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Mulder, Bernard J Oral History Interview: Former RCA and Protestant Reformed Church Executives

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HOPE COLLEGE LIVING HERITAGE ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
1979

BERNARD J. MULDER D.D.
INTERVIEW

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HOLLAND, MICHIGAN

INTRODUCTION

The Hope College Living Heritage Oral History Project consists of a series of interviews conducted during the summer of 1977 by Nancy A. Swinyard, the summer of 1978 by Conrad J. Strauch and the summer of 1979 by Derk Michael Strauch. These interviews were conducted with past executives of the Reformed Church in America, and with the Rev. Homer C. Hoeksema of the Protestant Reformed Churches. Upon the completion of each session, the taped conversation was transcribed and then edited by the interviewer and the interviewee for clarity. While the accuracy of the transcript is desirable, the viewpoint of the interviewee is maintained. Some alterations were suggested by the interviewer during the interview and in later correspondences, but the researcher will discover discrepancies between the interviews themselves and with published materials. Therefore, the researcher must be aware that these discrepancies exist, and seek to understand the perspective from which all statements were made. Tapes of all the interviews are stored in the Hope College Archives in Van Zoeren Library.

No claim is made that the information contained within these transcripts is absolutely accurate. No two people share identical viewpoints, and the separation of time from the interviewee's experiences with the events mentioned, can sometimes intensify this divergence.

Without the support of Dr. Jacob E. Nyenhuis, Dean of the Humanities and the Fine Arts, and Mr. William K. Anderson, Vice President of Business and Finance, this project would not have become a reality. Dr. Elton J. Bruins, though busy with his own pursuits, willingly lent his guidance and support. The success of this project can be attributed to the efforts of the interviewees, each gracious, receptive and cooperative.

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Interview with
DR. BERNARD J. MULDER
at his home in
Douglas, Michigan
on
June 6, 1979
with
Derk M. Strauch

Bernard J. Mulder was born on January 25, 1896, in Holland Michigan. He began his education in the County Elementary School and later graduated from the Zeeland High School in 1914. He then went on to receive his AB degree from Hope College in 1919 and then his Bachelor of Divinity degree from Western Theological Seminary in Holland, Michigan, in 1922.

He entered the ministry of the Reformed Church in America in 1922 after being ordained by the Classis of Michigan and went to serve his first Church in Muskegon. He was then the Pastor of the Covenant Reformed Church. In 1926 he received a call, and accepted, from the First Reformed Church of Pella, Iowa. He served that Church until 1932 and received a Doctorate from Central College in 1931. He was then called to the Bethel Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan and remained there until he took the position of Editor of the Church Newspaper, then the Intelligencer-Leader. In all of his pastorates he was very concerned about Christian Education and was able to establish many programs that aided in the education of the children, not only in his Congregation, but in the cities that he served.

Then came the task of being the first Editor of the Church Herald. He had that position for nine years and under his administration the subscription list went to 30,000. He also originated the "Every Member Plan" of subscription. In 1945 he left that position to assume the General Secretary of the Board of Education of the Reformed Church In America position. He held that job till his retirement in 1965. The interview deals mainly with this position and that of the Church Herald editor position.

Dr. Mulder has served on various committees and organizations that are as different as they are numerous. He has been the President of the Board of Trustees of the Western Theological Seminary and also a member of that Board. He was also President of the National Associated Church Press for two years in which he conducted a national conference in Philadelphia and in Boston. He also

shared in Press Interviews with Franklin D. Roosevelt and with Harry Truman. He continued to edit the Religious Digest, which he founded, and was the first editor. He conducted Sunday School lessons over the WLAV radio and also the Church news over WOOD. When he arrived at the Board of Education he continued to be active in outside organizations. He was the co-editor of the Covenant Life Curriculum and one of the originators of the idea. He served on the Board of Trustees of Hope College, Central College and Western Seminary. For three years, he was a member of the planning committee that established the National Council of Churches of Christ in America in 1950, was President of the National Council of Higher Education for two years, and edited the quarterly Christian Education for five years. He was the Reformed Church in America delegate to the National Council Board for 12 years, and Vice-President of the Division of Christian Education of the National Council for two years. He was also the Reformed Church delegate to the Third World Conference on Faith and Order in Lund, Sweden in 1952, and the delegate to the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches in St. Andrews, Scotland. Under the World Council of Churches, he was the advisor and counselor of the World Council of Christian Education to the Near East Curriculum Conference, representing the Christian Churches of six Arab nations, in the creation of the Curriculum Syllabus. He later returned to the Middle East twice to lead in Training and Writers Conferences. He also went to Tokyo, Japan, for the Fourteenth World Sunday School Association Conference representing the Reformed Church in America. He then proceeded to give a one week lecture series to an all Japanese Education Convention in Kyoto, Japan. After the Convention he was commissioned to carry the message to the Near East in a week long Sunday School Conference held in Alexandria, Egypt. His writing career continued through his writings in the Youth Quarterly in the International Lesson section for two years. He also did the lesson illustrations in the Earnest Worker.

