

Interview with Rollin Thoren

Interviewed by Russell Magnaghi

December 1, 1995

RM: Interview with Rolly Thoren, Marquette Michigan, December 1, 1995.

RM: Okay Rollin, could we start out by asking you the date of your birth?

RT: Well May 11, 1910.

RM: Okay, could you give us a little background about your family, were they from Marquette or the Copper Country or someplace in the Upper Peninsula?

RT: Well actually my grandparents came from Sweden in two separate batches. There was the Thoren side, and the Erickson side. The Thoren side eventually ended up in Negaunee where my grandfather, Charles Thoren was a tailor and he had several sons, he had Charles Thoren, and he had Theodore Thoren, and Theodore Thoren was my dad, and there was Titus and then there was a gal, Clara. And the Erickson side, that was John Erickson. When he came from Sweden he started up in Cadillac, Michigan, where my mother was born, she was Ellen Erickson. And then they moved to Eulan [SPELLED PHONETICALLY], and from there John Erickson came to Negaunee, and started up John Erickson and Son Grocery and hay and feed and general merchandise and he had everything in that store. That store was located across the street from the Kaye Street School, which originally was the high school in Negaunee. But I knew it as a grade school from Kindergarten to sixth. Then I went to school in Negaunee, graduating from Negaunee High in the class of 1928. My oldest sister, my ___ sister Mildred graduated in '25, and my brother Ted in '26 and other brother Rudy graduated in 1930. After graduation from high school I was sick and tired of going to school so I stayed out a year and I worked out in Minnesota, came back and started at Northern in the fall of 1929. The school then was composed of Kaye Hall with Longyear Hall and Peter White Hall, the three of them connected with corridors and then there was the fourth building as I recall it was the maintenance building and had the pumps and the boilers and all of that stuff. Well I played freshman basketball, in those days freshman were not allowed to play on varsity. So I played with the freshman. The school then was on the term system, there were three terms, fall, winter, and spring, and then the summer term which is only six weeks long you went twice as long but you got the same credit for the courses. The tuition as I recall it was 16 dollars per term, only in the winter term when I played basketball I had to pay an extra dollar that was for the towel fee. Well so much for my freshman year but I should say that I commuted from Negaunee. There were about four cars from Negaunee, a couple from Ishpeming, National Mine, and Gwinn. And there was no cafeteria anywhere on the campus, so we would take our lunch and we would sit outside of Longyear Hall on Kaye Avenue and there we would have our lunch and smoke our cigarettes, and when we got through come back into the college. But there was no smoking on the campus, so as soon as your foot hit the curb away went the cigarette. The only place within any walking distance, a restaurant was on the corner of I believe it was Kaye and Fourth, it was called the College Inn, and that is where everybody would go during the times where we had student assemblies at 11 o'clock every Thursday. Well then, I had played football at Negaunee High but I got injured as a freshman, so I didn't want to play any football at Northern, but I did play three more years of basketball my sophomore year, and my junior

year I was co-captain, and my senior year I was captain of the basketball team. I graduated, not cum laude, but anyway pretty high because I managed to get the state college fellowship award to the University of Michigan which entitled me to a year to work on my master's degree. I got a M.A with, what should I call it, with an emphasis on chemistry with physics and math. Then I came back to Northern on the invitation from Don Bottum and H.D. Lee to interview for a position at John D. Pierce. And I wish I had that letter from H.D. Lee telling me exactly what I should do and how I should deport myself because it was really funny I was not allowed to be seen in any bar, and I had to be careful, but it was straight forward enough just like H. D. Lee and Don Bottum, both were that way. So okay I was interviewed and Don said okay Rolly I want you to teach, I want you to be homeroom seventh grade teacher. The kids have had women teachers all this time now and I'd like them to have a man as a teacher. So I was homeroom seventh grade teacher, and I taught seventh grade arithmetic, eighth grade arithmetic, ninth grade general science, biology in the tenth, and Don says well I want to take geography in the eighth and I said yeah but Don I don't have much of a geography experience and I have got a master's degree in chemistry and I am not teaching chemistry. Well Don was teaching chemistry, and he says okay Rolly I'll tell you what we will do you take my chemistry and I will go over and I will take Mr. Slick's either algebra or geometry and we will give Mr. Slick the geography. After all he graduated from Michigan Tech and he ought to be pretty well grounded in the study of geography, so that is the way it went. And then he said I want you also to be coach for the John D. Pierce so we can relieve Mr. Hurst who was the coach with Mr. Hedgecock, the two of them had all of the athletics of John D. Pierce and the college and that would free Mr. Hurst to have more time. So I was the coach there at John D. Pierce in basketball and track, we didn't have any football there weren't enough kids in the school we only had, I believe 120 students in the whole high school. So that's, that was my schedule for seven years and that brought us up then you see, I started in 1934 so that brought us up into war days. And at that time then Don told me, he says well I'll tell you what, I am going to relieve you of John D. Pierce coaching and give it back to Mr. Hurst, so Mr. Hurst has something to do, after all there was only 13 men at the college now, they were all in the service. So then I went back to teaching what I had been and kept that up until 1960 when John D. Pierce closed. The high school closed first, but the grade school went on for a few more years after 1960 but in 1960 when we closed I had been, let's see Mr. Hurst had the basketball team back again but I was scorer. I went with the team and scored every game for John D. Pierce, and incidentally scored all of the basketball games for Northern as well. And then went on down to Lower Michigan with Mr. Hurst and his team, his high school team, and we won the state championship in class D and I was at the score table and I said that's it, I hung up my scorebook and I never scored another game until I got to following the Bishop Baraga school because my son, Sonny, my oldest boy, was playing for Bishop Baraga, and I got to some city somewhere and there was no score keeper, so the priest says hey Rolly I know you did scoring would you score for me and I said sure, so I scored the game he gave me three dollars! And I says what's that for? He said well we always pay our scorekeeper three dollars. In all the years I scored for Northern I never got a nickel so that was quite a change. Quite a change.

