

Madison Historical: The Online Encyclopedia and Digital Archive for Madison County, Illinois

Roland Harris Oral History Interview

Jeffrey Edison, Interviewer

Highland, Illinois

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Editor's Note: This transcript was revised by Roland Harris and the text varies slightly from the original audio recording.

Jeffrey Edison (JE): This is Jeffrey Edison, and I am interviewing Roland Harris in Highland, Illinois at the Highland Home. So Mr. Harris, where are you from?

Roland Harris (RH): I am from the little city of Alhambra, just fifteen miles north of here.

JE: How long were you living in Alhambra?

RH: Well, until I got married in 1947. My residency was there, but I was actually working in Edwardsville at the Schneider Funeral Home from April of 1946 until we got married on June 17th of 1947. I would go home on weekends or my days off.

JE: What was it like growing up in Alhambra?

RH: [laughs] Well, it was small town. Only about 350 population. I think that's about what it was when I was growing up, we had our own schoolhouse. A nice big schoolhouse that had been built in the middle 20s and was four rooms then they fixed out half the basement and started a high school in the basement of the building. The other half was where they actually practiced basketball, uh, when it was winter. Other than that we practiced on a clay court outside. We had softball, baseball, basketball, and tennis. Those were the four sports that the boys had and the girls had a of couple sports. I went through my junior year at Alhambra and then in 1942-'43 I came here to Highland and went senior year here at Highland. So, it was a small town atmosphere, you knew everybody and everybody knew everything about everybody else.

JE: So what, what did you do for fun while living there?

RH: I played at all sports from the time I was in 6th grade I was on the basketball and softball teams. Went all the way through 3 years of high school there, did one year of boxing, but I found that have a nose that bleeds very easily, I would always wind up with a bloody nose and so that took care of my boxing career. One year was enough. We played at an old barn that was just next to our house that was called a livery stable. It had the two wagons that the rural mail carriers would use and the man had the horses that he rented to the rural mail carriers so they could go out when the roads were impassible with a car. They would still take the old wagon and go with it. I know the one gentleman that left Alhambra at 9:00 o'clock in the morning and got home at 9:00 that night. That was normally is a 3 hour run. So it took

him 12 hours to do it that time. I don't know any other stories about that, but the old wagons were good hiding places. We played "kick the picket" if there would be three of us. We would be two against one or you know however number and they'd go hide and you could hide in the buggies sometimes or hide in the hay loft or just any place in the old barn or even you could go around the barn. You could be on the outside of the barn as long as you didn't go across the alley or across our area. So, we spent a lot of time playing kick the picket and then pickets got harder to get and so then we started playing the "kick the tin can." So then we got into playing softball or then wiffle ball came along. That we could even play in our alley. Because even if you hit a window, unless you really hit it hard we would break a window and then everyone would have to chip in and pay for a window glass and then have the man at the lumber yard repair it for us, but we pretty well made our own games. We used to put sand in an old canvas bag. Our mothers, sewed them up and made them into bases for our softball and we would carry them around, carry the four bases, set them in place and then would play. I started roller-skating when I was about 9 or 10 and then we had Route 140 going right through Alhambra and the sidewalks were pretty good, but Route 140 was really great and there wasn't a lot of traffic in those days and you go down the opposite side of the road. The actual side they drove on so you could watch the traffic and you could get off the road. So that was the big things. Then I started dancing, my mother and dad danced a lot at the little firemen's hall we had, it was called Harmony Hall and the harmoniers sang there originally and that's what it was started for. Then it became a little dance hall. It wasn't very big, but they danced a lot and I used to have to sit on the chair and watch them, my brother and I, and well then other people were bringing their daughters and we started dancing. I was dancing when I was 10 years old. That became a Saturday evening affair. They usually have a sponsored one dance a month at the hall and then other people would have a wedding dance or anniversary dance or something. Everybody would be invited, you know, didn't make a difference who it was, you could all come and have a good time. Usually share some cake and punch. You could always find somebody who willing to do something, and we loved to go to the tower which was just about a mile north of Alhambra. It was where the Illinois Central Railroad and the New York Central, the one that came out of Edwardsville, later called the Nickel Plate, crossed. There was a tower there where the tower man had to pull his big levers to move the tracks so they would go across or the other way. That was a favorite hangout. Our neighbor on the other side of us, on the other side of the old barn was the man that was there from 4:00 to midnight. At first. Later he got to be the day man. So we would walk with him. He would walk that mile usually and we'd walk with him and stay until it was 5:00 pm, time to head for home, sometimes we'd ride our bicycles out. That was always a big thing to watch the trains come and go and watch what was in the train. Every once and a while you'd see a hobo hanging on one of the back of the cars or inside an open car and that was always a chance that hobo would get off at the Depot and walk to our house for a meal. Mom would always feed them on our back porch. The city jail was at the other end of our block in the back towards the north. The city jail was there and the hoboes would come, it had two jail cells and they had oil cloth covered cushions that you could place on top the metal and there was little pot bellied stove and the guys would come and cook their coffee. Go out and beg for their food and then go back and eat it there. We knew most of them by name. They would come in the spring and again in the fall. The spring they would be headed north and then the fall came they would be headed south. They got off the train because there wasn't much to eat on the train and go to the tower or the depot. I got very good friends and I never had a problem with any of them because they all come to my mom's and she'd fix them a plate and they'd say we'll take it back and eat it. They would sit on the porch while she was fixing it. There was always something extra to do and our good friend ran the filling station at the other end of the block. My dad was a barber. He had his little barber shop there. In those

