

9-28-1977

Appledorn, Barb Oral History Interview: Class Projects

Pam Spring

Ellen Trayser

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INTERVIEWEE: Mrs. Appledorn

INTERVIEWERS: Pam Spring and Ellen Trayser

DATE: Sept. 28, 1977 TIME: 4:00

PLACE: DeWitt Center dancing practice room

INTERVIEW #1

OF TAPE SIDES: $1\frac{1}{2}$

SUMMARY OF TOPICS:

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Pam Spring: This is September 28, and we are here interviewing Mrs. Appledorn, who is a Klompen dancer.

Ellen Trayser: You forgot to say our names.

S: Oh, I'm Pam Spring.

T: Ellen Trayser.

S: Mrs. Appledorn, could you give us just a brief description of what Klompen dancing is.

Mrs. Appledorn: Well, Klompen dancing is different from folk dancing. A lot of times there's that folk dancing which is done in your softer shoes that tells a story.

And the Klompen dancing that we have ^{it} is done ~~in~~ with the wooden shoes where the name comes from, "Klompen". We're wearing wooden shoes ~~and~~ it can tell a story, but many times it's done in formation. At school we have twelve girls that comprise one group. And they work in formation. Klompen dancing is done ^{with the} ~~in~~ wooden shoes which is where you get your name from. Cause you get the klomping sound.

S: Yea, um, let's see, well you mentioned that you do it in wooden shoes. Does this hurt your feet?

A: These girls start conditioning very early like right now I'm working with an exhibition group. These are the girls that help me, why I'm skipping on to this just a minute is because I'm going to say how these girls condition themselves, these girls ^{help} ~~help~~ me to teach the newer ones ~~that~~ ^{comin} in.

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Starting to
We start after the first of the year. ^ Strengthen up
feet and leg muscles and things of this type. Otherwise
you would run into a lot of injuries. Under their
wooden shoes they wear many pairs of socks. Some girls
try to find out how many ^{pairs} they can get under there, but
the average I ~~would~~ imagine is maybe around , oh, I would
say ~~about~~ six pairs. They wear six pairs of any kind
of socks underneath, many times sweat socks you know
like your white sweat socks or gym socks, crew socks,
but they're always covered with a black pair of socks.
These pad the feet. If I had a pair of wooden shoes
here you know I could show you, but where you would get
sore is right at the top of your feet. and these pad the
feet. But they are conditioned, these girls have their
feet conditioned and their legs conditioned. Very much so,
they start right at the first of the year.

S: OK, um, let's see, now what is the purpose of Klompen
dancing, like you mentioned it doesn't really ^{necessarily} tell a story
but do they do it ^{like for} ~~on~~ a special holiday?

A: They do it during Tulip time. And over in the Netherlands
you will still see, you will still see people ~~over~~ in the
Netherlands wearing wooden shoes like around the dykes and
places where they're around the water and like this,
otherwise they [']are as modern as we are. But I guess it
does come from a traditional dance that ~~has~~ been done in the

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Netherlands, not this exact dance, but it has been done,
like many, many years ago they did wear a lot of wooden shoes
to protect their feet from the moisture in the Netherlands
and I believe that's where it did come from.

S: Yea that's interesting. O.K., um, now do you know ^{about what like the}
kind of costumes they wear for Klompen dancing?

A: Yes, I do not have the names of them ^{here} right now but
at the present time we have 10 costumes, authentic costumes,
~~that~~ ^{of} from the different provinces in the Netherlands. Now
these people over there do not dress in these costumes,
but if you would go over there like maybe on holidays this
is the type of costume ^{that} they would wear. A Province is
what I understand is something like a State what we have
~~a~~ states over here and each one has different costumes.
We have 10 different ones. There are 2 boys, 2 different
boys costumes, and there are 8 different girls costumes.
They are made right to the $\frac{1}{4}$ inch almost I mean hems and
everything have to be so far off the ^{top of the} wooden shoe. There
can be no zippers in the costumes it ^{is} all ~~has to be~~ done
with hooks and eyes and ties. These ^{girls} ~~all~~ go through
inspection every year even though that they've had their
costumes say they're seniors they have to go through
it just like the sophomores do. But they are authentic
and they keep adding to them maybe oh, once every two
years, I think we got a brand new one in I think it was
last year or ^{just a couple} ~~maybe 2~~ years ago

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They come from different provinces over there.

S: Oh, wow, that's neat. You mentioned that you had boy's costumes, too. Do both men and women Klompen dance?

