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Schaap, Elizabeth Oral History Interview: Sesquicentennial of Holland, "150 Stories for 150 Years"

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Interview with
Elizabeth Schaap

Conducted November 20, 1996
by Carol Haverdink

Sesquicentennial Oral History Project
"150 Stories for 150 Years"

Interview with Elizabeth Schaap
Conducted by Carol Haverdink, 11/20/96
Transcribed by Kristin Clark

CH: Let's begin by having you give me your full name.

ES: My full name is Elizabeth Mae Williamson Schaap. I'm fifty percent English and about forty percent German and ten percent French. My hometown was Bronson, Michigan. That's in the lower tier of counties, in Branch County bordering the Indiana line. My birthday is [date removed], 1918. I came to Holland in the fall of '37, graduated from Bronson High School in 1936. I was nearly finished with Argubright Business College in Battle Creek when a job opportunity opened up in the Holland area. I came into Holland on a Saturday for an interview and was interviewed by the Spring Air people (their national office was in Holland). They had many different dealers throughout the United States and Canada. The job was to work for the vice president of the company, C. J. McLean, and the president of the company, Charlie Karr, who was still ill in Arizona. When he returned later on in the year, I worked for both of these men. Today I think they would call that a confidential secretary or an executive secretary. Both of these men had a lot to do with protection of their patents. They wrote a lot of policy letters. When I came to Holland, I came as a total stranger, I knew no one. Absolutely no one. My mother worked in the Bronson co-op's down in Bronson, Michigan. There was a Mr. George Henneveld from the Central Park area in Holland who made her office as a salesman. When this job opportunity came to come up for the interview, she made a call to him and talked to him. She had heard a little bit about Holland. It was a horrible interview. I just

knew they weren't going to ask me to consider the job. I was very discouraged when I went back to Battle Creek that night. I was brought up to Holland by one of the teachers, a Mr. Balcomb, from Arguright College. That is quite a long story because they did not tell me there was two jobs because they also brought up another young woman to interview and I thought they were interviewing two ladies for the same job. Mr. McLean, in stead of dictating a letter, he read me a letter and then he turned me loose to go into the front office and type this letter. I couldn't get the desk top up and had to ask for help. It was just horrible! So, I took the letter in with blank spaces because by that time I was quite nervous and very upset with myself. Then the advertising man came in and said to him, "Jim, I read this letter yesterday. What did you do, did you just read that letter to this lady? That's another altogether different way than if you dictate a letter." The cadence is different if you dictate a letter. So, he suggested to him that he do another and dictate something else. So, he did and I typed that letter and then I went back to Battle Creek. I knew I wasn't going to have this job. When I got back to the business college on Monday morning there was a call for me to come down to the office and they had decided to hire me.

CH: Where was the Spring Air company located?

ES: That's down on 4th St. You looked out on what they called a swamp. There was a radio station down there and anybody that worked in that area, they called them "swamp angels". This was a nickname for that.

CH: Was that the same WHDC radio station that's there now?

ES: It's probably there, but probably enlarged. I was only there for a short while because

the executive secretary that was leaving did it very formally. They didn't even know that she had a boyfriend. She came in and very formally showed them her diamond and told them she'd be leaving in two weeks. They didn't even know she was dating. That's why they were behind the eight ball because they had two annual meetings a year, one at the Steven's Hotel in Chicago and one out at Castle Park. The Steven's Hotel one, in Chicago, was coming up in just a matter of days. So, I had a very quick induction into names and places and I went to Chicago with her and we took the whole meeting down in shorthand. This was quite a challenge for a young girl. You hardly knew the men's names, and not enough time to learn them. And then you had to come back and transcribe the notes. Then, Christmas followed very quickly after that and the man I was to work for had a heart attack down in Tryon. I think that's in the Carolinas. The way they treated heart attacks in those days was far different than they do now. I'd only been there a few weeks and I didn't have a man to work for. So, the office manager, Mr. Ben Lemmen, he was to find things for me to do. After Mr. McLean returned, everyday I would go to his home on 12th St. and he would dictate and then he would sign the letters I had typed the day before and that was the procedure that was followed.

CH: Where did you live, a young woman just come into town?

