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Kiekintveld, Don Oral History Interview: Sesquicentennial of Holland, "150 Stories for 150 Years"

Carol Haverdink

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Oral History Interview with
Don Kiekintveld

Conducted April 7, 1997
by Carol Haverdink

Sesquicentennial Oral History Project
"150 Stories for 150 Years"

Sesquicentennial Oral History Project
Interview with Don Kiekintveld
April 7, 1997
Interviewer: Carol Haverdink

CH: Thank you for agreeing to do this oral history project.

DK: Well, I'm more than happy to do it. I'll just tell you a little about myself. My name is Don Kiekintveld. I was born in Holland, Michigan, [date removed], 1923. That's the day that the Ottawa Beach Hotel burned, that morning. So I can always associate that together. My mother's name was Rena Ten Broeke. She originally came from out in the country near Borculo, out that way, and she married my father, Gerrit John Kiekintveld. We had four boys and one girl in the family. At that time, it was a little different state of affluency here in this country. It was very poor times when I was a kid. I can remember when the banks went closed. I can recall my father took out money out of the bank to build a garage and within two weeks the lights were turned out in the bank, the doors were locked shut, and it was tough picking from there on in. We didn't have a lot. We had a pot to cook in but sometimes there wasn't too much to put in the pot.

CH: Where did you live?

DK: We lived on East Ninth Street right across from where the post office is on Ninth Street. The lot is vacant there yet today. I think the city owns it or Hope College, either one of the two, right near the little park there. I attended Lincoln School over on Columbia Avenue and Eleventh Street. Had some of the finest school teachers that I know of. When I think back, what an education we received at that time and it

was really something to cherish and appreciate. I don't use any calculators. The one upstairs here is the one I use. I add and subtract and all that. I don't believe in those calculators. If the battery doesn't work you're out of business, and I'm sharp enough to know that I can multiply and add and take care of it that way. So I give the credit to the teachers I had at that time. They just drilled us and drilled us on math and other things too. So it was a good education. We lived there all my life until I got married. But just to tell you a little about how times were at that time...really, we had enough to eat, that wasn't it, but it wasn't that great. I had a newspaper route. Got up at four thirty in the morning, went to the Warm Friend Hotel and picked up the morning papers and did the delivery. I also had an afternoon job delivering papers for the Grand Rapids Press, still in business today. So I had two routes. Along with that, to make a few nickels, I didn't mind shoveling snow and I don't mind even today. But kids today are just a little bit allergic to handling a shovel and they wouldn't shovel snow if they had to. But I'd get up and I had a regular route, people that depended upon me to come out and shovel the driveway and the walks. And I have some very fond memories of very fine people that I did the work for. They were very nice to me, the pay wasn't much, I shoveled a big driveway and all the walks and got 20 cents or 25 cents. But it was money and there wasn't that much of it floating around. My dad was out of a job for a long time. He worked for the Sligh Lowry Company where the Hope College owns that building today. Pay was very, very poor. We did get through due to the fact that mother lived on a farm. That was a big help to us. They lived out there on the farm and they grew a lot of

produce and potatoes and they killed a hog once in a while and a beef steer or so and we had chicken and eggs from them. So we were well blessed that way. We had ample food. But when I saw all those people that used to ride the rails, the hobos...they were people who were just trying to eke out a living, but they went up and down the streets knocking on the door and some of them would sharpen a scissors or a knife or something for a sandwich and a bowl of soup or whatever you had. And we never turned anybody down, never. As poor as we were, my mother never turned down one of these transient men that walked around trying to get something to eat. They lived in the hobo jungle out there by the roundhouse, north of the river not too far from Windmill Island, and she would always give them some coffee grinds and something to take along to make another sandwich or a meal or so.

CH: So there was a hobo camp over there by the train tracks?

DK: It was a hobo camp. They had little fires and they'd take a number ten can and boil some water and make coffee in that. We would give them something to eat every time. The little you had you shared. And that was pretty much the way it was. There was a certain value to that because you had to remember there is always somebody worse off than you are. My mother always said that. We lived there, as I say, until the time I got married. I went into the service and spent a little over three years in the service and came back in the spring of 1946, just about this time, maybe a few weeks earlier, end of March it was. I had spent a little over three years in the service. I was overseas for three birthdays. I voted in the national election before I was 21 years old. They came around and said, "Hey, better vote." I said, "Well,

I'm not old enough." Well, I'm not going to put in all the fancy words that the sergeant said but he said, "You're over here," he said, "and if you ever want to get out of here you better vote. They're not going to ask your age. If you're old enough to be over here, you just vote." So I voted in a tent over there before my 21st birthday and I always remember that. I tell people that. "So how could you do that?" "Well", I said, "They weren't so strict on it. It took time to get the votes over here so that's the way it worked."

