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Wyngarden, Dale Oral History Interview: Sesquicentennial of Holland, "150 Stories for 150 Years"

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Abstract (subjects listed in order of appearance in transcript): Early years, family, army life in Alaska, Vietnam War, first impression of Holland, organizations, work for the city, Holland and planning, contributors to Holland’s success, industries, the Holland community, rise of diversification of Holland community, Planning Commission Projects, city growth, HEDCOR, housing, church and Holland, handling diversification, Dutch heritage in Holland, positives and negatives of Holland, traffic, air and water quality in Holland, gangs, outside opinions of Holland, Federal 201 Sanitary Sewer Program, growth of the city, and the changing role of women.
June 21, 1996

TLB: Could you state your name, your date of birth, and where you were born?

DW: I am Dale Cameron Wyngarden. I was born in Petoskey, Michigan, [date removed], 1941.

TLB: When did you come to Holland for the first time?

DW: The first time probably goes back to childhood memories, and I can’t put a date to it. My father was born in Zeeland, just outside of Zeeland. He grew up in Vriesland, attended Hope College, and then left this area to enter the ministry. As just a young kid for the earliest days we would come back to visit his family in Zeeland. He had five brothers and sisters remaining in Zeeland and his parents for many years. My earliest memories of Holland, were simply coming through it as a kid, probably in the mid to late forties on the way to Zeeland. And these are very vague images.

My first real awareness of Holland or coming to it as a place to be, was when I transferred here from the College of Wooster, my sophomore year in college in 1960 and came to Hope as a student in 1960.

TLB: Then after you graduated, you just decided to stay in Holland?

DW: It was a little unorthodox. I didn’t like school. I didn’t like the discipline very well. I dropped out and went to San Francisco and tried to be a "beatnik" for six months and then got drafted in the army. I wound up coming back to Holland in 1966, after being released from the army. Married a local girl. I actually finished Hope in
1972. It was a twelve year academic program with great interruptions.

TLB: Do you want to tell me a little bit about your family? Do you have children? And tell me a little bit about your wife.

DW: My wife is Chicago transplant, who came here with her family when she was in her early teens. She remained in this area. It was here that I met her through a friend at Hope. We’ve been married thirty-one years now and have two grown children. Both raised in this area and stayed in this area. On just south of town and one near Zeeland and we have three grandchildren.

TLB: You said that you were in the army, did you go over and serve. Do you want to talk a little bit about that?

DW: I do. It was a good experience for me being a sort of undisciplined character then. They, at least, made me shine my shoes, and get up when the whistle blew. It was a fairly uneventful term of service in a very eventful time. It was 1963 to 1965, I wound up being stationed in Alaska for eighteen months of my tour of duty of the two years that I was in. So essentially other than basic training and some advanced training, I wound up trained as a power generator operation. There was no excitement to that, it just meant wiping oil off generators in case they ever needed them. So I wound up being a clerk/typist, in an aviation maintenance unit in Alaska. Toward the very end, 1965 was the period when our advisory involvement in Vietnam was changing, from simply advising to moving troops over there in large scale. Right at the end of my term in Alaska I came home for a leave, and when I got back large numbers of my unit in Alaska had been transferred to Vietnam. I often wondered
whether the entire company wound up going over there. I just haven’t maintained
contact with them. I was in just before things really got greatly involved in Vietnam.

TLB: Do you remember what the reaction in Holland was like toward the Vietnam War?

DW: No, I don’t. I started working for the city when I got back from the service. Even
though, I was a municipal employee I’m not sure that I had, at that young age, any
kind of pulse on the community. That is, other than our own, which was one of real
ambivalence about the war and what we were doing there. The shock and the horror
of it. It was the first war, where it was a televised event. The nightly news had it on
it. Of course now the new generation watches Desert Storm and military involvement
like that and takes it for granted that it is a spectator sort of activity. Vietnam was
really the first of those types of wars. It was really hard to understand the process
and why we were there. And of course, as issues unfold afterwards your memories
of the war get blurred by what transpired afterward. Now I think many of us are
even more doubtful as to what our purpose was and why we were slaughtering so
many Vietnamese and killing so many of our own people for a cause that just didn’t
seem to have our heart in at the time.

TLB: When you came to Hope College the first time, what were some of your first
impressions of the city of Holland? Or when you came back after Alaska?

