

Interviewee: Mrs. Ann Brouer

Interviewers: Linda Waterman and Neil Knutsen

Date: September 28, 1977

Time: 3:30

Place: 52 E.14th Street

Interview #1

# of tape sides: 1

Summary:

Subject:	Page No.:
Feed and coal business.....	1
Electric Car.....	1
Brouer Furniture.....	2
Mrs. B.'s garden.....	3
Mr. Brouer.....	5
The Church.....	5
Grandpa Brouer.....	6
Brouer Furniture (cont.).....	7
Myra.....	8
Views of Hope College.....	9
Tulip Festival.....	9
Electric Car.....	10
Brouer Furniture (cont.).....	11

Brouwer

Waterman and Knutsen

Page 1

Interview

Neil Knutsen: What type of work was he doing in the coal business? What type of work did he do?

Brouwer: Just sold seeds and feed and coal from right on.

Linda Waterman: Was he in business for himself?

B: Um-hmm. Where the Frisch Supply Co. is now on River Avenue.

L: Oh yea.

B: That's where the store was. (Mumble) See it was built (Mumble).

N: He sold both seed and coal?

B: Yes.

L: So you have lived in Holland all your life?

B: Yes, two blocks.

L: Really?

B: That block and this one. (Pointing to left and right)

L: Oh my goodness. On Fourteenth and Twelfth?

B: No, Fourteenth. Between College and Plum.

L: Oh my.

B: That is between Central. I haven't lived very far.

L: Holland is a nice community. I wouldn't mind staying here.

N: It is very beautiful. With the trees on the campus, a nice campus.

B: I think so too.

(Pause)

N: We understand that your husband's father had an electric car?

B: Yes.

N: We were wondering how he got it, and what kind it was?

Brouwer

Waterman and Knutsen

Page 2

B: See, I looked for that picture. He's standing along side of it, but I can't find it now. He had a Chevorlet once and, ah, he went down 17th Street and ran up on the curb into a tree, but didn't do much damage. He brought it right back and then he bought this electric.

L: Oh wow!

B: His hands came across like this, you know, that he used for...

(motions with hands).

L: Steering?

B: So he used the Packard to take my mom to work. (Pause) Used to take the family around, you know.

N: How big was the car? I've never seen an electric car before. How many people can fit into it?

B: Just four.

N: Four?

B: Facing each other.

L: Facing each other?

B: Oh I just wish I had a picture of it.

L: Oh maybe we'll come back someday.

B: I just can't find the pictures (laugh) and he started the store. The store, that is Browsers, the business is 105 years old. The oldest in town.

L: We heard about an award.

B: Pardon.

L: An award that's coming up for the business. We heard about some award that is being given to the business.

Brouwer

Waterman and Knutsen

Page 2.5

B: I can't hear you too well.

L: Oh, is he getting an award for being the oldest business in town?

B: I don't think so.

L: No, we had heard something about some such award.

B: I don't remember that. And he was 97 when he passed away in '50 and he worked there every day up until three days before he died of a stroke. Ninety seven, he was 97.

N: How was his business established? Where was the business at first? Was it still on River?

B: Well Myra told me, we have(murmer) the history (murmer). She said that he started the business at the Park Theatre but I don't remember that. She wouldn't neither, but I'm older than she is. But anyway, then they went very soon over to River Avenue. It was an undertaking store and a furniture store. And Brouwer made all the furniture too. They worked long hours in those days.

All laugh

B: He was a real tall man.

N: Do you remember the date that it was first got started up? You said 105 years.

B: I would just say that it is 105 years old. (murmer)

B: First, you know where it is. It is on River and Nineth. That was the hardware store before that and they were the next. And there were other stores (undistinguishable, mentions Dan Oberlain)

L: Dan was the father?

B: He was my father. (points to picture on wall) He was in the business since he was 18 years old. (picture is of her husband)

Brouwer

Waterman and Knutsen

Page 3

L: Was he? We were wondering about that. (laughing)

B: He died ten years ago. And now my daughter Myra's husband is in the business, Ken Soberlain.

L: Did they make their own-I know that probably your father-in-law made some of the furniture, but how about your husband? Was he still making it? (should have said father, not father-in-law)

B: No, no.

