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Esther Dean Nyland's Radio Program – November 12

E-Esther Dean Nyland; A-Mrs. Ackerson; O-Marie O'Beck; V-Ethel Vandenberg

E: This afternoon we shall move south one block from Franklin Street, which neighborhood was described on our September broadcast, to consider the area of Clinton Street from the river to Fourth Street. We have with us three Clinton Street oldtimers, each of whom was born on that street: Miss Marie O'Beck; 84 years old; Mrs. Sophie Fritz Acherson; also 85 years...

A: 84.

E: 84. Pardon me. And Ethel Vandenberg, a juvenile of a mere 69. They will attempt to recreate their neighborhood as it was in their childhood early in this century. In much of this old part of town, houses of that day are still standing, built close to the sidewalk and huddled together as though seeking companionship and security. Miss O'Beck can quote a description characteristic as she recalls it from her childhood.

O: The houses were bulging at the seams with children.

E: Let's start now on the riverfront. I recall Joe Seifert mentioned last month that the O'Beck fish tug was at the foot of Franklin Street so I imagine you knew that riverfront, Marie.

O: Well, it was mostly occupied by fishnet reels where they strung the nets to dry. And the tugs docked down there.

V: Ya, we used to go down there after school to hang the nets and pack them and our pay would be a little bundle of number 2 trout, which are illegal nowadays and maybe they'd slip us a quarter of something but it would be day after day and there would be an awful lot of fish hauled in and out of there, along with all those nets. And weekends, we'd go down there and sneak in a few packings of them and just mess around like that. We got by with them and they liked it.

E: Suppose you take us up the street then, Ethel, on the south side first because there was no break there until Second Street.

V: Well, on the corner was the Theileman Brewery where they used to bottle beer. They'd get it in barrels from across the lake and then they'd bottle it themselves. And in the meantime, why if any of us was sneaking around there, why we never drank the beer but we used to mess around with it. And the fantail doves up in the cupola, we used to take care of them and take them home and keep them for awhile and get them tame, and then let them go and some more. And...

A: Next to us...

V: Well, then next to them east was Abbingas.

E: That was a little house right in the sand hill, wasn't it?

V: Ya, built right on the cove of the hill.

A: Airplanes were a novelty then so when we heard one, we used to dash out in the street. And this one was flying very low and it crashed into Abbinga's porch and kitchen.

E: How did that happen? Tell about that.

V: Well, we heard it. We were having supper and we heard it. We went out and just about the time we got out there, the dust was still flying around. And we went up there. And Ducky Swartz, he was still standing there and the fella that flew the plane, they had just taken him away. I don't know who took him. But Ducky telling about it that...he said that the fella was paying too much attention to him because he was motioning for him to come on, come on, come on, and I guess he was watching Ducky more than where he was going. He used to do the same thing to Ducky when Ducky flew over to Muskegon. But this fella came down through Abbinga's kitchen roof. I don't know if Ducky ever did that in Muskegon or not. But that sure made a mess up there. And the propeller of the plane hung right over the supper table and that kind of spoiled the supper meal for the folks there. I don't know if they had to put catsup on that or not, but...

E: Now next to the Abbinga home...next to the Abbinga house...

V: The Collins. Well, that was quite a family of Irishman and they were all rivermen.

O: And that was a wonderful family. The mother was a beautiful old lady and the father was an old-time fiddler. And he used to play the fiddle and call off the dances at the old Opera House. And being an Irish family, naturally they imbibed just a little bit. And they had a son that came home late one night and was unable to get in the house, and they had had an old rowboat out in the yard so he just decided to make his bed in the rowboat. Well, it froze that night and in the morning, his mother had to come out with a teakettle full of hot water to ... And they also had a daughter, a very beautiful daughter, Kate, who sang beautifully. In fact, she sang at the Catholic Church at all the masses.

E: And she sang at all of the entertainments.

O: Ya, the entertainments in Grand Haven at that time.

E: They used to have those sort of home talent plays and things and Kate Vander... she later was Kate VanderVeen, she married Claude VanderVeen. She certainly was one of the outstanding artists in our days wasn't she?

O: She certainly was.

V: There was sand hill and then we run into the old brick shanty there where the Kiefts made building bricks that they used on basement walls. And that sat just about straddle First Street, before First Street went up over the hill. And there's still...every once in awhile when the wind blows hard enough, you can find some of the broken cement around there. And we used to fool around there and help 'em – if you want to call it help. We never tipped anything over but there wasn't anything...well, they had a little cart there that they run on a track from the hill right down into the mixer, they'd load it up and then they'd push it down there. We used to ride that quite a bit. And from there on up, there was nothing but hills, a sand hill that took in all our sliding and took up all of our spare time. They folks always knew where we were at mealtime anyway. They never had to holler too loud. And we had to be in the house by the time the street lights come on. But from there on up to Jim Cantwell...I don't know too much about him. I knew him and I knew the family. He was more or less of a plumber and he was on the go a lot too.