RM: So to take a break, can we just go back, how did you spell that, how did you spell that, the Erickson part of your family?

RT: Yeah Erickson. E R I C K S O N.

RM: Okay. What did the, you mentioned the assemblies, what would the typical assembly consist of?

RT: Well that would be a sort of a, you see we were a teacher's college at that time. The prime function of Northern, Northern State Teacher's College was to train teachers, and Mr. Lee very often was the, because Mr. Lee was the superintendent of John D. Piece and also a part of the education department and he would hold his, he would hold his get togethers, sort of a get together on those days. Then we had other programs and Mr. Gries appeared at one of our programs I remember, and there was generally, generally had to do with college activities. And we were almost, I am not sure whether we were forced to go, I think we were, expected to be there, I think they took attendance. And those people who weren't there were reprimanded. That was also true of the faculty meetings. At the time I came, at the time I came there was a teacher, I think there was a faculty of about, between 40 and 45 I am not exactly sure, but in that neighborhood. And there were only what, 3 or 400 students at Northern. So that made quite a difference.

RM: So these assemblies then usually had programs that would enhance the future teacher's career?

RT: More or less. Right that would be it. And then we used to have, we always had critic meetings, we were called critic teachers and more or less I always had the feeling that we weren't really accepted at the same level as the college faculty. None of us to my knowledge ever got beyond the rank of assistant professor, we were all called assistant professors. I don't think anybody ever got associate, I know no one ever got full professor there as a John D. Pierce faculty member. But then we always figured that we were superior to any of the college people because after all after they had trained their students as well as they could they sent them to us for the final polishing. So we figured we were more or less, at least their equal and probably superior.

RM: Now do you remember on Northern's campus a thing called the Heart of Northern?

RT: No. Oh yes! Of course I do! That was just in front on Longyear Hall. It was a raised bit of the lawn about maybe three feet high in the shape of a heart and there were a few Norway pines on that thing. I don't know whatever happened to it, I just know I hadn't thought about it until you mentioned it.

RM: Part of it is still there.

RT: Oh that could be what they meant by the heart of the Northern. Although I never heard it spoken of.

RM: What did you hear of it?

RT: We just, we really didn't pay much attention to it.

RM: Did they have, do you remember them having any kind of activities on it or around it or anything?

RT: No, no no I don't remember that.

RM: Music concerts?

RT: No. We didn't have anything like that then. Oh another thing too that you would be interested in, is Longyear forest. Did anybody ever tell you anything about Longyear forest?

RM: No.

RT: Well Longyear forest is out on the road to Forestville and it was donated by Mrs. Roberts, who was, let's see, I wish I could think of her name, but anyway she is the gal who owned Deer Track, and she was a daughter of John M. Longyear. So she donated this tract, I don't know what it is, 40 acres or more? Out

there near Forestville and we call that the Longyear forest. And the biology department particularly used that for their field trips and did quite a number of studies of flora and fauna of Longyear forest.

RM: Oh.

RT: Now someone who can tell you more about that would be Dr. Robinson because he was here at that time. Dr. Mary was really the one in charge but he is long gone, and Dr. West, Dr. Luther West.

RM: Now was this, did this continue then, how far into the present?

RT: I don't think it lasted very long as a going concern. Probably 15 years maybe?

RM: So about what year then?

RT: 1970 no it wouldn't have been that it would be more like '60, 1960.

RM: '60 or so, and then they stopped using it?

RT: Well I don't know if they really stopped it but they never really capitalized on it. Dr. Luther West was the interested person and he retired and that took care of that.

RM: The other question, you were here, you were on campus at the beginning of, during the depression, do you remember what kind of impact the depression had on the College, the students or teachers?

RT: Well we were all in the same boat. We were all, it seemed like very poor. We carried our lunch because we couldn't afford to eat at a restaurant, in fact there was no restaurant except College Inn, and we didn't want to go to that one. But we commuted and somebody must have taken pity on us sitting out there at noontime eating our lunch because they allowed us to come in and have our lunch in the apparatus room which was in the corridor downstairs between Longyear Hall and Kaye Hall. So we would come in and have our lunch surrounded by mats and hurdles from the track team [laughter] and these horses that you work on, but we enjoyed it and it was worth our while.

RM: So this would almost be the closest you got to a student union of some sort?

RT: Yes, yes that's right. And I never did join any fraternity, my older brother Ted was a Theta, and Mr. Parker was the advisor there. I was one with the athletes and it seemed as though the athletes more or less anchored to the Tri Mu which was located on College Avenue just a block from Longyear Hall. And we used to gather there before the games.

RM: You have ventured to something kind of in passing about World War II, also what kind of an impact did World War II have on the College?

RT: Well like I say I think the enrollment got as low as 9, 9 men one year and in fact all of the men on campus at that time were 4 F, that is they were in the F category which is failing I guess and if you are class four that is after 1 2 and 3 so, and the sad part about it was Coach Hedgecock's son was a 4 F and it seemed too bad that you know, after all I wouldn't want any of my son's to be 4 F er's.

RM: So things kind of just slowed down then,

RT: Oh yes, oh yes, yes they had, but then when the warriors were through and the soldiers came back that is when we had our happy valley, our fertile valley out there. We had something like 40 units that were Quonset hut type and duplex apartments for the married GI's.

RM: And that was what, Vetsville?

RT: Yeah, you call it Vetsville?

RM: Yeah I've seen it,

RT: Well Don Bottum called it fertile valley because there was so many babies there.

RM: Now was that, where was that actually located because I've heard two different locations,

RT: Okay now I have to try and describe the present campus over that campus as I knew it. Alright as we came out of John D. Pierce and headed west, went up, I would say only 200 feet beyond the end of John D. Pierce and then we got this big open space which before that had been the football field. It's in front of what is now Lee Hall, the area just in front of Lee Hall extending to the South. Then the football field was moved from there another half a block or so farther west for a few years, then they took over down here at Memorial Field.

