6-6-1996

Dalman, Laverne C Oral History Interview: Sesquicentennial of Holland, "150 Stories for 150 Years"

Tracy Bednarick

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Published in: 1996 - 1998 - Sesquicentennial of Holland, "150 Stories for 150 Years" (H88-0234) - Hope College Living Heritage Oral History Project, June 6, 1996. Copyright © 1996 Hope College, Holland, MI.

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Abstract (subjects correspond to general order of appearance in transcript): Personal history (includes school, childhood, play, and career), the Depression in Holland, World War I, World War II, the return of Veterans after World War II, post World War II in Holland, a time of change, city government, changing make up of Holland’s population, Hope College, OPEC inflation problem, HEDCOR, Holland Furnace Company, positives and negatives in relation to the city of Holland, church in Holland, and the Vietnam War.
Interviewee: Laverne C. Dalman (LCD) Retired President of Peoples’ Bank of Holland
Interviewer: Tracy Bednarick (TLB) Oral History Student Coordinator

{...} indicate text that was inserted by Mr. Dalman after the interview, during the editing
process to make the interview more complete.

TLB: We are here in Van Wylen Library with Mr. Dalman. Could you state your full
name, your date of birth, and where you were born?

LCD: My name is Laverne C. Dalman. I was born [date removed], 1906 at 539 College Avenue,
Holland, Michigan.

TLB: So you’ve lived in Holland all your life?

LCD: I’ve lived in Holland all my life with the exception of two and a half years in 1931
and 1932. I might mention that I was the oldest one of 7 children, which was rather
norm for that time.

TLB: What did your father do for a living?

LCD: My father worked in a furniture factory, like so many others did in this town. When
I was born, my father had built a house on 539 College Avenue in 1905. There was
hardly any houses between 18th street and 23rd, between 22nd and 23rd. During my
lifetime, that whole south end was developed. It is interesting to note that in 1906,
the year I was born, the Holland Area Furnace Company was established in Holland,
along with the Bush-Lane Piano Company which was right within a few blocks of
where I lived.

TLB: Is the house that you were born in still standing?

LCD: Yes, still standing.

TLB: Do you want to tell me a little bit about your childhood and what it was like living in
Holland at that time?

LCD: Really as far as I was concerned we had no organized play whatsoever; we all had to make our own fun, our own way. We were very fortunate to live in a neighborhood where there was some activity, factories and so on. It was the era in time when there were numerous grocery stores, neighborhood grocery stores, and meat markets in the area. A good deal of our life centered around these little centers of grocery stores, dry good stores, shoe stores, and so on. We had one of those on the corner of 24th and State. As far as play was concerned, the area was largely unpopulated, no houses to speak of, we had lots of room to play. We had to make our own fun, as I said before. In those days we were able to visit factories, go through factories without any restriction; nobody cared, no gates--nothing. As a consequence of early life, I had been through the Holland Furnace Company many times, the Bush-Lane Piano factory; there was an outfit called Holland Cotton Products company. It had a very interesting operation. {At the various lumberyards we got kite sticks to make our own kites.} We really acquired quite an education while we were "fooling around." One of our main "funs" was going along the creeks in the area in the summertime. One of our big deals was to take a little hike over to Big Creek, which is now running under east 24th street into the Van Raalte Farm. {We had a deep swimming hole there, where many of us learned to swim. And as we grew older we spent a lot of time playing sand lot baseball and softball.} In general, it was a rather carefree, worry free life. It was a good life and healthy for the children.

TLB: What school did you go to?
LCD:  I attend Longfellow school and then Holland High School. I attended Hope College one year, and then I ran out of money and dropped out of school. I worked a year and went to a small business college we had in Holland, these were very prevalent in almost every town in our area. We received a very thorough and a good business education. By that time, I was about 19 or 20 years old. In the meantime, I had worked at many different places, because it was always a necessity to get a job; if you wanted to do anything. If you wanted do anything you went out and earned your own way of money. And often times, if you wanted something special in the way of clothing or anything like that, you went on and got a job. You did everything you could to make a dime or a nickel here and there. All of those things that I did as a child stood me in mighty good stead when I grew up.

TLB:  Do you want to talk a little bit about what World War I was like? Were you involved at all?

LCD:  I might mention a little bit more about my personal history.

TLB:  Okay.

LCD:  I worked in several places in Holland: the Western Machine Tool Works, Holland Furniture Company, and downtown in stores, and so on. This really much enlarged my view of things. In 1927, I secured a job in the office of Bush-Lane Piano Company. At the time that I was there was also when the crisis set in, in 1929. I was one of the last ones to go and the last three and four people to leave the plant. I went through all manners of liquidation and that sort of thing.