ES: They called it the Red Brick, which is now the Herrick Public Library. This was run by a family by the name of Kooiker. So, I had a room there, which was very convenient. Something very interesting happened right then and there. During the middle of that week, I asked my landlady, "Where is the Lutheran church?" When I

left, my mother had no long list of things for me at all. She only asked me would I go to the Lutheran church and study the Heidelberg Catechism. Because that's one of the questions she had asked Mr. Henneveld, if there was a Lutheran Church. She had been raised Lutheran. In the little town I grew up in, there were only four churches and there were no Lutheran churches. Our family grew up in the Methodist Church. Both of my parents came from Ohio. My mother from Sidney, Ohio, and my father from Piqua. Mother was raised Lutheran and my father was a United Brethren. She always wanted me to have the Heidelberg Catechism. So, my landlady said, "Oh, my dear, you don't know anyone in that Lutheran church, they're still having their sermons in German. There aren't very many young people there. You need to go somewhere where there's young people. Right down the street is Third Reformed Church and there's a lot of young people there and it'll be really close and they teach the Heidleberg Catechism, too." I came on a Sunday, so the following Sunday, I went to that church. When I came down from the balcony, I was standing there looking around and a lady came towards me. She said, "I can see you're a stranger. What are you looking for?" I said, "I'm looking for a Sunday school class for career girls." She said, "I know exactly where to take you." So, she took me to Clara Rievert's class. She was a bible teacher in the Holland High School. At that time, they allowed that. I met three girls that morning. They are still alive and they are still my friends. One of them was Beatrice Geerlings, her name is Beatrice Kaniff now. Two of them were Dalman girls, one was Dorothy and one was Lenore. A little later there was another girl that came to live with Mrs. Huizinga on 13th St.

where had moved to before Tulip Time in May. Her name was Florence Kraay and she is Florence Kraay-Holleman now. It was through this first acquaintance of mine, I said it is as if my whole life were planned from that point on. I think it was because I honored my mother's request. Anyway, Beatrice Geerlings became my first friend and the first one to invite me into her home. Shortly, I was in the choir and I was in the girl's League for Service and the young people's meetings. Unbeknown to me, several years later, through a former boyfriend of Bea's, she introduced me to Otto Schaap, and this was the man I married. On my first Sunday I made friends and I was accepted into the activities of the church. The fact that Otto was basically waiting in the wings was part of the overall plan for my life. We were married on September 14, 1940 in the Third Reformed Church.

CH: Can you tell me a little bit about him, where he was from?

ES: Yes, he was from what you would call the Five Corners area right down here on 32nd and Lincoln. His mother was Hattie Schaap. His father, John Schaap, was in Elm Valley Milk Company along with some of his brothers and a Mr. Jipping. Otto was the oldest of six children, three brothers and two sisters. When I came to Holland, this was during hard times. Holland was hit hard by the Depression. His name was Otto Elmer. Because his grandfather Otto was still alive, they called him Elmer. The first date I had with him, I would hear his boyfriend calling him Tip. And then he'd call him Ommie and he'd call him Elmer and he'd call him Ot and he'd call him Dutch. I finally said to him, "How come you've got so many names?" He said his first sister, Gladys, she's married to Harvey Vredevelde, couldn't say

Elmer, so she called him Ommie. He worked at General Motors in Grand Rapids and he said because he was a big, tall Dutchman, they called him Dutch. I said, "What do you prefer to be called?" He said, "I prefer to be called Dutch." So, I started calling him Dutch. He did not get to go to high school because he had to help his father on the milk route. They did send him to business college. A Mrs. DeVries ran this down on 8th St above one of teh 10-cent stores. Sometimes he would be so tired because they'd get up so early in the morning on cold mornings. He'd get cold and he's just have to go and get a cinnamon roll and a cup of coffee to stay awake. That's where he picked up his additional business experience. He had a natural inclination for math and if he could have gone on to school because of this fantastic inclination for math, he would have probably ran his own accounting business. It was so natural for him. We had our first furnished apartment on 15th St, then later bought furniture, etc., and moved to West 17th St. Our country was at war and he expected that he was going to be called. Dorothy and Lenore's father got him a job because the G.M. plant in Grand Rapids closed because they had to prepare for the war effort. He got Otto a job down at the Western Machine on 8th St. He still thought he was going to be called up, but he was found ineligible due mostly to his feet. By that time, he'd always had his eye on a piece of property on the corner of 32nd and Waverly. That was the old Sam Pas Farm. That came up for sale and in the meantime, in January of '42 our first son, James Clarence, was born. The farm came up for sale. His mother and father believed that when children went out working they turned the whole paycheck over to the parents. He did that for a long

time because there was the Depression. They had moved from the Five Corners down to the little farm that they owned over here on 32nd St. That farm is still run by his youngest brother, Dale. We had to get a down payment. We put a bid on it and the way of getting the bid will always remain an untold story, but we were fortunate that they accepted our bid. The house needed some work inside, but between a loan from my mother and because his parents gave him extra money for all the years that he had turned everything over to them we had our down payment. This was around 32 acres on the corner of E. 32nd and Waverly Roads. This was later called the Apple Avenue district, but that school was not built at that time. This is the border of this district. It's really quite a small district.

CH: And you farmed it?

