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Pott, Clare Oral History Interview:
Sesquicentennial of Holland, "150 Stories for 150 Years"

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Oral History Interview with Clare Pott

Conducted November 6, 1996 by Ann Weller

Sesquicentennial Oral History Project
"150 Stories for 150 Years"
A W: Is your name Clare or is it Clarence?

CP: It was Clarence, but when I got to school, I changed it to Clare.

A W: So you were always known as Clare.

CP: Yes, that is right.

A W: Where were you born?

CP: I was born in Grand Rapids, 71 years ago.

A W: Do you have brothers and sisters?

CP: I had two sisters, one is deceased and the other still lives in the Holland area, both school teachers like myself.

A W: And your parents, what did they do?

CP: My mother in those days, of course, homemaker stayed home. You know how that goes. My father used to be with insurance. But he became the financial agent for the Holland Christian Schools, which he stayed in for some 37, 38 years. In those days, and it still happens, as a private school, the money has to be collected for tuition and so forth. So you might say he was the treasurer of Holland Christian Schools at that time.

A W: And his name was?

CP: William. That's my middle name.

A W: So he would be familiar to people in Holland.
CP: Yes, very much so. Maybe not today, because he’s been gone 30 years. But in those
days, he was quite well known, yes.

AW: Tell me a little bit about your wife and children and where you all have lived.

CP: We are stayed people. We have lived in our present house for some 40 years. I
taught for 41 of those in the Holland Christian Schools and worked at the Holland
Sentinel. But, I lived the Holland area. My two sons married and live in Grand
Rapids. My one son is an assistant principal in Ada Christian School and the
daughters-in-law are teachers. The other son is in management with Dayton-Hudson,
the Target Corporation. They live in Grand Rapids. I have four grandchildren and
three of the four attend school, ranging from 16 all the way down to three years old.
My wife, Gayle, is a Holland native as well.

AW: Growing up as a child in Holland, what do you remember about life then? What kind
of place was it?

CP: Well, as you are going to hear, Holland in those days was much simpler. The
boundaries were much more established then they are now. We were pretty much of
one mind, being in the Dutch ethnic community. Like I said, things were simpler.
We walked to school. We came home for lunch at noon and walked back. School
ended at 11:45 and you had to back at 1:15, so almost everyone of us at the
neighborhood school, whether it be public or private, could walk to school and come
home for lunch. As I remember, we always had the warm meal at noon. That was
our dinner. The mother was able to do that because we had that hour and a half.
Now of course, dinners are almost all in the evening unless you are retired. So, we
got our nourishment in the middle of the day. Sometimes I think that is better. At any rate, it was simpler. When you talk to somebody relating to the city, you almost always knew that they were of the same heritage you were and they all had somebody coming from the Netherlands or wherever. Also, at that time, churches were either Christian Reformed, perhaps, or Reformed. A few were Presbyterian or so, but other than that, our faiths were pretty much the same too. In the long run, I would say that life was simpler. I remember every morning my mother would walk to the corner grocery store and the meat market and get the meat for the day, come home and cook the meal. The next day, then, she would go at it again. We walked to the meat market, we walked to church, we walked to schools. I guess that there were people who probably lived without cars. Basically simpler.

AW: It sounds from what you said that your family was involved in a church.

CP: Yes. We attended a Christian Reformed Church. We attended the same church for 70 years, but we just left that church half a year ago, for changes and so forth. Yes. My family was active in the church. My father was leader in the choir and mother sang in it. My sister sang in it. Yes, we were very active in the church.

AW: What kinds of jobs did young people have in those days?

CP: Well, I can only relate to myself. My first job, between college and high school, was for 20 cents an hour. I worked for one of the well-known hardware stores in this town. Twenty cents an hour - we got a raise at one time, I guess for about 2 cents. There weren't carry-outs in the big grocery stores, because we didn't have those big grocery stores. We worked in stores, hardware stores. I know this, some of my
friends had newspapers routes. I sold magazines too, "Ladies Home Journal," "Country Gentleman," as I remember. We would probably, on a ten-cent magazine, make two cents or something. We had those kind of jobs, but not as I remember, carry-out in the grocery stores. Of course, we didn’t have cars. We didn’t have to make money to put gas in the car. Basically, the jobs were on the simple variety.

AW: How about sports? Were you in sports?

CP: I played tennis. I was of course, active as an administrator of sports because I was Athletic Director of Holland Christian for some 35 years. In those days, of course, basketball was king (or football if you had football). There was no soccer, no women’s sports whatsoever. So, the students, I think from the standpoint of sports, did everything on their own. Today everything is organized. You belong to Little League, this soccer or that football team. In those days, we organized our own teams and went across town and played a group of some other boys from some other neighborhood. Like I said, women were not involved at all in sports. At any rate, today everything is so organized. You have to sign up in order to play. I hate to overuse the word simple, but it was simpler in those days. You didn’t have to belong to an organization to have fun. You made your own fun; you created your own fun. The games, you may remember that too, we used to play hide-and-go-seek with the neighborhood kids. We used to play run-chief-run or we used to play kick-the-can. We made our own fun. Today, you have to be in some program.

