Richard Wagner

Interviewed by Ruth Doyle on March 15, 1986, at an unknown location.

Oral history tape number: 26

This is March 15th. This record will be a conversation with Dick Wagner relating to the beginnings of Historic Madison, as part of the effort being made this year to gather up the history of Historic Madison. I'm going to ask you first, Mr. Wagner, to tell us something about yourself: where do you come from, what's your background, and what your interest was in the original Historic Madison, Incorporated.

I come from Ohio, from Dayton, in the southern part of the state, and I came to Madison to go to the university. They had an excellent program, and still do, in American history in the graduate school. My undergraduate professors recommended this or the University of Chicago, which was my other choice. I came and visited both.

While I was in graduate school I lived in what is now the Mansion Hill historic district and got interested in preservation. During Mayor [Paul] Soglin's administration I was appointed to the city Landmarks Commission. Being active in the Landmarks Commission was being involved in the preservation of the buildings and some of the history of the city. As I was participating in those activities, one of the perspectives that I constantly tried to advance was that there's a difference in preservation between preserving something because it's historic and preserving something because it's pretty and from the past.

Historic preservation has generally tended to be dominated by architectural historians. They like to talk about, as a friend of mine jokes, [unclear], the decoration that buildings have and their styles, and they can come up with more names for styles than you can imagine. I appreciate all that. I have a fairly good visual sense in terms of aesthetics. Yet, as someone who was being trained in the graduate program in American history, I knew that there was a very real difference between history of the shapes and the social trends and necessarily what happens to be pretty in the past.

One of the arguments that I used to make – and still make – is that a lot of history from the past can be very mundane and very ugly and yet maybe we should still save it. If we're talking about historic preservation we're talking about saving something of our past and our history, and we're not simply talking about aesthetics. So, during my participation in the Landmarks Commission activities, I was always trying to stress the historical. Now, the first historic district in the city being the Mansion Hill district, it was something that most people recognized as historic – their preconceptions of fine old houses with lots of detail and going back to the 1850s. But even so, in that district there were some things that architectural historians could appreciate as well as historians from the later period when we had in-fill housing and actually seeing that patterning of original spacing of the lots and the in-fill housing as historic.

What's in-fill housing?

Well, in the old days, when Mansion Hill was first established in the 1850s, you might have had ten houses on a block. Now, those houses might have had other ancillary buildings, like coach houses with them, or well houses, or other kinds of out-building structures.

Privies, I imagine.

Yes, some of them certainly would have had privies because the water system came later than those houses. But they had large grounds and gardens around them. Well, as the people who built those mansions moved out, other people found that real estate to be attractive. They came in the 1880s and 1890s and into the 1920s and even the 1930s and were building other buildings on lands that had been grounds, lands that had been coach houses and things like that.

Building houses, mostly?

Apartments. Yes, some of them were later houses and some of them were apartment buildings by 1910.

The standard three-story.

Right. Some were three-story. In fact, there is one building in the Mansion Hill area that was from the stone from when the old Walker's Castle was taken down. Walker's Castle goes back to the mid nineteenth century. The stone was transported and formed a nice turret, which was a nice echo of the Walker's Castle on Gorham Street, in a house that dates from the early twentieth century. And, seeing that pattern, one can begin to see a history of development.

Now, that had a physical, architectural history component, but it also was related to the economics and the social movement as to who moved where. Even when you think of the old houses, and some of them still have coach houses, you were thinking of the structure of society which had transportation built into their house – not only the place for a vehicle, but a place for horses and a place for servants to drive the vehicles, if they were wealthy enough, as many in Mansion Hill were.

And coach dogs.