On the basis of that experience, in 1931, I was offered a job; which was very
unheard of to anyone who might be offering job, to assist the receiver of a bank that was closed in Muskegon. At that time, I was 25 years old in the bottom of the Depression. Fortunately, I had had the kind of experience that they needed, because the Bush-Lane Piano Company was very large, besides manufacturing they had factory stores, they sold things on time, it was almost a bank in itself. By fortuitous circumstances, I was recommended for the job. I stayed there for two and 1/2 years. In the meantime, most of the banks in the country had been closed by President Roosevelt. Some of them took a little longer to get reopened than others. The People’s State Bank of Holland was reorganized and got underway on July 1st, 1933. At which time, I was offered a job as one of the three officers who took the bank out of Depression. I stayed with the bank until 1974; I was with the bank for forty-one years. Started out as one of the three officers originally in 1933, wound up as president of the bank in 1968. {On January 1, 1974, our Bank merged with Old Kent Bank of Grand Rapids. I retired on April 1, 1974.}

TLB: Do you want to talk a little bit about what the Depression was like in Holland?

LCD: Well, the Depression in Holland was practically just like it was everywhere else. It hit Holland particularly hard, because it was a furniture center. The old saying was that is was always one of the first industries to go down in case of a downturn and one of the last ones to pick up. As far as the pick up was concerned you had to wait for the houses to be built. Most people those days bought furniture because they were having a house built. As long as people built houses, with which there was a tremendous demand because there was an expanding population with people coming
from Europe and so on. We lost nearly all of our furniture factories. That was a terrible blow to the community. Some of them reopened, some of them did not. It was a terrible time, because there was no organized relief. No organized government assistance.

The only really worthwhile assistance came on the county level. The supervisors, which are now the county commissioners, were the people who had charge of distributing out funds and food, etcetera. Things were in really bad shape, people where losing their houses right and left. No jobs, but somehow or another we all pulled through. The city opened up the swamp for big gardens. Some people lost their houses, but we tried to make it possible for them to buy their houses back again after they got their job going, because the last thing in the world that we wanted was a house on our hands, especially when the county would only pay $5.00 for rent per month. Welfare, as we know it today, was absolutely extinct. There was nothing like the present welfare system at all.

People just relied on their own. For instance, one bakery in Holland got started in the bottom of the Depression, because the husband was a baker and he was out of work. He started baking bread in their kitchen oven, in their kitchen coal stove. His wife would peddle the bread with a market basket from house to house. That certainly later turned out to be a quite a very flourishing market. Things like that are just an example of what people did. Anything to keep body and soul together. Children that were married moved back with the parents. A lot of doubling up of households. A lot of home canning and all that. Prices were unbelievably low,
for instance a twelve pound ham was a dollar, eight gallons of gasoline for a dollar, three pounds of hamburger for a quarter, a loaf of bread somewhere between a nickel and a dime, a triple dip ice cream cone for ten cents.

The collapse of the industrial segment of our economy... The money supply dried up, because in those days one of the important backings for the currency was commercial paper, which was issued by corporations. That mechanism was further recycled through the Federal Reserve System, and so on as a partial backing for the currency. When the commercial paper supply dried, the amounts of currency gradually dried up too, which is an important reason why things were so very very tough.

It was a terrible time. In three or four days time in October of 1929, the stock market lost about 85% of its value. People that were rich one day were flat broke the next day. A lot of it was because the shrinking of values. Nobody to buy and everybody wanting to sell. The stock market just absolutely plunged. {Suddenly, literally in one day, everything seemed to change for a feeling of euphoria to one of utter despair.} Everybody felt real good about themselves after World War I. We had won World War I. We had feed the world. Our farmers had been very very prosperous, because everything that they could grow was gone over to Europe and throughout the world to feed the people. And all of a sudden the war was over with its problems. In 1921 or 1922, European countries got back to producing their own food and then all of a sudden the farmers who had gone in to great debt, which was a lot of them especially in the West, to finance buying more land and more equipment
and such were saddled with this big debt and no market. We did have in 1922-23, a somewhat of a minor depression, but we didn't feel it much here. Hundreds of banks failed in states of Iowa, Minnesota, Kansas, so on, which were the big wheat growing and corn areas. In spite of that there was a feeling of euphoria. Everybody thought it was going good. The automobile industry was new, and everybody had to have a car. You could by nice little Ford Roaster for $250. It was a wonderful time to live. It was often said the feeling was, "Two cars in every garage and a chicken in every pot!" It is a very common saying.

Because of this feeling that everything was invincible, as far as the stock market was concerned you could buy stock on margin. You never had to put more than ten percent down. The brokers’ houses, of course, were financing that through what they call a "broker loan." If a stock was worth $100 and all of a sudden it dropped to $85 or it dropped to $90, because it was only a ten percent margin they would put out a margin call and say either pay up or we sell out. By the time they got ready to sell out it probably had dropped to $85 or $80, so it precipitated a terrible financial crisis. But that is about the way things were. All I can say is that it is a wonderful tribute to the American people. They came out of it. If you talk to any one of the older people, they will have a story. Everybody has a story. Everybody’s got a story about what they did, how they survived.

