

3-24-1997

Teusink, Eugene Oral History Interview: Sesquicentennial of Holland, "150 Stories for 150 Years"

John Maassen

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.hope.edu/ses_holland



Part of the [Archival Science Commons](#), and the [Oral History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Repository citation: Maassen, John, "Teusink, Eugene Oral History Interview: Sesquicentennial of Holland, "150 Stories for 150 Years"" (1997). *Sesquicentennial of Holland, "150 Stories for 150 Years"*. Paper 133.

http://digitalcommons.hope.edu/ses_holland/133

Published in: 1996 - 1998 - *Sesquicentennial of Holland, "150 Stories for 150 Years"* (H88-0234) - *Hope College Living Heritage Oral History Project*, March 24, 1997. Copyright © 1997 Hope College, Holland, MI.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Oral History Interviews at Digital Commons @ Hope College. It has been accepted for inclusion in Sesquicentennial of Holland, "150 Stories for 150 Years" by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Hope College. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@hope.edu.

Oral History Interview with
Eugene Teusink

Conducted March 24, 1998
by John Maassen

Sesquicentennial Oral History Project
"150 Stories for 150 Years"

Sesquicentennial Oral History Project
Interview with Eugene Teusink
March 24, 1998
Interviewer: John Maassen

JM: We're here in the very nice home of Eugene Teusink, and we're here to discuss his unusual experiences living on a Century Farm. I'm going to ask a few questions just to get on the record some of the information we have here on paper. Your name is?

ET: It's Eugene Teusink, Gene Teusink. It's Henry Eugene, but I've always went by Gene.

JM: We have friends--he was Eugene and she was Jean and they were both Jeans (laughs). And you were born where?

ET: I was born right here in the house on 1468 West 32nd Street. Nine of us were born in that house.

JM: Is that right! Is that house still standing?

ET: It's still standing. That's the house right there (gestures). The fourth generation is in it right now.

JM: Probably been renovated a good deal.

ET: We've overhauled it about three or four times.

JM: When were you born?

ET: I was born on [date removed], 1919.

JM: What was your mother's maiden name?

ET: Anna Derks.

JM: Your father's name was?

ET: Henry Teusink.

JM: Do you have brothers and sisters?

ET: Yes. There were nine of us. I had three brothers and five sisters. My three brothers have all passed away and one sister. I still have four sisters left.

JM: Could you just give us their names?

ET: Yes, there's Genevieve De Pree; she's 95, and her and Lottie Matthews are both on 40th Street in the nursing home there. My younger sister, Jerry (Geraldine) Van Putten; she lives here in Laketown.

JM: The brothers have passed away?

ET: Yes. That's John Henry, Elmer and Russell, and my sister Jeannette. They all passed away.

JM: Does that make you the youngest?

ET: No. I've got one sister younger than I am (Geraldine Van Putten).

JM: You are married to?

ET: Elsie Bontekoe Teusink.

JM: How do you happen to meet?

ET: It was at a skating rink. It was when they closed 15th Street. I happened to have a bet with another guy that I'd get a date with her before him. I ruined a good pair of Chicago plastic skates skating on that street!

JM: Roller skates?

ET: Roller skates. Where there was the old sugar beet factory...They closed that, see. Holland used to have skating there. Actually, we had the Virginia Park skating rink

down here, and that one was made during WPA days. They took the old streetcar barns and took them down. You had to work there cleaning bricks for a cent a brick at that time, and that's what they made the community hall out of. And the skating rink. I really found her crossing Washington Avenue. What happened was she told me her name was Ruth Johnson. I looked for Ruth Johnson but I found her on Washington Square when I was coming with milk on a Saturday night and she was crossing the street. Harry Bontekoe, her dad, was a glass man from Holland here. Everybody knew Harry Bontekoe there.

JM: You were married when?

ET: We were married on October 15, 1940.

JM: And that was here in town?

ET: That's right. Maple Avenue Christian Reformed Church.

JM: You have a number of children.

ET: That's right. We have five children. We lost one boy before, but we have five.

JM: The names of your children are?

ET: El Jeanne is the oldest, Carol, Marilyn, and then Larry, we lost one baby too, and my youngest is Joyce.

JM: Do they all live in this area?