Right. Sure. All those things. So there was a history. One of the things as a citizen advisory committee member to the Landmarks Commission, before I was actually on the Commission, is I did some research on the historic district. I went back and looked at the city directories. If you look at the number of people who are living at an address it's much more than what we would think of. Say, the Van Slyke family, or the Hobbins family, or some of the old families of Madison, they have their names there. Then some of the other names might be German or they might be Norwegian. They were the servants who were living there in the same house. In other words, what we thought of as a homestead was really multi-family housing even then and it continued into the mid to late twentieth century as multi-family housing, except that it changed the nature from sort of a family and servants to a series of apartments or rental units that people were renting. You still have a density of occupation greater than the nineteenth century, but multiple family use in the houses was always that kind of way.

Anyway, this struck me as sort of part of the history of the area, separate from sort of the architectural niceness of the district. That's one of the things that I think led to interest in Historic Madison, was that the Landmarks Commission, in terms of what it was involved in as a city commission was regulating the exterior appearance of the buildings with control. If somebody came in and wanted a building permit, what would be an appropriate structural change to the building.

How were those houses selected that you had power to do?

Okay. That goes into the history of the Landmarks Commission itself. Mayor [William] Dyke was actually persuaded, when he was mayor, to sign a Landmarks Commission ordinance. That ordinance was based on some models from across the country, but it was not a very strong ordinance. He did a lot of flourish and signed it with a quill pen as a sort of historic gesture which, probably by the time anything in Madison would have been built, quill pens were not historic at all. That was an anachronism going back to an eighteenth-century concept to use one.

He should have worn his knee breeches.

Right. But those would have been inappropriate because Madison's history doesn't go back that

far. He signed an ordinance and it got involved. The original ordinance in Madison just really looked at putting plaques on things and maybe making people a little bit aware of some of the buildings.

During Mayor Soglin‘s administration we went in and followed a model based on the New York City Landmarks Commission and put some teeth in the landmarks commission ordinance – that the commission could designate an individual building but it could also designate a district and it could control what would happen in terms of city permit activity within that district. It became an actual regulatory function. The interest was in preserving that for more than just the immediate property owners in the area. During Mayor Soglin’s days we indeed got into all the arguments of property rights and public rights and things like that. But the Supreme Court, in a series of decisions, had upheld the validity of landmarks ordinances across the country.

In fact, just this past week in the University Heights area a man wanted to withdraw and the court told him it was not possible.

Right, right. That was due to many of the changes that we had put in during those days and kept in since that time. So the Madison Landmarks Commission had a lot of strength in terms of what it could do. There had been a fair amount of research done on the social fabric of the Mansion Hill neighborhood. The original physical neighborhood had extended down Langdon Street considerably beyond where the boundary is presently. In the 1920s and 1930s a lot of fraternity houses had been built and had demolished many of the old houses. We took a social recognition of the Mansion Hill neighborhood, based on the old families and based on the interconnections. We went back and looked at some of the press clippings they had of society affairs in, well, they didn’t call it Mansion Hill, but in that area. You could spot the addresses of those who attended and you could map them out on a map and you could see where the social interaction among Madison’s elite who occupied Mansion Hill or Big Bug Hill or Yankee Hill or Aristocrat Hill.

This all precedes Maple Bluff and Shorewood Hills.

Oh, yes. Much earlier. Much earlier. There were a couple areas that in the 1850s had vied for being sort of the prestige neighborhood. Leonard Farwell built his mansion out on Spaight [Street]. A few other people followed him there, but then that collapsed in the Panic of 1857 and the east side never did achieve that kind of a status. And Mansion Hill did, with further investments in the late’50s and’60s.

Some of the Mansion Hill people had cottages in what’s now Maple Bluff.

Yes! They did. Across the lake. That was thought to be more healthful, to go across the lake from the city, which today is what we would think as in the city, but that is the nature of things. The Landmarks Commission had a body of social research that I and some others had contributed to which defined the boundaries of the Mansion Hill neighborhood, then drew those in within the existing physical structures, and then did the designations. Then it proceeded through its regulatory powers to control building permits and what would be done as appropriate to the district.