ES: We farmed it for a while, yes. That was a lot of funny experiences. Otto's father was one of those people that wanted to help you get a "handful of money" together, so he decided to give us six pigs one time and all we had to do was feed them, but he made us promise we had to keep the payment of the feed up, so when we sold the pigs, we would have a "handful of money." We did that. Shortly after that, we lived there long enough that it was time for our son, Jim, to start school. Then the school was over here on 24th St. Then we had a real tragedy, our second child was stillborn. We waited a while and then we had a daughter. Her name is Roseanne. She's married to Greg Ritterby and they live out in Phoenix, Arizona. Then we had one more child and that was Curtis Williamson Schaap. He lives in Brighton. So, those are the children that we raised.

When I lived at the Red Brick, if we could back up a minute, there was a lady upstairs that was sort of hunched over a little bit, very pleasant. I had the room at the head of the stairs and she had a little corner room. Her name turned out to be Mrs. John Otte. She was originally a Phelps girl. Her father was the first president of Hope College. They had been married and became RCA missionaries to China. She was a prolific letter writer and because I walked past the post office, down River Ave. to 4th St, I would drop her mail at the Post Office. She also appreciated it that I would come in from work, not everyday but a lot of days, and chat a little bit. One time I must have been a little bit quiet or something. Remember, I came in the late fall and it was a hard winter. Nobody took taxis or anything like that. You walked through all kinds of weather and when you walked down River and got that far the winds coming in, it was very cold. I guess I must have said something to her like, "I don't know if I'll ever make it in this town." She said, "My dear, you will. I know you will. Just in case there's somebody making you feel that they are better than you are, I remember when 12th St. was the edge of town. I can remember when they kept their cows in a barn right attached to the house. Don't let anybody ever make you feel that you're not as good as they are." To me, that said something! Because getting acquainted was quite a slow process.

CH: Has there ever been any controversy or anything in Holland that you can think of over the years? Some controversy that comes to mind that you wouldn't mind talking

about?

ES: Well, after we moved out to the farm, I don't know exactly when Otto became president of the school board out here, but once he was president, he was always president. They knew that they had outgrown the school and that we needed to build a new school. This was a very small district, but a very cooperative one. At one of the meetings, someone got up and stated that they knew that Otto had taken some money under the table and that he had been down to Ann Arbor and that he had bought a new car. He said that he had the car right in the yard. The good neighbors that we had over here were the Van Appledoorn's. They had given to the district, ground, that the school could be on Apple Ave. We wanted to call it Van Appledoorn Rd., but they didn't want it so. Originally, this area was all filled with orchards anyway. So, we called it Apple Ave. Anyway, Mr. Louis Van Appledoorn stood up in this meeting. He said, reaching into his pocket and took out either fifty or a hundred dollars, "I know that Otto does not do that sort of thing. You've got to prove it and if you can prove that he took this car as a bribe for the contract on the school, I'll give it to you." My husband always carried fifty dollars in his billfold for the same reason, in case of emergency. He pulled out his and he said, "You can have my \$50, too." What had happened, we had been invited down to Ann Arbor for a football game and this car was an Olds. Each big man in this car factory in Ann Arbor, they could have another car which they would get for their wives. This didn't happen every year, but frequently. This was a car that one of those big men had bought for his wife and it had less than one thousand miles on it and it was time to

sell. So, it did look like a brand new car. When we went out for the football game that day, I guess we went down with two couples. We rode with them and then we drove the new car back home. That's what this man had seen. So, that was a test. They had dealt with him because they had dealt with the new school and all this sort of thing a so this was probably the most controversial thing. My husband had to deal with. He was also on the Selective Service Board. This was the way he served his country during the war. When he thought he was going to be going into the service, he was going to ask for shore patrol because he had also been in an interim time when he had left General Motors and he didn't quite have a job. He became a policeman for Holland during the war on the night shift. Because he had helped his father on the milk route all those years, he just about knew everybody in Holland. He really did. Between being on the selective service board and working with all these people all the time, his reputation went ahead of him.

One of the things that had happened in the Spring Air office was very interesting in my life. They wanted to open up connections with South America. They had a type writer made with extra rows of keys put on the right side and that had all the Spanish pronunciation marks. They would dictate the letter, send it to Chicago, for translation into into Spanish, send it back to the Spring Air people, and I would have to watch every word and type twelve, fifteen, or twenty copies of that letter. So, that was my typewriter. This was after our son was born and this Mr. Lemmen had kept track of former people that had worked there. One time he saw me. Of course we had bought the farm and I worked down at Fafner Bearing during

the war rather than to go back to work in an office. You could make much more. We really thought Otto was going to be drafted. We were making big payments on the farm and like every young couple that starts out, you try to live within your income. We worked at it so hard. So, he ran into me and he said, "Betty! Guess what!" He said, "How are you?" I said, "Fine. You know what I'm really missing is a typewriter." He said, "Oh, am I glad I ran into you! You know that Spanish typewriter we had made specially for you? We sold it back to Fris' and they tried to sell it. There isn't any other girl in Holland who can run it because the keys are off set in a different sort of way. If you want it, you can have it for ten dollars." Even then I went home and talked to my husband about buying it. That type writer became what I call a "dedicated typewriter." By then we had transferred our membership from Third Reformed to Ebenezer. We are now in Trinity which is on Apple Avenue.

