

1984

## Bosman, Nelson W Oral History Interview: Former Mayors of Holland

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**Repository citation:** Hope College, "Bosman, Nelson W Oral History Interview: Former Mayors of Holland" (1984). *Former Mayors of Holland*. Paper 1.

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**Published in:** 1984 - *Former Mayors of Holland (H88-0234)* - *Hope College Living Heritage Oral History Project*, January 1, 1984.  
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## INTRODUCTION

Mr. Bosman was one of the former mayors which I knew before this project was initiated. We were both serving on the Board of Trustees for the Netherlands Museum. That board is one of the few which I have sat on, but it is but one of many which Mr. Bosman has served. As can be seen on his fact sheet, Mr. Bosman has given his time and talents to many organizations throughout the years.

Mr. Bosman also served for a decade as mayor of Holland (and also had served as a council member prior to that). During his long tenure as top elected official in the city, Holland underwent many changes which directly shaped it into what it has become today. The <sup>n</sup>innovations during his terms of office will no doubt continue to affect the entire city of Holland in future years, all to its benefit.

It was under Mr. Bosman which the Human Relations Commission was formed, a committee which responds directly to the minorities and lower income people of Holland. The HRC, in solving the problems of the above mentioned, also strengthens the entire city of Holland with its solutions. Being a founding member of HEDCOR (Holland Economic Development Corporation), Mr. Bosman also helped form a committee which is still very active in promoting Holland and takes the spotlight as being the prime mover of the southside industrial park development. Their attentions are now turned on the downtown and its continued prosperity. The crowning achievement during Mr. Bosman's term, though, was the acquisition of De Zwaan and creation of Windmill Island. The island, ever expanding, is an educational and fun place which attracts tourists and local residents alike.

There can be no doubt in anyone's mind of the great contributions which Mr. Bosman gave, and continues to give, to the city of Holland. Even if Mr. Bosman fades from memory, his creations will last and be a positive attribute of the city.

Name: Nelson William Bosman

Birthplace: Holland, Mi

Date of Birth: October 12, 1906

Education

Elementary School: Lincoln Elementary School

High School: Holland High School

College: Hope College

Professional Experiences: radio sales and servicing, founder of WHTC

Father's Name and Occupation: Arend Bosman, woodturner

Mother's Name: Gertrude Marsilje Bosman

Spouse's Name: Lois Dressel Bosman

Date of Marriage: September 9, 1933

Childrens' Names and Present Occupations: Peggy, parttime art instructor; Susy, teaching in Grand Haven

Committees and Assignments: Board of Public Works, Windmill Island Committee, Child and Family Services, State Boundary Commission, Museum Board, HEDCOR founding member, Planning Commission, Tulip Time Committee, Board of Supervisors, Hospital Board, Spirit of '76 Anniversary Committee, City Council, Mayor

Affiliations: Third Reformed Church, Holland, Mi

Honors: Hope College Community Service Award, HEDCOR Award

Present Activities: retired but not tired

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## Interview with Nelson Bosman

Interviewer: When were you first elected to council?

Mr. Bosman: 1957. In 1961 I began as mayor.

Interviewer: Why did you run for mayor?

Mr. Bosman: I didn't run. Somebody else ran for me. 1961 - The council changed the boundary lines of the wards so I was not able to run because Henry Steffens was still alderman in my new ward. I decided to run for alderman at large. I had my petitions completely set and just about ready to go to the clerk's office when four men approached me uptown, asked and urged me, "Hey, you've got to run for mayor."

I said, "Oh, no."

"Well, we're going to draft you." I thought they were just kidding, but they did it. So I ran for mayor and I won, of course, and I ran for four terms after that. And at the end of my fifth term I said this is it and no more, ten years is long enough. So that's the story.

Interviewer: What annexing was done during your tenure on council?

Mr. Bosman: All of the annexing during council and as mayor: Holland Heights, up to Old Orchard Road, and the jagged boundary down Thirty-second Street.

Interviewer: How was that annexing done; what process?

Mr. Bosman: Voting. The people of the city voted and the people of the townships

voted, on the district that was being annexed. Division, that would now be Graafschapp Road now.

Interviewer: Was there an attempt to annex the north side?

Mr. Bosman: Yes. That was the original annexation proposal. Mr. Jalving was spearheading that; to take in, oh I don't remember just how far, but it would be the largest city in Michigan according to the square miles. But they turned that down fast; the townships didn't want anything to do with that. It would take just about all their township away from them.

Interviewer: What affect did these annexations have on the city?

Mr. Bosman: Well, most of the these people who annexed needed water and sewage. They had ceptic tanks on their property. They urgently needed service. They got better fire protection. It cost these people money.

Interviewer: All these public improvements were financed by special assessment?

