6-27-1996

tenHoor, Henry Oral History Interview: Sesquicentennial of Holland, "150 Stories for 150 Years"

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Recommended Citation


Published in: 1996 - 1998 - Sesquicentennial of Holland, "150 Stories for 150 Years" (H88-0234) - Hope College Living Heritage Oral History Project, June 27, 1996. Copyright © 1996 Hope College, Holland, MI.
Abstract (subjects listed in general order of appearance in the transcript): Work as a education officer in the Navy during World War II, Family life, Hope after World War II, Van Raalte Hall at Hope College and the fire, Hope students in the sixties, changing of shopping, changes in the church, Calvin Vande Werf (former president of Hope College), President Irwin Lubbers, Post World War II salary at Hope College, President Gordon Van Wylen, qualities of Holland, limits of the city, rules, influence of church on city, Sundays in Holland, committees at Hope, Hope social activities and the Milestone, safety, closing of 12th Street, factory work before unions, industry of today, characteristics of early Holland citizens, Dutch heritage, The Holland Sentinel under Butler, Women in the Reformed Church, and the uniqueness of the Holland community.
Interviewee: Henry ten Hoor (HtH): Retired Hope English Professor
Interviewer: Tracy Bednarick (TLB): Oral History Student Coordinator

TLB: The first thing that I want you to do is just state your name, your date of birth, where you were born, and if not in Holland where you came from.

HtH: I am Henry ten Hoor. I was born the eleventh of July, in 1914, in Holland Michigan on 21st Street, 301 West 21st Street.

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

HtH: Yes. It has been remodeled, I understand. I haven't been in it for years. It looks better now than it did when I was living in it.

TLB: Have you lived in Holland all your life?

HtH: With some exceptions. I taught for five years in Tennessee. I was three and a half years in the Navy. But otherwise, yes, I have been living here.

TLB: When you were teaching in Tennessee, was there something that brought you back to Holland?

HtH: Well, not exactly, when I was teaching in Tennessee I was drafted into the Navy. After the Navy, I came back to Holland. That was a hiatus there of about eight - nine years.

TLB: What time you were in the Navy? What years?

HtH: From March of 1943 to July of 1946.

TLB: What was that like?

HtH: It was very pleasant for me, because I became what was know as an education officer. I had swivel chairs, and WAVES as secretaries, and so forth. I had someone to drive my jeep. It was rather pleasant. First I was assigned to Pensacola
(Florida), which was a training station for pilots. Then I was assigned to California. That was a flying mission. We supplied the people and the island in the Pacific Islands. They also had a suboffice, which I visited once or twice a week, on Treasure Island. I was driven across the Golden Gate Bridge every once and awhile to tend to business there. The idea was to get enlisted men into a higher rate. For this the Navy had a whole series of books, and a whole series of tests to be passed, and then a final examination at the end of those books. If there was room for them in the compliment of the outfit that they were assigned to, they could get a higher rate and make a little more money. They liked that. That was a good job for me.

TLB: How did you end up getting that type of position? Was it just based on your education?

HtH: I was an English teacher. They didn’t really know what to do with English teachers. I was a boot; I went through boot training in Bainbridge, Maryland. While I was a boot, maybe I ought to tell you this whole story. The first full day we were there, right in the morning after breakfast we were assigned to squares on the floor, where there was a cardboard box. We were instructed to put all our clothes in the cardboard box. When we were naked as "jay-birds" then we had interviews. So I walked into a cubicle, and there was a lieutenant in dress blues sitting behind the desk. He said, "Take a chair." It was a metal chair; it was very cold. He pushed across the table to me a card with some writing on it. He said, "Can you read this?" So I read it to him. He said, "Have you graduated from high school?" I said, "Yes."
He said, "Have you had any college?"

I said, "Yes."

He said, "Have you had anything beyond college."

I said, "Yes."

He said, "Then what the hell are you doing here?"

I said, "I was drafted."

He said, "Why don’t you put in an application for a commission and when you get settled come back and see me and we will work something out."

Then I had my nine weeks of training and went back to where I was teaching at that time where my wife was. We moved her to Bainbridge, where I was. She got a room there. Then in August, my commission came through. Then I was assigned to a fighter director’s school on Saint Simons Island, Georgia. It was a very exclusive resort. The Navy had taken over the hotel. This was all mathematics. You had to determine the speed of attacking airplanes from a moving ship, with a certain wind velocity. That sort of thing. I couldn’t do that. I hadn’t had any mathematics since way back yonder. After about two weeks of that sort of training, everybody had an interview with the captain who was running the outfit. You would walk into the room, salute, and say your name. Which I did. He said, "How are you getting along?"

I said, "Not well."

He said, "Why not?"

I said, "Because I can’t do all this math." I said spur of the moment, "If you
want to kill a lot of good pilots, just put me in this job."

Without blinking an eye he said, "We will get you a transfer." They got me a transfer to Pensacola, and this is where I became an education officer.

TLB: So you were married before you were drafted?

HtH: Yes.

TLB: When did you meet your wife?

