Van Voorst, Cornelia Oral History Interview: Local Business Persons

Abby Jewett

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HOPE COLLEGE LIVING HERITAGE ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

1982

CORNELIA VAN VOORST

INTERVIEW
The Hope College Oral History Project was designed to record and transcribe for permanent collection the living heritage of Holland, Michigan. Since the project's birth in 1977, Hope student researchers have interviewed people with various perspectives on Holland's history. Past projects have included:

- Former Hope Faculty Members & Personnel - 1977 - Nancy Swinyard
- Past Executives of the Reformed Church - 1978-1979 - Conrad & Derk Strauch
- Important Women of Holland, Michigan - 1980 - Carol Bechtel
- Links Between Hope College and Western Theological Seminary - 1981 - Carol Bechtel
- The History of Holland Business - 1982 - Abby Jewett

The persons interviewed represent a vital, but non-renewable resource, whose reflections will provide primary material for future historical research.

Upon the completion of each interview session, the taped conversation was transcribed and edited by both the interviewer and the interviewee. Some alterations concerning accuracy of detail may have been suggested by the interviewer during the editing process, but at all times the viewpoint of the interviewee has been maintained. If the researcher should discover discrepancies between the interviews and published materials, it must be remembered that some divergence may be expected due to the highly personalized perspective of the interview. No claim is made that the information contained within these transcripts is absolutely accurate. No two people share identical viewpoints, and the interval of time between the interviewee's experiences and the events mentioned can sometimes intensify this divergence. Tapes of all the interviews are stored in the Hope College Archives in Van Zoeren Library.

Without the support of Dr. Jacob E. Nyenhuis, Dean of the Humanities and the Fine Arts, and Mr. William K. Anderson, Vice President of Business and Finance, this project would not have become a reality. Dr. Elton Bruins has given generously of his time and expertise as the advisor to the student interviewers. Finally, the success of this project must be attributed to the efforts of the interviewees - each gracious, receptive, and cooperative.
CONTENTS

Forward ................................................................. iii
Contents ................................................................. iv
Introduction ............................................................... v
Biographical Sketch ..................................................... vi
Interview of June 7, 1982 ........................................ 1-31
Index ................................................................. 32-33
INTRODUCTION

Cornelia Van Voorst, known as "Cornie" to her friends here in Holland, has had a successful career as a reporter for the Holland Sentinel for many years. In fact, in her career with the Sentinel, she has gained a knowledge of Holland that encompasses 99 years of the town's history. She was born, and continues to live in a house located on East Sixteenth Street. A popular Holland native, Cornie is loved and respected by many. Everyone seems to have a kind word to say about her, and she is not only known by the people of Holland, but she also is respected by those who have "made it big" outside of this western Michigan town. She receives correspondence regularly from Congressman Guy Vander Jagt, as well as receiving Christmas cards annually from such notables as Gerald Ford, and Robert Griffin.

The city of Holland gave her a great deal of recognition upon her retirement from the Sentinel. Even though retired, she still lives an active life around this town.

Friendly, as well as honest and humble, Cornie has a jolly sense of humour, and seems to get a real "kick" out of life. She has been an observer of many of the big events within the Holland community, and has many interesting tales about the people of Holland. I felt immediately at ease the minute I met her, and we conducted the interview at her home, over tea and cookies. The interview gives a personal account of some big events of Holland, and includes stories about everything from Holland business to Ronald Reagan!
Name: Miss Cornelia (Cornie) Van Voorst

Birthplace: Holland, Michigan: 1914

Education: Elementary- Lincoln Elementary School
            High School- Holland High School

Professional Experience: 99 years in the newsroom of the Holland Sentinel
                        (Well, over 40)

Parent's Names and Occupations:
   Father: Fred Van Voorst - Cement block manufacturer (died 1935)
   Mother: Elizabeth Ver Plank - New Groningen near Zeeland (birthplace)
           (died 1931)

Professional and Community Experience--activities, special assignments...
   Started out at the Sentinel, proofreading, writing social notes, and
   obituaries and gradually branched out into other fields covering all kinds
   of news except sports (and I did cover one football game). Forged ahead
   mainly by not making the same mistake twice, pulling myself up by my own
   bootstraps, yet mindful that one must not worship the college degree, or
   the self-made man. Just get the job done.

Affiliations:
   Since my personal interests have been mainly music and drama, I worked
   with such groups as the Concert Association, Council for the Arts, and
   Historical Commission. I edited the Tulip Time Editions for over 25 years.

Honors:
   Retirement from the newspaper business in 1978 brought a flurry of
   attention but not the sort of things like professional honors. Hope College
   gave me a Distinguished Service Award, and better yet, life passes to
   their theatrical series. Great gift!

Present Activities:
   After surviving duodenal ulcers, pesky allergies, a stroke, a heart
   attack with a pacemaker, and most recently, diabetes, I live quietly
   and manage to get a few laughs out of life.

Thank you for your cooperation,

Abby Jewett
Interview with
Cornelia Van Voorst
at
271 East Sixteenth Street
Holland, Michigan
on
June 7, 1982
with
Abby Jewett
This is an interview with Miss Cornelia Van Voorst, a reporter for the Holland Sentinel.

ABBY JEWETT: Miss Van Voorst, I'd like to begin by asking you about your background.

CORNELIA VAN VOORST: Call me Cornie.

JEWETT: Okay, Cornie. I know you grew up in this house, and you worked for the Sentinel, so if you'd like to give a little overview of your background.

VAN VOORST: Well, of course I was born here in 1914, and then I graduated from Holland High School in 1932, which you recognize as about the depths of the depression. My mother had died, and my dad died a few years later, so going on to higher education was completely out of the question. Anyway, in 1935, I started working for the Holland Evening Sentinel, and that's long before the days of job descriptions or anything like that, you worked and you did everything! There was proofreading, and writing society notes, answering the phone, and writing obituaries, and bit by bit I mastered quite a few things. In going over it, I would say, that if you would call it success, I guess I got there by trying not to make the same mistake twice! (laughter) And there's a million things you learn in a newspaper office! Incidentally, newspaper work, that is the newsroom, is, well, I would say that you have to work twice as hard as at any other job, but you have four times as much fun!

Now in the present stage of investigative journalism they don't have the fun that we used to have. We used to all work together and try to make this a good town. Now, they have to probe into everything. And, one of my old city editors used to say, "Don't spoil a good story with the truth." It was a joke
then, but sometimes I think that today's investigative journalism will go off entirely on one side, and then hope that the other side comes up and makes it equally sensational, and that never balances out. I used to cancel more good stories by trying to get both sides and that would neutralize it!

JEWETT: What do you think, for example, of the Washington Post, and what they've done with investigative journalism?

VAN VOORST: Well, we live in a changing world, and whatever I might think of it today wouldn't count anyway. But in the earlier years, the Washington Post, the New York Times were very...

JEWETT: They're very much into investigative journalism.

VAN VOORST: Well, they started the whole thing.

JEWETT: Yes, with Bob Woodward...

VAN VOORST: Sometimes I could kick Bernstein and Woodward from here to there, because it spread everywhere, and not always for good purposes.