Mr. Bosman: Special assessment to the property owners, and the city paid some out of their original reserves, too. The city requires a certain size pipe for water and sewer, and the larger size of pipe was financed by the city. You see, the old water mains were on Waverly Road, between Eighth and Sixteenth. That's where the Holland city water was coming from. And there were wells, Kelly Wells in front of Denooyer. One is still standing there, that red building. That was a well 45 feet deep. Then the smell of the water started to get vegetation down there. And they started pumping air and sand so that was the reason we had to go out to the lake and get water supply.



Interviewer: Did these annexations change the boundaries of the wards? Were the boundaries similar to what they were but just expanded?

Mr. Bosman: The original city of Holland was Fairbanks Avenue to Ottawa Avenue the lake and to Thirty-second Street; 2.85 square miles. That's all we had in the city of Holland. Then there was the annexation and that's why we've got two, three precincts within the wards. That takes you way south.

Interviewer: Could you outline the steps to the acquisition of the windmill and formation of Windmill Island?

Mr. Bosman: The original man who suggested Windmill Island was Carter Brown from Castle Park. His goal was to have that windmill out there in that swamp area. There was a big island there where people had gardens on during the war, right back of Riverview Stadium. There's where we thought would be a nice spot for that windmill. So we got Mr. Carsten from the State Highway Department to come in and see what he thought of that island. And he said, "If you put it there I don't want my name on that agreement or proposition at all to try and put it there. That island is a floating duck. You put something on it and it'll just tip right over."

So that killed that one. So then we went out to where it is now and Henry Koop, John Kempker's father-in-law, owned that land all that swamp area. And the city made a deal with Mr. Koop to buy that with a contract, five, ten years to pay it off. And that's how we got the island where the windmill should be. It's good solid ground.

So then we formed a Windmill Committee after the council agreed to go along with it on a revenue basis only. So then we formed the committee. I was chairman of it. Herb Holt was on it, the city manager; Bill Wichers, the archivist; Bill Murdoch. So, once we were done, this committee was abandoned, but now there's a new one, but I guess they don't do much. We were very active. We had to do everything, all the advertising, get people out there, get the windmill over here. Bill was a lot of help on that. They had restrictions on taking windmills out of the Netherlands. He worked and got this one. I think it's a wonderful project.

Interviewer: That was financed by?

Mr. Bosman: Revenues only. Just gate receipts. No tax dollars were used. It'll all be paid off by 1985. We started our payments in April of 1964 and the bonds we started paying off in 1965.

Interviewer: What groups were formed or active in the planning or expansion of the city?

Mr. Bosman: We had the Planning Commission. That was new. That was formed when the state got their new constitution; 1964, I think. That's when the city could have an ordinance for a Planning Commission. And whenever the city reorganizes there has to be a Planning Commission. That has to be renewed every two years. They did a lot of work. Here we sat with all this annexation, and we had to have development. So, they got Mr. Scott Bagby, a consultant they hired for that purpose. I think they did a good job getting zoning corrected.

Interviewer: So there was a lot of rezoning after the annexation?

Mr. Bosman: We had a lot of changes. We didn't want any more Grand Rapids' Twenty-Eighth Streets.

Interviewer: Were there any plans or attempts at doing things downtown?

Mr. Bosman: Not too much at that time. There was no thought of malls at that time. Meijers came across the lake, and we thought that was going to be the end of downtown, but it wasn't.

Interviewer: What was downtown like?

Mr. Bosman: They went from angle parking to straight, parallel, parking. Traffic was both ways, before they had the one-way streets. The highway came down Eighth and turned left on River going south. Before that it went to Seventeenth. That was before by-passes.

Interviewer: What were the changes in refuse collection and dumping during your term?

Mr. Bosman: They had garbage collection. People privately hired people to collect their garbage, and it all went to where WHTC is now. That was the city dump. That was a big place. Everything went in there. That's all quicksand, mud, muck. Can you imagine all this garbage? It started polluting the water. They started checking up on it just like they're having trouble on the northside now with their landfill. So then they had to stop it, just fill it up with sand. So then they went to the other landfill, up on the northside. But landfills are going to be problems until they stop. They're going to pollute. I think that only way to get rid of all that is to have one incinerator; I suggested that to the County Commissioners, put it at

Grand Valley College, and all the townships bring their garbage there and burn it and heat all the college buildings there. It never got that far. I think it's going to come some day. It'll have to because we start polluting the water, we're going to have problems.

Interviewer: What changes were there at city hall? A new computer came in late in your term.

Mr. Bosman: I think Alexander Grant was our auditor, and as we went along we asked them if we were ready for a computer or not. After they got all done with all their audit report, they said that we can get on the early start of it. But we have to make our own minds up. If we go for a computer, it'll cost two or three more people, but after that we'll be losing three or four people. But it just turns out that there's more people working on the computer then there were in the offices. Why? I don't know. After that I got out. I think computers are time savers but still people have to put the information in.

