

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

Interview #14

Mr. and Mrs. Kenneth E. Kooiker [Kenneth and Marilyn]
The Oral History of Tulip Time

Conducted by:
Jason Valere Upchurch
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- Interview w/ Kenneth and Marilyn Kooiker @ their home
- 544 Cherry Lane / Holland, MI 49423
- June 30, 1995
- Interviewer: Jason Valere Upchurch

Begin Tape #10 : Side A

KK: My name is Ken Kooiker. I was born in Holland, Michigan. I was one of the last ones born in the old Holland Hospital, which was the Netherlands Museum. I was born on twelve--twenty-nine--twenty-two.

JVU: And how have you been involved with the Tulip Time festival?

KK: Well, when I was a child, I used to go down there every year, but all the years I lived in Holland, we were always involved in Tulip Time in one time or another. The most involvement was with the tourist home of my father and mother, at 294 River Avenue, where the [Herrick Public] Library is now.

We had a tourist place, and it was the original Bed and Breakfast of those days. We served meals during this time of Tulip Time, and rented rooms. In the winter time, we had regular customers that stayed at our house during the whole year, and I was their waiter. I waited on tables during Tulip Time and during the rest of the year, and I had a great time doing it; met an awful lot of nice people. The two people that I remember very much so, is Mrs. Otte and Dr. Blocker from Western Seminary. These two people are very well known in the Holland area, even through Hope College. Dr. Blocker is the one I always remember one thing, and he says, "Money talks, and all it says to me is 'buy, buy, buy!'" [laughs]

[Continued discussion of Red Brick Tourists home, not related to the history of Tulip Time.]

MK: I was thinking there was a picture of Mrs. Otte in a Dutch costume. [Mrs. Kooiker is addressing a small book she wrote called *Kooiker--A Dutch-American Family History*] I guess it's not in the book. She was a daughter of one of the early professors at Hope College. Anyway, that has nothing to do with Tulip Time.

KK: I can very well remember that I'm sure G. Mennen Williams is one that came to eat at our place during Tulip Time. He was the governor of the state of Michigan. I waited on his table.

JVU: He was here for Tulip Time?

KK: That's right. I don't know which one. We had some other people that used to come, and my father was a staunch Republican, and he just couldn't stand Mennen Williams. I went and shook his hand, and waited on him of course, and my dad told me to go and wash my hands. [laughs]

JVU: Any other people, particularly memorable people who either stayed there or dined there during Tulip Time?

KK: There were so many. Most of the people that I remember are the ones from Michigan. We may have had some very important people, but we never--my dad at least--never said they weren't regular people. He could talk just like anybody else, and he was a great talker, and he loved people, and he was a salesman at heart. He knew a lot of people, but the Mennen Williams is the only one I remember during Tulip Time.

During Tulip Time we had dinners at night only; we didn't have any lunches. I can still remember people walking up the sidewalk to the house, and dad saying, "Well, here comes some more people." He'd say, "Ken, go get on your bicycle and get four more steaks." That's what we used to do. We'd get the meat before we got the people. Over a period of years, the people that used to work for my mother quit, and didn't want to get into the problem of feeding and so on. Pretty soon, all they had was the tourists, and that is when she remembers where my folks would take all the furniture out of the living room, and set up beds--three or four beds--in the living room. We quit long time before

that, having meals anymore. My mother couldn't take it.

MK: She would put two or three double beds in the living room, and there was one large bedroom upstairs where she would maybe have four double beds, and she always had roll-away beds available. So, this went on from the thirties on, until mid-forties after World War II.

KK: After World War II they took the sign down because of all the . . . well, The Holiday Inn, and all these other people started coming in, and so these tourist places weren't . . . people didn't stay in the tourist places anymore.

JVU: How did World War II effect business?

KK: They had just the tourist place, they didn't have the eating, and they still kept--when I left for World War II anyway--they were still taking just in the summer, and just during Tulip Time.

MK: It was effected badly, because she couldn't get the groceries. The rations . . .

KK: The rations and everything, so they just went to having the tourist rooms, and that's all. That's all that they did. They got rid of the tourists place, because right after the war, The Holiday Inn came in, and some of the other big hotels, and they just didn't have any business anymore.

MK: Motels became important, because people were now able to drive and they had their cars, and they could get gas . . .

KK: But they had during the war, a few people that they knew. It went down to almost nothing during Tulip Time.

JVU: What are some other ways that the food rationing and things like that during World War II effected Tulip Time that you can remember?

KK: Well, I went to the army; I was in there for five years, so I don't know how it effected Tulip Time, because I wasn't here. That I can't help. I was gone.

JVU: Do you still attend Tulip Time?

KK: Oh yeah. We go to things, but we're now working with the museum and we're working at the museum during Tulip Time.

