

Oral History Interview with  
Juliet Schutmaat

Conducted May 29, 1997  
by Ann Paeth

Sesquicentennial Oral History Project  
"150 Stories for 150 Years"

Sesquicentennial Oral History Project

Interview with Juliet Schutmaat

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Interviewer: Ann Paeth

Transcriber: Ann Paeth

Note: Juliet Schutmaat was interviewed in her home in her 101st year of her life. She grew up in Hamilton, helped write a local history on Hamilton, which is on file in the Joint Archives of the city of Holland, and has lived in Holland for much of her adult life. Due to background noise, the nature of the environment, and unforeseen glitches in the tape there are several places in the interview which cannot be heard or recalled by the interviewer, especially in the beginning of the interview. In these sections, "unintelligible" appears in brackets.

AP: Can you just state your name, and when and where you were born?

JS: Juliet Schutmaat. I was born in Hamilton.

AP: You helped write quite a history for Hamilton with your... father? Is that correct?

JS: I don't recall it was my father. It was a neighbor.

AP: When did you come to Holland?

JS: Oh, I didn't come to Holland until my children were grown, until my youngest went to college.

AP: Why did you come here?

JS: Well, we were in business.

AP: Holland isn't very far from Hamilton. Was it basically the same? Or was there anything different about living here?

JS: It was much larger. Hamilton is much smaller. It's a small town. It's growing, it's growing. [unintelligible]

AP: And that's changed a lot. So you've been here for some time now. What are some

of the biggest changes that have happened in this area? Probably mostly just the size would be the biggest change?

JS: [unintelligible] You mean, how is Holland different than it used to be? It's a lot larger, of course. [unintelligible]... than Hamilton.

AP: What about the church. How has the church changed?

JS: [unintelligible] Holland has a good many churches. A lot more churches than Hamilton. The one that I went to, and my family went to in Hamilton, burned. So we lost it. That was never salvaged again. So we lost that church. I miss it. We all miss it so much.

AP: What do you miss most about it?

JS: It was a small church, and you felt very close to the community.

AP: Where did you go to church after that?

JS: Well, shortly after that we moved to Holland. You see, this was in Hamilton.

AP: Then what church did you go to here?

JS: Third Reformed.

AP: Has that gotten a lot bigger?

JS: I think so. It's one of the older churches, I think.

AP: Where did your family come from?

JS: My great grandparents came from the Netherlands.

AP: So your family had been in America for several generations when you were born.

Where has your family ended up. Where have your children ended up now.

JS: They're all in different places, so I don't know what to say where they are. Quite a

few of them are right in Holland.

AP: Why don't we talk about some of the bigger events in Holland, for instance, was your life affected by World War, can you remember how that affected daily life.

JS: Well, I was younger then. What are you trying to find out?

AP: Just what things have changed, or what things were important to you about Holland or just your life here. What events were most important? What aspects of the community were most important to you?

JS: Well, we were in business here. Irrigation business.

AP: What did you do in your business?

JS: Manufactured farm irrigation [equipment].

AP: How long did you do that?

JS: We sold it, but...

AP: Did the industry coming into Holland effect that a lot?

JS: I don't quite get your question.

AP: In the 60s and so, a lot of big industry and manufacturing plants came in, and since that time, a lot of the farmland has been turned into industrial property or people have built homes or schools on them. So, did there used to be a lot more farming in Holland? Has it changed a lot? It seems like it.

JS: Most of the people that came were farmers. That's quite different now.

AP: When did that change?

JS: Gradually.

AP: Do you think it's good that Holland has become so industrial?

JS: Yes.

AP: Have you encountered any negative aspects to living in Holland?

JS: No.

AP: No? It's a pretty good place?

JS: I think it's a nice place to live. There's more people coming in every year.

AP: Do you think it could get too big?

JS: I guess so.

AP: I think for its size, Holland still really feels like a small town, though.

JS: Yeah. Compared with other places.

AP: Holland has really been, and I think this whole area in general, upheld as kind of standing out. Like last year Holland was named one of the top ten All American cities. What do you think is special about living here? Why do you think Holland seems unique from all the other cities in America?