days not many of the boys got hair cuts at the barber shop. Mom and pop cut their hair. A lot of the men did get their hair cut there, but several of the older men, the banker, the postmaster, and one of our friends who was a carpenter, they would get shaved three times a week. Shaves those days was 10 cents. Hair cuts was a quarter and so there wasn't too many hair cuts because the older guys didn't need very much hair cut. It wouldn't grow too fast. My dad said we're going to have to do something because this was during the late Depression days and so he started a little insurance agency. He got the Madison County Mutual Automobile Insurance agency for our area and that really helped us out. Then he got Hartford Insurance for home insurance and it made a big difference in our lives. I'll never forget in 1936 dad bought his first new car: '36 four door sedan. Gray with red wheels. Can you imagine grey with red wheels? Well, that's what it was. The spare tire was in the back. Hung on the back because there was a small trunk, instead of putting the tire in the trunk, which would take up almost all of the room, they put the spare tire on the back. That's what we drove up to New York in 1939 to go to the New York World's Fair. The biggest thing I've ever had happen to me when I was a kid was going to the World's Fair. My dad had a friend here in Highland, who had retired, a barber, he came up and stayed at our place for two weeks. He and his wife had lived at our place and our house and ran the barber shop while we took this two week vacation. Which was the very first vacation my father had ever taken. It was in 1939 when we went to Washington D.C. to meet the family up there that lived in Alhambra originally and we went to New York City to the fair and then went to Niagara Falls and into Canada. We went up and came back in Toronto, Canada and then into Detroit and back home. Two weeks we did all that so we was movin'. We only spent a day and a half at the fair because it was fairly expensive. Everything was expensive for us. We certainly enjoyed it. I still have my souvenirs that I purchased all along the way. We'd buy a little something. I have a little box with all of the little souvenirs from the 1939 World's Fair. Does that answer your question pretty well?

JE: So you mentioned that you started school in Alhambra, but then you finished at Highland. Why did you end up going to Highland?

RH: Well, Alhambra only had a three high school. All the small towns: St. Jacob, Marine, Alhambra, Worden, New Douglas, Serento, Panama, Witt, and Irving. They were all three year high schools. We had a league. We called it MBM. Madison, Bond, and Macoupin counties, and we played basketball and baseball and softball. Most of those schools didn't have tennis, but our school did have it. We played tennis against some of the schools down here in south of Highland like Trenton and some of the smaller schools down there. My brother also came here and he's two years older. He came and I visited the school. In fact by that time, my Aunt was teaching the 5th grade here. My father's youngest sister was teaching the 5th grade here so it was a big incentive to see Aunt Vi. We enjoyed the school. It was good for us. Got us going and I liked math and my brother did too. He became an accountant. I went to 6 months of college and it's called Jefferson College. It was a division of Missouri University and it was in St. Louis. I got a job on the railroad when I graduated from high school that summer. I painted all the signals on the Illinois Central Railroad from Mott, which was south of Edwardsville to almost Mount Olive. I had my own gasoline driven handcar, that rode on the railroad track and in those days we had little areas where we could pull off of and we had to watch the signals to make sure there was no trains coming or going, and we could use that track to go to these different signals. Every signal had a place for the little handcar. It was small and you could lift it up like a wheelbarrow. It had handles on each end and pull it off on the side, onto this little track. I did that because I was only 17 when I graduated from high school. I wasn't 18 until July and by October the 15th I was in the service already. I was drafted and got in

