

The Hope College Oral History Project for 1995  
The Joint Archives of Holland

Interview #6  
Mrs. Dawn Bredeweg  
The Oral History of Tulip Time

Conducted by:  
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Oral History of Tulip Time

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- Interview w/ Dawn Bredeweg @ The Pillar Christian Reformed Church
- 14670 Valley View Avenue / Holland, MI 49423
- June 20, 1995
- Interviewer : Jason V. Upchurch

**Begin Tape 4 : Side A**

JVU: If I could get you to repeat your name and date and place of birth.

DB: Okay. My name is Dawn Bredeweg and I was born in 1944 right here in Holland; lived in Holland my whole life.

JVU: My first set of questions deals with how you're involved with Tulip Time, and the first question is--what is the nature of your association with the festival?

DB: Okay. I am one of the historians here at Pillar Church. With Pillar being the beginning of the community with Reverend Van Raalte, we have historical lectures during Tulip Time, and I've been one of these lecturers for fourteen years, and I've been chairman of this committee since about ten years ago.

JVU: What areas of the festival have you attended or . . . been involved with directly?

DB: It's mostly just our church, because we have seven thousand to eleven thousand people coming through here those ten days, so I usually don't leave the church. Although, I do go to the Klompen dancing at night, and grandchildren see their parades and stuff. I love Tulip Time.

JVU: Could you describe for me any changes that you've noticed in the festival over the years that you've been involved?

DB: Okay, changes. The changes would be, it got longer--the tourists like it and the locals don't. [Because] The merchants downtown, they do a lot of complaining to us, because people don't buy. The locals don't come down to buy when the tourists

are here, and the tourists just pick up little things. We like it for the longer festival here at church, because it spreads out the seven thousand people over ten days instead of over four days, so we like the longer festival. But that's the main change.

The only thing from the tourist point of view, they all love it. They all love the shows at night, and they all come into the church, when you talk to them they're all enthusiastic. So whatever the city's doing, they're doing right.

JVU: How was it different when it was a shorter festival, and it was a four day festival? How were things run differently here in the church?

DB: Okay, when it was just a four day festival, then . . . well that's not really a fair question to answer, because then we didn't have the museum downstairs yet, and we weren't on the regular bus schedule. Now, when the busses pick up a step-on guide at the Tulip Time office, their first stop is here in the church because we work with the Tulip Time festival. So they stop here first whenever possible--you know sometimes it just doesn't work to come here first--but whenever possible, they come here first and we give them a history of the community. And then, when the guide keeps them on the bus, that's the basis for her talk. You know, how she talks about how . . . they have the history first. And when it was the four day festival, we were not on that bus run. So we just got a few guides who liked what we did, and they would stop here with their busses.

So we really have been busy since it's been the ten day festival. So I'm not a real authority on the old . . . because the old way, all we had was a free cup of coffee and a cookie for them. You know, and then there was . . . we told them a history of the community as they sat in the sanctuary, but there really wasn't much to see. So when we built the museum downstairs, then we really got . . . we have about 80% of the busses that come in town stop here.

JVU: So you actually work with the Tulip Time board then?

DB: Yes, and they appreciate us, because we're a free service. How often can they get their basics covered free? And as a church point of view, we do it as evangelism, because every tourist that comes through the door gets a tract. And at the end of every lecture, the guide gives a small testimony--maybe two lines, maybe three sentences. The word of the Lord is given to them, and then it's up to the Lord what they do with it. So that from our point of view, the church gets it, because it's our major evangelism thrust. And not many churches of this size--you know, only eighty families--can evangelize to seven thousand people in a year, and that's the way we look at it. That's why we're willing to give the service, and the city appreciates us because we give them the history.

We don't talk about the church too much, we talk about how . . . what the settlers found when they came, the Indians, and the land and the swamp, and the huge trees, and how the Indians taught them to cut down the trees and build their houses, and how the Indians shared their crops, and little funny stories also. We tell them about how there was a couple of drunk white men in a canoe, and that's how Chief Waukazoo's wife died. The squaw Chief Waukazoo died because two drunken white men hit their canoe, and she drowned. And Chief Waukazoo was so upset, he moved his tribe out of here. You know, these little stories, and that's what the tourists like. [Because] They don't come in here for a religious experience. So we tell them about what it was like, and how they came for religious reasons, and how they wanted the Christian community. We give it a humorous historical. There's a lot of humor in it. History is just what people were like way back then.

