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# Hyma, Andrew Oral History Interview: General Holland History

Don van Reken

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Oral History Interview

Interviewee: Andrew M. Hyma

Interviewer: Don van Reken

August 7, 1975

Abstract: Growing up in Holland, Michigan; John Haverkate's great-great grandson; U.S. Navy, 1908; De Pree Co.; city council.

DVR: I'm at the home of Mr. George [George is incorrect. The man being interviewed is Andrew Martin] Hyma. My name is Don van Reken, and Mr. Hyma is going to tell me the story of his family and of his boyhood and things of that sort. Let's start out with your own birth date, Mr. Hyma. When and where were you born?

AH: I was born in Grand Rapids, Michigan, on the 1st of June, 1888. My early childhood, my baby days, were spent with father and mother. In those days, they moved to Chicago, Chicago to Kentucky, to Cumberland Gap, and Benton Harbor. My mother died in Benton Harbor. I was five-years-old when my mother died and she was buried from the home of my grandparents in Holland, Michigan. From that time on, most of my life has been spent in Holland. My mother was the great-granddaughter of one of the old settlers of Holland, [Gerrit] John Haverkate. He came with the pioneers and was a veterinarian of sorts. He managed the stagecoach lines in the early days between Allegan, Grand Rapids, Muskegon, and Kalamazoo, and he had a flax\_\_\_\_\_ shop for taking care of his things. He had a farm. His farm was located on the corner of College and 8th Street, from the park down northward to the river, taking in the athletic field that is now there. My paternal grandfather came later in the late '50s. He came from the province of \_\_\_\_\_vert, and he was a flax merchant. They used to \_\_\_\_\_ the flax that they grew in Holland in the canals and then thrash it out to get the linen from it and ship it all over the world. At one time, he controlled the flax market in the Netherlands, and he became

fairly wealthy. Well, as misfortune came, the flax crop failed through successive years, and he lost all his money and came to America in the late '50s.

Now, at the time of my mother's death, I resided with my grandparents in Holland, Michigan, on 11th Street. I could remember my boyhood days, where I used to go to school. I started school at the Washington School on Maple Avenue and lived only a few doors from the school. I can remember the street on which I was born, the factory where my father worked as the superintendent of the cabinet room, and my trips through there. My grandfather often would take me out evenings for walks. We'd walk down Maple Avenue for a few blocks past the old brewery, which was a Seif's [?] brewery, and they had a bar where they would serve their beer. They used to make a beer which was called Silver Foam, and I think there might still be some old-timers who remember that. From there on, we'd walk down past the tannery, which was the Cappon-Bertsch Tannery at that time, where they had large vats in which to tan their hides. They'd change them from vat to vat, and it very much appealed to me to see how they threw these from one vat to another. These vats were fed by a creek, or as we called a tannery creek at that time. The water would come in nice and clear and leave the vats a dirty brown color and flow back into Lake Macatawa. Well, this creek ran all the way from College Avenue, as I remember it, and was tunneled through to Pine Avenue. From Pine Avenue, it ran down through between 14th and 15th, down to 15th Street to 10th Street, down to the tannery site. In my younger days, as I said, my father was employed as superintendent of the cabinet works at the West Michigan Furniture Company.

There are many interesting incidents in those early days, especially the congressional fight and election of G. J. [Gerrit John] Diekema as congressman. As it

was, George P. Hummer was the manager of the West Michigan Furniture Company, and he was a staunch Democrat and voted for William Jennings Bryan. My father was a very staunch friend of George P. Hummer, and there was a quite a campaign going on which was very, very interesting. I can remember how they used to have their slogans. One of them, I remember distinctly, was “You can turn the damper up, and you can turn the damper down, but Diekema goes to Congress just the same.” Of course, this didn’t suit my dad very much, but Diekema finally won out on the campaign. But George P. Hummer was a very interesting man. He was one of the former principals of the schools, a school superintendent for years, and he ran or managed the West Michigan Furniture Company at that time.

I became very much interested in Dad’s work. He put me to work in the summertime sanding carvings for the beds and the dressers and that sort of thing. It was a very tiresome time, as they had to be very smooth. After they had been carved, they were rough, and they had to smooth down to smoothness. Finally, I got very tired of this idea of sanding carvings, and Dad would put me at other little jobs at the plant.