JEWETT: Yes, that's true.

VAN VOORST: Holland just isn't large enough for a good scandal every week!

JEWETT: (laughter) Just can't find them, huh?

VAN VOORST: (laughter) No.

JEWETT: Really, it seems like that's what they want.

VAN VOORST: The business of making something out of nothing, I think, is really quite dangerous. But, that's what's doing all the time.

JEWETT: Yes, that's not always good. So what did you cover on the Sentinel?

VAN VOORST: Well, you started out like I said--proofreading, writing certain society items, and answering the phone and taking care of this and that, and writing obituaries. I left the newspaper in 1942 to work for the War Price and Rationing Board. I was gone less than a year, and I came back. I was very glad to reenter the newspaper again. And then, I became a "beat" reporter
on the news. I covered city hall, the school board, the elections, the police beat... just about everything. Of course, the Sentinel had only a small staff at that time. Now, there are so many people, I don't even know them any more. And many are out trying to deduce their own thing on investigative journalism.

JEWETT: How big was the Sentinel staff, when you first started?

VAN VOORST: Ha, three and a half people!

JEWETT: (laughter) Three and a half?

VAN VOORST: One person working half days.

JEWETT: Oh, I see.

VAN VOORST: And that was the staff. A city editor, a reporter, myself, who did proofreading, and answering the phone, and one girl who worked half days. Gradually it grew, and about five or six years ago the Sentinel was sold to Stauffer Communications, and everything is changed now. They've got a huge staff, all of them doing writing. But they all want to go in for the "thought" pieces.

I used to say there's two kinds of news--one that happens, like automobile accidents, or...

JEWETT: Van Raalte fires...

VAN VOORST: Fires, horrible things. And the other kind is what you make happen, like your city council, your operations at city hall, and on the school board. Everybody works at the stuff that happens by itself, because it makes much better news as front page stuff. The news you make happen, the programs, the planning--that's the every day work, that's what life is all about. Then the events that just happen, well you take it in stride.

JEWETT: Interesting. Which did you like covering better? What you had to make happen, or the other?

VAN VOORST: Well, you have no control over that. Now, Tulip Time, for instance,
is a huge success. And that is something you make happen. But it is so big, you have to plant the tulips, you have to plan the programs, you have to "beef" up the police department, so that you have traffic control. And there's a thorough involvement of the whole town. That is, of course, something you make happen, but it has been highly, almost wildly, successful.

JEWETT: Yes, so it's kind of both in one.

VAN VOORST: Did you get a chance to Klompen dance?

JEWETT: No, no, I never did.

VAN VOORST: Well, that's something for the Holland girls.

JEWETT: Yes, you have to be a high school girl, I guess.

VAN VOORST: Ah, not necessarily. We've got four high schools in it now, and a few years back we had some brave boys who decided they would Klompen dance too. The first year, this was about six, oh, seven years ago, we had three boys. And one time we had five boys. This year we had one boy. But I think that boys sometimes don't take as easily to discipline as girls do. In order to Klompen dance, the students have to have their grades up, and they need their costumes. And, they're very particular, everything's got to be authentic. There are practice sessions, and if you are a Klompen dancer, it means you can't get one of those part time jobs that pay.

JEWETT: Yes, that's true.

VAN VOORST: So, when we talk about twelve hundred Klompen dancers, it means that there is a tremendous sacrifice that goes on with it. And yet, when everything is said and done, I think that the girls who were Klompen dancers look back to that as a real highlight of their high school days.

JEWETT: Yes, they do. I had a roommate that was a Klompen dancer, and she just loved it. She also did the alumni dancing.

VAN VOORST: Well, we have some alumni grandmothers who have granddaughters dancing in the high school groups now.
JEWETT: Oh, wow!

VAN VOORST: That's how it takes on. Of course, that's always good for a feature.

JEWETT: I suppose that's true. (laughter) Well, what we're looking into this summer in the Hope College Oral History Project is the history of Holland business. I don't know exactly where to begin, since I'm sure you've got a lot of information on it. Maybe we could start back with the depression. When you first started with the Sentinel, what was the Holland business community like? What was Holland like during the depression?

VAN VOORST: Well, it was a small town, trying to hold body and soul together like all the other small towns during the depression. I think, as far as early businesses are concerned, that the Holland Furnace Company is THE company that mattered in Holland's early industrial life. I don't know if you were aware, but, we used to have a Bush & Lane Piano Company, too. The Baker Furniture Company on 24th Street and Columbia now occupies the Bush & Lane Piano Company. In fact, there was a grand piano from Bush & Lane in Hope Memorial Chapel in the early days. It wasn't a very good concert instrument, and some of our visiting artists didn't say very kind things about it! But in time, we got better pianos. They went out of business in the mid-twenties, I would say.

And THEN, the depression! I don't think that, oh, you're so young, you couldn't possibly understand it. And I was growing up in that time, and wasn't so aware of it either.

But, the Chamber of Commerce got the Baker Furniture Company to move here from Allegan, and I don't think Allegan ever forgave us for it!! And...it hit Allegan hard. I think that Baker Furniture had three different buildings in isolated places, so here they could move everything under one roof, so that was a good deal. And Baker Furniture Company is the king, you know.

JEWETT: Yes!
VAN VOORST: If you've got the price, fine.

JEWETT: Really, they have some gorgeous furniture!

VAN VOORST: Then, in the mid-thirties, as they were pulling out of the depression, we got a brand new industry called, "Holland Precision Parts". In time they changed the name to "Bohn Aluminum Plant Number 11". Bohn Aluminum is based in Detroit, and they have factories all over. They produce bearings. And, I think they produced quite a few things for the war effort. This was a big help to Holland industry, although metal working is, well,...a dirty job. There's always oil, and shavings around. But, the Holland people generally were good at crafts. Yet, they were furniture makers, and cabinet makers. They made bedroom furniture, and tables and dining rooms and things like that. And so then they had to change to metal working. Which they did quite well.

And then in the forties, there was a NASTY strike there. And, here I was a "green" reporter, trying to cope with a strike that had far ranging results. Well, I ran into a break because one of the strikers, one of the spokesmen, used to work for my father. So, I was in on that. And so it got, in time, that I could get along better with the strikers than with the management! (laughter)

JEWETT: Really?

VAN VOORST: Of course that's not strange because management has to be very careful. Strikers, even in a school strike...strike breakers can say anything. And the Board of Education, well, anything they say can be used against them. So, the management just has to be more careful. More tea?

JEWETT: Yes, maybe I will. Thanks. So, what was the strike like?

VAN VOORST: Nasty.

JEWETT: Very nasty, huh?

VAN VOORST: It ran for about 124 days. And I amassed a folder on it of all
that information. I've even got a wire in there from Walter Reuther.

JEWETT: Oh, your kidding!

VAN VOORST: The sad thing about that strike was that, six months after they got back to work, the plant went out of production. And, everybody was without a job. And those people who were strikers in the forefront, couldn't get another job in Holland. Well, that's tough.

JEWETT: Yes, it is.

