

Interview with David Slick: Marquette, Michigan, November 19, 1998.

Interviewer (I)

David Slick (DS)

I: Ok Dave, we'll start out with my usual first question. Date of your birth.

DS: December 30, 1928

I: Could you tell us a little about your dad, Carl Slick, and his coming to Northern Michigan?

DS: He had gotten his bachelor's degree and his lifetime teaching certificate at Central State in lower Michigan and it was immediately after his service in World War 1 and he went from there to Michigan Tech, where he got his engineering degree. I remember him telling me that since engineering jobs were few and far between in 1924, he took a teaching job and taught in Hamtramick, in 1924 and '25 I believe. And, I'm not sure of the years. My mother and dad came back to, came to Marquette in 1926 to teach in Negaunee, he taught in Negaunee one year and then joined Northern, I believe it was in 1927 where he taught Chemistry among other things. If I'm not mistaken he moved the next year to ??? where he finished his career as a critic teacher in 1964, I think that's correct. During World War II, he taught Math and Physics to Naval cadets in officer training in top navigation.

I: On campus here?

DS: On campus here. And he taught a number of military courses and he spent one year at the University of Michigan teaching officer candidates, I believe it was, I think it was mainly Mathematics, I'm not sure what other courses, Mathematics, Navigation, and possibly some Meteorology.

I: So he left then, he left Northern for a certain time to teach at the University of Michigan?

DS: Yes.

I: Because that's, I've run it cross that statement made. The faculty left, but I've never run across any of the faculty, so he's the first one that actually left for a period of time.

DS: Right. He actually had more education than he needed in his teaching job, but he seemed to be very hungry for it, and the legacy he left us as. He could apply what he'd learned to everyday life. For instance, driving on snow. He taught me and my sisters, very early in life, the difference between starting friction and sliding friction in winter driving. And he demonstrated it, and it worked very well. How to drive in the winter without getting in trouble. Um, he graduated from Tech, if I'm not mistaken in 2 years he had his engineering degree and he wanted to do engineering work, but apparently the engineering jobs were almost non-existent in 1924. So he taught school for the rest of his career.

I: Now in the process, did he teach Rolly Thorn?

DS: Now, as I remember he did. Yes. Because I think that Rolly graduated from John D. Pierce in 1930 somewhere in that area and dad had been teaching John D. Pierce since I think 1928.

I: Ok, this is interesting connection, all these people coming together here.

DS: Yes, it is.

I: Uh, could you talk a little, tell us a little about yourself and attending, you started out going to John D. Pierce and then could you tell us something about your own experiences on campus?

DS: My experience as a child of a member of the faculty was sometimes very frustrating. But, sometimes I suppose it helped, but except I was sometimes, on the receiving end of some of the older student's unhappiness with my father's disciplinary action or something like that. It didn't cause me any real problems. But I suppose I might have been expected to do better sometimes than I did in school... because of that.

I: Now, did your father ever teach you?

DS: Yes, I had him for advanced Algebra and plain and solid Geometry, and I had to do A and B work to get a C.

I: (laughs)

DS: I may be slightly prejudiced, but he was one hell of a good teacher there. He could make you understand it. And Math was not always my strongest suit.

I: Could you tell us some of your memories of the, uh, kinda the physical plant over there at John D. Pierce and Kay Hall and how you know how the students kind of interacted the lab school students and the students in the college?

DS: The John D. Pierce students were really pretty much a part of Northern, probably from the first grade on, we had student teachers in kindergarten I remember, we had student teachers all the way through. But, we were it seems we were brought over to the auditorium in Kay Hall for musical events, speakers that came in, movies that were shown, other sorts of interesting things, music we couldn't understand, didn't appreciate very much, but we were introduced to a lot of that at a very early age and I think it helped all of us, I think it was good for all of us. But, yes from probably after maybe the beginning of first grade the John D. Pierce students were very much a part of Northern. We, took some of our classes in Northern, such as Industrial Arts, woodworking, metalworking, shop classes and that sort of thing. That was all in Northern, it was outside of the John D. Pierce physical plant. John D. Pierce was a very small school compared to anything that I see now, the only time that I can recall that we had a lot of students was, when we had an overflow of students, was when I

entered first grade. We had over forty for a short time and that was a very large class. And they dwindled down to probably, less than thirty. John D. Pierce gave you a very good High School education, it was, I think there was a lot of attention given to making sure you were learning and not simply going through the motions. It was a good school to come from.