AW: Are there particular remembrances you have of the classes you went to as a child or particular teachers, maybe you remember?
CP: I ended up being a mathematics teacher. I think that so often happens probably due to the mathematics teachers that I had. I enjoyed math. I like the logical and the orderliness of mathematics. I related to a mathematics teacher. I think that we got a well-rounded education. Sometimes I kind of hate myself for not doing more with music, not that I am musically inclined. But that’s an area that I am so weak in. I wish that I’d had somebody who had prodded me in that area. Other teachers, in those days, we went to Catechism classes on Saturday morning, our day off. We didn’t do like we did now, attend after the service or during the service. In those days, we went to catechism classes. It was very demanding of us, by the teacher or minister that you knew your questions and answers, whatever you believed in. We gave up part of our time to go to catechism. Sunday School was still on Sunday. Yes, I remember teachers from catechism; I remember teachers from Sunday School. I think that every student today remembers some teacher in a good light, I hope.

AW: Any particular names that come to mind?

CP: Well, the mathematics teacher is no longer living, but his name was Tuls, Mr. John Tuls. We talked about him just the other day. I think if someone were to sit in my class and he were to sit there, you would see that I probably patterned my teaching after his in mathematics. Today, as I substitute in schools, I see that the teaching is somewhat different. When I do substitute, I always say, "Okay, I will be there but let me do it my way." My way was the lecture-explanation method. Today, it's not all unusual to walk in class where the students are sitting in a circle and they’re more or less helping each other with the tough problems. I guess that’s fine. We could all
learn from each other, but what happens, I feel at least, the better students take the lead and the weaker students sit more withdrawn in the corners. Maybe they don't learn as much. I don't know, we all go with what works for us. But there are some big changes in education.

AW: I think that you told me that you went to Calvin College.

CP: Yes I did. Then I took some courses at the University of Michigan. I spread it around, a little bit. But, I spent a summer or two at the University of New Hampshire. I went to school there under the National Science Foundation, as many of us did in science and mathematics, which was a real experience. Aside from the mathematics teaching, you became exposed to the New England culture, which was just wonderful. I did not finish there to get the master's - an illness in my father and mother - so I could not go back that summer after that. But nevertheless, yes, Hope, Calvin, University of Michigan, Michigan State, and the University of New Hampshire were schools that I went to after Calvin College.

AW: What was your first job after you graduated from college?

CP: My first job, after I left, was in 1948 when I became assistant city editor and sports editor at the Holland Sentinel. If I mention some of those names, like Mr. French who was the owner and publisher, and Mr. Butler were the owners and publishers of the Holland Evening Sentinel, those would make good news for the Archives. At any rate, I worked there for a couple of years. By happenstance, I was calling the superintendent of the Holland Christian Schools in August to find out whether he had his teachers for the year. I was going to write a story on it at the Sentinel. He said,
"I need a math teacher." So I said, "Maybe you better hire me," very off-handedly. We both laughed and two days later he called me and said, "Did you mean that?" I said, "Oh, I don't know. We all have secret desires, I guess." He said, "Why don't you come and talk to us?" I did, and he made it interesting for me. I became a mathematics teacher and I stayed there 41 years. Then at the Sentinel, I still continued to write sports for them on a part-time basis, covering various schools. But, my first job was the Holland Evening Sentinel.

AW: How did you happen to go there? How did that come about?

CP: My wife was in the Society Department and the Proofreading Department at the Sentinel. I was going with her at the time and she worked there. I'd stop in to pick her up from time to time, they'd say, "Hey, we need a job here." Randy Vande Water, whom you probably know, was the editor at the time. Now Randy has continued some of this. He stayed with the Sentinel longer than I did. That is how I really became acquainted with the Holland Sentinel, it was through my wife. She stayed there a good number of years after I went into teaching.

AW: I know that you were there a relatively short time, but from that time to this, how do you see the changes in the Sentinel?

CP: Oh, just monumental. I think what has happened today at the Holland Sentinel is that you have a good number of people who are probably qualified in journalism, I won't say anything about that, but they don't have, in many respects, a feel for the Holland area. I noticed many misspellings of local names of years past. I noticed that the historical perspective is not there with the people that are this time. I suppose that
happens with lots of places. But to me, that's the big change. My wife was saying
the other day when she was reading it, (she's probably more careful about it that I
am), how the use of some ministers in town or the family name is being murdered in
the spelling department. I think that's been a big change. *The Holland Sentinel* was
a family-owned concern. So in those days, it was very carefully run. Now today,
they are owned probably along with two or three other newspapers in the country,
and they just sort of follow their pattern. But, having worked there, yes, the changes
are mammoth.

AW: Now you mentioned, after the *Sentinel*, you went to Holland Christian. When was
Holland Christian founded, and what brought about its establishment?

CP: I think the school, as I can recollect, was founded in about 1923. Some of the Hope
College people, Dr. DeGraff, and Dr. Walters, and Dr. Ten Hoor, and Mrs. Jellema,
were former teachers at Holland Christian before they came to Hope College. It was
founded on the basis of religious principles. In other words, it is owned by parents.
It's a society for Christian Education. It is totally privately supported by tuition and I
guess you could call them, "mini-endowments." The parents put up the money, build
their own schools. But it was done out of religious principles, primarily Christian
Reformed. But I just read some figures the other day that there are 44 Christian
Reformed churches which sponsor it, but there are students there from some 25
Reformed churches in the area and maybe another 20 other churches, like some
Catholic and so forth. But basically, it was born out of, they felt, a religious need -
that there had to be some religious instruction in the schools. It's thriving - it's not
without its struggles, but it’s been around over 70 years.

