

Interview with Dr. Clifford Maier

Phi Alpha Theta

Location: Northern Michigan University, Marquette, Michigan.

2 December 1987

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Interviewer (I): First of all, this is a list that we have of faculty advisors. And I was wondering if that looks about right for when you were involved with the group.

Dr. Clifford Maier (CM): Yes. I talked that over with Steven, and with Dr. Magnaghi and that does look correct. I am familiar with that. That's, I think, correct.

I: Okay. I was wondering, how did you get involved with Phi Alpha Theta?

CM: Well, I was a faculty member. Actually I got involved with it at the University of Washington where I was a graduate student and they had a chapter there as well.

I: Okay.

CM: So I joined it there as a student. And then when I came to Northern here, I came in 1968 and there was no chapter here at that time. And then in 1969 I think Martin Dolan was the person that really gets credit for getting it off the ground. He thought that we should have one here and so he was the person that pushed it the most and he became the first advisor. He's still here on campus, he's up in the admissions office. He would be happy to talk to you to about some of the early days in fact he was much more involved in those early days than I was. So I just, I became a member of the local chapter then as a faculty member. I'd go to initiations and help a little bit. I really didn't get very much involved until this period back in '75.

I: Okay. Why did you get involved then? Was it just 'cause Mr. Dolan left the history department?

CM: Right. That was, I think, yes that's right exactly because I think that is the year that he left and I know he came to the first party, the first initiation after I took over. We had it over at our house and he was present there. Even though he was no longer in the history department he still came and he was welcome there because he had contributed a lot to it. Now in more recent times he's become more identified with the admission department. He doesn't really participate in the history department activities anymore but he was very active in those early days. He deserves a lot of credit for creating the interest and the enthusiasm in it. We had big initiations in those days. You know, I know when I was in charge of it, I think we had some initiations that were over 30. But he also set up a record book and if you ever could find that, that would be wonderful but this has been lost. This has been, I don't know what happened here when I turned it over there. I was on leave this year, that's when I turned it over.

I: Okay

CM: Their records just, I don't know what happened to them. They just, in that nice big green book. Now I think that that thing did survive that period but it got lost back in here somewhere.

I: Okay.

CM: It had the names of all the initiatives in it, every year. They would, we would try to get them to sign so we had their signature and everything.

I: Alright.

CM: It was like a green ledger book about this size.

I: Okay.

CM: Or maybe a little bigger than that, a little smaller. So that was a nice, nice thing that we were, that gave us a sense of continuity from one period to the next.

I: Okay, yeah.

CM: But apparently that's gone. I didn't realize it until just this year that it's been lost.

I: Okay.

CM: One of the things that I think was kind of interesting that I remember that in the early days, the Phi Alpha Theta organization has a recommended program that you follow, you know when you initiate people. Have you ever been to one of 'em? Did you go to the one over at Dr. Bern's?

I: For sure, yeah.

CM: Yeah, you were there okay. Well that was very simple and you could understand everything that's going on. But the original program was, it was a combination of philosophy and mythology, and all kinds of stuff and there were certain things about history. Like, you know that just didn't really make sense, or it wasn't even true really. I mean, here are historians that were supposed to be dedicated to learning the truth. They were in their own initiation programs, they were spouting hocus pocus kind of thing [laughter], you know, that were really mythology and pure fantasy and things like that. But initially we tried to go through that whole thing, we'd sometimes leave out parts of it but we would, we were supposed to stand around in a circle in the shape of the star that's the symbol of Phi Alpha Theta, we'd have various members stand at those various points and then you'd go through a procedure and they would say certain things at the right time. You really felt like you were getting initiated into a secret society or something like that. But a lot of people were embarrassed. Members of the history department were embarrassed when we'd go through this 'cause they usually were involved in saying some of these things and they just felt they were too far out [laughter.] So gradually it started to get, the program started to get revised and we started leaving some parts out, revising this, the wording of some parts of it. And as you learn now, it's totally revised. I think Professor Magnaghi's written, Northern's written, you know what was said there the other night. That's pretty much it, the idea that I think we really tried to follow with the Phi Alpha Theta guidelines on that program and all. So that would be interesting too, if you could get one of those old programs to just see what sorts of things that people had to pledge themselves to. And that was all there at one time too, and I don't

know if that's still over there in one of these piles or that Steve has. You know that Steve has been kind of organizing what's left, what survived.

I: Yeah.