L: Machinery?

B: The undertaking business they dropped quite soon. They have a music store in their now. And that's the Meyer Music store on 8th Street.

N: That moved out of the Brouwer Furniture Store?

B: Yes, Mr. Meyer and Brouwer were together for a few years. And then Meyer went into that store which I think is 75 or a little more years old.

Pause (laughing)

L: We heard that you're an avid gardner.

B: Oh, not much. (laughing)

L: Do you have your own garden here?

B: Oh, I got a sma ll one. I try. (laughing)

N: That's important.

B: I love flowers.

L: Oh, is it mainly flowers; not vegetables?

B: Oh yes, not many vegetables.

N: What type of flowers do you grow?

B: That I grow? Oh, just about every kind.

N: Well, what kinds?

Brouwer

Waterman and Knutsen

Page 4

L: Can you name a couple?

B: Roses, nathaniels, snapdragons, and locks and... can't think of um, and astors. But that isn't anything very important.

L: No tulips?

B: Oh, yes. Have tulips and narcissus and a few more dragons and a few hyacinths.

N: You have a wide variety, there. Do you grow any of your flowers during the wintertime in a greenhouse or something?

B: No.

N: They just bloom, you know, in the summer then?

B: I'd enjoy this conversation a lot more if you weren't taping this.

(All laughing)

L: I know it makes people nervous. It makes us nervous, too. We wish we didn't have to.

N: It's our responsibility to do this.

B: You keep what you want to and take what you want to?

N: Yea, Well this doesn't necessarily mean that it's going to go in the magazine.

B: It doesn't go in the magazine?

N: Well, it doesn't necessarily mean that. See what we're doing is just going on an interview to get practice and the material might be used in the magazine. It doesn't necessarily mean that it's going into the magazine.

L: We may be back to ask more questions.

N: Yes.

L: We'd kind of like to find out a little bit more about you.

Brouwer

Waterman and Knutsen

Page 5

B: I would like to have this thing (tape recorder) off.

L: Well, don't worry about it. It's not going to be used.

B: Shut it off. (laughing) That will be on there too. (laughing)

L: You've lived in Holland all your life. Did you meet, is your husband from Holland, too?

B: Yes.

N: How did you meet each other? Was it at Hope?

B: No, we were really at a church. The 14th Street Church, Reformed Church, on the corner here. That's really where we met.

L: Did you know each other as children?

B: No.

L: That's pretty neat.

B: I'm a Charter member at the 14th Street Church, that just celebrated their 75th anniversary and there's three of us left, three Charter members.

L: Exactly what is a Charter member?

B: They have built this church from 9th Street, the pillar Church. And then my folks were the first ones that went there. I was just a little girl then. So that makes me a Charter member. My mother and father passed away and my sister and brothers went to other churches. My husband came from Central Avenue on Van Lier's. He wasn't a Charter member. He would have to be there when they built the church the very first. So to

L: So for 75 years you've been attending that church.

B: Yes

N: That's impressive.

Brouwer

Waterman and Knutsen

Page 6

L: We heard you're having your 84th birthday soon.

B: Where did you get all this information?

L: Oh, we hear all sorts of things. Probably from your daughter.

B: Probably from Myra.

L: Yea, things get around Holland.

B: (Murmur) We have two daughters.

L: And what is your other daughter doing now?

B: Oh, he's with Chrystler.

N: A nice place to be.

B: Larry moved and ah well this is a joke we have in our family: Love, honor, obey, and live in Holland. And they wouldn't do it. (laughing)

L: Your parents came here, then where did they come from? Where were they before?

B: Um, my father came across from the Netherlands when he was six years old. And my mother was born on 24th Street.

L: So she lived in Holland also?

B: I have to really look at the history of Grandpa Brouwer. I haven't really been able to do it. I don't know even whether he was born here or not. Just Forget.

L: We'll have to come back again

B: Off the record, Bill's father was tall and real stately looking. He always wore a stiff-bosomed shirt tucked, with a diamond stud. Until he died in 30, so in about '28 he couldn't get those stiff-bosomed shirts anymore. He had to go to what everyone else was wearing. He tried all over to send for them, you know, he couldn't get them. He was used to wearing that kind of a shirt.