HtH: On a blind date. We were introduced by a mutual friend at a New Year's Eve party. I think that I impressed her by calling her the next day. And then we hit it off pretty well. Then two years after that, I was teaching in Tennessee and she was teaching in Holland. Then after those two years, when we had a little money, well when she had a little money, we were married. And then we were together down south for three years or so, before I was drafted.

TLB: Do you have any children?

HtH: With that wife, I have three daughters. One of them lives in Saugatuck now, right next to the Red Barn Theater. She has a little seven acre spread there with horses, and sheep, and chickens, and things. She is the youngest. The middle one is in Oregon, Hillsboro, Oregon. She has a son at Hope College. By the name of Matt Sterenberg. That is my grandson. He is in Europe with the summer school in Vienna. I have one who is a librarian, she was just until recently employed by the research library in Chicago. The name of which I can never remember. (Newberry.) She was the preservation person there. She and her husband have now bought a ninety acre farm somewhere near Bloomington, Indiana. They are both going on
part-time jobs. They are going to have fun on that, making it kind of natural. They are not going to farm it. They are going to make it a kind of natural reserve for animals and birds. That will be kind of fun and there is a pond on there that has fish in it so I have to get there.

TLB: Let's talk a little bit about Holland. What are some of the biggest changes you've seen in Holland since World War II?

HtH: I came here to teach in October of 1946. When I got out of the Navy, it was in July. I got in the last summer school at the University of Michigan which completed my master's degree. I was looking for a job, and I got one at Flint Junior College. I was there for about a month. Then the chairman of the English Department here, who had been my principal at Holland Christian, he called me or sent me a telegram to tell me that he had a job for me if I wanted it. In Flint, I was unable to find an apartment of any sort. I had not signed a contract there, because I said that I won't sign a contract until I have someplace to live. So I came home one weekend, and stayed here. I started teaching in October, five classes of freshman English with twenty-five people in each one. It was an impossible job, you know, but we were just inundated by all these new people coming back from war. The enrollment had been a college of 450 people, something like that, all of a sudden we had 1,300 people. We had to have people to teach them. We taught them Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday. We put up Quonset huts for them over there on the other side of Columbia Avenue over there for them to stay. We fed them in the Temple building. All kind of things we had to do in order
to accommodate all these people. That was one of the big changes.

My wife graduated from this college in like 1936. Then it was a small college. The tuition was $50.00 a semester. One semester, she won two essay contests at $25.00 a piece. That doesn’t happen anymore.

TLB: The prizes are still $25.00, but the tuition is a lot higher.

HtH: Exactly. One of those big changes, of course, is that the college has just boomed. Buildings began to be put up. Dormitories that they hadn’t had a need of were being put up, and other buildings. The college just expanded, and expanded. The Dow Center, when I was here they had the Carnegie Gymnasium. That was where all the important things happened. That is where you put on your plays, and so forth. The first Shakespeare play I ever saw was *Julius Caesar*, it was put on at the Carnegie Gymnasium. The Ghost of Caesar wore a black choir robe. And the conspirators had civil war sabers. I was impressed anyway. I was mostly impressed by the sound of the sabers going in to the scabbards. It had a kind of scratchy kind of quality.

The equipment around here is much better. The library was in Graves Hall. And that wasn’t much. The new library, which is now the social science building, got built. That was not really well thought out. It was hot in there all the time, in the summer time. But it was a gift. Then of course there was this building here, and all the connecting parts to this thing. And of course, the Peale Science Building got put up. Sciences were in Lubbers Hall. Finally, the humanities got moved. They had to move when Van Raalte burned down. Van Raalte burned down the first semester that I was retired.
TLB: The English department was in Van Raalte before?

HtH: Yes, on the second and third floors up there. Squeaking floors, leaking radiators, rattling windows.

TLB: So maybe it was fortunate that it burned.

HtH: Well it wasn't so bad, that's right. It was really a fire trap. It was all great big wide wooden stairways up to the third floor. It is a good thing that it burned when nobody was in it. It would have killed hundreds of people. That is one of the big changes.

TLB: Have you noticed a change in the philosophy of Hope? The rules and stuff?

HtH: Well, we went through the sixties and that was a rough time here. I can remember big meetings, ruckus meetings in the chapel in which people were standing around in the aisles, and by the outside walls smoking cigarettes and being just generally uncouth. There was this temporary kind of pressure from the sixties. I don't think that it has had any permanent affect on the basic philosophy of the school. I think what resulted from it, if my memories are right, is that we got some students on committees, student representation on committees. But this did not have a radical effect on what happened at this school.

I went to the Christian schools in this community. When I did that, this was a poor system. Not academically, but I am speaking monetarily. They just didn't have a lot of money. They had some good dedicated teachers. Some of them moved on, after they were done with us, moved on to college jobs and so forth. From that point of view it was a good school. The superintendent, would you imagine in this community, was a democrat. He was appointed, after a certain election, to be the
warden of Ionia prison. From there he went to the state of Washington and became the boss of all of the prisons in Washington State. His son, Roger, who graduated from the same school that I graduated from, became the Dean of Arts and Sciences at the University of Michigan. And then later on, Chancellor at Berkeley when they were having their rough times. You've heard about that? Well Berkeley was a "hot bed" of all kinds of revolutionary and radical notions. He just died recently, at a cottage he lived in at Port Sheldon. The point that I am trying to make, is that was kind of a poor school. The teachers were poorly paid, and all that sort of thing. Now that has become a kind of an elite school, because this is where the discipline is. It is not in the public schools. Parents who are serious about getting their kids a good education, and a disciplined education pay the bill, it is expensive now, and send the kids to the Christian school system. And they do well there. At one time, it was considered to be a school for Christian Reformed people, but now there are Catholics, and Baptists, the works go there. It has become kind of an elite school system, which is kind of bad too. It is expensive, but these people can afford to pay the bills. That is a big change that has occurred in this town.