AW: Where was it situated first?

CP: At one time, the old school where I went, was on the corner of Central Avenue and 16th Street. There’s that little mini-mall there and the school has burned down. But that’s where it was situated. Then about 5 blocks up the street, towards 25th Street was the first high-school. It has now become an apartment house. I don’t know if you are familiar with the pink house in Holland, but that was at one time, the first high school building. Now the complex is very impressive, on 40th Street and Ottawa Avenue, where there’s a middle school, there’s a high school, there’s a grade school, and there’s a grade school on south 40th Street. There’s a grade school north of town in the Rose Park area. They have about 2500 students, which is rather static. The high school is 900 plus. I think, being prejudiced, that you get a good education there.

AW: Someone had mentioned to me that they thought one of the sites was where Evergreen Commons is now.

CP: It was. Mr. Prince was a supporter of Holland Christian Schools. Incidentally, Mrs. Prince is my cousin. Elsa and Ed Prince bought the old Holland Christian High School and Middle School and turned it into Evergreen Commons. So when I drive past it, my old room, now remodeled, is where I did a lot of my teaching at that time. But, the Princes took that over and remodeled it and made the senior center out of it, which is wonderful.

AW: Just to add to the story, she’s your cousin from your mother’s side?
CP: My father's side. Mrs. Prince's mother, who is now 95 and lives in Freedom Village, and my father were brother and sister. My father came here when he was 17 years-old, from the Netherlands. The rest of the family came a little later. But his two sisters, Mrs. Zwiep, is Elsa's mother. Elsa's name is Elsa Zwiep. She and my other aunt live in Freedom Village. One is 94 and the other is 95. Both from my father's side.

AW: Well, I would like to know a little bit more about the high school and your teaching time there. What was it like for you, and how would you describe the changes that you saw in the time that you were there?

CP: Well, when you go through, I should say you work your way through, there are different administrations, different superintendents, different principals and so forth. To me, the joy of teaching, aside from the subject matter, but the joy of teaching is the kids. I still go back to substitute. My fun comes in rapping with the kids and seeing their eyes light up when they get a particularly tough algebra problem solved and you think that maybe you have had a little help in it. To me, if you are going to be a teacher and you don't care for kids, then I think that you best pound nails or do something else because that's where the fun is. Everybody has to have fun at their work. When I retired, living and well at the time, and still am, blessed with health, I did not feel that after 41 years that I really wanted to quit. I think that's a tribute to the kids. They have changed some. I think that through the years, (there are good students and there are bad students still today, some who don't apply themselves), I think that if there is one area where there's been a big change is that students demand
more accountability then they used to. They don’t just blindly accept what you say. I think where I deviate with my colleagues--school has become much more causal. The dress is more casual. Whether it is better or worse, I don’t know. The teachers’ dress is more causal. That’s where I part with them. I still (whether that’s good or bad), dress in a shirt and tie. I feel that one of the ways to impart to students that education is very important is how we talk, and how we act, and how we dress. I don’t want to go to school as a teacher, and still one of their leaders, wearing beach wear or shorts. I think that they have to know that the world says that the way you dress also tells you something. I want them to see that. Not all my colleagues agree with that. I could argue with them, but at any rate, the dress is much more casual. The language that the kids use--you’ve got to grow up with that. Just the other day, somebody wanted to borrow some money from me at school, and I said, how about 2 bits? He didn’t know what two bits meant. Some of the words which we thought in our day were slang and almost bordering profane, today have become part of the vocabulary. So, that has changed. But, kids are still good students and you still have to treat them like you used to treat them. But when the door closes, I guess I was boss of my classroom. I think that still holds true today. But we had wonderful kids in those days, and we have wonderful kids today. One of the joys of teaching, is to hear from them periodically. Yesterday, I got a note from somebody saying they use their math everyday. One of the real joys is to hear from students. It’s a little disturbing at my age to walk downtown and have students say hello to you. They are pushing a baby buggy, and you can probably recall where they sat in your class but
you can't recall their name. But they are pretty understanding in that respect.

AW: Well, there are a lot more of them then there are of you.

CP: That's right. They only had to look at me, but I had to remember all of them. That's true with every teacher.

AW: Did the curriculum change over time?

CP: Yes, mathematics is changing rapidly, and it has gone through various changes in my area. But the whole curriculum has changed. The schools now think that they have to be all things to all people. We used to teach the core subjects and the rest were taught at home. Holland Christian High School had quite a battle on its hands at one time with state accrediting agencies because we stuck with a rather core curriculum. They felt that we should teach home economics, and sewing, and things of that nature to our students to be accredited. But we kind of withstood that and said, we still think that we are giving them the basics. There were some battles over it. But today, my wife was just saying to me, that one of the schools in the area, in the phys ed classes, buy skis for the kids. They can use the school's skis. You can see what happens to millages when those kinds of things happen. But the curriculum, yes, is much broader. Then of course, is the advent of computers. When we used to go to conventions, lecturers used to say to us, "Well, in a few years everyone of your students will having a calculator or computer at their desk," we would sort of smile and say, yeah. But, that has happened. My grandchildren at 6, 7 and 4 years old probably know as much about the computer as I do. Just like putting a VCR on your television, they know that much better than we did. But, the curriculum is much
broader. Another thing, I think, we haven’t noticed it quite as much in the private schools as in the public sector. This must not be taken in the wrong way, but I think that 40 or 50 years ago, people taught because they were totally committed to doing what they wanted to do. I think today, there is still that commitment, of course, but teacher’s pay now is decent, the unions have done that. Consequently, it’s competitive. I think there are some teachers who think it’s a nice job; some look upon as a soft job. They say they go in it for three reasons. That’s June, July, and August (laughs). There are, I think, teachers in it who think that salary-wise it’s fine. I do think that there is a little loss of commitment when that happens.

