Teresa Hamann: This is Teresa Hamann, and it’s June 28, 2005. I’m conducting an oral history interview with Clark Hamor. Mr. Hamor, tell me about your background before you arrived at the University of Montana Library.

Walter Hamor: Well, I graduated from Libby High School in 1958, and entered the University of Montana in the fall of 1950...Graduated [high school] in the fall of ’53, and started into the music school and was a music major up until about the end of my fourth year when I changed my major to education and picked up a library science minor. Went a 5th year, graduating in the summer of ’58. Then I spent 36 years in the library business.

TH: Oh my. What made you change your major?

WH: Inability, on my part, of passing the sixth quarter of a music theory course. Six terms, and I couldn’t pass the sixth term. After two tries, I decided enough is enough. I need to get out and get on with my life. So I changed my major to education, picked up the library science minor, and ended up working two years for the University Library right after I graduated.

TH: Good. So how did you come to be at the University Library? Tell me about the hiring or interview process.

WH: Okay. It’s kind of an interesting process. I started back in January of ’58, and somebody had said that if I took library science courses, they were in the education school and so they counted the number of education credits you needed to have. Richard L. Darling was the one that taught the courses, and he had been here in the middle ‘60s teaching the library science courses. Had a master from University of Michigan, and so I just jumped in, took the courses. By the end of spring term, Kathleen Campbell, who was a librarian here at the time at University of Montana, and the librarian, whose name I cannot remember, at the Montana State University decided that whichever one didn’t take me, the other one would. So as I finished up my third term, I didn’t know where I was going to be until toward the end of the term, and I ended up here at the University of Montana. So for a term I had a job, but I didn’t know where.

TH: That’s a wonderful way to leave school, knowing you have a job.

What years were you here at the Library?

WH: It covered a two year span. I started in September of ’58, and then, no sooner, less than a month on the job, than the Selective Service called me to duty. With some support from
Kathleen Campbell, the University, and my local draft board up in Libby, we agreed that I would join the reserve unit and then spend six months active duty. So from about March to October, I was an active-duty down at Fort Ord, California, and my job would be held for me when I got back. I had less than six months on the job here and then had to go on active duty, and then I came back in October ’59 and then worked into June of 1960.

During that time, I was just...I made a list of the people, that I could remember, of the professional staff that were here. Kathleen Campbell was the head librarian, Bob Fischer was the head of acquisitions, Mary De Land was to head cataloger, and Adele Midgett [Adelaine Midgett] was one of the other cataloguers, Jean Davis (?) was the reference librarian, and Phoebe Johnson was the circulation manager. I worked 80 percent of my time in cataloging, and 20 percent in reference. During that time, I probably did most of the filing in the card catalog. So, my feet and knees are destroyed from the concrete floor that we had out there in the old library. There were other people that worked in these departments who were the paraprofessionals and the clerical, whose names I cannot remember at all.

TH: I had actually gathered a couple of names that I thought might have been your co-workers. Mary Collins, Mary Ann Kreiger (?), Madeline Bryson (?), and then you mentioned Adelaine Midgett, who was, it looked like possibly the head of cataloging?

WH: Mary De Land was the head of cataloging during the time I was here. There was a lady I remember, a young lady about my age, whose last name was Satterfield (?). I think she was one of the clerks somewhere in that back room that we...big back room is kind of the cataloging department. Acquisitions is just kind of a big L-shaped area, and I never did really...I probably knew them all well at the time, but that was a long time ago for me.

TH: Yes. With your 30 years in libraries, you’ve seen cataloging changed substantially. Tell me a little bit about how it was then, and how it is now. I don’t know if you still work in that area.

WH: No. I retired 11 years ago. Back when I started, this is back before MARC records [Machine-Readable Cataloging record] and before the computers got into this thing, and it was a leg-work doing author searches and title searches. Part of my job was to assign subject headings, and do the author searches. Awful lot of leg-work, as I remember, that took so much time to get a book once it was received and in hands, before it finally got out on the shelf. There was a long period of time. As we got into the ISBN—the international book numbers [International Standard Book Number]—after we got into those, and with the LC-card numbers [Library of Congress card numbers], then we were able to move things a little faster, because we could use some of the Library of Congress cataloging, and that became a little faster.