I: Could you tell us a little about, uh, this property that we're talking about that your dad purchased and a little some, maybe some description of it or your, kinda like you were talking about how the area has changed, rather dramatically.

DS: Well the area has changed massively, it's unrecognizable. Dad put an auction on the property sometime in 1940 and when he, I don't know the right terminology, his option was the auction so he was allowed to buy the property. He brought in a number of friends and acquaintances and together they pooled their resources and purchased the property in 1940 with the intention of sub-dividing it and selling lots and most of them were intending to build new homes themselves on the property, besides selling lots. We moved out to that property out to the old farmhouse, which was old and ramshackle at the time in, I believe just before school started in 1941. September of '41 I think. And of course what happened to the, in December of '41, we had just gotten comfortable in the house, thinking we'd only be there for a year or two at the maximum. And Pearl Harbor, matter of fact I heard the radio announcement, I can still remember hearing on big old floor radio at the time that the Japanese had bombed Pearl Harbor. And immediately it was impossible to get building materials, nothing could be done about building a new house, so we began remodeling and putting in new wiring and plumbing and everything else. It was huge undertaking and it took us several years, my dad and I did most of it, whatever we could. The property fronted onto North A Street, uh, starting at the distance of about one city block off of College Avenue and extending down almost to Center Street. It was all open rolling meadows that had been pastured. It was very rich farm land, I recall that when we would dig a hole to put in clothesline posts or something like that we would dig through 8-10 inches of nice, thick, black topsoil. The real good stuff. The old buildings of the, mainly the barn and maybe one other small structure were torn down during the war for the old building materials because building materials were almost impossible to get during the war and that left the house there all alone. And it was one of only a few houses on that property, until Northern bought the property. There's one nextdoor, there was one on Collins and there was one further up that belonged to, can't think of his name, basketball coach, the property had been, let's see, the property the original owners had bought the property I think it had been part of a railroad grant and it had been plotted and the house had, the front had been built, somewhere in the 1880's, I had seen it with a date in the 1880's on the plaque mat.

I: Now could you, if we were to walk up there in that area, would it be possible for you to identify where the house had been?

DS: I think so, uh, I still have a very good mental picture of the property, the house and so forth. I'd have to try it.

I: Because there probably aren't any landmarks...

DS: No, there'd be none. I thought I had brought a, no I didn't bring it. I had one picture of the old house but I don't, I didn't bring it with me.

I: If you could just (cuts out)

I: Ok, we were talking about the house and sort of what happened, then when did your dad sell the property, what were kinda the plans I guess after the war? You said that they bought the house, or they bought the property in 1940 and then the war came.

DS: It was, it was dad's intention to within a year, if I remember, to build a new home along the side of the old one and tear the old house down, but that never materialized because World War II came along and there was no building going on for the entire period of the war. If I recall correctly, the University bought the property, Northern bought the property from dad and mother I think in '63. And they moved out, onto Lakeshore Boulevard, and I believe it was 1964 that dad retired. The last couple of years before he retired he had been teaching some courses out at KI Sawyer to airmen. It was part of the University's, one of the University's programs.

I: And then how long did he survive retirement?

DS: Well, he retired I think I said 1964, and he died in 1990, and he died in 1990. He was almost 94 years old when he died, ten days short of his birthday.

I: What were his birth and death dates?

DS: October 25, 1896 October 15, 1990 Ten days before his birthday.

I: Now could us a little about your own, you mentioned your years at Pierce School. Could you talk a little about attending Northern and the interlude with the Korean War and what happened when you came back?

DS: I had been out in California, I went out there to live with relatives and kind of got my introduction to what it was like to out on your own somewhat in 1946 after I graduated from John D. Pierce. I came back to Marquette in 1947, and attended Northern for a year I didn't know what I wanted to do so I didn't get into the right curriculum and so forth and so on so I went back out to California and I was in the Los Angeles area until I was drafted in the beginning of 1951. I spent, I took basic training at Camp Roberts, California which is about 80 miles south of San Francisco and I was home for 5 days on leave, that's when those pictures were taken, and reported to base in the San Francisco area, Pittsburg, California and went to Korea, where I spent 18 months. We returned at the beginning of January of 1953, worked until fall when I went back to Northern to get my degree in Business Administration and graduated in 1956.

