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Van Duren, Ruth Oral History Interview: General Holland History

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Oral History Interview
Interviewee: Ruth Van Duren
Interviewer: Don van Reken
August 4, 1975

Abstract: Waverly Stone Quarry.

DVR: This afternoon is August 4, 1975, and I'm at the house of Mrs. Van Duren on 120th Avenue. This house has been here since 1927—and that in itself makes it history—but what makes it more historical is the fact that right outside the window of this house is a famous place in Holland, Michigan history. This is the Waverly Stone Quarry. Mrs. Van Duren, what was it like when you first saw it? Can you remember that?

RVD: Oh, yes. It wasn't called the old stone quarry then by most people. It was called by the old swimming hole. Almost every boy in Holland, I guess, learned to swim here because it had filled up with water after the company that owned the place gave up pouring the stone when they couldn't keep the water out. It was coming in from springs and also they discovered that all kinds of cement had been invented. The cement, I guess, was a cheaper building material. So it was owned then by a farmer who apparently bought it after it was abandoned by the quarry company. We liked the place, and my husband especially wanted it because he had learned to swim here with all his friends.

DVR: He was originally from Holland, then?

RVD: Yes, he was originally from Holland.

DVR: When was he born?

RVD: In 1896, I think.

DVR: That could very well be.

RVD: I'm pretty sure it's 1896.

DVR: What did his father do for a living?

RVD: His father and he were both attorneys. His father was Arthur Van Duren, an attorney, at one time, city attorney here, I think. My husband, of course, graduated from the University of Michigan, where we met, and that was the first I knew there was such a place as Holland, Michigan. So, after we were married, after I was out of school a year behind him, he said the only place he'd want to build a house would be out here. We couldn't find out to whom it belonged. We had to go to Grand Haven and check the old plats there. We found out a farmer up the road here by the name of Kragt owned it and was using it only as pasture, and was finally building a fence across from the end of the water there, because the cows would get into the pond and they couldn't get out—the sides were so steep, you see. After we built here, we tore down this bank right near the house, so that there's a gradual slope there where the family uses it as a swimming pool.

DVR: That's where your grandson is swimming right now, then.

RVD: Yes, that's right. My grandson and his friends are now swimming. They're out here just about every day either swimming or fishing, doing something of that sort.

DVR: Now, 120th Avenue, was that 120th Avenue through then? Was that the same street that's there now?

RVD: No, this was Waverly Road, and everybody on the road loved the name. But Consumers Power in Grand Rapids wanted to change all of the north and south streets, starting from the edge of Grand Rapids all the way to Lake Michigan, wanted them numbered, and were able to persuade our board of directors, or whoever they were, that they could change all these streets. And they did. They took the name Waverly away and made it 120th Avenue, even though the people got a petition and we begged to keep our name.

But it didn't do us any good. Sometimes it's helpful to an institution and not so helpful to the people who have a sense of history.

DVR: Now, you say it was named Waverly Road, and this is Waverly Stone Quarry. What is the nature of this stone? What is the characteristic of it, that you know of, that makes it so unique or so interesting?

RVD: Well, it's a sandstone formation. It's a bluish gray sandstone, and after it dries, it makes excellent material. As you probably know, Winant Chapel uses this, and also the building that's now occupied by the telephone company is built of this sandstone. And a great many of the houses in the old section of town have their basement areas—that house is built on old Waverly stone. The company used to have its office on 8th Street, not far from River, and I think shipped stone away from here, as well as using it in Holland. It was supposedly one of the big industries in Holland at that time.

DVR: Is Waverly stone found anywhere else in the world?

RVD: Yes, I have heard of two outcroppings: one other in Michigan, near Kalamazoo, and I think there are two in Ohio—the one I'm sure of is near Berea. They aren't all blue-gray like this is. Some of them have iron pyrites in them and that turns them brown or yellowish. But the ones that we've split open here to see if we can find fossils are both a little bit of the yellow and a little bit of the gray.

DVR: The blue-gray.

RVD: Blue-gray. Of course, they have to dry because it's a wet stone, because it's sandstone. The more it dries, the harder it gets.

DVR: That's interesting.

RVD: Yes. I imagine it was in the early part of this century that it was abandoned. I have a picture, which the *Sentinel* has used, and I've forgotten the date. The date is right there in the *Sentinel* that they used the picture.

DVR: Yes, this picture was in the *Sentinel* on September 16, 1946.

RVD: Yes.

DVR: The picture itself is dated September 6, 1901.

