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Vanden Bough, Mr and Mrs Oral History Interview: Class Projects

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Dave Van Dyken
Randy Fitzpatrick

My interview with The VandenBourghs

We are the VandenBourghs. We came to Holland thirteen years ago from Long Island, New York. We have three children. When they were through high school they came to Hope College. My husband commuted to New York city every day, a trip of one hundred and ten miles each day. After the children graduated from Hope College they married classmates and moved to various parts of the U.S.A. Our oldest daughter moved to Ada, a suburb of Grand Rapids. The next daughter moved to Oregon. Our son established himself in New Mexico. Our second daughter ~~is married to a Doctor, and has three children.~~ Our son is on the Research staff of the Atomic Commission at Las Alamos, they live in a very interesting part of the country. My husband and I have both traveled a good deal in the United States. Now my husband will tell you all he did on Long Island.

What was it like traveling 110 miles on the train every day?

Well it was a long ride. I did that for about 40 years, six days a week... A good benefit from the railroad were the passes which intitled us to travel free on the trains.

W
What was your main job on the railroad? P. 2

~~My main job was that of rate clerk, it was very interesting work. It involved adjusting rates and answering correspondence, planning trips. But most of my time was spent in the rate room which became very hard work during the years when the rates would change frequently.~~

My father founded the VandenBough oyster Co. in W. Sayville on Great South Bay. Dad died at an early age when I was only six. So I did not become involved in the oyster business. After Attending a business school in Jamaica, NY. my first job was with James H Dunham and Co., a wholesale dry goods concern. As an employee I could buy clothes at wholesale prices. This was during World War I. I can recall "Heatless Mondays and Meatless Tuesdays." But I did not dare to commute 102 miles a day between Sayville and New York so I left the job to take a position as a bookkeeper for Rand B in Babylon Long Island quite close to home. This was a construction firm which built mansions and farm groups for Millionaires on North Shore of Long Island. However I saw no future there and after 4 years resigned. A friend of the family told me about a job selling a children's encyclopedia on Eastern Long Island. I was not at all happy in this job and gave it up and went job hunting again in N.Y.S. I then landed a job as a bookkeeper in a downtown hardware store. I recall the man was very thrifty and when I went to the bank with a deposit he told me not to forget to bring back the paper clip. As time went on I became more of a janitor than a bookkeeper to which I objected. The owner gave me a choice, either clean those shelves or quite. I elected to quit and was again on the street without a job, a strange feeling.

I then took a temporary job at the famous Fulton Market (fruits and vegetables). When this job petered out in the fall I went back to an employment agency. This turned out to be my working career. I landed a position with the Penne RR in Penne Station NYC.

P.1 — This was interesting work. I handled a lot of correspondence both company mail and with the public outlining travel arrangements and handling refund claims adjustments. For the most I was involved in passenger fares not alone between points on the RR but all over the USA, Canada and Mexico. During the last few years fares were constantly going up and this entailed a lot of work for rate clerks I held title of chief Rate Clerk. I saw the RR business progress to a very high level but with the advent of private cars, busses and airplanes the pendulum swung the other way and chaos resulted. I began working for the RR on 10/5/22 and took retirement forty years to the day later. A short time later my wife and I moved to Holland and we are still here, frigid weather and huge snowbanks.

what was your main job on the RR?

My brother was a professor at Hope. He was the head of the education department. His picture hangs in the basement of the Van Zoren Library.

(Mrs VandenBough) My father wanted to retire when he was 45 and we lived in NJ. We had an uncle (with three sons) who started a poultry farm in NJ. That's where my father got the idea to start a farm. Since I was the only child I was sent to school. I went to Cornell University and took courses in the agriculture Dept. Until that time I had never been on Long Island before. My Grand mother lived in Brookland But Cornell was the nearest place to go. My Father went through the German army So what ever he said was it. So any how I had this...

So you met on the train?

ya, we had a poultry See for about two years I guess...

In the years around 1924 we took in about 8500 dollars which was a big sum in those days. Between the three of us we never worked so hard in our lives. We had 2200 layers and 10000 baby chicks for about three years. And during those years "My Feet grew bigger and my hands bigger" you know from working, we used to mix our own feed. We had lovely chickens. People would come to the door to buy out egg and chickens, it was a lot of work.

And then my father and I didn't get along to well, So I said I was going to NY to get a position and get a job. Before that I worked in a real estate dept. My friends were so amazed that I went out to NY and got a job. I took courses at NY University. When I met Jess I was down on wallstreet as a private secretary. I showed Jess my checks and they were larger than his. Jess was working for the RR at the time. He would sit next to me on the train, but I wouldn't talk to him. Boy this brings back memories.

What made you move out here?