Anyway, I came back from the service and I got married on April 9. Now this is April 7 today so on Wednesday we'll celebrate our 51st wedding anniversary. My wife's maiden name was Margaret Hietbrink. Her father was a teacher and they traveled around from Michigan to Kansas and Iowa and that area and Denver, and they moved from Denver to Holland. I met my wife here in Holland and we've been married, like I said, it will be 51 years. So I left home and then I rented an apartment for a while and then I had a home built for me on West 30th Street. I lived there for forty some years and then due to some health problems which I've had and my kids said, "Dad, maybe you ought to think about easing up a little bit." Well, that's easy to say, but my daughter volunteered to take us around looking for a condo. This one we found and it happened to be something that kind of fit the bill that I was looking for. I love the outdoors and wildlife. I've got a lot of wildlife around here and I just enjoy living here, so that's how I happened to move. We've been here now for a couple years at this address and enjoy living. I'm the type of guy doesn't give up and I like to be active and keep on going. I see so many people

giving up before they start, and really I think that's the downfall. Don't give up.

Anybody can do that. It doesn't take much of a person to give up. Those who fight and keep on going are the winners, you don't see anybody quitting coming up with a blue ribbon at the end of the race.

CH: This is Apple Tree Condominiums on 32nd Street.

DK: That's right. I can tell you a little bit about that. Somewhere within about 100 feet of this here piece down here I picked cherries, big black cherries, for Van Appeldoorns. They had an apple orchard and cherry trees here and I used to pick the big black sweet cherries. Of course, I ate a few of them too. But it was a place where I used to make a couple of bucks picking a few cherries. Rode over here on my bicycle from the east end of town, and we often did that. We didn't have somebody picking us up and bringing us over here. Picking strawberries, we'd be on Graafschap, south of Graafschap and west, pick strawberries down there, for I think we got a quarter a crate. Pick eight crates in a day, you'd get two bucks, but you didn't stand around if you picked eight crates. You had to keep working. Then ride my bicycle back home, and then I'd pick up my newspapers at Fris' and delivered my newspapers. So that's what you did to make a few dollars. Then things really got a little better. I started out working at the A & P stores. My neighbor man, Mr. Jekel, ran the A & P store and asked me if I'd like to go to work. "Yeah," I said, "I would do anything."

CH: That's the one on Sixteenth and River?

DK: No, it was the one on Tenth and River, right across from the museum there. It was

the A & P store there. Worked long hours. Pay wasn't that great, 18 cents an hour to start and I got 23 cents an hour. I think when I left for service I made about \$22 a week. But a buck was a buck in those days. You could do a whole lot with it. My mother and I went to the grocery store so often, my other brothers too of course, but to pick up the groceries we had a Red Flyer or whatever it was, express carts. Put a couple of boxes, loaded it all full, and you'd have change from a ten dollar bill. I've got an ad from the paper in my basement. I showed it to a few friends not so long ago how cheap things were at that time. They just couldn't believe that you could buy things that cheap. A nickel for a loaf of bread and three pounds of coffee for 39 cents (laughs) and all this other good stuff. But I worked there until I went into service and then when I came back I couldn't find myself as what I wanted to do, but I went right back there and they had to hire me and I went back to the A & P store and went into the meat department. I learned the meat cutting trade. I wasn't overly excited about that. I felt that I had more potential somewhere other than that. A gentleman stopped in to see me and said, "Hey, I think we can use a man like you. You seem to be a pretty hard working guy and we're looking for some salesmen. Would you be interested?" I said, "Well, I don't know. I don't know enough about it." "Well," he said, "what's your day off?" I said, "Thursday I had the day off." He said, "Why don't you come up to the office." The office was right upstairs for the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, a fellow by the name of Jack Dykstra - he's passed on a long time ago. He interviewed me and said, "Really, you should be in something other than cutting meat. You should be selling something. You have a

