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# Campbell, Rose Oral History Interview: General Holland History

Robert Quick

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Oral History Interview  
Interviewee: Rose Campbell  
Interviewer: Robert Quick  
August 7, 1976

RQ: This is Robert Quick, on Saturday, August the 7th in Rosemary Cottage, and Janet and I are talking to Aunt Rose and showing her the beautiful leather bag that shows Lake Macatawa and the scene surrounding it, including our cottage. Aunt Rose, this bag is made possible by the drawing that Fred Camel made many years ago, in which you gave me last summer. Just talk in your normal tone, and tell Janet and me about that drawing that you and Fred came up with for your Christmas card many years ago.

RC: Well, when we talked of it, we wanted to show, as far as we could, how Macatawa was laid out. Then we also wanted to have the hotel in it. Where is the hotel?

RQ: Yes, it's right there. There it is. That's the hotel.

RC: We wanted to show the Macatawa Hotel and where to find us from the hotel after the guests came into Macatawa. And so, when the drawing came back from the artist, I said, "Oh, my. You would think we were the people in Macatawa." I said, "I don't like that." I said, "You're leaving out all of our friends." He said, "Well, we can't put all that in there. We're trying to show where you live from the Macatawa Hotel where Grove Walk is." And so, I exceeded then, that idea.

RQ: Was this artist in Chicago, Aunt Rose?

RC: This was an artist who was a professional artist. He worked for Peabody Coal Company in Chicago. He said he wanted to do it for Fred, for a special favor. So then we had the cards printed from that, and we were sorry that we didn't have more because many

people who liked the idea would have loved to have one for a keepsake. And so I put it away in the trunk, and, the original.

RQ: I think the only thing that I added, Aunt Rose, that wasn't on your original is the seagull up there at the top. Do you notice the bird? And I used that to give perspective.

RC: Yes.

RQ: Because it makes you feel like you're up there with the gull, looking down. Kind of a bird's eye view.

RC: And I wanted to give some idea...people say, "What's Macatawa like? We've never been out there." Even in Holland, the people, many had never gone out and gone around to see the layout, or seen a map. Of course, I have one of the original plans.

RQ: Do you?

RC: What'd she see if I was here.

RQ: Oh, yes I would like to.

RC: It's ragged; it's old. It's in the bottom drawer of the chest in there. You can go and get it out some day when you have the time. This is made so beautifully, that it's a real treasure. How did you get this made now from the picture?

RQ: Well, what I did, Aunt Rose, was take your original ink drawing and copy it in a smaller form, about the size of this purse.

RC: You reduced it to the size of the bag.

RQ: Reduced it to 9x12, something like that. Then the man who works in leather somehow made a photographic kind of a positive transparency that he used to lay over the leather, from which he could guide the tools that he uses.

RC: He knew then, how Lake Macatawa operates, how it runs up to Holland, and then down into the channel of Lake Michigan.

RQ: Your artist friend did what I have been involved in for many years. He did what we call an aerial blyk; just like an aerial picture.

RC: Yes.

RQ: And so that's the reason, with the bird up there, it's a bird's eye in the sky, really. You're looking at Lake Macatawa as a bird would look at it.

RC: It was done in black and white, so I worried about that. I wanted coloring in it, and I got to thinking that it's going to reach them in the winter with the snow on the ground; it's going to work out all right.

RQ: I still have the original in my office, right over my desk.

RC: I'm glad you have it. I wish I could place every little thing I have with the right people that would appreciate. Let's see the other side now.

RQ: Yes, now the other side is, that's the Edgewood which was Ye Old Times and then prior to that was the Georgie. You can see...there is the railing of your front porch, Aunt Rose. You can see that right there and, of course, your flag and the little seats, the little benches.

RC: And there's the oak tree that was growing crooked.

RQ: Oh, yes, the crooked oak tree.

RC: I thought many times when I was growing up, I must take that out because it's going to be a crooked tree. And I thought, well, we need a tree there, even if it begins to grow under the house. Or it might push that porch over. I never knew it was going to get that large. (laughs)

RQ: That tree has a lot of character, Aunt Rose.