RVD: Now, that date, I think, should be checked because Mr. Arthur Visscher, a local man who is not living now, and a friend, used to come out every Sunday for a walk after church and take pictures, and this is one they took. On their way back, they always stopped at the railroad station, because that was the only place you could get any news on Sunday. And on this particular Sunday, they learned that McKinley had been shot. He writes on the back of the picture that he took the picture on the day that McKinley was shot. It shows the varying depth, which is, I would say, about 52-feet in the deepest place, although for years it was the myth that you couldn't find the bottom, you know. That was, of course, before we came here.

DVR: Now, it's about 50-feet deep at its deepest.

RVD: I think about 50.

DVR: And it's about 4 acres.

RVD: About 4, four and a half acres of water. All spring water.

DVR: We were just walking out there, and there's a lot of fish in there, as well as boys swimming. So it's a real nice little lake. Now, I also have in front of me a plot, a blueprint plot, of the entire area around the lake. Mrs. Van Duren tells me that it was plotted in 1927 for subdividing. But it was never subdivided, was it?

RVD: Well, we subdivided it. I think we were able to think commercially until we had the house built. And then every day we got more and more sentimental, and we couldn't bear to change any of it. We wanted to keep it wild like it is, because we have rabbits and we have pheasants and in the winter we have, up at the corner, usually deer once in a while and woodchucks, and lots of birds. It's sort of a sanctuary now for wildlife. It's a pleasant place to live. We put in four thousand trees around here, because this is a...what do they call it when you're near water...alluvial soil, where I imagine for years before, there was so much growth. In the spring, there probably was an overflow of that little river. When we moved here, we could walk across the river on stones. You can't do that anymore.

DVR: You're talking about the Black River?

RVD: Black River, which is one of our boundaries.

DVR: Black River is your boundary on the south.

RVD: On the south.

DVR: Now, just on the other side of the Black River, what is there now? Is there a railroad, or is there the highway?

RVD: Well, when we moved here, there was Huizenga's Farm. And through Huizenga's Farm, what is now M-21, was the tracks for the Interurban cars that came from Grand Rapids and went all the way to Macatawa. It was after we had built the house that they discontinued that service and made it into a highway.

DVR: Did you use the Interurban to get from here to Holland, then?

RVD: No, you couldn't use it locally, but you could use it to get to Grand Rapids. Inside of Holland you could use it, because it used to go along River Avenue, I think, to 17th or 18th, and then straight out to Lake Macatawa. I never rode it.

DVR: How did you get to Holland from here? You're about a mile or two out of town. How did you get to Holland?

RVD: Well, we'd go up to what is old 8th Street.

DVR: Old 8th Street.

RVD: Yes, they called it old 8th Street, and then straight—where the Ford garage is now, we'd turn. Of course, this road, Waverly Road, wasn't paved. I'm not too sure that 8th Street was paved all the way out at that time. It might not have been.

DVR: You had automobiles?

RVD: Oh, yes, we had a Ford. We were rich. We had a real old Ford, you know, one of those high ones? But it was great because living out the in the country, that old Ford with the big wheels, you didn't have to worry about getting through the snow, and we had to get through the snow to get into Holland and back.

DVR: You don't have some old Fords in the back garage here now?

RVD: No, I wish we had kept it, because it would certainly be a...

DVR: A delightful antique now.

RVD: It would be an antique now, it surely would. One of the interesting things that has happened out here is...I'm sure everybody remembers Judge Cornelius Vander Meulen. His grandson, whose name is Ellert, is a stone collector, and he used to come out here a great many Saturday mornings, sometimes with his mother and sometimes with his father. They would sample the rock. He was about 11 years old then, and he took some

of the rock from here to the University of Michigan museum, and Professor Louis Kellum identified it and said that it was probably 250 million years old, which is old.

DVR: That's pretty old, yes.

RVD: That's quite old. So that piece of rock is still on display at the University museum.

DVR: You say this house was built in 1927. Where did you get the plans for the house, and what are the details of the construction? You were way out of town then, so that must have been quite a chore.

RVD: Well, I had been living in Ann Arbor, of course, until I graduated. And in Ann Arbor, there was the first ranch-type house in Michigan, which I had seen and admired. I found out that the man who had designed it was Ernest Flag, who built the Cochran Art Gallery and had come back from Europe with a book of designs for small American homes, which he said should look as if they grew there—they should be built out of the material that was right on the ground, like houses were in Europe. So, I got his book from the library in Lansing and, with a local contractor, we sat down and we made a floor plan. We followed the rules in the book of getting all of these hardheads, which are the stones that are left from the glacial boulders when they receded. We got six loads from across the river, from what was then Boone's pasture, and that is where they always had the tug-of-war for Hope between the classes, you know. Of course, it wasn't built up like it is now. So, we could get all these lovely stones, and we brought them over here, and we got the rest of them all from our own place. They made great big piles of them and covered them with gasoline and set the whole pile on fire. When they were blazing hot, the men would take a sledge hammer and pop them—and they would pop just like popcorn—and that's how you get the open faces that went into the outside of the walls.

