Vande Water, Randy Oral History Interview: Tulip Time

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

Interview #21
Mr. Randy Vande Water
The Oral History of Tulip Time

Conducted by:
Jason Valere Upchurch
18, July 1995
The Oral History of Tulip Time
Interview #21

Interview w/ Randy Vande Water @ Hope - Van Wylen Library
- 655 Maple Creek Drive / Holland, MI 49423
- July 18, 1995
- Interviewer: Jason Valere Upchurch

Begin Tape 14: Side A

RV: My name is Randall Vande Water--most people call me Randy--I was born in Zeeland, Michigan on [date removed], 1930, and my association with the tulip festival is somewhat unique because knowing that I was going to be interviewed, I thought about how long I was going to be with the festival. It was from 1948 to 1989 as a member of the staff of the Holland Sentinel, and prior to that, I marched in the 1938, '39, and '40 and '41 Tulip Time parades. Then, after the war, why I had other responsibilities so that I was not in the parades anymore. I was doing things on a part-time basis for visiting radio stations or newspapers in the forties, and then starting at the Sentinel in '48.

So the areas that I've been involved with the most, actually, very area. Because when you are in a newspaper, there were certain things that I was assigned to cover, such as photographing the parade, or writing sidelights about the parade, or interviewing some celebrities or things like that. But in the newspaper, I think it was all-encompassing as far as the tulip festival. The one thing that I recall also about the festival involvement, is family involvement. My dad was the manager of Tulip Time after he retired from his position as executive secretary of the Holland Chamber of Commerce, and in that position--which he started in 1946--he was Tulip Time secretary for all those years until he retired. Then, when he retired in the mid-sixties, he was appointed the Tulip Time manager, which he held until 1970. So, family involvement.

My mother was also involved, in that she would rent out
our rooms to tulip guests for years. She loved to establish those contacts with people from other states, so frequently as I was growing up, we had people visiting us during the festival. So that was a contact. She also helped my dad for particular things at the Chamber of Commerce during his early years there. So that was a family involvement.

I've always had a lot of pride in the community, so I thought that this was something that gave Holland a great example of the fact that when you went to other states, and you said you were from Holland, Michigan, people said immediately, "Oh that's where the tulip festival is." So that's something that I know I've noticed that even in the service and things like that. People quickly tied up a small town in Michigan with the tulip festival.

And because my dad was a correspondent for the Grand Rapids Press and the papers in Detroit and Chicago, he also let me go along with him during the early days of the festival, and so I was fortunate enough to be at the events when the movie stars came from Hollywood in the late thirties. I particularly remember George Raft coming in 1939. I didn't know much about George Raft at that time, but I knew he was a motion picture star, and seeing him at the Holland Furnace Company. Then, in 1940, Dorothy Lamour, who was a well-known actress, came to the festival--and I was in the green area at the Pere-Marquette Depot when she arrived in a car--in particular, a red railroad car. It was the last car of the train. Now the train at that time--we had frequent passenger trains in here at that time--but that was a special car that came at the back of the regular train, and so included in her entourage, were the other entertainers who were going to be here that particular weekend, including some radio celebrities and also her former husband, who had his thirteen piece orchestra with him--his name was Herbie Kay. Also, another actor who was famous at that time, Reginald Denny.

But I remember Miss Lamour getting out of the car and the railroad car that is--and going over to the park part of the
depot, similar to what it is now, and then being met by the press, of which my dad was one, and so I was able to get right into the inner area with her, and then that was one thing that I specifically remember because I think she was probably one of the best known actresses of that time, who came here.

A couple of things that I found out much later, and in my recent years I’ve done quite a bit of research on Tulip Time and Holland history, and that kind of thing, and certainly they are dove-tailed--Holland history and Tulip Time. Come to find out, in reading an "as told to" book about Dorothy Lamour, she indicated that she’d made a motion picture in the spring of 1940, and then she had divorced her husband and went to Hawaii because she had an overbite--a major overbite--and wanted to get braces. These braces were applied, and so she was sent to Hawaii to stay out of the spotlight, and she was there for a few weeks. In her "as told to" book, it mentions that she was wearing these braces, and I specifically do not remember seeing her in braces, but she did have braces in Holland, Michigan, and according to what I’ve heard, and also from people who were waitresses at the Warm Friend Tavern at that time, where she stayed, she did have braces, which was unusual for a Hollywood star to have braces. That was something, a little sidelight.

And then after that, she started the road pictures with Bob Hope and Bing Crosby and those. She made several of those throughout the war, and she still is living, and she is probably the best known of the actors and actresses who came here. But then in the following year, we had Pat O’Brien, who had just made the movie Knute Rockney; All-American. He came, and with him was a French actress by the name of Simone Simon, and a singer by the name of Gertrude Neeson, and a few movie starlets. The radio program at that time "Fibber McGee and Molly," was very popular, and the person who did many of the voices, a fellow by the name of Bill Thompson--a young man who had I think five different characters in varying degrees of ages that he would do on the radio--was with that group. Now they came by automobile, and the
first time that we saw them was when they came to the Holland Furnace Company. Now the Holland Furnace Company located at 491 Columbia Avenue at that time was the world’s largest installer of furnaces, and Holland Furnace was a well-known company; it was the only Holland company on the New York stock exchange. So they had the finances and the publicity department and so forth to be able to bring anyone to Holland that they wanted to.