RC: It had a lot of character. And if you knew how to get that dead limb out, that's up there, I see everything. There's a dead limb hanging up in there, near the corner.

RQ: Oh, I hadn't noticed that.

RC: Well, anyway, I appreciate it so very, very much, and it brought back all the memories to me, which I appreciate.

RQ: Tell us, Aunt Rose, in your recollecting and recalling the past of Macatawa, tell us a little bit about George Ryder and his mother, as you recall them. She was the proprietress of the hotel, isn't it?

RC: Well, they operated the hotel, in the meantime they moved. I'm not sure that house was built there or if it was moved there. Of course, when the Ryders sold the hotel, they sold the big old square Rosewood piano there in the basement. I wondered what on earth we'd do with that little house with a big square... It took up the whole living room. George wouldn't give it up. He's like I am about some things.

RQ: Did he play the piano?

RC: He played a little, not much. But he wanted it because of its age. I tried to restore it. I went to every place in Chicago, and he listed every place that I could think of. They said, "You're wasting your time, parts are not made for that piano." It was a New York-made piano, and they don't make that piano anymore. They don't even make parts. And you couldn't find anything anywhere to restore it. It had to have new felts and new everything, but the wood was beautiful. Finally, when I wanted to rent the house, we couldn't rent it with that big piano in there. We didn't know what to do about it. So, I couldn't stand to let it stay there, and people didn't want the house with that there. We

decided to take it to the basement; we had plenty of basement room. We had the heavy, big legs taken off and the lid top taken off to lighten it. Then I had two men, I remember, paying them twenty dollars to get that moved into the basement. It felt guilty all of the time I was doing it, but I didn't know what else to do. No one around here was prepared to move the thing, I bet. So, we left it down there until your father decided that the wood in it was so beautiful, and he loved woods, different kinds. So he said, "I'm going to have that cut in two and use the wood for tabletops." Then he started to work on making a table top—you have one over there now, I know—made out of the Rosewood of that old hotel. Old square hotel. There wasn't but three notes that would \_\_\_\_\_ when they finally demolished it. I wouldn't look that way while it was going on. It was done while I wasn't around because I had so much sentiment about it. But there was nothing else to do. The time comes when you have to do something about it. But it would be a curiosity really now, but no one... You couldn't repair it. You could just look at it, that's all. And so, we gave up the lovely old piano, and I think it's a work of art. Really, that you would find very often and that bag has everything it takes. But I remember very well when we were discussing what to do with it, and I couldn't look at any shades. I was sorry to see the legs taken off because they always took the legs off to move a grand piano. I know I had my little grand in Chicago moved so much on elevators, moving to different apartments, that you took the legs off that you could get it in the doorway and get through and put it on the dolly and push it along.

RQ: Which piece of furniture, Aunt Rose, was it that Dad made with the part of that piano?

Do you recall?

RC: I don't know what. He made two or three pieces; he used some of that wood.

RQ: We made one; I helped him. We put two pieces of wood together, and then put the bottom of an old sewing machine on it. I'm wondering if that's part of the top of that piano.

RC: I remember that.

RQ: It was made out of Rosewood?

RC: Used the base of the old sewing machine for the base of the table. I remember that.

RQ: Because that's in our living room now, and I'm wondering if that was the part that was the piano.

RC: There should be more of that wood around. But I don't know who...

RQ: I'll ask Dad about that, he'd remember.

RC: He'd remember a heck more than I ever remember. George would sit down and play, and try to sing a little. Of course, George was a lawyer.

RQ: Was George a lawyer?

RC: Yes, he graduated at...not Ann Arbor, that's the medical school....Indiana, what's that?

RQ: Purdue.

RC: What?

RQ: Was it Purdue?

RC: No, it was another one.

RQ: Bloomington? Indiana University?

RC: Or Purdue at Bloomington?

RQ: That's at Lafayette. Bloomington is the University of Indiana.

RC: Yes, University of Indiana. No, it was one of the universities that was well known in those days, and after he died, I found his diploma in an old trunk.

RQ: You did?

RC: In the basement.

RQ: You don't still have that do you, Aunt Rose?