TLB: Do you have any ideas on how Americans were able to bring themselves out of the Depression?

LCD: Yes, I have some theories on that. They did everything they possible could on the
political side of it. Congress established the Reconstruction Finance Corporation, which was a very big help in getting banks reorganized and getting things going again. And there were laws passed called the NRA, National Recovery Act, which permitted manufacturers to group and do everything they could to help each other.

Another great help by the Federal government was to establish a National welfare system establishing such things as the W.P.A., Social Security, F.H.A., Bank Deposit Guarantee, and many other programs all through the 1930's. When we were out of the Depression we had another slippery slope in 1937, when we thought we were coming along pretty well then the stock market took a little dip and so on and so forth. The big impetus of getting us out of the Depression is when Great Britain rearmed, started to recognize the danger of Hitler and his regime, and they started to marshall all their assets from their British empire and started buying war materials that we were able to produce. That gave us quite a boost. Although later on at a terrible cost to us, because of our financial problems today that mainly stem from World War I(Should this say World War II?), which was totally financed on debt.

TLB: Do you want to talk about either World War I or World II and how they affected the Holland community? Concentrating more on World War II.

LCD: It is terrible to see the boys go off to World War I. They were shipped by the boat-load to Europe. What was really quite bad is that in 1918, we had a terrible flu epidemic. Lots of young men died from that. They would be drafted and sent to an army camp. Sometimes it wouldn’t be long before they were sent home because they were dead. They died of flu. That was the most hurtful, because it was a big loss
and they didn’t get to see any training or fighting. It was a bad deal. And then on the return, the celebration in November 11, 1918 was tremendous. It was a lot of happiness and everything.

World War II was more recent. It was very dramatic. We were much more totally involved. We went on a total war time basis. Practically no commercial goods, consumer goods were really available. No automobiles were built, no tires were available. Everybody scrounged around. Batteries were hard to find, probably couldn’t find any. They were in very very great demand. Gas was rationed. This really brought home what we never had in World War I. We had blue tickets for non-essential people for gasoline. And we had bread and meat tickets. You were either a blue ticket or a red ticket. Farmers had red gasoline tickets. Truckers had red tickets...or coupons...stamps. I always felt that those things were done to keep people war-minded. To keep them realizing that we were in a war. As war ended, there were just tremendous numbers of supplies out. I know that one company in Holland bought fifty thousand batteries right after the war was over. Those batteries were there, but they wanted people to feel that the war was there. That is part of the strategy of keeping the people geared up. It seemed; I am not saying that that is exactly true. That is the way it seemed.

TLB: It makes sense.

LCD: There were very strict rations. Sugar was rationed. Meat was rationed. You really felt that you were being, not to the extent that some people in other parts of the world were, but we knew that we were in the war. I guess that was important to the
government. During the war as I said, the whole country was more or less converted to the war effort. Holland Furnace company was making armor plates for tanks, and chains for ships. {Hart and Cooley Co. converted to produce ball bearings. And a lot of furniture factories and wood-working factories around here were making glider parts. They made hundreds and thousands of gliders. During D-day a lot of gliders were used to take troops across the English Channel. Also we had a very big deal going with the Chris-Craft Corporation. They built these landing crafts on the north side. I believe they made something like 4,000 of those. They were around 20-25 feet long, 8-9-10 feet wide, and carried 40-50 men. They were used for beach landings. They went out of here every night by truckloads to the Detroit area where they were tested and then shipped on to wherever they had to be used. Those things ended up all over the world. There were others too: Western Machine Tool Works and Buss Machine were going day and night on manufacturing machinery. Anybody who had any skills on metal and machinery building were using their talents to the absolute limit. A lot of food was produced for the war effort. We were really well dedicated to the war effort.

TLB: Did you notice more people coming in to Holland during that time?

LCD: Yes, we did get quite an influx of folks. Even before that time there were quite a few Mexican folks that came up to work the crops and work particularly at Heinz, which used a lot of them. Our migration of people from the south came a little bit later.

I might add that one of the most startling things about the period right after the
war was the return of the veterans. That was just a fantastic thing to see these young fellahs and girls coming home. Their whole attitude was simply one of change. One of the greatest things that the United States Government ever did in my estimation is to pass the GI Bill, which made it possible to subsidize these young veterans even after they were married to get an education. It had been denied them for four years. Some of these young people spent five years without ever getting home. Gratitude was shown. Hope College and Holland benefitted greatly by that. One of the big problems was that all of a sudden we had a lot of young people married. A lot of them wanted housing. Which we were hard pressed to provide.

I was not drafted. I was registered for the draft. At the age of 37 in 1943, the army quit drafting people of that age. In 1942, I was on the City Council. I stayed on there until 1948. I was in the city administration; we were totally involved in trying to find housing for these young people. It was very very hard, because people would come up to the Council and would literally just raise the "dickens." They would say, "What are you doing for these young people? They need to have housing." And that was always a big concern. They doubled up and stayed with family, etcetera. A great many of them got great benefits from the GI Bill. One of the best things that the country could have done.

