

Interview with Jacob DeGraaf<sup>c</sup>  
Conducted by Bonnie Lee and Terri Robinson  
March 16, 1977  
1:45 p.m.

OUTLINE

Boards and Committees worked for.....	Page 1
Tulip Time Committee.....	2
Float in Pasadena Parade.....	2,3
Tulip time, Committee & Flowers.....	4,5
Windmill Island.....	5,6
Family.....	6,7
Vacation to Europe.....	7
Involvement of Parks after retirement.....	8
Jacob DeGraaf Nature Center.....	8,9
Summer home and hobbies.....	9,10
"Jacob DeGraaf Day".....	10,11

Key:

Jacob DeGraaf: J

Bonnie Lee : B

Terri Robinson: T

Typed by Terri Robinson

T: It says here (referring to a paper entitled RESOLUTIONS) you worked in the Cemetery Department, what basically did you do when working with the public service?

J: I started for the City of Holland Parks Department on May 4, 1939 and then, that was just before Tulip Time in 1939 so I worked for the Parks Department for about three months and then I was transferred over to the Cemetery Department, as a laborer and after a few years I became mechanic when they mechanized in the Cemetery Department, then in 1946 I became, I beg your pardon, in 1945 I became a Foreman in the Cemetery Department, in 1946 I became Assistant Superintendent of Parks and Cemeteries and then I was in charge of Parks at the time when my predecessor, the Superintendent at that time, Mr. Smallenburg and when I was responsible for the operation of Parks and Cemetery but mainly Cemetery Department while he took charge of the Parks Department. And then when he retired in 1958 and then I became Superintendent of Parks and Cemeteries in 1959. I've been on the associated activities with the Park Department, I was on the Tulip Time Board since 1959, I was first Vice President of the Tulip Time Board and I held that office for

approximately, until the day of my retirement. I was on that executive committee in the capacity of Vice President of Tulip Time Board. And also during my 10 years with the city I was instrumental in starting a Michigan Association of Municipal Cemeteries in 1960 and I was the second President of that organization from 1961 to 1963. I've been Chaplain for four years with this committee and I've been on the Liaison Committee for, with the State Legislature, up until the present time. And I'm still a member of the Liaison Committee to work on legislations pertaining to cemeteries. I retired as of February 1, 1977. And I was also instrumental on being on various committee's that were appointed by the mayor and the council. I was on the Tulip Time Committee as I mentioned before, that's a council appointment. I was also on the original advisory committee to set up the mechanics for the acquisition of the windmill from the Netherlands. And I worked on that committee, the Windmill Island Committee, and now of course we have the windmill in Windmill Island which is that latest Municipal Park, to which there is a charge, an entry fee and I was also appointed by the Mayor and the council on the Rose Bowl Committee to organize a float. I was on the Theme and Design Committee of the float which occurred in 1976, on January 1, at the Rose Bowl Parade at Pasadena, Ohio and we were given the award of first prize in our category for our entry of the float in the Pasadena Parade.

T: What did the float look like, was it all made of Tulips?

J: A lot of tulips, of course every float in the Rose Bowl Parade has to be all real natural flowers, there's no imitation flowers, it's all real flowers and they're applied the day before the parade, the evening before the parade, and our float had about twenty thousand live flowers on it. We had two windmills on it and there were seven people all in Dutch costumes that were riding on the float. And then we also had the windmill itself was functional, by functional I mean that the blades of the windmill were all made out of wood and then they were all pasted with live flowers and then the blades of the windmill, they turned and it was a very attractive float and I think that's the reason we were awarded the first prize.

B: Did it take you long to construct the float?

J: Float construction was done by a concern in Pasadena. They have about five concerns that do nothing but construct floats and we hired those, that concern and (phone rings and he picks it up and lays it on the table) we hired that concern and they constructed the float, and we did a lot of work on it the evening before, the parade.

T: Did you go to see it, were you in Pasadena?

J: I was on the Committee and we had our reservations all completed and my wife in November, she had a heart attack and she was hospitalized for eighteen days so we had to make all our cancellations at the last minute.

B: What was your job? You said you were on the Tulip Board.

