

Spring 1992

# The Joint Archives Quarterly, Volume 04.01: Spring 1992

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# The Joint Archives Quarterly

Volume 4 Number 1

## Immigrants Reflect on the Past

Recently you may have shared with your son or daughter what the rides at the fair used to be like or how 8th Street has changed. You may have talked about that horrible tornado that swept through town or a bad experience you had. What you were doing was relating an oral tradition — the core of what we call an oral history.

The Joint Archives of Holland is engaged in a project that is aimed at recording memories, attitudes and impressions of individuals who emigrated from the Netherlands after the Second World War.

To our knowledge there has been no concerted effort to record the memories of this significant group of ethnic immigrants who came to the United States in the 1950s and 1960s. What were their reasons for coming? What did they find when they arrived — was it what they expected and if not, what surprised them? How has Holland changed from their perspective? Have their religious viewpoints played a role in their experience? The number of interesting and informative questions is endless.

The first step in our annual Hope College Oral History Project, supervised by the Joint Archives, was to hire an undergraduate student to undertake the work. This year it is Donna Rottier a Hope junior from Fremont.

Her first job was to do background research on what the experts say about the Dutch who came to Holland in this period as well as read up on what life was like in Holland 30 to 40 years ago. She then formulated questions, undertook a mock interview with one of the archivists and tested the equipment used.

After lining up the interviews and a discussion by phone on the process and importance of the work, she visits a person or couple's home for a 1-2 hour interview which feels very much like an informal discussion. Donna transcribes the interview from the tape and returns this to the interviewee for review and minor editing. The process of transcription can take 10-15 hours to complete. This final product then becomes the official transcript.

The transcript is probably the most important aspect of the process. Given the fact that audio tape will self-destruct in 20-30 years and the near impossibility of listening to tens of hours of interviews to find what a researcher needs, the transcript becomes the major tool to individuals working in the archives. It guarantees the memories will be preserved.

Donna spends 20 hours per week on the project, her other time is spent as a regular archives staff person. To date she has completed five interviews and three of these have been transcribed. If you feel that you or someone you know may be



Oral Histories bring back the details and flavor of times gone by - much like this old photo.

interested in being interviewed and is a post-World War II Dutch immigrant, I encourage you to call the Joint Archives of Holland at 394-7798.

The ultimate goal of professionals in our field of applied history is to preserve a record of our past and pass this on to the future in a responsible manner. By supervising an effective and professional oral history program we hope to keep the memories of our day alive for centuries.

## The Interview

Donna Rottier

Oral history is something that's completely new to me this summer. Not really knowing what to expect, I have learned a lot, and learn a little bit more every time I go through the process of creating an interview.

In the first step, actually setting up the interview, I have depended upon other people who have given names of immigrants they know and who they believe would make a good interview. From this list of possibilities, I have then gone on to

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# The Joint Archives Quarterly

## From the Archivist

Summer! Frankly, I've been looking forward to it for a few months as it gives us a moment to breathe a little easier and to tackle some of those projects we had to put off earlier in the year. It is a time when we have two full-time student staff on hand along with our cadre of dedicated volunteers and the amount of work we get done is remarkable.



What kind of work you ask?

Well, for starters we are in full swing with the annual Hope College Oral History Project. Our student coordinator of the project, Donna Rottier, is spending half her time interviewing immigrants who came to western Michigan from the Netherlands after World War II.

Chad Boorsma, a Hope College sophomore from Grandville, is helping with the internal organization of our shelving (a behind-the-scenes but very necessary job), a review of the collection looking to a new edition of our collection guide and some processing of new materials.

Of course our major concern has been the funding of the associate archivist position for the coming year. The NHPRC at the National Archives further confirmed its confidence in our work by awarding us a second grant which will fund the salary for the coming year. This was critical for us as we plan for the permanence of this position. As the Joint Archives has grown and has been successful it is important that we have the help to be able to work on ongoing collecting, preservation and provide adequate service.

As many of you have heard from me before, the bottom line for me as director of the archives is access. Access, access, access. Archives are only good if the material they preserve — to be looked at, studied and learned from — can be found and used. Access for our member institutions, for scholars, for students and for anyone investigating the past is important.

We appreciate your partnership in our work to make sure the fabric of our history will be preserved for this generation and the many to come.

Larry J. Wagenaar  
Archivist

## The Dutch and Their Faith Proceedings Available

The proceedings of the 1991 fall conference "The Dutch and Their Faith: Immigrant Religious Experience in the 19th and 20th Centuries" is now available. The proceedings contain fascinating articles which describe the struggles and triumphs of Hollanders as they dealt with their faith and how it affected their lives.

Included in the book are papers by Donald Luidens and Roger Nemeth on the numbers and role of Dutch in the Reformed Church; a humorous and insightful item by author Ronald Jager on the role discipline has played in the church; Elton J. Bruins describing A.C. Van Raalte and his vision for a Christian community; the History of the Protestant Reformed Church by Jon Huisken; a Dutch Jew in New York by Robert Swierenga and Catholics in Wisconsin by Yda Schreuder among others.

For those interested in ethnic studies or the history of the Dutch in the United States this volume is essential.

Copies are available for \$5 postage and handling by writing the Joint Archives of Holland, Hope College Campus, Holland, MI 49423.

## National Archives Awards Second Grant

The National Historical Publications and Records Commission at the National Archives has awarded the Joint Archives of Holland with a second grant in the past three years. This award, totaling more than \$30,000, will be used to fund the associate archivist position, currently being held by Craig Wright, for another year.