TLB: Did the bank do anything for people who were looking for housing?

LCD: There was a large building program going on. We financed houses right and left. We did everything we could, of course, but there was a shortage of lumber and everything. Everybody wanted a house at once. They shipped in some Quonset huts;
they had them on the campus over here. And housed people were the Civic Center is now; they had veterans in there and their wives. They also had a lot of single veterans there too.

TLB: I heard that they housed veterans at the Tannery, at the Cappon and Bertsch Tannery?
LCD: Tannery? Oh, that was at the Civic Center.

TLB: Okay.

LCD: The returning vets had to have jobs. It was a tremendous readjustment again, because now you had a lot more men around. For instance, at the bank during the war years we operated with four men, and about twenty-five or thirty girls. Then all of a sudden the men started coming back and there was a little bit of a conflict about jobs and so on.

It was a very very glad period because the war was over, although there was also a lot of sadness because we lost a lot boys. Particularly it was sad as far as our National Guard was concerned. Way before the war started in 1940, they were already mobilized. It is a very interesting history. And there are some histories written about our National Guard company which are very interesting. They were sent down to Louisiana and no one could figure out why they were sent to Louisiana. They were sent their for jungle training. Next thing we know they were in Australia. Then the next thing we knew they were fighting the "Japs" in New Guinea. We lost lots of boys; quite a few boys. I believe that it was something like we got ten telegrams in one day. "The war department regrets to inform you that your son has been killed in action." It was quite an impact because everything came in by
telegraph. We had a telegraph office downtown, right across from the bank. The telegraph office and the local clergy, churches, had it arranged that when a notification, a telegram, that a boy had been killed they would immediately notify a clergy man preferably of their particular faith. The telegraph boy and the clergyman would go down together to deliver the sad news; which is very very sad. Our National Guard Company is a long story, but it is a wonderful story of valor and bravery and hardship. There are quite a few fellows still living that were part of that National Guard Company. I wanted to bring that out, because I always thought that people ought to know about what the Holland National Guard Company did.

We could go on and on with lots of things about the war effort, but let’s just say that we got through it. I sure hope that it doesn’t happen again.

TLB: What did Holland do to get more jobs for the Veterans? Were there any specific efforts that Holland did to provide jobs?

LCD: Fortunately, I don’t think that we needed to really put forth a lot of an effort. There was such a shortage of everything. There were jobs for almost everybody when they got back. A lot of young people went right back to school. A lot of kids went into the service when they were eighteen and they were probably twenty-two, twenty-three, twenty-four years old when they got out. They wanted to go back to school. I can’t remember any real problem with unemployment. There was a big demand for the young people. Business picked up. The automobile companies got into production. The furniture factories started to pick up because households were being formed. If you were married, you needed furniture and that sort of thing.
It is interesting in sorts, we had shifted. We had lost due to the depression our whole base, except for two or three factories in the furniture manufacturing. We switched over to metal manufacturing, because General Motors had started a big stamping plant in Grand Rapids. Quite a few of our people in this area got jobs over there. General Motors had a very good training program in tool and die making and so forth. Slowly we started evolving into a more metal tuned economy, than furniture. You can look around today and see it. Then just in passing and after a number of years, furniture started coming back mainly due to this open office system that Herman Miller innovated. Now we have a good mix. We have a good mix of metal working. We have a good mix of furniture, and all the other lines. It makes it able to attract all kinds of industry because the workers have skill.

I might mention that the city of Holland went through quite a lot of change too, during this period. When I was a boy, the city of Holland was three and a half square miles. Well if you have seen three and a half square miles, it is a mile and half that way and a mile and a half this way. Now we’re something like fourteen and a half square miles. The enlarged city limits offered more people the city service. Now Holland within its boundaries is about 33,000 (people). I noticed in the paper the other day that Park Township has about 10,000. Holland township 15,000. And taking Laketown and Filmore Township, we are getting to be quite a good sized community. It has grown to beat the band.

During this period we resumed Tulip Time. I remember before the war that Tulip Time had got to be quite commercial, because the Holland Furnace Company
had run it. They had the money and they could attract movie stars and so on. It just kind of fell that way. I don’t think they wanted to take over Tulip Time, they just offered. I remember at a meeting after the war, we had we asked, "What will we do with Tulip Time?" It had really been suspended during the war. It was decided that we would have Tulip Time principally for our own enjoyment. If people enjoyed having the tulips and being in this Dutch atmosphere and if people wanted to come and see it to join in with us that is fine, but we weren’t going to try to promote it as a big Madras Gras or something like that. I think that Tulip Time is still basically that way. But other people are promoting it, but it still turned out to be a very fine thing. You give lots of people lots of pleasure. It also brings in some money into the community.

