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Kranenberg, Harold and Ethyl Oral History Interview: General Holland History

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RQ: We’re here in the Kranenberg Cottage with Ethyl and Harold Kranenberg, two people who have known and loved Macatawa for many years, and we’re here this evening to see if we can reminisce a bit about their experiences and remembrances of Macatawa. Krannya, I’m told that you have some interesting remembrances regarding Indians here in this part of the park. Would you care to elaborate on that?

HK: Bob, up on the hill, across from the cottage when we lived on Mishawaka, the sand dunes there. There used to be two Indians living in a wigwam right on the top of the hill. In fact, there was two different locations for two Indians apiece, living in wigwams.

RQ: What year was that, Krannya?
HK: I would say, if I can remember right, about 1910 or 1911, somewhere in there. It was just when I was a small boy, but I can always remember the Indians being there. Like the time the Indians were around here, they’d rent a store over in Ottawa Beach, and they had a little store down here at Macatawa at one time. So, they were around this area quite awhile.

RQ: I forget who it was that told me that there was some grass baskets that were woven by the Indians. Did they sell goods of that sort?

HK: Yes, they sold Indian products like that, mainly at the market they had on the Ottawa Beach side. That was a big store over there, and they had a portion of that store where they sold some of their merchandise. That was what they called the Ottawa Beach grocery store. This was a good-sized store.

RQ: Now was that closer to the shore than the hotel? There was a big hotel there, too, wasn’t there?

HK: No, it was to the east of the hotel, and that was quite an area in there. It was between the hotel and what they called Baker’s Landing, Baker Boat Livery there. In fact, part of the livery’s still there. They don’t call it Baker’s anymore, just back in the...

RQ: Now you were from local here, weren’t you? Grand Rapids, Kranny? Where was your home?

HK: My home was in Grand Rapids, but I was born and raised down here because my folks always had a cottage here when I was born.

EK: So you’ve been here 75 years.

HK: I’ve been at the park 75 years.
RQ: Ethyl, what was the first year that you came to Macatawa?

EK: I can’t recall.

RQ: You can’t? You came with your father and mother. And you met Harold here.

EK: Yes. And I went with his sister, I mean, and that’s how I met him.

RQ: That’s how you met Harold, through his sister.

HK: I imagine they were down here about 1918.

RQ: About 1918. That was two years before I was born. I didn’t get here... I wasn’t born until 1920, but we didn’t come to the park until ’23, and we were brought by another fisherman from these parts, Morris Flood. You remember Morris?

EK: Oh, yes.

RQ: And Morris used to fish quite a bit with Ethyl’s father, Mr. McClung, and my grandfather, Mr. J. B. Brooks. The three of them did a lot of fishing together.

HK: I can remember a portion of that, yes.

RQ: In fact, it’s interesting because in those days, when I was a youngster, we were in this cottage, which was then called the Sherwood and you, I believe, were down in the Georgie. At least for part of the while, wasn’t that true?

EK: Yes. After Don was born.

RQ: After Don was born. Yes. Tell me, do you recall George Ryder, Ethyl?

EK: Yes.

RQ: He was rather an interesting character from the park.

HK: Your cottage, now... you can always remember that it’s George Ryder’s cottage.

RQ: Yes, it was called the Georgie, as a matter of fact, and he used to have a plot of grass out front, as I remember, and would sprinkle it every night.
HK: Yes, I think that’s right.

RQ: Kept it pretty green, and I do remember that. His mother was the proprietor of the Hotel Macatawa—Mary, Mary Ryder—and the other evening over on Interlake, I was talking to Dorothy Hall, and she gave me a picture that showed Mary Ryder. First time I’d ever seen a picture of Georgie’s mother.

HK: I don’t think I’ve seen that, no.

RQ: I’ve never seen a picture of Georgie, other than one, which Aunt Rose had one time in the cottage, showed him in Egypt, riding on a camel. And I’d never seen that or any other picture since.

HK: I don’t remember that portion of it, but, of course, I can remember Georgie Ryder pretty well.

RQ: I’m told he was a student of Shakespeare. Do you recollect that?

HK: I don’t recollect that. No, I don’t.