DW: My first time impressions were very favorable. I had come from Chicago Heights,
Illinois, the south side of the city, suburban area. It wasn’t really a suburban area, it
was an old city of its own. An industrial city. It was a city where the downtown had
suffered some real death pangs from the out lying malls already. It was a city
racially divided. A heavy black and hispanic population. There was a railway track that ran down the center of the city that separated blacks from whites. Not great racial tension in the high school, but undercurrents of it within in the school system there. I came to Hope and it was sort of an idyllic community. The community was still largely homogeneous. The Dutch roots were evident in churches I think one church still had a Wednesday night service in Dutch. There was, downtown, a farmer's co-op. Where Wendy's and Long John Silver's now sit by the railway tracks was a grain elevator. Literally the farmers would bring the grain in from the outlying fields. There was this idyllic sense of having moved to sort of the country from a larger area. And I liked it. I felt very comfortable here. The downtown was not at that time threatened with anything approaching a mall. It wasn't the biggest whiz-bang downtown, I mean it was almost a pale shadow of what it is now aesthetically. Still it was the center of community life. People gathered there. There was still a hotel downtown. No Holiday Inn. Where Rest Haven is now was the old downtown hotel. And the college was right on the fringe of it. I felt very comfortable here. I felt good about being in the community, being part of it as a student, and later on when I married and raised a family here.

TLB: What are some organizations that you have been involved in? When and how did you get involved in the organization? And what did you do?

DW: I'm not a terrible great joiner. I grew up with my father a minister in the Presbyterian church. I spent ten years where I thought I was an atheist or agnostic. I didn't particularly enjoy it, and wasn't a very good one, and wound up drifting back
to the church and have been moderately active over the years in the Presbyterian church. And felt a good grounding in the roots there.

Most of my sense of attachment comes from serving on boards. I served on the boards of a couple of community agencies: Higher Horizons, which was the Big Brother Big Sister Program, which I think now is affiliated with Hope College, and Kandu Industries over the years.

Most of my sense of identity came from opportunities associated with my work. Not from the outset, but from very early in my career, as City Planner for about fifteen - eighteen years, and still am the director of the department that includes planning. For about close to a couple of decades, I have worked almost exclusively with the city on planning from a staff standpoint. That role brought me into contact two or three times a month with the Planning Commission, which is made up of the mayor, a council representative, one administrator, and six people from the community at large. I am just delighted in this association. If I look back and say, "What are some of the things that have kept me here?" One of them was just the opportunity to work with so many great people. You could go back and name the early Planning Commission, when I first started working here; it had on it Bill Wichers, Russel Bouws, Bill Butler, who was then the owner and publisher of the Sentinel. Just the opportunity as a young person to interact with people like this. The caliber of the Planning Commission is still great and high in terms of citizen volunteers and appointees. The planning role also involved the liaison to the City Council from the Planning Commission. I also get a fair amount of interaction with
our City Council. That is nice interaction. It is nice to work with these people, to know them. It satisfies my need for belonging without joining too many other clubs or organizations.

TLB: Is there anything, that you think really stands out, about Holland and planning?

DW: I don’t know where to begin to list them. In the midst of areas where some communities have prospered and some have faltered and failed you sit back and wonder why. Muskegon, at one time, was a great foundry city. Benton Harbor was a great industrial city and Holland was a little "podunk" farm town. Now if you look at the fortunes of those cities: Muskegon has kind of bottomed out, but is now coming back; Benton Harbor has bottomed out and probably stayed there. Holland has just seen a marvelous era of growth, particularly in the industrial sector. One of the things that is most remarkable is that we look around and see community that is filled. We are sitting here right now, in this interview, in temporary City Hall offices in the middle of our industrial park while we are renovating our neo-classical, 1912 City Hall, downtown. This is a marvelous investment and I am glad we did that rather than demolished it. But in the middle of the industrial park, if you look around here at industry right and left that are home grown industries. Early on in the growth of the city, we had GE move in here with the electric motor division, appliance motors. GE is now gone. They were here and they were a big presence in the community for a couple of decades. Heinz has had a pickle plant here for a long time. One of the first industries here in the industrial park was Lifesavers; originally it was Beechnut Lifesavers. Beechnut made baby food, and Beechnut made candy
confections and moved their plant here from New York, to start their gum and Lifesaver division. Separating them from the baby food. Other than three, which are sort of big national sounding names, the bulk of our industry in this city is homegrown with people who started it virtually from scratch. Things like the Haworth Corporation, which was started by a man who people in town still remember as a shop teacher. The Prince Corporation, when I first started with the city, Prince had built its first little building, but it was a little steel building sitting in a gravel parking lot probably the size of a muffler shop or an automotive repair facility. If you look at that less than thirty years they have gone from that beginning to an employer of thousands. And the quality of facilities, along with the genius to start up facilities to manufacture the very fine quality that hometown people brought to it. So I think that if I look back on this era of city, I don't know if every age thinks that their age is the Golden Age or Era, but it certainly has been a marvelous age for the community, in terms of industrial growth, in terms of the quality of industry that we have, in terms of what people who have prospered in industry have given back to the community in the way of downtown investment, investment in Hope College, support of the community in so many other ways. I can't imagine a greater age in which to work for the city.

