Brown, Phyllis and Harley Oral History Interview: Sesquicentennial of Holland, "150 Stories for 150 Years"

Marie Bostwick
MB: I am meeting with Mr. and Mrs. Harley Brown and speaking first with Mr Brown. We’d like to have you tell us what you remember from your childhood, where you lived as a child, where you went to school and, ultimately, how you came to Holland.

HB: I’m from Danforth, Illinois, which is a Dutch community also, not unlike Holland, only much, much smaller and I attended elementary school in Danforth. There is a Reformed Church in Danforth also, so the community is primarily Dutch and German. The German side of it came first and the Mr. Danforth who settled the town had to have some drainage so he went to Holland, the Netherlands, brought people back and helped to drain the land; it’s a farming community. I went to Gilman High School which is the next town over and graduated from Gilman High School. My father died when I was a senior in high school and so I didn’t think I would go on to college. But then after being at home for two years, I felt I really had to make a step and come out of that situation. I applied for a scholarship to Hope College. I had a very good high school friend who was attending Hope and, of course, I had cousins who had attended Hope, so it was not new to me. I came by train in 1955 from Gilman, and so my first impression of Holland was seen from the depot. I stayed with a friend, the same friend from Illinois. He happened to be working at the Niblink-Notier Funeral Home so we stayed over night in the funeral home. That was kind of interesting and different. Then I got the scholarship and
came back to Hope. So that’s the way it all really began.

MB: What do you remember of those first days at Hope?

HB: I’ve written some things down so maybe that will refresh my memory. I was a music major and so the first thing that I remember is, of course, the chapel because that’s where I auditioned for the scholarship.

MB: The scholarship was in...

HB: A music scholarship.

MB: In voice, instrumental?

HB: Voice. I think there were five faculty members sitting a long way back in the chapel and I was on the stage. Of course, I was as green as grass, coming from right off the farm so it was very intimidating for me. Tony Kooiker played for me. I had a piece of music and I had no accompanist and he said he would play for me. Sitting in that huge chapel with just me on the stage was a little bit intimidating. Like I said, there was no music building so I studied with Norma Baughman who was a quite a prominent voice teacher here in the area. Anybody that was anybody that studied voice, studied with her. She and her husband were on the staff at Radio City Music Hall, they were part of a quartet. When they saw that things were going to change, she came with her husband to Grand Rapids. Her husband started teaching at Hope. He died and she took over his students later on. So we had voice lessons in the basement of the chapel. But then the new music building was built. I’m not sure whether it was my sophomore year or completed my junior year, but one of those two years. So that was my very earliest impressions of Hope. I also remember Van
Raalte Hall for one major reason which was the Kletz, the coffee shop in the basement of the chapel. I remember so well, they used stoneware coffee mugs and I’ve got a couple of those mugs that we bought in an antique sale, and I love to drink coffee out of those very heavy stoneware mugs. Chapel was, of course, required in those days. I sang in the chapel choir. During my senior year, the senior music majors took turns directing the chapel choir. They sang every morning for chapel, just a response. Part of my job then, as a senior, was to direct the chapel choir. My senior recital was in the chapel also. In the meantime, Mrs. Baughman, the voice teacher, suggested that I sing in the church choir. So very early on I sang in Hope Church choir. I sang there, I think, for two years. Then I took a church choir of my own, Fourth Reformed Church choir, because by that time I felt like I could use some more practical experience.

MB: How far along in school were you at this time?

HB: I’m not sure whether I had it for two years or one year. Certainly I had it for one year and that would have been my senior year. But I think I had it my junior year also. I think I probably had it two years. I also taught privately at Meyer Music House. Fred Meyer was big in selling organs, and so with each organ he sold, people got ten free lessons. I was the person to give the ten free lessons.

MB: On the organ?

