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Vaile, Helen G. Oral History Interview: General Holland History

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Oral History Interview
Interviewee: Helen G. Vaile
Interviewer: Larry J. Wagenaar
October 22, 1998

LW: This is Larry Wagenaar interviewing Helen Vaile on October 12, 1998, at her home in Crown Point, Indiana. Why don't you, just for the record, state your full name and your date of birth.

HV: Well, my full name, before I was married was Helen Byrd Galaty, the Byrd being my mother's maiden name. And I married a man by the name of Vaile. I was born October 24, 1909, a long time ago.

LW: How do you spell Galaty?

HV: G-a-l-a-t-y.

LW: Where were you born?

HV: I was born in Oak Park, Illinois.

LW: That's where you grew up?

HV: That's where I grew up, went through high school. I went to Beloit College for two years in Beloit, Wisconsin. Then I transferred to the University of Illinois and received my degree there.

LW: And your mother's name was?

HV: My mother's name was Minnie Elizabeth Byrd, and her parents were Fillmore Byrd and Deena Roost.

LW: How is Deena related to John Roost, that we were talking about earlier?

HV: Well, Dena...let's see, I have to figure this out now. The original John Roost was my mother's grandfather, so I guess that she would have been a daughter of his. Does that figure right?

LW: Yes, that would figure right. John Roost, being the man who was Van Raalte's right-hand fellow, as you read in the book that we wrote.

HV: Yes.

LW: Tell me a little bit about your mother, since she is sort of the connection to Holland. We'll spend time talking about her.

HV: She and her sister, Edith, and her brother, Walter, grew up in Holland. Walter worked for the Pere Marquette Railroad in his adult years. He and his wife lived in Muskegon, Michigan. They had one son who was adopted, so the Byrd name just sort of died, really. My mother grew up in Holland, and when she finished high school, she went to Ypsilanti Normal, which was a two-year teaching college, and as I told you before, she was the first girl who ever went to college in Holland. Her sister, Edith, married a man by the name of Al Hogenstein, right out of high school. But unfortunately he died within a couple years; I think it was a diphtheria or typhoid epidemic or something like that. So, after my mother received her degree to teach, she came back to Holland and taught for a year in Holland. Then she went to Duluth, Minnesota, to teach.

LW: How long did she teach in Holland?

HV: Just one year, I think. To tell the truth, one of the reasons she left Holland was everything was so strict there. The teachers had to...she wanted to ride a bicycle and they didn't approve of it and things like that. Very strict. So anyway, she went to Duluth and it worked out very well. She lived with a family by the name of McNaughton, and

Mrs. McNaughton was like a mother to her. Their relationship lasted all of Mrs.

McNaughton's life. I remember her coming to visit us many times.

LW: Do you remember when your mother was born?

HV: Yes, 1878, September 23rd.

LW: So she went to college...

HV: It was right around 1896, and then it was a two-year college, so she must have gotten her degree in like '98—I'm guessing within a year.

LW: Where did she meet your father?

HV: My father came up to Macatawa one weekend, and, of course, it was sort of a resort-type of area. One of his buddies who was also a salesman in this Gilbert and Bennett Manufacturing Company, had been up there and had met Carolyn Purdy, who was my mother's best girlhood friend. The Purdys lived at 83 13th Avenue. Of course, Carolyn Purdy never married; she was secretary to John Vander Veen at the Holland Furnace or Furniture Company, I forget which. They were Grandpa and Grandma Purdy to us kids and Aunt Carolyn. But anyway, this other salesman had met Carolyn Purdy, and so he said to Carolyn, "You know, I have a friend who would like to come up with me some weekend. Could you arrange for him to have a lady friend for the weekend?" And that's how my mother and dad met.

LW: Blind date?

HV: Yes. My dad and his brother and sister were all born in Chicago.

LW: Was your mother vacationing in Macatawa Park from her job in Duluth or was this before that?

HV: No, she was just home for vacation time, the summer. Then the family did move to Chicago. My aunt, my mother and her father moved to Chicago and lived out near the University of Chicago. Then he died, and mother renewed her friendship with my dad and introduced her sister to his brother. That's the way it all started.

LW: So she was living in Chicago, and that's where she married your dad, in the Chicago area?

HV: Yes

LW: And then she spent summers in Macatawa?