We had a big house, it was empty. And all the children lived out here. We wanted our grandchildren to know us when we visited. So after we sold our property we decided to move to Holland. We were somewhat acquainted with Holland because my twin brother lived here. We put an add in the paper advertizing for a small house by the water if possible. We got many replies. We came to visit, and saw the house for 15 minutes and left with a deposit.

After moving to Holland we shopped around for some activities to get involved in

*gardening (organic)
garden club
rock & mineral club.
Louth Sea*

Interviewer: David Van Dyken

Interviewe's: Mr and Mrs VanderBorgh

1046 South Shore Drive, Holland

Date: Feb. 9, 1977

TOPICS OF DISCUSSION:

I Cornell

What was it like?

Why did you go?

II The poultry business

What was it like?

Work involved

Diseases

III Ag. School

Courses offered

IV The mistreatment of Poultry

evolution

pollution

Symbols:

E- Erna VanderBorgh

D- David Van Dyken

‡ Mrs Vander Bough was so enthused about this interview that she didn't give me time to turn the recorder on. So the tape doesn't have my first question recorded. But if I remember right, it was concerning Cornell University.

D. What was it like at Cornell University?

E. We had to roll the eggs. And then when they hatched we raised the baby chicks too. That was our assignment, each in a coop. And we had, it was for country school teaching as well as for Ag students, we stayed at Mott's House. There were only about forty girls in the girls dorm.

D. So you went to Ag. school to teach or was it the....?

E. No, so my father could retire; my father wanted to retire when he was forty-two years old, forty-three. And then we bought that land out in Long Island, and went into the chicken business, and then my father wanted to retire; he did. (laugh)

D. Was that a popular business in those days?

E. Yes it was. See one of my uncles, one of my mom's sisters husbands started a poultry business up near Gouldwell, New Jersey, and it was, very successful, they came back with glowing reports and so on. And he was an engineer in Germany. No he was an Industrial Engineer. He always had a very, he worked with ah, Who did he work with? A big firm in Newark, but anyhow he interested my father in this; my father always had an interest in the out doors, he always had a garden so. And after we got that poultry farm we started there, we had two thousand layers there, and then we had twenty-four hundred baby chicks, and when they arrived..... we had beautiful barns, two big rows and at that time we raised was it wheat or corn? We need seeds for rye eat in the yards. You know we planted that, my father was a hard worker, and then when the grain was up about four or five inches all the chickens were allowed to go out there to scratch and so on; so you they were not cooped-up chickens, they were out-door chickens. And we mixed all our own grains. They were all delivered in one hundred pound sacks. And then in one part of the garage we mixed twelve to fifteen hundred pounds at one time; and they were good grains.

D. What kinds of grains were they?

E. Wheat and corn and oats and mixed grains. I had a formula for it at that time. I've forgotten what it was, and also ah potash and different things went in there that were good, you know that were especially good for chickens. And the for the baby chicks we sprouted oats, we bought oats and then we had about four big barrels, and they had to be dumped over each day. Also and then we also had ah barrels of butter milk that was like a cottage cheez and it just looked like a nice whipped cream. And then we would mix that sprouted oat with that cream. And then my father made boards, about twenty boards I guess and then they stood up from the ground about this high (three-feet) and then we used to smear that on those boards and that went in the baby department. And those chickens would get on those boards you know, they would lick it all clean; and that was very nutritious you know, sprouted grains. We even use then now; they are recommended for even people to eat all these sprouted seeds. We worked very hard. And then we had ah running water in each coop. And then my mom helped also. Er used to scrap, and then we had ah chicken wire underneath the roost; no half the chicken coop had like a table. They were lovely coops, and cement floors and above there were the roosts see. And then the roost were slightly elevated. And then we had scrapers, that all came along with that place. The people that had it before us, it was quite new then, they gave up too I guess they thought it was too much work then; you had to scrap that, scrape the manure that had to be done every day too.

D. Every day you had to do that and change the litter?

E. Yes, No, the litter was changed about every week or so; it was necessary. And then we had to clean all those coops and then spread down hay so they'd have a place to scratch. And then we used to trap nest too in the fall.

D. What is trap nest?

E. To see how many eggs some chickens lay. When they were in their nest they were trapped, and then you mark them. And then another thing we

used to do was to put an ointment in their bodies so they wouldn't get lice, there was another job we used to do. Each one you had to wait untill they come out and catch them. We had a thing there so they had to stay there and then we'd put this blue ointment around his head, and that would prevent lice for a year.

D. What other diseases did you have?

E. We had chicken pox once. That was very bad. They get chicken pox on the cone. On their woddles, regular gray spots that turned out to be chicken pox. Sometimes you remove that, and put on an ointment. Then you also put on that magn potash in their drinking water which is a reddish substance, and the water gets slightly red and that also cleanse their systems; but by in large out chickens were very beautiful.