The experience had shown us that the commission itself was fairly narrowly focused simply on the city process for designation and for regulation of buildings once they had been designated. Part of what we realized was that there was a need for the historical information which related to these buildings but which would also relate to things that weren’t specifically designated landmark individual houses or were not specifically historic districts.

One of the interesting things that the Mansion Hill research also turned up, as a sidelight,

was the old Bloody Fourth, the Irish district. It was not near Mansion Hill, though now, in my time, they were in the same political district, the current Fourth district, but originally they had been in separate areas. Most of the physical remains of the old Bloody Irish Fourth were gone. They were not houses that withstood the test of time over many years. That was part of the history of the city that was not physically represented but which should be portrayed and kept out as part of the story of Madison. We realized that there was a need for something that would focus on local history and not only look at the mansions and look at the individual landmark structures but that would talk about the historical fabric of the city.

I think many people have sort of always assumed because we have the State Historical Society here in Madison that it takes care of our needs for history. Well, the Society does a very good job in many ways. But it is not a Society that is focused on Madison per se, except in so far as Madison happens to be the capital of the state and is a state institution. A lot of what it covers, in terms of state history, does relate to the history of Madison because Madison is the capital. But there's a lot of it that's simply the history of Madison as a town, as any other town – as an implement dealer area in the late nineteenth century, as an area where you had a lot of German immigrants coming in and then later Norwegian immigrants. While those things are of general interest to the State Historical Society in terms of state migration patterns, they're not of specific interest in terms of focusing on the history of the community and its interaction and dynamics.

So we thought that, while there is a lot of history presented in the city of Madison from the State Historical Society, there's not necessarily history that was focused on Madison and that told the story of Madison itself. Those two impulses sort of drawing together a group of people was the real impetus for forming Historic Madison. We thought it was finally time that the city's history should be looked at and that we ought to look at something more than just the buildings that sort of everybody nodded to as historical and begin to look at something that was really the history of the community as a whole. That's the reason we formed Historic Madison.

You leave me sort of speechless, because I don't think we've been doing that as we should have.

Well, it can change.

And the job is limitless.

Right. You could do... I mean, David Mollenhoff spent years writing his book on the period of the history of Madison.

And he still has sixty years to go. Or more. Sixty-five.

Right. And there are many things that David covered and there are many things that he didn't cover. We had a lot of fun in those days doing different kinds of programs. For a while we were doing sort of an annual dinner with a slide show program. We would take and do particular topics. One year somebody had suggested that it would be good to do something on the history of churches in Madison. So I and some other people agreed that we would do that, though in some ways we sort of joked and never followed up, that if we were going to do churches and sort of the moral life at one time we would feel obligated to do the reverse and do sort of Madison's low life in a future program.

And do you have it?

We did a program on Madison's low life. It was a lot harder to get visuals on Madison's low life. But there were tales of rowdiness from Camp Randall days and days when the old legislature used to meet and what would happen, where the parties would go on during the session, and all

kinds of stories of women of ill repute. Madison had that sort of life.

Where is that? Where are those slides, I wonder?

I might have some of them. Lance Nicar might have some of them. When we were doing the church history we did contact a number of the churches and learned that a lot of the churches had a church history, and so we borrowed theirs. Lance took the photographs. We had quite a good program on that.

That would be wonderful to have in our collection of things. Last summer at our picnic we had a young man who has done a lot of scuba diving in Lake Mendota and has a collection of bottles that goes back a hundred years. Fascinating to contemplate the amount of history that's gone to the bottom of the lake over the years! That would have been some of the high life and the low life, I imagine.

I'm sure some of the low-lifes threw things over the board and ended up in the lake, too. Historic Madison in those days was designed to focus, in terms of the history and particularly looking at broader social things, trying to portray some of the vast past political and cultural life of the city in many ways.

Did you have a lot of people working on those various projects?

We would have a committee of... it usually ended up to be about a half a dozen, and each of us would sort of pitch in and do some of it here and there. We sometimes thought we'd never pull it together. We ended up for these sort of slide-tape dinner programs doing an actual script and having slides, knowing when we were going to pop them in to match the script. From a historical research point of view they were not terribly thorough, though they were certainly entertaining and they certainly gave people a sense of what the history of the city was.