JVU: How have the tourists changed?

KK: The way they dress for one thing. I mean, they're a bunch of sloppy people, a lot of them are. You know. That's true.

JVU: Bigger numbers of people?

KK: I think a bigger number of people. During Tulip Time--when I remember it when I was a kid, or even living at 294 River Avenue--I mean, people were . . . women still had white gloves on, and there was still a lot of people, and ladies wore their hats. You didn't go around anywhere very often without a tie, and I think it's quite a bit different in dress. I don't think the people are that much different, except that you've got an entirely different class of people than we used to have.

The people who came to Tulip Time had money years ago. They were the only ones that could afford it. Today, anybody can afford it, so you get every class of people that you ever thought of having, at Tulip Time. I see that at the museum now. You get an entirely different group of people from what I can remember. You get a smattering of these people who have a lot of money, but that's the way I feel. Does that answer?

MK: I think the people who are coming now, are bringing their children, showing them a different way of life. I mean it's not the theme park life, and I think that's a good thing. They're bringing their children here, and they're talking them to the fields of tulips, and explaining the tulip story--of course if you go down Eighth Street, all you're seeing is elephant ears and that other stuff that they eat. We were overwhelmed at the museum this year and last year with people bringing their children and their guests, and just absorbing . . .

KK: During my time, you left the kids home, or they just never went. The biggest thing, the difference between before World War II and after World War II, was the amount of cars. I can remember when they lined up on Lakewood Boulevard. See, the tulip farm was out here on Lakewood Boulevard.

JVU: That would be the Nelis Tulip Farm?

KK: Nelis Tulip Farm was here. It would take you a good couple hours to go from River Avenue, go on out to the Nelis Tulip Farm,

and then go around down through--oh they'd have you go over to the Douglas Avenue or Ottawa Beach Road to come back.

We used to sit, before World War II, on my father's front porch. If you notice the picture, [the house] had a big front porch on it. That was our favorite place in the summer. It was all screened in, and we used to sit there and watch the people drive down River Avenue. At that time, River Avenue would just be absolutely jammed full of people. Car upon car upon car, and after World War II, of course, there were no cars until I'd say three or four years after the war, when people started buying automobiles again. But now, we don't see that many automobiles, we see busses. When I went to the World War II, we didn't hardly ever see any busses; it's all cars.

JVU: Can you describe to me some of the things the tourists--both back then and today, maybe the tourists you deal with at the museum--have mentioned to you about the festival? What they like about it, or what they don't like about it?

KK: Well, ninety-nine percent of the people you talk to are flabbergasted on the amount of tulips we have around the tulip lanes and so on. Most generally, the people talk about they came to see the tulips.

MK: I remember them saying how clean our town is. They can't believe how clean our town is, and I would say, "Well, it looks terrible right now." [laughs]

KK: All the years we've been back--eight years, nine years--and living here and seeing Tulip Time, and working at the new museum, it's so much different than what I used to remember as far as all the people. We get a lot more people now than we ever did in the thirty-eight or thirty-nine years. There are a lot, a lot of cars. The reason we had a lot of cars, we didn't have the traffic control that we do today. I think on Saturdays, when we used to go to the band revues when I was a kid, the band revues was still there, and we used to go to Kollen Park. There would be thousands and thousands of cars, and today you hardly see the cars at all, because they get out of town faster. They have a

way to get out of town, and . . . there are not as many cars as there were in those old days, simply because there are more busses.

MK: I was going to say another thing is the attractions we have now. Like Lawrence Welk, and the Smothers Brothers this past year; they didn't have that during early Tulip Time. The local people did . . .

KK: Did all of it. It was all local stuff. It wasn't as well advertised in those days as it is today.

JVU: Would you say those changes have been better both for the festival and for Holland?

KK: Oh yeah. Absolutely. Not only that, but I feel as though, when you think of the thousands of busses that come in here, we're really accommodating a lot more people than we did before. Only because the busses carry a lot more transportation.

[More brief discussion of traffic.
Not related to the history of Tulip Time.]

JVU: Are there any names that you associate with Tulip Time?

MK: Well, I didn't know him, but Mr. Brooks, I hear over and over when I'm doing my research . . .

KK: 7-Up Company. Ernie Brooks. His son graduated from High School with me.

MK: Well, he's the one who pushed buying the first tulips from the Netherlands and planting them here. Somehow his wife is still living, and sometimes when I see her I remember him.

[Brief discussion of Mrs. Brooks.
Not related to Tulip Time.]

MK: It was later in Tulip Time that I knew Mrs. Cappon, who was the teacher who oversaw the costumes for the girls that do the Dutch dancing. I knew her.

KK: I never had her because she was . . .

MK: I didn't know her personally because I didn't go to school here, but . . .