RM: Now where there any like Quonset huts or any type of temporary housing like that located to the east of the campus in front of West,

RT: Well now later that became faculty housing, let's see,

RM: I am thinking like along Waldo Street,

RT: Yeah there are a couple of buildings but they may have spread from the campus down there but I don't recall, other than maybe one building being down there. That was a later development, I don't remember the date on that particular.

RM: Now the, one other thing that you have been talking about up here, could you comment on Walter Gries, the things that you remember and some of the things that he did?

RT: [chuckles] Yeah. Well Walter Gries I think was an Ishpeming resident, then he went down to the prison and was warden at the state prison there and then when Dr. Tape was it Dr. Tape [SPELLED PHONETICALLY] or, yeah then he came in and he served as what do you call it, temporary, interim acting president for not too long a time. But he also he was a teacher of mathematics and I had a course from him during one summer term and in those days we had, it was sort of an unwritten law that if the professor didn't turn up within 5 minutes of the opening of the class the class automatically disappeared. And that happened one day and I was walking down the hall toward the big fire there and I met Walter Gries coming to class and he says Rolly where are you going? I says I'll tell you what Mr. Gries you weren't here after the class started five minutes, so everybody left. And that peeved him because he was a real stickler when it came to law and order and regulations.

RM: So you took him for math class in the summer?

RT: Yes, yep.

RM: Did you know did he teach at any other time?

RT: I don't think so, I don't know why he did that but,

RM: And that was about what year would you say?

RT: Oh that could have been in the early '30's. Yep, because I don't recall going to summer school after that and I had Walter and so it had to be while I was still a student and I graduated here in '33.

RM: Now the other thing, your name was on one of the programs for the freshman sophomore rush, could you talk a little about what that was all about? And what you had to do as the police?

RT: Oh dear, well I'll tell you what, well I don't know what regard my name was on the program,

RM: It was the 1929 program,

RT: But 1929 I was a freshman, and the rush had been going on for several years, it was always between the freshman and the sophomores and this particular year there was a flu epidemic and we were all inoculated, we all had shots in the arm and the doctors said no way can you engage in a rush because the rush got really rough. We used to have a great big push ball out there, push ball, I don't know maybe four and half, five feet? And put that in the middle of the field and the freshman on one end and the sophomores on the other and at a whistle they would rush for the ball. And then of course the idea was to push the push ball over the other guy's goal, but instead of pushing the ball lots of times you were just dragging on to people and hanging on to them so they couldn't push the ball. So okay instead of having the rush that year we had a track meet. And I was the high jumper and I hadn't been working for a while, stayed out of school for a year, and so the day before, a couple days before the track meet I practiced up and I was jumping my usual five and a half feet on the scissors. When I came time for the track meet for the rush day I was so stiff I couldn't get my feet off the ground. But that rush that was really something, in addition to the push ball contest we had an egg throwing contest where you took raw eggs and the freshman lined up on one side and the, no you paired up, two freshman and two sophomores and so on. And you toss the egg from you to your partner and you walk back a few feet and tossed it back to you and you kept going farther and farther away. And the one that ended up with the last whole egg was the winner and it was something because you catch that thing and you were covered in egg from head to foot. And then another activity too of the rush was the tug of war across the inlet to Shiras pool, which is a little creek. And the freshman line up on one side and the sophomores on the other and see who got pulled through the creek.

RM: So this wasn't across the Dead River?

RT: No, no, this was across the outlet to the Shiras pool, or was that the inlet,

RM: It was something to Shiras though?

RT: Oh yes, yeah. It's not there anymore. Shiras pool is still there but I don't know how they get rid of the water? Maybe it is underground piping at that time.

RM: Where was that outlet where would it line up?

RT: That would be, you know where the concession is? Up there it would be that end. It was very near to that place.

RM: And then there were some other, did they have some kind of a greased pig or grease pig grease bowl some things like that as part of the?

RT: I don't remember that.

RM: If not that particular year, other years?

RT: I just don't remember.

RM: That had another thing called a goat, a goat race or something?

RT: No I don't remember that one.

RM: And how about the women's wheelbarrow race?

RT: Well that was probably a part of the rush too.

RM: I guess you would, one would hold the legs of the other and the other would run.

RT: Yes that's right. The wheelbarrow race.

RM: Now what was sort of the reason for the rush, what was the idea behind it?

RT: Oh I just don't know, I think probably a matter of pride. It gets started and they usually get pretty bad the idea really the night before was to find the president and of the opposing class and take them out and tie them up so they couldn't show up at the rush. [Laughter] It used to get pretty rough. You get beaten up that way.

RM: Now I think I also saw, I think it is some old photograph, movies that Jack Deo has with that ball, it looks like they are tying up the opposition to get them out of the push, they had ropes or something and were tying them up,

RT: That's the way, yep. Keep the other guys from the push.

RM: So the whole idea was to take these people out so that they couldn't continue?

RT: Right.

RM: So you weren't, so what would happen part of the group would be pushing the ball and then part of the group would be taking out the opposition.

RT: Yep, yep that is what, I remember one year too when one of the fellows got to the ball just after the other team had pushed it and it was coming so fast he put his arm up and it broke his arm. So there were hazards.

RM: What was that ball made of, was it leather?

RT: It was leather, it was a big leather ball.

RM: And then filled with air?

RT: Air. Oh yeah. It was a heavy thing too. I'm sure it wasn't a rubber ball, it had to be leather.

RM: Now you said that then in 1960 they closed,

RT: John D. Pierce.

RM: John D. Pierce was closed.

RT: The high school.

RM: And then what happened to you?

