

10-27-1997

Maassen, John Oral History Interview: Sesquicentennial of Holland, "150 Stories for 150 Years"

Ena Brooks

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.hope.edu/ses_holland



Part of the [Archival Science Commons](#), and the [Oral History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Repository citation: Brooks, Ena, "Maassen, John Oral History Interview: Sesquicentennial of Holland, "150 Stories for 150 Years"" (1997). *Sesquicentennial of Holland, "150 Stories for 150 Years"*. Paper 72.

http://digitalcommons.hope.edu/ses_holland/72

Published in: 1996 - 1998 - *Sesquicentennial of Holland, "150 Stories for 150 Years" (H88-0234)* - Hope College Living Heritage Oral History Project, October 27, 1997. Copyright © 1997 Hope College, Holland, MI.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Oral History Interviews at Digital Commons @ Hope College. It has been accepted for inclusion in Sesquicentennial of Holland, "150 Stories for 150 Years" by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Hope College. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@hope.edu.

Oral History Interview with
John Maassen

Conducted October 27, 1997
by Ena Brooks

Sesquicentennial Oral History Project
"150 Stories for 150 Years"

Sesquicentennial Oral History Project
Interview with John Maassen
October 27, 1997
Interviewer: Ena Brooks

EB: Will you please state your name and date of birth?

JM: My name is John Maassen. I was born on [date removed], 1920, in a rural community between Hudsonville and Zeeland called Beaverdam. My father was the pastor of that church there, and so I was born in the parsonage of that church. I was the oldest of a family of five children. My parents had been married in 1919, in June. This was their first church and they moved into a new parsonage which has been replaced. Dad had a salary of about \$1,200 a year. With that he bought a 1920 Model T and somebody very recently gave me a picture of a young couple standing next to a Model T, and lo and behold, I'm the little two-year-old sitting at the steering wheel!

EB: What do you know! What denomination was your father's church?

JM: My father was a pastor in the Reformed Church in America, the Dutch Reformed Church. He was born in the Netherlands, and with his sister and two brothers emigrated to Northwest Iowa - with his parents, of course. I never really had an opportunity to know my grandparents well. The reason being that we would travel to Iowa about once a year from the middle west here where my father had churches, and we would visit perhaps for two or three weeks with both my paternal and maternal grandparents - neither of whom spoke English or ever learned to speak English. Since my father wanted very badly to speak English well as a minister, we never spoke it in the home! So, unfortunately, although I can remember my grandparents, I

never really had a serious conversation with them to my knowledge. But my father was raised on a farm. He was a young teenager when he came to this country. Just prior to their leaving the Netherlands, one of his brothers drowned in a canal in the Netherlands which is rather interesting. He felt the call to ministry. He was the only one of his brothers and sister to go on to school, and he started high school at the age of twenty-one at an academy in Orange City, Iowa, which is now Northwestern College. He was about thirty-one when he finished seminary.

EB: And that was where?

JM: In Holland. Western Seminary. He also went to Hope College. Graduated from there in 1916. My mother was the youngest of a large family of Dutch immigrants. She was the only one born in this country, and when she was born, six of the fourteen children had already passed away - which gives you some kind of idea what conditions were like in the late nineteenth century out in the prairies. Her father never owned a farm. He rented farms so they moved around a good deal. She was the youngest of the family. She was very active in church work, but as was the case with many young people at that time, her formal education was quite limited. She never got as far as the eighth grade! And yet I remember her as being a very articulate person who wrote well, who played the piano, was a good minister's wife and all of these things despite her limited education. My father's youngest brother is still living at the age of 101. I just visited with him again in Iowa about three weeks ago. He's very bright. Very interesting in many ways. He still drives a car. He too has only a limited formal education but has traveled all over the world. He reads

a great deal. He's not given to oral histories because he doesn't want to think about the past. He wants to think about the present and the future. I like to say that I have his "genes" and I don't mean his "pants." I mean his heritage! Because I admire him very, very much. So that's pretty much the background of my parents. When I was two years of age, my father accepted a call to a church in Sheboygan, Wisconsin, which is north of Milwaukee. That was a small city church. It was also a Dutch church in many ways. It had both Dutch and English services. In fact, my father's challenge in ministry was to try to help the church to make that tradition from a Dutch-English congregation to an English congregation. That was a very difficult time for many people to think that they had to abandon the language that their kids were no longer speaking and just move on into the English-speaking world. So most of his career dealt with that particular issue. When I was ten years of age in 1930, we moved to the Reformed Church out in North Holland which is just north of here about five miles. At that time, that was a very rural church and the North Holland School was a ten grade school. There were a few of them here in this area. There was one at Hamilton, as well as one in North Holland. The one in Hamilton has become a very good, well-known four-year high school. The one in North Holland did not develop in that way. But I attended that kind of a school from the time I was in the fifth grade until I finished the tenth grade. I had about fourteen classmates and our choice of subjects was extremely limited. We had no electives whatsoever. We had no organized gymnastic or athletic program, and I think that I got my reading, writing and arithmetic fairly well, but algebra and geometry and foreign languages

came a little bit later down the pike for me. I don't know whether I'm on track with what you're thinking about but...

EB: You're on track!

JM: I'll keep on talking in this area. We'll see how it goes. As I said, I spent the period of my growing up years in that rural environment and those were extremely difficult years for everyone because, first of all, dad was making a transition from a city parish to a rural parish. It was the onset of the Depression. It was a congregation that in those years was quite provincial. Very few people went on beyond the eighth grade. I'm not sure that dad always understood them; I'm not sure that they always understood dad. I'm not sure they always understood me as a preacher's kid. Preachers' kids had different positions in those days. My home life was very restrictive, which was in tune pretty much with the times and also in tune with the pattern that my parents established. My father came out of that tradition. His parents were not educated people. He was, and he took his calling extremely seriously. I think dad was more of a taskmaster in that respect...more of a legalist than my mother was. That I think is often the case. I don't mean to say that my childhood was too restrictive in that sense, but there were many things we never thought about doing. We didn't go to movies, we didn't play cards. We played Touring and Rook. We didn't go to dances. There weren't dances around that we could go to really (laughs) in that kind of community. By the time we moved to North Holland, my three sisters and brother had arrived and I had a sister by the name of Hermina who passed away in an accident on her way to Hope College with me. We were both

students at Hope and I was driving the car commuting to Hope College. We hit a patch of ice and some snow and crashed into a tree. She was killed. I've often thought if we'd had seat belts in those days she might have survived. Then I have a sister, Gertrude, who is known as Trudy. She'd probably pay me money not to call her Gertrude. And especially not to call her by her second name which is Nelvina. But she is married to a pastor as well and they are retired. They live here in Holland. Then I had a brother by the name of Pierce. My mother's father's name was Peter and my mother's brother's name was Peter, and she thought it wasn't particularly "couth" to use the name "Pete." She thought Pete and Petey were rather vulgar nicknames. So she named her son Pierce Emmett. You can't imagine the nicknames that Pierce had! Pierey and Pritz and what have you. I'm sure there were many times he wished that mother had really called him Peter after all. Then I have a sister by the name of Leona, and she is married and living in Waupun, Wisconsin, where she met her husband later when my father was serving a church in Central Wisconsin. I should also say this. School life in rural Ottawa County, especially in Dutch communities, was quite unique because there was almost no differentiation between the public school and the church. The communities were so mono-ethnic, if you will, that virtually everyone went to the Reformed Church in America or to the Christian Reformed Church. I can remember one person in my school who went to a Catholic Church and another person who went another church here in Holland. But virtually all of us went either to the Reformed or the Christian Reformed Churches. There were a number of small country schools throughout Ottawa County,

particularly north of Holland, and it was the custom for the pastors of the churches, whether they were Reformed or Christian Reformed, to go into the public schools and teach catechism in the public schools. Not only that, they would recruit the teachers, should they be qualified, to do the same. They were perfectly willing with the limited salaries they had to teach catechism as well as far as the regular curriculum was concerned. It was also true that we had devotions every morning in school and we sang hymns, and as I said, there seemed to be almost no differentiation between the school and the church. And the Christian School, although it was here in Holland, was not really very prevalent in the county - partly because there obviously seemed to be very little need for it. As far as the relationship between the Christian Reformed and the Reformed Church was concerned, the old history was always there. But there are pastors in the Christian Reformed Church who had my father as a Reformed Church minister as their catechism teacher in the public school, and there are others who are leaders in the Reformed Church who had Christian Reformed pastors as their teachers in the public school. Which I think is kind of interesting, especially when you realize that is fifty or sixty years ago - even longer.