D. What kind of chickens did you raise?

E. White Leggens. They were all specially bred from up-state New York. It was very interesting but it was hard work. It was also an experience. And if we wouldn't have gone out there I would have never met my husband, because that was his home area out there.

D. What was it like going to Ag. School in those days?

E. It was fun I enjoyed it. I like to study.

D. Were there alot of women in Ag. school in those days?

E. Yes. One girl we had come all the way from Isreal. She was a Jewish girl and she was learning the chicken business to go back. And a number of the men that were there. They send me an alumni magazine, but I threw the last one away. I'll save the next one for you. Some of them became managers in the poultry business.

Off the subject

The school was very nice. We had opening exercises, and oh we had very fine food. We had great big pitchers of milk. All the food was raised on the farm. A lot of the people that worked on Ag were assigned to these fields and at that time some of the courses I took in my spare time I didn't need. We had people from all over; from Algeria, downsouth, we had a mixed group, something like here at Hope. The barns and the cattle they were beautiful. I never bothered much with them but I was interested in the horticulture. I worked in the greenhouse just for fun. I worked with others who were assigned to the greenhouse as their workstudy.

They also taught landscape design and the florist business. That's I worked on, planting seeds. That also gets to be a chore. I also attended a course in bee keeping. I studied at night and sat in on classes during the day. I didn't get and credit for it, but I listened in and the bee keeping got very interesting. I also was in a course where they make cheese. All the equipment they had! I only went two or three times because I would never do anything with the cheese. But I went to the bee keeping. I saw the centrifugal machines. Those round machines? And all the hives were put in there you know. That how they extract the honey. They took the hives in the middle and turned on the machine that goes around real quick, and all the honey flies to the sides and falls out. Oh it was delicious honey. The milk and the honey were all grown there on the farm. It was quite an interesting place. They had a homecoming just like they do here, and a football game. One time, we had to do our wash, they had wash machines but no dryers, we had to hang it outside. It was halloween, I never thought anything about it and I left it out. We were busy, we had a halloween party; the next day it was up in a tree, all my clothes was up in a tree. We finally got someone to go take it down.

But I lived out of state see, I came from New Jersey. We had to pay extra money, this was a state school. But I was an only child and my father was very dominate. That was his idea, there wasn't anyone else to go so I had to learn. And then after we had this farm in West Sayville it was on the out-skirts of town-of course they knew I had finished Farmlandale (Cornell) and the neighboring farmers used to bring me their dead chickens cause I had also poultry diseases which I found very difficult to take. You know, look at the chickens innereds and find out what's wrong with them. But the liver would show up; it had spots on it. See a chicken has two stomachs too.

D. Why two stomachs?

E. To pick up things and to digest things afterwards. But it was interesting. What's his name? I can't remember his name. He was a good teacher. He had a lot of personality. One of these really smart teachers. I couldn't eat chickens for a long time. And we never worked so hard in all our lives.

D. How big was your farm?

E. Five acres. That's all the ground we had but the chickens weren't out, you see, and part of that was wooded. We could have bought more too. But my pa I tink after the first year, he thought that was enough. My father went back to work for Macky Radio, see that was during World War. He studied all this in Europe too. They made sets for all over the world. He maintained all the business. ~~th~~They used to call him Doc, And they didn't want him to leave. He was with that company at that time already, he was how old? He retired when he was seventy-eight. But Farmingdale was a nice experience.

D. Was Cornell basicly an Ag school?

E. No. It was mostly for educational courses. It was for country school teaching. Oh yes, and after that, (of the subject)

D. Did you candle the eggs too?

E. Yes

D. Did you have a machine too?

E. Yes it all came with it.

D. Did you use artificial lights to keep production up in the slack season?

E. No, not much. In those days they didn't do that. It was just starting in those days. All the chickens needed a run, and you planted grain for them so they'd have natural food to scratch and so, ~~that~~ also prevents cannibalism. You know chickens are very cannabilistic one to another. If one has a scratch or something they would always eat the other up.

