

THE PALIMPSEST

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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 their gold in a great brass-bound chest, they crossed the Atlantic in four sailing vessels, landed in Baltimore, traveled inland, then by boat and barge down the Ohio to St. Louis and up the Mississippi to Keokuk, Iowa. From Keokuk by wagon and on foot they made their way to the site chosen by their leader and named by him Pella, meaning "City of Refuge."

Among the colonists were tradesmen, artisans, and farmers; together they built a substantial town that grew and prospered. Their reverence for God, their Dutch habits of thrift, and their good citizenship won the respect of the pioneers of Iowa. They established churches and good schools. Through their invitation to the Baptists,

Central University, now Central College, was founded in Pella in 1853. They 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 the founding fathers and to keep alive the ideals 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*, L. B. Wormhoudt, 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 then 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 and, returning, 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 all festivals presented thereafter. The Town Crier appeared on the streets with his long Dutch pipe and handbell 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 in Garden Square 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, thou-

sands 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 L. 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. The society bought 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, Bibles and old books, some dating back to the sixteenth century, and metal cooking utensils. Many beautiful examples of Delft art in porcelain were placed in glass-enclosed cases, where they remain to be viewed at Tulip Time by thousands of visitors. Memberships from enthusiastic citizens of Pella enabled the society to finance its activities.

Through the years officers and directors of the Pella Historical Society, with officers of the Chamber of Commerce, have directed Tulip Time activities. Three of the original group have died: Arie Schilder, H. P. Van Gorp, and Hugo W. Kuyper. They were replaced by William D. Van Sittert, who is now president; Dr. T. G. Fultz; Robert C. Lautenbach, who died in 1953 and whose place was taken by his wife, Martha Lautenbach; and Mrs. Peter H. Van Zante. Members of the society 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 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, Lenore 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 program 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 Dutch psalm singing 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 paraded, and there were Dutch drills and folksinging on the streets. The festival ended with a final presentation of the *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 Historical Museum, the Scholte Home, 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 in the high school gymnasium. Visitors are carried in huge wagons drawn by tractors. Downtown the windows are filled with treasures from the homes of Pella. In one large display window an elderly 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 distinctive flavor; *erte snet* (pea soup); *boone snet* (bean soup); vegetable 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 cookies, *Sinta Klaas* (Santa Claus) and walnut and chocolate bars; Dutch cocoa and more, along with standard American dishes. Women of several church organizations set up shop in downtown buildings to supply the visitors with these Dutch foods.

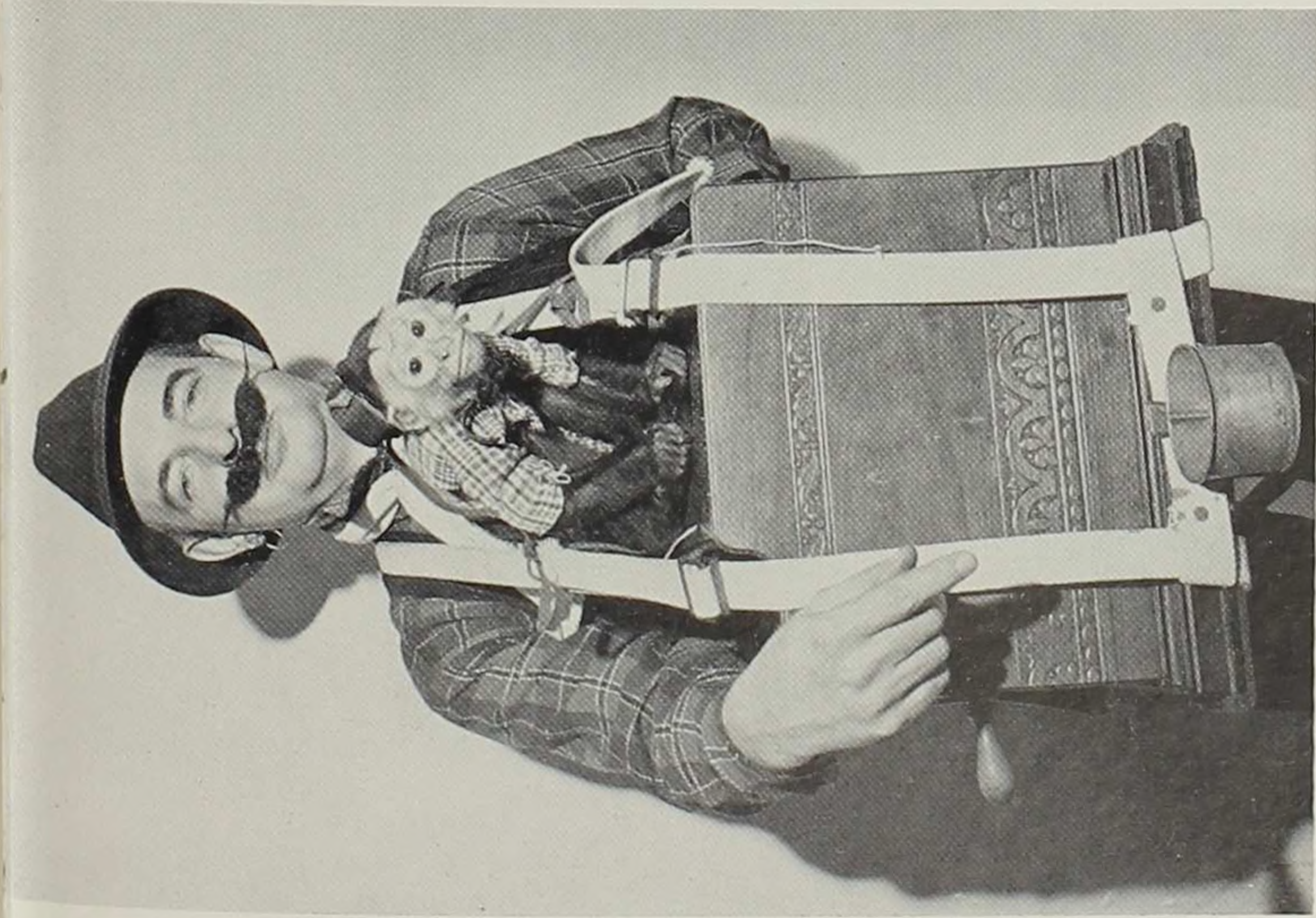
During the noon hour visitors may enjoy a concert of electric organ music or the band in Garden Square. Then at 1:00 o'clock, on a large platform facing the street on the west side of Garden Square, the children of the public schools, dressed in costumes and wooden shoes, present drills, dances, recitations, and skits, all in the Dutch language or dialect. Intricate folk dances are performed by the older boys and girls both on the platform and on the pavement.