EB: You can tell that was before the separation of church and state!

JM: Yes, very definitely! It could never happen today. And of course, they didn't know anything different, and it was a very isolated community. To give you an idea of how isolated these Dutch communities were, I'm going to tell you a little bit about what happened to my father when he was a student at Hope College. He was very fluent in Dutch, and so one summer his assignment was to go to a little community in

Central Wisconsin, called Friesland, which was named after the province in Friesland in the Netherlands. It was made up almost completely of Frisian children whose parents were brought up in the Frisian dialect, which is one of the many dialects in the Netherlands. They learned English in the public school. They talked Frisian in the home. But the church used Dutch! So my father's responsibility that summer was to teach the Frisian children Dutch so that they could participate in the life of the church! Now that gives you a little bit of an idea of what things were like in virtually every ethnic community here in the United States prior to or in the midst of World War I before we got involved. There were ethnic enclaves all over the country and without telephones, without radio and television and so on, there just wasn't that much interaction. And what has happened in more recent decades is quite remarkable. When I finished the tenth grade, I decided to go on to senior high school. There were not that many of my class of fourteen that did, but two or three of us did. For me, that was a dramatic change because I could walk to school prior to that. Now I had to find my own transportation to school. In those days, there wasn't any school transportation provided for children in the rural areas. So we had to find our way to school. For perhaps the first year, I would ride to Holland with a couple of fellows in the community who worked at the Home Furnace Company on the east side of Holland. I would ride as far as the plant with them and then I would walk from the east side of Holland to the high school, which now is the Community Education building just west of River Avenue on Sixteenth Street. I would walk across town. Then, if by chance something happened that I could not ride with these

fellows, I would on occasion walk home five or six miles. I don't tell my children that because they say, "Oh, D-a-ad!" But nevertheless, that was one of the things that happened. It wasn't too long and dad bought me a car that I could use. We had a choice between two automobiles. One was a 1930 Chevy coupe with a rumble seat. The other was a 1932 Ford V-8 with wire wheels. We chose the Chevy because the Chevy was only \$90! The Ford was \$125! I drove that to school until I was rear ended by one of our neighbors. Fortunately there was nobody in the rumble seat because the rumble seat was crumpled and that was the end of that car! Then we got a 1936 Ford. While I was growing up in North Holland in the early teens, although we were not living on a farm, we were living in a farming community. And so I worked in various ways. In the summer of 1933, which was the depths of the Depression and also the beginning of the real drought in the middle west, I went out to the middle west and worked for my uncle, the one that I talked about earlier. I worked as a very green farmhand at the age of thirteen for room and board. I remember that quite well. I was very green. I had five girl cousins who still remind me that one time I fell into the cow tank while I was slopping the hogs. And others remind me that I really didn't particularly trust horses too much so I held them at arm's length literally! I also remember one day we were sitting in the farmhouse around noon and the radio news was on. Suddenly we discovered that the notorious criminal John Dillinger had been arrested. Now for us of that generation, that was one of the great news stories. And I remember that. Well, after that summer was over, I went back to North Holland again. I remember getting a bicycle as a reward

for that summer from my parents. That was my first bicycle - at the age of thirteen! I did other things as a young teenager in terms of work. Sugar beets was a big crop in this area in those years. There used to be a sugar beet processing factory here in Holland, and one of the things that required hand labor was what they called "blocking sugar beets." The sugar beets were sown in a row but they had to be separated eventually so that they could develop. So you went through the rows with a hoe and you just sort of blocked them - you separated them into clumps. So I did that. I hoed corn. I remember I earned fifty cents a day for hoeing corn. I picked strawberries and perhaps you got a penny or so a quart for doing that. I picked pickles. I remember picking beans. I remember standing on a very primitive corn cutter. It was in the shape of what we used to call a "boat." It was really a kind of a drag. It had two sharp blades on an angle in the forefront of it forming a triangle, and we would go between the rows of corn with a horse pulling us. That blade would cut the cornstalks and we would grasp the cornstalks in our arms. We would tie them and cast them to the side, and in that very primitive fashion we would harvest the corn. I can remember driving a horse which would go around and around and around on a kind of a winch which would hoist bales of hay up into the barn. That was the way that power was provided in order to do that. I can remember working in a mow stacking straw and I did not realize what a bad case I had with hay fever. I remember how miserable I was when that took place because it just about killed me. Those jobs were all good for me! But they were a lot of work. We did have some fun. My dad felt that the community ought to build a community center

for young people out in North Holland because the kids had really very little to do. Most of them did not finish school after the eighth grade, so there was no high school athletics or anything like that. There was no readily accessible library. Dancing was out of the question. One of the things that they did like to do was take their cars and run all over the countryside with their cars. They tended to misbehave in church, particularly up in the balcony. There were those who went to youth groups and there were those who did not, and those who did not would sometimes let the air out of the tires of those who did. Typical kids of a different generation! When I came to Holland to Holland High School, I, as I said, felt very much out of my element because suddenly here I was in this "great big town." It had, I think, fifteen or sixteen thousand people! That was a lot of people from my perspective. The high school seemed to be so sophisticated and so challenging. I think I did fairly well in terms of my grades, but at the same time not living in town, not being particularly exposed to athletics at an earlier period of my life, I really didn't get into too many athletic activities. I remember having a very minor role in one of the school plays. I also remember that in those days it wasn't uncommon to have a year book published, and they would put under the senior pictures in the yearbook a quote or a phrase or something that they thought summed up this particular personality, this senior who was graduating. Under my name was the word "hypnotized." And so, not too long ago since I retired here in Holland, I wrote an essay for HASP with the subject "Hypnotized At Holland High School." I told the story of how inhibited I was and how indeed I might at times have seemed "hypnotized." But how through the years

all of that passed and it's just kind of a memoir, and I thought that the topic was kind of fascinating. "Hypnotized at Holland High School." Another classmate by the same token had the word "bewildered" under his name. I'm glad that custom is past because it's rather inhumane. But nevertheless, that's the way it was! We used to have school plays out in North Holland. They were big community events. They were held in the school. Again the church and the school were not that separate. They interacted. Winter was a time for quite a bit of fun. We had some hills in the area that we could slide down. It wasn't unusual to hook a sled or maybe somebody on skis behind a car. The roads were not plowed, so they were snowy and you'd get pulled along by a Model T or a Model A without any problems. I can remember the winter of 1935 or '36 when we were snowed in for several weeks and the school teacher from Holland lived with us for all that time. And I can remember that when the snow plow finally came through, we all came out with shovels to help the snow plow clear what is now 120th Avenue, or Waverly Road, so that we could get to town. That was quite an experience! While I was in high school I had several jobs. I worked at Vogelzang Hardware which is still in business here in town. They had two stores at that time. I worked in the store at Washington Square which is Eighteenth Street and Washington Avenue. I did whatever had to be done. I was a clerk. I was a gofer. The hardware business was quite different in those days. You never had the big chains we have today. I don't even recall having franchises particularly. They were all individual operations. Vogelzang Hardware Store in particular was unique because it was a regular forest of all kinds of things hanging

from the ceiling and in every conceivable way. And you just had to find your way through them. If you go to the present day Vogelzang Hardware, you find it to be an entirely different place. But that's the way it was then. We would weigh nails by the pound and we would fix windows, putty windows and so on. That was part of what a hardware person did. We had what we called a "turp room," short for turpentine, down in the basement of the store. There were kegs down there that had linseed oil and turpentine and that sort of thing. And if somebody wanted linseed oil or turpentine for painting, they would come in with a can and we would go down to the basement and we would fill the can with turpentine or linseed oil or whatever. Very few things were actually pre-packaged. We had to package them ourselves. After I got into the service, my brother took that position. Then when he went into the service, another young person took that job. They had a very serious tragedy, and in fact, you read about it in Holland's history. For some strange reason there was...The fact that there was a gasoline pump out on the street wasn't strange, but there was an outlet to the tank that was used to fill the tank from a tank truck. And there was also an outlet that didn't go anywhere except to the basement, a dummy outlet. And the truck driver began pouring gas in the dummy outlet and flooded the basement of the hardware store. Of course, there was an explosion with all the turpentine and the linseed oil and the gasoline and so on. I understand it was a very, very tragic thing. The driver of the truck I understand was either killed or injured and the young man who had taken the place that my brother and I had was killed. You can read about this in the history of Holland, Michigan, as sort of a big event. But I've often