ET: No. El Jeanne is in Iowa City. She is a registered nurse and her husband is a doctor in nuclear medicine. Carol is in North Carolina. She's a teacher and married to Ted Lillie. Marilyn is in Portland, Oregon, married to Rick Duistermars and she's a teacher. Larry's home running the farm. Joyce is on the north side. She and her

husband both teach at West Ottawa.

JM: Tell me what this community was like when you were born. What are your first memories of it? Were you a long ways out of town in those days? Tell me something about that.

ET: Well, at that time we thought we were a long ways out of town because it was all horse and buggy and horse and sleigh. In fact, when they started Virginia Park, all those basements were dug with mules. We had about four or five teams of mules all the time. One team of mules worked for the county or the township to pay taxes, three teams pulled milk wagons, and the other team we had the dray business. We hauled the trunks from the depot to Macatawa. We took care of the sand on the beach. We still do this.

JM: So you used the scoop scraper behind the mules?

ET: That's right. And we still do. My son Larry. Now that's the third generation that is taking care of the sand on the beach down there at Macatawa.

JM: It's all motorized now?

ET: Yes, it's motorized now. But I did it for years with a team with mules.

JM: But then you were also farming, right?

ET: Yes. We farmed all this. At one time when my dad first started...you see the milk wagons here (photo reference). We had from River Avenue to the park here, we had all the dairy deliveries. That dates back to when they had the can and the quart dipper. They didn't have bottles yet. You poured it in a pan and that was it. In other words, when it got too much for three teams (too many houses built on the

route)...he kept three teams on the milk wagon...then he would take and sell part of the route. I think there were five or six routes that were all sold such as Maple Grove...all these dairies were sold from that.

JM: Did all that milk come out of your farm?

ET: No, from the farms in this area. We had the Tinholt farm. We had...it was the Will Helmink but it was really run by Henry Lagers. And Henry Du Mez, then it was John Speet and later it was his son-in-law that ran that one, Harold Lubbers. Then there was Bert Walters; these were all the farms that were around here. We took the milk from them and bottled it here...or it was in cans then, and then afterwards we had bottles.

JM: In the beginning you didn't do any pasteurizing or anything like that?

ET: No.

JM: Just strained the flies out! (laughs)

ET: That's right. I can remember in '36 we were snowed in for six weeks here. I had to get this milk with the sleigh. It got so deep that the telephone wires were just showing on Myrtle Avenue. One time I was in a blizzard there and I took a complete circle out in the field and I ran into Henry Du Mez' barn over there and that's Spring Arbor today. That's where I ran into a barn, and he called my dad and said, "You better stay overnight here because you can't..." My dad said, "Get the mules out on 32nd Street. They'll find their way home." They needed the milk. That would be twelve feet of snow!

JM: I remember that winter. We lived in North Holland at the time. I remember that

very well. Now, you obviously did have a dairy herd though.

ET: Yes.

JM: How many cows did you have roughly?

ET: We always kept from 16 to 20 cows.

JM: All hand milked?

ET: All hand milked. I was five years old and I had milked in a little cup first, and then a little pail, and then it was too late. Then my dad thought that anybody that didn't get up...4:30 was milking time. I can still hear him yelling yet, "Milking time!" And if you didn't get there, from then on you had to milk. That's it!

JM: When did you start getting mechanization? When did you start getting milkers?

ET: Well...

JM: You always milked by hand?

ET: We milked by hand until when I was married. Then I had a milker. In 1940.

JM: When did you sell your herd?

ET: I sold them in '54. My brother didn't want to pasteurize. He got his milk from Maple Grove then. They pasteurized it. And then he was the only one that ever went into Mac. No other dairy ever went into Macatawa. In the '60s or so, that's when they quit because people got their milk from the stores then.

JM: So you really did a lot of work at Macatawa Beach. You were the suppliers for them.

ET: That's right.

JM: I'm fascinated by the fact that that was quite a resort at that time. Living on the north side, I never knew anything about that.

ET: They had fifty cottages burn down one time. Another time a hundred and some. In the 1800's they had all the plumbing... underneath there the drains all went to the channel. They had their own electricity; everything was their own. They were a private resort.

JM: And the big hotels.