RQ: I had an interesting talk this morning with Sub Boshka, and he was recollecting some of the times in his remembrance, in his life, and I was recalling that his mother, Mrs. Boshka, was an interesting soul. Used to kind of go around the park very quiet-like, almost like a gypsy.

EK: Picking things up.

RQ: Picking things up and...do you remember Mrs. Boshka?

HK: Of course, I remember Mr. Boshka, Kap Boshka.

EK: I remember her.

RQ: I think Kap Boshka was the lighthouse keeper for a good many years.
HK: A good many years, yes. As long as they actually run the lighthouse, you might say, until they put it on automatic power out there, practically. I couldn’t guess how many years, but it must have been, I would guess, 35 years or 40 years or something. Long time. Now, when I was young and they were first building that, I think he was still in at the time. I noticed in that paper it says something about 1909, but I actually poured cement off a barge, worked out there when I was a kid, putting cement on that pier.

RQ: Is that right?

HK: Yes. On that outer pier there. We built that pier right there.

RQ: Now what year was structure in there?

HK: I couldn’t have been more than 14 or 15 years old, so it must have been around 1916 or so.

RQ: Around 1916.

HK: I worked a couple summers wheeling barrels around there and so forth on the barge.

RQ: There is a society, I’m told, locally sponsored, who is to salvage or save the lighthouse.

EK: Yes.

RQ: Yes, they had that. There’s a Mrs. Heuvelhorst that lives on the channel.

HK: That’s been going on for quite a few years, Bob.

RQ: I’m certainly glad to hear that.

HK: I think as many as... I would guess as many as 15 years ago, after they started to close down the Coast Guard and everything. They had a petition out to save the
lighthouse. They were gonna tear it all out of there. And they wanted to save the old lighthouse as it was.

RQ: Yes. I think they succeeded in stopping the immediate plan, but I haven’t had a chance to talk to Hestor Gronberg. She was one of the instigators and one of the officers.

HK: I think she was in it to get the petitions up and so forth.

RQ: I was hoping to see her before we left, but I guess I’ll have to write to her instead.

Kranny, do you recall, in those days, in your youth here, there was a place called Angel’s Flight? Do you recall Angel’s Flight?

EK: Oh, I do.

RQ: You recall that, Ethyl?

HK: I had to take the motor up there.

EK: A lot of people out there, and they danced up there.

RQ: They had a dance hall?

EK: Yes.

RQ: Kranny, you said you helped to build it, huh?

HK: Yes, and it was a very, very tough thing to get the big motor and the gear wheel to pull that car up the hill. It took quite awhile, and to get that on top of that hill and everything was quite a feat. Then when that thing was actually built and so forth, when we were young, we’d go up and play cards underneath that thing.

RQ: Oh, is that right? Underneath the dance hall?

HK: Yes, right underneath the bottom of it.

EK: They served soft drinks there, something like that.
RQ: Yes, Sub said they had a concession there that sold Cracker Jack, peanuts and ice cream.

EK: Ice cream, that’s what I recall.

RQ: And wasn’t there a little kind of a picnic grove for children?

EK: I don’t recall that.

HK: Well, they had quite a platform there that the kids could…

RQ: Yes. And swings and slides and stuff. Teeter totters; I think is what Sub said. Places where the mothers could take their kids and get out of the heat _______.

HK: __________ the start of that, let alone the first cottage was going up_________ I can’t think of his name.


HK: Art Fowl. He was the original starter of that.

RQ: And then, I’m told, there was a Mr. Barry. Do you remember a Mr. Barry?

HK: No, I don’t know Mr. Barry.

RQ: Sub said that Barry took over, and he did not last very long because he kept yelling obscenities at the children who were playing on the cars, and Mr. Miller heard him. He didn’t take too kindly to that.

HK: We used to make ice cream right down there below there where the theater was and the bowling alley. Had an ice cream factory there.

RQ: An ice cream factory? Right near the theater?

HK: Yes, we made ice cream for the fountain there.
RQ: Oh, for the fountain. I didn’t know that. I didn’t even know there was a theater, either, until I saw that postcard, Kranny. What did they show there? Motion pictures?

HK: Motion pictures, yes.

RQ: Now those must have been silent films, some of them.

