6-1-1977

Ross, Metta J Oral History Interview: Retired Faculty and Administrators of Hope College I and II

Nancy Swinyard

LIVING HERITAGE ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Miss Metta Ross

Table of Contents

Preface

Interviewee: Miss Metta Ross

Interview I: June 1, 1977
Miss Ross' home in Holland, Michigan

Interview II: June 29, 1977
Miss Ross' home in Holland, Michigan

Interviewer: Miss Nancy A. Swinyard
A.B. Hope College, 1977

METTA ROSS

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH AND SUMMARY OF CONTENTS

Metta J. Ross was born in Allegan County, Michigan, on August 14, 1890, one of three children born to Horace Earl and Orsa Minerva Ross. She attended Wayland high school and went on to college at Western Michigan University, the University of Chicago, and the University of Wisconsin, and graduated from Hope College in 1926. After pursuing graduate study at the University of Michigan, she received her master's degree.

Miss Ross came to Hope College as an instructor of Freshman English in 1926, but later taught history, also. She was elected professor of English in 1941 and professor of history in 1946. She retired in 1960.

Miss Ross is affiliated with the National Council of Women of the United States (1961 to 1971), the International Council of Women, and Delta Kappa Gamma International Sorority. She currently resides in Holland and is involved in research and writing the biographies of Mme. Breshkovsky and Alexander Hamilton.

Miss Ross narrates a range of experiences, including her work in the Women's Suffrage Association and its connection to her being hired as a member of the Hope College faculty. Many of her anecdotes seem tangential to Hope College, but they do give the reader insight into the many events which have shaped Miss Ross as a person, and are at least indirectly related to the development of the college. Miss Ross describes the changes in women students during the time she taught at Hope, discusses members of the History Department faculty, and reflects upon her contacts with Dr. Lubbers and Dr. Vander Werf. She also briefly tells how Dr. Paul Fried came to Hope College.

INTERVIEW I

ROSS: I had done a number of things before I came here, and each one, as far as I was concerned, contributed a great deal to my character and personality. It was a strange feeling, but I always felt that I helped my men more than my girls, though I had some wonderful friends with the girls -- one of them gives me credit for the man she married. He was and is a good friend, too. But I had a man's point of view because of this 16 year older brother who took me through so many things. I could speak their language. When I would talk about summer vacations, I could get down to brass tacks with them. Other things -- horses -- he taught me to ride and to care for them.

When I got out of high school, we could take an examination and teach for a year, in this state. I took my examination and I taught the lower grades. And I got a good lesson then. I had a very good friend in the country, and her son came in my class. Well, she never told me that he had fits, and one day he had one in class and it almost killed me. I hadn't any more idea...here I was 17, 18 years old. But experiences of that sort just never seemed to cross my path.

After that, I went to Western State University. It was a small college then, so you knew most everybody, and everybody else knew you. But they had some very well established literary societies there. The women on that faculty, and the men -- the one man in history, I've had more fellows say to me, "Paul Hickey? I'd black that man's shoes on main street if he'd ask me to!" We just worshipped him. He went every summer to France to collect new views and to better understand what made France great.

One of my best friends on campus at Western State was Margaret Spencer who was second in line in the Art Department. Those three pictures on the wall were done by her. Laura Shaw was another of my very good friends. She later was head in the Drama Department. That's where I got my interest in drama. The third was a red-headed little short woman who was the head of the German Department. So I was not choosy. But it gave me background and ideas which I believe had something to do with that course in cultural history, which I taught 12 years. One section always, if not more.

Then I had a next door neighbor about when I was leaving high school who was from the University of Iowa. She was one of the grandest girls. A little bit older than I, but we became very fast friends. She gave me another outlook on life in the United States. Later, she went to California to teach, and married a younger son of a noble family in England. He was a nice fellow, but money was hard because he got only his remittance and he couldn't work. Well, she lived with him I think for about five years and they were fairly happy, but she couldn't take it at home; so she got a job and taught. Then she came back to Michigan and we renewed our friendship. She had much to do with what I have been since. She was religious in a way in which I had never seen religion. I took a job in Kalamazoo as a kind of right-hand organization man -- don't jump, but I haven't mentioned it in Holland -- of the Woman's Suffrage Association. It was just in its infancy then. It had just become a state organization, and Sue was secretary to the State President. So in my off times, I would drop into the office. Soon I became good friends with Mrs. Clark, too. This all has to do with Hope College -- my part, at least. They had the first national convention the summer after I really began doing some work for Mrs. Clark, and, of course, Sue and I went along to the convention which was held in Chicago. It rained that day as it did on Joan of Arc, somebody, anybody who nearly

got drowned. You never saw it rain so, and we were in a march from the Palmer House about ten blocks. When we got to the Chicago hotel, marching up State Street, there stood Mr. Diekema. I had just seen pictures and I think I'd heard him talk, but I recognized him. He had on a stovepipe hat and he was all dressed up. As we came along, he recognized someone in our contingent, Mrs. Clark I guess it was. He said, "May I have the honor of marching with the Michigan contingent?" And of course that was cream on the milk. He did.