AW: You mentioned that the parents really own the Christian Schools. Have you noticed differences in how they related to the schools when you first started at Holland Christian, or now. Or is it pretty much the same?

CP: Yes, the way of raising the money is much different. I think in the old days, maybe the commitment was a little stronger on the parents too, but the mother didn’t work. But today, with the advent of the larger curriculum and lots of other things that today’s culture demands, the tuition has sky-rocketed. It is not at all unusual for people in our type of school, whether it be in Holland or Grand Rapids or wherever, where they are paying 15, 16 thousand dollars to have their children educated annually. Well, a normal salary is tough, so the mother is out there working as well. Consequently, you become very committed when you are putting that much work and effort into sending them to those kinds of schools. So, yes, I think the money has become an object for the parents too. We have many, many mothers who have to
work or do some kind of part-time job to help pay the tuition. You hate to see this happen. The schools at one time were born out a need for some religious instruction in the school. But today, you could price people out of that kind of school. It eventually could happen that you could have a school of the elite on the order of the Detroit Country Day or the Ann Arbor Green Hills School and so forth. You would hate the have that happen. But it could happen. So the school has to provide ways to keep the tuition down and they've done that. But still, on our normal salaries, to come up with anywhere from six to fifteen thousand is a lot of money. I do think the commitment on the part of the parents, except for the very affluent, it's still "Listen, we want our children to get a good education; we believe in Christian education." By no means is the Holland Christian Schools or the schools of this type, a religious school. In no way. What I mean to say is that we believe that all instruction is given within the framework of God. We teach mathematics in those eyes; we teach history in that way; we teach English in that way, and so forth. But it isn't a matter of going to that school and you have a religion class for an hour and that's the end of it. We try to have christian emphasis permeate in every class.

AW: I think that you touched on this before about some of the changes in students dress and so on. Do you think that students today are more or less concerned with the communities, activism, religious involvement? How is that different?

CP: I think more so, much more so. Now I can only speak to the school that I worked in. But for graduation, one of the requirements is that there has to be a service requirement. I know that lady on my corner has her leaves raked, has her windows
washed. Whether they do that because it's a requirement, or whether it is born out of
a real love, it's hard to say at that age for young kids. But I do think that students
today want to be much more involved than they used to be. Just a little sidelight--I
say that often talking about dress. It used to kind of get under my skin that I would
be in class teaching math, which I thought was important. A student might be rather
sloppily dressed, although we do have a dress code, nevertheless, not like it used to
be. At any rate, sloppily dressed, maybe his shirt out of his pants, if he could get by
with it and so forth. Then a half hour after school, I would go to one of the grocery
stores and he's a carry-out boy and he's wearing shirt and a tie. That sort of
bothered me! We had good students then and we have good students today. It's still
nice to be a teacher.

AW: In the period of the 50s, 60s, when there was the start of the hippies, did you see any
of that?

CP: Yes we did. You cannot shut the world out of your school. Being parent-owned, you
could legislate more so than you can in public situations. But yes, you can't keep the
culture from permeating and getting in. Very, very minimal, but we did have a few
people who were in drugs. It's not a problem there, but it does come in.

Consequently, there had to be some measures taken in those areas. The types of
songs that students are interested in today are a lot different then the ones I used to be
interested in. The types of things they listen to, the types of plays and movies that
they might go to see are totally different. That too, has come into your school
system. One of the things in schools that are private according to a certain plan, face
is - years ago, when I taught and also in the 40s, 50s, and even late 30s when I went, is that parents were more of one mind. Today, parents are more cosmopolitan. Consequently, the same commitment might be there, but in a different sort of way. So you just can’t call up your neighbor across the street and say, "Are you going to let Sally, your daughter, do this and this?" They might say, "We think it’s fine." So, we don’t have the one-mindedness that we used to have.

AW: More diversity in many aspects?

CP: That’s right. Definitely. That is, I think, been a problem not only for the private school, but for schools too because they have to insist on their rules as well. So that’s a problem. The advent of drugs in the school systems today brings problems.

AW: Now what other problems, you just mentioned that you had other problems?

