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Sinke, Lois Oral History Interview: Class Projects

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Interviewee: Mrs. Louis Sinke
Interviewers: Tom Frakes/ Takashi Sugie
Date: 9/29/77 Time: 1:00 P.M. - 3:00 P.M.
Place: 49 East 8th Street

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T.F. Who was the first Van Landegen?

L.S. The first Van Landegen in Holland would have been my grandfather Johannas Van Landegen, in the Dutch way, but he changed that as a very young person to John. He wanted to become Americanized and he became a naturalized citizen as soon as possible. He considered himself an American and he would not even allow Dutch to be spoken in the home. He said his children were all American, he was a natural American, they were making their living in this country and they should speak the language of this country. They were not Dutch any more!

T.F. I see.

L.S. My grandfather's name was originally Johannas, but is John in English; John Van Landegen. That was when they came to Holland in 1865.

When my father was one year old he came with his wife who was Anna Pyster Van Landegen, and they had three children in Kalamazoo. They came from Kalamazoo, not the Netherlands. My grandfather came from the Netherlands as a boy of twelve with his family and they settled in Albany which was a Dutch settlement. They had a great tragedy there. His father and grandfather died within three weeks of the colera epidemic leaving my great grandmother a widow with six children; the oldest, my grandfather, twelve and the youngest a babe in arms and no money and nobody who could speak the language. They knew nobody and how she got along is beyond me.

T.S. Me too!
L.S. Otherwise, no organized help in those days either and then the boy of
the family, no matter if he was ten or twelve, he became the man of the
house. He had just gone in school and they had to get him right out of
school and go to work to support the family. How he managed to do it,
I don't know but they apparently got along and I have never known why
they came to Kalamazoo or how that came about. I never asked anybody
and doubt that there is anybody left to ask. But anyway he did and he
was still taking care of the family from working in Kalamazoo, which was a
Dutch town of Norris.

Then my grandmother came to America when she was six years old from
the Netherlands from Amsterdam. My grandfather had come from Zealand and
they came with one of the founding parties of Zealand for two or three years
and that is were my grandparents met and married and had three children.
Then they lost their two little boys in one week of the flu, five and
three years old. My father was one year old and was expected to die too but
somehow he recovered and lived to be 80. All but one of the 80 years of his
life were spent in Holland.

T.F. That's a good long time.

T.F. How did the store get started?

L.S. My grandfather somehow or another got started in the hardware business. I
don't know if he did it when he first came or if it was a little later, but
it wasn't too much later because my father used to talk about being a small
boy and his father taking him to the store and that was on East 8th Street.
L.S. The building that he built was the first three story brick building in town and the building still stands. That was considered a great thing in town. 50 years later he was said to have built the most beautiful home in Holland on the corner of College and Tenth. Which was torn down many years ago and I only saw it as a child.

T.F. Was this shop ever a hardware store?

L.S. This shop was never a hardware store, it had some hardware in it but when he went in with my father, who was a tin smith, it was mostly wells, pumps and then the tin smith trade. It was more of a tin shop. I have always lived here and still do up stairs.

T.F. How long have you had the antique shop?

L.S. I have had that for 30 years.

T.F. Do you have any favorite antiques that you like the best or collect?

L.S. I really don't collect anything, I guess I like them all but I was raised with antiques on my mothers side. There isn't really room for those or anything else so I don't keep anything anymore. At first I would fall for a piece and had to keep it but I would think how foolish when I have too much alreadly and I have no family to leave them to.

T.F. Is everything down here from your family?

L.S. All of the things downstairs have been bought for sale except for the props. Like the cabinet and the tins, which are probably choicer than anything I have for sale and they are not for sale!

L.S. These tins and the smaller ones on the counter are from the old Van Putten store which is right where the Sports Supply store is now.
L.S. They were used for storing tea and coffee. These little tins were used for spices, things were not pre-packaged those days.

T.F. Where do you buy most of your antiques?

L.S. They're getting awfully hard to get and mostly it's when people pass away and when people move away from big apartments to a little apartment or to a trailer and there is just no room for them, so they have to part with them.

T.S. Do they sell them cheap?

L.S. Well, they don't sell them cheap, the bargains are gone; they know their value very well and quite often there are people who have collected and who have paid retail prices too for their things. It's not all family things but years ago I bought most of my things from old people who sold their family things, they didn't care about them any more. They lived with them all their lives and wanted something new. The grandchildren, and even the children, would say get rid of that, it's old we don't want that or it's old get something new. The young people now want them, and now you ask the old people for things and they say I can't sell that, my grandson wants that or this is put away for my granddaughter. That source, which is our best source, is really gone. Antiques are becoming more valuable and are considered a great investment today.

T.F. Then they never do decrease in price?

L.S. They never have as long as I have known about them and I don't think they can because the supply is diminishing and the demand is going up.

T.F. What was the back of the shop originally used for?
L.S. The back part of the shop was the workshop. In the front of the shop are most of the little items and in the back are the big items.

T.F. How did you get started in the antique business?

L.S. It was started really, as a hobby. I was having a lot of nervous trouble, and I had surgery before we were married. I knew an old lady who was a retired antique dealer and she suggested it to me.

I've always been glad that I got started with it, I can't say I've made a fortune by any means, not even a complete living, but it has helped me. It's been a great interest and I've met many interesting and very fine people; and I've made friends through it. Some of my dearest friends and I wouldn't have met if it wouldn't have been for the shop.

I've always tried and taken pride in keeping a clean shop.

T.F. Has the store always been this color red?

L.S. Oh no, not at all! In fact this back room was very plain, the walls were sort of white-washed and had the grey of years and it wasn't a bit attractive. There is all sorts of pipes running across the real ceiling. This is a white ceiling in the back which is muslin. So it looks like a perfect ceiling and its walls have been painted with two coats of white.