RT: Well by that time I had been doing some teaching in the biology department at Northern. So when John D. Pierce closed I had the opportunity to either go with Dr. Hunt in the chemistry department or, I had my master's degree in chemistry, or with Dr. West. And by that time my chemistry had sort of, retrogressed because I was only teaching high school and I had become interested in biology. As an undergraduate I took, I took one year of I guess they called it 105 zoology from Dr. Lowe [SPELLED PHONETICALLY]. And the reason why I took it, it was on a challenge because I was a senior, I have everything that I needed accept teaching and one other,

[END OF TAPE 1 SIDE A]

[BEGIN TAPE 1 SIDE B]

RM: Okay you were saying you were looking for something to take in your senior year.

RT: Right I was looking for something to take in my senior year and one of the kids says I bet you can't get an A from Goth Lowe [SPELLED PHONETICALLY]. And I said I bet I can what does he teach? He teaches Zoology. I says alright so I signed up as a senior in a freshman course, it was all easy 105. And when I game walking into Dr. Lowe's class he said well, I forgot what he called me, Mr. President or something like that because he knew me, I didn't know him, but everybody on campus I was captain of the basketball team and all that stuff. And I says yep I have come to take your Zoology, well we were on the three term system. So okay I showed up and he very seldom called on me because he goes through the whole darn class first and if they didn't know the answer then he would call on me, so I figured what the heck I am going to get an A in this class. So at the end of the first term I got my card, C. And that old so and so I got better than that, so then the second term when it came time to get the final exam I was out in Ashland sick, I was with the basketball team and I had a cold and I didn't show up for the final. Well anyway I made it up later, he gave me a B. But I finally got my A, that was in the spring time that is all the reason why I took it. But I got so interested in biology that when Don Bottum told me I was going to teach biology in high school I thought that was great. So okay I did for 25 years teach biology until I got over to Northern and by that time by chemistry had faded and my biology was great. So when I was given the opportunity to teach either with Dr. Hunt or with Dr. Lowe I went with Dr. Lowe. And my experiences ever since have been biological rather than chemical. But I was an assistant, lab assistant for Dr. Hunt in chemistry for a couple of years and got 20 dollars a month, which was in those days that was pretty good.

RM: Now since you brought the name up could you comment on the, is there anything you would like to comment about some of the personalities, like Dr. Hunt?

RT: Well Dr. Hunt was a really great guy. And he used to pull the darndest tricks on his classes too where he would pretend to have some eye explosives and don't get these mixed up and then they would mix up and everybody would scream [laughter] he was a real jokester. Quite different from Dr. West who was a very serious very studious very serious gentleman and much loved. But then I took physics from

Pop Lewis and Pop Walter Ferguson Lewis [SPELLED PHONETICALLY] was his name and I was a senior taking physics from him and Matt Bennit [SPELLED PHONETICALLY], Dr. Matt Bennit [SPELLED PHONETICALLY] was in the same class as I was and Pop would always take the roll call and Mr. Bennit was never there and after he got to taking role call you can hear clopity clopity clop coming down the wooden hallway of Peter White Hall and I knew it was Mr. Bennit coming, and Mr. Bennit would come in and talk with ___ and say well Mr. Bennit if you are coming for tomorrow's class you're early! [Laughter] every time that Matt was late he said that same old [laughter] oh gosh. He was quite a guy. Now other people that I, oh golly we played a lot of volleyball in those days. The faculty had a real great volleyball team and we used to play over in John D. Pierce and some of those who were always there, was Don Bottum of course he was always there. Earl Ferns [SPELLED PHONETICALLY] was there, Oscar Matteson was there, Del Garby [SPELLED PHONETICALLY] with physics was there, Oscar Matteson [SPELLED PHONETICALLY] who was the bookstore was always there, and I was always there. And Clucus [SPELLED PHONETICALLY] that's right Clucus [SPELLED PHONETICALLY] and Forest Roberts and we would play every Saturday, every Saturday morning during the wintertime. And one year we had this terrible terrible snowstorm and Don Bottum called me up and he says Rolly how would you like to play volleyball this morning, I says I think that will be great, he said well I called you first because you live farthest away and if you say you'll come, the rest of them will come. That was in 1938, the big storm that we had and that storm was so big that the wind came right from the north and it swept in between the houses and swept the snow so it piled up in front of the houses you know on the south side, and the snow was so deep that it went up to the top of the lamppost and buried all but the light on top. And then it it'd be down to nothing, so when I walked home I lived way over on Ohio Street and I had to walk those four or five blocks across where the wind had blown, I go up like this and I get up to the top and I run down here and cross this place and try to get up the next to the next hill. I barely made it home, the snow was that deep. But then the, the college boys would always challenge the faculty volleyball team, they never beat us we were that good. Of course playing, year in and year out you get to the play.

RM: So the students didn't do a lot of practicing?

RT: No no volleyball wasn't really much of a game in those days. Now it is. My goodness with our girls the way they are doing you know? Yep that was a lot of fun.

RM: Some other characters on campus, what can you say about Mrs. Carey?

RT: Oh, well, yes, she was an _____. I shouldn't have prefaced that remark by saying that I had an eighth grade student by the name of Charles Conden Carpender [SPELLED PHONETICALLY], who is now a doctor Charles Conden Carpender [SPELLED PHONETICALLY] from Normand, Oklahoma world authority on reptiles and he loved reptiles and I was his teacher in eighth grade and he said Mr. Thorin do you mind if I bring my lizards over and my snakes because my mom doesn't want them in my house. And I said sure but don't bring that rattle snake over, I said you can bring the rest of your snakes. So I had a hognose snake in it and a king snake and a couple of frilled lizards that he had at home and brought them over, and the occasionally one of those darn snakes would get out and I would come to class and open up my lab in the morning and I would go in there and all I would here is EEMEEEE shriek from across the hall that was Mrs. Payne, and I knew that one of my snakes had gotten out and had got over to her room that was across from my lab so I would go over and get it. Well okay there was a social evening, we had a social evening every Friday night that the faculty had took turns being chaperones for. And I happen to mention to a group of people there that one of my snakes had gotten out. And Mrs. Carey was there

