

HARRY HOLZER INTERVIEW
Hotel Hunt, Montevideo, Mn.
June 3, 1975
Carol Swenson, Interviewer

Q: I'm Carol Swenson, the date is June 3, 1975, I'm at the Hotel Hunt where Harry Holzer, better known as "Cap" Holzer is currently residing in Montevideo, Mn. in Chippewa County. Would you like to start by telling me where you were born and when?

I was born in Montevideo in 1900, on a blustery day in November.

Q: Could you go on and tell me a little bit about your early life here in Montevideo?

Well, as I said, I was born here in 1900 and I been here just about ever since. But along the way there's always a span in your life where you get out of the hometown for a while. I graduated from the high school here and went to Carleton College, spent four years down there. I didn't become the president of the college, I guess one of the students remained that way. Then after I got out of there, I got into journalism, I don't know how I got there, but I landed there and I was in that for 47 years.

Q: Was that in Montevideo here?

In Montevideo, yes. During that time I was a member of the school board for 12 years, I was secretary of the Chamber of Commerce a couple of years, anyhow, that was to fill in until they got a new one. And then I went into the army during World War II, and that took another four and a half years of my life, and now I'm back here again. Not enjoying any sunny clime or sitting on a beach or anything, but going through the winters like the rest of the people. And summers- the summers are nice. Actively I've been in- well, you're bound to get into a lot of things when you're in the newspaper business. We never figure they're very important, you know, a newspaper person is never good news, so you never make any record of it. I was one of the founders of Fiesta here, worked on the early days of that, and then I was in the Kiwanas Club for quite a few years, I was president of that club and lieutenant governor of the Kiwanas, of the Dakota-Minnesota district. At that time I worked on the...oh, through the schools here I got it started- vocational guidance. I worked there with the help of prominent men throughout the state and the University of Minnesota. It was all new, it was so new that nobody knew just what to do or how to do it. The results however, have been the development of on-the-job training that has helped, I believe, some of the students. And it still should be given a lot of consideration, that's my opinion, anyhow. That's all I can think of that's of any importance. Some people think other things might be important, but I don't.

Q: How did you end up going to Carleton? Why did you go?

Oh, that's easy. I went there because I was a football player. A friend of mine, Osburne Cowles(?), he was a football player at Carleton and later became coach at the University of Minnesota. We were very good friends, he was from Brown's Valley and he talked me into going down there.

Q: Then you played a lot of sports when you were in high school?

Oh, yes. Four years there, four years in college, four springs and four winters-football went nine months of the year.

(63-5 min.)

Q: I see. What sorts of things did you do in college?

That's a good one. I was mostly busy trying to earn a living to get through school. I was waiting on tables, that was my big contribution, but I also went out for debate. I did some debating, nothing to write home about, and well, went to school- attended classes.

Q: What did you major in?

I majored in economics and education, I had 2 majors and a minor. I sometimes think that it was a waste of time. But it was not, I don't regret it at all. When everybody says, "well, you got to go to college," I don't get excited about that, because some people are college material and some are not. For those that are college material, it's lucky and they should be able to go to college, through some means. But as I see it now, it's much easier to go to college, you can get loans so much easier, there's so many agencies, all you have to do is be enterprising and get out- you'll find someone to give you money to go to college. If you want to go to college, money isn't the big problem, it's staying there and learning something that's the problem. And now they're going to vocational....

Q: How did most of the kids finance their way through college when you were going?

I think Carleton was a little exceptional, they had more parents there who were well fixed, but those that went there worked their way through, waiting on tables, you'd be surprised...most of the debaters and athletes were waiters. The girls didn't go into that, at that school, at that time. They had jobs like working in the library, and secretary's they could get, but now, as I understand it, I haven't been back there in some time, they have to spend all their time studying because the courses are tough. They really make it tough. You either learn or get out. That's the way it is, and they're not monkeying. I think it's a good thing, they used to bandy about a four year loaf, well, it's no four year loaf now, you either work or else.

Q: When you were secretary of the Chamber of Commerce, what time was that, which years?

I've got to think about that for a minute...it would be 1926-'27, somewhere in there like that.

Q: What sorts of things did the Chamber of Commerce do at that point?

Well, we developed during that time what you would call bargain days, and that's once a month on a wednesday, everybody would put in a bargain in little squares, and they'd be real bargains. What I mean, it was to try and widen the area as a retail center, and other towns copied the idea. Actually, Fred McCarter was the father of the idea, but he went to California and I filled in there until we could get another man, because I had all I could do with the newspaper business.

(123-10 min.)

Q: What brought you back to Monte after you'd graduated from Carleton?

Well, my mother and sister. Somebody had to take care of them, and they didn't want to be alone, they asked me and I said OK. They looked after me when I was a kid, so I thought I could look after them. That's the reason and then, you get kind of anchored down here in a place and it's hard to move again. And that's the story on that. Town...I spent four and a half years in Europe, this is as good a town as any I've seen over there. People spend a lot of money to see a lot of old castles crumbling away and stuff like that. I think people exaggerate a lot. Maybe not, I guess I'm not one of those scenery guys. I like just the natural things. Minnesota has just as much, if not more to see than the European countries, or the Orient or South America. I like to sum it up by saying Americans are nosy, they like to get over to those countries and gloat "well, I got a nicer dress than you." Canada and the United States are beautiful countries, both of them. And they have good people, well... people are good all over the world, it all depends where you live and how you're doing economically, I guess. If you don't do well economically, nothing is right.

Q: Would you say Montevideo is a friendly town?

It's a town that it's hard to get acquainted in, but once you do, it is a friendly town. To a stranger, they're not coming for just a short time, they're staying friendly in people, but when you come here and you're going to live, it takes a little while. You got to break the social crust. But when they're once taken in, people usually like the town very much. And regret leaving it. Now, I'm going on what people have said themselves when they had to leave for a period of time, it's just as good a town as any they've ever been in. And people, like, when they come and see what we have now, since they built the mall, they call it a cute little town. And we keep it pretty clean. They're surprised when you say you can't park your car over night on the street, because they'll want to sweep it in the morning. They seem non-plussed about that.

Q: Do you think the atmosphere of the town has changed?

Yes, I do.

Q: Well, we're more sophisticated.

Q: Now?

Yeah. And we're trying to be bigshots, we're trying to be like, you know, what they do in big metropolitan centers, we try to imitate them in a lot of ways. Example:... I don't say it's all bad, what they're trying to imitate, I don't mean to imply that either...for instance, they want to get culture, high class talent in the music field, and so they have what they call the Minnesota Valley Association, and that's this whole area right here, and they charge so much for a ticket, and you have to belong to the Association in order to attend. Well, that's way they get some famous tenor, some famous soprano, some chamber group, or a band or orchestra, Guy Lombardo was here, that's just to illustrate that some of the things you can't get through that. It takes a little money and you have to be a member of that's why they want to get some culture.

Q: What type of people usually belong to this Association? Is it mostly the upper class people of the town?

Oh, yeah, definitely so. They like to call....it used to be called the "Blue-stocking Gang" 40 or 50 years ago, but we still got them. I don't know, every town has them.

Q: What sorts of things....do they do things in a group, this "Blue-stocking Gang" , or what have they done for the town other than this Association?

(195-15 min.)

Oh, they put their money into different industries, such as manufacturing and banks, lumber companies, and they support ...well, schools, and churches, as a matter of fact, some of them started a college in this town. They called it Windom College, and it served a good purpose, they finally had to close it down, because they couldn't get financial support- I don't know if that was due to lack of experience on the part of the trustees or whether they just got tired of it or what, but anyhow they started out and that college served a good purpose for about 20 years.

Q: Do you remember anything about the college, what type of college it was?

Well, it granted give a B.S. and a B.A. degree.

Q: Was it a 4 year?

4 years, yes. Oh yes, it had to serve another purpose, it had to have a high school course. And this is why: It started late in the fall, that would give the farm kids a chance to come in and go to school. It also had 4 years of that, and they arranged it so the farm work could be done. They also had accounting and bookkeeping for the kids that wanted to improve themselves, they could go there and get that type of training.

Q: So it was kind of vocational mixed into it?

Yes, that's right. _____ Burien(?) who was the president of the University of Minnesota, was a teacher at that college.

Q: That must have been one of the only colleges of that type because usually you find colleges being either a 4 year or a two year vocational-technical type school.

They didn't originally want to make it a college, like the rest of them, a 4 year academy of advanced learning, But they had to, because the community needed that, the high school couldn't take care of that. The young folks needed that out there. And they couldn't afford to go away to college, but still, they wanted it. But the trouble is, like many other ventures they ran out of money.

Q: Were there any attempts to keep young people in the community?

That was part of the idea of the school, yes.

Q: Did the students have to pay tuition?

Yes. Not very high, according to today's standards. And some of them paid board and room, they had a dormitory. A lot also roomed in private homes around the town here. Attendance used to fluctuate, depended on

the crop, if they had a good year, they figured they could pay the tuition. Paw would say, "yup, you can go." And a lot of the townsfolk, young ones would go there too. They like d that atmosphere, I think.

Q: Were most of the students from the town, or from a further distance aaway?

(255-20 min.)

Most of them were from this area, I'd say the furthest away would be 20 miles out.

Q: You mentioned that you were in World War II. What sorts of things did you do during the war?

I was a captain in an Engineer Company. We planted mines and we removed mines, we built bridges and we helped knock them out. What you would call demolition work. There's so many divisions to that Engineer Corp- I happened to be in a combat battalion, the mission there was building bridges, and demolition work and laying mine fields and building fortifications. There was a topography company, taking care of maps, they had like a library of maps, they had these offset presses truck mounted, they did their own printing right there in the field. The engineers and draftsmen from civilian life, why they would get that ready in no time. Then they had an oil and gasoline company that kept the tanks supplied with gas, and then you had your trucking company. The engineers, they had a lot of divisions.

Q: Was there any particular reason why you ended up in the Engineers Corps?

In the army you often wondered how you got there. You get picked, you don't pick it. You go down to the reception center, and you take a lot of tests, they got these tests there, and then you sit around a couple of days, and then...the Engineer Corp, Infantry...or whatever. They pick you, where they think you might fit in, they're usually wrong... This friend of mine from town here, I saw him down there at Fort Snealing, and he said, "what did you get into?" I said the, "Engineers. Now aren't you going to tell me what you got into?" He said, "Cavalry." He was a druggist- we laughed about that a lot.

Q: You were drafted early in the war?

Yes.

Q: You mentioned before that you worked on a Claims Commission?

Oh, yes. That's part of the Engineers job too. This commission was to ascertain whether a European over there had a legitimate claim of damage to property. Now the law said, if it's in a combat area, you don't get nothing, that's automatically ruled out. So the commission had to rule: was it in the combat area? And if it wasn't, was there damage done, and by whom and how much? Because there were a lot of slickers over there, people out to get as much as they could. They were always after old Uncle Sam. And our job was to protect the moneybags of the country.

Q: Did you have to go out there and inspect the buildings....

Oh, yes, sure. One of my jobs was, when ever we would leave an area, I'd have to draw a map of anything we demolished. We had to use... sometimes we would knock down hedgerows, which over there was the same as a fence, to be able to get through-the equipment was so big I'd draw that on, how much damage there was or what buildings we may have damaged accidentally.

(329-25 min)

Q: How many people were on this commission?

We probably started out with 6 men and ended up with 2. Most of the time 4. We only covered certain areas. We had a station in Brussels for a while, so we had that part to take care of. And they all had damages. We always made a lot of friends with the civilians over there. They'd tell us, "hell no, that was busted down before the war." We didn't make the decision to pay, there was a higher commission that did that.

Q: What was the attitude of the civilians to the U.S. soldiers?

They were very cordial, but they all wanted to get something for nothing. Let me put it this way: a daughter of a professor at the University of Brussels worked in the regimental headquarters of the Engineers there- those jobs were given to the civilians who worked in the underground, and that was a reward. She was saying that, "we appreciate the help we got, we appreciate the money, but we don't want outsiders coming in and telling us how to run things. Or how to live. That was pretty much true, they resented that and it's not necessary. But that's our own fault. I think the U.S. has been too dictatorial, we give them money and then go and tell them how to live. We always push, ignoring their customs and traditions. For instance religion, they have their own religion and they're going to stick by it. That's true of any country, whether in Africa, South America or Europe.

(401-30 min)

Q: When you came back to Montevideo after the war, did you work for the newspaper again?

yes.

Q: What sorts of things were happening at that time?

There was some rebuilding to be done, reorganizing, all businesses and the soldiers and soldierettes, WAFs and WAVEs coming back, to get organized, and then there was a lot of talk about those who didn't go to war. I personally never let that bother me, if I dealt with somebody who was a slacker, I dealt with him accordingly, I knew who he was and what he was, just avoided him, not so much that I wouldn't talk or anything....It's like now, I don't like President Ford's amnesty for those deserters that went to Canada, I just can't agree with him.

Q: You feel there shouldn't be amnesty for these people?

That's what I feel. We had deserters, in New York, in England, all over, it's not fair to the fellow who sticks to the job and takes the chance of getting shot. It's not a question of war or not, it's a question of our situation, our laws; you're drafted, you get into the army, you fight or you're shot. What's good for one should be good for the other. There's a lot of people that are preaching things too late, like the Vietnam War. People should have been hollering about that a long time ago, when they first went over there. But at the time a lot of people cheered, they thought we should stop the communists. Then after we started losing, then people- I feel sorry for the parents who lost a son or a daughter as much as anybody, but if you want to stop that kind of thing, you got to let your congressman know, you got to put pressure on him, and your representative. Quit Bellyaching. Except a few that agitate and march and stand on a step someplace and hollar "down with the war" and all this stuff. Well, that to me is really silly. We aren't going to have any more war with any outside country, now this is my opinion, but we're going to have one right here, a civil war in our own country. The framework of our society is crumbling.

Q: Has that been happening here in Monte?

Yes.

Q: In what way?

Well, first of all the way they vote. I have no objection to a person voting Republican or Democrat, or anything because that's what we have.

(486-35 min.)

But when people start cuddling up without knowing it to socialism and communism, and then go out the other side of their mouth and talk about free America, and free enterprise, they don't know what they're doing. They're confused, and you're going to have trouble. Racism isn't settled by any means, Not all Negroes, but most of them have a hatred for the whites, and probably rightfully so, but they overlook one thing: it is not this present generation that brought them over here and enslaved them, they were set free some years ago, and things have got better in the south, but it's a slow process. They are in a hurry, and a lot of them are being used by foreign elements. I can't help but believe... I'd do that too, if I wanted to disrupt this country. I'd take the dissatisfied minorities and work on them too, if that was my job. That would be all wrong, to say that all Negroes are that way, and it's hard to explain what percent, well, there never has been any big study, but you see it, it's what you feel.

Q; In talking about...people taking action about what they feel is wrong, you mentioned before that you were around the time of the Farmers Holiday. How do you think that fits in, is that a correct way?

No, I don't. I never did. Here's what they did...the farms with the big mortgage on them, they had no way of paying them back, they had over-capitalized and over bought, paid too much money per acre, and they were not good farmers. Then again there were some...you feel sorry for anybody that's going to lose something they put into. These here, when they're going to force the law, no, we got to be ruled by law, then you got to go by it. And the owner of that mortgage had a right to foreclose and collect, according to law. But instead of trying to arbitrate, it's more dramatic to stop the auction or sale. That's the only way to get a tention.

(549-40 min.)

Now here's what they did, I think it was the time they dumped the milk in the streets, they actually barricaded the town, kept people from going in and out. I didn't like that at all. And some of us stuck up for that and we busted it, but we had to pay for it later. /The radicals, they are radicals when they wnn't listen to anything. They're just trying to be smart, that's the way it looks to me.

Q: You said you had to pay for it, what do you mean by that?

Those people that tried to uphold things and said," we're going to go in and out of this town freely or battle it out," well they were called the conservatives, they always use that set....

Q: Do you think the city council has been very representative of the wants of the people in Monte, the actions they've taken?

Oh, I think so. As much as they can be. Any town is limited by the money it's got, but people just don't understand, they think the money grows on the bushes outside city hall. They all want this or that, but there's only so much money and after that's gone, that's it. You see, we Americans, we can't wait.

Q: Have the council meetings always been open to the public?

It's always been open as far as I been here. Anyone can come in.

Q: EARlier, when I talked to you we discussed bootlegging, I was wondering if you could recall anything about that?

About bootlegging?

Q: Was it a very big business in Monte?

(623-45 min.)

No. Almost every town our size had their runners, running south with tin cans- \$18.00 a gallon. And everbody craving to get hold of him, "boy, we got a good bootlegger..." and the sheriffs would go after him. And guys made their own homemade beer, and would sell it and it was pretty strong stuff too. Strong wine, not that many moonshiners

around here, most of it was spiking malt with alcohol, that was the drink, or use gingerale- it made it very exciting to duck the law, that's why the law didn't hold up, because the people weren't for it. Except a few WCTU members.

Q: Who's the WCTU?

Don't you know what they are? The temperance union.

Q: Was there an active one here?

Oh, yes, sure.

Q: Was it again this "Blue-stocking" group?