TLB: It seems pretty remarkable, coming in from another community to just see how much the community gets involved in everything, and what comes back from the industry. What are some of the biggest changes you have seen in Holland since 1972 would be the time you stayed?
DW: 1966.


DW: It is June 21st, about a month from now I will be celebrating my 30th anniversary with the city as well. I am getting to be one of the old timers around here. I think the biggest change is the transformation from what seemed to be predominately an agrarian type community with a little industry to an industrial community with a little agriculture. The whole West Michigan area, as a kid coming up from Chicago, it almost seemed at one point once you got past Indiana that West Michigan was just an orchard. It was interrupted by a few cities: St. Joseph, Benton Harbor, and New Buffalo, Holland, and Zeeland. The whole sense was that is was predominately an agriculture area. Now agriculture is still important, but there is no sense of that being the dominate quality or character of the Holland area. In terms of some of the ethnic changes, because of the agrarian roots, my perception, now I can’t quote you numbers, but there was a significant Hispanic presence in the community back in the 1960s. It was already a manifestation of the community. People who had come to the West Michigan area, predominately through the migrant system of harvesting, then began to drop out of the migrant stream and settled in the community and took on industrial jobs. I suspect that proportionately the Hispanic population has increased at a faster rate than the Anglo.

Of course one of the other changes has been the diversification of minorities as part of the town too. We don’t have a big black minority here right now, but in 1966 if there was black person in Holland at all it was either a Hope student, or a
missionary visiting. They were not here in the community in any presence notably other than through the College and the Seminary. They're more visible as a part of our community right now. And certainly the wave of Asian immigration that followed the Vietnam War as a conscientious effort, I think, as a nation we wanted to clear our conscience a little bit about a war we didn't understand and had second thoughts about. We wound up with a large number of our churches sponsoring immigration of South-East Asians. Of course, they represent a sizable minority in the community. And they are visible. We went out to eat last night, at a Chinese restaurant just north of town, and right next to it was a small grocery store. Both of them are obviously run by Orientals. They weren't Chicagoans who learned to cook chop suey.

TLB: Right. Do you want to talk about some of the projects you worked on for the Planning Commission?

DW: Yes. My era here included some neat opportunities. Probably the one area that has been consistently a challenge and a blessing has been the growth of the industrial park. We did not invent the industrial park. Years ago when I came, the dominate location of industry was downtown Holland. A few factories were just north of downtown. There were a few along the railroad tracks. Those tended to be the locals. In fact, the waterfront and the railroad tracks were really the industrial quarters of the community. The Hope College art department is sitting in what was the old Sligh Furniture Manufacturing. Right next to that, where the tennis courts are, sat just a very small company which was American Aerosol. They made spray-
paint, and they contract aerosol can processing. Baker Furniture was just up the road on the railroad tracks.

The dominate location in industry has always done that; it’s followed the transportation linkages. When it was boating and lumbering the dominate location was right along the waterfront. The era when I worked for the city was one in which the highway system continued to grow and trucks gradually replaces rail as the dominate means of moving goods and materials around. Consequently the industrial park out here was served by what was then called the bypass around Holland. Which is US-31, and is anything but a bypass, right now.

Prior to my coming to the city, in 1958 or so we annexed, the city grew from about 4 square miles to 12 square miles. The motivation for annexation, at that time, was driven primarily by a new state law that required that all school districts in the state be full K-12 districts. Which meant that little rural school districts that were in abundance, one-school districts right out in the country that would send their kids through sixth grade to their own locally controlled school, then would send their kids to the big city and pay tuition for High School, those were forced into consolidation. I think it was that need of people in rural areas to say we have to affiliate with the school district. In addition to this, the prospect of municipal utilities. Some areas that were annexed like the Maplewood, and parts of Holland Heights neighborhood already had neighborhoods growing in small residential pockets. The annexation era of 1958-1959 really forced Holland to look at its growth potential from a town of four square miles to about twelve. That included the area that we are in now and the
industrial park. Could you repeat the question? I am off on a tangent.