HB: On the organ. Of course, the people that bought those little organs, they were little chord organs, weren’t terribly proficient. You know they advertise that you can teach anybody to play in ten easy lessons. Well, you know, I’m not sure it ever really
came to that, but I did teach there also. I remember Russ' Drive-In. The people we stayed with, Bill and Delia Van Regenmorter, lived on Seventh Street. So all my four years at Hope College I lived on Seventh Street and not in the dorm. There were no dorms originally so all the male students stayed in private homes. This was a home on Seventh Street. I could have gone into the dorm my junior and senior years, but I chose just to stay there because it was quiet and it was no problem. At least once week, I would take them out and drive to Russ's for a hamburger. Of course you had your little thing on your car door and it was a drive-in. That was always fun. The best part of the whole thing was that I took my first meals at Hope College in the dorm, but that only lasted one semester. Then I bought meal tickets for the Windmill Restaurant. Now the Windmill Restaurant is no longer in existence, but it was on the corner of College and Eighth Street. That restaurant was run by a husband and wife, I think their name was VandenBerg. You could get a meal ticket and your meal was 65 cents. Most people that went to Hope went to City Kitchen. City Kitchen was right across the street and down in the next block, but they charged 55 cents a meal. Now for this extra ten cents you got quite a bit more food, so we always ate at the Windmill Restaurant. The interesting thing about the restaurant, and this wasn't just with the Windmill Restaurant, it was with others also, but I always remember that at Tulip Time they had a separate menu printed, so that the people that came to the restaurant who were visitors or tourists paid the long price, the expensive price, and we college students still kept the cheaper price. So they raised the prices. That was not unusual, a lot of the restaurants did that and probably some of the stores
also I would think. One of the things that stands out in my mind from those early
years was as a singer, of course, I participated in the musicals. One that I remember
very clearly was the Red Mill. There was revival of the Red Mill a few years ago as
part of Tulip Time, but this was the original one that we did. This would have been
in 1958, I think. It was at the Civic Center and was on three nights, I think. Morrie
Ryder directed the orchestra and Ann De Pree and I sang in it, as well as some other
people as leads in the musical. It’s a very dated musical, it’s pretty boring I think.
But it was a part of Tulip Time, so that made it really important. I also remember the
All College Sing at the Civic Center where all the fraternities and sororities sang.
That was a big thing. I directed the Arcadian Fraternity song during my senior year
for them. So those are some of my early impressions of being here at Hope College.

MB: I’m going to ask Phyllis about her childhood and where she lived.

PB: Not on a farm (laughs). I was born and raised in Grand Rapids. I am an only child.
I started in the public schools and then, in the fourth grade, my parents changed me
to the Christian School. First of all, in kindergarten, my mother had a thing about
starting in the middle of the year. Back in those days you could start school in the
middle of the year and my mother did not want me to do that. So she held me out a
semester and I started in the fall. I’m a December baby, so when I got to
kindergarten, the teacher said, "Oh my, she’s so big." (laughs) Then she upped me a
half a grade so then I was in a half year class which my mother didn’t want me to be
in. So here I was. I went to the public school through the fourth grade and then I
was going to go to the Christian School. Well, the Christian School did not have half 
year grades at that time. So then it was will we put her back or will we advance her 
a half a grade? They advanced me a half a grade again saying that if I couldn’t do it 
then they would drop me back. But I was able to do it, so all in all, I skipped half of 
the kindergarten and half of the fourth grade. I went to the Christian School and 
graduated from Grand Rapids Christian. Like Harley, my Dad died when I was a 
senior in high school. I was always going to be an RN, a registered nurse, but my 
mother said there’s no money. She said practical nursing had just begun, had been in 
vogue for just a couple of years, and why didn’t I try that. I tried practical nursing, 
that’s a year course, and I did that at Grand Rapids Junior College. Now it’s called 
Community College, but back then it was Junior College. I did that, then a dentist, 
an orthodontist in Grand Rapids asked if would I like to come to work for him. He 
had a need for an office girl which had nothing to do with practical nursing but it paid 
well. I took that job. His name was Dr. Victor Ver Meulen and he was a Hope 
College graduate. We came once a week to Holland to work on children’s teeth. 
This was back in the late or middle 50s. He came and I came with him every 
Wednesday and we worked in Dr. Titus Van Haitsma’s office because Dr. Van 
Haitsma had Wednesdays off. We would go to the Warm Friend for lunch on 
Wednesdays and Dr. Ver Meulen would always pay for my lunch. We always had 
the same thing - I think it was a barbecue and maybe onion soup. I know it was 
chocolate mint ice cream for dessert. I remember that for sure. Then we would walk 
back and work the afternoon. During that time of those two years, Dr. Ver Meulen
was talking one day with a new orthodontist who wanted to come to Holland to be a
full time orthodontist, he had just graduated, I guess, from dental school. He has just
now retired from orthodontia here in Holland. But at the time, Dr. Ver Meulen said
to me, "Well, I surely hate to discourage him, but I don’t think he’ll ever find enough
business in Holland, Michigan, to work full time in orthodontia." Well, today I think
we have four or five orthodontists that are extremely busy. This was Dr. Boven.
Dr. Boven goes to Third Reformed Church and I talked with him just a few weeks
ago and told him that whole story. He remembered it very well of Dr. Ver Meulen
saying this to him. Dr. Ver Meulen was a Hope College graduate and he encouraged
me to do something more with my life. So I came to Hope and I had a wonderful
time. I always say I didn’t learn much but I had a great time, a fun time, and I found
a husband.

HB: Phyllis always cries...

PB: I always cry...

HB: Anytime. She cries when she sees a flower, she cries when she sees a butterfly so....

PB: Back in those days, Hope didn’t cost like it does today. No one would come to Hope
College today for a good time. But back then it was my own money which I had
earned, and I came for a good time and I had it and I found a husband. And that’s
all that matters.