World War II. I was first at Fort Sheridan in Chicago and then went to Fort Sill in Oklahoma. I was in the field artillery. The field artillery needed a lot of fellas who had math too because all the calibrations on the gun was done mathematically by fellows keeping it in your head, or on paper as you were using the 105 howitzer which was what I was in. I was an acting corporal during my first 16 weeks and then I was able to go cathry school. It was school to be what we called a non-commissioned officer and when I graduated from that after 16 weeks I became a corporal. Then I taught 105 howitzer and gymnastics. After 16 weeks as a corporal, the next 16 weeks of training for the recruits, I was sergeant. At the end of that 16 weeks, I took those fellas that were in my unit overseas with us. We went to Fort Ord California and then over to San Francisco. Got on a boat and we were waiting for a convoy so we sat off of Hawaii. We could see Hawaii off to the north, but we never did get there. We sat there for 5 days just going around in circles waiting for the convoy to take shape. Then we had 32 ships when we finally got all together. Went from there to New Caledonia which is an island between Australia and New Zealand. It makes a little triangle and we picked up the outfit we were going to be assigned to. We went as recruits and replacements and we were assigned to the 98th field artillery battalion, these men had been on Guadalcanal and we were replacing those that had been killed and wounded and training them on the new 105 howitzer. We left there after two months and went to Leyte in the Philippine Islands, Leyte Island. We landed in Leyte Gulf off of troop ship. We had a troop ship that had was built for 4,000 troops and instead of having 4,000 we had 8,000 troops, which meant we had to be up on deck or lower decks from 6:00 in the morning to 6:00 at night while somebody slept in our hammock down below. Then that evening we were down below from 6:00 pm to 6:00 am. I had learned to play bridge in the meantime when I was at Fort Ord. The First Sergeant said we are going to need you. I said well you got four. Well, we're going to need five because we're always going to be one in the chow line. That's exactly what happened. We laid on our bellies playing bridge under our trucks for shade. Whoever started breakfast line, he ate and got back and all four of us had eaten and it was his job to start for lunch. The four of us had eaten again. It was time for him to go to his evening meal and then we finished that. So there was always four playing bridge and you never played with the same partner because you always changed partner as you played. We played four hands and then we changed partner. You kept your own score because you were always playing somebody different. I had a little 20 page bridge book, fit in my shirt pocket. That's how big it was. Today the bridge book is 198 pages and it's a regular paperback type book so that's how bridge has changed. There's so many new rules and we call conventions and things. And I have been teaching bridge here in Highland since 1970. 'Bout every two years I have a class, we call a beginner and an intermediate class. That's getting a little ahead of my story, but anyhow. I went in as a replacement and by the time we got there, the Japanese had pulled out of Leyte entirely. The ships couldn't get back in. There was about 2,000 Japanese soldiers still on Leyte. Around 980 of 'em actually brought out their white flags and became prisoners, but the other guys decided they weren't willing to do that. The Japanese had their own theories so they didn't. It was our job as field artillery to blast them out of these caves. We were over on the west side and we had landed on the east side. We were over by Ormoc, on the west side. There was some caves similar to the area which we still see around Collinsville. There's the bluffs they call them. That's all limestone, and that's what was there. There had been some little caves in the area. They created a big cave out of a small cave as they dug out from the inside. We got some shells right inside that cave which you couldn't see. The cave went down into the ground, but we were able to get the shell to go down into that hole and then we wiped out all of them. A lot of them by that time knew what was coming and we were moving. They could see us. We couldn't see them. They knew what was coming. A lot of them did surrender, but I don't know how many exactly we killed, but it