JS: I don't know what kind of industry we have here that's different. That's what sets it off from other places.

AP: Are the people different, do you think?

JS: No. Are you comparing it to some other city?

AP: I guess just with other cities in general. I guess you've been in this area all your life...

JS: Yes.

AP: I guess just other cities and other areas of the state even in general. It might be hard to compare. What kind of organizations or activities have you been involved?

JS: We were in business.

AP: Was that with your husband or your family? With your husband?

JS: Yes, yes.

AP: So did you run it together?

JS: Yes, with my husband. I helped.

AP: Describe what you did in helping with that.

JS: Describe what I personally did? I helped in the office, wrote the letters, did some book work.

AP: And you raised your children, too.

JS: Yes. Although they had grown up quite a bit before we moved here.

AP: You said your youngest was in college when you moved?

JS: No. She was in high school. I think she was in the tenth grade.

AP: Was she happy that you moved, or was she kind of sad.

JS: I think she was. I think she liked it.

AP: Did your children go on in school? Did they go to college?

JS: Yes, but not all in Holland. They didn't all go to college in Holland.

AP: How far did you get to go in school.

JS: Just in high school.

AP: What was your school like when you went to school? How big was it?

JS: I went to school in Allegan because my father was a county clerk for seventeen years. And during that time, I went to that school, and that's where I went to high school. Allegan high school.

AP: Did you have a favorite subject.

JS: I had commercial studies. I think I liked that the best.

AP: What did you like about that? Or you just liked them. Did you have a favorite teacher?

JS: Yes, I think I did. I can't say her name, but, yes, I'm sure we had favorite teachers.

AP: Can you tell me anything about them.

JS: Well, I think most teachers are different. Some explain things so much better than others do.

AP: Can you tell me about someone who has been really important in your life, and why they were important?

JS: I think a teacher in high school, because that's as far as... I never went to college. I think my school teachers probably taught me all I learned.

AP: Is there any pastor that stands out in any of the churches you've been to as really special?

JS: No.

AP: Have there been any controversies in Holland, or big issues?

JS: You mean, like the city itself?

AP: About the city or about the church?

JS: There were several churches... When we lived in Allegan, we lived [unintelligible]... There were many churches there.

AP: Were there any big issues in changing anything in the church

JS: I don't think so.

AP: Why don't you describe your favorite thing to do with your family, or your favorite fun thing to do.

JS: I was a child when we lived in Allegan.

AP: What did you do for fun?

JS: Nothing, just with our neighbors...

AP: What would you do with your neighbors?

JS: What did we do with our neighbors? We just associated with them.

AP: Do you remember going to Tulip Time?

JS: Not then. I don't think there was any Tulip Time that early.

AP: When did that start?

JS: It wasn't until much later.

AP: What was it like then? Did you go to it when it started up?

JS: No. See, it was in Holland. It started in Holland. We lived in Hamilton then, Allegan.

AP: So when you moved to Holland, did you go to Tulip Time?

JS: Yeah, when we first moved.

AP: What was it like?

JS: It grew. The whole thing just started and it grew.

AP: Did they have parades all along?

JS: No. It first started as a small thing. I think mostly in the schools, it all started in the schools. I think one of the teachers at the school was the one that started it. And it kept on, it's been growing ever since.

AP: Did you go to any other activities or clubs or anything like that?

JS: While we lived Hamilton, that's a very small town. There isn't much there.

AP: In Holland was there more stuff to do like that?

JS: There is now.

AP: But there wasn't really before.

JS: Well, we didn't get there, so much. We lived in Hamilton. That's a really small town. There wasn't much doing there. The schools were bigger.

AP: Is Hamilton bigger now than when you were growing up?

JS: They tell me it's growing like mad now. It was quite a small town when I lived there.

AP: Do you think the role of women has changed?

JS: Yes.

AP: How?

JS: Women didn't used to vote. Or run for office.

AP: Do you remember when women got the right to vote?

JS: Yes.

AP: Were a lot of people upset or were a lot of people really happy about that?

JS: I think so. I was one of them.