So they had Henry Boresma—the late Henry Boesma who finished his career at Hope College—was able to get these Hollywood celebrities starting in 1938. 1938, Richard Arlin and Rochelle Hudson came. And then in 1939, George Raft and Fay Wray. Fay Wray is famous, in that she was in the King Kong movie, and she has become certainly a trivia comment, because people remember Fae Rae whenever they talk about the gorilla and the Empire State Building. And then, as I said, in 1940 with Dorothy Lamour, and ’41 with Pat O’Brien.

With the war starting on December seven, 1941, the Tulip Time was canceled and we never had any movie stars come after the war, because the war, in 1946, why Tulip Time went to four days. It had been an eight-day festival. It had been Saturday to Saturday, and the idea was to have these Hollywood stars come here, and Ted Husing came in 1937, by himself—he was a famous sports announcer—and he in turn told what he saw, in describing the Saturday Volks Parade. The parade that’s held on Wednesday now, was held on Saturday then, and it included street scrubbing and they didn’t have as many bands as they have now, but they had some bands and that kind of thing. Then, the following Saturday was a parade of bands. Again, they had maybe a dozen or fourteen bands, but they didn’t have the bands that they do now. But it was still very prestigious, and band directors liked to get here, because they had a band revue—which started back in the early thirties—and was run by Gene Heeter, who was the director of instrumental music at the Holland Public Schools, and so that mass band group of High Schools from throughout Michigan would perform at the Riverview Park, which
was our athletic field at that time. Then they would, in turn, march up Columbia Avenue, and join the parade and head west.

Getting back to the movie stars, one other thing: In 1941, we had the National Barn Dance, the WLS Barn Dance, which originated every Saturday night in Chicago. The old Barn Dance—the Hoosier Hot Shots and other entertainers; Eddie Peabody, I remember seeing Eddie Peabody, and I’ve never seen anybody since, who could play a banjo so fast, and it was just something I’ll never forget, seeing him entertain. They performed here on Saturday night.

In 1939, we had Professor Quiz, and Professor Quiz originated a nation-wide broadcast. He was on radio every week from Chicago, and Professor Quiz and his wife came to Holland and did this particular show right from here. Some of the announcers that were here went on to really become known during World War II, and the one that I think of immediately is Robert Trout. He wasn’t Edward R. Murrow, but it was the same type of thing. He would say, "This is Robert Trout from London," or "This is Robert Trout from," later in the war, "Berlin," and that kind of thing. He was a very well-known announcer for CBS.

Now what the Holland Furnace Company did, by sponsoring these programs, they had the NBC one year, CBS the next, depending on the sponsorship, and they would have as many as a hundred and five affiliates pick up this broadcast. Now what these movie stars would do, on Saturday morning—or I should say early Saturday afternoon, just before the parade—they would originate a broadcast, something that a writer would have come along and they would have [them] talk about tulips and wooden shoes and that kind of thing, with a little humor, and they in turn would say, "What a beautiful place," and "Oh everybody in America should be in Holland, Michigan." That kind of promotion. And when you hear somebody like Pat O'Brien or Dorothy Lamour say that on a radio, it was a perfect commercial to say, "Well, I better go to Holland, Michigan and see all these tulips." And so they would do a half hour broadcast.
Then, that broadcast would be recorded and was played again later in the evening for the West coast, and at that time—in NBC's case—they had the blue and red network; the red network now is ABC. Then, when CBS did it, they also would do the same thing. They would record the broadcast, and then in turn it would be replayed west of the Rockies. So those were the movie stars of prior to World War II. I remember it personally, and I've done a lot of research on it, because they—to us—represented something that put a small town on the map, and we can be eternally grateful to the Holland Furnace Company and its president, P.T. Cheff and Mr. Boresma who I mentioned earlier. They were responsible for . . . they had a lot of civic pride, and they had built the Warm Friend Tavern, which is down on Eighth Street and Central Avenue in Holland, and it was a wonderful place for people to stay, and it gave an opportunity for them to not only talk about furnaces in their commercials, but also talk about this beautiful place to stay. You may recall, in those days we didn't have motels, so people stayed in hotels, and many honeymooners came from many places to say that they'd had their honeymoon in Holland, Michigan. These entertainers did a good job of selling Holland, and through the Holland Furnace Company.

Jumping ahead some years, just to conclude the Warm Friend Tavern, Rocky Marciano—who was the World's Heavyweight Champion—had won the championship in 1952, and the Holland Furnace Company was looking for a promotion. The company always said, "Well, we want to be champions; champions at what we're doing. If we're selling furnaces, let's be champions at doing it." So why not bring in a champion. Mr. Cheff, the president, had always been interested, personally, in boxing, so they approached Al Weil—who was the manager of Rocky Marciano—and they said, "We'd like to have you train in Holland, Michigan." And so the Furnace Company owned some property out North of Holland off a hundred and sixty-eighth street, behind the Holland School Forest, and they built a couple of buildings out there for
their picnics. And so in 1953—in February of 1953—Rocky Marciano came to Holland and began training for his bout with "Jersey Joe" Walcott.

Well, what resulted at that time, was again, another help for Tulip Time, because all the top sports writers—people like Red Smith from the New York Times, and others; Oscar Freely and others who were well-known writers at that time—came to Holland, Michigan, were headquartered in the Warm Friend Tavern, and were filing daily, their stories back to their respective papers. Jerry Lisca from the Associated Press out of Chicago was here for weeks. Well, Marciano trained here, and then injured his nose, and so that he had to stop his training and go back to Brockton, Massachusetts, and was there for a time before the nose healed. But then the fight was rescheduled. It was always going to be in the Chicago Stadium, but it was going to be in April. Well, when he came back in April, the fight was rescheduled for May fifteen, a Friday night, in Chicago, and so Marciano trained for a few days, and then went to Chicago in the Holland Furnace Land Cruiser, and had the fight; knocked out "Jersey Joe" Walcott in the first round, came back in the Holland Furnace Land Cruiser, and Saturday was Tulip Time, so Rocky Marciano then was riding in a convertible on the Saturday of Tulip Time.