HV: Yes, then the family spent summers up at Macatawa. For years, we rented the cottage that was a third one south of the channel—way down at the end—and oh, that beach was beautiful. It just extended forever. Mother loved Lake Michigan. I think she probably was its greatest lover. She said she could sit and watch that because it changed every ten seconds. Every evening we all had to watch until the sun went down below the water's edge before we could head down to the hotel where all the activity was. It was just a wonderful childhood. And, of course, evenings, everybody congregated down by the hotel. They had a big ballroom, and Mr. Miller always had an orchestra there, and all the rockers around on the porch and the benches along the walkways. The families all just gathered there. It was just a wonderful family resort.

LW: How long did you spent at your rented cottage?

HV: Just a month. It was always the month of July. Mother and my brother and I...of course, my brother came along five years after I did, but we didn't have cars in those days, so we took the boat over. There were two boats that ran, the *City of Benton Harbor*, which was a side-wheeler, and then the *City of Grand Rapids*, which we preferred; it was more

luxurious we thought. So we boarded that. Dad couldn't come over until about the tenth of July, so mother and the two of us would board the ship, and I think I told you we were allowed to stand at the rail as long as we could see the Wrigley Building, which was bright and lighted, you know. And we could see a lot longer than she could. (laughs) You could still see it, you can still see it. But getting ready to go was something too, if you're interested about hearing about this.

LW: Yes, please tell me.

HV: About two, three weeks before we were to head up there, we'd get the big old trunk out from the basement and put it in the corner of the dining room. And then whenever mother thought of something that had to go in there, it all piled on the dining room table until she could pack it and then it was sent up American Express and there waiting for us when we got there. We had a little dog called Spot, and she knew something was going on as soon as that trunk came up, and she never left my mother's side. It took quite a while because we had to take a lot of our own equipment and blankets and everything. So we filled that trunk; my mother was a good packer. So it was waiting for us when we got there. And as I say, we boarded the ship and we ended up in Holland.

LW: Tell me about the ship. Did you sleep overnight? Is that what you did?

HV: Oh, yes. They had regular berths; it was really a very nice ship. We had a state room, and it arrived in Holland quite early, usually around six o'clock in the morning or seven.

LW: What time did it leave Chicago?

HV: Well, it was usually in the evening, shortly before dark, because we were allowed to stay up just that long. It was really a nice ship. The largest ship I had ever seen until I was married and moved to New York City when I saw the big ocean liners come in. Anyway,

when we got to Holland, the first thing we did was get off the ship and go over to see Carolyn Purdy and John Vander Veen in the office to let them know we had arrived. Then we'd grab a bite of breakfast someplace and then we'd catch the interurban. We'd go down to where the interurban stopped. I don't know if you...you don't recall it because it was probably long gone.

LW: I have pictures of it, but tell me about it.

HV: It wasn't really a station exactly; it was just sort of a building. The interurban got so far and then turned around and went back, and that was as far as you could go. The cars were only allowed to go to a certain point and then you walked. So after we got off the interurban, as you came along on the left side—of course, the lake was on the right—but on the left was a row of buildings. There was the Cameron hardware store, where we always had to stop to check in and get our keys. The post office was there, and then there was a grocery store and a meat market. And that's all there was along there. Then you started this walk with benches on either side up to the hotel. To the right of the hotel was Interlake Walk and to the left was...I think Michigan was the name of it if I'm not mistaken. Then we'd just walk all the way down to the lake and then all the way down to the cottage and look at our stuff. Then we settled in for the month and that was it.

LW: What year did you start going, that you recall? Ever since you were an infant did you go?

HV: No, I was probably about two or three years old.

LW: About 1911 or 1912?

