White, Virgil B Oral History Interview: Sesquicentennial of Holland, "150 Stories for 150 Years"

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AP: The first thing that I have everybody do is state their name and birth date and where they were born.

VW: My name is Virgil White, and I was born in Arkansas, in 1918. My parents were not southerners. However, they were drawn down to Arkansas by his parents, my grandparents. They thought they were going to become rich cotton farmers. It didn’t work out that way. My parents then came back to Michigan where her parents were living in Holland. That’s why I came back here when I was maybe about four years old.

AP: What did your parents do?

VW: They were farmers, basically. My mother had been from Muskegon, and she became a school teacher and went out west to North Dakota and taught in a small school there. My dad was a farmer from Kansas, but they met in North Dakota, and were married there. I’m the third in a family of five children and we were born all over the place. My sister in Canada. One in Illinois. I was in Arkansas. A couple younger sisters here in Holland.

AP: But when they came to Holland, then they settled?

VW: Then they settled in Holland. First they had a home in which they lived with, at that time there were three children. Then they bought a house on East 18th Street, near the railroad track. We, at that time, were the second house from the track, and we
heard the trains rumble through. But you get accustomed to that. It was not a problem for us. We ended up with five children, so there were seven of us in that relatively small house. But I still remember the train wrecks that happened on occasion with those old steam engine trains, in the 1920s. The trains would be lying on their sides and the box cars might be open with stuff in them. I don't think there was any great amount of looting. I don't think that took place like it does in today's world. But those things happened. We lived there and we went to church faithfully at Sixth Reformed Church. My father had been born a Quaker, but my mother was Dutch, so, of course, we went to the Reformed Church. He subsequently became an elder in the church. But he was sickly and ill and died relatively young at 53 years old. But they did have 25 years together, so that was good.

We grew up there on East 18th Street, and that street was not paved. We played ball in the street and in the early days the ice truck came and we'd get ice chips off the old ice wagon. In the winter, the horse drawn plow would come and push the snow off the so-called walk ways. They were not paved. We played football and softball in sand lot and in the road. I went to Holland High School--first in Lincoln School in the old building before the present building was erected. Then I went to Holland High School. It so happened that I was in a capella choir as a senior when this young lady at my right here was a sophomore in the same organization. But I didn't know her. Then, after graduation from high school in 1936, my dad was severely ill and passed away shortly thereafter. I had two younger sisters and a widowed mother. I couldn't go to college. I was OK academically, but we didn't
have any money. My dad, when he did work, had worked in the furniture plants. In the Great Depression, things were very, very tough. We were on welfare and we had a plot of gardening down along the river. The city gave us each a plot of land in the area that is now Window on the Waterfront. It was full of cattails, and my brother, Lew, and I, and my father, as he could, dug those cattails out, and it was rich land. We had a lot of carrots and cabbages and all kinds of good things, some of which we peddled through the neighborhood and sold for a few nickels. That was in the early 30s. That was a fun time. So I graduated from Holland High School and then went to business college nights, because I worked for a retail bake shop downtown—the French Pastry shop, which at that time was on the south side of the road. I learned to be a cake decorator and things like that. In '37, I opted to go to the Civilian Conservation Corps, or the CCC. I went to Upper Michigan as a volunteer in that organization. We got $30 a month, $25 of which was sent home. My mother needed that for the two younger girls. And I could keep $5 for my personal expenses, and that worked out. I really followed my brother in that, because he had done it before me. He graduated from high school in '34, and had gone into office work. As soon as I got up there, they found out I could type and knew a little about office work, having taken that in high school. They recruited me to come into the office, and I became company clerk. I transferred then to another camp closer to Sault St. Marie, where my brother and his wife were. So I was in RACO, which is just a little west of Sault St. Marie. I got into Sault St. Marie on weekends or Saturday nights, and could stay at my brother's place. Anyway, I came home for Christmas in '37. The
boss at the bakery wanted me back, so he and I wrote a letter, which he signed, he was a Dutch guy, but he signed the letter that we composed, and then I was able to get my discharge from the CCC. By that time I had a little higher rating. I was earning a little more, sending a little more money home. In the spring of '37, I came back and I went back to the bakery and they gave me an increase in wage. Then I assisted in the bake shop, running the bake shop, which meant the book keeping and the buying of the supplies, and payroll, things of that nature. I assisted the owner who was of Dutch descent and didn't have any training of that sort. I stayed there until '41.