O: The Tylers formerly lived there. And one of them married a Mr. Rosbach who was a very prominent hotel man in Grand Haven. Two of the girls became teachers and two, nurses. The mother was a hard-working woman, the father having been drowned.

E: And many students here remember Mrs. Rosbach, Mary Tyler Rosbach, who taught in our Junior High for a long time. Well now we'll go back to the river and take the north side, coming up. Ethel, go down to the corner now on Water Street.

V: Well, on the north side...

E: On the north side, ya. Mm-hmm.

V: On the north corner of Water and Clinton. Well, the first family I knew there was Kingsbury Scott. He used to work at the Tribune office. And, of course, there was nobody around there during the day much. And then next to them was William Nauta.

E: I found an interesting item in looking through the old newspapers. I found in the Grand Haven Tribune for March 25, 1903, this little item: "William Nauta has moved his house from across the river and will place it on his lot on Clinton Street near Water Street. Mr. Nauta is superintending the work himself and the moving of the house over on a scow is an interesting feat in house moving and was well worth witnessing." That was a little before our memory, I guess, Ethel, but then that's how it got there.

V: It was. That's the way it got there from across the river. And next to that was...the first family I knew was the Swartz's. And back of the Swartz's there was my grandfather's...where my grandfather used to have his smoke...fish smokehouse that later became the property of H.J. Dornbos. How long he had it there, I don't know. But he did use it for smoking fish. He was about the first one around here, I guess. I never heard of any more. But we never knew anything about that. That was too early for us.

O: Well, I remember when they had several small houses in the yard and we used to get fish from the fisherman when they brought the fish in. They used to smoke them there, and I suppose he sent them to...sold them to merchants in Chicago.

E: And when I was a little girl and used to live around the corner, I can remember the Fishers, Homer Fisher and his dad and the other brothers, coming home. They must have had something to do with the fishing down in there because I can remember, even as a little girl, I was so enamored with those handsome Fisher boys.

O: Well, Fisher had a fish tug down there, their grandfather. So maybe that's why they were interested too.

V: Well then...Swartz was one of the first ones I knew of – Swartzes and McKinneys – I think they were in-laws. And next to them was Art VanderMeiden.

A: On the corner.

V: Ya, on the corner. I think he used to work down at the Grand Trunk warehouse.

E: I think so too. I remember that house very well. But when I was just a little girl, we lived in the little house next door for awhile. After the tannery failed, we moved in from Beechtree because my dad was working down at the Grand Trunk, and Mrs. VanderMeiden was my very dear friend because she didn't have a daughter and so she loved little girls. Then they had this one son, Roy, who was like a big brother to me, and always my champion, I know. So there were just those three houses in that block, the VanderMeiden house, on the Clinton Street corner and the little house where we lived, which, I understand had once been the second school in Grand Haven and had been converted into a house. And then on the corner was the big house that Joe Seifert spoke of as the Reghel's home. But in my childhood, a family by the name of Murray lived there. And I remember very well because they had this son Willard Murray who was just my age and he had long, golden curls. And so one day, they dressed me up in my brother Neal's clothes and dad took a picture of us two four-year-olds and I'll swear that I looked like the boy and he looked more like the girl. You remember that family?

O: Ya, but the Whipple family used to deliver milk...the Murray family, I mean. But before that, a Neal family lived there and they were very prominent teachers. One on them became a principal in a large school in Chicago, Jay Neal.

E: Then across the street, there were only three houses too. We mentioned the Ball house last month, on the corner...Gerrit Ball's home. And next to that was the Wallace residence and I remember that as a brown house with an unroofed porch across the front of it. And I was interested in reading an article that Henry Griffin wrote in the 1880s, mentioning the first good dwellings in Grand Haven. And among the first five, was the one he called the David Carver home then occupied by William Wallace, and he was still living there in the early 1900s. I don't remember Mr. Wallace so much but I know from my history studies, that he and his neighbor, Mr. Sanford, were both on Grand Haven's

first City Council in 1867. But at the Wallace home lived also Mrs. Wallace's sister and she was my first grade teacher down at the Columbus Street School, and probably yours too. Elmira J. Gray. Many people will probably remember her.

O: On, my. I remember her.

E: Uh-huh. Now I think that Marie remembers the Wallace daughter's family lived there for a time.

O: A family by the name of McKellips. And Mrs. McKellip was a very wonderful pianist and lots of us took piano lessons from her. Miss Gray was also my teacher in the old Central School.

