

Mary Ann Mongan Oral History Interview Transcript

MAM: Mary Ann Mongan – narrator

JMM: Jan Mueller – interviewer

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Location of Interview – Residence of Mary Ann Mongan
3729 Broadview
Cincinnati, Ohio 45208

JMM: The following is an unrehearsed taped interview with Mary Ann Mongan, the retired director of the Kenton County Public Library. The interview is conducted by Jan Mueller for the Kenton County Public Library at Ms. Mongan's residence—at—in Hyde Park on Saturday, February the 7th, at approximately 10:07 a.m.

JMM: First off, I just want to thank you again for allow me to visit you, and to actually meet you, working in the library as I do, and seeing your picture and knowing what I know about you and your long history of...of library experience as a library administrator and as a director...it's really an honor for me, as a soon to be librarian, to meet someone that had such a distinguished career. So, thank you for allowing me to come and talk to you.

MAM: As I said before, thank you for giving me a chance to talk about the library...I don't get much chance to talk about it anymore...

JMM: It's a great place...for—and you have much to do with that [laughs], which is, which is fantastic...It's something you must be very proud of...probably—did you...did you every think when you started your career as a librarian that at some point, one of these places would be named for you?

MAM: No, that would never have occurred to me...In fact, it didn't occur to me when they were doing it...I thought, this is strange—what are they doing here? [smiles]

JMM: [laughs] But, I think...I think it...it's quite an honor...it says quiet a bit about the esteem that not only the library staff but also the community and everyone that's been involved had for you and for your years of service...that must mean quite a lot.

MAM: I was certainly delighted with it, but it just...was such a surprise...

JMM: You didn't expect it [laughs] Are you more of a humble individual...you...

MAM: I did what my job was...

JMM: [laughs] I think you went above...

MAM: I didn't expect that you got anything special outside of the paycheck every once a month, or whatever it was. And it was once a month at some point...

JMM: That's...that's difficult...I worked at place where it was once a month and it was a small library and it's quite a...quite a difference from what we're used to with even, bi...bi-monthly paychecks...or weekly...So, that's quite a stretch [laughs]. It's difficult for budgeting purposes, sometimes...I'm going to check the recorders to make sure they're doing what they're supposed to be doing...good. [pause to check that both recorders are recording]

JMM: And...I...one of the things I noticed when I started to look into information...you know, I like to do background information, and there's a lot of information on the library...and there's information about you at different points...of course, mentioned in the newspapers and things like that...but, there's not a lot about your background as far as your...your family...and, again, if any...if any of the questions I would bring up, for any reason, if you would not feel comfortable answering them...or, for instance, what I typically do when I begin is...is ask someone their...their date of birth...and, so I don't...you know, sometimes people don't want to answer that...and I don't...I don't...

MAM: I don't mind giving that alright...in another two weeks I'm going to turn 80...and you get...get to a point where you forget that you don't really...[laughter in background—narrator and _____] ... You don't have to be shy about it anymore.

JMM: [laughs] Well, that's fantastic! Two more weeks? That's very exciting! From today?

MAM: Yeah...well, actually, a week from today...

JMM: A week from today...

MAM: Ten days from today...seventeenth...

JMM: Almost a Valentine's baby! That's wonderful...that's quite a...quite a date...an 80-year birthday...

MAM: A big milestone...

JMM: It certainly is...it's very exciting!

MAM: It's pretty exciting to still be alive!

JMM: [laughs] Well...I...I am going to be 45 and, um...40 was a rough one...for me...so, I...

_____: Me too....

JMM: [laughs] I'm still...still not, you know totally reconciled with that...and soon I'll be 50, so, I think...its...its just a relative, thing, I realize, but I think when you get older, and you have all of your years that you're thinking back on...and...and you're—you've done all of these things and now you can sort of...take pride in everything that you've done and think about it...and that must be a nice thing...for your to be able to read...and have the time to read...Have

you enjoyed that aspect of retirement? Being able to read all the time—I mean, not all the time, but...

MAM: I do a lot of reading, yeah.

JMM: That would be wonderful [laughs] wonderful. Have you...Are these what you're reading right now [gesturing to several books on table to the right of Ms. Mongan's chair] Are you reading anything really good, right now...that you're enjoying?

MAM: Nothing exciting...very, very light kinds of things I've gotten into lately...right now I'm on Sharyn McCrumb, and I do like hers...

JMM: She's very interesting...we just did *The Hangman's Beautiful Daughter*...I think it was the year before...for the Appalachian tie-in that they do every year...the One Book, One Community tie-in that they've been doing for Boone, Kenton, Campbell...NKU...and different libraries...they try to get everybody reading the same thing and have—open up a discussion about it...so...she's...she's very interesting...I'd like to read more of hers...once...once school is over I'll be doing a lot more reading...a lot more reading and a lot more genealogy [laughs]...which I look forward to!

JMM: And that brings me back to my question that I...I diverted from originally...your...Can you tell me a little bit about where you were born...Are you an Ohio native?

MAM: Pardon?

JMM: Were you born in Ohio? In Hyde Park?

MAM: I was born in Cincinnati, yeah...and in Hyde Park...I...well I didn't live at this house until fairly recently...but it was not too far from here...

JMM: And so this is sort of your hometown, more or less...where we're at, in this area. I think that's nice, because I've always lived...I live in Highland Heights, now, but I grew up in

Newport, and I think there's something about your hometown...that...you have your...have your roots here...you have your connections here...so...that's wonderful.

JMM: And may I ask you to state your Mother's name, and a little bit about her, maybe...her date of birth...anything that you might want to tell me about her?

MAM: Her name was Norma...maiden name Hupp...H-U-P-P.

JMM: What would you remember about her...as far as her...her...uh...

MAM: I remember her as being very gentle, quiet kind of woman...that's about the extent of the memory...

JMM: And what about her date of birth?