AP: How did you meet your wife?

VW: One time I was out for a ride with a friend toward Jenison Park. He had a girlfriend at a home, and she was with that girlfriend, and I met Sirena Becksfort there, we call her Si, in the spring of '38. She was about to graduate from high school, and I had been out almost two years. I just thought she was a pretty nice little gal. She was pretty and had a lot of good things going for her. So we dated a little bit. Well, for quite a while before we were engaged. We were married in 1941, in the spring. At that time I changed jobs, too. I had an opportunity through my work at the bakery, one of the owners of the Standard Grocer Company, was selling us supplies. He said to me, "Is this your career? Is this where you want to work?" I said, "If I had some money, I'd buy the bake shop, but I don't have the funds, so I guess this is not the career I want." I was still going to night school, business college, and learning about business law and accounting, things of that nature that I was taking classes in. He
was at the Standard Grocer and Milling Company, their warehouse and offices were on River Avenue across the track from where Fris is now located near 4th Street. So they offered me a job to do billing for them. Si and I were married that same weekend that I changed jobs. We were married at her parents’ home on Southshore Drive near Jenison Park. At the time of Pearl Harbor in December of 1941, we were living in an apartment on College Avenue. I remember that we came home from church and heard the news of the attack at Pearl Harbor. The work at Standard Grocer Company progressed satisfactorily. They were happy with what I was doing. I could pick my hours, and I was increased in salary a little as time went on. Si was working in the office at Holland Furnace Company after having graduated from high school in ‘38. After we were married and I was working odd hours, I went in early morning and I was usually done by noon. We were a young couple and the war was on, so we figured we’d better enjoy life. So she quit at Holland Furnace so that we could have our afternoons together. We did a little fishing and golfing, we did some hiking and things like that. In ’42, I felt that I should go to service, and I would be called anyway, so I attempted to join the air corps as an air crewman. I was OK, except they determined in my final interview that I had a little speech defect. I stutter a little. I did worse than I do now. They determined that would not work out, so I didn’t make that. So I waited until I was drafted, and I was drafted in ’43. In the meantime, she became pregnant. Our son was due to be born in October of ’43. I was drafted in the summer of ’43, but I received a slight delay, so I didn’t go until after our son was born. I didn’t actually go into active service until October of ’43,
and she was in the hospital when I left.

SW:  He was six days old when you left.

VW:  At that time we had an upstairs apartment that we rented in town on West 21st Street. I went into the service and went to Fort Riley, Kansas, which was a cavalry training base, and I took basic training there, and was ultimately transferred out to California where I joined the 11th Armored Division in a cavalry reconnaissance outfit. I was a replacement. Again, due to my training, I was assigned into the office. I wasn't company clerk, but I was the assistant. Si came out to visit me in the summer of '44 in California and we had a great time while grandma and grandpa took care of our son. Her parents were close to us, and our son just loved to be with his grandparents.

I might tell you a little bit about Standard Grocer Company. They were a good old firm, owned by the Muller family. Mr. Ren Muller was president, John Muller was treasurer and sales person, and Dena Muller, their sister, was really the operating person. She ran that business and I worked for her. When I went in service, they said, "When you get back, you will work for us again." It was the law, anyway, but they wanted me back. So that's what happened.