marveled at the fact that we could live in such an unrestricted time that those kind of things could happen. Maybe we're over regulated today, but we could have used OSHA in those days. After working at Vogelzang Hardware Store, I moved up town, literally, and started working as a clerk at Lokker-Rutgers Clothing Store. In those days a person like myself could afford to buy a suit at Lokker-Rutgers. Today I can't afford it! (laughs) It's a much more upscale store than it was then. But it was a good place to work. It was a good experience for me. I enjoyed it a great deal. I think I earned seventeen and a half cents an hour at the hardware store. I think I earned about thirty-five cents an hour at the clothing store. Of course, you could buy a few things for that too. I could've bought a meal for twenty-five cents. After entering college, I also worked summers. I worked at Baker Furniture and we packed radio cabinets. Baker Furniture was building radio cabinets at that time. I remember one or two summers working out in a pickle receiving station north of Holland. Heinz Pickle would have stations where farmers could bring their pickles and we would stand over a conveyor belt and we would sort out the pickles manually as to size and condition and so on. There would be special crews who would do that, so I did that too. My college experience, I recall, was a rather neutral one. I really didn't know where I was going. I didn't have a lot of self-confidence. I was a commuting student commuting in from North Holland where I'd lived all these years. I can remember sitting at the curb in my car near Dimnent Chapel and eating my brown bag lunch and admiring the house, a sort of a Cape Cod structure right kitty-corner across from the Chapel which I still think is a nice looking house!

EB: Yes, I know the one you're talking about! (Laughs)

JM: But anyway, that's what I would do. There were a few others like us who came from rural areas. Costs at Hope College were phenomenally low! I can't even tell you how cheap it was. Of course, it was expensive for us in those days, but it wasn't anything like it is today. Not conceivably. I have a granddaughter who is graduating so I know something about the costs. When we registered for college we went to Graves Hall which was I think the library at that time. But the administration offices were also upstairs. We walked up the stairs to the administrative office, which was basically the president's office, and we registered with the president and with Mildred Schuppert who was a long time here both at the College and at the Seminary. As much as I can remember, that was the only red tape we had. We just registered, paid whatever you had to pay, and that was it.

EB: Do you know the enrollment at Hope College then?

JM: It must have been less than five hundred, I would think. Soon after that came the big war and that changed the enrollment pattern drastically. My greatest interest academically was English literature. I had always read from a very early age. My parents had gotten me a library card in Sheboygan, Wisconsin, before I was even eligible age-wise for one. I can remember reading almost everything there was in the house. Whether it was a magazine or whatever, I would read it. So reading was exciting for me. I had a very, very good English teacher in high school by the name of Janet Mulder. As I moved on to college, her dear friend and roommate, Metta Ross, became my English professor. I always seemed to do well in literature

appreciation and writing and that whole area. I was in a fog pretty much when it came to mathematics and science. I had almost nothing in my earlier years. History was okay. But literature was my big thing. I really thought that I would be a school teacher. I thought that would be the thing that I would most like. I did not join a fraternity. My father had been a member of the Cosmopolitan Fraternity as a college student, but these were Depression years and I think Dad felt it wasn't that important and even in those days I tended to do what Dad said. And so I did not join a fraternity and I'm rather sorry about that. When it came to extracurricular activity, I wasn't that involved partly because I was a commuting student. Although I do remember auditioning for the senior class play. The senior class play was called, "Smiling Through." It was one of these saccharine types of plays that you might find on the campus of Hope College in those days. So a number of us auditioned, and lo and behold, we got rather sizeable parts! But it appeared that some of the big people on campus hadn't really auditioned and so instead they, through some process or another received, these juicy parts. And so my role was quite reduced. My single line was in connection with preparations for a wedding. We were all meeting together on the set and we were to go out and fill the rice bags for the wedding. My line was, "Well, on to the rice bags!" And that's what I had to say! Well, a number of us were really quite upset about what we thought had happened in terms of the audition. So I uttered this line instead of the one that was given to me. "Well, on to the rice, bags!" And I don't think the director really ever forgave me. When we had the fiftieth anniversary of our class several years ago, some of my classmates still

remembered that line. So that may be the most memorable thing I ever did at Hope College. I practiced taught, teaching English in the ninth grade at the Junior High here in Holland. That was a real growing experience for me. I was very nervous about it. I liked to stand behind a chair so that they couldn't see my knees quake. I had a critic teacher who was outstanding. Her name was Mame Ewald. People I've talked to since who had her, all think of her as being a very fine person. She really helped me in terms of my self-esteem, and I really have fond memories of what she did for me. There were others that I remember fondly too. But as I said earlier, my high school and college years were almost in neutral because I had no real sense of where I was going to go. By the time I became an upperclassman at Hope, the war clouds were very definitely on the horizon and there were crosscurrents going on on the campus. Senator Vanden Berg was quite an outspoken isolationist, and he was our United States Senator at the time. So there was a pacifist movement going on on the campus. That was of course before Pearl Harbor and before we really got involved. And then suddenly Pearl Harbor was attacked and I remember that very, very well because on December 7, 1941, Hope College held its first Christmas Vesper Concert. I was in the choir and I was taking off my robe and putting it away when I was told that Pearl Harbor had been attacked. So I heard it in the lower level of Dimnent Chapel right after the vesper concert at Hope College. And parenthetically I might say that one of the things that I really did get involved in was the vocal music program at Hope. I sang with the Men's Glee Club and we took a trip east and so on. So then, of course, immediately we were confronted with

directions. What should we do? Should we enlist? Were we likely to be drafted? I can remember that my father and I went to see a colleague of his who had been in World War I in order to explore what might be best. Should I enlist or should I wait until I was drafted. Well, I was a senior. The second semester was almost upon me. It seemed best if I would just wait for the draft to take me. So I graduated and took little jobs in the interim. In November of 1942, I was drafted and went to Camp Custer at Battle Creek. (You may know of it coming from Kalamazoo).

EB: I do.

JM: I went to Camp Custer. There were quite a few from Western Michigan who were drafted at the same time. Some of them were good friends of mine from this area because I had been very active in what was then known as "Christian Endeavor." It was a youth movement in those days, a Christian youth movement. And two or three of them I stayed with all through my army career! But many of us were sent from Camp Custer to Camp Crowder in Missouri which was a Signal Corps camp. It was there that we began to prepare to become a part of what they called a "Signal Intelligence Unit." These Signal Intelligence Units were devised in such a fashion so that there would be one unit that would be monitoring the German Army transmissions in the field in Morse Code and trying to copy them. They would also usually be encoded as well so that you couldn't break them. At least we couldn't. But we would search these channels and get to learn how an operator operated his Morse Code. We called that his "hand." How it did it...He had a specific rhythm or tone. And that was what I became. I became an "intercept radio operator" as they

called it. Once we received these messages, they went in two directions. One went to cryptographers to be broken down, and all of them, I think, went to direction finders which were closer to the front. These direction finders with rather primitive radio equipment were able to pinpoint where these signals were coming from. So they could determine the movement of certain German Army units in that fashion. After training at Camp Crowder we went on maneuvers in the Ozarks and then wound up in Florida. While we were in Florida, we stayed in what had been a nightclub with adjacent grounds right near the Hialeah Race Course in Hollywood, Florida. We monitored shipping along the coast. However, from there we went to New York and were shipped overseas to Britain. In this whole process I wanted to go to Officers Training School because I had my college education. I was hearing from back home and so and so was a second lieutenant and so and so was becoming an officer and here I was just a private first class, and I thought I should be an officer. But they seemed to treat us as a special unit. They wanted to keep us together. Many of us had special educational backgrounds and even though we were not given particularly significant rankings, they kept us together in this Signal Corps unit. So even though I passed the board appearances for officers training, I never was released in order to take advantage of it. In retrospect, I would say that was good! Who knows what I might have gotten into had I been an officer! And I had a lot of good experiences. When D-day came and the invasion took place, I happened to be in a dentist's chair in England. I was being treated by an army dentist who in order to keep his drill going was pumping it with his foot! And when the news came to the base that the

invasion had occurred, we were sent back to our units. By D plus three we were on the beach. By that time the bulk of the heavy fighting was past. But we were there and we began to monitor with our radio sets the cut off of the Cherbourg Peninsula. We were attached to First Army Headquarters, and all through the period of time that we were in Europe we did that sort of thing. We just moved along with the advancing troops. Finally the war ended. We were in Germany. We waited for some time to be shipped home. We were sent down to Southern France and finally were shipped home. I remember that one of the men who was released with me was a friend of mine in youth work here in the city. His name was Irving Lemmen and we spent the entire war experience together which was rather unique. There were others from this area too. But in any case, we had that experience. But I had not been at home for thirty-three months! So I had been away for a long time.