Well, I never saw Mr. Diekema again until I came to Holland to teach. I didn't know him for a long time after I got here. I don't know why, but I was invited to the Century Club, and Mr. Diekema was there and he treated me as if I was a long-lost niece. His second wife was a very charming woman and she was nice to meet. But I couldn't figure why. Then next time I had occasion to talk college with the president, he mentioned Mr. Diekema, because he had some connection with my being there. "Dimmy," Dr. Dimnent, said to me, "Didn't you know that G. J. Diekema got you here?" I said, "What?" I only knew the man from the Congress Hotel to the auditorium. He said, "Sure. I've known him since," he said. "He told me that if we wanted someone to teach to get you. He's on the Board of Trustees and that means something." So I landed at Hope College. You never knew Mr. Diekema, he died before you got here. It's too bad he did because he was a wonderful man. He was a lawyer, but he could do most everything.

Well, that's how I came to be here. I landed at the college at an inopportune time for me. They had just lost their Freshman English teacher. I had majored in English in high school and had done work in college, but I wasn't prepared to teach English at college. I knew I wasn't! So I knew that it meant that I had to have some courses myself. I had three classes a day, three days a week. It was really something. Then, the poor old gentleman who was teaching history came to chapel one morning without any

collar on -- the removable collars. And I guess I told the Board that he was getting too forgetful to teach. So the next year I was moved up into the history spot, and that's how I got there.

I had in the meantime helped students with drama. This friend who was in Kalamazoo in the theatre had given me some secondhand courses from a Russian woman. She had taken the courses in New York, so I had Russian makeup courses. So we had quite a growing drama group. So I've done almost everything except teach math. Math and religion I haven't taught. That's the story.

But in the meantime I have had some very unusual opportunities. Lest I forget. I had breakfast, for instance, one morning at the Palmer House with Miss Laura Clay, who was Henry Clay's niece. She was quite an elderly woman and I was still in my 20's. She was a most charming person, and a typical Southerner, although she was not very far south, of course.

Before I went from high school to the college, I was living in an apartment on Eighth Street with Ann Coleman, who was one of the most beautiful blonds I think I have every run across: tall and stately and dignified and very much composed -- not that that has anything to do with it, I suppose. But she and I, first, remember that my father had read to us from that Russian history book...lo and behold, here was Katerina, oh, I can never say it all at once without looking at it, Breshkovsky , who is now known as the Grandmother of the Russian Revolution. She had walked a thousand miles. She had been about 20 years in Siberia with 23 kopecks a week given to her by the Russian government which they took again for her food which she ate, so she really had only what friends could smuggle to her. Well, of course a while ago she left. We took a room at the Pantlind in Grand Rapids and stayed overnight. Her aid was not a woman, but a man, a very nice man who ran her wheelchair but didn't talk much. But she just opened up and told us what it was like. On that first trek out, she walked over a thousand miles. I've

worked several summers on her, and it was over 1300. She lived in a little shack so cold she froze to death most of the time. Sometimes she had to stay in bed most of the time to stay warm at all. But after she delivered her lecture, which I think was the second, I think she sensed that there were students there because she announced that if anyone would like to stay after and talk... Well, there was a stampede of about 30 people, and we sat on the floor, some boys with their chins in their hands, and that woman talked to us and answered questions and I think that was the most marvelous thing that ever happened to me. So Russian history is a thing that had been in my mind all the time. I taught it for a while, but to the students here, there were other things that were more impressive. All that sort of thing went out to Europe. But I'll never forget her. She was a daughter of a nobleman, and she was sent to Russia to teach children of the serfs to read. That was her crime. The only books that they had to read from were a few Bibles that they smuggled in -- they weren't allowed to have Bibles. So she taught children to read from the Bible. That was the charge against her. The wolves used to eat people on the way to Siberia. It must have been awful. And her father was a nobleman! He had a big estate, and she'd married a nobleman. I don't think it was a very successful marriage, although they did stay together for a number of years. There were no stories of the sadness of breaking up or anything. I'm sure she never had a child. He was a lawyer, a nobleman. But I've talked too much.