AP: Yeah? You were excited? So it was very important to you to vote.

JS: Yeah.

AP: So, what would you tell a young person today, because so many don't vote... Tell them why it's so important.

JS: That's the way you change life. Things happen in life. A lot of them happen because they voted a certain way.

AP: And then you said women could run for office, too, eventually.

JS: Yes. I don't remember what lady did first, don't remember that.

AP: Now, so many women work, too. What do you think about that?

JS: Well, I think home's where they'd be a lot happier, if not so many people worked.

AP: Did any of your churches ever have women ministers? No. Because that's been a change, too, that women can be ministers.

JS: They're lots of them now.

AP: Does that seem weird to you? Do you think it's good or bad or just different?

JS: Yes, it's different for sure. I'm not going to say I'm against it. I'm not for it either. Anyone can have the chance to do whatever they want.

AP: Has Holland gotten a lot less conservative.

JS: I didn't get in touch with Holland until I was quite grown up. I always lived in a little town.

AP: I guess just this area in general. Hamilton is, really, right next door to Holland, the area in general is very much alike.

JS: Yes.

AP: Can you think of any significant events in your life? Kind of turning points? Something really important?

JS: Well, you got an opportunity to vote, and that was quite a big event.

AP: How old were you then?

JS: I guess that was after I was married.

AP: Did your husband think that was good, too, that you could vote?

JS: I was [unintelligible]... I was all quiet before.

AP: Do you think your priorities have changed at all?

JS: You learn more and you study more of what goes on. You make up your mind differently, I think. What did they want you to try to find out by asking questions? What do they want to find out?

AP: Just how this area has changed and about your life. We want 150 different stories about each person's own life and what things were important to them, what things were significant, what things they remember the most as being most important. Things like that. Do you have any strong memories that stick out as being very important to you?

JS: No, I don't think so. Except, that everything changes. when you were young, you couldn't vote.

AP: How has technology changed your life? What inventions have kind of come to be and changed everything around.

JS: They go so fast now a days, you can't keep up with them.

AP: Yes, they do. Do you remember thinking something was so odd when you were young, that now is a normal everyday object?

JS: When you were young, you didn't think about it. Or think much about how the world is run. I think as you grow older you see what the problems are and try to do something about it.

AP: What are some of the problems that you can see now?

JS: About the matter of education, I think depends all on the person in charge, and what they're trying to do.

AP: So education's really important.

JS: One of the most important things that happens. (tape ends)

AP: So you said there is much to be desired, still, in education. Your family moved to Holland for your irrigation business, and then eventually you sold it. After that, what happened? Was that when you retired, or did you do something else?

JS: I just more or less retired. We didn't go back into another business.

AP: What did you do with your time once you were retired?

JS: I don't know how to answer that.

AP: That's OK.

JS: I worked in the business. I helped in the office in the business. I did that for the business, farm irrigation. I didn't do any other business since then.

AP: Well we've talked for nearly an hour. Is there any important thing that you'd like to talk about that's left or a piece of advice or anything left that you'd like to say.

JS: To whom?

AP: To whomever you'd like to address it. To anybody that would read this.

JS: There always are changes. Day by day there are changes. Although, they happen much faster than they used to. I think a person should stay posted by reading and studying what's going on in the world, and we could use whatever we have for good or bad. Nothing stands still.

AP: Is there anything else that we should talk about.

JS: Did they ask you to get some certain kind of information.

AP: No, no. Just whatever is important to you to talk about, or important to your life.

JS: [unintelligible] There's change.

AP: It sounds like very good advice, to me, to keep studying and to keep learning about all that's changing. Do you have any final comments?

JS: The world changes and everybody should keep up with studying about it. There are lots of things in life, and you don't know about it. So you have to pay attention to what's going on in the world. Otherwise, you'll get left behind

AP: I think those are very good words to leave with someone. Thank you very much for taking the time out today to talk with us. We appreciate that very much.

Additional Notes:

Along with writing a history of Hamilton, Juliet and her husband donated land for a park, Schutmaat Park, in Hamilton. She also ran a book review club for many years. Those close to her describe her as a true lady.