ET: There were two big hotels. The Grand burned down and the Macatawa Hotel they tore down.

JM: What else did you grow here on the grounds?

ET: Actually at first it was a lot of rye and corn, and that dates back to when we planted corn. We had a pole with five chains on it and both ways we marked the field. We were the first ones to get a planter that worked with a check line. I planted for all these neighbors because they couldn't get rows squared.

JM: Corn was always checked. It was never in a row?

ET: No. It was planted in two rows--the checkline had to go both ways and diagonal if you got it good. Then you shocked it.

JM: Why was that? Why can we now plant corn in a row? Why was checking so important? So you could cultivate it?

ET: You cultivated it two ways and even three ways if it was planted good. The idea was you didn't have any chemicals to kill the weeds. And then you could keep it clean.

JM: Were your crops primarily to support your dairy herd?

ET: That's right. Only for the dairy herd.

JM: How many acres was this farm by the time you were born?

ET: We had about 160 acres.

JM: And it was bounded to the south by what street would you say?

ET: That's 147th.

JM: And to the north?

ET: By 32nd. But we had forty acres north of 32nd...in Park Township in Ottawa County.

JM: You split the county line then.

ET: That's right. We split there. And we used to sow rye...In fact Virginia Park at one time...I farmed all of that. I was small, we plowed that all with mules, and then we dug the basements for all these houses that were in there. During Depression days, this is what happened. There were all little houses in this area that would be east of U.S. 31 (now 64th Street). The old U.S. 31 was the old highway. There's where they were. At that time we had to give them milk because they all had little children, but they didn't have any money to pay. So they'd work the milk bills out for a dollar a day. They went to Hamilton and cut all this oak wood and we hauled it all for them and they buzzed it and that's how they kept alive, made it warm at that time.

JM: Your ancestors came from the Netherlands?

ET: No, Germany. Both of them came from Germany.

JM: About when did your first ancestors come here?

ET: My dad came...it was about 1887.

JM: Were they a part of the Graafschap community then?

ET: No. My dad and John Henry Koning, they were fifteen year olds that came from

Germany. They didn't have a relative in the United States at that time. They got to New York and they had three dollars between them. They hitched on a lake freighter and the lake freighter ended up in Douglas. That was the Captain Taylor and Jager farm. The farms are still there on the lakefront. They took a liking to my dad and his friend and said they could work for room and board for the winter if they wanted to. Well, they did, and then they went to Graafschap to catechism to learn English and go to catechism. That's where he met his first wife.

JM: Was he speaking German or was he speaking Dutch when he came?

ET: My dad could speak German and Dutch and English, and he could write them all.

JM: Of course that part of Germany was right close...

ET: Right next to...(the Netherlands).

JM: A kind of a spill over.

ET: Right. It was a spill over. I don't know if it was taken over. They were right on the border.

JM: You read about that German element when you read the history of this area. And it's not as German as you think. It had a strong Dutch influence.

ET: They had both. Right, they did. He worked for Captain Taylor for a couple years sailing on a boat. But he didn't like that. He mainly farmed for him.

JM: What had he done in the Netherlands?

ET: Sheep herder mostly because they knit...he always knitted socks and stuff. That's how they made enough money to leave.

JM: He wasn't a sea faring man at all.

ET: No. He didn't care about that at all. He mainly farmed there.

JM: How did he get this land? Or when did this land become part of your family?

ET: That was in 1896. My dad was married. They had their first child. He worked over there in Douglas for Captain Taylor on the Jager and Taylor farms and...They had a lot of fruit farms, which is what it was at that time. His wife's brother, that was Gerrit Derks, had this farm. He had got it right from the lumber company. Really what it was, the lumber company had logged it and then he got it right from there-- from the Burtch Lumber Company it was. He died when he was 28 of flu, so then there was only a brother and he bought out that brother, my dad did.

JM: Do you have any idea what this land must have cost at that time?

