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Stielstra, Jennie Oral History Interview: General Holland History

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Oral History Interview

Interviewee: Jennie Stielstra

Interviewer: Don van Reken

July 29, 1977

Abstract: Resident of Lakewood Blvd. and the north side of Holland and daughter of Nick Stielstra, who farmed and owned a small vegetable and fruit truck farm business and store at Ottawa Beach and served as clerk for Park Township for 20 years.

DVR: Today is July 29, 1977, and I'm at the home of Miss Jennie Stielstra, who lives in Park Township, just west of Division Avenue on Lakewood Boulevard. Jennie has lived here for umpteen years, and she's going to tell me today a little bit about her personal and family history. Jennie, how old are you?

JS: I'm 71 years old.

DVR: I suppose I should say Miss Stielstra, shouldn't I?

JS: Not after the years we've known each other.

DVR: When and where were you born?

JS: I was born under this roof, August 26, 1905.

DVR: What was your father's name?

JS: My father's name in America was Nicholas; he was born Klaas Stielstra.

DVR: He was born in the Netherlands?

JS: Born in the Netherlands in Holvetgreceland [Holwerd, Vriesland], June 5, 1880.

DVR: What trade did he have when he came to this country?

JS: As an adult, he was a farmer. Prior to that, he did some factory work.

DVR: Did he do factory work here in Holland?

JS: Yes, he did some work in a furniture factory. I don't remember which one.

DVR: What was your mother's name?

JS: My mother's name was Cornelia Boeve. She was born here in America, shortly after her parents' arrival from the Netherlands from Heldeleent [Gelderland]. She was born on December 11, 1881.

DVR: Did you have any brothers or sisters?

JS: I'm the eldest of ten children; there were five boys and five girls in our family.

DVR: Well, that's a good-sized family. What's your earliest memories of your home, of your mother?

JS: It's difficult to go back to the very earliest memories, but I do remember mother as a very concerned mother. I remember her as taking a great interest in me, in all of her children, but being the eldest child, I think I perhaps had a large share of her early interest in my person, my training, cared for me in my illnesses.

DVR: She was very competent as a housewife, I suppose, with all the cleaning and the preserving and things of that sort.

JS: Home life was simple yet difficult in the early days. My father bought this 80 acres of property here before his marriage at the age of 20, which would be in 1900. He had to have it mortgaged; he had no savings but a small down payment. He and mother were married in 1903, and this land was uncleared at the time. They had to cut down the trees, have the lumber sawed. The first year they lived with his parents, right across the road, while this little home was being built. It was a simple three-room home—living room, one bedroom, kitchen, and a back kitchen, which was used for storing firewood, the tubs for the laundry, the boots and the coats. There were no indoor bathroom facilities. Water was pumped with a hand pump. There was a wood stove—in the early years, all the heating was done with a cook stove in the kitchen.

DVR: Just one cook stove?

JS: One cook stove in the kitchen. During the winter months there was a small heater in the living room. In the spring time, with spring cleaning, the little stove was removed for the summer months when the house was cleaned. In the fall it was set up again, but for the rest, most of the activities were in the kitchen.

DVR: Now that we have some idea about your family, what about foods that were eaten, or how were foods obtained in those early days when you were a young girl?

JS: As the farm was cleared, vegetables were grown, and my father became a truck gardener. These vegetables provided for the family needs throughout the summer months, and mother canned a great deal. I know at the height of her canning time, she wasn't satisfied with less than 500 quarts of fruits and vegetables on her shelves. That did not include the bushels of cabbages, which were stored, and the squash and the apples that they would buy in the fall. Potatoes did not grow very well on muck land; they always bought their supply of winter potatoes, many bushels at a time, and they would be stored for the year's use.

DVR: Where were these things stored?

JS: Well, with the little tiny house, there was a small Michigan cellar. After the house was enlarged, we had a good-sized basement room for keeping these supplies, and the barn took care of the excess things that you didn't hold in the house. We raised beets, carrots, onions, lettuce, and turnips. The later years, the main crop was celery. During the early years, my folks sold much of this produce at neighboring resorts, especially at Ottawa Beach and Waukazoo, until it became their main livelihood. Beginning in 1904, they began peddling at the beach, just a buggy with a horse. This was mainly for mother

because of mother's health; she had suffered a severe case of pleurisy when she was in her first year of marriage, and so the doctor advised much fresh air. Later, x-rays showed that she had developed tuberculosis. But, her health improved, and she and my father kept onto this, and later, my fathers' brother and he became partners in this produce business selling to the resorters.