CM: So you'll undoubtedly be going through all of those files but the person that might have one of those old programs, see I turned everything I had, I had quite a few records, I turned them all over when I quit. I thought that they would be saved. But somebody's lost them. And now Martin Dolan, he might, if you called him up, he might just happen to have one of those old programs and some of the information that were. And there's a lot of symbolism, like you're aware that, did you see that well symbol, picture of the...

I: Of the snake? Yeah.

CM: Yeah it's all over. All that stuff stands for something. There's quite a story connected to every one of those symbols. [Laughter.] That would be an interesting thing to show the way Northern has adapted its initiation wording from what it originally was to read more into who has taken the liberty to change that.

I: Okay, let's see. When you were involved, as far as sponsoring the group, did you notice any conflict or problems arising because of the history club? Was there any problems as far as, like I don't know lack of membership or something that way?

CM: I don't remember that that was a problem, but I think later on it did become a problem. Now there was a history club and there was Phi Alpha Theta and it seems like there wasn't enough students to go around for both of them or something. But the people in Phi Alpha Theta, participated, or felt they were part of that club and so they weren't real enthusiastic to become involved in the history club and the people that were, and the history club was open to then, to everyone. There wasn't enough leadership there to keep the history club going because the more committed students were, usually were in Phi Alpha Theta so. I wasn't involved when they had those problems but that might be a reason why the Phi Alpha Theta organization was kind of unhealthy in this period. Two clubs kind of competing, well maybe not competing but drawing on the same group, and that's kind of dirty. It dissipates some of the bigger than might have been probably all in, part of one club. So that, and it a problem to deal with that because not everybody who's interested in history can be part of Phi Alpha Theta so that's what's worsening. But you can say "well we'll have history club that everybody can be a part of." But these other people already part of the other club, so they're more committed to that and they won't make much of a commitment to this one.

I: Okay.

CM: So I'm not sure just how just they're dealing with that situation right now, you're probably aware of that. Do we have a history club right now? Or don't we, we don't, did we drop it?

I: I don't think it's anymore.

CM: Yeah, I think the two clubs were really hurting each other. I think it's probably good that, then you've got a Phi Alpha Theta so there's really nothing for the other history students is there?

I: Not that I know of.

CM: There's not a history club. And that's always been a problem, the better students get qualified for Phi Alpha Theta and they get into that and there's nothing for the others. So that's a problem that has been ongoing and I don't think it's been solved yet.

I: Okay. When you were involved and you had different events, I notice a letter, right here, apparently you had a presentation, I believe it was on Nazi Germany or something? I'm not sure but did you have; did you seem to have good turn outs for the things you had planned?

CM: You know this, oh I know what this was. Yeah one-time Phi Alpha Theta sponsored a talk, yeah by Mrs. Barry and with [Dr. Krites] about Nazi Germany and it was a thing that was open to the public. And, does it say in here how many people came? That was a pretty good turnout.

I: Okay.

CM: It was held over in the University Center, and we were all around, sitting around in kind of a semi-circle thing behind big tables, but there was quite a few people that went to that. I'd say that the spirit of the Phi Alpha Theta group was the best back here, in this period back here up to the first ten years or so.

I: Okay.

CM: As large as it was, a large group of students always, 15, 20, 30, 25-30 students initiated.

I: Alright.

CM: I think just the size of it had a lot to do with the fact that we had a bigger history department back then to. We had about 15 were we have 10 now. The history department was younger, I think, and a little bit more ready to commit itself. These guys are getting a little old and tired now, and it's just not putting that much into it anymore. So, yeah some of the things that we did back there were, the initiations always had a big crowd. Although the one that you were at, at Ruth's place there this fall now that's been one of the best that we've had for quite a while. Largest group in, a nice group of initiates for sometimes when we've only had 2 or 3 or something and we had how many, 10 or something?

I: I think so, yeah.

CM: So this is kind of like, this looked like old times again a little bit. The last one we were at, so that's a good sign.

I: Okay. What were your impressions as far as the importance of a group like Phi Alpha Theta on campus?

CM: Well. I think they can, they can inspire better work in history. Especially if there was, if it would really work the way it should. If there was, if Phi Alpha Theta got together occasionally

talked about a history subject, maybe discussed the papers, circulated papers and things like that. But I don't think that's ever worked that way on our campus. But still when a group of students, this one way of the better students coming to know who they are. Otherwise it's all kind of private, and the person who lives off campus they don't really get to know the other students and they don't even know who the ones are that might be interested in talking about history with them. So it's a way of them getting together, and there is some stimulation that I would say from one student to another. A little bit of pride there that they're all in the same club. It helps to develop professional attitudes towards history, which is important especially when the person is going to go on to be teacher or a scholar.

I: Oh yeah.

