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Steffens, Margaret Oral History Interview: General Holland History

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Oral History Interview
Interviewee: Margaret Steffens
Interviewer: Larry J. Wagenaar
August 25, 1998

LW: I'm here with Margaret Steffens on August 25, 1998, with archivist Larry Wagenaar. We're just going to have a conversation and just talk a little bit. You were telling me about when you first moved out here.

MS: Yes.

LW: Tell me again about when you first moved out here.

MS: It was 1926. We came out here and there was just sand, no lawn around our property or shrubbery or anything. We came out for the summer; there was no electricity.

LW: You said you had to wait ten years before electricity came out to the lakeshore?

MS: When Consumers Power came through. So we had lamps and that worked very well, but we had a gasoline engine, so we could pump our water, which we've always had to pump out here. We still have to do that.

LW: Were there any other cottages out here at that time?

MS: This one was built later. This one was built later.

LW: Two on either side.

MS: But there was one, two cottages over, and there was one, two cottages this way, and other ones along the lakeshore that were here before we came. It was developed, I think, around the early 1920s, maybe even before we came out here. Not all the property was occupied, but a lot of it was at that time.

LW: So when you first moved out here, Getz Farm was still operating.

MS: Was very busy. You could buy flowers there in the summertime and vegetables. My brother was at a Grand Rapids YMCA camp at Barlow Lake, called Manitoulin, and we'd go to see him. He said to my mother, "I'm so tired of canned vegetables." So, the next time we were going, we went over to Lakewood Farm and bought a bushel of beans. A couple times, I think, we bought things. I imagine the cook was pretty upset because he had to prepare all those vegetables. Yet, "I'm so weary of vegetables and things out of a can!" So we provided at least a vegetable a couple of times. But you could buy lovely flowers there and very nice vegetables.

LW: Any other memories of the farm?

MS: There were lots of people on weekends and particularly on a Sunday afternoon. We would go to church and coming home from the church service about noon or shortly after noon; it was difficult to drive that distance where the farm was. So, many times we would take the road which is now Riley Street—it was just a dirt road and not very good—but we would take that to avoid all the confusion in the Lakewood Farm area. They first put in a cement driveway, which just care of one car, so when you met somebody you had to get off the pavement.

LW: How far out did that go? Was it all the way from River to Lakewood Farm?

MS: Yes, it did. When they built it, it did, but it was just for one car. Very small, narrow area.

LW: And that's how you normally came out, except on Sundays?

MS: On Sundays when it was very, very busy—weekends were very busy, particularly on Saturday...well, I think even more on Sunday—so we'd take this road, which is now Riley Street and it was very, very difficult.

LW: Was Lakeshore paved at that time?

MS: No, it was a dirt road for a long time. We were a rural route number. I think we were Rural Route 4 in our mail.

LW: Now, south of the farm toward Ottawa Beach, wasn't that sort of a divided little road? Because I remember remnants when I was growing up of asphalt on either side; it was kind of a boulevard type of thing.

MS: Yes, and there weren't as many cottages, of course, as there are now. There were some. There were cottages along the road at Ottawa Beach, perhaps even before there were as many cottages in this area. It continued up the road to the north after Ottawa Beach was developed.

LW: You probably remember the Ottawa Beach Hotel then.

MS: Oh, yes, and I remember the Ottawa Beach Hotel very well. We would go out and walk the sidewalks sometimes, the boardwalk along the hotel. If you happened to be there on a Saturday night at that time, before the dinner, you could watch the people from the city, particularly the women, promenading with their nice dinner gowns on. A very, very attractive place to visit. My father was assistant cashier at the First State Bank, and he got to know a number of people who were here in the summertime. When they would come in, they would always like to have Mr. Westveer wait on them. So, we got to know the manager at the Ottawa Beach Hotel. So, we used to go there quite often on a weekend, particularly on a Sunday for dinner. It was a beautiful hotel and had very nice meals. Then one night it caught fire and that was the end of the Ottawa Beach Hotel, but it was a popular place, very attractive and very nice food.

LW: And the Macatawa Hotel was just across the...

MS: Across the bay. That was destroyed—not by fire—but that was taken down.

LW: Yes, tore down.

MS: I think there were three fires at Macatawa. One time I remember fifty cottages burned at one time. There were many, many cottages there. I never did know the exact number, but there were very serious fires. I think there were three of them, in which a number of cottages were burned.

LW: Now, you grew up in Holland yourself, right?

MS: Yes, I've lived here all my life.

LW: Where did you grow up in Holland?

MS: I lived at 318 Central Avenue, where I was born, and that's the second house from 13th Street on Central Avenue. There's a row of red brick houses that were built by my great-grandfather. I lived in the second one from 13th Street, facing Central Avenue. I lived there until I was eight years old. My parents had built a home on West 11th Street, and I lived there the rest of the time until I was _____.

LW: Out toward Kollen Park?

MS: No, near Washington School. We lived a half a block from Washington School on West 11th Street, it was Maple Avenue School when I attended, and it was a run-down, poor building, very unattractive. But we managed to be educated.

LW: What was Holland like when you were a kid?

MS: I was thinking one day when we were talking about living in Holland, living in one place all your life. When I was young, maybe ten years old, and my mother would send me downtown on an errand or I went down to do something, I knew all the people I met, not

all of them, but most of them. Now I can go downtown and not meet a soul I know.

That's a difference.

LW: Of course, the whole tenor of the community was different.

MS: Oh, yes.

LW: Very conservative and pretty small-townish.

MS: And that's how I was brought up, very conservative, and I think I brought my children up the same way. I didn't know I was doing that, but I discovered that when they told me about some things that made me aware of the fact that I was too conservative.

LW: What have they told you?