HK: Yes.

RQ: Because that was before the talkies. Silent films – did you have a piano player in there, too? Or was it just all silent?

HK: I don’t remember. I don’t think there was any kind of sound. It was just the movie.

RQ: Just the movie?

HK: Yes. The bowling alley was right next to it and a bunch of boat houses. We used to fish out of them. The people that lived right across from us in the _______ Cottage on Mishawaka, now I can’t think of the name….burnt down in 1927. That was a very nice cottage at that time.

[End of side one; side two starts with a long period of no sound]

HK: …fish all day long. Perch, at that time, I’d catch a bushel basketful in the morning…not a bushel basket, but a market basketful of perch in the morning. I’d sell them to Harry Skinner for five cents a pound. Then I’d go in the afternoon and get another basketful for him. I fished all day long every day in the boathouses out on the pier. That’s when perch were really running.

RQ: You mentioned Harry Skinner. He and his brother, Al, lived in the little cottage next to Casey’s down there, didn’t they, Kranny?.
HK: Yes, they lived right next door.

RQ: He and his brother were, I guess, legendary characters from Macatawa Park.

HK: That is right. They were here for a long time and they run that boat livery for Miller.

RQ: You remember the two boys, I’m sure. In fact, in that post card, you’re shown there with a paddle, standing beside Al Skinner.

HK: I worked for the ____________. I used to carry that boat across ________ the other livery down there. We worked 14 hours a day, seven days a week, and I got fourteen dollars a week.

RQ: Fourteen a week. Dollar a day. Two dollars a day.

HK: Yes, two dollars a day.

RQ: Boy, that was a lot of work for that, wasn’t it?

HK: That was supposed to be considered pretty good pay, but I worked fourteen hours a day. It was a long shift, seven days a week. Row a boat across there and dumped the cargo in the water on the one side there and had to call the Coast Guard. I had to hold it _____________ out of the water. Of course, in those days, Bob, the Ottawa Beach Hotel was actually a showplace of the country.

RQ: It was a beautiful structure, wasn’t it?

HK: At that time all of us best bands in the country sang there; there was a new band every two weeks about.

RQ: Frank Welch tells me that…

EK: It was formal on Wednesday and Saturday nights.

HK: Everybody would dress up.
EK: Around here, too, people used to get out ____________.

HK: We used to walk on the boardwalk... ________________ and walk back and forth every night. Everybody used to be dressed up in those days.

RQ: Frank Welch was telling me that he recalls taking the ferry boats over there often to the big dance bands that they had.

HK: They had the best bands in the country. They had two boats coming in from Chicago every day. Two boats a day. Out of here and in here every day.

RQ: That was the Graham and Morton Line, I guess.

HK: Yes. One was a side-wheeler and the other was a stern. And one night—this is quite an interesting deal—the Puritan came through there, and my dad and Mr. Muller, who used to live on Mishawaka, from Holland, were fishing on the end of the pier there. This big northwest breeze blew that boat right in there and cut the pier right off at the end and they were fishing on the end of the pier.

RQ: They got isolated from the mainland then, didn’t they?

HK: They got isolated from the mainland. Boat gone right through the pier. When that happened, the excitement and so forth, my dad lost the ring off his finger.

And my mother was cleaning his fish; she found my dad’s ring in a white bass she was cleaning.

RQ: In the white bass? Boy that is an unusual story. How that ever got there...it just fell off and the fish grabbed it.

HK: And the fish got it in his mouth.

RQ: That’s one for Ripley, isn’t it?
HK: It really is. It took the end of that pier right off. Of course, the boats coming in there twice a day… You might say that was actually a showplace of the country at that time.

RQ: Yes.

HK: And then you don’t realize after the boardwalk and everything had been taken up, how much the park had changed with people getting all dressed up and going over there to dance.

EK: Well, I mean until recent years, we used to swim into the late afternoon and get all dressed up every evening.

HK: Every evening we’d get dressed up.

EK: I mean, you wouldn’t think of not being all dressed up in the evening.

HK: You can’t realize what a difference the park actually is compared to those days when everybody used to walk on the boardwalk.