Brouwer

Waterman and Knutsen

Page 7

L: They didn't make them anymore.

B: No, they didn't make them anymore.

L: But you said that he worked until he was 97?

B: Until he was 97 years old. Of course, he let up a little, you know, when you get older. But then he was in the store anyway. He'd come everyday with that electric. Every Wednesday he went up from the hospital in that electric to visit people there.

L: Oh, the electric car was still around until he was older.

B: Oh yes. We'd tell him, you know, oh Grandpa don't go, like Tulip time it's too busy. But he would always go. Of course in those days they'd always stop when they saw that electric coming, but now days that wouldn't work very well. It'd only go 22 miles per hour. You couldn't use it out of town, you know.

L: I would expect that they'd just stop in awe to see it.

B: They sold it for \$125 after he passed away to a man in Flint. An antique place, you know. The cost of it was the charging the batteries. The batteries were quitten on them. They really needed new ones with \$800, that was in the garage. The place where Professor Green lives. (Murmer) Professor Green on 12th Street. Right back here(Points). That's where they lived. They had the generator in the (doorbell). Excuse me.

N: You said that Brouwer Furniture, when the Tulip time came around that you didn't want him to go to the store. Was there really alot of business then?

B: Traffic, traffic. No not business, traffic.

N: It didn't surge, the business, get higher or anything, with all those tourists coming in? Or was there any time when there was considerable

Brouwer

Waterman and Knutsen

Page 8

amount of business?

B: No.

L: Does he mainly sell just to the people of the community?

B: (Shakes head, yes)

L: Is the furniture that's in here now from Brouwer Furniture?

B: Hum, Nothing new though.

N: It looks very unique.

L: Do you know the style of this furniture?

B: No, no.

L: Did he work with any particular style?

B: No.

L: Early American?

B: No, no.

Pause

L: So one of your daughters—one or both of your daughters lives in Holland?

B: One does and one doesn't.

L: So one is teaching and the other is a housewife?

B: Yes, Myra is in teacher's placement.

L: Teacher placement. What does that mean?

B: It is in VanRaalte down in the basement.

L: Oh I see, she places the teacher's that come in.

B: Haven't you met her?

N: No we haven't, but we will.

B: Are you freshmen?

N and L: Yes

B: Oh well, that's the reason.

Brouwer

Waterman and Knutsen

Page 9

B: She was supposed to speak to a bunch of seniors today at an orientation meeting just for seniors. Of course, she speaks to mostly seniors because that's her job, trying to place them somewhere.

L: Oh, she places the students.

B: For ten years already.

L: Does she take care of placing teachers at Hope? Newcoming teachers?

B: I suppose, if there would be an opening. (Details of Career Night)

L: Have you seen Hope grow at all? Hope was here before you were. Correct?

B: That's right.

L: What do you first remember of Hope College? How was it?

B: Not ~~Wyant's~~ Chapel, the other one was here.

N and L: Dimment?

B: Maurice Hall. Of course, going way way back (murmured a name)

L: Do you still like the campus now even with the new buildings?

B: Oh yes.

L: Did it retain it's beauty?

B: Yes. That new building is going to be finished soon.

N: Phys-Ed building?

L: How long has Tulip time been going on?

B: Many years.

L: When do you first remember it? When you were little did they have it?

B: No, later on. You read about it, you know, but you just forget how long ago. The teachers at high school started it.

N: What is the festival like? What do they do?

Brouwer

Waterman and Knutsen

Page 10

B: Well formerly they had it for over the weekend. There would be so many people here. They had it for about ten days, but now they just have it starting on Wednesday's til Saturday when there is a big parade. We have a parade on Wednesday's with floats and they scrub streets. We have wooden shoes and Dutch costumes. Anyone who wants to do it. Men running in with pails and they scrub it with these big poles and that's what they do before the parade. Every school has a different idea that they make, on Thursday's children's parade. Then on Friday it is a day people can do whatever they wish. There are programs going on different places. Saturday is the big parade with all the bands.

L: Was the electric car ever in one of those parades?

B: No.

L: No, we thought it would be.

B: You mean the electric?

L: Yes the electric car?

B: No, they never had it in there.