selling aptitude that would carry you through most anything. I'd like to have you meet the manager." So I went to Muskegon. I met the manager there. He talked to me and interviewed me and he said, "If you can't make twice as much money as you're making in the A & P store, I miss my guess." He said, "I'd like to send in your application and review it, and we've got to have a few references and that," he said, "and we'll see how you fare out." So I had references and I sent them up to him. Within 30 days I was hired by the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company. Well, I worked for them all my life. Forty some years I was licensed. I just turned my license in last year. In April a year ago, I turned it in. I got a letter back. They still want me to carry a license and go back to work but I said, "No." I had enough of the night work. So I turned my license in. But I worked for the Metropolitan for forty some years. I always tell my friends eighty some years because forty years of days and forty years of nights, that makes 80 years. I put in long hours. But it was a good living and I never regretted it. I mean I always took time out for my family, PTA meetings for the kids, instead of shunning them and forgetting them I'd take them out to the lake fishing or something, one day in the week to get away with the kids. Because I had to work nights - it was a night job more so than it is today, but it's still a lot of night work. So that's basically what I did for a living, and I keep very, very active at this time. I do quite a bit for the Sesquicentennial. Elder in my church. I do a lot of work for the Gideons. You've got something that's got to be done I'm more than happy to do it. As one of my fringe benefits, I help a fellow at the Farmer's Market, and in turn, I never have to wear out my knuckles knocking on

doors. He has a hundred acre farm and he knows everybody around him. I do a lot of hunting on this property so I work the Farmer's Market twenty hours, thirty hours a week in the summer. I set my own schedule. So that's how I keep active. Is there anything else you'd like to know about my younger life? I can tell you a lot of humorous things.

CH: That would be good.

DK: Today, kids are so restrictive and I don't know maybe there's a reason for it, but I had a BB gun when I was a young kid, shot a lot of squirrels and things like that. I had a rifle and I could sling that rifle over my shoulder and walk right over to Eighth Street. Montgomery Ward was on the north side of Eighth Street between College and Central Avenue. Walked in there to pick up a box of 22 shorts. They usually sold for about 20 cents a box, something like that, 23 cents maybe. But once in a while they had a sale on, two boxes for 29 cents or something like that. Why, I'd go down there and walk out the back door and went over there to Central Avenue and right near where the WHTC is, the cold storage plant was there and they dumped all the garbage in what was the dump. That's the place they want to make a big tourist attraction down there now. They want to put the Window on the Waterfront and extend the Area Center on that. Well, good luck to 'em. I know what it's all about. It's a swamp and there's garbage there ten or fifteen feet deep. I know that and I don't know, it may even have something to do with the pollution we enjoy over here on the big lake, but I used to sit down there...We'd go the four of us, sometimes six of us, sometimes two of us, Saturday afternoon, and for entertainment (cost us 15

cents, we'd get a box of shells). We'd shoot rats down there and we couldn't count them until we had them either in a coal bucket or a box or something so we'd pick them up and count them. We had teams and those that won were treated by the others and we stopped at Mills Ice Cream where 'Til Midnight is now on College Avenue. The winners were treated by the losers to ice cream cones. In those days, a big five cent ice cream cone was a real lunch. But today you don't enjoy that. That's what we used to do. We used to shoot a lot of sparrows and sparrows were two cents a head. Where Freedom Village is today is where the Limbert Furniture Company was, and they had this ivy growing all over the walls back there. The birds roosted in there because of the warmth of the building and that. We used to go up there to shoot those sparrows. I was just a little wispy fellow at that time. I grew a lot after that, but we used to shoot them and some of them didn't drop down on the ground. We used to crawl up there on the vine and pick them up and put them in the bag to take them home. Well, that worked out good because we knew the night watchman. One time the night watchman was either sick or on vacation and there was somebody else there. We were busy doing this and the night watchman called the police. Well, those that were on the ground retrieved birds, and after I threw them down, took off and run into the swamp. I was hanging on the side of the building and he said, "Come on down. Buddy, come on down!" Well, I had to come down. They had me and they had my little BB gun, and I had to go to the police station, and they got hold of my folks. I was a culprit, you know, but we never broke a window. We never got into that type of fun making. But we did shoot a lot

