Spring 1990

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Photographic Heritage

Do you remember the gas station pictured on the reverse of the Quarterly? Or this earlier marquee on the Holland Theatre? These are two of the pictures that come from the Ernest Penna collection of negatives housed at the Joint Archives. This collection of photographs represent a cross section of what Holland was like in the 1940s and 50s including quite a few aerial shots of Holland.

We are constantly looking for more images to add to our collection of photographs. Photos are a rich resource and are often used to identify old structures and locations and how they looked in times gone by. Architects visited the Archives before working on the renovation of several downtown structures including the Knickerbocker Theater above, to get a feel for how the building used to look. Currently a movie studio in Los Angeles is using photos for an upcoming television presentation involving Holland's Medal of Honor recipients. Still others are helping the city produce a video which focuses on the history of Holland.

In future issues - as in past ones - we will print some of our pictures for you to see. If you find some in your collection of photographs that you would like preserved at the Archives for future generations please give us a call at 394-7798. We are particularly interested in photos of locations in the Holland area.

Fading Memories

Part 2 of preserving your heirlooms

The Traverse City area recently ended a two year project which was focused on how to preserve your treasured family heirlooms. These might include the diary of your grandfather, photos of a great uncle or the ribbon your mother treasured from her graduation. It is my hope in the next few months to make available a workshop for those who might be interested in how to better store their family treasures.

In the last issue of the Quarterly we highlighted several suggestions to prevent deterioration in your family photographs by avoiding greasy (continued page 3)
From the Archivist

Since our last issue many of you have been asking me questions regarding preservation of materials in your home in response to the article in the last Quarterly which discussed proper albums for storage of photographs. In response to your questions I have included in this issue two additional articles on preservation. I have outlined some steps on where to store your heirlooms. Also there is a discussion of audio and video tape and its inherent instability. I hope you find these helpful.

In our continuing efforts to make the collections easier to use we have added a public computer terminal to our reading room for searching our Guide. Any staff member will be happy to show you how to use it.

Finally, I would like to bring to your attention the article asking for your support of our program. If you feel that we are providing a valuable service in our preservation work and would like to share in our goals we would deeply appreciate your financial help in further enhancing the preservation of heritage.

Larry J. Wagenaar

Former U.S. Archivist visits Joint Archives

On March 30 the Joint Archives held its Spring Speaker Program which featured a lecture on the status of archives in America by Robert M. Warner. Warner, who served as Archivist of the United States from 1980-1985, provided a unique look into the work of archival facilities on a local, regional and national scale.

Those present heard Warner speak of some of the challenges he faced while in Washington and a number of humorous anecdotes. In addition to what archives save he also mentioned the mountain of records the National Archives does not save and what becomes of it. It is possible your tax form from 1982 is now a part of the roof shingles on your home!

The former national archivist also encouraged the Joint Archives in its efforts mentioning that the Holland operation was a definite success and served as a model for other archives to follow.

Warner's remarks were followed by a reception in the Archive's reading room and then the Joint Archives Council hosted a dinner in his honor.

Historical Society

The Holland Area Historical Society will hold its June meeting on the shores of Lake Michigan in Macatawa Park. The meeting will be held at the Owl's Nest nestled on Lake Michigan behind Point West Tuesday, June 5.

The Social will begin at 7 pm with a talk by Richard Den Uyl and Donald van Reken who will describe the area's history. A brief walking tour will follow.

The public is encouraged to attend this event which is $3 for Society members and $4 for nonmembers. Call the Society secretary, Larry Wagenaar, at the Joint Archives of Holland to reserve a spot (394-7798). Mark your calendar for this opportunity to see and hear more about historic Macatawa Park.
plastics and sticky photo albums. Several other measures may also help to preserve them.

The biggest hazard is the location where your photos (or other treasured items) are stored. Possibly the worst places for this are the most common storage places for such items - the attic or the basement.

Exposure to excessive heat, cold, dampness or to sunlight seriously affects photographs and documents and accelerates their deterioration. Most of us have let a photo sit in an area near a window and watched it fade and change colors over the period of a few years. Exposure such as this can cause serious, irreversible damage. Storage in an area of excessive heat will dry out emulsions and papers and cause them to crack. Dampness will create a climate where photos will stick together or, if wet enough, will wrinkle. In all of these cases photographs are most often irreversibly damaged. Avoid attics, basements, areas near a fireplace or near a furnace.

With all of this doom in mind it should be noted that many photographs are stored well in adequate areas of the home and are not exposed to too many hazards. If you follow a few simple steps you will be able to ensure that your family treasures will not end up with mold and mildew and sent to the landfill. In the summer issue the Archives staff will address in what kind of container you should store these items. If you have a preservation question for which you would like an answer right away please call us at 394-7798.

Would you help?

The Archives operates with funding from the three member institutions that sponsor it. Each is non-profit and depends on the generosity of donors to help them in their operations and by nature the funds available from them for historical preservation are limited. In our work we have been in the position of seeing many needs for the preservation of our heritage that we are unable to fulfill due to very limited funds and the first obligation we have to provide historical reference service - the primary function of the Joint Archives.