During this time (post World War II), our city government changed because we went some years ago to city manager form of government. Previous to that, perhaps it would be interesting to know, the city had a strong mayor form of government. I think we had six wards and we had two council people from each ward. So that would make twelve people on a council. Everybody had a job. The work was divided up this way, by committees. For instance there was a Public Safety committee; this committee was responsible to the council for running the fire and police department. Then we had the Streets and Sidewalks committee, which was responsible to the council for maintaining the streets and sidewalks, building new roads and storm sewers and all that sort of thing. We had another committee, the Ways and Means committee, which was in charge of seeing the raising of money to
run the city. There was also a Board of Public Works Committee and that sort of thing. So if you were the chairman of that committee you were literally the boss of that particular function of the city. And at every council meeting you made a report as to what was happening so on and so forth. Well that pretty much is over with, now a great amount of power of the city is vested in the City Manager. He is responsible as one man to council; he makes his report. It is working out a lot better. Most of us are business people and we just didn’t have the time to give to it. We didn’t like to be bothered by … for instance, if you were the chairman of Streets and Parks committee, and someone had a pothole they would call you in the middle of the night and would say that they’d like to have that fixed. If you didn’t get it fixed within a few days you would have another phone call. You have a different kind of duty and probably a lot better. I am quite happy with this city form of government.

TLB: Do you feel that the changing of government had a big influence on how Holland changed as a city?

LCD: No, I don’t think so. I think probably Holland was moving along with either form of government. Because the city was getting larger with all the complex city endeavors, it was better to go to city manager form of government. Of course, during that time our BPW expanded tremendously. I don’t know what they contributed to the city of Holland in lieu of taxes. At one time a very substantial amount of the earnings of the BPW were poured back into the city. Half were used to help keep taxes down. A good example of this is that the original Holland hospital was built in the late 1920s by Board of Public Works money that had been accumulated. Low-rates and
wonderful service from the Board of Public Works. For a time to time people thought it would be a good idea to sell the BPW to Consumer Power, but nothing came of the idea. Our school system just expanded tremendously. We had to build a lot of new building, because of all the new children. We always felt proud of our school system. I am glad to see that is continuing nicely.

In regard to the population, the city has changed a lot. Going from being all practically all pure ethnic Dutch or a Dutch extraction. [A large section has been deleted here in reference to the question, and has been replaced by the following information that Mr. Dalman added after the interview.] {After World War II, our economy became quite diversified. New industries were established, which needed different skills. For instance, Holland became quite a center for Die Casting, a new industry. These companies needed people with particular skills which were supplied by people from Kentucky, Alabama, and Tennessee. Many of the workers stayed in Holland and made a significant contribution to the community.}

TLB: Not to interrupt, how did the community react to the increase number of Mexicans?

LCD: [A large section of this text has been deleted by Mr. Dalman in reference to the question. A replacement answer added later follows.] {On the whole very well. Our people were accustomed to the Hispanic presence here. For many years there was a seasonal influx of Mexican seasonal labor. This was first brought on by Heinz Company to help with the pickle and tomato harvest. As time went on more and more help was needed in such thing as the blueberry fields, the fruit picking in the area, vegetable crops locally, and later in the growing of Christmas trees and
ornamental bushes. Gradually more and more families stayed through the winter and found jobs in local industries. So over the years the numbers of Hispanics filled need, not only as farm workers, but later on as factory workers as well. Our area has always tuned in to higher education and as our young people went on to higher education, jobs at the entry level positions needed to be filled. As a result, for instance, while I was president of the Chamber of Commerce in 1962 and 1963, one of our biggest concerns then was that we were getting many young kids coming out of high school. I think we figured at on time that between Holland, Zeeland, West Ottawa, Hamilton we had about 1500 young people coming out of high school. A high percentage went on to college. Of course our big concern was, as the Chamber of Commerce, was to attract industry that would give good employment to these young people. But on the other hand as the industry came in there was still a void and it needed to be filled. The people (hispanics) did and fill those jobs. So many kids were going on to school, which was a great thing as far as our community was concerned. That helped bring on this diversification. I think that this ethnic diversification is just a natural result of the movement of industry and the fast growth of our area. There are jobs to be filled, they hear about them, and they apply, and the employment department or the United States employment agencies, so on send them down here. Our employers need them. This is the way of upward development, and I don’t think there is anything we can do much about it.

TLB: Do you want to talk a little bit about Hope College and the community?

LCD: I’ve always felt really kindly toward Hope College. [tape flips here] Speaking of
Hope College I have always felt that it is a great asset to the city of Holland. It just gave over the years thousands of young people the chance to go to college and stay at home. What it is has done for the community is unbelievable when you just look around to the cities within 100 miles or so about the same size as Holland that do not have a college. Look at the diversity of students that it brings in, the high class students really, and the economic achievements they make, and the recognition that Hope College has had. They have been recognized many many times as being one of the better small colleges in the country. It is a huge industry in itself. Their payroll amounts to millions every year. The economic of the industry is so much, that some one needs to sit down and find out what Hope College means in dollar and cents. It is huge. I am particularly pleased with what they are doing downtown. I think that it is just wonderful. I hope that they can settle any of these problems about the people living on the boundaries of the college. I am sure that they will get that straighten around to, because they always tried really hard. I am really grateful to the College, because whenever they do have even a new parking lot it is well done. And the buildings are wonderful buildings, they add a tremendous amount to our community.

