

VOICES OF LANSING: AN ORAL HISTORY

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Lansing, Michigan

DONNA MARGUERITE WERBACK

Transcript of an Oral History Interview

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Donna Marguerite Werback

PREFACE

This transcript is the product of an interview conducted July 17, 1990, for the Lansing Public Library Oral History Project, by Geneva Kebler Wiskemann.

Signed, dated agreements of release and biographical information accompany the original cassette.

Transcribed by Patricia Siggers
Lansing, Michigan

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VOICES OF LANSING
Oral History Project

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8 Donna Marguerite Werback

10 This is Geneva Kebler Wiskemann. I am here at
503 Curtis Road, in East Lansing, on a hot and muggy
12 July 17, 1990. I'm talking today with Donna Werback.
We were really introduced in absentia by Jane
14 Ingersoll Piatt.

GW: I can't really remember when Jane Piatt started
16 talking to me about you, but I have some keen
interest in the Moral Re-Armament, especially as it
18 appeared in Mackinac Island. I've always wanted to
talk to more people about that.

20 How did you meet Jane?

DW: We were in high school together. We graduated
22 together in 1926. We met in a Latin class.

GW: Oh, then you've been friends for a long time.

24 DW: Yes, indeed.

GW: You were in the military, too?

26 DW: Yes. Jane and I went in together. It was the Army
that separated us. She was assigned to Air Force
28 bases, and I was at Army Headquarters in Columbus for
three years. That has made a difference.

30 GW: But you've retained your friendship all through this
time?

32 DW: Oh, yes.

GW: I know from talking with Jane that she had some
34 interest in Moral Re-Armament in the early days, but
can you tell me how you were introduced to the
36 organization?

DW: Actually, it was Jane who introduced me to it. I did
38 not know about Moral-Armament when it first came into
Michigan. In the first year after I was in the Army
40 (It was 1946-47), I was a graduate student at the
University of Michigan. It was while I was in the
42 South on spring break that year (It would have been
April, 1947), that MRA brought a revue called "Ideas
44 Have Legs" to Lansing. They gave it in Grand Rapids,
and Lansing, and Detroit, that I know of. There may
46 have been other places; I'm not sure. At that time,
Jane first met them.

48 When I returned from my vacation in the South on
a Sunday, I found that two of the MRA people had been
50 spending the weekend with Jane, out at her River's
Bend home. I have known them ever since. In fact,
52 one of those two people is still my closest friend
down at Fort Myers Beach.

54 GW: Where you now reside?

DW: Yes. So that was our introduction to it, and Jane
56 and I both went together to the MRA Training Center
at Mackinac later that summer, at the end of August.
58 We met it together, actually: I always say Jane was
the one who introduced me to it. < Laugh >

60 GW: Well, it was an interesting world movement, and maybe
I shouldn't be saying the word "was." A remnant of
62 it still exists.

DW: It still is, very much. They don't have any
64 headquarters at Mackinac anymore, but they're busy in
other parts of the world. Right now they have a very
66 important summer conference and training session
going on at Caux in Switzerland.

68 GW: At Mountain House?

DW: Yes, do you know about Caux, how to spell it and all
70 that? This year is particularly significant because
they have great numbers of people from Eastern Europe
72 who are able to come. There were quite a few last
summer, and that may have had some influence during
74 their fight for independence during this past year.
This year, of course, it's a chance to give them
76 training in nation-building and how they can have the
governments that they want and need.

78 GW: My interest in Moral Re-Armament was rekindled
because Blanche Coggan had done research in

80 association with Forrest, her son, at the State
Archives when I worked there as Archivist.

82 Blanche, you know, died in March of last year
and her son Forrest was executor; so it was good
84 faith I think, that brought the manuscript that she
had prepared back to Forrest, and he brought it to
86 me. I recently allowed it (with his permission) to
go to Dr. Philip Mason, who's on the board of the
88 Wayne State University Press, thinking that perhaps
it might have merit for a small publication.

90 We really need to bring it up to date. Some of
her material was written about 1959, so there's a
92 whole story that goes beyond what she had written.

According to what I have read, the MRA were
94 holding assemblies as early as 1928, came into
Detroit in the '30's, and eventually they went up to
96 Mackinac about 1942.

Did you spend any other time, beyond that one
98 training session, at Mackinac?