MAM: I don't...I don't know exactly...around 1890..91...somewhere in there...

JMM: And what about your father? What was his name...and...

MAM: Edwin Lawrence Mongan

JMM: What was the year of his birth...and...in general...

MAM: He was a salesman...travelled a lot...saw him only on weekends...travelled through Kentucky, of all things...

JMM: What was he...what did he sell?

MAM: He sold roofing to wholesale places...lumber yards, and to...hardware companies and things of that sort...not individuals...but just companies...he sold from...worked for...a manufacturer...

JMM: And so, you didn't get to see him as much as you probably would like to...on the weekends, he was...he would be home...so he just travelled throughout the...travelled throughout the state...

MAM: He'd leave on Monday and come home on Friday on the whole...

JMM: That would be tough...that would be very tough...Now are you an only child?

MAM: No, I have two older brothers.

JMM: And what were their names?

MAM: Pardon?

JMM: Do you mind if I—but what were your brother's names?

MAM: Well, there was an Edwin Lawrence, Jr....and Thomas...both of them had children and grandchildren named after them so they're...those names are well established in the family.

JMM: That happens a lot. And that's...its...wonderful because you have that continuity...and then...for genealogists, it can be quite a challenge as they go through...and they...they try to connect all of these, and they realize they're actually researching a great-grandfather rather than a grandfather...

MAM: And the names...the dates don't exactly work out...

JMM: No...[laughs] no, it can be very frustrating, but its also very rewarding! Do you know anything about how your parents met?

MAM: No, I don't.

JMM: That is a tough one...and that's one of the great things about oral history...you can go...and...I wish I would have done that with my own parents...and didn't do that...it's nice to be able to go and talk to people...and get their information...get their memories and recollections as well...I mean...that's something that...you can find facts anywhere, but finding someone's personal experiences...and how they experienced things...I think that adds a great deal...and that's one of the reasons why we wanted to do this...to...you know...We know about your...your record as an administrator, which was impressive, and still is...but then, you as a person...a little bit about you as a person and what...how you were feeling as you experienced some of these things...as...as you go along through your career...that's something that we'll touch on as we go along.

JMM: Your education...like your early education...where did you attend elementary school?

MAM: Its still in Hyde Park—its Saint Mary's.

JMM: OK...so they had a high school...because I know you attended Saint Mary's High School...so they had the elementary school and the high school....together....

MAM: Right...the high school no longer exists...

JMM: OK.

MAM: Where it survived with some other school...but the grade school is still there.

JMM: That happened a lot. Because I went to a Catholic grade school and a Catholic high school and those have since been absorbed into other community parishes or schools...and then that happened a lot with the grade school-high school scenario where they would keep the grade school and then the high schools would combine...and that's pretty common...that's exactly what Dave had thought, as a matter of fact...him being the Diocesan archivist for Covington for so long...he knows a great deal about all of these things...that's what he pretty much said...

MAM: Incidentally, not something you asked, but when I was in grade school, I spent a lot of my time in the library...volunteered there as a grade school student...in the school library...which was not much of a library, but to my eyes, it was fine.

JMM: Yeah. So you've always loved books...for as long as you can remember, probably...even when...before school, you probably had a love of books.

MAM: Yeah...I spent a lot of time...when I was naughty, as all children were...my punishment was always not being allowed to read for the day...or for two days...depending on the severity of the punishment.

JMM: Well, that's a terrible punishment! It would be for me, as well!

MAM: It worked...I...I hated it!

JMM: I'm sure...that would be...what was your...what was...what were your favorite books when you were growing up?

MAM: Well...as...as a really young child the one I remember best was the "Angus" books...do you remember the Angus...about the little Scotty?

JMM: Oh, I do—yes, yes. [laughs] And those were your favorite?

MAM: Well...pre-school, yeah. Later on, I read through everything in the library. I liked everything. I read them all, except fairy tales [smiles]...I never could stand fairy tales...the Red Fairy Book and the Blue Fairy Book...the Green Fairy Book...I never liked—but I read the rest...worked my way through the shelves of the Children's Department.

JMM: [laughs] A lot of people, you know, either don't like that fantasy genre, or...or they do...and their...and some people, as you're saying, they'll read everything, and that's how it was

for me, too, in grade school...it was a very small library, but I pretty much read everything in it...it was...it seemed tremendous at the time....even though it was small....

MAM: It's all comparative, I guess.

JMM: Yeah.

MAM: Well, this I read from the public library...which is on Erie Avenue, not too far from the school.

JMM: They have...that's...a...that's a Carnegie Branch, isn't it? Its one of the Carnegie buildings that Hamilton County still...they have about seven, I think....

MAM: It's a Carnegie building, but they've remodeled it a lot so it doesn't look like one anymore.

JMM: That was what I was going to ask you as we go a little further along...a little bit about that...because you've had some experience with three different Carnegie libraries...so I thought that was interesting, as well.

JMM: So, your high school was Saint Mary's...and...as far as your high school years...

MAM: I remember during my sophomore year, I decided it was time I needed to get a job, so where did I go—to the library, to the public library, and got a job as a shelver. So I worked through high school doing that.

JMM: That's one of the things I wanted to confirm...those were—that's one of things that I found a lot...that was your first official job...you were a shelver, or a page, at the age of fifteen...at the Hyde Park Branch, is that right?

MAM: Right.

JMM: And so you've always gone there...now you can go there...you still probably always went there as a patron, but its nice that its come full circle now, again, and...how does it seem different to you now....your memories of a child in that library...and now, going in as a patron...what do you think about that?

MAM: I think that they've improved it considerably...the building itself...what is now the Adult section used to be the Adult and Children's Department and everything...but they've...opened up the downstairs and put the Children's down there so they have a lot more room and a lot bigger collection...although when I was shelving them it seemed big enough to me [smiles].