TLB: Do you ever remember any situations where Hope College clashed with the community?

LCD: Just on a few occasions when neighbors complained. Mostly just neighbor complaints. That is all I can remember. [looks at paper] I can’t think of anything else.

One thing that I might mention about, it is something we forget about quite
easily, is that how the OPEC inflation affected the people in general in 1973 and 1974. Back in 1974, gasoline was still twenty-eight cents a gallon. Then all of a sudden we got this Opec thing and gasoline, and crude oil was supposed to shot for more that $85.00 a barrel or something like that it was even high at $35.00 a barrel. Everything based on oil just went up, things just followed. When we think now as to the increase in cost and price that was really, if you think back it was quite, a startling thing that happened to us all. It was inflation; gold went from $800 an ounce, to today where it is $400 and ounce roughly. It affected the economy, and the world a whole lot really.

One of the things that helped the Holland city; a great thing a wonderful thing that was done was when we established HEDCOR. That was very interesting. HEDCOR really, we have to give a wonderful man by the name of Mr. Jay Petter, who was a very prominent business man in Holland. He owned Buss Machine Works, which was making machine tools and die-cast machines. Wood-working machinery too. He was the member of the Board of Directors of our Bank. I can remember him at board meeting of the Bank saying that he had attended a board meeting with Michigan State Chamber of Commerce, where he was also a board member there. He said, "You know there is a little town that did something that I think is a really great idea and I think we ought to look into it. I think we ought to form an economic development corporation. Let's get ourselves a chunk of land and see if we can't attract some worthwhile industry here." Our Board of Directors took it up. Mr. Clarence Jalving, who was our president at that time, became very very
interested in it. He devoted quite a bit of his time to it. [A small section has been deleted here by Mr. Dalman and clarified in the following note.] {Mr. Jalving contacted Henry Maentz, who was president of the First National Bank about the idea. These two men contacted Ottawa Savings and Loan Association and it was agreed by all to form the Holland Economic Development Corporation, or HEDCOR. It was funded by capital provided of $50,000 from each bank and $25,000 by Ottawa Savings and Loan. Various private parties in town invested additional amounts. In all the initial capital was approximately $135,000.} I subsequently became one of the executive vice-presidents of the HEDCOR. I had quite a lot to do with the early development. We went out and bought 300 acres of land where Beechnut is located now. In a very short time, we sold 100 acres to Beechnut. At an increased value, because we improved the property and so forth. And subsequently it just rolled along. We would sell some land and then buy some more. We kept on doing it. Especially on the south side. That worked so well that subsequent boards in the last few years, the same Hedcor governing the south and the north side, developed the north side, which is continually growing. And the south side too. It is amazing when you see how much has been done. It has done a wonderful job for the city. It has attracted high class good working conditions and good economic stance all the way around. I am very very proud of what has been done in that area. It has added an awful lot to the city to make the city what it is today.

TLB: It seems that Hedcor has a direct relation to how Holland is now. Without it, it would be...
LCD: It has been adopted by many other cities, but we got in to it in its early stages. As I said before, our first sale was to Beechnut, we sold many acres to. It was just a thrill to sell 100 acres to them. The were big, you know: Beechnut baby food, Beechnut coffee, Beechnut candies and gums, and so on. They've subsequently been sold at other times to other companies, but still they are here. And given all these years, a wonderful employer. We were able through Hedcor to provide land so that Haworth could expand. That was just one indication of what we were able to do.

TLB: Were you involved with the Holland Furnace Company at all when they started to go down?

LCD: They were a very important factor in our city, until they started going down hill. Their history is pretty well documented by two or three books around. I would say that the most of them are quite accurate and everybody wrote from their perspective. But still it was a wonderful company. The people that ran it originally, they were just top notch. It was established by a man by the name of J.P. Kolla and his son in law, Mr. A.H. Landwehr. It is interesting to note and I ran across this several years ago, of course the Holland Furnace came to town the same year I was born, but I didn’t remember much of it. There was no Holland Chamber of Commerce, but there was outfit called the Holland Association of Commerce. They thought that it would be a good idea to see if they could get some more business in Holland, so they bought ten acres of land up between 24th and 22nd streets along the railroad track. This induced the Bush-Lane Piano Factory to come and take five acres and the Holland Furnace Company to take the other five. Both of them subsequently grew.
When I was working at the Bush-Lane Piano factory in about 1928 or so, we had three hundred people in the factory and over thirty people in the office. It was nice employment—good employment and a nice company—a good company to work for.