There were other plants near there. There was Buss Machine Works, which was adjacent to the West Michigan Furniture Company, and there were many other furniture factories in Holland in those days, which seemed to be the main...There was the old Ottawa Furniture Company on River Avenue, and there was the Holland Furniture Company. Furniture seemed to be the main industry in Holland.

DVR: Where did they get their wood?

AH: They used mostly solid oak, which was brought in from different companies down there. Further down the lake, on the point, was the old C. L. King Basket Factory, where they

would bring in the logs and the log boom at that place where the factory was well back of the point. They had a big dock at one end of the point there, and a log boom on the other. They manufactured baskets—cut through there and make peach baskets, and they supplied all the farmers and orchard men with their baskets.

Holland was quite a shipping point in those days. They would bring the peaches and pears and fruit to the dock, the Graham and Morton dock, and they'd run the steamship line to Chicago, to the Chicago markets. So, the farmer could get his fruit on the Chicago market within a day's time. It'd take about a day for the boats to go through. There were several boat lines in those days—there was the Graham and Morton and the old boat, the *Soo City*, was one of them; the *City of Grand Rapids*, the *City of Saugatuck*, and most of them were side wheelers until later on, we got larger ships. The *City of Grand Rapids* was quite a boat. It sailed from here in the morning at 9 o'clock and arrived in Chicago at about 4 o'clock. It was an overnight trip. There were two trips a day to Chicago by the boat line. You could go at 9 in the morning or in the evening at 8 o'clock; you'd be in Chicago by morning. Well, I've taken several of those trips on that boat, and there were sometimes some very rough seas down there. A person could easily get seasick.

Well, later on, they built the interurban line between Holland and Grand Rapids and Saugatuck. This interurban line would pick up all the orchard men's and the farmers' produce and bring it to the Graham and Morton dock, which was right near the West Michigan Furniture Company. I used to watch the proceedings and the loading of the boats, and I enjoyed that very much as a youngster.

Then when we had to go downtown for groceries or that sort of thing, my aunts would take me down 11<sup>th</sup> Street and bring me to the downtown district. On 11th Street there were a few houses down there, and we'd go down as far as Maple Avenue. On the corner of Maple Avenue and 11th, there was a small orchard—a plum orchard and that sort of thing—ran by a lady down there. We'd get some plums and pears and apples down there as a youngster, and it would always be a pleasure to pass that place because we always were able to get some kind of fruit.

Going on a little further, we'd pass the homes of the Van Landegend's and Hadden's, \_\_\_\_\_, manager of the West Michigan Furniture Company, and Metz lived on the other corner. They would take us to church, and they would bring us to the Third Reformed Church on 12th Street.

DVR: What kind of sidewalks did you walk on then?

AH: Well, in those days, the streets were gravel, graded gravel streets, and the sidewalks were plank sidewalks with cross flanks. You could hear people coming for quite a distance down there as they plunked along on the sidewalks. Some of the streets had nothing but paths that were footpaths. I can remember in the hot summer days, when the streets were very dusty, we used to have the sprinkler come up as a big tank, a yellow tank sprinkler with a spray the width of the street. It would go by and lay down the dust once or twice a day for us.

In those days, winter times were very interesting. My aunts and grandparents and my father were all good skaters, and we all would skate on Black Lake, starting at King's Point. That was quite an event every day, with their old Dutch skates. Oftentimes, the lake would freeze up over all the way to Lake Macatawa. We could skate for six miles

up and down. There was one old skater there who was quite the champion skater. They could make that in very short time on Lake Macatawa. In the wintertime, we'd watch them cut ice. They'd cut ice in large cakes and carry them on sleighs. With those old ice sleighs, you'd carry them down to the ice house. One was Van Alsbury, which was down where the Georgian Bay company had their boat, the *South American*. In the early days, there was a big ice house there because they could cut clear ice. They'd take and saw this ice in squares and pile it on the bob sleighs and carry it down the street. We used to hop these bobsleds so many times when we were kids, on these ice sleighs. It was quite an industry in the early days. They would peddle the ice in the summertime from door to door, and cut you out a cake of ice. That was about all the refrigeration we had in those days.

As a youngster, I went to school at the Washington School, and I can remember some of the old teachers. My grandparents later on moved up to the Keppel Building, across from the fish market on College Avenue. That was the house that was built by Mr. Keppel in the old days. He had several brick houses around the town, built from brick manufactured in Zeeland—red brick, red clay. There are several brick houses spread throughout the town, which were built by the brick manufacturers in Zeeland there. I can remember those well.