Dr. Mulder was married to Louise Ella Weaver on May 31, 1921 while he was still attending Seminary. She was his constant help throughout his ministry. He is also the happy father of three children; Betty June Burton, who is a mother and a homemaker, Dona Louise Rypstra, who is an RN and a mother of three, and Judith Ellen Van Zanten who is a teacher and a mother of five. Dr. Mulder takes great delight in his three daughters and all of his fourteen grandchildren.

At the present he is the Minister of Calling for the First Reformed Church of Hamilton, Michigan where he also leads the Midweek Prayer and Bible Study Hour. He still preaches in area Churches and does some preaching at the Community Church of Douglas where he also does some calling. He takes great delight in his home as is evident by the gardens and the flowers. He enjoys reading and listening to soft and Classical music. He is still a teacher at heart. During the interview I felt more of a teacher-student communication than an interviewer-interviewee relation. Dr. Mulder has served the Church with determination and vision and he still follows the actions of the Reformed Church, and has hope for the future of the denomination. We of the Reformed Church in America will be forever in debt to Dr. Mulder for his work in advancing the growth of the Reformed Church and the Kingdom of God.

STRAUCH: I'd like to begin with your coming to the Church Herald in 1937.

In his term paper, John Van Zanten says that you displayed an "ingrained editorship" that would be with you throughout your career. Could you tell us more about this "ingrained editorship" and where it first appeared.

MULDER: Well, as far as newspaper work is concerned, I began serving as a reporter for the Holland Sentinel in my high school days as a student in Zeeland High School. I reported the events, the activities, especially athletic activities, of the school. It was then called the Holland Daily Sentinel. I did that for a couple of years including some special events in the community of Zeeland, but particularly relating to the high school. But in that sense the idea of newspaper work and reporting got just a little bit in my system. And of course, when I came to Hope College, I continued the same for Hope College and particularly the athletic and special events at Hope College. In addition I was assigned, on occasion, to cover the City Hall meetings and so fourth. So that through all this time, I got something of an idea of newspaper reporting and, of course, I was under the direction of the editor of the Holland Daily Sentinel. But somehow or other it became a part of me, that "nose for news" as they say. And when I was in Grand Rapids before the Church Herald, I did serve on the Editorial Committee of the Church Herald. I do say that in that paper (the biographical sketch), I was particularly responsible for the Church news page, when it was still the Intelligencer-Leader. It was at that time a weekly paper. But I did not share in the editorial direction of the paper. A committee of four shared that responsibility, but Dr. John R. Mulder, who was professor at Western Seminary, had the last word as to what was to be put in the paper, as far as articles were concerned. But I took care of the news part, and continued to do that, until I was called to be the editor. I supposed that all that background led people to thinking that I could be the editor. Well, I guess that they thought that I had a flare for it. I don't know myself, but I did. In a way this is what happened. I did not ask

for the position. I was happy in the pastorate in Bethel Reformed Church. But Synod's Board thought that somebody ought to be editor and they thought that I could be, and I felt it was a challenge because there was something in my nature that responded to the idea. I don't know if that answers your question, but that's the probability of it.

STRAUCH: In 1937, you became the first professional editor of the Church Herald then the Intelligencer-Leader. Did you have any frustrations and anxieties when you first took the position? I remember reading that the paper had a difficulty when you took the job.

