

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

Interview #12  
Mr. & Mrs. Marvin Freestone [Marvin & Margie]  
The Oral History of Tulip Time

Conducted by:  
Jason Valere Upchurch  
29, June 1995

The Oral History of Tulip Time

Interview # 12

- Interview w/ Margie & Marvin Freestone @ their home
- South State Street / Zeeland, MI 49464
- June 29, 1995
- Interviewer: Jason Valere Upchurch

Begin Tape 9 : Side A

(In this transcription, Margie Freestone will be labeled, "Mrs" and Marvin will be labeled, "Mr")

Mr: My name is Marvin Freestone, I was born in Holland, Michigan, [date removed], 1930, many, many years ago.

Mrs: Hi, my name is Margie Freestone, and I was born in Grand Rapids, moved to Holland when I was five. I was born in 1932, and I've been here ever since.

JVU: How have the both of you been associated with Tulip Time?

Mrs: I think I started didn't I? Working at the wooden shoe factory, let me think. The early fifties, middle fifties was when I started there, and I worked every Tulip Time, and sometimes all summer for seventeen years, decorating the wooden shoes. That was fun. In the mean time, Marv got involved too.

Mr: Well, I got involved through the Wooden Shoe factory, being employed there; working there during Tulip Time. I think where I really first got involved with it: I was a fireman for the Holland Fire Department, and at that time we sold barbecues; lunches, pea soup, you name it. We also sold souvenirs at the Fire Department which was a way of raising money for the Fire Department. We would make money that went into the television fund, or the magazine fund or whatever. From there on we finally opened a store of our own, and basically that's where our involvement with Tulip Time started from. We had a store on--the John Good Store, which I'm sure that you don't remember; very few people remember it anymore. It's where the Arts Council is. They tore that building out, saved the facade, the front of it . . .

Mrs: We just rented it for a week.

Mr: Yeah, we rented it for a week. In fact we rented it for seventy-five dollars a week, that was just absolutely a great deal, and throughout the years, we had a number of stores that we rented.  
JVU: Just for Tulip Time, or year round?

Mr: We started out just for Tulip Time, then we went to--1965 I think it was--we rented the store next door to the hotel, which is now the Rest Haven . . .

JVU: The Warm Friend?

Mr: Warm Friend Hotel. We rented the store next to it, which was an old store--it's since been torn down and rebuilt--then we were open from Tulip Time all the way through Labor Day, and as of Labor Day we'd close down. What we sold, was Dutch souvenirs; wooden shoes, delft, you name it.

Mrs: I decorated the shoes. That was an attraction. There was a place I could sit in the window.

[Brief discussion of family involvement with store,  
 not directly related to the History of Tulip Time.]

JVU: What are some things that the Wooden Shoe Factory does differently during Tulip Time, that they do the rest of the year?

Mrs: I don't know of anything outside of beef up their help and . . . do you?

Mr: I don't know. I can't say that they do anything really different. Beef up their help.

Mr: I know when we used to work there, it was just packed. They'd let two people out and two people in because there was no room for anymore people in there. I mean it was just like a zoo. We enjoyed it, it was fun, like the excitement.

Mr: You worked in the old Wooden Shoe Factory; the one downtown.

Mrs: I worked when it was still downtown on Fourth Street.

JVU: How was that different from the one we have now?

Mrs: It was upstairs, and it was very small.

JVU: When did they move out to 31?

Mr: They kept both of the Wooden Shoe Factories. That one, the one on Fourth and River, was more of a . . .

Mrs: They called it the Dutch Novelty Shop didn't they?

Mr: That was a separate company Marge. The Wooden Shoe Factory was, it was more of a factory than it was today. It had merchandise they stored in the back, and inventory they'd made today. Then when they built the one on . . . first it went on M-21, and that place burned down. That was about where US-31 and 21 cross. That was about the location of the original one was. Then that burned down. Then they built one out where it is today. Of course, it expanded.

Mrs: When they were in downtown too, the wooden shoes were not that shown being made there were they. That wasn't their attraction where people could go in and watch.

Mr: The machine part of it was not shown. There was a hand carver. I can't remember what that fellow's name was, that hand carver. Oldenmulder was the fellow who ultimately was the carver, the one person that I know. In fact, he really showed me how to carve wooden shoes. I learned to do that. Traveled the country around, which is not part of Tulip Time, so we don't have to get into that, but it was an exciting . . . I think the whole thing, the whole Tulip Time scene, as far as we were concerned, was just the excitement, the fun of doing it. Involvement.

JVU: What areas of the festival, other than working with the Wooden Shoe Factory, have you ever been involved with? Have you had other involvement with the festival?

Mrs: We worked the market downtown, on Fourteenth Street. He carved at the market. You were the wooden shoe carver there. You were in the parade. I was in the parade when I was a child, you know, marching with the school. As a grownup, I don't think I was called to be in the parade. You were, because you were carving.