EB: Now, you had correspondence back home while you were doing the war. What was it like here in Holland?

JM: Well, that's interesting! Because I don't know what it was like here in Holland (laughs). I just finished taking an oral history from Beth Marcus. She was my classmate in high school and college and was born on the same day I was. She's had a very distinguished career as a leader in the Reformed Church in America. But for the first ten years of her career, she was in charge of the Ottawa County Red Cross right during the war and afterwards. So I learned a whole lot more about what happened here in Holland from her than I ever would have learned from my own correspondence. My parents never kept my letters, but my sister did. A few years

ago she gave me the whole bundle! And I had forgotten them completely! She was a student at Hope College at that time. So I put them all together, printed them and sent them to my kids. They responded in a most remarkable way! They said, "Dad! You're part of history!" (Laughs) So that was kind of neat. When I got back from the service I was really at loose ends because my parents had moved from North Holland to this same little community in Wisconsin where he had taught the children Dutch many years before, and he became the pastor of that church. Well, I had no relationship to that community at all. I can remember taking the train after discharge from Fort Sheridan in Chicago and getting off the train in the middle of the night in this little community of Friesland, Wisconsin, which was on the Northwestern Railroad. And my folks were there. My youngest sister was there, now a young teen and not just a little kid as I remembered. We went to the house, and to be honest with you, I just had to make an adjustment. I was in a different world in a different day and in a different scene (this was in November that I was discharged) and with the Christmas rush coming and so forth, I found out that if I came back to Holland I could work at Lokker-Rutgers again as part of the sales crew for the Christmas rush. So I stayed with a good friend of mine here in Holland. His parents were very nice to let me stay there for a few weeks and I worked at the Lokker-Rutgers store. One day one of the professors at Western Seminary came in. His name was William Goulooze. He was a very highly respected professor at Western Seminary. He was also a friend of our family although I didn't know him intimately. He came in and asked if he could have a white shirt. Well, you couldn't buy white shirts in those

days. Everybody was getting rid of their olive drab and their navy blue and they wanted civilian clothes. It was very difficult to get white shirts! It turned out that he knew that and it was his way of getting to talk to me. He began to lay on me the call to ministry which I just was not interested in! I never wanted to be a minister. I didn't want to take on the same mien that thought my father and his friends had. It was just not for me! In fact, after that experience I went back home to Wisconsin and I registered at the University of Wisconsin with the intent of pursuing a master's degree in English and was accepted. Paid five dollars down on a room that I think was going to cost me fifteen dollars a week room and board. Then came back home to wait for the semester to begin. In the interim Dr. Goulooze who had talked to me at the store kept contacting me by letter! On one occasion he said, "If it would make any difference I will come out and see you!" Now, that was 325 miles by railroad or car in the early post-war years, and I was just really impressed by that. (Side A ends)

The call was disturbing! I found myself in utter misery for about a week until I decided that, okay, I'll go and I'll enter the ministry. So at the beginning of the new semester at Western Seminary, I joined the class that was abbreviated because there were so few people available to go to seminary. Another young man and I became the first two veterans of the war to become students at Western Seminary. At the same time during the period of time when I was working during the Christmas rush, my sister who was a resident at Van Vleck Hall (the old Van Vleck Hall at Hope College), thought that it would be great if I would have a date with one of her very good friends. It appeared that I had sent a picture of myself home and she had

pinned it on the door of her room and somebody had stolen it! The person who had stolen it was the person she thought I ought to meet. So we had a double date. It was rather interesting because we first of all went to my sister's fiance's home for dinner. I always say, "Where else would you go in Holland in those days? There were no night clubs!" But anyway, we went there for dinner. And then we went bowling and the bowling alley is still on the corner of Ninth and Central, isn't it? The second floor?

EB: Yes.

JM: That alley is where we went bowling. It was a date, and yet at the same time I was interested in finding out more about American girls. I hadn't seen them for a long time. So we didn't really pursue this relationship. But then about, oh, a little over a year later...yes, it was fourteen months later when this particular girl was a senior and had already been accepted to be a missionary to Japan by the Reformed Church in America, I began to realize that although I was looking at other girls, she was really a pretty nice person! I could see her climbing a gangplank on the ship to Japan and I wasn't sure that I was real happy about that. (My wife has the dates in her mind. I can't give you the exact dates.) But in March we started going together. In May I gave her a ring. And in August we were married!

EB: Wow!

JM: Now, I don't know why you younger folks are so slow!

EB: (Laughs)

JM: But anyway, that's what happened. And in that period of time she still had her

appointment to Japan. So there were pressures on me to volunteer for missionary service as well. It was not something I was particularly interested in. But they were quite direct because MacArthur had asked for a large number of missionaries, and they were really trying to get me to do this. I can remember when I was a senior in seminary taking a train out to Palmyra, New York, where I was candidating as a young student soon to be a minister. On the way back I was having breakfast in the dining car (you did that on the train in those days) and, lo and behold, here came this executive from the Board of Foreign Missions of the Reformed Church! He saw me and he said, "John! What are you doing here?" Of course I knew that he must of felt that I was definitely out of place. I should have been preparing to go to Japan! And here I was actually candidating for this church! So I told him and he shared the table with me. I ordered pancakes and in those days everything came in pewter. You had little pewter pitchers of coffee and syrup and so on. I picked up a pewter pitcher and I poured the contents over my pancakes and it was coffee instead of syrup! I never blinked an eye! Ate the soggy pancakes! Perhaps he noticed. I don't know. But I often remember that. Several years later, my wife and I were in charge of a retreat at Camp Geneva and then he was there too as part of that retreat group. We had to volunteer as "jumpers" as they were called to serve tables and so on. I was in charge so I appointed all those who had receding hairlines - and he definitely had a receding hairline - and then I told the story of what had happened in the railroad car! We were good friends by that time and I didn't stand in awe of him any more! But that was an interesting sidelight. As far as the seminary experience was concerned, I

had no Greek, no Hebrew, no Philosophy, nothing that went into the whole process of preparing for the ministry. And yet, here I was in seminary! I had no romantic attachments at that time whatsoever. I had met Harriet, but we weren't at all involved. So I took a ten hour course and I just assumed that I would make it up in the next three years. And so I did that, but after only ten hours I was already asked to do some preaching. Then I served a little Congregational Church out near your home town called Alamo. Do you know where Alamo is?

EB: I do!