At 1:45 the clang of the Town Crier's bell is heard, and he appears in picturesque velvet costume, knickers, long stockings, buckle shoes, and

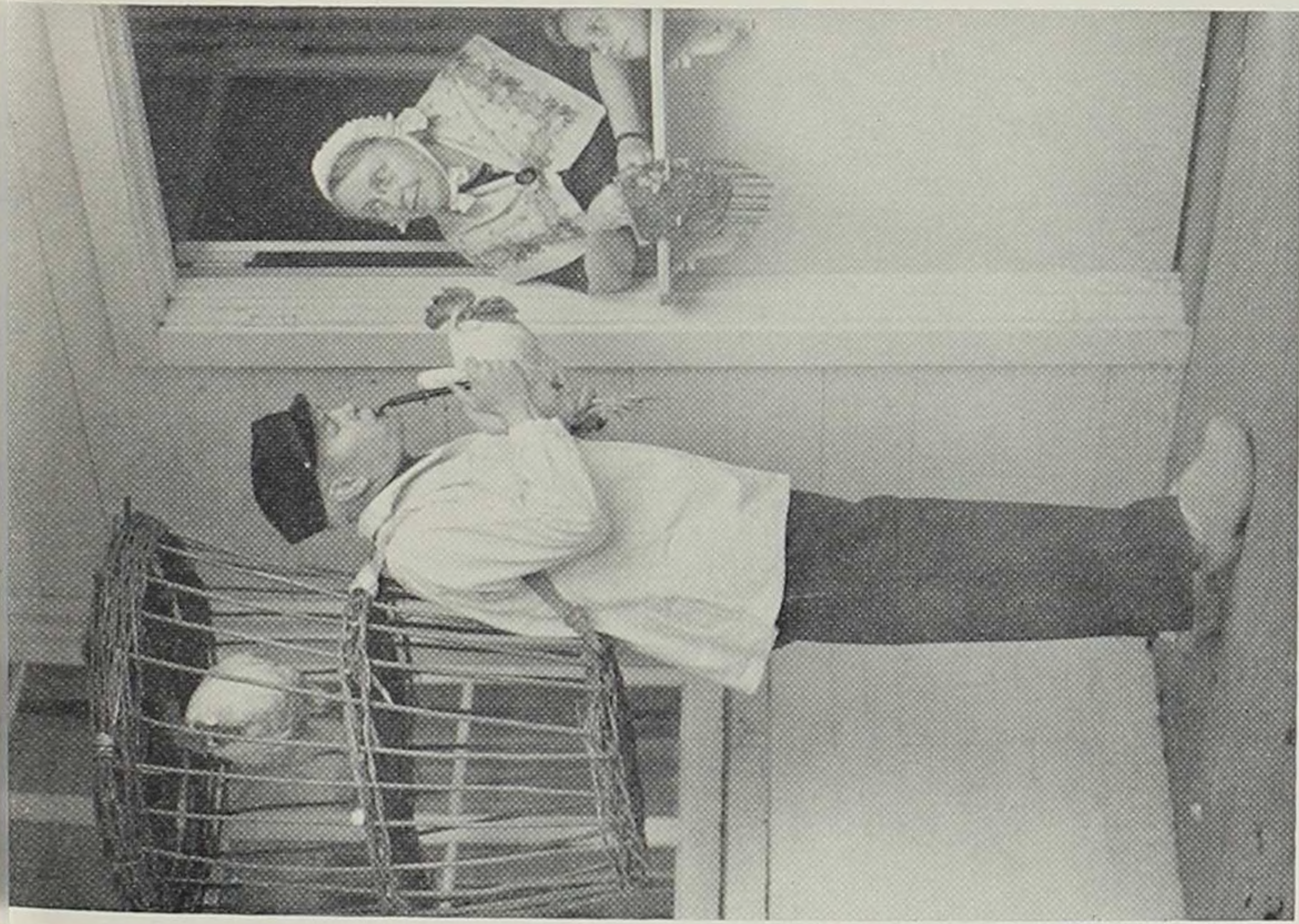
broad hat with feathers. Behind him walk in solemn procession the Burgemeester (honorary mayor) and De Stadtsraad (City Council), all in costume, the Burgemeester wearing high hat and tails, long stockings and buckle shoes, and carrying a handsome gold-headed cane.

