

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

Interview #24
Mrs. Marie Zingle
The Oral History of Tulip Time

Conducted by:
Jason Valere Upchurch
25, July 1995

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- Interview w/ Marie Zingle @ Hope - Van Wylen Library
- 165 Euna Vista Drive / Holland, MI 49423
- July 25, 1995
- Interviewer: Jason Valere Upchurch

Begin Tape 16 : Side B

MZ: My name is Marie Zingle. I'm Mrs. Richard Zingle, and I was born in Arkansas City [R-KAN'-ZISS], Kansas--it looks like Arkansas City [R'-KAN-SAW] when it's written--on [date removed], 1924, so I had my seventy-first birthday last month.

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

MZ: More recently, I have been the president of the Woman's Literary Club, and we've been involved in serving meals, and participating in the festival. I was president about ten years ago, or so now, but during the time I was president, I decided to write a book about the history of the club. I was exposed to the archives that were held at the clubhouse itself, and I got so interested in the archives, I decided that Hollanders should know what role the club had played in developing this community, and all that it had given to the community. So, in the process, I discovered that we were involved way back in the first days of the tulip festival.

JVU: Just briefly, as an overview, what can you tell me about the early involvement of the Literary Club in the festival?

MZ: Well, I discovered, in the archives--in the scrapbook actually, the early scrap book of the club--a newspaper article that the headlines of it stated that Lida Rogers had made a speech at the Woman's Literary Club--it was just part of the regular program, she was the speaker for the day--on April 26, 1927 to be exact. She had spoken that day, on Civic Beauty; that was the title of her speech. She belonged to a committee of the Woman's Literary Club that was actually interested in Civic Development, and Civic

Improvement, and this was a long-standing committee of the club's. Actually, another woman, about nine years earlier, had spoken on Civic Beauty; about what could be done around Holland to improve the beauty of the city itself.

Lida Rogers talked about all the nice things that Holland was known for. She talked about fine police protection, and lovely homes, a good educational system, and she went on and on. Most of her speech is about all the fine things that Holland had going for it as a town. At the very end, she said . . . something to the effect that she knew the Chamber of Commerce had been looking for something that it could use to make Holland something special, and she said she had been toying with the idea of that everyone should plant tulips in their yard, and that once a year, we would have, what she said which we could call "Tulip Day." She went on to say that this would take a lot of planning, but that maybe she and her biology class--she taught at Holland High School, and was called the biology teacher there--maybe she and her class could start a campaign the following fall, to promote this in the community. There it was, on the front page of the Holland Sentinel, and I picked it up in the scrap book.

Years before, people had been aware, I think, of her involvement, but over the years, by the time I found this article, most people in Holland could not tell you when and where the idea had originated. I really felt that I'd come up with something from the past, in Holland's history. So, I included it in the book I was writing. This is the book.

JVU: Just so we get it on tape, it's called *The Story of the Woman's Literary Club; 1898 to 1989*.

MZ: Right, ['89] is the year it was published.

JVU: Just mention that it's open for research in the archives, and also for sale. MZ: Her speech itself I pretty well have covered I think, but later, after Tulip Time caught on--maybe I should tell you first, that was in the spring of '27. Nothing was done until the fall of 1928, when she and her High School students, true to form, decided to really get this campaign going, and planted two

thousand bulbs around the foundation of the High School. The High School, then, was what became the West unit of E.E. Feld Junior High, and that whole complex is now Community Ed offices and classrooms, and also the Board of Education; Holland School Systems Administration building. So at the time though, for people who lived in Holland and went to school here, this would be the old High School that faces Pine [Avenue]. The tulip bulbs were bought by the students, themselves. They paid their own money; they really supported her idea here, and planted the tulips themselves, and they actually had a special bed out in front of the High School with the school colors. They come up with a dark red and a yellow, or gold, orangish-gold tulip. The article that I read, said those were the most expensive tulips they bought, these special ones for the bed out front with their school colors.

There were other buildings [with tulips] in Holland spring when the tulips were open in May of 1929, but for the most part, there wasn't all that much going. It wasn't really a festival yet, and a lot of people weren't even involved in it. There was one man though: the covers for the tires that he sold at his tire store, he had printed, "Tulip Time in Holland," so as far as I've determined, that was the first advertising for Tulip Time. This man was very ingenuous with this. As far as I know, it was the only advertising. There was no promotion, there was no festival, there were no programs or parades, but I really feel that that was the first of any tulip planting--planned tulip planting--that was involved.

The Chamber of Commerce though, in the fall of 1929, they got involved, and the city actually purchased tulips that were planted around town, and in all the parks, and that was the beginning of what was advertised as Tulip Time in itself. Lida Rogers, in her speech at the Woman's Literary Club, talked about having one day; a "Tulip Day," but by the time it actually came about in 1930, they had already decided to call it Tulip Week, or Tulip Time, and it was more like a four or five day festival, rather than just one day.