DW: Oh, yes. I was there for long weekends quite
100 frequently, and it wasn't really until about 1953
that I began to feel that I had a part in it myself
102 and spent longer and longer vacations there.

Then in 1958, I took leave from my position in
104 the Michigan State Budget Office and went to Mackinac

106 to devote full time to the MRA work. I worked
108 primarily in the Finance Office, although that really
110 was not the main point of my being there. It was to
112 help other people and myself to learn more how to
114 live under the guidance of God, which was the whole
116 point of the training center there.

118 GW: Yes, their focus was on absolute honesty, purity,
120 unselfishness, and love. That's a big ideology.

122 DW: That's right. That goes a long way. One of the
124 first thoughts that came to me was that honesty and
126 unselfishness, et cetera, were not the main point:
128 It was that word "absolute." It came right down to
130 it, because we don't live in an absolute world these
132 days, you know. < Laugh > So this is the main
134 difference.

136 GW: Your talents, developed in the Budget Department for
138 the State of Michigan, transferred. That was
140 something you could contribute wisely.

142 DW: Yes and no, because so often when there was a real
144 need to do something, you didn't plan for it months
146 ahead because the need was right now. You took
148 action on it and raised the money and did it.

150 GW: It was all volunteer contributions, wasn't it?

152 DW: Primarily, yes. We had to hire some of the working
154 people around the Mackinac Center there, but most of

130 the people who were with it full time were certainly
 just contributing their time, all of their efforts,
132 et cetera.

 GW: I know that in 1958, Blanche wrote that there were
134 5,500 delegates that came there. This attracted
 people from all over the world. You must have met
136 some interesting personalities. Can you recall some
 of those?

138 DW: Oh, we did. I remember particularly, it was the end
 of the 1958 season when they decided to film the
140 musical play, -- I can't think of the name of it.

 GW: There was one about that time called, "Mackinac:
142 Island of Renaissance."

 DW: That was one of the shorter films. "Crowning
144 Experience" is the name I'm trying to think of. At
 the end of "Crowning Experience," there is a final
146 big scene of the international get-together and
 meeting up there. We filmed that first in September
148 of 1958.

 We had people from every continent there; from
150 North Africa, many Asians, many kinds of Europeans,
 and American Indians. I one time said that I
152 couldn't get mad at any of these countries, because
 they were the home of some of my friends. < Laugh >
154 It was very true in many ways.

156 One thing I particularly remember from that time
when we had so many others there; we had quite a few
Muslims there, and this man from either Tunisia or
158 Algeria, I can't remember which -- It was just the
first day of one of their fast seasons. It may have
160 been the beginning of Ramadan. I've never checked to
see, but I know it was in September. We met at 7:30,
162 and 11:00, and 5:00, each day when the real training
sessions were on. He was going off to pray for the
164 day, so he just came to the 7:30 meeting and then
left us.

166 While he was there, he was telling about the
importance of sacrifice. He illustrated it by
168 telling the story of Abraham taking Isaac to the
mountaintop, being ready to sacrifice him if that was
170 what God willed him to do. I thought, "How utterly
amazing to have a Muslim here, telling us a story
172 from Jewish history, to an audience that is largely
Christians." You realized it's something we all
174 share. That's the kind of unity we need in the
world.

176 GW: Are you still active as a participant?

DW: I haven't gone in recent years to any international
178 training sessions. I'm sort of physically beyond
that.

180 GW: But your interest has not waned, has it?

DW: That's exactly right.

182 GW: In reading Blanche's manuscript, she referred to this
"Crowning Experience," which is really the story of
184 Mary McLeod Bethune, isn't it?

DW: Yes. Forrest Coggan was there at the time we were
186 making these films, the crowd scenes particularly.
He's in the background of one of them, so you see the
188 top of his head. I think the top of my head got in
[there] a couple of places, too.

190 GW: There are several films. There was "African Tale";
and then they did the plays that weren't transferred
192 to film, too. They had several plays. I think
"Ideas Have Legs" was their first musical, previewed
194 in Grand Rapids. There was a program -- Forrest
sent me a note from the Grand Rapids paper just
196 within the last month, that there was a special play
given in Grand Rapids, originating from this cluster.
198 Is it Southwestern United States where the activity
is now headquartered?

200 DW: No, not really. In the United States, there's quite
an active group in Minneapolis, especially. There's
202 another group that's in Richmond, and another group
around the Boston area, centered among the Harvard

204 students. Then of course, they have the offices for
MRA in the United States there in Washington, D.C.