VAN VOORST: It's understandable. Then, the company was completely reorganized and it came back into production again. But entirely all new. One time there was a minor fire there, and I was out there talking to some of the boys. One of the men called me afterwards and said, "There is nobody working here who knows anything about the early days of this factory. Do you have anything?" And I said, "Well, that was before my time on the newspaper, but I do have a fancy file here on the 1947 strike! And if you'd like to look at that, you may." OOh, that was fine. Well, in due time it was returned to me, with a very elaborate thank you. That was in the days when they started having copying machines? And I have a feeling that every clipping was reproduced, and now a part of the file, which is all right.

That nasty strike lasted about 124 or 129 days, which up to then was the longest strike in the whole country. Now, since then, the plumbing business in Wisconsin, I think, had a strike that went on for three years.

We had an interesting deal. Now I don't know if I have this story exactly straight, because there are probably many versions of it, but you've probably heard once of the "sit-down" strike in the GM plant in Flint?

JEWETT: Yes.

VAN VOORST: This was way back, in the late thirties. And, the Governor called out the National Guard. Now, you don't call out the Flint National Guard to deal with a Flint strike. You call them out from Holland. And, I
won't mention any names, but the colonel was a Holland man, and this was pretty tough. You know, here were these people who had taken over the plant, and just sat there. How do you get them out? Well, this was the Roosevelt administration, and he had Fanny Perkins for his Secretary of Labor? And of course, this was all that, well,...shall we say, "liberal" stuff that Holland hadn't ever run into before. So, Fanny Perkins would call over from Washington and they'd say, "Oh, the colonel isn't here." And, one time there was a smart young man from the labor department who was telling them what they ought to do, and they kind of shoved him into a closet overnight. Only that story never got published. (laughter)

JEWETT: What was this? Some guy from the labor department...?

VAN VOORST: Well, some man from the labor department who was causing troubles for them, well they just put him in a closet, and forgot about him!! Let him out the next day!!

JEWETT: Are you kidding?

VAN VOORST: It was in Flint.

JEWETT: That's funny!

VAN VOORST: But, you never know what the ramifications are of mentioning names. Now, I had associations with the UPI manager in Grand Rapids. And he was working one of those strikes once. I don't know if this was Detroit, or Flint, or where. But the automobile company didn't like the way he covered some of the news. So, his name went on, what I call a "bitch" list. And then around 1948, you know, when the cars were coming through, but you had to wait a year and a half before you could get a car? Well, his name came up, and somebody recognized it and...WHAM! He didn't get a car for another year!

JEWETT: That's really something.

VAN VOORST: They play for keeps.
JEWETT: I guess. So what was the strike then all about? Was there just not enough pay?

VAN VOORST: Who knows? They always say it isn't the pay, but it's the money usually.

JEWETT: So, during the depression, was Holland really down?

VAN VOORST: Oh, yes.

JEWETT: Really affected?

VAN VOORST: Every place was.

JEWETT: Yes, I guess.

VAN VOORST: I think one of the brighter spots was the post-war era. I think it was early in the fifties when we got the Parke-Davis plant here. And that was nice. We started getting some national industry. And in 1955, GE came to town. And that was a real blessing. We were going through a period there where Heinz was the biggest factory. And this was before the modern days of an adequate pay scale. So, they were attracting...well, people from the South, from some of the islands, and Holland was not the nice place it used to be. We had a lot of...lesser people, that came for employment there at Heinz. And the people that came here to work at Heinz found that Michigan was quite liberal on welfare, and so they brought all their kinfolk up. And now there's a difference of opinion there, but I think perhaps the Latino population is 18-22%. But I have no basis for that.

Then, General Electric came to town. It was a Hermetic Motor Division, and they also brought their headquarters company, which at that time dumped seventy-five executive families on the city. Now these are people who've gone to college, who send their kids to college, who want the town...kept up.

JEWETT: Yes.

VAN VOORST: And so they added a great deal. I always bless GE for that.
Of course the plant is on 16th Street, and I live on 16th Street, and I knew that I would be paying a price for the traffic and everything. And, yes, in due time I came to know the right times to go in and out of my driveway. I've been eternally grateful that my father has arranged that we turn around in the back yard. Otherwise, backing out of the drive onto 16th Street—you'd have to wait 25 minutes.

JEWETT: (laughter) That would be hard.

VAN VOORST: But GE was a definite blessing to Holland. And then, of course, in due time, they got the employment up to over, say 1,200. And that was more than what Heinz and Holland Furnace Company ever had.

One of the greatest industrial blessings in this town was the development of the Holland Industrial Park. Have you driven around there to see all these plants?

JEWETT: Yes.

VAN VOORST: Well, that is a definite blessing. And Mr. John Van Dyke, Jr. was the chairman of HEDCOR. That's the Holland Economic Development Corporation. I think they started with about 500 acres, I'm not sure of that. But it adjoined the area there where General Electric is, and branched out, southward. And they set it up. They put in the railroad spurs, put in the water, and you've probably noticed the big water tank on 48th Street, and the fire department on 32nd Street. Well, all of these things almost had to rush a little bit. They needed the water there to get some pressure because that's the high part of town. And the water storage at this end is a bit lower. So they needed that. They needed new railroad spurs to service these plants and they needed roads. And, of course, the great advantage of newly developed industry is that they always build in their own parking lots. The businesses that started at the turn of the century, that was before the
automotive age, and they never planned that much property for parking. Well, anyway, Holland Economic Development Corporation succeeded,...so well, that when it was ten years old Mr. Van Dyke said it had gone beyond his greatest dreams. Then, of course, the biggest plant that they've developed there is the Lifesavers. That was Beech-Nut foods when they first came. Now there's a little interesting development there. You've probably heard something of the twelve year tax break?

JEWETT: Not too much.

VAN VOORST: Well, when you build a new plant, you see, there's always a temptation to go outside Michigan. So, Michigan set it up so that you could buy bonds and finance the building, and also only have to pay half the taxes for the first twelve years. Now they've been talking about this twelve year tax break without ever qualifying that you do pay half the taxes, and that's for keeping them here. So, if they didn't do it, you wouldn't get even that half of the tax, see? But, the newspapers never make that clear, and there's an awful lot of people in Holland who say, "I'm paying their taxes." It isn't right. It isn't so at all. But anyway, Beech-Nut got the city to underwrite their twelve million dollar tax bill, so I don't know how it works now... maybe it's all over with. But actually, if they didn't pay it, Holland would own the plant. So we were safe on that.

Well, they were going to promise that within six years, they would build another facility as large as the candy factory for baby food, because there's a lot of farm land around here. Well, then the pill came in! (Laughter) So they never expanded out there. So, I don't know what the situation is on who owns what. Later, the state of Michigan limited the bond business to one million dollars. Anyway, that was going a little bit like a house afire...asking the city to sign over their bonds. But, that's
under control now, I would think.

JEWETT: What about some of the native businesses? Have they added a lot to the Holland community?

VAN VOORST: Oh yes. Charlie Sligh was President of the National Association of Manufacturers.