MB: That’s how you got to Hope. Then did you decide to stay in Holland?

HB: No, but before we get away from this though, I should say that I remember that my
total expenses for Hope College, a year, was $1000.00. That even included books
and my housing and tuition, of course. I could make $1000.00 in the summer through a summer job. So basically I earned my own way and Phyllis did the same thing.

MB: How times have changed!

HB: How times have changed! For $1000.00 you could go to college. After I graduated from Hope I was looking for a job, even before the senior year was up. In Fremont, Michigan, there a high school, and there was an opening there. There were two previous Hope grads that been the choir directors at Fremont High School and they both moved to other schools. So they had a history of hiring people from Hope. I called and made an appointment and I got the job. So I was at Fremont High School, that's where Gerber Baby Food is located. I taught there for four years. I taught there a year before we were married, and then we were married. Then we were there together for three years. It was a wonderful beginning because it's a fairly small town and a lot of cultural advantages because Gerber pours a lot of money, just like Ed Prince does in Holland, into arts and that sort of thing. There was money for a concert series even in a small town that size. So we taught there and had a great beginning. But I always said I wanted to at least start over once in my teaching career. I wanted to leave my early mistakes behind and start over fresh. So I went to Michigan State, by that time we had two children, and I got my Master's. I had taken some courses ahead of time and with those courses plus the courses in nine months that I could get at Michigan State, I was able to complete a Master's degree. Then we came to Holland after that.
MB: To Holland High School?

HB: West Ottawa High School.

MB: All of this time Phyllis, besides raising a family, you were at home?

PB: Yes, but I also did my practical nursing. In Fremont, I worked for a general practitioner for a short time before we had our first baby. Then the summer after Dean was born, he was born in the spring, I job shared. Today you hear so much about job sharing and I say, big deal, I did it thirty-five years ago already. But then I didn’t work for a couple of years. When we went to Michigan State, Harley had classes during the day so he was home mostly in the evening. So he took care of the children and I worked evenings, just a couple of evenings a week at Sparrow Hospital on the OB floor. I had the children in the day and he had the children in the evening. He also had a church choir in Lansing so that we could make ends meet. When we came to Holland, we were only here a couple of months when I applied at Holland Hospital, and I worked there part time from 1964 until 1980. Not continuously - there were a couple of breaks in there when we had our third child. In 1980 I went to work part time again for general practice doctors here in Holland. I did that part time until 1989, from 1980 to 1989. In 1989, our last daughter graduated from Hope and we paid our last tuition payment. So I said why not retire? I still go back to help them out once in a while, but I’m supposedly officially retired from nursing. You can’t ever officially retire from nursing, I guess; at least I can’t. I still keep my finger in it once in a while.

MB: Let’s go back just a little bit and talk what Holland was like when you first came. If
you have any special thoughts about it, how was it different?

HB: It’s interesting, when we came back to Holland after being away, after going to Hope College, we rented a house on 14th Street which is also where we presently live. So we’ve really come full circle. Our first year back in Holland, we lived just down the street in a house, and now, of course, all around Hope College there are college houses that the college has purchased and the students live in those college houses all over. This was a large house, two apartments really, and we lived on the lower floor and another couple lived on the upper floor.

MB: That’s a college home now?

HB: That’s now a college home, right. Then that same year we started to build a house on the north side. There were almost no subdivisions in Holland. That was certainly something that came much, much later. We lived maybe ten minutes from West Ottawa High School and I ordinarily always walked back and forth to school. The street where we lived was sort of the end of the housing, so when I walked to school I really walked through a woods. It was just an untended area with just trees - a wooded area really.

MB: Do you remember where that would be located now?

HB: Sure, it’s Kingswood Estate now.

MB: Just south of Riley?

HB: Just south of Riley. It was quite an open area. All over on the north side there was land to be held. We just had lunch with a former student of mine who is big into building and contracting and that sort of thing, and he said that even on the north side
it is very difficult to find a lot to build new homes on because in Holland it’s literally impossible.

PB: Remember River Avenue where the north side Russ’ is now there was a chicken restaurant on one side of the street and Naber’s Grocery Store and hardly anything else along there, and now it’s McDonald’s and Burger King and Russ’ and gas stations and banks and....

HB: Well, that whole north side where all the industry now is, there was nothing. There were just farms and fields and now it’s totally almost all industry. With the opening of Westshore Mall and that whole area of the highway, that whole thing is just totally built up. There are very few vacant spots even along the highway.

MB: And quite quickly, too.

HB: Yes, it certainly was. I would say no more than ten years that this whole major growth spurt...

MB: Along the highway,

HB: And in that area took place.

MB: What do you account for that?

