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## Hyma, Mrs. George Oral History Interview: General Holland History

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Oral History Interview

Interviewee: Mrs. George Hyma

Interviewer: Don van Reken

August 5, 1975

Abstract: Mrs. George Michmerhuizen Hyma, Overisel, Michigan, Albert Michmerhuizen family, Hi Klomparens, butcher, Fillmore, Michigan, cattle trains, Buffalo, New York, Bertha Michmerhuizen Damstra, Julia Brinkma, Sandy View School (District #1, Overisel Township, Deka Pulaker (teacher), Jane Nykerk (teacher), Jenny Nykerk (teacher), Reverend Nykerk, Bernice Takken Rottschaefter (Arabian missionary), Albers family of Grand Haven, Michigan, Van Zwalenburg and Michmerhuizen Grocery (13th Street and Central Avenue), Henry Hyma, George Hyma, Mary Hyma, Jenny Hyma, Jeannette Hyma, Alvin Boss, Roy Hill, Third Reformed Church.

DVR: This afternoon is August 5, 1975. I'm at the home of Mrs. George Hyma on Pine Avenue. We're going to try to get some information from Mrs. Hyma about her early life and her early days. Mrs. Hyma, how old are you now?

MGH: I will be 93 this month.

DVR: This August?

MGH: Yes, the 30th I will be 93.

DVR: When and where were you born, Mrs. Hyma?

MGH: I was born in Overisel, about nine miles from here. We had a lovely old church, and a good school, too. But the church among us was...they were very devout people, very. And my grandmother, she belonged to the Christian Reformed church, and she was so devoted to her work of living a Christian life that she couldn't talk, really, on anything but God's holy word. That's about all she could talk to us. And sometimes, the young people resented it. But now, if I am old, I look upon her as a saint. To think that in my old age, I am blessed with such rich memories of her life. She \_\_\_\_\_ pray,

and I want to tell you her prayers...sometimes tired the younger people. But now that I am old, I look upon it as a great blessing in my life.

DVR: This is your grandmother you are talking about?

MGH: Yes, that's my grandmother Michmerhuizen.

DVR: Your name was Michmerhuizen?

MGH: Yes. I'm the daughter of Albert Michmerhuizen. My father, well, he lived to be an old man, but not in the 90s. My mother, she lived to be a few weeks from 100 years old. Now you see, that's an old age.

DVR: That's a good, old age.

MGH: Yes. I like to think of the church. You know in the church, they didn't have the best of music. In the early days, we had no organ. But one thing we had...when we entered God's house, it was sacred. Very sacred. And you could feel when these teachers came up, I used to think they were old ladies. And they were young women. And they would come up and teach the Sunday School lesson. They took turns, you know. It was something deeply spiritual when we came. I had an uncle—we called him Uncle Hi Klomprens. He had been the superintendent of the Sunday School for years and years. He certainly was liked very well. He was such a true Christian in every way.

DVR: What was your father's business? What trade did he have?

MGH: My father, he was a butcher. He handled cattle, and he would buy up and go to Buffalo, New York with cattle. He also would butcher and go around the country with their horse and buggy—there was a name for that, but I've forgotten it—and sell meat to the \_\_\_\_\_.

DVR: You say he went to Buffalo. How did he go to Buffalo with the cattle?

MGH: By train.

DVR: He went by train?

MGH: Yes. They had special freight trains for the cattle. They came at Fillmore, Michigan; that's where they would load up. I remember going when I was a child with my father there, and we waited for the train to come in. Then to see these cattle go into these freight cars. Oftentimes, they were so thirsty; oh, they needed so much water. The men were kept busy giving them water.

DVR: Now, Mrs. Hyma, I'd like to ask you about your home that you lived in when you were in Overisel way back when. When was that, 1880? 1885?

MGH: Yes, because I was born in 1882. It must have been not long after the division came in the churches, the Christian Reformed and the Reformed. You recall that division?

DVR: Yes.

MGH: And also when the Sunday School first came during that time. There were no Sunday Schools before that.

DVR: Did you have any brothers or sisters?

MGH: Oh, yes. I had four brothers, and I had three sisters. Today, I have one sister living and myself. That's all.

DVR: Two left. How old is your sister?

MGH: She's 82.

DVR: She's ten years younger than you.

MGH: Yes. Shall I tell you who she is? She's Bertha Damstra. She lost her husband not quite a year ago.

DVR: Now let's talk about your home. What is your earliest memory of your home in Overisel?

MGH: Well, it was a plain little home. It was painted white, and it had a white fence all around the yard, with a big gate where the horses and buggy went through. And the little gate was where the people that were walking would come through, you see. It was a nice little home; it had its comforts and its wood stoves, you know—nothing like we're having today. Not at all. And we had lamps; and I still...someone gave it to me, it was from my mother...it was a lamp that I was so pleased to have because I remember when I about ten years, I had to fill the lamps with oil and keep the wicks clean so they would be ready for the evening.