MS: Well, my son, when he was eighteen years old, before he finished high school, we thought it was that he get his college courses in foreign language. So he took his two years of German after his junior in high school and after his senior year in high school, and when he entered Hope College, he had finished his language requirements. Then we thought it would be real nice if he went to the Vienna Summer School. And he did. He left in June and they were gone all summer. He left with a group of boys, someone had a car and they drove to Montreal where they boarded the ship for Europe. This was before we had all the transportation by air. And he was gone all summer. He traveled before summer school; he traveled after summer school. He came home and we talked about his trip on the way home. We met them. We went down to meet them with our daughter in Montreal on his return trip. When we were home one day, he was sitting in the living room and I went in to talk to him. We talked a great deal about the trip, but there were some definite things I asked him. He looked at me and he said, "I learned one thing when

I went on this trip to Europe this summer.” I said, “What was that?” He said, “I’ve been overprotected.” What do you suppose that meant? This conservative mother.

LW: (laughs) How many children do you have?

MS: I have Henry, who lives in Midland, with Dow Chemical over thirty years. I have a daughter. That’s Henry Westveer. My family name is Westveer. My daughter lives in France. She married a Frenchman, that’s how she landed there. She’s a teacher in three schools in Paris, which are college level. They’re private schools. She teaches public relations, and I think she teaches some courses in American living and things like that. She has some very fine students. She’s very interested in students, very interesting and very interested in this country and what we do and, of course, we’re just as interested in what they do.

LW: What does your son do for Dow?

MS: He was, for many years, in different departments, and then he ended his really active part in the department which they did all their advertising. He used to take material, lots of times to Las Vegas, to advertise Dow in great convention places. Then he finished that, and now he’s in a department which examines all the material that is published against Dow, the company. I guess it’s tremendous. It all goes in the computer. I think there are 25 people that work at that. (tape malfunction) His wife also works at Dow; she was a Hope College science major...

[Tape malfunction]

[interview continues]

LW: You were telling me about meeting your husband.

MS: Yes. He spent his first years of school at Van Raalte Elementary School and I was at an elementary school which is now Washington School, it was Maple Avenue Elementary School. He was a year ahead of me in high school and, of course, in college. He was a football player; he majored in math. After we were married, he sat down one day and said, "I'll teach you accounting." I said, "I listened to all you told me, and I don't understand you. Why don't you do it?" So, thank goodness he did. I can keep track of where we spend our money and pay bills, and that's your accounting. I did not do it. He used to tell me there were shortcuts in math, and I said I had never heard of shortcuts. He knew all the shortcuts of math and figuring things out. So, that was fine, we divided that work up in our house—he took care of that and I took care of some of the other things—so we got along just fine. He graduated from Hope College in 1926, and then he spent two years at Northwestern doing graduate work. He's an accountant, he worked in that field. Neither one of us got a job the first year we were out of college. Finally, he went out and looked for a job and the high school north of Grand Rapids...Rockford, I should remember, I was there for two years. When he came home he called me up and said they wanted a high school teacher in Rockford High School. He said, "I went to apply for the teaching and the football coach. I applied for that, but they said they'd pay me less than..." he was working at People State Bank. "They pay less than I'm getting at the People State Bank, so I'm not going to take it." So, I went over and I interviewed all the members of the board and the superintendent and the principal of the high school, and I got the job. I taught there for 2 years—I taught English, I taught journalism, and I taught speech.

LW: You had graduated from Hope with an education degree?

MS: No, I was at Hope College for two years. I wanted to do speech work, and there wasn't any training for me at Hope College. My parents took us on some very interesting trips when we were young. One was, after 2 years at Hope College, they took my brother and I on a Burnington Railroad conducted tour. It left from Chicago, and there were only 19 people on the tour. We were the only family from Holland. The rest of the people were all from Chicago. We visited the Black Hills, Yellowstone, and Glacier Park. We had wonderful service on the train, excellent meals, and a real fine tour. On the tour was a family like ours, a daughter in college and a son in high school. I found out that she was at Northwestern University, and I said, "I'm very interested in going to Northwestern University." She said, "You are?" I told her why; I wanted to go into speech work. I didn't have any training like that at Hope College, but my mother. So I visited with her and she said, "I lived in the freshmen dormitory my freshmen year, but I'm going to live in the sorority house. You possibly could get a room there," because this was the beginning of the Depression and there were so many Chicago and Evanston girls that stayed at home rather than pay the fee of living in a sorority house. So on our trip back, this nice trip out west, my mother and I went out to Evanston to interview the registrar at the school of speech. I don't know yet how in the dickens we found our way out there, but we did. Got on the elevated train, and got out at the right place. I told her what my training was at Hope College, and she said, "You can't come and do that in two years. You can't possibly do it, but you could do it in two years and two summer schools." And so she told me to have my credits sent in, so I went to Hope College when I returned home. I visited with this girl, who was a student, and I had a very good time with her. Then I came home and went to the registrar and asked him to send my credits in, which

he did. I was accepted, and this was August. Now, you don't apply to the universities you want to go to in August, you apply long in advance. This is August and I applied, and I had to take a special exam and I was admitted. I did live in the sorority house; I did join the sorority and I lived there. So I spent three years at this school. Instead of 2 years and 2 summer schools, I spent three years, and I enjoyed it very much. My mother said to me several times, "Wouldn't you like to go to the University of Michigan?" I said, "No, I'd like to go to Northwestern." I was very pleased with my education, but I couldn't get a job. So I was home in Holland doing volunteer work for one whole year until I found the job.

LW: When did you marry your husband?

MS: We were married in 1936.

LW: So you had gone to Northwestern, come back?

MS: Yes.

LW: Was it after you worked in Rockford?

MS: Oh yes, I taught in Rockford two years, and then we came back. We were married in 1936, in April. Henry was working at the People State Bank. The bank had already opened; his father was a stockholder, and he managed to get a job there.

LW: (laughs) Amazing how that works.

MS: I was teaching, and I don't remember what he got in salary, but it wasn't very much when he was working at the bank. I taught the first year at Rockford High School for \$720 for nine months. You couldn't do very much, and things weren't expensive. My room—I lived in a home in Rockford—was \$3.00 a week, and my meals were \$3.00 a week. I didn't make very much, \$720 didn't go very far. I remember my second year, I was

senior class advisor, and so senior class was always in my room. The second year, I enjoyed that class more than I did the first one, for some reason; I just felt more interested in these students. I wanted to buy a suit. So, I went down and bought this suit, and I didn't have anything else, money, to put with it. Well, the students must have seen my suit, so when I finished this year, they gave me a very handsome handbag, which matched my suit. I was very pleased. They were in my room every morning to get their books that, of course, were kept in my room. They were very nice students, and I enjoyed them. I went back three times to high school reunions at Rockford High School. Since I've been there, they have two beautiful new high schools. But I went to the old building, go for lunch. I wouldn't go back now, because I don't think the same students are there, probably, that I knew. But I went back...it wasn't too long that I had left, so I still remember the students very well.

