

INTERVIEW

AIDA CHALLANCIN DUTMER

(July 23, 1904 – November 26, 2006)

Aida Dutmer attended Northern Michigan University in the 1920s and worked on campus as a secretary from 1930 until 1963. At 90 years old she lives at 316 E. Magnetic Street, Marquette, Michigan. She was pleased that I asked her for her memories of Northern. Unfortunately she declined being put on tape but allowed me to take notes and left me with her recollections.

Ms Dutmer was born in Crystal Fall, Michigan on 23 July 1904. Her father's family name was Challancin and they were from Aosta, Italy but were actually French living in Piedmont. In Crystal Falls where he arrived in the 1890s he operated a grocery store until he was wiped out during the Depression of 1893. Then he opened a saloon but did not like this business because it kept him indoors and he could not pursue hunting and fishing. Eventually he opened a small store and gas pump. Her mother's family, Dalpra was from Austria but today would be in Trentino. Her mother traveled to Crystal Falls with female friends and settled there. Aida was born in Crystal Fall. She attended Northern State Normal School beginning in the fall of 1923.

Lilac: The dark violet lilac plants in Dutmer's garden are originally from the bushes which graced the front entrance of Kaye Hall. She removed some slips from the original plants and they have turned into trees. The original plants have long since been removed. She has said that I can have slips to see if these plants can be revived on campus.

Boarding Houses: Boarding houses were popular with students when I went to Northern. There was one in particular operated by a widow with children which served excellent meals. The faculty went there for their meals. Mr. Luther Gant married one of the MSU women who taught kids up here and they ate there.

Heart: Yes I remember the Heart. It was there to look at. I remember being in one of the May Day celebrations at the Heart. We wore special uniforms for the event. May Day was usually celebrated at the Heart. Miss Grey and others taught exercise in gym classes. Everyone had to take these exercise classes. Then as part of the class, the students would put on routines or gym exercises, near the Heart on May Day. This was done to celebrate the coming of spring.

Bookstore: When I first was on campus I worked in the bookstore from 1923 through 1925. The first bookstore was in the basement of Longyear Hall and when I arrived on campus it was a new idea. Just as you went into the main door you turned right and went down the stairs and there was the bookstore. It probably measured about 28 x 30 feet in size. The bookstore was a new idea. Frank Martin, who taught in Industrial Arts, was appointed by President Munson as the director of the bookstore. They ordered books and sold everything "but not much" meaning that the quantity and variety was limited. However there were all of the supplies necessary for school. Aida was a

clerk who waited on students. I worked one or two hours per day. The staff consisted of Aida, a male student and Mr. Martin. Eventually the bookstore moved over to Lee Hall.

Depression: Students attending Northern were from humble background and they were poor. The terrible days of the Depression did not help the situation. Many students lived on farms and naturally did not have much money. They would bring vegetables with them to campus. Then they would either use the vegetables in their home cooking or faculty members would purchase excess produce to help the students out. Many students commuted from Negaunee and Ishpeming.

World War II: During the war there were so few students on campus that there was little need for a dean of men on campus, however Lee held the position. Carey was in charge of the largest number of students on campus.

Presidents: John Munson was a "brilliant man" and everything moved with him. He was a kindly person. Prior to coming to Northern he taught downstate. He knew the Carey who was in teaching. Mr. Carey was in the auto business and also engaged in the lumber business. He would call in Carey, Olson and McClintock and discuss problems. Carey and Olson were good friends. McClintock was a kindly, intelligent person. He expected you to do your business. Webster Pearce had a very nice family. Some of his children went to NMU. Also he was a very kindly person. He was a family man. Henry Tape was "very kindly." Edgar L. Harden was very nice. Congenial; his wife was very beautiful. He was liked and things went well. There was little interaction between the presidents and the student body as the presidents were busy. Everything went beautifully as the leaders knew what they were doing. There were not a lot of problems. Everything operated smoothly. There were not a lot of problems.

Jobs: First I was Dean Carey's secretary and served the other half time as Miss Lydia Olson's secretary. One in the morning and the other in the afternoon. I was classified as an administrative assistant and did everything that was called for in the office. After Miss Carey retired I continued under Ann Thompson who was dean of women. She told me, "You can't retire until I retire." Aida said that would be too long. She was married here in Marquette. She was very young and very nice. In later years we were getting a lot of counselors and students acted as support staff.

Ethel Carey: She was a wonderful person to work for. In the 1930s she was involved in a terrible automobile accident. She and her mother, who was visiting, were driving up the Big Bay Road to Middle Island Point to visit Miss Spalding. Their auto was hit by a logging truck, killing her mother, and seriously injuring her. She was disfigured and out of work for something like six months. She had to go to the University of Michigan to have her mouth repaired along with her teeth. After that she did not have close-up photos taken of her because of the disfigurement. I do not remember all the rules and regulations which Miss Carey operated from. She did remember that at one time she, another student and Miss Carey sat down one afternoon to develop the rules and regulations for the female students. [It seems that this list or booklet of rules has been lost.] She would send students slips if library books were due. She would call in a student if they were late

getting back to the dorm at night or if the students had been a nuisance. Carey had a friend who was a dean at the University of Michigan and said: "The stories I hear about University of Michigan students - I don't think I could take a job like that." During this time even though the students were poor, the women wore dresses and students did not wear overalls. Cigarette smoking was not allowed on campus. She built a home on College Avenue (later owned by Hal Wright) and had a special room where Miss Spalding could work on her art and she stayed there.

Marquette, Michigan

Grace Spalding: I took her for classes. She thought I would like to be an art teacher. She spent a lot of time in Italy and attended school in Europe. She lived in Chicago and attended the University of Chicago. I have a painting by Miss Spalding in my living room, over there.

Lydia Olson: Miss Olson got students interested in library work by working in the library and then encouraging them to go into the field. Many of them got good on-the-job training. I worked for her for a period of time in the library. Miss Olson kept the students busy at all times. When things slowed down and there was not much to do she would have us go through the local newspapers, cut out articles, and paste them into scrap books overlaid one on the other. [These scrapbooks are preserved in the University Archives]. I worked on this project a "lot of times." Miss Olson was keeping these scrapbooks from the start. She was a marvelous person and maintained a wonderful library.

When I was her secretary I'd be writing letters and she'd watch me while dictating to see if I was keeping up with the dictation. She knew the job of a secretary because she had been a secretary in housing and a University of Chicago (?) graduate. Her sister....

Gilbert Brown: I liked him.

Roy Copper: was a kindly man; "he was the kindest person I knew."

Ruth Craig: I knew her well. She is still alive in the Lower Peninsula. Probably Ruth Bishop who maintained correspondence with her would know her address.

Priscilla Densmore: She was involved with John D. Pierce School. She was a very good secretary.

Ebba Eklund: a student was a "dear one." She taught school in Ishpeming for years. She worked with Miss Olson and the rest of us in the Library. She is still alive and would be a good person to interview.

Al Cameli attended MTU and probably knows people and can identify those in the photos.

[The interview ended with coffee and the promise to get me slips of the dark lilacs so that they could be re-introduced back to campus. I left Miss Dutmer's home around 5:30 p.m. after a very pleasant visit. She donated several year books to the University but had no photographs. It seems

that she and her sister took many photographs which were stored in the family home and she thought that her sister-in-law probably got rid of them years ago and did not want to ask her for fear of 'bringing back bad memories.[?]Ms Dutmer lived in Wisconsin for a time after leaving Marquette. She ended her days in Marquette residing at Norlite Nursing Center.]

Taken by Russell M. Magnaghi

Marquette, Michigan

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