I've added all these touches of red, so I try to keep the color scheme red and white, inside and out. All this red and white was my idea and covering my dad's work bench with the red and white plaid, and the table with plastic.

T.F. Is this extra room your office or something?

L.S. No, that's a little storage room, that's were I keep extra bags and things for the shows.
L.S. Also things that need fixing, like a lamp if it isn't complete, or anything on lay away. Everything that's here looks old and everything that's here is old, very old, and I go in for atmosphere as you see, which most antique shops don't do. I stick with the old. I try to keep my father's reputation up for being an honest man.

The front room floor is solid maple and in the back of the counters, in the front is white pine, the center is narrow maple. I think it's a measure of economy. Where you walk the most you put the wood that would take it the best.

T.F. What is the ceiling made of?
L.S. Tin, that is all embossed tin.

T.F. How about the front of the store?
L.S. Oh, the front has the old walk-in window and it has steps inside. Then the railings are pipe and chicken wire. That, of course, you never see anymore and steps inside or walk in windows and long, long doors. The double doors which is definitely a sign of an old building.

T.F. Did anyone ever help with the store?
L.S. Yes, and that's why I feel that I should do my best to carry it on and as well as I can to make it a contribution to Holland, in their memory. I also want to leave it to the city, as I hope to do, and hope it will be a contribution that will be worth it, and give people pleasure as well as interest and help them to remember the pioneers that built Holland, that made it the good town it is. Because it wouldn't have been without them.

T.F. Thank you very much for your time.

L.S. Your welcome.
Interview Transcription

Date: January 21, 1977

Interviewer: Lois Sinke - antique dealer and lifetime resident of Holland.

Interviewer: Kim Nagy

Topics Discussed: various antiques in Mrs. Sinke's shop, account of the sale of the Van Putter Store, various references to ways of life in Holland during the late 1800's and early 1900's, methods of antique dealing.

Note: There is a follow-up interview containing more historical information basically about Mrs. Sinke's family and the founding of Holland and Zeeland.
LOIS: certificate that I told you about for anyone who'd been here a hundred years or more (mumble)
KIM: I'd really like to see that.
LOIS: I thought you might find it rather interesting. And what was it you wanted to know about?
KIM: I was just wondering about this ribbon case - um - like what kind of ribbon or -
LOIS: Well they used the bolts of broad ribbon, when they wore great big bows in their hair. When you see old pictures quite often you'll notice they had huge bows of very broad ribbon in their hair, and that came on huge bolts and it was laid along here along these little poles on each side, and it opened like wings on each side and that's where they kept their ribbon. Then they'd take out a bolt and cut off as much as you needed.
KIM: Ohhh -
LOIS: That's quite rare and its partly burlled walnut, it's made of beautiful wood. I've had many chances to sell it, but I don't want to sell it, I'll never get another.
KIM: Oh, I wouldn't part with that.
LOIS: And then this is the umbrella case I started to tell you about from the old Van Putten store - and they put umbrellas through here if you feel under here you'll feel the cane, I had a piece of hard board put here so that I could use it [as a show case] but this opened up like this and they pulled the umbrellas right out through the top and this bottom had a glass door similar to this only not oval but that too was awkward to open that way so I kept
it but I don't use it. But that's a very rare -

KIM: I've never - I haven't even heard of an umbrella case like that or a ribbon case.

LOIS: Very few people recognize them for what they are. The ribbon case is usually taken either for a wine case or a linen case. It could be used for either. And this is an old dry sink, and I put these artificial fruits which I sell and the pump and call it the produce department.

KIM: (Laughs)

LOIS: It's for a little touch of humor in the old store. But a dry sink, you probably know what it is.

KIM: Yes, we have one. (laugh)

LOIS: Oh, well then you're familiar with that, and that's a very old one as you can see. And then all these cases back here are old store cases. Now that was for cheese you notice the little screens at the top and the back for ventilation that's the way they kept the cheese. And this one was for crackers and you see the vent going down there (Kim: uh-hum) and this shelf wasn't there, it had no shelf, but it would be filled with crackers and then they'd scoop out as many as you wanted, put them in a bag opening, that little door, that little slant door, then some more would fall down (Kim: uh-hum). That's a very old thing too. And of course the candy case and cigar case, my great aunt had back in the 1880's. I told you about those and here's an interesting thing too: is the pot-bellied stove that's an old depot stove.

KIM: Is that an original?
LOIS: That's the original. Uh-huh. It's not in use but it could be. It's in perfect condition and it's something that's very saleable but you have to have an old pot-bellied stove in an old store. (laugh)

KIM: Where did you get that?

LOIS: I got that up north somewhere and I can't remember just where - somewhere in the Traverse City area I believe, many many years ago. I've gathered all these pieces, oh, a period of probably 25 or 30 years ago. I've been in business — 31 years this year.

KIM: That's a long time.

LOIS: And these were candy cases as they are now. And the tins over there are from the old Van Putten Store, and those are very rare, very old. You see they have quite a lot of decoration on them and they, they were for coffee, tea, and that sort of thing. The smaller ones were for all different spices, and they have the spice in still with the little scoops. And they'd buy spice by the Oz. or whatever you wanted.

They'd put it in a little bag for you.

KIM: Oh.

LOIS: And the Grand Rapids Museum got half of them, and I got half of them. We both wanted all of them, and he thought it was fair to divide them. I was very surprised to get any of them when the Grand Rapids Museum wanted them for their Gaslight Square. And those I have had more offers on those because you just can't find them anymore. And all the old tins up here are all authentic old candy tins, coffee tins, and lots of tobacco tins, and you can't find any of those anymore. They've gone very very high if you can find them - surprisingly high.