HB: Well, it’s kind of interesting. Our son couldn’t wait to get out of Holland. When he was going to high school, “I can’t wait to be gone.” Well, interestingly enough, he went to General Motors Institute; he’s an engineer. When he would come home on vacations, his friends would come with him and his friends just loved Holland. They’d go to the beach and they would have a boat and they camped out (we had a little pop-up trailer). His friends just loved Holland. Interestingly enough, Dean now,
with his wife and family, live in Holland. He has a boat, they live on the north side and I think they are confirmed Hollanders now, too.

PB: And many of his friends...

HB: And many of his friends from the Detroit area and from Flint, Saginaw. Lots of things to draw...

PB: The lake then, that is one thing...

HB: That’s a major drawing card and the industry. He and his wife are both engineers so they work for Donnelly. That’s a big drawing card.

MB: So you think maybe the spurt of growth came from the increase of industry here?

HB: I think partially, and I think it was a time when there was more money available and so people were building larger homes probably. That whole north side, where you get into the Parade of Homes homes where you have very large dwellings. I think that was a drawing card.

MB: But don’t you think that part of it comes from people wanting to get away from the city? I mean the larger cities and want a "quieter" place. It’s not that quiet place anymore but it’s still quieter than Grand Rapids or than Muskegon or Chicago, or whatever.

HB: Whoever heard of a traffic jam and now we have traffic jams in Holland. I used to go out to visit through our church a man that was in a jail on the north side. I would wait sometimes fifteen, twenty minutes to get across the railroad track. I would have to be there by six o’clock so I’d get caught in the five, five-thirty traffic and you know, I just couldn’t get through. Traffic jam in Holland, Michigan.
MB: Now, what year are we talking about?

HB: Well, that was just two years ago, so it's recent.

PB: There never were traffic jams until just a few years ago, maybe five years.

MB: That's interesting. The year you built your house near West Ottawa School, was when?

PB: 1965.

HB: '65. We built it for $15,000 and the lot was $1,100. Most of the lots sold for a thousand dollars or was it fifteen hundred? I'm not sure. The reason the lot was slightly more expensive was because there were trees on the lot. So that was why the cost increase. For fifteen thousand dollars, what in the world today can you build for $15,000?

PB: Probably not even a garage.

HB: Well, it's true; we took down the garage here and built a new garage and it cost, I think, seven thousand just for the garage. The garage was practically half the house.

PB: When we did build that house, you did all the painting inside and all the finishing of the cupboards and all the yard work and the ground sprinkling, so that was the basic cost.

HB: That was the bare minimum. De Young was a contractor and he had a basic plan for a house. You could do small variations, not too big. Interestingly enough, some things that we incorporated into our house then later they put into all the houses that were built after that. Ours had a sliding glass door, we wanted that. So they then put that in and a couple of other features that we had in our house.
MB: Now, we left you teaching at West Ottawa High School. Where did you go from there?

HB: I stayed right there. I never left. I taught a total of thirty-three years, and except for the four years at Fremont and the one year at Michigan State, all the rest of the time was at West Ottawa. They were really wonderful years. For one thing, West Ottawa was a brand new school and a brand new school district. Everything that we did was really new. There were no traditions or precedents that had to be met. When I came, the choir had never participated in a festival, an adjudicated festival where you received a rating, and it took four years to get a first division rating for me to do that. I taught the teaching of vocal music at Hope College also in a night class, and I used to tell the students that until you had one complete group of students go through your program, from freshman to senior year, that’s when you feel like you truly gain ownership of that particular program. One thing that has really changed a lot, I’m painting for a lady now and she used to teach music at West Ottawa. The elementary schools used to have a lot of religious, sacred music at Christmas programs. Now she says that’s all gone. There are no more Christmas programs because it’s just too religiously incorrect. A few parents would buck that. In those days, I would take my choir to sing in a church on Sunday night, the whole choir. We would sing sacred music. Probably it would a little tougher to do that today.

MB: That’s surprising in a community that is so well founded in the church.

PB: You, or Holland High, were able to do it a lot longer than in the bigger cities. It’s just a couple of years now that they haven’t been able to do that. Where at other
schools that's been disbanded for many years, already. It's too bad.

HB: It's interesting also that the formation of West Ottawa School district was a breakaway for Holland. The people always refer to, when you cross the bridge, that's going to Never Never Land. They always used to say "WAY on the north side" and they would string out the word 'way', waaay on the north side. When you crossed the bridge, which they used to call the old Grand Haven bridge near where the windmill is now, that was quite a long ways away. If you had something at the school, often the town people would not come because there was still a little bit of antagonism from the fact that West Ottawa was a separate school district from Holland. I think there still may be some older people that still feel that way. Of course, Holland and West Ottawa are big rivals in sporting events. But it's friendly rivalry.

MB: That's good. There is the rather magnificent West Ottawa Performing Arts Center.

