

THE PALIMPSEST

EDITED BY WILLIAM J. PETERSEN

VOL. XLV

ISSUED IN APRIL 1964

No. 4

Copyright 1964 by The State Historical Society of Iowa



Tulip Time in Pella

Midway in the nineteenth century, in August of 1847, a band of Hollanders, more than seven hundred, under the leadership of Dominie Hendrik Peter Scholte, sought a new home and religious freedom on the divide between the Des Moines and Skunk rivers. With bag and baggage, and with their gold in a great brass-bound chest, they crossed the Atlantic in four sailing vessels and landed in Baltimore. Thence they traveled inland and went by boat and barge down the Ohio to St. Louis and up the Mississippi to Keokuk, Iowa. From Keokuk they made their way by wagon and on foot to the site chosen by their leader and named by him "Pella," meaning "City of Refuge."

Among these colonists were tradesmen, artisans, and farmers; together they built a substantial community that grew and prospered. Their reverence for God, their Dutch habits of industry and thrift, and their good citizenship won them the respect of the pioneers of Iowa. They established churches and good schools, and in response to

their invitation to the Baptists, Central University — now Central College — was founded in Pella in 1853. Pella's founders encouraged the development of small enterprises, mills, and factories; this kind of foresight they passed on to succeeding generations.

From a desire to commemorate the sacrifices of these founding fathers and to keep alive the ideals which they cherished, the citizens of Pella came to celebrate Tulip Time. An operetta, presented by the students of Pella High School in April of 1935, was the direct inspiration for Pella's annual festival. The colorful Dutch costumes and the tuneful melodies of the production, *Tulip Time in Pella*, made a hit with the audience.

Among the listeners were Lewis W. Hartley, business manager of the *Pella Chronicle*, A. B. Warmhoudt and Tunis Kempkes, clothiers and members of the Chamber of Commerce. Alert to opportunities for community promotion, the three men saw in the operetta a perfect "natural" for Pella with its background of Dutch ancestry and tradition. They interested other businessmen, and at a meeting of the Chamber of Commerce on April 25, 1935, plans were made for the first Tulip Time, a one-day affair to be held in May of that year. Since Pella was not yet a tulip town, the planners decided to use potted tulips and have wooden tulips made by George Heeren, a Pella cabinetmaker. However, it was resolved at the

meeting that in the fall of 1935 thousands of bulbs would be planted to provide the natural color for future festivals. A delegation of five businessmen was dispatched to Holland, Michigan, to observe the festival there. On their return, they brought back many ideas that were later incorporated into the planning for an annual Tulip Time.

Thus this historic first Tulip Time, though on a smaller scale, set the pattern for the festivals presented thereafter. The Town Crier appeared on the streets with his long Dutch pipe and hand-bell to open festivities. Citizens appeared on the scene wearing wooden shoes and Dutch costumes. Antique displays in the store windows attracted much attention from the crowds that jammed the streets. The formal program began in early afternoon with a Maypole drill by the young people in Dutch costumes. This was followed by an address of welcome by the Burgemeester (Mayor), T. G. Fultz, a Dutch drill by school children, a dialogue in Dutch dialect, the singing of Dutch psalms by a choral group, and duets in the Dutch language by two couples who were beautifully costumed in garments that had been brought from the Netherlands. The evening program, presented in the high school auditorium, was the operetta, *Tulip Time in Pella*, with Dutch dance specialties between the acts. At the end of the day enthusiasm ran high. Pella must have an annual Tulip Time.

In anticipation of the next year's festival, thousands of bulbs were planted in the late fall of 1935 in lanes along the curbs and in mass plantings in the parks. In February of 1936, John Res, a bulb grower and broker from the Netherlands, came to Pella to advise the citizens in the planting and care of tulips.

Early in 1936, civic leaders, recognizing the need for an organization to assist businessmen in conducting Tulip Time, and wishing also to provide for the housing and preservation of heirlooms, revived a dormant historical society. Named as officers and directors of the society were A. B. Wormhoudt, president; Hugo Kuyper, secretary; Tunis Kempkes, treasurer; Dr. J. J. Sybenga, curator; P. H. Kuyper, B. F. Vander Linden, Arie Schilder, and H. P. Van Gorp, directors. Memberships from enthusiastic Pella citizens enabled the society to finance its activities, which included the establishment of a museum.

The society purchased the Wolters Building, a residence which in pioneer days had been a store. The building was remodeled, under the supervision of Dr. J. J. Sybenga, as a museum, with the exterior painted white with Delft blue trim. Included in the furnishings were a four-poster bed and a built-in fireplace, exactly as in a Dutch home, along with metal cooking utensils and Bibles and old books, some dating from the sixteenth century. Many beautiful examples of Delft

art in porcelain were placed in glass-enclosed cases to be viewed by Tulip Time visitors. Since 1959, the museum building has again been used for commercial purposes, as in Pella's early years. It retains its distinctive character, however, and a number of antiques remain on display there.