And when you did that you used the newspapers, I assume?

In part. But again, they were programs that we put together based on whatever materials we could get to hand. We didn't have the academic's time to do large amounts of research on them. When we could find published materials and, in some cases, archival materials, we used them. We didn't really set out a formal research scheme to actually plow through tons of material before we came to our conclusions. We went off looking for what we could find and what could be presentable.

And where did you go for things like that?

We used Madison Public, the State Historical Society, and we used private collections. Phil Fox, who has a lot of material on old Madison, was a very good source for many of those things. I sort of talked about the dinners. They were fun, and I remember them.

Did you plan two or three of these a year?

We did one a year.

How many people would come?

Oh, we would have easily seventy or a hundred people at the dinners. We usually had them at a downtown hotel. That way we didn't have to manage worrying about the arrangements for the dinner itself. The hotel took care of it. We did sometimes recognize the drawbacks of hotel food. What we did, and we did this for a couple years, we did a table of Old Madison desserts. Linda

Mallahoo was active in it in the early days and then had her *Taste of Old Madison* cookbook. We sort of started farming out members of the board who would take some of those recipes and do some of them. So while we got through on hotel chicken or whatever they were serving us, we had in the end some very delicious desserts. And it wasn't that you got just one dessert, the way a hotel might, but that you could go and choose from this wonderful groaning board of chocolate and sugar and all that.

That would be marvelous. I think we ought to do that as a way of promoting people coming to the program.

Sure. If you got somebody who agreed to make a dessert you know they came to the dinner. The shows were fun and we had a lot of fun doing them.

Do you remember anything about the membership of the group, how big it was?

I think membership was near two hundred at its peak. I think probably during those days one hundred and fifty was more common. We had a mixture of members. There were some old-time Madison folks who were interested in it, but for the most part it was a lot of younger folks who were sort of discovering almost the "history biz." That's a bit coining of a term. We had people involved because we were doing things that they enjoyed doing, like the dinners and the slide shows.

One of the other early activities was the alternate parade of homes, which got us a lot of support and interest and membership. We had people who were going out and being involved with the neighborhood associations. The arrangement would be to always try to find some associations that were interested in doing it, but that we would try and put people in who could help do some of the research on the neighborhood and who could help the owners perhaps locate some sources and things like that. We always had a mixture. There were always some historic things and some things that didn't really have a lot of history but were simply available to show and interesting to look at it.

And going to be history.

Right. Going to be history some day. One of the things that Historic Madison always did in the alternate parades was that we did some general research, usually on the neighborhood, and could talk about it in terms of the context of the development, as an example, when University Heights was a suburb and the streetcar line moved out. Actually from the program we had done on churches, we knew that initially all the Madison churches were downtown and then finally they had to decide as the city grew and their membership started to move whether they would go east or west or try and stay downtown. So you had a congregation like First Congregational deciding to abandon a church right off the Square and move to the west side.

Not Holy Redeemer.

No. Holy Redeemer stayed there. Right. And Grace Episcopal stayed there.

Of course, Holy Redeemer doesn't really function as a church any more. That is, it has Mass, but it's not a parish.

Not the same parish function, yes, that's right, that it used to have. That was the old German Catholic parish, primarily Austrians and Bavarians, who had settled in Madison who went to that congregation. It's interesting if you look at the German settlement in the city that the German Catholics were mostly in I think that was the old First Ward, and that the German Protestants

tended to live east of the Square, rather than west, north and west of the Square, which is where Holy Redeemer was.

And the Irish went to St. Raphael's.