Well at that time of course, television was in, and—not as much local television as we have today, but there was that opportunity for him to be photographed and then shown on the television news and that kind of things. So again, the Holland Furnace Company had a role in Tulip Time. The Furnace Company would also have their annual conventions here, with their sales people, and they always geared it for the weekend of Tulip Time, so that those people—then, at that time—would be using our big lake boats that were well known. They were used for tourists throughout the summer, but people would then see those ships going out on the Great Lakes. They were The North American, The South American, and The Alabama; three excursion craft that Furnace Company would use prior to the season in May, they would
have their sales people going on those ships. And also the movie stars; they would use the movie stars in the years that they were here, to always put on a little show on the ships, on Friday night, so that they could entertain these sales representatives.

One other thing that the Furnace Company did before the war, was bring in two professional golfers. Jaque Hutchinson and Ralph Gudahl. Well, if you check the World Almanac, Ralph Gudahl, at that time, was a good-looking young golfer--somewhat like an Arnold Palmer--who had just won the Masters, down in Augusta, and so Mr. Cheff wanted him up here. So, he came up with Hutchinson, and then two amateurs from this area, and they played a golf match out at the Holland Country Club, and that was another exhibition where Holland people, Holland tourists, getting the opportunity to see one of the country's top golfers. Like bringing in Jack Niclaus today, that kind of thing, so that was that particular thing.

Okay, that's what was happening before the war, and then I think what I could talk about, in following the idea of the changes in the festival--I think one of the major changes occurred about ten years ago, when corporate sponsorship was started. Where the festival had always been a small festival in finances, they had done the best they could, but it was something where the manager wasn't given the salary and such and such. It was a part time job, a board ran the festival, and for the most part, that was satisfactory. The tulip was always the queen, and people came to see the tulips, and we didn't have a lot of shows other than locally produced shows that would be like the Flower Show, or musical groups, or the Band Revue and things like that. But at the fiftieth anniversary of the festival, it was decided--in 1979--to go after some of the Lawrence Welk entertainers.

Don Stoltz was president of Tulip Time in 1979, and he went down to the Miller Auditorium in Kalamazoo, and contacted on of the Welk entertainers who played piano for Welk, and he also managed these programs . . . when the entertainers were not working with Welk during the television year--that nine months of
that time--so they were available during the spring. So, separate entertainers were brought in here, but this particular man had been married to a woman from the Netherlands, and had a real interest in Tulip Time, and so Stoltz was able to convince them to come, and the Lawrence Welk entertainers then provided some outside entertainment.

Starting in '79, or even before that, I think the festival became a festival for seniors. It became a festival for those people coming in on a bus, whether they came from Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania, or Appleton, Wisconsin, or somewhere in Tennessee. They represented people who could come at that time of the year, who were no tied to jobs, and so I think that--and I know this is a generality--but it seemed to me, at that time, the older people were starting to come, and the busses--although the busses had come long before that--but that this now gave them an opportunity to see a lawrence Welk Show, and it was that age group that liked to see Lawrence Welk on television that also like to see him in person. So there was a good match there in the late '70's, early '80's.

But I say, when Kristi Van Howe came in--and I don’t remember the year now, but I think it was in the early eighties--then she began going to local people, local companies, getting corporate sponsors, and getting to be able to put that money into the festival, and in turn, put the festival--with no question--into the black. Because there were times when the festival was running in the red. Holland, being what it is, where you depend--and still do--on your city to cooperate, many things the city does: first of all, buys the tulips. You have the tulips, and the care of the tulips, and many things that need to be done. Putting the bleachers up downtown, all that kind of thing, plus the thousands and thousands of volunteers, and I know in my newspaper work, I always wanted to write an editorial annually, thanking the volunteers, because I think that we had probably seventy, seventy-five hundred volunteers. People who just do so many things in the churches, helping with meals, and information,
and driving a float, and all that kind of thing that ... people in the community would do.

There was a period of time when it seemed to me--and I don't know the particular years--but it seemed that the number of street scrubbers seemed to be down a bit. Well, that was only just for a short time. In recent years, the street scrubbers now just go on for block and block and block, and we have hundreds of them, and that's wonderful, and I think one thing that I've noted in looking at the street scrubbers; I see many people who I've always seen, people like Jim Lugers who is eighty-three, and probably has--he and his wife have probably--scrubbed in every Tulip Time. And then there are others, who are city officials, long time city people, who have scrubbed, or teachers, and things like that who have always been a part of Tulip Time. But in recent years, I've noticed many people who are newcomers to the community. People who have come in as a vice president or as a foreman, or whatever, even for your cultural diversity that we've noticed in Holland since the mid-seventies. And so that result has been that these people have said, "Hey, I'm going to put on a Dutch costume."

This is the pride of the community. Others are saying it's the heritage of the community, and so they've gone out and scrubbed streets, so that's one thing that I've noticed.