206 Things have changed a lot since 1959-60. We
found we were putting too much money into supporting
208 real estate, and not enough into getting out where
the people were.

210 GW: That's interesting. Where did you stay when you were
on the Island? Did you stay at the Island House, or
212 in one of the dorms?

DW: I stayed in all of them, over the years. Altogether,
214 I was on the Island from 1958 till 1970. I'd be away
for a few weeks at a time. I voted up there, so that
216 was my home. I stayed in most of the buildings that
were related to Moral Re-Armament and some others, I
218 guess.

GW: A lot of different changes there through the years.
220 What would you say would be some of the highlights of
your experience? What stands out as you look back,
222 without a lot of time to think about that?

DW: I think those international conferences that I've
224 just been talking about were probably the most
important thing that happened during my years there.
226 Of course, a lot of what went on then at Mackinac is
now happening either at Caux, in Switzerland, or
228 there is a similar conference center that's been

230 built in India, which is very much a center for the
Asians and for Australians, et cetera. I mean, it's
regional.

232 GW: They did have a center in the Philippines, too. I
wonder if that still exists.

234 DW: No, that never was really a major center. It was
very active there; but only for a couple of years, I
236 think.

GW: Then there was the Rife Valley Center in Africa. I
238 don't know whether that exists anymore.

DW: I think that was on somebody's farm there; and
240 whether it still exists, with all the political
changes, I don't know.

242 GW: There's been so much going on in the world. What a
time for you, to look back over history.

244 DW: That's true. It was a great privilege to be part of
it.

246 GW: Forrest has told me that he spent several months on
the Island. I think he wintered over on the Island.

248 DW: I think he did. I think he came there just about the
time we started filming the "Crowning Experience," in
250 the fall of 1958, and stayed through until the next
spring sometime or other. His brother had been there
252 during the summer. Did Forrest tell you that?

254 GW: It seems like he mentioned that his brother was
active in it, but I don't know which one -- which
brother.

256 DW: Oh, he has more than one? I only knew about one; the
one who was head of Convair, out in San Diego.

258 GW: O.K., that's the one. Well, he had lost a brother
earlier, too. I had that confused in my mind.

260 They'd been doing, apparently, a lot of building
up there in '55 and '56. They built the Great Hall,
262 and that type of thing. They owned property in other
cities, as I understand it, so they did have a lot of
264 property and that took maintenance, didn't it?

Rickard Tegstrom is a name that comes to mind.
266 Did you meet him up there?

GW: Not formally, but we were all living in the same
268 community. I saw him at work often. He was [either]
Swedish or Norwegian. His specialty had been filming
270 wildlife and nature and things of that kind, which he
did for Walt Disney Studios, and that was when some
272 of the MRA people had met him. He went to Africa
with them when they were making the film, "Freedom,"
274 which was filmed in Nigeria. Then he and his wife
came to Mackinac just so he could film the "Crowning
276 Experience." He was a very gifted man. I don't know

278 what's ever become of him, whether he's still filming
 or not.

 GW: I wonder what happened to the assets of the film. Do
280 copies or masters of these films, or the scenarios or
 scripts for the plays still exist?

282 DW: I'm sure they do, but I haven't any idea where they
 are.

284 GW: They must have an important archive somewhere. I'm
 going to have to find out about that.

286 DW: I think they would have had that in Los Angeles,
 where most of the film final production and editing
288 was done; duplicating, you know, and all the final
 business of film making.

290 GW: Technical work, yes. There was a lot of politics
 going on through all those years between the City of
292 Mackinac Island and the Mackinac Island State Park
 Commission. I've read how the deed passed. The
294 Island House, particularly, was a focus of
 controversy for a long time. Do you remember much
296 about that?

 DW: Not really, because it was mostly before my time. I
298 know that the Island House, during the Depression
 Years, had reverted to the state for nonpayment of
300 taxes and stood empty. Then in 1940 or '42, '41, --
 You probably read it, maybe in Blanche's manuscript,

302 how MRA happened to go to Mackinac; that the Park
 Commission, on behalf of the State, offered the use
304 of the Island House to MRA. It was used for several
 years: I'm just trying to remember. I didn't get
306 there for the first time until 1947, so they had had
 it for about five years at that point.

308 GW: The State Park Commission, I think, acquired it by
 deed in '47, and then they leased it to MRA prior to
310 sale. Then there seemed to be a discussion about
 whether public property should be used for private
312 uses, et cetera.