RC: No, but I gave it... Do you remember the old couple who lived in back of Van Regenmorters?

RQ: Boshka?

RC: Lived right back the Boshka's, and he worked around here, helped around the lighthouse.

RQ: Oh, I think I...Rosie. Was it Rosie?

RC: I'm not sure about that. I remember George went to this \_\_\_\_\_ and it was a lawyer. But he appreciated music, and he really had a very bright mind. But he dressed so...he didn't try to follow the usual form of dress around here. Put on anything. He'd put on an old gown or something, and go to the lake that way. But George was a very interesting character. He'd run over here to see if he could do chores for my parents. He'd say, "Mr. Duncan? You got a porch to paint or anything I can do for you today? I've got a little time; I'd like to help you out." And then my father would pay him, and he wouldn't cash that check until at least a year after. It would be worn out in his pocket. My father would write to him and tell him to please cash that check so he could straighten his \_\_\_\_\_. George would wear those checks out and have them in his little vest pocket; he kept his checks in there. When he didn't want you to pay him, he wouldn't cash the check, but he'd keep the check. So, I remember the worries my father used to have trying to get George to cash the checks so he could straighten up his account. But he helped willingly and wanted to do something for somebody all the time. I'll arrive in front of the door..."Oh, can I help carry that?" He had a very generous nature.



J: Well, Bob, now is that the “R” that’s on those few pieces of china?

RQ: Ryder, yes. George Ryder.

[End of side one]

RQ: Now this is the second tape and Aunt Rose is telling us a little bit about her early years in Macatawa when she lived next to Frank Baum. Is that right, Aunt Rose?

RC: We were in this place next door to Mr. Baum. He lived on the lakefront and we lived on Macatawa, just back in \_\_\_\_\_. So, we lived there and then the next year, this was the original Steketee house. You must have Earl Harold show you these old photographs he’s just found of this low wall, with only two houses and maybe a little bit of Georgie’s porch on this wall. The corner is vacant. Then there was a little teal house. And then it was vacant here and then this house was you. And it shows his house very clearly and it’s a good picture of this house. My father bought it from Mr. Steketee’s son-in-law. And Mr. Steketee built Georgie Miller’s big cottage.

RQ: The Keyma.

RC: The Keyma. And that vacant lot there was a beautiful tennis court. The girls went to eastern schools and they came home and they had the loveliest tennis matches over there. The ends of the little court were latticed, and they were covered with vines of honeysuckle. At certain times of the year there was a wonderful odor all over the neighborhood from the honeysuckle vines there. They had seats around so it was very attractive to the neighborhood.

RQ: Oh, my, yes. We never saw that.

RC: Originally, the map will show you that this plot here was part of Grove Walk. On the other side of Grove Walk was left open to be woods. You entered the rear of the other

cottages because people used to come in with \_\_\_\_\_ with one horse dray and bring in trucks. And when they came, they came to stay all summer. They'd rent a room. A lot of cottages rented rooms because there wasn't enough hotel space. It became very popular and the big boats would come over from Chicago at night, or the daytime boat – there was one each way, every day. Big boats like the *Puritan*, which went to the First World War and carried soldiers to the other side. The *Puritan* was used during the war only over the ocean. Most of the boats here weren't built for ocean voyage. Of course, we had the *Soo City* and the *Benton Harbor* and the *City of Grand Rapids*, besides the *Puritan*. The *Puritan* was the most beautiful, but the biggest boat was the *Grand Rapids*. *City of Grand Rapids* was a beautiful boat, too. It was, I think, a three-decker. You could take a boat at the Graham and Morton docks in Chicago, and in the morning you'd wake up in Holland.