The Town Crier announces that the Volks Parade (people's parade) will be along shortly and that the dignitaries will inspect the street to make sure that not a particle of dirt remains when the queen and her retinue pass in the parade. The Burgemeester calls for the street scrubbers, and sixty to one hundred men and women, young people and a few children appear in a solid phalanx — the women carrying large scrub brushes and the men carrying on their shoulders yokes to which are attached two large pails. They scatter and, at the command of the Burgemeester, scrub the streets diligently, the Burgemeester inspecting all the while. Pails are filled from large metal tanks on the curbs, and the scrubbing continues until every inch of the pavement in the block has been thoroughly washed. The scrubbers leave in a body to join the parade that is forming several blocks away, while the dignitaries are whisked away to reappear heading the parade in cars about fifteen minutes later.

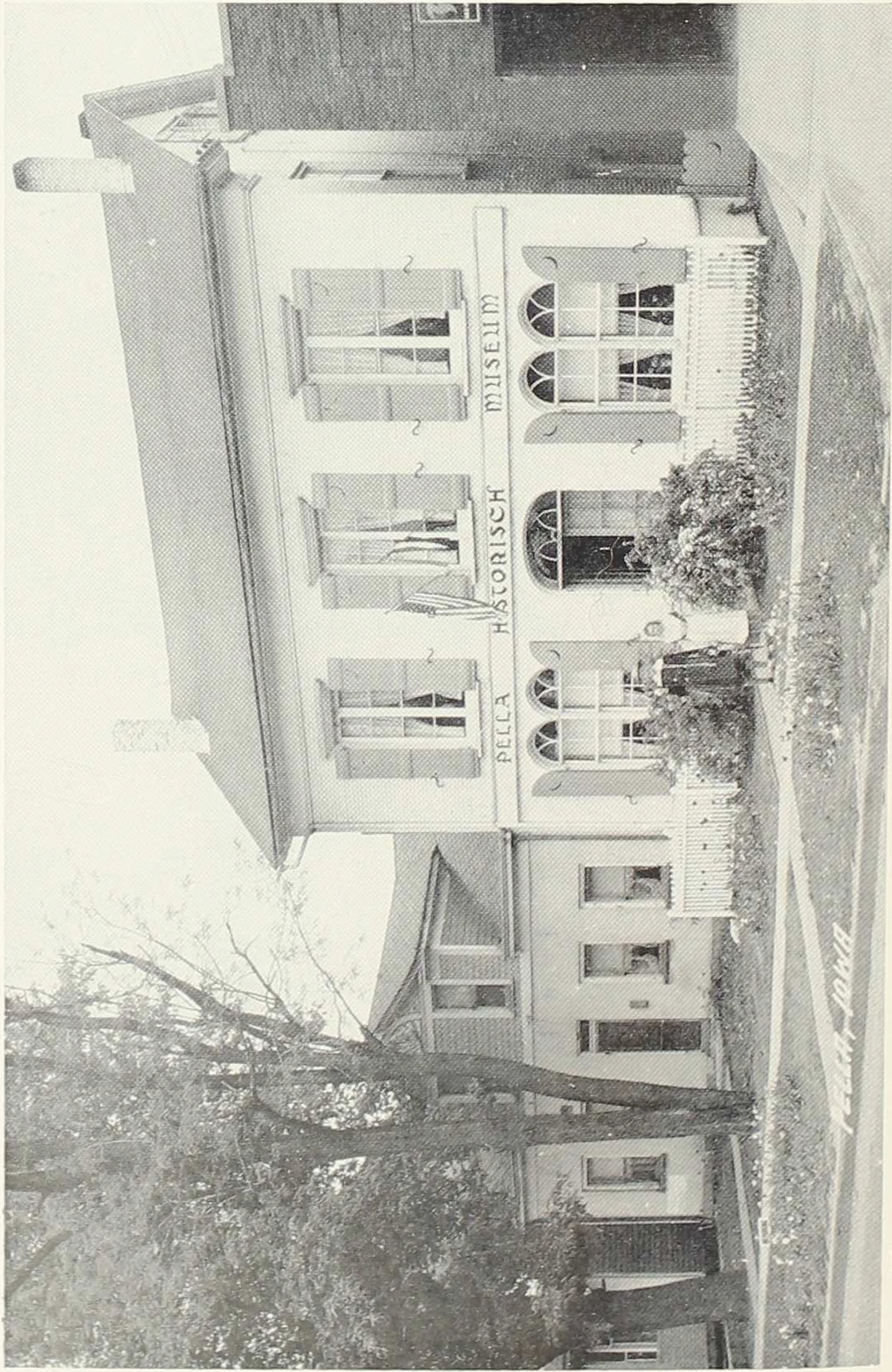
At 2:15 the sound of distant music is heard. The parade is coming. By this time the curbs and sidewalks in six downtown blocks, including those



Organ-grinder Lester Liter is Part of the Street Scene at
Pella's Tulip Festival



A Dutch Door and a Dutch Custom — Doing Marketing
on a Stoep at Pella



The Famous Pella Historical Museum, Where Heirlooms Are Housed and Visitors Gather at Tulip Time

around the Square, are massed with spectators — thousands, seated on bleachers on Broadway and standing from four to thirty deep everywhere.

Beautiful floats, built by civic organizations, service and veterans' organizations, and churches, appear in the parade. Behind them march the Street Scrubbers and all the children of the public and parochial schools, all in colorful costumes and wooden shoes. Uniformed bands give the parade a martial tempo. Visitors, however, find the Dutch specialties the most interesting: De Kippeboer (chicken vendor), a Dutchman carrying a wicker basket on his back in which are his live wares; the organ grinder with his monkey: De Skaarslijper (scissors grinder) with old and patched clothing, pushing a handcart with a hand-operated grinder; De Kaasman (cheese vendor) with a large chest mounted on a tricycle carrying his cheeses; vegetable vendors; two buxom Dutch housewives pushing a two-wheeled cart loaded high with garden produce; the milk man with a smaller 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 shout 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 — this is to portray the love of the Hollanders for large families; the orphans, a group of little children clad in severe black and white costumes and marching, with eyes turned downward and looking neither right nor left, behind their supervisor, a woman dressed just as they. These features are described over a sound system as the parade passes through the downtown streets.