MULDER: It did have, but I was not afraid as far as that is concerned. Of course, there were some very real problems because of the fact that the Intelligencer as such, had passed off the scene and had merged, in name only, as the Intelligencer-Leader. But the big problem to begin with was that there were a large number of unfulfilled subscriptions on the part of the Intelligencer which had to be absorbed without recompense by the new Intelligencer-Leader. This was so because of the decision on the part of the General Synod to publish its own paper. Before that you see, the Leader had been published by the J. Klaasen Printing Company. The committee did the editing but the Klaasen Printing Company was responsible for its formation and circulation. Unfortunately--and I say this without prejudice--the Klaasen Printing Company also published the Sunday School Guide, and they did have a man in that field. But instead of promoting the Leader, he mostly promoted this Guide and let the Leader just hang on the edge. It was a thing in which they were not too greatly interested. So that when I assumed the editorship, and the management of course, because then the management was turned over to me, there were, and I don't remember how many, there were a large number of unfulfilled subscriptions to the Intelligencer which, of course, we were obligated to fill, but without subscription money coming in. So that was a problem that had to be

assumed and, of course, we worked away at it. In the early days of the editorship, although the subscription list began to grow, there were two, probably three, times that I pledged my own house at the bank for a loan in order to pay the printer who had to be paid at the end of every week. Now this was a real concern, but the bank was very gracious and kind but did have to have some substantial collateral in case of necessity. Well, fortunately, it never had to be used, but you can imagine it might cause a little bit of concern, and maybe a sleepless night or two. But on the other hand, I was not afraid. And at the bank with which we did business, the manager was an elder in the Reformed Church and was very sympathetic and understanding and we got along fine as far as that is concerned. As far as I was personally concerned, you can understand that it caused some worry that we might not be able to catch up. But fortunately, we did. And we, in that respect, came along very fine. And we worked out the situation, but that was the first thing that we faced, those unfulfilled subscriptions on the part of the Intelligencer. For which, of course, the subscribers had paid; but the money had gone into the fund in New York City. There wasn't anything left, and there was no transfer of funds, just names, that's all. But we made it!

STRAUCH: Is that when you came up with the Every Member Plan?

MULDER: Then sometime later, I created the "Every Member Plan" which I think I have described to you, (at the initial interview on May 31, 1979) a plan whereby a Consistory would subscribe for the membership, and thus, substantially decrease the office work in billing. We sent one bill to the Consistory for "X" number of subscribers and that was it. Instead of sending one hundred bills to a hundred people, we sent one bill to one Consistory. Well, from the standpoint of office work, since I had only one office girl who did the billing, who did the subscription list, who did everything as far as that is concerned, outside of being the editor. And of course, I was the editor and manager for a twenty-four page weekly: no assistants, no help; selection, choosing, reading, copy-reading, and

proofreading - everything was on my shoulders. The Hundred Percent Plan, (every member plan) began at one dollar for the year. Of course, the costs were different than now, but it caught on, and in the nine years that I was there, it moved the subscription list to over 30,000. It caught on very well in the Western section of the Church, not too well in the Eastern section, and that has continued to this day. There is a much greater response to the Church Herald even today in the Western section of the Church than in the Eastern areas. We moved out under the thought that the Church Herald was the pastor to the denomination, and of course we tried to be. We had a set policy for the paper with that idea. As articles came in, they had to be of such nature that the average lay-person reaching up just a bit could read and understand. It wasn't a paper just for the clergy, although there was something there also for the clergy. One of the problems in the early days was there were some ministers who were eager to write, and this was fine. But there were quite a few who wanted to write, but before they got hold of the subject, they tried to get a lot of irritations out of the way. One of the problems of the editor was to use his red pencil and cut out those pet peeves. Men were good writers, but always had a lot of peeves first, and those had to be cut out. This made them mad. They said, "If I write, you are not to touch it," Well I came with that to the General Synod, and I said if "I'm the editor - I'm the editor, and otherwise you get somebody else. If I'm the editor, I'm going to be the editor." And of course, there were some questions about that, you know things like that do happen when you start and I suppose they still do. I am sure that that doesn't cease and did not cease in the nine years. But one of the methods I used (laughing) if someone was really hot in presenting criticism of the paper, I'd ask him to write an article, and very soon you had a friend. Oh yes, he was honored to have a byline and so a published article. This hasn't any value, but in a way, those are things that come across one's desk, and I suppose they do everybody's. That was one good

way to make friends of people, because when asked to write an article they realized what it took to write. For clergy it was especially so. It was quite totally different than writing a sermon or writing to fill one page. My idea was that an article should only be the length of the page. If it's longer than that, most people won't read it. That policy is pursued right along. In the present day, I sometimes see articles that are much longer, and for clergy that may be all right, but for the average layreader, that is the limit of his sustaining attention. If he hasn't finished it by then, and if the writer hasn't said what he wants to say in about that time, then the writer hasn't been concise enough. I am not offering criticism to the editorship of the Church Herald.