 DW: Of course, a lot of unusual things go on at Mackinac
314 Island. With all that is there that has been made
 available to the friends of the park commissioners,
316 et cetera; as you say, lots of politics involved.
 < Laugh >

318 GW: Did you ever run into a Reverend Ling?

 DW: Father Ling was the long-time Catholic priest there.
320 I didn't know him personally, but a lot of my friends
 did. He was a very good friend of Frank Buchman, who
322 was head of Moral Re-Armament.

 GW: Oh, they were very friendly? Well, there are not
324 many churches on the Island. At that time they had
 about five hundred population?

326 DW: I would guess.

DW: I would guess.

328 GW: How many people were there from MRA? Do you have any
idea?

330 DW: Well, it varied greatly from time to time. Sometimes
it might be down to five or ten people, when they
332 would take a revue off on the road; and when we'd
have a really big weekend up there, there could be a
334 thousand people there at the MRA Center. Of course,
there were more after we built the Cedar Point
336 buildings and the Great Hall, so there were more than
there ever were in the Island House days.

338 Suddenly the State decided that they didn't want
MRA in the Island House anymore (That was '49-'50,
340 somewhere along in there), which sort of forced MRA
to provide their own facilities. By that time
342 several people had bought different pieces of
property up there, so they put it all together and
344 built some new buildings. That was just about the
time that I got really interested in MRA.

346 GW: Have you been back to the Island recently?

DW: I was there last summer for a long weekend. We had a
348 small liberal arts college there, using these
facilities from 1965 to '70, and the former students
350 had a five-year reunion last year. There were great
numbers of them there. Some of the MRA people were

352 also there, and others who had never had any
 connection with MRA, but had been at Mackinac
354 College.

 That was my last visit. I must say, it's being
356 used very nicely at present. The people that own the
 Great Hall buildings have modernized them and painted
358 them and everything looked very nice.

 GW: You weren't disappointed in what you saw there?

360 DW: I was not. You know there are always some people who
 think "isn't it awful it isn't like in the old days."

362 GW: Sometimes the old days aren't that perfect, except in
 memory.

364 DW: That's right. It really served its purpose very
 much. Blanche may have noted in her manuscript,
366 [that] the Island House and all the program there was
 really the inspiration for Mountain House at Caux.
368 Of course, that has gone on to be practically a world
 capital. It's much more convenient to get to for all
370 of the people from Africa and Asia, and the Near East
 and Middle East. They've always had a lot from those
372 areas, and this year, [people] from Eastern Europe.
 You really feel God's timing in it; that at Island
374 House we learned how to do it, and at Mountain House
 you get the fruition of it.

402 had been an affiliate member for several years. I
served as an elder at Chapel by the Sea from 1983
through 1987.

404 GW: You come here to Dorothy Wright's home (your sister).
Well, this is a lovely place to visit here; it's like
406 being in the country almost, but you have all the
advantages of downtown East Lansing.

408 What do you see ahead for MRA, Donna? What do
you think is going to happen? Do you have any idea,
410 with these challenges that we're all facing?

DW: This is one time when you can say, "The Lord only
412 knows," and be truthful about it. I think so often
of that line in the Bible, "The spirit listeth where
414 he will," but none of us knows where or when.

The hardest thing for modern people to accept, I
416 think, is that you don't have it all planned out in a
hard-and-fast way. You move on what the spirit says.
418 It's the Quaker philosophy that it all depends on
where the spirit leads you, and that certainly has
420 been true.

During Frank Buchman's last years he would often
422 be congratulated for all that he had accomplished,
and his only reply was, "I have been wonderfully
424 led." It's so true.

376 There are lots of other centers around the
 world. The British have two important centers. One
378 is their theater and arts center in downtown London.
 The other is an estate up near Chester (Tirley
380 Garth). That is used a lot for weekend conferences.
 It's in the center of England so that it's convenient
382 for bringing people in there by the busload, or of
 course now with air travel, you can have a whole
384 European conference there over a weekend.

 GW: It all started in England. It was called the Oxford
386 Group, originally.

 DW: That was where that term came from. I think, in many
388 ways the scope of Frank Buchman's thinking and doing
 did start in those Oxford days; although you can go
390 back and trace it to his time at Penn State
 University just before World War I, when he had a lot
392 of experience in training young men in how to depend
 on God and follow His directions. I guess that puts
394 it briefly.