SWINYARD: There are so many questions I could ask, and I don't really know where to begin. You have so many interesting things to talk about! What I'll do will be to start off with a couple of questions, and when you want to add more, feel free to do so. We certainly don't need to get through everything today.

ROSS: Do you know that this is the first time in 30 years that you have caught me at home at this time? We always went north. We have a beautiful place up on Drummond Island. We've got to sell it and it just breaks my heart. I say beautiful, but it is a log cabin, but it was built probably by the last man who knew how to build a log cabin. We had a terrific wind a year ago last fall and we were sitting out, and I said to Janet, "I'm afraid this is going to be our last summer here" because that wind was rising and the birches were bent over almost double. But that place never creaked. There wasn't a creak like you would get in a house like this. Not a sound. The man who built it was very honest in his building, and now we have to sell it.

SWINYARD: That's a shame.

ROSS: Our next door neighbor around the bay used to come over for coffee and we would go over there and she is a very good friend and she has a big place, and she said, "Anytime you want to come, there is a guest room there for you."

Our families are so badly scattered, and I miss it. You need family for all kinds of problems, especially property problems.

I had a former student here just this morning, a retired high school principal. I had told his wife by telephone I would like to see him and he came promptly. He gives me credit for the wife he has, and the three children, all of whom have doctor's degrees, because I persuaded Bud to give up the very good gas business his father had bequeathed him and his brother to go to college. He was such a nice person, and he just couldn't waste himself that way! I just kept after him. Every time I got gas I gave him a lecture. He was successful in teaching.

Well, I've run on about a lot of things that you didn't want, didn't need, I mean. I should have told you that along with my father and his Sun-

day reading, I grew up as the playmate of a woman who was at my earliest remembrance at least 93 years old. She lived next door to us, and going to see Grandma Pierce when I got home from school was just as much a part of the day as sitting down and eating dinner. She was a dear old soul, a New Yorker, so she had background I didn't. She had a painting of her husband in her living room, and it was of the type you've experienced where the eyes follow wherever you go. I'd be playing on the floor -- I was just a little kid, five or six years old -- and there were his eyes. Believe me, I wouldn't have put a block down anything but"square!" You learn, without knowing, things such as honesty and kindness and fidelity. Even my skill with horses. I could drive horses my father wouldn't let my brother drive.

And I also knew some very fine young men. I must admit I've been engaged three times, but it didn't stick.

SWINYARD: Let's go back to when you were first talking about coming to Hope, and you had to start teaching Freshman English and cultural history. That was about 1926?

ROSS: Yes. I taught it in the basement room of the old library.

SWINYARD: In Graves. Did you say that you had more friends among the students than among faculty?

ROSS: Yes.

SWINYARD: I had read that you had had very large classes. Could you talk a little bit about the atmosphere of the campus when you got there?

ROSS: It was a bit lifeless. Things went on without any particular "change in pace." Very formal and dignified contacts with both students and faculty, generally, but it gave one a sense of "a quiet, rather dignified, mooring place." One was daily, however, aware of a pervading sense of chal-

lenge.

SWINYARD: When you first became a professor, what was your perception of Hope's relation to the Reformed Church?

ROSS: It was very close. I lived in the town. Janet sang in the choir, and we went to Hope Church every Sunday. To teach at Hope was tantamount to being Dutch Reformed.

SWINYARD: In the 1940's you were starting a drama club. Would you talk a little about this.

ROSS: It developed into a bona fide club with officers, etc. After several years they became affiliated with the (National) International Relations Club.

John Hammel, from the Dutch East Indies, came to Hope as a Freshman. He and I just clicked immediately. He wanted to be a scholar. He was a cartoonist and wanted to write plays! He was an artist, and he would demonstrate for the students and they would remember anything he said to them much longer than anything I would teach them. He said, "I'm a cartoonist. God made me a cartoonist." With a couple of strokes, he could draw a picture for the students that would get a good hearty, wholesome laugh. And he said, "I could teach them drawing." I had inherited the course in drama. I had to work like the dickens on that, but I had always liked drama. John said, "You can have a little drama group and work with them," and I could do this. So we got started in that way. We would meet Saturday mornings. They actually let us use a room for it!

SWINYARD: Was this President Dimnent?