We lived there until I was 9-years-old. When I was 9-years-old, my father remarried and we lived at 30 Graves Place, which was the street up on 11th Street between Centennial Park and Hope College Graves Library. I went through the schools, Central Avenue School. There was a large school, a grade school there. There was no

high school at that time, which they built later. But I went to the grade school and graduated from the 8th grade there.

Then, my parents sent me to Hope College Preparatory School. Instead of going to high school, Dr. Kollen would come around and get his pupils to go to the grade school. The grade school had four classes, starting with a D and ending with the A, and it was a four-year high school course. I graduated from college prep in 1906; then entered Hope College as a freshman and junior. I wanted to leave Hope College, and I wanted to study medicine, but finances were such that it couldn't be done. So, I had to go to work with my dad at the plant factory. Of course, I didn't like the factory work very well, and I still wanted to study medicine, so I made up my mind to go into the medical department of either the Army or Navy, and I chose the Navy medical department and enlisted in the United States Navy in 1908.

DVR: How old were you then?

AH: When I went into the Navy, I was 22-years-old. I spent \_\_\_\_\_ in the Navy in the four years. I spent some time first at the hospital, the Naval hospital in Norfolk, Virginia, where I got my training, and then aboard ship. My first ship was the old *North Carolina*. In 1908, the fleet took a trip around the world and left Norfolk harbor. The fifth division, was comprised of four armored cruisers—two of them were built at the Boston Navy Yard and two of them were built on the San Francisco. The two on our side was the *North Carolina* and the *Tennessee*, and the *Montana* and the *Washington* was built on the west coast. But they were all sister ships, all the same type of a ship. Well, we took the trip around the world as a fifth division of the Atlantic fleet, and it was a beautiful sight



to see these ships steam out of the Norfolk Navy Yard, up past Cape Hatteras, to join the fleet.

Well, I spent some time aboard the ship as a pharmacist mate and finished my term of enlistment in 1912. During my enlistment, we made several trips to the Panama Canal. We carried Teddy Roosevelt aboard, and Teddy Roosevelt would often take his place amongst the enlisted men, especially the coal heavers, and he'd shovel coal all the way from Norfolk to Panama in dungarees. He ate with them in mess. He was very much interested in the Panama Canal, when they built the canal. We had a lot of trouble in building the canal as when the cleaver cut, it would keep coming down and they couldn't make it. From \_\_\_\_\_ to Panama City, we marched all that way across the isthmus there.

We went to the celebration of the liberation of South America by Simon Bolivar. We went to Caracas, Venezuela, and we went further down to the equator, down to Bahia Blanca \_\_\_\_\_ and back there, and that was the extent of that cruise. Of course, we were in the Cuban occupation and the Haiti rebellion as our Atlantic service. Well, we were paid off at Newport, Rhode Island, in 1912. Then, I went to school, a pharmacy school at Marlette, Michigan—the Practical Institute of Pharmacy—and took the State Board of Pharmacy in 1912. I took the State Board examination in Detroit at the Tower Hotel with the graduates of the University of Michigan and Ferris and all the rest of them, and I got my registration.

Shortly after I got my registration, one of the doctors I had been with in the Navy started a drugstore in Norfolk, Virginia, and had me come down as a partner with him to run a drugstore in Norfolk. I worked there for about a year and came back to Holland,

and worked in a drugstore here at Geiger's Drugstore, at that time, on the corner of 8th and Central.

I worked there for a few months and then finally I wanted to go to the manufacturing pharmacy of the DePree Company. The DePree Company started to manufacture pharmaceuticals in 1912. So, I got in on the ground floor of the DePree Company at that time and had been with them for the past 63 years, continuous service.

I wasn't satisfied with my education as a pharmacist, so I decided to go back to school again, and I matriculated in the \_\_\_\_\_ University and graduated in Business Administration in '22 and Industrial Management in '24. With those credentials and the two credentials I had at Hope College, I still wasn't satisfied. I didn't know anything about chemistry, so, in 1932 [he graduated from Hope College in October 1938, not 1932], I went back and took every course in chemistry that Hope College offered and graduated with an A. And I graduated from Hope College then in '32 after being out of school for some years.

After I graduated from Hope, Dr. Jellema and myself decided to go on and get our doctorate degree. So we matriculated at Michigan State College and did our work in biological chem and microbiology.

DVR: Which Dr. Jellema was that? Dr. John Jellema?

AH: Yes. Dr. John Jellema finally went into medicine, and I kept on going to get my doctorate. I got my master's degree in 1940, and then I went on to get my doctor's degree in '45 from Michigan State in microbiology and biochem. It was a long struggle. At the same time, I would carry on my duties at the DePree Company and study evenings and got my residence by attending state college Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. Well, I

finally got my doctor's degree, and I was happy to get it. I was 57 years of age when I got my doctorate. It was a hard struggle.

I did a lot of research work for the DePree Company at that time on vitamins and chlorophyll and arsaphenamine and so forth. I was retired as a consultant when I was 75-years-old.

DVR: How old are you now?

AH: My present age is 87.

DVR: And you still go to work every day?

AH: I still go to work every day.

DVR: Do you have a desk there then?

AH: Yes, I have a desk there, an office. But that's about my personal history.

To go back to my childhood days, going down 8th Street and going down River Avenue, there was a grocery store on the corner of River and 11th. Going down further was a meat market, DeKraker and DeCuster; a White's meat market. On the east side of the street, where the post office is, was a Phoenix Planing Mill; and going further down from the planing mill was a carriage work by Gunst—old Mr. Gunst, a civil war veteran, who would paint carriages and make carriages and that sort of thing. Then further down to 8th Street came the Russ' Clothing Store and Kromers Drugstore, Smith's Drugstore across the street. The changes have been tremendous since those days. What they will be in the next years to come, if it keeps on, I think Holland will someday be quite a city.

Well, there are many more things I could say, but I'm growing tired.

DVR: I have one or two questions that I wrote down here. Do you remember what the wage was when you were in the Navy?

AH: My wage was \$16 a month and a horse blanket. \$16 a month, \$4 a week. (laughs)

DVR: Did you manage to save anything from that?

AH: Oh, yes. I still had the idea of studying medicine, and I saved my wages. I saved \$300.

So, one day, I got up my courage and applied for discharge. I wanted to buy my way out.

I had been encouraged by William Howard Halsey, and he had helped me. I had

matriculated in the University of Virginia, which was his school, William Howard

Halsey, afterward Admiral Halsey. His first service in the Navy was an assistant

surgeon, and I served under William Howard Halsey long before World War II. So, I

applied for purchased discharge and the old Admiral asked me, "Hyma, how much

money do you have?" I said, "I have \$300, sir." He said, "That isn't near enough for you

to put yourself through the first year in medicine. I advise you to ship over for another

four years and then go into medicine." Of course, I was already 24-years-old at the time

and it didn't look too good to me, so my request wasn't granted.

DVR: One other question I have is, when were you married? And what about your own children? How many children do you have?

AH: I married Elizabeth DeVries in 1915. We built this house, our home right here, and have lived in it ever since.

DVR: That's 60 years in this house.

AH: Yes, we've been married 60 years next December. I have one son, John Henry, who at present is in Nashville, Tennessee.

DVR: Were you ever involved in any politics here in the city of Holland?

AH: Yes, to some extent. I was elected alderman of the then third ward, which has been changed, for two terms. I served under three mayors: Mayor Nick Kammeraad,

Nicodemus Bosch, and Ernie Brooks. I put in two terms as alderman, and I put in 5 years on the Police and Fire Board.

Our old chief of police was Frank Van Ry and, of course, we've had several others. Frank Van Ry and then our fireman was Cornelius Blom. In that term of years, we had a police force and fire board buying new fire trucks. We bought one of the first ladder trucks that Holland had, and hose.

DVR: Were there any exciting issues while you were in City Council? Were there any great issues or very controversial things?

AH: Well, when I went into the Council there was quite an issue going on of the Armory lot. The city owned that lot, and they didn't want to sell it at all to build the National Guard building. They had quite an issue on that. Finally, it was sold to the National Guard.

Then there was something on the city inspector and the city physician.

[end of side one]

AH: Dr. Westrate, William Westrate, finally got the place as city physician, full-time. We had a part-time physician in earlier days—Dr. Godfrey was the part-time physician—but the full-time city physician was Dr. Westrate. He finally won and became city physician at that time.

I spent about 23 years in Boy Scout work when they started in 1913 under Jake Van Putten and myself, and we ran the first Scout troops in Holland. I put about 23 years in Scout work and about 8 years in Sea Scouts. Our Sea Scout ship was a very successful ship. We were rated the third highest ship in the United States—San Francisco first, New York second, and Holland third.

DVR: That's quite an honor too, then.