TLB: What I was asking you is what some of the planning projects are that you have done?

DW: Thank you. The industrial park, itself, was a by-product not of the city, but of a group within the Chamber of Commerce who got together and said, "We need to go out and invest in some industrial land, and provide room to grow in, because we are stifled and locked in the industrial sites in the downtown central city areas." I think the one project that has been a kind of continuum through all of the years, has been the ability to work in partnership with HEDCOR (Holland Economic Development Corporation) in zoning, planning approval, utility extension, development of some new streets out here to supplement the old farm roads that had already served as a network for this area. We are not entirely done now. Now obviously the South-East industrial park was the very first phase. That took place in three increments. Then came the realization that the Holland area, itself, was growing at a pace faster than just the city itself could accommodate and HEDCOR has since their early couple of decades in the city invested significantly in lands up north of town in Holland township. They have a couple major industrial parks going up there. They also have another small phase under development inside the city. We are looking at some additional annexation with Fillmore Township under a state law which provides a cooperative agreement with townships for a systematic phased in annexation of about another couple of square miles which would allow continued growth of our industrial park. That has probably been the highlight. Let's face it, because the fuel that engines the government is taxation, and industrial development has been very good in
the building of our tax base. It has allowed us to then go out and do other good
deeds and good works in the city like building sidewalks, building utilities, renovating
parks, and buying parks. All of which have also been fun and rewarding.

TLB: As industry increases in the community, how is Holland dealing with the increase of
growth of people?

DW: Marginally well, I think, we went through an era where we kind of opened the doors
of opportunity for housing. When I started with the city in 1966, you could probably
count certainly on both hands all of the apartment facilities in town. I think that the
largest one was a maybe a building with eight or twelve apartments in it. We had no
significant inventory of apartments at all. We made opportunities for apartments.
Some of the choices were driven by political realities of the age. There were
neighborhoods that didn’t want apartments near them. We decided early on, after
zoning for the Meijer store on 16th street, that if we didn’t do something as an
alternative we would end up with one more strip commercial road way out on 16th
street. Which at that time none of us felt we needed or wanted. We already had
several entries into the community, like South Washington were strip commercial
districts. So we rezoned that to multi-family. I think that in retrospect, there may be
too much multi-family zoning and development. In some respects, the multi-family
development that took place out there didn’t really live up to our hopes and
expectations. And part of it is that we are victimized sometimes by national policy
that drove the investors toward that area during a era when people were investing in
apartments not to own them for pride or cash flow, but for tax write off purposes.
For me that is a lousy reason for people to own low income property. But at any rate, we went through an era of opening ourselves to apartment development. We have seen a fantastic market develop for condominiums, as peoples lifestyles have changed. As couples become "empty nesters" and say, "I don't need the four bedroom house anymore, I want to free myself up to play golf, or sail, and do other things." It was just a fantastic growth of the condominium as a lifestyle alternative. That opened up houses. I think that housing is the biggest crunch that comes with industrial growth. And the biggest challenge we are facing. We have gotten aggressive in rental inspection programs. We have financial assistance for both renters and home-owners to assist in repairing homes.

We see some areas of the central city in the community growing more and more and more fragile in terms of maintaining the quality or an image that people feel secure in and willing to invest in. And have taken initiatives with a program like Our Street, which puts inspectors and community based police officers on bicycles right down on the road. It just says that we are not going to let a neighborhood tumble over the edge, where people start writing it off. I think that housing has been the biggest challenge from a governmental standpoint as a byproduct of industrial growth.

Commercial has taking care of itself; in one respect, it is not traditionally an area that government has been involved in other than through zoning and making opportunities available. Traditionally in the exercise of zoning every government has over-zoned for commercial. We probably got enough commercial zoning to serve a city of 700,000 here. What that has allowed is things like the malls to come in. That
certainly was a major challenge for downtown in 1988, when the mall opened up and took the traditional downtown anchor stores: the Sears, the Pennies, the Steketees out of downtown Holland and put them in a mall. We've had to cope with that, but again through the investment of mostly private industrialists in the community, and most obviously the legacy of Ed Prince's investment down there it happened. I think we are really well positioned with a downtown area that has found its place and will continue to prosper for years to come.