DVD: How nice. What is your earliest memory of your mother or of your father?

MGH: My earliest memory?

DVD: Of your mother, yes.

MGH: I don't know what to say. I recall when I went to Sunday School, I guess if I am expressing myself right, I went to Sunday School around five years, and she took so much pride when Sunday came that we children were well dressed, you know, and were clean. Any my father's memory that I have—he had a bug board, if you know what that is, where he held the meat in—they were called bug boards. A little girl next day, her name was Julia Brinkma, and she had a birthdate on the 20th, and I had it on the 30th. When school opened in September, then we both went. And my father took this bug board with the horns, and I can see him lift up girls up and put up on the seat. It's so pleasing; it's just as vivid in my mind as if it were yesterday.

DVD: That was your first going to school?

MGH: Yes, that was my first going to school. It was such a happy time.

DVD: What kind of beds did you have in your household there?

MGH: Most of them, I think, were straw ticks. And every year my mother would feel they had to be emptied, and my father would go to the barn—he'd have maybe some nice, fresh straw, and that was very clean—and he would feel these straw ticks for my mother. They'd be nice and clean again to sleep on.

DVD: Where were the bedrooms? Were the bedrooms in an upstairs room?

MGH: Yes, we had two bedrooms downstairs—a little one to the side that came off my father and mother's room, where the little ones slept. And then the older ones...we had two bedrooms upstairs, and that's where I had to go was up with the older ones.

DVD: What about cooking? What kind of stove did you have?

MGH: Oh, my mother had a cook stove. In the hot summer weather, she baked her bread, and she did all her canning on the old cook stove.

DVD: What kind of foods did you eat? Do you remember some of the vegetables that you had?

MGH: Yes, I will tell you. We all liked, in the wintertime, johnnycake. It was so pleasing and some people would eat it with milk and others with syrup and gravy. And then we had streaked pork. They would fry that out and they would put that on the johnnycake with syrup, and it was such good food in the cold winter days, you know.

DVR: Was any food preserved in those days? Did your mother do any canning or...? How did you do that?

MGH: Oh, yes. My mother dried a lot of apples, oh so much! And she made jelly; in those days she made a lot of jelly. And she canned the fruit, too.

DVR: How did she can then? Did they have jars or rings or...?

MGH: Yes, I think most, if I recall, she had crocks—stone crocks—and when she'd pickle peaches, she would put them in there with this rich syrup and a plate on the top, like they did with sauerkraut. My mother never made sauerkraut, but she did up a lot of fruit, though. And you seldom saw anything go to waste. I think that's why I'm so economical. I feel what God has given us we must be saving of, we must not waste it.

DVR: What type of clothing was worn then? Cotton clothing, wool?

MGH: Oh, I must tell you. [laughter] My mother could not knit, and if she could, she was too busy. So she had her grandmother knit stockings for the boys and for me. And she always had a special yarn that was a little finer for the girls. And, of course, at that time I was living in Overisel...I was the only girl, you see. What was your question again?

DVR: About clothing.

MGH: Oh, yes. And then she made flannel petticoats. We had those woolen socks—stockings—and she'd make flannel petticoats. Everything was wool, and she'd make my woolen dresses. She even made my coats and our pants. And for my brothers she made the trousers, sometimes out of my grandfather's or my father's. She'd wash them and make little pants for the boys.

DVR: Did she use a sewing machine?

MGH: Oh, yes, my mother did. Before she married and lived in Kalamazoo, she worked for a famous dressmaker, and she was really an expert at making things beautifully and very neat. My mother was a very "neat" woman.

DVR: Where did you get water from for the household?

MGH: Well, we had a pump, and when it was time for wash day, my father would do the pumping, because we children were still too small at that time to do any pumping for her.

DVR: And he would pump a tub-full then?

MGH: Oh, yes, my father would bring it in. They had the boilers, we called them boilers, and he would fill them, you see, with water. Then on the back of our cook stove there was a reservoir and he would fill that with water.

DVR: Your mother washed by hand?

MGH: Yes, in those days she did, and I will never forget the first washing machine my mother got. First she would not want one, but then my father came home one day and he brought her a washing machine. And then he got up early on Monday morning and would run the washing machine. See, it was all by hand.

DVR: Hand-powered.

MGH: Yes. Today it's electrical.

DVR: How did you dispose of wastes? You didn't have toilets then?

MGH: No. Well, we had what we called the "outhouse," you know. But where the waste went, you mean along food lines?

DVR: Well, either way, yes.