AH: So. I've done a great deal of Scout work and I've given it a tremendous amount of time and effort. It's been very rewarding. That's about the extent of my politics and my political assignment.

DVR: Thank you, very much, Mr. Hyma.

AH: Now you ought to read it back to me and see what it sounds like.

DVR: Before we finish, Mr. Hyma, I'd like to ask you some things about Holland and how they've matured—for instance, water. When you were a boy, what sort of water supply did you have, and how and when did change take place?

AH: Well, in the very early years, it was a pump, a well. You'd pump the water from your own well by hand, a pump with a handle, and get your suction until you got your water. Later on, the city built their own pumps and had their own pumping station and piped the water into the homes so we could get city water. That was the first water we had for years. Of course, water conditions in the summertime got very bad and things got very dry. And here we were, at the site of the largest freshwater body in the world, suffering from want of water. So, finally, they went to Lake Michigan to get their water and now, of course, there's ample supply.

DVR: What did DePree Company do for water in those days? Did they have pumps, too?

AH: In those days, yes. At that time, we had it pumped in from the city's different wells—from different pumps and different stations—and they'd use the well water from that.

DVR: When did electricity come in? Was that in your time?

AH: Yes, in the early days, of course, we had kerosene lamps. I know as a young fellow, before school I used to have to clean the lamps because they'd get sooty from the kerosene. I'd polish them with old newspapers and get them ready for the evening. It

was part of my chore. Finally they got into gas lamps and gas light came in, but electric light came in later and was supplied by the Board of Public Works and the pumping plant where the water tank is on 6th Street.

DVR: Now, when you were in the Navy, in this battleship, how did they light the downstairs, the below decks in the battleship? What kind of lighting did they have there?

AH: \_\_\_\_\_ and developed their own electricity.

DVR: They had electricity?

AH: \_\_\_\_\_ by the dynamos, \_\_\_\_\_ built it to get light wherever you wanted.

DVR: Now, this hospital that we have in Holland...at the time that you were a boy, I suppose the hospital was down in the center of town?

AH: When I was a boy, there was no hospital in the town. I think the first hospital we had was the hospital at Dr. Kremer's old home, which is now the museum. That was our first hospital, and I don't think they had any more than 20 beds.

DVR: Yes, that would be about the right size.

AH: Yes.

DVR: Do you remember when you first saw your first automobile here in Holland?

AH: Yes, I can remember the first automobile was Mr. [George W.] Browning; he was the manager of the furniture company here in Holland. He had the first auto. It was a stick \_\_\_\_\_ with four wheels, and he'd go down the street and see that, and that was quite an idea, quite a thing. That's the first automobile I ever saw. Of course, they came up later to the days of the Model T and so forth and so on, and finally we got to our Lincolns and our Cadillacs.

DVR: What was the first automobile you owned?

AH: The first automobile I owned was a Chevy, I think. Then we got the one from Indiana.

DVR: Studebaker?

AH: Studebaker.

DVR: What year did you have a Chevy?

AH: I've forgotten how many years. That's been years ago. That's probably 1930, because we took the trip to the World's Fair in Florida in 1932.

DVR: In 1897, they had a big parade in Holland for the 50th anniversary of the immigrants. Do you remember anything about that parade in 1897?

AH: Yes, that was quite some parade. They built an arch across the street and Vaupell had a harness shop and he had a big white horse, and they put that big white horse on top of that arch. That was placed down 8th Street between River and Central, and halfway down the street. They had quite a contingent for the old Civil War vets in the parade, with flowers. It was really quite something. Let's see, that was in 1897. Well, then they had the \_\_\_ Battle in Centennial Park with the Spanish-American War vets. And the hill where the fountain is, was San Juan Hill and they had to charge San Juan Hill, and their musketry go down. I can remember the old Spanish War \_\_\_\_\_ —two Klaasen brothers dancing, \_\_\_\_\_, and they all had their old uniforms on and their old campaign hats, and they charged San Juan Hill. I can remember that distinctly. The semi-centennial was quite a parade. They had replicates made of the first church on the college campus, near where the Otto house used to be, and they had old Chief Pokagon come down and give a lecture and a talk. He was here at that time; he was the chief of the [Pottawatomie]. He was quite a chief; I can remember him distinctly. Well, that's about all.



DVR: Well, I'm very grateful to you for a very entertaining narration of your life and of your days. Thank you, again.

AH: Well, it's been very nice to recollect all these things. But to do it on the spur of the moment, it takes a little effort.

[End of interview]