

MAY 15, 1976

## POOL #12

## Niles to Holland Tulip Festival to Grand Rapids Airport

A heavy rain that locals said had been falling all day had stopped about ten minutes before the Fords landed at a temporary helopad at Holland and proceeded immediately into town, arriving at about 5:30 p. m. at the spot where the main annual Tulip Parade had ended just before the Presidential party got there.

The result was that for the poolers the parade consisted of the standard motorcade, four local police motorcycles, and twelve young women dressed in Dutch-style costumes consisting of white bonnets and black or blue dresses and black ankle length pantaloons -- dresses on six, pantaloons on six of the young women. All of them wore wooden clogs, sharply pointed up at the toe. Six of them walked to the right rear, six to the left rear of the President's limo.

The parade marshal estimated a crowd of 160,000 at the start of the motorcade and raised the estimate to 250,000 just before the motorcade reached the end of the motorcade route on Van Raalte Avenue at 6:30 p. m. Each figure is equally believable. People were lined up for the entire route, which must have stretched about 30 blocks along Van Raalte Avenue, from anywhere from six to fifteen deep. The evident size of the crowd enabled the wire service reporters to say, quite correctly, that this must have been, in terms of numbers of people, the largest reception that Ford has received in this country during his Presidency. However, this pooler sensed a striking lack of rapport between the crowd and the Fords. The President and Mrs. Ford stood together in the rear seat of their car, the top had been removed, throughout the entire hour of the motorcade. Both of them waved to the crowds, the President usually to his left and Mrs. Ford to her right. There was a fair amount of welcoming shouts and squeals, all of them friendly, and a fair number of signs, ("Welcome Mr. President") also all friendly, but the net effect seemed to this pooler to be oddly negative and dull, it was as if the Fords were there for the crowds not the crowds there for the Fords, although all of these people had waited for the Fords after the Tulip Parade was over.

Five minutes after the motorcade passed the point where the parade had ended at the corner of Van Raalte and 30th street and the motorcade had headed for the helopad a light rain had started up again.

Foger Stroh

John Osborne/New Republic

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