We don’t have any "blue laws" anymore the way we used to.

TLB: What were some of the "blue laws?"

HtH: Nothing was open. No businesses were open. Maybe a lone gas station here and there. No restaurants were open. All the stores closed. Most of the stores closed Wednesday afternoon and then they were open again through Saturday night. Saturday night was the big night, big shopping night here. Everybody went
downtown, to Eighth Street. There were no malls or anything like that. All the business was down on Eighth Street. Now you see the malls that have taken over. Partly because they are outside of the town; partly because we didn’t want to let them inside the town when they first made their applications to get in here. Rather than the town profiting from the taxes that they would pay, it is the townships that are getting this money. Really that wasn’t the smartest move in the world. And the result of that was that Eighth Street began to decline in importance, and attractiveness. And then the program that was spearheaded by Ed Prince of the Prince Corporation; he poured a lot of money into the renovation of Eighth Street. He owns a lot of it, his outfit, he died recently, but his outfit owns a lot of property on Eighth Street. He is the one that got the snowmelt and all this renovation that has been going on. Now it is a kind of a lively Eighth Street again. It is mostly specialty shops and thing like that. They don’t want to have a McDonald’s or a Burger King in there, although I think that it would be nice. I mean, they’re on all the important streets in Athens, Rome, Cairo, and all over. Why can’t they be in Holland? But nothing like that.

Big changes since the war.

TLB: Have you noticed any change with the church and how the church relates to the city?

HtH: I really don’t know how to answer that. I know that there is a greater kind of friendliness between the churches that were at one time not very friendly at all. The Reformed Church and the Christian Reformed Church. Some of it you still see, in the way the basketball teams that fight each other. [laughter] There is a much greater friendliness between those two things. The big things that they differed over, the
Reformed and the Christian Reformed Churches, is that the Christian Reformed Church insisted on Christian Day Schools. When Van Raalte was one of the important people in this community, he just used the public schools as Christian Day Schools, until somebody called him on it. Then he couldn't do that any more.

The other matter was membership in lodges. That was a great thing too. It split up a lot of churches, I mustn't say that either, but a lot of people left their original congregations because of their difference of belief about lodges and so forth. Even the little country churches around here, which were part of what Van Raalte liked to call the "Colony," they all had this fight. I know this, because I have been translating the consistory minutes of the Overisel Reformed Church. In one instance, one of the elders who had been kind of a founding elder there, who had been a faithful member in that church, and an elder for years and years finally thought that he should leave that church because of his disagreement about lodges.

TLB: Some of the churches were against the idea of lodges?

HtH: Yes. The Christian Reformed Church was very much against that, because, I only know the very basic reason, but they carried on some kind of religious rites and exercises that were in contradiction to the basic religion. Something like an additional religion. And it was secret and they didn't like that. The history of the Masonic movement in Europe and so forth made it complicated. If you read Poe's "Cask of the Montillado," you will find out the guy is a Mason. It all happens at the end of this catacombs, and halls. The guy that is drunk asks him if he is a Mason. And he
says, "Yes, look here." That is all connected to the same strange movement. The relationship now is different. In fact we have a standing committee between the Holland classis of the Reformed Church and the Holland classis of the Christian Reformed Church to deal with this unity business. We put on services together and so forth. In particular, on religious holidays and that sort of thing. That is a lot better than it was. They even hired me, as a historical member of the Christian Reformed Church, over here at Hope College. Calvin didn't do that very easily. They insisted that these people be from the Christian Reformed Church, or maybe in certain branches of the Presbyterian Church. They were very careful about that.

TLB: I think that that is one thing that is changing with Hope too. It is becoming more willing to hire people that are not necessarily . . .

HtH: Yes, that is right. And there was a time when we hired people without any concern for this, which I didn't think was such a hot idea either. The concern of the administration was just academic excellence, no philosophical compatibility with the Church in the college.

TLB: Do you remember who was president of the College at that time?

HtH: Most of this happened when Vander Werf was president. They named that thing after him. He was a graduate of this school. He was the son of a Reformed Church minister. He came here and messed it up. He really did. He couldn't stand the pressures I guess. He hired a lot of people who were not sympathetic with this kind of school, and were here just to make their own little niche. He spent a lot of money on that. I must say for Vander Werf that he was interested in seeing that the faculty
was a little better paid. We were miserably paid for a long time. Some of us were making with master's and higher degrees than that, were making less than teachers at Holland High School with an A.B. That was not comforting. [laughs]

TLB: Is there anything that stands out about Vander Werf's time as president that maybe unusual, or something toward his personality that stands out?