RQ: We were noting just the other evening about the fact that when we walked down to the hotel—where the Hotel Macatawa used to stand—and the soda fountain, even after some of those other structures were gone, remember those great long park benches for everyone to congregate and sit on the benches. Everybody in the park could be congregated down there, and you’d have a way to communicate and gossip.

HK: In fact, the benches were all taken.

EK: I hate that now you walk down that way and there’s no place to sit down there and do anything.

RQ: No, you never really see the people at all.
HK: Well, as you can remember, with all the fires we had, 160 cottages burnt and so forth, and some of those cottages were mighty big cottages and were burnt. The one on Mishawaka there had eight apartments in it. Eight families.

RQ: I have a picture of that, Mishawaka Avenue that Dorothy Hall loaned to me. Her grandfather, who was a man by the name of McGroy, took pictures of the fire that came that year that swept around from the south beach on up into the hill. He took a sequence of fire pictures and the next morning, he took the final picture, which showed the utter destruction of the whole Mishawaka Avenue. Nothing but chimneys left standing.

HK: That was in June of 1927.

RQ: Yes, June, 1927. That burnt the side of Auntie Rose’s cottage. That’s where it started. I mean stopped. Right there.

HK: That’s right. Then I designed our new cottage up there on Mishawaka.

RQ: Oh, did you?

HK: I designed that.

RQ: What was the name of your cottage up there, Kranny? The Kranenberg? I remember that cottage.

HK: No, I think we called it the Seal. Didn’t we?

EK: I don’t remember.

HK: I don’t remember, either.

RQ: But then you designed the new one to replace....

HK: Yes, I designed the new cottage to be put up there, which is practically the same now; the Fields made some changes.
RQ: The Fields own it now?
HK: The Fields own it. They bought it from me.
RQ: Oh, I see.
HK: Just after my folks died and none of the kids wanted...well, we had this cottage.
RQ: What was your brother’s name, Harold?
HK: My older brother?
RQ: Yes.
HK: Harry.
RQ: Harry? And you had another brother?
HK: My younger brother George. He just died here a couple months ago.
RQ: Oh, it’s George that I recall. He was the tall one.
EK: He died a month or so ago.
HK: About a month ago.
RQ: Just a month ago? I’m sorry to hear that. I didn’t know that.
HK: Well, I just got back from Florida, so it’s over a month. Two months now.
RQ: As I remember, the two tallest men that I could ever remember watching walk by were George Kranenberg and George Noble. The two Georges. And they were big, tall, over six feet.
HK: Well, George Noble’s father built the cottage up there.
RQ: Did he?
HK: George Noble’s father was quite a builder. That’s how George...
RQ: That’s how George got started. George was an excellent carpenter, too.
HK: His father was a builder at that time. That’s how George was in the building, picked up the trade.

RQ: Speaking of the need for somehow to get together, that was one of the purposes that I had in mind of creating some kind of a book of Macatawa, to bring memories of different people, by me going around and seeing different people, and then collecting these into some composite form, maybe there would be some way that people would get an idea of where the other person was, or what he was doing—some way bridge that gap that has been missing.

EK: I can remember how we used to come up from St. Louis with a trunk. You know, big wardrobe trunk.

RQ: Yes.

EK: I mean we packed them, I remember, what was his name that used to deliver the trunks all the time, Kranny?

HK: Uhh...

RQ: Was that Pete Rank?

EK: Yes.

RQ: Big, husky guy?

EK: Yes.

RQ: Pete Rank. Oh yes, he could pick them up with one hand, almost.

HK: There was another part of the park that was always interesting was the Grand Hotel and ________.

RQ: Oh yes, tell us.
HK: The Grand Hotel was quite a hotel and people got thrilled every summer. People would come back to the Grand Hotel. Everybody loved that place up there.

RQ: I have a picture of that hotel, Kranny. I understand it did have quite a few rooms in it.

HK: Yes, it did. It was a good sized hotel, and it was filled every summer. That was quite a lively spot up there.

RQ: Yes.

EK: And I can remember that they used to walk these Indian trails.

RQ: Indian trails, yes.

EK: And they would be marked with pieces of white cloth, I mean, on trees. And I remember that.

RQ: I can remember my grandfather taking us on the Indian trails.