Interviewer: The Human Relations Commission was formed during your term. Why was that formed and what was it formed for?

Mr. Bosman: Well, we were getting, starting to get, the Mexican people coming up here. Heinz brought a lot of them. Before that we had these migrant people. They started up north and worked their way down. Working in the fields and orchards, and they all seemed to stay in Holland. They liked Holland. And there they were; somebody had to help them. The language barrier was a problem for them. So then the state agency too, Mr. Filkins, Judge Filkins, was one of the people who was on that committee of the state organized this Human Relations Commission. They

stated out with six or eight people, nine at the most I think. And we had different ones: educators, ministers, minorities on there. It worked out very well. But they enlarged it to a bigger group and that got out of hand. Now I don't know, I think it's back down. There were a lot of changes since I got out. There would be resignations. But I think it helped the minority. It was designed to help them in the beginning; getting a place to stay, a little bit of control on the renters.

Interviewer: What changes were there in city hall itself? You had mentioned before that the mayor got his own office.

Mr. Bosman: Yeah. When I came in to be mayor, people would ask, call me up and say, "We would like to see you," (total strangers), "Where can we see you?"

"You better come to my home," I said. They came here. They had their problems, and then we went over to the city hall in the different department and told them what they were concerned about. The auditor department, John Forger, was running that had the present mayor's office for his office. And he moved up to the third floor which used to be the welfare office years years ago, county welfare. When they moved out, the auditor went up there and I said, "The mayor's got to have an office here. We can't have people coming to our homes all the time."

Outsiders would say, "Where's the mayor's office?"

"Well we don't have any." That was embarrassing. So I said we had to have an office. So council went and got this office set up. And its a busy, busy place, used a lot.

Interviewer: Were the council chambers in a different part of city hall?

Mr. Bosman: They were on third floor; that whole area was council chambers. I don't know just when that moved. But then they went down onto the second floor where they are now. There were a lot of complaints. People couldn't get up to the third floor. Nobody ever thought of the handicapped getting up there. They never came, I guess they couldn't get up there. They never asked. So now we've got it on the second floor. That's where council is right now. But the second floor and on the third floor, that was the judge's chamber.

Interviewer: There was a municipal judge? What did he do?

Mr. Bosman: Well, before the municipal judge came in we had the Justice of the Peace and he was appointed in the city of Holland or the county, and there was more than one. And if you had a misdemeanor you had to appear before him and he would sentence you, fine you, or whatever it was. There was no office, he would be in the back of some store and you would appear there. That was changed in the charter that we go to a municipal judge who ran for office. I don't know what his term was, but his office, courtroom, was on the second floor where the Board of Public Works (BPW) manager is now. That was the judge's room. Then they changed over to district judge and the county provides his office for him, and the city I think contributes to that. So that's the difference between the two courts. Cornelius Vander Meulen was the judge when the municipal judge was phased out. Judge John Galien was elected as the district judge. They've got nice office facilities next to the police station.

Interviewer: Were there any major changes in the city charter while you were in office?

Mr. Bosman: I would say yes. They had two council members from each ward, six wards, that would be 12 people on council. They had their own committees. No manager; the mayor was presiding officer. He would appoint committees, like the Police & Fire Commission. They would be citizens of Holland with council's final O.K. They had the Health Department with one man, Ben Wiersma. He was our health officer. He took charge of all the health, he'd go to all these restaurants and check them over, he had to do the weights and measures. So then we went to the Environmental Health Department and a lot more people were hired to do all this. They had the Street Department Committee.

This was the best way to go -- to this city manager form of government. In 1951 we did it. And the manager ran the city with council giving him the orders of what they wanted; eliminated all these other committees. Just like the Justice of the Peace, everything was running kind of all just together. It's much better this way with the manager, much better.

Interviewer: How much were you paid for being mayor?

Mr. Bosman: I was getting paid \$5 a meeting and \$50 a year for being the mayor. And the council members just got \$5 a meeting and up to \$170 a year. Any meetings beyond that you just donated your time. That stayed the way all that time. One of the members of council asked if I'd appoint a committee to evaluate the mayor's and councilmember's job, getting paid correct or not. And they came back and said we didn't have to have any more pay. Now today, what is it? (It's up to \$35 dollars a meeting.) Special meetings were just free. But there weren't too many. Council meetings met first and third Wednesdays. Special meetings would be whenever we called it. If there was something important that came up, like a bond issue had to

be determined right on that particular day, they'd call a meeting with six hours notice. And then you'd get over there and the manager would show what you had to decide and then we'd vote.

Interviewer: What other developments were planned, discussed, or implemented? Like the new police station.