ET: I don't know. I took it over. It was during the Depression days for the debt that was on it. You take Heatherwood, the big one where the doctors are there? I can remember when Red Mentz (president of First State Bank) begged my dad to sign a note for \$600 for that 56 acres. We were pulling the dead peach trees to earn money to save our farm. That's what happened over here in the community. You take Case Rosenberg. He built all those homes and his carpenters worked there and built everything west of the pike, 64th Street it is now, but then that was U.S. 31. They were \$5,000 houses. Well, the bank talked him into keeping all five of them going. Well, he lost all five of them. In fact, the guys of the community built him a little house of the scraps so that he could live. He lost everything, Case Rosenberg did.

JM: Now, would this be in the city limits of Holland? You aren't in the city limits of Holland?

ET: No. The corner of our farm touches the city.

JM: Of course, when the farm was purchased, the City of Holland was a long ways away basically.

ET: Right.

JM: Was there a community of any kind? Did you have a store here or a place that you could trade right in the country here?

ET: The Community Club, that's what I was telling you about, was really the main thing. We had the Virginia Park Community Club.

JM: Almost like a cooperative?

ET: No, it was just a club that they got together for plays and they met. It was a social community club besides the church. The Central Park Reformed Church was moved and my dad was one of the seven families who moved the church when the Christian Reformed and the Reformed split. Then they moved the Central Park Church over here. In fact, the church barns that were moved from Graafschap to there, they were moved over to our place and we made an 88 foot chicken coop out of them. Right now I split them in half. They are the wings of my barn. The east wing was the church barn. It's still standing. That's got to be over 150 years old.

JM: Now, that was a move that predated the move to Central Park?

ET: That's right. You see the Reformed and Christian Reformed were there (in Graafschap), and then they moved the Reformed church over here because they were right next door to each other then. The Christian Reformed used to try to sing louder than the other church.

JM: You went to school when you got to be five years old or something like that. Where did you go to school?

ET: At Lakeview School at that time. You went either with a horse and buggy...in fact, I drove a horse and buggy, and we kept it at the neighbors there. We used to take a lot of the kids from this whole neighborhood and ride along, or otherwise you walked it. I went through there and I skipped the fourth grade. That's why I was younger. It's a foolish thing to do. They used to skip grades then. My classmates were a year under me. I helped dig the basement for Harrington School, and that's where I went next. It was in the sixth grade on that I went over to Harrington. Then I went to Holland High.

JM: How big was Lakeview School when you were there? How many rooms?

ET: It was a two room school.

JM: And now that school is still in existence, isn't it?

ET: That's right. They tore the old school down.

JM: Is that on the corner of Lugers?

ET: Right. Lugers and 32nd Street.

JM: It's a much bigger school now.

ET: Oh yeah. And they built Harrington in '28 I believe.

JM: So how far did you have to go to school? A couple of miles?

ET: Just about two miles.

JM: By old standards not so far, but by today's standards you'd have to take a bus.

ET: Yeah. That's about it. Right.

JM: So then the Harrington School was more into town, right? You said you also went to the Harrington School.

ET: That is in the City of Holland...actually, the district. We're in the Holland district. And I went through high school. In fact, I rode a horse to high school two years.

JM: To Holland High School? Where did you keep the horse?

ET: On the corner of River Avenue and Seventeenth Street. Mokma , it was. Peanut Mokma.

JM: Did he have a barn or something?

ET: He had a garage there that I kept the horse in. Jock Riemersma used to say if I'd get a little late he'd always say, "You either got to feed more oats or start earlier!"

(Laughter)

JM: (Laughs) I remember Jock too.

ET: Yeah, you remember Jock, don't you?

JM: Oh yeah, I sure do! Well, that's interesting. I was trying to get at the fact that you must have been far enough out of Holland so you didn't go into Holland for all your shopping, or did you?

ET: No. Central Park Grocery was the store in Central Park. That was the only store. In fact, in the summertime they had a joint one at Macatawa. My oldest sister and her husband owned and ran that Central Park store. They used to go and take orders from all the people. They'd take orders and then they'd deliver it. And from Castle Park too.

JM: So then, of course, you obviously were baptized in one of the churches here. Was

that Graafschap?

ET: No. Central Park Reformed.

JM: When did you change churches?

ET: When I got married we went to Maple Avenue Christian Reformed for twelve years. I missed a church out here. The Park Christian Reformed Church is part of the farm. Forty-three years ago we started a little block building. In fact, where we had our milk house was where we had catechism classes and we had men's society. That's when we first started.