CP: Well, I think, maybe not so much in the administration of the schools, but in the paying for schools, public-wise as well, you can’t get by with a shell any more. You have to provide rooms in the school to be able to cook, to able to sew. You have marvelous phys ed facilities. You need a lot of property. In the public sector, there are millages. One of the things at a private school where I taught is that no one there is excused from accepting their civic responsibility also. You still pay the same taxes, you pay the same millage; you get no breaks. Consequently, a lot of these people, in many respects, are paying a double-shot. Now there is a matter of the voucher system that some people, particularly the movement of the Catholics, want parents to receive money from the state and send your kids where they want to go on the order of the charter school system. That’s fine, but I think that there are also
drawbacks with every dollar, comes some control. Consequently, if you want to accept state money, you may find some state regulations as well. The closest the Holland Christian Schools come, is that we do have a very fine lunch system. The government does supply some of the surplus food to them without stipulating, saying if you are going to do that, we’re going to make you teach this and this and this. That part has been kept out so far. When I say other problems, people even without private education, have a job paying for their schools. No question about it.

AW: This is kind of a minor issue, but I was intrigued when you said that Holland Christian had a dress code and it was different from an earlier dress code, or it evolved over time. Can you tell me what it was at one time and what it is now?

CP: Sure. As I said to you earlier, administrations change and new brooms come in a make changes, and principals changes and so on. Teachers change. At one time, blue jeans were not permitted in the Holland Christian Schools. They did not have a uniform, they simply said no blue jeans. That was refreshing. I think people from the outside and other schools kind of looked with envy at that happening, but as the culture changed somewhat and the principals changed. Blue jeans of course are standard dress now. But then what happens, you want to have the knee flipped down so you have a cut in the knees so that you can look a little sloppy. Then you have to legislate that. Then they say you can have blue jeans, but they have to be good looking blue jeans. Blue jeans are probably more expensive then some dress pants, which you probably know. Then how do say what’s dirty and what isn’t. Then there is the matter of shorts and girls’ dress particularly. How high may the shorts be and
so forth? You can’t be running around with a ruler all day long. But, at one time, for many years there were no blue jeans. We didn’t insist on ties or anything else, just being neat. But that has changed. If you walk there, I would like to think that you would notice a difference, but I am not sure. I think that you would see the same sloppy dress as you would other places. So, they succumbed in a way to their environments.

AW: Let’s talk a little bit about what you did as athletic director. How would talk about the role of sports in school?

CP: Well, my personal opinion, and I think it’s the philosophy of the private school, is that sports are a nice addendum to the curriculum, but in no way should it overtake what goes on in the school. We do have phys ed within the system as a requirement, which we think is good for the whole body, health-wise as well. But all of our athletics, we think, is in a proper perspective to the school curriculum. I for one believe it’s a wonderful thing for outlets for kids. But when I first started as athletic director, we had basketball, baseball, a little track, and of course tennis. Aside from that, that is all we had. We maybe had four or five teams and no women’s sports. We now have 28 teams. We have all the sports, with the exception of football. The reason that we don’t have football, if you know what I am saying, is that we hate to rob Peter to pay Paul to have one of the school sports cut so more people could go out for something else. We believe that at 28 teams, you can find a spot somewhere. I am very interested in football and so are a lot of people there at Holland Christian. But that is another financial obligation that you have to fulfill - your uniforms, your
transportation. I have to say this because we have already talked about Mr. Prince.

Before his death, Ed Prince gave the school (and he had done much for that school in
the way of buildings, Elsa too) they provided 5 vehicles - two 15-passenger buses,
two 22-passenger buses, and a 60-passenger bus, all in school colors for
transportation purposes. So, that’s another expense that the school didn’t have to pay
for. But athletics have changed. It is enjoyable to go to the Civic Center and see
2,500 people cheering for your team, and hopefully being good losers when that
happens. We’ve been blessed with good teams and that’s fine. Participation, at
Holland Christian as I remember it now, was probably 60 to 70%, which we feel is a
good outlet for students. But in no way did we let that overshadow our basic
curriculum. Our students do not leave early, unless they have a study hall, to go to
an athletic contest. Sometimes you have to bend a little bit. We are not a member of
a league; we are strictly independent. Consequently, we have some advantages and
disadvantages. Advantages are that we can play whom we want to and we don’t have
to play perennial weak sisters on the schedule. We can go out and we play
everybody from Traverse City to the north to Detroit Country Day to the east, to a
school in Lansing. We used to play East Lansing. We go south to St. Joe. We have
even been to South Bend. So you can do that as a non-league. On the other hand, if
you are in a league, the league makes your own schedules for you and you can play
every Friday night. The work of the athletic director is somewhat simpler because
the schedules are made and the officials are procured and everything for them. That
is not true in our school. There are advantages and disadvantages. But I think
generally they are happy with what’s what.

AW: At what point did you have organized girls’ sports and was there opposition to that?