STRAUCH: You mentioned that you set policy for the Church Herald: to unify the denomination, to foster a healthy interest in church work and, the third was to indoctrinate, to be pastor to the denomination.

MULDER: That's right, you've got that all right.

STRAUCH: How did you make the paper work in these functions?

MULDER: Well, of course, first of all by the articles, the selection of the articles tended in that direction. Indoctrination, of course, simply means teaching the basic facets and principles of the theology of the Reformed Church in America. And most articles had to conform to that. As such it became a teaching ministry both from the standpoint of interpretation of the Word and in the sending forth of the Word of God through missionaries and missionary news. It is in this way that we sought to teach. At the same time, at that time, more so than it is now, there was a rather sharp division of our Church as far as East and West were concerned. One of the efforts was to help each side to understand the other side by selecting articles from opposite ends of the Church so that each could see that we were, after all, one Church and one in faith and one in practice. And I think it worked very well in that direction, and I tried anyway.

STRAUCH: You tried to remind the Church that it was a national Church?

MULDER: That's right, yes sure.

STRAUCH: You said that the job of the editor was to set the policy of the paper, to insure that the contents were interesting and in balance. How did you try to achieve this in the early years and in the later years? I remember reading that there was some criticism that the Church Herald was not theological enough.

MULDER: Of course there were some who criticised, but you see the average reader, the rank and file people who were the readers of the Church Herald are not basically theological in their outlook on life. They are much more practical and want to be more practical in their outlook on life. They understand, and want to understand the principles of the faith; but their outlook is not to argue or to be too concerned about the little inflections of the Word. They want to use it in the broader sense. Now that doesn't mean that they aren't interested, but nevertheless in reading articles they are not interested in quibbling about certain nuances of translation, and so forth. And I've never used that in my ministry either because the average person is not educated to the extent that he can understand too well. It doesn't have too great a meaning for him, the things that sometimes theologically minded people argue about too much.

STRAUCH: In 1945, you left the Church Herald and took on the responsibilities of the General Secretary of the Board of Education. What was the condition of the Board when you arrived?

MULDER: Well, of course, in the first place, the Board of Education was an independent organization, just as all Boards were at that time. But it was a Board that concerned itself largely at that moment with the matter of student aid and Sunday School work, the later through a Department of Publication and Bible School Work. It recommended certain textbooks that might be used, produced by other denominations, and publishing houses. A large part was working with colleges and the theological seminaries in finding students for the ministry and

how these could be helped to a scholarship fund that was available. There was one assistant, Mrs. Sanford Cobb, who did work in the Sunday School field. It did not produce anything on its own at that particular time. There was also a Director of Youth Work, Dr. James Nettinga, working largely in the field of summer camps and conference and youth programs in the local church.

STRAUCH: Then there wasn't any "denominational" Sunday School curriculum at that time?

MULDER: No, not at that time. None that was produced by the Reformed Church. It consisted largely in the appraising, reviewing and evaluating of other systems and recommending them for use by the Churches. Yes, that's right.

STRAUCH: It seems that in reading over the biography that was written by John Van Zanten, alot was going on outside of your position at the Board of Education. At times did you feel overwhelmed and want to withdraw from it for awhile?

MULDER: No, I can't say that. Of course, I have been interested in Christian Education all my ministry. I served as the secretary of this and that in Christian Education as I wrote down in this paper (the biographical sketch), and inaugurated the Released Time Program of education in Muskegon Heights and in Grand Rapids. It was approved by the Board of Education in both Muskegon Heights and in Grand Rapids. It was approved by the Board of Education of the Grand Rapids Public Schools but not largely taken advantage of by ministers. But I was always interested in Religious Education. In coming to the Board, we were very much interested in a catechical program in the recommendation of text books by Dr. Kuizenga, and Dr. Oudersluys and other books. None of these had been produced by the Board of Education.