At the Sentinel, since the mid-thirties, we have put out an edition called, "The Tulip Time and Resort Edition." In the early part of the festival, this was the biggest edition that the Sentinel put out each year, and it not only went to your subscribers, we printed many of them, and then they were sold by hawkers during the parades, and it was a very popular souvenir. People would buy this paper, and take it back to Tampa, Florida, or Bay City, Michigan, and it would show you pictures of Dutch dancing, of tulips, a phase of every bit of the festival. So, the people--when they went back home--could say, "Here's what the newspaper did, and this is what we saw." So this was well received, and just a personal note: As editor, managing editor of
the Holland Sentinel in 1979, the Sentinel won the coveted Stauffer Award. Now the paper was owned by Stauffer Communications since 1977 until just recently when it was purchased by Morris Communications, but at that time--1979--all the papers were judged annually as to something that they had done and produced themselves, and presented for the readers. That particular year, we received the trophy from Stouffer Communications for the job that we had done for the job we had done on telling the people, the visitors about the tulips festival. So that's something that I remember personally.

Now the crowds at Tulip Time is something that the press always wants to have in its lead paragraph. It's the who, what, why, when, and where, and so you ask your local police, "Well, how many people are here?" You ask your Chamber of Commerce and that kind of thing. I've always said that over the four days, since '46, we've probably had a quarter of a million people, and there were times--several times--when I would just choose to hop into a vehicle carrying a float on a Saturday, and say, "Let me ride the parade route with you, I want to see how many people are here." Sometimes--depending on the parade route--has always gone over eighth street, and just for the last several years, it's gone out to Holland High School, which is on Twenty-fourth and Van Raalte. But there were years when it turned on Eighth Street and went South on River Avenue, and so it depends. The parade now, I think, covers two and a half miles--I believe that's right--and it takes two and a half hours to pass that given point. But I say over the four days, you probably have over a quarter of a million people. I know that when you're sometimes estimates of crowds, and you go back to the thirties and see where they listed how many people were here. I have no reason to question the accuracy of those quotes, but it indicates already in the late thirties, that they were having these huge crowds--particularly on Saturday to see the parade.

Now, what happened, and still happens, is that people would--after the parade was over--they would meld right into
Eighth Street, and so you’d get these pictures, which I on occasion took myself—I would stand on a ladder, maybe at Eighth and River, and shoot East—and you have this mass of humanity coming at you. Those people have all been, in some cases, six and ten deep to see the parade, and now they’re all on Eighth Street. So those pictures are, of course, for posterity and indicate that there were thousands. But I have to say that the crowds are bigger than they used to be. It’s hard to say.

I think they’re all about comparable, but I think that the busses, that’s the big change in the last generation; is that we get a lot of busses and those are in and out, and that is something that didn’t occur in the forties and early fifties. There weren’t the busses that there are now, or have been the last several years, and I’m sure that other people who give comments, will indicate about the bus factor, and how many are involved, and that kind of thing.

Going back to talking about this particular "Tulip Time Edition:" the paper reflected not only the Tulip Time, but also had feature stories on things like the hospital, the museum, Hope College, things that people could read about at their convenience. So we would start on that paper—we had one person assigned to it, and it was her job, and she did it from the thirties until she retired in 1978, and her name was Cornelia Van Voorst. She would come in, and put those stories together, arrange all the pictures and that kind of thing, and some pictures we had on file, some we had to take, and she also got stories from people who wanted... a personal story that they could tell about, say they were a personal who had survived World War II under a haystack in the Netherlands. Well, that would make a good feature story, because this particular person would have then come to Holland, Michigan, and here’s Dutchman seeing Tulip Time in Holland, Michigan, and that kind of thing. She would get many stories of that nature, and so... the point I want to make, is that the paper was, to us, something that we regarded as very important, something we wanted to do a good job
on, wanted to make sure our stories were accurate and that kind of thing, and we knew that it would get good readership, and it did. We would print several thousand more, and every year we would sell out with no problem at all, because the paper would be published on Tuesday night, and we would have a little--down at the Sentinel Office--we would have a little picnic for the people to come and help, because normally our press run was not that large, so we had people helping with that. We had sandwiches and that kind of thing, so every year people would look forward to that. Then, starting on Wednesday, the local people with their regular paper, would get that special edition, and then we would, in turn, sell it the rest of the week. I think that’s the same pattern they use now, as far as the sales. I’ve seen the young hawkers every day.

In addition to what I just said, because Holland is such a resort area, and Memorial Day kicks off the season--we figure here, Memorial Day through Labor Day is resort season in Michigan--since Tulip Time is always the Wednesday closest to the fifteenth of May, that is perfect for the kick-off of the resort season, so that we would have articles--in the days before the resorts were torn down--we would have articles about Macatawa Park, which was raised in 1956. It was a hotel, been there since 1895, and that was a very popular with Chicago, Cincinnati, St. Louis people who would come here for the summer. The Waukazoo Inn, which was torn down in 1960. Same type of thing, and the Castle Park--which is still there, it’s a stone castle--was popular with the same type of people, from those cities, who wanted to come and start the resort season.

But after World War II, when motels were starting to be built--we didn’t have a lot of motels in Holland until the seventies--but we did, and that’s why the people came and stayed in private homes, as I mentioned earlier. But in the 1970’s, when the Holiday Inn--which is now Best Western--that was one of the first big hotels, and then the road coming in, people put their hotels out on the highway. But, we didn’t have a lot of
motels for many years, and that could have been a drawback, because people had to stay in Grand Rapids and that kind of thing. I say the resort hotels would be open for Tulip Time, and that would signify the opening of the season. Now those two that I mentioned, that were torn down, were wooden hotels and therefore to renovate them--after World War II--would have been impossible.