MGH: My father had—and most everybody on the village—had one or two pigs, and a lot of the waste went to them, you know. I can't recall much of that because I was in the house more with my mother.

DVR: And everyone had pigs and dogs and chickens?

MGH: Well, we didn't. That's a strange thing. My father, I guess, was too busy, and my mother was too busy. We did have one little dog. My father had...someone gave it to him. We didn't have him long, because they didn't know how to feed the young dog. He got too much fresh meat. And I presume that one of the boys would give him something and



another boy—well that killed the little dog. You see, he got too much before he was old enough. It was a little shepherd dog; I shall never forget it.

DVR: Now, you said there was a fence all they way around your yard.

MGH: Yes, and that was painted white.

DVR: Was there a garden inside the fence?

MGH: No, there were a couple apple trees with the russet apples. Those russet apples were so delicious. My father was no gardener. He was in his later years— that's the way he made his living, selling sweet corn—but outside of that, he was a butcher. He bought cattle and he sold them and he butchered them, you see.

DVR: Now, what about school? Did you go to school at all? In Overisel was there a school?

MGH: Oh, yes, I went until I was ten...well, from five to ten, then. That was called the Old Sandy School. It's on a hill. Now, my children drove me by there the other day, and it's a new school, very modern. I don't know who the teacher is, but my teacher, shall I tell you who they were? The last one was Pulaker; they called her Dekka Pulaker. Then we had...my memory just slipped me now... In the early days we had two sisters, they were the Nykerk girls. Reverend Nykerk, he was an old \_\_\_\_\_; he drove a white horse and a top buggy, and these were two daughters, one was Jane the other was Jenny. And it was a two-room school.

DVR: Were you taught in English or in Dutch?

MGH: Oh, no, English.

DVR: English.

MGH: Oh, yes. Yes, that was all English.

DVR: Was it Dutch in your home?

MGH: I'm sorry to tell it, there was never a Dutch word in the home. My father, when he got outside of the home, he was talking Dutch all the time. But not in the home. Therefore, I feel ashamed to think I'm not able to speak the Holland language. I understand every word. And I have a little prayer in Dutch. I picked it up by this great musician, Brock, and he said it there, he stated a little prayer from a woman that she said, \_\_\_\_\_ . And I saved that Banner, and I put it away. Somebody came to call, and I got it out and I said, "I want you to see this Banner." And I laid it down with the other Banners and when we picked them up that precious Banner was in there. And it was by this wonderful musician; oh, it was a beautiful article.

DVR: How often did you come to Holland when you were a little girl? Did you come to Holland?

MGH: Oh, very seldom. Always one had to stay home, but in those days we were all little. So, when my father went, he generally took me along. And maybe once a year, with a horse and buggy, it took us over an hour to come to Holland.

DVR: How big was Holland then?

MGH: Well, I can't tell you that because it was built up as far as 13<sup>th</sup> Street. None of the rest was still...it was all field yet. I recall that much, because I was...oh, I wasn't even ten years old. One of my friends, where we went to stop, was Takken, Bernice Takken. She died not very long ago. She married a Rottschaefter. She went out as a missionary to Arabia with her husband. Then they came back of ill health, and he died at Pine Rest; it's just a short time ago that she died.

DVR: Did you ever go to Grand Rapids?

MGH: Not when I was a child.

DVR: No.

MGH: But I recall my father, we had relatives in Grand Haven, and he took me along. There was a sad experience. They were cousins of my father by the name of Albers—A-L-B-E-R-S—and they had a daughter just my age. Do you know, to this day hardly a day goes by that I think of her. She suddenly took sick and died, and they had no other children, and my father had so many. They found the father and the mother at midnight on the cemetery, hovering over this child's grave. And then, in later years, they had one and it was a Mongolian. Oh, it was so sad.

DVR: What did you do for recreation?

MGH: For recreation? Well, I didn't get much of that. I was kept busy with the little ones, but the boys played what they called anti-over, antyover is what they'd say. They'd have a ball, and they'd take the end of the school house or the end of the kitchen and throw that ball and catch it. I didn't get much of that. And another thing they did, we had wood piles, and they would get up on these wood piles and see who would dare to jump it, you know. Well, I never could. It sure would go wrong if I tried it. [laughter] I wasn't much of a tomboy.

DVR: Did you ever see a parade when you were a young girl...young lady? What was the first parade that you remember seeing?

MGH: I can't tell you.

DVR: You can't remember?

MGH: No, I was full grown before I saw a parade.

DVR: You didn't come to Holland in 1897 for the big parade then?

MGH: Oh, I must tell you. I was around 16 or 17 years old, and my father had invited everybody he knew. We lived on the corner of 14th and College, and we had people come and sit in doorways in the kitchen, the dining room was filled, every room in the house was filled. And my mother, in those days, thought she had to serve to them all. So she made I don't know how many batches of bread, and how many coffee pots of coffee to serve to all those people. And I didn't get out to see the parade. I stayed home to help my mother, because there were children not even two years apart, you see.