HB: Certainly is and you know, it should have been named the Brown-Langejans Memorial Auditorium, but it never was. (laughs) We always did a musical every year, a full fledged musical, and we did it in what was called the cafetorium. The cafetorium is nothing more than a glorified cafeteria with a stage at one end. The stage was sort of an afterthought. Originally in the plans, there was to be no stage, there was to be a portable stage. This was all done while we were at Fremont teaching. This was done at that time. We always did all of our concerts and everything, and now of course, the year that I leave, here is this wonderful magnificent auditorium. It's a great place, but I don't regret having it because its a
wonderful auditorium. Hopefully Holland will some day have that also.

MB: The city.

HB: The city, the city auditorium.

MB: You don't feel that the Civic Center is quite right for it?

HB: Oh, no, the Civic Center is not right at all for it. The Civic Center is a basketball court with a stage tacked on the end of it. Same as the cafeteria. The cafetorium at West Ottawa was little better acoustics. Of all the cultural things that are available in Holland, it certainly does need a community auditorium. And I hope that it goes through.

Pb; Maybe by the time the community is 175 years.

HB: Maybe, let's hope it doesn't take that long.

MB: No, I don't think so. So, how did you end up back on 14th street?

PB: We've always liked antiques. Even back on our honeymoon, already, we would go by a home and say, well you could do a lot with that. Some junky home that needed a lot of help, because Harley likes to fix up things and is handy. But we were going to move. We came from 14th street here and we were going to go to the north side. We wanted a big old home and there wasn't anything on the north side. Maybe a farm house way out somewhere. At that time I think we only had the one car, yet, didn't we? So we wanted something close to the high school so he could walk. And there were no old homes in the area, so we built the new home. Well, then we still continued to get antiques, and look and talk, and then our kids once in a while would get really nervous about this, that we would be moving or thinking of moving. So
through the years we promised them that we would never move until they finished high school, till they were all out of school because that would probably mean changing a school district and all that. So we kept our promise. We weren't really looking for an old house, we just talked about it and we would see one and we would say, "Oh, isn't that beautiful" and this type of thing. We have a friend who is a realtor and one day we stopped in an open house. It wasn't anything we were interested in, we just stopped in to see him a minute. He said, "Oh, I think there's one on 14th Street, an old home that's opening up. Why don't you ride by it?" I don't think we ever took 14th Street to go anywhere all the 25 years that we lived on the north side. It just wasn't a street....so we didn't have any idea where the house was or anything. We rode by and thought it was quite nice. So then he took us through it and we made an offer and it was accepted and we got all excited. About a few days later our realtor friend called and said, "Well, they've decided not to sell. They're taking it off the market." I said to Harley, "Well, then that was the way it was supposed to be. We weren't supposed to have that house. So just forget it." It was just a few weeks later when our realtor friend called again and said, "Well, now they've decided to sell again." So, they would take our offer because we were the first ones to offer. That was in February of '87. We moved in in April of '87 and we've done a lot...Harley has done a lot of work. I always have to say that. People say "Oh, my, you've done so much." And I always say, "Harley has done it." Because he has. Every single wall has been painted or papered, every floor has been sanded or recarpeted except for our bedroom; a new garage, as he said, a new
driveway, a new roof, a new furnace. I don’t think we want to add how much money we’ve put into this house. (laughs)

HB: But it was wonderful house, originally. The family that built the house, I understand was a very prominent family in Holland, the Steketee family (laughter). The interesting thing about this is when I talked to Kay, she said, and maybe you can verify this, that this house was the first house in Holland that had a furnace as original equipment. Now, I don’t know where she got that, I believe her...

PB: Because it doesn’t have a fire place. So many old homes had fireplaces.

HB: This was probably just in that transition period when homes were not using fireplaces as much anymore.

MB: I have to tell you that my father built this house for my mother instead of taking her on a honeymoon.

HB: Oh, is that the story. I knew that they moved into it right away as newlyweds.

MB: Yes, and I have a feeling that he was sort of showing off to put some of these things in, making it especially plush for her. So that could very well have been, and I remember that old furnace.

HB: Yes, we remember it too. We had only moved in in April, and by December the furnace had gone out. Of course that was a new furnace, this was another furnace that had been replaced before that, but now this second one was…and now we are on the third one.

MB: But it’s interesting to me that you haven’t changed the basic structure. It looks to me as though the woodwork is still pretty much the way it was.
HB: Still the same wonderful woodwork, quarter sawn oak, still see the light cresta, which is the pressed board.

PB: Kay told us, when we took her thought the one time or when she came to look it over, that your mother had a cleaning lady who cleaned and polished the woodwork every Friday. I said to her, "Well, I'm surely glad that your mother had that cleaning lady to do that, but if you think that I'm going to wash it every Friday, you've got another thing coming. (laughs) I think that because it had such wonderful care in the beginning it's been able to be kept like this. Because Harley didn't do anything to this woodwork...

HB: No, the only thing that I did was varnish the windows sills and just the window casing itself, not the wood around the window. So that's still the original finish. And the pocket doors still work yet.