JEWETT: Yes, I'm going to do an interview with him, also.

VAN VOORST: Well, his son is now in the same position. Charlie Sligh, the third or fourth?

JEWETT: Yes...third...I guess it is.

VAN VOORST: Well, anyway, there was a testimonial dinner back maybe 15 or 20 years, and Chuck was talking about the early days, when he was hiring executive people for about $15 a week! That's as low as the depression was! They also had a deal with the city. You see, all these plants were empty, and they were reverting to the city when they couldn't pay taxes. And so the city would try to place an industry in there and promise so much if the industry would hire a hundred people by a certain time. And that's the way Charlie Sligh started going. Now he was born to a wealthy family, but a lot of people lost their money, or didn't have nearly so much during those depression days. And, he was telling quite a story there on how they had to ride the depression, and I'm sure that story can be duplicated, many, many places. Oh boy! We may talk about recession now, but it "ain't nothin'" compared with the thirties! Except, I didn't know how bad it was at the time either, and shucks, nobody had any money anyway! (laughter)

JEWETT: I didn't know if the smaller towns would have been affected as much.

VAN VOORST: You better believe it! When I started work and got on the "beat"...this is in 1943, the Chamber of Commerce man took me on a tour of our industries, and I was amazed, because I thought that most of our industries
were just something that grew up here like all the other Holland people. I got into Precision Parts, now Bohn Aluminum, and I found out that as foundries went, this was the absolute lastest in the whole country. That was the development of the manufactured items where people didn't do it "this" way because this was the way they did it in Holland, they would get the expertise from all over the country, and then they would look for a place to build a factory, and Holland had something to offer.

And, of course, power and water are very, very important. Land you can usually find, but if you have to have the water and the power...power, they can do that over a wire on a pole, but water, boy, is that expensive. That's under the ground, which costs more.

JEWETT: So then, before these industrial companies came in, Holland was mainly furniture?

VAN VOORST: Yes.

JEWETT: And then, was Hart and Cooley one of the other types of companies that came in, too?

VAN VOORST: That came in I'd say, in the twenties. They manufactured furnace registers, and chains. And then of course, during the war, Fafnir Bearing Company moved in with Hart and Cooley. During the war, everything had to go to the war and Holland Furnace Company made anchor chains. And, Bohn Aluminum was turning out bearings for machines.

JEWETT: Speaking of Holland Furnace, would you want to tell me their story? I know something happened there as part of a scandal, but every time I talk to people about it, they don't seem to know much. What do you know?

VAN VOORST: Well, I'm not sure that I know the whole story either, but, did you notice the big house on the corner, when you turned there?

JEWETT: Yes.
VAN VOORST: Well, now that house belonged to the founder of the Holland Furnace Company. That was J.P. Kolla, and he had two daughters, Louise and Katie. And one married August Landwehr, and the other married Oscar Nystrom. The big house on the corner was the Kolla home, and the Nystrom's lived with them, because the house was big enough for them to stay there. And then the Landwehr family lived next door. The Landwehr family moved, well, I don't know if you know where Bill Lamb's house was near the Washington School, at Washington and 11th Street, but that is where they lived.

And then, they got money, and so they all relocated at Hazelbank. That's their own private development on Lake Macatawa. Beautiful! And in time, Katie Nystrom divorced Oscar and married Ted Cheff. Now has that name stood out to you?

JEWETT: Yes, that's P.T. Cheff.

VAN VOORST: Yes, P.T. Cheff.

JEWETT: Okay.

VAN VOORST: He was a contemporary of her daughter, Leona Nystrom. And so you can imagine what scandal it was for a woman to marry a man the age of her daughter. Now, if it's the other way, marrying the older man, well then, that's alright. But oh, my! And that marriage lasted. There wasn't a time when they couldn't have pulled out, one from the other. But, when they were married 25 years, Katie was talking to me on the phone, and she said, "Cornie, did you ever think it would last?" Oh boy! (laughter) We weren't all that chummy, but anyway, she was really happy on that anniversary. Well, Holland Furnace prospered, and it became nationally known.

JEWETT: Now what time was this all taking place?

VAN VOORST: Well, I would say that Eddie Landwehr and Johnny Nystrom were my contemporaries, a year or so older. I think this all started around 1910. In fact, I remember it was in 1957 that they marked their 50th anniversary.
Then I had quite an interview with Ted Cheff. Talking with Katie once, I wanted to get something on this, and she said, "Oh, Ted thinks quite a lot of you. You can call him for an appointment anytime." I didn't know he thought I was that great, but I got along fine with him, and I got quite a story.

JEWETT: So it was started by the Kolla's?

VAN VOORST: Yes, the Kolla's and then Oscar Nystrom was the man who could put it together. He was a tinsmith. And August Landwehr was a salesman, a super salesman, and the company became nationally known. Holland Furnace. And their marketing strategy was that they were the world's largest installer of furnaces. Now they proceeded on the theory that they would not sell a person a furnace that would not suit his needs. Now, this is a relatively large house, and the furnace downstairs is, about that big. It's not a Holland Furnace now, but it used to be. They were very particular that the furnaces they installed had to fit the house. And they weren't cheap either. So, I think there was a time when nobody in Holland was buying Holland furnaces, but fortunately elsewhere they were! So they became quite well known.

Well, installation of the furnaces finally, should I say, backfired? Between the salesman and the installation, there were many questions. And there were crooks who were associated with it, too. And, Holland Furnace was blamed, rather than a person selling it.

JEWETT: So, in other words, the salesmen were doing something wrong?

VAN VOORST: Questionable.

JEWETT: Okay, but they were employees of Holland Furnace, though?

VAN VOORST: Well, there was a time when Holland Furnace employed about 250 people here, but had 7,000 salesmen on the road. And it was the sales tactics that did them in. Now, that is my version. I'm sure you could find a lot more, but I think that's close enough to the truth to at least put it
in perspective. And, then Holland Furnace was finally sold and then it just
was wiped out.

JEWETT: So when did this happen? When was it sold?

VAN VOORST: I would say around 1960. But you know, that's over twenty
years ago. Memory gets a little dim! (laughter)

JEWETT: Yes!

VAN VOORST: While I might have some stories, I don't have anything organized
in my junky desk.

JEWETT: When did they find out about the scandals? I mean, it went on for
years and years and then it finally came out?

VAN VOORST: Well, I'm trying to figure out...now, I got a letter from a
former boss who worked here, 1946-fifties. So it was during the fifties, and
he was in Albert-Lea, Minnesota, and that was the site of one of the big
cases against Holland Furnace. And he wrote me about it, and enclosed some
clippings, and so on, and he had had lunch with Ted Cheff, but that was, I
think, in the mid to later fifties, when this bubble burst.

JEWETT: And so people just started suing the company?

VAN VOORST: Oh, you know, nothing succeeds like success. And then the
opposite also is true, when things start running down...and the stories
get better...as they get worse...you know.

JEWETT: So was it just their bad salesmanship?