of sparrows, but kids don't enjoy that today. Another thing used to be was when the light plant was over by the ball park, right where the Window on the Water Front is not too far from Freedom Village, the water that came off the turbines down there was a little bit warmer. There was a creek there called Hot Water Creek. Blue gills and fishing was at the top down there. You couldn't beat it. I'll admit, I used to skip school, and once in a while hide my poles in a vacant lot there near where the Rusk company was, and I'd walk as if I was going to school but then I'd head over to the Hot Water Creek and fish for bluegills down there. I'd come home with a nice, one of these mesh bags we used to have on the ends of stuff...you see oranges and that in them today too, and maybe twenty-five or thirty bluegills and it was food for the family. It was good fun, so I enjoyed all those things. But things have changed as far as kids enjoying that type of thing today. And we used to go down the river, we could fish on the river. You'd drop a coin in, didn't have very many, and usually it was a penny. You drop it in and you could see the bottom through the water was so clean. I don't know how many years it's been since you could drop anything in the river and see what it is. Sometimes it's almost ready for plowing, the way it looks to me. It could be a rice paddy. But that's when the river was clean and you could eat fish out of there, but that's gone too. They talk about correcting it. It needs some correction somewhere, but I don't how soon they're going to get to it. Everybody talks about but it, but nothing's done. Those are real good memories of when I was a kid. I remember the big sand hill that was behind Sixth Reformed Church. Most of that sand has been distributed over Holland now. They used to use

it on the street corners when it was icy and the city brought a truck load of sand out of there.

CH: Sixth Reformed, that's on...

DK: Lincoln Avenue and 12th Street. It was a great big sand hill there and there was a few homes on 11th Street, there were homes on 13th Street, but we used to take barrel staves, anything we could slide down the hill on...people didn't have toboggans in that day, most people didn't, and we used to slide down that hill and that. But most of that sand has been distributed all over Holland, put it on the corners. Louie Dalman lived on 13th Street, friend of mine, I knew him very well. He used to have a nice Indian collection, I always marveled at what he had. Rev. Vander Beek was the pastor there. I didn't attend the Sixth Reformed Church, but I often went with a boy from the boy's club with Rev. Vander Beek on little field trips and sometimes looking for Indian artifacts and that. Those were great times. I just remember them. They stick very vividly in my mind. We didn't have a lot of money for entertainment. You made your fun yourself and it was just great living, something your can't forget.

CH: Now you attend Pillar...

DK: I attend Pillar Church. I've been there all my life.

CH: Can you give me any recollections of the changes at Pillar Church?

DK: Yes, I have a lot of fond memories of Pillar Church. I always had a desire to go to the top up in that church building down there. We had a janitor by the name of Mr. Olive, he was a friend of my father. And I said to him one day, "What would I have

to do to get up in the balcony of the church underneath where the rooster is up there?" He said, "Well, if you want to do that sometime, you see me on a Saturday. Let me know when you want. There's a place where you can go up through the balcony in the church, get a ladder and get in there. It's kind of dusty up there, but if you'd like to go up there," he said, "I'll take you up." So my brother and I and my father went one Saturday morning and we went up there. That was the highlight of my life to see the inside of that building, how it was built. Those big hand-hewn beams and wide boards that are 21 inches wide and all put together with pegs. It was just something to see and I've always had an interest. I've been up there a number of times since that, and it's not open to the public. But there's so much wood up there and how that building was built back in those days, without any tie bars or anything in the main auditorium, is just something great to see. They put it together to last and the good Lord has saw fit to spare it from the fire of 1871, and the building still stands pretty erect and tall. A little bit of creaking once in a while on a windy night like it was last night. But no fear. Another thing that happened was right after the war. I saw the building raised up and a basement put underneath. It was a wonderful time to take a look at what was underneath there. I always wondered about it. You could just see sand and there was a kind of tunnel underneath there. But it was difficult at that time to get somebody to take on that task of lifting up that church, but the contractor...and I lived upstairs above by the name of Al De Weerd, kind of a gutsy old fellow, and he knew nothing but work. He was an old Dutch fellow. He said, "I'll get that building up in the air." So he got these square wood blocks with a

screw jack in and they raised that church in the air. They put a few small front end loaders underneath it. They pushed the sand on what is now the parking lot and they moved it all out of there. I had a chance to take a look at the structure how it was built, and there were some big, big beams all the way across, hand-hewn beams, just as solid as the day they were put in there.

CH: Do you remember what year that was?

DK: It was right after I got back from the service, 1948 about, something like that? '50? We were living above Al De Weerd. I just don't remember, but they raised the church up what they did was they encased all the beams with steel and posts of steel because we have a big auditorium over the basement today as a result. But we continued to have worship services right while it was there. I remember, by the porch when they raised it up, they had planks we could walk on. I spent as much time as I could there. Whenever I had a little time, I would run by there and see what was going on. The big drills that they used to drill holes in there they got stuck in the solid log, they were oak beams, just tremendous beams about 18-20 inches wide, the width of the building and same thing up above, and they encased those and the building is very, very strong. Since that time we've done some remodeling there. We had to cut in a door on the east side near the Ninth Street side. They cut that out and we've had little problem with termites having a dinner or two on us but we've treated them pretty roughly. We have it checked all the time and we took care of the problem. But they cut a piece out and that piece of wood is still on display in our Heritage Room in the church basement. I'm a member of that Heritage Committee,

and the late Mr. Bratt and I worked together a lot on putting that thing together. I miss him. He had one thing that I don't have and that's the ability to translate the Dutch. So I relied on him pretty much.