HV: I think that picture that I gave you of me at the park on the carousel; I would have thought I was probably five years old. But we'd been coming there for two three years or more. And I think the last year that we were there, was, let's see...I graduated from high

school in '26. It would have to have been, I don't remember if we were there in '26 or if '25 was our last year. However then, in 1942, mother rented a cottage for a week and my husband and my daughter, who was not quite four years old, and I were there. My mother, her sister Edith, and Edith's oldest son Gordon, who was an Episcopal priest and rector at a church in Grand Rapids at the time, not married, came down. So we rented this cottage and, as I say, I think that was called Michigan Walk, that one, and it was directly across from the Miller's cottage. The Millers had come down there for years. I remember the Miller's daughter and her two children were there at the time, a little boy just about Bonnie's age and a new baby. This little boy fell in love with Bonnie, and he kept coming over to me, he couldn't say his "L"s, and he said, "I yove Bonnie, I yove Bonnie." One day I was hanging some things out on our line, and he came over and he looks so perplexed and he said, "You have such a yittle yine, and we have such a yong yine," because they had a baby. But anyway, that was in 1942 and the strange thing that happened at that time, and it was very scary really, when mother picked up the key at Cameron's, she said, "Now, I think it's going to be a little bit chilly tonight and the cottage is probably damp. Is the fireplace is working order?" They said it must be because they come down every once and a while. Well, my husband built a fire in the fireplace, and he and my cousin and my aunt and I started playing bridge on a table in front of the fireplace. All of a sudden I said, "Everybody be quiet, I hear some crackling, and it's not right from the fire." "Oh," they said, "you're imagining something." I said, "No, I'm not." So my husband ran upstairs to see, my daughter Bonnie was in bed, little four year old, all tucked in already. He said, "There's nothing up there, Helen." And I said, "Well, there's something. Run down the basement." And do you know that they

had boarded up...they had this big ash pit, and when they closed the cottage apparently they had boarded all of that up. And as our fire, the embers, fell down there, that board was on fire. So my cousin went out, ran up and down, "Fire!" Yelled at the top of his lungs. My husband went downstairs, and fortunately, by the time the bucket brigade started—you know, we had bucket brigades then—he had managed to pull that down and got enough ashes to smother the flames. But it was really strange, everybody came running out of their cottages in pajamas, no matter what they were wearing. Fortunately there was a pump right outside our cottage, between ours and the next one, and everybody was pumping and running in with buckets, and I said by then my husband had really smothered it. But having gone through that other fire, and those cottages are so close together, and they're just dry timber most of them.

LW: Let's go back to the fires of the early '20s. You said you've gone through that before. Tell me about that.

HV: We were in the cottage down near the channel at the time, so ours was a third from the last to go. But I think that we were either thirty or thirty-one that went, and it was all over in an hour and a half.

LW: Tell me about how it got started and how you reacted once you learned about it.

HV: As I recall, somebody said that this family that was in the cottage farther south of it that started it, they were bathing some children and they had lighted a heater in the bathroom and it caught the curtains on fire, was what we understood. It just went from one cottage to another. Of course, everybody was out with buckets running down to the lake and running back. They were trying so hard where there was the least little space between cottages to wet down the next cottage, hoping that that would stop it at a certain point.

But there was a very strong south wind that day. It just...well, you can see from the pictures, the flames were just almost horizontal. Everybody thought we better get our belongings out as soon as we can, and that's why the beach was so littered—everybody was hauling stuff out. Fortunately, we had such a wide beach where we were, and everybody took stuff as near the water edge as they could because the heat was tremendous. You just felt like you were being burned unless you were down quiet a ways.

LW: That must have been scary.

HV: It was. Fortunately, we were able to rent another cottage on the Interlake Walk for the rest of that month.

LW: Was this early in your time?

HV: Well, it was about halfway through, we had about another week or ten days left, and we were able to rent a duplex cottage and we had one side of it. But, of course, mother wasn't happy because those cottages are very close together—across from each other and next to each other—and she wants the lake. But it gave us a chance to finish out. Then the next year we rented a cottage on the lake, but it was just a little south of where the bathhouse had been. But there wasn't a nice beach there, that beach had eroded more. Because, see, the channel and the breakwater protected our end.

LW: Did they rebuild the cottage where you had stayed previously?

HV: Well, eventually all those were rebuilt, and, of course, much nicer cottages, because they were very primitive. We didn't have running hot water, we had to heat our water in a tea kettle. We had kerosene stoves, the two-burner kerosene stove. And I have very vivid pictures of my mother cooking on that stove. It couldn't have been much of a vacation

for her. But all of her Holland friends got down to see her. And, of course, she still had so many friends there then. My dad would go fishing; I think you saw that picture of that line of fish. People would go out on the pier and out on the breakwater, and they'd have three hooks on their line, and they'd pull up three fish at a time. The worst job was the cleaning of them, but he was good. He did all the cleaning. The Holland people came down and they just loved mother's fish dinners. She had two huge, heavy cast iron skillets, one on each burner, and she stood there just frying fish as fast as she could because there were eating them faster than she could cook them. But, anyway, they really were quite primitive. We had bathrooms, we had running water, but no showers or things like that and no hot water. So, it was a different era than today, where we expect all the amenities when we travel.