DVR: They started selling in 1904. How long did this go on, this selling of produce to the resorters?

JS: It continued until the early '30s or nearly up to the mid-'30s. Although in the later years, it was not by horse and wagon, nor by truck, but by a store at Ottawa Beach, which served as a center from which Ottawa Beach and Waukazoo and Chippewa Resort were all served. This store had groceries—not a large supply like in the supermarkets today—but a simple supply that met the needs of the people.

DVR: Did you participate in the selling, on the wagon and...?

JS: My early days, my early memories, were Saturdays spent on the wagon throughout my teen years, that would be beginning the early part of July and going through beyond Labor Day. That was the end of our season there. I continued this throughout my high school years, throughout my college summers, even after my teaching years here in Holland; I continued with this through 1929. I think that was my last year spending my entire summer in the store.

DVR: Did you go house to house then, when you were with the wagon?

JS: Oh yes, we went house to house. It was a double-deck wagon drawn by a team of grey horses. We had two teams and two wagons that were running, plus a truck which would go through Waukazoo. Ottawa Beach couldn't take cars at that time. We had to go

through the beach sand to reach the customers. It was before the days of the state park and the oval there.

DVR: There was no Ottawa Beach Road even, was there, at that time?

JS: No, you would go along what is now 168th Street to get to Ottawa Beach.

DVR: What kind of animals did you have around the house?

JS: Around the barn we had horses. I think the limit of the horses we and my uncle had together at one time would be five horses, so that four could be on the road and one would be left for the cultivating and farm work. Other times of the year, two horses would be used on the farm to do the plowing, but, horses were the main work animal support. And we had cattle, milk cows—six or eight at the most—just to provide the family with milk. Oh, perhaps at certain times we would sell some when there was too much. Later years we had goats; this was mother's project in her later years, and my brothers and sisters had a good time playing with the goats. I remember my brothers were allowed to have rabbits; these were kept in the barn. We didn't have animals around the house. Cats, too, were barn animals over here. When they milked, the cats got their milk and perhaps something would be taken to them. But, as for dogs, I cannot remember ever having had a dog. At my grandma's across the road, they did have a nice collie dog for a time, but we had no dogs here.

DVR: What about chickens?

JS: Chickens, yes. Many years, it was just a few chickens to provide us with eggs. Later years, they would buy a number of chickens. Again, my father and his brother were in partnership at that time, and they would buy about 1,500 baby chicks each spring. These would be kept under heaters and cared for during those early spring months. But the time

they could be separated into roosters and pullets, they would sell all the pullets and the others were kept for butchering. We chose from these and selected, week by week, the biggest, and sold them at our resort trade. Friday nights was always the big evening when they had to do the butchering, the killing, and then we would have to rush them back to Ottawa Beach, on bicycle oftentimes, or otherwise with carts, and pull them around to the various homes and deliver.

DVR: They would have been ordered then?

JS: They were ordered; they were only killed on order.

DVR: What school did you attend?

JS: My grade school days were spent at the Waukazoo School, which was about a mile and a quarter from here—it was a little one-room wooden school, eight grades, one teacher—until I was in the 6th grade, then we received a new school, a two-room school, and it was a two-teacher school. So, my last three years were spent in the new school. There was still no electricity there at that time. They did have some pressure lamps there when they gave their Christmas programs and so, but otherwise the activities were all during the day in that school.

DVR: What happened when it got dark during the day?

JS: Well, I can't recall. I suppose we probably sang or played games.

DVR: Was it dark in the morning when you went to school in the winter time, or not too dark?

JS: Not too dark. School started at nine o'clock. I had to walk to school. In the early days, there was no pavement here. Just beyond our home, just west of it, the road often was covered with water after a rain, especially in the spring time after the snow melted. In

those days, dad would have to hitch up the horse and buggy, and he would take me to beyond the water holes, and then I could walk the rest of the way to school.

DVR: Were there any special events in that elementary school that you attended? Any special Christmases or programs?

