Benson, John Oral History Interview: Sesquicentennial of Holland, "150 Stories for 150 Years"

Ann Paeth

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.hope.edu/ses_holland

Part of the Archival Science Commons, and the Oral History Commons

Recommended Citation

http://digitalcommons.hope.edu/ses_holland/6

AP: The first thing I have everyone do is state their name and where and when they were born.

JB: I'm John Benson, and I was born in Moline, Illinois on [date removed], 1920.

AP: How long were you there?

JB: Till I was six years old, and then I moved to Holland.

AP: What brought your family to Holland?

JB: My oldest brother, who was at that time 21 years of age, moved up here from Rock Island, Illinois, the twin city to Moline, with the Szekely Air Motor Corp. They made air craft engines over here on 12th Street near Kollen Park in the building where Thermostron is located. He moved up here in 1925; we moved up here in 1927. Then my father worked as paint foreman for the Vacatap Washing Machine Company, which was over on Howard Avenue across the lake.

AP: Have you been here ever since?

JB: Yes. I never moved away. My brother did.

AP: Describe what Holland was like at the time when you moved here, your neighborhood, school...

JB: When we moved to Holland, we lived on 9th Street, three doors from the Cappon House on the same side of the street, so I got to know Barbara Archer very well as a child. She came every summer, she and her brother, and we did a lot of playing at
the Cappon House, in the barn and in the yard.

I would say that we weren't too welcome as newcomers to the city. The city was quite clannish. Often times they even ignored my mother in the stores; they wouldn't wait on her, because of us being outsiders coming into the city. Also, we were Methodists, so we joined the First Methodist/Episcopal Church in Holland on 10th Street, and we've been very active in the church ever since that time.

I was one of the first classes to enter Washington School. When we moved to Holland, I was in the first grade. We came in February, and I walked from 9th Street up to the E. E. Fell junior high, where the first grade was temporarily set up. So we walked up in the morning, and had to come home at noon and go back after lunch, until the new Washington School was finished. I was very, very proud of Washington School. It was beautiful.

When we moved to Holland, the old Cappon tannery was still on the corner where the Civic Center is now. The first three houses on the south side of 9th Street and Maple were all moved there when they built the new Washington School. Before they moved the houses, there were all bark sheds for the tannery; they used bark in tanning hides. The little store on the corner of 10th and Maple was John Van Zoren's store. Mrs. Van Zoren's brother ran the meat market. The meat market was on the one side of the grocery. We called him Chip Wyngarden.

Then, of course, at that time Kollen Park was not a park. It was the location of King's Basket Factory, or what remained of it--big cement abutments, the machinery rested on. All that was removed to make the park. The park didn't come
up to Van Raalte, it didn’t start until after the railroad track. The Harry Harrington’s owned that property, and eventually gave that property to add to Kollen Park. I remember the little stick entrance they used to have to Kollen Park, made out of sassafras limbs, I guess. So that was quite a very nice addition to Holland. Of course, we came from a place that was along the old dirty Mississippi River. So we thought this lake was really wonderful, and yet it wasn’t really good at that time. (laughs) But I watched Kollen Park develop; that was a lot of fun, and we enjoyed it as youngsters. Then, of course, being along the lake like that and living right on 9th Street, we spent a lot of time in the bulrushes collecting turtles and minnows and all kinds of things like that. I, being interested in gardening, was always down there collecting cattails and things like that. I would even go along where the light plant is now. The river ran where they built the light plant, they filled the river all in, and made the channel straight as it is now. I used to follow that river all the way around to where Parke-Davis is now. That was a working tannery at that time. I used to walk way over there when the lilacs were in bloom, because there were some white lilac bushes, and I just thought they were the most marvelous flowers, and along the way I collected turtles no bigger than a quarter, sometimes killing some snakes. Then there was a little store on River Avenue called Puffet’s Store. They were a couple of old English people, and she had a little sign at the back door, "Mrs. Puffet’s Tea Garden," and she would serve English tea out there. She was kind of hard of hearing, her husband looked like a little English Toby; he was little and pudgy, and she was hard of hearing, and we’d come in there and whatever we’d say, she didn’t
understand and she'd say in her English accent, "Clark Bar?" She thought you were asking for a Clark Bar--Clark Bars just came out when I was young. It was really cute.