D. Do you know what causes that.

E. Lack of excercise. A chicken is normally a bird like a pheasant; it's been commercialized to this extent. The original chicken layed in the spring time. It ~~never~~ layed as a chicken lays today. A chicken is so made to be so sophisticated by the food it's ~~getting~~ and the trap nesting they do. All the birds that lay the longest to raise the baby chicks from chickens who have a good history of laying eggs. They don't take a breed that hasn't the ability to really lay. And then just like they have a cow, A cow ish't supposed to give milk constantly as it does today. And the original cows if you ever go into the museum of natural history in New York, the cows in the time of the Egyptians didn't have those huge utters. They had cows, but that's from the breeding they do and the milk raising

they do., That's why these cows have these enormous utters. These animals are really mistreated through the generations just like the chicken. The chicken should be out in the trees.(laugh) And what they do today is especially cruel, when they put four chickens in a small 2 by 2 cage. The eggs drop, everything just drops. This is all mechanized. I don't particularly, I didn't want to see those. I saw one once, part of it. I said oh no , I can't look at that. I tink it's a tremendous cruelty even to a chicken. And now they don't keep chickens. It's very difficult to even buy a foul. A foul would be more than one year old. Now they raise the chickens untill maturity, when they start to lay and after they are going to rest, they call that the molting period, see when the chicken is going to renew his feathers and looks very ugly. Even their waddles, you know the waddles are the red part around the head, they all shrink up. It just you know, the chicken would have a molting period and renew it's strenght and it starts laying. It would start laying bigger eggs again.. But during that time you have to feed the chicken so the farmer, the poultry men of today would not waste his time trying to feed a chicken during it's molting period. So as soon as the chicken stops laying they watch this, you can tell by the appearence ot the chicken. A good chicken usually has nice beautifull waddles and then a lovely red cone. As soon as they are molting the cone shrinks down the bill becomes white and so on. The legs become white and then do you want to know what they do with them? They sell them to the soup factory. They clean that all out as soon as the chicken starts to have a rest, they kill them.

D. Did you do that on your farm?

E. No we didn't. We carried a lot over because my mother and father (laugh) we were all to sympathetic to the chickens. We carried a lot wver.

But we sold the cockrels see, and you should see them after we fed them on all this butter milk and so on. After ten weeks you get a very beautifull bird. You can tell a cock by their cones. The cones develope on the cock and the hen remains to have a very small cone, so you have to caul those out. You can caul the cocks out when they are ten-twelve weeks old. Because the people want eggs that aren't fertile either, so we separate them. We had all these cocks and we had this man from Rockvill Center, who came to get them, and he brought his own boxes. He had a whole truck full of these cocks. They started to crow then too. As they left

all these birds were looking at us. They got to be friends; they come in there and sit on your head and your shoulders. And you can pick them up. We looked at that truck and we all cried. (laugh) See if you give a bird what it should have it gets to be a beautiful creature just like a dog or a cat. But I still think that working with poultry and doing a good job takes a tremendous amount of integrity. Off the subject. Although again when we visited Joyce's roommate's people in New York when she was at Hope there, she was the daughter of a dairy man. He had eighty or ninety cows, and he also bought and sold cows so he quite an outfit there. But you should see how mechanized that place was. All the cows were milked with the artificial milking system. They had all pipes where the milk went up into the ceiling and all that ran into a great big tank, and there were all these dials that went everywhere. And then the milk trucks would get to that place and they had this great big tube and would suck it out of there with a vacuum or something.

Side Two

- D. Do you think the courses you took at Cornell affected your thinking toward organic gardening?
- E. I think it definitely has. I've always realized that chemicals of any kind, whether in food or in water or on the land, were extremely toxic and dangerous. I think they are responsible for some of our strange diseases. The water is so polluted, in the years to come we'll have to buy drinking water. Even around here our drinking water is sub-standard. I'm glad we have our own well, we have trees in the back and so our water is all right. you know this land is virgin land. And look at Jess' oyster business on Long Island, That's almost all spoiled.
- D. Why is it spoiled?
- E. Because of pollution, hepatitis and all kinds of sicknesses. If you eat too much of it, if you ate it once and a while it probably wouldn't hurt you, but a number of people out there are really, they grew up with the oyster stew and all kinds of oyster dishes because they were right at their door step. So at that time even our poultry feed that we mixed when we were there, that was all good grain, there wasn't anything artificial in it, nor was it mixed-up with any drugs of any kind. Now here when you go down to the co-op and watch them mix grain for animals, sometimes you go in there and you can see what they are putting in there and they put a great deal of chemical material in there to prevent illness.

And even if the cattle or chickens don't have it they already put something in the food to protect them against it. That's why the eggs of today don't taste like the eggs that I remember even though we get our eggs from the farm in Hamilton where the chickens run. And you should never eat anything that comes out of the bakery because everything is so sophisticated and chemicalized; bleaches and preservatives makes it harmful for the body. That's all accumulative if you keep on eating it over a period of years.

- D. Don't you think it's a necessity of these days?
- E. Know you sound like our son. He said too, "mother if we didn't have that we couldn't feed all the millions of people." But I still, it's a problem if you want to stay healthy. But today even a fly can't live in a vegetable store anymore because the vegetables are so sprayed.

This concludes my interview with Mrs Vander Bough on Feb. 9, 1977, on South Shore Drive.