ROSS: No, he was president when I came to Hope. He was a good friend of mine, and a wonderful man.

SWINYARD: Wichers?

ROSS: Yes. I knew him so well, and he asked me to rewrite one chapter that he had written in Dr. Dimnent's biography.

Anyway, it got to the point where I was teaching the group makeup. Laura Shaw had been in New York and had taken lessons from a Russian actress. She was very fundamental, and she taught Russian makeup. She made me look like 16 just for once when I was much older.

Some of the boys had been in India, and had learned some native dances, and they wanted to show off and show us some dances one night. It wasn't too graceful.

John Hammel was doing well in his drawing, and they got to the point where they needed a semblance of models to work from. Well, I didn't ask permission, because I was at the point where I thought, "It's my job, maybe it isn't, but if they want the job, they can have it!" We talked it over, and one of his "models" said, "I have a very modest bathing suit that comes up to my neck and down to my ankles. I could put that on and lie on the table and let them draw." Strangely enough, I never heard any objections. But I did hear about the dancing. They were not two by two's: they were individual dances.

I met the president one day in the hallway and he said, "I have a budget for you -- some money for this year!" I said, "Good." We needed the money. "How much is it?" "Ten dollars." (laughter)

SWINYARD: Even then ten dollars wouldn't go that far.

ROSS: I know! You couldn't buy enough lipstick and paste-color for that. I was given a lifetime membership in Palette and Masque, which was a very nice gesture. Of course, it's been gone for a few years now.

SWINYARD: So you started a local chapter of the national organization?

ROSS: No, it wasn't a chapter, but we had hoped that it would be. But I haven't seen a play in... I don't like the plays they're giving. They don't require any great talent, and it doesn't give the person who takes the part any chance for character development. Summer season is usually very light plays.

SWINYARD: Were there any problems in getting a theatre group on campus? Did that create a stir?

ROSS: Not to my knowledge. I think that may have come to the president.

SWINYARD: I think that covers all my questions about drama, and we've been talking for quite a while now, so perhaps it would be better to continue at another session.

INTERVIEW II

SWINYARD: Would you like to talk about the development of the International Relations Club?

ROSS: If you'd like me to, yes. My father always used to read to us a great deal, and he didn't want to read nonsense. He read newspapers and magazines. When I first went to Western, my professor of history there was T. Paul Hickey, and if you saw anyone who was there during those years, they wouldn't ask you "What did you say?" because we loved him. One of the fellows in the group said, "Why, if that man would ask me to black his shoes on main street I'd get down and do it." And that's the way we all felt about him. He went to France every summer, and came back and taught French history. So I got a pretty good dose of French history there. And from that man it really meant something! I think that was the beginning. Then, I think I've spoken to you of it, of my friend who was working for the suffrage association.

SWINYARD: Yes.

ROSS: I got into that, and the first thing or the second thing or the third thing I knew I was assigned by the president a group of counties which were my counties. I didn't know it. And I noticed in some press release that I was supposed to be state organizer. Well, that only lasted about a year, I think, and then we had that election and won. My counties, I'm very proud to say, had the largest vote, proportionately, of any group in the state. There's so much in connection with that that's interesting, too. I told you, I think, that during that time I met Miss Clay and

Dr. Blanche Haines. I knew him so well, and he used to go to her house for weekends. She was in Washington with the assistant surgeon general, and when he retired, they offered her his position. She said, "No, I'm too old now. I'm 53 years old." (laughter) So she didn't take it. She was one of the grandest women I think I ever knew. She was born a Quaker and I think she always was one. I think that, undoubtedly, was the thing that gave me the spark which got me into history here at Hope. First I was tied up in English, which was good. We had a good time, and drama. I inherited Mrs. Durfee's drama class and came to love drama even more than I had before. I had said when I graduated from high school when they asked you what your ambition is, mine was to teach Shakespeare at Wellesley. Of course, just little me. So I had a world of interests. I don't know how I ever got through.

Then, when I was shifted to a full history course, I taught Egyptian history, ancient history, cultural history. I started with the cultural history with two or three classes a day in that. The war was upon us, of course, so we had a course which would keep us in step with the war. All together, I think, I taught 21 different courses, but I haven't counted.

I suppose I just walked into it as many people do, I think, into their life's work. Again, it was the men in my classes that sparked interest: "Why can't we have a course in this? We were all in the service: we want to know what they did when we were gone. Why did this happen?" So I spent my summers up at Drummond, working on those courses, and went back and taught them during the year. I don't know how many courses I taught. I should count them up, but I haven't.