When I was a youngster, 10th Street and Van Raalte Avenue were dirt roads. So we used to run in back of this great big wooden sprinkler wagon that was drawn by two horses, and the guy had big pedals he'd push on, and the water would all spurt out about the width of the road. So we'd all fly behind him with our bathing suits on to splash in that muddy water.

At that time they had the buttermilk man. He'd come along with his horse and wagon, clanging his bell, and he had two milk cans in the wagon. One was buttermilk pop, and the other one was plain buttermilk. The Dutch ate buttermilk pop. That was made with buttermilk and rice and raisins. He had a big dipper in each milk can. So when you went out, you'd either get a big dipper or two of buttermilk pop or just plain buttermilk. Then the ice man, he was a favorite of us kids, of course. His name was Tibbets. We'd always call, hey Tibbe, how about some ice?" He'd say, "Get out of here or I'll cut off your ears." At that time, the ice wasn't scored, so he had to chip what he thought was twenty-five pounds or fifty pounds. Then they had a scale that they hung the tongs with the ice in it on. Everybody had a card and they'd put their card in the window. You put it to read twenty-five pounds or fifty or a hundred. Right down at the bend of Van Raalte and 8th Street, there's an office building now. That used to be Superior Ice Co. They had a little shack out in the front called the "jitney" and they had a young kid, a
friend of mine when I was a youngster, ran the jitney in the evening, and you could drive up there and get fifty or whatever ice you needed. We all had ice boxes, not very many people had refrigerators. Then they got a scoring machine, which would score the ice block. Then it would just score twenty-five pounds, and you could get two or three or whatever you needed.

We spent a lot of time in back of that place, too, because they had boat houses back there. A lot of people had what they called launches. They’re about as wide as this room, and they had a big engine in the middle of the boat, not an outboard. Some of these people, then, would keep their launches in these rented boat houses. They had big doors that opened out on the other side, you’d go in the little door, and here was the big boat parked in there. Then they’d open the doors and take the launch out. They had a lot of those in back of Heinz, too. So, that was a lot of fun. I remember one time getting into mischief there. They had trestles where they would hoist the boats up there so they could work on the bottoms. Some of us kids stole a couple of those big iron things, I don’t know how we ever got them down, but we rolled them down the street. Of course, they caught up with us.

Harrington Coal Company, we used to lie there for hours watching his steam shovel that would come down the track transferring the coal, shooting steam out the side. I can still smell that sulphur from the coal, that black smoke billowing out of the steam shovel. We also had a good time at the sugar beet factory. In back of the sugar beet factory around Heinz there were all these boat houses, and we used to fish down there catching blue gills and some perch and some bullheads (that usually
swallowed the hook). The sugar beet trucks used to be lined up way down 14th Street almost to River Avenue at times, waiting to get their sugar beets unloaded.

AP: Do they do as much sugar beet farming here as they used to?

JB: I don’t think so. I don’t even think they raise as many pickles. They used to move them (sugar beets) into the factory by water. They had big long cement bins, and in the center a heavy force of water would come through. They’d dump those sugar beets in there. Then they would tumble and wash them, and the water would bring them into the plant.

AP: Did you go to Holland High?

JB: Yes, I went to Holland High. I also graduated from Holland Business College. That used to be on the corner where Alpen Rose is now. It was a three story building (old bank building). Woolworth’s Dime Store was down below, and they had offices on the second floor, and the business college was on the entire third floor of that building.

AP: Was that a real common thing to do, to go on to business college after graduation?

JB: Well, it wasn’t real common to go on to college. It was the depression. I know my mother got a job at the candy factory so I could go to business school. It cost about thirty-five dollars a month for me to go to business college. Because we were Methodists, Albion was our college, like Hope is the Reformed college. She said, "Would you like to go to Albion, or what would you like to do?" And I really didn’t know what I wanted to do. She said, "Why don’t you just go to the Holland Business College. You can always use that training, and in the meantime, if you decide to go
to Albion or Hope, then you can go there." So I went to business college and after I
 got through there in two years, I got a job at the Holland Dye Company on the north
 side of the lake, which turned out to be BASF. So I worked there for forty-three
 years, straight from business college, in various positions. The last position I had
 over at BASF was manager of office services.

