

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

Second Draft of Interview w/
Mrs. Beverly Frego Harper
The Oral History of Tulip Time

Typed by Mrs. Harper
as a supplement to original transcript

HARPER DRAFT : Edited and Amended by Beverly Harper

- Interview with Beverly-Freggo-Harper @ her home
- 471 East 8th Street, Holland, Michigan 49423
- June 30, 1995
- Interviewer: Jason Valere Upchurch

Begin Tape 9 : Side B

BH: My name is Beverly--maiden name Freggo, F-R-E-G-O, and then I was married to Harper. Beverly-Freggo-Harper.

JVU: You were born here?

BH: Yes, I was born in Holland, Michigan, attended Washington Grade School, graduated from Holland High School. After that, from Grand Rapids Junior College with an advanced business & accounting degree.

JVU: How are you associated with the Tulip Time Festival?

BH: In the early part of 1947, I had heard that Bill Vandewater needed a secretary-bookkeeper, I applied, and was hired. This was not only for the Chamber of Commerce office, but for the Tulip Time office duties as well. I worked for them through 1947 and 1948. I left the latter part of 1948 because of getting married and moving to Kalamazoo for approximately a year where I worked for the Kalamazoo Chamber of Commerce.

JVU: What specific areas of the Tulip Time festival did you deal with? You were working for the Tulip Time office?

BH: Yes. We were taking care of all of the duties of Tulip Time which included the Tulip Time Housing and all of the mail. This was prior to the Tulip Time office being set up at the Netherlands Information Bureau--through the direction of Willard C. Wichers. I was working at the Chamber office through this "transition" period. This change was much to the disappointment of Bill

Vandewater because he wanted the Tulip Time office to remain within the Chamber of Commerce office. He, personally, felt that is where it should remain. However, any mail, or contact, that would come through our office--addressed to the Chamber of Commerce even after the "transition" period--we had to take care of ourselves. It was not directed back over to the Tulip Time office at the City Hall. This, of course, was done through the direction of the Board of Directors of the Chamber of Commerce. We still had a lot of correspondence and information we had to send out through our office. The Chamber of Commerce office was located in such a convenient location in the downtown area that it was like "Grand Central Station". Everyone, it seemed, came in with their questions and problems. Bill Vandewater was the man to see as he always had the right answer for everything. For instance, some of the merchants would have a question, or problem, pertaining to their Float in the parade, and Bill would know just what to do.

Also, the Tulip Time housing was set up in the back room of our office building. We laid the groundwork for the Tulip Time housing. Mr. Harold Vanderploeg, from Van's Resort, was the head of the Tourist & Resort Committee of the Chamber of Commerce, and was appointed the head of the Tulip Time housing. We set their office up in the vacant room in the back of our offices on West 8th Street. We were the second building east of the Model Drug Store. We would have people lined up from the sidewalk and through our office building to the back room for people to find a place to stay. We hired Mildred VandenBosch to assist Mr. Vanderploeg with that. In 1948, Mrs. Ray Knooihuizen was hired to take charge of the Tulip Time housing committee with the help of Mrs. VandenBosch and two others (including Julia Stone from the Netherlands Information Bureau--who later took my position at the Chamber of Commerce office, after I left).

JVU: What made the Tulip Time Committee decide that there was a need for this program?

BH: Well, because of the tremendous volume of letters that we would receive every day--thirty to forty letters a day. At times, probably even more than that. It was too much for us to handle just in the Chamber of Commerce office alone, because we, of course, had our many other duties to do. We already had a heavy workload. As it was, even though they took care of the Tulip Time housing, we still had the telephone ringing off the hook, as you can imagine, and people stopping in for information to have their many questions answered that come up throughout Tulip Time. Our office was open until ten o'clock every night and sometimes I wouldn't leave until nine. Bill would always stay until ten and there were times I would stay that long. We had all of the Hotels sold out in advance which included the Hotel Macatawa (which people enjoyed being on the lake), the Hotel Netherlands and the Warm Friend Tavern, of which none of these exist today. We also had all of the resorts in the area filled to capacity and had to send visitors out-of-town. I can remember telephoning the Grand Rapids, Muskegon, and Benton Harbor areas for last-minute reservations. This is why it is so important for local residents to register their rooms so that we can keep our visitors right here in the immediate area. I also encouraged my own mother to rent her vacant rooms over the years, for Tulip Time visitors, which she did and enjoyed it very much.

JVU: What were some of the questions that people would ask back then when they called? Was it about places to stay?

BH: Well, yes, and also what there was to do in Holland. Of course, the activities with the schedule of Tulip Time was mainly it. They would appreciate, so much, what we would do for them that many times visitors would come back in and leave a box of candy or some small gift. We never were allowed to accept any money although they even wanted to "tip" us sometimes. We never did accept any monetary award, but when they wanted to leave a gift on the counter, there wasn't much we could do about that. They just felt they wanted to do something to show their appreciation. They were so grateful for the help that we would give them through the Chamber office.

JVU: How was it different back then, as far as selling the festival?

BH: First, there's a lot more publicity I see on the festival now. Secondly, I think it's great that they have a lot more for the people to do now. That was about the number one complaint; there wasn't enough to do everyday. I'm happy to see they have things going along very well now with lots of entertainment. I've seen that growth, and couldn't help but notice that. Since they've extended the number of days for the Festival, I've been wondering if that's a good idea. It probably is as long as they have enough activity going on for the visitors, especially for those who arrive the week-end before. I had noticed a write-up in the Sentinel, afterwards, that there had been some complaints about not having enough to do the first week, since they've extended it. See, that reminded me of what we went through in 1947 and 1948 when there wasn't enough activity. If you look at the programs then compared to the programs today, they have made a wonderful change. They have wonderful programs almost every night now with fine entertainment during the main part of the Festival.

JVU: In 1947 and 1948, when you were involved, it was still a four-day festival?

BH: Yes.

JVU: You think these changes have been good for Tulip Time?

BH: Yes, I do. I feel that we have to keep making changes. I also noticed in the Sentinel where they're having some of the stores open--some of the downtown merchants have decided to remain open on Sunday. I think that's a good idea, too, because we have to keep catering to the visitors, and we do have so many wonderful stores downtown where they can just go in and browse around. I feel that's a plus also.

JVU: Holland has become more ethnically diverse in recent years. How do you think that's effected the festival?

BH: I think it's very good that we have all of these ethnic people in Holland. I think it's a very good positive sign that we love all people. The Festival is something that all of the people of Holland can do together to help celebrate

together and bring us closer together.

(Brief discussion of Mrs. Harper's ethnic heritage.
Not directly related to Tulip Time.)

JVU: You say you participated in the festival when you were younger?

BH: From the time I was in kindergarten, or first grade, I remember being in the parade.

JVU: Do you have any specific memories that stand out as particularly memorable or special from being in the parade:

BH: I just remember how excited we were, and how happy we were to be a part of it. It makes children feel important, I think, that they're all a part of this. I can also speak for my own four children with some of them being in the Dutch Dance, some in the band, some on Floats in the parade, and all of them in the parades each year while they were in school. One of my daughter's specific memories are of being on two different Floats in two different parades. One of the pictures of one of the Floats was published one year in a Tulip Time advertising book. We still have that book.

JVU: One of the recurring sentiments in all of my interviews is that the children in Holland are very important to the Tulip Time festival. Have you seen it that way throughout the history of Tulip Time that you've been involved with?

BH: Yes, and I know that the people, too, would always inquire about the Children's Parade at the Chamber of Commerce office. They always looked forward to that.

JVU: What would (the tourists) ask about it?

BH: They would ask, "when is the Children's Parade going to be?" Also, they would ask if they were all of Dutch descent. I think the volume of children that we have in the parades is just what impresses people--the number of children involved in this. The children always brought smiles and still do.

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

through dealing with them personally or just from knowing that they've been involved? Any names that come to mind?

BH: You mean outside (of) visitors?

JVU: People from here in Holland who have been involved.

BH: Well, of course, Mr. Willard C. Wichers; we had a lot to do with him and through his office staff. We had close communication there. He was a wonderful man and a great leader in that. Also, Bill Vandewater, under whose direction I worked. Those two men did an excellent job, and to me, I felt they had the best men for the jobs. They went beyond the call of duty. They would put all of their energies into their jobs and work long hours. They were two very dedicated men.

Before you go to another question, I just have a note here about Mr. Sipp Houtman. In 1947, he headed the Tulip Time Committee and was instrumental in getting Tulip Time organized--along with the help of Bill Vandewater. Mr. Houtman took it very seriously and put a lot of work and effort into it, too. At times, he would get upset because of lack of funds to deal with the expense of Tulip Time. I do remember, as a result, having to mail out special letters of requests for donations from the various businesses, manufacturers, and tourist & resort businesses. This was done through the efforts of Bill Vandewater and the Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors. We really owe it to all of them for continuing our Tulip Time.

JVU: Mr. Houtman; he was the director who took up the Tulip Time festival right after World War II.

BH: Yes, and Bill Vandewater and I worked along with him. He was our local Postmaster at the time, and he would come into the office about every day.

JVU: What was the feeling, or what was the atmosphere around Holland that first year the Tulip Time festival occurred again after World War II?

BH: Well, it was very exciting, and everyone was enthused and willing to put everything into it again. We had wonderful cooperation from everyone; from all the various committees of the Chamber of Commerce, and the local people who would stop by, or call in. We found that the local people were very willing to rent their rooms to accommodate our visitors.

JVU: Would you say, then, it was a welcome relief, maybe, after the years of being off?

BH: Yes, definitely. I know even with my own experience, I felt that this was wonderful being able to get on with normal life again, and getting on with Holland's Tulip Time festival again--the most important event of the year.

JVU: Were there any differences in the festival that year, coming right after the war like that? Were there any people honored for their activity in World War II?

BH: Now that I don't remember. I'd have to kind of give that some thought and think back. I don't remember right now, and I wasn't involved with that part of Tulip Time either.

I would like to mention that, in 1948, Mr. Arnold Hertel, from the Hertel Insurance Agency, headed the Tulip Time Committee--after Sipp Houtman in 1947. He was formerly from Grand Rapids and had only been in Holland for three years. He, too, got right in there dressing up like a typical Dutchman and enjoyed every minute of it. He was a great man for the job, too, and very enthusiastic.

JVU: Since you worked fairly closely with Bill Wichers, you probably experienced some of the Dutch heritage events of the festival. Do you think that the Dutch pride, here in Holland, the Dutch pride that the citizens of Holland have in their heritage, do you think that's what brought on the Tulip Time festival, or do you think that the Tulip Time festival has caused people to experience a little more Dutch pride?

BH: Oh, yes, I think that's it, that the Festival has brought out a lot of it.

JVU: Are there any specific instances where you notice that, or do you think just

in general

BH: I've experienced witnessing this through Bill Vandewater and Willard Wichers, and over the past few years through Bill Vandewater's son, Randy, who has written many interesting articles and books. I also have a lot of Cutch friends, throughout the city of Holland, and I have heard them mention this many times. I could see the pride in them, and I've felt the pride for them too. It's a very exciting time for Holland. Most people don't realize the excitement until you work behind the scenes. Then you really get caught up under the extraordinary pride and excitement. I'm sure that the people working for Tulip Time now, will relate to that. I'll have to admit that I missed it after I had to leave.

I would also like to mention that a lot of credit is due Mr. Nelson Bosman who took charge of all of the radio and electronics pertaining to Tulip Time. He put in a tremendous amount of work and a lot of late hours.

JVU: Did your office also deal with him directly?

BH: Yes, and he would come in the Chamber office almost every day too. He was a very willing worker, and very dedicated to Tulip Time. He made contact with Bill Vandewater pertaining to his assignments he had to do for Tulip Time.

JVU: What is maybe something that--working in the office you worked in-- what is something that maybe you know about these men and the way they dealt with Tulip Time, that nobody else could tell me? (laughs) No deep dark secrets, but . .

BH: I think what stands out the most--like with Mr. Bosman, too, I'm sure he had a tremendous amount of headaches and a lot of responsibility there--(they) were always so cool, calm and collected you know, and that has made a lasting impression with me; along with their dedication, hard work, and persistence to having the best Festival we could possibly have.

JVU: Anybody else you wanted to mention?

BH: I also have a picture of Mr. Larry Wade here who was also very active in serving on the Tulip Time Committee along with Sipp Houtman and Arnold Hertel.

(Brief discussion of Wade's Drug Store.
Not related to the history of Tulip Time.)

BH: I want to mention some of the Chamber of Commerce Board members who, at that time, stood out the most in my memories because of their close communication with us at the office and who deserve much credit: (They served Tulip Time also).

President of the C. of C., 1947 - Charles McCormick, Pres. Heinz Co.
President of the C. of C., 1948 - Henry Maentz, Pres., First Nat'l Bank
- Carl Andreasen, Pres., Holland-Racine Shoes
- Arnold Hertel, Hertel Insurance Agency
- John Van Dyke, Rooks Transfer
- Larry Wade, Wade's Drug Store
- Harold Vanderploeg, Van's Resort
- Nelson Bosman, Bosman's Store
- W. A. Butler, Holland Sentinel

(Pause: Mrs. Harper hands interviewer a set of articles from The Holland Sentinel, brief discussion not related to Tulip Time follows.)

BH: I was working at the Chamber of Commerce when Mr. (Jaap) deBlecourt came over from the Netherlands to take charge of Windmill Island. I can remember when he and his wife arrived, and also when they came into the Chamber office.

JVU: He just retired from Windmill Island.

BH: Yes, I saw the write-up in the Sentinel. He did a fine job.

Another memory I have is when I was asked to help find children for the Chamber of Commerce Float. They did not have enough children for it. So I made arrangements to have one of Mayor Steffens grandchildren (whom I use to babysit for) to ride on Float. We thought that it would especially be nice to have one of his grandchildren on it since he was the Mayor. There are a lot of nice, pleasant memories that go along with this particular job.

JVU: Any that you want to share, go ahead.

BH: I should mention that the Antique Organ that was donated to the City of Holland, from the Netherlands, arrived in 1947, to help celebrate Holland's 100th Centennial year in August. It had been used for many of our Tulip Time parades after that, and then was put away in storage. I can still remember four of the men who accompanied the Organ here, and how happy and excited they were to be here. I have heard re-

cently that they would like to take it out of storage and start using it again in the parades. Recently, I have been helping the Holland Historical Trust committee in locating one of the men who accompanied the Organ here, in the Netherlands, to get more information about the Organ. I had remembered one of the men's names from the Chamber of Commerce office.

Also, some of the Floats that were in the 1947 Tulip Time parade were held over for our Centennial parade. Bill Vandewater insisted that I be on one of those Floats, and I still have the picture of that with myself wearing a beautiful white gown, along with three other girls wearing gowns.

Another part of my responsibility with the Chamber of Commerce office, along with the Tulip Time office, was the complete charge of the bookkeeping. During the two years I worked for Tulip Time, they would run in the red and that is why Sipp Houtman did have a big responsibility. It was upsetting to him. They did a wonderful job, however, through the Chamber of Commerce efforts. Everybody came through at that time to keep the Festival going.

JVU: For the sake of comparison, what would the festival make in a year back then?

BH: Oh, I think you could find that in the Chamber of Commerce office records, but you know, I don't remember right now. Probably because I had the full responsibility of the Chamber of Commerce books also. I remember when they were getting the groundwork laid again, for Tulip Time, they wouldn't have enough money to cover it all. It had to be up to the businesses and the various committees of the Chamber of Commerce, and the Chamber of Commerce itself. They did a fine job keeping it going, right?

JVU: Yeah. It stayed alive, that's for sure. Do you feel that there are any problems with the Tulip Time festival, or have there been problems in the past that the festival has overcome?

BH: Other than the financial problems, I can't think of any right off hand. Or, probably the directing of traffic years back. They've settled that and it seems to be working out good now. Other than that, I can't think of anything.

JVU: Two last questions: What do you think Tulip Time means to Holland?

BH: I personally think it's the greatest thing that ever could have happened to Holland. It has put Holland on the map, and wherever I go, in the past years of traveling, people right away recognize Holland as "that's where the Tulip Festival is!" So then, the communication has opened up and we talk about Holland.

JVU: What has the festival meant to you, year after year?

BH: With being a resident and growing up in Holland, I'm glad to see it continue year after year. As I mentioned, I was caught up in the excitement of it during the two years I worked for it. I had a lot of responsibility and know just how everything operates, and it was a very happy and pleasant time of my life. I see how many people still look forward to coming and it is still growing more each year--the statistics are proving that.

JVU: What is your favorite part of Tulip Time:

BH: My favorite part? Oh, there's so many! (laughs). I love the Parade of Bands, however. I love that. Of course, the tulips too. See, there are two priorities I have, but I do especially love bands. To see so many bands come from all over and participate in the parade, I feel it's a very uplifting experience for everyone.