I called it a "dedicated typewriter" because I did the church bulletins, the song sheets for the summer hymn sings in the Civic sponsored by our Sunday School Class, and Ebenezer reports on Ministries, Cherry Nursery, School by-laws and correspondence, etc. There was a lady in Holland, one of the first ladies that started Tulip time (Lyda Rogers), somehow I became acquainted with her. I did some typing for her, she always had a lot of correspondence. I'm not bragging about this, but I always was very open for new experiences.

I even took some courses, some lay courses at Hope College that Mr. De Pree, a missionary back from China, offered. I wanted to learn as much as I possibly

could about the Holland culture. I took classes to become informed. Something else that happened to me in the young people's group, I always did drama when I was in high school and acted in the C. E. plays in Holland. During the war, Rona Penna and I went around doing a skit to encourage people to buy War Bonds. My mother taught elocution. When you come from a small town like my little town of Bronson, people think of Bronson and they immediately think of Bronson Hospital. The same people did not develop that, they were distantly related. That's where the name Bronson came from, from these people that settled in different areas. Because the land around Bronson, MI was rolling prairie and it was very, very productive. That little town was a very cooperative town. I know through the Depression the four churches pulled together and they sewed clothes for people. In my little town, if you did anything well, believe me you were doing it and the whole town was in back of you. But the nicest thing was, if you did it only reasonably well, they were back of you, too.

CH: How does that compare with Holland?

ES: Well, Holland was a larger place. And you've got to remember that after my father died when I was about eight, my mother had been trained in office work and we lived out at Madison Lake, of Branch County on a farm. My only sister had died six weeks before my father had died that fall. A year the following fall, my mother, brother, and I moved to Bronson, and my mother did office work at the Bronson Co-op. A co-op's then meant that this was where people brought in their cream and their eggs and where they bought their seed, where they brought their grain to be ground

into feed. My mother, Minna Williamson, probably knew everyone within a radius of fifty miles. One of the fabulous things that my mother did, during the Depression, something that made it a little easier for everyone because in my hometown there were a lot of Polish people. Many of them were just like one generation away from serfdom. When some of these early people came from Poland and these places, they almost cleaned out the wild game in the area because that's where they got their food from. Then the Depression was on and so my mother worked with the nuns and with the priest that was there. They would come in and talk to my mother as to how some families were paying their bills. There was a great sense of caring in that community. So, she started something very unique. These people trusted her, she learned how to spell all of their names like Boguska and Sikorski and they had never had people that could spell their names correctly. She would talk with them and say, "Can we set up an account with you? You can pay so much every week or every month." She did that which was a lot of extra book keeping for her. Then when times started to get better, then they wanted to go a little bit further. They wanted to buy some furniture down at Sturge's or go to Battle Creek or Kalamazoo. This was before there were credit bureaus. They said, "Do you know anyone where you've paid on credit?" And they'd say, "Oh, yes. Mrs. Williamson down in Bronson. I have been paying her for years." They always told her afterwards that she really established the first credit bureau of southern Michigan. I'm telling you this to tell you that my mother was a very caring person. She knew how to work with people and they trusted her.

My mother came to live with us. Her health began to fail and so she lived with us for quite a few years. I set it up with her that she would know the ladies of the neighborhood and she did some public speaking. She enjoyed the Holland people. She was a member of the Order of the Eastern Star and she found her way in this area.

I never have anything to complain about for the Dutch people. I thought their humor was great. Their industriousness was fabulous. Their way of life, of going to church, I thought was wonderful. I liked that they had big families because I came from such a small one. My mother's and father's relatives were back in Ohio.

When the city began to grow, because Otto was on the school board and because quite a few children were coming from this area. When the annexation took place, the first pole for the annexation was stuck in the corner of our property. That meant that the children would start going into the public schools. They were already going into the public schools, but that meant after a certain age they went in there. We had no bus service. We were on this side of Waverly, if we'd lived across the street, there was a bus that picked up those kids because they had to take them to 16th St. school. A better part of our life was hauling kids back and forth into Holland High School until as soon as they got old enough, they had a car.

CH: What schools did they attend then?

ES: Well, 24th St. School, all graduated from Holland High, Jim graduated from HOpe College and Curtis from Western in Kalamazoo. They first started at the 24th St. school, across from where the East Middle School is now. This district has always

had a lot of schooling in it so it was involved with Lincoln and I think one other school, and the middle school was here, 24th St. school, and Apple Ave.