LW: So, did you quit your job when you got married?

MS: Yes. I taught two years in Rockford, and then I was married in 1936. Then Mr. Riemersma, principal of the high school, do you remember him?

LW: I've heard of him.

MS: Oh, you're much younger. He called me one day and said, "Margaret, could you come over and teach for us? Miss Hoekje," who was one of the other teachers, "is ill and we need a substitute." Miss Hoekje taught Bible and journalism, and I had taught journalism and helped with the school paper in Rockford, so that was easy. But I never taught Bible. He said she had very good lesson plans, and I said, "Yes, I know, I took her course in high school." So I taught there for \$600. I didn't teach every day—she would be ill, and then she would come back. Then at the end of the school year, she finally had to retire.

My total salary for that year was \$600. We didn't have an automobile when we were married; we didn't have when I was teaching. When I finished teaching, I said, "Henry, we're going to have an automobile." He said, "We are?" And I said, "Yes, with the money I made teaching at Holland High School. So, we went out looking for cars, and the car we bought was a brand new Plymouth, \$600. The Chevrolet was \$605, so we bought the Plymouth for \$600. That was our first car. Our children don't understand this, because when they were growing up and in high school, we had two cars, but we did without a car for a whole year after we were married. We borrowed our parent's car once in a while, and most of the time we walked.

LW: Where were you living after you were married?

MS: We lived in a little house on Washington and 14th Street, on the southeast corner of the street. We lived there for eighteen years. The reason we lived there was to save money. It wasn't an expensive place to live. So we saved money, and then one day, Henry said, "Let's remodel this place." And I said, "No, I would like something better." So one day he came home and he said, "Hope College is looking at a house on West 12th Street, just beyond the library. It's a very nice house, and I went through with Dr. Lubbers, but the college is not going to buy it." He said, "I'd like to have you go through. I'd like to have you to see the house." So, I did, and we bought it.

LW: Which house is this?

MS: This house was built by Frank Duffy, who ran a business in Holland, and it's on the north side of the street.

LW: On 12th Street?

MS: On 12th Street. It's a cream colored brick house, about half a block from River. We lived there eighteen years. When my husband retired, we decided to live out here. We sold our house in town and I live here now. Of course, it's been over twenty years. We remodeled it; it was a summer cottage.

LW: You had to winterize it, I would imagine.

MS: Yes. My father died in the 1950s, and after he died, my mother said, "I am going to sell the cottage. I don't want to take care of it anymore." I made the best speech of my life—I said, "Why don't you give it to me?" and she said okay. I said "You can come out here anytime. I'll come and get you. I'll drive you out here. I'll come and get you. You can stay anytime you want to, as long as you want to." And she said alright. So then when Henry retired, we remodeled it into a permanent home. But we never spend a winter here, even now I don't.

LW: Where do you spend your winters now?

MS: I spend my winters at Port Hills, in Grand Rapids, which is a very nice retirement center. I go back to that place in October and I come here in June. I have four grandchildren.

LW: Your husband had worked for Hope for quite a number of years.

MS: Yes. Henry finished working in the bank, and then he came home one day and he said, "I am going to work for the Michigan Unemployment Compensation Commission." I think its name is a little bit different now. He said, "I've been hired to do that through a man who asked me to apply, and I did." He went to Detroit for his instruction, and his instruction was all given to him by a professor at the University of Michigan. He said to me, "It was excellent, just excellent." Well, he was an accountant

_____ , so he had to go out and help people figure their

taxes—something entirely new—so there were a lot of problems. I remember there was a man in Holland called one day and said, “Would you help me?” and Henry said, “Sure, that’s I’m for, to help you.” So when he finished helping him—he told him how to do it—and finished helping him and he said, “I’d like to pay you,” and Henry said, “You can’t pay me, I work for the State of Michigan. You cannot pay me.” He said, “This is why I am hired to help people, who need help.” So he said, “You have storm windows at your house?” and Henry said, “No.” He said, “I’ll make storm windows for your house.” So he made storm windows for every window in our house. Mr. Smeenge was his name. He made us storm windows to keep our house warm in the wintertime. (laughter)

LW: When did he go to work for Hope?

MS: I think it was in 1947. He started, as I recall, in February. He came home one day, and he said...the man who was the previous treasurer was, I think, in his 70s. He came home one day and said they had a group of GIs on campus. I think there were 50. I’m not sure that I have that right—maybe there were more—and they put up temporary housing for them, which never looked very attractive. But they were there and they turned the gymnasium...the old gymnasium was there...and they used the gymnasium as their dining room and built a kitchen under the stage. They took care of them that way. Henry came home one day and said, “There had been no accounts set up for those GIs. I’ve just discovered that. I can’t do that during my working hours; I have plenty of work to do during the working hours.” So he went back every night until he had daily accounts set up. One night when he came home, I said, “Is there anybody else there that works at night?” He said, “Yes. There is another man there, his name is Hollenbach. He’s there too. We usually finish at the same time, and then we walk home together.” They lived