JVU: So you see these changes then as a good thing?

DB: Yes, definitely. We appreciate this.

JVU: Would you say that the church, as the festival has gotten longer, has gotten more involved, or would you say the involvement has stayed the same? Have you always worked with the Tulip Time board, or was that just when the festival changed to a

ten-day festival?

DB: Yeah, that's about when we got involved with the Tulip Time board, because all of a sudden they thought we needed some more help, because they had more days, and that's when we got involved, and I would say that we really were just one thing that was offered during the four-day festival. But all of a sudden, when it became ten days, then the Tulip Time office started working with us, and we started working with them, and it's been a good relationship.

JVU: My next question has to do with some of the heritage of Holland . . .

DB: Oh I already covered a lot of that [laughs].

JVU: This is right up your alley I guess. Do you think that Dutch pride has affected Tulip Time, or do you think that Tulip Time is what has brought on a rise in Dutch pride here in Holland?

DB: Oh that can go either way, and I think it's equal. I would think that's almost equal both ways. I think the people in Holland are really proud of Tulip Time, because whenever you travel [people] say, 'Where are you from?' and you say, 'Holland.' [They say], 'Oh that's Tulip Time.' You know, wherever you go--California, Oregon, or wherever you are. Some of the older people don't like the traffic, but down deep they're still proud of Tulip Time. I think there's a lot of Dutch pride here. That's why you see all these Dutch . . . that's why you see all these bumper stickers[that read], 'If you ain't Dutch, you ain't much!' You know?

JVU: Also talking about ethnic heritage . . . Holland has become more ethnically diverse in recent years. How do you think that has affected the festival?

DB: How that has affected the festival? I think it's broadened it, because we have that Latin American festival the weekend of Tulip Time, and all these school children--these Asian and Korean children--marching down the parade with their Dutch costumes on. That just shows the community that hey . . . that shows the

tourists that this community has many different ethnic backgrounds, and we're proud of all of them. Look at the Dutch dancers, they're not all white girls. There's all kinds of them, and they're all just as good, and they're all just as proud of their Dutch costumes, and they all do it good, and they're all intermixed, and they're all friends, and I don't know . . . I just feel like it shows the tourists that we have a good mix, and we're a good community.

JVU: My next set of questions deals with some more personal memories of the festival, so if you have any specific memories that might even pertain just to you, feel free to share those. First question is, what specific memories do you have of past Tulip Times that stand out as special?

DB: Okay, I've got to tell you the funniest one that happened this year, the minister and I just came in this office and hooted. We laughed so hard. [The minister] gives a Dutch service twice a Tulip Time. We have an authentic thirty minute service, all in Dutch, and we give the bulletin out half in Dutch, half in English right next to each other so they can read it in Dutch and translate it in English--just what's going on. Well, these busses that come in, most of them do not understand Dutch, but they've shown an interest to their tour guide that they wanted to see it. So the minister preached in Dutch for about ten minutes--it was about a twenty minute service--and one of the tourists, as she was leaving, she shook his hand, and she said, 'I didn't understand a word you said, but whatever you said, it was terrific.' And we laughed, and we laughed. You know, she just wanted to say something nice, and she didn't know what to say, you know. We laughed so hard. It loses something in the translation, but at the time it was so funny.

Let's see. A lot of the tourists, when you tell the humorous stories about what happened in the past--we always talk about how during the original services, the women had these snuff boxes and they would put perfume on this little sponge and put it in this perfume box, and put it in a purse and come to church.