TLB: You've covered some of these already, but can you think of some other qualities that seem to stand out in the city of Holland?

DW: From time to time, I suppose with all of us this is a bugaboo, but I like the "churchiness" of the community, although "churchiness" is not the best word. I like the abundance of churches and the commitment of people to them. I think it bespeaks a people who are for the most part well-grounded in a fundamental place in life and a relationship to their Creator, to their community, resources, and each other. It sometimes fails in all of us between the theory and the practice. I think that is a good quality about our community. I would rather live in a community with a lot of churches, and a lot of "churchy" people, than a community that is lacking that.

Our natural resources, I haven't said a lot about that. We are kind of blessed just by our geographic position. If you like big cities, and I do, I don't want to live there, but they are fun to visit. Three hours in either direction you can be in either Detroit or Chicago. Three hours in the evening you can be back here on the shores of Lake Michigan bordered by sand dunes. If you like the North Country you can
head up in the other direction and be in state forest and north woods. About the time you get north of Muskegon you begin to smell the "piney" smell in the air and start thinking about a piece of pie at the "Cherry Hut," or something like that. If it you got to be somewhere in life, geographically this is not a bad place to be.

TLB: Right. Back to the church, how do you think the church influences the city? Why is the church so connected to the city and what does it do?

DW: The Church you know, it isn't the church anymore. At one time there may have been a very strong influence of the Reformed tradition here, and it still is dominate. Early on someone told me that one Dutchman is a Christian, two are Congregation, and three are a Schism. You had for many years even within the Reformed tradition the separation between Reformed and the Christian Reformed. I think that in the current state of affairs churches of all denominations have developed a sense of social awareness and a sense that their mission is not just to somebody with a Turban in the subcontinent of Africa. Rather their mission is to the community itself. I see it in our own church in their current effort to sponsor a homeless family. A decade ago it was sponsoring a Yugoslavian immigrant family to the community. I see it in some of the used clothing stores around here. The Catholic Church has the Saint Paul Society; Bibles for Mexico is good. I see the church work in the community in recent years with this kind of sense that our place and our mission is to do things right in our own back yard.

I also like churches because I think that they are places of beauty. Some of the finest architecture in town has come about because of the churches. They are
places that have organs in them. They gather little kids for programs and activities. They sit, many of them, in our neighborhood, where if you look around our church there is a tot lot or something for the neighborhood itself to use and enjoy, parking lots where kids can skateboard. They make beautiful music and they get people together to sing. Those are all great things for a community.

TLB: How did the public react to changing of Holland to become more of an industrial city that occurred in the late 50s and 60s?

DW: Sometime gauging the public pulse is difficult; I think, enthusiastically. Industrial jobs for a lot of people meant for forty hours a week with a little bit of overtime. I am going to digress, but we interviewed a person for a street department job who is now a herdsman for a dairy farm here. One of the reasons why he wanted to come and work for the city was the stability of hours. He works six and a half days a week. He gets Sunday afternoons off. This is a dairy farm; cows don’t go on holidays. You get a little detached from that. This man described his lifestyle, working on a dairy farm, and it wasn’t his farm, it was somebody else’s.

Agricultural work is hard work. We became a community with a swelling middle class. We were not only making SlickCraft boats here in the community and Chris-Craft, more and more people in town were able to buy them and enjoy them. I think that there was a great swelling of middle class related well to our industrial prosperity. It has just kind of ridden a wave of appreciation for it.

TLB: One of my questions was, “What about Holland has helped industry?” That would be HEDCOR and the natural resources and stuff like that.
DW: Good utilities. Our police department is second to none. A good quality fire
department. Good equipment. Our street department. None of our departments are
over staffed, but the city, in support of departments like that, has never chintzed on
equipment. We operate our programs with good first class equipment. All of that is
part of the support package of the community for industrial growth.

TLB: What do you make of the increasing diversification of the Holland community? And
how do you think relations between cultures is changing in the Holland community?