LW: Did other families lose a lot in that fire?

HV: The ones nearest the end where the fire started, of course did because they didn't have time to get things out. But at our end of the line, we were able to get a good many things out. There wasn't much in the way of furniture we could move, but our own personal things and some of the things that belonged to the owner. It really was a horrible experience. You know, you just feel so helpless. Nothing you can do.

LW: Is that the only year that you had problems with fire?

HV: Yes.

LW: So, it must have been '22 or '23?

HV: Well, I think those pictures are dated, I think it was '22.

LW: That's what rings in my mind; it's been a little while since I've looked at those.

HV: I think it was 1922. One of the things that we enjoyed doing, the coast guard was in a different place than it is now, it was along the channel nearer Black Lake than Michigan, and on the Macatawa side. I understand now it's on the Ottawa Beach side.

LW: It is, yes. That building was actually standing well in to the 1970s.

HV: Oh, was it?

LW: Yes, the old one.

HV: As I recall, it was a real, white building painted white, and immaculate. Oh, the grass and everything, those men just kept it so immaculate. But once a week, they had a drill, and we loved going to watch them. It was really interesting.

LW: Tell me about the drill. Tell me what you saw, what did they do?

HV: Well, they man their boats and get them in the water and try to time themselves.

LW: They were big boats that were like in garages and then went down a ramp into the water?

HV: Yes, they had a ramp that went down in to the channel, and then they could go to Black Lake or Lake Michigan. Once a week they had that drill, and we kids just loved that.

LW: How often did you go in to Holland on the interurban while you were there?

HV: Well, we really didn't, they came to us. I think the only time we actually went in on the interurban during our stay there was when we had to have our little dog spayed. Sounds funny, I don't even know if you want to hear it.

LW: Go ahead.

HV: So I took little Spot to Holland to be spayed. Then I had to go back to get her and brought her back on the interurban. I think that's the only time I remember ever going in while we were there. We were just there to resort and entertain.

LW: So, really, Holland was relatively distant place from your point of view, that you didn't need to go to when you were out there.

HV: No, we didn't need anything in Holland. We had everything we needed there. And we didn't need that much; we weren't real demanding people.

LW: Where did most of the people come from that vacationed there, from your impression?

HV: Well, there were quite a few people from the Chicago area. I really don't know. I guess at that time I really wasn't interested in finding out.

LW: Were there a lot of children and playmates?

HV: Oh yes, lots of children.

LW: Did you notice much change from...you started going...of course, you were very young when you started going but, as you grew and you went there until you were 17 or 18 years old, did you notice...

HV: No, I was just 16, either 15 or 16 my last, because I graduated from high school when I was 16, and I can't remember if we went that summer or the summer before was the last summer. It was one or the other.

LW: So then you probably wouldn't have any impressions of change.

HV: No, it all seemed the same to me. The cottage was there and we did the same thing all the time.

LW: Did you take the ferry across the channel to the Ottawa Beach side at all?

HV: We did do that. We did that a couple times, and we thought Ottawa Beach was much more elegant than Macatawa. Well, the hotel was, and it was a different type of resort really, it really was.

LW: How was it different?

HV: It seemed to be a different class of people. It wasn't as family-oriented. At least that was my impression. It seemed like the people that went there maybe had more or were interested in different things. Sort of like the people down there now. Our little experience down at Macatawa when we visited just a couple months ago, I had to talk quite a bit to that gatekeeper to convince him that I should be able to go in there. He finally said, "Well, I'll give you a pass for an hour." So, we got over to the area, and, of course, the hotel was gone and that restaurant that had been there the last time I stopped by was gone, and there was that grassy area down at the lake. I sort of stood there and had to get my bearings, but then those cottages to the right as my back was to the lake, to the right were all the same cottages. I recognized every one of them. But they had cars parked up around where I never saw cars before. So I went over to the walk, which was Interlake Walk that I thought was the one to go down, and this couple came along on their rollerblades with all the equipment you could imagine—the helmets, the knee things and everything else.