[Brief discussion of family involvement in parades,  
not directly related to the history of Tulip Time.]

Mrs: Weren't you in the parade when they had the big wooden shoe? Motorized . . .

Mr: Yeah. Have you heard about that? The wooden shoe? That was a wooden shoe built out of fiber glass, around the outside of a car, a vehicle. You sat down inside it, and looked through the front, where the shoe comes up, and I had a couple of peep holes in there, and I

couldn't see where I was going. You couldn't turn it too sharp, because it would rub up against the fiber glass.

Mrs: It was neat though.

Mr: It was quite a unique thing, and it was quite well done, I have to say. It was sponsored by the Wooden Shoe Factory again, and they had their advertisement on the side. That was a fun thing to do.

As far as our involvement with the committee, and the Tulip Time Committee, no. We were never involved with that, however I have to say here and now, that I would like to have been. I have some of my own opinions of what should have been done with Tulip Time, but I have to swallow those and say that's the way it is.

[Brief discussion of son and granddaughter's picture on a Holland post card.

Can be viewed in the Archives files.]

JVU: Could you describe for me any changes that you've seen in the festival through the years you've been involved, and even now as an attendant? What are some of the changes you've seen in the festival?

Mrs: Well, the change that I'm disappointed in is they didn't have the parade of bands that they had in the old days, on Saturday. It had, what, like sixty bands that came usually from all over. Now, if you get just a couple from bordering states, maybe one from somewhere across the country, but it just isn't the same I don't think. And the expansion of course. There's been a lot of controversy about that.

JVU: Over what parts of the expansion has there been controversy?

Mrs: The expanding it to two weeks instead of four days. There's been a lot of thought going into that, what you hear, whether it's the real tulips or just the news paper, or what.

Mr: Well, originally there was a two week festival, as you probably know, and then they cut it back to four days, which I think--probably--the best thing you could have; make it intense.

Mrs: The only draw back in the old days, the way they had it with the four days, was that the people that came from out of town that stayed over for Sunday, everything was closed. There was not a place to get a sandwich, nothing to eat or anything. The people just didn't understand this, coming from places where everything was wide open on Sunday. They couldn't imagine coming to a city where everything was

closed up on Sunday. Well, that's all changed now, the many restaurants and everything they have now.

[Phone rings. Tape turned off for conversation.]

Mr: Where were we? What was the question?

JVU: We were talking about the changes that Tulip Time has gone through.

Mr: Right. There was something I wanted to say right there, but . . .

Mrs: About the Sunday? That's where I left off.

Mr: Okay. We used to have a store, as we discussed, had a store downtown. First year, we had a store, we got our license, a temporary type license, and I went down and purchased one for four days; Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, and Saturday. And then on Sunday, we went down and opened the door up just to take inventory and prepare for the next day to get our merchandise out of the store, and my gracious sakes, that ended up being our--not our best day, because Saturday certainly was--but we did a good piece of business. The next year I decided to be fair and square with the city, and be honest about everything, I asked for a license for it; Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. They told me I couldn't have. I said, "Hey, I live here, I pay taxes all my life, lived in Holland, Michigan," and finally, by the time I got home, they still said no I couldn't have it. But by the time I got home, they had called and said, "You may open up." I guess the only reason I say that, is that again, you can have it on a Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, and condense it to that, and it become much more exciting, much more interesting.

JVU: Do you think the changes that the festival has gone through have been positive or negative? Do you have an opinion on that?

Mr: They've been negative. I'd say that they've made some changes that shouldn't have happened.

JVU: Do you want to say anything about that?

Mr: I think I have already. The change of opening up to more time. We used to have a part time manager, and then a few girls in the office at Tulip Time, to sell tickets and what have you. Today, I think we've expanded it too much. There's too many people hired, and

the payroll and so forth, to where we need the help of industry to finance Tulip Time. I know that the reason for it is the Rose Bowl and the Rose Parade, that's what they did. But I think that Holland should have stayed with the smallness, the hometown affair.

JVU: Do you think that Dutch pride has affected Tulip Time? In other words, do you think Dutch pride is what brought Tulip Time to be, or do you think that Tulip Time has brought on a rise in Dutch pride here in Holland?

Mrs: That's an interesting question. I don't know.

Mr: Repeat the question.

JVU: Sure. Do you think that Dutch pride is what brought Tulip Time into existence, or do you think that Tulip Time has caused the Dutch in Holland to have more pride in their heritage?

Mrs: I think that its just like some of both. I think that the people were proud of their heritage when they started Tulip Time, and of course that was a big advertisement for them, to be proud. No, I think it was kind of a mix.

Mr: I think that I would have to say the same thing, that . . .