on 18th street and Pine, and we lived on Washington and 14th Street, so they would walk together so far and then they would separate to go to their own homes. He enjoyed his work with Dr. Lubbers; Dr. Lubbers was wonderful. When we were students, he was a professor of English at Hope College. He was the kind of professor that impresses, because he could recite poetry without looking in the book. (laughs) He had been a three-year missionary in India, and he told us some of his experiences. He recited poetry, and he was a fascinating teacher. He was president of Hope College when Henry came, and he said, "I learned more from Dr. Lubbers than any other professor, particularly in business and running the college, than I ever learned from anybody. He is a wonderful person to work with." He came in one day and said, "Henry, we have to get more students at this college. When I was a student at Hope College, there were four hundred students. We have to get more students, and if we get a lot more students, we have to have housing." So, he said, "We're going out to get housing; we're going to do this," which they did. They borrowed the money, and the first person alone, I don't remember the company but it was an insurance company, loaned them money and they built Durfee Hall. Then they loaned money from the government and built Kollen Hall. I don't know anything about after that, but that is what they did when Henry was there. I guess he must have told Henry he had to go out and find the money. So they borrowed money from the government, and he also borrowed money from the Illinois-Continental Illinois Bank, where he used to make trips there frequently. One time he said, "I'd like to have you go with me. They're going to entertain us for lunch today in..."...a certain dining room occupied by the officials of the bank. So we did that. One of the vice presidents stopped to see us one time when he was traveling through Michigan, so we got to know

those people. Then Henry found a lawyer, he had to have a lawyer; I don't know how he found this lawyer in Chicago, maybe it was suggested to him. Well, they got to be friends of ours. We visited them in Western Springs and they visited us here at the lake. Then we had an engineer that worked for the government—came over to inspect things and moved into our house, and told me one time almost how to bring up my children. I felt like saying to him, “You have your department and I have mine!” (laughs). But we met very interesting people. The one couple that was the attorney was in Western Springs usually invited us to their home there, so we had a very nice time. But they put up Kollen Hall and it's been a success.

LW: When did your husband retire from Hope?

MS: He was sixty years old, he didn't feel well. He had high blood pressure. I said, “Henry, I think you better retire. If you'd have a stroke or a heart attack, it's all over.” He said, “I don't want to sit at home all winter.” And I said, “What do you want to do?” He said, “I want to play golf,” and I said, “That's fine.” So we either went to Florida or California, mostly Florida, because it's so much easier to drive. We went to Vero Beach, Florida, where we made friends, and we went to Leisure World in California, where we had friends. He played, I don't know how many games of golf, but many games of golf, and I was able to entertain myself and enjoy things there and attend things that were planned for us.

LW: Do you remember what year he retired from Hope?

MS: (pauses) Well, let's see...

LW: I can find that elsewhere, but...

MS: He was born 1908, and I was born 1909. He retired when he was sixty.

LW: Okay, so 1968. And when did he pass away?

MS: He died November 20th, 1992. And he died right here. Did you know John Hollenbach?

LW: Yes, I did.

MS: Well, John Hollenbach and Henry one time decided that when they were going to die, they were going to die at home. They both did the same thing. I couldn't take care of him alone; I wasn't a nurse. So he was right here, when he could no longer go out and play golf, he stayed at home. Finally he had to take to his bed, so we put up a bed in the living room. I couldn't change things in the bedroom furniture; I didn't know what to do, so we changed things in the living room so he was here. It was probably in October when he could no longer get around. He has some very dear friends in Holland, there were seven of them, and they came here every single week to see him. Those are my best friends. They are very dear, very wonderful to come and see Henry every week while he could no longer...

LW: Who were his closest friends?

MS: John and Winnie Hollenbach came, Nell Wichers came. Nell Wichers and Bill were good friends of ours, and when Henry was at the College, Bill was on the Board of Trustees. In the wintertime—of course, we weren't here in the summer—but in the wintertime, they used to call up and say let's take a walk. In the wintertime, they'd walk around the campus and talk about what they were going to do about this school, and what the school needed. I wasn't with them. Then Henry would come home and sometimes Bill would stop over, and Henry would fix hot buttered rum. Have you ever had hot buttered rum?

LW: (laughs)

MS: Oh, it was delicious! That's what we've had to get warm. Well, they were walking in the snow! They always walked around the campus and talk about the campus. Bill was on the Board of Trustees at that time, when Henry was treasurer. So they came over. Bill died first, and poor Nell came over, she had arthritis so bad, I can still see her walking up this walk to our house. Then Julia Bolhuis, when we lived on South Shore Drive, and Nell Wichers, and Leon and Virginia Bosch. Leon was a student at Hope College, and I think he was...I'm not sure if he was in Henry's class, but they were friends in college and they've been good friends all those years. Of course, I learned to know them when we were married. So those are my best friends, and they came regularly to see him, and they still are my best friends. Leon Bosch was ninety last year. Did you know him?

LW: No, I don't. I've met him, but...

MS: He was a professor at Northwestern University, in the school of business, for forty years, I think. They retired out to California, and we went out to California to visit them, and they now live in Freedom Village, so we see them quite often. Henry had another good friend, Otto Yntema; they were all friends at Hope College, and they all belonged to the fraternity, the Fraters.

LW: He was a Frater?

MS: They were all Fraters. They were all good friends, so I got to know a number of the Fraters after I married Henry.

LW: I wouldn't doubt that.

MS: And I was singing. At that time when Henry was at the college, we used to entertain students quite often on Sunday, for Sunday dinner. There was one student; he was a

student at Hope College that still talks to me about how nice it was that we had them over for Sunday dinner. I don't remember... this person I see once in a while, but, of course, some of them I don't see. Henry did the cooking; he was a better cook than I was.

LW: Oh, really? (laughs)

MS: Oh, yes, he was an excellent cook. I didn't know how to cook when I was married. I had a very competent mother; she didn't want any help, so I didn't know how. He did, so I let him cook, in particular for the Sunday dinner for the students, he'd cook the dinner. It was very well done, so I let him do that. He had a good time doing that, and he enjoyed having students over. I said to him, "Where'd you learn how to cook?" when we were married, because he knew much more about it than I did. He said, "My mother had a stroke the first two years I was at college. She couldn't do anything for two years, so we all had to do something." And he said, "I'm not going to run the vacuum; I'll cook." So he said, "I did the cooking." And he was a very good cook.

LW: How many children were in his family?

MS: He had a sister, a younger sister. He was the oldest in the family. So he cooked many good meals for us. Now I cooked too, of course. He was too busy to cook when he was working at Hope College.

LW: Is his sister still living?

