

SITES FOR NORTHERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

Russell M. Magnaghi

December 11, 2020

Today we overlook the campus with its splendid buildings, lawns and trees, beautiful throughout the year whether green with sunlight or braving a winter storm. However, after it was decided that Northern State Normal School, by the way where did the term “normal” come from? It came from a French term *école normale* from the Latin, *norma*, a rule or model, the term applied to a school training of teachers. The first French school was founded in 1834, followed by in one Massachusetts established by the educator, Horace Mann in 1839 and then Michigan State Normal School now Eastern Michigan University in 1849. Between 1899 and 1927, Northern was known as the Northern State Normal School.

But let’s get back to site selection. There were three sites discussed as possible locations for NMU. The first was promoted by Marquette pioneer founder Peter White. As early as 1875, while in the state legislature, he saw the need for a college in the Upper Peninsula. It was through his on-going efforts at Northern was established.

After it was decided that Northern would be located in Marquette the next question was where would it be located? Peter White led a group of people to donate land on the south side of Marquette at Adams and Division Streets west of South Front Street. The donation was presented to the State Board of Education but they rejected it because of discrepancies in the title - land owners who refused to give up their title.

White was not discouraged about this turn of events. For a number of years he anonymously donated \$1,000 (\$26,300 in today’s value) annually for the development of an art collection. The Peter White Hall of Science on the original campus was named after him as was the Peter White Lounge in the old University Center and the Peter White Fund which is used to fund faculty research projects. At the time of his funeral in 1908 afternoon classes were canceled and honorary pall bearers included President Kaye, Dr. Lewis Anderson and John Lautner. Descendants of the family maintain close ties with the University.

The second site which is little known was to be on the south side of Park Cemetery where Harlow Park stands at the corner of Seventh and Washington Streets. I presume that this was an advantageous location because trains bringing students to campus could stop a few blocks away. However, nothing came of this idea.

In the summer of 1899 John Longyear and his wife, Mary, along with their business partners, Frederick and Ellen Ayer gave the first twenty acres of the original Northern campus to the State Board of Education. Longyear was a land looker or surveyor, iron mogul, two-time mayor of Marquette, president of the Marquette Historical Society. Ayer on the other hand from Massachusetts was involve in the patent medicine business and a Lowell textile mill. The site was readily accepted by the Board of Education as it was free and clear. However the White people incorrectly claimed that it was too close to the mouth of the Dead River and in the summer students was fall to miasmatic fevers due to the damp ground!

The Longyears also contributed to furnishing the first building, South Hall later called Longyear Hall and Mary provided the salary for the first music teacher, Sophie Linton. Longyear and Ayer built the first dormitory on the site of St. Michael Catholic Church parking lot, which operated until 1917 and was home to President Waldo and his family as well as students.

Now for a little-known site away from campus – Longyear Forest. In 1949 at the time of the semi-centennial of our founding, Mrs. Abby Beecher Roberts, Longyear's daughter gave Northern 120 acres of land near Forestville Road for education purposes and a decade later an additional forty acres were added. The site, which includes Waldo Pond and Raspberry Lake has been used for numerous science classes and a rugged cross country ski trail. The site remains little known and I only know of the ROTC program in the past using it for forest mapping purposes and art students doing scene sketches.

Two other “forgotten” sites are the beach property from Fair Avenue north which was dedicated by President John Jamrich in July 1972 and called University Harbour Park. Now students could sit on the beach enjoying rays, while remaining on campus! Northern is the only state university with lake front property.

This concludes my presentation and I wish everyone Happy Holidays and a Healthy 2021, when I can return in person for these presentations. Thank you.