CM: It's a way of recognizing achievements of people and allows the stimulation to continue to achieve and keep up your record and even make it better. So it's kind of subtle but I think it's important contributing to the quality of history work that's done on the campus. And of course it's kind of interesting, good socially too, people get to know other people who have similar interests to them and become social about it as well. Make friends, lifelong friendships in some cases.

I: Do you think they try to be sort of more like a service organization in some way? Like do things for the community.

CM: I don't know, I doubt it. I might be wrong about that. But I, I'd like to see them more involved though in professional type of activities. Actually, maybe sharing their papers with each other. Their better papers at they've written for an upper class. The problem always is that nobody wants to write papers strictly for that, when they don't get credit for it, because if you spend your time writing a paper for a Phi Alpha Theta presentation and you don't get any credit for it, you might get a lower grade on the papers you're writing for other courses. So probably the only practical way to do it is to have students share papers that they've actually done for classes. But even that takes some organization and sometimes takes away from the time students have to spend on their studies, and so that's never gonna get off the ground. I would like to see a little bit more of that and I would also, I have been at Phi Alpha Theta presentations where students have presented real, not here at Northern, but from other schools where they present really top notch papers. That really takes quite a commitment on the part of the faculty to help them get a paper in shape where it's good enough to compete with other students who are really committed to it. It really requires a commitment on the part of the university as well to help finance, especially for students at Northern where they would probably have to go and present their papers downstate someplace and a lot of them don't have the money to do that, so until Northern has an institution that's ready to support student activities like that it's probably not going to go very far. But I'm telling you if a student goes to one of those kind of thing and sees the quality of papers that are presented by other students, it's really a stimulation for them to set higher goals for themselves and likely makes a better student out of them.

I: Okay, let's see. Digging through the files again, I found that...

CM: Well this is the one I was at, see now.

I: Okay.

CM: We took a student down there; I was the first one, I was an advisor at that time. And that was the year 1980. Yeah that was the year I was advising it.

I: I think there's a letter you wrote.

CM: Yeah, that was about going down to Holland, Michigan.

I: Do you think that we should try to go to more stuff like that?

CM: I think that would be excellent. This was a really, a stimulating thing. The student that I had with me, he was really taken quite aback. He thought he had a pretty good paper but when he heard these papers around town, he just looked like, we looked bad I'm telling you.

I: Yeah?

CM: But a lot of these papers are presented by private schools, small schools. Alma College you know that's pretty high priority school, and Hope College was another one and those professors work with those students. It's quite a different attitude than what you'll find in state schools. There was some from smaller liberal schools there too I think like Olivet College, the catholic school. Adrian College and Hillsdale College, these are all small schools but boy some of the topics they, you know most history students, graduates wouldn't even know what they're about. Irish Confederation, leader or follower, well that really required... oh that was our topic okay that's right that was Ken Moss, but he didn't have the thing very well under control. But there's stuff here about the Italian unification movement and I think I remember something.

I: Okay, would you...

CM: Anyways there were very, some of the topics really got into history at the level that you would, could only expect from graduate students, they were that good you know. So I'm telling you, Ken Moss that went down with me, really realized that if he ever went back to something that he'd have to do a better job. [Laughter.]

I: Would you like to see, I'm assuming that this is, the regional conferences are like yearly meetings? Right?

CM: Every two years.

I: Every two years? Would you like to see us, like, go over every two years? Or like every four years? Or?

CM: That'll be a possibility if you can go over two years, aim for every four years or something like that. The university would make a commitment to every four years, if we really did well every four years and got some recognition they might be ready to support us every two years. But they are concerned about good publicity, this could be one way of getting it. But yeah, I would like to see Northern involved in that sort of thing. And you know we do have some graduate students, MA candidates, their papers now have to go through committee of prereaders.

So they're pretty good quality papers. Usually they don't come in until the last minute before they graduate that's the problem, then it's too late to get involved in these activities.

I: Yeah.

CM: But if we had the will I think we could set it up too, so that we could get some of those better papers in early and get these people fed into these kinds of things.

I: Okay, let me see I have another paper. I was reading through this letter right here, and it's talking about changing the initiation from just in the spring to once in the fall and once in the spring. Is that started pretty much while you were sponsor?

CM: I think, what am I recommending? That we have it both in the fall and in spring?

I: If I understood the right way, you're just telling them that, I guess, that there was sort of lower turnout as far as activities go and so since the seniors who are initiated in the spring seemed to be gone the next fall and so.