MS: No, his sister died after she was married and had her first baby, so he's very fond of his niece, who was the child that survived. She's still very good to me; she bought our house on West 12th Street. She said, "If you ever think of selling this house, we'd like first chance." So, we were in Florida one year, and a real estate agent called us and said, "I have a buyer for your house." Henry said, "I didn't put it up for sale," but he said, "I

have a buyer.” So he said to me, “Well, what do I do?” I said, “Your niece said if you ever sell the house, give us first chance. You better call her.” So he called her and she said, “Yes, we’re interested in your house.” So, they bought our house. We found down there, the new president of the seminary, I’ve forgotten which president it was...

[End of side one]

MS: ...Family Portraits, written by Margaret Westveer Steffens. This is the story of my mother, Maude Marsilje Westveer and of her family, and I dedicate it to my grandchildren: Marie Pierre Robert, Anne Elizabeth Robert, David John Steffens, and Robert William Steffens. “Not in grief, or regret merely, that rather with the love that is almost joy. I think of them, of whom I am a part, as they are of me.” And I read that

_____.

LW: Is this something that you had written before?

MS: I wrote this for my...after...

LW: Can I take a peek before you...

MS: Sure.

LW: I’m wondering if maybe I can just borrow this and Xerox it. Would that be alright?

MS: Yes, if you want to do that. Am I still on this machine?

LW: Yes, it’s running, but that’s alright. My staff transcribes these tapes, and if it’s already typed up, there’s no reason to do that a second time. So, if you don’t mind me borrowing it for a few days...

MS: No, you can borrow it.

LW: I’ll Xerox it and then bring the original back to you.

- MS: See, I wanted to give this copy to the Herrick Public Library because I was on the board there for fifteen years, and that's why I wanted them to have this copy, but you could make a copy if you wanted to do that.
- LW: Yes, if that's alright, that's what I'll do. I'll take it back and we'll make a copy of it.
- MS: I wanted my children and my grandchildren to know where they came from, what was their family, and that's why I did it. You don't want me to read it?
- LW: I think it would be redundant. If I copy it, there's no reason to put it on the tape.
- MS: I like to read.
- LW: (laughs)
- MS: Now, the photographs, I think, are identified, and they're all photographs that were in my possession. I had copies made of all these; one copy went to each child and each grandchild, and all the photographs. One of the photographs of me was taken in college.
- LW: This one here?
- MS: Yes. And this is my mother, her high school graduation picture. She graduated from Holland High School in 1897, and it was the big event in her life. She wanted to go to Hope College, but her father said, "No, you stay home to help your mother." So, she was very disappointed. She was the only one in her family—there were four children, two of them died from diphtheria when they were young—but she was the only one in her family to graduate from Holland High School. This is my mother, and this is my brother when he was a baby. There I am, I was about five years old. And this is my mother's family—this is my mother, her mother, her father, her brother Tom Marsilje, her older sister, and her younger sister.
- LW: Is your brother still living?

MS: No, he died in '72. He worked for Dow for thirty years. But it was a real event, no one else in her family graduated from Holland High School, so she was so proud. And then she later taught school. Then when I was in the fourth grade, our teacher was ill, and the principal, a friend of my mother's, called and said, "Can you come, Maude? Can you come and teach?" My mother said, "Well, I never taught the fourth grade, I taught kindergarten." She said, "You can do it." So, my mother came and taught us fractions. She brought apples to school, and she cut up the apple into parts to show us the parts, and put them together to show us the whole. That's where I learned fractions. And then she kept us all after school when I was first there. The teacher was ill, and I guess she had no discipline. She kept us all after school, and she read the list—my name was on, too—and she said, "You were all awful." We wandered around the room and did strange things, so my mother was for discipline.

LW: (laughs)

MS: So that's what she did. You know stayed after school. This is...

LW: The picture of you in your car.

MS: Yes, our first automobile, a four-cylinder Buick. You'll never believe, we drove that car—maybe not that car, but I think it was—way up north to Petoskey with our four-cylinder Buick, may not have been this model, may have been a later model, because I wasn't that small when we went up north, this is my college picture.

LW: You mentioned you had to change the tire several times on your way up to Petoskey.

MS: Oh, yes, and the roads going up, well, it took us forever. We traveled three days to get to Petoskey. The first day we'd have lunch at Ludington, we went very slowly; you couldn't go very fast, the roads were all dirt roads. They were just abominable. And we

had forest fires and we had flat tires and we had all kinds things happen, so it took forever. So we got to Ludington to the _____ Hotel for lunch, and Manistee the first night at the Chippewa Hotel. The second night we were in Traverse City at the hotel. The third night we arrived in Petoskey.

LW: Now you can do that all in a half day's drive.

MS: Yes, all that in one day. And we had no reservation. We rode around...we had this principal at school my mother had taught. Well then she said when she finished teaching that year, "We're going up north on a trip this summer. All the money I earned teaching we're going to have a trip this summer." So our destination was Petoskey and Bayview. We didn't have a reservation and the woman who was the principal went with us, and she had a reservation there because she was to meet friends. They had a summer session there—the Methodist Church. I don't know if they still do, but they had a summer session there at Bayview. They had an auditorium there when they had programs, and we use to go there—they had movies there, they had performers, somebody would sing or entertain. And either side of that auditorium were two tall, high buildings, I think they were three stories, but they were dormitories. So we got there and my mother's friend had a room reserved for her in the dormitory. My mother said, "Now maybe you can get in here," and she said, "Oh, no, I won't go in there with children, nothing but fire traps," they're about three stories high, as I recall. Well years ago, after that, we were in Petoskey, and I said to my husband—we were in Bayview and we were driving around—and I said, "I'd like to stop in Bayview and look around." He said, "You do?" and I said, "yes." He said, "Well, I'm not interested," and I said, "well, just let me off." We were at the Bayview Inn and I could walk back. So I walked down to where the auditorium

was and looked at it and looked up these buildings either side where my mother wouldn't stay because they were fire traps. I looked very carefully and everything was still there, and I looked up at the sky and I said, "Mother the buildings are still here."

LW: (laughs)

MS: Now this is my brother. I think I've identified every...this is my brother and this is my husband. He spent half his fair time fishing and smoking cigars. This is my parents on their 45th wedding anniversary. That was my first Christmas, one of my first Christmases.