My first job in Oregon, when I moved to Oregon, I was a cataloger in their public schools. Did 34 elementary schools and three junior-highs. That was in 1966. A lot had transpired, so there was a lot of data already there that we could use in terms of determining the cataloging. Now, with
the computer stuff, it’s just...I know it’s gone far beyond whatever I imagined when I retired 11 years ago.

In a school library at that time, I was using some of the Follett databases. There was an archival copy you could get, and after the entered your stuff, you can see when you got hits. But the systems were so literal. If you had one misspelled word, it wouldn’t find it. There was no overall thing that would say, all these things match with the exception of this. If the word “the” was misspelled or wasn’t there, it wouldn’t find it. So I developed my own little bit of cataloging that I figured if it was in the card catalog, it could be found. The only person that would deter would be the browser, who’d go to the shelf and wouldn’t use the card catalog. So I would get most things close to where they needed to be. So I didn’t worry too much about spending a lot of time with cataloging, when I was on into my career, because most the time I had to do it all myself, and a lot of times never had any clerical help. So, I took the easy way out.

TH: [laughs] Sometimes, that just needs to be done.

WH: Just a little piece of information here. This Richard Darling that taught the library courses, in 1958 he went to Michigan so he could finish his doctorate, and he was the library supervisor the Levonia Michigan School District. Over a two-year period, six of us went out to be librarians for a month in the school district. So, we got to put into practice what we’d been taught. It was kind of a kind of interesting thing. I spent six years out from Michigan as an elementary library, four of it under Dr. Darling. That was it was kind of a fun thing we could—

Another humorous incident that...I look back now. It was kind of dumb, but it was humorous at the time. During the spring term of ’58, Richard Darling asked me if I want to go to the Montana Library Association meeting over in either Billings or Bozeman. I said, “Sure!” so I went with him. Turned out there was Dr. Darling and myself and 300 ladies. We were there only two males at this library conference. I thought, boy, that’s not half-bad. Maybe this is not too bad a field to be in. Had a lot of good experiences in the library business

TH: That’s good. You brought up something that I was curious about—gender and gender roles were starting to be large topics at this period of time.

When I first moved into the library field, it was a female business, so to speak. Unless you got into the large public, large academic, and then you’d start finding the males. It didn’t bother me so much here, but when I went out to Michigan, and I went into an elementary library setting, the people would ask what do you do?

I said, “I’m a librarian.”

“Where are you a librarian?”

“Elementary school.”
Then they kind of give me a raised-eyebrow look, and say, oh yeah? Being a librarian was bad enough for a male, but being in an elementary school, that was even worse. That changed drastically over my career. I’m finding now, in my home state of Oregon, that the people involved in the library and educational-media field, now is swinging back into the female—people that are involved in the organizations, and that kind of thing. It kind of bothers me that this swing has started to happen. Part of it is because, in the school libraries, they’re moving people out of the positions. They’re handling it with clerical staff. I think that’s probably why the males have started to move out into the administration, or doing some other kinds of things. But I didn’t notice that. Probably, the height of the male...of my experiences was probably in the late ’80s, early ’90s, and then from there it started kind of smoothing out again and moving back to the female preponderance. It wasn’t a thing I thought about at the time. In retrospect, now I look at that and say, “Oh, wow.” People did look at males, early on, in library work as not being the right kind of individual.

TH: I can imagine that. You mentioned that you did a lot of card-catalog work when you were here, and card-catalogs are, I think, the current images is of them flying out of the window into the trash can. What do you think of the change from card-catalogs to computerized catalog systems?

WH: Love it. I guess I’ve always been just a little outside the box, but as far as the computer stuff, I wanted to move into it slowly. I did not want to just, all of a sudden, do it, and then...I kind of wanted to watch to see what other people had done, look at the pitfalls and everything, and see just what to go with it. Because I worked for the preponderance of my time in the public schools, there were two or three companies that provided some databases that you could use, so you input so you could get the hit and get the full MARC records then so that you could have your circulation systems. The automated circulation that’s connected with your cataloging, to me, was absolutely fantastic. It was a way to monitor collection. Inventorying became wonderful. I could do my whole high school collection in two days by myself.