A: She was also my teacher and I have to tell you a peculiar thing. She was very forgetful and she had we kids running around looking for her glasses when they'd be perched on top of her head. And then she found out that we knew they were there, then she'd give us dickets.

E: Mrs. McKellip's daughter, Helen, who lived there with her grandmother at one time, now Mrs. Shutes of California, sent a very generous gift to our Museum fund in memory of her grandparents, Mr. and Mrs. Wallace. Now the house next to the Wallace's was the Sanford, Isaac Sanford, but everybody called him Ike. I recall him as having a little goatee, a white goatee, and a very big gold watch chain across his front. And he walked with a very great military carriage. I believe he had been an officer in the Civil War. But his wife was always Grandma Sanford to me. And their two granddaughters lived with them; Bessie, who was an invalid and dies of consumption, and Kate, who was a very gay, vivacious person, married Charlie Boyden, who was the only son of the wealthy Boyden lumberman. And it was through the... well, Grandma Sanford, I believe, was a sister of Danny Miller, and through the friendship of Charlie Boyden for Burt Gale, that when the son died, he had inherited this very famous possession in the family, a gold medal, which Daniel Miller had been awarded, a Congressional Medal of Honor, for an heroic rescue on the Great Lakes, and this Boyden boy had inherited it. And when he died, Charlie sent it to us for our oldtimer's collection and that was displayed very proudly every fall – it was written up in our paper and the Grand Rapids paper – so we know them very well, I think. Then on the corner was just this sand lot with locust trees. No house at all, but we used to play. But Ethel, you remember that and I guess I'll give your street back to you. Now back on Clinton.

V: Well, next to the lot east was out home. And with eight in the family, it was a pretty good sized house but there isn't much I can tell. My father used to be engineer at the light plant and after he got out of there, Bob Moore took it over. And then dad went in business for himself, the electrical business, and he had a place down underneath what is Time Loans now. It used to be in the basement. That used to be Fant and Stone Pool Room down in there. And my grandfather used to work down there too.

E: Let's stay on Clinton Street, Ethel.

V: Ya, but I mean that's just how they got in there. The people next door to me I don't know. I don't remember who they were.

O: A Thomas family lived there and she was, I would say, a midwife. She used to bring most of the babies to town, and we were confused as to who brought them, the doctor in his little satchel or she with a big shawl, or cape, you know. And one of her daughters married Orrie VanTol. He was also on the Council for a number of years.

E: And he was a partner in VanTol and Ekkens Grocery Store. And later on, VanTol's Clothing Store with his brother who we all knew as Baldy.

O: Mm-hmm.

E: Alright, go on from there then, Ethel. Next to the Thomas family would be the Fritz family.

V: Ya, that was Fritz. He worked at Dake Engine and some of the boys sailed. And Mary and Catherine, two girls, I think...

E: There were more girls than that. Those two, I think, were the youngest.

V: Ya, those were the younger ones and I used to walk to school with them.

E: One of the girls married John Kelly, senior John Kelly.

V: They were the older ones.

E: Sure.

V: But the two younger ones I did know. And I think one of them is in Denver right now.

O: Yes.

E: And next door.

V: Next to that was O'Briens. I never knew them except walking on their lawn, you'd hear about it. And on the corner was Daltons. They came here from Canada and he was superintendent at the round house for the Grand Trunk Railroad. That was down on the end of Columbus Street along the river.

E: Now let's turn the corner and go down Second Street, that block.

V: Well, down there was Daltons.

E: Next to Daltons.

V: Next to Daltons was...

E: Doorncat, wasn't it?

V: Doorncat. I don't know too much about them.

E: He was an agent for the railroad, Pere Marquette, I think.

V: Ya, but just exactly what he did, I don't know. He was a railroad man.

A: Then Thieleman.

V: And then Thieleman had that saloon and they run the brewery down on the corner of Clinton and Water Streets where they used to bottle the beer.

E: He started the first Ford agency here.

V: Ya.

E: For most of my life, that's what he was doing.

V: Ya, that was Gus.

E: No, the father. And Gus was in with the father.

V: Well, then next to them was Major Mansfield. And, of course, knowing the people and knowing anything about them was two different things. I couldn't tell you much about them wither. And I don't know the next people. Then on the corner was Keltzens. They had a cigar store.

A: He was our mayor at one time.

E: Ya, they told about that on Franklin Street. So let's go across the street.