After the war, my husband decided that he didn't want to work in a factory anymore. We, in the meantime had started to raise some chickens. Always up to that traditional handful of money that my father-in-law spoke so well of and really set good examples for. My father-in-law was a good farmer. He had a large herd of cattle. He instilled in his sons high integrity. There's nothing wrong in having loans, and those are the years that a handshake was all it took. But he said if you tell someone that you're going to be in there on the 23rd and you know already by the 21st that you're not going to have it, you go down that day and tell them, "I'm going to be couple days late, but I will be here on Monday," and be there. And so, throughout this family, they've always had good credit because that's the way business was done back in those days. So, back to Schaap Brothers' Poultry. My husband decided, this was after the war, he went to Detroit and we went down to the markets where the poultry was brought in and he did some inquiring around and yes, there was a son that was back. This was Harry Storch. He was back from the war and they wanted to enlarge their poultry business, they dressed poultry. He said they would talk it over. So, we got a phone call. Then the next thing was to find a truck to truck the stuff in. Because of the war, there was nothing, everything went for the war effort. My husband had been working at Holland Precision Parts, owned by Bahn Aluminum. He was a foreman.

CH: Where was that located at?

ES: That would be the west part of Holland. It was quite a large plant. He had a line of girls that he was the foreman for. Here again, he just had this, he was born with a very happy disposition. He never read anything into a situation that wasn't there. The girls worked very well for him on that line, he never had any trouble with those girls. And if there was trouble, he very quietly handled it. So, anyway, we finally found a truck. He would buy this poultry from local farmers and then he would load it, take it to Detroit, and in a matter of just a few weeks he realized he couldn't handle it by himself. So, he had a younger brother right under him, his name was Oliver Schaap and he lives kitty corner from Niekirk Church and he still lives there. And so they went into partnership and that was the beginning of Schaap Brothers' Poultry. Another one of the reasons that he wanted to go into it, we had raised these chickens and we had raised them for laying eggs and that sort of thing, to make a little extra money. Then we had a buyer that said he would stop every week. We thought we would have about a crate or a crate and a half of eggs. And he got to the point that he wouldn't come on Monday like he'd promised. Maybe he'd come on Wednesday and then he would dock us because the eggs were old, and that was upsetting to my husband. All these things kind of worked together. So, the business got going and going and a very, very unique thing happened. He and his brother would go out and buy on Monday morning and at that time there was a big change in this whole big farming area. At that time DeWitt was getting bigger and bigger in Zeeland. Many of the farmers had stopped raising cows and they had converted their barns to raising chickens. It was a growing business; there was money in it. They

would go out buying every Monday morning.

One of the unique stories of the whole thing was on a Monday morning and I was washing and home alone. Jimmy was in school and little Roseann was with her dad and uncle--out buying. There was a knock at the door and there stood a gentleman. He said, "I understand that you buy poultry." I said, "That's right." Being a woman, I have to insert this because this gentleman stood there and he had the bluest eyes I think I've ever seen in my life. Where we used to go on vacations around that time was up to Beaver Island because Otto learned about Beaver Island through a fellow policeman, the Kempkers, who had cottages up there. A couple of times we had gone over on the boat and one of the men on these boats, he was a seaman, he had these same kind of blue eyes. I don't know if you know the difference between blue eyes and seaman blue. But this man at the back door had these blue eyes. Really blue. He said, "I'm in the market, I'm trying to find another way to move my poultry." I said, "Oh, and where are you from?" He said, "Fennville." I said, "OK." He said, "Does your husband buy turkeys?" I said, "Yes, he does." I knew that he did because he'd get these orders from Detroit and he would have to buy the equivalent of two to four crates of turkeys. So, if these were Tom turkeys, you'd have four in one crate. If they were hen turkeys, you'd have six. So, maybe he would take ten to fifteen to twenty turkeys. He said. "Well, do you suppose he could handle my flock? I have a thousand." To this day, I would like to know what my face looked like. I said to him, "Well, I don't know. But my husband and his brother will be back around eleven o'clock. Why don't you stop

back and talk with him?" He said, "You're sure he'll be back by eleven?" I said, "Well, I hope so. He's told me that he's going to be back by eleven." He said, "Well, I've got just an hour to do my errands and I will be back." I'll tell you truthfully. I went in the house and I prayed. I thought, "This time let Otto and Oliver be back on time." Somehow I thought this was good. Otto came strolling in and he said, "Well, did you have anything today?" I said, "Oh, yes!" Kind of, that's the way you played, those were the games that couples play. He said, "Alright, what did you buy?" I said, "A thousand turkeys." He said, "I've got to sit down on that one. You're kidding!" I said, "No, he's coming back." He said, "You think he'll be back?" I said, "I do. I think so." Sure enough, he rolled in the yard and they talked and he used the same procedure that he used when he first contacted the Storch's down in Detroit. He said, "Give me a chance to contact my source and I will get back to you." They had one truck. That meant that they trucked in four loads of turkeys. That was the beginning of my husband's reputation as the turkey king of Michigan for moving poultry. I always said to Mr. Sissen, because he both had turkeys and he had quite a few brothers in that area and they all raised turkeys. I said, "You'll never know it, Ed, but the day before I had bought a new clothesline rope. I had made up my mind, if you came back and my husband wasn't here yet, I was going to tie you to the porch with that new rope!" He said, "I believe you would have done it, Betty." I think I would have.