Okay, I’ve rambled on here, Jason. Let’s see, what else did you want me to talk about?

JVU: How about these questions that deal with some more personal memories of Tulip Time.

RV: Okay, just a couple of things. I happened to see [a question on] culture, and I wanted to comment on that.

After the war--and I don’t think you can ever say any kind of an interview of Tulip Time without talking about Bill. I was glad that you had already interviewed Nell, and Nell certainly is a marvelous lady, a wonderful lady, and would have many, many experiences. After the war, Bill and Nell personally signed for a thousand Dutch people to came over here, who were in the situation, the Netherlands had been blown to bits, and so they took a chance on those people, and they came over here. The city of Amsterdam, because they were so grateful for what the people of Holland--I think of my mother, who if I couldn’t wear my little knickers anymore, she bundled them up and sent them off to, I guess to Canada, and in turn they got to the Netherlands somehow. Also, finance. People gave money in the churches, and that kind of thing, to help the people in the Netherlands. So there was this great bind between the cities. W had this great feeling, I should say, between the countries.

And so the city of Amsterdam gave us this big barrel organ in 1947. It’s presently being renovated out in Vermont, but it will be back here for the festival next year. It was a huge barrel organ, and that was something that was really quite a sacrifice to the people of Amsterdam, to give up that big barrel organ. Because, in the Dutch culture at that time, the barrel
organ was the very main thing in downtown Amsterdam. They may have others—I’m sure they probably did—but they gave us a huge barrel organ, and they gave so many other little things that are in the museum now that were priceless at the time, that the people were willing to give to the United States because they appreciated it.

Well, I say that was the first influx of the culture. That was in the early fifties; late forties and early fifties. Then, in the fifties also, we were starting to get the brazarro. The brazarro was coming in here to do the migrant work. Some were staying, and working at the Heinz Company, working at Wire Products, or working at some of the furniture factories. I remember doing articles as a reporter in the mid-fifties, going out to the migrant areas, and through an interpreter, saying, "What are your plans?"

"Well," they said, "We’re going to stay here. We’re going to call for our families." These were brazarros now. The brazaros were just the men. Now later we had the migrants that came as families, and there were some of those two. They would work right up the coast of Lake Michigan, picking different things. They would pick pickles here, they would pick cherries up in Traverse City, they would pick blueberries in Holland, which started about that time, in the early fifties, before they had mechanical picking. So that’s when the migrants were here.

Then they would, in turn, get the jobs in the community, and the children would get into the schools, and so you started to have—in your parades of the sixties—you started to have not the blue-eyed blonde that you were used to seeing, but you had several of the hispanic culture, and that of course, as the community has become more diverse, you have seen that each year, in Tulip Time—and the media being the media, often times, I know, likes to do that—in other words, the picture that appears at six o’clock on the news, will not be the blue-eyed blonde, it’ll probably be hispanic, black, or Asian, which is wonderful, to show the diversity of the festival. Because early
in the thirties it was decided to have the Children’s Parade, which allowed the youngsters to get out and just strut their stuff down Eighth Street, and mom and dad and the parents and grandparents could wave at them and so forth. Well, this started way back in the thirties, it’s a continued practice, and it now allows these youngsters in the elementary schools to get into Tulip Time, and I think that that has given them an appreciation of just an excitement of being able to be in the festival, to be seen, and to be a part of the festival. But one of the conditions is that you must have a Dutch costume, so that schools make arrangements for this. You have your Dutch costume exchange so that that, in turn, has given the youngsters who may not have had a Dutch costume, the opportunity to wear a Dutch costume, and parade in costume.

As far as personal memories go, there are a couple that come to mind right now. The first one that comes to mind, again, is surrounded by quote, a kind of "flirtation" with a celebrity. But as a young person who is interested in journalism, and radio, and newspapering, I took every opportunity I could, to get into a position where I could assist, and get some exposure, as far as experience I guess would be a better word than exposure. And I think right after the war, the television was becoming more popular, and there was an entertainer in New York named Arlene Francis, who was later one of the stars of "What’s my Line," which down in the old black and white days, was a very popular program on Sunday night, and people watched it.

Well, Arlene Francis came to Holland, again, as part of the Holland Furnace Company. She’d been invited to come here, and I was working at the time for a radio station that was in infancy as far as television going, was called W-KZ0 in Kalamazoo. It’s now WWMT, and I did that kind of thing. I would try and get hooked up with them, so that I could do ... a gopher type of thing, just to get experience, and so forth. Well, I remember Arlene Francis was having lunch with Mr. Cheff, the chairman of the Holland Furnace Company, and here I am--a
student in college, concerned with my wires that I was stringing from Eighth Street, up to one of the rooms in the hotel, which was on the second floor, where we were going to do the broadcast. I remember, taking my wires, and so forth, and bursting into this room, and they were having a nice lunch, and suddenly the embarrassment that I had done, I certainly had all the manners that I'd been taught, I should have knocked on the door, and that kind of thing, but they were--particularly Ms. Francis, and Mr. Cheff too, but Ms. Francis, being in that world of radio and television--was very gracious, and saw that we had a job to do, and said, "Go ahead and do your job." We did it. We strung those cords, and I remember that because it was just an incident that showed, to me, people who are maybe on television, and the celebrities--and I was at the age where you were forming certain opinions--that I was pleasantly surprised at how I was treated.