CH: You were instrumental in setting up the Heritage Room?

DK: That's right. He was always on the Historical Committee and he wanted me to serve with him, and I knew him real well. Just a prince of guy and I...its just a year ago he got killed, by the way. He done a lot for our church keeping the records and that together. I'm chairman of the Heritage Committee today and we have a lot of artifacts and things that are kept there. We treasure every one of them and try to do the right thing to keep them, preserve them. And the same thing with the church. I'm against any more alterations or anything else with the church. We've had movements a number of years back where they wanted to put aluminum siding on. No, no, no, no, no! The building would lose its charm. That wood was imperfect and there's something about that when you stand alongside that building and you see the irregularities and just the beauty of that building and we should never, never, never think about putting aluminum siding on. It costs us a lot of money. We paint every year, one side. Every four years that building keeps being painted due to the fact that it's so hard and so many coats of paint on there. We have the same crew come by every year and they take this side and then they take this side as they go around. We did make a mistake. We put in the aluminum sash. I was very much opposed to it myself at the time. I already had an interest in the preservation of the old, but to get that done would have been more expensive and they looked at the

dollar instead of the beauty. That aluminum sash is modern. But it got to the point and we often sat on the west side of the church and the breeze is from the west. They were so bad, the window sills were rotted and that dry rot. Occasionally a flurry of snow would come through, so it was time to get something done. We did it, but I don't know what the difference was in cost, to have that specially worked out, but no doubt it was very expensive. People voted to have aluminum sash put in there which I think was a big mistake. We've done some other altering in there I don't think we should have done, but my vote is one and majority wins and the younger Pepsi generation is always looking for new, and that's instilled all over and they don't want to preserve what we have had. It's just too bad, and it's been that way in our entire city. When that Van Raalte home was knocked down, I had no money of course, to invest in it. It was owned by Eerdmans. It belonged to the College, he gave it to the College for the tax write off as a charitable thing. It wasn't too long and the home was knocked down because it was more feasible to have a soccer field there. Big mistake. Big mistake! Today we go over to Europe and have their termite eaten buildings shipped over here to get something authentically Dutch and that's a big mistake. We should have saved that building at that time. I played around that building. I knew that building. I knew the tunnel in the back and the crypt back there. I remember the log road from the cemetery that goes through West Smallenburg Park down there. These modernistic people that know all about all the things when they built that football field down there should have checked it out. It was nothing but quick sand and a marsh. They had to redo that whole football field.

Some of the boys had a lot of education but they didn't have much common sense figuring out what had to be done. There was a spring right there off the edge of the wood trail, the wood trail logs, and it went right across to the old church that stood there in the cemetery. Then they walked down Fairbanks Avenue. I remember before it was paved, went to the old parsonage down there and I drank a lot of water out of that spring down there. It was full of buttercups and flowers. Mother always packed us a little lunch - a piece of cake and a sandwich - and we'd go down there and they'd always warn us about the quicksand and mucky condition. We'd go down there and we'd play around there and drink out of that spring down there. That spring was there...they had a little problem when they put in Smallemburg Park they had to drain it out. But that's where Dr. Van Raalte got his water for the church right out of there, and I remember that old log trail there. Played there many and many an hour. But like I say, we've lost a lot of good historical things in the interest of progress. I think over here on 32nd Street, that Kooyer's home, made out of Veneklasen brick. The building should never have been destroyed in the interest of the new modern condos. We've got a historical district, but some of the real history of some of these old buildings and others where Dr. Arendshorst is. That building should never have been destroyed! And they're still pushing over some of these buildings. You see a few of them around the countryside made out of the old Veneklasen brick - should be preserved. But now we have to take the other route and go over to the other country and ship them over. I think it's dead wrong, dead wrong. But that's my thoughts! (Laughs).