KIM: How much — uh do you mind me asking 0 how much that — I have no idea of the realm of money, you know, that you spend for antiques, but if I was going to go somewhere to buy a — maybe a set of dishes or something that were antique, what would that run me?
LOIS: Well, that would depend on what kind of china it was. If it was fine china or cheap china even in it's day, if it was Haviland which of course is very popular, and always was very expensive. Oh, it would probably run you 5 or 6 hundred, 7 hundred, for service for 12.

KIM: Where do you go then, do you go out like to sales or auctions?

LOIS: Not anymore, years and years ago I did, but things go higher at auctions than in stores. People get excited you know, and it's a one time only chance- and not too many dealers buy at auctions anymore. It's not good buying. Mostly it's calls, you know, when a person dies, or moves away, or moves to smaller quarters, and they have to sell their things because there's no room for them. Or go to nursing homes. It's mostly through calls. And nowadays it's mostly collections coming back on the market for that reason. Which of course means you buy high. Where it used to be- a - the old people had their attics filled, and basements filled and they thought it was just junk and thought you were just a little bit nuts to be buying it at all, you could get it easily and get it cheaply. But that day is long past. All the old attics and old basements have been scoured. It's very hard to buy really old things now. You usually have to pay a pretty big price. That's why they've gone up so much in the stores.

KIM: What is - how old would something have to be, to be antique?

LOIS: Well- an authentic antique, officially, it should be a hundred years old. But around this part of the country there aren't too many things that are a hundred or more. And they are acceptable at fifty. But of course we like them to be at least seventy or eighty if possible. And then, we uh, have collectables now which are under fifty years, some of them only thirty years like Depression glass which is so popular and
isn't antique at all. Because the really old things are getting so rare, people are in desperation going to newer things and they call them collectables, rather than antiques and some of them are pretty expensive.

KIM: I see. (pause) Oh, gee, there's just so much here. Teddy Roosevelt?

LOIS: Oh, that's, ah, not old, those are little plaques, plaquettes they're called from Denmark — and that's the Presidential series.

KIM: Oh —

LOIS: There's a whole group of them over there — and they were specially done for export to this country. Just that series of Presidents. Those are all hand painted under glaze like the Christmas plates. They're made by Royal Copenhagen like the Christmas plates. This is an old thing, this is a seamstress table, and you see it has the measurements

KIM: . . . right on it!

LOIS: right on it — so many inches, so she could measure her material. And that collapses — you can fold it all up. I liked to take it to shows because it was just the width of a chair. And you could only go out in the aisle a chair width. Since I'm alone I only need one chair so I could use this because it's a chair width, and I would take a bowl of candies to the shows, and sometimes the little notes too, what I call my antique-ish notes. And they would go on this little table.

KIM: Oh.

LOIS: But now people are interested in these little old tables, they never used to be so I never bought any that I could have bought very cheaply. And now I can't find them. Everything now people are interested in that's old. And these lamps — like this one — is interesting I think, it's made from an old coffee pot. And in the back part of the shop there
are a lot of lamps made from many interesting old things.

This grinder is one of the first electric coffee grinders that replaced the big double wheeled hand grinders. See how strange it looks.

KIM: That really is odd looking.

LOIS: The coffee went in this top aluminum piece, then came down into this pin thing here and then they put it in the bag. They ground the coffee for you. A pound or two pounds or whatever you wanted. There were always, coffee always came in coffee beans then and they ground it for you. Some people bought it and ground it every day in their own homes. They thought it was better - fresher.

And that big cabinet came from the Van Putten Store too on the dry goods side, but I don't know what it held. I was in that store with my mother when I was a child so many times. She did a lot of sewing for herself and for me and I guess I never notices what was in there. I can't remember now.

KIM: That's rather odd sized units -

LOIS: Isn't it? And it's so big. But it's just perfect for the little "potties" or for the jugs. I used to have that filled with potties and jugs, and you can see how low my stock is now.

KIM: Gee, that's a lovely - is that a tourine?

LOIS: No! That's a pottie. Isn't that a beauty?

KIM: That is just beautiful.

LOIS: All these others are potties. And of course they all had covers - most of the covers are lost now. And they're very collectable for planters.

KIM: Oh, gee, that would be pretty.

LOIS: This is the old clock from the Van Putten Store - and a the man who sold me this had worked for them all of his life from a boy of twelve as a delivery boy. And he kept the store open for them when they were in
their 30's and could no longer come down to the store and couldn't take care of the dry goods so nothing could be sold from the dry goods. But the groceries - he could sell those. Of course most of the time he was sitting there watching the people go by and supervise. And they were pretty well-to-do so they could afford that luxury. So he kept it going and as a result of his faithful service for all those years, they had nobody, they left him everything--the store, their money. The poor man only lived six months so he didn't get much pleasure out of it.

But this clock he said he would sell. But he said that's to be the last thing to go from the store. He was rather eccentric - he was a very honorable man. He wouldn't sell you anything out of the store until the store was sold, but you could put your price on it, he'd put your name on it and then when the time came you were to have it at that price. I thought of course those things usually amount to nothing, some stranger comes along and they forget all about you and sell it to him. But he kept his word to the letter. When he sold the store and it took him three weeks to get hold of me, I was going to different shows, he had a hard time reaching me - had every excuse in the world to let other people have it. Everybody was after it - he wouldn't think of it - we had an agreement. And the very last day, he said you can come and get the things, this is the last day of the store, it's sold, everything else is gone but your things - they're all here. And every one was there with the little number on them, the price, even though the museum had offered him three times the amount that we had agreed on - he sold them to me.

KIN: Oh -

LOIS: He kept his word, and he said the clock will be the last thing to go - and when I have to close down and leave the store, everything is gone, then the clock goes but not before. And it was going nicely -
this is the exact time that the Van Putten Store closed - after a long, long history - and I don't know why but I just have a sentimental feeling about leaving that clock there like that and I never started it again.