JM: It was a converted milk house, you mean? It wasn't a milk house any longer?

ET: No, it was empty...it was a block building twelve by twenty about.

JM: But you used that as your shelter.

ET: We used that first. And then I moved that later and made toilet rooms of it. We just tore it down last year. Now we have built the church (Park Christian Reformed Church).

JM: That's the pony recreation business?

ET: Yeah, the pony farm. That's what this is. This is Teusink's Pony Farm.

JM: And you are that Teusink?

ET: That's right--and my son runs it now. Although we both run it all the time. Both of us (my wife and I) work on either the ring--she works on the ring--and I have the hay rides yet.

JM: How did you start that business?

ET: Well, that dates back to 1932 about. We used to take sleigh rides to Zeeland and back

for five dollars. We don't get that much today! That was five days wages! You used to get back at two or three in the morning, but Bosch's Restaurant there, they'd go to eat there and then they'd come back, and you'd take them back to Holland.

JM: With your mules.

ET: With all the mules. That's right. We'd always give hay rides for Mac and these other ones. That dates right back to the thirties. Then we had the dairy. We sold the dairy about the last of the forties and then went into hogs. I had all hogs. I had seventy acres under woven wire fence. We raised hogs in the woods here. I sold little pigs is what I did.

JM: They were not raised in pens like they are now.

ET: No. I let them right out. Two litters a year and they'd just be out there and they'd nest right out in the woods. I got out of the hog business, and in 1954 we started in the ponies. Then as the city kept growing, and the farm became somewhat recreational, then what we did was we'd give pony rides and ring rides; that's how we started. And hay rides and stuff. But then when we really started into more we had church picnics and groups like that. But I always worked out for contractors part-time. In fact, I worked at Roamer Boat for nine winters--putting in and installing motors. I worked for Jack Lamar and I worked for John Mulder Construction.

JM: This was a seasonal thing? You closed down in the winter with your pony rides?

ET: Yeah, that's right. I ran the international business for G and K Equipment (International Harvester). In '39 is when the city...I was a steeplejack. That's where I made enough money to marry...I painted just about every stack in Holland and

Zeeland, the water tanks, and I painted the steel on the first Holland light plant here. That was for a dollar an hour. That was union labor there. Strom and Strom Construction. And we got a dollar an hour. The laborers that pushed the wheelbarrows got fifty cents an hour, the steel workers got a dollar seventy-five, and the boilermakers they got two and a quarter. Right then I can tell you that I painted a stack at Bayview and it was seven and a half cents an hour! And I can still see this guy there. He had seven children, and he said, "How much you get for that stack?" Well, I says, "I got twenty-five dollars." Tears was coming and he says, "I got seven and a half cents, but I still couldn't paint the stack," he said.

JM: Because of the height?

ET: Yeah.

JM: Now what seems so unusual about this farm, if you want to call it that, is that so many things went on here. My wife and my family come out of northwest Iowa. If you've got a farm this size, it's all corn or soybeans or something like that. No pony rides or anything like that. It's all farming.

ET: Actually your agriculture department for Michigan State was recommending that these farms of sixty or eighty acres would try recreation if they were into the other crops. So that's the first...I had them all here and went over...They couldn't believe it. I was so far ahead of what they had already...

JM: You had Macatawa to help you, of course. Being near to Macatawa didn't hurt.

ET: We're in the area, and I'm from Holland. In fact, we made all these trails through here. The City of Holland trucked all their spring clean-up here. We made roads of

them all right through the swamp. I took all their spring cleanup for ten years, so that's what all these trails are here on the farm.

JM: Did you have virgin timber on this property when your family first got it?

ET: No. That was taken off. The virgin timber is in the valleys. We've got trees that are 150 years old, the beech and the ash and the maples. They were never logged in the valleys. We have three creeks that come through it. In fact, the way it is right on the farm now, you got Ottawa County, Allegan County, the State of Michigan and the City of Holland, they've got a big dam on the farm, this side of 32nd for flood control (built in the 1980s). They back up the water; they built it--it's twenty-two feet high and it's supposed to be once in a hundred years that it would go over that. Twice it has gone over already.

JM: Obviously, this is a zoned area, isn't it? Or is it zoned agricultural still?