 GW: Were you affiliated with a traditional church?

396 DW: Oh, yes. I belonged to Peoples Church here for fifty
 years, altogether. I moved to Florida in 1974 and
398 became active in the Presbyterian church there at
 Fort Myers Beach, called Chapel by the Sea. I
400 finally transferred my membership down there, after I

GW: So much that we plan does not happen, and we don't
426 even know where our motivation comes from sometimes.
Much of it comes from young people about what they're
428 going to do in the world. I'm always so amazed when
they say to young kids, you know -- fifteen, sixteen,
430 "What are you going to grow up to be?" They take it
as, "Well, I'm going to be a doctor, a lawyer, a
432 merchant, a chief," -- and "to be"; it all happens
quite without our control sometimes. That's what
434 you're saying.

DW: That's so true, yes.

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< Side 2 >

438 GW: We're doing a "Voices of Lansing" Project, Donna. I
got some people like the History Committee of the
440 Chamber of Commerce and the Library together, and
we're interviewing people who have contributions to
442 the community and memory of changes to it. Oh! we
would never live long enough to interview all the
444 people we should, you know, let alone those that we
really know about. Each interviewer knows ten people
446 that are vital to our memory, and there's so much
that has not been written down.

448 We do transcribe these interviews, and then we
ask you to sign a release so that they can be used,

450 because without that release you can't even legally
 listen to them. They would be put in the public
452 library with the transcript and your release, so that
 people could use it for scholarly and historical
454 purposes.

 I really appreciate your sharing your memory
456 with us, because I don't know of anybody in Lansing
 now, except you and Jane (I'm sure there are other
458 people who were very active). Forrest has mentioned
 a Mr. Snell.

460 DW: I was just going to mention them. They live here in
 East Lansing.

462 GW: They're still here. Do you know if they are still
 active in the movement in any way?

464 DW: No: I mean, they're in the same situation that I am.
 He is a professional engineer (a retired engineer, I
466 should say), but he has interests down in Belize.
 His thought was that the people in Central America
468 needed to have businesses (industries or whatever you
 call them) established that would give them jobs and
470 that they could carry on. So he and a few associates
 started a shrimp farm along the coast of Belize. Now
472 it has grown and grown, and they have a real business
 going down there. He wants to sell that now to
474 someone else, so he can go on into new fields.

GW: How exciting! I'll have to contact him.

476 DW: She's here most of the time. He's down there about
half the time, but as of yesterday they were both
478 still in town.

GW: Good; I'll follow up on that.

480 DW: As a matter of fact, this book is theirs. This is
the American edition of the biography of Frank
482 Buchman.

GW: Oh, "On the Tail of a Comet: The Life of Frank
484 Buchman."

DW: The English version came out three or four years ago,
486 I think. Doesn't that have the Snell name?

GW: Oh, yes, John Snell, 918 Rosewood, East Lansing.
488 This is by Garth Lean, published in Colorado Springs.
I'm going to have to look this up.

490 DW: I don't know whether the library would have it yet,
but it would be a good one for them to have there,
492 because it's very good.

GW: They should have it. Here it's got the ISBN:
494 0939443074. With that new International Standard
Book Number, we could order so easily. This is
496 copyrighted 1988. I must get this and pursue this.

DW: So many of the books that were written about Frank
498 Buchman were inclined to be -- you might say,
adulatory. I mean, it accented the positive all the

500 time. Garth Lean has done a very fair job of taking
all of the negatives and meeting them head-on. If it
502 was a time when Frank Buchman or Moral Re-Armament
were wrong or slightly wrong, or whatever, he said
504 so. I think all of us who've had any association
with it, have appreciated that, in reading the book.

506 GW: I suppose Buchman's being quoted as being supportive
of Adolf Hitler, back in '38-'39, would be a definite
508 negative.

DW: That certainly would have been. I think that's dealt
510 with in there too.

You know, it's very interesting -- I don't know
512 whether Blanche has mentioned Tom Driberg or not: He
was a man who was very active in British politics and
514 worked his way up in the Anglican Church (the Church
of England). He took exception to the teaching that
516 God could change a person. He fought all his life
against Buchman and all that he stood for. Driberg
518 just died in the last few years, and then all the
truth came out about his homosexuality, and his lies
520 about the work of MRA and all the rest.

GW: He spent his career attacking MRA?