JM: It's near Otsego and Plainwell and that area. I served that little Congregational Church for a summer. Had no car. Had a bicycle and served that church there. Then when I came back to seminary, I came into a full complement of students. By that time, young men were coming back from the service into seminary. I have done a lot of research with the intent of writing a paper on the impact of World War II on the seminary because I think that was in many ways a water shed. My classmates virtually to a person were World War II veterans, many of whom had changed course in the midst of their war experiences and were in some cases as ill prepared academically as I was. Some of them had electrical engineering degrees, for example. One of my colleagues, who is a very respected theologian, got his bachelor's degree from Hope College at the same time that he got his professorial certificate or his B.D. from Western Seminary! We all had to adjust and get caught up. That period for me was a time of real growth and change. Instead of being a mediocre student, I felt I had a role to play. I had a goal to achieve. I became a

different person, and it was an exciting time for me to have that experience of knowing what it was like to be a good student and to exercise some leadership and things of that sort. In that process, while I was in school, my wife and I became involved. Then during my second summer assignment I was at the Battle Creek Church, the Trinity Reformed Church of Battle Creek. They were meeting at the Army Post at that time. I cut short my service there by a couple of weeks so that I could get married in late August in Iowa, and then the two of us moved back to Michigan. Then my wife not planning to go to Japan, at least at that time, became the director of religious education or Christian education at First Reformed Church here in Holland. She did that for the two remaining years while we were in seminary. After graduation we accepted the call to the church in Palmyra, New York. Palmyra is in the Finger Lakes District of New York State about 27 miles east of Rochester and only four miles north of Hill Cumorah. Hill Cumorah is the site where allegedly Joseph Smith unearthed the golden plates and met the Angel Moroni which became an element in the founding of the Mormon Church. And so it's a rather interesting environment. It was a small town church, really a town and country church, quite a few farmers. A good church for a young pastor to be in. We had a good experience there. We were only there about three years. We already had...well, soon after I graduated our first child was born. So we already were having a family. And from that place we moved to Fourth Reformed Church in Kalamazoo. Those were the days when ministers were in short supply. Calls were quite prevalent. Short pastorates were not too unusual. I can remember going to that

church without ever having had any contact with the church prior to their calling me. Just a total "out of the blue" kind of experience. We had four very good years in that church - '51-'55. It was a very Dutch church. I was the first minister of that congregation not able to speak Dutch. They wanted some changes, and we had the first daily vacation bible school in the history of that church. We began to broadcast our services on Sunday evening through one of the local stations in Kalamazoo. However, it was a church that was pretty heavy on the older element and we were, of course, very young and wanted to have some more adventure. So I made myself available for any particular church start that might be available. A lot of new churches were starting. So we accepted a call to Grandville, Michigan, where Zion Reformed Church was just getting under way. They were meeting in a school. They were made up, to a large extent, of people who were moving out to Jenison from the churches in Grand Rapids. Some of them were from the First Reformed Church of Grandville. When I got there, there were about fifty families that were meeting in the Bursley School which is a rural school in west Jenison. And living in a very crude farmhouse. We had four children - two of them were in diapers. They were only fourteen months apart. Harriet will tell you that it was a gruelling experience for her! I would go out and come back ecstatic because people were coming from right and left and were all moving out to Jenison and the church was growing by leaps and bounds, and she was fighting cold air, trying to deal with diapers without any drier and catching mice here and there throughout the house and having a rough time. Well, to make a long story short, we did build a church building. We had a

comfortable parsonage eventually provided for us. In the six years we were there, the church grew from about fifty families to something like 240. We sent a nucleus over to start the Fairhaven Church which is now Fairhaven Ministries in Jenison. And it was a very, very rapid growth situation. Those were the days of the birth of the baby boomers. I think I baptized thirty-six babies in one year - which is just incredible by today's standards. I can remember we had a vacation Bible school with 350 kids, and in those days, the minister did a lot of things. And we had a lot of enthusiasm. Harriet and I were always a team. I remember that I not only preached twice on Sunday but we had a two-week Bible school which was also common in those days and I would drive the school bus (we would borrow a school bus from one of the Christian Schools). I'd drive the school bus, pick up the kids and drive them across M-21 (which was a major highway then), across the railroad tracks. Pack them in the bus! Beat on the top of the bus saying, "Come on! We can get more in here! Three in a seat!" And we'd probably get about 90 children in a bus that was supposed to seat about sixty. But the Lord was with us! And we'd pick them up and drop them off and so on. Well, at the same time, I taught the Junior High segment of program. I still had to do my duty on Sunday. I was superintendent of the entire event. Had to recruit a lot of teachers. But in any case, when you are young those are the things you do. And when you are stupid, you also do those things! We had a great time - even though it was difficult. By that time we had the four children. Our daughter Beth is now a teacher. She has had a very interesting career in terms of teaching because while we were in Grandville my wife starting teaching again. And she began

teaching by serving as a substitute teaching public school music. But she also began teaching kindergarten and she had one of our children as one of her pupils while she was practice teaching. After all her experiences as a teacher, she still had to get Michigan certification. So she started teaching part-time while we were in Grandville. She taught on a part-time basis for the remainder of our career until in 1970, when I took another kind of position with the church, she became a full-time kindergarten teacher and got her master's degree in 1977 and taught for fourteen years. Our daughter Beth, right out of Hope College, got a job teaching in the same district but in a different building also on the kindergarten level. They taught together for fourteen years as colleagues. When my wife retired in '84, Beth took over her class! And so Beth now has been teaching in that same system for twenty-seven years. But in any case, Beth was part of our family by that time. Steve was two years younger almost to the day. He's an attorney now in Alton, Illinois, which is a suburb of St. Louis. Our daughter Mary was born while we were in Kalamazoo. She was a very heavy baby by the time she was born. She was born in Bronson Hospital just north of the church and she created a couple of false alarms! In other words, I even got a guest preacher one time because she was supposed to be born that Sunday and...she didn't come! In any case, she finally arrived. But in time we discovered that she had an opening in her heart which was quite...well, not so unusual I suppose, but quite foreboding in those days. And at the age of six while we were in Grandville, she had open heart surgery in Grand Rapids. In those days that was quite a dramatic procedure! We can remember that so well because our people

in the Grandville church rallied to our assistance in such a marvelous way. We had to have people who would give blood. There were about two dozen people who gathered at the hospital to give blood for her the day of her surgery. The children were concerned about Mary. There's a story that they still tell in the church when they have new member orientation of a little girl who knew that Mary was being operated on that morning who knelt at the side of the road as she waited for her bus to pray for Mary. Just little touching things like that. Well, interestingly enough, just as we were in the midst of that medical crisis we got the call to go to a church in Wisconsin! And that was startling to us because once again we had never candidated there, never had any contact with that church! They were very patient with us. They said, "Just take your time and when you feel that you can come out to visit us, why don't you do that." And so we did. It seems as I look back upon my career that whenever we made a change it was in response to a specific task that had to be done. Starting a church or whatever. The task that needed to be done in this church was the erection of a new building. The condition in that situation was very drastic. It was an old frame building. We took an actual account of people who attended. There were about 500 in church on Sunday. But they sat everywhere in the building. It was a rural church so there no fire precautions of any particular kind. No planned exits. No fire extinguishers or whatever. We were really challenged with the idea that we had to replace that church! However, that was not what the congregation really felt! It was only what the leadership of the church felt. So we had to face that challenge! And we thought initially that it would take us most of our ministry to get

to that point. If we got them to the point where they would think about having a new church, we might have done our job. As it turned out, we saw some ways in which they might be able to deal with this in a different way. Took them to Michigan to see some churches here. In Wisconsin they felt they had to build the kind of transept structure like the Lutherans have and the Catholics and we told them there was a simpler form. So the result of that was a large congregational meeting, the largest in the history of the church. The church voted the project down by six votes! We were devastated! All of us who had made that trip. We KNEW what the church needed! We finally decided that the only response was for us to continue to point out as tactfully as we could that we still had the problem and that we would bring it up as an issue at our next regularly constituted congregational meeting. Which we did! Instead of using the high pressure tactics we had used before, the result was that we had an overwhelmingly positive vote. We went ahead and had a magnificent time building this new church building. By that time, our youngest child was born. She was born in 1961 just prior to our moving also. Just to review with you again our other children, I mentioned Steve and I mentioned Mary and Beth. Sue was born about fourteen months after Mary in Kalamazoo, and she now is the mother of five children in Kansas City. They just moved to Shawnee, Kansas. She has a master's degree in deaf education. I should say that Mary is a registered nurse much as a result of her medical experience. She lives in San Jose, California. Our youngest child, Janet, is very gifted musically. She had a music scholarship and a Rolscreen Scholarship to Central College. She got her masters in vocal performance at the