MB: Margaret Steffens has a wonderful story to tell about using those doors to put on shows here, and using those as stage doors...curtains.

PB: Well, our grandchildren love to play with them, they come and they will pull them out and they pull and pull and I say "Not any farther, not any farther, that's as far as they go." But they just think it is neat. When we first moved here we thought about shutting the living room off during the winter to save on heat, but the thermostat is in there so we couldn't do that.

HB: It would have been too confining, anyway.

PB: Yes, but it was a thought on a cold, cold winter to save on heat.

MB: I have a feeling that might have been a reason why they put them in because there are
two sets of them. But they just closed off that room.

PB: They could have easily done that. I think a lot of people did that back then, or would shut different areas off. But we don’t. We spend most of our time in there, where there are gorgeous things.

MB: So are you retired now?

HB: I’m retired. This is my fourth year of retirement. The interesting thing people always asked is, "Do you find enough to do?" And I said, "Well, yes, I think so. I set the alarm for 6:30 because if I don’t get up at 6:30 I don’t accomplish everything I set out to do." Up to about four years ago, I had a church choir at Trinity Reformed Church, which by the way, from a historical standpoint, that building now has been torn down. That was on the corner of 20th and Central and it’s now a parking lot. The new building is now on Apple Avenue. I had bell choirs and church choirs there for all the years that I was in Holland except one. I started out my very first year. I had a church choir in First Reformed Church in Zeeland and then after that the rest of the time I’ve been at Trinity Reformed Church. We’ve just now transferred to Third Reformed Church and that has a really fine choir program too developed by Roger Rietberg. Roger had been there forty-five years and they needed an interim director, kind of a bridge between his leaving and someone else coming. So I took the two choirs at Third for six months and that was a very interesting time. It was very enjoyable. That’s how it all really started. I’ve really never been without a church choir or church choirs for all the years that I taught. Now I still do a lot of painting, house painting. In fact I’m just finishing up a job
now, a full inside of a house, and I guide at the museum. I really enjoy that. That’s very enjoyable. I’m very interested in Holland history and so I do mostly tours. I do the children’s tours, the third grade classes. Every third grade class does a museum tour and I do that. The nice part about it is my daughter teaches third grade in Holland Heights and so I get to take her class through and that’s always fun. I make a trip out to the class in the fall and bring antiques to talk about antiques. Then in the spring when they do the tour, then they kind of remember who I am. So it works out well to do that. So I don’t want for things to do.

MB: That’s the worst part about retirement. There’s no such thing. Well, what else can we think of to talk about? What do you remember about physical changes in Holland? You’re living right now in what is popularly called the "core city" and sometimes that gets a bad name. But you don’t seem to think so.

PB: Jeff Burke has bought many of the homes right along here and have fixed them up considerably inside and outside and rents them to very reputable people. The fact that he lives right here, he can watch them. We had our flag stolen and our Christmas lights off the tree ripped off, but outside of that we really haven’t had any problems with the neighborhood. We have noise sometimes from the Hope College kids on their way to the 7-Eleven store and back again. And when school first starts in the fall they have their annual party or "whoop de doo" you know. But outside of that we have not had any trouble and we don’t have any close neighbors. The church in the back has some very loud music but it never bothers us. So far we’re very content here. When things get bad then the for sale sign will go up. But right now
everything is fine.

MB: It looks pretty much like it did when I lived here.

HB: Yes, I can imagine.

PB: Well, Mrs. De Graaf has lived next door for thirty or thirty-five or forty years, I don't know. She's been there forever. Mrs. Verheul, around the corner, is still there and she's lived there forever also. So some are very stable neighborhood people, and others of us kind of come and go. And of course the parsonage, across the street from 14th Street Church, that will always be there. There have been homes for sale on this block since we've lived here where they don't even put a for sale sign up. They just say they're going to move and their house sells like that. It goes that fast. We're looking forward to the time when we want to sell it and that it happens to us. We can just tell our friend, the realtor, or put the word out to a few people that we have it for sale. Our house on Mae Rose went within two or three weeks after we decided to sell that. That's a long time ago, of course, but hoping the same will happen here.

HB: This block has had several things in the paper about it because we really were some of the first people to do a block picnic. We had a good thing going. Well, then a couple of years ago, I don't know if you remember this or not, but when the OAR organization was going to buy the house down the street, then the people in this area...what they were going to do was to...We have nothing against OAR, but we didn't want to see a large house be cut up and made into something other than a family dwelling. And so we opposed it, and kind of got a black eye through the
paper because we were opposing something that really has a wonderful...OAR is a great organization. They do a lot of rehabilitation for recovering alcoholics and drug addicts, and they really do a very fine job. But they do take a home, a large home, it’s really one of the largest homes on the block, not the one we’re living in but the one down the street, and they would have turned it into sort of like a dormitory. We hated to see that happen. So our neighbor, the one that has all the houses, bought the house and so he owns five houses on the block. We kiddingly say now it should be called the Burke Memorial Drive or Burke Street because he’s the one that has all the houses.