They had their own eviscerating plant, (discontinued after a few years, and wento only to handling poultry) and it got larger and larger and then they had to go to

semi's for hauling. So, this was Schaap Brothers' Poultry.

Then one of the great things that happened in our lives, he came home one day and he said, "Guess what I did today? I bought a piece of property on Hutchin's Lake that has cherry trees on it. What would you think about that?" I said, "I'd think that I had died and gone to heaven. Cherries are my favorite fruit!" So, we built a cottage out there and we had many happy years with the cottage at Hutchin's. It was something that was on the way home for him and we did have quite a few people that worked for us and he did a lot of work with the DeWitt company.

Let me say this, business come naturally for the Schaap's. They are naturals. Our eldest son, Jim, is the president of a large company and lives in Barrington, Illinois. My daughter runs her own cosmetic company in Phoenix. Our youngest son, Curits, is a top salesman for a company that builds nursing homes and lives in Brighton, MI. They are born to sell. This is true in the whole history of the Schaap's. The father of my father-in-law told his sons, and there were six of them, he would rather that they would be selling pencils out of a tin cup on Penny's corner uptown, than to be working for somebody else. After I married into the family and we began to have some cousin reunions, I think there were like thirty two first cousins, Schaap's. I think nine tenths of those people were independent people. They were in business for themselves. That's no longer true, but the industriousness that Dutch people have is fabulous to see.

One of the things I did for the city was I served on the Holland Historical Commission. A spin-off of that was a committee to save the old fire house. I was

the secretary for that committee.

ES: I'm extremely proud of what my husband did. I refer back to this, he had a tremendous mathematical bent. That helped him so in business because the trucks could roll in at night, they always have to weigh in because you have to go over scales when you're on your way. He'd say, "How many turkeys have you got?" And he knew the weight of his trucks and he'd say, "What does this weigh then? That's wrong, you've got to go back and weigh again." He just knew. He could do rapid calculation.

When my mother came to live with us, this was something that they bonded on because my mother was a mathematical genius, too. She helped him set up his books, and she did the bank statements. We had just one phone. My mother and our three kids all learned how to deal with the public, answer phones and write down what they said correctly. My mother could answer that phone like a pro. She loved it because of all the activity that was in our yard. This went on for quite some time and then his brother decided that he'd been bringing a lot of his used office furniture back from the Detroit area, so they stopped being partners and Otto decided what he was going to do was he would enlarge his egg business and discontinue hauling turkeys. He had one man that helped him, and would take in eggs and some crates of things. When he returned, he brought things back like fish and other fresh stuff for Lambert's poultry and other customers. You just have to have a nose for business. He also bought semi-trailers so that for all of this building that was going on in the area, he rented out these trailers as storage trailers that the builders would put on

their lots. You asked about how did we go along with the growth of the Holland area. Our farm became the Schaap subdivision. The first man to buy a lot in was Edgar Prince. This became a remarkable relationship between my husband and Mr. Prince. Otto always had a dream to own that piece of property to farm it and he did. Mr. Prince always had a dream, and the rest was history for the Holland area.

A very sad thing happened while we were in the poultry business: one buyer had refused to pay for two mammoth loads of poultry and that cost the company much, much money. About this time, I knew that I should go back to work because my husband wanted to pay off all the farmers that he had gotten this poultry from. This had happened over a Labor Day weekend. They took this man to court, but it was useless. If that man had robbed a bank of that amount of money, he would still be in prison. That's not the way they handled things back then.

Steketee's was coming to town. In this interim time I had doing volunteer work in different places. One of the fabulous things that had happened in my life was that the Holland Area Council of Churchwomen had united and the offshoot of this was a very workable, wonderful migrant ministry out in the blueberries. This is one thing I hope to incorporate in this story because I'm getting the information together, but the churches cooperated, we bought an old school out there that West Ottawa was not using, we built a Friendship Center, and we worked with the state and we had staff that came on and helped us. We had donations of food and money and clothing and time and ministers went out and held services and it was a wonderful time for women in the Holland area, it really was. That took in Reformed Church women and

the Methodist Church women.

CH: What years?