J: Tulip Time Committee? Tulip Time Committee is, the main work in the Park Department is to plant all the tulips, for instance, in the downtown horticultural park which is right directly across River Avenue. It's a six acre park and we have different designs, windmill design, wooden shoe design and other arrangements of tulips. We plant pretty close to forty thousand tulips just in this one park. The tulips are all planted in October and the dates for the Tulip Festival are always on the Wednesday closest to the Fifteenth of May, is usually the starting date of the Tulip Festival, of the festival for 1977 will begin on May 11.

T: Do those tulips have to be planted every year?

J: The tulips in the parks are planted every year and then we have eight miles of tulip lanes where we have three rows of tulips just inside of the curb strip and we have eight miles of tulips going thru the various sections of the city and they're very well marked for people who want to come and take a tour of the tulip lanes. There are three rows of tulips on each side of the street and they're clearly marked. And this also incorporates the boulevards and Colon Park which is situated on Lake Macatawa which is a twenty five acre park, and then we have various plantings there, also of tulips. Now when the tulips are through blooming then all the tulips in the parks and on the boulevards are all replaced with annual flowers, Petunias, Marigolds, and Snapdragons and Coleus and different types of summer annual flowers. The year around,

as far as the growing season is concerned from the first of May until the first frost in the fall, we have a variety of color in all our parks and all the boulevards.

T: Where do you get your tulips?

J: Our tulips are all imported. There are specifications for the order for the tulip bulbs indicate that they have to be grown in the Holland, Europe. And they have to be grown by the grower and we draw up specifications and they have to be put on bid forms and we select what we think are three or four of the best growers and then we send them the bid forms so that all the four growers can bid on it. Naturally the lowest bidder usually is the successful bidder, however, we have deviated from that, it's not always the lowest bidder that is the best supplier. Sometimes that's a different thing to convince the members of the council but with my years of experience I think they have taken the thought, the avenue of going along with my judgement because of my experience.

B: It says on here that you were on the Board for the planning of the Windmill Island, I was wondering whose idea that was to begin with? (Again, she was referring to the paper entitled RESOLUTION).

J: The Windmill Island actually, the idea was originated by Mr. Carter Brown who owns Castle Park which is situated between Holland and Saugatuck right on Lake Michigan and it is a tourist area, and it has a large castle and it's all brick constructed and it's very old, I'd say it was anywhere from ninety to one hundred years old and they've

kept it in it's original state as closely as possible. And they have dining facilities, it's a resort area and they have cottages there around the castle that are privately owned. But it was Mr. Carter Brown that came up with the idea and then Mr. Wickers of the Netherlands Information Service, he went to the Netherlands and tried to buy a windmill and it took an act of Parliament, at the Hague, the Dutch Government to release a windmill. And the city of Holland was fortunate to get the last windmill that was exported from Holland, Europe and now they have all become, by act of Parliament, they have all become National Monuments and it is impossible to get another windmill out of Holland, Europe. Because that is one of their main tourist attractions, there are, right now, less than one thousand functional windmills in Holland, Europe, so they want to keep as many as they possibly can because of the tourist attraction.

B: How long have you been married?

J: How long have I been married? We just celebrated our 40th wedding anniversary last September 20.

B: Do you have any children?

J: We have six children, we have nine grandchildren of which I'm a very proud father and grandfather of all of them.

B: Are all your children older, graduated from college?

J: I have three that graduated from college and two that went right to work right after they were finished with high school and went right to work, three rather went to work and they're still working at the same place where they originally started when they finished from high school.

B: Does your wife, when you've been on all these different boards, help you with any ideas?

J: Well, she is very helpful and she's very considerate because of the time consuming, the job is very time consuming because your on various boards and various committees and alot of your meetings are in the evening. But she has been very gracious and she's been the best wife in the world and like I say very gracious, because that was part of my job and she accepted that. But we still have had alot of time to do alot of traveling, during my vacations that I've had. Now that I'm retired, well, we expect to do alot more traveling, in fact, the 21st of April, 77 we'll be leaving for Europe for a period of four weeks. We already have spent three weeks in Florida in February and so we're starting our retirement by doing some traveling. That was our main goal.

B: Where would you like to go in Europe, do you have any idea?