I can remember taking pictures at the festival, as I said, standing on a ladder and taking these pictures down Eighth Street. I think one of the examples of one of the personal memories that certainly has to rate at the top, was in 1976. For the first time--now we've had candidates here, in fact we had candidates here again in eighty and I'll tell that story in a moment--but in 1976, we had a sitting president. We had never had a president in the Tulip Time parade, as a sitting president. Gerry Ford had been to Holland many, many times. He was a congressman for our area. He was the fifth district at that time, which represented Ottawa and Kent County. He was elected in 1948, as a young Navy Lieutenant. He played football at the University of Michigan, was well known to people in Holland; many people knew him as Gerry Ford--first name, no problem--including my dad, who was a very good friend of Gerry Ford's. Well, here comes the president of the United States. It started at Tulip City. He came there by helicopter from Grand Rapids--and this is just an aside, and I smile because the secret service and all that kind of thing, everything was fine. The biggest problem for the local press, were the locals who were a little bit too
concerned with their authority, and they were—that often times, sometimes happens, but. The thing that occurred before the festival, that fascinated me; we’d all knew Gerry Ford, we’d all met him many times, and to see him ride down Eighth Street was kind of, "so what," but the thing was, before that . . . I was called on Thursday night. A former reporter of mine, by the name of Tom DeCair, and he called me and said, "You’ve got yourself a president." Then he said [he] was going to let it go to the wires [then], but he gave me about a five minute break on that before he called the wire, so I knew—because he’d worked for me and now was the assistant press secretary under Ron Nesson, and he was good friend—he called Holland and said, "Gerry’s coming Saturday."

Well then we went into this process, and everything became extremely secret. You couldn’t find out anything, and so the next day we see people turning up manhole covers down Eighth Street, seeing things like that; very obvious. We found out after the festival, that they had a special room in Holland Hospital set aside for him; that there was a code red room in the police station. We didn’t know these things at the time. We could not get those stories, because they were not for public dissemination at the time. So, I remember a secret service man coming to my desk, and saying, "I want to go on your roof," and the Holland Sentinel is located on Eighth Street, just west of Rive Ave . . .

-End Tape 14 : Side A-

Interview with Randy Vande Water

Begin Tape 14 : Side B
JVU: Talking about President Ford . . .
RV: There'd been a report, the day before, that there had been a person arrested in Wisconsin, threatening to assassinate the president, and so the security here, was--we didn't know what was going to occur. But I did talk to the secret service person, and he said, "Well, this is a festival crowd," and I want to quote him now--twenty years later--and get it correct, but he did indicate that there's something about a festival crowd that--although they're never at ease--they recognize that this is something that they didn't sense that there would be any difficulty. But you just never know. But anyway, they were all business, and it was really some thing to watch that secret service, in a limited way; see them go on the roof, take them up there. The conversation that I just related, was my version of it. I say it was such that they were really quite closed lip. They didn't say much about anything, particularly on the record, and they don't--secret service people don't--speak off the record anyway. It was a case of us learning a lot. But I think the people of Holland were more fascinated with the idea of the secret service, and what is done when a sitting president comes, than Gerry Ford, because we've all seen him many times.

Well, anyway, and getting back to that digression which I had earlier, and I don't want to be misinterpreted by the local gendarmes, but it's one of those things where, I've seen presidents since and before, but it's one of those things where, when he arrived, things moved right along. There were no problems. There were certain things that they don't allow him to do, and this was difficult, because he's seeing people who he'd known for twenty, thirty years. Like my dad, he's trying to reach over and shake hands, and so there's a tendency for the local person to move forward, and of course there is where you have that little business of whether it be the local deputies--and usually it would be--where they wanted to then prevent anything for fear of anything that could be serious. Everybody was doing their job, but I say I was particularly impressed with
the secret service.

Another thing that I was impressed with, was watching the personal White House photographer. His name was Kennedy, and he had taken a lot of informal shots of Susan Ford, the President's daughter, and things like that, and he was a Time Magazine photographer. He was a Time Magazine photographer who had been picked up by the Fords, to shoot everything, and those White House photographers, they do, they shoot everything. Watching this man, who had--I think--three or four cameras, well maybe not so many bodies, but he had so many lenses with him; knowing which lens to take out in a hurry, and that kind of thing. Watching him go down Eighth street. Now, the President entered the parade--I don't remember where--I think he entered right at Central and Eighth, so he did not go the entire parade route--and this too was all preorchestrated as to where he would enter, and when he would enter, and all that kind of thing. Everybody knew what that was.

Stationing our particular photographers, so that we knew where, because they hadn't shot a president before, how this would all react, how close they could get to the vehicle, and at that time--even though the Kennedy [assassination] had been what it was--Ford did ride in an open car. He was of course a candidate at that time, since he had replaced Nixon, he didn't have his own term, so he was running for his own term. And so that made it a little different, in that he was a candidate. Now, the Carter forces sent Jeff. Jeff Carter was the son of Jimmy Carter, and he came that day too, and a local democratic group chose not to have Jeff in the parade. I don't know why, but they talked to me about that, about the fact that he was here, so we did cover that too.

But the fact that I'm sure local people would think that the reporting was not balanced, but when you have a sitting president compared to the son of the candidate for the democratic nomination--because Carter wouldn't have won it till November, and this was May--so there was probably criticism on that. But,
Jeff Carter didn’t choose to be in the parade or anything like that. So, to see Gerry Ford as sitting president was quite something. Then, he took right off, because he was in the middle of trying to get Michigan’s support because there was a primary coming up the following Monday, and so that’s why he wanted to get that support from the large group here. So that was something that I always remembered.