AP: What do they do there, how has the company changed?

JB: Well, in fact, the Tiesenga’s owned the company, and they had an office in their
 home on the southeast corner of College Avenue and 14th Street. I think it’s a frat
 house now. I went by there the other day, and I thought, boy, Gen Tiesenga would
 turn over in her grave if she could see what a ramshackle house it turned out to be.
 Then they decided to have somebody over to the plant to do the office work. I could
 take shorthand, too, so I did almost everything over there. Mr. Trueblood was
 treasurer and general manager of the plant, and before he was hired, he used to have
 to write all of his letters in long hand, drop them off at the Tiesenga’s home, and
 Mrs. Tiesenga’s sister typed them. Now, having someone like me at the plant, he
 could dictate all of his letters, and I could type them. So they kept expanding, and
 one morning, the whole plant burned. It was first the Holland Aniline Dye Company,
 then Holland Color and Chemical. Then we were purchased by Chemitron
 Corporation. Then they bought a company over in Huntington, West Virginia:
 Standard Ultramarine Company. Then they called the company Holland SUCO,
 taking the letters from Standard Ultramarine. Then we were purchased by BASF.
 That’s where I retired from in 1983. Now there’s no BASF in Holland at all. Have
you ever been in the building up there on Columbia? It's just gorgeous. It used to be
the Holland Furnace office. It's just beautiful!

AP: I talked to a woman who used to be a secretary in there, and she said businessmen
would come in and just hold their breath.

JB: It was like walking into the Chicago Theater or something like that, all black marble
and rococo ceilings, art deco lights, beautiful statuary. The whole place was just
marvelous.

AP: I'm curious to know a little bit about this place, the area around the lake, how long
you've been living here, your house...

JB: Well, living with my parents, we lived in various houses in Holland. My mother
said, "As soon as you get it all cleaned up, then they want to sell it or they move into
it themselves." So in 1950, we lived on 10th Street over near Kollen Park in the
Fairbanks' house. He was co-owner of the Superior Ice Company. He had passed
away and Mrs. Fairbanks rented the house to us. All this time, we owned a house in
Moline, Illinois. I said to my mother, "Why don't you sell that house, and I'll help
you if you want to build one," because my parents owned a couple lots out here in
Virginia Park. So that's what we did. In 1950, my parents built a house over on
Whitman Avenue. So I've been out in this direction ever since. When I was in
Junior Chamber of Commerce, one of the fellows, who was a fellow officer, lived in
this barn and they made this into a house. We held some executive board meetings
out here, not thinking I would ever live here. My father died in 1963, and in the fall
of 1963, I bought this. I've been living here about thirty-three years. I put in
fireplaces, changed some walls around. I just enclosed this back porch. Otherwise, this was all screens. I hated to get rid of screens, but I’m getting older, and to take them up and down and wash them, take out all this porch furniture and store it in the garage. It was really getting too much.

As a youngster, Virginia Park was really popular. You lived in Virginia Park, or you lived in Montello Park, Central Park, Jenison Park, all these different parks. Nowadays, you don’t hear too much about them. Over here a few blocks was a big barn when they housed the Interurban. They repaired the Interurban in these big barns. The Interurban was just going out when we moved to Holland in ’27. There were still some street cars standing around. I don’t know how it came about, whether Virginia Park Association bought those barns or what, but they used them as a recreation area. We roller skated in this big barn. They put on plays out there, along with dinner parties. It was really fun. That’s where the fire station is over here now. Eventually, the barn burned. So it was quite a strong association, and there were a lot of home talent shows.

AP: When you say everybody lived in all the different parks, would that be a neighborhood or a subdivision?

JB: See, Virginia Park still is not in the city. Montello Park and Central Park have been annexed to the city. Old Orchard Road is the city limits.

AP: Do you remember when a lot of the parts annexed to the city?