The advent of the of the technology came in so fast, that I fear that there were a lot of misconceptions, a lot of wrong streets they went down, before they got this thing put together. Having been a little cautious about it, I didn’t move as fast into it as some of my colleagues did, but once I got involved with it and got working in situations where we had...I was a library director of a community college where we had all the online things to be able to do the cataloging. So it was just a matter of looking at it and, see what we could find, or how do alter to fit what we’ve already got here. It made that aspect much easier, but I was a little hesitant at first, because I was afraid that we would move too fast, and in some instances we did. I find that it was kind of fun once I got in. Where I was having to do it all myself and didn’t have—a lot of times—didn’t have paid clerical help, it was tough, because when you tried to use volunteer people, they didn’t really understand everything. So I had to show them how to do a worksheet, and then I would take the worksheet and enter the stuff in the computer, because I...
TH: Yes. So the changes in cataloging—from card catalogs to computer systems—have been an enormous change in libraries over the last 10, 15, maybe more years. Back when you were here at the University of Montana Library, were there any other changes...are there any changes that come to mind that were happening around that time in the Library?

WH: While I was a student here...It’s what’s now the old Social Science building was the library, and while I was here, they built the addition out the back, which became the stacks. I think that happened just about the time I got hired, and there was a lot of shuffling stuff around until we got stuff at the right...where we wanted to have it in the right place. I remember working card-catalog out on the concrete floor, out in that lower wing, which was where the card catalog and the reference thing...The circulation desk was out in the old part of the building, and the reference and everything—reference and the card-catalog—were out in the newer part. That was the one major change that I remember, because it happened just while I was a student, and then moved into it as an employee there.

TH: That would be a tremendous change.

WH: Some of the things that were happening, that I remember now, there was a big push, at the time I was employed here, to bring all the satellite collections back into the main library. Some departments were reluctant to let go. Some of them were more than happy to have that out of their hair. I know I spent a little time with Carling Malouf, who was the anthropology, over trying to organize what they had so that we could make a decision as to whether he wanted to keep it there or move it to them to the main library. Of course, the law library wanted to keep theirs separate. Forestry was kind of up in the air, and I think by the time I left they still had theirs. Some of the other small departments on campus...Looking back now, it was kind of a political thing; that they didn't really want to give it up. I noticed, over time, some of these collections have come back out in some of the departments, I think is what’s happening. Haven’t been able to identify that, but it’s a feeling I’ve had when I talk to people on campus here. That was one of the impacts, and I’m sure that’s been one of those things that’s fluctuated over the years here as to whether the department will have it or the main library will have the collection.

TH: It may well be. We’re going to pause here for just a moment.

[Break in audio]

TH: This is Teresa Hamann interviewing Clark Hamor, returning to the interview. Clark, do you have any other memories or last thoughts about the Library or the University you like to add before we move to a different subject?
WH: Like I said, it took me five years to get through. Met a lot of wonderful people who are still friends of mine—students when we were here on campus. One of them ended up in Central Oregon. He was an administrator in the school district I worked in in Central Oregon. I've got some lifelong friends that I've made here on campus. I've become passionate about the University. So much so, that I come back and spend the week of homecoming working in the Alumni Office, and my wife comes with me. She never attended today of school here, and we both work in the office. I represent the University doing college fairs around the Northwest. I feel strongly about the institution, because it did a lot of good things for me. I came out of my shyness and got a lot more aggressive than I ever used to be. This place has a very soft spot in my heart—for this institution. I will do whatever I can to help.

TH: That's wonderful to hear that connection with the University, but you also have a lifelong connection with Montana. You were born in Montana, I understand?

WH: Yes. I was born in Kalispell, Montana, in 1935. I lived for about a year-and-a-half up between Trego and Fourtine, where my father worked for the Forest Service at the Ant Flat Ranger Station. Then in 1937, when I was about a year-and-a-half old, we moved to Libby and lived in several places in that community. When I was there, Libby was about 2,000 people, and I think it's still 2,000 people. It was a small-town atmosphere. You didn't just have one set of parents, you had a whole bunch of sets of parents, because everybody knew everybody. You couldn't get away with very much as a young child in there. Libby, primarily, was a lumber town, and after the lumber industry moved away, it was sad to see the community kind of die.