JMM: [laughs] I'm sure it did! There's always, always more books to be shelved...no matter how much you do, the next day, you come in, and there's...I guess its sort of a sense of job security, but it can be a little tiring [laughs] ...but it can be really fun...it's probably one of the best ways to learn about the collection...and learn about how...

MAM: Then, in college, I moved up, I started working at the downtown Cincinnati library, in the Circulation Department, or the Lending Department, as they called it.

JMM: Now I did not know that...I did not know that you worked at the main branch

MAM: Yeah...through a lot of college. Actually, some—for a good part of it I worked there during the day and then left at 5:00 and went to Hyde Park in the evening, at the desk in Hyde Park...so I had two library jobs for a while.

JMM: Wow...so you got a lot of experience before you ever...went into the...

MAM: Not that it was a whole lot of help, but it was interesting...obviously, I liked it.

JMM: Well, that was quite a lot experience to have before you even began library school...Now, you....you...for college, you attended the University of Cincinnati...

MAM: Right.

JMM: And what...I know you...the Bachelor's...was it a Bachelor of Arts or a Bachelor of Science, and in what discipline?

MAM: English literature.

JMM: Oh...that's...mine as well! [laughs]

MAM: And I started on a Master's in that, but I gave up halfway through and went to library school.

JMM: I was wondering about that...I was wondering about your...your career aspirations...but, see, obviously...you always had this connection with books...and so, at some point, did you...you obviously...the literature connection, and so the English study came into...and that seems to be the case with so many librarians...they have an English degree...or history degree, or sometimes, a mix of that...liberal arts and things like that...

JMM: What about...when did you first realize that you wanted to be a librarian...or choose that as a career?

MAM: I guess, during that period, while I was working at Cincinnati, and trying to decide did I want to finish this English literature...

JMM: You decided then that you would go to the University [of Kentucky]...that was...was that the main library school in the area at the time---the University of Kentucky? Is it...

MAM: Well, its...it was the closest one.

JMM: So you...did you actually have to relocate?

MAM: For a...I lived there in Lexington for a year...or for a year and a half...or three semesters, or however long it took...

JMM: And did you...did you go to school full time...or did you work as well while you were in Lexington.

MAM: No, I went to school.

JMM: That's the best way to do it. And they have so many libraries at UK...so many different kinds of libraries...and did you spend...did you ever spend...do you remember spending time in any one of them more than the others, or...

MAM: No, I didn't spend a lot time, except studying and doing my assignments.

JMM: Its quite a...quite an undertaking...it's a...I think, a challenging degree...and, if you—we're going to backtrack just a little because I wanted to ask you about your love of books because its such a common tie, it seems like...the...almost no matter what you do...in a library...most of the folks you encounter, whether they be in Circulation, or in Reference, or in Children's, or Technical Services, if they're cataloging...doing outreach, everybody has that underlying love of books...that connection with reading. Of course, so many people do...and...you know, throughout the community, its that nice, common tie...

JMM: So, if I were to ask you who your favorite author is, who would that be, and why?

MAM: I wouldn't know.

JMM: [laughs] That's almost an impossible question...I think. Have you seen those "Reading" posters where they make the individual who's doing the poster has to hold the book that meant the most to them or author...a work by an author that meant the most to them...that would be very difficult, I think, to choose...

JMM: So, you wouldn't be able to pick...

MAM: No.

JMM: Do you like the classics...or Shakespeare...English literature...or...

MAM: It's sometimes one, and sometimes another...right now, I can't come up with any single name.

JMM: But...you have diverse interests, so you like to read a variety of genres...not a particular...just not historical nonfiction or anything like that...

MAM: No.

JMM: That's interesting, because there's...

MAM: If its in print, I'll read it.

JMM: [laughs]

MAM: Or, if its not in print, I'll read the cereal box. [smiles]

JMM: [laughs] Something... I know, you have to be something all...is that how you are...you have to be reading something all the time, whether it's a book, or whatever's in front of you...you're going to be reading...

JMM: So, what to do you...when...now, and when...even in your career as a librarian, how did you choose a book? How do you choose the books that you read now? Do you read reviews, or word-of-mouth, or different things...

MAM: It's mostly...try to find something I haven't read before, which is a challenge.

JMM: Definitely. Do you have a reading log? Do you keep a reading log?

MAM: No.

JMM: I know some of the patrons will come in, and they'll have a little reading log, and they'll have their books, you know, marked off, and they'll wait...their favorite authors....and they're waiting for something to come out from them...from him or her, and then they'll go down the line and see if there's something new available...it seems to work OK for most people.

JMM: Do you re-read books that are particular favorites? Do you have...do you have a collection of your own books, either from your childhood or your adolescent years, or things like that, or do you tend...do you not really get attached to the books themselves as much as the stories and the words...

MAM: The one I've just read is always the best one I've ever read.

JMM: [laughs] I agree, though...it gets you off on that...whatever the topic is...is the topic of interest at that time...so...that's good! And you...so, I really...the next question would be more of the same, I suppose, because it would be a favorite author, but you really, there's not a particular one...that you're drawn to, is that right? Just any different...any...of the popular authors...or even...even classical authors...

JMM: And so, you decided that you wanted to work toward your Master's degree...went to Lexington...stayed there for about a year and a half...and then you took a break...a short break...

MAM: It was an academic year, plus a summer...which is, I don't know, three semesters or something...that was...as quick as it was possible to do it.

JMM: That's the smart way to do it...and then, did you allow yourself a break afterwards?

MAM: No...

JMM: You went right to work?

MAM: Right to work...in...in Newport.

JMM: Yeah. So you were the head librarian? That was one of the funny...I enjoyed the quote...that you had mentioned that you wanted to be a “big fish in a small pond” and I was wondering about your experiences...at—in graduate school, the classes that you took while at UK...do you feel like those aptly prepared you for the position as a head librarian...and to take on a administrative role like that?

MAM: No, I don't think there was anything in that line [of study].