HK: I think the Grand Hotel burned in 1922. I can verify that. I can look it up.

RQ: Well, I think I have it.

HK: I wrote that down for you.

RQ: You wrote that down for me, Kranny, and I have that in my notes. Let’s see, there was another structure up there called the auditorium up on the hill.

HK: No, that was right here.

EK: We used to go to church there.

HK: We used to go to church there. When I was a kid, I used to go to Sunday school down here at the Godfrey cottage, which is last known now as the Den Uyl cottage—Owl’s Nest. I went to Sunday school there. Mrs. Godfrey would run
the Sunday school class for us kids. But the auditorium was right on top of the hill here.

RQ: I guess that burned, too, didn’t it?

HK: That burned down. Then they used to hold Sunday services right down here, right in the vacant lot.

RQ: Now, your father, Mr. McClung, was one of the initial founders of Macatawa Sunset Service.

HK: That Sunset Service, yes.

RQ: Yes, Earl Carol just gave me a hymnbook to give to my dad.

HK: Oh, he did?

RQ: He still has some.

HK: There might be some in Georgie’s cottage, for that matter.

RQ: We kept all the chairs and everything in the basement. We used to put them out there on that vacant lot where the bathhouse used to sit.

HK: Now before it got there, it was held right out in front of the Den Uyl cottage, the Godfrey cottage. We used to hold it on the beach there, that’s how much bigger that beach was at that time.

RQ: You’d be sitting in the water now, wouldn’t you?

HK: That was all right in front of there. That was before they had it on the vacant lot. I had a postcard. I don’t know if somebody got it from me. I had a postcard of the old bathhouse, which I can always remember so well because every day when I was a kid, I used to be down at that bathhouse.
RQ: When you get a copy of my book, Kranny, you’ll get that because Dorothy Hall had a copy of that. She had a postcard, a color postcard, of the two-story bath pavilion, right at the foot of Grove Walk. She had it; looked just like new.

HK: I used to have that, but somebody copped it from me.

RQ: Is that right? You lost it.

HK: Yes. I have one of them there that still shows the bathhouse on the lakefront, but I don’t have a good view of it. I used to have one of the new bathhouse they put on the vacant lot here.

RQ: I don’t have much in the way of pictures of that, but it was kind of an unsightly looking thing.

EK: Yes, it was.

HK: It had quite a few rooms in that bathhouse; it was a pretty good sized building. I used to, when I was a kid, _______ walk underneath that thing all the time.

Walking underneath the boardwalk all the time.

RQ: Speaking of hotels of Mac and other places, I understand that there was a big hotel in Jenison Park at one time. Is that so?

HK: No, not a big hotel. Just a little lodging over there.

RQ: A little lodging.

HK: Yes and they had some rooming houses at ____________ Avenue. Used to be a bar room over there.

RQ: And didn’t they have a Ferris wheel and things of that sort?

HK: Oh yes, merry-go-round and everything.

EK: A regular county fair.
HK: They had everything there. They had a dance floor there, and a merry-go-round. What do you call those up and down things?

RQ: Roller coaster.

HK: Roller coasters.

RQ: Yes, I’ve got a picture of a postcard showing Venetian Night. The one year when that place was lit up like a Christmas tree.

HK: It would be.

RQ: Really a beautiful sight.

HK: They had some big barge out there.

RQ: Yes, they fired the fireworks from the barge there.

HK: From the barge, yes. Every year in August they used to have a big roast there, and thousands of people came down to the roast, you could hardly get in there, any place in Jenison Park at that time. They had bowling alleys there and all kinds of amusement deals.

RQ: Speaking of amusement, when I was a teenager, one of the other characters of Macatawa was a lady named Ma Burmingham.

HK: Oh, yes.

RQ: Do you remember Ma Burmingham and the activities that she used to promote for the children, the young people?

HK: Very well. Yes, she did. She put a lot of work in that. She used to live on Mishawaka.

RQ: Oh, did she?
HK: Right next to ____________. So, I knew Ma Burmingham many years before she built a cottage down here.

RQ: Before she built the Tennessee?