MB: Did he buy Irwin Knooihuizen’s house too?

HB: No, he did not. Somebody else bought that. He has worked on almost every house on the block, however, because he is a contractor. He did a lot of work on Irv’s home. And several others also.

MB: I have to say that this corner at 14th and Central is one that has stayed pretty much the same as it was. If anything it has much improved. But of course, it was Depression times that I remember and we were going down hill.

HB: Just in transition state.

MB: What kind of antiques do you specialize in?

PB: Well, Harley is always looking at furniture and he likes to refinish it. We’ve had some unbelievably ratty looking pieces of furniture, and when he gets done with them they sell at the Tulip City Antique Mall in a very short time. He scrapes and works hours and hours on some of them. I like crystal and china and beautiful dishes. I
think my very favorite is turn of the century type of dishes that are very ornate and beautiful. If I could only deal in those, if I could afford to buy them first so that I could turn around and sell them, I would do just those things. But they’re far too expensive for me to deal in them. But I do like that era of dishes and things, let’s put it that way. Stuff as I’m always saying. We have so much stuff! We do have a good time doing it. That’s another thing that we do. We have a booth in the antique mall on the highway and so we have to go to auctions or antique sales or estate sales and things like that in order to get the products that we in turn sell in our booths.

MB: You are very busy people.

PB: Yes, but that keeps us hopping, keeps the arthritis away and makes the day go extremely fast. We have grandchildren and they also keep us...Our children, because they all live in Holland, have many "will you do this" type of jobs, mainly for their dad, or "will you babysit," or "will you watch the children just for a little while while I go to the dentist, the doctor, the hair dresser" or this or that. Anyway, it’s lots of fun.

HB: And we have twins too. We have twin grandchildren.

PB: Oh, isn’t that wonderful!

HB: One of our daughters has twins. That makes it kind of interesting.

MB: I think that points up something that I have noticed about this town and that is that when parents stay, the kids tend to come back and rally round.

PB: It’s very interesting because so many people, if they don’t know you, they ask, "How many children do you have?" and we say three. Then, "Are they around?" or
whatever and then we’ll say, "Why yes, they’re all in Holland." It’s wonderful, but it’s so unusual nowadays because society is so mobile. Like Harley said, Dean went away to college and met his wife there and she was not from this side of the state. She was from the other side of the state but she was willing to come and live over here. Our daughters went to Hope and their boy friends, husbands, are from this area too. So there was no question of them moving away at all. They’ve never said anything about moving away and I know they just won’t! I don’t know if it’s that they’re so in love with Holland. It’s just that they’re here and their jobs are here, but it’s neat to have them all around.

MB: Isn’t it wonderful what a magnet Hope College was!

HB: It really brings in so many cultural things that are associated with the college. We go to a lot of concerts and plays. We have the summer tickets for the plays, and so it’s good. One thing we didn’t mention is that we do quite a bit of bed and breakfast through this house. We belong to the two clubs. One is called "Mennonite Your Way" through the Mennonite Church. We’re not Mennonites but anybody can join the club. The way it operates is for a very nominal fee you can stay in someone else’s home when you travel and then in return then you are expected to have people in your home. So we have the Mennonite Your Way and we also belong to a group called Evergreen which is a very similar kind of club. We’ve used it very extensively.

MB: So you do an exchange of residences.

HB: Right. We have quite a few people. We’re on the college list and the seminary list
so we have a lot of visiting professors and teachers that come in to apply for jobs and that kind of thing. We do have quite a few of that kind of thing also. It's kind of fun to have. We've had people from the Czech Republic and a lot of Japanese people because Hope has a very strong exchange program with Japan. So those people, the chaparones who come with those students, will often stay with us.

PB: And the college likes it because we're so close that they can just walk back and forth.

HB: We also were interviewed earlier in the year because we took Tulip Time guests in almost from the beginning when we lived on the northside. I don't know how many years we have been doing this, but all the years we've been back in Holland we've always had people. In those days, of course, there were very few motels and so people all over the community would have house visitors. Our kids would sleep in sleeping bags in the basement and they would give up their bedrooms. We've done that for many, many years.

MB: Sounds like a great idea. Well, I think we've just about wrapped it up.

(Long pause on tape, then continues.)