Anyway, with the 11th Armored Division, we were in California, we figured we might be going to the far east for the war there. But actually they shipped us all to the east coast and we went to England. Then the whole division moved to France after Normandy, and we were in the Battle of the Bulge. I was in a recon outfit in a jeep on a machine gun and the radio. We were in Patton's third army, and we drove
up from the south and helped to relieve the city of Bastogne, which was surrounded at that time, in the winter of '44. The weather was terrible. The refugees were coming down the roads there in Belgium and were all over the place. We were in our light tanks and jeeps. The snow and everything... We lost some of our personnel to the enemy. Worst I got out of it was frozen feet, which still bother me a little bit today. But I came back whole and hardy, and I thank God for that. In the meantime, our second child was born, because Si had been visiting in California. Then I finally came home in '45, and we had a son and a daughter. That daughter was sickly for a while, but she pulled through. They're our two oldest children.

AP: What was that like for both of you to make that transition? Being left with a newborn baby right away? Coming back to a family? What was that like?

SW: It was rather difficult when he first came back because Ginger wasn't expected to live. It was rough. She is now a special ed. teacher in Macomb, Illinois.

VW: It was pretty tough while I was away. I was always able to write faithfully, but I don't know if the mail came through so well. In fact, she had one batch of mail she had sent to me came back marked: "unknown, unable to locate." Well, we were in combat in early '45. So she didn't know what was happening. But she knew what outfit I was in, because 11th Armored was in the news. The news report would pretty much tell where the 11th Armored was operating, so she had an idea where we were. The war ended in May of '45, but I didn't have enough points to come home, and I didn't want to go to the Pacific, because that war was still on. So I signed up to work in an office there at United States Austrian Forces. I was in Salzburg,
Austria, which is a beautiful place. I worked in an office there in an office building doing routine clerical work.

AP: That was probably well before it was the tourist place it is today, before the Sound of Music.

VW: Yes, right. Then the war in the Pacific was over, too, in August of that year. The bomb was dropped. So I was anxious to get home to my wife and my two children. But we had to wait our turn. Everybody couldn't come home at once. Then I became ill, somewhat. I thought I had pleurisy, because I lost weight and I had pain in my chest. But I didn't want to end up in a hospital in Europe, I wanted to get home. Then in Thanksgiving of '45, the right to come home surfaced, and I was taken to southern France. I wasn't feeling all that great, but we got on a ship and came to New York harbor, and I was on my way home. I'd have been home for Christmas of '45. I came through Camp Attabury, Indiana. Of course, in the routine X-rays and physical that they put us through before they would give us our discharges, the doctors determined that I had TB. Tuberculosis, in those days, was a pretty serious thing. I had a spot on my lung, and that was what was giving me my pain. Si came down to visit me in Camp Attabury, and there I was, skinny as a rail, and she was up here in Holland with two little tykes. It wasn't very nice that I couldn't come home for Christmas. What did you say, you had a Christmas tree bought and you threw it out?

SW: I gave it away.

VW: At that time, she was living in an apartment out in Jenison Park, which was not too
far from where her parents were living. Her parents, through all this, were a great help. So instead of getting home for Christmas of ’45, I was sent to a sanitarium down in North Carolina. I was in North Carolina for eight or nine months. They fed me well and I had a lot of rest, and they finally determined that I was healthy enough to go home. So I was home by October, ten or eleven months later. I had put on about forty pounds during that time in the sanitarium. Si hadn’t seen me since before Christmas. I weighed about 180 instead of 135. Anyway, we came home and lived in that little four room apartment for a while, then we were able to buy a home.