Then, in 1980, we had two people who wanted to run against Carter. One was Ronald Reagan and the other was George Bush, and again, we had the same thing that we had in ’76. The Michigan primary, the Republican primary, was going to be on the following Monday. Ronald Reagan came from Grand Rapids and George Bush came from Muskegon. That were their previous places where they had been. It was determined immediately, and I was involved in this--and we met over at Westenbrook’s Lawn Mower place, which is East of Holland on M-21--and the plan was agreed upon by the local Republicans, and the chairman of the Bush campaign and the chairman for the Reagan campaign, was that we will have ... Bush will ride in one division, and Reagan will ride in another. Reagan would arrive first. This was all orchestrated. I saw it orchestrated so well. I’ve gone to national conventions, political conventions, I’ve seen those and I know how that all goes, but to see this orchestrated in a lawn mower shop ... They’re saying, "Okay, Bush is in Muskegon," and they’re of course in contact with him at all times, and "Reagan is in Grand Rapids."

Reagan [would] arrive at--the parade was going to start at three o’clock--he’ll be here at two fifty-three, or something like that, with Nancy. He did. He rode in, got out of his car, exchanged pleasantries with three or four of us that were there, and then Nancy--the plan was to have her change her clothes. She wanted to ride in the parade in a special outfit. It was also starting to rain, so they had to arrange to get a raincoat for him, and he’s a tall guy, so they got that. Well, Nancy goes into this, but here is Nancy Reagan having to go into a little
"one-holer," which is their rostrum, to change her clothes, and of course . . . her secretary, whatever she is, stood at the door, while Mrs. Reagan is in this little bathroom, which I looked at later, was strictly just a john with a mirror and a sink. I mean, we've all seen those in gas stations. Well, that's where she changed her clothes.

I visited briefly with the candidate. He was strictly a candidate at that time. I have regretted, and I told my wife this, I have regretted not asking him about the nickname, "Dutch." He had been nicknamed Dutch when he was a radio announcer, and of course when he became president, and the gipper thing, of course, was pretty well known from the movie. But I regretted, because I did exchange--and Reagan was more of a small talk person. Bush didn't have quite the small talk that he may have developed later as president, but Reagan was a little more of the--as we saw when he was president--quips and things like that. But it was only just brief. It was only for a few minutes, and then, in turn, off they went so he could arrive at the parade at a specific time, like three, seventeen, so he could enter the parade and go.

Well then they had two or three divisions so that Bush would not arrive at Holland for at least another half hour, and then he would enter the parade in the fifth division. Well, by the time Reagan got on the parade route, it was raining hard, and any hopes for having any kind of a--they were in open cars--but in hopes of having people see them very well . . . Why, she was bundled up, and he was bundled up. The photograph that we have for posterity, shows them both in rain coats, and just really soaked with holding an umbrella, and Bush the same way. Bush chose to, as I recall, Bush got out of the car about at the Civic Center, and he was soaked anyway. He had one of those lightweight, plastic coats on, and then at that time--because they were not in office--they did not have the secret service, they just had their staffs with them, and a certain amount of . . . police too, but not [many]. The governor has a staff, and
local police join with that, and that kind of thing. The police business, you weren’t conscious of that.

No, and Mrs. Bush didn’t choose to change her clothes or anything like that, so that was it. They just went ahead with that. In fact, I think I stand corrected, I don’t even think Mrs. Bush was here. Actually, I can’t recall that now. I think it was just George Bush. Okay, those are some memories.

Jvu: One thing—if you could mention—your father was very involved with Tulip Time. If you could just mention what some of his involvement was. A lot of people I’ve interviewed have mentioned his name as somebody that they remembered.

Rv: I’m glad to hear that, Jason, that’s a real tribute to him. My dad was a coach. This was the depression. He wanted to be a coach, but he loved newspaper work. He was working at the post office. This was in the twenties, obviously, and Tulip Time started, technically, in 1929. Well, he was coaching in Zeeland, Michigan as a football/basketball coach. But he was the correspondent for the Grand Rapids Press, and everyday—and I’ll get to the point—and everyday, he would call the Grand Rapids Press, and he would write something. Okay, so he saw the very first Tulip Time, as a correspondent. Then, in 1930 and ‘31, he was still teaching school; ‘32 he was still teaching school. The reporter for the Grand Rapids Press, died on the eve of Tulip Time, so here’s my dad, who’s in Zeeland—that’s where I was born, and I’m on the earth at that time, obviously two year C don’t know what their father is doing—he suddenly is thrown into covering this whole festival, and he just did a marvelous job. I know I saw the letters that he received. He just picked up on it, newspapering was his world, he loved it, he was, I said, a school teacher, but a correspondent, but he did it, and the Grand Rapids Press said he did such a great job, that they had him do it continually, all the things.

He was the Holland correspondent to the Grand Rapids Press from 1929, and 1932 to 1985, and he was—at that time—eighty-four years old; he was still covering the press. And I
say, we kidded, because here he’s competing with his son, and
because I’m putting out the other paper. Actually, a good
competition, and just a wonderful guy. He was just great at what
he did. So then, he was connected with newspapering as a
correspondent. He was a part of every Tulip Time . . . in fact
he started press day. Before television was strong, he had the
press day, and he said, "Why not bring the press in here a day
before, and do a mini Tulip Time?"