KIM: 5:24, it seems like an odd time doesn't it?
LOIS: Ages.
KIM: It seems like it should be the stroke of midnight or something-
(Both laugh)
LOIS: But I'm real sentimental about that.
KIM: Oh I can imagine.
LOIS: But that clock is very old and I imagine it was there the whole lifetime of the store. Probably wouldn't go now it's been stopped so long - and clocks don't like that! Oh, this sun bonnet is a very interesting thing. And there's another one in the back room, which hasn't kept it's shape as well. This came from the old East Saugatuck Store, that man stored away things in the basement as store keepers used to do when they weren't saleable any more. They never threw anything away you know, and they'd store things in the basement. There was a box of some - and the box was just filthy dirty, and so I sold three of them and kept two. But I'll never come across authentic sun bonnets again and I never have, they're the only ones I've ever seen. And they had been stored for fifty years and I have had them for twenty-eight years, so they're seventy-eight years old and never been worn. And doesn't that look nice for its age? It's so perky!

KIM: It sure does.
LOIS: They look very pretty on, they're very becoming - they're very becoming especially for young girls. And that is on an old hat holder too.
That didn't come from the same store, but it is an old hat holder from an
old millinery store where they used to display hats. An old wooden frame -

KIM: I was just going to ask you about this clock. My grandmother has one just like it -

Note: The rest of the tape is a discussion of the various antiques in the back room of the shop. Due to extreme background noise the tape is barely intelligible. 

Some of the items we talked about were: a shoulder yoke for milk pails, a tin hearing aid, two paper mache tubs, three one hundred year old dressers, Mrs. Sinke's father's work-bench, and a doctor's bag with bottles.
Note: Mrs. Sinke is discussing a certificate she received.

LOIS: ...Bicentennial year, it's all over now because the bicentennial is over. But if you've had any ancestors in Michigan for a hundred years or more. That has to be verified, by death certificates or grave stones. I called the Pilgrim Home out where my Great-Grandfather was buried. I remember my Mother taking me to my Great-Grandfather's grave many, many years ago, but I didn't remember where it was. And so I called them up and then they told me and they told me the date and so forth. I could have gotten two certificates, one for each person. But it was Two Dollars a certificate, and I thought that was just foolish - why not have the two names on one for just Two Dollars.

KIM: So you had, this is for your Grandfather and Grandmother?

LOIS: My Grandfather......

KIM: Just your Grandfather...

LOIS: John, Johannes, you see is the real name, Van Landegend, and then my Great-Grandfather

KIM: Oh, I see.

LOIS: ....was my Grandmother's Father. Jan Pyster (sp?)

KIM: I see, ok.

LOIS: And he was the one that I told you was in the 1850 census. And my Grandmother was a little girl in that census, and then in the 1870 census, of course, she was married to my Grandfather and was the Mother of a family. It seems so strange somehow, there she was again!
KIM: That's really nice.

LOIS: So they were here a long, long time, more than a hundred years.

KIM: How did you hear about that?

About the certificates?

LOIS: Oh, um, I guess it was in the paper, but I'd never seen it. But a friend of mine that moved here from Chicago three years ago retired here. She had some relatives here and she had had relatives in Michigan more than a hundred years ago. Although she herself was born and reared and spent most of her life in Chicago. And so she thought it would be nice to get a certificate, she didn't have anything to do with her time anyway. So she browsed around and got all the information, and she said to me "aren't you going to get a certificate?" I said, "Oh, I don't think so, I don't know who would be interested in it but me." And she said, "Well, I think it'd be nice for your shop." And I said, "Well, that would be kind of nice." And so I went to the library, the librarian helped her. And then the librarian helped me by showing me these old census records and it was real easy for me. She had a more difficult time because the ancestry, you know, wasn't so well known, and she didn't know so much about them as I did. Now, with my Great-Grandfather it could have been quite difficult except that I knew he was buried over here in Pilgrim Home because I'd seen the grave. So I could call Pilgrim Home and get dates from them. And then, too, I knew that he had been so very active as I think I told you in the old Pillar Church, which was then the Van Raalte Church. And he'd been elder and lay-reader and Sunday school teacher and what-not. And I thought I'd have to call the church and get their records, but when I told
the librarian that she said 'well we have a book on that church, on the old Van Raalte Church'. And she said 'we'll just go through that book', and she said "there he is!" He was right in the book, you see, as one of their elders.

KIM: Then that made it easy for you.
LOIS: That made it very easy and simple for me; it helped me a lot.

But now, the, a , I didn't see the book. They came with the founding party of Zeeland, and they'd more than one book; because there was more than one ship, I understand. She only had the one ship, and they weren't on that ship.

KIM: Did you know what ship they'd been on?
LOIS: No, I still don't. Now, she said she had two books out, and she said it might be in one of those. In fact, I must have known about it, but I probably forgot about it, because years ago I wasn't interested in ancestry. As you get older you get more interested in it, especially when you get interested in antiques, you get more interested in your ancestry I think, in the past. And so, I never questioned about these things, and, in fact, as I say, I must have known it but I didn't remember it. But, a, when I looked up the death articles that my Mother had pasted in the family Bible, you know, they used to always do that, from the newspaper, and there was quite a lengthy article on my Grandmother's death, because my uncle, who was married to my Aunt Mary Van Landegend, I think I told you, was a newspaper man. He owned the newspaper, and of course, he wrote a long, lengthy article about his mother-in-law, naturally. And in there he wrote about, that she was the daughter of one of the early leaders of the Van Raalte Church. Elder, he had
been elder many, many times, her father. All of this sort of thing, you know, they used to go into a great deal of detail anyway, of your life and your ancestry when you died. A lot different than it is now, they were much more sentimental in what they wrote, and personal. And, a, then it said that she and her family had come when she was six years old. I knew she'd come here when she was six years old and that they'd come to Zeeland, she told me that herself. And a, but she didn't say anything about it being the founding party, she probably never gave that a thought. Having been only a child it wouldn't have impressed her, you know. And a, then it said in this article that the founding party of Zeeland was founded the same year Van Raalte founded Holland - 1827. So, it must be a fact because he certainly should have known the facts about his own mother-in-law.