and she screamed bloody murder and she went tearing out of there, went home. And I see John D. Pierce and Kaye Hall where the events were all connected, they were all one long corridor there. And did I catch hell. You know because my snake had gotten out and Mrs. Carey had hit the ceiling and he she told Dr., Mr. Munson whoever it was and I caught the devil. And I says alright you didn't give me enough money to get me any cages, I had to build my own cages and if you want me to teach biology out of book I'll do it, I will get rid of all of my animals. So they bought me a couple of cages and another aquarium. But that was Mrs. Carey and she, she was a straight laced gal, she didn't want the girls to wear red because that would enflame the boys you know. But she was a really great lady. And I remember years later when we were having Elder Hostle [SPELLED PHONETICALLY] and some people came from Arizona wherever it was and we stayed in Carey Hall and he met Mrs. Carey and he said that is the first time I ever met the person for whom the building is named [laughter]. And then she always had a rose ceremony, where I forgotten exactly what it was but it was honoring the senior girls and that crazy Dr. Hunt, and I forget who else, Mr. Branner, Mr. Branner [SPELLED PHONETICALLY] and Dr. Hunt went kind of crashed into this party for all of the girls and did all kinds of crazy dances you know just to aggravate Mrs. Carey because they didn't think much of the rose ceremony. But she was a fine person.

RM: Now did she also monitor the smoking on campus?

RT: I don't know but she undoubtedly did. There was no smoking anywhere on the campus except Mr. Hurst and I used to sneak down into the tunnel every once and a while because there were tunnels that connected the buildings, heating tunnels and we would go down there for a smoke, there was nobody anywhere.

RM: Now what do you remember about some of the presidents, you were here when Munson was here?

RT: Yeah Munson was here all the time that I was, and then the same year that, let's see I went down to Michigan, either he left that year which would have been 1933-34 or the year before and Webster Pierce came then. And when I came as a new teacher I was asked to go and talk to Dr. Pierce and I went over and he says well Rolly congratulations we are sure glad to have you here but don't stay too long. I stayed 41 years [laughter] don't stay too long, he figured I should do better somewhere else. I never did get my doctor's degree and that wasn't very good, I should have gotten it but by the time I got around think about it I had a couple of kids I was trying to support and never really paid us very much I couldn't take a year off to go to school so I never got it.

RM: Now do you remember much about, sort of the personalities of these individuals like Munson, Pierce, Tape?

RT: Well, Pierce was a very gentlemanly person. I didn't really get along too well with Dr. Tape because I, I was working in the mines up in Crystal Falls one summer and I was making a good wage, but I got time and a half for Saturday and double time for Sunday. I was working in the lab analyzing iron samples, so it came time for Northern to open and on a Saturday was the first meeting and I didn't make it because I wanted my time and half, my double time so I showed up on Monday. And a week or so later I got a message to come over and see Dr. Tape and so I did and Dr. Tape was there and Mr. Bottum was there and Mr. Thoren you didn't come to my first faculty meeting. And I says yes I realize that I had this job in Crystal Falls and I had to, it was a big load of iron that I had to get out and I just didn't make it. He says well I should fire you, you know just like that, but he didn't and when I left I told Don Bottum I says,

dammit I have heard that bloody old speech of his so many times and he never says anything different it is always Northern marches on, it is not worth a damn and he is no speaker anyway. But [laughter] that didn't set very well you see in those days Ruth Bishop [SPELLED PHONETICALLY] was the secretary and she took the attendance and make sure that all the faculty were there for their first faculty meeting because that was the tip off speech see and I didn't go. So we never really hit it off too well because he knew how I felt about him.

RM: Oh this thing you said to Don Bottum he heard?

RT: No he didn't hear that.

RM: Oh he didn't hear that?

RT: He didn't hear that, no, but he must have known how I felt.

RM: Now were these, these presidents was it your feeling, were they sort of, they had total control over hiring and firing,

RT: Right, well I presume you would, they had the last word the final word. But I know that I got the job there at John D. Pierce because of Don Bottum because he was my critic teacher when I was doing my students teaching, I taught chemistry for Don Bottom and I also taught mathematics for Mr. Slate [SPELLED PHONETICALLY]. But I know very well, it was so funny when I talked to Don he, first day he was teaching and Mrs. Densbar [SPELLED PHONETICALLY] she was the secretary, knocked on the door and Mr. Bottum went out and came back into me he says, well Rolly I've got to go, take over. This is the first day that I had been there! So I took over. And he never came back, he never came back to view my teaching, the whole darn term that I was there until the last day that I was giving the final exam and practically everybody had finished the exam, time wasn't anywhere near up yet, everybody had finished and they were all sitting there quietly and I was sitting there and Don Bottum walked in and he sized it up immediately and know that everybody was through and he said well Rolly you must have done a good job teaching chemistry. If anybody can do that [laughter]. So when I left that spring to go to the University of Michigan because that is what it had all come to and then he says well I want to talk to you when you come back so that is how I know that. But the rest of the presidents we were, well we were a little different, apart, the training school we didn't really think of the president as the big boss, we thought of Don Bottum and H.D. Lee, they were the people to whom we were accountable. So we never really got to know the presidents.

RM: So even though the buildings were relatively close, you didn't have that much interaction with what was going on down the corridor?

RT: No, no, no and then too as commuters, in my college days, as commuters we really almost didn't feel very close to the college activities because as soon as school was out the car was waiting and we had our people we have to take home and whatnot. And one winter, Marquette was on one time, and the rest of the county for some reason was on the other time. So we would get up in Negaunee and leave Negaunee at 8, get down to Marquette at 7:30 for an 8 o'clock class, but then we would leave at 4 o'clock to go home, we would get home at 5:30 so half an hour made a difference. And then one year coach Hedgecock changed the basketball practice from after school to after supper, and here my car's already gone for home so I was left in Marquette, so I walked from Northern down to Washington Street

to catch a ride, find a ride home to Negaunee because my car had gone. So that wasn't very good. But I survived.