JMM: I was wondering...that...because now they have a management class, and I'm actually taking it now...and they say that...one of the things that have come up, or...a quote from the textbook is that “Management can't actually be taught. The principles can be imparted, but the management...management must also be learned through experience.” Do you agree with that....that you learn on the job with management?

MAM: Yeah. Which is rather hard on the people being managed.

JMM: [laughs] But, its almost...its very difficult to teach that type of...those types of skills...and working with people...its just...a matter of the individual personalities...so much comes into play there. That's...that's very, very demanding. Well, that's one of the...

MAM: You can imagine...in Newport, and later, in Covington...and it was Covington, not Kenton County...I did everything....there were only three people on the staff and maybe a part time one in the evening...so, you did ordering and cataloging and reference and personnel, and everything else, in addition to being an administrator.

JMM: In a way, that would be good, because you would have such a well-rounded knowledge of everything in the library, and of your staff, and of your collection...but it would be very, very demanding as well. Did you enjoy that? Did you enjoy that...did you miss that when it became more of an administrative or a managerial role?

MAM: Yeah, I did...I did enjoy it all...I...suddenly...not suddenly, but eventually came to the conclusion in Newport that I was never going anywhere there....I was going to get my \$3600 a year from then on...it was time to move, and I heard of an opening in Covington...which seemed like a big city to me after Newport, so I applied for that job...obviously, I got the job...

JMM: Yeah....because I have...in this one...you have to forgive the quality [showing Ms. Mongan old photographs] of these, but I think—in a way—they're sort of fun...because this is a microfilmed copy of...here you are with your outgoing...your predecessor, Rebecca Cox...and that is from May 17, 1958—the Kentucky Times Star....and, the photos are tough on some of the older...we don't have some of the photos from the older papers, the originals, so sometimes you can just get a microfilmed copy. I don't know if you want that or not [indicating copies of photos brought along as visual prompts). If you want to keep it, you're welcome to...I've got a few things I brought...that I...you have probably seen before, but its sort of fun to see yourself...there you are at the beginning of your career...the beginning of a long and auspicious career...

MAM: Looking a little confused...

JMM: [laughing] Now I would not call that look on your face confused, you seem very self-assured. That's what struck me about that...you're young to be getting that position, but yet, you seem very...very confident. Do you feel like you were confident when you began, or...

MAM: I don't think I was at that point. Eventually, I acquired the confidence, but not at that point...

JMM: You certainly looked it...you looked it...so...and that's...I mean, for the time period, administrative positions in libraries...um...I guess because libraries...I was going to ask a question about this a little later, but, since it...you know, it came up...that's something that we talk about even now in library school...and...um...the way that the library profession has been viewed over time...and for years, I think it was seen as a profession that was dominated by women. And that seems like its changed some as the years have gone by...and there are a lot more people...you know, men and women, pursuing that profession, but, at the time...How do you think that has changed? Do you think its changed a great deal from...even like your experiences at Hyde Park when you go, or your experiences throughout time when you were at Kenton County...do you see that changing as you—as the years went by?

MAM: Certainly it changed. I think at the time I started it never occurred to anybody that right out of library school you could be an administrator. Of course, they didn't have classes...why would they?

JMM: That's what I was...that's what I was wondering about [laughs] because, I thought—that has always impressed me that you know...you pretty much started at the top from the beginning at Newport....

MAM: In a very small pool....

JMM:And at...but...yeah, at the top...and gained a lot of experience and knowledge that way obviously because you were able to go from Newport...I think there was a staff of three there...when you started...

MAM: Pardon?

JMM: Was there a staff of three...I think...at the Newport branch, and then, onto Covington. And then from there, it just...you know...exploded because of the...

MAM: Well, Covington kept growing...you know...people kept asking me how could I stand to work in one place for so long...with...at one job? But I said it wasn't the same job any two years in a row...it was always different.

JMM: That's one of the nice things about libraries...do you think...is that one of the things...dealing with the public...that you enjoy? The...the differences in people, and interacting with them and how its always something new. Do you like that aspect?

MAM: Yeah...I did manage to work the Reference Desk and interact with people to some extent all the way through until I retired...which I really didn't have time to do, but I did anyway.

JMM: That's impressive...I think its good, too, because that's something...Dave has...more or less...I think he's following in your footsteps in that sense...because he still does work the Reference Desk...and being out there with the public...I think that's something...and I think it impresses the staff...the staff feels that because the director is there...and, you know, working side by side with them...the patrons enjoy that because...you know...there...you're...your're the actual head of the library...but uh...along with the Board, of course...and you're working with, directly with the people...and I think that...I think that's so important...and I think its...its commendable that you did that and kept that precedent year after year...it was...impressive.

MAM: I guess I continued...I did it originally because there wasn't much choice...there wasn't anybody else to do it...and I just kept it up....

JMM: If you didn't do it, do you think you would have missed it?

MAM: There wouldn't have been anybody there to mind the store.

JMM: [laughing] Well, it certainly has...it has changed a lot...with computers and everything like that...but I want to take a moment and look at where we are...because the one thing, I think, that was interesting that I had mentioned earlier was your...was the time you had spent in three different Carnegie libraries...and for so many communities...when those...they're...they're just

grand, elegant, classically styled buildings that are...and even...even though with some alterations through the years they're still something different about them...as opposed to the more modern structures, and...I know that in looking at one of the quotes when Covington was...by the mid 60s, becoming overcrowded and losing patronage to Hamilton County because of the growing student bodies...for Thomas More...and then, at that time, Villa Madonna College...and, the...you know, the library had primarily served at that point, the citizens of Covington...and you had said...and this was...like...from March 26, 1967...they were asking what you thought about the Carnegie building there in Covington...you said: "It's fine for looks, but not so good for efficiency." And that seemed to be true of those buildings...what did you experience...or, what problems do you remember experiencing as...as the building started to have problems....