KIM: Yea, it was in the paper too.

LOIS: Yea, in the paper, so it must be a fact that she did come with the founding party.

KIM: Do you know why they came?

LOIS: Well, I think it was mostly because of religion. I know, she told me this too, that there was a potato famine at the time in Netherlands, times were very hard. But a, and that was the reason a lot of people emigrated, the potato famine. There was a potato famine, I believe, in Ireland at the same time. That was when the big Irish emigration was on, when the Irish came to New York, you know. But a, a great many of them came more, much more, for religious reasons. As that's when they were having the trouble in the Church, you know, the Church was getting too modern to suit them. And broadening it's views too much,
becoming too lenient and they wanted to stay very much in the old very strict ways. And a, they broke away from the Church, these people that felt that way. And had their own meetings in each other's homes and they were quite persecuted. Because the, you know, the Reformed Church was the State Church of Netherlands. And there, of course, the government had a good deal to say about the Church. I guess it still is that way, it isn't a free Church like ours, where anybody can go out and found any kind of Church they want to. You can't do that over there. And you can't in England either, the Anglican Church is the State Church of England. And these people would hold meetings, and I read this in books on the early days in Netherlands; that they would have secret meetings with just candlelight. And if anybody suspected them, the, I guess it would be the police, guards or whoever they were, would break in and take them off to jail - they'd be arrested.

KIM: I had never heard that about Holland.

LOIS: Oh yes, there was a good deal of religious persecution with this particular group breaking away from the State Church. Now whether there were other denomination's represented in Netherlands at that time I don't know, but you would think that there would have been. But I've never heard of them.

KIM: Well, they probably would keep it very quiet if there was a State Church -

LOIS: Yes, they probably would. Because now according to the museum over here - you know they have that great big glass church - maybe you've seen it? And then they have a card, I guess you would call it,
telling you the different numbers of people in this denomination and that denomination. So there are some denominations represented. And actually the Catholic is the strongest denomination today in Netherlands. And that is so surprising because there has, in the past, in the early days of Holland particularly, there was a great deal of prejudice against the Catholic Church - a great deal of prejudice. And for many, many years, and that seems so strange when that is the leading church in Netherlands. And we always think of the Dutch as being Reformed - because here of course, they're overwhelmingly reformed. There are some Dutch in the Catholic Church I guess, but the overwhelming majority are still Reformed or Christian Reformed. But they had a great deal of trouble and, that was, I think the reason my ancestors came. Particularly my Great-Grandfather who was a leader in this traditional church in keeping things very, very, very strict.

KIM: They they moved, they came to Zeeland.

LOIS: Yes, they founded Zeeland. And now my Grandmother just mentioned Zeeland and that they couldn't make it in Zeeland - couldn't make a living in Zeeland. And were there for only about 2-3 years and they went to Kalamazoo, but she didn't say anything about coming to Holland. And so I was very surprised when I looked in the census, and there they were in Holland. So they must have come from Zeeland to Holland to Kalamazoo. And either she had forgotten, or, for some reason didn't think it worth mentioning - because they were both so small you know, and they were almost like one I guess because they were both starting at the same time, and they were both little more than a wilderness.

KIM: That could have been it, they just thought of it all as the same area.
LOIS: They thought of it all as one. But they were here in 1850. And then I know that they went to Kalamazoo and I know that she met my Grandfather there and that they were married there and the first three children were born there. The two eldest boys and then my Father was the third child, and he was the only one of the three to live to grow up. Two of them died within one week of the croup. Three and five years old and my Father was one year old and was expected to die but he survived.

KIM: He survived.

LOIS: He lived to be eighty.

KIM: Oh.

LOIS: Wasn't that a terrible tragedy though? And they used to call it the croup, but I think what they called the croup we would call today, diptheria. Which is almost obsolete today too, but diptheria used to take an awful lot of lives. Because they choked to death you know and that was the same kind of thing, and I really think what they spoke of as the croup which we never hear about anymore was really diptheria. And then three months later my Grandmother's Mother died. And at that time - I know they were in Holland then - because, and my Father was just a baby in arms because she told me about them going, it took them almost all night with a horse and buggy, to go to see her Mother die. Somehow, they got word to them and it was an awfully hard job to get word from one town to another you know. Kalamazoo was harder to get to then than it would be to get to Europe now. You'd get there about as fast on a jet as it, and it was a bitter January night she said, in a blizzard. And she had one of those footwarmers like I showed you in the back room, with charcoal. I guess she had more
than one, one for her feet and she had one all wrapped in blankets on her lap, and she had my Father on that and wrapped him all in blankets to keep him from freezing. In those days there was no such thing as babysitters. They knew nobody here, they were just here. To leave him with, so you took your babies and your children everywhere, there just wasn't any choice in those days.

KIM: It's amazing he lived through that.

LOIS: Yes, wasn't it though? It's a wonder he didn't freeze to death - I don't know how she ever kept him alive. He must have been a sturdy baby! And anyway they got there in time to see her Mother die, so within three months she had lost two little boys and her Mother. And she said then she wanted to die too. I can remember her saying that, and I would imagine you'd feel that way.