ET: No, they went and zoned it to residential, but as long as we keep agriculture, they can't touch it.

JM: So how do you maintain the farming element yet? Do you rent out? Or do you do some farming yourself?

ET: We still farm better than two hundred acres with hay. I baled 5,628 last year. That's all on farms out around these farms here. On our farm here, we do rent one field that we don't put corn on here any more. We put flowers. Henry Walters rents it and we get rent because we're so busy in the spring. For about six or eight weeks, we have five or six bus loads come every day. School children. And that's just when you should be planting corn.

JM: Yeah, right! (Laughs)

ET: We plant about twelve acres of corn on the neighbor's farm here, and we shock it yet. We shock it just so we have something to feed ponies and horses. It keeps them busy and they aren't chewing.

JM: If you shock it, you've got some nostalgia there. In other words, the old shocks...you don't see those much any more.

ET: And everybody thinks we just do it for the looks, but we feed a shock a day to the ponies just to keep them busy. I have thirty some head of ponies back here.

JM: You raise your own stock? You replenish your pony herd?

ET: Yeah, right. We have stallions.

JM: You sell ponies too?

ET: Once in a while, but mainly we use them.

JM: So you're not a horse trader?

ET: No, we bought a new team of Belgians. Once in a while you buy some in, but it's mainly just to replace or we sell if there is something you can't use. Because it takes quite a few years to make a good trail pony and ponies that can be used.

JM: And seemingly there's no end to the interest in that particular operation.

ET: No. In fact, we have a leasing program that has about twenty girls Monday, Wednesday and Friday, and another twenty lease these ponies. Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday we lease to them.

JM: Oh, do you? So they can ride them.

ET: So they can ride them. In fact, the Holland Sentinel just happened to take a picture of

three of them that were riding along 32nd Street. One was Representative Hoekstra's daughter, another one was the Chief of Police's daughter, and the other one was De Visser, a granddaughter of Lee De Visser that's got a million dollar race horse! It just happened to be the three that happened to be here.

JM: Now you went on to high school of course. That was to the ninth grade. Where did you have your eighth grade then? At Harrington School? There was no junior high then?

ET: No. We went to junior high and high school.

JM: It was the same building that now is the community education building?

ET: That's right. It's the one on River Avenue there. That's where I went to the ninth grade.

JM: My guess is that you were so busy on the farm you didn't do much else but go to class.

ET: You had chores to do early in the morning, and in fact, Mr. Moody, the gym teacher, was the one that worked...he lived right straight west of here. He had seven children, I think, and he used to bottle milk for us in the mornings to earn money to pay for his milk bill. He was the principal there. In fact, Hanson and Donovan (teachers), they both hunted with me. Used my hounds to hunt with and stuff. Maybe one of the things that would be good to hear...The Tinholt farm is now the Tinholt subdivision. The farms I'm going to name now are the ones that we used to have with our threshing and silo filling group.

JM: They were in your "ring."

ET: In our ring. That we helped each other. You didn't pay for anything; you all helped each other. There was the Hank Lugers farm, and that's the one that is now Heatherwood and Elders subdivisions. The next one was Henry Du Mez and that's Spring Arbor where the condominiums are now. Then there was Harold Lubbers (or John Speet it was at that time) and Stanley Heneveld--that's the red brick on the corner here of 62nd and 147th. And then the next one is Bert Walters and Henry Walters Nursery is there right now. And the two Slenk farms. That was our circle. The last of them just died two weeks ago--Harold Lubbers. And I'm the only one left of that circle.

JM: You were probably younger than most of them too, right?

ET: That's right. But I always had to run the blower or the water wagon or something like that. We kept it going. You started pretty young in those days.

JM: You really were in transportation, weren't you? With mules, and ponies and horses.

ET: That's right. Always.

JM: What do you remember about high school?

ET: Not a whole lot...you had basketball. That's when you jumped center after every basket. I can always remember the time...we didn't get up there too high every time. We had regionals over in Kalamazoo and Carl Van Dort (laughs) was the center, and we lost...I think it was 52-53 or something like that, and Carl made 51 of the points! And they were all crying. "What are you crying about," he says, "you didn't make any."