MAM: It was certainly just a lack of space, also...the two floors was not too great in the Covington...in the Carnegie...because you had to haul every book upstairs when it arrived and haul it downstairs...and, the offices were upstairs and all...the public was downstairs...except for the children...I guess they thought they'd climb the steps to the Children's Department...it was on the second floor...

JMM: That's what they did at Newport, too. The children wound up...the children wound up on the second floor...and, no elevator, so you couldn't get the book trucks up or down, like you said...and...its just amazing that for so long, people had to adapt, without...

MAM: They came out with little things, like, the applications that people turned in on the first floor had to be...to get the names typed in the top on the second floor...so we had a little system with a cord and a clip that we let down...let down over the railing, and they clipped them on and brought it up...after they were done, they were...went down the same way.

JMM: That's a pretty ingenious setup, though [lauging] That was pretty...you know, adaptive at the time because you had to figure some way, you know...some way to...

MAM: You have to do something...you couldn't run up and down that many times...

JMM: No...no....and the auditorium....

MAM: There wasn't much to do with the books, though...the books had to be carried.

JMM: When the auditorium...what did you...what were your thoughts about that...how that...I know a lot of Carnegie buildings were built with some kind of...of course, now, most libraries have...you know...multiple meeting spaces, or...you know, either large or small...for study groups or for large presentations...but then the Carnegie buildings had these auditorium-style...and of course, Covington's was just...grand...

MAM: A big black hole that swallowed money.

JMM: [laughing] It was...it was...it was....really, I can imagine! At one point, it was eventually closed off, wasn't it? It's...its beautiful now. Have you been...?

MAM: No, I've been in the other part of it...the Carnegie...the museum...

JMM: The Art Center part?

MAM: The Art Center part...but I've not been in the auditorium.

JMM: It's really...its resplendent...it really is quite beautiful.

MAM: All it took was money to fix it up...

JMM: Yes...

MAM: Money...and at that point it had to come from the library funds...which was from the City of Covington...like...\$50,000 a year...

JMM: And that had to go...

MAM: There just wasn't enough to stretch to fix up the auditorium.

JMM: No...I guess with that, a lot of those buildings...the...the...you know...they were wonderful when they started, but the problems arose later with...you know...the efficiency issues and different things like that...and then, that's when...you turned to the...um...well, the state had enacted the legislation and...to allow for that...the formation of the districts...and so you led that petition...petition drive to join the...all of the ...what was the Erlanger-Elsmere Library, the Talking Book Library...uh---or, no—the BookMobile...and then the Covington Library...that merger...and that was what this...I thought this was interesting...Dave actually had this in his office...

MAM: I think that that would have been the big achievement of my career at Kenton County was getting that accomplished...getting those...all those petitions signed...the city...or, the state had just passed a new law allowing...the libraries to issue a special tax...or to levy a special tax that way...but, as you can imagine, its not easy to get people to agree to this...and sign their names saying, "Yes, I approve of this."

JMM: That's what I was going...that's one of the things I was going to ask you, because I thought that...of course, the state did put the legislation through, but then, the real work started with those...with the petition drive...and that had to be just an absolutely incredible undertaking...and...it just had to take a lot of patience and a lot of...

MAM: We were lucky in that the city...was so happy to get rid of this....drag on their taxes...they gave us a small amount, but enough to hire a couple of part-time people who could coordinate this...we had two part-time people who took care of the volunteers who went around getting signatures...

JMM: Wow, that would have been...it...just...a huge...and then, to actually see it through...and have that happen...and then, of course, you were name the Director of the Kenton County...the

newly formed Kenton County Public Library System...and so, that had to be a proud moment, knowing that you had not only gotten all of that through, but...and, you know...

MAM: Yeah...and Erlanger was still in their little old house...and the BookMobile still was just a BookMobile...

JMM: But...

MAM: And not much else...

JMM: But that was shades of things to come...

MAM: Yeah...there was some hope, then...and we had promised the people that there would be a new library if this passed. So then the building of the Covington building started.

JMM: That's what...

MAM: You had to show something...

JMM: I think this was the...was this the...it was prepared by the library consultants...Hoyt R. Galvin & Associates and it talks all about the program for public library facilities...and they talk about what would need to be done...and...its from 1966. And Dave had this in his office...and he said that you might be interested in seeing this...and you probably...you might have seen a bit to much of it!

MAM: I have a copy of it...

JMM: [laughing] You probably don't want to see it after everything that uh...I thought that was interesting, though, because its...how, all the different features they were addressing, and things like that...I mean, its really quite an undertaking, and you've done it throughout your career,

basically, three different times...with the building of all of these facilities, because of the new Covington location....

MAM: But didn't have to re-do the tax...once the...that was only the once...

JMM: That's true...but that was still...just overseeing the construction...the whole process...site location...that would...

MAM: Actually....I didn't...I did the Covington one, but the Erlanger one was done by the Associate Director...in Independence wasn't...until fairly recently...

JMM: OK...oh...the...the first Independence...on Taylor Mill Road...and then the second one now...on Walton-Nicholson...just to actually expand the one system...or the one structure...and then the BookMobile...and then, to wind up with three different branches...and, with Erlanger's...they're the busiest branch library in the state of Kentucky...and then, consistently, the Kenton County System was always rated one of the highest in the state...so that had to be a source of pride...because of all of the hard work that you put into it...and...as we went through some of the information about the site itself...that was chosen, because I know there was some dispute with the City because of the...there was one...I guess a facility that was still standing on the property that they wanted the library to buy...and there was a long dispute until the construction started at Fifth and Scott...and how did that site get chosen?

MAM: That site was chosen primarily because it was largely unoccupied...there were a lot of empty spaces...not as much deconstruction to happen...

JMM: So that was...

MAM: Demolition...

JMM: It was sort of nice because it was a couple blocks up...or, I guess, down, more or less, from the original Carnegie building...so it was sort of close by...sort of in the heart of downtown Covington, too.