KIM: Especially just coming here and having all that happen -

LOIS: They had a lot of tragedy. And my Grandfather's family had even more tragedy, even worse tragedy I think. They settled in Albany, my Grandfather was twelve. And he was the eldest of six, the youngest was a babe in arms. And they, Albany was a new settlement too and practically a wilderness. They chopped down their trees and made their own, built their own cabins, everybody did. And they were here three months and just had the cabin finished. And they just got him and the ones who were older, the one old enough to go to school started in school, there was a school and then the cholera epidemic came along. And my Great-Grandfather and Great-Great Grandfather, his Grandfather had come with them, both died within three weeks of the cholera. And left my great-grandmother a widow with six children, the oldest twelve and the youngest
as I said, a babe in arms. No money, they used what money they had
to get here, which wasn't much, I guess, to start with. And then not
knowing a word of the language, and not knowing anybody here. And
I've often thought, what a dreadful position to be in. You know today
we can't imagine what some of these pioneers went through, because
everything, you know, we have all these organizations today, there's
help for people. There's welfare, there's all sorts of places like
Action House. Places to go to if you were left in a position where
you had nothing and had a child and couldn't take care of it. All
sorts of places where you could go for help, anybody. And there was
no place to go for help then. Everybody had to help themselves.
And if the Father died, the eldest Son was the man of the family and
if he was a boy of ten or twelve he was still the man of the family.
And they had to pull him right out of school, he had to go out to work
and support the whole family. You don't know how they ever managed to
do it, but somehow they got through it. And he always regretted it so
much because he wanted an education and he was a very studious person.
And I think he must have been, from what I've heard of him, quite highly
intelligent. Beyond the average, because most of the early immigrants
who came here, of the Dutch people, were from farms and fishing villages
and didn't give much thought to education or to bettering themselves
in ways like that, or in cultural things. And he did. And most of
them thought nothing of, that they had less than a grammar school
education. Well, that was enough to get by you know, they worked with
their hands. But he wanted an education. And he always regretted it
and he became the mayor of this town and the mayor at that time was city
manager; and he was self educated. A hundred years ago came the centennial. So you can imagine he did a pretty good job of educating himself if he could manage the city and the city's finances. Because the mayor really wasn't just a figurehead then, he was the head of the whole town. And then he was a businessman here. And then, as I think I told you, when they looked up the census she said how well-off he was because he had $3,000 in real estate, and $1,000 in personal property, and she said "you're grandfather was well-to-do." I said, "He was?" and she said, "yes, just look at the difference" - he was the only one on the whole page that had more than $200. In real estate and personal property.

KIM: Oh no - and that's what it's costing us to go to college for a year!

LOIS: Just think of the difference in money value.

LOIS: Well you see, he had built that three-story brick building - the first brick building, the first three-story building in Holland. And there was an article many, many years ago, I was a child when it was printed, and they used to print, that was my Uncle Ben's paper, the Holland City News; and they used to print a 50-year & 25-year ago column that Mayor Van Landegend had built the most beautiful home in Holland. And that was on the corner of College and 10th if I'm not mistaken. And it was a great, big house. And I can remember, as a child passing it and looking at it, and I thought it was the ugliest thing - because it was all this gingerbread you know, very, very, Victorian. Everywhere they could put a curlique they had a curlique. I thought it was awful! And I was only a kid! Now I suppose I'd think it was a very beautiful example of Victorian architecture. I wasn't able to appreciate it then.
And they - it's been torn down, quite awhile ago now - it's been torn down. It's too bad, it was one of the nice old homes that should have been preserved. And used for some purpose that would have been suitable for it. Now, of course, it would have been preserved. Because now - but in that period you see - but you see, he must have been quite successful to have built the most beautiful home in Holland and the first three story brick building. But - how little it took to build it then. And yet if you think what people earned, it was, I suppose, just as much as a great many thousands would be to us.

KIM: Probably.

LOIS: Because people's wages were next to nothing. And here, back in 1903 (note: there is a pause here because someone came to the door, but Lois didn't acknowledge him) even in 1903 people were earning 10 cents an hour in the furniture factory. Ten hour day - a dollar a day. And they could live on it and support a family on it. As I say, groceries were so cheap that for a dollar, I've been told this too by old timers, that they would bring home two great big bags that they could hardly carry of groceries for a dollar.

KIM: They grew a lot of stuff on their own too, didn't they? Everyone had gardens.

LOIS: Except if it was right in the heart of town - they grew a lot of things. Of course, they did all their own canning and they ate more simply. They didn't eat extras - these fancy foods like we have today. They made their own pickles they didn't have anything extra like that. They always made their own sauerkraut. And they put by vegetables for the winter. I can even remember my father doing that. In the fall the farmers who traded with
him would come in you know, and they needed different things and they would trade. They did a lot of trading in those days. And they'd trade a bushel of potatoes or a couple bushel of potatoes - and we always had potatoes all winter. We never went to the grocery store and bought potatoes, when I was a child. And I think most people did. If they could afford to, unless they were too poor to do it, you know. And we had cabbages hung up, I can remember hanging from the eaves. And carrots and turnips and rutabaggas because you had no frozen foods - you were dependent on the winter vegetables. And apples - we got those all in the fall for all winter. I can remember my father would go over them every week to see if there were any rotting and get them out, you know, so they wouldn't rot. But um, almost everybody did that. And a lot of people, he never did that because he had no place for it, a lot of people would buy a side of beef, a half a cow, and hang it in a shed. And it would, the winters were so severe, it would stay frozen all winter - they'd go out and cut off a hunk. Chop a hunk off, I guess. You see, that way it was much cheaper living, too. Rather than going to the store and buying piecemeal, so to speak, as people do today. People who lived then couldn't believe the money that it costs to live today. I can hardly believe it myself, of even the past ten years, five years. Now gas, my gas bill for last month was $83.95, and I haven't even been able to keep the place warm. (Another interruption) And my biggest gas bill in former years when I was keeping the place warm was $40 a month. See - it more than doubled. And I'm not even comfortable.
KIM: Is everything gas? I mean do you have gas for everything?