LW: Wonderful. I'll get this copied and get the original back to you.

MS: I had copies made for all my children, so they all had a copy and they had the photographs.

LW: Wonderful. Thank you for taking the time to share some of this stuff with me. Any other stories that we can talk about?

MS: (laughs) I'd have to think real hard for some more stories. I've had a lot of fun. I'm 89 years-old; I've had fun all my life, I've had a good time, a wonderful education, a fine home, fine parents, a wonderful brother. They took us on lovely trips. They took us on this trip out west, they took us on a trip in the St. Lawrence, we started at Toronto, parked our car, just left it there, got on the ship, shot the rapids in a special...a pilot came on and we shot the rapids in the St. Lawrence—they don't so it anymore they told us, but they did it when we were there. We were on the ship all the time and spent a night in a hotel in Montreal, and we spent a night in the Chateau Frontenac in Quebec, which was elegant. The rest of the time we were on the ship. We went up to the Saguenay River, which flows off from the St. Lawrence as far as it was navigatable, and I think we were

on...I can't remember the number, maybe 10 days, maybe it was a little longer than that. Our parents took us on lovely trips that went out west and the one on the St. Lawrence River.

LW: What did your father do for a living?

MS: He was a banker. My father went to the Hope Preparatory department—they had a high school program, they called it Hope Prep—and he lived a block and a half from campus. So he went to that school, and when he graduated, he went to the Holland Business College, which you went to classes at night, on the corner of River and Eighth Street. He got whatever courses he was interested in, and then he got a job working in the office of the Ottawa Furniture Company, which is north on River Avenue, which makes me think that not a one of those companies are left, and there use to be five wonderful furniture companies in Holland. Then he went to the shoe company, and finally he went to the bank. He started in the First State Bank. It was founded by a group of Holland men, including my grandfather, my mother's father, Isaac Marsilje. He got to be assistant cashier; he was there forty years. He knew everybody in Holland and everybody knew him. And when I was thinking about going out to Ottawa Beach, he got to know the people that were the managers of these hotels in the area. They'd come up and always ask to be with my father—they like to do the business with him. So he knew these people. So on Sundays in the summertime we'd go to—I don't ever remember going to Macatawa, but we did go to Ottawa Beach many times and other little restaurants around, and sometimes in the wintertime we'd go to Saugatuck. There was a very nice restaurant there, and I can't remember the man's name right now. He had a restaurant downtown Saugatuck, and I can remember that his wife was a cashier and her hair was tinted with

blue, I suppose that attracted me when I was a student in high school. My father would paid sixty cents for our Sunday dinner, a piece. And it was from the first course through dessert.

LW: Wow, that's amazing.

MS: I grew up in a period where things were very inexpensive. We didn't make much money, but things were also inexpensive. So we bought our first car for \$600.

LW: That wouldn't even pay the sales tax on a car nowadays.

MS: No, so I'm astounded today at the prices of things because I lived when things were much less expensive.

LW: Of course, people are making a lot more money, too.

MS: Oh, yes, it's quite different today. I didn't make salaries like teachers get—I don't know what they have today, but it's much more I know.

LW: Yes, things are much more expensive as you said.

MS: But you see, my expenses weren't very much. I had meals in a private home at one of the mothers of the two students. They were both in school, and she served meals in her home—we had meals at the table with the family. There were three or four of us that were teachers, had our meals there for the week, then the weekends we were on our own. There wasn't very much to find to eat in Rockford, Michigan, but we got along.

LW: Did you ride the interurban very much?

MS: Yes, my mother and I used to take the interurban quite often to ride to Grand Rapids in the wintertime. If it was good weather, of course, she drove. I don't think she drove that first car I showed you, but she drove. They always had Buicks; they drove Buicks for years, and my mother learned to drive. We used to go to Grand Rapids and do shopping,

but if we couldn't shop, we'd take the interurban, if it was bad weather or if it was in the winter, so we'd take the interurban. All I knew about Grand Rapids for years—and now I live there in the wintertime—but all I knew was the shopping center downtown. I knew Steketee store Friedman Springs and a couple of others stores—Herpolshimers—that's all I knew because I never knew any other part of Grand Rapids, till I was older.

LW: (laughs)

MS: But I knew downtown, that's where we did our shopping. And the interurban was very good service. The interurban ran down 13th Street in Holland and down 8th Street, and good service, didn't take too long to get there, electric train. Then when it was good weather, my mother learned to drive the car, when we first had a car—well, maybe not the first car, but when she was quite young she learned.

LW: Was the rail line still running out to the Ottawa Beach Hotel when you young?

MS: That I don't remember. That must have been before my time because I don't remember that. There was line, I think to Saugatuck, that the interurban had.

LW: Yes, they did. Then that went belly up in '27 or something like that.

MS: Now, that copy that I gave you, I'm going to give to Herrick Library.

LW: Yes, you mentioned that.

MS: I was on the Board of the Herrick Library for fifteen years. I spent many happy times there. I came in when Mrs. Hays was the librarian, and she was the first professional librarian we ever had in Holland. She was very good, and she's the one who dreamed of having a...she dreamed about Herrick Public Library, she didn't know the name, but she had the dream that we should have a library.

LW: Were you on the board when the building was built?