HtH: Well, Vander Werf was a graduate of this school. He graduated in same class, as a chemistry major, as my brother-in-law. We knew him a little bit on another level than professional. When he came in here as president he made his inaugural speech in the chapel. We all adjourned to Van Raalte Hall for something or another. On the way we fell into conversation. He said to me, "Henry, what did you think about my speech?" That is an embarrassing question. I did the best that I could.

I said, "I agreed with some of it." [laughter]

I think that this was an indication of his uncertainty of this whole job. This had certain embarrassing results. He would have an appointment with someone who was a potential donor or something, and then he wouldn't keep that appointment. This got worse and worse and then we finally had to dry him out a little bit over at Pine Rest. He had some bad times. He didn't get along very well with other people in the administration. Always hiring new deans. Very strange thing was in a very short time (after hiring them) he wasn't on speaking terms with them. The only time he would speak with these people was when he was off on a trip. He would then stop in Grand Rapids and call the Dean and tell him what to do. We went through lots of deans during that period. Even though he was the guy who hired them.
He was very much obsessed with details. He would go through the dining hall. He would make sure that the dishes were clean, things of that kind were well tended to. There were more important things for him to do, besides police the kitchen. [laughs]

TLB: Where you here during times of any other presidents?

HtH: I was hired by Lubbers, who did everything pretty much off the cuff. When I was hired, nobody had contracts. We just had word of mouth. When I was hired, I was hired on the basis of ten months, $250 dollars a month, $2,500 a year. You laugh at that. I think my grandson makes almost that much being an RA over there in that building. You never got a contract. After the first year, the strange thing that happened was that I got an eleventh check. Nothing had been said about whether I was hired for next year or not, so I thought I better talk to the President about that. I got an appointment with him. We talked about next year, and I was to be hired for the next year. Nothing was said about money. Isn’t that strange? I said, "Well, I think I have something here that belongs to you."

He said, "What is that?"

I said, "It is a check for $250, this is the eleventh one."

That office was being run by Lubbers, a treasurer, and one secretary down there in the corner of Van Raalte Hall. They didn’t pay attention to everything very well. He said, "Well Henry, what are you going to do this summer?"

I said, "I’ve got summer school at the University of Michigan."

He said, "Well, can you use that?"
I said, "Well, sure I can."

"Why don’t you keep that for summer school?"

I said, "Okay, but there are a number of other people that were hired at the same time I was."

Dr. Folkert was, Mr. Steketee was, there were a lot of other people too who didn’t stay around too long.

I said, "They are all going to summer school too."

"They’ll all get it!"

They never did. I told them. We rode up and back in the same automobile.

I said, "Did you get you $250 bucks for summer school?"

They all said, "What $250 bucks?"

They never got it. That is the way that he ran his business you see. And that is the way he kept salaries low too. And there was no official program for salaries.

What was your original question?

TLB: The different presidents. . .

HtH: That was Lubbers. Then came Vander Werf. He was young and energetic, but insecure in his job. Those were years of some embarrassment in the city.

TLB: Did it get out of the college too or did it stay mostly within the college?

HtH: It got out of the college to this extent that he didn’t carry on the business outside of the college very confidently. Every now and then he was gone for a little awhile to get back in balance.

Then we had a period in which William VanderLugt became the chancellor.
We were looking for a president. I got on that search committee. That search committee finally landed on Van Wylen, who was teaching engineering school at the University of Michigan. He had had three years at Calvin, I think, and then he went to MIT, or some place. Then he came to Michigan, and I think he was Dean of the Engineering School. The Engineering School at the University of Michigan was a very good one. They had a very good English department in the Engineering School. Isn’t that unusual? But they did. So we brought him over here. We had lots and lots of conferences with him. Some people liked him and some people didn’t, because he was a little bit more conservative than Vander Werf had been. This was true particularly on the religious questions. We finally hired him. We interviewed lots of people from New York, from the West Coast, from all over. He was it.

He did some interesting things around here. He established all these deans. Before this time, we had departments. We had a rather amorphus arrangement, but we did this by departments. He hired all these deans, and things: Natural Sciences, Dean of Humanities, Arts and Humanities, and so forth. Apparently that has worked pretty well.

What’s more? He managed to get us in the black. We were always running in the red. Lubbers was always running us in the red. And Vander Werf was too, because he was raising salaries and things like that. Which we were glad of, but it wasn’t good for the college really. Van Wylen got us back into the black. I think basically because he established some relationships of confidence between the Reformed Church of America and this college, which had not been very good.
Lubbers had not been so hot on that; he would much rather deal with Michigan Colleges Association. Then when he got in the red, he would send a begging letter to the Churches, you see. They didn’t really go for this.

Van Wylen had a way of convincing people that he was honest and that he was telling the truth and so forth. They built that Dow Center while he was here. They put in a dance studio there. There were a lot of people in the Reformed Church that didn’t like that, you see. I know that he went to talk with the people at Maplewood Church, which is a conservative Reformed congregation in this town. They asked him about this. He said, "Yes, we are going to have a dance studio in there, we are going to teach dance, and we are going to equip it with mirrors and everything that a dance studio needs." He convinced them that this was a genuine part of the liberal arts program. And they gave money, because he was honest with them. Lubbers wouldn’t have done that. Lubbers would have down-played that thing, then they would find out later on what the truth was. That was not smart.