STRAUCH: You've talked about the Time Released Program. In Pella, you were able to establish a catechism program in the schools, where the students received grades for their work.

MULDER: In Pella, Iowa, at a certain hour in one day of the week, the entire school system was taken over by teachers of the respective churches, Reformed Church in America and the Christian Reformed. There were a number of Catholic youngsters in Pella who then went to their small Catholic Church and a fine, not a priest, a Catholic lady, came and taught them in the teachings of the Catholic Church of course. All was by permission of the Board of Education of Pella, Iowa, and the grades were entered on their report card, which was in recognition of the values of religious teachings. You see there were some - very few - who were not interested at all, either Protestant or Catholic, these were brought into a classroom and had to go on with their studies, which they didn't like, but were then under the supervision of a teacher.

STRAUCH: Wasn't there any opposition to having religion in the public schools?

MULDER: Very little opposition here, this was very much in favor on the part of the people.

STRAUCH: In 1956, statistics show that only 40% of the Reformed Church in America used denominational Sunday School materials. What was the cause of such a low percentage at this time?

MULDER: Well, lets see, 1956, the Covenant Life Curriculum wasn't there yet. We started work on it in 1950 but you see in the first place the denomination or the church schools had for so long been accustomed to making their own selections like Pilgrim Press, the Sunday School Guide and David C. Cook materials. In the Western sections of the Church the Sunday School Guide, of which I've already spoken, and which is still in use by many, had made a large inroad and, of course, a good road in usage in the Churches. You see, the denomination or a large part of the denomination was enamored of the International, or as we call it, the Uniform System Lesson Program. This in itself is a good system as far as that is concerned. David C. Cook and Scripture Press and Gospel Light Press and the Sunday School Guide, all used the Uniform System as the basis. And the Churches

for half a century or more had used this Uniform series and thought it was fine. It was very, very difficult to get them to turn over to any system that we proposed. In the Eastern sections of the Church they used, I remember, the Pilgrim Press, which was Congregational in nature but a good lesson system. The Church was slow in moving in the direction of the preparation of materials for its own particular use, and according to advanced educational principles. The Uniform Series seeks to cover the whole Bible in a certain period of time. Right now in the Church where I am working as Calling Minister in the summer I teach the senior adult Bible class, on the basis of the Uniform lesson. Recently, they had a fine series on the ministry of the Church, and last Sunday they began a series all over again in Old Testament history. Three hundred years of Old Testament history, Saul and David; they go back over it again and again. They've had the Uniform so long that it is very, very difficult to get them away from it. So it is true that less than 40%, and I don't know what the figures are now, of usage by Reformed Church Sunday Schools of the material that has come out under the Covenant Life Curriculum, and is now moving into JED (Joint Educational Development). The material is beginning to come out under this joint educational program with many more denominations sharing in the production of the materials.

STRAUCH: How was the Covenant Life Curriculum, the idea of writing it with the Southern Presbyterians, accepted by the Reformed Church in America?

MULDER: Well for those who were really interested in a thorough education it was accepted eagerly and happily. To those who were wedded to the Uniform System, it took quite a long time and some have never changed. As a whole, the acceptance was enthusiastic on the part of many but not at all with open arms. If I may put it that way. The idea that we were working together with the Southern Presbyterians was fine; but, they were not ready for that type of material,

and with the lesson quarterlies, a great deal had to do with cost. The general quarterlies and papers like the Sunday School Guide and others cost far less than the books of the Covenant Life Curriculum. Those were relatively expensive, and very often the cost factor itself was a deterrent regardless of the value of the educational method. That's unfortunate, that churches are that way in training up children, that the very factor of cost should enter into it greatly, but it did, no question about it.

STRAUCH: Was it accepted that we were working with the Southern Presbyterians in this project?