I have a picture I want to show you... I have a Dutch war medal for the encouragement, etc., which the students sent, as well as some much-needed things such as eyeglasses, which were not to be had in the Netherlands.

Anyway, I think we had 13 nationalities in that group, and we used to have parties together. Some of them were just young fellows who asked questions of their Dutch counterparts. So I got a pretty good education myself: it did as much for me as it did for them, of course, I think it should. If anyone teaches anything, I think you ought to grow as much inside as you expect your students to grow.

Yes, I taught Russian history, and I have part of a book in the making here on Madame Breshkovsky. One of the highlights of my life came when I was teaching history here. I had just come in and I had an apartment with Ann Coleman, I remember. She was teaching history at the high school. We saw an ad in the Grand Rapids Press: Madame Breshkovsky was to be in Grand Rapids for a lecture. She is known as the Grandmother of the Russian Revolution. She was born in a noble family and taught the children of the serfs on the estate to read and write, and the only books that they had were two Bibles that belonged to her family. This got her into trouble with the Russian government.

SWINYARD: Yes, I remember.

ROSS: So the Russians took her for using that as a textbook because the Bible was out. She walked 1,000 miles over that frozen Russian Siberia to the place where they put her in prison for 13 years, or something like it, and all that time she kept in touch with her friends in America. She had, in the meantime, married a young lawyer, but when she went into this sort of thing, he just walked out on her. He didn't want to get into anything. Well, she was to lecture at old Powers Theatre. I was surprised that she was able to talk because although she had been back in this country a couple of times (she had made friends in New York while she was in prison) I expected to see just the leavings of an old lady. She did come out in a wheelchair. A man wheeled her out and stayed with her. He was her constant

companion.A very fine person. She lectured, and that theatre was full, too. Everybody in America wanted to hear Madame Breshkovsky. When she had finished speaking, she said, "I noticed faces in the crowd that had lights in them. Would you like to come up on stage and talk with me?" Well, of course, there was quite a scramble, many, because it was an adult audience. There were quite a number and we just sat around on the stage floor and she talked to us. She told us how they treated her. They did awful things. She was to have 30 kopecks a month, and they would take away that so that sometimes she was practically starving. If it hadn't been for friends she had made in New York, she would have starved. She had just a little cabin to live in, so that she had to stay in bed most of the time to keep from freezing to death. That touched me off. I've been, figuratively speaking, writing her biography ever since. I've enough notes for it, but I don't know if I have the energy and the time.

So it's hard to say what it was. Just history itself. It is the most interesting thing you can imagine.

SWINYARD: It was the culmination of everything for you, then.

ROSS: Sure it was. We're making some very bad history now. Oh! We spend our money for magazines, we have Reader's Digest for fun, and Newsweek and U.S. News besides others that are given us. So we keep quite closely in touch with what's happening. The things that are happening in Russian now are almost as bad as they were before.

SWINYARD: Let's get back to Hope College. You mentioned that you had a war medal from the Queen of the Netherlands, and I understand it was because you had people writing letters to people affected by the war.

ROSS: No, that was the interesting part of it. It was rather to the people in the Netherlands. I had a niece who was a graduate nurse who was on

the first ship that Hitler bombed in the Adriatic. Of course, I had my special interest in the thing. She was stationed, after they got settled, in Bari, Italy, which is quite a good sized city. And she was very close -- she's one of these girls who gets very close to people -- to a number of people. One woman had had her glasses completely crushed and they could get none ground in Italy, but she did have her prescription. I don't know how she ever had. So Beth sent me the prescription and I had my eye man make it up and I sent her glasses back. We did things like that: clothing that they needed and things like that. One woman said, "Do you have a handbag that will still hold money? Could you send it to me? Mine is completely gone." It was really for doing those little things, which took time but nothing else much, that I was given that bronze medal. And I was quite proud of it, but evidently it has slipped out somewhere. I'll find it someday, I'm certain.

SWINYARD: Yes. In prefacing my next question, I must say that some people have labled you a feminist because of all the work that you have done in promoting the equality of women. Could you comment upon the changes that you noticed among the women students during the time you were at Hope?

ROSS: Yes, there is a great change. The girls who came to Hope College in the 30 years I was there, the first of them were rather meek little girls, but you could see them grow out of it. They were beginning to take their place and speak for themselves. They didn't say "yes" to everything the boys said, that sort of thing. They became more and more choosy about their boyfriends. It's interesting: I wish I had the percentage of girls who married those men that they met at Hope. I don't know how I could get it. I'll bet it runs into the 70's.