Housing was real tight after World War II. You couldn’t rent a place or buy a place unless you had an inside track, somehow. Her uncle and aunt owned a small house down on Fairbanks Avenue near the railroad tracks, overlooking the swamp. That we bought, then, from them. We borrowed money from the bank. Then I went back to work again for Standard Grocer Company. In the meantime, they had built a new facility on East 16th Street, which is now the Holland Transplanter company. That’s the building the Standard Grocer Company built during World War II in the 1940s. The Muller family continued that operation, it being an IGA wholesale business and serviced the IGA independent stores. We had almost 200 hundred stores that we serviced. I went back into the billing department. Then Miss Muller wanted me to do more than that, and she got me started in the buying department. I would see salesman and write up orders with her approval. She was a great woman to work for; I’ve never worked for an individual who was a better person to work for than Miss Dena Muller. She was a great person, and she helped me a lot. She liked us as a
family, and she helped me in my career. I went to a Dale Carnegie course for public speaking, and that helped me. We built a new little Cape Cod house on West 32nd Street, west of the windmill out that way. In '47, our second daughter was born. In '52, our third daughter was born while we lived out there. We ended up with four children, three girls and a boy. They're fine children, and they all get along well. They're more interested in their careers maybe than having family, because we only have three grandchildren. We lived there until about '60, then we bought a large house on Graafschap Road, near 22nd street, which is just up the road from here.

SW: That was the old Montella Park Christian Church Parsonage.

VW: In the meantime, Standard Grocer Company did continue to grow, and I was promoted and became the head buyer, and it worked out well. The Muller family had no heirs for the business, and so they sold the business in 1959 to an organization from the other side of the state. Of course, they came in with the usual story: everything will go on as usual, there will be no changes, the business will continue to go. We were servicing some 200 independent stores, and we were doing a good job. I had grown in the business. Initially, then, after the Mullers left, I was general manager there for a while. Then they started bringing in new people and they had new policies. I could see the handwriting on the wall, that it was not going to work out for me. Their ethics and policies were not as I would want to see them maintained. I had an opportunity to go, with another company, through a family association of the Muller's. I joined the Howard Miller Clock Company in Zeeland. Mr. Howard Miller was a brother-in-law of Dena Muller. He was a fine man, also,
to work for. They needed an office man, so I became that office man. I had spent twenty-some years with Standard, and they were good years, and Miss Muller was really a fine person who made an impression on me. Anyway, I went to Zeeland, and shortly after that, they built their new plant on East Main Street. I became office manager with related duties, and as we grew, we hired additional people and we got into data processing with computers. I was able to assist the management there, which was Howard Miller and his sons, Jack and Phil, all of whom are fine people. Howard died a year ago. Mrs. Miller still lives in Brook Village. She’s over 90. I worked there for 22 years, later as controller and finance officer. In the mean time, we built another house on the east side of town, a little closer to Zeeland, because I was travelling to Zeeland. I retired in ’83. I wanted to retire a little earlier, but they convinced that I should stay on, and my good wife said, "You aren’t ready to retire yet. You know that." I worked till I was 65. But we do have a good retirement, I praise God for that.

We’ve always been active in our church. Our church is Central Park Reformed Church, which is celebrating its 150th, too. Central Park was originally in Graafschap, and they were one church. Then the Christian Reformed element of Graafschap broke off, then, eventually, the Graafschap Reformed Church moved to Central Park. That’s been her home church. Si was baptized in Central Park Church in 1920. I thank God for putting us in the right place, for giving us reasonably good health, and we now are enjoying a good retirement.

We had a cottage on Lake Michigan for 28 years when our kids were
teenagers. They really enjoyed that. They’d go swimming in sixty degree water. I
guess we would, too. I was on the beach too much. I did remain on the board of
directors at the clock company for quite a few years after that. But now I am entirely
free. I had an excellent relationship with the personnel there. We started going to
Florida. First we rented, then we bought a small condo, then we built a small home.
So we’re in Florida in a villa. We just are real thankful that we were able to do it.

AP: What are the biggest changes you’ve noticed in the city?