[PHONE RINGING]

RM: I am kind of curious when you were here in the early days where some of the places were, what was the, do you remember what was the bookstore like and where it was located?

RT: Oh definitely. The bookstore was in Longyear Hall, in the basement of Longyear Hall. As you came in, up the stairs and hung let's see, yeah, oh that's right you hung a right and went down past Clucus's [SPELLED PHONETICALLY] office which was here and hang a left and downstairs and the bookstore was under the first room of Longyear Hall on the, that would be the Northwest,

RM: North side,

RT: No Longyear Hall ran east and west, yeah, it would be on the North side down in the basement. The libraries, there were two libraries, there was the main library which was in Kay Hall, and as you came up the steps you got a picture here of Kaye Hall? Well maybe not, but anyway, as you came up the steps there was a landing halfway up and you continued on up and into Kaye Hall and you head to the right of the main staircase that went up and around the balconies that had up there, it was on the right hand side and that was the main library, but then there was a history geography library and that was on the second floor of Longyear Hall, and when it came time for a new library Dr. Tape called me in and he says Rolly, see at that time I was kind of official photographer for Northern, I was never appointed that I was never paid as a photographer but I took all the pictures. In fact I took all of the yearbook pictures all of the placement pictures and he says Rolly I have an assignment for you I want you to take photographs of our libraries in the very worst position that you possibly can because we need a new library. So I took my trusty speed glass, I photographed all of the dingy old places I could find in both libraries and I am not saying that Lydia Olson Library came as a result of that but I did what he asked me to do. And Lydia Olson was a real nice lady too, she was in charge of the library as well as all of the books, the books at John D. Pierce, and she knew where every book was, boy, and you just didn't keep any books out, she was tough.

RM: Now you said you took the photographs for the University kind of in an unofficial capacity, what has happened to all the photographs?

RT: I gave them to you, or somebody, I gave all of the negatives that I had of Northern to somebody. I don't know, you see when I moved from 431 East Ridge, when I sold my home and moved into a mobile home we didn't have any room for anything so I took all of my negatives, all the ones except the ones of marked Thorin, the ones marked Northern and John D. Pierce and I destroyed all my negatives except those saved. And I gave them, I don't remember Russ whether it was you or somebody else that I know that I turned all my negatives in, so they are somewhere.

RM: So this would have been about what year?

RT: About '76. '75, '76, '77. When did you come?

RM: I came in '69 but I wasn't involved in any of this, the,

RT: Where, who would know? Golly I can't think, I turned them in, I think probably audio visual, I bet you audio visual would know. Manning? Try Manning?

RM: Bob Seaman [SPELLED PHONETICALLY], Bob Manning [SPELLED PHONETICALLY]? And then you also took these ocean pictures?

RT: Yeah try Manning, yeah I took the, they had a Path E 16 mm movie camera, and Dr. Halverson had been the photographer and when I came he says Rolly you are now the official photographer. And he handed me this path A camera, and it was a Turret model and it had one long lens, it had a 50 mm lens and then it had a wide angle, and I had to be careful when I was using the wide angle, that I took, take the telephoto lens off because otherwise it would show up in the view. So took the pictures for Ed Money, he was the coach then, and I would sit up way up high in the bleachers, or was there a room there? Yeah, yeah I think there was a kind of a, yeah there was a room for the scorers and announcer and whatnot and I was up there and coach told me to take just the offensive parts of the game or like say on a kickoff where the ball would go over he wanted me to make sure I took those. And the films were, they weren't magazine type, they were the round type and I would usually use two per game, and son of a gun I was getting near the end of the first reel and I didn't know whether to continue shooting this piece or then we would get down to a touchdown and then when I would run out of film, and before I could get the thing reloaded again the ball had gone over. But that was a lot of fun.

RM: Now what period of time were you doing this about,

RT: Well whenever Ed Money was here. I don't know how we would figure that out. But it must have been in the '40s

RM: Yeah. Because in the '50's Presacka [SPELLED PHONETICALLY].

RT: oh okay, I never worked with Presacka [SPELLED PHONETICALLY].

RM: Alright the other thing here that I want to ask you about, do you remember the north gate on the corner of Waldo and Presque Isle, there was a gate down there.

RT: Waldo and Presque Isle, yes oh yes sure I remember but I don't remember ever using it.

RM: It was kind of on the extreme end of the,

RT: It was! On the end of the bog. Yep, it goes right down from Olson Library.

RM: Up until about last year, or a year before they still had the stairs that went down but that is long gone, that gate. Do you know, do you remember, do you remember people talking about another faculty member that was here, Luallen Jace [SPELLED PHONETICALLY]?

RT: Oh yes of course I never took any courses from him, but he was teaching when I was a student and he was blind and he used to have the class roles all on cards, each person would have a separate card and he would come through the thing and then he would read the braille of the names and then he would get you up and quiz you and quiz you and then when you got all through he would make a mark, he would but the mark A B C D or F on the card and would but it on the bottom of the deck. So you kind of knew when you were coming up but then you weren't exactly sure because he would occasionally shuffle the deck. But he was quite a, quite a well-known person in his field, history.

RM: Now how would you kind of sum up Northern, from the time you first became associated with it as a student to what you see here now as an emeritus faculty and returning to the campus?

RT: Well, our faculty was always considered really top notch, and when I came it was very excellent. As years went on and kept getting more and more people in I sort of lost track. Being over there in John D. Peirce like I say we were somewhat isolated because we had our own kids to take care of and the student teachers. But I don't know, I wouldn't really, I wouldn't really want to give someone an opinion of quality of student, I just wouldn't.

RM: I was thinking more in terms of just the physical outlay and sort of the way the institution has expanded.