SWINYARD: I'll vouch for that.

ROSS: I think it would probably be fully that amount. Put me back on the track, please.

SWINYARD: The difference in women students.

ROSS: Those girls were, at first, as I said, shy and not very likely to talk. Then, they began to see. I gave them a chance: people always talked in my classes. They saw that they weren't laughed at if they said something that wasn't too smart. The boys, therefore, treated them differently, too, because I gave them a chance, I suppose. There were outside influences, many of them, and of course everything was changing. The last girls that I had in college were very independent, but very curteous and very kind, most of them, all of them, really, very nice to me. I had difficulty with just one girl in college, and that was the daughter of the garbage man in Chicago who's worth several million dollars. His son and daughter came, and she copied completely a term paper and she wouldn't admit it, so I just flunked her. That's the only one I know who ever went out really hating me.

They became much broader, much less feminist, but not because of anything. I didn't let that enter into my work, but we just talked about men and women in positions as you would talk of any of the women about the men. The girls' attitude toward their men friends changed, not because of me but because of the changes in life, these men coming back from wars mutilated and nerve sick. You people missed all that of course. They began to assert themselves more, to realize that after all they were people and maybe they did have something worthwhile to say, and they said it. And they said it very well. I had one girl, for instance in class, who had been in a military camp in France just within the shoreline. At the time that the Germans came across to get us, the building she was in which was not very strong, evidently, was fired upon by them. She managed to make her way out through a hole that

they blasted. Some of the soldiers helped her out, but she had one leg that was practically useless and one hand which was nearly as bad. By the end of the year that she was there, I felt that it wouldn't be long before her mind would not be too useful. That sort of thing. That's an extreme case, of course. She was an American. I don't think I had any other American girls who had been in the service, but I had hundreds of men. They were such nice fellows. Some came in uniforms, too. I remember one lieutenant, not strutting, just walking in his uniform. I don't think anyone felt that he was conscious of it, but they couldn't get clothes. They couldn't get them fast enough.

SWINYARD: Could you talk a little bit about the development of the History Department? Some of the people you were in contact with there?

ROSS: The History Department was not a very large department. The football coach taught Freshman history -- two sections I think at that time. Though he's dead and gone, I have to admit that he was not a great history teacher. Not from the students' eyes, either. This man, Shaw, whom I told you about who is now editor of this history of the Marine Corps, after he went to Columbia, he wrote back and he said, "I'm sorry I'm having one of my Freshman courses over again. The notes that so and so used at Hope were the notes on the original notes that I'm getting now."

Another member of the History Department was one of the fine men who is retired now as an invalid. He was a very fine person. He taught German, too. He was a good friend of mine and still is. His wife is an invalid now, has been for years. He's just an angel to her. I can't even think of his name.

SWINYARD: It will come to you later.

ROSS: He lives out here a little ways. A very nice person. I took the place. I moved up.

Well, that's all there was of it for a long time. The two of us were practically the department. I'm forgetting something and I can't think of what it is. Oh, I know. The head of our department retired soon and we had to have a new head. The dean called me in one day and asked me to come in and see a letter of application for the position, and I did, and to my pleasure, it was an application from Dr. Hawkinson of North Dakota. John said, "Can you believe she's true?" Well, it was what you'd like to have written about yourself about what she'd done and was teaching, and so forth. He said, "That's too good to be true." I looked it over and put together the courses that she'd taken and what she had done and I said, "No, John, she's just a brilliant woman, that's all. Let's get her." So he agreed and they hired Dr. Hawkinson, and she was wonderful. A large woman, tall and broad. We were very good friends for about four years, I guess. Maybe five years. Then suddenly she asked for a leave of absence to go to Sweden to teach an adult class in history. And it was such a fine opportunity that we decided to let her go. We split up her courses and she went. She was only to be gone part of a year. Her home was in Minnesota, her sister was there. She was back in Minnesota before Christmas time. And her sister's letters didn't sound good at all. (We always called her "Hawkie") She got to writing to me a letter, but I was afraid she wasn't going to be able to come back, but she did, to my surprise, before college opened, and before I knew that she was coming so I could greet her first. John called me and said, "Hawkie is here but she doesn't look good." At Christmas, she had to go back home. Within a couple of weeks they sent her back to Minneapolis, and she died of a tumor on her brain. Here she'd been struggling with that thing all this time. Looking back to the questions she would ask me even when she first came here, I can see that she knew there

was something wrong. She didn't know what. We didn't either. I miss her greatly. She was a splendid person and the boys loved her. I don't know whether the girls did so much or not, but the young fellows did.