But it's been a great town. I don't knock the town. It's been a great town. I don't condone everything that's going on today. I think the quality of life is a little different today than it was years ago. We didn't even have a key to our front door. Never locked it. Trusted everybody. Today, I don't have any flowers back here but when I lived on 30th Street I wouldn't go in the back and work in my garden down there without locking the door. And it's that way today. It's a whole different scenario. Not that I don't like to see some progress, but I think we've moved just a little bit too fast and we haven't been able to keep up with it. Roads, things like that. Wondering about getting money to fix roads, having to get money for a lot of things that would be nice but so often you see people have a champagne appetite with a beer pocketbook and how to finance it? We've been monkeying around trying to get a library, and if there's anything we need is a library. We're living in a highly technical area and people have to know and learn and we've been putting that on the back burner for so long! It's terrible! And these kids in this country today are falling behind in education from what the rest of the world is. If we want to have our status in the world as what we have, we've got to get these kids educated to a better degree than what we have today. We really do. And we shouldn't make any bones about it...any question about it. Everybody throws a monkey wrench in the way. They want to put a big motel...one of the industrialists down there wanted to do that, and tie in the internet. Get the library up! It's coming up now and blessings to them. I hope it goes through because there's so much these kids today should be packing up here where it belongs and utilizing it. If we're going to survive as a world leading

country, we're going to have to look towards that thing instead of all the other things that we're making our priorities. That's how I feel about it.

CH: You have a big interest in the American Indians. How did you get involved with that?

DK: Oh yes. Well, let me just tell you about that. My grandfather lived on a farm north of Borculo off there towards Allendale. There was a big creek that came off the river down there and of course the Indians followed the waterways and couldn't make it along the river bank. They had to move inland and stuff. The back end of his farm...he had a lot of muck land there. When I was a kid there in the summer time we got out of school in June. My mother would pack a box (I don't think we even could afford a suitcase) but we had a box full of clothes and stuff and we went over there to my grandpa's farm and he had celery and carrots and onions on the muck farm there. And on the back was a big ridge of sand, light soil. Of course the Indians, being smart people, lived very, very close to nature, and knew very well you couldn't make it in a swamp in that heavy muck land. For drainage and such that sand was great, so they had campsites along there. I'd say to my grandpa, "Where did you get this arrow?" "Oh," he said, "back there, you know, where that big beech tree is?" "Yeah." "That's my fence row there. It goes way back to the other farm but if you want to go look there, I'm sure you can find some Indian stuff." He had a box full, one of these match boxes underneath the old pitcher pump in the kitchen in the farmhouse. And there were 20 or 25 of them in there. So I was seven years old and he said to me, "Would you like to have one?" I said, "Yeah, I would like one of

those." So he gave me one and that started when I was seven years old and I still have it in my basement. I'd feel bad if I lost that one. I'd feel bad if I lost all of them, but that one in particular was the first one that my grandfather gave me. I went back there in that sand blow area and I did a lot of scouting around and I did find pieces and a number of Indian stones back there. He did some clearing of the land. He blasted out some stumps and that. And when he worked that land up I found it in there a little later on. But that's where I really got started and it's grown on me ever since. Being the name Kiekintveld, that's Dutch, but translated into English it means "Look in the Field" and I got to live up to that. So I'm still looking in the field. The Good Book tells you to keep looking up and I think we should. But if you're looking for Indian stuff, you got to keep looking down. It's all in the ground. And the ground holds many, many secrets. With a wind like we had this weekend, I got a couple of places I'd like to visit. The sand moves. In the winter time the soil heaves and freezes and then it rains and the winds and all the stones and gravel come up on the top. You want to check it out take a walk over to Ottawa Beach and see all the gravel laying on top of the sand. So I got interested in it and did a lot of checking around and there are a lot of little Indian sites here. In fact, right where the football field is there was a fellow there, and I may be wrong, but I think his name was Dykstra. He grew a lot of farm crops, garden crops, vegetables and things, and he found quite a few Indian stones there, arrowheads and stuff. I got some from him, I still have them in my collection. Where the Henry House meat packing company is...it's now owned by Tyson, they're trying to sell it, but on the