So Van Wylen was here for a long time. He was here when I retired. He and his dear wife had an open house for me and my wife, when I retired. And when he retired, I wrote a poem for him. He asked me to read it at a faculty meeting. They misprinted it in The Anchor, which was not unusual for The Anchor to misprint something. I said that it was a certain kind of meter, you see, and whoever was the editor didn’t understand. They just said pentameter. [interviewer flips tape here] That got published in The News of Hope. They all said, "That’s not pentameter."

I said, "I know it is not pentameter, that is not what I wrote. It is the editor
that wrote that."

I still do that to the Holland Sentinel. They put out pictures and underneath they say something about a "momento," instead of "memento." I put red circles around it, and send it back to the editor.

Oh, more presidents. Well, I retired before Van Wylen, so that was my last president. What I have seen of Jacobson at meetings the first year that he was here, he was uptight. I could tell that. He was not humorous, very formal and everything. But I understand that he is doing fine job now. He is relaxed in his job now, in some respects he is a better Hope College President than a Van Wylen was.

TLB: Have you noticed any differences between how the College presidents relate to the students?

HtH: No, I really haven't.

TLB: Maybe to move back to Holland a little bit... What are some qualities that seem to stand out in the city of Holland?

HtH: I went in for a physical one time, to my doctor, who is a Hope College graduate. In the course of that he discovered that I had aneurysm in my aorta. So he called another Hope College graduate and said, "Bruce, I think we have a 'live one' here!"

So we made an appointment and Bruce and he finally fixed that.

When he discovered that I said, "Can you take care of that here in this town?"

"Oh, Yes," he said, "we have a lot of good doctors here." And he said, "You know why we have a lot of good doctors here? Because these Dutch people pay their bills."
And that is true. That is why industry has flourished here, because you have a labor pool here that are very conscientious. It is changing a little bit, people coming from the south are less committed. Or how shall I put it? They have other things that take precedence. If coon season is open then they figure that they ought to go hunting and not tell anybody that they are going to do that. But generally speaking, in this town you have a good labor pool of conscientious people who turn in a good days work. There is general pride in the appearance of where they live. The like to keep their houses painted, and they like to keep their lawns mowed. They don’t like for the neighbors to do that on Sunday, but they do like people to mow their lawns. They just generally are nice, good, neat people.

What happens as a result of that is that all kinds of people who have been living in the Detroit area, or someplace like that, they come here for Tulip Time, they see Holland nice here, and everything is arranged. They then retire here. They start looking for a house and they retire here. Some go to Freedom Village over here. People from all over have come there. They like it here. Eighth Street is a place in town with nice little boutiques shops. We have the College, and they import all kinds of interesting speakers. If you are a retired professional person you can join HASP. There are nice monthly meetings and classes, and this kind of thing. It is a very nice town from that point of view. Close enough to Grand Rapids, and you can get to Chicago by train if you want to get out. It is not bad. We have nice beaches.

TLB: Are there any negative aspects to Holland? Or any drawbacks to living here?

HtH: Yes, I think so. In my case for instance, I came up through the Christian school
system, and I went to Calvin College. Academically this was perfectly good, but from a broader cultural point of view this was somewhat limiting. I was talking to somebody about this yesterday. I was saying that maybe the thing is to put the kids through junior high in the Christian system, and then send them to a public school to broaden them. I think that that is maybe one of the things that is culturally somewhat limited. Although, the College does a lot to mitigate that. Gives people opportunities at least. When I was a child in this community, we had theaters. On Eighth Street was this strand, and then later on there was the Holland Theater where the Hope College one is now. Then there was one on River Avenue, which was called the Colonial theater; it is now that Park building. One of my distant relatives tried to make that into a kind of youth place at one time. They swiped all this electronic stuff out of there. He was somewhat disappointed about that, now the place is closed up. It has really deteriorated. It is an eye-sore. Well anyway, we weren’t allowed to go to those. They were bad business. So as I said, my only exposure to drama was Julius Caesar in the gymnasium, in choir robes and Confederate sabers.

TLB: So you weren’t allowed to go to the theaters based on your religion?

HtH: That is right, this was worldly stuff. When I was at Calvin there was a rule against it too. They would sometimes post faculty people at these theaters to spot kids who were going. It is a different world, girl!

TLB: Not coming from the Reformed Christian tradition, I am still assimilating to it.

HtH: Sure. I’ll tell you this is very interesting. Have you read any of the novels of Chaim Potok?
TLB: Yes.

HtH: *The Promise* and things like that. Well, you see there is a very striking parallel between the way the Reformed and Christian Reformed people responded to certain worldly urges, and the way these orthodox Jews did. They didn’t use the telephone on the Sabbath, they prepared everything before the Sabbath, and then they had their Sabbath rituals. I can remember my father on Saturday night would polish all the shoes. He would shave and then he wouldn’t shave on Sunday. My mother would peel the potatoes and everything Saturday evening. There was a minimum amount of work on Sunday, although Sunday dinner was a pretty big dinner. Some cooking was done, but not much. But the parallels are really striking, especially in what you might not do. If you talk to children or people who grew up during that time, they were all bored to death. You couldn’t do anything. You could sit around and read certain things, not just anything. Not the Sunday paper, that had all the frivolous stuff in it. But you could read certain things. You could go for a walk, but you could not ride your bicycle, or go outside and play ball, or skate. You had to grow up in it to know.