522 DW: He wrote a book telling all the wrong things, you
see, as if it were true. He not only did that, but
524 he came to this country, went around to library after

library and put the book in all the libraries. I
526 have a friend in Canada who taught Library Science
for many years and is very knowledgeable about book
528 things. She got printouts from librarians who had
this computer access system (I can't remember what it
530 is called nationally). She asked for a list of all
the libraries that had Driberg's book in it.
532 Practically everyone had it: Or if she asked about
what they had on the subject of MRA or Buchman
534 (probably MRA), and it came out library after library
had this book. Now she and others have been working
536 to get this into every library on the same basis. It
needs to be there so that people can read the whole
538 truth of the matter.

GW: The balanced story.

540 DW: Yes, exactly. I think the thing that is hardest for
people to understand and accept, and the hardest
542 thing for those of us who have been active with it
(and should know better), is that it's not an
544 organization. It's really not a movement, as such;
as we think of them. We think of it as a group of
546 people.

The same friend of mine who did this work with
548 the libraries, a few years ago wrote out a definition
for Moral Re-Armament, which I think pretty well hits

550 it. I meant to get this copied out so I could give
it to you. I'll copy it on one of these larger
552 sheets.

GW: Do you have it there to read, Donna?

554 DW: Yes, I do. She wrote, "Moral Re-Armament is a world-
wide network of friends who are eager to be channels
556 of caring and reconciliation and inspiration for
mankind, and who therefore are eager to accept
558 continuously within themselves the changing and
reconciling and inspiring spirit and direction of
560 God." I think that pretty well covers the dimensions
of it. It is a matter of individuals, really.

562 GW: And who is the person who wrote that?

DW: Her name is Geraldine Hughes, and I think that came
564 to her when she was at Caux two or three years ago.
She may have refined it a bit after talking with
566 other people, sharing it with them, et cetera.

GW: You have a notebook here. Is that sort of your
568 "chapbook?" that you write down special things?

DW: It is, at this point. Actually, this notebook was
570 given to me by a business and professional women's
group down in Naples, Florida.

572 GW: It's nice to have a book like that, that you can put
down a favorite poem or a thought; and you carry that
574 with you. That's nice.

DW: Did you have any other questions here?

576 GW: You've answered a lot of them. I'm pleased to know
about this book, the biography of Buchman. Did you
578 have a scrapbook there? Is that something you wanted
to show me?

580 DW: No, this is my scrapbook from my days in the
military, 1942-'46. In the summer of 1946 when I was
582 first out, I had started putting things in here, but
I never got around to pasting them in. My family had
584 given me the scrapbook the year before. I'm getting
it ready so that a grand-niece of mine can do the
586 pasting in and putting in captions and things like
that. I got just that far last night.

588 GW: Be very careful what kind of paste you use, because
it can yellow and destroy the papers so easily.

590 DW: I know. I threw away some clippings that had been
stuck together with scotch tape that turned yellow
592 and brittle.

GW: Sometimes they either turn brittle (that adhesive
594 tape) or then they melt.

DW: Yes, and mess the whole thing up. Fortunately, the
596 one that I found there that had been stuck together,
I had another copy of, that had not been stuck
598 together; so I just threw the one out.

GW: Today we can microfilm the materials and that gives
600 you a good security copy; because your story, as you
record it in your scrapbook, is going to be very
602 rewarding to people.

DW: Reading all these news articles, I have what seems
604 like endless clippings. Of course, they're probably
available elsewhere. We don't need the same story
606 from the Chicago Tribune, and the Detroit Free Press,
and the Detroit News, and the Detroit Times, and the
608 State Journal. < Laughter > I discovered that the
day that they opened the WAAC Training Center; I
610 think every paper carried the same stuff. I'm sort
of throwing out some of those things, which helps. I
612 had just stuck it all into a folder or something. I
can't remember how I collected it all, in my travels.

614 GW: Now it's especially valuable because it's all brought
together, and it's brought together by you, the
616 participant at the time; very important. I'm glad
you're doing that. Do you have a similar scrapbook
618 for MRA?

DW: No, I don't. It wouldn't go in a scrapbook; I can
620 tell you that!