RT: Oh yeah well boy it sure has expanded. I remember there was a group of us, ten of us, who had bought the farm from these ladies beyond East Street, where the campus now is, and what we were trying to do is subdivide and sell, sell plots. But the city wouldn't go along with it because this was out in the boonies, this was beyond their pipes and their lines and everything else the university, the college was the only thing out here, so they wouldn't go on with it. Then the high school, Marquette public school wanted a part of it, so we sold ten acres of it to, is it Sandy Knoll,

RM: Whitman.

RT: Whitman, Whitman School, they were on 10 acres, the rest of it, we sold as a block, except for a couple of lots that each of us kept for ourselves, and that all took place oh gosh, that was real early,

[END OF TAPE 1 SIDE B]

[BEGIN TAPE 2 SIDE A]

RM: Thoren interview tape two. Okay you were,

RT: Right, so we were going to build out there and Betty and I had the promontory that looks out over the whole property we were going build, but at that time you couldn't buy a stick of lumber, you couldn't get any cement concrete anything, everything was war, because of the war. So we gave up, we gave up on the idea, I could have, I could have built there but you couldn't buy any building material but my father in law said hey Rolly I can get you an old mine building down in Gwinn, brick, you knock that apart and you could have all the bricks. Well I would have done it except I had no car, I had no truck, couldn't get any gasoline, it was all on coupons you know, so I gave up. So then we bought in town, and then we sold that, sold that, and sold that and we ended up at 431 East Ridge. And from there we took the mobile home.

RM: Now was the property you were talking about, you said you were on a hill over there, would that be where like, well the property that kind of overlooks the West Science and Jamrich Hall, just kind of a little hill over there by Whitman School is that over there?

RT: Yes it is between Whitman and the industrial arts building.

RM: In there?

RT: Yeah.

RM: Which then eventually Northern picked up.

RT: That's right.

RM: So you sold, your group sold the property,

RT: To Northern.

RM: Sold it to Northern, I see.

RT: Right, and then we divided it up 11 ways because there were ten of us and we had 11 shares. And so I took my money and bought the house over on 431 East Ridge.

RM: Now what was that property when you bought it, what was that property being used?

RT: And abandoned farm. It had been a farm, but these ladies just let it close. It was 40 acres.

RM: So that would have been all of the property now to the, now probably by,

RT: Clear down all the way to Wright Street,

RM: Lincoln to Wright to,

RT: Well 40 acres it's a quarter of a mile on each side you see,

RM: So it has got basically the campus where West Science is today.

RT: Right, oh yes.

RM: Everything we can look at to the south,

RT: Right.

RM: And they were what, a dairy farm?

RT: No, no just, I don't know what they farm at, but the heck of it is we only paid 5,000 dollars for that 40 acres, I'd have bought it myself except we didn't have 5,000 dollars. My 500 dollar share is what it was, one tenth of the 5,000, I had to borrow my life insurance to go through. But Mr. Slick was in it, and Mr. Maculum [SPELLED PHONETICALLY], and I don't know if you ever knew Harold Swanson, Swanson the Swanson funeral guy. The Van Zellen's [SPELLED PHONETICALLY], Dr. Van Zellen Mrs. Von Zellan [SPELLED PHONETICALLY], we were quite the group.

RM: So there were how many in it, ten?

RT: Ten, I think there were 9 people and the Von Zellan's [SPELLED PHONETICALLY] had two shares. Yep that was fun.

RM: And were there any sort of humorous interesting things that happened on camps while you were here, you kind of mentioned some of them. Outrageous occurrences with students?

RT: Outrageous? No, no. We only had one bad experience, that was the time that we were getting some, was it the black basketball team that came here? And they staged a sit down in the gym, did you ever hear that one?

RM: Oh yeah. I think that was just about when I first got here.

RT: Could be.

RM: But before that time when you were here in those years the '30's and '40's the place was pretty quiet and reserved?

RT: Oh definitely. Yeah. There was a greenhouse, did you ever know the greenhouse on the end of Peter White Hall?

RM: I guess I have seen pictures of it.

RT: Yeah and Mr. Butler [SPELLED PHONETICALLY] was in charge of that and he had a banana tree growing in there and another palm tree. But there never was much use made of it.

RM: Now did they have a lot of, in the Peter White Science Hall there, did they have a lot of, do you remember them having a lot of like stuffed, stuffed animals for class use?

RT: The only stuffed animals that I recall were the birds, stuffed birds. And they had a pretty decent collection. I took over, see after, why can't I think of the name, in biology, was a war veteran, and he had been gassed and typhoided and he was in pretty bad shape and he called me up one summer and says Rolly would you take over my Ornithology class? I can't make it this year, and I says god I don't know anything about Ornithology, he says yeah but you are the best damn bird watcher around, why done you start that way? So I did and that was in '47. And we had a group of, well there was quite a collection of birds and then I also got a collection from a fella up in Witch Lake, an artist, but other than that now of course they have a wolf or a fox or something over there,

RM: A few other things, we saved one of the, there was some kind of a hawk that somebody saved, I guess all that stuff went out,

RT: Oh wait a minute now, it was a passenger pigeon wasn't it?

RM: There might have been one there but we have one upstairs the dean has it in his display case we have some kind of a hawk, a Mexican hawk or something.

RT: Oh I didn't know about that one. That must have come in recently then.

RM: No no this was all, this was saved by Rudy Krusog [SPELLED PHONETICALLY], and Rudy was wandering around the Peter White Building and ran into an attic or something an ran into and attic or something and found all these birds and old equipment and whatnot and he took one of the birds and a flattened alligator which he still has in his office and I guess when they tore the building down they, whatever was in there, went with the building. They tore everything out, and those were the only things that have kind of survived, the alligator and the hawk from that collection.