University of Southern California and traveled to Australia, New Zealand and Fuji and so on with the special singing group of the University. She now teaches music and is married to a geologist and lives in Midland, Texas. After we had been in Hingham for a while (and this was a small country community - a strong church but a small community) we became restless again. Then we did something that proved to be the most challenging of all the things we had done in our career. We took the opportunity to start a church "from scratch" in Des Moines, Iowa. "By scratch" I mean we had no place to worship. We had no people. We had nothing. And we with our five children packed up and moved to Des Moines, Iowa, thinking we had a place to live. The day before the moving van was ready to go we were told the house that was to be rented was not yet completed. We somehow arranged to find a temporary location. We started the church with a small group initially, a Bible fellowship. Eventually we had a congregation with buildings et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. Harriet commuted twenty miles each way to fill a part-time position in one of the consolidated districts near Des Moines. Had a lot of stress! She had to put up with a minister-husband who was really at loose ends because I had always been in the "bosom" of the church and here I was out on the front lines. Didn't really know what the world was all about. But somehow the Lord pulled us through. One of the remarkable things that happened to us was that we had a daughter, Beth, who was ready for college. She had changed schools as a junior. She began her junior year in Des Moines in a much larger school. She was determined she was going to make the very best of her situation. And she did! But as graduation approached and as she

was planning to go to college, all she had was a \$200 scholarship to Northwestern College in Northwest Iowa. However, she was quite a leader at school and she was in charge of the annual awards ceremony. Mother had a doctor's appointment and I went to attend the award ceremony. There I sat in the bleachers in the gym and the principal started handing out the awards. Amongst them were scholarships, and the first was a full, all expenses paid scholarship to the college of the recipient's choice, the only expenses for the student being books and laboratory fees. He called a young man forward to receive this scholarship which came from the CEO of the Younkers Department Store chain (there is a Younkers here too) in memory of his son who had been killed as a student there. And I sat back and I said, "That is something else! The father of that young man is the most fortunate person I can think of." It was just amazing. I could not imagine that such a thing could happen. And then suddenly the principal said, "And this year we have a second winner. Will Beth Maassen please come forward." And Beth received a four-year college education, all of her expenses paid with the exception of books and laboratory fees. It changed her life. It changed our lives in many respects. We didn't have the heavy burden of college for her. She was free to pursue other things besides clerking at J. C. Penney or whatever in part-time. She did a lot of volunteer and other types of work in the summertime and it was just a remarkable thing! I have often told younger pastors this. "If you are in the place where the Lord wants you, He will give you what you really need." We felt that was what we really needed and He gave it to us. And it was just a remarkable lesson for us. Well, it wasn't too long after that when I suddenly had the

opportunity to really change careers. People tell you that it's really good to change careers at fifty. And that's exactly what happened to me! I don't know why we were so blessed. But anyway it happened. In the Reformed Church we have what we call regional synods. They used to be called particular synods but now they call them regional synods. They are made up geographically of a number of classes or districts in the church. Each of these regional synods has their staff, and each staff is headed by what they call a synod pastor or executive secretary or a field secretary. I was called to be the executive for the Synod of Chicago which is now called the Synod of Mid-America. My responsibility was to continually develop the program of the regional synod, and the regional synods developed much stronger programs through those years in all parts of the church. We had youth camps. We had new church development which was a big part of my responsibility. We helped churches in crisis. We helped churches who were looking for pastors and pastors who were looking for churches - that whole situation. It was a full time administrative job for me with an office and with the opportunity to travel. I'd had a lot of experience in starting new churches for ill and for good and so I was able to bring those talents to pass. I think one of the things that really helped me was that I had come from a situation where I had been in difficult spots and I wasn't speaking from "Mount Olympus" to these people. So during those fifteen years we had a great time living in the Chicago area. Harriet developed her career as a teacher. At the age when many teachers retire (fifty-five) she got her masters degree and we had a very, very broad experience there. By that time our kids were moving on toward college. Our

youngest got most of her education in South Holland. South Holland is a suburb of south Chicago. And then, just as we were about to retire in 1985 (I was about to have my sixty-fifth birthday), we suddenly got a phone call from California and it came on April Fool's Day! I have said in retrospect I really had to check the spirits that day! But it was a call from Dr. Herman Ridder who once was president of Western Seminary and is a resident of Holland now, and who was the associate pastor for Dr. Robert Schuller at the Crystal Cathedral in Garden Grove, California. Out of the blue he asked me to come to a semi-retirement position and start working with him in California. My first reaction was, "Well, I can't do that, Bud! I haven't retired yet! I still have a couple of months to go." And I said, "We're planning to host a trip to Europe in September originating in Chicago. We really can't come right away. Besides, we need to think about this and pray about it." "Well," he said, "just take your time. We'd like to have you come as soon as possible. But whatever you do, if you do come we'll not just have you hold little old ladies' hands. It's going to be something more significant." Well, we continued through the summer and then as the summer went its way, we had another phone call from him and he said, "Will you put Harriet on the phone?" I did. He said, "We have a proposition for you. We have the adult education department here at the church and we've had a full-time staff person doing this. But we would like to have the two of you share that position." I wasn't real excited about it because I had been doing so much administrative work. But nevertheless, okay, if that's what they want us to do, we'll do that. But we saw ourselves as semi-retired people who would be living on

what we could earn from Social Security and pensions plus a small stipend and we wondered how this would all work out. Would we share a desk? How would this work? We'd both be working on the same program together. Well, we got to the Crystal Cathedral and lo and behold we each had offices and we each had secretarial support and we were each members of the management team for the Cathedral! It was absolutely astounding! (Laughs). Well, it was a very serendipitous time. All of our ministry has been a serendipity, but this was a very serendipitous time for us. An entirely new environment. New opportunities. New types of people. A new climate. An exciting place to be. We worked together on this adult education program. We had hundreds of people involved in adult education on Sundays and during the week. Then I felt that I wanted to do more pastoral work and Harriet sort of picked up the educational aspect of it, and I went into a more directly pastoral role and particularly I did ministry for senior citizens. That led us to a travel ministry where we developed what we called "The Safari Club" and we organized trips for seniors. We probably have taken seniors on about fifty one-day trips throughout Southern California (some of these little old ladies were excited just to be in a traffic jam after being in an apartment all week long). (Laughs) And we went to places like Hearst Castle, Death Valley, you name it. But then we also had larger trips like Alaska, a two week trip through the Panama Canal to the Caribbean. The Oberammergau Passion Play in Germany one year. The East Coast and making a presentation at Marble Collegiate Church in New York. Going to Branson, Missouri, of all places and having a good time there. We had all those opportunities as well. Then I also

became the teacher for one of the largest Sunday School classes in the church. In a church like that, because it is so large, you almost have to have "sub-congregations" and that was what this was. It is called the Homebuilders Class and it was a marvelous group of people. Very friendly, very accepting. I became their pastor and their teacher and their friend. They became our friends. Initially I was just a member of the class. Eventually they asked me to be their teacher. We just had a marvelous time together. A couple of years ago we went back and we conducted their annual retreat which they have every year, about a hundred and thirty people at this retreat. And that was another marvelous experience for us. We still maintain close relationships with those people. Well, then in 1992 my wife and I came back to Holland. We always came back to the middle west to be with family every summer. But we made a special trip to Holland in the spring because it was the occasion of Harriet's forty-fifth anniversary of graduation from Hope and my fiftieth. And when we came to Holland we said, "This isn't the town we thought it was!" In fact, we had said earlier - much earlier - that neither of us would ever want to retire in our home towns - she from Orange City, Iowa, and me from Holland, Michigan. We felt they were much too provincial, too out of the way. Couldn't be the place for us! But we came to Holland and we saw what had happened to Holland and how active it was and how cosmopolitan it was and we realized how many friends we had here who were retiring here. So we said, "Maybe we ought to think differently about it!" We really had thought of finally retiring in California! But we also realized that our life there was the Cathedral and the Cathedral was our life and if we ever tried to

completely leave the work there, we'd probably never get away from it. So later that same summer we came back and looked at a number of condominiums and we bought this place. We rented it out for about a year before we came. It was in '92 that we bought the place and we came here in '93, in August. And we have been here since then and (Harriet comes in) why don't we just stop for a moment and I'll introduce you to Harriet and then we can sum up by talking about...(Tape stops)