O: Across the street the Lillie family lived. They told about that too, the boys being doctors and lawyers. Leo Lillie wrote the history of Grand Haven. And then the next was Captain Zwamer and VanWeelden. They were fishermen too, sailors. And they also had the gravel pit up the river and had gravel scows. They were some of the first in that business. Then on the corner was D.A. Lane. He had the first book store in Grand Haven and afterwards, it was occupied by the Thomas family who had a shoe store downtown with Richard Vyn.

E: Mm-hmm. Okay, now let's move up around the corner, it was the mares family and the VanTol family lived there, and who else? Not Dixons.

O: The Dixons. That was the first artificial stone dairy in town and they delivered milk. But the Marse family had a couple of children who couldn't hear and they were our first experience with deaf children and they went to the school at Flint. And then when they would come home, we were very interested to learn the sign language from them.

E: And then next to them was...now who? I had it here and I...

A: Koomer. Koomer.

E: The Koomer family lived there and then Dursema. Lucy Dursema lived on the corner, didn't she?

A: Mrs. Dursema. It wasn't Jenny though.

E: Wasn't her mother a dressmaker?

A: Ya, they lived on the corner. And then around the corner was the VanTols and Albers and...

E: You can skip that, and Bonds across the street. Now on the other side of the street was Henry Albers, wasn't it?

A: There was Henry Albers.

E: And then on the corner of Clinton...

A: Was the Robinson family. The Robinson family and the Boot family was next door. And then there was an old fisherman that lived in there somewhere that used to sell fish. I don't know, he had a real Dutch name, Wannanier(?). I think his name was. And then another Fritz family of which I was a member.

E: Tell about you family.

A: Well, my father was a baker and he has worked for the Dursema Bakery for many, many years. And finally, he went over to the Grand Haven Bakery and worked for them. Well, then next to them was a Holstelle family.

E: Well, how about your brother? I think you should mention that. Your brother Tassie.

A: Oh, my two brothers that were fisherman. My brother Bill and my brother Walter, known as Tassie Fritz. And, in fact, Tassie was the last commercial fisherman on the lake. He just dies a few years ago.

E: Out of this port.

A: Out of this port, that's right. And then next to the Fritz family was the Holstelle family. He had a little store on Franklin Street. And then the Boomgaards. I think they were noted for having one of their...their uncle had the first pump that was located down on Fulton Street. I guess everybody remembers that pump. And then the Deremos lived next to them. And there was a big lot and they had built a...he raised chickens. Mr. Deremo raised chickens and he had a great big chicken house in the back there. And it was three stories tall. Eventually, they made a home out of it and it's now the VanTol home on Clinton Street, Paul VanTol. And next to their place, my old grandmother lived there. Her name was Kastor. And then on the corner was the VanWeelden family.

E: Now then we'll have to go across the street back to the south side, down Second where VanderZalm is and move up. Do you want to do that, Marie?

O: The VanderZalms, as I said, they became quite famous. They has a store downtown, they first 5 and 10 cent store. One of them was a doctor and one of them was a professor in a southern college. Then next door was a little, old house. A wash lady lived there. But afterwards a family came from the old country. That was very interesting because we would get them to teach us the Holland language. And then cam a big vacant space – I think at one time they had a cement block factory there, too...also, I should say. Mr. Willet owned that. Well, then came our summer playground.

E: You have to move along, I think, Marie. Come up the street.

O: Well. Then next to the sandhill, a family by the name of VandenBerg lived. Lawrence VandenBerg was our superintendent of schools and he afterwards became a professor in a college. They were a very noted family. Then next door was a Bishop family who had a little dry goods store in their home, and used to come around peddling with a little satchel every Monday morning with dry goods.

A: And next to that...

O: And next door was where I was born.

A: No. Between your house and that house was a big barn where this man, Mr. Butz, raised big, great big horses.

O: Oh, I don't know about that.

A: I do.

E: And now you finish up the block.

A: Yes, go ahead, honey.

O: In my day, a barn was just a barn. We lived next door. My father was a fisherman. He had two or three tugs and my folks were all sailors – captains and marine men, engineers.

Next door, Grandma Ball lived and she was the father of Duke who had a dry good store downtown.

A: And a grocery store.

O: And next, VerDuins lived. They became famous fishermen too. And then Holstelle family lived. Before that, the Swartz's lived there and also there was a house in there occupied by VanHorssens.

E: We'll have to jump to the corner. We must mention who lived in the corner house.

O: Yes. Dykemas lived on the corner. That was a family bulging...more than bulging at the seams. They has the largest family in the block – 14 children, and the first pair of twins on the street. And Mr. Dykema was a janitor at the school and also the engineer and the whole works – kept us comfortable for \$4,800 a year.

E: Well, we'll have to stop. I am sure these reminiscences have brought to mind many families important in the development of our community. And we are grateful to you oldtimers for your delightful memories.