JM: Now you said you rode a horse to high school. How far would that be in miles to

Holland High School from here?

ET: At least five miles.

JM: I would think so. So it was a twenty minute, half hour ride?

ET: Seventeen minutes I could make it, but then the horse would lather. It was a race horse. In fact, we harness raced.

JM: Were you the only one riding a horse to high school?

ET: Yeah. I was the only one.

JM: So you were the school cowboy!

ET: That's right (laughs). When Hope College had their fiftieth anniversary, they wanted a covered wagon and they wanted to know if I could get some Indian ponies or something out here. Well, we put the covered wagon with a team of mules, started way over at College Avenue some place, it was almost the depot there. We had Ed Heneveld, Yutz Heneveld, they were all riding these ponies. They started out and went on a loop and there we went on a runaway with that team. We took a figure eight in these empty lots that were over there and they thought it was all part of the package! (Laughs).

JM: I remember the pageant they had too at that time. After you graduated from high school then of course you stayed right on the farm.

ET: Yeah, right. I worked out. I mean, I did steeple jacking and that. My mother passed away when I was eighteen, and then they had to have somebody to run the farm. I took the farm for the debts that were on it at that time.

JM: My assumption is that that was a pretty good investment.

ET: It was. None of my brothers wanted anything to do with it. But I've always loved it and I did.

JM: Your father had passed away earlier?

ET: In 1960, not earlier. My dad died at 88 years old in 1960.

JM: Now you said you had one son working with you on the farm? And he's working in the pony operation?

ET: Yeah, he runs it right now, he and his wife. His children are into it too.

JM: Is this an incorporated business?

ET: No, it's not. It's a partnership.

JM: It's a farming operation basically. Even though it's entertainment to a degree.

ET: No, with the Internal Revenue Service we're listed as a farm.

JM: Now I see quite a bit of empty land out the window there. Is that just fallow land or does it lay there like that?

ET: No, that's pasture. Well, it's hay land. We're raising alfalfa and hay now, and that's all we do. We don't raise any corn right on the place. Now there's 76 acres left on this block yet.

JM: How much do you actually have in crops, that is in hay, at this point? How much of that original farm is still being cultivated?

ET: Only about fifteen acres here. Actually we hay two hundred acres, but that's all outside. Other farms around. In fact, some of these farms we hay for them because they want to hold it. When they're holding (waiting to use the land for non-agricultural purposes), they have to have it mowed once a year.

JM: When you talked about digging basements for people with the mules and the scoop scraper that you hold with your hands and so on, which I remember, you didn't have sand here so much. It was sandy here, wasn't it?

ET: All sand.

JM: Okay. It was clay up around North Holland.

ET: I know!

JM: You were actually already developing this property then, weren't you? Were you selling those lots then?

ET: No. We did sell across the road (north of 32nd Street). I mean, we rented that. Actually, there was about twenty acres in there. We sold the twenty across the road.

JM: And then that was developed by somebody else.

ET: Yeah, right. We used it for years. A Chicago party had it. It didn't get developed until about thirty years ago (1960s).

JM: Are you developing any of your land yourself? I see a lot of houses here. You just sell lots?

ET: Yeah. Well, once in a while you had to sell a lot to keep your head above water. But outside of that, we're at the end of that. We haven't sold any more...We need every bit we got for trail rides and hay rides and stuff.

JM: I'll bet the neighbors are glad about that!

ET: That's right. And when you take a realtor on a hay ride he goes crazy! Because there's all valleys and beautiful land. We've got three creeks that go into it.

JM: So what do you think will happen to this property?

ET: We hope it stays right the way it is. We're trying to save it.

JM: Think your grandchildren will take it over some day?

ET: Yeah, they're working on it right now.

JM: How old are they?

ET: Well, the first one is just married (21 years old).

JM: So you have to start thinking about your great-grandchildren!

ET: The other two are in college (20 and 21 years old).

JM: The nice thing about this area is that they don't have to leave home to get good jobs.

ET: Yes. That's why I can always say even during Depression days we could always find work by Macatawa--I mean within reason. You could always find a job there.

JM: What do you remember about your early days in church? Was it still Dutch and English? Or was it all English?

ET: It was all English here at Central Park Church.

(end of side one, end of interview)