The parade over, the hordes of visitors scramble back to the bleachers on Broadway. There on the platform are the Burgemeester, dressed now in a colorful red and gold robe, the queen of the preceding festival, and Queen Wilhelmina and the provincial representatives. The first function of the Burgemeester as Master of Ceremonies is to present the Dutch provinces represented by eleven women, each attired in the authentic costume of her province. These costumes are beautiful and varied, but they all include the lace caps and gold head ornaments, full skirts, waists and blouses ornamented with lovely embroidery and lace, colorful shawls, knitted stockings, and wooden shoes. As each provincial representative is presented, she walks to the front of the stage and curtsies to both the queens, garbed in royal robes and wearing golden crowns. The Burgemeester then tells the audience something about the province she represents.

At the end of this ceremony the sound of trum-

pets is heard. The queen and her attendants are coming! With measured step and to the accompaniment of *Pomp and Circumstance* played on an electric organ, the queen and her attendants approach the stand. The young women, all in formal costumes in pastel colors, are preceded by uniformed heralds and pages; little girls, also in formal gowns, carry the train of the queen's robe. Then follows the coronation, the Burgemeester taking the crown from the head of the festival queen of the preceding year and placing 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 token, a gold pin, memento of the occasion. The Burgemeester presents, in turn, each young woman to the audience, and each speaks a few words of greeting.

When the formal ceremonies are over, attention goes to the street, where Dutch dancers in costume and wooden shoes go through intricate routines to organ accompaniment. They play, also, Dutch folk games, one of which is called "Planting the Tulips." Band and drum corps drills follow to complete the afternoon program. Visitors then may resume their tours to the featured exhibits or they may choose to view the window displays and the mass plantings in the parks. As the day ends

the parks are floodlighted for nighttime enjoyment.

Evening shows for Tulip Time are presented in two locations. One, an elaborately staged operetta, is presented at Douwstra Chapel on the Central College campus; the other, a program of entertainment by local and professional talent, is presented downtown.

The evening operetta has become traditional, and talent of the Central College music and drama departments, together with the best talent in the community, is drawn upon for the cast and for the choruses. In 1936 the operetta, *The Blue Tulip*, written especially for Pella, inaugurated the long series. Through the years two of Victor Herbert's finest operettas, *The Red Mill* and *Sweethearts*, have been popular. In 1953 the Broadway favorite by Kurt Weill, *Knickerbocker Holiday*, the story of Governor Peter Stuyvesant and the Dutch of New Amsterdam, made a decided hit. No expense is spared in producing the operettas — costumes, lighting, scenery, and properties are all elaborate. Direction is by members of the speech and music departments of Central College.

Pella has a large concrete outdoor stage in a natural bowl in West Park, three blocks from the downtown area. Tulip Bowl, as this is called, was used for the first time in 1950, but capricious weather and low temperatures at night have cut attendance on numerous occasions, with resulting

deficits. It now appears that the operettas will hereafter be staged indoors. The operetta, staged every evening of Tulip Week, draws many music lovers from nearby towns and cities.

The evening shows downtown are mainly for the entertainment of local people. The huge crowds of visitors through the day could not possibly be accommodated in any building or even in the outdoor bowl if they elected to stay. They come primarily to see the flowers, the colorful festivities, the parade, the costumes, and the window displays; they leave at the close of the day.

The advent of World War II brought rationing of gasoline and other restrictions, and 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. While the festival was in progress word came of the conquest of Holland by the Germans. Deep gloom prevailed over the town. A few days after the close of the festival, Princess Juliana of the Netherlands, then exiled to Canada, visited Pella. She spoke to a huge assembly gathered 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 in 1945 and 1946. Instead, in 1946, a giant auction was held downtown, the proceeds of which, over \$7,000, were devoted to relief of the people of Holland. During 1946 the citizens of Pella began once more to make plans for a revival of Tulip Time, which they realized was the community's greatest asset. The 1947 celebration was back in the pattern of those held before the war years.

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 Sunday prior to and the Sunday following Tulip Time. Inclement weather has in some years decreased attendance to about 50,000. What the presence of such holiday crowds means to a town of 4,500 population can hardly be grasped — every facility is taxed. But Pella's crowds are good natured and orderly. They put up with minor inconveniences happily, and take pictures of the flowers, costumed Dutchmen, the street scrubbing, and the parade with enthusiasm. For camera fans Pella's lovely parks, the Sunken Garden with Dutch mill and the memorial formal garden are top points of interest. Both are within easy walking distance from the downtown area.

The Sunken Garden was a project 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 Dutch windmill, replica of one in the Netherlands, was erected. It was financed by public subscription. The park is beautifully landscaped with shrubs and trees; large beds 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, more than twenty-five thousand blooms are a riot of color. The bulbs for this planting were a gift from 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. Vande Mortel, Dutch Consul General, of Chicago, Illinois. It is cared for by a resident of the Home for the Aged, Peter Lubberden, under the supervision of the Pella Historical Society.

For visitors who wish to order tulips, identification of varieties at both gardens is made easy by stakes bearing the names of the different varieties. At the Tulip Show the exhibits are tagged and numbered. Visitors may make their selections by name and order bulbs to be imported through the Central College industries, which will distribute them later by mail. The Pella Historical Society buys bulbs by the thousands from time to time for new plantings and to replant lanes and

parks. More than 8,000 bulbs were planted in preparation for the 1954 festival.