Later, she wasn't particularly involved with Tulip Time planning after her original idea was presented, but later she was sent a letter by a committee that was involved in Tulip Time a few years after it got started. It was sort of a questionnaire. It was a survey: what didn't she like, what did she like, you know, I think they looked at her as a consultant. One of the things that I found rather amusing, was that she said one of the things she didn't like that was happening was, was Dick Smullenberg--I believe his name was--who was superintendent of parks at the time, had allowed concessions in the park. Well, I assume that means Centennial Park. This wasn't keeping with her idea, and it was true with the other early chairmen of the festival, that this would be an ethnic festival, there would be no clowns, there would be no commercialism involved; it was to be strictly a flower festival. They started out actually calling it a "Flower Festival," and the tulip was queen. No queen was elected or chosen, and there was no float with a queen and her entourage, and that's true today. The tulip reins as queen of this festival.

There was a Blossom Time festival that had already been initiated at St. Joseph and Benton Harbor, and people at first began comparing the festival here with that one, but it became obvious that that was a more commercial venture, and they had a queen, and a lot of parades, and floats. I think probably Holland, in the early days, sent floats to that festival. By the time the Tulip Time festival started here, it was announced at one point [that] Blossom Time at St. Joseph/Benton Harbor, was second of all the flower festivals in the country, second only to the Rose Bowl Parade and tournament, so it was pretty bi stuff at that time, but of course Holland's festival soon caught on, and I believe they still have that festival. I think the two are still running a few weeks apart.

JVU: Okay, you were talking about her remarks she made on a survey that was given to her?

MZ: Right. The committee was interested in her comments. I don't know whether she was the only one that received this request, but

there was one place where they asked if she felt what the purpose or the objectives of Tulip Time should be. These are the things that she specified at the time: she said that Tulip Time should be thought of as a way to beautify the city, number one. After all, that had been what her speech had been about, back in 1927, and it still was foremost to beautify the city. It should also be used to develop civic pride. She felt that it would foster a spirit of unity and cooperation in the community, and I'm sure that's still true. It should be a festival to promote greater appreciation of the heritage of the people of this community, and I think she felt very strongly about that.

She was a biology teacher, a very fine teacher, and it would have been interesting to have been a student I think, in her class. I know there are people here in Holland that had her as a teacher in her later years, but from what I read about her, it was a hands-on kind of experience if you took biology under Ms. Rogers. The course was called biology, and this has bothered me. It was not strictly biology. I have a degree in biology, and what she taught, I would call more general science. She had students had a contest one year, to build bird houses for different kinds of birds. She taught them that sort of thing. She was into ornithology. They learned how to identify birds. They also had to work at what was called the School Forestry Preserve, over on the North side. It's now the Kiwanis Club I believe, as far as I know. Do you know?

JVU: I'm not sure.

MZ: I think they turned it over later, but it was presented by the Keppels, to the Holland School Board, and in later years at least, back in the forties, she would take students over there by bus, and they actually had to work on that forest preserve. They planted seedlings. She was into conservation. The students were, early on, back in the twenties and thirties, taught about conservation of forests. It seemed to me--of course this was before the CCC Camps of the depression era--but she was already into worrying about replenishing trees, and what was happening to the forest, and this

kind of thing.

Early on, [she] was involved in all these things, so I can see how Tulip Time sort of naturally evolved in her way of thinking about what Holland needed, and what Holland could use.

JVU: Did you have anything else to mention about Lida Rogers?

MZ: When she talked here about Tulip Time, she felt [it] would bring about greater appreciation of the heritage, of people's heritage. I know she was speaking of the Dutch heritage. She herself, was not Dutch, but I think that she felt every one here should appreciate the heritage of the people who founded Holland. She was very much interested in history, and in the history of this country, and just by accident, I happen to be a D.A.R. member, and am the registrar of the local chapter, and I read where she had been quite active at one time. So, I looked up her record. She was a D.A.R. member for many years, and was very involved in the local chapter. She served as regent here for four or five years, and had practically every job in the group, over a long period of time. I think she was probably still a member of the D.A.R. when she died.

But, was very proud of her heritage, and the fact that she was a descendant of a patriot who had served in the American Revolution, which is what you have to be, to qualify for membership. She was the descendent of a patriot who served for Massachusetts. His name was Wing Rogers. This was her Rogers genealogical lineage, and her father was named for this patriot, Wing Rogers, which I thought was interesting. So, I can see why she was concerned about the Dutch heritage of this community as a local citizen--she was very proud of the Dutch heritage even though she wasn't Dutch--as well as her own heritage as a descendent of a Revolutionary patriot. This was very important to her.