In the meantime, the Holland Furnace Company right next door had developed into a huge company, because of the nature of their business was much more spread out...they had something like 500 branches at one time. If you figure with branch managers, salesman, installers, probably ten people working in each office on the average that would be 5,000 people working for the Holland Furnace Company outside of Holland. After they got pretty well established, they built that nice beautiful building up there on 21st street and Colombia. They developed a factory-owned branches in operation. It filled it a very great need, because people discovered that warm air went up and cold air went down. It would be nice to have a furnace in the house. A lot of houses were built. Holland Furnace company also did a nice job of putting furnaces in older homes. Every branch had a branch manager and so on; hundreds of young people came out of Holland and went to work for the Holland Furnace Company were sent to various branches. And they opened branches with the help of the company. It was a wonderful outlet for people with ambition who wanted to get somewhere. It took a little something of get up and go to leave Holland, but they would end up in all sorts of places. They were mostly in the Middle-West and the East. They had the whole thing divide up; they had branch managers for different places. New York State had a lot of population. That was called the Empire Division. If you were the "top-dog" in the Empire Division you wound up with a
pretty good income and you got a little cut-off on every furnace you sold. It was a wonderful outlet for a lot of young people.

It was just a shame that for one reason or another the company just did not have the vision. It is a long long story; all of it is documented. A lot of the troubles started with the death of Paul Landwehr who was killed in a boat accident, when he was a young man. He was just a couple of years younger than I, in fact he was in High School when I was. Mr. A.H. Landwehr, the father, was terribly affected by the accident to the extent that he became ill. It seemed that the whole future course of the company was significantly altered.

TLB: Besides HEDCOR and the City Council were you involved with any other organizations?

LCD: Being in the bank, I was involved with several different things. Like I said, I was president of the Chamber of Commerce. They passed that job around a lot of times. I was treasurer of a lot of organizations, because of the fact that I was handy at the bank. We used to have things like the Community Concert Association, the forerunner to the Hope College...

TLB: The Great Performances.

LCD: Yes, that sort of thing. I was quite active in the Salvation Army for a long long time as an advisory board member, which I felt was a real contribution because of the good work that the Salvation Army was doing. And then HEDCOR. I was president of the Rotary Club in 1960. It was just a lot of different things. Everything that happened, such as the Tulip Time board, you were involved. You were downtown,
you were handy, and they needed you. It was expected of you because that was part of your job. Whatever good you could do for the town, you found that the bank benefitted. That is the way it is with everything; the more you do for others the better you get for yourself.

TLB: What are some qualities that seem to stand out in the city of Holland?

LCD: There are so many, I have been happy living here all my life. Like I said, I have lived here all my life, with the exception of two and half years which were when I was in Muskegon from 1931 to 1933. I think Holland does a very very good job. We have a highly respected police department and first class city management. The city Board of Public Works can't be beat. The church atmosphere is changing, but has certainly been a wonderful force in the community. And the College is just magnificent. It adds so much to the town, that if you pulled it out it would just be terrible. I am thankful for people like Ed Prince who have helped the city so much. And there are lots of other people. I often think of people like Millie Campbell, who founded the Holland Foundation. Which now is growing; it has just consolidated with the one in Zeeland. It just took one lady to do that. I am proud of the educational opportunities the kids have had here. There are wonderful schools. If anybody didn't get a good education then I think that it is their fault, unless they had a learning disability. I think that Holland is outstanding. It has a wonderful location. It is a nice place to live.

I made that remark many years ago, "It isn't going to be long before industry discovers us." And they did. And now they are pouring in here. And if you really
want to get your eyes open just ride around town. Especially take a look right north
around Holland. US-31 toward Grand Haven is a little indication and back in off 31
all the housing development. There are so many things that are going on around
Holland.

TLB: Can you think of any negative aspects of Holland? Any drawbacks to living in
Holland?

LCD: Well for one thing, some of those things that are happening as a result of our growth
spurt is our traffic congestion. Our streets were not built or laid out for the kind of
traffic that is happening today. A lot of that stuff could be cured if there was enough
money. So many of our city streets need repairs and attention, but there is only so
much money to go around. Everything had to wait its term. I am just please as to
the way they fixed up Seventh Street. It looks wonderful. I fully expect that Ninth
Street is going to be just as nice, if not even nicer. I really can’t think of much else.
I think the big thing right now for most people is the traffic. Simply one of our big
problems is the river and the bridge. There is really only one bridge in town here,
except for the bridge over on 31, going over the river on the east end of town.
Perhaps a bridge or more in the town would ease congestion. We are just going to
have to overcome that, if you are going to build on these county roads like Riley
Street and Lakewood Boulevard, which is much more of a country road. It has
carried a lot of traffic because of all the development. I find that the state of
Michigan is going to have to spend a tremendous amount of money in the roads. Just
look at the roads of Grand Rapids, as an example, which is very very rough and
needs a lot of attention. I would say that this is probably the biggest.