Always in the public eye at Tulip Time are two costumed individuals, the Burgemeester (the honorary mayor) and the Town Crier. Dr. T. G. Fultz was mayor of Pella in 1935 when the festival was inaugurated and was later made honorary Burgemeester for life. A jovial and capable man, he enters the spirit of Tulip Time wholeheartedly, is everywhere at once and master of ceremonies at all formal presentations. Professor George Francis Sadler, a teacher of music, was the first Town Crier and so continued through 1952. He died in April of 1953. He had greeted thousands of visitors on the streets, welcomed them, answered their questions, posed for pictures, and, with his clanging handbell and handsome velvet costume, had been the picturesque symbol of Tulip Time. In 1953 his place was taken by the mayor of Pella, Tunis H. Klein.

Preparations for Tulip Time begin in July when new officers are elected to the Chamber of Commerce. The officers and historical society leaders then name the chairmen and members of the twenty-eight key committees. Over-all direction is assigned to the steering committee, whose chairman is the president of the historical society. In February of the new year the budget is set up, guarantee funds are raised by businessmen and allotted to each committee. Receipts from bleachers,

ORANGE CITY MAY FESTIVAL

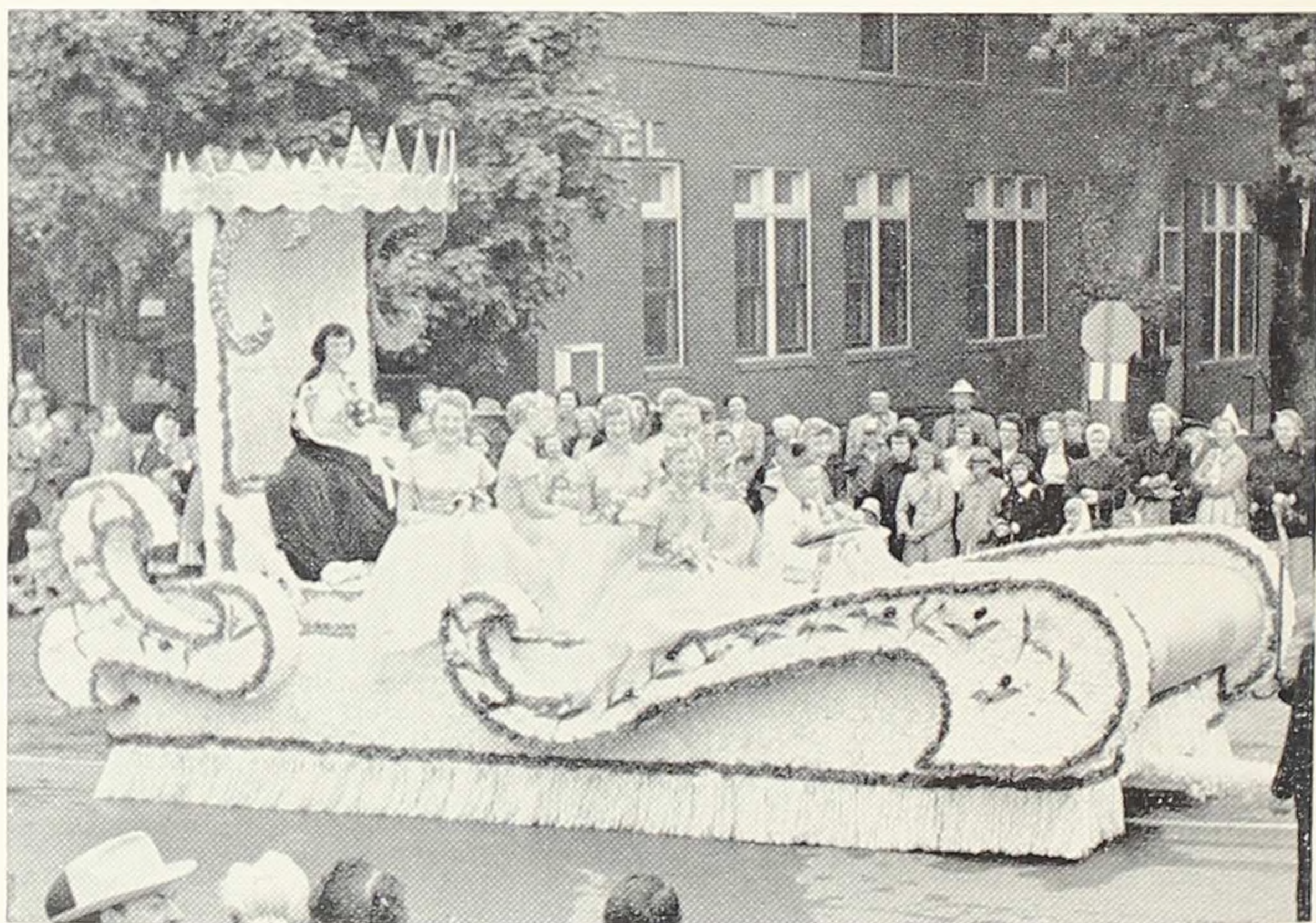


Folk Dances Are Practiced for Months

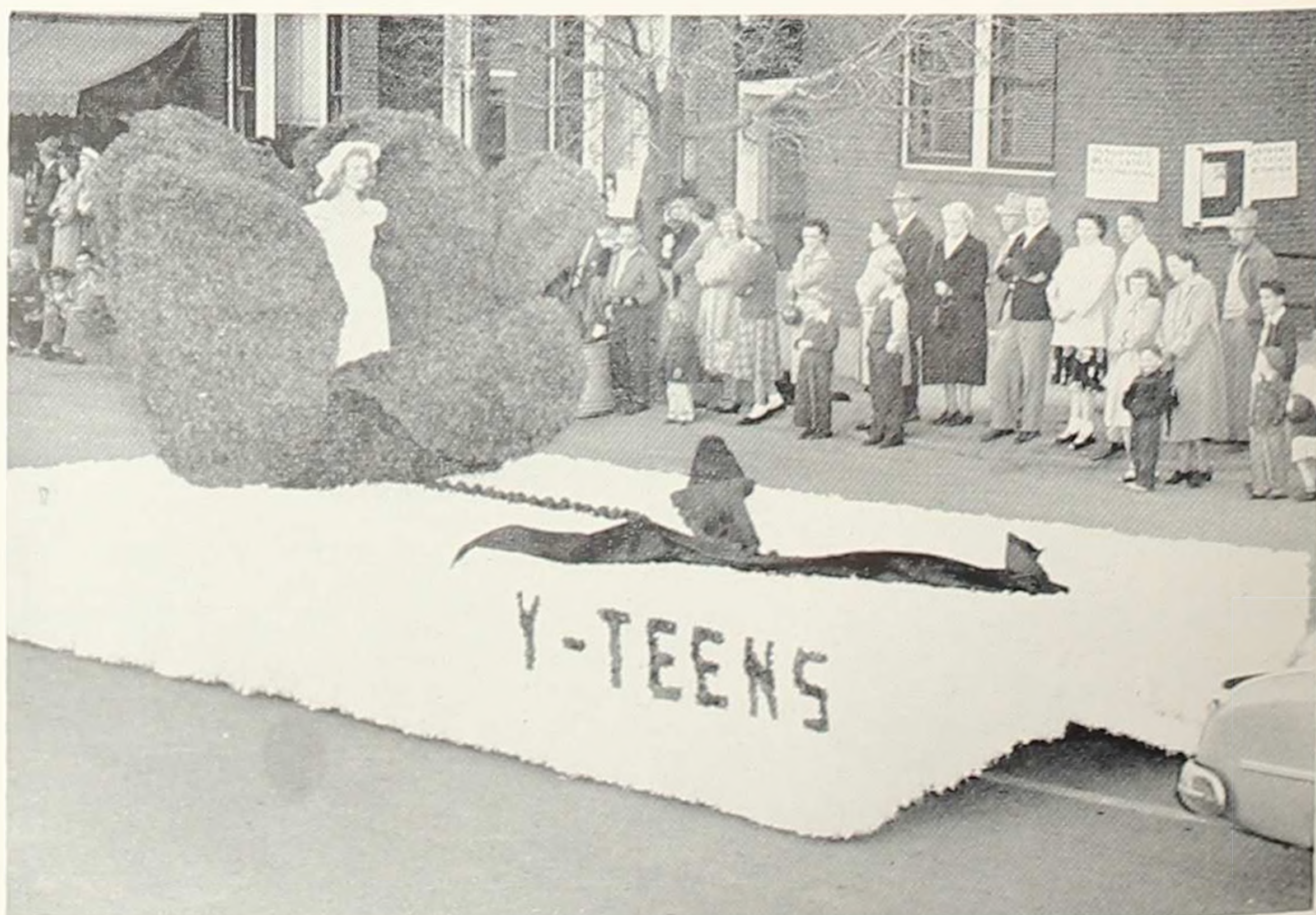


The Family Pet Becomes a Beast of Burden

ORANGE CITY



Orange City Tulip Queen and Attendants in 1952 Festival Parade

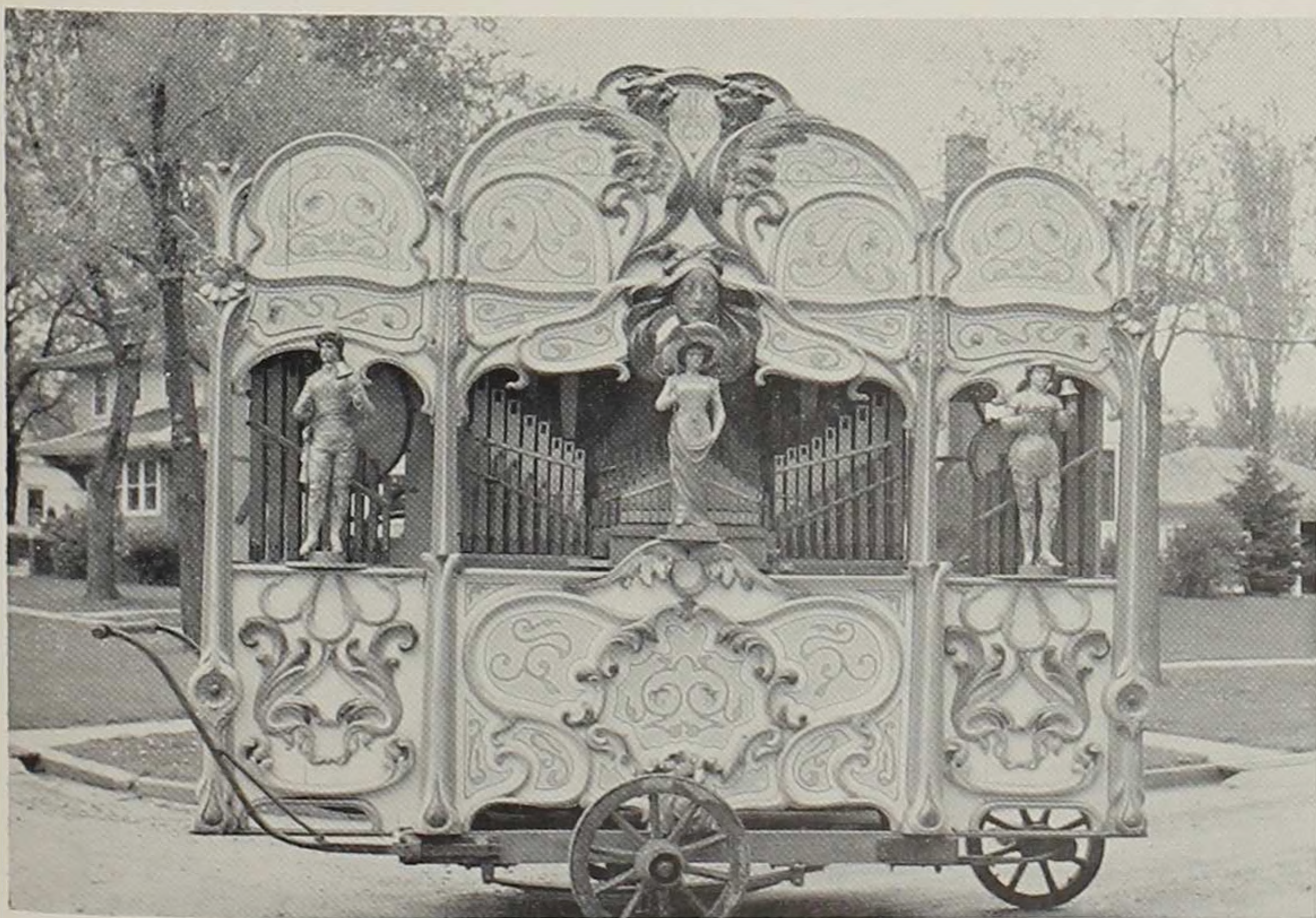


Typical Float in Orange City Festival Parade

MAY FESTIVAL

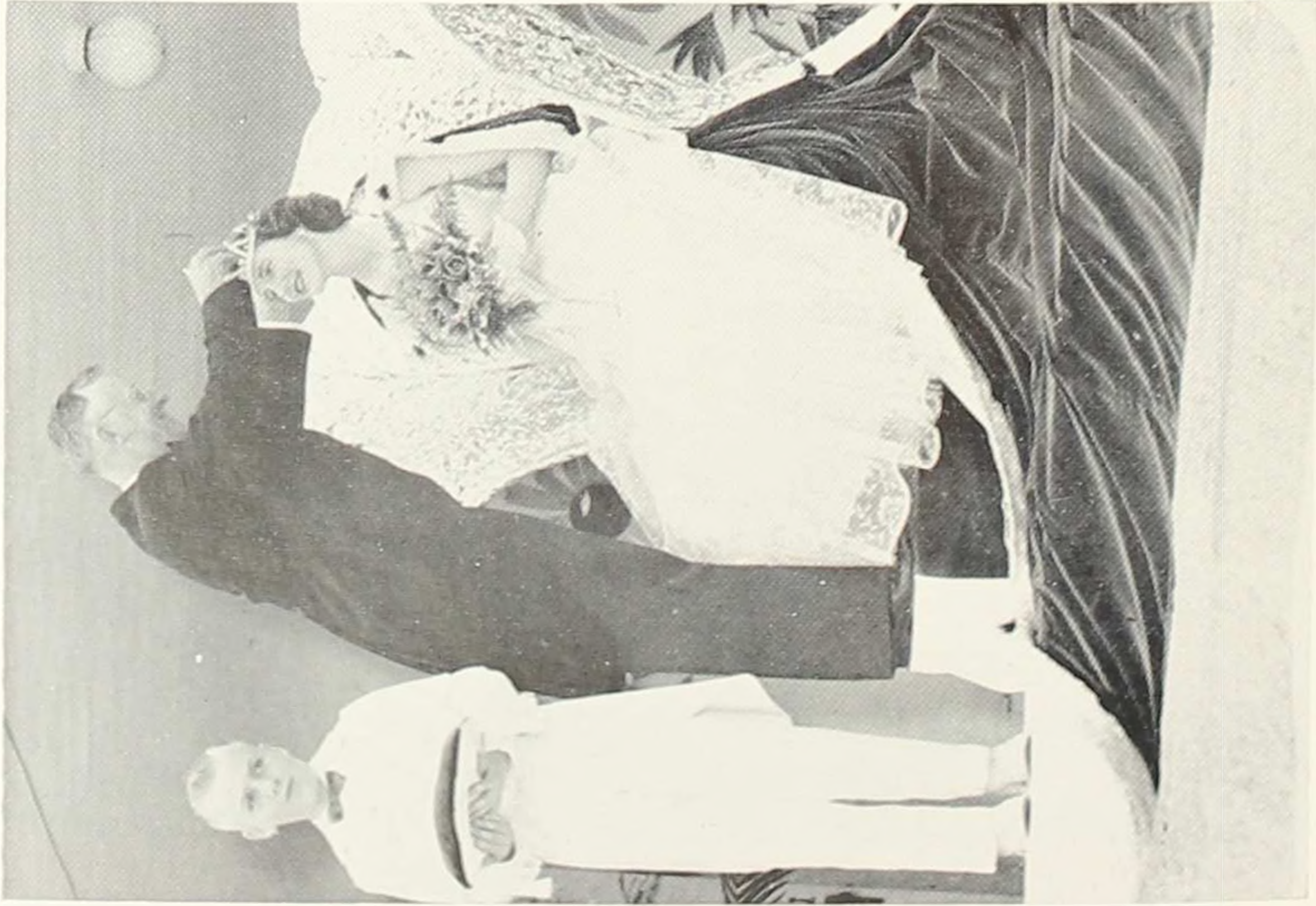


De Schutter's Boat, First Entered in 1937 Parade

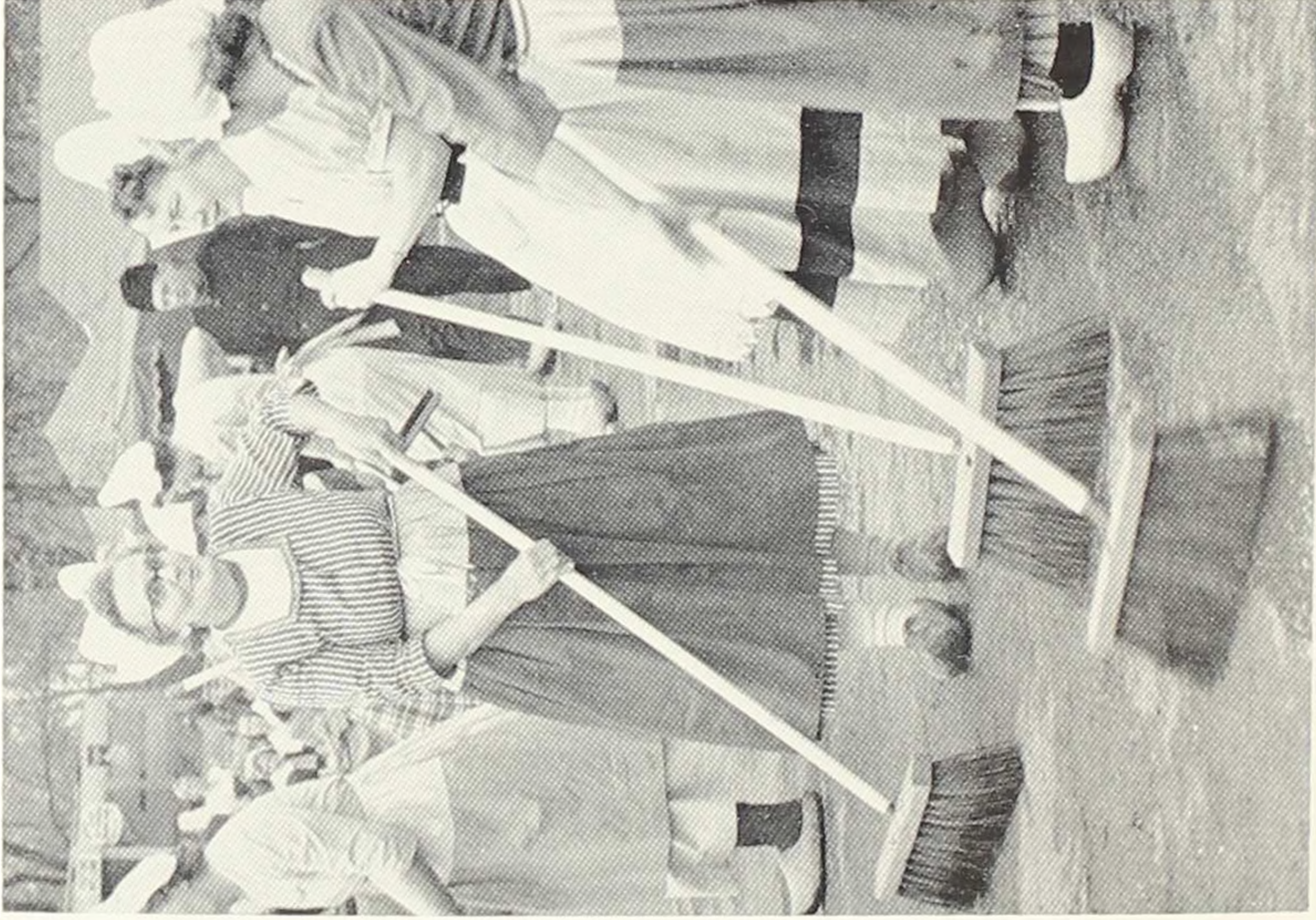