VAN VOORST: Well, it was extremely unfortunate. Ted Cheff once told me
that they made their mistake by standing by their product to the very end.
And then when the sales business started going crooked, they had to take
the blame. Now, on the other side, there is Frank Kleinheksel, who was a
direct descendant of Dominie A.C. Van Raalte. He's dead, passed on now.
But Frank was their all time super salesman in the city of Flint. And he
ran a really clean operation. There never was any breath of scandal about Holland Furnace in the city of Flint. Everything was fine.

But down...in, I don't know if it was the city of St. Louis or where, it was like a chain stitch dropping...one thing after the other.

JEWETT: So then, P.T. Cheff had to go to jail for this?

VAN VOORST: He ended up in prison. Not too long, because Katie, being his wife, became quite ill, and he was given a shorter term to come home with her before she died. And you see, all these things have wide ramifications. Ted Cheff was one of the six owners of WHTC, the radio station. Well, once you have a prison record, you can't be a member of a corporation. And these ramifications went on and on. And he ended up being responsible for a lot of things he really didn't do!

JEWETT: Ah, that's too bad. It must have really broken up the family, like Katie Nystrom.

VAN VOORST: Well, yes. I had quite a correspondence with Ted Cheff at one time, and I said to him, "How in the world do you take time out to write letters to me?" And he said, "Cornie, you have no idea. Over my desk I get all of these telephone calls and all of this correspondence. So I get a little note from you saying, 'Thank you for the ham at Thanksgiving time,' and it's so different from everything else that it's such a relief." Well, that spawned a most interesting correspondence. But then, he took offense at something in the Sentinel, and I hadn't even written it, and I didn't even know what it was about. And that closed that little pleasant chapter.

JEWETT: So this was when he was in prison, then?

VAN VOORST: No, I guess it was before.

JEWETT: That's pretty interesting. I was also wondering about the development of the Holland Sentinel? How did all the changes come about?
VAN VOORST: Well, I would say that family owned businesses usually last just so long. Katie Cheff said that "Family businesses last 25 years."
Holland Furnace lasted 50 years! Well, the same thing is true with the Frenches. They bought the paper, in, I think, 1928, just before the crash.
JEWETT: The Frenches are a family?
VAN VOORST: Yes, C.A. French. And, they built the building on west 8th Street that you're familiar with. Then the depression came along, and the crash, and here they've got a great big building, and have to cut back.
And when I started work there in '35, I said they had a news staff of three and a half. And, then, they sold it in the first part of '77. They sold to Stauffer Communications. Now, Mr. A. Butler, a son-in-law, died the next year at 84, I think. And so many changes were overdue, and Stauffer stepped in and started making them. And that was fine. Except they never stopped making changes! You know how that goes! (laughter) Sometimes you like to halt and catch your breath. But, I worked there for a year and a quarter after the new takeover. And after ninety-nine years, all of a sudden I'd had enough, so I retired in '78 and have no desire to go back to writing.

When Stauffer Communications, which is based mainly in Kansas, owning about eighteen newspapers, took over the Holland Sentinel, they started a brand new market for them here. And this southwestern Michigan quad at the time was a nice prosperous, farming place. Holland Sentinel was number four in their chain of newspapers. And it was a brand new market. Well, I'm not sure if I got everything correct, but they had hopes of immediately moving that to number two? Yesterday? Well, we still have a lot of Dutch families, and they don't spend their money all around. Let's say they've gotten over the old habit of the depression days when one family would subscribe to the Grand Rapids Press and the other to the Holland Sentinel and then they would exchange at 7 o'clock at night to read each other's newspapers.
(laughter) We're over that. But the price started going up, and 25 cents for a daily paper—this means something to a lot of Dutch people. So I would say, that, with all the money they've poured into the place, and the huge staff they employ, that they really haven't advanced as much as you would think they would. But, of course, there's a lot of advancement, but I'm afraid they did lose quite a few customers when they went up to 25 cents.

JEWETT: Really? That's the Dutch for you.

VAN VOORST: You bet.

JEWETT: Which one of Holland's industrial companies do you feel has been the most successful?

VAN VOORST: Well, in their day, Holland Furnace was THE plant here. Now I think our national firms, like GE, Lifesavers, and Parke-Davis are doing well. And, then of course in Zeeland, there's the Herman Miller plant. Between Holland and Zeeland they've now got about ten or fourteen buildings including a HUGE plant in Holland.

Zeeland is a very nice, stable little town. And they've got a lot of prosperous families, more so than what Holland has comparatively, you know. But Herman Miller, yes, that's really a big one. Now, we've got some plants that have had their ups and downs. We had the Home Furnace Company, which wasn't nearly so big as the Holland Furnace Company. Fifteen years ago, their plant, which is along the railroad tracks, on East 6th Street, burned down. And what they came up with was a fire loss there of $3 million. Well, with everything involved, they said it really turned out to be that much. Now, they relocated. They were with the Lear-Siegler chain. They relocated in the Holland Industrial Park, with a nice, new plant. But, they were manufacturing the Miller Gun, which is the small furnace and air conditioning...
unit, I think, for the mobile home, with a small furnace, and air conditioner. Then, when the credit started going bad a few years back, when they charged so much interest people couldn't afford to borrow money, the market just didn't hold up for them.

JEWETT: Now, 8th Street's undergone a lot of changes, hasn't it?

VAN VOORST: I'm not sure that my view of 8th Street is exactly right. But there was a time when the Walter Walsh interests owned, well some people say, 2/3 of 8th Street.

JEWETT: When was this?

VAN VOORST: Way back, in the twenties. And they still have quite a few properties, but not nearly so much anymore. But I always credited Walter Walsh with that. Now, his son-in-law was Earnest C. Brooks, who was Holland's leading Democrat. And I maintain that 8th Street looks as good as it did because Ernie Brooks never boosted the rents, as high as other places. And so, our town didn't move out into all these malls. And we've had all kinds of people planning malls all around Holland, and they've never materialized. I don't think "Thrifty Acres" is a big mall. Anyway I think that it must have been about 8-10 years ago that they beautified downtown. We used $100,000 of revenue sharing money, and I think they got an excellent bargain for what they got. Oh, of course, towns are always terribly conservative when it comes to spending money. You know how that goes. You wouldn't BELIEVE the opposition to developing Windmill Island. That conservative element was present. And they fussed, and they didn't want 8th Street changed, and it would spoil their parade route and everything. Well, as it turned out, 8th Street was thirty feet wide. The street in front of my house is about twenty-seven feet, and they march a parade over to the cemetery on every Memorial Day. You can get a band through there. And so they still retain
the marching bands at Tulip Time. But, oh, the fuss, fuss, fuss, that went on.

JEWETT: How has it changed? What companies have stayed there, which ones have left?

VAN VOORST: You mean which stores?

JEWETT: Yes.

VAN VOORST: Well, there has been quite a few changes on that. Now in the early days, Steketee's is not the Steketee store...there was a Holland Steketee's and the Steketee store downtown is really a Grand Rapids store. And that must have been about twenty years ago that it came. Now DuMez's is an old family store. And we used to have a Kresge store downtown. It's not there anymore. There's still a Woolworth's store, bless 'em. And these other stores sort of come and go.