TLB: Have you been involved in any organizations, either in Hope College, or in Holland city? And what were they like?

HtH: You mean other than the church? Right now I am a member of HASP. You know what HASP is? I sometimes do a little course for them. In August, I am going to do one lecture on *As You Like It*, because they are going to give that in the theater here. They all come to find out when they should laugh. [laughter]
TLB: You need that sometimes, with Shakespeare.

HtH: That is true. The language has changed a bit. The sense of humor has changed a bit. The things that are being satirized have changed a bit, so you don’t quite know anymore whether you should laugh or not. I haven’t been a great organization person.

TLB: Where you on any committees at Hope College?

HtH: Yes, I was on several. Let’s see if I can remember. I was on the Student Activities Committee. We tried to devise all kinds of activities for students to do.

TLB: Nice wholesome activities?

HtH: We once upon a time considered how many skates we should order for people to skate in the gymnasium there, on weekend nights. There was always this business that kids in certain classes had their parties, fraternities had their parties, sororities had their parties. We went there to watch.

TLB: To chaperon.

HtH: Yes, to chaperon. The kids wanted to dance all the time. That got frowned on too. I was the advisor to the yearbook, The Milestone, for a number of years. The editor was a smart kid; he is now teaching in a British University. Larry Siedentop. We reported these activities of the classes, these sororities, and fraternities as dances. We used the word for the first time that it had ever occurred. I got the Dean of Women down on me something fierce. I said, "Well that is what they were doing, and that is what the word means so we put in there. We might as well be honest about it." And it didn’t make the world fall or anything like that. I was on that committee. I was on
The Milestone for a number of years.

I was on the Student Rights Committee. That was during the 60s or 70s. That kind of thing was very important. There was all kinds of pressure to get rid of chapel. My first assignment was on the Admissions Committee. The Dean of Men was on that, the Dean of Women, the Registrar, all these people. The Dean of Men would always ask the man in charge, whose name was Al Timmer. Have you heard of Dean Hinga? He was the football coach and the Dean of Men. Well, he would ask, "Well Al, how many Arabs do you have for us this year?" We used to have a lot of Arabs coming here as result of the Reformed Church mission in Arabia. We had a famous mission over there. That was one of the first ones. I was also on the Search Committee for Van Wylen. Then for awhile, the faculty was organized into divisions. There was a kind of rotating chairmanship. The humanities group, I was chairman of that for some time. I was temporary chairman of the English department for a semester or so, while somebody else was gone. That was it, I'm not a great committee person. John Hollenbach, who was the Dean, never liked that. He was always encouraging me to join committees.

TLB: They does take up time out of teaching too.

HtH: Yes they do. I have noticed that the only person that is wide awake is the chairman, the rest of the people are asleep. [laughter] That doesn't get you very far.

TLB: Have you noticed if things have changed for women at Hope? Are there more women? Less women? Rules?

HtH: Well, it was very typical. I went to college that way. People here went to college
that way. Men had very few rules. They shouldn’t drink in their rooms, and stuff like that. So far as being in at a certain time, men never had to bother with that. When I lived in dorm at Calvin College, you could come and go anytime you wanted. But the women couldn’t do that. In fact the women didn’t have a dorm. They stayed in various housing. They were kept check on. Women lived in Voorhees, it was the important women’s dorm at that time. They had to be in at certain times during the weekend, and during the weekends it was a little bit later. There is much greater liberation now, if that is what you want to call it, which goes with it certain risks too. Now you have to have people who accompany women from one place to another.

TLB: Escorts?

HtH: Yes, an escort service. This whole safety service with police cars and uniforms and the whole works. We never had that back yonder. It is nice in a way, because it keeps the students somewhat out of the hands of the local police. Who might deal with them somewhat differently.

TLB: Concentrating more on Hope College, because you know so much and this is what you have done for so much of your life, has there every been any controversy that came along while you where at the school? Either within the school or with the community?

HtH: There always is almost every year the business of loud parties at college houses.

TLB: Does that go back pretty far?

HtH: That goes back quite a ways. There was pretty sharp controversy when we closed 12th Street, so that we could have an integrated campus with Western Theological
Seminary. People on that side, didn’t like that very much. That was their route to work. Now they had to go around it. They didn’t like that. There was a lot of bad feeling about that. The notion got around that Hope College could get anything they wanted, because it had influence with the Council. All that kind of stuff, completely ignoring the fact that it wasn’t very nice to have all this traffic chasing right through the middle of your campus all the time. Maybe some time we ought to close 10th Street too. This is now a nice integrated campus, much safer, and so forth. Yes, there was a lot of uproar about that.

TLB: Have the problems facing the general citizen of Holland changed in the past fifty years? [pause] Or how is daily life different?

HtH: The past fifty years?

TLB: Or before.