MULDER: That in itself was all right. You see there was a large movement that we unite with them at one time; and then, of course, it was voted down. I remember traveling to the West Coast and speaking in Spokane, and all down the West Coast in favor of union with the Southern Presbyterians, organic union. But it was voted down. And of course, nothing still has happened, but the Northern and the Southern Presbyterians are trying here and there to get together, but usually it gets voted down. Now I don't know, a number of what they call their Presbyteries, we would call them Classes, but in certain parts of the Church, both Northern and Southern Presbyteries are uniting in their work and outside of directions from the respective denominations. They are sliding into union by the back door. But then you see from the Southern Presbyterians there again is a split off, on the part of a number of churches that feel that the Church as a whole is not sound enough in doctrine and theology. So you see, you try to work at a greater union, and there is another group that thinks we're better than the rest of you and then they break off again. It has happened in the Lutheran Church. You see, those things do happen. And I suppose they will continue. Men are concerned about certain interpretations and practices. Well now, I don't mean to say that it must all be easy go. There are certain basic

principles as far as the evangelical Gospel is concerned to which one must adhere, this is true in both doctrine and in life.

STRAUCH: The need at that time as you said was a great need for the Covenant Life Curriculum, because the Church must always seek to improve its ways of working. The needs of our time are different than the times before, and that the Church could provide a new curriculum. Would you please elaborate on that for us.

MULDER: Well, of course that says it all, as far as that is concerned, but as a result of the studies of languages and archeological discoveries, knowledge of the historical background of the biblical tradition and of the writers of the Biblical books and the situations which they faced - I mean, in the last century the knowledge of all of this has so greatly increased that in order to be, how shall I say, yes, we must preach the truth up to date and teach the truth up to date in the light of all the knowledge that we can gain. This was not contained at all in the old curriculums because it just had not been discovered, if I may use that word. As this knowledge increased, it must be incorporated in the studies that are presented. And as well, the psychology of learning had greatly increased and continues to greatly increase as we begin to understand human nature better, and its relationship to the various components of life, and the attitudes towards life. As this knowledge increases, both the psychological and from the practical standpoint, it needs to be geared into your teaching aids as far as that is concerned. That's why; now of course, why did we join with the Southern Presbyterians, simply - money. I mean we in the Board of Education and under its curriculum committee discussed for quite a long time, as to starting our own educational system, our own curriculum. In fact, we had progressed as far as to have a number of outlines prepared by qualified people in the Reformed Church. But then when you face the issue of taking it to the printer and the promotion thereof, in the life of the Church,

we just as a Reformed Church were too small. Just too small. In a very casual kind of conversation with the General Secretary of the Board of Education of the Southern Presbyterian Church, between him and me, we were at a meeting of the Association of the American Church Colleges, annually the Presidents of the Colleges and all Secretaries of Education were invited to attend. So, we went too. Just as we sat talking, the Southern Presbyterians faced the same problem we were facing, the need to do something, but the cost was too high. Now of course, they were much stronger than we, and one thing led to another and we said to each other, "Why not do it together?" and that caught on. I proposed that to our curriculum committee and to the Board of Education, of course, and they were enthusiastic about it. This was in 1950. So, a meeting was called in Montreat, North Carolina, an exploratory meeting, where we sent a number of people and that was how we got started. Then the curriculum committee was appointed, and of course, from there it was step by step. Many meetings, of course, and many places in order to work this out. Advising the program, and setting the areas of study: the Bible, the Church and the Christian life, became the three main facets of study. From there we moved forward, but it took us ten years before the first book appeared. In all some two hundred books were presented, and then in addition, I became as Secretary of the Board of Education, the co-editor of the Covenant Life Curriculum, with the Southern Presbyterians, and the editor for our Church which meant that my briefcase was always full with manuscripts going home everynight and over Sundays. It was something, but it was interesting.

STRAUCH: Reading over your biography, it seems that you must have slept two hours each night in order to get all of your work finished for the next day.

MULDER: (laughing) Well, I don't remember but it was alot of work, but fruitful! And the Board went right along with it, you know, so that was fine. I had

the finest cooperation from the Board of Education. I honestly can say that I don't remember any opposition from anyone, that anyone vetoed what either I or a committee proposed. And, of course, the Board began to grow, because we developed into the Childrens Department, our Youth Department and the Adult Department and the selection of personnel, which was also on my shoulders. I remember traveling to Michigan and to California and other places and finding people and asking if they would be interested.

STRAUCH: You mentioned that the Board started to grow, branching into sub-divisions, departments, why was that so?