LOIS: No - nothing. Just heating.

KIM: Just heating.

LOIS: Just heating. The stove is electric, the hot water is electric, everything else is electric. The only thing is heating. And I haven't been comfortable all winter. So it's unbelievable even in the past five years to think that utilities have reached the height they have.

KIM: Oh, I know.

LOIS: And of course, back in those days, people had stoves, they didn't have central heating at all. And they burnt wood, coal, went out and gathered driftwood and stray wood. Think how different that would be. And they heated probably two rooms at the most. They never heated the bedrooms.

KIM: Whew!

(Both Laugh)

LOIS: But, you know, it sounds like it was rough living and we have such comfortable living, but I don't know whether we are not about to go back to something like that. Now, when you read about places where they're cutting down; the gas that commerical place can have. And I had a letter from the gas company with my gas bill, I guess everybody did, and it asked you to keep your thermostat down, you know, as low as possible. And they said that gas prices are going to go up and there is a very great possibility that gas will have to be limited. So we may get to the time when we won't even be as comfortable as they were! We'll have to use the old stove!
KIM: Everyone's going to be studying -

LOIS: We're going backward now. Instead of as we've always done - going ahead for more and more comfort each year and a higher standard of living, we're going backward. To a lower standard of living. And it doesn't look very good. And we are with our utilities, even electricity, there's talk of cutting the amount of electricity you can use. They've done that in some places. I was just reading in the Centennial that there were quite a few factories in the southern states that were closed because they couldn't get gas and electricity. And they don't need a great deal. And schools, churches, it really is a serious situation. We've got to go back to a different way of getting energy. Because they're running too low on natural gas and electricity. And they say coal is going to be the answer - going back to coal. Because we do have a lot of coal.

KIM: We'll be glad to know all this - having studied our ancestors.

LOIS: We know they survived it but I still don't think they, we're as tough as they were. You know, they must have been awfully strong because they lived very hard. Everything was done by hand, women's housework was so hard - everything was hard. And we've had it so easy and we haven't appreciated it a bit, we've been so used to it. And I don't think it's going to stay that way.

KIM: When you just think about, you know, our ancestors and all the diseases like you mentioned -

LOIS: And the kind of epidemics, even my mother remembered when she was very young. I think she was still a child in Chicago. As I told you, she lived with her aunt for a great part of her life in this country.
KIM: No, you didn't mention that to me, I don't think.

LOIS: Oh, well she did. With the great antie who had those show cases.

KIM: The show cases.

LOIS: And mother remembered a great small pox epidemic. Everybody had to be vaccinated, she was vaccinated. And my goodness, they left you a scar about that big on your arm, when they vaccinated you in those days. But she said people died like flies. Everybody was terrified when a smallpox epidemic would come.

KIM: My grandmother she said remembered, when she was small, having houses quarantined, from, I don't know if it was smallpox or something else.

LOIS: Well, they even did that as late as when I was a child. I can just remember perhaps seeing two signs when I was a child, and I was quite small. And that's all I can remember on that. But, and I don't remember what it was, it wasn't anything like smallpox measles, they used to quarantine you for measles, and scarlet fever. And they used to have to fumigate the homes after those diseases too. They thought that they left germs all over you know, in the air and what-not. And now you hardly hear of those diseases and nobody would think of being quarantined or fumigated or anything like that. There's many diseases that used to take a lot of lives, even those diseases took a lot of children's lives. And now my brother, as I told you, was born and died here at the age of three months. He died of dysentery. Well, you know, today nobody would die of dysentery. And my mother said there were eight babies right around this block - eight going right around, this was all residential you know, except for a couple of stores here, this one and one other - and there were eight babies died that summer. And nobody knew what caused it, they
didn't seem to know what to do for it. She said that the doctor here didn't seem to be worth anything. Of course, she felt that if they'd been in a bigger city maybe the city doctors would have known more. But I don't think any of the doctors had very much at their hands to do with. And they couldn't stop it you see, and of course dysentery's very weakening. And I think it, my mother couldn't nurse her babies, any of them. And I think it was undoubtedly contaminated milk but they never heard of contaminated milk you know. And they thought that my, if you got fresh cow milk that that was the most healthful thing in the world for you. They used to, the old timers, used to talk about people living on farms you know, giving their children milk fresh from the cow as they'd milk the cow. Oh, that was supposed to be wonderful. City children were deprived, they didn't get milk like that. When, of course, actually a great deal of that milk had tuberculosis. And that was responsible for a great many of the very young deaths with tuberculosis. But they didn't, they'd never heard of contamination.

KIM: When did your mother come here?

LOIS: To this country?

KIM: Uh-hum.

LOIS: Well, let's see. She was, when she first came she was six. And my aunt and uncle lived in Wilkesbury. That's rather a strange situation. My aunt and uncle owned a motel in Wilkesbury and they had become quite prosperous. This was in a period of prosperity.

KIM: Excuse me - Wilkesbury?
KIM: Pennsylvania, ok.

LOIS: Coal country you know. So it was the height of the coal years and the coal towns were very prosperous. And so they did very well. And they had, they went back (to England) every year. One went back one year and one back the next year. They took turns, it was always one taking care of the till. And they had two children - one born in England and one born, they settled in Long Island, Oyster Bay, it wasn't anything then just a country place, and a, both of those babies died in a few months. Both boys, and they never had any more. And they felt so bad about that, they wanted children so much. And my grandmother had children like fleas. She had ten! That was great auntie's sister. And a - so any time they went back there of course, they always envied my grandmother's big family. Maybe she wouldn't have had such a big family if there were any other way those days, but will, of course, I don't think anyone would willingly want ten children.