I: Oh, ok. What was it, wait a minute... returning after the Korean War, could you, I haven't done any interviews with anybody about that particular experience. What was sort of returning to classes after that, you know that war experience, what was it like to return to

classes where there were other veterans from the Korean War? Did the GI bill work for you?

DS: The GI bill worked for us, and what you could say about all of us veterans it was no Joe College, rah rah rah, we're here for a degree we're gonna learn all we can we're gonna get our sheepskin, get out a job, and get on with life. That's what we all did. It was, not that we didn't have the college spirit, we weren't there for the social experience, we were there to get the education, get the diploma, get a job, and get on with our lives.

I: But around you were students who were here.

DS: Around us were students that had not been in the service, but when I was attending Northern from '53 to '56 I think my classes must have been at least 50% veterans.

I: For both World War II and

DS: Some from World War II, and mostly the Korean.

I: Mostly Korean.

DS: Right.

I: Oh, ok. And then could you tell us a little about your career in terms of after you graduated what you went in to.

DS: I bounced around trying a number of different things. I didn't know what I wanted to do with my life a great deal until after I got out of the service and I knew immediately that I wanted a career in the business world. I went to work for General Motors Acceptance Corporation in, after graduating from Northern. I spent ten years with them, I worked briefly for Fort Howard Paper Company and I ended up with (???) Corporation, which is an oil and gas company, large producer, off-shore drilling and all that sort of thing, chemicals, headquartered in Oklahoma City and I spent 15 years in their headquarters in financial management. My final responsibilities were for credit approval and collection of all accounts receivable and all the paper flow for the division of (???). And I retired in 1989, and shortly thereafter we moved back to the Upper Peninsula. We felt much more comfortable in the Upper Peninsula than in Oklahoma. But it was quite an experience, but I'm enjoying the Upper Peninsula hugely, I still am after eight years.

I: How long were you gone?

DS: Total, almost thirty years.

I: Thirty years, ok. Now obviously you've seen changes, could you comment on the changes of the Northern campus from when you were here to what you see today?

DS: (laughs) Yes, I was, I'll be blunt, I was stunned by what I saw. I did not like what I saw. I hope I don't upset anybody's feeling when I say the Cohodas Building is a block on

the map. I was very disturbed to see Longyear Hall, Kaye Hall, the Peter White Building gone, not so much John D. Pierce because that had been a troublesome structure from the start and I knew that it had had problems. But to see those old historic buildings of Northern gone, and Kaye Hall I think was the prettiest, because it had marvelous staircase atrium with all that marble and everything, it was kind of heartbreaking to see that gone. The campus is not recognizable, it's as if everything was taken away and an entire new institution was brought in building, there's nothing remaining to remind one of the old campus. There is, I don't see, I haven't seen anything that is a reminder of the old campus.

I: So there are no landmarks, things that you can set your mind and lock into in your eyes and so on.

DS: Nothing, nothing at all. Nothing.

I: Alright, that's good. Are there any, uh, any other little stories that you might want to add to the interview? About your dad, things that he might have done, problems he had with students...

DS: I've been ? with David McClintock and his brother, Walter, I ran into them downtown several months ago. And, they both stopped to say hello and they realized who I was, I recognized them, but when they realized who I was, David said, "Dad was watching us play basketball. And he called me aside after the game and said, David you could have won that game. And I asked your dad how and he said, you could have stepped on that man's foot as he was shooting the basket." (laughs) Dad played basketball in high school, he attended high school in Lake City, down near Cadillac. He graduated from there I think in 1916, matter of fact I think I have the picture at home of his, him and his teammates, the basketball team from his senior year. I hadn't thought of that in a long time.

I: Yep, ok.

DS: And yes, my dad taught both David and Walter McClintock.

I: And then you said he probably already talked Rolly Thorn.

DS: And Jerry Grunstern who is retired from Frei Chevrolet. Also, ?.

I: So he, I guess he was pretty much a fixture on Northern's seen there for many, many, many, many years.

DS: Long time, I think that his total years teaching, from the one room school house he taught in for one school year in lower Michigan at least part of a school year until he gradate..until he retired in 1964, I think he had 43 years, that's an awful long time. I think that's what it was.

I: Ok, good.