JS: Christmases were the main thing; we had some good teachers who did their utmost to put on a program for the parents at Christmas time. I remember in particular one teacher, she was not my teacher, but she came to the school before I left it—Anna Camps, taught there for some 30 years. She and the teacher who shared her work in the two-room school put on lovely programs, Christian Christmas programs. The special thing I remember is that these two women, besides teaching and putting on a program, always had homemade candy. They must have worked many evenings producing enough candy to fill little boxes for each of the 35, 40, 45, 50 pupils—I don't know how many they had at last. I admire the dedication with which these women worked in that school, that was through my grade school days. In 1919, I took my exams, county exams, I suppose, maybe state exams, what were they called in those days? I can remember having to go to town to take those exams. All the children from all the community all around here had to be at the Carnegie gymnasium at Hope College; tables were set up in the gym. We came there with our little ink bottles and our ink holders with our pens, and we wore our next to best dresses or best dresses—mother would have a special gingham dress made for that occasion, and the girls all looked nice. It was a very scary experience; we've not had experience in the city, and this was a rather nerve-wracking experience to have to take all these exams and write them in this public place. I was one of nine to graduate—nine eighth graders from Waukazoo School.

DVR: You said you didn't have much experience in the city. Didn't you go to the city very often for shopping or for materials or entertainment while you were in elementary school?

JS: No. Occasionally, we went to the big church with my father and mother—that might happen once or twice a year when we went to the Central Avenue Church, which had balconies. We could sit way up in the balcony and view the people from there. We did occasionally go to town with dad to get the groceries, which was a once a week affair. Fridays was always grocery day. On that day, dad was the one who went town. He had a grocery order; it was written in a little book. Dad would take mother's book and his sister-in-law's book from across the road, and his old mother's book. In each one of these was written whatever the needs were for that week—5 lbs. of sugar, might be 50 lbs. of flour because they bake their own bread, so much tea, cheese, coffee, oatmeal; it might be they needed a bit of cinnamon. These little books were put in dad's coat pocket and then taken out at De Jongh's store. All of my childhood years, I remembered we bought our groceries at the De Jongh's store, which was located on 10th Street. I think today it's a cadet house for the Central Avenue Church.

DVR: That building was torn down about three years ago. The property was transferred to Ottawa Savings and Loan, that's where their drive-in is now.

JS: I see...oh. Well, that's the store that we always attended when we were children. You paid your grocery bill about once a month; that seemed to be the customary thing. You also bought your kerosene for your kerosene stove there. In later years, mother used kerosene in the summer, and then in much later years, kerosene was used as a cooking fuel in the kitchen here, too. You could buy it, but you'd take your five-gallon tin along

and have that filled with kerosene. I could remember De Jongh's store having a dry goods counter along the one side, where you could buy calicos and gingham and percales and some of the basic things you needed; flannels for flannel nighties, which were needed in the cold homes. They also in the back part of that room, I can remember, sold boots and wooden shoes. I can remember Grandpa, Grandma, and Dad buying their wooden shoes there. Wooden shoes were used a great deal down in our muck. I don't think Grandpa and Grandma ever used anything down when they worked in the muck there. Grandpa died in 1927 and Grandma in '32. They always worked in the fields amongst the vegetables there, weeding and tending them. They always wore wooden shoes; but De Jongh's store had wooden shoes you could buy. They also sold underwear, fleecelined underwear. So there were quite a few things that you could get right at De Jongh's store. At the end of the month, when the bill was paid, De Jongh's gave a little bag of candy and a cigar upon payment of the monthly bill. This was something the children always looked forward to. The big chocolate drops in that little bag of candy and a few little jelly beans and so forth; this was the treat of the month. Daddy was not a smoker; he did manage to use up the cigar about one a month. In that day, he would take it out and have a few puffs on Sunday and then it would lie up in the windowsill above his chair. Maybe the next Sunday a few more puffs, and for the next time the grocery bill was paid, there would be another cigar for him.

DVR: Very interesting. Now, when you finished elementary school, then what happened?

JS: I stayed home a year. In those days, country girls seemed to think they had finished their education when they finished grade school. There was no compulsory education in those days beyond the 8th grade, except for those who didn't make it; they had to stay in school

until they were sixteen. Mother had seven children at this time, and while I was in the 8th grade, brother William was born. Mother's health, again, was not its best, and the following year I was home with her. But it was her desire, the desire of my parents, that I go on to school if I so wished. So daddy made inquiries at Hope College, where they had a preparatory school at the time. The day he made those inquiries, he called up the Brink's bookstore and mentioned to Mr. Brink, who had once been mother's Sunday School teacher, that they were considering sending me to Hope College, Hope Prep. Then Mr. Brinks said, "But why not send her to Christian high school?" Until that time, the Christian school was kindergarten through 10th grade. He said, "We are planning to make it a full high school now." So, on the basis of that, I was enrolled in Holland Christian High School and graduated in 1924 with the third graduating class of the school. I was one of thirty students graduating at that time. The next fall, I enrolled at Calvin College and took the teacher training course, which was a two-year course at that time.