Mr. Bosman: The police station we decided. I think I appointed a committee, the last one I appointed, to work out a new police and fire station. And then we got a fine station on Thirty-second and Waverly. We had to do that because we had the industrial park, and if there was a train stalled across the road then how would we get firetrucks up there? So that was the reason for putting that one on Thirty-second and Waverly. So if there was a fire in the industrial park they could get at it in a hurry. And another reason we got it over there, we would have time enough to go under the Lincoln by-pass so that we wouldn't have to be stopped by a train to get at the other part of town if we had to have all the firetrucks together. I appointed the committee and Bill Lamb finished it up, the police station. And I think Lou Hallacy did the fire station by Kollen Park.

Interviewer: Could you comment on the airports and the one in the township getting money from the city?

Mr. Bosman: The city always made a contribution of \$3000 a year. And they would have to run the airport, and it got the city off the hook, no insurance to pay and no liabilities. It made it easy. That worked for many years. By my time Tulip City Airport started operating. So then we didn't pay anymore. The city dropped it. The townships paid money into it, Holland, Park. Tulip City wasn't even thinking of



being sold to the city yet, but now it's all ready to do so, isn't it?

Interviewer: Yes, we just need some money from the state and federal governments. Could you outline the steps to the building of Herrick library?

Interviewer: Mrs. Hazel Hayes was the librarian. We needed a new library. She was the instigator of getting this new library. She worked with Bob Visscher who was mayor at the time. She contacted Mr. Ray Herrick, from Tecumseh, Michigan, told him what our problems were -- we needed more room and all that. I remember him saying Hazel Hayes has the same name as my wife, Hazel Herrick, and he was going to find out about this. When I was mayor, the Library Board would invite him on the 21st of July. That was his birthday. They would have a little luncheon for him at the library; the mayor, his wife, the city manager, and the board would go to this party. And he would tell us different things what happened, and that's where he said Mrs. Hayes, has the same name as my wife. It was a good project she had. It took time, but that's how we got the library. The old library was up in the second floor of city hall. I remember at the time when the library was up there that the budget for it was \$40,000. Now it's four-hundred-some-thousand but we've got a bigger library now too, of course. It takes more people to operate it. But I give her a lot of credit for getting the roots started on this thing.

Interviewer: How was the new city manager selected when Mr. Herbert Holt left?

Mr. Bosman: I appointed the committee; myself, Mr. Peerbolt was on it. Then we advertised in the municipal league magazine. We had quite a few applications, six or eight anyway. Mr. William Bopf came from Mason, near Lansing. Different ones came over to look it over, and they all would have liked the job of course. Mr.

Harold Mc Clintock was our first manager, then it was Herb Holt, Bill Bopf and now Terry Hofmeyer. They came down and we interviewed them, let them see our city. They were all impressed with our town and the way it was run. Like I say, the manager form of government is the only way to go. If council's got anything to tell him, they can tell him on the council floor; we like this, do a study on this, or that or that. And he did it. The next meeting, or whenever, we'd have his report on this or that. But that keeps us going pretty good I think.

Interviewer: Did the media have any influence directly or indirectly on the actions of council?

Mr. Bosman: No, I would say that we had a good reporter. Cornie VanVoorst, was the reporter to the Sentinel. And she kept right on the middle of the road, no sides at all. She kept an even keel with the Sentinel. When something would come up that would cause a lot of flack, I would go over and talk to Mr. Butler first and tell him this is what we're planning on doing in council. He liked to know ahead what was going to come. We didn't have any trouble with him, never. Cornie did a good job with reporting city council. And we had those luncheons at 5:30 at the hotel or different places. That was started before I got there. And she would always attend those meetings. If we discussed something that would come in the future that we didn't want anything to be said about it, we would ask her not to put anything in about it, and she wouldn't. But she knew what was coming. So it worked out very well.

Interviewer: In a slightly lighter vein, I noticed that in 1965, the Dutch millright on the island, J.D. (Deke) Medendorp, had some problems with a car.

Mr. Bosman: Bob DeNooyer was a good pusher for the windmill, DeNooyer Chevrolet, and he gave him a car to use. He was quite a guy, Medendorp. And we had that road going to the island, it wasn't developed at all; it was just a swampy deal. And he was driving that car and it got stuck in the water, up to the running boards. And there he stands there hollering, standing on top, "How do I get out of here? How do I get out of here?" But they got him out.

He knew about that windmill. When that thing was being put up over here, he was watching. Dale Schrotenboer was the contractor. There was a lot of brick in that thing, ninety-some-thousand bricks and its all on piling. It won't move. It's not on an island that'll tip over. But that was quite an experience to hear that from Mr. Carsten from the state highway department: "If you put that thing on there I don't want my name tied to it at all. It'll just tip upside down." That thing's heavy. Oh!