GW: Maybe a room? < Laughter >

622 DW: I have finally thrown out some of the things that I
collected back in the 1950's. I figured I didn't

624 need to be the MRA archive source. I don't know
 where those are -- oh, from Mackinac College. There
626 were some things that were taken from Mackinac to the
 library at Lake Superior State College. It was
628 primarily the Mackinac College Archives. Whether
 there were any MRA things, I don't know; and I don't
630 know whether the MRA things after that were taken to
 Allentown, which was Dr. Buchman's original home,
632 which has been turned over to the Lehigh County
 Historical Society. They maintain it as a kind of
634 historic place or museum or whatever.

GW: Open to the public?

636 DW: Yes, now it's open by appointment. It is in a double
 house, and one half of it belonged to the Buchman
638 family. Some of Dr. Buchman's friends had bought the
 other half years before I knew anything about it;
640 people could come and stay in this other half, and
 they could keep his half as more of a museum.

642 Ever since the historical society took it over,
 they had had one or another of MRA couples or
644 individuals living there who were sort of curators
 for it. I had visited there a couple of times, but
646 as it happens so often, the historical society found
 that they were having difficulty maintaining it; so
648 they asked the last curator to leave and said that

650 they would just have one of their volunteers
available on certain days.

GW: House museums are very expensive.

652 DW: Yes, I know. I mean, I'm sure they are. I [can't]
speak as though I had experience, but I know they
654 must be. Whether there are still any filing cabinets
or things there, I'm not sure.

656 GW: I guess we have a challenge to locate the archives
and records.

658 Returning to Lansing after wintering away for
several years, what do you see as the greatest
660 change, Donna?

DW: Well, it's a different place. < Laughter > That's
662 about it. I think they're struggling along with
things, like fixing up the old capitol instead of
664 building a new one. I think the area around the
capital complex there, west and south of it -- All
666 the area, of course, has deteriorated. I'd like to
see them have a "Rebuild Lansing" program going, to
668 preserve what they have. I think what they've done
with the capitol is certainly a step in the right
670 direction.

GW: It is a gem of interior design.

672 DW: I haven't seen it yet. I certainly intend to.

GW: Oh, you must see it before you go back.

674 DW: I think my friend, Geraldine Hughes, will be visiting
me here for a few days early in August, and we'll do
676 it then. Last year when she was here we did get to
see the Historical Museum and State Library.

678 GW: And the new History Center.

DW: Yes; which is a great thing to have, because I
680 remember way back to when the State Office Building
had the Pioneer Museum down at the end of the hall.

682 GW: Before it went over to the Turner House.

DW: Yes; before the fire.

684 GW: Oh, yes. I worked at the library at the time of the
fire, in 1951.

686 DW: You did? Well, you worked right down below me, then.
I was in the Budget Office on the second floor.

688 GW: The library was on the first floor.

DW: Yes. It used to be very handy when we needed to look
690 something up; I could just go out the back door and
down the stairway to the library. < Laughter >

692 I'll never forget those newspaper pictures of
all the volumes on the bleachers at the Boys'
694 Vocational School -- trying to dry them out. That
was an experience.

696 GW: I was working with steel helmet and boots with a crew
from Manpower, back in the building. I was young at
698 that time, and I had one of the crews that were

700 moving books out to the bleachers. I never worked
701 for long periods in the Boys' Vocational Fieldhouse
702 where we set those bleachers up.

703 We had to turn the books, and keep the air
704 circulating through them. That was so exhausting.
705 So many of the librarians were middle-aged at that
706 time: Gail Curtis and Miss Lindow -- Cora Lindow,
707 Louise Hayes. Louise Hayes was such a gem.

708 I remember one time we had something called
709 P-18's. These were pamphlet materials; you know,
710 monograph type of things. She was taking care of
711 these, and she found this nice line to hang them on
712 so she just hung them up like clothes, lopped over
713 this line. Of course, they were dripping wet. Many
714 of them did not survive, or perhaps shouldn't have,
715 but there were a lot of valuable things lost too.
716 Then we discovered that the line was an electrical
717 cord. < Laughter >

DW: Oh, joy! So what happened?

718 GW: We took them down and nobody got any "baddies," but
719 we said, "Louise," -- (Hazie, we called her,
720 affectionately) and we said, "Hazie, we think we'll
721 find something else for you to do." You had to
722 remember the funny things that happened. It was such
a tragedy; and a tragedy right up till now, because

724 we've never been able to replace the Shakespeare and
 some of the treasures that we lost. I really grew up
726 then.

DW: Was the card catalog preserved over there, so you
728 know what you lost - in a sense?