Right. Indeed. And then St. Raphael's was so packed – that was in the old Fourth Ward, that's where the Old fourth was – that then St. Patrick's was split off from that as a separate congregation. Again, when we were touring with the alternate parade of homes, we had sort of amassed some of this data and so we would weave some of this in to the description of the neighborhoods – what their ethnic composition had been and what the institutional relationships, such as churches, had been, and the schools and other things that had been developed. People in the neighborhood might know something about their house or maybe a couple houses down the block, but they didn't really have that sense of the history of the development of the city as a feature.

One of our recent parades I worked at a house down on Gilman Street where the woman that had been the maid of the family for forty years and had retired in 1940 – something like that – came to look at the house. In about ten minutes she gave us more history of the place and the family than we could have gotten anywhere else. She was a close observer for a long period of time.

Sure. Those are the kinds of resources that you just never know when they're going to pop up.

We find – and maybe you have a suggestion about this – occasions, which we have about three or four times a year to gather the membership, that we have fifty or sixty people, but often not the same people. We get a different crowd. About the same number, but they're different.

And that's fine. I mean, that they have different interests. To assume that you have to have some of the same people, I think, would keep you limited to certain focuses, whereas by doing different things, you draw different people in at different points.

One of the things that I was very proud of that we did during those early days is that we made a decision to start the *Journal.* At the time when Historic Madison was organized there was only one other local historical society in the state, the Milwaukee County Historical Society, which published a journal. Newsletters, sure, lots of local history societies did newsletters, and we did one too. In fact, we did very nice newsletters and it was lots of fun. But the *Journal* was an attempt to say we're a little more serious and that in this town, which has an academic tradition, we think we can support that kind of a publication.

Sort of the permanent record.

Right. Permanent record and one that takes more time to develop. It's not just sort of a short snippet or a little tidbit of history, such as we often did in the newsletter, but something which tried to more cohesively and coherently present the story about some aspect of the city's history. Thinking the Milwaukee County Historical Society is a funded institution that has permanent staff and things like that, and here we were, a volunteer organization, and yet there was enough interest and liveliness to do programs like the alternate parade and the annual dinner and to do the *Journal*. It was an exciting group, it was fun. The board meetings of Historic Madison were some of the funnest board meetings of any organization that I've ever belonged to in the city. Just a lively, lively group.

That's interesting. We have some liveliness in our group but it doesn't, I think, compare to what a pioneer group has. We have some of the people from the original group. Anna and Phil Fox

are still very faithful members. But we don't have a cohesive group, although the board meetings are interesting. And they're different. We go to the Attic Angels Tower for our meetings now and have our dinners at the University Club. We only have one a year. But anyway, I would be interested to know about the relationship of the two organizations. The Madison Trust, did it precede Historic Madison or came after?

Historic Madison came first and then Madison Trust came afterwards. Again, both grew out of that same group of folks who had been involved and interested in the Landmarks Commission activities. The Trust was more focused specifically on a concern to preserve properties. Thinking back to sort of the cause or the occasion for many of these is when Mapleside went down.

That was some of the impetus for forming the Landmarks Commission in the city and it was also the impetus to say that in some ways we need to have more tools to deal with that kind of a crisis situation. The Landmarks Commission would never be in a position to buy a property. It could afford some public protections, but it couldn't actually assume ownership kinds of controls and rights of property. You can regulate within limits, but you really can't achieve the kinds of intervention that you sometimes need with regulation if you want to save a particular piece of property. So there was a feeling that we needed to have a private group that would have funds available that could go in and save properties.

The Trust was based on some similar models that other communities had, where they had actually established revolving funds and they had a board of directors knowledgeable in property who could go in and buy properties, home them, resell them to people who would accept them on a basis that would preserve them, and that might mean accepting a preservation easement or a historic covenant or landmarks designation or something that would tie the property into a preservation situation. That was the vision for the Madison Trust for Historic Preservation when it was formed, that it would be kind of an active real estate function. I think what has happened over the years is that, while it has helped some individuals acquire properties that they're interested in, it did not itself become involved in a real estate function and instead has focused more on educational and informational kinds of efforts.