was a large number that was killed in that cave. That was the two weeks of action that we had. The rest of the time we were training L.S.T. [landing ship tanks] to go to Japan. I say the atomic bombs saved my life, then the atomic bomb was dropped, I was on my way to Manila. I had been, we had some casualties, we had one man killed in our outfit and I helped the medics with the 19 others that were wounded. My thought was when I was in school originally that I would become a funeral director and embalmer. Then in high school and in college I took aeronautical engineering. I thought I would be an aeronautical engineer. Well, that didn't happen because when I came home Curtis Wright and McDonald's was laying off many of their engineers. They didn't need more, so I went back to being a funeral director, but let's get back to what I did after the atomic bomb was dropped. I went up to Manila and stationed at the number 1 station hospital in Manila right on the Rizal Avenue which was the main street in Manila. They put up three barracks buildings. We were living in the second floor and down below we were interviewing all the American prisoners who had been in Japan as they were bringing them back to the hospital. The first stop was Manila. They would fly them that far. Then they would come to the hospital and if they were able to walk or come in a wheelchair, they would come to us which was what I did for the first three weeks. I couldn't sleep. The stories I heard, of the atrocities that they did to the American prisoners. Fortunately the gentleman that was with us, the first sergeant, had enough time in that he got to go home and I was able to take his place. By that time I was a staff sergeant so I took his place. I never was made the first sergeant, but I did first sergeant duty. I got to assign the fellas to do the jobs instead of actually doing the job and that was a different story entirely. I had my own jeep and every weekend, we would work just Monday thru Friday, and every weekend I could go take some of my buddies and we would go to different areas. We had buddies who were in other camps and the like and would get to go where they were and see their part of the country. We got up all the way to Subic Bay and Baguio and places that had airports. I didn't leave the Philippines until April 1st, 1946 because I was not married, the time in service, one month counted as a point and you had to have so many points before you get back and your time overseas counted as two points so it took a while for me to get enough points to get back to the United States. I had a girlfriend back here, Lorna Ritt, who I had been writing to and when I had my two furloughs, we had dates and I figured we would marry, I asked my mom and dad to bring Lorna along to meet us at Jefferson Barracks, Missouri where I was discharged on Easter Sunday of April the 21st 1946. They brought her along and on June the 17th, 1947 we got married and we'd been married 69 years. We'll be 70 years this coming June. It's been a whirlwind. I started working at the funeral home in Edwardsville on May the first, of 1946. Worked there 'til September of 1948 and then I came here to Highland and worked for Tibbett's and Company which was a furniture store and a funeral home. In 1950, the gentleman who owned the business, Mr. Tibbetts, had a heart attack and I started managing the store for him, and then he let me start to buy. That year he let me buy 20% of the business and then by the end of the year I had 40% of the business and then I could buy 49% of the business. When he retired completely, I was able to buy 100% of the business. I kept the furniture store for a number of years and then I bought an old banker's big three story brick home. Started my funeral home over there and made a larger furniture store. I had to have a manager there, had to have a manager at the funeral home, and I was then putting out more money than I was making so I decided to stay in the funeral business. It's what I knew best and did that for the next 30 years. I retired from funeral business, a friend of mine who was our neighbor said, "Rolly, you should get into our public relations department at the bank where I work." So I worked 14 more years in the public relations department at the First National Bank here in Highland.