RT: Yeah well when they were tearing Peter White down, I went over there one day and I waked into the chemistry lab where I had been a student and a student assistant, and I said hey what are you doing with these tables, well we got to throw them all out, I said well hey how about saving one for me? He says sure, and I forgot about it. And he called me up sometime later and said, Mr. Thoren, it was one of the janitors, Mr. Thoren I have got that table you wanted. See I was teaching adult photography, he said come and get it I put it out in the hall so I knew that something was kind of haywire so I went and talked to Mr. Gant and I said the janitors have saved a table for me, can I take it? He said no way that is state property and I can't sell it, I can't give it away. I said ok. So okay when they tore down Peter White Hall

they moved these tables out, they were oh from here to the wall anyway and solid oak, they were standing like this you know, and a drain down the middle, then another set over here would have been just perfect for me. They took it out and they parked it by the maintenance building there, my lab was up here and I could look out, and I could see my tables, I could see them falling apart and the wood would warp and get wet and spilt. I thought what a shame, those beautiful tables and then years later when Dewey, Dr. Dewey [SPELLED PHONETICALLY] came to be principle over there at John D. Pierce, I was the stock room man over there and he says we should get rid, I told him I said we've got all of these old books in there from 1900 nobody ever wants them what do we do with them? He says well, you can't destroy them, I says alright, you get a truck and you get it over here and we load all of the bloody books in that truck and you ship it to Lansing. Which we did! [Laughter].

RM: Really?

RT: Couldn't give them away, he couldn't sell them, couldn't burn them, I says Lansing wants them, send them. So it is kind of crazy. But all of those tables, those beautiful chemistry lab tables, I had a chemistry lab in my basement, a photographic lab in the basement, it would have been just perfect for me, but couldn't get it.

RM: Yeah they are kind of doing something like that with all these computer, they gave us all new computers and then the old ones are sitting literally in a pile in, central receiving and they are allegedly going to auction them off in June because there are people on campus that could use them, students could use them.

RT: Oh sure!

RM: Because they are, I mean some of these computers are really high powered like this one right there, very good use for but, but you could also recycle for the school kids, send them to these schools.

RT: Everybody needs them, my son David asked me the other day he said Dad I should get me a computer I said, I'm not going to get a computer for you, he says he could sure use it. I'll mention that to him.

RM: Look for about June or so there, there could be an announcement in the paper they are going to have an auction of theses, all these computers, about a hundred and twenty three. Like the ones that I have I was going to get rid of and I thought wait a minute we could use them in the museum.

RT: Oh sure!

RM: So I found of where it was located and we transferred them so we have two of them in the two museum areas, storage areas we can use them, otherwise no one seems to want them. I checked and it was almost like you were causing trouble.

RT: Yeah.

RM: So after a few question I just stopped asking them,

RT: Well that's too bad because there is so much good stuff. We went out to K.I. Sawyer when they were having their auction and so on, they had billions of things like that but I didn't know if they were working and I didn't know how to put them together that kind of a deal you know, so you have to watch out.

RM: Okay well that kind of answers my questions. Anything else you want, that I didn't ask, that you want to toss in about Northern or something?

RT: Well no that more or less covers the story. I did work for Dr. Halverson too, when he came he called me up one day and he said hey Rolly I need somebody to go over my rock collection and I see that you had rocks and minerals would you do it? And I said boy I don't know anything about rocks and minerals I just had one course you know, but he had that big collection I don't know whatever happened to it.

RM: Now what was the,

RT: Geography.

RM: Was it in a large container or boxes?

RT: As I recall it was in boxes about this square with compartments and the whole thing was about as big as that microphone and I said oh Dr. I would like to help you but I don't know too much about that. Anyway I am colorblind I couldn't tell pink from purple and that doesn't help when you are trying to analyze, trying to identify.

RM: Now do you remember, speaking of rock collectors, like was there something called a Longyear collection of geological specimens or something?

RT: I don't know but there could have been. Kaufman, there is a Kaufman collection of lots of dollars, _____ Collection but I don't know about. Unless see that was in Peter White Hall, that collection, it may have been moved I don't really know.

RM: Yeah because there is one floating around that is referred to as the Peter White Collection, it is kind of in a large case. A piece of scientific academic furniture and it's around. I've seen it and I have just kind of wondered what the history of it was, it was called the Longyear collection. A lot of it consist of, maybe this was it, rocks and specimens that came from,

RT: I bet they were iron ore drillings. Cylinders about that big.

RM: Yea some of them and the some were just pieces of rock from a mine site or something, and it is all marked by its location or whatnot I don't know what the status is of that.

RT: Now was I trying to think of anything more, see we were all commuters, and

RM: Now did anyone when you all came down by car did anyone come by train?

RT: No.

RM: No.

RT: Although they were still operating trains but when we used to go on our basketball trips, Hedegcock would drive one care and I very often drove the other car because I would come down form Negaunee. And we never had a bus like that to transport us. It was always private cars. And Hedegcock he was quite a driver, and quite a talker and he would be driving and he would start to talk to the guy next to him, and then he always had to look you in the eye you know, so we were driving along and he would go slower and slower and slower and finally someone, Hedegcock wake up we are not going to get to Ashland on time [laughter]. And he would say jiggers! And he would trample on the accelerator and go

like mad again and then start to talk again and slow down. Oh quite a guy. Well I see you have got yourself a CD business up there and player and what not, tape?

RM: Yeah and Tao,

RT: Yeah and Tao was in my class.

RM: Oh yeah,

RT: John Lockner [SPELLED PHONETICALLY], the fellow from California, was an excellent architect. Did you ever see his movie on his stuff? Oh it is really something.

RM: Something he produced or?

RT: It was something that produced featuring him, featuring his various architectural, his buildings hanging on mountains and all kinds of, you know, earnest stuff. But he passed away this past summer, he was one of my good friends from classes. Class of '33! And I do have the John D. Pierce school bell.

RM: Oh really!

RT: Yep, yeah it was presented to me when I retired. It ___ black, this big you know, it's got the bell here, nice brass sign saying presented professor Rollin K. E. Thoren on the occasion of his retirement after 41 years of dedicated service.

RM: Quite a career.

RT: Yeah well, I see you're a bird watcher you got a mobile eh?

RM: Yeah that's about as far as I get watching,

[END OF INTERVIEW]