DVR: Let's go back to high school. Was there anything exciting about high school, anything special that took place while you were there? Activities or something you participated in, debate or sports, or governor came to town or anything like that?

JS: I remember the high school itself was in its developing stage. The first year we had three teachers. The school was on 15th Street, two story building. Part of that was already being used by the 7th and 8th grades, so we were given the upstairs rooms and we could use a couple of the basement rooms, and then later, we had used a room of the old 14th Street Church. We also used a room in the old Central Avenue Church for awhile, their assembly room at the back. And in the basement of that Central Avenue Church, they

constructed a chemistry laboratory; I can still remember some of the pranks that were played in that chemistry lab. Then, as the last school before the main building was finished, we went up to the old Prospect Park Church—a wooden structure way up on, I think, 24th Street—today it is an apartment building—with very thin walls and the classes marching through each other there. It was a great deal of confusion, yet it is amazing what the teachers accomplished, even under those circumstances. And then the last school during my senior year, we moved into the new building, the one which is now the middle school—the main building on the Y.

DVR: The corner of State and Michigan.

JS: That building was new when we moved into it during our senior year. That was a great thing, to have that as our high school. It had a gymnasium, too. I do remember that in our senior year, there was a junior/senior banquet. That's about the only outstanding thing I can remember. I know we each had to pay 35 cents. Some mothers cooked a meal there—cream potatoes, chicken, carrots and peas, and I don't remember what we had for dessert. I think it was much like any meal we would have had at home, but it was considered quite an occasion. I don't even know how the women...what they had to cook on there. I wouldn't be surprised if they brought in some of the things, but this was our first big affair. We did have a few annual class parties.

DVR: Where would you go for parties?

JS: I remember one that we had that was in Maple Avenue Church. Now, these were all the old churches, none of these buildings are standing, the ones we were in at that time. Fourteenth Street, Central Avenue, Maple Avenue, have all been replaced since our school days. I remember beach parties. We had quite a beach party one time as a high

school group who went to Ottawa Beach, again, in the day before the oval. We had a wiener roast; the teachers were all there with us and it was quite a high school outing.

DVR: How did you get there? Did you take a boat from...?

JS: No, we must have gone by cars, somehow or other.

DVR: By train?

JS: No, no... In 1924, we had cars and trucks on the road. Some people had them.

DVR: They came right by your house then in order to get to Ottawa Beach?

JS: Oh yes, the Ottawa Beach Road wasn't in existence then. That came across the old interurban tracks years later.

DVR: Then you went to Calvin, you said?

JS: Yes.

DVR: What did you take up at Calvin?

JS: I took the teacher training course.

DVR: For how long?

JS: Two years, graduated from that in 1926. The professor there who was in charge of most of the education was Professor Van Zyl. But, I also took courses with Professor Johannes Broene, and Professor Van Haitsma and Professor Swets.

DVR: Where did you live when you went to Grand Rapids?

JS: I began my first year working for my room and board, and I did that for only a few weeks. I stayed at the home of Professor Harry Dekker. After that, I boarded for \$6 a week, room and board, with Mrs. Kuyper, the mother of the reverend...

(recording malfunction, stops then resumes, although harder to understand)

DVR: ...while you were growing up?

JS: Well, when I went to high school, it was a matter of walking. I was...that I could walk it from here. From... to my home, up the Y... just three miles, and so, that was within walking distance... Most of the time, winter and summer, I ... However, my freshman and sophomore year, when the weather was very severe, I stayed in town with a widow lady, a cousin of my father's. I'd go to De Jong's store; they had these seats in front of the counter that turned around and around, and you could sit on that and wait...

DVR: Did you have anyone to walk with from this area?

JS: No, no one from this area went to high school. Well, there were some who went to the public high, but he lived nearer Holland, but I didn't walk with him...

[recording becomes clearer]

DVR: Now, you said that the railroad went out to the lake. When did you ever ride the interurban or the railroad? Do you remember your first experiences with the interurban or the railroad?