As we were saying earlier before we took a break, we had suddenly come to the conclusion that Holland would be a good place for us to live and so we moved here in August of 1993. One of the first things we had to do was to determine where we were going to go to church. When we would tell people back in California that we'd probably have our choice of about thirty Reformed Churches to go to and none of them would be so far away that we couldn't attend them regularly, they would be absolutely shocked! And then to tell them that on top of that there were probably thirty Christian Reformed Churches to worship at was also a big surprise to them. Well, when we came to Holland one of the things we noticed about church life was that indeed it was quite different than it was even when I was in seminary. I used to think when my dad was a pastor that he could have served almost any church in Western Michigan as far as the Reformed Church in America was concerned. Their expectations were pretty much the same. They had the same general expectations in terms of programming, sermon material and that sort of thing. That surely is not the case today and that is very, very different. No two Reformed Churches are alike! I think that is one of the things that attracted us to Holland - that there was finally

diversity. When I was in Holland High School (and we like to think of that as being good and I think it probably was good)...Once again, even as the North Holland School was an extension of the church, even Holland High School was an extension of the church. They had a Bible course. Seniors were given Bibles by the school. There was chapel every day with hymn singing and so on. All of that we think is admirable but of course we are also living in a multiethnic society and we were even then! So those things were bound to change. I can remember Al McGeehan, who is the mayor and a member of our church, saying that when he came to Hope College in 1960, he and his friend (and they were both raised in the Reformed Church out east) innocently began to play tennis on one of the public courts and a cruiser stopped and tactfully suggested that wasn't the thing to do on Sunday. And that was in 1960! So when you think of what we experience today in Holland, a very great change has taken place. In fact, I see church life in a state of revolution, not only here in Holland but in other parts of the country too. And the revolution I think is, first of all, in the whole area of worship. Hope College is a case in point with the phenomenally successful program they have which centers pretty much on a totally contemporary style of worship, as I understand it. So today we have a variety of styles of worship and that variety is in evidence here in Holland. One of the surprising things to me is that some of the "radical" forms of worship are found not in Reformed Churches but in Christian Reformed Churches, which we always were brought up to believe were more conservative than we. There is a lessening of loyalty to denominations and I see that in my own children as well. One of our

daughters has just moved to a suburb of Kansas City. Her husband has been an elder in two Reformed Churches and an elder also in a Presbyterian Church, and now they have about decided they are going to go to an Evangelical Covenant Church. And that's pretty much par for the course today. That is certainly true here today. I can remember Central Wesleyan Church as just another one of the non-Dutch churches in town. It's a mega church today! Fantastically successful on the South Side with a sanctuary that I believe seats more people than the Crystal Cathedral does! Christ Memorial Church, which is a Reformed Church, is nevertheless a mega church and I believe that they have approximately three thousand people in worship on a Sunday with a broad program. Staff ministries is a very different development over the years. It was very unusual for a Reformed Church to have an assistant pastor. It had to be a very big church for that to happen. Now to have staff is very common. Our own church, First Reformed Church, which is not a huge church nevertheless has a senior pastor, Dan Gillett, a minister of outreach in Elizabeth De Jonge, and a youth pastor in Dan Doebler. The interesting thing about that is that Elizabeth is a woman! And that's another of the developments in the church. I think in that respect, knowing the denomination as a whole the way I do, that Holland is a bit more progressive in terms of accepting women in ministry than some other parts of the church are. That may be partly due to the fact that it is closely related to the Seminary. But I think that is true. There is a lot of entrepreneurship in the church today. In other words, there is competition! So you have to come up with the best and the biggest and the brightest and entertainment is a factor for good or for ill.

There is inexorable change that is going to be affecting the churches here. We've decried the loss of Sixth Reformed Church and Bethel Reformed Church here in town, but those things are inevitable in a situation where you no longer build churches a few blocks apart because people only walk to church. People are much more mobile and are much more diverse than they used to be. Some loss of these small churches is inevitable as much as it may be regrettable. The relationship between the Roman Catholic and the Protestant Churches is a great change. I could tell stories about experiences I had thirty years ago in the church which would be almost diametrically opposed to experiences we have today between these two groups. And it's a very positive thing here in Holland! The whole matter of ethnic change has been here in Holland for quite a long time. I mentioned working with sugar beets and working with pickles. We had migrants way back in those days too. They were usually housed in what I suppose many would call "substandard housing" although a lot of people lived in what we would today call "substandard housing" in those days. But now the Hispanic population has become quite an integral part of the city and they cannot be stereotyped! They probably never could have been but they cannot be today. I have taken oral histories of one or two of them myself who very much impressed me. We are seeing more and more African-Americans here in town. Asians are here. The neat thing about Holland and Grand Rapids is that the Reformed and Christian Reformed Churches took an active role in relocating Asians. They sponsored Asian immigrants and that's one reason why we have...I think we see more interracial families here in Holland than you do in some other places. Not on

the marriage basis, although that is present but in the adoption of Korean and Vietnamese children and so forth. We have lived in two communities where racial change has taken place. I was particularly involved in that when we were working for the Synod of Mid-America which centered upon Chicago. There is an incredible Southward movement out of the South Chicago suburbs of Roseland and Englewood into the far south suburbs of South Holland and Lansing and some of the others. Whole congregations were relocated. The relocation was massive! It was painful. The same thing is happening again because a community like South Holland is becoming overwhelmingly African-American even though it is a middle class community. I see the same kind of fears surfacing here in Holland and people are talking about "on the one hand" and "on the other hand" and the "other hand" there are "those kinds of people." And I have first of all said, "Okay, we're having racial change but it doesn't compare with anything we saw in Chicago or in Orange County, California, or LA." Secondly, I think we have a kind of governmental leadership here in this city and spiritual leadership here through the churches that should be able to handle it creatively and I think are handling it creatively. What I would hope is that there isn't too much "white flight." That's the thing that really concerns me because I know what "white flight" has done to other communities. I sense some "white flight" and I think the movement is eastward to Zeeland. It may seem rather strange. but I think that is true. I think there is that element of "white flight" and even though Zeeland and Holland have been separate communities for many, many years, they're not that far apart (Laughs). They have become closer and closer and

closer through the years. So that's another issue. The culture in Holland and Grand Rapids and Muskegon is absolutely incredible! We attended the Cyril Barker Memorial Concert last night at Central Reformed Church in Grand Rapids where Harriet's brother is interim pastor, and we have opportunities like that almost every week in Western Michigan! To hear that kind of high caliber concert or presentation. It's just really incredible. For us, the HASP organization has been very meaningful. HASP is an acronym for Hope's Academy for Senior Professionals. It's an adjunct of Hope College. It started about eight or nine years ago under the leadership of Dr. John Hollenbach and some other of his colleagues who had just retired from the faculty of Hope College. They thought it would be good to have a small group of people who would just have a continuing education experience. Now we have about 370 members! We are setting out on a capital fund drive to try to help the College provide housing for our group. We have monthly meetings. I've been the monthly program chairman for that group. Harriet has been very active as a volunteer in the service organization. We have classes almost weekly on a number of subjects - whether it be world affairs or astronomy or you name it, literature - and it's an incredibly stimulating thing. It's part of a wide network of similar organizations called "Institutes for Learning in Retirement" - ILR. Institutes for Learning in Retirement, that you find on college campuses everywhere. And Holland's is a model organization for that whole movement. Economically, of course, Holland is incredibly wealthy. I thought I saw wealth in Orange County and I did because Orange County is wealthy. But I've never seen so many Lincoln Town Cars as I see

in Holland, Michigan! (Laughs) And when you go out to Ottawa Beach and you watch the parade of boats - it is something to see! (Tape 1 ends). (Resumes) Of course, along with this economic progress is the need for increased population. I don't have to review all the problems that are accompanying that because we hear about it all the time. Increased traffic. We've been here for four years now. Twenty-fourth Street is a whole lot busier than it was four years ago. And the issues of building. To think that Grand Valley would have a branch campus here in town. That the library would triple its size and we would build a branch library in addition. That the City Hall is renovated as beautifully as it is. I marvel at times that we find enough craftsmen to do the work that has to be done here in building. It's just a phenomenally exciting area! Of course, that's exactly what Orange County, Florida, was too, and in the late seventies and early eighties Orange County was the center of a great deal of interest all over the country because of its tremendous growth. And it still is an exciting area, but I see many of the same things happening here that happened in Orange County. We're starting to shop now at the same chains that we shopped at in Orange County because they're here now. They weren't here when we first came - like Circuit City, Menards and Staples and other places like that. So it's very, very challenging. I hope that we continue to have the right leadership. When I take oral histories of older people I can "feel their pain" as our president says, but I also sense that there is a kind of a character there that says, "Okay. These are people too. These are God's people. We've got to deal with it somehow." I hope that continues. I don't know if there is anything else that you'd like to have me talk

about.