VW: For sure, when we were kids in and around Holland, it was a Dutch community. We
never had any livestock or poultry where we lived on East 18th Street, but the
neighbors did. The chickens would wake us up in the morning. There were chicken
coops all around, across the street and next door to us. Now they can’t have that.
Practically all these people were Dutch folk. Whereas now, that’s not true. I think
that’s probably for the good, because it was almost exclusive: "If you ain’t Dutch
you ain’t much." I’m not so sure that that’s right. My brother and I had paper
routes when we were kids. We’d ride our bikes down town to the Fris store on 8th
Street between River and Central. The morning Herald from Grand Rapids would be
dropped off there. We’d take them in the store, summer and winter, fold them up,
put them in the carriers, and go pedal our routes. Lew had one route, I had another,
and there were about four or five other young boys who did the same thing. But I
remember when the Interurban tracks going down through 8th Street and River
Avenue were torn up. It must have been ’30, or before. Of course, the changing of
the buildings. I think what Mr. Prince has been able to accomplish down town has
been tremendous in salvaging the area and making it extremely attractive now. Those buildings were becoming deteriorated.

AP: When did they stop using the Interurban?

SW: When I was a kid they had tracks down to Jenison Park and Macatawa Park, a big recreation park with merry-go-rounds, ferris wheels, and all that sort. I lived not even a block away from it. So we heard the noise all the time. That changed a lot. Of course, it’s quite close to Macatawa Park, too, within a mile or a half mile.

VW: Now that area is residential and the Macatawa Yacht Club.

SW: But there was a big dance hall, and we used to have picnics there all summer long—church picnics, factory picnics. So that was our playground. And the hills at Macatawa Park, especially in the spring when the flowers were open, we ran all over the hills. The fires at Macatawa Park when all these cottages burned down, there were two big fires. I remember all that stuff.

VW: My brother was two years older. When I was twelve, he had been caddying out at the country club a year or two. So we would ride our bikes out to the country club. In those days, we just leaned our bikes up against a tree and left them there all day. There was never any problem with anybody fussing with those bikes. There were a few others there, too, besides our own. I caddied there for about five years or so during the summer. We did a lot of other small jobs to pick up a quarter here and a quarter there. We had to have money for books for school and clothes and it worked out. The roads at that time, 16th Street was blacktopped, and we’d ride out that way. Country Club Road was not, it was gravel all the way. That whole area was open.
field, for the most part, with a few farms and orchards. But it was all undeveloped, just a smattering of homes out there. Now it’s all city. East 16th Street, where Highway 31 goes through now, was an airport for a while when we were kids. That later became the GE plant. The Fairgrounds were changed on East 16th Street, which is now cemetery property. That was a great attraction every summer when the Holland Fair was on. We kids weren’t too far, we were east enders and we walked out there. Our folks were quite lenient. They let us do things. One summer, probably 1933, my grandfather was quite ill up in Minnesota, and he wanted to see his two grandsons. So Lew and I took just a few dollars and hitch-hiked out there - we actually rode the boxcar part of the way like the bums did, and stopped a couple of times to visit relatives. But we got to see the grandparents and made it safely home; did sleep a couple of nights in haystacks, etc. I was 14 and my brother was 16 at the time. In today’s world, I think parents have to be a little more conscious of where their kids are. But when we were growing up, we were here and there and everywhere on our bikes. We’d go down to the river and we’d go down to the boat docks. Once my brother and I were fishing on a boat dock down here on Harrington Docks, and a big passenger boat from Chicago had come in, and was docked there. I was fishing to the side, and somehow I slipped and fell in the water. I could swim, I wasn’t in any danger. But some guy pushed my brother aside. He had to get a hold of me and save me. We worked for every nickel, but it didn’t hurt us a bit.

SW: When I was a kid, 32nd Street was just a dirt road with tracks down the middle. It wasn’t paved until after we were married and built a house there.
VW: After we built there in '48, that last lap from old Saugatuck Road, which was the highway then, was paved. The old Tower Clock has always been there, as long as I remember. The old depot, of course, deteriorated and has been replaced now with the Padnos Transportation Center.

SW: Southshore Drive was all cottages at that time. There were very few permanent homes along there. Now many of those little cottages are gone and they've built homes along the lake shore.

VW: We were never smart enough to buy lake front property. (laughs)

SW: Then, of course, there were lots of fires in these old houses, (tape ends) as well as in the Mac Hills. Our own house on Park Street burned down in 1927, something like that. Sunday noon in January. My dad stayed home from church that morning to take care of my brother, fortunately. My mother always brought him upstairs for his naps. But dad just put him on what they called the davenport at that time, and that's where he had his nap that morning. The whole upstairs was burned out and full of smoke and on fire before he would have been able to get him out.