JS: I remember experiences as a child going to Grand Rapids with my parents riding on the interurban. During college years, it was a matter of taking the train back to Holland. My father would take me to the train depot, and I would take the train to Grand Rapids, and then the street car from the station to where I was staying. But I went home not very often, perhaps every five or six weeks I would come home.

DVR: Did you make any special or memorable trips while you were in Michigan, while you were in elementary school or high school?

JS: My folks took us to John Ball Park on some occasion. I think it must be after we owned a ton truck that we all got on the back of the truck and went to Grand Rapids. Whether

we went to John Ball Park prior to that on the interurban, I have faint memories, and it seems to me we did. But, those were rare occasions.

DVR: What did you do for recreation in those years when you were in high school or in elementary school? What did kids do in the spring, for example?

JS: Around here, the neighborhood boys had their baseball teams—the balls would come out in the early spring. But for most children, by the time they came back from school, it was time to do the chores. I know after I had walked six miles a day, if I went from here to high school and back, you didn't become involved with much in the evening.

Wednesday evening was my catechism evening. During my high school school years, I attended that in Holland at Ninth Street Church. In those days, Harderwyk Church was still all Dutch. And all during my grade school years—from the age of, perhaps, 7 through 13, 14—I would walk from here to the church. That's a two mile walk to the church and two miles back. On Saturday mornings, all the neighborhood children walked for catechism on Saturday mornings.

DVR: Did churches have picnics then?

JS: I can't recall ever having a church picnic in Harderwyk Church.

DVR: Do you remember any special pastors that you had at Harderwyk Church—any outstanding one?

JS: Well, we had a close relationship with all of the pastors who were here. My father served in the consistory—under nine pastors, consecutive pastors, that daddy was in the consistory—and so, whereas we lived halfway between town and the church, we often entertained visiting students who were preaching in our church. We had very happy

relationships with many of the pastors. I'm not going to single out any special one at this time.

DVR: What about city life and parades and things like that? Do you remember any great parades that were in the city or any special events, any special fires that you recall in the city?

JS: I remember the Decoration Day parades. Memorial Day was the day when we would go to town and watch the parades. Many of the city children marched carrying flags, and my folks were very keen on having us understand the meaning of patriotism, and so Memorial Day was a great parade day in Holland. The 4th of July, I don't remember parades, perhaps because we were always occupied at the beach on the 4th of July. I do remember going out to the beach and seeing the fireworks. They used to have these Venetian nights, with the boats all lit up and fireworks, too. It would be a certain night, during the summer, when at the beach they had these Venetian nights, when the boats were all decorated.

DVR: You're talking about Ottawa Beach?

JS: Ottawa Beach, yes.

DVR: And who would do the fireworks?

JS: I think it was organized under the Ottawa Beach Park Association. I don't know of any other way that it could have been done. These were all the big events that took place mainly still while the hotels were standing. After the fire, which took the Ottawa Beach Hotel, I can't remember the big events there anymore.

DVR: Let's go back to your family again. When did your family come to Holland, Michigan? Your dad came in what year?

JS: I think it was the beginning of 1889. He was 8 years old, but that was prior to his 9th birthday.

DVR: You have no knowledge of how he came, if it was on a ship...

JS: On a ship. His father died when he was very young—about 6 or 7 months when his father died—and his mother remained as a widow in the Netherlands with this only child. She had planned to come to America with her husband and the newborn baby, but her husband became ill and died, and therefore, she stayed on in the Netherlands. Later she remarried, Roelof Dykman. She married Roelof Dykman; he was a widower with one child, Frank Dykman. Together they had a child, Peter Dykman, who was my father's half-brother, and with whom he was in business for many years, living on the farm. My father had to start school, he went to school in Holland—there was a school on 10th Street at that time. That's where he started as a little Dutch immigrant boy wearing wooden shoes, he told us. He had to start with the beginners, because he knew no English, and he went through about four years of school. I don't think he ever went beyond the 4th grade. In those days, there was no compulsory education. He had learned to read and write when he was in the Netherlands; by this time he knew English. He had reached the age of about twelve, and he went to work. My grandmother felt that if he got into the printing business, he could further his education by printing and reading. So he started. He had to work a hand-foot machine—printing letter heads, printing envelopes, addresses—and he worked at this and worked at it.

DVR: Who did he work for?