MAM: That little pizza place, on the corner stood there for a long time...that only went down in the last few years...

JMM: And they were pretty adamant about trying to get the library to buy that...[laughing]

MAM: We didn't, though...

JMM: [laughing] Well, that's good, because it turned out very well...

MAM: Finally needed the parking space...and we gave up and bought it and turned it into a parking lot.

JMM: And that is still...

MAM: After some consideration...could we use the building for anything, but there didn't seem to be any reasonable use for a building that was separated from the main building.

JMM: Yeah...that's true. And the parking is such that its become quite a problem right now [laughing] for the staff...there's so many staff...and then patrons...and then...they've actually had to buy different parking passes for the parking lot, that...its like a parking structure across the street...next to the Middle School, there...to allow some people to park over there to alleviate some of the parking constraints. Did the Board, or you ever talk about or consider when choosing the site...ever consider leaving Covington...because at the...around that time there was sort of an exodus to suburbs and a lot of the downtown areas were not...

MAM: Well, the politics of the matter sort of demanded that we keep the library in Covington or you'd never get the signatures of the Covington people.

JMM: That's true...so that was really not something that was considered—was moving it. It was going to stay in Covington...it was just a matter of where at the time. That's interesting...Do you remember the condition of the old Covington library when...when it was time to move to the new facility...and...was it in pretty dire...

MAM: It was in pretty good condition except for the auditorium.

JMM: That was the problem...the problem area... because it had been blocked off for so long...and the maintenance problems...just heating a vast area like that would be incredible—I can imagine...What do you think...this was your...I thought this was another very interesting little picture ...this is actually from the opening of the Covington facility...there...and it just...its, again, a poor reproduction, but that was the best I could do with the photo there, that they had in the paper, but what do you feel was....how did you feel that day, and...when the building was finally opened and all that work...you know....you could welcome in the patrons and...

MAM: I saw that big building and I thought, “How are we ever going to fill this up?”

JMM: [laughing] It didn't take long, did it?

MAM: No... it didn't....

JMM: [laughing] If you have space, it will be filled, it seems! What do you think the...how do you feel the patrons responded when they were coming in...was it a very exciting...

MAM: The patrons were obviously happy with it...

JMM: I can imagine...it had to...its such a different structure completely from what you were used to with the Covington building...and, you know, with the Carnegie building...and what the patrons were used to...did they....do you remember any feeling about...were their feelings negatively or positively about the fact that it was a more modern facility...I know that the

architect was Robert Ehmet Hayes & Associates and he was awarded the Honors Award for the...by the Kentucky State Society of Architects.

MAM: I don't remember that the patrons had any particular interest in the architecture...they were mostly interested in the interior.

JMM: They wanted...what was...the contents...what was inside...they weren't really worried about how it looked on the outside, or the inside appointments...and its obviously more spacious...and with the elevator to the second floor, and...so that, all of those modern improvements had to be something that people were excited about...One of the things I wanted to ask about is through...the...now, with different things going on in history...you know, the libraries have really sort of become social centers in a sense where a lot of people gather for different...for programs or for book clubs, for children's programming, and teen game programs, different things like that...and so, libraries quite frequently respond to historical events, just like we all do ...and you know...like...I remember September 11th, I was working at the Newport Library when that happened, and we actually brought a TV in because people wanted to see the coverage, and they kept asking about what was going on...and so, they literally brought a television in so people could watch while they were there...what are your...you've experienced so many amazing events, historically, while you were in Covington...and even before that...and one of the things that somebody had noted...I actually drew on this source myself...there was a book published by Reinette Jones, and its about library services to African Americans in Kentucky, and she says that...you know...she cites the Covington Library as being a...you know...an open facility...and...making it the first desegregated main library...and she said that the 1901 Board minutes basically said that the library and all of their...all of its parts shall be open to every man, woman and child in Covington. And I know Newport had similar wording in some of their Board minutes...that the...one of our administrators had said that she has spoken to one of our patrons who...he remembers when he was a boy...she didn't give me the time period of this...so this may be pre-dating your time...I should have gotten an exact date...but he was saying that he was only allowed in the library on Wednesdays, and he had to stay in a particular section. Do you remember things like that going on in any of the area libraries?

MAM: No.

JMM: I was wondering about that because with the desegregation, with the Brown vs. the Board of Education in 1954...with that legislation passing...you know...

MAM: I think that the Covington Library is one of possibly the few libraries in Kentucky that was always open to everyone....

JMM: That's....

MAM: I can't take credit for that...I came into it...

JMM: But that's good, though...I think it says a lot for the library and for the city, the community, and, you know, for those using the library and working in the library...it's a nice precedent to have...

Do you remember any other historical events and how, you know, the patrons might have reacted? I mean, like now we do...we'll do book displays...like if...if...I think, with...when President Regan passed they had a book display...and with the inauguration recently we had a TV in the lobby and people were gathered all around...and it was, really an experience, with everybody sharing the experience together...they seem to try to bring history in and sort of...unify people in a way...and...and focus on the things that the library has to offer the community as well. Do you remember things like that going on...like when...

MAM: No, I can't come up with any particular time anything like that happened...

JMM: Like when [President] Kennedy was assassinated or anything like that...if there was any kind of display or commemorative thing...or anything like that...

MAM: There probably were displays, yeah.

JMM: I wondered about how that was...or...when...the moon walk...different things like that...all of these tremendous things that have gone on...and also, during your tenure as director, you obviously had staff members...and key staff members that you relied upon...and...do you remember some of the key staff members...that you...

MAM: And Board members....

JMM: And Board members, yes.

MAM: We were always very fortunate in having always good Board members...very devoted ones...and a devoted staff, for that matter.

JMM: What about Alice Clay...did she...she oversaw the automation, or...part of it when you were moving towards the automation of the catalog, and so on...

MAM: That was an exciting time.

JMM: I can imagine....