J: We're going to go to Holland, Europe. Holland and Germany. It has always been my desire to see these large tulip fields of these large growers and also to see the (Kenhauf?) Gardens which is only open six weeks out of the year and it's all flowering bulbs, tulips and hyacinths and crocus and narcissuses. Then of course the gardens, there's alot of flowering trees and shrubs and they all come out almost simultaneously and that's a sight to behold from the pictures and the movies that I have seen. So I hopefully this spring, will be seeing it in it's reality.

- B: Do you plan on staying involved in the development of more parks in Holland? Now that your retired?
- J: I have sent a letter of resignation which will be read this evening and I have resigned from all boards and committees pertaining to my work on the past, I do that with \_\_\_\_\_ because I've been involved for 38 years and 9 months on alot of these boards and I still hope to as time allows, if I'm not traveling or if we're not on vacations, well, I hope to assist in any way I can because the city hall has been good to me and I want to reciprocate. And if I can be of any assistance in my retirement I'll be more than willing to do so, if time allows.
- T: Can you tell us a little about the Jacob DeGraaf Nature Center?
- J: Jacob DeGraaf Nature Center, the City Council bought an eleven acre track land on 26th Street and we developed that into a Nature Center which is composed of all paths through the fifteen acres that we now have. We have aquired additional property and we're still trying to acquire additional property. We have just received thirty thousand dollars from the Department of Natural Resources which is a matching fund, and the city has supplemented that with another thirty thousand dollars and we're trying to, the plans are on the drawing board now, for an Interpretance Center so that the Nature Center can be used the year round. And in clemete weather we can have school groups and college groups come in and make use of the facilities

of which we never had before. But within the next year we plan to have a fine Interpretive Center at the Nature Center and also have a full time naturalists so that there will be somebody there that will be responsible, can take groups on tours. And also there are plans for a Sunday film promptly on Nature and also a tour of the Nature Center. Because the Nature Center should be used in all four seasons or otherwise 365 days of the year. Because it's a changing something, everyday it changes, you might find a different species of birds one day and then you might have to wait another two weeks before you find that same species back again. And as for the trees and shrubs are concerned, well, you see them in the winter time when they look like their almost dead, and they are bleak and then the spring of the year when they start to bud and in the summer when they're in full leaf and then in the fall when they're changing colors. That's why I say it's the four season, the year around project. And then the Council honored me by naming it the DeGraaf Nature Center.

B: Being so busy, do you have any time to pursue any hobbies that you have?

J: Oh yes, I have alot of hobbies, I, we have a summer home, 75 miles north of Holland, we spend alot of time up there on the weekends in both the summer and in the winter. We like to do alot of fishing, both my wife and I are very interested, my family, children and grandchildren, are all interested in fishing and hunting. And we do alot of that in that area, in season.

T: Where, where is this at?

J: This at Upper Silver Lake, which is just west of Hart.

Right near the sand dunes of Silver Lake, in fact, the overflow from Upper Silver Lake flows into Silver Lake, which is a State of Michigan State Park, and from there it flows into Lake Michigan. It's a very popular recreation area in the summer time, and there are a few people who live in that area the year around. We might even do that, now that I'm retired, we might live there in the winter too.

T: My grandparents live there now. My grandfather is retired, and they love it.

J: Your grandfather lives there? On Upper Silver Lake?

T: On Silver Lake. But they just love it.

J: What's his name?

T: Kenneth Robinson.

J: Robinson, their right on Silver Lake?

T: Yes.

J: Just west of the state park?

T: We're across the lake from the park, closer to the dunes. You and your wife should enjoy it up there-it's peaceful.

B: O.K. Thank-you.

J: It was my pleasure.

T: I'm reading off a paper given to Mr. DeGraaf entitled RESOLUTIONS, and on the bottom there's a paragraph that says, "Now, therefore, be it resolved, that this council of the City of Holland, Michigan, hereby expresses it's deep appreciation and gratitude to Jacob DeGraaf, for as many

years of dedication, faithful public service, and extends best wishes to him and his family in his retirement and in recognition, thereof, hereby proclaims, January 26, 1977 as "Jacob DeGraaf Day" with appropriate activities planned and urges all citizens to participate, therein, and to pay tribute and express their appreciation personally to him. Adopted by the City Council, January 19, 1977."