

Russell M. Magnaghi. *John X. Jamrich: The Man and the University.* Marquette, Mich.: Center for Upper Peninsula Studies, 2014. 118 pp.

By Terry S. Reynolds

John X. Jamrich was the eighth president of Northern Michigan University, in Marquette, Michigan. He held that post from 1968 to 1983, an important period in the university's history. Frankly, not many biographies of university presidents have been published. Most of those that have been published appeared because of the person's accomplishments beyond the realm of his or her university presidency. Thus any biographer of a university president faces difficulties in providing a broad context for his or her subject. This is the case with Magnaghi's biography of Jamrich.

Magnaghi's interesting account of Jamrich's early years depends heavily on Jamrich's manuscript autobiography. Of Slovak ancestry, Jamrich was born in lower Michigan but spent a portion of his childhood in Slovakia. He developed a wide range of interests and skills. He studied mathematics and physics in college, served as a meteorologist in World War II, and became a skilled pianist. His shift from mathematics towards educational administration as a graduate student was circumstantial rather than planned. An appointment as assistant dean of students at Northwestern, accepted because it came with free room and board, prompted the shift. He shifted and completed his PhD in Education in 1951. In 1957, after working in academic administration at small colleges in Iowa and Nebraska, he became assistant director of, and primary data collector for, a massive two-year study of higher education in Michigan. Magnaghi points out that this position gave Jamrich a thorough acquaintance with higher education in Michigan and important contacts across the state, including in the state legislature.

On completion of the study, Jamrich accepted a post at Michigan State University. He would remain there for more than a decade, serving as director of that university's Center for the Study of Higher Education and as Assistant and then Associate Dean of the College of Education. The central role he had played in Michigan's study of higher education made him a highly sought academic consultant during this period.

In 1968 Jamrich became president of Northern Michigan University at a time when the university was in turmoil over a faculty dismissal case. Magnaghi rightly sees Jamrich's primary contribution as guiding the university in its transition from teaching college to regional university. He organizes his account of Jamrich's years at Northern Michigan University topically rather than chronologically. Separate chapters cover new program development, interaction with faculty, athletics, building construction, and students. Jamrich himself provides a largely bulleted account of his post-retirement activities in an epilogue. Appendices provide information on Jamrich's reports and publications, professional activities, and awards.

In dealing with Jamrich's presidency, Magnaghi provides background on the political and economic context within which Jamrich operated, but other contextual materials are missing, notably comparisons with other university presidents and academic institutions during the Jamrich presidency. Thus, for example, we have no good idea how Northern's transition from

college to university compared with similar institutions or how Jamrich's response to Michigan's cuts to higher education in the early 1980s compared to those of other presidents of Michigan universities.

Magnaghi clearly admires Jamrich and appreciates what he did for Northern Michigan University. Although not an intimate acquaintance, he was perhaps too close to Jamrich and his family to provide a dispassionate and objective analysis of Jamrich's work. His account is not at all critical. Magnaghi, however, recognizes this and acknowledges at several points in the work the existence of strong opposing views of Jamrich's performance on particular matters.

Magnaghi notes in the volume's introduction that it is intended to be a "base line" biography, that is, a biography that does not claim to be comprehensive, but instead provides a base from which later scholars can work. It certainly achieves that goal. The volume, however, could have used an additional close copy edit. Too frequently one finds an awkward sentence, a missing word or letter, a quote that has no reference note, or a minor contradiction.