VW: Your mother had been at church and you were riding home in the car with her?

SW: Oh yes, and she got all excited. But all she could do was watch the house burn. Later, a new house was built to replace the one that burned down.

VW: And that's the one that the depression came and your folks lost that house. The mortgage was foreclosed. That house is still there.

SW: But all that street has old houses on it. And several of the old houses have burned down. Like the Minor House. That was a rooming house. That burned down on
New Year’s Eve. I remember our folks covering all the windows so us kids couldn’t see it burning, because we were scared to death of fire after seeing our house burn down. That was my oldest brother and myself. But that’s all changed out there.

The boat docks, we used to go to what is the Macatawa Bay Yacht Club now. It used to be the old Interurban dock. When the boats would come in, they would stop there. We kids would have a lot of fun going there. The cooks would give us cookies and apples. We weren’t allowed to go on the boats, but we could be on the docks.

VW: So you went swimming in the lake over there and played in that creek that runs through there.

SW: Oh yes. We pole vaulted that. Jesiek’s boat yard was there at that time. It’s now Eldeen’s. The Jesiek’s kids were all about our same age. So we’d get row boats and pull them up into the woods and come down those waterfalls. We had fun. In winter we slid down on the snow in those in the Mac hills. We’d go way up on top of Seldom Inn, come around the curve, and race down the hill. Some of the kids would go too fast on the ice, and they’d land on the lake instead of on the road.

Once in a while my dad, in fact the whole neighborhood, would help out and cut big six foot blocks of ice out on the lake. They drew their horses out there and put it on the sleighs. There used to be a big old ice house on 66th Street south of 32nd. Between every block a lot of straw was put, and they would peddle that ice in the summer time through the hills of Macatawa to the cottages.

VW: Most of us those days didn’t have refrigerators. It was the old ice boxes. I remember emptying, in our house on East 18th Street, we had a little ice box, and
everyday we had to take the water out.

SW: I remember doing that on 29th Street after we were married. We had an old ice box. Life has changed. We had the old washing machines that you cranked. Now you push a button.

VW: My parents never had a car. My dad came off the farm. I’m sure he could drive farm machinery, but he never had a car. He always took the bike, he called it the wheel, to work. He worked at a couple of the furniture factories near downtown.

SW: There used to be the tanning factory where the Civic Center is now. Dad worked there for a while. Then he worked across the lake in the old Vacatap Factory. We had the old Park School out in the woods on 40th Street, a two room school. We walked there everyday. Then the Harrington School was later built. Then we transferred and the old Park School was torn down.

VW: We used to walk over there and fish. We could get out to the breakwater. Casey Landman had the bait out there. You could buy minnows from Casey. We could either walk out along the channel and fish, or he’d run a boat out to the breakwater. If you wanted to go to the north breakwater, you usually went from the north side. Baker ran the boat to the breakwater on the north side. We’d go perch fishing in that area. The fishing was usually pretty good. Your dad did some work on the lighthouse, didn’t he, Big Red?

SW: Yes, only in the summertime. He did some painting, too, in Saugatuck. It used to be the furniture factories worked in the winter, and most of them laid off all of their workers in the summertime. Then he had a summer job. He worked as lighthouse
keep a few summers. Then he had a few summers during the Depression when he
did the painting at the Pavilion and the Butler Hotel. That was a three story building
at that time. The street car used to run through there. We had the Angel’s Flight
over there on the hill at Macatawa.

VW: Flight of steps to the top of what is now VanAndel’s retreat up there. It used to be a
flight of stairs and track, they called that the Angel’s Flight.

SW: We used to go up there. That was quite a resort area at that time.