The interurban would have come in, they'd have a car on the track and people could get on the interurban. They had no other ways to get out here; very few cabs to be had. See, we didn't have automobiles and all. They get out to the cottages down here. It's a boat landing here in Macatawa, which it did for a good many years. The big boats landed here. They landed at one time; the main dock was in Holland. So, when they landed here, they'd have loads of trucks down there on the basement that had to be carried to the houses by dray, and they had a big bay horse and an old-fashioned two-wheeled \_\_\_\_\_, big heavy \_\_\_\_\_. And they'd load those trunks all piled up and they drive in and move into the little cottage over there and unload from the back door. They had a few boards laid down with sand, they didn't have a road way, but they used it as a road way. There were some very soft places, they'd have two boards laid across and

I've seen them deliver the trucks many times all along those cottages. But I don't know of anything especially interesting. Only in the beginning, this was plotted to be in lots, the other side of Grove Walk. That was meant to be open, and the grove down here to the park; that was a beautiful picnic grove. You had a well there.

RQ: That's where the parking lot is now.

RC: And they had facilities there. They had the toilet facilities built up there.

RQ: I remember that.

RC: You remember that. Part of the old foundation is in the ground there now. And you know right where it was. It got so it was quite a nuisance in public. Those are things that I don't need to talk about.

RQ: Aunt Rose, I was asking Frank Welch to recollect. Do you recall where Macatawa got its name? Where did the word Macatawa come from?

RC: Well, it's was the Chief Macatawa. He was Indian chief.

RQ: He was an Indian chief?

RC: He was Indian chief. Most of the Ottawa's lived around here, but I remember most of the Ottawa's must have lived on the Ottawa beach side. And this is marshy land through here and he used to fill up in the winter and that's when they begun to make a channel, so the boats could get through. There was a boat-building place over on Waukazoo somewhere, toward Holland. They would build boats there in the winter, and then by spring, the sand had washed in here, this was a natural channel they had. The boats couldn't get out into Lake Michigan. That's when they begun the real development of the channel. It was quite a long while before they built the pier, and then they built the breakwater many years later. I remember when they built the breakwater, and people

thought the breakwater was an error on the part of the engineers because when the wind came a certain direction, it blew in and swept out the beach.

RQ: Yes, in fact our beaches right now have been eroded drastically because of the breakwater.

RC: I think they relate to the error that was made then, because we didn't have any trouble until after those breakwaters were built.

RQ: The compounded the air when they added that connection between the breakwater and the pier.

RC: They used to come and every spring, early, before the cottagers began to come, they would come and work back and forth cleaning out the channel so that the big freighters could come. We had lots of big freighters in then, and they would come. Then this boat would take the.....and dump it, way out in the deep water. And now they won't allow them to do this. We expected this year; they had all that stuff that was taken out of the channel...

RQ ...put on our beach.

RC: We expected to put on our beach.

RQ: But there's no money in the Corps of Engineer's Fund.

RC: Then the board, they were afraid of it. Afraid it was contaminated.

RQ: Oh, I see.

RC: They were afraid to have it put on the beach. Later, they found the water was...the stuff was impure. It sunk to the bottom. But I was one of the figures supporting it because I really thought we were gonna have our beach.

RQ: In 1977, they were supposed to have it in their budget, but...

RC: I beg your pardon?

RQ: I say, last year Bob Evans told the cottage owners that the Corps of Engineers had money in their 1977 budget to do that.

RC: I know.

RQ: Now, this year they tell us that they don't. You can't believe these people.

RC: They say they don't have any money to spend on it, and I was greatly disappointed. I would have... \_\_\_\_\_ let us have the beach, protect the property. Even if we have to keep the people off the beach for a few years until we have it examined, you know?

RQ: Well, it sounds to me like that was a weak excuse for not doing it.

RC: There was so many interesting things back in those days. A little *Skidoo* and a \_\_\_\_\_ ferry were little ferry boats that went back and forth between here and Ottawa Beach and Waukazoo. You see, there was a beautiful hotel in both places.

RQ: Yes.

RC: I looked at a picture today of me pushing my go cart on the *Skidoo* right down here at the dock, with Duncan sitting up in his little go cart. I believe a friend of mine says I could pay to just make the rounds, ride around and just give people a little ride. We used to do it often.

RQ: Those are the kind of pictures I'd like to get a hold of, Aunt Rose, to put in my book. Those would make interesting pictures.

RC: You could look through my books. I'm making scrapbooks now that I want to send to different members of the family, and so I worked on one today while I was sitting up.

RQ: Well, good for you. That gives you lots of things to do then, doesn't it?