JB: Yes. I remember going to Harrington School for meetings. Then the group annexed the schools to the city, but they didn’t annex any of the actual properties. There were
a lot of hot and heavy arguments about it.

AP: What were the issues? Taxes?

JB: Yes, taxes would go up. I don’t know what the percentage was, but quite a bit more. Then you had less to say, too. They kind of liked to keep it more-or-less rural, and that type of friendly neighborhood thing. There’s a small section of Park Township on this side of the lake. Just recently a group wanted this section to go into the city. I haven’t heard anything more about it, there was too much resentment, I guess. Of course, when we moved to Holland, Jenison Park was an amusement park. They had a merry-go-round and shooting alleys. You could take little steamer rides, too, out on the lake. They had a pavilion built out over the lake, and you could rent row boats. They had concession stands for ice cream and cotton candy and stuff like that. My father, after the Vacatap went bankrupt, got a job during the depression days with Hart and Cooley. I remember Hart and Cooley having a picnic out there that I went to.

AP: Let’s talk about the depression days. What was that like? Was there an awareness of it, or only in looking back?

JB: Well, many people were on relief, of course. I remember when you could go to certain areas to get things, flour and things like that. My father always worked. He didn’t make much, but we never were on relief or needed anything like that. Everybody was in the same boat. I remember having my sweaters for school darned and patched, but everybody had them darned and patched, so you didn’t know the difference. I remember in grade school, there was a little sign above the light switch:
"Electricity costs money, don’t waste it." So they only had the lights lit on one side of the room. One side had the windows, the other side didn’t have windows, so they had the lights lit on that side of the room only. But everyone was aware. They had gardens in the swamp area down by the river. You could have a patch of ground and raise vegetables. Of course, you had an egg man and people who had gardens were selling things. You didn’t see a lot of cars. I remember we used to sit on the front steps and play cars. Every so many cars was your car. Maybe you get a rattletrap of a car... Of course, in those days, none of them were very beautiful.

AP: How did World War II affect things?

JB: I was not in the service, but our plant made color for the war effort. So they "froze" your job. If you had contracts with the military, then you had a hard job changing jobs, unless you got certain permission to make a change. Of course, it was all rationing. You got stamps for gas and stamps for sugar. But everybody was pulling together.

AP: Let’s talk a bit about how the city has changed. What are some of the biggest changes you see in Holland today?

JB: The integration of everyone is so different. When I was a kid, you used to see a lot of these little old Dutchmen sitting in Centennial Park, almost in a Dutch costume--the same kind of pants, the little caps. I think that the whole thing is modernized. I remember there used to be Steketee’s Dry Good Store downtown, and when you went in there, they just turned on the light where you were. If you moved a little way down the counter, shut this light off and turn that light on. I was always fascinated
with where Vogelzang’s is now on College and 8th. That used to be the J.C. Penny’s store. They had a central change person. If you bought something, the clerk would put the dollar in this little metal box with the bill, and then she’d stick it in this little track, because there were wheels flying around with "clotheslines" going all over the room. And this little metal box would go ching chang, bing bang, and go into the office, and the cashier would put the change in there and send that thing back.

Lokker Rutger’s store used to have a lady sitting up in a balcony of the main floor of the store. Then they had wires that went up to her, and the clerk would put the money in the little box and pull the rope. That little thing would shoot up to her, and she used to make the change and send that thing down. It was maybe only fifty feet or twenty-five feet, but it was so funny. I always thought that would be kind of neat to do. Especially in Penny’s. I thought that was real cool.

I think the integration of people, the change within the Christian Reformed, Reformed, so forth, none of them liked the Methodists, we were kind of outcasts. Slowly, now, all the churches are working together. If you were Catholic, that was terrible. All those things have changed for the better.

AP: What do you think about the size of the community now?

JB: The size? I wish it’d stop growing. I think we’re just getting too many people. Too much building. They’re taking up too much valuable land for housing. I just wish people would settle down and be satisfied and work together and enjoy life.