The other thing that just has devastated Libby is the asbestosis thing. I have several friends that have succumbed to the illness and have a number of them that have the disease. So far, I'm clear, but I'm not holding my breath. The small-town atmosphere was really interesting. I think, when I came from Libby to Missoula, I think Missoula was about 35,000 in 1953. When I left here to take a job in Michigan in 1960, I went from 35,000 to the Detroit area—seven million people. Talk about our culture shock for the small town Montana kid. I finished a master's degree in six years doing it part-time, and I came back West just as fast as I could.

TH: [laughs] Was your family in logging?

WH: Yes. My dad worked for the Forest Service for quite a number of years, and then he moved to work for the lumber company. At that time, it was J. Neils Lumber Company, and he worked for them until he retired in the mid-'70s, I think it was. He'd been a forester, cruising timber out the woods, and everything.

At the end of my senior year and during most of my summers while I was attending school here, I worked in the sawmill. They used us college kids to fill in for vacation times. So I worked much different places in the sawmill, and that's what put me through college. When I go out and visit with people about what it costs to go to college now and this kind of thing, it cost me 900 dollars a year for room, board, tuition. You can't even get one term for that now.
The lumber community was a very close community, and along with the Forest Service community. There were some lifelong friends that my family had through the Forest Service and the Neils Company. It’s sad to see the lumber industry gone from there, from Libby, because that was a very vital part, very strong part of the community. They made sure that the college kids always had jobs. It was kind of a neat thing. All sorts of stuff that you do in a small town that you don’t have access to in the bigger towns. Like when a field would flood, and so we’d go out there and ice-skate on this field in the moonlight. There were all kinds of stuff that I miss about the small town. I live in Salem, Oregon, now, which is, 120,000 people. When I first went to Salem 30 years ago for a one-year job, it was 60,000 people. I like the small towns, but I think the small towns suffer.

TH: I think that’s very true. You grew up, were born at the tail end of the Depression, and you grew up through World War Two and Korea. Do you recall any particular impact those world events had in Libby?

WH: Well, I started first grade in 1941, and I’ll never forget the day Pearl Harbor was bombed, December 7. I was in the first grade when that happened. I thought, wow, that was real. There was a hush in the building, even the kids were crying even though they didn’t know why. That was one thing I remember. I remember, in terms of the Korean War, that a lot of folks that I knew from Libby, that ended up being drafted, and going there. The impact, I know, on that small town, there were a lot of folks that got drafted there in Libby that I knew in terms of the Korean War. World War Two, there was a lot of volunteers that came out of Libby.

The impact. I don’t think as kids we really knew, that we really understood it. One of the things that I remember very definitely is the coupon books—the rationing. The Forest Service had a plan, where staff members that were kind of seasonal employees, they made arrangements to go to help in other wartime activities. My dad went to the Salinas area in California for about a year and worked with the rubber plants and did that kind of thing. I can remember Dad was a Camel smoker, but the he couldn’t get Camels. All he could get was some rotten stuff. Mom would save up the coupons and save up cigarettes, send it to him. I think that was the reason he quit smoking the cigarettes, because he couldn’t get those Camels. I can remember going to the grocery store with Mom and the coupon books. Then after, I was old enough to be able to go to the store myself, I would carry the coupons with me and the grocery list. They kept the [unintelligible], and I carried it home. The rations for the tires and sugar—it’s a memory, but it’s not real hard. I don’t think it impacted me, like it might have impact with my parents, but there were some definite of things.

I left in ‘53, so most of the other impacts in terms of the world events and that kind of thing, were things that happened to me as I grew into adulthood. It didn’t impact me, because I wasn’t actually involved, other than my having to do the active duty—the six months and the five and a half years in reserve. I think it impacted people more than what most of us as children really realized.
TH: Yes, I would think so. After you left, Libby went through some changes—the building of the Libby Dam, I believe.