LW: A time warp.

HV: Yes. So I said, "Am I heading right? I want to go down to the beach and to the lighthouse." He looked at me and said, "This is a private gated community, and unless you live here and you are visiting someone you're not supposed to be here."

LW: So, what did you say to him?

HV: Oh, I just said, "I have a pass; I'm permitted to come." In the meantime, Bonnie and I had been talking about all the millions of dollars tied up in boats in the harbor, instead of a little row boat now and then. Then we ran in to this couple and I thought, I don't ever want to come here again. I don't know whether they're all like that or not.

- LW: The point of view of the residents there tend to lean in the direction of what you've expressed, from what I'm told. It's very difficult to get in there anyway.
- HV: They act very much like the nouveau riche that have to show off. Now, whether they're all like that or not, I don't know. But when we got down to the lake, oh, the kids running on bicycles and roller skates and everything, up and down, and up and down. There was so much more than there used to be. It was much more relaxing and quiet then. One thing we thoroughly enjoyed when we're there...do you know anything about the Indian trails?
- LW: No, why don't you tell me.
- HV: Well, up higher off the lake and a little bit, it would have been south, there was this very, very wooded area, and it was referred to as the Indian trails. We loved going up there. They did have trails that went in all different directions. It covered quite an area; I don't know whether any of that forest area is still there or not.
- LW: There's a little bit of it left.
- HV: Well, it was a big area. We'd all go up there and hike the trails. I remember one time we got lost, and we weren't sure just how to get back where we started. But, you'd get out, it'd be a hot day down on the beach and you'd go up there and it was so cool and so relaxing. We'd take little Spot up and she'd just run in all directions—she was part whippet hound—so she really ran. We just loved going up there. I'm sorry that that has not been preserved.
- LW: I think there is a number of cottages up in that area, but there is still quite a bit of woods if you go to the south and a little bit to the east of where Macatawa is. Some of that has

been developed, a long time ago, into cottages up in the hills. So it's not just woods as you probably would remember it from your time.

HV: There was one group of cottages that was up high. I remember we took this walk up, and if you recall, one of the pictures I sent you was a picture of my mother and me at a pump. It was like that little structure there, and with a pump and cups to drink from. We wouldn't probably want to drink from everybody's cup nowadays, but we didn't think anything of it then. Many times we'd take walks up there. My mother was quite a walker; she enjoyed exercise.

LW: Tell me about Angel's Flight.

HV: Angel's Flight? Well, first I'll tell you about that walk that went down from where the hotel was. There was a walk that followed the lake down to the channel. There was a bowling alley there, which was not like a bowling alley you've ever seen because it didn't have ten pins. It was just a thing about this wide, the width of the alley, and it had five carved—or whatever you want to call it, like out of cardboard or maybe plywood or something—shaped like pins and painted. You roll your ball and try to knock those down. And then they had a handle, and you'd go like this and they'd all pop up again (laughs), but they called it the bowling alley. We used to enjoy that. Then a little farther down was the Jesiek Boat Livery and Bait Shop. That's where we always got our minnows to go fishing. And that's where we, when we had a quarter, which was exciting, we'd rent a boat and row. That's where the Angel Flight was down off of that walk that went up the big dune. There really wasn't anything once you got up there especially. You know, you just took the ride up on that little cart and looked around up there, stayed a while, and then you came back down again. It's nothing like any of these

rides in these parks today with the roller coasters and all that sort of thing; it would be very boring to anybody now. But you got a beautiful view up there. Another thing that you might be interested in, that between our cottage and the next one toward the channel and behind our cottage, was quite a high dune, and all these sand cherries grew there. Grandma Purdy loved to make sand cherry jelly, and it was good. So we kids would go out with a little bucket and we'd pick a lot of sand cherries and give them to her. We didn't walk that far down, so whether those things are still there or not, I don't know.

LW: Did you ever go to the zoo? Lakewood Farm?

HV: Yes, George...what was his name?

LW: George Getz.

HV: Yes, George Getz Zoo. Yes, we did that. Let's see...I was trying to think. We must have gone there in '26 because that's the first year we had a car. So, we must have been there in '26, and we did go to the zoo.