Because the services were three hours long, and so when the minister was talking and--we always say a minister is never boring of course, but a minister does go on and on and on--the women would open up this little snuff box and take a whiff of perfume and smell refreshed, and give it to the lady next to her. Then that lady would sniff, and the snuff box would go up and down the row with every body sniffin' and snuffin', and [the tourists] laugh at that [story]. Then afterwards, after the tour, then they come up to the guides to talk, and they come up and say, 'My mom had one of those,' or, 'I remember my grandma had one of those.' The heritage is the same the world around. No matter where these tourists are from--whether they're Pennsylvania Dutch or from Seattle, Washington--they all have to tell you about a little thing that happened to them way back when. These are all senior citizens we're talking to you know.

[Brief discussion of tourists. Not regarding Tulip Time.]

DB: If you don't like people, don't get involved with Tulip Time, because it is people. It is people. We have a set of eight guides that do it here, and lecture, and those eight just really love it.

JVU: Are there any specific people that you associate with Tulip Time? Maybe here from the church or even the community?

DB: Yes, Sharon Koops from the Tulip Time office. Is Tulip Time office going to read this?

JVU: I don't know who's going to read it. It's going to be in the Archives for everybody to read, hopefully.

DB: Okay. Sharon Koops is a great gal over there. She is in charge of the step-on guides. She makes all the schedules, and she gets all the reservations for the busses, and she comes, and she listens, and she pays attention to what kind of group is coming. If it's a senior citizen group, she lines them up different than if it's a teenage group. She has a group that comes every year from the Amish community down in Indiana, and

she just knows her groups, and I think that she is a Holland treasure. She is just one that goes way beyond her duty, because she does such little things for so many people that just gets lost. Nobody knows she does these things, you know. She has that ability to read people, and to ask the right questions and to bring them where they want to be. In the middle of a tour, she's been known to say, 'Hey these people are too tired, they're cold, don't bring them to the tulip farms. They don't want to go there.' She reads her groups, and I think Holland City does not appreciate her. I think that she is a treasure.

JVU: How would you spell her last name?

DB: K-O-O-P-S. She is . . . I don;t know what her title is, but she does all the scheduling for the step-on guides. She doesn't work year round at the Tulip Time office, she works just at Tulip Time because she has her own travel service out of her house. Mrs. Ed Koops.

JVU: Now you said you lived in Holland all your life.

DB: My whole life.

JVU: So then you've been involved with Tulip Time even beyond the church, as an attendant. What has Tulip Time meant to you year after year? What do you think Tulip Time stands for?

DB: Oh Tulip Time to me, has always been a time to show off my city. All these people are coming, they're coming to look at us, and we better be behaving and we better show them the right things and be friendly. Before I started working in the church-- I didn't start working in the church until my kids were old enough to go the parades by themselves, because I always figured my kids came first, and I don't have my guides work either until their kids can go on their own. I always pride myself that I had never missed a parade, until I started working here in the church. I was in my late thirties before I missed a single parade. My husband kind of has that same pride. This is a big thing for us. We'd better be enthused about it. If the city people aren't enthused, it will never work.

JVU: It seems that what you're talking about, is similar to the

way Tulip Time started, a community pride sort of program.

[Phone rings. Tape interrupted. Resume after call.]

JVU: I was talking about the way . . . you had mentioned having a sense of pride in the community, and I was mentioning that at the beginning of the festival, how it was a community-based program. I guess there's not many organizations that are more community-based than a church.

DB: Right.

JVU: So how do you see your program here at the church, reflecting the history of Tulip Time as far as that's concerned? Keeping a sense of community.

DB: Keeping a sense of community. We keep telling the people-- and I think that's kind of answering your question--we keep telling the people that [the settlers] came here for religious reasons, and then the church grew up and many denominations came into the church, and all the denominations worked together. Sure there are a lot of unchurched people in the community, but there's a lot of organizations in the community that take care of them. You know, the Loaf and the Good Samaritan, and City Mission. Through it all, even though this isn't a religious community any more, there's a lot of religious community pride. We kind of go on the religious end of it here, you know what I'm saying? But I'm not answering your question.

JVU: I think you are in a way.

DB: I don't know how to be more specific than that. We let them know that we are very proud of our city, and that it was because of the beginning they had that it grew into what it is today. We keep repeating that, because history repeats itself; what used to be is again just a different trend, just a different turn of the same old history.

JVU: I'm not sure if you mentioned this before or not, but how long has this church been involved with Tulip Time?

DB: This church started to be . . . the first time we opened the

doors at Tulip Time as a hospitality center--we offered coffee and the cookies and the place to get out of the weather--in 1963, was the first time we opened it.

JVU: So you've been doing this for a little while now?

DB: [Yes] No, no, it's not sixty-three because it was twenty-seven [years], it was sixty-eight, because in three years, it will be thirty years. I misquoted. Next year will be our twenty-eighth year of doing it.<sup>1</sup>

JVU: My next set of questions is about the tourists themselves. Again, right up your alley. How do you feel about the guests that Holland draws during Tulip Time?

DB: I love them. They got such a neat cross-section, but I don't know where they keep coming from. When you see Tulip Time, would you want to come every year? But they do. There are so many people that come into this church, and say, 'We've been here every year for fifteen years,' or another one would say, 'We were here ten years ago, and we had to come back,' or, 'We were here twenty years ago when we first got married, and we had to come back,' or 'We were here when so and so was little.' Like I'm supposed to know these names you know.

'Well when Josey was little, we came here on her tenth birthday, and now she's married and we got to come back.' And I'm thinking, oh my. We went out to the Strawberry festival in Florida this year, wonderful, but I don't think I'll ever go back. You know? We were at Mardi Gras n New Orleans, wonderful, but I don't think we'll ever go back. We were at Tulip Time in Anacortus, Washington, wonderful, won't ever go back. And these people, they just keep coming back and back, so they see something that we as locals don't see. Tulip Time office sees it, because they keep doing it year after year. Every year my husband and I say--he's a guide too, so he's just as involved as I am--we keep saying to each other, 'How many more years can

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<sup>1</sup>This portion of text modified from original recording by Mrs. Bredeweg, to ensure proper dates and figures.

Tulip Time go on? There isn't anything new.' But they keep coming back, and they love it. You very seldom see an unhappy tourist, unless their feet hurt or it's cold outside.

[Brief discussion of tourists. Not regarding Tulip Time.]

JVU: Can you describe to me, some of the sentiments that the tourists have expressed to you regarding the festival, or regarding your program here at the church?

DB: I think I answered that already.

JVU: I think so too, but anything more specific? Maybe anything that you remember somebody specifically saying to you?

DB: They generally love it, and they complain about it. You know they complain about it as they love it, you know what I mean?

[Brief discussion of tourist gripes.

Not directly related to Tulip Time.]

DB: Generally they just say, 'Oh we just came from the tulip farms,' or, 'We just came from the windmill,' or they'll say something specific like, 'Do you know the name of that yellow tulip that's so lacey?' . . . and then they ask a lot of questions about the costumes, and they ask a lot of questions about how this has changed. They still have the idea that Holland closes up on Sunday. This one lady this year in fact said to me, 'Do they really close up on Sundays? That you can't get in the town on Sundays?' And I said, 'No, we're open, we're here.' She said, 'Well, I know the church is, but you don't have a single store, restaurant or gas station open on Sunday, do you?' And I said, 'Yeah we do.' She says, 'Well, they told me in Alabama that you were all closed on Sunday, that we had to get out of here before Sunday.'

JVU: That they had to leave town?

DB: They had to leave town, and that was from Alabama, I remember her saying that.

JVU: Well I know in the past, Sunday activities have been sort of a point of debate. I won't say problem, but . . .

DB: Good word, debate.

JVU: What do you see as any major problems with Tulip Time, and the Tulip Time festival?

DB: On Sunday or any time?

JVU: Any time.

DB: I don't see any problems. I really don't. I think that the Tulip Time board has a monumental task, and they do it superbly. They try to develop things for all interest groups. You can look at the variety of the shows, you know. And the people that don't like the parades, there's still other things to do during the parades. And the idea that our city, the size of our city, can plant all those miles of tulips--you know that is absolutely free--and at night they can go and watch those Dutch dancers, all those thousands of girls and boys dancing, I think that our community is just . . . I don't think that we have enough pride, because we don't realize how much work that is, and the girls get the glory, but what about all those teachers that back in February--when it was snowing outside--started teaching these girls. And all those hours, and . . . I don't think those teachers are recognized hardly at all. I just think . . . oh, man . . . how many hours, and working with that age group has got to be tough. High school kids are not always happy.