KK: Well, the one that comes to my mind is Lida Rogers. I had her in school. Everybody that was a biology student of hers, went out on Lakewood Boulevard to our forest.

[Brief discussion of Mr. Kooiker's tree in said forest.
Not related to the history of Tulip Time.]

JVU: Did she ever share any of her ideas for Tulip Time with you in her class?

KK: The only thing that I can remember about ol' Lida, is that she taught you all about tulips, and that was her forte. She could tell you exactly what to do with a tulip, and how to take care of it, and I've remembered it to this day. You do it in November, and you let them in there for so long . . . two or three years. It's probably changed because over the years, the tulips are so much different than they were before. She told us exactly how to take care of our tulips. The only reason I remember her, is that in the museum they have a small article about Lida starting Tulip Time.

JVU: Were there any other people that you can think of?

KK: Yeah. Nels Bosman. Nels Bosman, for years, was my Sunday school teacher. He used to digress, and we always had to go to his house two or three times a year and he'd show us his train set.

[Brief discussion of Nels Bosman's train set.
Not related to the history of Tulip Time.]

JVU: What do you think Tulip Time has meant to the city of Holland over the years?

KK: I'll tell you what it stands for for me. I was in the [Junior Chamber of Commerce], I think it was. At one time I was in the [Jaycees] in Holland, Michigan. The [Jaycees] had a

survey, and all the Kiwanans got together and split up to make a survey of what was good and what wasn't good in the city of Holland for Tulip Time. I can remember that they gave the committee I was on, the duty to find out what little old ladies in town here took in tourists, and made money on it, and what they did with it; the money after they earned it at Tulip Time by taking in tourists. It was really fascinating to me, to find out that there was an awful lot of people that took in tourists, and then they had the outside of their house painted. They spread that money around to buying paint and a painter, or they had something done to their furnace or they had something done inside, or they had new kitchens put in their house because of the money that they had accumulated with tourists during Tulip Time.

MK: Well, I know definitely that happened with Ken's mother. After Tulip Time was over, she would replace towels, sheets, many things that they needed . . .

KK: But this survey was done to show the city what really . . . Everybody that I ever knew said that the only people that made money, were the people who had restaurants in the city of Holland. There's a lot more people in Holland that make money from Tulip Time than just restaurants. All of the kids that work in High School, that have jobs in Tulip Time, and only Tulip Time, put it in their pocket and went to the mall, and bought some clothes, which they probably wouldn't have done if they hadn't had that extra money.

MK: I think we can thank, to some degree, the industrial parks that we have here. Those people coming to Holland, seeing Tulip Time, they say, "My this is a wonderful place to be. I'd like to live here. I'd like to bring my kids here, why not move our business here?" I feel that that's why we have a lot of these small firms that have located in [Holland]. We started out with one industrial park, now we have them all around.

KK: I don't think that Freedom Village would have gone as well as it has, if the people didn't know that there was a Tulip Time in

Holland, Michigan.

JVU: You think the festival is attracting senior citizens?

KK: Absolutely.

JVU: How is that different from the past? Has it always been the sort of festival that's attracted an older crowd?

KK: Well, I think in years when I used to know it, I think it was just older people, because they're the only ones that had money to travel. Most of the young people didn't have the money. I think today, it's because the senior citizens got more money than the young people still.

MK: They're the ones on the busses.

KK: They're the ones that are on the busses. Forty-four of them per bus, and well what two or three hundred busses?

[Brief discussion of busses.
Unrelated to Tulip Time.]

JVU: What do you think it is about Holland that allows the festival to grow the way it does?

KK: Because the people, like us . . . Holland Tulip Time; if we didn't have it, what would we have? We don't have anything, and Holland Tulip Time has introduced an awful lot of wonderful advertising. It's not any different than Branson, Missouri. Branson, Missouri would be absolutely nothing if they didn't have all that other stuff, and the same thing with Holland. Holland would not have . . . Lifesavers, General Electric. general Electric doesn't hardly have a plant this size--well, it's not anymore--but at that time, they came here only because of the work ethics and Holland itself. It's a clean town. The day after the biggest parade on Saturdays, you can drive down town or anywhere and never see one single piece of paper anywhere.

MK: On Sunday morning.

KK: On Sunday morning. You don't even know we had Tulip Time, and that's because of the work ethics, and the ethics of the people who are running Tulip Time. In most everyplace else that

I've ever been where there's been a lot of people, the dirt and the filth and the papers and everything are still there two or three weeks later. Now that is one of the biggest differences of Holland, Michigan, and I would hate to see that happen where somebody else takes a hold of this and let's it go down the drain. I think Holland Tulip Time has been a really marvelous place to come, and of course you get Chicago, you get Detroit, you get the Eastern part of Michigan . . .

MK: All of Ohio comes.