ES: It started in 1958 and continued for many seasons until the State took it over. I had a lot of experience in putting committees together. I had been president of different church and community groups.

Anyway, when this job description was in the paper that they needed an office manager at Steketee's, I had the audacity to try for it and they gave me the job. That was when the store opened downtown. That was a good job. I worked there I don't know exactly how many years, but it was a very fine experience. It was a good experience and fine people to work for. One time they had between 72 and 90 people between full-time and part-time people. It was a very busy place. As with anything, your opinion of the job begins to change sometimes.

In the meantime we had sold the farm home. So, we didn't have any place to live. We put it on the market because we thought that it would take. (We had friends who had almost an identical house and their farm home had been on the market about five years.) I thought, "Well, I have one son through Hope College and married, and a daughter in college." I was getting tired of the heavy workload. So, we sold it. The first people through, bought it. And we didn't have any place to live. I wasn't anybody's valentine at that point! It took a little while because the person that wanted our house had to sell theirs and the person who wanted to buy their house first had to--it was about a three way deal. I had to go out and look and find a place. So, we lived out by Tulip City Airport. In a little apartment out there.

My husband said, "Where do you think we're going to build?" I said, "I've got it already picked out." He said, "Where have you got this picked out?" I said, "Well, it's right there on 32nd St. just where that little river is. That would be a dandy place to build. You could still get to work and the kids could still go in to high school and college." He said, "Huh. You and all the other important real estate men in the Holland area have been trying for years to get this. You'll never get it." I said, "Well, I'm going to start drawing plans." I started to draw plans and I really worked on those things. Early in high school quite a few of my books were filled with house plans. I don't know why, but I always had a lot of erasing to do before I could sell my books. So, I drew the plans for the house. I said, "Let's find out if we can take these plans over to the Van Appledoorn's." Because Mr. John Van Appledoorn and his mother owned the land. She asked us to come over and show them the plans. She encouraged her son to sell us this lot. That's how we got this lot. This is 27 years that I've been here. My husband died in March of '86. That same year in December I had a heart attack. So, Otto's been gone eleven years. I wasn't supposed to have made it, but I have, so I have been a widow for all these years and I've stayed here.

Something else that happened when we got rid of the poultry trucking business, we'd always been interested in antiques. Between the 70's and 80's we opened Mousetrap Antiques, using the barn and buildings to display the merchandise we purchased at auctions.

By that time, after this house was finished, I was ready to start back to work.

I'd always had my eye on working for someplace like Beechnut because that plant was really, really growing. So, I went down there and put an application in there. They said, "Well, we'll call you." The same routine answer you get for anyone. "We'll call you if there is something." So, I didn't hear for a couple of days, so I called and they said, "Well, there's nothing happening in production." I said, "Well, I didn't apply for production. I applied for office work." "You did? Well, wait a minute. Let me tell someone about this and we'll call you," they said. And they did. So, I went down for an interview and they told me that they were hiring someone for the first time down in Engineering and Maintenance. These were two offices right down in the heart of the plant where they had never had a woman work. This was a man's world. Then I was called back for a second interview. They gave me the job, but they wanted to know why I had come in on that particular day. You have to be ready for questions like that. "So, why on earth did you come in?" I said, "Well, I just live on 32nd St. I can't help but notice how this place has been growing. I just thought maybe you wouldn't have any office work for anybody now or maybe three months from now, but eventually I would think you would keep adding to the office staff." Later they told me that in the combined meeting that morning of staff, they had set up for the first time a job that they wanted a woman down in the Maintenance and Engineering Departments. That was the day that I had called back the second time. They thought because in a plant that size, the people that work in the plant sometimes know more quickly what's going on than even the executives do. That's the rule of thumb in big plants in case you've never heard this before. They thought

that somebody had found out about it and given me a call. I said, "No." That proved to be a very fabulous job and I think it put together all of my skills that had been put on the shelf for quite a few years. My shorthand knowledge came back to me and by that time I was known for one thing. I am what you call an organization person. I organize. Later on, they even asked me to change jobs down there and go into personnel. Didn't make the change as I was thinking about taking an early retirement. But you see, this all came with working in the migrant ministry, working with people and being open and learning how to listen to people and that sort of thing. So, my years there were very, very enjoyable.

We'd always been very busy and when Otto had worked at General Motors, that was a night job, and when they trucked, those were nights. So, he said he had reached the point in his life, so he semi-retired. He said that we would have time together. In a given week we got everything done that needed to get done and then some, but it was not an eight to five job. But in the meantime, we had been in the antique business. We were in that about ten years. That was a fabulous thing, we went all over and it was a great together job. This is not an area for antiques, but down where I came from in southern Michigan, the Dutch culture is one thing, but I was raised in an area where there were the Polish Catholics, the Polish culture.