Well anyway, this one time that auntie was over there, she was very partial to one of my mother's brothers. He was just a little older than she - Uncle Harry. And she wanted to bring him over for a visit, to this country. And he wanted to come. And they weren't too happy about the idea but they agreed. And it was to be a few months, I guess. Well his visit turned out to be three years. And by that time my grandparents were getting pretty tired of this visit lasting so long and were quite insistent that they bring him back which they didn't want to do
at all because they had become very attached to him, especially
great auntie and he had become very attached to them, and didn't
want to go back. But they insisted on it, so they had to take him
back. So my great uncle took him back. So then he got him back there
and a, I should have thought my grandparents would have known better
by this time how these visits began, and he said that he thought that
since they'd had the boy so long, and he was so partial to little
girls, and especially my mother, that it was only fair that he be
allowed to take my mother back for a visit. And they should have
known how these visits ran but apparently they didn't. So that's
how my mother came, for a visit. And she was six. And that visit
lasted until she was thirteen! And my uncle was so unhappy back there —
he wouldn't eat and he carried on and he got himself sick in bed, and
the doctor told them that if they didn't send him back to Auntie and
Uncle in America he wouldn't live. Because they couldn't get him
to eat and he was carrying on and just deliberately making himself
sick, of course. Because he wanted to come back. For some reason
he liked it so much better here, and Auntie and Uncle, I guess they
spoiled him, and of course there was a big family and there wasn't
much room for spoiling there. And here he'd been by himself.
And so that's how my mother was still here and they wanted her back.
This went on and on and on, and they kept asking for her to stay
a little longer and she was the same way as my uncle, she didn't
want to go back, and they didn't want her to go back. But finally
my grandfather was very insistent and he sent the ticket for her.
She just absolutely had to go back. And mother said Auntie was sick in
bed after she left. She felt so bad about it. And she went back and
she was there two years, well she didn't behave as badly as my uncle,
who never went back by the way. Never kept any contact with England
at all. He wasn't the least bit interested in his relatives in England.
There was one uncle, who was a brother of his, born after he was here,
and he never saw him. And he died at the age of 59. He'd never
seen his brother. And he had no interest whatever in meeting him or
anything. And, this uncle lived in Chicago and I remember him -
he died when I was twelve. But he didn't even seem - he didn't have
an accent or anything. He was just completely American. But anyway,
my mother was there for two years and she was very, very miserable.
She didn't like England and she said that her parents were good
to her and she loved her parents, but not the way she loved auntie
and uncle.
LOIS: But anyway, my mother was there for two years and was very, very miserable. She didn't like England and she said her parents were good to her and she loved her parents but not the way she loved Auntie & Uncle. They say when you give a child away, you might call it, you lose them. They're so young that their attachment to you goes to whoever has them. And you'll never get it back, you never get the same love back.

KIM: It was probably like her parents were her aunt & uncle.

LOIS: Yes, it was. She loved them (her parents) as an aunt & uncle but she loved her aunt & uncle as her parents. Her aunt was her mother to her. And her mother was more like an aunt. And she said that, oh, they just did everything to try to be extra nice to her and do extra things for her, you know - make her special - nothing worked, she was very unhappy and she was fond of her brothers and I think there were some sisters then, my grandmother lost five of her children. Three or five of the ten - which was quite prominent then you know. They'd get this and they'd get that. But she didn't like England, and she said England was stilted oh everything had to be; and I saw that when I was there four years ago - everything has to be correct and proper and it's not the casual, free way of life that we have. All I heard was what was correct and what was incorrect. And it must have been terrible back in the days of Queen Victoria. They were very proper and very correct and mother was used to a much more casual way of life. With much more freedom and it was different here,
and this had become her country. And England wasn't her country and she was coaxing her father she said all the time and all the time to let her come back. And he'd say "We'll see, we'll see," that's all she ever heard. Well - he never did see. Oddly enough she actually ran away from home and ran away to this country! And I can't imagine my mother doing anything like that because my mother was very conservative - she still had the very proper English ideas you know. And was dignified and she wasn't the kind of person to do a thing like that at all. You just never could have imagined it because she always did the proper thing - this was hardly the proper thing! But she said that she had made up her mind, her father was never going to see. And she had just had England up to her neck. She didn't put it in those words because you didn't in those days - but that's the way she felt about it. And she missed Auntie so much, she was so homesick for Auntie & Uncle and for this country. And she wanted to come back so badly. So she coaxed them to let her visit an Aunt, this was another sister, who lived, oh, about 25 miles from there. Was in the country and was a widow - a young widow. And that was alright. She was very close to her Aunt anyway. And of course they had no idea what she was up to. In the meantime she had written to Auntie here and told her that she wanted to come back and would she please send her the money, so she could get a ticket and let her come back. Never saying a word about her parents and so Auntie took it for granted that everything had been discussed and it was agreeable and that they'd finally given in. And then she said, would she send the letter with the money or the ticket to this Aunt; I forget her name now, although I do have her picture with her name on the back of it in the back of the old album, but I forget what her name was now. But a, because she was going to visit her for a little while. Oh, it was a very clever plan. I don't know how a child
of thirteen could figure it all out! And it was remarkable how there wasn't a ship - there could have been so many ships. The letter could have come to the house instead of to the other Aunt's, but the letter came to the other Aunt's, and the other Aunt knew nothing about if course, this plot. And a, she stayed for the few weeks, she thought, of course, that she'd put her on the train for London, she thought that she was going back home to London. But she went to London and from London she went right to Liverpool where you had to go at that time, you couldn't a, when she went back later visiting, when she was just over thirty when my sister was a little girl, to visit her father, her mother had died, a, then you could go, and you can now, to Southampton. But it happened to be Liverpool then. And she went right on the train to Liverpool, and you see, those days you didn't need a passport, you didn't need identification of any kind. If you had a ticket or you had the money for a ticket you could, why you could just, anybody could get on the ship.