L: No.

B: They didn't, I don't know why, but they didn't. I did finish that about that they bought that for \$125. That man from Flint called me about 4 years ago. He wanted to know the history. But you see, I wouldn't know as much about all that as much my husband would. I didn't pay that much attention.

L: Did they charge the batteries from an electrical outlet?

B: I don't know how often in the garage.

N: Did they have an electrical cord coming out of it that you stick in the wall.

Brouwer

Waterman and Knutsen

Page 11

B: I never went in there to look at it. I don't know. There again a man would know all about it.

L: Did you ever ride in it.

B: I did.

L: Was it quiet?

B: Oh yes.

L: Do you like it better than riding in new cars?

B: No.

L: Why not, too slow?

B: Oh, I don't know. I mean it's kind of fun to go in it once.

L: Does it have a cover on top or was it open?

B: Cover,

L: Were there large wheels?

B: No, not very big wheels. Very small. I'll get those pictures from Ken sometime.

L: We'll have to come back to see them.

B: That one picture I wanted to show you had all lace curtains tied back. There was one of those great big baby buggies, about that big you know, with an umbrella folded. That stands in the window. Really find it a an interesting picture. I've always had it, but I couldn't find it.

L: They made baby buggies at the furniture store?

B: No, they didn't, just decoration.

L: And who's running the business?

B: Ken Soberlain, Myra's husband. He's 50 years old today.

L: Oh today.

Brouwer

Waterman and Knutsen

Page 12

B: He went in right after college.

N: Did he major in business?

B: No he didn't. No, just thought he'd like to do it.

N: It was passed down through the generations then?

B: Yes.

L: Does he have a son he thinks he'll pass it down to.

B: Well, both their children are both adopted. Jim just graduated from Hope. He's not working right now. ~~He~~ He couldn't find a job. I don't know, everyone doesn't like it, you know.

L: Yes, it's unusual that it's gone through the generations.

B: We had a boy and we lost that boy. Otherwise that would have been my son. One of our own children would get it. Do you sell this magazine?

N: Yes, off campus and on campus.

L: We bring it to some of the smaller stores in town. I think a lot of the people who come here for Tulip time would be interested in it. It's a very unusual magazine.

B: Well you just stop here anytime you want to and I'll see if I can get those pictures for you.

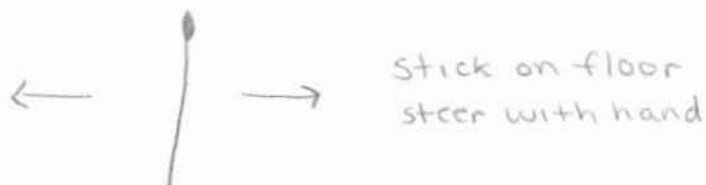
L: Okay.

B: And I can also look up a little more history.

L: We'll stop back again.

Notes:

The steering of the electric car:



Has pictures of car.

She will get the history.

Picture of husband on wall.

Very beautifully furnished house. Very rich looking.

Brouwer Furniture in house.

In middle of interview the doorbell rings. Little girls asking to rake lawn.

Mrs. Brouwer looks as if she is in her sixties, not her eighties.

Seemed very nervous.

Neil Knutson  
Linda Waterman

## Comments on Interview

We ran into several problems on our first interview. We interviewed Mrs. Ann Brouwer. First of all, we found that she had little knowledge of the mechanics or history of the electric car. She may be able to find some pictures of it, however. Secondly, we found that Mrs. B. did know more about Brouwer Furniture. She mentioned a written history of the business, but she did not know where it was. (If we were to follow this topic we could arrange an interview with Ken Soberlain, Mrs. B.'s son-in-law, who is the present owner of Brouwer Furniture.) Thirdly, Mrs. Brouwer was very conscious of the tape recorder. It seemed to make her quite nervous.

We also discussed some ways in which we could improve our next interview. One would be to use a different tape recorder. The one we were using was not working well. Another comment was that we must be more aware of what the interviewee is saying. A few times we failed to pick up on some of the things Mrs. B. "rambled" about. We should

have listened to her more carefully and made her elaborate on these topics.

It was the first interview that either of us had been on. The next one should go more smoothly. (We hope!)