Orange City's Dutch Street Organ

ORANGE CITY MAY FESTIVAL



Dutch Vice-Consul T. E. Klay Crowns May Queen



A Little Gossip During Scrubbing at May Festival

tours, and evening shows are later balanced against the budgeted fund. A Tulip Time budget is sometimes as high as \$10,000.

In April, Pella citizens elect their queen and her four attendants, and all are honored at a coming-out party shortly before the festival. The Burgemeester is the chairman of this committee.

Committees for the 1954 Tulip Time have been named. Direction will be by President William D. Van Sittert of the historical society. Each committee is functioning; the dates May 13, 14, and 15 have been set; the evening production will be *H.M.S. Pinafore*.

Attractive folders listing the program events for the three days are available. Overnight visitors will be housed in Pella homes. Information on lodging may be obtained from the Tulip Time Hostess at headquarters downtown. Family groups may wish to bring picnic lunches, and to them the parks and many lawns are open — no questions asked. Souvenirs of Pella festivals can be bought only through Pella's legitimate merchants. There are no stands, no hawkers. Tulip Time may not be commercialized. This is the ideal adopted in 1935 and strictly adhered to since.

Pella's streets and parks will be open to the many thousands of flower lovers. Members of garden clubs of Iowa, Nebraska, Missouri, Illinois, and Minnesota will arrive in chartered buses. Traffic will be regulated by the Iowa Highway Patrol

and local police. Camera fans will come from everywhere. People from far and wide will enjoy a holiday of simple festivities, with complete absence of carnival atmosphere. They will find a warm welcome everywhere in the town.

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

GEORGE VER STEEG