MS: Yes, I was on the board. I just came on the board shortly after she arrived. She called me one day and she said, "I want to know if you would come over and see me this afternoon at my apartment." She had an apartment in a house on 11th street. She said, "I want to talk to you." I was chairman of the board then. I went over and went to her room, and she said, "I have some letters here." She didn't show me the letters, I don't know what the letters said, but she said, "We have a man interested in giving us a library. The reason I know he's interested because yesterday his builder and his architect came here to look over property and they picked a site. They came and told me." Now she said, "Will go to the city manager and tell him what this proposition is, because he sent them, I'm sure we're going to have the gift, and I don't want anyone else to pay for the property"—it took the whole block from 12th to 13th Street like it does now. And she said, "I don't want anyone else to buy it, so will you go to the city manager and make arrangements?" So I went to the city manager and talked him. We decided that whatever it cost us was worth it, because we were going to have a library. So he presented to the council and, thank goodness, the council said okay. Mr. Herrick's architect and builder came and started the library. Then we had to furnish it. Mr. Herrick did not buy the land, he put up the building. The city had to buy the land, which they did, for \$80,000 as I recall. That's why she wanted me to talk to the city manager before the land would be taken by somebody else. There were three old houses on...one house was not old—one was a nice brick house—but there were two old houses on it and they were taken down and then they began the building. I was the only member on the board who didn't have a job, I mean I took care of my home and I was a wife and mother. But I was the only one that didn't have any job outside my home. So they said, "Margaret you'll have to take over

because we can't leave our work." Much of the things, of course, were ordered, and the steel stacks were made by the Hamilton Manufacturing Company in Wisconsin, where Mrs. Hollenbach was brought up. But there were a lot of other things, and they didn't know what to do about table and chairs for the reading room. They looked at me since I didn't have any other employment except my home, and said, "You have to go find some furniture for us."

LW: (laughs)

MS: I didn't say no, but I went out hunting. And every time I walk in that library I think thank goodness those tables and chairs that I ordered are still here.

LW: (laughs)

MS: They didn't fall apart or nothing happened to them, they're still here.

LW: That's right.

MS: They were made by a firm in Grand Rapids that I luckily found some way, and they were made to order for a certain size and certain way for the reading room. So we had a good time. I went out with Hazel Hayes several times to visit new libraries to get ideas. We did that quite often.

LW: What year was the library finished?

MS: The beginning of 1960, it was '60 or '61, the building was dedicated. We had many, many meetings to talk over what we wanted to do, what should be done in the library, what should be in the library. Of course, the important part of the library was the reading room and the children's reading room. In our board meetings, we projected this for 20 years, but by 10 years the thing was all filled up—the whole was used and there wasn't

any extra room. After 10 years, we never knew it would be used so well, so fast. So the new building, of course, was most necessary, the new addition.

LW: Yes, it's in the middle of construction right now.

MS: Yes, it's in construction now. It's wonderful that we have it. The library, ever since it was new, it's been so well used. At first we just served the city of Holland; later, you see, came the townships, which, of course, increased the use of the library. Then when I was first on the board, Mrs. Hayes said to me, "Margaret, the American Library Association has a winter meeting, and you should join the association and you should go the winter meeting because they have excellent meetings for board members." So I did. We always had the Edgewater Beach Hotel. in the winter time. We'd go in January, and I'd go to all the meetings that were arranged. We'd also go to the general meetings of the library association and attend their big dinner. But we did go to the meetings that were planned just for the trustees. They were very interesting and I met many fine trustees and got ideas. Then I was in Detroit one year, and the American Library Trustee Association made a gift each year to an outstanding trustee, and I won it one year. The people in Holland nominated me and I received that. And then, several years afterwards, I was chairman of the committee to make the award. It was in Kansas City, and I said to Henry, "I hope you'll go with me," and he said, "Yes, I will." So we went to Kansas City and we had a very nice time. I made the presentation after the dinner and the general meeting, and if you did that if you were invited—and I was recipient once and made the gift once—so twice I was invited to the president's dinner. You bought yourself a nice gown—it was all formal—to attend the dinner, and this time my husband was with me. I sat next to a man who was a director of a scientific library in Kansas City. I said, "I've

never been in a library like that.” He said, “If you want to come over tomorrow morning with your husband, I will take you through our library.” Well, it was very interesting. It was made for...you know the people who make the cards, the famous greeting cards?

LW: Hallmark?

MS: Hallmark. This was a gift from the Hallmark’s family, the man and his wife and they had no children, so they said the building would be named by the person who died first—it was Lydia, I think her name was, named for the woman, the wife in the family, who died first. It was very interesting, they had a little corner with some furniture in from there home—a little fireplace and things like that, so it was very interesting. I had never been in a library like that before, so it was interesting to see that. Then I served on State of Michigan Library Board for 15 years. I belonged to the Michigan Library Association, I was on that board as trustee _____ chairman, and one day one of the members of the State of Michigan Library Board came to me and said, “Margaret, we’d like to have you on our board.” I said, “How do you get on the board?” He said, “You have to be appointed by the governor.” I said okay and went home and said, “Henry, the State of Michigan Library Board members want me to be a member, and you have to have the governor appoint you. I don’t know how to do that.” He said, “I’ll take care of it.” I don’t know what he did, but I was appointed to the board.

LW: (laughs)

MS: And every month I’d get in my car and drive up to a board meeting in Lansing—had the board meetings in the morning and part of the afternoon. There were two women on the board—I was one and then there was another woman from someplace north of Grand Rapids, quite a distance. So they told us that they didn’t think we liked to drive in the

winter, and we didn't; maybe we could come the day before in the afternoon, if we wanted to, spend the night, and then we'd be there in the morning for the board meeting and we'd go home, of course, when the board was over, usually in early afternoon. So I used to do that. I did that for ten years—traveled to Lansing to the board meeting. They said to me one time, "Margaret, how do you get here?", the people who lived in Lansing. So I told them and they laughed and laughed and laughed. I went around the Capitol Building and finally got to the street that the library was on. The library in Michigan, the State Library was burned at one time and that building was destroyed and they were in a temporary building for years. It wasn't very nice, but it was just what it was. Of course, now it's very beautiful. So they said, "How do you get here?" Later I got there and they all laughed. They said, "That's not the way to do it." I said, "Well, how do you do it?" They told me shortcuts, so after that I learned shortcuts on how to get to the state library. (laughs) I went there every month for 10 years to board meetings, and they were very interesting. I enjoyed meeting people on that board, and I enjoyed doing that very much. And then I went to all the American Library Trustee Associate annual meetings. There was a mid-winter meeting, and then they had a big convention in the summer. Usually I attended those meetings, and I had a very good time.

LW: When did you go off the state board?

MS: I don't remember when I did. I just served the 10 years, and then we were spending our winters away.

LW: That's right.

MS: So I said, "I can't do this and not...I can't attend board meetings and be a..."