north side of the river right across from Windmill Island, was a big campsite there. In fact, that whole Scott subdivision if you'd take and move all the houses out of there and work that land up I'm sure you could find bundles of stuff that's still buried in the soil. A big Indian campsite there. I used to ride my bicycle when I was a kid down M-40, that's where the truck stop is now, used to be the Bruce Allen Feed Mill, there's quite a few pines out there. That was an Indian campsite. Found a lot of stuff there. New Richmond and Richmond Hill going down, I've had a number of times when it was just a bonanza. In fact, not so many years ago, maybe fifteen years ago, they did a little bit of turning of the land closer to the river down that hill. They worked that land up and there was a lot of gravel and stones in there, and I made many a visit down there and picked up lots of Indian stuff on that hillside. All along that river all the way to the Lorden farm (it was owned by the Kleis family), but all along there all the way to Saugatuck there was a lot of Indian campsites there. In fact, several times they did a dig from the college at Kalamazoo up along there and I found oodles and oodles of stuff in there. I'm convinced that even today there's still stuff there. But you have to move the ground around and work it up. But there are open areas and when I was a kid I could still see the campsites where they had the rocks, and the rocks were so big so often that they crumbled where they had their fire places and that. I could find those in there and today that's pretty much dispersed but I found a lot of Indian material there. So that's how I got started and I've kept up with it and today I have a real fine collection. Another one I have to give credit to is Rev. Vander Beek of Sixth Reformed Church, just a tremendous man for young

people. I went out often with him and some boys I knew from that end and take field trips and we'd pack a sandwich and so along. We'd be looking for Indian stuff. He was a great guy to learn a little bit about the outdoor world and I give him a lot of credit for the interest that I had and how I kept on it because of him. And Louie Dalman had quite a bit of stuff too. He worked for the city in the street department over there on East 13th Street. But that's how I really got interested in it and I still have a great interest today. I just love the Indian people. I think they're the most abused people in the world. The poorest of the poor. Forgotten people and I support them. A lot of Indians in South Dakota and that on the reservations. I get a little time this summer I want to run out there. I have a school teacher friend over there. But I'd like to get over there and just do some scouting around over there too. But I still do some hunting for them. I still find a few pieces now and then. I don't have the time as what I did before. Like I say, private property is something you have to deal with and you just can't be marching on everyone's property. But whenever I see a home being dug or a basement for a home in an area that was a good Indian area (and you've got to know the area), I got a few foot prints that were made there.

(Laughs).

CH: What would you say is your most vivid memory of something that would be of historical interest?

DK: In Holland here?

CH: In Holland.

DK: Well, I can remember a lot of things. I remember we moved the grandstand from the

fairgrounds over there on East 16th Street. They moved it down Columbia Avenue and put it over where Riverview Park is. That's right across...well, it's Window on the Waterfront. The big grandstand was moved there. I remember when I was a kid used to get out to the fairgrounds and sometimes the rabbits hanged it out and I was fond of rabbits. I grew a lot of them when I was a kid. They'd get out and we'd get them caught in a corner and we'd catch them and we'd have some pretty nice stock. I grew a lot of rabbits and sold them the meat to a couple different butcher shops. They'd place an order for four or five rabbits on a weekend and I'd kill them and cut them up, and they'd sell them in the market down there and make a few dollars that way. But historical thing...that old grandstand moving it over there. That was one thing. Oh, just so many. Some of these old schools. I think of Froebel School that would be over there on 10th Street with a big bell tower on the top. We used to catch pigeons up there. Today I wouldn't have the nerve to go up there. That building's gone. The old Lincoln School where I attended on Lincoln Avenue around 11th Street. I remember so much of these old things, old buildings and that. Where the Civic Center is today, where it used to be the old tannery down there. I remember that big cement pillar thing, how they blasted those out so that they could put some footings and stuff in there for the Civic Center. There's just so much stuff that passed away. Not that you should keep everything that's old, but I do have to admire people in the other countries of the world how they preserve a lot of that older stuff. I'll be going to the Netherlands here in a couple of weeks myself, the 16th of April, and I'm looking forward to seeing some of that old, old stuff there again. How they

preserved it and that. But here, I've seen so much of that interest in progress and just pushing things over and not keeping it. And now today we're spending big bucks to try to restore a little of it. If we had had a little foresight, think about these things earlier, it would have been something more meaningful because it was here and not being moved in. I feel the same thing about the Windmill. A great project of course. It's having its financial difficulties and I don't know the answer to it. But myself, I have some ideas about it, but I'm not an educated man to expound on any of that. But I think one thing we have to do in this town is think about another route to get across the river. I've talked to some of the council men as long as 15 or 20 years ago when they had work sessions. We've got one bridge. If something ever happened to that bridge down there, you can see what kind of a mess we'd have in this area? You'd have to go over to 120th Avenue to go around to get over there to Ottawa Beach. We should have, many years ago, College Avenue, Central Avenue, scoot it right across the swamp. Today they could do it. But there's not thought to that. You got Windmill Island sitting down there. One escape route. That was the old interurban track. I remember that very, very good. I used to ice skate on the pond back there. I know where it came up under where 7th Street was, it came under the road down there. Somebody thought there were cement vaults down there when they started working on it. That wasn't cement vaults, that was the old interurban railroad track. Used to play down there as a kid. Sometime, seriously, we're going to have to put some kind of bridge across, and even now with the talk about having that area center there, I don't care how many people they hire from coming out of