LW: That was the first time you went to the zoo?

HV: Yes.

LW: Because there was no other way to get there unless you had an automobile.

HV: Unless you had a car. Now, the Hooks, we called Aunt Cora and Uncle Ray Hook, he was a painter and a decorator, and he's the one who did the Warm Friend Tavern when they built it. He did most of the very nice homes in Holland. They lived at 150 14th Avenue, 14th Street, whatever it is. Both Purdy and the Hook houses are still there because I passed them. He had a car, and they would come down to see us very frequently, especially in the evening when we were all gathered up near the hotel. He'd give all us kids a nickel so we could get a box of Cracker Jack. That was exciting. But

then he also would drive us to Saugatuck. Usually once each year we went to Saugatuck.

They had a huge big pavilion there, I don't know...

LW: Yes, that's burned.

HV: That burned, I know, years ago, but I don't know whether you were aware of that it was there.

LW: Yes, I'm aware it existed.

HV: There was a movie at one end of the pavilion and then a dance hall and an orchestra. We used to think that was pretty exciting. We usually managed to do that once a year.

LW: Tell me what your impressions are at Getz Zoo when you went there in '26. That was your last year going there then?

HV: Yes. Well, up until the time we went in '42, but the consecutive times. Well, I was used to the Lincoln Park Zoo in Chicago, and so forth and so on, so it didn't impress me that much as a big zoo. But, you know, we all thought it was nice that he was doing it. What's it like now?

LW: The zoo went out of business in the late '30s. So it hasn't been there for a long time. I was wondering if you had many memories of it.

HV: Well, we went there that once and as I said having been accustomed to the Lincoln Zoo, it didn't seem like very much. The animals were fun to look at and so forth and so on. But it never really was much of a zoo, was it?

LW: It was called Lakewood Farm, but it was also known as Getz Zoo. He had at least a sampling of animals out there that were somewhat exotic, at least for the time.

HV: I guess I wasn't that impressed with it.

LW: Did you go fishing quite a bit? Was that something that you and your...

HV: I went fishing a little with my dad. My dad loved to fish, and whether he caught anything or not, he enjoyed it. He was a salesman. I think it was a nice change for him, just to get away from all the business. He'd rent a boat and go out on Black Lake or else he'd go out on the breakwater. He had his pipe with him, and he'd just fish and come home and be perfectly content whether he'd caught anything or not—some days he was very lucky and some days not.

LW: On some of our older pictures of Macatawa Park, there is a building near the waterfront which had the word "Casino" on the top of its roof. Do you remember that building and what was in it?

HV: Was that on Black Lake?

LW: It was on Black Lake.

HV: I don't recall anything like that.

LW: Remember there being a casino of any kind?

HV: No, what would have gone on there?

LW: I should have brought the picture along; it might have helped prompt your memory.

HV: Where on Black Lake was it?

LW: It's kind of difficult to tell, but it's along the waterfront. And that's all that I can remember from the photograph.

HV: I don't remember anything like that right there at Macatawa. It might have been between Macatawa and Jenison Park.

LW: Do you remember there being a casino of any kind?

HV: No. It might have been, maybe on the water between Jenison Park and Macatawa or something like that.

LW: That might have been. What kind of amenities did the hotel have, that you remember?

You talked about going to congregate at the hotel.

HV: I don't know what the rooms were like because I was never in the rooms. But it had a wrap-around porch with a lot of rockers on it. And at the one end, on the main floor, was this ballroom. I really don't know, but I remember Mr. Miller, the owner, and he always wore one of those pith helmets sort of.

LW: Oh, really?

HV: Yes. Not always, but part of the time you'd see him with this pith helmet on like he was from Africa or something. It sort of tickled us as kids. He was sort of the Kentucky Fried Chicken colonel. He was sort of that type, as I recall. Never did have a picture of him; we should have taken a picture of him, shouldn't we?

LW: Did you go to Jenison amusement park much?

HV: No, that was just a special treat.

LW: Did you go at all ever?

HV: Oh yes, that was a picture of me on the carousel there.

LW: Tell me about the park.

HV: It was really a small amusement park area. They rented boats there, I remember, and then they had the carousel. I think that one picture of my brother and me on that slide was taken there. They just had a few little things to entertain kids. It wasn't a big affair, really. But it was pretty; it was very wooded and a very pleasant place.