No, no, they liked their nips. Well, like the party they had out at the country club one time, and they had a big punch bowl, a beautiful cut glass thing, and they filled it full of punch, and some of the men they spiked it pretty strong. Then two jokesters from the town, who didn't belong to the blue-stockings or to the country club, but knew them very well, they got the local constable to go with a couple of salesmen out there and pull a fake raid out there by the federals. One guy picked up this punch bowl and threw it right out the window, smashed it. Cost that guy \$30, no \$35 for the punch bowl. It was really something.

Q: Did they usually have big parties when they got together to drink?

Yes they did...

Q: Or was it mostly small groups that got together?

That was the most common thing, of course. But once in a while there'd be a party, they'd fix it up in a big cream can or something like that. Fix a lot of punch and spike it up real good. A lot of power in that old hooch. Yes, St. Cloud #13, that was a corn, and they used to make moon in St. Cloud and call it St. Cloud Moon #13. And that was something, we used to call it "memory eraser", you drink enough of that and you wouldn't remember nothing after a while. We used to have it around. But nothing like New York, none of those big deals.

(700-50 min.)

Q: There were no, like, speakeasy's in town?

Well, wait a minute...speakeasy...no, it was more or less a private thing, there were places where you could sit down, buy a drink and sit down, but there were not too many of those. Down on Division Street, that was the rum hole there, they sold moon down there. But not what you could really call speakeasy. Just about every restaurant, people would come and spike [↑] under the table and then drink it.

Q: Were there ever any big raids or anything like that in town?

Oh, every now and then the sheriff would raid a house, but that was to get the runner that was bringing it in. Some of the sheriffs saved the stuff and used it for the car in the wintertime, save the county some money, you know, they had a good excuse anyway. Probably tumbled too, I don't know.

Q: Did the law then pretty much ignore the bootlegging?

No, they didn't work all that hard at it, but it all depended, if somebody got too promiscuous, then they'd clamp down, but other than that they pretty much kept their eyes closed.

Q: Was there something called the Santa Claus train?

Oh, yes, that's the railroad, you know. See, Montevideo really grew when the railroad came in. It's kind of funny, I don't know if you know about that, the Hastings and Dakota Railroad Company was taken over by the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul. When that came to Montevideo, then the town started becoming prosperous. So the railroad is important to any community and still is, in spite of all the tracking and all that. This division superintendent, I can't remember his name, but he was a guy that believed in helping a town, to keep things going lively and build up business for the town and the railroad and goodwill, and the railroad boys who belonged to the brotherhood, which is the same as a union, they went along with him on that. So at Christmastime they would get a flatcar, and get a christmas tree about 20 to 30 feet tall. Then they'd anchor that to the middle of the flatcar, and get a ...put cotton snow all over and they had lights on it, they had a little generator, and before they had lights, they'd use those red flares, signal fuses and put them all over. Then they'd have to get a full crew, you know, to run it- that's the law, and they'd have to get permission from the company and then they'd take it out into the country a ways, and rig it all up, also with those fuses wrapped around the drive wheels of that locomotive, and come chugging into town. I

(815-55 min.)

tell you it was really something to see, they had Santa sitting on the flatcar and the kids just squirmed you know. And the people flocked to see it. Then they'd give little gifts and things to them.

Q: You said too that you were one of the founders of Fiesta days?

Well, there isn't much to say about that, except this, I can say this much about it, Roland Acker (??) was actually the founder of Fiesta Days. He got the idea. But you had to have a starting committee, and we had to work like the dickens to put it through Washington and our own state capitol. We got a lot of publicity, we got color pictures in the Tribune, we did a lot of pulling, we used all the influence of people we could get. Silverman, he was the executive editor of the Star, and he came up here for something and we met with him and after that we could get anything we wanted in the paper.

Q: What was the idea behind it?

Goodwill between...part of the ~~policy~~ goodwill policy of the U.S. is South America, they were working on that, the U.S. wanted to get the good will of the South American countries, which they still haven't got, as a matter of fact they've lost some ground. It worked out all right as far as Montevideo, Uruguay, was concerned and Montevideo, Mn. But as far as national, it didn't take. We had the ambassador from Uruguay here and the Uruguayan queen, they pick a queen every year.

Life magazine came out and did a story and I got my picture in Life, dancing with the queen. She was about 6 inches taller than me and I had to look up at her. I laughed when I saw the picture, my chin was resting on her bosom.

Q: Was it something that was supposed to catch on throughout the United States or....

No, just Montevideo. It was really just to get a foot in the door, so to speak, down in South America.

(953-60 min.)