She was very important, I don't think she ever got all the credit she deserved. There was a tulip named in her honor. She was honored. The city did come around to recognize her for her contribution. A woman that knew her quite well, told me after my book came out, she told me, "You gave her way too much credit," and

she said, "She wasn't that big a deal. She was a science teacher."

And I said, "Well, she came up with the idea, and she went about impressing people with the fact of how Holland needed this," and to me, that was important.

JVU: Maybe we could talk just a little bit about the Woman's Literary Club.

MZ: What would you like to know about the Woman's Literary Club?

JVU: What was their earliest involvement with the Tulip Time festival?

MZ: It was when Lida Rogers stood on the stage at the Woman's Literary Club. That, to me, was important enough to put in my book. I had no intention of hardly mentioning Tulip Time when I was researching the book, but when I found, late one night, this little newspaper clipping--very yellow, very old, very brittle--and I knew I had found the beginning of the story of how Tulip Time began. I did a chapter in the book. I talked about the day she gave the speech, and how the Lit Club, a few years later, after the Chamber of Commerce started ordering bulbs, and planting, and encouraging everyone else to get involved, the Lit Club--because they were so civic minded, and because Lida Rogers had stood on their stage and announced to the whole community that this would be a good idea--they got behind her and the Chamber of Commerce.

[Some of] the early chairmen for Tulip Time, came out of the Woman's Literary Club. A lot of people don't know that. Mrs. John Telling served for four or five years. She felt, as Lida Rogers did, that there should be no commercialism, it should be strictly a Dutch ethnic festival, and it should represent the Dutch customs. Eventually, the street scrubbing got started, but I know in one year, early in the festival, somebody at the Woman's Literary Club decided that because it was a Dutch custom in the Netherlands to scrub their houses--I don't know whether it was spring house cleaning or not, but women would scrub the exterior of the homes--they would demonstrate to the visitors. By the time they actually decided to do it one day during the festival, they decided the house [they'd chosen] was too big, and the second floor

too high, so they demonstrated on one side of the Woman's Literary Club, how the Dutch women scrub a brick building.

I don't know that that was the beginning of the scrubbing of the streets. They only did it one year. I think they decided that everybody knew how to scrub a house. They had shown everybody one time. No, that didn't continue. They tried a lot of different things.

At one of the early festival, they tried making little Dutch dolls, dolls, and decorating them in Dutch costume. They tried all kinds of things. They also started serving Dutch lunches, and that is still done to this day. That has continued, and I think the menu is still the same as it was back when they first started. In the early days, back in the thirties and then into the forties, up until World War II, the food would be prepared at the members homes. I've heard several of our older women say they can still remember lugging those enormous soup kettles, and transporting them by car, and carrying them in the back door of the Woman's Literary Club.

The menu consisted then, as it does now, of Dutch pea soup, ginger bread for dessert, cole slaw--they call it salad, that was the cabbage salad they called it. In fact, someone told me that before our clubhouse was remodeled back in the fifties I believe it was, they actually had a room back in the back, they called the salad room, and that's where everyone went to chop the cabbage for what I call cole slaw, but to them was just salad. We still serve cole slaw, but we make none of these things now, we buy it from caterers around Holland. That's kind of a club secret.

JVU: Not anymore.

MZ: Not anymore. We serve ginger bread. We were serving ginger bread with whip cream on it. That has been changed a little. We keep fluctuating between a cake and the ginger bread. Sometimes the ginger bread's a little dry, but it's pretty much that's the stock menu. We still do that. [Lit Club also served pigs-in-the-blanket at these lunches.]

The club house, over the years, was also used for various

shows and exhibits. The flower show was held in our auditorium for many years. Now we have a quilt show there every year. We still serve the Dutch lunches in the basement, and we've had a very fine working relationship with the Quilters' Club of Holland, who have been very good renters of our building upstairs, and we've picked up customers who have come to see the quilt show. We talk them into staying for lunch, and they come downstairs to the Lit Club then.

In the earlier days, many of the busses that came to Holland, dropped off their tour groups over in Centennial Park, which is directly across the street from the Woman's Literary Club, so we've been in a very fine location, to be a center of activity and shows--not only the quilt show, but before that, the other kinds of exhibits that would go on there.

Now, busses go out to the malls for the most part, so we don't have so many of those large tour groups that land right at our doorstep.

JVU: Was there any other involvement that the Lit Club has been known for over the years?

MZ: One of the early costume shows was started by the Lit Club. The Dutch dancers now where all standard costumes that have been designed to look like those from the different Provinces, but back in the early days, women who still owned many of the clothes that their grandmothers had brought over from the Netherlands, or that they had inherited, were presented in a costume show, and the first one was held in the Woman's Literary Club. Some of those early ethnic shows that were presented for Tulip Time. We don't have that sort of thing anymore. The costumes now, are pretty much those that are made for the dancers.

-End of Interview-