HK: Yes, after this burnt down. The Reed’s...Dr. Reed and so forth, they used to ask Virginia Cunningham, Mother and Father used to rent the cottage, I think it was the Kelly Cottage, had the Kelly girls in it. They used to rent a cottage in there. It burnt at that time...

RQ: Ma promoted a number of big events.

HK: She did a lot of work for the kids.

RQ: Among them were the hayrides, and we had a mock wedding one year. And then I’m trying to remember the big event, I think it was the most outstanding one I can ever recall, where everybody in Macatawa participated. I just gave a picture to Bonnie Van Regenmorter of Rolly Van Regenmorter in the old taxi called the Silver Bullet. They sold rides for ten cents, running around the park. But I can’t remember what we called that event. It wasn’t Venetian Night and it wasn’t a hayride and it wasn’t...I can’t remember what it was. It was kind of a festival. I would think it was a Macatawa festival. Do you remember that? It was about 1939 or ’40.

HK: I think that Ma Burmingham used to promote something like that every year.

RQ: Yes, she had something about every year.

HK: I forget what she called it, but she did quite a bit on that for the kids and so forth.
RQ: Her grandson, Pierce Winningham, was also very active. He did some coaching of the young boys, younger than he, in both tennis and softball. And then there was Art Tazer’s brother Ted Tazer. Remember Ted Tazer?

HK: Ted Tazer, yes.

RQ: He was quite an athlete in his day.

HK: Yes, he was. He was a pretty good tennis player. I can remember playing tennis down at the tennis courts over 50 years ago.

RQ: There was only one court there then, wasn’t there?

HK: At that time I was doubles champion of the City of Grand Rapids.

RQ: You were the doubles champion?

HK: Yes. So I played a little tennis in my day.

RQ: You played a little tennis in your day.

HK: We used to have some beautiful tennis players down there. They used to come from the castle.

RQ: Yes.

HK: And we had some very good tennis players down there. Of course, those days we had quite a bit more activity to look forward to because we had indoor softball games. Central Park used to be in, Waukazoo, the Castle and ourselves.

RQ: A regular intramural league.

HK: Yes.

RQ: Wasn’t Jim Hall involved in that activity? And Chuck Bradford?

HK: Well, I think they were in it every once in a while.

RQ: Also, remember that the Patingill boys were active. Vic and Pete.
HK: There used to be a pretty good deal there with Waukazoo and Central Park. It’s hard to realize all the things.

RQ: Speaking of tennis, Kranny, it’s interesting that you should mention your championships in Grand Rapids. I was taking lessons this summer from Amos Alonzo Stagg, Jr. He has been teaching tennis for about 55 years, I understand.

HK: I don’t see how he can possibly do it.

RQ: His age is 77, and he’s just remarkable. He gets around on that court like a man half his age, and says he doesn’t have a pain in his body, whether he gets up or he goes to bed. He’s just in remarkable condition.

HK: Wilson’s still playing tennis down there.

RQ: Wilson, yes.

HK: I know he is 80; I don’t see how he can see the ball anymore.

RQ: You mean Mr. Camel?

HK: Camel, yes.

RQ: Mr. Roe Camel. He married the girl, what was the name?

HK: Married the Wilson girl.

RQ: He married the Wilson gal, yes.

HK: They used to live up in Mishawaka.

RQ: I can remember playing him several years back, and I couldn’t get a game off him. He was quite a player. Really something.

HK: Of course, that was a lot later, but I can’t figure the…that was her grandfather and grandmother, I guess, the Wilsons. The Trumps used to live next door to us and then the Wilsons.
RQ: Well, Kranny, this has been most interesting, and I just want to thank you and
Ethyl for taking time and going into the past and giving me the benefit of your
memory. I’m sure it’s going to be very helpful when I, this winter, try to sit down
and organize this with some of the pictures.

EK: You’re going to have a project.

RQ: Yes, it is. It’s a big project, but I’m looking forward to it and I fully expect to get
it published next May. I’m going to dedicate it to Mother and Dad and hope to
put it out on their birthday—they had birthdays on the 14th and 18th of May, and
those are the dates I have selected to publish this.

HK: Oh, that’ll be great.

RQ: I’m sure you’ll be one of the first to find out when it’s ready. Thank you, again.

[End of interview]