MULDER: In order to do adequate work you have to grow and create departments, Childrens work and Youth work and Adult work. Then we had a special curriculum committee and then we entered into publication. We started the Reformed Church Press, we had one bookstore in New York, and started one in Grand Rapids. Both of them are gone now. But, of course, as the work enlarges, it has to be divided, you get specialists in the field of children's work, youth work, and adult work, and you seek those who are specially trained and prepared in that direction and we did find them. Of course, they in turn created work for their departments and the values thereof their special training: camps and conferences of every kind and nature as the work developed. At the same time the Department of Education grew, as far as that is concerned. I myself was, in addition to all the other things, the director of Higher Education. This concerned itself with colleges and seminaries, but largely in the matter of student aid, there was quite a scholarship fund at the time. To determine who could qualify for these scholarships, I would travel to the colleges and the seminaries and interview the students and for how much and so forth. So only as we departmentalized could we adequately begin to serve. The Church was also growing and calling for such services calling for special skills, and we tried to move along and respond to the call.

STRAUCH: As the Director of the Board of Higher Education, you were able to sit on the meetings of the Board of Trustees.

MULDER: As General Secretary of the Board of Education, and also the Director of the Department of Higher Education, I was privileged to sit on the Boards. I never went to Northwestern, but I was active at Hope College and Central College and Western Seminary. And I was a voting member, although often people of this nature are ex-officio, as they call it. That was not my case, I was a voting member and could help to determine policy and speak, if necessary. On the Western Seminary Board of Trustees, when I was editor of the Church Herald, I was for two years president of the Board of Trustees. But this was not an ex-officio position. I was a full voting member of the Board and could help determine policy and program, as it related itself to the Board of Education.

STRAUCH: At any point in time, did you have to step in and give more direction than usual?

MULDER: No, I don't think that ever happened, and I would have been hesitant to do so because the presidents of the Institutions were qualified people and they knew very, very, well what they were doing, so that was never necessary. As far as I was concerned, I would have been hesitant to do so because in that sense, they were also hesitant because they were also members of the Board of Education by virtue of their presidencies. So you see, it was an interrelativeness. Now this did not mean that we were subservient to one another, but it did mean that we had a common interest and, in my case I was certain that they were qualified to do what they were doing, and had adequate reason for what they were doing. And by that reasoning, I hope that they felt that I was qualified to do what I was doing as I led the Board of Education. And so it proved out to be John R. Mulder, Irwin Lubbers, and Gerrit Vander Lugt - they were fine members of the Board of Education. They did not hesitate to speak, Dr. Gerrit Vander Lugt was

president of Central College, and was for a long time chairman of our curriculum committee. He was an educator, very wise and very helpful, Dr. Lubbers was, of course, an administrator, and Dr. John R. Mulder was a theologian, so that there were facets that they could bring in that were helpful for the total program of the Board of Education. In the same way, I hope that I brought something to their Boards by the larger knowledge of an educational program. So that worked out beautifully. I don't know how it is today. First of all, the whole set up is different. The Church, now the Program Council, and I know that such men do not sit on the Program Council because the Program Council is appointed by the General Synod and represents, of course, the various facets of the Church: the Classes and the Particular Synods and so forth. It is a totally different setup.

STRAUCH: A little more complicated in my opinion.

MULDER: Well, if it means progress I am for it, but I don't know about it. It's different now, but the great deal of the work that I did, especially in curriculum, is now directed by Dr. Arthur Van Eck. He's in that sense, and I remember so well coming to the Southgate Reformed Church of Detroit, where he was the Pastor, as we had our seminars and teachers training programs, I had made it necessary to select leadership. Now, one to watch was Arthur Van Eck. And all unawares on his part, he was being monitored and developed and when the time came that we needed this type of help, I asked and he came. Fortunately so, he's been and is still a very fine man and in the course of time we helped him to attain his Doctorate in Education. We did that once before with the Youth Director, Dr. James Nettinga. He's now retired, but he did the Young People's work, and we helped him by paying his tuition and time off in New York University to attain his doctorate. Later he grew, and he became the General Secretary in the American Bible Society, a very fine position. (Dr. Mulder later informed me that the procedure used in selecting Dr. Van Eck was used to acquire all of his

staff. The story of Dr. Van Eck is used because he is presently in the position that Dr. Mulder held at the National Headquarters. His loyalty and admiration for his staff was displayed in his concern that no one feel neglected, so this addition was made.)