CP: We were one of the forerunners of girls’ basketball, even under the old rules. I don’t know if you are familiar with that, but girls used to have six on their basketball team rather than five. We had teams on that basis. That was back in the late 1920s. But it was tough to find teams to play because not many schools had it. Then, in the 1950s and 1960s, we still had a girls’ basketball team and played a few other schools that did. But basically, I would say 12 years ago, 14, 15, something right in that area, did girls’ sports really become full-blown. No, there was not opposition to it. If there was opposition, it was a matter of how do we finance it? The problem is (I say this to you and I say this in a kind way), there were the comments made by parents of girls who were out for sports, they wanted to start at the top. In other words, if we have a girls’ basketball team, they should have all the uniforms that the boys have and so forth, pronto. That was tough to do. I think today in our school and the public schools around, they are accepted very well. I would have to say that our girls’ teams, in many respects, if you look at it on a win-loss basis, have been more successful than some of the boys’ team. But girls, by nature, were not always competitive. Early coaches and early girls’ teams were more social. When they played tennis, they didn’t play competitive tennis, they played social tennis. I can remember some of our early girls’ coaches, you would go to their practice to check and take a look and they’d be sitting in the middle of the floor and sort of chewing the fat. That’s not true any more. Hair dryers are now in the locker rooms for both
boys and girls. So those are things that change. I do think that it is still true, and
that may change eventually, there are probably more men coaching girls’ teams than
there are women coaching girls’ teams. It works out well. Just a little sidelight, when
we built our school in 1968-1970 with a huge gym, we anticipated what was
happening, we built it with a divider so the boys and girls wouldn’t see each other
when they were in phys ed class. We never used the divider because kids accepted
each other. Kids, I think, are much more adaptable than we adults are anyway.
They accepted that without any problems. We have no dividers that are used or
anything else. Every school had to have a private shower in the girls’ locker room
for those who were a bit shy. (tape ends)

AW: Were there any outstanding victories that occurred or special athletic events that come
to mind?

CP: Well, I guess sad to say sometimes, you measure on the wrong standards; you kind of
measure your success on wins and losses. Through our history, I guess I would have
that at my fingertips, through our history, we have about 8 or 9 state championships
in various sports. I happened to coach tennis and basketball. We had four in tennis,
state championships. Some our toughest competition came from the Lansing area.
Mason, for one, was a always very good in tennis. Now Okemas has become
outstanding in tennis and soccer. We have won state championships in tennis. We’ve
won it in basketball, although it has been 60 years ago, 1934 and 1935. We’ve won
swimming championships; we’ve won soccer championships, we’ve won softball
championships. One of the outstanding things is that our girls’ softball team had an
outstanding pitcher, her name is Kathy Arendsen. She has received national acclaim as a pitcher, just an outstanding pitcher. She is now 30 some years old, but she is a native of Zeeland, attended Holland Christian and was at one time, recognized as the nation’s outstanding woman softball pitcher. She used to coach softball at Yale and now coaches at Southern Mississippi, I believe, girls’ softball. Just an outstanding person. But yes, any time you move through the tournaments, state-wide, they are exciting. I still follow our teams as much as possible. We follow University of Michigan football almost every Saturday. We follow Hope College, Calvin College, and of course, Holland Christian - I guess that comes first. So we remain very active in athletics. Yes, anytime you win a championship in a sport for the first time, it’s exciting. You have a whole new group of parents who become involved. You have the soccer parents, you have tennis parents, you have swimming parents, basketball parents. I think that is good. You get a whole new group of people involved and they’re excited too. But I guess through the years, basketball is probably still king. Somebody told me last week that they bought season tickets to Holland Christian basketball in 1949, the first time they could and they still sit in the same seat at the Holland Civic Center. That is loyalty, no question about it. Yes, a lot of outstanding memories of athletics at Holland Christian. I remember as a child 1934 when we won our first basketball championship. That has eluded us since then. Though we have won many regionals, there was a time when Holland Christian as a school in the state, and there 714 high schools, had won more district and more regional basketball championships than any school. So, all the marks aren’t made in the classroom.
There are marks made outside too. I think we have sort of kept it (I don’t know if my wife thinks that we have always kept it in perspective) but we have always kept athletics at arm’s length from the standpoint of the curriculum as well.

AW: Do you remember students that you taught in your math classes, whose names we might recognize in Holland today or who have gone on to teach?

CP: That is a tough question.

AW: You mentioned Larry before.

CP: Yea, I had Larry in class, Larry Wagenaar. An associate of mine at Holland Christian High School was Dr. Robert Heyns. He is a year or two older, we went to school together. Dr. Heyns is now deceased. But he was the chancellor at the University of California at Berkeley under President Reagan, who at that time was governor. My uncles, except for one, were teachers. The one uncle was the Dean of the Literature of Science and Arts at the University of Michigan. He was a German instructor. So, I guess that it has kind of been in my blood. Last year, towards the end of the year, I got a call from Washington. He was a student of mine. His name was David Leep. His parents still live in Holland. He worked with one of the big airplane factories on the west coast. I don’t know if that is McDonnel Douglas or whatever. He was calling me to say that he is working in the aircraft plant. He is very high up in the echelon there. So, you do hear from them. Just so I don’t overlook anybody, I better be careful with that question. But they are countless. That is one of the joys of teaching, no question about it.

AW: Lots of people out there balancing their checkbooks and doing their everyday math
because they learned it school.

CP: True, they probably do it a different way than I used to do it. They punch in on the computer now. But, that was another thing that teachers coming up in my age group—we had to become accustomed to the computer era too. Now I see today that it is different again. You can hardly buy a computer and not have it outdated within the next few weeks. Maybe not a wealthy or affluent person, but the joys of teaching are immeasurable. But if you don't like it, don't stay in it. It is bad for the student and it is bad for you.

AW: Moving away from the schools for a minute, what qualities seem to stand out for you about Holland? Do you see any drawbacks of life here or what would be the positive aspects of it?