GW: Yes. There were many of those heraldry books in
730 genealogy that were glazed paper; art paper, and when
 they got damp they just melded together, solid.

732 I remember going in with five inches of water on
 the floor of the Records Department, where the
734 genealogies and the art books, some of the fine art
 books and general reference tools were. I try not to
736 think about that too much, but when I walk into the
 new building, it hits me some days that it's a long
738 wait from 1951 till now to get a library. It's a
 proper house for our treasures.

740 With the MRA, Donna, I find many history books
 -- You can go through Michigan History Magazine
742 (that I see you have here), on the bed here: There's
 no MRA indexed. It's a little-told story.

744 DW: Yes. I actually was in on some sessions with Blanche
 [Blanche Coggan] when she was working on her
746 manuscript and there were some things, the way her
 interpretation of things went or what she included,
748 that I felt were a little -- not really misleading

and not intentionally wrong; but we tried to help her
750 to steer it a little different angle. < Laugh > Of
course, I haven't thought of this for thirty years
752 almost: I don't remember whether she tried to
publish it and could not find anybody who would take
754 it -- (She had something in mind at that time,
whether it was some state publication, or what) -- or
756 whether she couldn't find anyone, or whether she had
decided that it had better not be published.

758 GW: I think it was really the latter. I got that
impression from talking with her, as I remember,
760 Donna, that if she didn't think the time was right --
that to wait would be better. Then she got off on
762 another challenge, the Underground Railroad in
Michigan, and that took up most of her time. She
764 brought the MRA to a certain point, and let it cool;
and maybe that was alright.

766 DW: I would love to have a chance to see it again. Do
you have a copy of it now?

768 GW: I don't today, but that doesn't mean that we can't
get one for you. You might be able to read that and
770 make some comments.

DW: I would like to. That might refresh my memory on
772 some of these things that I'm slipping on now.

774 GW: You'd have valuable comments to make on the
manuscript.

776 DW: Yes. I'd like to have the chance to really give the
whole story.

GW: Blanche's work was certainly a rich beginning.

778 DW: She was very painstaking about wanting to get all the
information, et cetera.

780 I think that I talked with her about it some, in
her home here or up at Mackinac too. When I get to
782 review it, I may have some thoughts on how to clarify
the different points that seem a little questionable
784 in the light of history since then.

GW: Yes; things written close to the time are different
786 from down the road. Memory is farsighted.
< Laughter >

788 DW: I plan to leave next Monday, to go to Canada and
visit Geraldine Hughes for ten days or two weeks,
790 after which she may come back here with me.

We're both interested in family history
792 materials. My mother's family were all Canadians.
Geraldine has helped me with research in several
794 Canadian libraries. I want to get up to the Detroit
Public Library, where I did a lot two years ago on my
796 father's family, who were Germans and came to Detroit
in the 1850's.

798 I'll be in touch with you when I get back. I'll
 be here the rest of this week, but I think this
800 morning we've covered just about all I can think of
 or I know of.

802 GW: Or remember, right. Well, I didn't want to tire you
 out, but I think your suggestion about the manuscript
804 might be a good memory jogger, and maybe Geraldine
 would have some comments that would be different too.
806 Everybody's memory is a little different.

 DW: That's right. We remember different things, of
808 course. There were always so many people at Mackinac
 who were involved in different things, that a lot
810 more was going on than any one person could know
 about, really. Same way with all of the outreach
812 since then; the stories of what some of these people
 have done who were at Caux, or at Mackinac back in
814 the early days. It would take a whole library to
 tell all the stories, but we can sort of narrow it
816 down to what happened in Michigan.

 GW: If we could just have insight from people in Michigan
818 or even in the Lansing area, that took part in that,
 I think we've made a great contribution. I certainly
820 appreciate the time you've taken, Donna, to spend
 with me this morning.

822 DW: I'm glad to do it.

GW: I'm delighted to meet you, after all these years!

824 DW: Didn't know that we had been through so many things
together; these common experiences, like the State
826 Building fire.

GW: And then your genealogy work: You know, we'll
828 probably find out we're related.

DW: You never can tell.

830 GW: It's a strange thing that we're all one family: We
just haven't met them all yet. < Laughter >

832 DW: I've never heard it put that way.

GW: Remind Geraldine of that, if she gets discouraged.
834 Thank you so much.

836 < End of Interview >

838

Transcribed by Patricia Siggers
840 Lansing, Michigan

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