I can't sit still as you know right now I'm starting a museum here at four rooms and hall of the original 1912 retirement home. We'll have time after a while to go up and see what's going on, but I collected what we call Highland memorabilia from 1950 I started collecting this memorabilia and when we moved here I moved 98 boxes of Highland memorabilia that I had in my basement at home. We sorted it all out and we got it down to 44 boxes. It's all in alphabetical order A, B, C, on down and all the little towns around us have a box. So we're starting to fill up the first room. We have four rooms upstairs in the old part of the home that was built in 1912. In 1912, when the home was built, it was 14 rooms downstairs with a men's bathroom on the south end of the building and the ladies bathroom at the north end of this big building, and a long hallway. And then the same thing up on the second floor. So it housed 28 people and each one had their own room, a closet, and a window, and a door going out into the hallway. That was about it. One bath tub, one basin, one stool in the men's room. Same thing in the ladies room. When I was asked to come on the board here, in 1956, be a member of the board. There were 10 people on the board and one of the first things I started to talk to them about was putting on some additions onto to this building, and we're in that first addition. The first addition went north out of the basement of the home. The quarters are on a hill and this is coming out of that hill. We would have had to put a really big, big area filled in here so instead we used it as the quarters themselves. We have two more wings we made out. One goes to the west and one southwest. So right now we have 28 rooms in use. We have 5 or 6 rooms that are not in use, but we have 3 people that are coming in so we'll be in pretty good shape again. We love it here. We've been here since December the 10th of last year. They took three single rooms here in this unit and made one big apartment out of it. They did this last year and when they started doing it, we had talked, we had been here two years before that, and in those days they just had a two room apartment. The wife and I figured it was just too small for us. So when they started making the two three rooms apartments out of these single rooms, we were told what they were doing and we came up right away and looked to see what they were doing. That was in October. By the time they got it all ready, we moved in on the 10th of December. We really love it here. Our meals are furnished, the food is great, we have good cooks, we have people here in the building 24 hours a day. They do our own cleaning of our room, they change our bed once a week. They do our washing and ironing. Washing *and* ironing. Yes, they do a great job. The people here that work here are just dedicated to the Highland senior citizens and they do a wonderful job for us. Couldn't be better. I didn't think I'd say that. We built our own house 23 years ago and we said that's where we are going to stay, but the wife broke her left ankle three times and the last time also tore the ligament and so standing is a thing she can't do. There's too much standing at home cooking, ironing, and washing so she does very well here now. What else do you need?

JE: So you mentioned that you started the museum part of this home.

RH: Yes.

JE: What interests you about Highland history and, like, Madison County history?

RH: Well, history was my second favorite class in, mathematics was the first and history was the second. Being in World War II like I was, we had so much interaction with the other people which was history and I started a Highland Historical Society in 1971 here in Highland and I was the first president. Six of us started it. Within a year we had 200 members. We tried to save the old Swiss residents farm was built just north of Highland in 1832-1833. It had needed a new roof and we got that on the east side. The west side we had it half on and we did that in the first year we had it, and we had the new roof on half the

opening was on the west side and on December 14th, 1971 there was a tornado here in Highland and it just took the east section and took it almost 200 feet. Almost up to the house of the farm. Took the west section of that roof and threw it about 30 feet to the west. Can you imagine? One went to the east. One section went to the west. Turned the barn a foot and a half on its foundation, so we couldn't save it anymore. And so we thought that ended the historical society, but it didn't. We got other projects going. We redid the chapel out at the cemetery. We were then given Latzer homestead. Louis Latzer was the founder of the Pet Milk Company that was here in Highland. It started here in Highland in 1885. The Pet Milk Company in 1977 gave us his home and farm 40 acres of ground. We have what we call Harvest Day still out there. We have steam engines come and old cars, old tractors, and we have it three days Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, the second weekend in September. We make enough money to take care of the buildings and with the income from that we're able to take care of this farm. Then we were also given the old stage coach stop which is an old brick building. We fixed it all up and that's a historical society museum. I gave a lot of things to them when they started and it is full. There is not room for anything else so that's the reason we started this museum here. I had these 98 boxes which are now 44 boxes. Which we're gone from, we're in the O's right now. We're going through the O's through Z's boxes because that's the room that's ready. It's the furthest one to the south so we're starting there. We'll have four rooms, plus the hallway which is the entire length of the building. The hall is going to be an art museum and then the north end of that building is going to be, we're calling the North farm room building. We started out asking for centennial farms, but we found out that there aren't that many centennial farms in the area. There's even a couple sesquicentennial farms in the area. We're asking anybody in the area that wants to put in a picture, if they'll frame them, we'll put them up. I have nine other people who've said they're going to bring things. I have 18 other people who have already brought things for us to put in there. SO we're going to be fairly close to saying, hold off until we get these all up to see if we're going to have more room. So it's a work in progress. We started this in April and we were are well in October and we're just starting to put memorabilia on the shelves. All the shelving that I had at home, I brought up here. The men who work here, are putting plexiglass in frames in front of these shelves now, and then with doors so we can get into them. So it's going to be really nice when we get it all done. My wife used to call it my Highland junk. Now she definitely calls it my Highland memorabilia. Lorna worked with the box company here in Highland for over 20 years. She was the first computer operator they had. She was on the computer the rest of the time. So, she has her own computer and her own iPad. Now we bought another little computer for the museum. She has 1400 and some odd things already entered on the computer, and tells who gave it, if somebody gave it, other than myself, because when I had the funeral home, I had big cabinets filled up there in the one room. And people started bringing memorabilia in. I had a booklet. I had over a hundred names in that book of people who had brought things in. So we're listing their name on the item that they brought in. So it's going to be a lot of grandchildren, who had never seen the items that grandma or grandpa gave or their dad and mom gave, and we're going to have it on display and it's going to show their number and their name on the item. So it's going to create a lot of activity. The schools, I know both of the history teachers at St. Paul and Highland and at the middle school. They're going to have their classes come whenever it's ready. It will be next year. Not this year anymore, but that's what we're planning on doing. One of my hobbies besides collecting all this Highland junk was, I took up art, yes oil painting in 1990 when I retired. I figured I needed a hobby, which I really didn't, but I took up art and I've painted little over a hundred pictures in the years. And now, I'm basically painting our son's homes on canvas and now I'm painting our grandchildren's home on canvas. I really enjoy that. I have several of my pictures are up here in the art