CP: At one time, I thought that the positive aspects of Holland were the fact that we were one-minded in many respects. Our heritages were the same; our religious beliefs were close or similar. You could relate to people that you knew. Of course the town had 20,000 people in it. The boundaries weren't there. At one time, I thought that was a very secure feeling. Now of course, we have several ethnic groups here, which, like growing pains any place, brings some problems. I don't lay that at the foot of any one group, but as the town expands, and you have to take care of a different culture in either your churches or in the legislation in the town, that does bring some problems. It bring problems in housing, it brings problems in the city regulations. People who are used to something different, today the city has to make adjustments or do something about it. Core cities, as far as churches are concerned--
we all used to walk to church, now there are very few people in the church who do that. They take their cars. We have two mega-churches in Holland which we did not have before. It also meant that when you have mega-churches, some churches pay the price. I happen to go to a church that has paid that price. Another church two blocks up the street, a Reformed church has paid that price. I think in the last years, three or four churches either have merged or paid the price of the mega-church. Now the mega-church is great, as you grow, you have much more talent. You can have bigger choirs and can afford to do more things. On the other hand, people that now attend some of these churches can get lost easily too. You can be a member and not a member. So that has changed as Holland has changed. It used to be, this is maybe more religious than you want it to be, but it used to be that you knew that in your neighborhood, there would be no lawn-mowing, there would be no clothes hanging on the line, there would be no window washing on Sunday. The sabbath was kept as the rest of the town did. That’s not true any more. Sometimes you have to bite your tongue. On the other hand, you have to realize that diversity is also good. I wouldn’t be one to run it down. I’m just saying that if we all make the proper laws and regulations, we should all abide by them, whether it be those of one heritage or one ethnic group or another. But yes, growing pains are good but can also be a problem. Then, of course, when you get to be this age you get nostalgic. But I still think that it was nice and it was fun when you walked to the corner store and got your meat for the day. We used to chase the ice truck. We didn’t have refrigerators. They would come through the streets with ice trucks. You would put a card in your
window whether you wanted 50, 75, or 100 pounds. We would stand in the back of the truck so when he would chip the ice, we would get pieces of ice. To me, that still is immense in my memory. That was great; we did that with the neighborhood kids. We walked to church. Then you would see your neighbors. Then you would walk home from church. I know that sometimes Holland is painted as a very closed group. I don't look upon it that way. But it may sound that way. But what we might do on the sabbath day was not always what you can do today. My children do many more things on Sundays than I ever were permitted to do or did. That doesn't necessarily mean it is wrong, but it's a change. As you get older, you have to get used to that. Not that we are right necessarily, I think that we are right in some things (laughs). But nevertheless, that does make for some stress and other things.

Holland is coming up with its 150th anniversary. I remember the 100th at Riverview Park, which is now no longer there. If you're new to town, Riverview Park is where Hope and Holland High School used to play their football games. It is right on the waterfront, but that is gone now. There's a little field there, but the stadium is down. So, yes, you can look with nostalgia at an awful lot of things. I think that as the town got bigger, the problems became bigger. But we also became, even though I talked about being one-minded before, less one-minded. That is good for all of us too. Some of my friends are of other ethnic groups now. My wife volunteers in the program at Hope College with tutoring some from other cultures. We never had that opportunity before, but it's there now. I tutor math to whomever. That opportunity is now open to me too.
AW: How's retirement been for you?

CP: Retirement is fine. I've always lived a very busy life as a teacher and as athletic director. There are days when I look at the phone and say, "Phone, ring! Talk to me!" There are other days that I wish that the phone didn't ring. Just as an example...last week we were gone six nights, either family or church or school. Some people say we are busier than we used to be and that's true. But you now can be as busy as you want to be - your job doesn't demand that. I substitute only at Holland Christian. I don't do it as a living. I don't substitute to make more money, that isn't it. I do it because I like to be close. But when they call in the morning and say so-and-so is out, could you substitute, I have the option to say yes or to say no. That is a good feeling. If you're blessed with health and strength which we have been, that adds to your retirement. We do travel, but never more than 10 days or two weeks at a time. Then your grandkids draw you, activities at church or school draw you. But we've done a lot more of that. We've never been at areas of color in the fall during schooltime, because I was teaching. But now we've been down south, we've been north for that, and that's wonderful. I think, with retirement, and this maybe is good or maybe isn't good to mention, but when you retire and you're both living, you now think more as two of you than you do one. You say, "Shall we go here?" It used to be "Well, I have to go here," or "I have to do this," and your family is home, and your wife is home with the kids. But now, you think with the two of you, "Shall we go to this concert, or shall we go to this program, or sports contest? Shall we stay overnight?" We can do that. So that is different. But
retirement is fine. However, if you have the energy, I don’t like to get out of what I’ve been doing so quickly. I stayed until I was sixty-five, and there are some who can’t wait until their sixty and they’re counting the days until that happens. That hasn’t been true for me. I still love what I did and would continue to do it if I were physically able to do everything. I don’t look down my nose at retirement.

AW: Sounds like you found a balance for keeping in touch with education.

CP: Yes, and it does take a while to do that. Like I mentioned about the telephone, when you’ve been sort of in a leadership role, when that ends, you better be able to handle that. On the other hand, I think you’ve got to prepare for that before it happens. That you don’t just all of a sudden retire in June, and then wonder why you’re not called or whatever. You have to think about that before. I think that’s true with your lifestyle and your finances, too. We’ve always had a good financial situation, and my lifestyle accommodated that. But don’t expect that all of a sudden now that you’re retired it’s going to be a lot better. That doesn’t happen. You’ve got to prepare for that. On the other hand, I have no complaints. If you prepare properly, I know that I won’t be doing the things I never did before, in many respects. But it hasn’t dropped off either. In some ways it’s been better. We eat out an awful lot. (laughs)

AW: You take part in HASP?