Through the years, officers and directors of the Pella Historical Society, with officers of the Chamber of Commerce and other service groups, have directed Tulip Time activities. Members of these organizations have rendered countless services to Tulip Time and the community.

In 1936, huge crowds attended the festival, now extended to five days. Features of the first day, designated as History Day, were the opening of the Pella Historical Society's Dutch home and miniature Dutch Village, the scrubbing of the streets, and the colorful parade welcoming Queen Wilhelmina and her provincial attendants (enacted by young women of Pella) to the city. Then came the coronation of the Tulip Queen, Lenora Gaass, great-granddaughter of Dominie Hendrik Peter Scholte, the founder of Pella. Her four attendants were Virginia Van Gorp, Martha Intveld, Betty Lankelma, and Ruth Heerema. The afternoon ended with an address by John S. Nollen, president of Grinnell College, and a grandson of Pella's patriarch, Dominie Scholte. The evening's highlight was the performance of the operetta, *Windmills of Holland*.

The second day, Church Day, was given over to religious observances and sacred choral programs in which the singing of Dutch psalms was a noteworthy feature. On the third day, Neighbor Day, musical groups and officials from neighboring towns brought greetings from their communities to Pella. The fourth day, Central College Day, consisted of programs, including a pageant of *Hansel and Gretel*, given by the students and faculty of the college. On the last day, Pella Day, trips were taken through the Tulip Lanes and the Dutch Village, the school children were paraded, and there were Dutch drills and folksinging on the streets. The festival ended with a final presentation of *Windmills of Holland*.

From all over Iowa and from surrounding states, thousands have journeyed to Pella's Tulip Time. For a visitor, a day of Tulip Time begins in the morning with tours of the points of historic and local interest: the Memorial Garden at the Home for the Aged, the Sunken Garden with its lagoon and Dutch mill, the campus of Central College, the Tulip or Floral Show, and the miniature Dutch Village, displayed in what is now the junior high school gymnasium. Visitors are carried in large wagons drawn by tractors to all of these points of interest. Downtown the shopwindows are filled with treasures from the homes of Pella. In one large display window, a typical Dutch shoemaker carves shoes to order from blocks of

cottonwood or maple with old hand tools such as were used for centuries in Holland. Crowds gather about this window all through the day.

At noon, the restaurants offer special foods prepared in the Dutch manner: *snijboontjes* (green beans cut on the bias and with a distinctive flavor); *erwten soep* (pea soup); *boonen soep* (bean soup); hot bologna made from recipes unknown except to Pella bologna makers and famed far and wide for its flavor and texture; "letters," a baked delicacy with almond paste filling in a crust that melts in the mouth; Dutch *Sinterklass Koekjes* (Santa Claus cookies); walnut and chocolate bars; Dutch cocoa and much more — all of these along with standard American dishes. Women of several church organizations set up shop in downtown buildings and in church social halls to supply the visitors with hearty Dutch fare.

Shortly after the noon band concerts, crowds of visitors begin to fill the bleachers erected on Broadway, on Central Park's west side. Then at 1:45 sharp, the *Burgemeester*, dressed in a colorful red and gold robe, and the preceding year's Tulip Queen, dressed in Dutch costume, mount the large stage. They are followed by representatives of the Dutch provinces. It is the *Burgemeester's* first function as Master of Ceremonies to present these eleven ladies to the Queen and to Pella's guests. Each of the eleven is attired in the authentic dress of her province. The beautiful and

varied costumes all include lace caps and gold head ornaments, waists and blouses ornamented with lovely embroidery and lace, colorful shawls, full skirts, and knitted stockings. As each provincial representative is presented, she walks to the front of the stage and curtsies to the audience. The Burgemeester then tells of the province she represents.

As this ceremony ends, the sound of trumpets is heard. The Queen and her attendants are coming! With measured step and to the accompaniment of *Pomp and Circumstance*, the royal party mounts the stage. The young women, all in colorful Dutch costumes, are preceded by uniformed heralds and pages.

At this point, on the first day of the festival, the coronation takes place. The Burgemeester takes the crown from the head of the preceding year's Queen and places it on the head of the newly-elected Queen. He presents to her a beautiful loving cup which will be hers for a year and upon which her name will be inscribed, along with the names of the Queens who have reigned before her. To each attendant he presents a gold pin as a memento of the occasion. The Burgemeester presents each young lady to the audience in turn, with the Queen greeting her subjects and festival visitors. On succeeding days of Tulip Time, the newly-crowned Queen and her attendants again will be presented to the audience.