"We are excited about the confidence the NHPRC has put in the Joint Archives as a History Research Center," said archivist Larry Wagenaar. "The other grants were given to such established repositories as the Henry Ford Museum and the Clarke Historical Collections at Central Michigan University."

The activities funded over the next year will take Craig's work a step further, providing for national access to the collection through the library network OCLC. Other activities will include ongoing work with patrons visiting the archives and important efforts to assist the new museum with exhibits design.

According to Wagenaar "this second grant is essential in our efforts to make the associate archivist position permanent. The increasing level of use, new materials coming in and service we provide makes the work of both archivists, the four part-time staff and volunteers even more important."

### Summer Hours at the Archives

Monday - Friday  
1-5 p.m.

Mornings by appointment

# The Joint Archives Quarterly

## The Processor's Table

by  
**Craig G. Wright**  
Assistant Archivist

Since the theme of this issue of the Quarterly is oral history, I'd like to talk about a different type of oral history, one that doesn't get recorded or saved in the archives. Many people have commented about how quick-



Elton Bruins and Gerrit ten Zythoff looking at the museum archives, C.1967

ly I have attained a good grasp of Holland's history. I must give credit where it is due, to our patrons.

By assisting the people who come to the archives in search of historical knowledge and listening to their stories we look for answers to their questions, I am in effect hearing many short oral histories. These stories enable me to put the information I've read in books by scholars such as Henry Lucas and Jacob Van Hinte into a local as well as personal context.

I want to take this opportunity to recognize a few of these people who have been so helpful in my education. Dr. Elton Bruins is already known to most of our readers as a rich source of local, regional, and church history. He was instrumental in making clear to an old Methodist like me the intricacies and interrelationships of a variety of Dutch churches. It is hard to believe that only two years ago I had never heard of the Reformed Church in America or the Christian Reformed Church. Elton is also thoroughly knowledgeable about A.C. Van Raalte, Isaac Cappon, and Hope College history.

Another frequent patron overflowing with the stories of Holland's past is Randy Vande Water. He showed me that for many years the December 31st issue of the *Holland Sentinel* contained a recap of the major local events and issues of the year. This has proven to be a great resource used by many other patrons in their research. I can't remember a single topic of local interest that Randy hasn't been able to help me out with. If he doesn't know about it himself, he always knows who does.

My work on the exhibits committee for the new Holland Museum has also exposed me to a wide variety of stories and introduced me to some of the history of the local Hispanic community. For example, Tino Reyes has told of his days as a migrant worker and how some of the area farmers lied to the workers and told them that there was no Catholic Church in town. Stevie Gonzalez also told us many stories and mentioned

that there is a woman in town who, in her youth, had washed clothes for Pancho Villa and his men.

Many of these folks serve as invaluable reference people for the archives. When we don't have materials which answer a particular question, often we can refer the patron to someone with knowledge of the appropriate subject area, or I might ask the question in passing the next time I see one of our "invisible" consultants.

I wish to apologize to all the other people who have shared their little oral histories with me over the past two years. There simply is not enough room to mention them all. In a very real sense, it is the stories they have to tell which make history come alive and help us relate the past to the present.

## The Interview

(Continued from page 1)

contact these people, tell them a little about my project, ask them a few questions about their experiences, and then usually set up another time for a more extensive interview.

Although the first couple of interviews were a little nerve-racking, actually doing the interviews and talking with these people is the most exciting part of the project. Most people are more than willing to reminisce and tell you about their lives, and I have learned that everyone has a personal, unique story to tell. The interviews are never very formal, and I feel comfortable when I occasionally forget a question half-way through it, or when I sometimes stumble around trying to decide what to say. I think it's a fun learning experience on both sides, both in getting practice doing interviews and also hearing the stories of people's lives. Plus, this information will then be preserved for future use in research.

Following the interview comes the necessary, but also more tedious and time-consuming task of transcribing the interview so that it can be accessed conveniently by researchers. Often I think it is very apparent to my co-workers that I am transcribing one of my interviews as I sit at the computer in the back room of the Archives with a perplexed look on my face trying to make the conversation that flows so well on the tape fit neatly onto the computer screen. A less-than-pleasant task sometimes, but alas, one which must be done.

After the interview is down on paper, a copy is then sent back to the interviewee, and they have a chance to edit, and ultimately approve the copy. Hopefully, though, leaving it close to its original form, because it is what people say and reflect upon in a normal, conversational context that makes oral history so valuable.

This is somewhat of a long process, with ups and downs, happy points and not-so-happy points, but in the end, the ultimate final product is a good, solid interview that will be preserved long after we are all gone.

# Special Oral History Issue

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HISTORY RESEARCH CENTER

The Joint Archives of Holland

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## 1992-93 Educational Programming

**October**     **The Georgian Bay Ships** Jack Gruber  
Complementing a program we held a couple of years ago, this session will look into the unique history of the North American and Alabama that sailed for this cruise line. The ships wintered in the Holland area each year into the late 1960s. Admission: \$2.

**February**     **Fading Photos: Care and Identification of Historical Photographs** Mark Coir  
The purpose of this program is to help participants understand how to care for and preserve photographs either in a professional setting like an archives and historical societies or in a private or business situation. Half day workshop. Fee: \$25.

**April**     **Spring Speaker** To be arranged.

**June**     **Archives 101: Basic Skills Workshop**  
Richard Harms  
This workshop, which runs a full day, has been very popular. It is designed to introduce individuals to the many facets of setting up and running an archives. Aimed at those who do not have professional training this workshop has been highly rated by former participants for its content. Fee: \$25.



Holland Cycle Club Competition Sept. 30, 1897.