museum because I painted and I spent a lot of time out at Silver Lake painting scenes out there. I've got two of those in the museum up there. And also, the one of the old barn that we tried to save. What else you need to know?

JE: I'm interested in, like, what are your favorite parts of history for Highland and this side of Madison County? What enjoy most learning about Highland?

RH: Well, the Latzer Homestead is a big 12 room house frame sitting just a mile and a half outside of town. He was a farmer, he was a milker and so when they started with the idea of starting a milk factory here, he was all for it. He became one of the directors, one of ten directors. He had gone to McKendree College in Lebanon, one year, and took up chemistry. His father returned to Europe and didn't come back. He just went over to visit, but never returned. Louis had to quit college and come back and run the farm. He had a younger brother he was four years younger and so he was still in high school. And so, he came back to run the farm. He kept on milking. The original barn is still out there. The house, the original house sat right beside the barn. Which was the Swiss-German way of doing things. The house and barn were very close. With bad weather, you didn't have so far to go. They only had about, I would say about 14 or 15 feet from the barn to the house. So they didn't get very wet or they didn't get much snow to get to the barn. That original barn is still there. The original barn has a big hay loft and the big hay loft was used, for many things. I'll tell you the greatest what it was used for. It was used to house the miniature Pet Milk factory. There was a miniature of the Greenville, Illinois plant built in 1941. They built it all out of stainless steel and what they called graniteware which is a metal with porcelain over the top and that unit weighs 3 ton. That would be 6,000 pounds. It was 26 foot long and 8 foot high. It has motors and pumps and everything in it to make the thing work. That all was stored in that hay loft of that red barn. After 1987, Highland had its sesquicentennial, the Pet Milk Company stored the miniature in the red barn. They had it on display in 1987 at the exhibition hall here in Highland. Then when they took it down and put it back in 17 wooden crates, they had no place to go with it. We offered them, they could have the hay loft if they would distribute it along the hay loft over the whole hay loft. Not stack it, but put it one layer high. They did. Then Pet Milk was sold to a new owner that didn't really know anything about this being in the hay loft. So we wrote to the new owner, asked them what we should do with this miniature Pet Milk factory that we had. They said they knew nothing about it and we should write and tell them about it. They would give some ideas. So it was in crates, took pictures of the crates, sent it to them. They said, well you have it, you own it if you'll take it. We said we'll take care of it. So we took the old pole barn. Took 1/4 of the pole barn and made it the area of the Pet Milk factory. Two local men were very good mechanics, set it all up and got it all running, had to new belts and pulleys, and everything on it. They did all that. This year, was the 19th year that we had it up and running. So we'll be celebrating our 20th year of the miniature factory running. And uh, it's a sight to be, all 32nd gauge, like railroads called 30 second scale. Everything in. Even all the little men that were standing around doing the different things, we still have. They've had to be new clothes put on, but they took the old clothes and made clothes exactly the same or as close as we could get as the same type of material so it's something to see. That's one of my jobs that Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, I and Bill Alexander give tours of the miniature museum. It's a half hour tour. Bill Alexander, one of the other men, and Jim Gifford who now is here at the building management. He was the other man who restored it. They start up the factory every year and have it running, Bill Alexander and myself we take turns. If I talk 20 minutes I need to rest a little bit so, we do that from 10 in the morning to 3 in the afternoon. So, it gets to be a big job.