town, and it's easy for them to make a statement, this and that, because you never hear, you never see them again. They're gone. That's the best area? They're going to get out of there quicker? There's no way you're can convince me...(tape side one ends)...Talk about putting it there when you go south you come up to a one-way street you got to take Seventh Street. If you get across it, you go over to Eighth Street you got one-way to go there, you go over to Ninth Street you got to go one-way there. For the easiest place to have the traffic flow? No. I think somebody's taken a little too much drugs or something to come up with that as an answer. I don't think that's the most feasible spot. I know what they're looking at. They want to save the downtown, I know that, but they started too late. We lost it when we lost the mall. The tax dollars go to the township. We could have had it in our tax coffers here. When they did Eighth Street, fine, they did it okay, but why didn't they put all Dutch architecture on the buildings? A lot of things they could have done differently but I'm not going to criticize them. I live here, I made a living here but that's my views. I just feel very strongly about that and I don't think that's the best place for the area center. You will have to build it on a swamp. I don't think that's great and they're going to have to do something about the smell, do something about the river. I work at the old Pillar Church sometimes. I guide during Tulip Time. We open it up for people to come in to use the rest rooms and things like that. Many, many times people ask me, "What's that putrid smell when you walk over to the river by Windmill Island?" Well, I hate to be blunt about it, but I tell them well the river isn't the cleanest. But between you and me, it's nothing but a sewer trough. I

wouldn't swim in there. I wouldn't eat a fish out of there today. We've lost something. It's time to get it corrected.

CH: Anything that we haven't discussed that maybe you'd like to make some final comments on?

DK: About the town or city or...?

CH: Anything.

DK: Well, I don't know what to say, but I appreciate living in a town like Holland as a young person, and even today. But the quality of life is not there. In the interest of all the progress and all the growth that we have here, we've lost a lot. And I know there's a place for everybody in this world, but we see so much of these people coming up here and I just have to think again back to the depression. People made it. It wasn't the best life. They made it. But they had something that grew within them, some qualities of love, life and living, sharing with others and appreciating what you have. Today I don't see too much of that. I see too many people eager, willing, ready to jump on the wagon and get something from the government. We've got too many people riding on the wagon and not enough people pulling it. That's the way it looks to me. We've got all this influx of people coming in, and nothing against those type of people. I lived with a lot of different people in the service and I've been all around. I've done a lot of traveling. But if they want to come here they better conform I say to what we're doing. How we live. People come down here and we see more crime today. It's awful. You can't walk down the streets at night. A lot of these old people pull their drapes at five o'clock at night and seal themselves in.

It's getting like these big cities and it isn't getting any better. But in the interests of having a diverse group of people in this community, they're recruiting Detroit and all over to get these people over here. They don't have the same moral fiber as what the people had here years ago. And it's gradually getting less and less and less. And I think what has to happen, I said it earlier, we got to have a bone-chilling recession instead of all this going up so that people start to do the things that are right and appreciated. And we got to go back to the Book, the Good Book. You got all kinds of methods and ideas how you can correct all this stuff. It's very simple, it all doesn't cost much. They got to instill in their minds, and the sooner they do that, the sooner it's going to get back to being a better country and a better place to live. It's right here. Take the Bible out of the school. Kids don't know what the Bible is. I distribute Bibles for the Gideons and have to do it on the sidewalk. I remember one cute little girl. I said, "Would you like to have a little Bible? They're free from the Gideons. If you don't want it, it's all right, but you can have it. It's free." She said, "What's a Bible?" I remember when on Sunday morning you'd see people coming out their houses and everybody walking to church. Today they don't have that and something's got to be done. The moral fiber of this country is at a very low spot. I think the sooner we get back to the Good Book. All the instructions are there. The Good Lord didn't miss a thing. They're all there. I think the sooner we do that, get back to it...we don't have to spend more money for jails than we do for education. And everything will come back together in a couple of years. That's my philosophy. I can't help it. I think it's the right way. Now at the end...the good

things of life and it's got to start with the Supreme Court. It's got to start with the judges and all those kind of people. When we have that come back, I think it will be a better world to live in and a better community to live in. I'm very, very sincere about that.

CH: That you, Don. I appreciate your being willing to give us this oral history. Thank you. (Interview ends)