WH: Yes. In the ‘60s there. Yes. The population grew. Schools got built because of the influx of the workers there at the dam. Libby looked like it was on the road to really recovering and doing good things, but I don’t think people realized that after the dam was completed all that economic impact was going to be gone. One of the things I think that they’re trying to do now is they’re trying to capitalize on the recreation thing to help bring in economic dollars. It’s one of those things they probably didn’t look at early enough back to be able to get the infrastructure set up to handle it. So when the mill left, they weren’t really ready to hit it full-time. That happened in Bend, Oregon, where I worked, but they had gotten the recreation thing headed up long before the mills moving out and dying down. So, the recreation thing was full-bore. So it’s a recreation and retirement community now, and that’s what Libby’s turning into is a retirement community. I have a classmate of mine that now builds houses, and he only has to build one or two a year, because they’re so expensive.

TH: That’s incredible. What a change in the Libby economy.

WH: The economy there—it’s not strong, but there's a lot of people with a lot of money that live there that have moved in from outside. There’s nothing to keep the local infrastructure going. I find it hard to go back all the time and visit there and just see all the storefronts that are empty.

TH: Yes. That is difficult.

We’ve talked about your early years in Libby, some about your education here at the University and your experience cataloging. Are there any memories or other thoughts that you would like to add, either in those areas or some other area?

WH: Just that—

[End of Side A]
TH: This is side two of the oral history interview with Clark Hamor on June 28, 2005. Clark, you were going to talk about your career in libraries over the years, I believe.

WH: Yes I was going to comment on it, because I felt that the training that I got in the library science courses here prepared me very well for my later career. I think I said earlier, I spent 36 years in the library business. After I worked my time here at the University of Montana, I followed my instructor to Michigan in 1960 and spent six years in elementary libraries out in Levonia, Michigan, which is halfway between downtown Detroit and University of Michigan-Ann Arbor. I started out serving four schools the first year. Then three schools the second year. Two schools the third year. Then the last three years I was there, I had one school that had 1,000 kids in a kindergarten through sixth grade. No way you could really learn the kids, but it was an opportunity to be at the right place at the right time with, because some of the leaders in the school library field were housed in the state of Michigan. So some of us got to be involved in things that we had no business being involved in. One of the things that I got involved in, the children’s catalog, which is published by H. W. Wilson Company, was used as a buying guide for elementary libraries and children’s departments in public libraries. It was published about every five or six years. The 1966 edition—I was one of the people that voted, to help what went into this catalog. So, it was kind of a real experience here with less than five years library experience to be involved with that. So that was being at the right place at the right time.

From Michigan, I finished my degree working at, part time, the University of Michigan. In 1966, finishing my degree on Friday noon. It’s Saturday morning, we were on the road to a job in Salem, Oregon, where I was a cataloger for 34 elementary schools and six junior-highs. Worked there a year, and then moved into Central Oregon, where I worked as an elementary librarian and a junior-high librarian. Helped plan the elementary library with open-concept kind of thing. Seven-thousand square feet in the elementary library, so it was kind of a fun thing to do. Picked up a second master’s in education media while I was there in Bend.

From Bend, I moved to a rural school 20 miles east of Klamath Falls, Oregon, where I served all 13 grades out of one facility, which is kind of a novel experience, because it’s like a three-ring circus because you’d be working with the class of elementary kids and having to monitor the high school and junior high kids that are in there. From there I went to a position, in ’82, being a film-librarian and library consultant for a county education unit in Pendleton, Oregon. The job got eliminated after three years, and I went from there to Ontario, Oregon, to be library-director of Treasure Valley Community College. Saw them through a remodeling project where we doubled the size of the facility. Then had an opportunity to get my summer vacations back, and so, I moved across town to the high school in ’88 and worked six years at the high school, and retired in ’94.