STRAUCH: I'd like to return to the subject of the colleges. In recent times and I am sure in the past, there is talk about the colleges to the Church and the Church to the colleges. How did you view this relationship when you were the Director of Higher Education?

MULDER: I wrote a paper once, "What the College has done for the Church." Look for that in the Archives. So if you find that, you know the relationship of the college to the Church. The colleges are denominationally oriented and they belong to the denomination; and therefore, must be supported by the denomination and this is very uniquely so in the Reformed Church in America. Now the college Boards are independent Boards of Trustees, as far as that is concerned, and yet in the larger sense they are subject to the denomination, and the college has the right to ask the denomination for support and the denomination gives this support. Now as far as our theological education is concerned, while I was first in office there was constantly the thought: why do we in this small denomination need two theological seminaries? And this, in about the middle of my tenure in New York, this question came up again. So we appointed a very select committee which included a number of people of the denomination: Dr. Wynard Wichers, who was then President of Hope College, the General Secretary of the American Association of Theological Schools, Rev. Ernest R. Palen, President of the Board of Education, and a number of their leaders, who went into the question very thoroughly as to the possibility of the uniting of the two seminaries. Because our denomination was thought to be too small to maintain two such schools. Financially, you see, that came up too. It was also an effort to unite the denomination, East

and West. But the conclusion of the study was: we need New Brunswick and we need Western. So it was left there and we went on, in that way. Now after my day, they have for operating purposes, united the two seminaries under a single board of Theological Education and for a time the president, the Dr. Herman Ridder, was president of both schools. Now that single presidency didn't work out too well, I guess, but that was after my time, now each school has it's own president. But they operate under the single Board of Theological Education, and they interchange students. A number of students spend two years at one seminary and one at the other, I don't know exactly how that works, but it works that way in order that they may be acquainted with both schools of theological education.

STRAUCH: You have mentioned again this East-West split. Was it that apparent in your administration?

MULDER: It wasn't a split. "Split" is not a good word, it implies that there is a break-off. It wasn't that, it was an East-West sentiment, let's put it that way - in the sense that the East was a little more liberal and the West a little more conservative. Since that time we tried, and in my tenure too, to have graduates from Western Theological Seminary serve Eastern Churches, and vice versa, in which they soon began to discover that the thing wasn't very real at all, but just talk. And so while there is partial sentiment still. And there are some diehards in one part of the Church, but not in Michigan anymore. Some say the East is a little too liberal, whatever that means by that word "liberal." But it is lessening, and the anniversary we had just a year ago was a mighty uniting force.

STRAUCH: Wasn't it in 1969 that there was a proposal that we dissolve as a denomination?

MULDER: Yes, oh yes. Well that 1969 Synod was a bad one they say, but, I wasn't there, and glad of it too!

STRAUCH: Also when you were in the Board of Education, the new hymnbook was arranged and published. Why did the Reformed Church decide to cooperate with the Presbyterians? Was it because of working with the Covenant Life Curriculum?

MULDER: There again number one - money. Publication of a hymnbook is very expensive now and as you could realize. And, of course, to go it on your own meant that we just couldn't do it. So the proposition was made, "Why not cooperate with the Presbyterians?" In theology we are both Presbyterian, and in government, so let's do it together. We, the Reformed Church in America, had this advantage, that the capital structure was furnished by the Presbyterian Church. This helped us very much, very, very greatly. You see, we had no capital funds, but the capital structure was supplied by the Presbyterian Church, although we shared in the editorial part, in the selection and choice of hymns. I think it was fairly well accepted in the Reformed Church. Many churches use the Hymnbook. Well, gradually new hymnbooks are again coming out. That's a periodic proposition, but it was quite the long pull. How many hundreds of hundreds of hymns there are! Just to select the number which constitutes our The Hymnbook, was a great task. But all of them were under the skillful editor of the Presbyterian Church and we enjoyed it very much.

STRAUCH: You were in charge of the final publication were you not?

MULDER: Well, I was part of the committee. That's all.

STRAUCH: That about closes the interview, we have covered quite alot and quite alot of years.

MULDER: I don't know if I've helped any.

STRAUCH: Yes, very much so!

MULDER: Well, I'm glad (with a sense of satisfaction in his voice.)

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