CM: If we initiated them in the fall, at the end of the fall semester as well, we'd have some people there that would be interested in the, having a more active group. Yes. I remember that now, and I think that's a basic good idea and that's what we've done here. Off and on, at least we're doing it right now. We've have initiation in the fall, now students that who are a part of feel kind of part of the group at home for this next semester. Yeah, I think that's a good idea and when we first started all of the initiations were in the spring that's true. Gradually we moved over to more than one initiation during the year. I think that's a good idea.

I: Did that prove...

CM: Unless your group was so small that you have only 1 or 2 initiates then it doesn't look, it doesn't give a good impression. So, I don't think you should have initiations too often or make too much of them if you have a very small group otherwise it gives a bad impression.

I: Okay. When it was just in the spring and the seniors would graduate before the next fall, did that really hurt the group as far as like?

CM: It often did, because a lot of the people that you didn't identify them until the end of the year and then they were gone. So then you had, you didn't have much of a core there to participate in social activities and stimulate each other. You didn't try to identify the new group until the end of the next year. So I guess this is the merits of trying to identify these people early in the year, so they get to know who their colleagues are, their friends are.

I: So you remember who any of the presidents or officers were while you were sponsor?

[Laughter.]

CM: Oh boy. No, I can't remember that. But I wrote it down in that book too, but I just don't remember. I do remember a couple of people that were presidents after I, they were more recent. One of them I think was Betty Dollquist and there was a fellow by the name of John Paul, I think from Ishpeming. I think were right in those late 70s or something. There was a girl by the name of Athmos too I believe, I can't remember her first name right now either but I can see her. I

think Russ Magnaghi might be able to remember some of those more recent ones. But, well now Dolan he's good at remembering names, he might remember some of those early ones. That would be kind of nice to remember who the first president was while we're writing the history down. But gee that book would really be something nice to have.

I: When Mr. Dolan was setting up the chapter, were you involved in any way as far as helping him out trying to get stuff going?

CM: Not really any more than any other faculty member. You know we talked about it in department and we say "yeah we support this." We offered our homes, I had it over at our house two or three times I think during time Dolan was in charge. We use to participate in the program, we'd do some of those readings that I was talking about, things like that. But I don't know that we, I don't think we did much more than that, that I did more that, or anybody did much more than that. He was one person that kind of took responsibility for getting the mechanics together and getting the program set up, you know "you bring this, you bring that, you be in charge of this, and you be in charge of that" while he was advising. He carried the ball on that.

I: Okay. Can I ask you a few questions about the archives, if you don't mind? [Laughter]

CM: Okay.

I: How did that get started?

CM: Well it got started as a result of, I think, really as a result of the entrenchment that was going on the Northern in the early 80s, about '81 or '82, there were, they actually did lay off some faculty members in some departments and we were met with the possibility of us getting laid off. In fact, we actually did lose one person, John Berens who worked in the library. There was possibly another one. We got a call from the Michigan State Archives, and they were thinking at the time of developing regional archives. Rather than sending all the stuff from like public records from the courts, from the counties and so on down to Lansing, their idea was to leave them in the region in which they were created and a logical place to house them would be a public institution like universities. So they called and Berens took the call and they, we didn't have anybody trained in archival work. But they said well they thought somebody could probably do it who was a historian and went to Washington D.C and took a course, kind of a basic workshop, two or three-week workshop. I don't remember if it was three weeks now or two weeks. Just learning basics about archival work, and then this could be the beginnings of getting set up, or getting to know enough about archival work so Northern could be declared a regional depository for these other records. So at first, the thing that was interesting about this is that at the time we were in danger of losing another faculty person this possibility developed so we felt somebody should try to establish an archives here so that way we get release time to do that, and then we wouldn't have so many people in the department. Like nobody would get cut. So at first Russ Magnaghi was going to do it because he had been interested in public history and archival work really is Michigan history and UP history and he'd be the logical person to do it. My field is European history, I really don't know anything about Michigan history yet, except for little bits here and there, or UP history. But when the time actually came to go, he didn't want to get tied down, or couldn't get tied down like that. So it was a matter of someone else going, or the

whole idea falling through. So I and Ron Jones went to this workshop, but Ron Jones was also not willing to be tied down with an archival kind of thing were you have to be here a lot more and he was also in charge of student teachers.

I: Oh okay.