Mrs: I think they've changed the parade now, to include the different nationalities that we have and everything, and this is fine, except that if this is a Dutch parade--a Tulip parade--that I really think that the people that have moved in, should swing over and join with instead of making it so diverse, by keeping it as a Dutch flower festival. That's my opinion, I don't know.

JVU: Holland has become more and more ethnically diverse, especially in the last few years. I was wondering how you see that effect the festival in recent history.

Mrs: I just think that as long as they've moved in here, and everyone's trying to get along peaceably and everything, but that they should join in, and not have the Dutch festival spread out to cater to every ethnic group. I think they all should still focus on the tulip festival. That's what it started out to be. So, I don't see anything wrong with that, and I don't think that people actually would see anything wrong. They can have their Fiesta Celebration and everything, and that's just wonderful. But when it's going to be the Holland Dutch tulip festival, they can join in that, and it would probably be just as much fun for everybody. So, it would be just like

us going somewhere else, and donning their costumes, and joining in. So that's just my own personal feeling.

JVU: Tulip Time was sort of founded on a sense of community, back when it began. How do you thin the ethnic diversity in Holland has effected the community itself?

[Brief discussion of ethnic diversity in Holland,  
not directly related to Tulip Time.]

JVU: How do you feel about the guests that Holland draws during Tulip Time?

Mr: I think they're just fantastic. I think the more we have, the better I like it.

Mrs: We've never been ones to say, "Let's get out of town, it's Tulip Time." We've never felt that way.

Mr: First off, when you have a business, you want all the people to come that you can get . . .

Mrs: Even when we didn't have a business, we enjoyed Tulip Time. We enjoyed the people coming.

JVU: What sort of experience do you think the tourists have that come to Holland? Both in experiencing the community, and also the Dutch culture?

Mrs: We've talked to some Dutch people that say, "The only time we see--and we're from the Netherlands--and the only time we see costumes is when we come to the parade in the Holland, Michigan. We don't dress like this in the Netherlands. Anyway, I'm sure they did in the past, but that was sort of just a chuckle, what this one lady said; spoke to me about.

I think the people enjoy coming. The letters that they get, and the letters that are in the paper, and everything. Most of the people you've been in contact with over the ears; people enjoy it. Some people say, "This our fourteenth year we've been here in a row." You know, I mean, they come back and come back, and bring their friends. I think it's more positive than negative.

JVU: What are some of the things . . . that some of the sentiment that some of the tourists have expressed to you about the city and about the festival?

Mr: I think that they were all very favorable. They were all upbeat. They liked the festival. They were very positive. In fact, we owned a business beyond the last fifteen, twenty years--well, we bought a business--out by the state park, and everybody thinks that Holland is just grand. I would say that for Tulip Time, that they have a very positive [response] and they like Holland. It's an enjoyable town.

Mrs: I really think that's the consensus of that.

Mr: That is changing somewhat. The more I hear of--I have some relatives over in Prate, [and they say], "You got some problems over in Holland." I can't understand it, because they've got some problems over in Prate too, believe me, but they've had those for years I guess.

Mrs: But that's the media, you know. The things they pick up, and you can't take a whole lot of stock in that.

[Brief discussion of family business, and Holland economy  
not directly related to Tulip Time.]

Mr: It's always been a wonderful experience, Tulip Time. I have fond memories of it.

Mrs: I don't have any other personal things, except what I put on the tape before, so I won't repeat that.

JVU: Are there any specific people that you both associate with Tulip Time?

Mrs: You mean like the wooden shoe carver or . . .

JVU: Sure. Anybody that's been involved with the festival, that you've interacted with or you just remember having a large role in Tulip Time.

Mrs: Sure. Fred Oldenmulder. He was like a fixture for many, many years with Tulip Time as the wooden shoe carver.

Mr: I've had a lot of great experiences. I've been able to interact with Dwight Ferris--he was the, I think, one of the first managers of Tulip Time; part time. I just enjoyed visiting with him, knowing what was coming off with Tulip Time. He was an interesting gentleman. I shouldn't say, "he was," he still is. H has not left this world yet. I hope he doesn't for a long, long time.

Larry Overbeek. I don't know if you know Larry or not. Larry's been a friend over the years. Not so much anymore, but I

could expound some of my feelings about I don't think this should be done, and that should be done, but we had a good time arguing about Tulip Time.

Mrs: Our involvement with the wooden shoe factory has certainly been an involvement for us with Del and his family.

[Mr. and Mrs. Freestones son enters the conversation here.

Noted as "MF"]

MF: Our whole family, everyone except my youngest brother, worked at the Wooden Shoe Factory.

Mr & Mrs: We already put that on their.

Mrs: That's right, my mother too. She was the bookkeeper there.

[Brief discussion of family involvement with the Wooden Shoe Factory.

Not directly related to the history of Tulip Time.]

JVU: Do you have an opinion as to what, if there was one event in the history of Tulip Time that [was] very important for the path that the festival has taken, what that one event might be?

Mrs: Okay, repeat that.

JVU: Do you have an opinion as to what one of the more important events, or maybe the most important event in Tulip Time history has been? [What] has caused it to go the direction it's gone?

Mrs: I can't say that, but I think one of the things that I didn't mention before: my feeling is that they've eliminated, was the Band Revue.

Mr: We mentioned that.

Mrs: No, I mentioned the Saturday parade. The Band Revue at Riverview Park, which is no longer, but that was a big attraction on Saturday. We no longer do that, and I think that's a shame. Of course that involves having all those bands come in from everywhere you know. They're kind of tied together. Not having that Band Revue, of course didn't bring as many bands in.

[Brief discussion of Margaret Van Vyven, not directly related to the history of Tulip Time.]

Ms. Van Vyven's thoughts on Tulip Time can be seen and heard within this project.

Interview #7, and a re-read on Tape 5a, as Interview #17.]

JVU: Do you see anything wrong with the Tulip Time festival the way it is now?

Mr: Sure.

JVU: Do you want to explain?

Mr: Sure. I can do that without being vicious about it. [laughs] I'm being critical. They have altogether too many politicians. Altogether too many television stations. Altogether too many . . .

Mrs: Personalities.

Mr: And they should have, and I'm talking about a band or parade now. Too many, as I said, the personalities. I think that they could, and I know that this costs money, they could have some floats . . . upgrade the floats, upgrade the bands. I think it's real nice when they get the band from Esconaba in here, who comes down to stay at West Ottawa schools, in the gymnasium there. The kids all sleep out, and they have a massive slumber party, and it's wonderful. I think we should upgrade them, the bands.

Mrs: Both of us felt that antique cars didn't have a place in the parade either. They have absolutely nothing to do with . . . And one of the parades, or one of the floats that went by when we were watching the parade, was all decorated in geraniums. There was not a tulip in sight. I don't remember which float it was, that doesn't matter, but I thought, "this is ridiculous." They've gotten too far away from what they started out to do.

JVU: Did you want to add anything?

Mr: No, that's good. They're bringing in too many . . . I think the Lawrence Welk Show, that was wonderful to have that, and that was a wonderful show too. Believe me, I realize that you people are much younger than what I am, but when I went to the Lawrence Welk Show, I really, truly enjoyed it. I honestly did. It was grand, and I think you would, and you would if you took time to go. It was good music. We've got too many of those, again, personalities. Who was the woman that was in it?

MF: Tammy Wynette?

Mr: Well, she put on a show, but the woman that was a parade marshall or something this year.

MF: Oh, Jane Powell.

[Brief discussion of Jane Powell.  
Not related to the history of Tulip Time.]

Mr: I think they've gotten away from what they were. Maybe that's good to a degree.

JVU: What has Tulip Time meant to you year after year?

Mr: It's meant a good time. It's meant fun. I never wanted to leave town when Tulip Time came around. Like Marge said earlier, people would say, "Boy, I'd like to get out of town. We always get out of town." I never felt that way. I just think that . . .

Mrs: I didn't either. Even as a youngster before we started having businesses and so on, and that wasn't the whole reason. I've always enjoyed Tulip Time. It was something you looked forward to. That's what it meant to us.

Mr: I think it meant more to us back then, as the fun thing to do. The parades were nice to be in, and it was kind of proud to have your mother and dad standing on the sidelines to wave to you. That part. And this year, this is something--what did it mean to me--I thought this year I neglected to go down and take a picture of my son who was in the parade, and I feel bad about that. I thought, dog gone it, I should have seen to it that I got down there to a parade.

[Brief discussion of son's involvement in parade,  
Not directly related to the history of Tulip Time.]

Mr: It's always been a fun, enjoyable thing. I feel bad when I hear people say they're going to leave town.

JVU: Why do you think they have that opinion?

Mrs: Traffic mostly. They don't like the invasion of their city. They can't get a cup of coffee in the restaurant when they want to.

Mr: I also think that it's just something to say. It's an excuse.

[More discussion of leaving town,  
not directly related to the history of Tulip Time.]

JVU: Last question: What is your favorite part of Tulip Time?

Mrs: I think mine, I don't know about [Marv], but I've always enjoyed the Dutch dancers forever. I think that's my favorite part.

Mr: I would have to say that that is my favorite part, and unfortunately, I didn't go see them this year, or last year maybe. Well, we did last year, we went down a couple of times. We lived in town, we walked downtown to see what was going on. I would say, yeah, the Dutch dancers. The parades are . . . The kids parade is nice, I think the Volks parade is nice, that's kind of the home town type, you know. That's nice. The Dutch dancers are nice. They work hard.

-End of Interview-