A: The high schools are where we get our dancers from, like 10th through 12th grade, ^{it was} always before ~~we had~~ just girls. ~~The girls~~ had taken the boys parts. It is still this way, but there's that change in things in previous years like for instance the way this all got started was like when girls were starting to enter boys sports and different activities in school, all right then we got some boys that said okay, we're going to go out for Dutch dancing. Well, how it started out was sort of like a lark but its not that way any more. It's very difficult to learn and these boys are really enjoying it. At the present time, last year I had 270 dancers at Holland High. This is just at Holland High, though, when we get downtown, we have 4 different schools that enter it. The next largest is West Ottawa, I believe. Anyway ^{there's} ~~its~~ Holland Christian and West Ottawa I'm not sure. Anyway Holland High ^{usually} has the most dancers. They were the original ones that started it. So we don't have as many boys but last year we had 6 boys from Holland High that danced. THERE seemed to be more ^{and more} all the time. At first there was maybe 2 dancers then Maybe we had 4 boy dancers then now

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~~this~~^{last} year we had 6 boy dancers. But normally ^{and make average} its the girls that take the boys parts.

S: So over in Holland they did have like men and women.

Is like a partner dance?

A: Yes, it's very much ^{of} a partner dance

S: Oh, I see. OK, um, oh yea, who taught you how to Klompen dance?

A: The Klompen dance I learned from JULIE Keefer. She had had dancing, she was in charge of it for 10 years, 9 or 10 years at Holland High. I got my position because when she stepped out of it there wern't a lot of ^{other} people that wanted it. It is known as "The Job". It leads into a big hassle, It has to be about the biggest group, the biggest ^{coming} ~~get~~ together after school. And no one really wanted to get into this, I was a professional dancer. and I used to teach dancing too. So this sort of qualified me ~~for~~ to go in. And I guess because my last name is Appledorn. ^{My name} ~~It~~ used to be White. I guess that qualified me for it, I don't know. I did learn through it, and I worked with the girls, I worked with the girls to learn it. The first year was a transition year that went between Mrs. Keefer and myself and she gave me some of the ways that she did it and since then I've taken over I've done a lot her way and ~~xxxxxxx~~ added a few, but not a few new things to the dance but on how youre going to teach it, how youre going to organize it.

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But the dance has remained the same for quite a few years and I cannot quote how many years. I think Tulip time in Holland, I think we're going into our 49th year. I could be wrong but I think it is. I think it's our 49th year we're going into. This Klompen dancing has not been the same for 49 years but for a long time. They used to have a different dance every year. Actually what our dance is it's 3 dances and theres a break in between each one. And it lasts exactly 15 minutes. And this is done all during Tulip Time and ^{also my} ~~there's an~~ exhibition group goes out and does it. They have different times during the year.

S: Oh, well then like they used to do a different dance every year. Do they get these from Holland or do they create the~~se~~ here in Holland, Michigan?

A: They created them here probably in Holland, Michigan but I imagine some of the steps ~~like~~ for instance I've gone back in the records and there has been steps like OH theres like a windmill step, thers a waltz step but its done a certain way in your wooden shoes. There's like different names for ^{all the} different steps I should them, and I know them when I'm teaching them and I'll know them at the first of the year but for some reason I can't think of them right now. But they basically many of the steps we~~er~~ used

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I imagine it did come down from there if you'd like to know some more on that you could check with Betty Dick. Or there's a lady by the name of ^{Ginny Borgman} Jenny Boardman, a physical teacher at Holland High. She did a lot of the original work on many of these.

S: Gee, that's interesting. You mentioned that you were a professional dancer before.

A: I taught more than I was a professional dancer.

S: Ballet or modern or what?

A: I taught ballet, tap, modern jazz. Now modern jazz is not like modern dance. It's a lot like the dancing that you would see on TV. It's sort of fits in between disco and modern dancing. I taught about every kind of dancing you know like acrobatic and acrobatic dancing, which is like gymnastics. and things of this type. That's what I did before. Now I work with the hearing impaired so I... I work with the hearing impaired ^{children} up at Jefferson School ages 2½ up to about 6 and I work with high school girls in Klompen dancing.

S: Hum, that's interesting. Um, let's see, what else did we want to ask you. Oh yes, are there any Klompen steps that are hard to learn?

A: They're not really all that difficult to learn ^{but} it takes a lot of endurance to do it, an awful lot of strength. This is why we start practicing so early. We start as I said before right after the first of the year and

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they learn maybe a couple steps a night until spring vacation then right after spring vacation the ones that know it come in and we dance, and we practice out at one of the big parking lots at ^{Holland} a high school. I would say they aren't all that difficult, maybe they are just some of the dances but I would say they aren't all that intricate or all that difficult. I would say it takes more stamina to do some of them like the high kicks. High kicks are very very important in this. And keeping together, Are you girls from out of town? Have you seen any of the dances? OK it has to be done very uniformly, everything together. It's quite something to see. We have it down on 8th street, we have like... all told we have around Tulpi time around 800 to 1000 dancers. Around the park we have about 6 or 700 dancers. We go all the way around Centennial park and I just cannot give you an exact number.