JEWETT: Yes. And People's Bank, that's kind of a mainstay, isn't it?

VAN VOORST: Yes, People's and First National Bank. We used to have three banks. The tower building used to be a bank. Then, in 1936 they merged with Holland City State Bank, and it became Holland State Bank and then it became First National. They've got a name THAT long, but they still call it First National. Then you will notice that all of these bank branches have come in the last decade. They just spring up everywhere.

JEWETT: Getting back to the Holland community, what company would the average Holland worker be employed by, let's say during the 1920's?

VAN VOORST: Holland Furnace. See, Holland Furnace in 1920 was THE company. There were a lot of furniture factories along the lake. Yes, furniture, and of course Heinz has been here all these years. Heinz was not a particularly beloved place. Heinz allows a lot of autonomy to their different plants all over the country. Oh, we used to joke about it sometimes, that the people at Heinz here always ran the company so they saved as much money as possible.
And it wasn't always that necessary. One time the former mayor told me that he had gone out to lunch with some Heinz people from the local business and the Pittsburgh people were giving them hell because they were giving them a black name, by saving all these pennies. Well, that story was never published either.

JEWETT: Holland Furnace, of course, was probably a big event, but what were some other BIG events that took place in the Holland business community, as you look over the years?

VAN VOORST: Well, I'd say Holland Furnace Company was the top of the pile. And then came the Bohn Aluminum Plant, which is a large factory. And then Parke-Davis took over the old tannery, and rebuilt about fourteen buildings over there. GE came, and then the development of the Industrial Park, and I guess, Lifesavers was one of the larger buildings there. Herman Miller, of course, branching out from Zeeland into Holland, that was great.

JEWETT: Yes. What's the story behind Herman Miller?

VAN VOORST: I don't know too much about that. Herman Miller is really the name of the father-in-law. D.J. DePree really was the father figure of Herman Miller. I think he named it after his wife's father, or something like that. But they were making furniture, bedroom furniture, and they were making about seven pieces. And people were going into apartments. And so they changed. And he hired Charles Eames as a designer. They went into all new furniture, and then they just grew by leaps and bounds. Hugh DePree, D.J.'s son, was the president, and he also was president of the Hope College Board for many years. Well, they have office furniture, hospital furniture, chairs, and are quite diversified. And it's all expensive! (laughter) You pay $1,100 for a chair,...I'm more modest than that!

JEWETT: (laughter) Really. I've heard that Holland Furnace did a lot for the
community. Did other businesses, too? Didn't Holland Furnace sponsor company picnics?

VAN VOORST: Well, like I say, back in those years Holland Furnace was the king of Holland industry. Their picnics were the sort of thing to talk about. Of course, that's when life was much simpler than it is today. A picnic today "ain't" nothing. I think Holland Furnace never did as much for the community as the community would like to remember. Katie Cheff got the animal shelter that's between here and Grand Haven, but I don't think that's that great.

JEWETT: Has any other business done a lot?

VAN VOORST: No, you see, Dutch people are generally prolific, and they've got families, and they leave the money to their kids!

JEWETT: I see. (laughter) Tell me some more about your work with the Sentinel.

VAN VOORST: I covered city council, city hall, the board of education, and political events. That's the way we were. Things were kind of a "one person operation". By the time I got on the city hall "beat", why, we had a sports director. Otherwise, Watson (Waddy) Spoelstra, when I first came there, did sports and everything. Anything that happened, Waddy did. At least I think I covered only one football game in my life. But back then we'd cover everything else. And, I must say, that between Hope College and Tulip Time, that I maybe met more celebrities in Holland, Michigan, than many big time reporters. Now when Queen Beatrix comes here on the 26th, that'll be the fifth time that Holland has entertained Dutch royalty.

JEWETT: Oh, really. When were the other times?

VAN VOORST: Now, you see, it started in 1941. Juliana was princess, and of
course their war started in '39, and so she was out in Ottawa, Canada. And she came to Holland, and got a degree at Hope College.

JEWETT: I didn't know that.

VAN VOORST: And Bernhard came with her. So, then in 1952, she was then queen. She came on a state visit to the United States, and included Holland in her itinerary. Oh, there was a little parade downtown, a reception at city hall, and another reception at Hope Memorial Chapel. You know, Holland, for a small town, has a very impressive chapel! Then, in 1965, Bernhard came. Now, Bernhard was an excellent salesman for the Netherlands. He made many, many business trips in this country. Many of them private. This one was official. He helped dedicate Windmill Island in 1965, and then he got an honorary degree at Hope College.

Then, in 1972, Princess Margriet and her husband, Peter van Vollenhoven came here. The town was celebrating its 125th anniversary. She helped unveil a plaque in the chapel, that was for G.J. Diekema. He was the town's leading citizen. He was a lawyer, not an industrialist. And he became minister to the Netherlands. Now, they call them ambassadors. And he died in the Netherlands in 1931. His body was brought back in a glass covered casket. They had a funeral there in the chapel. He was America's Ambassador to the Netherlands. Now, Beatrix is coming. She is the queen. I was in the Netherlands in 1967, and it was my first trip there, and it was for free. That's the way to travel.

JEWETT: For free? How'd you get it for free?

VAN VOORST: Well, you see, the Netherlands is a tiny little country. It's one quarter of the size of Michigan, with over 13 million people on it. And they had blown $110 million to develop the Schiphol Airport, hoping to make it the gateway to Europe, supplanting Paris. And they pretty well succeeded,
I would say. But they were dedicating the airport, and they had invited 100 people, newspaper and travel editors from all over the world. And I was privileged to be one of twenty Americans. On a Thursday night in Amsterdam, I was having dinner with some Dutch friends who I had corresponded with for years, and the baby was born that night. And it was the first male in 116 years, in the House of Orange. The first baby boy. Well, after that, all the other princesses got married too, you know, and they started having babies, all of them boys! So now, Juliana, I don't know what her rank is now, she's the past queen, has I think, 14 or 15 grandchildren. And all but two of them are boys!

JEWETT: So, they're going to have a lot of kings coming up!

VAN VOORST: Well, of course, the baby that was born while we were there is named Alexander, and he is the next crown prince. And of course, everybody argued on the way home on the plane. A couple of businessmen next to me, (now this was on "royals" class, you only fly first class when somebody pays your ticket for you). But they were saying, well, the people that they talked to over there weren't too happy about having a man, because Holland has prospered under the women. Queen Emma, Wilhelmina, Queen Juliana, Queen Beatrix...well, I said, "Cheer up, he's got to wait for his mother and grandmother to pass on first!" (laughter) So, Beatrix proceeded to have three boys, and Margriet has four boys, and Irene had twins, a boy and a girl, and I think the last, was Christine.

JEWETT: Your name's Van Voorst. I'm sure your ancestors came over from the Netherlands.