DW: I think that diversification is a challenge. I am not overly optimistic about the ability
of people to cope with diversity. It will manage through some how. But even the
animosities of the world come between people that have lived near each other almost
elbow to elbow. You see this in the Middle East, with the tension between Jews and
Arabs, that goes back thousands of years. You see it in Ireland with people whose
heritage is identical, save for a difference in religion. I think that when a population
diversifies, there is an increasing risk for tension and polarization. What you do is
you work hard to overcome that and to get around that and to struggle against that.
One of the places where I fear that that can show up is in our school systems. I
know that everybody in the community probably doesn’t talk a lot about it, but I
know that it is a concern. People are moving out of Holland, into alternative districts
around here such as Saugatuck, such as Zeeland, such as the Hamilton district, to
avoid the Holland district or even more recently, perhaps the West Ottawa district.
Are the charter schools and the schools of choice going to show up in terms of
greater polarization of population? I think these are challenges and you respond to
them the best that you can. Society allows people, among other things, a great freedom of mobility, and you can’t control this. You can’t attack it from directions. We are the central city in this area. We have neighborhoods 80, 90, 100 years old and housing that is in vintage. When you see initiatives like people who want to create historic districts and take pride that there neighborhoods are 80, 90 years old, you support that and give them as much encouragement as possible. You do things within the school system. Perhaps, like looking at the Lincoln school now and trying to recreate it as not a neighborhood school, but a magnet school for arts or sciences. I think that the community, as we grow more diverse, will struggle with that and the realization that economic polarization along with racial can divide a community. So we need to try to fight against that economic stratification as well.

TLB: How does the Dutch heritage still play in the community today?

DW: One of the characteristics of the Dutch is that they are a people of great tolerance, historically so. My European history gets a little fuzzy, but during the days of the Inquisition which was during the late 1400s. As the Inquisition wound up driving the Jews out of Spain, many of them moved north and found refuge and tolerance among the Dutch. It may be tolerance to a fault. Even among the eyes of the European neighbors now, the Dutch tolerance for drugs, for prostitution, regulated, but in certain areas of major cities, their tolerance for a well regulated euthanasia are probably stretching the limits of tolerance even in this country. I think that there is that kind of openness about them, despite the fact that they can sometimes be a stubborn people. There is a greater ability to accept diversity. It isn’t genetic, but I
think that it is part of the cultural heritage, that the Dutch brought to the community here. And I think that a little bit of that still prevails.

TLB: Do you find any negative aspects to Holland or any drawbacks to living in Holland?

DW: It is kind of the flip side of the same coin that I find exciting. We celebrate the industrial growth, prosperity, and community. It also brings with it more people, escalating housing prices, more traffic congestion. Three days ago, we just had a record rain storm; people in the community on a fairly widespread basis suffered water damage to their homes. Most of is came into their basements, most of it in the central city areas. This is a by-product of more and more development out on the perimeters of the city with parking lots and roofs like this that shed the water and then it all drains off somewhere. Yeah, I like to see a growing community, your are glad for the prosperity that it has brought many of us, but by the same token you can’t help but sit back blissfully and say, "This isn’t the same town that it used to be."

Downtown is a very unique shopping area, but it is not the shopping heart of the city. You can’t by groceries there. If you find blue jeans there, they’re designer blue jeans. You don’t see the working class community walking in and buying there Carharts or their work uniforms there. If they do, they are out in the mall somewhere north of town. I think that growth is somewhat of a mixed bag. I like it, and it has been one of the reasons I have had a job and have had exciting things to do, it is also one of the things about the community that you say, "Wait a minute, how fast can we keep growing? Do we want to keep growing? And what are all the
by-products that we have to continue with as a result of the growth?"

TLB: Have you noticed a change in the problems that affect the citizens of Holland? Are there any problems that affect the citizens of Holland?

DW: The ones we just mentioned: traffic, and drainage. We have just been through an examination of air quality here. There is some suspicion that our air quality failed the mid-EPA standards. Then we started pointing our finger at Milwaukee and Chicago, saying that it is not really our fault, it is the quality of the air that blows at us from major industrial areas downwind or upwind from us. At any rate, these are things that suggest that maybe we are not as pristine as we would like to be. The quality of our water is an ongoing issue. We just had another group convene through our regional planning agency. The MAC Regional Planning Agency brought together several people yesterday to talk about a new initiative to clean up our water. Those are environmental.