Found it very difficult for one house that they did do and restore. We were talking about historic preservation and the Trust.

Right. My involvement with the Trust was only at the very early stages when people were talking about organizing it. I didn't really follow it with any care, except as sort of a general observer from a distance. My sense was that they got away from their interest in actually managing and owning and securing real estate into more of a program that focused on information about preservation, how to do it, and information about buildings that were historic and how to go and research it. When they chose that course of action, which obviously can be an eminently sensible course of action, they ended up being a lot more parallel to Historic Madison than I think what both original intents and purposes were for the organizations. I think that's the situation.

There's a certain overlap in membership.

Right.

And board. We have one person now who's on both boards. But can you see any reason why this merger would not be a good thing?

Not necessarily. And it would, to my mind, be somewhat limiting – not in the sense of a bad

thing but somewhat limiting if the broader sense of history was still not there in Historic Madison in a merger with the Trust, because preservation people really do look at the physical remains of things.

The foundation.

Foundations and structures.

Water leaks into the basement.

Right. But they also look at things that you have a physical record of. Something like politics, you don't get much physical records from politics. A lot of the cultural life of the city, you may have some structural remains of it in a theater or something like that, but you don't get a sense of what entertainment was like in nineteenth-century Madison when you had opera houses and touring groups coming to use them.

Chautauqua.

I mean, people didn't have TV, they didn't have a lot of even the publications and magazines that we take for granted today. They had a different means of information and entertainment and there are very few physical remains about those kinds of activities. So if in the merger the emphasis was focused largely, entirely, solely on things that had a physical or architectural remains or which there might be some photograph of, you could lose some of the history. History is really a much broader dimension and study of what we have done in times past.

And also setting things up so that a hundred years from now people will have some idea what we were all about.

Right. And that's one of the important things for a historical society to do is to maintain an archives and to create a record of things that people will want to know about in the future. If you're concerned with preserving a building, that building is preserved and may last. But the records that relate to another function going on may not be saved unless you're doing an archival record to try and save things. In Madison, which is a city of great activity and intellectual, social, and political circles, you don't often have direct physical remains to capture the depth of those functions in our society the way you do for another community where those are not as important. I mean, if the community is based on industry and manufacturing or something like that, you usually have some physical remains related to that. And while you might have a house of a famous professor here, still, knowing how ideas were circulated and how they interacted and what the social structure is and battles were of the things, that's a lot of history of this city.

One of the problems, it seems to me – maybe you could have some suggestion – is that using the newspapers and thinking we've got two very contentious newspapers here for a long, long time, you don't get the whole story. Very often reporters – I used to notice this in various committees and boards that I've been on – they decide. They set the agenda and what appears in the paper is what the public thinks happened, without any refutation from anybody else. So we have to have other sources.

Right. And the creation in terms of even an oral history program of making sure that you're documenting things. In the nineteenth century, even in the early twentieth century, many of the people who were involved in those kinds of activities kept records, diaries, memoirs, different kinds of things that would record those. A lot of even what was not official was written, in terms of correspondence with other people.

It wasn't done on the telephone.

It wasn't done on the telephone. Today it's done electronically, on the telephone, in transitory records that may not be kept on computers.

One of the problems with family history, we find in this family that we know it doesn't cost a whole lot more and you get immediate gratification from using the telephone.

Right. And we're not going to stop using telephones and things like that. They're wonderful. But we're losing part of the generation of the record. On the other hand, we've tended to be inundated with a lot more paper which may not be as meaningful in terms of recording and knowing what the family life is like.

The Xerox machines.

Right. There's ten copies of it out there and maybe out of those ten two or three that end up saving it rather than pitching it. Some of that may get in archival materials, but there's a limit to the kinds of materials that end up in archives. A good historian wants different kinds of sources. Somebody who's involved in sort of preserving that historical record or interested in that record ought to be trying to generate or create those in ways that they will be there for the future.