KK: All of Ohio comes. It's a good Dutch community, and it's now getting to the point where it's not just all Dutch.

JVU: What is your favorite part of Tulip Time? You can both answer that.

KK: Our favorite--mine is--to go around the tulip lanes. They really are gorgeous. The last two years, they're absolutely perfect. I mean, during Tulip Time, they just seem to [know] it's Tulip Time, and out they are. They're just gorgeous. You can go one street and say aren't those beautiful, and you go to the next street, "Oh aren't those beautiful," and before you know it, there's the ending of it. That's usually what we do.

MK: You see tulips that are fifteen or twenty inches tall. It's unbelievable.

KK: It fascinates us.

JVU: Wold you say that's also your favorite part of Tulip Time?

MK: No, I don't think it is. They're there, but I'm involved with the Woman's Literary Club. From the beginning of Tulip Time, those ladies have served the typical Dutch lunch; pigs in a blanket--saucizebroadges--and pea soup.

KK: You know what that is. Saucizabroadges are pigs in a blanket.

MK: Well he knows what those are. Pigs in a blanket and pea soup and gingerbread; that's a typical Dutch lunch. So, we open our building to that, and we dress in costume, and we have a great time. We have a lady named Mrs. [Rose] MacDoniels, who plays all the good old oldies and we have a nice time down there. And the

people just love it. They love coming down where it's quiet to a degree that you can control it. She plays the piano, and the people are busy eating, but it's a restful place to be, and we don't advertise, we just take people off the street, walk them in, and it's been going on for the whole length of Tulip Time.

That's one of my favorites, the other one is a new interest, and that . . .

-End Side A-

Interview with Ken & Marilyn Kooiker

Begin Tape 10 : Side B

JVU: Okay, you were talking about [your new interest] the Holland Museum.

MK: Yes, that's a new interest since we moved to the building at Tenth and River. We get some interesting people there. Lot's of Dutch people that you wouldn't believe that many Dutch people were coming to the United States, but there they are, and they find themselves in the museum. We learn as much from them as we're telling them.

KK: Some real fascinating people. And you know, I always say, there's nothing more interesting than people, and I just love it, and now they tap me on the shoulder and ask me if I would help them with school children.

[Brief discussion of Holland Museum programs.
Unrelated to Tulip Time.]

KK: We stayed in Holland for about fifteen years after I came back from World War II, and then after that, Tulip Time was still here. Oh, I have to tell you about one thing that I did.

We lived in Huntington, West Virginia, and my neighbor behind me was a Huntington High School band booster, and both his boys were in the Huntington High School band. One day we were out there looking over the fence and talking, and he said [they] were trying to plan to go someplace with [their] band this year, and we've done it all. And I said, "Well you've never been to Holland, Michigan have you?" So, I went and got a hold of a fellow that I knew real well, the head of Holland Tulip Time Incorporated, who used to be my neighbor, and I called him up and I asked him if the band would be allowed to come up on Saturday, to Tulip Time.

So, they sent him all the band information. They had to be just so much, they had to win so many things before they

were allowed to come to Holland. Well, everything was fine, and well, I started it, and then the corporation--BASF, well it wasn't BASF at that time was it? It was Holland Color, or Holland SUCO--and so they got together and we sent the band up here, and Holland SUCO paid for their dinner at night and so on, and here Huntington High School band, from Huntington--people didn't even know where Huntington, West Virginia was. We had a real good band, really, and the interesting thing was . . .

MK: That boy went on to be in a McDonald's Band.

KK: He was a tall great big black boy. The drum [major]. And then at the end of their band, they had two or three young girls hold a great big banner up, and on each side it said, "Now you just saw the Huntington High School Band." Nobody around here ever seen that before, but we had a band come up here, and everybody complimented me on sending such a marvelous young group up to Holland, Michigan for Tulip Time. They were . . . they had gone the farthest and so on, and I never got a chance to get up here. My corporation sent all the big shots, but I never got here.

MK: The kids in the band, and the people who were with them had never seen Lake Michigan, and they took them out to the beach, and they said . . .

KK: Ottawa Beach, and they said, "That's not a lake, that's an ocean." You can't see across it. For year after that, I'd see one of these High School kids, and they all knew who I was, because I got a plaque and everything, and after I left Huntington, they gave me the key to the city.

MK: The door's locked, don't come back! [laughs]

KK: They gave me the key to the city, because I did help them. We started them on their way, and they stopped at Greenfield Village, and several other places on the way up here.

[Brief discussion of actual trip to Holland.
Not related to the history of Tulip Time.]

JVU: Anything else that you'd like to add?

MK: I'd just like to tell you my name is Marilyn, because I didn't do that on the [tape]. I;m not going to tell you when I was born. It's long enough that I have a lot of experience.

-End of Interview-