There were very explicit directions in the flag book. They are built in trenches, and they would build a trench probably two feet high, and then they would put the stone faces and cement and then wires going opposite to the wall. Then they'd keep building up the wall as they went—the same thing, cement, stone, wires, and so on until they got to the windows, and then they had to use the angle iron, because of the weight of the stone.

That was the only way they could support the windows so they wouldn't change position, I think. So, the whole house is built of these walls that are 18-inches thick.

DVR: They sure are thick.

RVD: They really are, yes. It's a very substantial house. I have had friends say that I was building a bomb shelter. It could be, I suppose, because it's so tight. It's cool in summer and warm in winter because of it, I think. And it is a ranch-type house, out in the country where ranch-type houses should be, I think.

DVR: I agree with you. How long was the house a building?

RVD: From June until November of 1927, because I know we got in two days before Thanksgiving in November. One of our big problems was that none of the furnace companies knew how to heat a house this long, so they had to put in a double system. They had to heat the ends with radiators and hot water, and the central part with hot air. So, we had to have two furnaces, which was kind of a nuisance, but now it's all right because when you only need the center of the house heated, you can turn off the other furnace.

DVR: Now you still have two furnaces?

RVD: I still have to have two furnaces. Although I'm sure, now, with perimeter heating, they would know how to handle long houses.

DVR: I'm sure they would, yes.

RVD: They didn't then. So much has happened since this house was built.

DVR: Well, after seeing all this wonderful place and hearing your story, Mrs. Van Duren, I'm still wondering about one thing. Was this pond, this quarry pond, the swimming pool, the swimming hole, as you call it, used for any social work or any social activities at all?

RVD: Well, when my husband was living and our son was the right age, we had a Boy Scout group for three years, and we had them here every Saturday afternoon. Of course, we'd have a wienie roast, and we'd have our project, which we had established for each year was that every boy in the group would finish the summer a good swimmer and a good diver. So, my husband, of course, being the swimming person, he also hired a chap who had done some teaching. They gave the boys the workout. Then this man who had done teaching had also worked for the Red Cross, teaching the boys who were getting the lifesaving courses. So, in those days, there were not the available swimming pools that we have today, so he used to bring his classes out here to get their... whatever they got.

DVR: Lifesaving certificates?

RVD: Lifesaving certificates in diving and in swimming. They used to use the quarry for that.

DVR: I should imagine that was a very delightful place, because the water would be just about right and there's no great waves and no great wind.

RVD: There's no current at all, so it was easy to do. Of course, we enjoyed having them, because it meant a big group of boys out here at least once a week. When you live out in the country, that's a nice thing for your own child.

DVR: Yes, I should say. What other social work have you been involved in? Have you been involved in any other social activities?

RVD: Yes, I am a pioneer social worker in the field of mental health; I'm a nationally accredited social worker in the psychiatric field with a degree from the University of Michigan. I had graduated with my bachelor's in the area of literature, but I had almost equal credits in the sociology department. I discovered that when I went to work after the Depression had made quite a dent in our family and in our earning power, it was a good thing that there were jobs available. So, I worked for the state in the categorical programs, like ABC and Aid to the Blind and Old Age Assistance, and then the state loaned me to the Ottawa County Probate Court. I became the county agent there and stayed for ten years. We had, of course, there, neglected, dependent, and delinquent children, and that was all under that one department. I served under two different judges—Judge Vanderberg and Fred Miles, not Fred Miles, Sr. but Fred Miles, Jr. Then from there, I was given the opportunity to finish my master's degree if I would commit myself to accept a two-year stint in Ottawa County to open a mental health program. So, when I got my master's degree in 1954 and '55, I went into that part of the program with my headquarters in Muskegon—which had charge of, I think, seven counties, ours being one of them—and began the program here with four different offices: one in Grand Haven, one in Holland, one in Coopersville, and one in Hudsonville. They were very informal offices; I had to carry all of my work in two suitcases that I carried by hand from office to office. I was in the attic over a doctor's office in Grand Haven, and the Health Department let me use their box room for an office. A church in Hudsonville let me use the Sunday school room. And in Coopersville, I was in the fire station. So, we did a little pioneering in mental health, I'll tell you.