CM: It ended up that I, even though I'm not really the logical person, because of my training is all outside of the United States. It was either me taking it or nobody taking it. So that we first start working on the thing in the fall of '84, I believe. I just worked with one student that one term. That was, it's been a very slow process. Right now we've got a fair amount of material in here now. I understand that the training we're doing now; we have a computer in here now. We're really, we could be doing archival work on a more sophisticated level than what we have now. I'm trying to do it in the most advance way so we don't have to redo it later on. The only big problem is we have no help, and they're not willing, the administration has not been willing or ready, or felt ready to really fund it. They're funding it to the degree that they gave me 2/3rds release time for 2 years. Now this year I've had to go back to 1/3<sup>rd</sup> release time. It looks like it's going to be that way next year again, and so until we get, if I only get 1/3<sup>rd</sup> release time I really can't do a lot of work in here. If they would be able to fund a 1/2 time or full time archivist or a person who has learned the archives, wouldn't have to be a professional archivist. A secretary, a person to be a secretary and learn what's happening here and be a continuity person because right now I'm working with students, and students graduate and I have to start all over again training the techniques. You're spending half your time just telling people basic things, that just eat up the little bit of time we have and you don't get that much work done. So that's where the problem is right now, I'm the only person right now. I have a request in right now to try to at least to get a least a 1/2 time person, but again we're hearing rumblings again that there might be a financial crunch coming in as far as the state is concerned we're gonna get less money and all that stuff. So we don't know if that's gonna go through again. So, the archives, the machinery is there, the know-how is there. It's just really the help now, and if we got more help, then eventually we'd need more space too.

I: Are there any other problems besides just, not really having enough people?

CM: I think the basic thing is to have the help and enough space. But of course there's, I don't know if I want to put this on tape or not [laughter.] But the administrations attitude, they don't seem to recognize it. An archives that could be, that were supported at a certain level could be an asset to the educational process, because like yourself, you come in here and do research, and read through material. It could be an asset to the university in terms of prestige because a good archives does lend prestige to an institution academically. It's just, it's a resource center but it's got to be, it's got to get to a certain. In the beginning stages we just have little bits and pieces, but if we keep building and building eventually you'll have a lot material that, you know one part contributes to another and you've got a good source of information. It becomes like a good library then.

I: Okay.

CM: But our administration at this point doesn't seem to see it as really contributing a lot to our, I guess their priorities are other places. They feel, you know if there was enough money to go around every place or there'd probably be money for this to but you gotta, you can't fund everything. One of the things that is going to be left out at this point is the archives. [Laughter.] So that is a little bit of a problem with perception, I think at the levels where the decisions are made as to where the money goes.

I: Okay, what kind of general material have you guys collected so far?

CM: Well our policy statement was, since we knew right from the beginning we aren't gonna have a lot of money for help and space, was that first of all we should concentrate on university records. We have kind of a threefold policy at this point and we haven't really done, we haven't done anything with fulfilling the two aspects of the policy, except for one or two sets of material. The second phase calls for becoming larger and collecting material from the community, outside of the university, that are not being collected by other institutions like the Marquette Historical Society. We don't want to be running competition with them, or anything like that. But materials that are obviously of historical value but would be lost if they weren't taken by us. If other institutions can't take them in I mean. So that would be the second phase and then eventually the third phase would be to become a repository for these public records from the county, court records and things like that. We haven't taken any materials like that at all yet. We have taken in a few sets of local materials like the Finnish hall that was being torn down, and there was a lot of stuff from there that showed the kind of values that the Finns had. We could actually write a paper or two about that particular group based on those. But mainly up to now it's all been university records, minutes, reports, private papers. Papers like you would write, students that seemed to tie with the history of Northern. I always try to get a paper like that, because then another student can come in here and build on your paper.

I: Okay, last question. What do see as far as the future of the archives goes?

CM: Well, that all depends on the perceptions. If the financial situation of Northern improves somewhat and as the perceptions at the highest level of our administration seeing this as valuable, the money will eventually be here. It's really, comes down to just money. I really think that the archives ought to be funded, it's, there's really no institution in the whole UP that is funded enough to collect the material of this area. Some of the materials have already been collected by institutions downstate like the University of Michigan. What's the name of it...? I can't remember the name of the museum down there that's been coming up and getting various papers even way out of Marquette. But they're taking them down there. Most of the people down there don't realize the importance of the individual, so they just sit there when if they're kept here locally likely there'd be much more use being made of them. And so I think that Marquette is the center-point of the UP and I think it's a logically place for a lot of UP records to be stored. As soon as we get some people that think the same way, and have money I think we'll go someplace. I really thought of resigning because there's been such low support for it. But I think that if it's kept alive long enough until the right perceptions happen to come along, it'll grow into a significant institution, or department or whatever. But at the moment it doesn't look like its gonna happen till the next year or two.

I: Okay, thanks a lot.

CM: You're welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW.