

Mississippi State University Libraries

Lloyd-Ricks-Watson Project

Oral History

Mr. Marco Nicovich

April 23, 2012

Interviewer: Ms. Mattie Abraham

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**(Tape Side One, 000)**

Ms. Abraham: This is the echoes of Lloyd-Ricks-Watson Oral History Program and this morning we're interviewing Marco Nicovich, and I'm Mattie Abraham. And today is April 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2012. Thank you for coming.

Mr. Nicovich: You're welcome.

Ms. Abraham: Looking forward to it. Can you tell us, what is your relationship to the Lloyd-Ricks-Watson Building?

Mr. Nicovich: I started working in Lloyd-Ricks for the Editorial Department in 1977 as a photographer doing research photography for the division... for the MAFES office at that time, and I stayed there until we combined offices in 1989 or 90, somewhere right in there, I'm not sure of the exact time frame; so I was there for a little bit.

Ms. Abraham: Okay, and then you moved to Bost Extension...?

Mr. Nicovich: Then we moved to Bost Extension, the office of MAFES Editorial was combined with the Information Service from the Extension and with the Media Services at the Vet School into one department that finally was named Ag Communications after a couple of little twists; and that department still exists on the first floor of Bost.

Ms. Abraham: Okay. So the time frame of your relationship with Lloyd-Ricks-Watson is 1977 to...

Mr. Nicovich: Around 1990.

Ms. Abraham: Nineteen-ninety. What are some interesting experiences that you had, or maybe some of the personalities that you met during your time there?

Mr. Nicovich: Well, it was an interesting building because when I entered there it was run down, in very poor shape. At that time they did renovation in a musical office sense; they'd moved you from one office to another and kind of renovate one office at a time it seemed. The building had steam heat with radiators that were clogged up, and they had heat pumps in the windows; all window units provided all the air conditioning you had. We had one cold winter about 1980, roughly that everybody went home and turned the heat pump off, the steam didn't work so the building got real cold. Back then they had IBM typewriters and the grease kind of froze up in that IBM typewriter so they had a lot of service calls the first of January. (*chuckles*)

Ms. Abraham: That cold, huh?

Mr. Nicovich: It was that cold, and literally it got so bad that we did wear heavy clothing to work because the building was too cold to work in; the heat pumps did not keep up once you got below freezing and we had... back then we did have cold winters, right the last few years we haven't but back then we had several cold winters with single-digit temperatures for days at a time so we were miserable. But they finally renovated it, put new steam radiators in it, cleaned it up, started putting central air, and then they put... replaced the French drain around the building; the building had actually flooded when it rained; so they dug out everywhere around the buildings, took out all the air conditioning in the middle of August because they had put central air conditioning outside the building right on top of the French drain so they had to remove all that and re-do the French drains, and after that to my knowledge it never flooded. But it has been continuously renovated. I went

through there today just looking around to refresh my memory on what they had done; the building itself is in decent shape now, but it is still one of the older buildings on campus.

Ms. Abraham: What floor were you on?

Mr. Nicovich: I was on the first floor, the floor that flooded. When we first did our little musical office renovation and we got the new area for me, they had carpet and all kinds of stuff down in the area and it flooded right after that; that was right before they put the French drains in; so my new office got baptized, and it was not a pleasant experience to say the least.

Ms. Abraham: Did it ruin some of your things...?

Mr. Nicovich: It ruined some stuff, and there were some things in there that were ruined, but I knew when I moved there not to put certain things on the floor, but of course, you get forgetful and things like that do happen. It was really, really interesting to see how bad it could get on occasions. But the French drain did solve the problem as far as I know. Originally my first darkroom was what was turned in, in the musical office thing, my darkroom was turned into a ladies room. It was an older building built when there was only male students so there wasn't a ladies room on every floor and I had plumbing so that ended up being a ladies room in the renovation. And now they've eliminated all those restrooms on that side of the floor and it's a classroom now, or a lab, one of the two, and they've put the restrooms in the center hallway for the first floor.

Ms. Abraham: You were on the western side...

Mr. Nicovich: I was on the western side...

Ms. Abraham: And the first floor...

Mr. Nicovich: ...Up underneath the steps, just about underneath the steps there. The men's room was directly under the steps, and I was one off from that when I started.

Ms. Abraham: Hmm. Well what did they do for a new darkroom for you? They made you a totally new one?

Mr. Nicovich: They made a totally new one, and actually made two darkrooms for me, and made it so we could really do a lot of work; back then it was all film. We did almost all the title slides for presentations in Agriculture, we did a lot of E6 color slide processing, we did black and white for public release to newspapers and all kinds of PR releases; so we did a good bit of wet lab... what we called wet lab work. But nowadays you... you're... it's at a computer, you're nice high and dry, you don't get to smell that good chemistry, and it's a real big difference. But I had a whole wing on the west side of the first floor; everything from the stairwell to the north side of the building on the east side of the hallway was our art and darkroom.

Ms. Abraham: Did you do film and video too, or were you specialized?

Mr. Nicovich: We did... we didn't do film or video; I've done film, but that was separate. We did a lot of sports film just like they do a lot of video now.

Ms. Abraham: Mm-hm.

Mr. Nicovich: Again that was back in the '90s, '80s and '90s; that was all film. Right in the late '80s it transitioned into video, but we did... we did a whole bunch of that stuff. But we had... I began work with Chester Wells. He was a great guy, a real good character; he came out of Ag Economics, so he had a very good handle on figures, and he ran a tight ship and a real good budget. So we did what we could with what we could get, and he managed to run a real good thing and we got a pretty good bit of equipment every now and then when there was money available. But it was always a hodge-podge of equipment, and you know, along with the building being kind of a hodge-podge, the equipment was hodge-podge; but we ran a good ship as far as what we put out there. After Chester Wells, Keith Remy came on board, and I can't remember the exact number of years he was there. And when we became a merged department Ned Browning became

the Department Head. So those were the three Department Heads that I had, and those were the people who made, you know, most of the decisions in what I had to do, or didn't do in the building. The building itself, you know, was a character on its own and had various little quirks with steam heating, particularly when it first cranked up it sounded like somebody was jumping up and down on a trampoline on the floor above you. *(laughs)*

Ms. Abraham: *(laughs)*

Mr. Nicovich: But it was a lot of fun working in the building there with numerous people. Louis Wise was the Vice President at that time, and he was a great gentleman to work for; and he was one of the better storytellers that I've ever known, and he could come up with some stories about some people and tell it right, at least he said it was right... *(laughs)*

Ms. Abraham: *(laughs)*

Mr. Nicovich: ...but he had some good stories and was a wonderful person. I hate that he didn't live very long after he retired. I worked with Rodney Foil as a Department Head and as a Director and Vice President; and so he moved on up there. Rodney came out of Forestry. Another one out of Forestry was Charles Lee; I worked with him as a Department Head before he left here. Most of the... most of my work involving administrators was PR work, awards in various meetings that they'd go to, in MAFES all the Field Days, these folks would show up at the Field Days 'cause they'd give a talk. I'd be out at the Field Days to take pictures of whatever was going on, so we moved around in a lot of circles. We had a few of the Presidents that we worked with. I came in under Giles' administration; and all of them since him I did a little bit with. But it was just again, go to the meeting, they're there and I'm there; but it was, you, know... I got to know them just a little bit.

Ms. Abraham: So you were sort of insulated from top management by your directors.

Mr. Nicovich: Right, right. See, I wasn't... I didn't deal directly with any of the Allen Hall administration. Now, I dealt with them a little bit before they got to Allen Hall, because several of them came out of Department Heads, and before they went over to the President's office or before they became Dean or Director; and I dealt with them a little bit more on a one-to-one basis then. I didn't have to go up and talk with them to get my information and my stories. Generally I was responsible for cutlines on a photograph, I didn't do the stories; somebody else was doing the stories and somebody else was doing the interviews; so I had a little bit different thing on that. A number of the people that I'm aware of because of the historical files that I dealt with in the office and they'd call me up and want a picture of this and that and yonder; and I'd have to dig back through and find out who they are, and of course I'd ask questions, and I'd see the story that went out; once that I put out my photo there was always a story to go with it. So I got to read the stories, so a number of the people that had names on buildings over on the Ag side in particular, I knew through the stories; Dorman, Clarence Dorman, Dorman Hall, just strictly through the stories and their names. I worked with Hunter Andrews but I did not know his dad, but I knew his dad through the research that his dad did in ammonium nitrate and the liquid ammonia inserted into the soil is part of a fertilizer really a leap forward in fertilization of your crops.

Ms. Abraham: How much, I was just going to ask, at that point how much would you be aware of the other things that were actually going on in that building, or did they keep you so busy and you were travelling so much that it was more on a request basis?

Mr. Nicovich: Well, most of it was on a request basis, but I'd get a request all over the building. We had started out as Home Economics and is now Food and Nutrition and Human Science; they were in our building, they were part of the MAFES group, so I went over to their work and got to see a number of research projects involving food and food by-products, and we were... in the early '80s we were working on muscadine grapes a lot, taking muscadine grapes and getting the wine, so I got into... I saw a lot of that and how it was developed. They also took

wine... the grape by-products, the pulp that was left, that they could do various things with and trying to make it into a feed product, or using it as a food additive, various things like that that was research oriented in the Nutrition Department; and it's a lot of stuff like that. They had labs on the first floor on the east wing, so I got to see firsthand a lot of the stuff that they were doing.

Ms. Abraham: And I guess since you were serving the PR end, you got the cutting edge stuff...

Mr. Nicovich: Right.

Ms. Abraham: You got to see the cutting edge work that was done.

Mr. Nicovich: The people that were doing the research were putting out press releases and getting awards, so I would take a photo that would be related to what they were doing rather than send out a mug shot. We'd go into the lab and have them doing something or showing something that they came up with giving a representation of what they're doing rather than doing just a mug shot. A lot of these people were mostly graduate students who came and went. A few of the professors were continuous there, but none of them are around anymore, and most the names I'd have to go back and look at the directory to see.

Ms. Abraham: To see? Except for maybe one, which you said was Dr. Mark Keenum.

Mr. Nicovich: Mark Keenum.

Ms. Abraham: You said you knew him as a student.

Mr. Nicovich: See I met Mark Keenum when he came to the university as a student because Ag Econ had a classroom across the hall from me, and I also took mug shots of all the Ag Econ senior class and he came through that class. He went over to Extension for a little bit, and in the mid-'80s he was part of the RIF (Reduction in Force) in Extension, and he moved over and found a job in Ag Economics a little bit later and then went to Washington and, of course, came back here. But I met him several times and, of course, on a daily basis while he was a student and as an Ag Economist and when he actually worked for Ag Econ and... but he's always

been a real gracious fellow, and one of the nicer ones to come through that... through there. (*laughs*)

Ms. Abraham: Would you have ever predicted he would be President?

Mr. Nicovich: I knew when they called him about three times to get him to Washington and talked him into doing that that he could do very well and he would do very well because he was very conscientious, did his... from what I could tell did an excellent job with what he was working with, and I always thought a lot of him. Him and Marty [Fuller] both were great people to work with, and I thought a lot of them and both of them ended up in Washington, and I was hoping that they would do very, very well; and I was pleased to have him come back here as President.

Ms. Abraham: One thing I'm curious about since I'm an Archivist is the type of maybe filing system you might have inherited and how you filed all that material, especially negatives, and...

Mr. Nicovich: Most of it was filed by some kind of subject matter, whether it was department or some special project. Most of it is still sitting over in Bost in a file cabinet somewhere; there's a room that has probably 15 feet of file cabinets; most of it is slides, but the other part of the negatives are a little more condensed, but there's probably more negatives than there are slides. But then you take 15 or 20 shots to get one picture, so there's lots of different variations on the work. And that stuff is still sitting over there. A few of the things have been filed over here [library] prior to my starting work over there, supposedly there was some stuff donated over here to the library of the agriculture work that was done on MAFES Highlights.

Ms. Abraham: We do have quite a bit of that, so you're thinking that that at one point a major donation was made of some of the early files?

Mr. Nicovich: Some of the early files. As far as I know during my time frame nary and since unless they've done it real recently, they haven't donated the rest of them back over here; they probably need to, to consolidate all the stuff...

Ms. Abraham: But you're... it sounds like your saying considerable research is still being done in those files, or...

Mr. Nicovich: Well, what they are doing is going back and digitizing over there.

Ms. Abraham: Oh, okay.

Mr. Nicovich: ...Some of the stuff. But it was, you know, a big change going from negatives and slides to digital images, and then going back and digitizing what you have on file, and then a lot of the stuff in the negatives you have to go back and match it up with the actual article; the article is not sitting in the files. There's you know... so there may be some I.D.s written on the negatives that will give you a clue of what it was, when it was; and, of course, it was usually dated. You have to go back in the Research Highlights or one of the other publications, pull an article and see what's what.

Ms. Abraham: So you inherited a system with I.D. numbers?

Mr. Nicovich: No.

Ms. Abraham: No? You had to create one?

Mr. Nicovich: You just created it generally...

Ms. Abraham: Okay.

Mr. Nicovich: ...And it's everything in Ag Econ is sitting in Ag Econ; everything in Agronomy is sitting in Agronomy, or now it's Soil Sciences.

Ms. Abraham: Mm-hm.

Mr. Nicovich: So some of the stuff has department heads and department names that if you don't know what it is now in the musical name system, you know, you're not real sure what it is. And in agriculture research sometimes even if you have the names and all the information you still don't know what it is because it's plant material with something on it; some disease, some thing; and they may have a

man in the picture. The only reason you'd ever want that picture is if you want to go back and research that researcher and what he was doing and have a compilation of what he or she did. The rest of the stuff is maybe useful from slide point to have an identification of some disease on a plant or something like that.

Ms. Abraham: Mm-hm. So all those files that were in the bottom floor of Lloyd-Ricks were moved over to Bost when you went?

Mr. Nicovich: Yes ma'am.

Ms. Abraham: Okay. And were fairly intact?

Mr. Nicovich: Most of them are intact. There are some that probably have been misfiled and are missing out of the thing, but there was no master compilation of what's actually in the file; there's a master list of the files that tells you where to look for various things. In some of the topics it's hard to know which department was working on what, so there is a little bit of a cross-reference but not much. Most of it is fairly self-explanatory, and it's by department.

Ms. Abraham: Mm-hm. I imagine when you got to Bost you had a lot more space to organize yourself.

Mr. Nicovich: A pretty good bit more space. The Photography Department originally the photographers had the most area in the floor. We were very, very rich as far as floor space, but that's because of the dark rooms, and dark rooms take up too much space. And besides we had a filing room, a photo room, a studio, and two dark rooms, and actually another room originally that was a press camera room where we actually did stuff for... you know, big stuff for... we could make plates for the press. But all that was very, very you know, space oriented. Nowadays most of that stuff has been turned into offices or shared use so that the photographers don't have near as much, but still they have more than their share of... if you go down and look who's got the most square feet, hmm. Why's he got the most square feet? He's got more feet than the director. (*laughs*)

Ms. Abraham: So you've really seen a lot of transitions, not just because of the increase in space from Lloyd-Ricks-Watson, but because of the change in your technology and all of that.

Mr. Nicovich: Technology was a complete change. We did mostly black and white, went into color slides, went into color negatives; to some extent we subbed out the actual processing of the negatives; but we started getting digital images off color negatives fairly early in the game, and we had a processor in town that did that for us, and we started going digital in that manner. And then when digital cameras became a little more reasonably priced we went totally digital. So it was a complete... several changes and, of course, once you went digital you had to update your software every year, year and a half, completely. Some of the stuff was a major learning curve, some of it wasn't; so there was a lot of things due. But that was in Bost.

Ms. Abraham: In Bost. So when you were in Lloyd-Ricks-Watson, you really... computers and software didn't figure terribly heavy...

Mr. Nicovich: We had the early computers... we were one of the first departments around that had ATs versus XTs; everybody had XTs. We had some of the original floppy disks; the original floppy disk was about the size of a 45 record, and it was floppy; we had a few of those things laying around that somebody else was using that we had use of, but those things... the smallest little flash drive you can get now has more memory than the whole computer than what we had at Lloyd-Ricks.

Ms. Abraham: Mm-hm; it's pretty amazing.

Mr. Nicovich: It's really, really amazing what has changed in that time. But we did work some graphics on computers in Lloyd-Ricks, at the end of our tour in Lloyd-Ricks we were doing graphic design, and graphic presentations on computers.

Ms. Abraham: Hmm. Well it sounds like a fascinating career, not just because of the building but, you know, the totality of what you experienced and the people you met. Are there any other people or things you can think of that we didn't touch on?

Mr. Nicovich: Not offhand.

Ms. Abraham: How about are there any colleagues or anybody you worked with you think we might have missed? We have a list of some 40 people, but...

Mr. Nicovich: You know, Keith Remy and Troy Kight; Troy Kight's out at... he's over in the Carolinas somewhere, so he's kind of out of pocket, but...

Ms. Abraham: I know we have Keith.

Mr. Nicovich: I'm pretty sure you have Keith. Troy, Troy...

Ms. Abraham: And Chester...

Mr. Nicovich: Chester is deceased. He didn't, he was like Louis Wise, he didn't live very long after he retired. Both of them unfortunately died too young. You know you've got Verner Hurt in there, and...

Ms. Abraham: We do. What about, were there any either secretaries or assistants that were memorable?

Mr. Nicovich: We had Pat McHann; she is still around. I don't know whether you talked with her; she is local. Debbie Nettles...

Ms. Abraham: Okay. I think those are a couple that we probably don't have....

Mr. Nicovich: ...And Jean Alice McDavid; all of those are still here locally.

Ms. Abraham: Mm-hm. I don't think we have Jean Alice...

Mr. Nicovich: Jean Alice didn't... she worked with us right as we were doing the transition, and Debbie worked with us before that, and she moved over as an editor in Ag Communications before we moved; she went to the Extension side before we

moved into the merger, so she worked both sides before the merger. She's local; she's a relator here in town. And I am blank on the gal that ran the library.

Ms. Abraham: (*laughs*) The person I knew was Kathy Nash, but she was in Bost.

Mr. Nicovich: Kathy Nash was in Bost. Now this was the gal that ran before that, but I think she's moved to Jackson now. I moved; I'm sorry. I think she has moved; her husband was mayor here years and years and years ago...

Ms. Abraham: Oh.

Mr. Nicovich: ...And he died; another one that died young. I want to say Lola, but that ain't right; that may not be right.

Ms. Abraham: Well, if you think of her, you can let us know, and...

Mr. Nicovich: I believe she's in Jackson, but those other three are local if you want to call them and see if they want to make some comments. Debbie probably knew more people in the building than any of them because she got out and got around, and she worked with Chester and Keith and then went over to the other building and worked with all the rest of the folks that I worked with; and she's got a pretty good memory on her, she's much better than mine.

Ms. Abraham: (*laughs*) Well, you've done well, and I appreciate it. It's been a great interview, and I appreciate all the work you've done for MSU, too.

Mr. Nicovich: I've enjoyed it, enjoyed working for MSU for a number of years.

Ms. Abraham: Thank you.

Mr. Nicovich: Thank you.

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