JS: I can't remember who the printer was; it was a printer in Holland. They were living in Holland yet at the time. He was an apprentice. On Saturday's, he got a dollar a week. I

think those were 10 hour days, 9 hours on Saturday. At last he felt that he was doing his work as well as any adult could do it, even the boss wouldn't be able to produce more than he was doing. And so he asked for a raise. But the boss thought he should wait a little while longer. My father was so disappointed that he took his dollar pay home that night, and on Monday morning, he went to the basket factory and applied for a job. He was quickly accepted, and he was promised 2 and a half dollars a week. He was elated. And then, for a time, he worked in the basket factory. I don't know how long he worked there or when he later transferred to a furniture factory. I know he put in some time in a furniture factory, as did his stepfather. Many months of the year, they couldn't work on the farm, and then that factory money came in handy.

DVR: Did he work in a factory after he was married?

JS: I don't think he worked in the factory at all after he was married. They developed the land here, first the dry land up above and then later the low land which was full of trees. The main farming was done across the road on grandpa and grandma's farm, which later became Pete Dykman's farm. But, this land here had to be cleared, and it was many, many, many years of hard work dynamiting out the roots of the trees, pulling out these with the horses and teams and chains. They'd have to chain the stumps and have the horses draw them and pull them out of the muck before that soil could be used. At first, it could only be used for the larger crops such as cabbage and celery, later on some of it could be used for smaller crops as the root crops.

DVR: What can you tell me about your mother's background?

JS: My mother was a little farm girl; she had one sister older, one sister younger, and a brother—the youngest of the family is a boy. So, the girls did a great deal to help their

father on the farm. They lived north of Holland, what is now 136th Avenue, north of the West Ottawa School. Mother went to Pine Creek School. Again, before the turn of the century, there was no compulsory education. Mother was distinguished by being the first one to receive a diploma from the Pine Creek School. She took the exams and got her diploma, whereupon she went to Holland Business College for one year and became a book keeper. Until her marriage, she worked in the De Grondwet office, which was the Dutch weekly newspaper those days. She worked there, in fact, they had difficulty replacing her because she not only knew her English but she also knew Dutch. And so, she continued there for a few weeks after her marriage, until they could get someone to replace her.

DVR: What newspapers did you get in your home in those days?

JS: I can recall only two newspapers in my youthful days. De Grondwet was the newspaper for the community. It was a Dutch newspaper. Just what it contained, I don't know; it was the paper my folks read, and I suppose they always continued an interest in it because it was the paper in which my mother had worked for all her pre-marriage years.

DVR: How did you get De Grondwet? How did it come to your house?

JS: I can only recall it coming by mail. If there was any other delivery, I don't know. The other paper they read was the church paper De Wachter, and it was many years later before that exchanged for the Banner. After the children could all...

[End of side one]

JS: I remember De Grondwet used to have nice Dutch stories—serial stories, too—and some were for children. I can remember mother reading those to me, and I think I learned my Dutch greatly by just sitting in church listening to Dutch sermons and by having to

memorize the answers to the Dutch questions in catechism, so that I can understand the Dutch language.

DVR: Now, you were never involved in city government or local government, but your dad was very much involved in local government. Could you give us a little idea of what he was involved in, starting when and so forth?

JS: I still remember when dad came home from Grand Haven, very much pleased to think he had obtained his American citizenship. Transportation wasn't the same, and they had to go through various times of tests and so forth. It was in 1916 that he got his American citizenship. In 1918, he ran for township treasurer and became the Park Township treasurer. Only two years before that had Park Township come into existence; prior to that, it was Holland Township. So, he was the township treasurer for two years. I don't know how soon after that, but later he served the township as justice of the peace. He served as that for quite a few years. Until he reached the age of 78, he served as Park Township clerk. In all, he put in over 30 years of township service. The office of the Park Township clerk was right in our home then; they had no special building for township officers. The supervisor lived on the south side of the lake. I can remember that he served with Mr. George Henevelt as Park Township supervisor and then Mr. Nieuwman also as supervisor. I think it was just during the services of these men as supervisors that dad served, and he served as clerk.

DVR: What year did he complete his service for the Park Township?

JS: I think it was 1958 that he terminated his services.

DVR: A long, long time. Do you have any special knowledge or ideas about automobiles in Holland? You mentioned a one-ton truck before, was that the first truck that your father owned?