S: So you really dance a long time?

A: Right, yes, and all during tulip time these girls dance. I have great respect for them because these girls are involved in band, see we don't make them choose at Holland High. At Holland Christian I think it is and I don't know about West Ottawa, but at Holland Christian they make the girls, like if they are in Dutch dancing like if they are in the parade or something they cannot dance on the street afterwards, well ours do it. Now

ours do both, they are quick change artists. They keep their costumes at the Methodist Church or at the, oh, this center that's right over...it's the Christian youth center that's right behind the Methodist Church. They are very Christian girls. They keep their costumes there or at friends houses and they quick change between band costumes and Dutch costumes and things of this type plus they are also out for athletics at this time, too. I have a lot of respect for these girls because they sure do a lot, they sure do an awful lot. And work veru hard.

S: That seems like a lot of work.

A: Well it is for instance I do the dance in slacks or shorts and tennis shoes, but you have to realize what they are doing it in, they're doing it in wooden shoes, all the socks, they have got petticoats, long skirts and aprons, shawls, lace hats. The boys, their costumes aren't quite as intricate. ~~They~~ They wear the slacks or the pants type and the jacket, but they are doing it with wooden shoes and everything else on. If you hit really hot days it's really something. These girls are just exhausted. Well last year, I have to tell you this, last year we had it, it was just before the big parade, on Saturday. We started from two different areas. I started one group from Pine and 8th and somebody else started another group from down by Kollens Park and the group that I had there was no grass to get off on or

anything else like there is at Kollen Park. So the girls were waiting to walk down the street. Some of them were sitting on the road or they were laying on the road. Anyway I had this blow horn and I was saying "As soon as you girls finish here I want you to go out and get Gatorade." Well they know I'm always a big pusher of Gatorade because a lot of the tennis players drink it and this sort of thing. And so just kiddingly I said go out and get Gatorade. You know it was just sort of a passing thing, I said this will put everything back into you that you've lost while you were dancing and I went to buy Gatorade afterwards and there was not a bottle or can left in the whole city of Holland. I tried four different places. They just couldn't believe the big run on Gatorade. I could probably get sued. I can see it now, Klompen dancers drink Gatorade. S; You should put in an advance order on Gatorade at your supermarket.

A: It was just all sold out everywhere I went. They kept saying, "Oh these Klompen dancers keep coming in and getting Gatorade"

S: How much do the shoes weigh? Do you know?

A: I don't know how much they weigh, they try to make them out of a lighter wood. I could not even guess how much they weigh. (She takes off her shoe.) Probably

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about the weight of an average shoe. But you see you have so many sox under them and girls have all the pattiadoats and the long skirts and then if it rains then everything is soaking wet so it feels like you are carrying great weight on your feet.

S: It seems like they would be so heavy, it seems like they would slip off, too.

A: What keeps them on is the sox and they really aren't that uncomfortable to wear. I get in them towards the end closer to tulip time particularly when I was learning so that I could know what I was telling them and what I was asking them to do and to know how it felt. For ~~example~~ example, when I told them to kick over their head I wanted to know that it was really possible to kick over your head. Last year I had one of my dancers in emergency^{ward}. She kicked herself in the head with her own wooden shoe.

S: Oh my gosh!

A: This was not good and Mrs. Dick said "I told you, Barb, not to have your girls kick so high." But it slipped off the front of her foot and ~~it~~ ^{it} hit her right in the head and it was a group of 10th graders. I had told these girls, no matter what happens, keep dancing. Well, I really didn't mean bodily injury. I meant like sometimes a hat might fall off or something. But what they did is they pulled her and her partner off to

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the side. She was faint. They pulled her to the side and they kept dancing.

S: Well, the show must go on, right?

A: They said, "Well you told us to keep dancing."

S: That reminds me of one of my dance recitals.

Do you have any young kids dancing or any older people dancing?

A: Like our Klompen dancers its a tradition they dance between 10th and 12th grade. They do not dance before. Now, that's as far as this dance goes it is all high school. But in Holland there is an elementary group that does dance. Also in the past few years they have started a group which does the same dance we do. They are alumni dancers. And they come back and they have a very large group of them now. That's why were close to almost 1000 dancers now. Because last year they had a large group of alumni dancers. Now these are girls like theyve done this dance and it sort of gets to you. It's very much a tradition. OK when you once learn it