AP: Has the approach to housing changed a lot? It seems like they’re building bigger and bigger.
Oh yes. My brother, was the reason we moved up here. My parents received a letter from Dr. Kool’s. He said, "Paul has visited me several times, and there’s nothing wrong with him, but I think he is terribly homesick. If one of you or both of you could come up here and visit him, I think it would do him a world of good." In those days, you had tin lizzy cars. To move from Illinois 350 miles away, it took you twelve hours to drive 350 miles in that tin lizzy. So my dad drove up here. While he was up here, my dad was a paint man, he got the job with the Vacatap Washing Machine Company as paint foreman. So we moved up here lock, stock, and barrel. I remember my brother writing my mom. He said, "This is the strangest place you ever saw. The people are so clannish. The houses..." We were used to real big square houses, similar to Grand Rapids... He said, "They all have a lot of kids, and it looks like they put an addition on the house every time they had a kid."

There’d be the main house, and then there’d be a washing shed, a coal shed, etc. Then he said, "They don’t even have a YMCA up here." We were used to a big Y with a pool and everything. He said, "If it weren’t for the church and the people from the church taking me under their wing, I don’t know what I would do." I remember the first morning after getting here, looking out the window, and there was a little kid standing out there, and I said, "Hi, Dutch." And he said, "Oh, Dutch yourself." He was a Norwegian living next door, the Anderson’s. Speaking of the Anderson’s, there was the Cappon House, and Balders family lived next door, then the Anderson’s, then our house, then the Deleays, and then it was the little Settler’s House. Grandfather Olaf Anderson lived in the Settler’s House. Five of them lived
in that house: old grandpa Anderson, Bertha, the oldest girl, Oscar, the boy, Gunial, the girl, and Ellen, the younger one. They all lived in that little dink of a house. We had a lot of good times in that house. Next door to their house was that square house where Grandma Charter lived, that was Mrs. Deley’s mother. She was an old, old lady at the time. I have a little pair of mittens that she one time knit me. I was always scared of her. She’d sit in the window, and one time coming home from school, she wanted me to come up to the door, and I didn’t know whether I should or not, but she gave me the little pair of mittens. She lived to be ninety-some years old.

AP: Have you seen much about the restoration of the Cappon and Settler’s houses?
JB: Oh, I think it’s marvelous. Barbara was here just a couple of weeks ago. There were two dinners that they were having in her honor. We had a good time reminiscing and laughing. I have a little snapshot of Hilda Anderson’s 10th birthday party. Right in the front row stands Barbara, and I’m right next to her. We had a lot of good times. It was kind of strange. I never knew where they lived in West Virginia when I was youngster, but come to find out, they lived in Huntington, West Virginia where Standard Ultramarine Co. was located that Holland Color bought. Her father was hired at Marshall University as a coach. Then came the depression, so they had to drop the athletic department. Then she said he also took up pharmacy at University of Michigan, so he opened up a drug store right kiddy corner from the Huntington High School. She graduated from the Huntington High School, so we have Huntington people living here that came here after we bought out Standard Ultramarine Company.
AP: So the community is a lot less predominately Dutch now? It’s changed a lot?

JB: Oh yes.

AP: Did that just gradually happen?

JB: Oh sure. There’s a lot of "Dutchie" influence. I’ve always heard, "Oh, they’re so Dutchie." When you see this stereotype coming into Russ’, and you say, "There’s some more Dutchie." 

AP: What are some of the characteristics that people would say the Dutch possess?

JB: Well, I think especially the women, they say, "Yah, he’s my cousin," or, "Yah, we got to go out on coffee, tonight, we’re invited out on coffee," or they’ll say, "We’re going by Russ tonight." Or when Mr. Steak was in town, then they would just say, "Let’s go by Steak once." That’s a Dutchie expression. Or, "Let’s have chicken once." There are certain characteristics that are typical. There’s kind of a gossipy thing, too. "Oh yah?" We used to go up to Vogelzang’s when we were kids, and if you were a girl, they’d say, "What do ya want, girlie?" Or if you were a boy, "What do ya want, boy?"

AP: A lot of people I interview call me girl. They’ll say, "Let me tell you, girl."

JB: When I was a kid, we used to go down to the park and some of the kids we’d walk to school with, would call me "Yonnie," instead of John. I never liked that.