We also have to get used to this ethnic diversification. But I am pleased and it is wonderful to see the Hispanic people taking hold of education. And how they are so proud of their children graduating from high school. I am glad for the opportunity that everybody has here; if you want to get ahead you can get ahead.

TLB: I have one more question that I really want to ask and then we can go from there. Are you involved with the church at all and how do you think the church is changing in Holland?

LCD: Well, I have been a member of the Trinity Reformed Church from the time that it was established in 1911. My father and mother were charter members of Trinity Reformed Church and I was baptized in Third Church. My baptismal papers were transferred when my father and mother became charter members of Trinity Church. And so I have been a church member all my life. Things have changed. The Sunday isn’t anywhere what it used to be. It observance used to be different. There is a change in thinking as to what the Sunday should mean. It used to be that you had to work the six days of work and on the seventh you should rest. Now "rest" is beginning to mean doing something different and that sort of thing. I’ve noticed that that is happening. Women all wore hats in church and men all wore suits and neckties. Now people come to church in very casual attire. Which I find nothing the problem wrong with that. It is different if you are accustomed to something. I think that they are still doing real good work.

I find that people are very much interested in the church as long as they’ve got
children. And they are very concerned that their children have a good Christian education. I think that children bring a lot of people to church, which is probably as it should be. Anyway, I think we just have to swing with the tide. We can’t fight it. If we are going to try to go back, you are never going to get any kid today to sit there reading a Sunday school paper all afternoon and not being able to get out in the yard like it was when I was a kid. Times are changing.

TLB: How do you feel that the Dutch heritage plays in the community? How do you feel that the Dutch heritage has influenced Holland?

LCD: Well all you have to do is look at the Christian schools. It has been a tremendous force. It probably isn’t as much as it used to be. But you must remember that when the Dutch came here in 1847 they came with practically just the clothes on their back and a few tools and so on. They landed here when it was nothing but woods. They lived. Their whole outlook on life was one of dependence. They depended on the Lord for everything, even their daily needs. Rain was so important. Crop was so important. If you didn’t get it, what were you going to eat this winter? They lived with the Lord. The circumstances they were in... If you stop and think to what it meant for them to leave the Netherlands, especially Van Raalte and his crew, that was a tremendous undertaking. To come out and to pick a spot like this when there were no roads in here at all. When Van Raalte’s group first came in the spring of 1847 they walked from Allegan, through the woods and through the snow. They were very very close to the Lord. They felt his need all the time, every moment. I think that naturally we are getting away from this. The average person isn’t dependent
on...can't see his need for good weather so that we have good crops. He just takes that for granted. And so many of us do, take so many things for granted. Our pioneer forefathers thought were very very important.

TLB: Do you have family or relatives that live outside Holland? What do they say when they come to visit Holland?

LCD: "I can't believe it has grown so much." The usual things. "I can't believe what is going on." I am that way myself. For the last several years I have been in Florida for six months a year, and every time I come back for six months I can't figure out what has happened.

TLB: This is probably going to be my last question, then I will give you a chance to add anything that you want to add. Concentrating on Holland, how do you think the role of women has changed?

LCD: That is a big subject. You could spend a lot of time. Tremendous change. All we have to do is look about us.

TLB: Is there anything that you want add about how Holland has changed? Is there anything that really stands out in Holland's history that you would like to talk about?

LCD: [checks his notes] About all I can say about change and that sort of thing is that we sort of brought it on ourselves. This is because we have a wonderful community and it is an attractive community. It brought people here. Because of our climate and our wonderful Lake Michigan and Lake Macatawa location, and the educational opportunities. We have made it so people want to be here, and like I said before industry sought us out. We really, outside of HEDCOR, we really had no organized
effort to attract the industry and businesses here. They found us, and I am grateful to that. And I think that this is a contributing factor to the Holland that we have today.

What was the question again?

TLB: Are there events in Holland’s history that stand out that you want to add? Andy events or changes?


TLB: Was the war effort during the Vietnam War different than World War II in Holland?

LCD: Yes, Vietnam was entirely different. One of the real problems of the Vietnam War was that President Johnson tried to fight the war as they say it, "With guns and butter too." Totally different. Vietnam War was very unpopular. It was a war that really scarred the country a lot. It divided the country. It was a very unfortunate situation.

TLB: Was there any resistance movement during the war? Where there people in Holland that resisted the war quite strongly?

LCD: We had kids that went to Canada and so on. That was so terrible. Other young men were drafted and were probably given six weeks of training or so and then put on a big 747 and within twenty-four hours they were in Vietnam in the jungle. That was pretty hard for quite a few people to take. And quite a number were killed. Everybody got behind the World War II effort, not so with Vietnam.

TLB: I think that wraps it up, if there is nothing...

LCD: I might say that I hope I have been able to add something to your oral history of Holland. It has been a wonderful place to live. I have lots of happy memories. I
hope that they continue to do well and with that I will say "Goodbye."

TLB: Okay, thank you very much.