CP: Yes, I do take part in HASP, and I enjoy meeting with like-minded people sometime. You go to a few church meetings, a few school meetings, and there goes the week. We all know that life isn’t going to be forever, and you’d like to make it as full as you are physically able to do.
AW: This is really open-ended. Is there anything else you'd like to talk about - concerning your own life or the Holland community?

CP: That is a little tougher. In my own life, I guess, and I've alluded to that a little earlier, I guess I have an appreciation for music and thing of that nature. But I've never been able to participate in it. I don't have a good voice for singing, although my family does. I don't play a musical instrument. My grandkids all do and I admire that. One takes ballet and I admire that. I like to go to concerts at the University of Michigan, or Hope College, some at Calvin. I guess if there was a void in my life, and I don't know if I didn't have the opportunity or not, but I wish that I had dealt more in music. I think it's a wonderful avenue to be expressive. Sometimes when you are in mathematics or some other discipline type field, whether it be a language, I still get a tremendous kick out of listening in political situations, I like to hear good politicians talk. I get wound up at elections. I stay up for election returns and things of that nature. I guess I wish I had cultivated that a little bit more. But I think everybody's going to have that in their life, eventually. You'll never say, "I been so well-rounded that I don't know if there are any openings anymore." I'm not sorry for my religious heritage. I'm not sorry for my Dutch heritage. I'm not sorry for the opportunity I had to work with young people and still do. Sometime we have an idea that we think that we're too old and kids probably won't relate to you. But that's not true. I always say that kids today, young people today, want you to understand them. But they don't want you to be part of them. I always felt that I didn't want to go to school with my shoelaces out because they did. Then they start
thinking how much older I am than they are. But if I understand their problems, they relate to me. But they never ask me to go out with them on Friday or Saturday night, wherever they go. That's for them, that's not for me. That's where the line is. So I think you have to understand young people. But I think you have to know where the line is to where you enter all their activities. They have private places, too, where they want to be alone. But if I'm espousing some philosophy now, as a teacher, if there's one quality, whether or not I had that or whether or not all teachers have that, that remains for people to talk about later - but I think you have to be brutally honest. I think a student has to understand that you're honest with yourself and honest with them in relationship to other students. That's not to say that you're not going to take to one student more than the other, or that you're going to be thrown together at certain activities more. But I think in your classes, when you teach them, they have to understand that everybody gets the same shake from you. I don't know how much you're familiar with football, but I went to a lecture last week at Calvin College. They brought in Bo Schembechler - I don't know if you know him or not. Anyway, he is not of the same heritage as I am, and he's not of the same religious belief I am perhaps. But he said too, as a coach you have to be honest. Kids will understand that. He said, "If I were in an important meeting and my secretary said one of my players wanted to see me," they were instructed to stop immediately and get that student to me. Because he'll come to you once, but they're not going to continue to come to you. You've got to deal with them. I'm not sorry for what I did. I can't do much about changing Holland anymore. There are good things about it, there are bad
things. I've very thankful to have lived in a town that had a college and was small enough. There are so many blessings that come with having a college, regardless of whatever religious affiliation or none at all. To have a college is wonderful. Holland, I think, has accepted Hope College, and I think Hope College has accepted Holland. They're a good match. But I can't change what is, so we bite our tongue and say well, that's the way it is. It's a lot less stressful if you don't try to change it at our age.

CP: Thank you very much. That concludes the oral history interview with Clare Pott. This is Ann Weller.
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
Interview with Clare Pott by Ann Weller
10 a.m., Wednesday, November 6, 1996

Date of Birth: [date removed]  Place of Birth: Grand Rapids
Moved to Holland at age 2

Mother's maiden name: Cornelia Kaashoek (deceased)
Father's name: William (deceased), immigrated at age 17 from The Netherlands

Siblings: Marjorie Heerspink; Frances (deceased)

Cousin of Elsa Prince on father's side of family

Spouse's maiden name: Gayle Koop
Date of marriage: 10-20-48, at Women's Literary Club, Holland

Children: David, born [date removed] in Holland; now in Grand Rapids
Daniel, born [date removed] in Holland; now in Grand Rapids
4 grandchildren

Religion and church membership: 14th St. Christian Reformed

Schooling: Calvin College, A.B., Univ. of New Hampshire, Univ. of Michigan, Hope College

Residential history: has lived 41 years at current address, 24 East 25th Street, Holland

Occupational history: 1947-48, sports editor and city editor, Holland Sentinel (wife also worked at Sentinel). From 1948-89, taught math at Holland Christian High School, retiring in 1989; also served as Athletic Director there. Final salary approx. $42,000-$44,000.

Memberships: HASP; Natl. Assn. of Teachers of Mathematics; on local committees re Holland Civic Center and Holland Stadium; vice-president of council at church.

Other: Currently substitute teacher at Holland Christian; tutors; enjoys golf, sporting events (especially U-M), gardening, concerts.