

HERB MARSILJE

INTERVIEW: 25 JUNE 1986

HM worked in the Home Office for about one year as a traveling auditor. He also worked in sales in the St. Louis branch for three years. He returned to Holland in January 1935.

His grandfather Isaac was an early investor as well as secretary, and his father Tom Marsilje was on the Board of Directors in the 1930s. JP Kolla's wife Caroline was his wife's great aunt. His sister-in-law is Katie Murvenne (husband Art).

ON THE EARLY DAYS OF HFC:

"My father and grandfather were not involved in the original corporation, but they bought out Guy Bouwman and then put money into the company. My grandfather became secretary."

"Dad and Grandfather bought stock in the early teens. Their money helped the Landwehrs buy out Guy Bouwman."

Innuendo: Katie Nystrom and Guy Bouwman?

One of the original investors was HM's father-in-law Edward Muhlenbrock. CJ McLain's father was also an original investor.

"They became a fantastically profitable company. They probably beat the Fuller Brush Company in going house to house selling merchandise rather than selling to dealers."

"An awful lot of people from Holland went out in the field for them and opened branches and were successful. This was in the 20s. Then they had some of these division managers who were real torpedoes."

"In the 20s, Holland Furnace had a tin shop in Chicago that made fittings with union labels. But the castings were made in Holland, where there were no unions."

ON INVOLVEMENT OF FATHER AND ED MUHLENBROCK IN 30S:

In the early 30s, there was a great turnover in HFC management. Charles and Edgar Landwehr left the company as president and vice president, and a man named Thorne became president. Ted Cheff, meanwhile, was working up the ranks. Some Holland businessmen --like HM's father and father-in-law -- became involved with HFC.

"Cheff came up through the foundry. He was superintendent of the foundry for a few years.

"The banks may have made the decision (to get rid of Charles and Edgar) along with Louise and Katie."

"They booted all the home office and brought in people from the outside." Thorne was "the New York bankers" choice to run the company when it was in trouble. They just said we'll close you up or we'll put our man in to run it."

One of the men fired was Arthur Wrieden. "A lot of people in town felt he (Wrieden) was the smartest of the bunch."

"Louise was calling the shots and looking for friends in town to support her. She was sweet-talking everybody."

"Everybody in town had some stock."

"It's very possible that there was some hanky-panky going on."

"It started making money again and started riding high. Cheff wanted to be president, so they booted my father-in-law (as president -- he had taken over after Thorne left). And my father was off the board within. . . ."

"Both my dad and my father-in-law would come away from meetings boiling mad at what they (the board) were letting go through."

"The Landwehrs and Cheffs had enough stock to control the election of directors."

Katie Cheff was "a strong-minded woman who had a terrific temper."

Mulenbrock had more stock than the Marsiljes, but "together (they had) probably the biggest block of stock outside the Landwehrs and Kollas."

"Dad told me that he thought Mulenbrock would get even with them (the Landwehrs and Kollas)."

SELLING THE PRODUCTS:

"The Holland Furnace Company never made any money selling

furnaces in new houses. Wait until they were worn out." They sold "re-sets" -- replacements.

"One fiasco they had was they invented an air conditioner, an air cooler. It was a unit where air was forced through a spray of water. They experimented around here. It really did quite a job. The big office building had a mammoth installation. They spent thousands putting that on the market. But it didn't work because the water temperature varied."

"One thing that was practical was the Air-U-Well, an airplane propellor on top of the furnace."

As a traveling auditor for the Home Office, "I'd check inventory, money, make some field inspections of installations. Some division managers just blew up. They felt that the Home Office shouldn't inspect."

"There was pressure for sales. Who can get results?"

ON PEOPLE:

Ted Cheff had a commission from the Kentucky governor. "He was a Kentucky colonel." Cheff, HM, Nelson Bosman, Willard Wichers and one other owned the radio station WHTC from its beginning in 1946 until 1983 when they sold it.

Eddie Landwehr "had some smarts, but he felt he never had to be very ambitious. At the end, he may have been an alcoholic."

Herman Landwehr was "sort of a lightweight."