn't know what to do, and really, when I was holding them they were invisible because they were just in boxes but they weren't cataloged, I think we had lost some of the release forms, but you go up to the archives now and everything is in beautiful shape there, you know, there are hard files on them and cross-reference and I think it's, I'm really happy that is kind of the culmination of all of this work, and so I'm very happy to see that result in the archives. So I've been encouraging the, you know, the archives and promoting them, then most recently, and I don't want to sit here, you know, saying I've done everything, but one of the things I was concerned about was that in the past Cliff, when he started \_\_\_\_\_ archives, Cliff Maier had two-thirds release time, so he had two-thirds working in the archives one-third teaching, and then for some reason this was changed, and this last fall this had been going through my mind, why this has changed, because Cliff does a great deal of work, and he does more work than is expected \_\_\_\_\_ to the archives, so I was concerned about this and this was having an effect on me, I really felt that he'd

been slapped around by having this removed so we talked it over since I'm in charge of that curriculum, I saw that if we lost him in the classroom we'd lose one course, students would probably take these courses, take other courses or whatever. So what I did was to bring this to the department head's attention and we had a meeting and discussed it and the department agreed that the department wouldn't be hurt that much and it would be much more helpful to Cliff to have this extra time and then so the department voted and the dean went along with it, everybody went along with it and we got Cliff back to two-thirds release time to work in the archives and one-third for class, so, what I've tried to do is little things like that, just minor things but not really minor because Cliff was really upset by what had happened there. But, you know, right now I just kind of, sort of encourage him, and I don't think he's happy to see me anymore because I keep bringing him items and things and I think they just went through all of my papers that have that section of stuff filed and they said, "No more, because we spent the entire year working on everything you brought in," but I'll keep holding the stuff on file and process it as it needs processing.

I: Ok. Do you see any major problems in the future for the archives?

RM: I guess there could be problems, I think what's happening is Cliff is doing such a professional job in terms of preserving and cataloging and making that material available, and also I'm very happy to see that when we get different university programs and different things and there's an old picture \_\_\_\_\_ and I'm very happy to see NMU archives. So what I think is happening after a rather, you know, slow start, though all archives do that, if you talk to the people up at Tech, they had similar problems, things were very slow, they had to sort of really prove themselves, I think even today, Therese Spence [?], who by the way is a former master's student at Northern, she was here in the early '70s, then she got her archival degree at

Wayne State and went up to Tech, she's been helpful also in terms of working with Cliff and so on and she kind of helped play a certain role in terms of getting the archives going, somebody we could talk to if we had a question, so. And we... Let's see, now I'm getting sidetracked here.

I: The problems.

RM: Oh, the problems. I think what's going to happen is that if the archives are getting a lot of coverage on campus, and now I see there's a move to make the archives not just an educational component but a total component in the university, so I think what's happened is, I'm hoping what's happening is that the university, the administration, will see the archives as an important part of the university community. And that, and I think that's happening, but you have to be very careful because it's a slow process, and you can talk to any archivist on the university campuses, you know, talk to the fellow down at Michigan State and the people up at Tech and so on and you find that the administration and people don't believe that the archives are important until they're looking for something, they go to the archives, a picture, a document, something that is absolutely needed, and they find it and they're thrilled, and, but that's a slow process, you know, how often does a person look for a lost document or a lost photograph? But, it's, that's the type of thing, the other thing is that the archives has to devote itself, in terms of, you know, showing what we have, and Cliff has done that, he had a very nice display a while back on Northern during World War II. And that's another thing, they found a packet of letters, they were cleaning an office out, they cleaned out a desk, and behind the desk was a packet of letters from former students who were now in the military, World War II, who wrote back to the university, and so all of a sudden we have this, you know, and where would this stuff go? I think it was Marilyn Robert [?] found them and immediately sent them over to the archives. So, the archives, as time passes, more people will know about them and more people will send their material over, and as

that happens they'll become richer, they will be used, and I think they'll also get more money going into the archives and you'll have an expansion.

I: Do you have any other things that you wanted to comment on?

RM: No, I think that's about it.

END OF INTERVIEW