AP: And Jan is such a common Dutch name.

JB: Instead of John, they’d call me Jan, or Jannie. Jannie Benson. (laughs) I’d avoid even walking with them. It bothered me that much, even as a young kid. We used to love playing in the fall, too. Hope College would have their bonfire or tug-of-war
across the river. They had that when I was a kid, too. We used to plan to go to that. Then, in the evening, when they used to have Carnegie Gym, the college kids, or anybody, would collect boxes. They had piles big as this house. Then after the Pull, they'd have a pep rally in the gym, and they'd have some of the old players, pep everybody up, and then they'd light this great big huge pile of boxes, and have this great big bonfire. The next day was the big game. I remember they'd play Albion or somebody like that, and they'd have this pep rally the night before so everybody was all pepped up for the game.

AP: Did a lot of people from town go to see the Pull or things like that?

JB: I think maybe they would have about a hundred people at that time. It was way out on the river. They cheered all the pullers. They didn't have a beautiful girl for each guy pulling. Everybody would just cluster around. You might get your little hand in there to help pull. It didn't do much good, but it was really fun.

AP: What has been the influence of Hope College on the community?

JB: I think it's had a very, very positive influence on the community. It's done a lot of good. Although I think the community holds Hope College up too high. "We mustn't build a more beautiful library, because it might outshine a college building." So what? I criticize the statue of Van Raalte facing Hope College. Why should it face Hope College? I think it should be at the entrance of the park, where everybody will see it, not just way over on the other side, because he was a founder of the Reformed... (tape ends) ...very good influence, cultural influence, educational influence on the community. It's been a very good college. I don't know if it still is,
but at times it's been one of the top ten in the nation.

AP: Earlier we talked about the annexation and how people had some heated discussions about annexing. Have there been any other issues or controversies in the community that you recall?

JB: No. Not any big ones. I think that they've gotten on the bandwagon with some of these smaller issues. I think it usually would be something that the church would object to, something that they thought was really "wicked." That word they used an awful lot when I was young. This was wicked, that was wicked, you were wicked if you did this or...

AP: What kinds of things were wicked?

JB: Going to the theater was wicked. Dancing was wicked. Even in high school, we had all of our dances in the Women's Literary Club, because you weren't allowed to dance in school.

AP: Probably doing just about anything on Sundays was bad?

JB: It used to be the city tennis courts had signs: No Playing Tennis on Sundays. Stuff like that. But the fact of it is, they used to sneak to Grand Rapids to go to the movies, and hoped that nobody would see them.

AP: Well, if somebody else was there, they were in the same boat. Have there been any organizations or activities you've been involved in in the community?

JB: Yes, I was a member of the Junior Chamber of Commerce for years. That was a wonderful experience. I remember, I was working, and you had to be invited to join, you just couldn't join. Chuck Cooper, who is the retired president of Holland Motor
Express, called me at the office one day, and he said, "How would you like to be a member of the Holland Junior Chamber." I said, "I'd love it." I always admired them. They had the March of Dimes to raise money for polio, to find a vaccine. They'd be on 8th Street slapping yard sticks for people to lay money down on the board. I always admired all the young fellows that were in any of the J.C. activities in the community. I was real pleased to be among them. I held every office except president. Mr. Trueblood, the manager of our company, was so against it. He was always against the fact that he might have to give you a little time off, or that you might be doing some work for another organization. He was so against it, that I could never take the presidency. But I was vice-president, executive chairman...

We'd always put on a big Halloween party every year. We had a concession stand at the Civic Center selling popcorn and popsicles and things like that. I was co-chairman to have the new works put in the Tower Clock. We had a difficult time, and it was only raising $200, but my gosh, that was like "pulling teeth" to get $200. We sold Christmas trees, and we just did a lot of fun things. We all worked together. We had a tent out at the tulip farm, and none of the guys were apt at making change or selling anything. People would pick up all these souvenirs: a pencil, an eraser, a little windmill, all that little stuff. You had to figure it in your head, twenty-five cents, fifteen cents... Half the people would say, "Hey, you gave me too much money," or, "You didn't give me enough money back." We'd have more fun about that. We had a lot to do with Tulip Time. I remember one year I was in charge of all the scrubbers in the Volksparade. Other times, we were in charge of
various things during Tulip Time.