PB: When we first came, and for the first (well, we've been here since '65, so we've been here a little over 30 years), let's say the first 20-25 years, Harley had the choir at Trinity Church as he said. That choir sang morning and evening, every single Sunday until just a few years before he retired. Then they didn't sing in the evening. Now, the choir only sings three Sunday mornings a month. Church attendance in the evening, back when our children were growing up it was expected, demanded of our children, that we went as a family morning and night to church. Everybody did back
then. Today in the Reformed Church, the Christian Reformed Church I’m sure is still somewhat better at this, evening worship is down considerably. When you do go, you see very few families. You see mostly our color hair or grayer, older people. Church attendance as a whole, I’m sure, is down. It’s down all over, not just in Holland. There used to be articles written in the magazines about how everyone in Holland, Michigan went to church. They walked to church and they wore black. It sounded like we were an Amish community or something. Maybe when Dr. Van Raalte was here the people walked to church in their black, but that’s been a good many years since that’s happened. So I think that even though we’re considered a Christian or a religious community, things in many areas have changed. It’s still a wonderful place to live. I wouldn’t change it for anything, but it, like everything else, has changed in that respect. Do you agree or not?

HB: Yes, I think so.

PB: Not that people are less Christian. I’m not saying that. I’m just saying that corporate worship is totally different than it was 30 years ago when we came to Holland. Harley says, one of his many quotes, that he believes we’re the last generation to have two services on a Sunday, a morning and an evening service, because many of the churches don’t have an evening. Our children and their friends, that age young people, do not go twice a Sunday any more. Not that I’m saying that’s bad, I’m just saying how things are changing.

MB: You’d be surprised to learn then, that I remember as a teenager that we had no evening service at all. We went to Christian Endeavor at Third Reformed Church.
Catechism on Wednesdays. But the Sunday morning service was the only one I remember going to, and that was as a family for sure. So then it became a little more religious perhaps? You think it’s dropped off a bit now.

PB: No, we’re at Third Church, and I think that the worship services at Third are just wonderful. The people that are at Third Church are so community oriented and so ecumenical. Right now with St. Francis having their fire, two of the masses are held at Third Church - the Saturday evening one and the Spanish mass at 12:30 on Sunday. So as we’re leaving church, all of these many, many, many Spanish people, they must pack the sanctuary. They come with these tiny, tiny babies to these old, old people. They just come in droves to Spanish mass. The people at Third Church are involved in so many areas of the city. If you know the population of the church, and then you know what’s going on in the city. They’re reaching out into all areas. It’s a changing society, that’s all there is to it. I’m not saying good or bad, just a change from our youth. Harley went to church in the afternoon, his second service was in the afternoon when he was growing up. Not an evening service, but an afternoon. On the farm, I guess that would be typical.

HB: I think that was a rural thing because then if you had to milk the cows at night, that would take care of that whole situation. There’s one more thing that I wanted to say particularly about Tulip Time. I remember really well hearing one year at the Civic Center as part of the Tulip Time program, I think the school was Battle Creek, I could be wrong on that. Anyway, they brought their band, choir, and orchestra. The whole group. They really did a wonderful concert as part of the Tulip Time
situation. Cal Langejans and I were talking afterward and we said, "Why do we have to bring in an out of town group? We’ve got so much talent in our schools, why don’t we do the same thing?" So that really was what started the Tulip Time Salute, which involved Holland Christian, Holland High, West Ottawa, and Zeeland. That’s still going on yet today. The best talent is used. Solos, small groups, large groups, the orchestra, the band participates. I remember those were such busy times during Tulip Time because the kids were involved in the parades during the day, and this was done generally on Thursday night and Saturday night, two nights. It isn’t done that way anymore, but that’s originally the way it was done. The Dutch dancers would dance, and they had to dance at 7:00, and then by 8:00 they’d have to be at the Civic Center to do this program which would involve all the schools. So they really were very, very busy. Plus, often my bell choir from church would also play because we had kids from Hamilton, Zeeland, West Ottawa, and Holland all going to Trinity. We had a bell choir and at that time it was sort of unique. So the bell choir would play as part of the program also at Tulip Time. It’s interesting to see how that has grown and has maintained over the years. Because there’s so much talent in the area, why bring in another school from someplace else when you can use your own talent?

PB: I think another thing about Tulip Time, you know one thing reminds you of another thing. I think we’re probably the only community around that each of the high schools have a choir, each of them have a band, and each of them have an orchestra. I mean that’s very unusual. I do step-on guiding on the buses at Tulip Time and when I’m on the buses and I tell people that, it’s hard for them to believe that there is
so much music in a "small" town. They also remark about all the children. If they have been to the Children’s Parade the day before, they cannot believe that there are so many children. The children go on and on and on. Then I say, "But that isn’t even all the children because it’s not mandatory that the children march anymore. So as many children are marching, there’s that many children out floating around." But we do have big families, or a lot of children in the Holland community, that is for sure.

MB: Almost every family has children.

PB: That’s right, and more children and more children. Some people coming in are just amazed at all the little Dutch people. They’re not all little Dutch people, but for one day they are.

MB: That’s an interesting phenomenon too. It’s happened since I left. To see very dark haired kids in Dutch costumes!