JE: So, one more question for you. So, I read that you do some articles on the *Highland News Leader*.

RH: Oh yes.

JE: So what caught your interest in doing history articles for the *Highland News Leader*?

RH: Well, that has a story all on its own. Julius Spindler who was the President of the Farmers and Merchants Bank during World War II, his secretary wrote letters, to all the servicemen who would write them a letter. He put in the paper, you write me a letter, tell me where you are, give me your address, and we'll send you a letter. Well then, the newspaper decided that that would be a good thing to put these letters in the *News Leader*, the paper I write for today. They would put a whole page of the paper for him to put his letters in. Well, that got to be good advertisement for the Farmers and Merchant's Bank, but also for the newspaper and great advertisement for the people who were overseas. Other people didn't even know they were overseas. All while the war was going on, he was getting these letters. And he was writing in a column to go with it. He would have a little column in the paper. It was something about Highland. He retires and moves out to California and he's Dale Carnegie teacher out there in California, and actually becomes the state of California chairman for Dale Carnegie. When he retires again, he comes back to Highland. We had played bridge with them when they came back. We were sitting there one evening playing bridge and he said, "Rollie, I got something for you. I said," He said, "You're going to start writing a column in the paper. I talked to the *News Leader* and they're willing to do it. He said you gotta take up all these Highland stuff. I said, "Well, my great great great grandfather was here before the Swiss so I guess I'm really capable of taking on this job." He said, "Yeah, your grandpa, great great grandpa, James Reynolds had a farm out here. The Swiss had their first meal with him." I said, "Yup, that's right." That's the way it came down to me from my aunt Alberta Harris Mabold who was the genealogist of our family. I said, "I've always been interested in that." He said, "You gotta start writing." So that's what I did. This is, I think, my 23rd or 24th year that I've been writing articles for the *News Leader* about Highland history. And I'm only up to World War I right now in all the writings. I started out in the early 1800s. 1804 when the first people came to the area, and then when my great, great, great grandfather came in 1818 when Illinois was made a state, he came to this area, but then he settled first around St. Jacob and then he bought this farm in what we call Saline Township. He had 160 acres which in those days was a tremendous big farm. Most the people had 40 acres and they had a hard time taking care of that, but he had two grown sons and two grown daughters. The sons and daughters all built homes around the area. They actually did the farming. He did the butchering and the things like that, but they did most of the farming. He, his wife, and one daughter fed the party of 15 Swiss who came to Highland October the 15th of 1831. They had their noon meal with Reynolds family. I always enjoyed history and genealogy and I had aunt Alberta and her husband, who were both from Marine, her husband was the postmaster there, got me interested in our family history. She had all the things on the Blakemen side and also the Reynolds side. The Blakemens came here from England and came right to Marine. They were the ones, he was a sea captain, and he was actually one of the three men who started Marine Settlement. They were mariners so they called the little town Marine. They started what was called Marine settlement in 1819. Then the town of Marine was started about a mile and a half north of that. It was a better area than the area they had. In 1818, Illinois became a state and that's when they could start selling land, but there was people who lived here before that. Well those people got the first chance to buy. So the Blakemans when they came and the other sea captains that came could only buy little pieces here and there so of like a patchwork quilt. The area that was around Marine had already been purchased and so even though it

was a little better they bought his area south of Marine. Marine cemetery that's on Marine-St. Jacob road is where he gave the Blakeman's, my great-great-great grandfather, three greats again, gave the land for the Union Church and cemetery which was next, south of his farm on the Marine St. Jacob road. I do have ties from 1819 to 1830, they settled here and Reynolds settled here in 1830. So, I guess I'm almost a Highland Native, you could say.

JE: Well thank you very much for your time today. It was very thoughtful and I appreciate you talking to me. Thank you.

RH: My pleasure.