Now, they could say mean things about their Uncle Joe and Aunt and Uncle Joe's son, but you couldn't say anything mean. I found it quite the same way here. They could talk about their family, but they didn't want any strangers talking about their family. So, cultures that cling together, I guess there's a sameness about them.

You have to remember that I had a mother who worked with people and I married a man that worked with people and my kids work with people. To kind of finish this off, now I think of all the things Otto did in this community and what his name stood for, and the new school. In the meantime we were members of Ebenezer, it went into the Zeeland classis, I was tremendously involved with the migrant ministry, our kids were in Holland High School. We had really nothing to do with Zeeland area. Because I had been in quite a few of the Reformed Churches in the Holland area, showing the slides, promoting the migrant ministry. We chose to transfer to Trinity. Trinity was thinking of building a new church and relocating. Otto was always an elder, a very young elder, at Ebenezer, and served many terms at Trinity. HE was a youth Sunday School teacher, and we also were youth sponsors. A group of Trinity folks asked Otto to talk with Mr John Appeldoorn about land for Trinity. A new church was built over on Apple Avenue. I just am very proud of what he was able to do with it because nowadays kids think differently, and it's alright that they feel that way, but you can become a very helpful, good citizen. Because he was obedient to his parents and he gave them his money and he never complained about doing it. I don't know if kids would do that nowadays. I think God just honored him in many, many ways.

When this business came up about, "We need a new center," this is what really prompted me to want to do this. When they were building the school, could they do it? Some of those meetings were pretty tough. There was one gentleman that was stiff headed. He just gave everybody a really hard time. Of course, there was

the other gentleman who accused my husband of getting money unfairly. One night Otto came home and he was really discouraged. I said, "You know what you have to do with that man? You've got to put that man on the other side of the table." He said, "What do you mean?" I said, "Give him a really hard job to do about this prospective school. He's so concerned with money, you give him the job of finding out how much delinquent taxes have ever been in this area. It may be, he's right. Maybe we can't afford to build that kind of a school down there. So, if he is right, you will have lost nothing, even he will have brought you the information. Maybe he's going to be wrong." So, he gave this gentleman that job and that's what I meant by putting him on the other side of the table. If you sat back of the table rather than out in the audience, you cut in two what you're going to say because out in the audience, you've got power, but back of the table, you're listening to everybody. This gentleman went out and he found out that in this area, there had never been delinquent taxes, ever, ever, ever. He was "gung ho" from then on to build the school. This is not a big district and Otto also worked with two families who lived in Allegan County, Bill Jacobs and Frostie Kooyer, and those kids could go to Apple Avenue. And cooperated with the school district, cooperated with the annexation of the city. He even developed his own subdivision which also brought income to the city. There was always good will. There was none of this fighting or basking. When they talk about now, "Where does the center go?" I say that that's where the center goes because this is the developing saga of the history of this area, the GE site. That's where I'm saying it belongs because everything that happened out here, there

was something magical about it. It worked. My husband, he employed all the employable kids to help with Schaap Brothers' Poultry. That's kind of my history of what I recall of having married into a fine, fine family.

I know when they talked about widening 32nd St. they sent Mr. Vander Meulen because there were walnut trees and whatnot. They came in and said, "Well, I guess we need to talk to you about the trees." I said, "Take them down." "What?" I said, "Well, I've already talked to Mr. John Van Appeldoorn about those trees. I said, 'Tell me how old those trees are?' Well, they were planted by his grandfather. I said, 'Well, what is the life of walnut trees?' Most trees don't live over a hundred years. Now is the time to do it because they're going to start dying anyway. Then you pay to have them taken down." He said, "Well, well. We never expected to hear that from you!" Anyway, that was my last cooperative thing with the city. Twice I had to appear before the Board of Appeals where they establish the value of your property. I have the same accountant that the Schaap Brothers' Poultry had to deal with and I said, "How can I handle this?" He said, "Well, Betty, get your ducks all in a row." My points were brief and organized, and both times they gave me what I had hoped for. I said, "You need to know, that our family has always cooperated with the city. My house is there and it looks almost identical to the day it was built. But it's no longer a family house. No family would move into this house with children because of the traffic and the cars and the condos. I want you to know my husband's name was Otto Schaap. He gave the city of Holland a lot of cooperation."

CH: Thank you so much for being willing to share that with us.

PS from ES:

I obeyed my Mother and did study the Heidelberg catechism when I joined Third Reformed Church soon after coming to Holland. By honoring my Mother's request, in retrospect, I learned it was the beginning of a happy, productive life for me.

My husband has been gone for eleven years. Trinity Reformed Church honored me by electing me to be an Elder (5 yrs) in that interim time. As a Community service, I helped coordinate the Holland Widowed Persons Service for four and a half years as well. And I am the stage manager for a senior acting troupe.