[EDITED – SECTION DELETED]

JMM: the...uh...oh my gosh, that would be quite an undertaking just to automate all of those records...and then, put barcodes on everything...

MAM: It was particularly exciting because everybody pitched in and worked on it...worked together...they probably never had before and maybe never did again...

JMM: I think that would be...I wondered about that...how did...how did everybody deal with that...that kind of a...a huge undertaking? So you remember it being a very unifying event for everybody?

MAM: Yes, I think it was.

JMM: That's...that's excellent. Because there's...there are always challenges going on, and it's nice when people can join together...and work together on these things. Makes it...makes it...everybody share a little bit of the load. I have some...also, I have these...I'm...I'm going to...I'll leave these with you, too. They're...and these are just ...they're just photos...now, some of them we have in our...on our Web site. We have a database of photos called "Faces and Places," and the library has the Kentucky Post photo archives...and then, just photos that they've acquired over the years...and photos that people will bring in...and then they'll donate...it's a searchable database...of course there are quite a few of them on their of you at different points in your career...and some of them actually came from the Post...and some were just in the library collection. So some had actual dates, and when they did, I would put them on the back, but, I just thought you might want to look at them, because I know there is one with you and Phil Carrico in here with the art collection that the library used to have where they would check out the masterpieces they had. We still have some of those paintings hanging in the staff offices...but they had all of these paintings, reproductions of masterworks that people could...check those out...which I think was a great idea! And, I thought you might like looking at some of these [passing photos to Ms. Mongan, laughing]. I remember Phil Carrico very well, because he was the director of the Campbell County System at one point...and then he was the regional librarian and everything, so....I think...and what about the art collection, what do you think about—I'll take those if you want and I'll put them over here—What do you think...what did you think about the art collection...when Covington...when the new building opened and the art collection with Duveneck...

MAM: You mean the circulating art collection?

JMM: Either one...the ones...like...the Duveneck works , or...the

MAM: Which were not intended to be circulating...but they were...they were stolen [smiling].

JMM: Yes...yes...and I...there were...there was coverage of that in the newspaper and...well, one they actually never did recover...wasn't it at...the second time, it was stolen? But the first time there were six of them, right...that...

MAM: I guess they all...all six of them turned up...

JMM: Yes.

MAM: Stuck against some trash cans in an alley somewhere in downtown Covington.

JMM: Oh...that is...that must have been...

MAM: After lots of publicity in the paper.

JMM: And then someone found them...or they just...I guess maybe they figured they weren't going to sell them...

MAM: They were put there; because I guess they figured they...their chances were not good on selling them.

JMM: I'm so glad that they were recovered! Because they're really...I mean, being able to go to the library and see this kind of art...The art collection is something that I have a huge interest in, and I've presented on it at different times...

MAM: But they were in their own gallery at that time.

JMM: Where was that...was it on the second floor?

MAM: It...in...yeah, in the Carnegie building.

JMM: OK, because...because that's right...I think that would be so great if we could do that again, when they renovate the current structure. They've talked about that...I don't know if that will happen, but...you know, with the...they're planning on doing some kind of remodeling situation with the current...

MAM: Is it really going to happen?

JMM: I don't know...they...they...had...they did bring in some consultants and have talked to people in different departments about what they would like and how...how they would do all that...They said that the building itself, the structure, is very sound, so I guess it's a matter of figuring out what the budget will allow as far as....

MAM: There isn't a lot of room to expand.

JMM: No. They even talked about...there has been talk about going out, over the parking lot and up. There have been a lot of different things out on the table...I don't think that anything has been decided or anything at this point, but...it will be...it would be nice if we could, at some point, have that collection all in one place...

MAM: It sounds like a redoing of the Erlanger branch...went through all that...possibly over the parking lot, and all that...finally came to the conclusion that it would cost more than it was worth...it's easier to build a new building.

JMM: That would be nice...

MAM: Or more sensible to build a new building, and that's what finally happened.

JMM: And now that building is...that...they just have such an influx of people...its amazing, it really is...Their...their circulation numbers are through...are just amazing. Now, if I am tiring you, let me know, because I don't like...I don't want to overtax you...because I'm going to come back at some point, so, if you would like me to stop...

MAM: I have my calendar here, if you want to set a date.

JMM: OK...do you want...do you want to stop now, and...

MAM: No.

JMM: [laughs] Because I was going to say that I would love to come back...I brought my...is Saturday...are Saturdays typically better for you?

MAM: Well, other days are OK too, depending which ones, but not any for the next two weeks...I'm having my niece...my niece is coming to visit for two weeks from out of town.

JMM: That's exciting...I bet you're looking forward to that. That will be wonderful...no, I would not want to interrupt that by any means...and I know...I could come...I mean...sometimes when I work on the weekends I'm off through the week, so I have written some dates down, and you can let me know...which...which would work.

MAM: After the 23rd.

JMM: After the 23rd of February?

MAM: Yeah.

JMM: Let's see...what about...I have Friday, March the 6th, or March the 14th, which is a Saturday, or even the 21st, which is another Saturday.

MAM: When did you have in mind for Friday, March 6th?

JMM: Does that...does that sound...

MAM: Yeah, that sounds good. When?

JMM: What is...what would be most convenient for you? I can come anytime that would be most convenient for you.

MAM: How about around the same time—10:00?

JMM: That would be perfect...March the 6th...that way, that will give me time to look through some things...there are always more questions that come up...I have a...and I have a few more...I just wanted to make sure that I wasn't overtaxing you, or overstaying my welcome, because I tend...I tend to ramble on...

MAM: At my advanced age, you...you...you've got to be careful here [smiling].