So they did a mini Tulip Time over here on Tenth Street
where the museum is now. The telephone company is that Dutch
architecture, so you had that in the background; he was a
promoter, he knew how to do those things, and so he had a mini
Tulip Time. Scrubbed the streets, and Dutch dance, and all that
stuff. Now you have to remember, there’s no television. It’s
all . . . not as it is today, so those people could come in,
could take their footage, go back--and it’s all movie film then--
edit it, and put it out next day, as, "scenes like this were
repeated today in Holland," because they didn’t have those videos
like they do now, where they could take them, and put it on at
six o’clock, or even--they just didn’t have the transmission
capabilities.

So he put these press days on, and even after the war,
when he became manager of the Chamber of Commerce . . . from 1946
when he was appointed, then he was the secretary of the Chamber
of Commerce, and the secretary of Tulip Time. And so he did that
until he retired, and then they named him manager of Tulip Time.
So this man--and I mentioned this to somebody one time--had been
involved, through the reasons that I gave you, either as a
correspondent, as a member of the Tulip Time board, a secretary,
or manager, from 1929 until 1985. I mean which is unprecedented.
He was just a part of it. Here you see him as a reporter. [Mr.
Vande Water shares photo] There he is as a reporter, right front
and center. That was always my dad. And he told me one thing,
he said, "Never highhat anybody," and I’ll never forget that,
because he said, "You never know who’s gonna make the news." You
know, if you try to be arrogant, and you turn somebody off, they could turn out to be the next day, the person on the front page, and they say, "Hey buddy, I’m not giving you the time of day."

He lived that way; my mother was the same way. He .  .  . loved newspapering, and so he was in that correspondent thing. I smile, because—and this is a real confession, but—parents have a way of programming, and I think he saw in me, an opportunity to epitomize what he might have liked to have done. I am influenced by a term paper he wrote about what he saw himself doing in twenty-five years, and that twenty-five years from [then, was] exactly what his son is doing. He had seen himself as becoming the managing editor of a small daily, comparable to Holland or Grand Rapids, or whatever, and I did, and so he, thankfully, had the opportunity to live long enough to see me carry out what he had wished he might have done. But he was so good in the trenches. He was a good reporter. He had the who, why, what, when and where, there was no monkey business with him. It was his coaching. He was the same kind of coach. He was fair, but he was firm. I think my goals, at working on a small daily, were wanting go more into management.

[Brief discussion of Mr. Vande Water’s career with the Holland Sentinel.]

RV: That makes me feel real good, and just gives me a wonderful feeling, that other people have mentioned him. When you’re in your own family, you can be maybe a little subjective, but I’m glad to feel that other people felt that he did play a key role, because he did. He was, as I said . . . he actually, in some way, was involved in Tulip Time from its first year, until 1985, because that was when he stepped down. He was eighty-four years old, almost eighty-five, and then the bureau was coming here, and so they said, "We’re going to run it as a bureau."

JVVU: One last question, just to wrap it up. If you could just tell me what your favorite part of Tulip Time is.
RV: Well, I think the tulip is first, and just the beautiful tulips. The miles on the lanes, and then the Klompen dancers. My daughter was involved in Klompen dancing.

JVU: Maybe one other question. What do you think Tulip Time has meant to Holland, Michigan?

RV: I think, and now my heritage is showing--but I’m glad it is showing. I really feel that the nay-sayers, the people who want to do this and that about Tulip Time . . . I was going to run their letters to the editor, and never hesitated. If you don’t like Tulip Time, tell us. Write your letter, and say why you don’t like it. But I feel that it has provided the community with that pride; a pride of its heritage. It’s definitely the pride of its heritage. We were founded by a little band of Dutch people in the middle of the nineteenth century, and then it takes a school teacher, a biology teacher, my biology teacher, Lida Rogers--who was non-Dutch--says to the Woman’s Literary Club, "We should have a Tulip Day." She convinces another non-Dutchman--the son of a preacher in Chicago, by the name of Ernie Brooks, who was our mayor at that time--to buy a hundred thousand tulips. He’s a non-Dutchman. Then he, in turn, goes to a lady who came here because her husband made shoes--the Holland Shoe Company--her name is Mrs. Ethel Telling, and I think these names have all come into your conversations--her husband’s name was John--and he said, "You are a person who people respect. You be the chairman of Tulip Time. Get these volunteers going. Get people making costumes. Get them doing these various things." And then he went to a fellow who was an Irishman--and my dad had so much respect for this guy, he learned so much from him. He was [at] the Chamber of Commerce. His name was Bill Connelly. And Bill Connelly, in 1934--and I did a piece on it in my first book--he says to the people of Holland, to the council, "You should have a miniature Netherlands in the swamp over here. Well, it took us thirty years to do it, to get the windmill. But Bill Connelly was such an operator, that he went to people like The Furnace Company and said, "Bring in these movie stars."
So, you had four non-Dutchmen who had great pride in this community, who got Tulip Time off the ground, and there's no question about it. My dad used to say it all the time. It took for non-Dutchmen. He was as Dutch as anybody else. His dad was Dutch, his mother was Dutch. My dad was a good promoter too, and saw the thing as to how to move this thing. He and Bill Wichers, Nels Bosman, some of these others, worked closely together in the forties, fifties and sixties. I think it's a chance for a community to show its pride in its heritage, and what better to have a flower festival, where the tulip is queen. We don't need some "honey" on a float--that's okay, that's fine if you want to do that--but the tulip is queen, and you really accentuate your floral beauty. So that's it! The tulip here is queen, and that's it!