SWINYARD: Did you know anything about student government when Dr. Lubbers was president?

ROSS: Yes. I was a member of several student-faculty committees, one with Guy Vander Jagt, now a congressman.

SWINYARD: Did you know how you or any other members of the faculty viewed Dr. Lubbers' method of settling student tensions by his practice of having committee meetings at the Warm Friend Hotel over luncheon?

ROSS: It was very productive. I viewed it with mixed feelings because of the things that happened. We had for instance, this doesn't seem to belong but it is apropos, we had in our science department at that time, a young woman, very brilliant and had a doctor's degree. We were very good friends, too: our minds sort of clicked, and we used to spend quite a bit of time together because we could go out to meals and that sort of thing. She left us, I couldn't tell you why, and took a position in Missouri. She was supposed to have been head of the department at Hope, but a man came in to take her place, and I think that's why she did it. She came to see us. John wrote and asked her to come over and see if she'd like to come back. He said to me, "Why don't you take her down to the tavern for lunch. Get a bunch of women together." Which we did. In fact, we did it for other people, too. We felt that it was one of the nicest things that the college did because you had a chance to get close to the person, maybe to sit across from him or her and look in her eyes while you are talking. It gave you some feeling, too, of his social background, of his disposition, and where he'd been -- she'd been. We knew quite a bit about her, but just getting over,

with her, that case, all the women who were at the table were urging her to come back. I don't think there was a woman on the faculty who didn't like her. I think Irwin was criticized a great deal for spending money that way. I felt that he was, but I think the money was well spent. I went to a few mixed meals, too. I think that was very good. It gave us a chance to get to know the person and for him or her to get to know us. In some cases, the person who was being entertained just decided that this isn't my kind of crowd and so would back off.

SWINYARD: But what about President Lubbers' meetings just with the students?

ROSS: Oh! When he met with them alone. I was in on that to quite an extent. I haven't thought about that in quite a while. I really think that at that time I felt it was a good thing. He got to know them and I think he also got to know us better. I don't doubt it. He was a very astute person. Still is.

SWINYARD: Yes. Did you have any contacts for the Michigan Colleges Foundation? Did you have to go out to any businesses?

ROSS: No. Incidentally, his wife and I belong to the same bookclub here, so I saw a great deal of her. I don't know whether I'd known her when she was a student here or not.

SWINYARD: Mrs. Lubbers?

ROSS: Yes.

SWINYARD: She graduated in 1922.

ROSS: 1922. No, that was just before I went to the college.

SWINYARD: Is there anything more that you'd like to add about President Lubbers? Your work with him or what was generally felt about him. Do you remember a petition that went around about him?

ROSS: No, I didn't know about it. Maybe they knew I was a friend of his and they didn't want me.

SWINYARD: It was relatively soon after he arrived, and I guess there was some rumbling between him and the Board of Trustees.

ROSS: You're speaking about his transition from teaching to the presidency. That period.

SWINYARD: Right. After he became president.

ROSS: He was a very, I don't know if I should say popular teacher, but I think he was. I think I could use that word. He was a very good English teacher. I remember now there was some little feeling that someone else who was there might as well have been moved up as for him to have been.

SWINYARD: Do you know who that was?

ROSS: I wouldn't say because I'm not sure. We had a number of young fellows, comparatively young, on the faculty. He and I were always so frank with one another that sometimes we were liking each other very much and sometimes we weren't liking each other very well, but that was perfectly natural with independent people.

SWINYARD: You retired in 1960?

ROSS: 1960. They had a hard time getting faculty, so I taught a few classes a couple of years after that.

SWINYARD: But not until Dr. Vander Werf became president in 1963?

ROSS: Yes, 1961, 1962. I don't think it was more than a couple of years that I did work after that. Mr. Vander Werf was a former student of mine, so of course it seemed kind of a joke to me that he was becoming president.

SWINYARD: Did you know him well?

ROSS: Oh, yes. I knew him **very** well, and his wife very well. Yes, we had been on a first name basis for years. He was a good English teacher.

SWINYARD: Now, who was this?

ROSS: Dr. Vander Werf.

SWINYARD: Who? In English? Dr. Lubbers?

ROSS: Yes.

SWINYARD: Dr. Vander Werf was in chemistry.