JMM: No, no! [laughing] No, I just don't want to...don't want to infringe on your day... and... and... you know, you're taking time out of your day to spend with me and to do this, so I want to be sure that, you know, when you're ready to...to stop...[laughing]. I do have a few other questions...and...obviously...and I...I think...you know...with your...and this is of great interest to me, and I'm sure it's going to be of great interest to other...other people because of your long history with the library, but then, you know, people like myself, who are aspiring librarians and...and plan to...you know...more or less be in this career...you know...until...if...if there is retirement...in... in...on the horizon, with things now, I'm not too...quite too sure...[laughing]...but, we'll see...and so I would like to know a little bit about your...you know...you've actually already answered one of them because one of the things that I had thought of was...you know...what would you say was your proudest moment or what you thought was...you know, through all the years of service that you provided in the library environment...you're saying that bringing that petition drive successfully in was a big thing.

MAM: That was the key to do anything...doing anything after that time.

JMM: That's true.

MAM: Because that really quadrupled the...the amount of finances...it more than quadrupled...any rate it was possible to do a lot of things...could not have automated, could not have hired more people, could not have done much without having the additional funds to do it with.

JMM: It was...it certainly was key, and that...it is...its an impressive accomplishment...and...and I had already asked you, too, about your thoughts about...about gender and librarianship...and about men in the profession and...obviously, that's changed, and now there are...there are...its seems a good mix of...of men and women...it doesn't seem like its...its as much a...a...a profession that's dominated by women anymore...its seems like its...I think...I think its more of an even mix now, compared to, say, even twenty years ago...or...

MAM: An even mix of what?

JMM: Of men...men and women...that...that there are a lot of male librarians now that...it seems, in different...in different areas...

MAM: In administration, certainly. In others...not so much.

JMM: More in the administrative area, you...you know I wonder if...because that's something that I...I think that I...I came from the corporate background...that...I had always wanted to be in libraries but I was just not able to make that switch for a while...and...and the corporate environment...at that time was...you know...when I was in it...there were quite a few...I guess you could say the glass ceiling was there...and you know...there were...the higher positions usually went to the...to the managers who were men...and that's one of things that I found attractive about the library environment is that...so many successful women have made impressive careers...yourself, and the director of the Hamilton County Public Library...Bev...not Bev...my gosh...(unintelligible) ...Kim...Fender, because she started...she was in Newport at one time, too...and I think that's...there are a lot of ...there's a lot of opportunity for...for women in the library environment, it seems...do you...do you think so?

MAM: I think that's true, but probably not as much opportunity for men as for women...sort of a reversal of the usual...

JMM: It's sort of nice...[laughing]...in a sense, that there's some balance there...And...you know...for people like myself just starting in the career, for people that are...that are basically...have been out of school for a while and are working in libraries and trying to sort out...you know...if they want to be in a public library or a special...or an academic library...if they want to do outreach, or behind the scenes work, or reference, or children's and young adult...What kind of career advice or suggestions would you have for...for people in the...beginning librarians or even those that are established and looking forward...what would you...what kinds of advice would you give us?

MAM: I would advise...[unintelligible]...obviously you have to decide what you like to do and what would be most compatible with your own personality, but, on the whole...I...I...I think administrative work is more rewarding than any other.

JMM: Why...why is that? What do you think makes it better?

MAM: I guess because you can see the results a little quicker.

JMM: Is it...is it...do you like the working with people aspect of things, or...

MAM: That, too.

JMM: And the planning elements, or the budgetary elements...sort of...sort of being...being in on the...that whole aspect would be interesting...let's see, what...what would you say...it...what do you think is the most important aspect of being a librarian...or...of the services libraries provide...what...what do you think is the most important thing about...you know...why they...why people are drawn to them, either as patrons or to have a career...as a...as...you know...in a library environment?

MAM: The day-to-day interaction with the patrons.

JMM: Is...is the big...biggest drawing card...and the...do you think the...the best, the most important service provided is being there...that...it's a privilege...it definitely...it definitely is...and I think its...you're right, its very rewarding... You don't get board, by any means! [laughing]. Its definitely not a boring...as you pointed out...it changes all the time...and so many things are changing... and...obviously, you experienced that with the whole, the influx of the computers...as you...as we were talking about it, with the automation of the catalog and everything like that...Hi there [greeting person who came into the room]... So, you experienced that...and...and its still going on, even now...

MAM: It will continue to go on, hopefully, forever.

JMM: Definitely. What do you think about how they...how the...how they've trans...how computers have transformed the library environment, and how they've changed the library...being a librarian...how you access information...and help patrons find what they're looking for...what do you think about...

MAM: Certainly its...its more possible to find things than it was...it was...to come up with what the patron is looking for than it was a few years ago.

JMM: Do you feel like...if...because...at one point, then...you know...if someone wanted a magazine article you had to go to the Reader's Guide and...and look everything up and then have the magazine pulled from the closed stacks, and now they're on these databases...and...

MAM: If you even thought to look in a magazine in the first place.

JMM: [laughing] That's true...that's true... and the reference collection...like literary criticisms, a lot of those have gone into database format...but then...you know, there's a lot of talk about...well, libraries will...this happens...I took an academic library class and it was a topic there where they say the library as...as place is not as important any longer because of the virtual

accessibility...that people can read now...of course there's a big move toward e-books and being able to download books ...just like, you know, people do with their MP-3 players with music and...but I think that most people who are in libraries sort of feel like libraries will always be around...what...what...what do you think the future holds for libraries and librarians?

MAM: I think the librarians better keep their eyes open and be able to help the people who can't do this on their own because that's the only way there's any future in libraries.

JMM: Very wise...because its...do you think...there are still mentions that we have as information professionals, so to speak, or they'll just have to find other avenues now, as things continue to change, that's going to be the key...

MAM: And a little flexibility.

JMM: Yeah...being able to adapt...and, well, you obviously did that throughout your whole career, which is why it was...it was...such a successful one. So you think that's probably one of the most...would you say, flexibility is one of the most important things to keep in mind for the future...I guess that's...we should all keep that in mind [laughing].

MAM: Have you come to a good stopping place?

JMM: I...I have.

STOPPED: 52:59