Let me ask you if you have any suggestions about this. One of the things that we have been concerned with in the last three years, or four or five years that I've been on the board, has to do with finding a place for our stuff – not a museum, because we have a wonderful museum here, but a place where people who want to read. I always have in mind something like a Christian Science Reading Room, where materials are available and open at certain hours. Do you have any suggestions about how we might do that? We have our eye on the depot and we have our eye on a couple of other places that are not presently available.

One of the other aspects of the early days of Historic Madison that I haven't touched on but that this brought back to me was that there was a very direct involvement of the Madison Public Library. Initially Bernie Schwab and then one of his assistants was involved with the board. The board most often met at Madison Public for its own meetings. There was an interest purported on the part of Madison Public in having a local history room function kind of thing, where collections could be gathered and where research could be assisted in terms of genealogy or local history materials that would be accessible to people. I still think that's a very good idea.

There's a problem – I've noticed this in traveling around the state – that many local historical societies do end up with a place or a building. And then they struggle so much just to keep the building, the painting project on the weekend, or the roof. Real estate takes a lot of effort and unless you have regular income going into it, it can deteriorate real quick. In the early days I steered, for what my voice was worth, the board away from trying to look at establishing a local history museum. One, I was afraid of the resources that that would consume unless we had a very sound foundation, and that, to my mind, it was more important in terms of getting the history, the programs that we were doing, out to people and that information and knowledge was higher priority to me than a building. On the other hand, if you had a space that provides a focus for things, but if you can get somebody else to maintain that space for you and provide the heat and light, you're a lot better off than if you have to do it yourself as a volunteer organization.

We have attempted, made some efforts to consider a section of the Madison public schools, a room in a building, which are now available but five years from now are not going to be available, because of the resurgence of the child population. The Pied Piper took them all away

and now he's bringing them all back again. So we've tried that. We've tried various other places. It's conceivable, I suppose, that we might be able to get something in the museum downtown when they develop the third and fourth floors of the old building. But I agree, we don't want to put a lot of resources in it. But we have this feeling that if we were focused in some way, had our meetings and conferences at some particular place that was ours and some permanent staff of some kind... but I agree. We could maybe raise the money and get it started, but to keep it going month by month is really a problem.

And insofar as if Madison Public would ever show that interest again...

Bernie Schwab, I think, had a particular interest in this that doesn't seem to be there now.

No. I know it doesn't. But that doesn't necessarily mean that sort of enough public interest and outcry might change the map.

We do have this one space in the basement down there, and Dane County Historical Society provides Donna Hartshorn, who works a few hours a week. It is the beginning. We have decided we will just start depositing everything there and when it gets to a certain point, something will have to be done about it.

Right. Insofar as most of the materials that are in public hands relating to the history of Madison are either at Madison Public or at the State Historical Society, one or the other of those locations would make the most sense. Since the State Historical Society is so focused statewide and if they did it for one community people would say why don't you do it for another, I think they would have a difficulty with that. Madison Public is at least presumably responsible to the same group of people who you are interested in reaching and who, frankly, might well use this as a service if it were provided for them. There is an ongoing interest in history that continues to be in every community.

There are thirteen, I think, historical societies in Dane County. Do you think it makes sense for all of them to kind of gather? Make an umbrella...

They do participate now in some of the capital-area group activities.

And they have one joint meeting a year.

Right. I think that's probably about the level of cooperation you're likely to get. People in Mount Horeb want to talk about Mount Horeb, or in Mazomanie they want to talk about Mazomanie. They may have some interest in Madison and they may have some interest in sort of what a Madison group is doing, but they're less interested in Napoleon Bonaparte Van Slyke unless he happened to own some of their land or something like that. So I wouldn't expect a lot there. If we ever ended up with a county library system and if the county operated the library as a function of the local history program, that could well emphasize working with all of the historical societies and they could have a local history collection that would work for Historic Madison as well as for... and I think that would be a very sensible thing for the county to be involved in.

We are now concluding the interview of March 15, 1986.