DVR: Now, you said you lived at 14th and College.

MGH: Yes.

DVR: But that means you must have moved. You moved to Holland at some time?

MGH: Yes, but I must tell you before that we lived on the corner of 13th and Central called the Van Zwalenburg and Michmerhuizen Grocery. That building is still there. We lived upstairs. That's the way we lived then, and the babies kept coming. So, my mother thought we needed to get on the ground floor. Then my father built that house on the corner of 14th and College.

DVR: That's very interesting. When were you married?

MGH: I was married in 1904 to George Hyma. He was quite a little older than I, and he was foreign in the old country, but I'm thoroughly American.

DVR: What work did he do?

MGH: George was a cabinet maker. He loved good furniture. Oh, he just loved good furniture. He would like to look at it and examine it. I have one piece that he made; it's in my bedroom. It's a bookcase. And he could tell by opening a drawer how good it was made,

you know, and by the sound of it. He was an excellent worker, and he enjoyed his work so much.

DVR: Did he have any brothers or sisters?

MGH: Yes. Henry Hyma was his brother. They are all gone now. And then there was a Mary and a Jenny and a Jeannette.

DVR: And how many children did you have?

MGH: I had four. We had three girls and one boy. George, he's with the Ford Company—holds quite a big position. He's one of the personnel...well, he's doing very well. But I have a daughter that I feel I can praise. She's our oldest daughter. And we got the most beautiful letter yesterday. You know, when my children came into the world, my hope always was to send them to Hope College, because I couldn't go and because our life was different—we had so many children, you know. And then...sometimes things leave me, you know.

DVR: You were talking about your daughter.

MGH: Oh, yes, her letters. Do you know, Mister, that my daughter that lives with me, she had an appointment this afternoon, but she has to read the letter to me; I can't read them because I can't see. We had the sweetest time, because... you may say nothing sweet about shedding tears, but we did. And I shed tears, and I just let them come. She had such a beautiful way, my daughter Ruth, of expressing herself. What God is doing for her. She is a very wealthy person today, but you wouldn't know it. I mean wealthy in material things and wealthy financially, you see. But she brings out...there is so much depth in her life. The way she speaks of God is amazing to me. I hope and pray that I could have done that to others. But she is a marvelous woman, and I often think by

myself of my grandmother on my father's side was such a devout woman and maybe the Lord, as she said in her letter, God has great plans for us sometimes, and we can't see His plans.

DVR: Two of your daughters are married?

MGH: Yes.

DVR: And one lives at home with you?

MGH: Yes. My youngest daughter married Alvin Bos. See, Ruth was the oldest. She married Roy Hill; he was a dentist. And then my youngest daughter married Alvin Bos; they live her on 25th Street. He's in the vending business.

DVR: Oh, yes, vending machines.

MGH: Yes. Well anyway, that's my youngest daughter, and she does so much for us. She, too, graduated from Hope College.

DVR: All your daughters did?

MGH: Yes.

DVR: And your son?

MGH: Yes. But that was my prayer, as I said to you, about my children when they came into the world. I was deprived of all that with hard work. I can tell you what I've done. I have made hook rugs; they are beautiful. The other day I picked them up and I said, "I must put them away." There is so much of my life has gone into that, but it was pleasure, happy pleasure. And that's one of them. I have one in the dining room; it's a very nice one, you see. I'm forgetting that I'm on the air; I'm sorry.

DVR: [Laughs] Well, I think it's the simple pleasures that make life meaningful finally. Not your complex...

MGH: Yes, and as you look back upon life how grateful you are to God, to think I had the help and the strength. But my one great hope always was that they would go to Hope College.

I have a big heart for Hope College.

DVR: I can hear that.

MGH: And this daughter lives with me would have graduated, but she was stricken with a nerve condition, and now she has arthritis so badly.

DVR: Oh, yes. Well, I don't know what else to say, Mrs. Hyma. Thank you for your story and for telling us about life in those early days.

MGH: Yes.

DVR: What church did you attend in Overisel? Was that the Reformed Church, then?

MGH: Yes, that was the big, white church with the bell. And you could hear that bell far away.

DVR: And now what church do you attend?

MGH: I belong...I joined the church on the corner of 12th and Pine. I was 16 years old when I made confession of my faith.

DVR: That's the Third Reformed Church.

MGH: Third Reformed Church.

DVR: Well, thanks again, Mrs. Hyma, for giving me all the information that you've given.

MGH: I'm afraid I didn't give you much.

DVR: I think it's time to close our conversation. Thank you.

MGH: Yes.