JS: That was the first truck, and he bought it for his huckster business. It had to be cranked, I know that, it was something he didn't let the women try. Later, he bought a little half-ton runabout, and I learned to drive that—I think I was about seventeen then. You worked the gas and the spark and you shifted, that was my first experience.

DVR: Do you have any special knowledge about the hospital in Holland? I suppose living on the north side, you didn't have much to do with the hospital.

JS: I must say, we never had to use the hospital a great deal, for which we were very thankful. My mother died at the age of 82 and had never been in a hospital, as a patient, I mean. All ten children were born in the home. She had one doctor for all of her obstetrical cases. For every birth, Dr. Daniel Cook was the doctor.

DVR: Where was his office?

JS: He had an office in his home, in Holland. It was on the east side, I don't remember, somewhere around 14th Street, I think—13th, 14th. Most of his coming out here the early years was his horse and buggy.

DVR: Do you have any knowledge of trade or industry that took place in Holland? Where did you work when you worked in Holland?

JS: I never had much occasion to work in Holland. I remember during one teachers institute time, I spent two days in the canning factory. That's the extent of my factory work.

DVR: You mean the Heinz factory?

JS: Yes, when it was up here on 6th Street, I think, at the time. And, at Christmastime, I did work in Abraham Peters five and ten cent store, just for the Christmas holidays. But otherwise, I had no experience working in Holland.

DVR: Now, we've covered your early life, but we haven't done much about your adult life. While we still have a little time left on the tape, could you tell us something about your adult life? I know that was very interesting and different too.

JS: Well, my teaching experience began in Holland. I taught in the Holland Christian Schools from 1926-1929. The following year, I spent at Moody Bible Institute. Then I taught two years in the Timothy Christian School in Cicero, Illinois. In the spring of 1932, early summer, I left for Nigeria. I served in Nigeria as a missionary teacher until 1956—24 years.

DVR: You served for what? The Christian Reformed Church?

JS: I went out under the Sudan United Mission in 1932 with Miss Johanna Veenstra, and the church took over that field in 1940. So, from 1940 on, I was with the Christian Reformed....

DVR: What field is that that you're talking about?

JS: The Nigeria—Lupway Genawe Field.

DVR: Where is that in Nigeria?

JS: At that time, we spoke of it as being in northern Nigeria, just south of the Beneway River. Today it's called the Beneway state, I think. Oh, no, I think it's called Gwundala State now, it's been changing so rapidly.

DVR: It's changed recently, yes.

JS: It was Beneway Plateau State, and today it's the Gwundala State.

DVR: What was your work there then, in general?

JS: My general work, my basic work, was teaching in the schools; teaching adult illiterates.

DVR: What did you use for transportation when you went out visiting other places?

JS: Often used a bicycle. Otherwise, it was foot travel, which I had learned when I went to high school and grade school here.

DVR: What language did you talk there?

JS: I spoke the House of Language there, which was the trade language of northern Nigeria.

DVR: How did you learn that?

JS: Well, my first tutoring was under Miss Johanna Veenstra, with African helpers, and the rest was just by listening and talking and teaching.

DVR: Well, now that we've finished this whole interview, I'd like to know more about your family. What brothers and sisters do you have?

JS: I have five brothers. As I mentioned previously, I was the oldest of the family. My brother Clarence, who lives in Ludington, was born in 1908. My sister Hilda married Everett Merr; she was born in 1911. Living at home with me here is my sister Hattie, who was blind since birth, and with her mental retardation, she has always been in the home except during her teenage years, when she attended the Lansing School for the Blind. Next is my brother Edward, who was born in 1914. He lives in Redlands, California, and has spent the past couple of decades or more there, he and his wife and family. And my brother Peter, who at present lives in Indian River, he and his wife are teachers in that community.

DVR: Indian River? What state?

JS: Michigan, northern part of the lower peninsula. My brother Bill, who lives in Wisconsin, he and his wife are there at present. He is teaching at the University of Wisconsin at Stevens Point. My sister Silvia lives here with me in the parental home. She was born in 1921, and she's a teacher in the Holland Christian Schools. This past spring, she was honored for having spent 25 years with the school system here. And the other is my youngest brother Gerald, he lives next door, he and his family.

DVR: Well, thank you very much for all this information, and for the time that it has taken to give me all this information. I think that you have a very interesting family and you've had a very interesting life. Thank you, again, Jennie Stielstra.

JS: Thank you, Donald van Reken.

[End of interview]