LW: An active trustee, sure.

MS: So I resigned. But it was very nice and I met very interesting people.

LW: Was your husband active politically?

MS: Yes, he was on the city council for 10 years. One day he decided that he was going to run for mayor. Is this being recorded?

LW: Yes, it's alright.

MS: One day he decided he was going to run for mayor and he talked about it and talked about it. He was on the council for 10 years and he wanted to be mayor. I said, "Henry, I don't think you should do that." "Why not?" "Well," I said, "in the first place, your business is with Hope College and that must take all your time." "Yes, it does." I said, "If you have to cut a ribbon someplace and you're supposed to be in your office, I don't think you should do it. So he didn't." If he'd been retired, that would have been different. But I thought his first obligation was to Hope College and to be there in the office and take care of those things, and you're bound to be asked to do things when you're the mayor of the city. I suppose he was disappointed, but...

LW: What things happened in the city while he was on the council, do you remember? Any big things?

MS: Well we built the Herrick Library. He ran for 10 years, but he never campaigned. Our kids used to sit by the radio when an announcement would come in from the Holland station who was winning the members of the council you know, and the kids would say, "Oh, I hope he makes it."

LW: (laughs)

MS: But he never campaigned. We had a great deal of trouble in Holland with Harry Harrington—he was mayor—and he was the mayor who appointed me. He and his wife

were friends with my parents, and he appointed me to the library board. He got the wild idea that he was going to put a building on 12th Street, right next to our house—a county building—and they were going to house different offices there. Now, we had a very nice home on 12th Street and the area was very nice. Two or three women that lived there on that block came to our door and said, “Mr. Steffens, we don’t like this business about having this,” – they were going to put a jail in that building. “We don’t like this, can you help us?” and he said, “Yes.” And that’s how he got on the city council. He ran for the council and fought for that. We got Mr. Harrington straightened out, and we never had an office building put up next to our home, or any office building at all put up in that block.

LW: So that issue is why he ran?

MS: Yes. Harry Harrington nearly died from a heart attack, so we didn’t have to worry about that anymore. But it was a very disturbing thing to think of, putting a jail and an office building in a nice residential part of the city. I don’t know why he wanted to do that; I have no idea.

LW: Yes, that’s strange.

MS: I think the city is a great deal different than when I was young because there are more people that are of different backgrounds, which is a good thing. I used to think, when I was young, I figured this out by myself one day, that it was a good thing these people came in here, because Nell Wichers told me one time about a group of islands on the North Sea, and she said, “Margaret, they don’t want anybody else in there, and they’re _____.” You have to have new ideas. People come in, and I’m sure that’s why they succeeded. We’ve grown to be an interesting community; we still are

conservative, I'm sure, but we're an interesting community because we have different people.

LW: That's right.

MS: All the churches started being organized in the Dutch language, and Hope Church was established after Dr. Van Raalte started Hope College—they had to have a faculty. Well, there was no faculty here, most of them came from the East. So they established Hope Reformed Church, which was in English in the beginning. And that was for faculty and other people. And there were other people who came in the community who were not Dutch. My mother said one time her mother said “Watch those Yankees, watch them.” “I don't what you were supposed to watch,” she told me, “but she said, ‘watch those Yankees!’” Those Yankees were the ones that helped this community grow and develop to what it is, I'm sure.

LW: What church do you go to?

MS: Third Reformed Church.

LW: Did you grow up there?

MS: Baptized there, grew up there and taught Sunday school there when I was in college. I had a dear little group of girls. They were all divided into groups and we sat in little circles and had our Sunday school lesson. I was telling about Noah's Ark, and I was telling about all the animals that went in—I talked quite awhile on this story—and one dear little blonde in my class, they were all five years old, looked at me when I finished and she said, “Is it true?”

LW: (Laughs)

MS: Oh, I had a good time.

LW: Do you get to church most every Sunday?

MS: Not now, I'm not very good at going every Sunday. I still support the church, and I still do attend. But in Grand Rapids, I started when I was younger...it'll be five years in October that I went to Grand Rapids, and so I'm not as fast and running around as much as I did. We have Vesper service every Sunday afternoon at four o'clock; I usually go to that. But if I go on the bus—the bus goes to many churches—and I first did that. I think it went to five churches, so you leave at ten after nine and you don't get back till twenty minutes to one because they have to go deliver all the people then go back and pick them all up. So I don't often take that anymore.

LW: Well, my wife just joined the staff of Third Reformed Church in June.

MS: Did she?

LW: She's the director of children's ministries up there.

MS: Oh, in Zeeland?

LW: No, in Holland.

MS: I was going to say that there isn't any church like that in Zeeland. What is she going to do?

LW: She's director of children's ministries.

MS: Children ministries.

LW: Works with the children.

MS: Our assistant pastor is going to leave and go to Hope Church.

LW: Yes, she preached her farewell sermon last Sunday.

MS: I was just astonished when I read that, they sent every member a letter.

LW: The reason I asked if you had been there recently was because my wife did the liturgy two or three weeks ago. So I was wondering if you've met her.

MS: No, I've been there, but I haven't been there every Sunday.

LW: So you'll probably meet my wife one of these weeks.

MS: Yes, I'd like to. I'll have to get there some Sunday and go around and meet people. Of course, when I was young and growing up, I knew everybody in the church. Now I go and there are maybe five people I know when I walk out. It's entirely different, it's a strange feeling when you've been in something all these years. Of course, it's a different congregation, people I knew are gone, most of the people I knew—not all, but a great number of them.

LW: Of course, a number of people are still that you know—Nell Wichers is still there and a number of others.

MS: But there are about five. One Sunday I walked out and I thought, "Now, I've talked to five people." That's horrific; I used to know everybody. I was quite shocked. But, of course, I'm 89 years old. How could I not expect that to happen? So, I'd like to live to be 90. Why, I don't know, ninety sounds like an interesting...

LW: You want to see the year 2000 turn over.

MS: Well, that's a pretty long from now. I don't think I'll have pep to do all of that.

LW: Well, thank you for sharing some stories with me, I appreciate that. I'll get this copied and bring the original back to you.

[End of interview]