ROSS: I had had some contact with Mr. Vander Werf, Dr. Vander Werf, while he was still in college. I had forgotten all about that. I was the faculty sponsor for the Anchor. Those were war years and we were told from Washington what we could do and what we couldn't do. The restrictions would go to the president, of course, and then the president would relay them to him. But that was a difficulty. Calvin and I used to rub elbows frequently because he would just refuse to cooperate. He would put on his hat -- a literary gentleman always wears his hat -- and flip the brim up and say, "Well, maybe Washington says so, but I'm not going to do it." I never liked that kind of attitude, particularly, so we were friends, but not warmly as some of the others had been. Irwin and some of the others. Well, if fact

there hadn't been so many, either. "Dimmy"was here when I came, Dr. Dimnent.

SWINYARD: Then Wichers.

ROSS: Wichers, yes. Wichers then Lubbers. Wichers was a very good president in some respects. A very very different person, though, from Lubbers, so that I think that most of us felt a little grinding of the cogs when they made the change. Wichers had dignity and that sort of thing, and Lubbers had dignity, too, but of the slap on the back if you like it, and if not, "step on his toe" sort. But on the whole, Lubbers was pretty well liked by his faculty.

Funny, the good ideas. I've known people well as people, not as president or doctor. Sometimes it's a handicap, you know, because we find little things in some of our associates that annoy us, while if they were our doctor or someone like that whom we see only occasionally, you would feel were a matter of strength, actually.

SWINYARD: What are you referring to in particular?

ROSS: His ability, and he was proud of it, I think, and in some ways we liked it too. His ability to say "no" to you or someone else and have them go out with a sunken heart but feeling that you'd been patted on the back.

SWINYARD: Dr. Lubbers.

ROSS: Yes, that was Dr. Lubbers. I think every one of us felt that. There were times when we'd ask for something, and he'd talk quite a bit -- he was a good talker -- and when he got all through you'd think he was going to say "yes," but he said , "I'm sorry, we just can't afford it. I don't think we should spend our money that way." And out you'd go. Well, I certainly

have talked this afternoon. I don't know what you can ever make of it.

With all this talk of myself and my students, and my activities at Hope, I have omitted any mention of the one whose friendship I have so highly prized since he came to us during Hitler's invasion of Austria. Somewhere, en route to his objective, America and education, he picked up a "buddy" who was also fleeing the "scourage of Europe."

When their ship docked, in New York, John Vander Meulen, a loyal Hopite, met them and questioned them as to where they wanted to go and do. They said they wanted to go to college, but having been under cover for so long they didn't know where. John called Hope's president, and they were soon on their way to Holland, with a firm promise of a place to live and to get a college education.

The next year Paul Gottwald got a scholarship in Ohio, and left us, but Paul Fried remained until he joined the U.S. Army, and was sent overseas. After the war ended, he remained in Germany and continued to serve through the Nueremburg Trials, as an interpreter. Upon his return to the States, he finished his work at Hope and was graduated in 1946. By the time he was elected Associate Professor of History in 1953, he and I were firm friends. Hes yearly summer school, for Hope students and others was, from the beginning, an outstanding success.

SWINYARD: I don't have any more questions here. Thank you very much for these two interviews, which have been both interesting and enjoyable.

INDEX

Interview with Metta Ross
June 1, 1977

Due to ill health, Miss Ross and her housemate were unable to vacation in the Upper Peninsula as usual. Miss Ross was interested in participating in this project despite her recent illnesses. In preparation for my interview, she had gone through her materials and written some brief notes on certain items. Her eagerness to talk to me led her to talk extensively without being questioned, although the train of thought did not always center directly on Hope College. She was ready and willing to tell me anything I was willing to listen to, and, at one point, cried briefly when she remembered certain people who had been dear to her and who since had passed away. I found it difficult to steer her back to my areas of interest in questioning because I sensed her loneliness and her joy at having a visitor, although she is not without friends. The first side of the tape is a recording of her spontaneous recollections, given after she had asked me what kinds of things I was interested in. Side two seems to be a little more to the point, although it, too, took the long way around in answering some questions. After about an hour and a quarter, with only about 25 minutes of that being of prime importance, I suggested that we continue at another time, and she readily agreed, for she was tiring and her housemate needed assistance. I told her I would probably not transcribe the entire session, but would instead sift through what she had told me, and type the more relevant anecdotes. I explained that I would be in New York next week, but would be in touch with her upon my return. We chatted for a few minutes, and she bid me a fond good-by.