DVR: You did quite a bit of riding around too, then.

RVD: Oh, yes, you really did. That was part of the job, of course. And then, of course, all of the work had to be reported one day a week to Muskegon, and Dr. Rooks was our psychiatrist then in Muskegon.

DVR: When did you retire from all this work?

RVD: In 1970, I retired from this particular job. Then I took another job as a psychiatric social worker for the Christian Counseling Service here in Holland. I worked for them, well, I shouldn't say just in marriage counseling, because we took children, whatever age the person was who needed service. This was a program that had begun by John Palen, who had a ministerial degree, as well as a social work degree, and the pastor of Trinity Church. They started it in Holland, and it is now a going agency, of course, and I think it will continue to be. It's a needed one, and the churches use it. But surprisingly, I think that there are as many people who are unchurched as are churched who ask for that service, for some reason or other. They know that it's absolutely confidential, which is number one, and, of course, although all government services are supposed to be confidential, when you make five copies of everything, you wonder if it stays confidential. The state naturally has to know every case that's being served. Now Ottawa County has a well, well-developed Mental Health Department.

DVR: Well, thanks an awful lot, Mrs. van Duren, for all the things you've been telling us about your house, and about Waverly stone quarry, and about your family, and about yourself. This has been a very delightful time this afternoon.

RVD: I made one error.

DVR: You made an error?

RVD: I didn't say Cora Vander Water, did I?

DVR: No.

RVD: It should be VandeWater. She was the first judge I worked for, and Fred Miles was the second judge I worked for.

DVR: She's retired, too, now.

RVD: Yes, she's retired and has a lovely place in Bradenton, Florida, and writes me every year, "Why don't you come down here and enjoy the comfort of being in a nice warm place all the time?" Although I'm not too fond of snow, I am fond of where I live.

DVR: You have a wonderful place here. Thank you, again.

RVD: You're most welcome.

[End of interview; Don van Reken continues recording]

DVR: Since there is some room on the tape, I'm going to be reading now from the *Holland Evening Sentinel* of September 16, 1946, which gives some of the information about this Waverly Quarry. "The sandstone sand rock deposits on the banks of Black River were discovered by H. D. Post, Holland pioneer, in 1848, a year after Holland was founded. The first practical use of the stone was in 1859, when a quantity was quarried in a crude way and moved in scows down the river to Lake Macatawa for constructing foundation and basement walls of Van Vleck Hall at Hope College, which still stands today. The quarry took its name from the geological formation of the stone, known as the Waverly sandstone, from its development in Ohio at Waverly and the extensive quarries at Maria and _____. The rock here was a fine grained uniform bluish gray siliceous sandstone, entirely free from the iron pyrites which discolor the stone from some of the quarries in this formation. The cement was silica, and the stone when first worked was soft and easily worked, but on exposure and drying of the quarry _____ rapidly

hardened and soon became practically indestructible. In a test in Madison, Wisconsin on four one-inch cubes, the stone was found to resist an average crushing strain of 8,200 pounds per cubic inch. In 1867, John Roost purchased the quarry and used several thousand chords for pier ballast at harbors in Holland, Grand Haven, and Saugatuck. In 1880, several carloads were shipped to Kalamazoo and used in the construction of a three-story building on South Burdick Street, which had its entire front made of this stone. This was the first use for other than foundation walls. On April 20, 1889, the Waverly Stone Company was incorporated and operations were begun for developing the industry by constructing side tracks, erecting derricks, and putting in a steam saw gang. Other developments and improvements followed rapidly in the next few years. When the water is exceptionally clear, one can still see a track and one loading car in the bottom of the pond. Although legend has it that the pond was bottomless, the Van Durens tested in with plum lines and learned that it's no deeper than 40 or 50 feet. Among the Holland buildings constructed of Waverly stone are the tower building, Winants Chapel at Hope College, the Chamber of Commerce building, and a few other commercial buildings downtown besides the basements of numerous older homes in the city. Officers of the Waverly Stone Company when the business flourished in 1892 were H. D. Post, President; H. H. Pope, Vice President; W. J. Garod, Secretary; J. C. Post, Treasurer; F. C. Hall, Manager; John Stroop was Chief Engineer. V. Brown-Monette, a geologist at the University of Michigan, was in Holland in August to study the Waverly rock formation in connection with a geological report on this sandstone all over Michigan. This is the end of the article which was in the Holland Evening Sentinel on September 16, 1946.