Before leaving the stage, the Queen directs the Burgemeester to make preparations for the Volks Parade (people's parade). After he and De Stadtsraad (City Council) have inspected the street, they declare that it must be scrubbed so that not a particle of dirt will remain when the Queen and her retinue pass in the parade.

The Burgemeester calls for street scrubbers, and sixty to one hundred or more men and women, young people and children appear in a solid phalanx — the women carrying large scrub brushes and the men bearing on their shoulders yokes to which are attached two large pails. They scatter and at the command of the Burgemeester, they scrub the pavement diligently, the Burgemeester inspecting all the while. Pails are refilled from large metal tanks on the curbs and the scrubbing continues until every inch of pavement in the block has been washed thoroughly. The scrubbers then leave in a body to join the parade which is forming several blocks away.

At 2:30, the sound of distant music is heard; the parade is coming. By this time the curbs and sidewalks in six downtown blocks, including those around the Square, are massed with spectators — thousands, standing from three to thirty deep and seated on the bleachers on Broadway.

Beautiful floats, built by civic organizations, service and veterans' clubs, churches, and schools, appear in the parade. Behind them march the

street scrubbers and all of the children of the public and parochial schools, all in colorful costumes and wooden shoes. Uniformed bands give the parade a truly festive air. Visitors, however, find the Dutch specialties the most interesting parade elements: De Kippenboer (chicken vendor), a Dutchman carrying on his back a wicker basket in which are his live wares; the organ grinder with his monkey; De Schaarslijper (scissors grinder) with old and patched clothing, pushing a cart with hand-operated grinder; De Kaasman (cheese vendor) with a large chest carrying his cheeses mounted on a tricycle; vegetable vendors; the milk man with a small two-wheeled cart drawn by a large dog, just as was done in the Old Country; and the shoemaker busily carving shoes. All the vendors hawk their wares in the Dutch vernacular.

In the parade, too, are unusual groups: the baby section — mothers pushing ancient carriages in which little children ride; the whole Dutch family — father, mother, and twelve to fourteen children from tiny infant to high teens marching in orderly line behind the parents — portraying the love of Hollanders for large families; and the orphans, a group of little children clad in severe black and white costumes and marching, with eyes downcast and looking neither right nor left, behind their supervisor, a woman dressed just as they are. All of the parade features are described over a sound system as they pass through the downtown streets.

With the parade over, attention shifts again to Broadway where Dutch dancers perform before the bleachers. Dressed in costume and wooden shoes, the dancers go through intricate routines to organ accompaniment. Band and drum corps drills follow the Dutch folk games to complete the afternoon program. Visitors then may resume their tours of featured exhibits or they may choose to view the window displays and the mass plantings in the parks, which are lighted for nighttime viewing and enjoyment.

After the evening meal, the street scrubbers again appear. Their task completed, they retreat and are followed by the day's second parade. Floats for the evening parade are beautifully illuminated to highlight their distinctive features. Following the parade, the Dutch dancers again perform, and a variety show on the stage facing Broadway brings a close to "a day in Holland."

The outbreak of World War II brought with it rationing of gasoline and other restrictions. Consequently, plans for the 1942 Tulip Time were undertaken with some misgivings. However, a three-day festival was held, during which a patriotic pageant, *Defenders of the Flag*, was given each evening. A few days after the close of the 1942 festival, H.R.H. Princess Juliana of the Netherlands, who had taken exile in Canada after the fall of the Netherlands, visited Pella. She spoke to a huge assembly in Garden Square about

her country and its plight, winning the hearts of everyone with her democratic and unassuming manner.

In 1943 and 1944, despite wartime difficulties, one-day celebrations of Tulip Time were held. There were no floats in the parades as in previous years, but once again a patriotic pageant, *The Four Freedoms*, was presented on the evening of the 1943 festival. No festivals were held during 1945 and 1946. Instead, in 1946, a giant auction was held in downtown Pella, the proceeds of which — over \$7,000 — were devoted to the relief of the people of Holland. During 1946, however, plans were busily being formulated for a revival of Tulip Time, the community's greatest asset. The 1947 festival which resulted, commemorated Pella's centennial and was in the pattern of pre-war Tulip Time celebrations.

Total attendance for recent festivals has been, on several occasions, well over 100,000, with additional thousands touring the town in their cars on the Sundays prior to and immediately following Tulip Time. Inclement weather has decreased attendance in some years to about 50,000. What the presence of such holiday crowds means to a town of 5,200 population can hardly be imagined — every facility is taxed to the limit. But Pella's crowds are good-natured and orderly. They endure minor inconveniences without complaint; instead, their enthusiasm for seeing and photo-

graphing the flowers, costumed Dutchmen, the street scrubbing, and the parade overcomes any such trifles.