RC: I finished one, and Warren was here and he talked to me about it, and I showed him some of the pictures. I kept a lot of the old pictures, and I know the very oldest pictures I'll see are those that came to Florence and Earl recently.

RQ: Yes. Florence and Earl both mentioned this. In fact we're planning to go over and see them.

RC: You must see them. And it just shows these two houses.

RQ: They mentioned a windmill that stood down here.

RC: There were only three houses that showed at all.

RQ: Only three, is that right?

RC: But there was a tent farther down. I remember when we had a tent on this \_\_\_\_\_.

RQ: Aunt Rose, in any of your pictures, your collection of pictures, have you ever had a picture of either of the Skinner boys, Harry and Al, or George Ryder?

RC: No, I haven't. But I know more about Harry and Al. I know a lot about them.

RQ: Tell us a little about... you know, you gave a story last year that Fred wrote on Harry Skinner describing his own funeral. It's most humorous and just very...

RC: About Harry.

RQ: About Harry, and about him coming back describing to his friends what happened the day he died.

RC: Well, I can just say a few words. I can tell you that his \_\_\_\_\_ and Harry wearing Fred's old clothes. He couldn't wear them to the office, but he'd get \_\_\_\_\_ every day. Anyway, we'd give them to Harry, and instead of having them altered, he wore them just as they were. We were sitting on Georgia Miller's front porch watching the fireworks, everybody having a good time, and I looked down there and I said, "Do you see what I

see?” And Fred says, “Harry Skinner?” And I said, “Yeah.” He said, “What does he have on?” and I said, “An old winter suit of yours; it is blazing hot. He has on that old winter suit of yours; vest all buttoned up and everything.” He was walking with a cane and was just running along. So, he says, “What on earth is \_\_\_\_\_suit on he thinks he’s dressed up.” I can’t laugh about because I guess he died that night or the next morning. He died right away. He had a stroke or something. I said no wonder; he had enough clothes to kill him.

RQ: He had a winter suit on that Fred had given to him.

RC: Yes, he had a winter suit on. And Fred and I discussed it while we were sitting there on the porch and I said \_\_\_\_\_didn’t love Harry because Harry never liked her. He could tell you about everything and he wasn’t shy of words. He did very well in the use of describing anything. It was his own matter, his own style.

RQ: He was often kidded about how much he resembled Vice President Garner. Do you remember that?

RC: Oh, yes, that’s what he really strutted. He would ask you if you thought that he resembled Garner. We used to say, “Well, I don’t know Harry. I haven’t thought about it. Maybe you do, you must be about the same size.” And so he loved that. We were all very fond of him. What we’d say about Harry isn’t criticism at all. He was just an interesting personality that we all needed. Much more than Al.

RQ: Well, there was another very interesting personality that we haven’t really talked about, but she was a very active soul, and that was Ma Birmingham. Do you remember, when I was young, Aunt Rose, she did a lot of things for the youth around here and went to Holland and...

RC: Oh, yes. She was always going on hayrides. That was her \_\_\_\_\_, giving hayrides to the children. The boys that do the hauling now, their grandfather.

RQ: Oh, yes. His name escapes me.

RC: Well, I can't think of the name right now, but I've spoken of him many times. But he'd come in with his muse and scrape the yards every spring and dig us out of the sand, because in those days there was so much beach. The beach went almost a city block out here; all along here. My mother said the beach is too wide and the bathhouse is built out into the water, you know—the big two-story bathhouse. It went into the lake, finally. It was lost entirely. Oh, I remember all these funny little things that happened, but at the spur of the moment, if I can kind of formulate a connection with what I have to say...

RQ: Yes, I think you're getting a little tired, Aunt Rose. You've given us a lot of valuable bits of information here. I think what we'll do is just close things off for now. Let you rest.

RC: This one and that one and then Frank and I get to talking...

RQ: Good. I'll think up some more questions for you.

RC: He lived north, always, and I lived south. And he was nine when he came here, and I was 11.

RQ: Well, we'll pick up this romance a little bit later now, Aunt Rose, alright?

RC: Alright.

[End of interview]