VW: When we were kids, we’d go pick berries in the summer for a few cents. We’d pick
east of town. There were some berry patches out there for red raspberries. We’d also go south toward Gibson and pick dewberries. My mother would take all the
kids, and we’d go out there and pick berries. We’d stay in the barn for about a week
or so, maybe ten days, and we’d be picking berries. The dewberries were always full
of briars. I remember an airplane came over, and my brother was there too, and he
was watching that airplane and fell right back in the berry bushes, and was full of thorns.

Another thing that changed a lot relates to nature - I have always been
interested in the natural world, especially birds. There used to be so many more of
the songbird types in town and the suburbs; now many of those good birds are pretty
scarce. No doubt the loss of habitat has made the difference. And I remember those
beautiful elm trees that lined the streets of Holland. Along came the Dutch elm
disease, and most of the trees are gone now.

SW: My grandparents had a farm toward Zeeland with a big sand hill on their farm. They
felt that it used to be an Indian village at one time, because in that sand, they found boxes of arrowheads, tomahawk heads.

**AP:** Was there much influence by the Native Americans here that you recall?

**VW:** No, not in the 20s or 30s. There were a few families that were here, but for the most part, their influence had long ago passed.

**SW:** But those big fires out at Macatawa Park, when those houses started to go, that was terrible. I remember one was at night. Sparks flew up all over. My folks were out there. They had pails of water to pour on the roof if the sparks hit, because the sparks came up over the hills. It must have been windy. There used to be the Ottawa Beach Hotel, which was right across the lake from Jenison Park. I remember when we were little kids and all the neighbors pulled the kids out of bed, and they all went down to the park to watch the fire.

**AP:** What has the role of the church been in your lives, in the community? Has it changed?

**SW:** My dad used to tell us stories about moving the church from Graafschap to Central Park. He went through that.

**VW:** The church has been a vital part in our lives through the years. I've always been heavily involved there. We both were, and the family. As far as in the community, yes, the church was very much a gathering place. I think it's less so now. It's not as important to many people. I think especially the organized church. But it is different.

**SW:** The old church that was moved here from Graafschap, that's the old church we grew
up in. It had a tower. When the wind blew hard, it would sway. Once in a while the bell would ring because the wind blew it.

VW: That church had been built in the village of Graafschap in 1904 as a new church for the congregation, which was doing pretty well. About ten years later, the church was not doing as well, and the area toward the lake, toward Central Park and Macatawa Park, was growing fast. There were new houses being built along the lake there. There was agitation among the Reformed Church people that we didn't need two churches in Graafschap village, we should have one out there toward the lake. So there was agitation to move the church. It was physically broken down and transported and rebuilt in Central Park.

SW: My dad used to tell us stories about the wagons pulling parts of the church out here.

VW: So that church, subsequently in 1950, was dismantled and replaced with our present church. Later on, the present church was added to, so that's the history of that church.

SW: We've always been involved in Central Park Church. My dad was an elder there for years. We've both been teachers at one time or another.

The old passenger boats used to come up here, and people would come from Chicago and get off over at the Interurban Dock, and we used to watch them come in.

VW: The Harrington Dock was used heavily for passenger ships, too.

SW: This was a stop here, and then it went on to Harrington Dock in town. They often stopped at the Jenison Dock, too. I've got a picture of that downstairs.

VW: We also have some memorabilia of the old Standard Grocer Company that I was able
to salvage, and I want to get that to the Archives. We’re members of the historical trust. We don’t participate a lot, but I think it’s very worth while for us to support it as best we can. From our church records, we’ve also placed a lot of those in the Archives at the seminary. Our old church records go back to 1848, and they’re all in Dutch. There will be other records and items that will go to the Archives or to the Museum.

SW: Well there are so many things that they want to show. Like the great fire of Holland. I remember the girls’ piano teacher had a doll that came through the fire.

AP: I think they have a piano or something that somebody buried to survive the fire.

SW: Oh yes, they buried things.

VW: You’d be surprised what you can do if you move in faith. Anyway, that’s our life story for the most part. We had happy times, and God was with us.