HtH: I remember when there was not a labor union anywhere. My father worked in the furniture factory, in various jobs. There was no job security. There was no kind of representation of labor anywhere. Everybody was on his own, and the result was that the wages were very low. I have had some experience with this myself. One summer, I got a job at West Michigan Furniture company. Without having been instructed about anything, I did something one time after I had been there for two-three weeks. It was against the rules, and they fired me. It didn’t make much difference, because making twenty-five cents an hour, you couldn’t subsist on it really. It was quite evident that the working man had no power at all. He was at the mercy of the boss, that’s all. The big boss came in one day and he saw me sitting in
the windowsil doing my work, rather than standing doing my work. Nobody said a word to me, and I could do it just as well that way, as the other way. But it was not according to Hoyle. You didn’t have a chance to say you didn’t tell me anything about this. "Why didn’t you instruct me if you want me to do something a certain way?" It wasn’t so very bad, because I went from there to the Wooden Shoe Factory. There I got a job for forty-five cents an hour. That was pretty good, but that was a murderous job.

Now you see, we have these big enlightened industries here. Many of them are not unionized, but they have all the advantages of an union shop without paying union dues. I guess that is one of the good influences of unions. I remember, that there came to our church a Laotian family. One of them was a young man, who had some experience in upholstery, and plastics, and things like that. He came to us from some place in Indiana, but he couldn’t speak English very well. I was retired. We were appointed by the church to be concerned with his family’s health and education. He needed a job. So I went around with him, and finally got him a job at Haworth. I had a friend in the echelons of Haworth, and that helped. I went with him the first morning after he had been hired, for orientation. There was a long table that was loaded up with coffee, orange juice, and Cokes, donuts, rolls, and Danishes. At each place there was a folder with a name on it, with all the information about the job. Two women took turns explaining various aspects of this. And this kid who couldn’t talk English, he was hired for $11.00 an hour, time and a half for overtime, and complete insurance: dental, pregnancy insurance, the works. That kid made more
then, than I made at Hope College. That is the difference, a great great difference that happened. I have visions still of these men, before this influence came here, and this is true whether the shop is unionized or not unionized. . . I have visions of these old men in their dark clothes walking to work carrying their little black dinner pail. And they did this until they died. There was no social security support. They went to work, until they couldn’t go to work anymore. They never got beyond having a little house. Some of them got a car, but not many.

TLB: I have a few more questions. How do you feel the Dutch heritage plays in the community, and how does this interact with the other cultures that are coming to the community?

HtH: I think that the qualities of most of the Dutchmen that came here were these: they were God-fearing in maybe a kind of limited way, but they were God fearing. This influenced their behavior in such a way that they were law-abiding, and they were good working people. They paid their bills, and they hung together. We got our groceries from Peter Prins’s grocery store, because he went to the same church that my parents went to. If they weren’t in the same church, they were at least in the same denomination. There was a kind of mutual wealth building there, and good service, and so forth. My father, every Saturday night, would go to Peter Prins’s grocery store and pay the bill. Then Peter Prins would give him a little sack of candy, and a couple of cheap cigars. Then on the way home we would buy a pound of hot roasted peanuts. We would sit around the kitchen table and eat peanuts and eat Peter Prins’s candy. There was this kind of ghetto, a Dutch ghetto, although this is a
ghetto you could get into and out of. Most ghettos you can't get out of, with the real meaning of the term. This one you could get out of. The result was that some of these Dutchman became very wealthy here. They had a lot of support from the old countryman.

One of the most influential people in town was the fellow by the name of Abraham Peters, who was a Christian Reformed fellow. He had a ten cent store on the corner where the Viennese restaurant is. He had a tower on it and everything. That was the dime store. Later on it was Woolworth's. And he made a lot of money. In fact, his son, who went to my school, and later on lived in Grand Rapids. He was the fellow who was responsible during World War II for making the bags for Oleo (margarine) with the little coloring thing in it. So that you could mash it all together and make it look like butter. He made a fortune off of that. His father had money, and they could launch something like that. The Dutch culture, I think, was a very stable culture. They knew what they should do, and what they should not do. Mostly because they all were very pious people; they had these religious preconceptions that they lived according to. What was the rest of your question?

TLB: How does the Dutch heritage still affect the community today?

HtH: Well, you know Tulip Time. Just last week, one reason that I couldn’t get with you last week is because they had that group from the Netherlands here.

TLB: From Gronigen.

HtH: Yes, I think that they did come out of Gronigen. Among those were two people with my name. They are distant cousins that had just put out a family tree genealogy. I
had spent some time with them. This was a lot of fun. Our assumptions are still the same. We can talk and understand each other without explaining a lot. Even though we have a language barrier of sorts. Because my Dutch is a little bit laughable for him, and his English is a little bit laughable for me. We do understand each other fundamentally.

Tulip Time is mostly a business deal now. And prices go up a little bit. I remember how my freshman used to write impassioned themes about how all the prices went up during Tulip Time. I've experienced that myself.

There was a time when I wrote editorials for the local Sentinel. I would do that on weekends. I would get up relatively early on Saturday morning, I would go to the Windmill Restaurant out on 8th Street, and have breakfast. Then I would go to my office and pound out a number of editorials, short ones. Some of them would get printed and some of them wouldn't. The editor was an absolute stoop, you know he was a former truck driver. He married into that job. That was the problem. I went there (the restaurant), the Saturday morning of Tulip Time. I ordered one egg, toast, and coffee. And the girl behind the counter said, "You can't order one egg."