A top attraction for camera fans at Tulip Time is the Sunken Garden with its Dutch mill. This came into being through the efforts of the Junior Chamber of Commerce. A natural depression was converted into a lagoon with a retaining wall in the shape of a wooden shoe. A replica of a windmill in the Netherlands was erected, financed by public subscription. The park is beautifully landscaped with shrubs and trees; large plantings of tulips make bright spots of color in the area.

The Memorial Garden is a formal planting. Located on the grounds of the Home for the Aged, its blooms — more than twenty-five thousand — are a riot of color. The original bulbs for this planting were a gift from the bulb growers of Holland in recognition of Pella's contribution of more than \$100,000 in food, clothing, and money to the people of Holland after the expulsion of the Germans in World War II. The garden was dedicated in 1948 by Dr. J. B. V. M. J. van de Mortel, Dutch Consul General in Chicago. Both points of interest, the Sunken Garden and the Memorial Garden, are within easy walking distance of the downtown area.

For flower lovers, identification of the many varieties of tulips at both gardens is made easy by stakes bearing the names of the blooms.

At the Tulip Show, exhibits are tagged and numbered. This facilitates visitors' selecting and ordering tulip bulbs for fall delivery; this service is usually offered by one of the local civic organizations. The Pella Historical Society, of course, buys bulbs by the thousands from time to time for new plantings and to replant lanes and parks.

Always in the public eye at Tulip Time are two gentlemen in most distinctive costumes, the *Burgemeester* (honorary mayor) and the *Town Crier*. Dr. T. G. Fultz was major of Pella in 1935 when the festival was inaugurated and later was named honorary *Burgemeester* for life. A jovial and capable man, he enters into the spirit of Tulip Time wholeheartedly. He is a formidable figure in frock coat, long stockings and buckle shoes, high hat, and carrying his handsome gold-headed cane, and appears everywhere at once and acts as *Master of Ceremonies* at all formal functions. Professor George Francis Sadler, a local teacher of music, was the *First Town Crier* and continued as such through 1952. A living symbol of Tulip Time in picturesque velvet costume—knickers, long stockings, buckle shoes, and broad hat with feathers—he greeted thousands of visitors on the streets, welcomed them, answered their questions, posed for myriad pictures, and announced the various Tulip Time events to the accompaniment of his clanging handbell. Since Professor Sadler's passing in 1953, his place has been very ably taken by

several local individuals; he will always be remembered by many people — both local citizens and visitors alike — however, as “the Town Crier.”

Preparations for Tulip Time begin in July when Historical Society leaders name the chairmen and members of the key committees. Overall direction is assigned to the steering committee, whose chairman is the president of the Historical Society. In February of the following year, the budget is set up, guarantee funds are raised by businessmen and allotted to each committee. Receipts from bleachers, tours, and other attractions are later balanced against the budgeted fund. A Tulip Time budget will frequently run to \$10,000.

In March, Pella citizens elect their Tulip Queen and her four attendants, and all are honored at a coming-out party before the festival. Preparations continue as brochures listing the program events for the three days are prepared and distributed. Float building, begun earlier, continues apace, Dutch dancers rehearse their routines, and plans are made for the accommodation of overnight visitors in Pella homes. All of this activity increases to a rapid tempo as the festival date approaches.

Visitors to Tulip Time will find the answers to their questions about food, lodging, and entertainment at the downtown headquarters of the official hostess. In addition, of course, Pella citizens — always friendly and anxious to help — stand ready to direct and assist festival-goers. Many

families may wish to bring picnic lunches; to them the parks and many lawns are open — no questions asked. Pella's streets and parks, of course, are open, too, to flower lovers, and thousands of garden club members from Iowa, Nebraska, Missouri, Illinois, and Minnesota will arrive in chartered buses. People from far and wide, almost all of them seemingly camera fans, will enjoy a holiday of simple festivities, with complete absence of carnival atmosphere. Tulip Time may not be commercialized; this is the ideal adopted in 1935 and strictly adhered to ever since. As a result, there are no stands and no hawkers. Souvenirs of the festival can be bought only through Pella's legitimate merchants and service organizations.

The cloppity-clop of wooden shoes is music to the ears, camera shutters click, crowds surge through Garden Square and around the park to see the window displays, scores of people walk in happy mood to the mass plantings and troop into the building where the city's finest blooms are on display, bands play and costumed dancers appear in the streets. It's Tulip Time in Pella — a day long to be remembered and to be recorded in countless albums in black and white and projected on numberless screens in color — a holiday with no regrets. Pella's door is wide open to you — to everyone.

GEORGE VER STEEG
HENRY VANDE KIEFT