We are asking you to consider a gift so that we can expand our collections and work on the preservation of new materials. We also have several equipment needs at the Archives.

Preservation is one of our first collection priorities. The Archives has been working on preservation of our photographic collections which includes placing each in a protective plastic sleeve and making sure they are stored in an acid-free environment. The Archives needs to continue this effort and purchase a large volume of these protective sleeves.

The Joint Archives is also continuing its efforts to microfilm our deteriorating newspapers. We have raised $3,000 of the needed $12,000.

Other needs are in the community for education and outreach to uncover the materials which should be preserved at the Archives and assist you in saving your own heirlooms.

The Archives also is in need of several pieces of equipment including a typewriter, camera and computer items.

Finally, as the Archives expands its services we have found a need to increase our book collection on our history.

Would you consider supporting our efforts with a gift to the Joint Archives? Your aid will help to insure preservation of our shared heritage.
The Joint Archives Quarterly

Willard Wichers Papers
Donated

One of the most significant gifts donated to the Joint Archives of Holland has been the papers of Willard C. Wichers. Comprising more than 150 cubic feet of material, his papers include materials on nearly every aspect of Holland and western Michigan history since 1930.

Willard Wichers was born in Zeeland and graduated from Zeeland High School and later Hope College. While at Hope he was primarily in charge of the alumni number of the college Milestone which was an oversize volume detailing all the school's alumni through 1930. Following this he was in charge of a historical survey of historical records for all of western Michigan. In 1937 he founded the Netherlands Museum and later the Netherlands Information Service.

Throughout his career Wichers served on a multitude of committees and commissions including the Michigan Historical Commission. He was heavily involved in the 1947 centennial of the founding of Holland, Royal visits, bringing the windmill from the Netherlands to Windmill Island and preservation of Holland's lighthouse better known as "Big Red."

A Day in the Life of the RCA

The Joint Archives of Holland is currently involved in collecting a copy of Easter Sunday sermons from each pastor in the Reformed Church in America. These sermons will give insight into how ministers in the RCA deal with the various themes in the Easter season and will become part of the Western Seminary Collection at the Joint Archives.

So far over 160 sermons have been returned to the Archives in various media including transcripts, audio and video tape. Each has been cataloged and the entire collection will be open to researchers beginning in September. Several churches have also contributed anniversary booklets for the Archive's church files.

We anticipate that this collection will enrich future generations of the church to understand the Easter message in 1990.

RCA pastors who have not yet forwarded a copy of their Easter 1990 sermon are encouraged to do so. The can be sent to The Joint Archives of Holland, Hope College Campus, Holland, MI 49423.
Your Tape Won't Play?

Did you record your family on videotape? Have a cassette recording of your child's first words? We have focused already on the hazards of improper storage techniques which can cause any item to deteriorate more rapidly, like a car rusting outside in the rain rather than in your garage. But sound and video recordings are different. Not only is their deterioration speeded up by poor storage, they self destruct on their own!

At a recent meeting of professional archivists we discussed the problem of audio and video materials which have become a part of our various collections across the country. Throughout the field we are finding that our tapes are slowly becoming unplayable; they snap, stretch, sometimes even seem to melt right before our eyes.

What I found out was very disturbing and has prompted me to implement new measures at the Joint Archives to preserve our magnetic heritage. The tape which we use on a daily basis is made of a backing which is most often polyester. A binder is applied with magnetic particles which actually record the impulses that store the music signal.

Experts say that random failure of tape begins as it reaches 20 years of age. The maximum temperature that tape should be stored at is 70 degrees with no more than 50% humidity. It has been found that deterioration doubles for every 15 degrees above the maximum safe temperature. This is why the tapes stored in your car fail so quickly.

Cassette tapes, so common in everyday life, are not considered archival but they show up more and more in our archives and are used almost exclusively in the home. When using these avoid tapes longer than 90 minutes in length, purchase high quality tape (avoid the 3 for $1.00 specials) and buy cartridges with metal screws so that if the tape jams it can be disassembled and spliced. If a tape is spliced make sure it is duplicated immediately.

Those who deal exclusively with sound recordings in the archival and museum field point out that a tape should be periodically rewound at play speed. As a tape ages avoid the fast forward and rewind as this will cause numerous problems with the tape. After it is 20-25 years old consider duplicating it onto a new cassette or reel. Self destruction of audio and video tape cannot be stopped it can only be slowed down.

Remember: store your tape away from heat above 70 and in a dry place, when playing older tapes do not use the fast forward or rewind (use play speed) and after a tape exceeds 20-25 years of age consider having it duplicated onto fresh tape.

Summer Hours

Monday - Friday
1:00 - 4:30

Summer Staff

Reba O'Shesky is the summer intern at the Joint Archives. She has been working part time at the Archives since the fall of 1988. Her work will include a revamping of some often used vertical files, assisting in the production of a supplement to the Guide to the Collections and processing of new collections.

Joe O'Grady is working part time in the Archives and assisting with collection needs. Joe is also working on an oral history project of the history of the Hispanic community in Holland.
The Joint Archives of Holland
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