LW: There was a roller coaster there, too, wasn't there?

HV: I don't remember a roller coaster. There might have been, but I don't remember it.

LW: And a swing where there were seats and it would twirl you around. Some of our pictures show that.

HV: There was something like that, but I don't remember a roller coaster.

LW: Maybe that came later or something. We have pictures of the roller coaster.

HV: Oh, do you? Well, then it was there.

LW: Small, I'm sure. Any other memories of Macatawa that you have that we haven't touched on?

HV: I don't know.

LW: I've asked you about all the major sites out there.

HV: I know one of the big deals every day was to go to the post office to see if we had any mail. It was quite a walk when you stop to think, from way down near the channel. But, we all had to see if we had mail.

LW: Do you remember who the post person was?

HV: I have no idea. But then, of course, we'd have to go for groceries. Now I do remember one thing. There was a man that came with fresh fruits and vegetables in a cart every day. My mother was always so delighted because she always said that Michigan fruit was the best fruit in the world. Apparently the soil there was just perfect so the strawberries have a better flavor and the cherries have a better flavor and everything else. So she was always delighted that he would come. He just brought this cart and went all the way down the walks either way and people bought. And, of course, the milkman came and delivered like they used to. The ice man came. They always just walked right in; nobody ever locked their cottages. They always just walked in, put the ice in the...

LW: So there was a standing order?

HV: You had a sign that you put out if you wanted 25 pounds or if you wanted 50 pounds.

You put this sign in the window and then he knew what you wanted. And the same with the milkman, if you weren't there, and they'd put it right in the refrigerator for you.

LW: Really? Times have changed.

HV: Yes.

LW: See if there's anything else here that I was going to ask you about. Now, you went there in '42?

HV: Yes.

LW: And was that just for one week?

HV: That was just one week. My husband and I had come, we lived in New Jersey at the time, and we had come home for our vacation. We usually spent one week on vacation in Kokomo, Indiana, where his family was, then one week in Oak Park with my family. Mother decided that that week it would be fun if we all went back to Macatawa and refreshed our memories. I can't remember the name of the family that had that cottage. They called them cottages, but you know they were big. We had four or five bedrooms in that place. But they were just great, big timber, all dried timber, old, you know, and very close together. But I remember that it was the Miller cottage that was directly across the street from us and that's still there. They're all still there. So they must be...

LW: They're all private residences now.

HV: Oh, yes. But just think how old they are.

LW: Some of them go way back.

HV: Because they weren't new when we went down there. Mother remembered them as a child, so they have to be...she'd be...

LW: Yes, they would go back probably to the late 1880s or 1890s.

HV: Yes, she would have had a birthday in September; she'd have been 120 years old.

LW: When did your mother pass away, what year?

HV: Let's see, my dad passed away in '67, and mother passed away...it was 1960, seven years before he did. I always said she had regal posture. She always carried herself well. Poor soul, the last eighteen years of her life she was so crippled up with this terrible progressive inflammatory rheumatoid arthritis. She suffered terribly and, of course, was very crippled up. So, in a way, her death was a blessing as far as she was concerned because she suffered so terribly. And then dad was alone for about four or five years in the house. We finally talked him into going in to Plymouth Place, which was a lovely retirement home in LaGrange Park, Illinois. I never heard my dad or mother raise their voices. My mother was the best disciplinarian in the world probably because no matter what she promised you, whether it was bad or good, she kept her word. But she never raised her voice, and we always knew what we were expected to do. My dad took care of her all those years and I never heard him raise his voice to her or get impatient in spite of the fact, she really became quite demanding because of her suffering. So when we talked him into going in the home and we had to sell the house, which had been the house I'd grown up in too, you know, it was sort of a tug at my heart too. But I was feeling so sorry for him when I was driving him out to LaGrange. I thought, "Oh dear, what's going to happen when he gets there? What's his reaction going to be?" And bless his heart, on the way out he said to me, "Well, Helen," he was 85 then, "it'll be interesting to find out what kind of a new life I can make for myself at 85."

LW: That's a good attitude to have.

HV: And I've often said, I hope I can face life like he did.

LW: Well thank you for taking time to talk with me today. We got some good memories down.

HV: This is all interesting to me, but to how many people I don't know.

[End of interview]