VAN VOORST: Well, the strange thing is that Van Voorst is a distinguished name in the Netherlands. I never knew that. But Bill Wichers' office, you know, the Netherlands information service in Holland, has been in city hall
for years, and I would meet all of his visitors. He and his wife Nell were tremendously popular in the Netherlands, so that all of these official people who would come to this country would have to come to Holland, Michigan, to visit Mr. Wichers! And I would end up interviewing them. And Bill has always said that I have interviewed more Dutch officials than any other reporter in the country! Well, I don't think it's all that important. It took me a while, but I would notice that when I'd say my name was Van Voorst--they'd give me an extra handshake? It took me about 3 years, until I found out that it was a distinguished name. And it is not "from the woods" or "from the forest", as we might assume. It is from Voorst. There is a little town there by the name of Voorst, with a castle. And that's where the barons lived. But anyway, when I got to the Netherlands, besides getting an extra handshake, I'd get my hand kissed! That's important!

JEWETT: (laughter) Yes! What other celebrities have come to Holland? Have you seen quite a few, with Tulip Time?

VAN VOORST: You know, I gave a talk once before the literary club, and I had the information there and I don't know if I can find it. Well, Ottawa County is maybe the most Republican county in all of the country. So, we've had a lot of high ranking Republicans here. Mark Hatfield came. Have you ever met him?

JEWETT: Well, I rode up in an elevator with him while I was in Washington!

VAN VOORST: Well, he's a great guy. And there's Gerald and Betty Ford, and Prince Bernhard. Ronald Reagan was here in 1965, and he, he's a charmer. He came back in the days when he was employed by GE as their TV host.

JEWETT: Did that have anything to do with the company being here?

VAN VOORST: Oh yes. Well, the company was here long before that. But he was making a circle of towns where they had plants. And so GE arranged for
this joint service club luncheon in the civic center, and I met him in the hotel, and he had a press conference. And of course, he was real charming. Oh, he's a charmer!! He had full make up on, at 10 o'clock in the morning. So, one of his aides gave me a transcript there, and I said to him, "I'm going to have to write this without hearing you, can you tell me what's important?" You know, if you're going to cover a speech, you might as well get what they think is important about it. And he took the speech and looked at it, and looked at it, and he said, "You're going to have to forgive me, but I've never seen this in typed form before. I write all my own speeches, and I speak from cards." He dug into his pocket and took out some 3" by 5" cards in handwriting. "This is the way I make my speeches. Well, let's see, you might want this one, and this one, and, yeh, over here." And, of course, he picked out the meaty parts. Writing speeches without hearing them is what you do in the newspaper an awful lot. And I had no trouble at all. He's a charmer.

You'll find this in the top-notch. Ted Cheff had it. Simon Den Uyl from Bohn Aluminum has it. When they speak to you, YOU are the most important person in the world at this moment. And Ronald Reagan had it. They make you feel very important. Well, the speech went over so well that I heard it on the radio twice after that. They ran that tape, I don't know how many times. Then I was in Washington one time, and I talked with Esther Van Wagoner Tufty. She's now over eighty. And, she's a democrat. So I asked her if she'd heard Ronald Reagan. Yes, he had addressed the Women's Press Club. And she said "Boy, he really had them in the palm of his hand. And they gave him a rising ovation." And she said, "I heard that speech, and I found holes in it. I didn't want to rise to my feet on that. So afterwards I went over to him and said, 'Mr. Reagan, there were parts of your
talk there that just didn't hold water.' And he said, 'You don't think I wrote that speech, do you?" So then we compared--it was the same speech. (laughter) So, I don't want to detract from Ronald Reagan, it's probably what anybody would say to get over to the next person.

I met Hubert Humphrey, and William Scranton from Pennsylvania. I'm sorry that he never got any further. He was a tremendous guy. Tom Kleppe and Former Secretary of Agriculture, Earl Butz were here. Tom Kleppe is married to Glen Loew of Holland. Guy VanderJagt, and Jose Ferrer, who came to Hope College to direct a musical. Robert Taft, Jr., Dutch ambassadors, Soapy Williams, astronaut Frank Borman, Ethel Waters...they all came.

Incidentally, I saw Ethel Waters in "A Member of the Wedding" on Broadway. It was about, oh, 1951. And she came to Holland for one of the arts festivals at the college. This was on black musicians or black artists. And she was really great! I happened to be in the office one afternoon and the telephone rang, and it said that Miss Waters had arrived at Dr. Vander Werf's house, if anybody wanted to interview her. And I went over there. I mentioned I had seen her on Broadway, and she started talking. And here is a whole circle of all the faculty in the room. And we started talking and everybody listened. Here, is me, a kid who's never been out of high school, you know. (laughter)

JEWETT: How is the decision made as to what goes on the front page? I've always wondered that.

VAN VOORST: Well, see back in those days, it was an earlier world. You work with what you've got. An important local story is used. People like to see Holland things on the front page. So, the city editor would work with what he had. You see, everything is in competition to other things of THAT
day. Not yesterday, not tomorrow. You work with what you've got. Here is your raw material. So everybody to the society editor...you might scrape like the dickens trying to make a page look like something on a low day. Whereas another time, you have six white satin weddings, and you don't know what to do with them all, and you can't even get them all in. And then of course to the local people, they say, "My daughter's wedding wasn't at the top of the page." And you know, that's really bad.

I even met Earl Butz, Ann Landers, Bob Griffin, oh, Governor Milliken has been here a lot of times. And really, the inaugural addresses of Calvin Vander Werf, Gordon Van Wylen, and John Hesselink of WTS were really something special. When I was on a Caribbean cruise I met Jim Bishop, author of _The Day Christ Died_. And he was a real charmer. He's a gentleman and a gentle person. Of course, I wasn't working, and he was very interesting.

JEWETT: With Charles Sligh as President of the National Association of Manufacturers, did that put Holland on the map at all?

VAN VOORST: Oh, prestige-wise, I think it did something. Of course that was quite a few years ago. Now when his son is that, I don't feel the same thing at all! I never got to know Charles the third like I did Chuck junior. Did you know that Chuck Sligh, Jr. introduced water skiing in Holland?

JEWETT: I had heard that he was a national water skiing champion.

VAN VOORST: Well, this was a good forty years ago, but he was out in Florida, and chummy with Dick Pope, who developed one of the gardens there, Winterhaven? And so Chuck came back, and we were just fascinated with skiing. Of course, water skiing got to be old stuff to us, after a while.

JEWETT: So, Holland had a lot of water skiers, then?

VAN VOORST: It certainly did.

JEWETT: Out of all the industrialists in Holland, I guess John Donnelly is
another one...who would you say has been the most successful?

VAN VOORST: Well, John Donnelly...did you know he studied for the priesthood? And then his father died, and he had to come back and take over his father's company. So he became an industrialist, and thoroughly nice guy. I would say D.J. DePree in Zeeland, Hugh, and the others, really did a lot. And then there's Clarence Becker, of Home Furnace, and they joined Lear-Siegler and rebuilt it, and it was highly successful.

JEWETT: Now where is Home Furnace, now?

VAN VOORST: It's called Home Siegler, and it's ~ Brooks Avenue, sort of behind the Holiday Inn. Simon Den Uyl probably was one of the most successful. But he did it in Detroit. He was a Holland boy, who became president of Bohn Aluminum. And then there was Ray Herrick, who is a contemporary of Simon Den Uyl's, but he went to Tecumseh and became a multi-millionaire. And then he's the one who gave Herrick Library. Those are two boys who made it outside of Holland.