AP: Has Tulip Time changed a lot?

JB: Oh yes. I have one of my little child autograph books from the 30s. At that time, they distributed to each child six seals. You were supposed to sell six seals, I think each were a dollar. I have one of those seals pasted in the cover of my autograph book. I’ve often wondered if the museum has one or the Archives. I’d just as soon have that steamed off of there and give it to them. I brought down to the Archives an interesting thing. When the Holland State Bank was robbed, I had a bullet that had hit the step of the store across the street. I was about ten or twelve years old. We heard the bank had been robbed in the morning. So after school, boy, we guys were going to go down and see all the chips off the… If you look at the one side of the Warm Friend Hotel, you’ll see where the bullets chipped a lot of the glaze brick. We came along there, and this guy just picked up this bullet, it was all flat, and he said to me, "Hey, would you like a bullet from the bank robbery this morning? See where it hit the corner off this step?" I wore that on a chain for years. A year or two ago I brought that down to the Archives and asked if they wanted to keep that bullet. I think they passed it on to the museum. I have a couple letters I’m going to bring down there. One was written by DeRoo, who I think was one of the early presidents. It’s dated 1876, I think, in beautiful handwriting. We lived in a house that was torn down to build the new center. We didn’t live in that house a long time. We got it all fixed up, this very gorgeous home with all raised plaster in the ceiling, roses and ribbons and things like that. We just got it fixed up, and they let it out to the frat
house. Ottawa Savings and Loan owned the place, and they let the fratters have it.

Up in the attic, I wished I had saved all of this stuff now, there was all this beautiful
writing and letters. I saved one of a wedding invitation that had little inserts of the
bride and the groom. I think they were mailed to DeRoo. Those I will bring down
sometime and put in the Archives. Somewhere, too, I have a letter at the same time,
written on the stationary of the Palace of Honolulu, Hawaii.

AP: Have the roles of women changed in the community? How have they changed?

JB: I think the roles women play now have evolved the same all over in the country.

Maybe it was a little slower here. Maybe there were more chauvinistic attitudes in
our community for a longer period of time, especially in having women rise up to
executive positions, things like that.

AP: Are there any drawbacks to Holland, or are there any areas that are problematic that
need to be addressed?

JB: I imagine there are in this modern age, but it isn't nearly as bad as what larger cities
have to deal with. I think as we get an influx of people from the eastern part of the
state, and you get your ethnic groups, then you have more problems, as you know. I
can remember years ago, the blacks had twenty-four hours to get out of the city. I
had a lot down here on South Shore Drive, and when I sold it a few years back, the
realtor couldn't believe they had a statement in there that it could not be sold to any
black people. There were no blacks unless they were servants. Of course, Macatawa
people always brought a lot of black servants in the summer time. Thursday was
always their day off, so you would see blacks downtown. But if they just came into
the city, the city just gave them so much time, they could stay over night, but they had to be out of town.

AP: What things are you most thankful for being in this community or your life here?

JB: I'm very thankful for the area. I just love the lakes. I used to do so much hiking. The lake and the dunes, and the beauty that's around here. The smallness of the area, the community. Even now, it isn't large, I wouldn't say. Not too big. But I have appreciated that very much. I've appreciated the advantages that I've had in the schooling. I've enjoyed school so much. I was just talking to my sixth grade teacher. She's about ninety-four now. Last week, I was up in Grand Rapids, and I went to visit Mrs. Carl Damson, who was my third grade teacher. She was Dorothy Mead at that time. We had a good time talking about the "old days."

AP: Are there any things that we haven't talked about that we should talk about?

JB: I don't believe so. I know our friends and relatives from Illinois always loved to come up here.

AP: So they've given good reports?

JB: Yes. Climbed up Mt. Baldhead in Saugatuck, go to the beaches. Those things we did when I was young, too. Big pavilion in Saugatuck was a big attraction.

AP: Well, then we can probably just wrap up. Thank you very much.

JB: Oh sure.