I said, "Why can't I order one egg?"

"You can order only two eggs."

I said, "I don't want two eggs, I want one egg."

There was another girl there, who was regular and who had gone to my church at one time a long time ago. She said, "Give him one egg!" So I got one egg. That was the stuff they were pulling.
TLB: Do you remember what time that was?

HtH: That must of been in the fifties or something. The editor, the owner, he was not much of an editor, couldn’t write a sentence. He came to Lubbers, who was the president at that time. He asked Lubbers for the names of some people who could write editorials for him. He would pay us a certain amount of money. It wasn’t much at all. I think that it was $100.00 a month or something like that. When salaries sure were not very high, that looked pretty good. It at least paid for my breakfast on Saturday morning. Lubbers suggested four people: Bill Schrier, who was the chairman of the speech department; Bert Ponstein, who was in religion, Ade Klaassen, who was in economics; and me, and I was in English. We all four were writing editorials for awhile. I don’t know how many a month, maybe six or eight a month. Then people started to die off, until finally only Ponstein and I were writing them. Then The Sentinel was sold, and that whole business stopped. That was interesting to be able to sway the public opinion. Although sometimes it didn’t agree with Butler, who was the owner; he would put an additional sentence or two on it and shoot the whole argument instead of just not printing it. He was a real ass. We got to the point that we couldn’t do it. Dr. Ponstein would go to his office for some peace, and I would go to mine in Van Raalte Hall. We would write editorials until about ten o’clock and then we would go out for coffee.

TLB: Explain a major turning point in your life.

HtH: I thought that at one time that I might be a minister. Then I went to college, and got involved in literature courses. I thought that I liked this better than Hebrew. So then
I became an English major. It was not a dramatic thing, actually. I just thought that I liked it better.

[Discussion concerning decisions]

HtH: I was a delegate to Reformed Synod in 1990, when we had this great discussion about women as preachers and elders, and so forth. I was assigned to the committee that was dealing with this problem. There were all kind of people, delegates there, that had asked for that committee. I didn’t ask for any committee. I think that is the reason I got on the committee. Nobody that had asked for the committee got on it. Our committee made two reports, the majority report on whether women should be ordained or not and the minority report. The majority report said no, we have to study this some more. We had been studying this for twenty five years. Nobody wanted that. The minority report was that women should be allowed to be ordained, but that we should wait two years to have this affirmed by a synod in the future. That was a mistake. I made an impassioned speech, that the synod heard, for people like you. This year they approved of that finally. There is one local girl now who is going.

TLB: I am just of the opinion that anyone who wants to do good work for the church should be able to do it.

HtH: Of course. I made this point when I made my little speech. My first wife, who died of cancer incidently, was intellectually my superior. She was a valedictorian of her high school class; she was valedictorian of her class here at Hope College. She was a straight A student. That is why she could earn her tuition with essay contests.
Spiritually she was a more mature person than I was. Now my second wife, although she is not intellectually my superior she has a real gift for hospitality and friendship. It is remarkable. I just made the plea that the church impoverishes itself by not taking advantage of these gifts that these women have and these abilities. One fellow afterward said, "I didn't think that I would vote for this, but I think I will now."

[laughter] I got one convert. But we passed that thing. It took five years, six years, to really see how prophetic we were, how clear our vision was, all that stuff.

TLB: Can you tell me what you have heard others say of Holland? Such as people who come to visit Holland, or family?

HtH: First when I was teaching here, we got a lot of kids from the East, New Jersey, New York, out there. They would come here and they would complain. So I would say, "Don't tell them that they roll up the sidewalk at nine o'clock and there is nothing to do on weekends." To a certain extent that was true. If you weren't in the mold of this community then it was kind of a shock. After their senior year, a surprising number of them were looking for jobs around here. And they liked to be here. They liked to teach in the Holland schools, because the discipline was pretty good here. That has changed somewhat, as it has in almost every school. There was this change of attitude about the kind of mood that was current in this place.

    More and more lately, lots of people have come here because it is a prosperous community. There are jobs here. Almost anybody can get a job here, if he is willing to take one. The older people find that it is a wonderful place to retire to. It has that nice outfit over there (Freedom Village). It has all the advantages of a
college town. It is not too big, so they don't get lost in a great big urban jungle. It is nice and clean in most places. We have lots of retirees that come here.

This is an interesting thing. I had a question about my credit card not long ago. I dialed the right numbers, and I explained to this feminine voice on the other end what my problem was, and when we had it solved she said, "When is Tulip Time?" [laughter] People are beginning to know this town.

TLB: People tease me when I tell them I go to school in Holland. They say, "You go to school with all the Tulips, and Dutch people."

HtH: Yes.

TLB: Do you have anything that you want to add about your life, or Hope College, or the Holland community?

HtH: Only the same thing that all old people say, my how things are changing! And it is true. All you have to do is look at how the roads are dug up and the buildings that are being built and changing. [tape runs out here] Some people maybe angry about this, but it is happening. And still, fundamentally everybody likes to have this as a moral community. [end of interview]