I think that the one social issue that our society, in general, is suffering from and certainly Holland is no exception, is the kind of liberation of our youth to run rampant or to run amuck. We've got kids now who now have spendable money. They have been exposed to drugs. I am of an age where your exposure to the sins and evils of the world in grade school were cuss words, or maybe a Playboy magazine. Today we've got kids who are exposed to much harsher violent influences to their life in the way of drugs, in the way of child abuse. It is just incomprehensible what we see of kids being abused or unguided. One of the things that we are dealing with in the community, I think as well as can be expected is the
tendency for kids to migrate towards gangs and engage in gang type of activity. This becomes a threat to people, to the community as a whole. It isn’t unique to us and I don’t know where you would go to get rid of it. At one time you would have said it is simply Chicago or Detroit problem, and you get away from it by going to Holland, Michigan. I don’t know, today, if they say you go to Cadillac, or Traverse City, or Petoskey, or is it in-fact infiltrating those areas as well.

TLB: Yes, we just had somebody come up to Cadillac to talk about gangs, because it is becoming a small problem in Cadillac. But it is there. I don’t think that you can. You just have to target it. Can you tell me what you have heard others say of Holland, such as family from out of town, or friends?

DW: Of course, you hear what you want to in life. What happens when people visit Holland, you first of all try to show them our best. There is one of amazement and astonishment, especially if they knew of the community thirty or forty years ago. I have seen it in my own father growing up in this area. He is retired now in South Bend. In the years that he has come up here every now and then we would get in cars and ride around areas like this. The astonishment of the quality and diversity of the industrial and commercial tax base here.

We do this on Mayors Exchange Days. We do this with visiting people; we put them on the bus. I remember about three years ago, the Michigan Association of Planning Officials tried to sponsor a Planners Exchange Day. Already the Michigan Municipal League has a long standing Mayor’s Exchange Program. We exchange Mayors and a few dignitaries over the years with other communities. The Planners
Exchange may still be going on, or it may have died. We participated in it a couple of years. One year we exchanged with Albion and that was kind of depressing. Albion at one time was a large foundry city, very prosperous, but the foundries were declining. Albion College sits about in relation to downtown, a few blocks away in relation as Hope does to downtown Holland, yet the closest we got to the College when touring Albion was riding two blocks away from it on the bus with somebody pointing to it and saying that the College is over there. That would have been one of the first things that we would show people as we tried to showcase the Holland Community. From City Hall, we have downtown, and then Hope College. Muskegon had the same reaction when somebody on a Dial-Ride bus ride through our town asked us to take them to our slums. Of course, Muskegon was dealing with that and has had slums and slum neighborhoods to deal with. So we took them and pointed out a block off Pine Avenue, I won’t say which street, they all kind of snickered and said that we didn’t understand what a slum was. I think that the general reaction of people here, both by its geographical location and by the community we have built collectively we are a very remarkable and attractive place.

TLB: Definitely. Can you explain a major turning point that the community has seen?

DW: A few. I am going to get redundant here. I think that the development, probably in the early 1960s, the creation of HEDCOR, and the development of industrial parks was a major turning point for the city and the very beginning of this type of growth and prosperity. It was a turning point. Any body looking for an industry could have bought farm land, it was a turning point in that it was an initiative from the business
community that said we needed to become leaders in accommodating future growth and development in the city. I would pick that as a very definite one.

Another one, I think, that it was significant for the area and this is a little more subtle. I may get the date confused, but I would peg it in the late 1960s or early 1970s, there was a federal environmental opportunity. It was the Federal 201 Sanitary Sewer Program. At that time, the city of Holland had a waste water treatment plant, where it is now, that served only the city residents. Everything north of the bridge in Holland and Park townships, was sitting on septic tanks. The federal government through a massive national program of grants aimed at the cleaning up of the environment made available a great deal of money to allow an expansion of waste water treatment plants. The mandate was that you had to be expanded on the basis of need without regard to political boundaries. I think that at that time it was a fairly extensive program of expanding the waste treatment plant and expanding the sanitary sewers. Our own city investment alone was about 30 million dollars, and the township as well. Holland township already had water by a purchase agreement with the city of Wyoming that ran through the township. Our own water treatment plant lies out in Park township, north of Tunnel Park. Because we had run a major pipeline down through Park township and had been with an agreement with the township to sell them and furnish them with water. Growing means fundamental utilities. The basic ones are obviously electric, sewer, and water. That program soon became available to areas north of town. And all of that made available meant rampant residential growth, growth of malls, growth of industrial parks out there. I
think that in terms of physical growth in the community and directions of growth, that was a subtle, but probably most significant things that happened. It also did what it was intended to do. For years during hot summer months, Lake Macatawa, because of all the septic tanks and septic run-off was often characterized by algae blooms. The lake looked like green carpet out there. One of the things that is evident since that sewer expansion is that we gotten people off septic tanks and on to a waste treatment program. That has helped clean up the lake.