Walter Clark Hamor Interview, OH 397-001, Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana-Missoula.
During this whole period of time, while in Oregon, I’ve taught library courses at the Southern Oregon College in the summer, University of North Dakota, Texas Women’s University Graduate Library School, Central Washington University, and Western Oregon University, plus about 25 terms of evening classes at library media classes. I was able to do a lot of things in a lot of different venues, and I would say I prefer, personally, the elementary schools probably better than any of them. I enjoyed the community college, but it was an administrative job but I just wasn’t cut for administration. I was more of a hands-on kind of individual. I just feel strongly that the base that I got here at the University of Montana as a student, and then as a as an employee, helped prepare me to think outside the box a little bit as far as libraries are concerned and to get involved with associations.

Been involved with the Oregon Educational Media Association, which is the school library, the audiovisual people, for a lot of years. Served on their board of directors. I’ve done a lot of things, and I feel that my time here with Montana was the basis for the whole thing. I feel good about that.

TH: That’s wonderful to hear that the University of Montana really provided you with a starting point and base, too, for such a wonderful career. At this point, would you have any last thoughts, or memories you’d like to add?

WH: I’m just sitting here, watching people go up the M, up the hill there. Can remember going up and down that thing as a freshman and painting the M. Can remember Arbor Day [Aber Day?]. I can remember the kangaroo-courts out in front of the library, with the horse-trough that people would get dunked.

It’s not a pleasant memory for some people, but during the time I was on campus here, I think Carl McFarland was the president. There were two incidents that I will relate. We were renaming the dorms, and we had a small brass choir that played at each of the dorms at a dedication ceremony. But what happened as we got into some of these dorms is that the only thing you could hear was the toilets flushing. We had a case of food poisoning from the previous night. There were over 700 kids that got very deathly sick. It was a case of thaw-meat—cook it, freeze it, thaw it again, and reuse it. There were broken appendages, sprained appendages, strained backs. People were very deathly ill. The Health Service couldn’t keep up with it all. People jumping out of their bunks trying to get to the restrooms. The next morning, there were two dietitians on the road, but it was an unpleasant experience. Looking back, you can look at it as a humorous experience, but at the time, it was not. I was lucky. I must not have eaten the meat, because I wasn’t bothered with it. The gal I was dating at the time got very sick. It was one of those things that you kind of remember, and I don’t know whether anybody currently remembers the guy that was the Dean of the food service—guy by the name of Lendal Kotschevar. That was one of the unpleasant things I remember.

Another thing that happened, during that time, the street that runs, that used to run across the base of the Oval? I think that was Maurice Avenue. It had so many potholes in it—this was
when he could still drive around the Oval—but Maurice Avenue had so many potholes in it, there was a constant struggle between the University and the city as to who was responsible for mending the potholes. It was getting close to homecoming time—and I can't remember the exact year—but the students were getting fed up with it. So at homecoming we hung a big banner at the base of the Oval that said Carl’s Bad Caverns, and hung Carl McFarland an effigy. A lot of people from the mid-'50s still remember that.

TH: I’ll bet they do. You mentioned kangaroo-courts. That wasn’t something [unintelligible]—

WH: It was a fun thing kind of. It was a thing where they try you for some...On Arbor Day [Aber Day?] if you weren't doing some of the work, they would try you for not doing the work, or some stupid little thing they’d take you over there and give you a trial and dunk you in the tank and let you go.

Another thing I remember vividly were the Forester’s Balls. Those were just absolutely fantastic. Those foresters did great jobs decorating and everything. I went to several of those and was amazed. While here, I also played in all the band groups, all the brass groups, the pit-orchestras for the musicals, and the operas. Great times. I wasn't the greatest musician on campus, but I played well enough to keep up with everybody else. The music events are kind of what I remember today. I've come back...For several years, I played, about 10 years, I played in the Alumni Band, marched in the parade for homecoming. So, it's been kind of...I haven’t done that the last few years. Body is not letting me do some of those things anymore.

TH: Yes. Though, it's wonderful to be part of traditions for so many years.

WH: All the volunteer things that I do for campus, now, I look at is as ways I can give back without giving money, and I think the more people that get involved on a volunteer basis, the better we can make the University.

TH: Very true, and now you’ve contributed, yet again, to the University with this oral history.

WH: I appreciate the opportunity to have done this and to share thoughts and whatever. It's a great for me to, kind of, remember the past.

TH: Thank you very much. We appreciate your memories.

[End of Interview]