[Phone rings. Tape interrupted. Tape resumes after call.]

JVU: My next question is similar to the last one. Do you see the festival facing any challenges for the future? Do you think it will have to change for the new generations, or . . .

DB: That I've never really given any thought to, so I don't know if I could answer that question or not. I'm sure the Tulip Time board is working on that. Because if you don't keep growing, you die, and I think every year they grow a little bit. I think that they'll keep that in mind, but I couldn't tell you how. No, I

don't think I could answer that question.

JVU: Well, I just have one last question, and that is, what is your favorite part of Tulip Time?

DB: The Dutch dancers. I love the Dutch dancers. I get tears in my eyes when I watch them. As tired as we are here at church, one night we always go to watch the Dutch dancers. We have out of town friends that come in and we do the Dutch dancers, and then we do the junk food circuit. [laughs] Go to the Dutch dance and do the supper with the junk food. It's just part of tradition I guess.

Maybe I like the Dutch dancers because when I was growing up, I lived around the corner from the old Holland High School, and that was in the early fifties when only Holland High was Dutch dancers. Not Holland Christian or West Ottawa, because Holland Christian was against dancing at that point, and they thought the Dutch dancers were the same. But after school, that music would be playing for their practice, and my friends and I would go every single night after school and sit on the curb and watch them practice. And then we, as little kids--eight and nine years old--we would dance right along with them in the middle of the road--because there wasn't a lot of traffic then you know--and I think that's where my love of it comes from. [Because] When they still do that tulip, I can still count to myself, 'One leaf, two leaf, one-two-three, stem, jump!' You know, that's the tulip. One leg, one-two-three is the stem, you jump for the tulip. I can still hear that instructor say that, and that's exactly the way they do it. Meet your partners, you got to, 'HI!' [mimics Dutch dance] You can still hear that instructor bellow that out over the microphone. I love Tulip Time. I like those Dutch dancers.

JVU: If there's anything else that you'd like to add, any specific stories that you can think of not only from the church, but maybe just from attending Tulip Time year after year . . .

DB: No, I think the Dutch Heritage show, when they added that years ago, that was a great addition because many tourists

mentioned . . . talked to us about that, that they had been to the Dutch Heritage Show, and that . . . That's so authentic. They see the original costumes, and they hear what it was like in the Netherlands, and the tourists often comment about that show. We don't hear a lot of comments about the other shows, but if we hear about any show, it's about the Dutch Heritage Show. They comment about that.

And they like the historical one over at the Maas Center, where they get a breakfast, and then they listen to a lecture by [Professor] Bruins. They like that too. Kind of takes the wind out of our sails if they've come here from [Professor] Bruins. But it is different yet, because Bruins is strictly history. We have the humor of what the people were like.

[Brief historical story not related to Tulip Time]

JVU: What would you say--I don't know if I want to say important--what would you say is a very important part of Tulip Time history? What would you say is one historical event that has shaped the way the festival has turned out in recent years?

DB: One event?

JVU: If there is one, or if you . . .

DB: I don't know, I think that Tulip Time has grown because of the city pride. We've enjoyed it, and we've wanted it, and we've wanted it to grow, we've given . . . elected a board, or appointed a board to do it for us, and they've done a good job. [And] I think one of the major things that happened years back, is they incorporated all of the High Schools into that Dutch dance. So all of the High Schools are part of that, and to me that is the center of Tulip Time, the Dutch dancers. Look how often they're in the parades, and they're at Windmill Island, and they're at the tulip farms, they're at Dutch Village, and they dance every night, and now we have alumni because the girls are so proud that they don't want to quit when they get out of High School. And I think the tulip . . . and the tulips--look how

many thousands and thousands of tulip bulbs our taxes don't pay for, and the city itself is proud of them. Very few homes don't weed them in front of their house. You know. That's the individual, doing their individual things.

I think that when we expanded tulip lanes, and we expanded Dutch dancers, I think that all added and the festival grew beyond that. That's just my little old opinion.

-End of Interview-