EB: Besides the HASP organization, have you seen any way that Hope College has changed the Holland community?

JM: Oh, I think they're inseparable. I was on the Board of Trustees for Hope College in the late seventies and early eighties when Dr. Van Wylen was president. Of course, Dr. Van Wylen left his imprint in many ways. I think he increased the credibility of the College among the churches for one thing. He is a man of great credibility. He was also a president who did a lot of building for the College. I think that as colorful a person in a sense that Dr. Van Wylen was, it is remarkable that Dr. Jacobson can pick up his reins and do an equally effective job even though they are two very different personalities. But Hope is very much a part of Holland. Of course, it always was because Holland was a theocracy at one time. In other words, the church conducted the affairs of Holland and supposedly God through the church and so it was all one bag, and how you can separate the two is a good question. I think the whole problem of ethnicity is facing the College as well. How are they going to be relevant in a multi-ethnic society unless they become more multi-ethnic themselves. They are an elite school in many ways which is great! But maybe there's room for Grand Valley to have a campus not too far away. Davenport is here and growing. That's okay too. I guess we have to be accepting and flexible and have vision and make room for all the growth that's taking place. I think Hope College by the way is a more avowedly Christian institution than it seemed to be thirty years ago! For good or for ill. I know not everybody agrees in the direction in which worship is going at

Hope, but I think it's unashamedly Christian today. The Anchor is an example in point. I remember when I was a young pastor reading the Anchor one was almost embarrassed for the Christian context of the College because it "wasn't sophisticated enough." That's not true today. We have an increasingly effective faculty who are making their presence known in other areas besides their circle. The Seminary has gone through a very critical time. One of the reasons for that being that the denomination established alternatives for achieving a seminary education by allowing students to attend other than Reformed Church institutions. That has siphoned away a lot of students who would normally be coming to our own seminary here or at New Brunswick. We've had a crisis in leadership too through a period of time. But there, too, we're having a renaissance. There is a definite increase in the student body of young individuals who are looking at the ministry as a career from "day one." It's not bad at all to develop ministry as a second career but to have it as a career from "day one" indicates a certain strength that I think we're going to be able to take advantage of in the years ahead. So that's also a plus.

EB: What is your view of the upcoming of women in the Seminary?

JM: Women in the Seminary? You said, "Up and coming." It's been there for quite a while. (Laughs).

EB: Well, there's been a lot of stuff in the news in the past two or three years about...

JM: Well, yes. Particularly as it relates to the Christian Reformed Church because they are the ones who have not until recently accepted any. I think that years ago I never took it seriously. I mean, it just wasn't one of those things that happened, you know.

I've never had a theological problem with it. I think we do have a problem with assimilating women in ministry. Finding places for them. But we have some exceptional role models. I think about Elizabeth De Jonge, my own pastor, as an exceptional role model for women in ministry. And I had the opportunity to work with a lot of women in ministry in the Crystal Cathedral because that was a place where many students found their field education and they weren't necessarily all of the Reformed Church. There were many denominations coming out of Fuller Theological Seminary and I worked with them quite closely. So it's not a problem for me. It could be a difficult career situation I think for a married couple. But then that's true for married couples where the male is the pastor as well! There are pastors now whose wives are picking up sticks and reapplying for entrance to the bar because they're now having to practice law in a different state because their husbands have accepted positions elsewhere. I think pastors are moving for the sake of their wives' careers too. That all has to be worked out because that's not the way it was for many years. I'm sure that my mother would never have thought of doing anything else, and I'm rather sure that Harriet too having had her own career nevertheless was willing to subordinate it to mine. (I don't think she heard that. You did!) (laughs)

HM: Well, I moved where you moved.

JM: "She moved where I moved," she said. Okay. Is there anything else?

EB: I believe that's pretty much it. I think we're finished!

JM: Well, I thank you very much for letting me talk!

EB: (Laughs) You're very welcome!

JM: Ministers are paid to talk and they're educated to talk but they have a real difficulty listening!

EB: And we learn a lot from you.

JM: Oh well. Sometimes. Great. Thank you.

(Tape ends)

Initial Contact Form

Name: John Howard Maassen

Date of Birth: [date removed]

Place of Birth: Beaverdam (Zeeland) MI

Mother's Maiden Name: Jannetta Kleinjan

Father's Name: Herman Maassen

Siblings Names and Birthdates:

Hermina Maassen - 1922 Deceased

Gertrude Maassen Vander Haar - [date removed]

Pierce Maassen - June 2, 1926 Deceased

Leona Maassen Posthuma - [date removed]

Spouses Name: Harriet Bernice Muyskens

Date of Marriage: Aug. 12, 1947

Place of Marriage: Orange City, IA

Children's names (include places and dates of birth:

Elizabeth Ann Maassen Piel -

Stephen John Maassen -

Mary Louise Maassen Gustafson -

Susan Kay Maassen Toren -

Janet Lee Maassen Menzie -

[birth dates removed]

Holland, MI

Clifton Springs, NY

Kalamazoo, MI

Kalamazoo, MI

Grand Rapids, MI

Dates of Death and Burial: N/A

Religion and Church Membership: First Reformed Church, Holland, MI

Schooling and/or other training:

Holland High School - 1938

Hope College (Eng. & Education) - BA 1942

US Army Signal Corps Training - 1942-43

Western Theological Seminary - BD 1949

Residential History:

Beaverdam (rural Zeeland), MI 1920-22

Sheboygan, WI 1922-30

North Holland (rural Holland), MI 1930-42

US Army (US and European Theater) 1942-1945

Holland, MI (WTS) 1946-1949

Palmyra, NY 1949-51

Kalamazoo, MI 1951-55

Grandville, MI 1955-61

Hingham, WI 1961-65

Des Moines, IA 1965-70

South Holland, IL 1970-85

Orange, CA 1985-1993

641 Maple Creek Dr., Holland, MI
1993-

Initial Contact Form

John Maassen - p. 2

Occupational History (list all occupations chronologically, noting places of work, the type of work done there and the approximate salary):

Summer of 1933 - Worked as farmhand on uncle's NW Iowa farm for room and board
1933ff - Hoed corn, blocked sugar beets, picked strawberries, beans and pickles on rural farms near Holland.

c1938 - Sold books and Bibles door to door

1936-38 - Worked part time as clerk at Vogelzang Hardware, Holland (17.5 cents per hr.)

1938-42 - Worked part time as clerk at Lokker-Rutgers Clothing Store, Holland (35 cents per hr?)

College summers: Packed radio cabinets at Baker Furniture; Sorted pickles at Heinz Pickle station north of Holland.

1942-45 - US Army enlisted man radio operator.

1949-52 - Pastor, Reformed Church, Palmyra, NY

1952-55 - Pastor, Fourth Reformed Church, Kalamazoo, MI

1955-61 - Founding pastor, Zion Reformed Church, Grandville, MI

1961-65 - Pastor, Reformed Church, Hingham, WI

1965-70 - Founding Pastor, Calvary Reformed Church, Des Moines, IA

1970-85 - Executive, Regional Synod of Mid-America, Reformed Church in America

1985-93 - Pastoral Staff Crystal Cathedral (RCA), Garden Grove, CA

1993- - Retired

Membership in Clubs and Organizations:

Various denominational boards and agencies

Rotary Club 1955-61

Board of Trustees Hope College (on two occasions)

Hope's Academy for Senior Professionals (HASP) 1993- present. Past chair of Monthly Program Committee

Evergreen Commons - 1993-