The latest turning point in the city, which is a follow up to the growth on the north side, was the decision by a major mall developer to locate. Holland is what you call a secondary market. For years we had the Woodland Mall over in Grand Rapids, and people would go over there to shop. You would do your back to school shopping at big malls and then come back to Holland. There came a point when mall developers said, "Golly, there is enough money in Grand Rapids to support Woodland Mall. We can build a mall in Holland, and capture that expenditure right there."

These aren't homegrown malls. They are big investments. They are highly speculative. They take people connected with marketing to national players, like the Sears, and the Pennies' chains, to determine what they need in the terms of floor space. I think that the opening of the mall north of town in 1988 was a great turning point for the community in terms of shifting of the retail center and forcing the downtown into reexamining its place and re-finding its place in the merchandising community.

TLB: This is my last question and then I will give you a chance to add anything you want.
What do you see for Holland in the near future?

DW: In the near future?

TLB: Or in the wider future.

DW: I see a little bit of a leveling off. I think that we have pushed our resources to the point of straining many of them. Our school systems. Hope College has just gone through this process of examination. They have enjoyed the same kind of growth. When I came to Hope in 1966, I am probably wrong, but I would say that the enrollment was somewhere in the twelve to fifteen hundred range. They have added greatly to their physical plant over the years. The enrollment is now up to 2,900, or something like that. They have gone through the self examination, that asks whether we are going to keep growing or start leveling off. They are able to control their destiny better than a city is, because they simply can limit the number of enrolles they accept and control it that way. We can’t. We are one governmental unit among four or five in this area that says "yes" or "no" to industrial growth or expansion. Just the simple fact that our highways are congested, our roads are more and more congested, and our storm drain systems are labored. More and more people are commuting from distances to fill the jobs that are available here. Maybe it is wishful thinking, but I really hope and see for the future a little bit of a leveling off. We don’t quit growing, but we sit back and take a breather and try to catch up with some of what we have created here.

TLB: Is there anything that you want to add about either about your work, your life, or Holland?
DW: No, I look back and I kind of fell in to this. As a kid, I was uncertain of what I wanted to do in life. I've always envied those who had a vision from somewhere in high school and pursued it and succeeded and enjoyed it. I kind of stumbled into some things in life. Stumbled into several opportunities here. I started as an inspector and just about the time that I was burnt out as a housing inspector I had some opportunities to begin working with the Planning Commission. At the time, I kind of reached a limit of satisfaction with that, so that job merged with the City Engineering Office. Our department of Community Service is now with Planning, and Downtown Development Authority, the City Street Department, and Civil Engineering. It has just been a great opportunity to see a job in the community evolve. I have been very grateful for that. I look back and see that it was a real privilege for somebody misguided early on to be able to work thirty wonderful years for the city. I look forward to retiring and except for a few of those winter months when I really may want to get out of here like a snowbird, I just plan on staying right here.

TLB: Okay, thank you. There is one additional question I will ask you if you want to comment on it you can or not. Concentrating on Holland, how do you think the role of women has changed?

DW: Holland is probably as good a place in the world as you could concentrate on to ask about the role of women. I think that for better or for worse, the kind of Dutch and Calvinistic tradition kept women in a certain perspective, out of the pulpits and into the kitchens of the community. I am glad to see that kind of image delineation
fractured. I am pleased to say that in our own congregation, the Presbyterian Church, that barrier was long ago broken. Just recently we are seeing this in the Christian Reformed Churches. I think that has had implications of segregation of roles in the church that have carried over into the home. I think that that has had a kind of a prevailing delineation of roles historically in the community. It is diminishing. Obviously if you go back to institutions like Hope, some of my fondest memories of professors were women professors. Those barriers did not exist throughout the community entirely. As a society, there has been a change and it has happened here too. Women probably didn’t have much of a place in the working world, other than as school teachers or as secretaries, until World War II. At this time they came into industry and got into war time production and manufacturing. I am particularly delighted to see the kind of church grown attitude about segregation of roles finally crumble. It is a delight.

TLB:  Okay, that is it. Thank you very much.

DW:  You are welcome.