JEWETT: What about the younger generation? Who do you see there? Are there any new companies, like maybe the Prince Corporation?

VAN VOORST: Prince Corporation is in a class by itself. Edgar Prince, well, he graduated from the University of Michigan with an engineering degree. And he started out with Prince Corporation maybe twenty or twenty-five years ago, and went right up. And of course, you know his daughter is married to Richard De Vos' son, so he's right in there, with the Amway millions. (laughter) That's nice.

JEWETT: (laughter) Yes. Worked out well.

VAN VOORST: You see, as I get older, I don't regard the sons with the same aura of greatness as I did their fathers.

JEWETT: Well, the fathers are the ones that got the company going. And they
probably suffered a lot more. I'm sure it took a lot, to get companies
going like Sligh Furniture, and all that.

VAN VOORST: You see Sligh and Donnelly all relocated in the Industrial Park.
That's why Hope College now has an art center.

JEWETT: (laughter) Yes, that's nice, too. Gosh, if you have anything else
you'd like to say...

VAN VOORST: Nothing that I can think of.

JEWETT: Nothing that you can think of, huh? (laughter) This has been very
interesting, I've leaned a lot from this. Thank you very much.

VAN VOORST: Well, you're very welcome. I don't know what you're going to do
with all that mess.

JEWETT: Oh, we'll keep it for someone else to look at, years from now, or
something...
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INDEX</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Albert-Lea, Minnesota.................................................................. 16-17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baker Furniture Company......................................................... 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Becker, Clarence.......................................................................... 30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bishop, James............................................................................... 29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bohn Aluminum (Precision Parts).................................................. 6,13,22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bohn Aluminum Strike...................................................................... 6-7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Borman, Frank............................................................................... 28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brooks, Earnest C.......................................................................... 20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bush &amp; Lane Piano Company......................................................... 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Butler, A......................................................................................... 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheff, P.T...................................................................................... 14,17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Den Uyl, Simon............................................................................. 27,30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DePree, D.J.................................................................................... 22,30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DePree, Hugh............................................................................... 22,30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diekema, G.J................................................................................... 24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donnelly, John............................................................................. 29-30,31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DuMez's......................................................................................... 21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eames, Charles............................................................................... 22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eighth Street................................................................................ 20-21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fafnir Bearing............................................................................... 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jose Ferrer..................................................................................... 28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First National Bank....................................................................... 21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flint................................................................................................. 7-9,17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flint &quot;Sit-down&quot; Strike.................................................................. 7-9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ford, Gerald.................................................................................. 26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ford, Betty..................................................................................... 26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French, C.A.................................................................................... 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Rapids Press......................................................................... 18-19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Griffin, Robert............................................................................ 29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hart and Cooley............................................................................ 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hatfield, Mark............................................................................. 26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hazelbank....................................................................................... 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holland Economic Development Commission (HEDCOR)......................... 10-11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heinz Factory............................................................................... 9,11,21-22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herman Miller, Inc....................................................................... 19,22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herrick Library............................................................................. 30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herrick, Ray.................................................................................. 30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hesselink, John............................................................................ 29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holland Evening Sentinel............................................................... 1-2,3,17-19,23,28-29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holland Furnace Company.................................................................. 5,11,13-17,19,21-22,23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holland Industrial Park.................................................................. 10-11,19,22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holland State Bank......................................................................... 21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home Furnace Company.................................................................. 19,30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hope College................................................................................ 24,31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hope College, Board of Trustees.................................................. 22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hope Memorial Chapel................................................................... 5,24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humphrey, Hubert.......................................................................... 28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kleppe, Tom................................................................................... 28</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Kolla, J.P..................................................14
Lamb, Bill..................................................14
Landers, Ann..............................................29
Landwehr, Eddie...........................................14
Landwehr, Louise Kolla...............................14
Lear-Siegler Chain.....................................19,30
Lifesavers, Inc..........................................11,19,22
Loew, Glen...............................................28
Miller Gun................................................19-20
Milliken, William G...................................29
Netherlands..............................................24-26
Nystrom, Johnny.........................................14
Nystrom, Katie Kolla.................................14-15,17,18,23
Nystrom, Leona..........................................14
Nystrom, Oscar...........................................14
Parke-Davis.............................................9,19,22
People's Bank............................................21
Perkins, Fanny, Secretary of Labor.................8
Pope, Dick................................................29
Prince Bernhard.........................................24,26
Prince Corporation.....................................30
Prince, Edgar..........................................30
Princess Margriet.......................................24
Queen Beatrix..........................................23
Queen Juliana.........................................23-24,25
Reagan, Ronald.........................................26-28
Schiphol Airport........................................24-25
Scranton, William......................................28
Sligh, Charles, Jr......................................12,29
Sligh Furniture Company............................12,31
Spoelstra, Watson......................................23
Stauffer Communications............................3,18-19
Steketee's...............................................21
Taft, Robert, Jr........................................28
"Thrifty Acres"...........................................20
Tufty, Esther Van Wagoner..........................27-28
Tulip Time...............................................4
"Twelve Year Tax Break"..............................11
Vander Jagt, Guy......................................28
Vander Werf, Calvin..................................29
Van Dyke, John, Jr....................................10-11
Van Vollenhoven, Peter..............................24
Van Wylen, Gordon..................................29
Walsh, Walter..........................................20
Waters, Ethel..........................................28
Wichers, William......................................25-26
Williams, Soapy.......................................28
Windmill Island.......................................20,24
Woolworth's, Inc.....................................21
Cornelia Van Voorst, 71, of 271 E. 16th St., died Saturday afternoon, April 5, in Holland Community Hospital.

Miss Van Voorst retired in June 1978 after more than 40 years as a reporter for The Holland Sentinel. Her main responsibilities included City Hall, Holland City Council, Holland Community Hospital and the boards of education, but she covered many other areas, from music and theater to features and interviews with many dignitaries. She edited The Sentinel Tulip Time editions for 30 years. Following her retirement, she continued to write Cornie's Corner for The Sentinel.

In 1967, she was among a group of 100 writers from all over the world who were invited to attend the dedication of Schiphol Airport in Amsterdam.

Born in Holland, she was a lifelong member of Sixth Reformed Church. She was a member of the Historical Cultural Commission, the Council for the Arts and Concert Association Board. She had been active in many local organizations.

Surviving are a sister, Mrs. Leonard (Rolene) Fought of Holland; two sisters-in-law, Mrs. Ralph (Orthea) Van Voorst of Brandon, Fla., and Mrs. Fred (Marian) Van Voorst of Holland; and several nieces and nephews.

Services will be held at 3 p.m. Tuesday at Notier-Ver Lee-Langeland Chapel with the Rev. Mark Minegar and the Rev. Henry Mouw officiating. Burial will be in Pilgrim Home Cemetery.

Visititation hours are 7 to 9 this evening at the funeral chapel.