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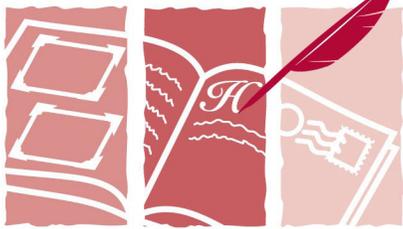
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The Joint Archives *Quarterly*

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For the Sake of the Call: Family Pain Across Generations

By Grace Pettinger



Piecing together the stories of the past inevitably holds complexity. As family members relay genealogical histories, documentation is preserved and lost, and time passes, the lives of everyday individuals become the victims of the past, lost completely to the historians attempting to retell their stories truthfully. As historians, we strive to give justice and merit to the experiences of those who came before us, in hopes that our short walk on earth has value. In a distinctly new moment in human history in which we document our lives, we take for granted the ability to share our stories.

Nettie Kleinheksel was born in Overisel, Allegan County, Michigan, on November 7, 1870. As the fifth and last child of her parents, Johanas and Johanna Kleinheksel, Nettie was the second child born in the United States after the Kleinheksel family emigrated from the Netherlands.¹ We know little about Nettie's childhood, as much of our files hold information from the later period of her life. Nettie grew up in the late 19th century, accustomed to the trials of grief within her family. At the age of three, she lost her father. After her

mother's remarriage and the birth of three half siblings, her mother and youngest half-sister passed away in 1880.² Nettie married Harry Peter Boot, a 1900 Hope College graduate, in August 1903 after studying at Moody Bible School to become a missionary.³ Together, the couple immigrated to Amoy, China, in October of the same year. There, they had their only child, Theodore "Teddy" Peter Boot, in 1904.⁴ Nettie and Theodore returned to the United States in 1906, based on his residence in Amoy ending in 1906.⁵ Harry presumably joined them in 1907, according to a Vancouver Incoming passenger list.⁶ Nettie died of a sickness that caused her respiratory system to fail in 1908 in Cook County, Illinois. Shortly after Nettie's death, Harry returned to Amoy, leaving Theodore with a family of a minister in Overisel, Michigan, according to a family member of Theodore.⁷

Nettie's short life has been reduced to only official documents of her departures, her marriage documents, her burial place, and documentation of her residences in census reports. In addition, a family member of

(continued on page 2)



Reynolds Retires as Director

Geoffrey Reynolds retired from the Joint Archives of Holland on May 27, 2022.

Geoffrey began at Hope College in 1997 as a collections archivist, after obtaining his MLIS degree from Wayne State in 1995. Back then, the Joint Archives of Holland was an independent, jointly funded organization reporting to a governing board. In 2001, he was appointed director of the Joint Archives of Holland.

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From the Director



At the end of May, I retired as the director of the Joint Archives of Holland after 25.50 years. I want to thank all of you for your moral support these past years as the archives has grown in volume, financial support for digital projects and student research support, and for being cheerleaders

of our work. I feel truly blessed to have shared such a fulfilling career with so many of you. My future will include returning to my hometown of Charlevoix, Michigan, where I plan to enjoy spending more time with family and friends and pursuing my hobby of restoring and using vintage boats. Let the new adventure begin!

Geoffrey D. Reynolds

For the Sake of the Call (continued from page 1)

Theodore also donated photos of Nettie with Teddy and Harry, a journal and letters about her death, and some of her possessions, such as her glasses, pocket watches, and jewelry. The historian finds this amount of documentation of Nettie's life remaining to be a treasure trove of information. However, this amount of information still falls short of making her story clear. While I have had the opportunity to scour Nettie's files, I will never be able to completely represent her life truthfully. I am only able to interpret the remaining documents to the best of my ability.



Nettie Boot, 1903

past holds true for the Boot family, but must be acknowledged. As historians, we must use the information we are given to interpret the truth; but we must also realize that more information and different interpretations most likely exist and can challenge our findings, as with any research.

In attempting to tell her story and that of her family's, I have relied heavily on an interview I conducted with Leslie Herbig, Theodore's niece and the donor of the Boot family information. In this interview, she reiterated that her uncle's description and her memories provide only one perspective on her family story. She assured me that many family members might have different perceptions of the same story. This inevitable challenge in recounting the

Nettie's personality and spirit showed through the files donated to the Joint Archives. Although she did not write any letters herself, the photos of her with Theodore, and her faithfulness to her mission and to her family, are evident. The files include countless photos of her laughing with Theodore, as well as photos of Theodore as a child, with loving messages scrawled on the reverse side.⁸ Also saved in the collection is a journal written by a physician, nurse, or possibly her husband, Harry. The journal details Nettie's sleep and eating patterns in the last few weeks before her death. It also noted how she felt and, at times, the weather of that day. On her final day, the writer documented, "Didn't sleep very well. Orange juice for breakfast, eggnog during the night. Twitching and cramps, some better. Beef broth with egg in it at 9:30 am, "Bored" a little, Lunch potato soup and crackers. Bowel Treatment at 4. Hot Bath at 5, Respiration failed. Read to her at 9:30 pm. Psalm 23, John 14:1-8, Matthew 5, Prayer. Is Jesus with you? Nodded "Yes." The next entry merely documents Nettie's death at 3 a.m. on Tuesday, April 14, 1908.⁹



Harry Boot and Teddy,
ca. 1908

After her death, Harry gifted Nettie's personal bible to Theodore. He leaves no indication of if he left this for his son before or after he chose to return to Amoy, China. However, this seems to be the only gift saved from Harry to Theodore. Inscribed in the Bible, Harry wrote, "Given to Theodore Peter Boot, on the death of his loving mother, by the "bereaved" father, whose prayer is that his son may leave the same testimony his mother gave, "For me to live in Christ, to die is gain' Phil 1:21, Search ye the Scriptures, Your Father HP Boot."¹⁰ This is the only message from Harry to Theodore in all of the files.

While the files and possessions donated belonged to Nettie, they also communicate a tragedy of love, loss, and heartache that belongs to an entire family. The Boot family story resounds through the entirety of the 20th century and across generations. In fact, because of her untimely death, Nettie is the most unrepresented person of the family of three. After Nettie's death, Harry returned to Amoy, China, to resume his ministry. Letters soon after the death of his wife updated Boot on the endeavors of his colleagues in Amoy. Some encouraged him to return as soon as possible. One from Mrs. Mary Elizabeth Talmage, a fellow missionary to China, even stated, "I trust some good friend will be raised up to care for and love the motherless little one, so yours may be made very plain for a speedy return where you are much

needed.”¹¹ Harry heeded this advice and returned to Amoy, although there is no evidence of the date on which he departed. Within his own collection in the Joint Archives, he lists journal entries and posed for photos in China in 1908.¹² It is evident that he did return based on the letters and postcards to Amoy in the subsequent years, as well as his marriage to Anna Meengs in Amoy two years later.¹³ Within Harry’s official collection, there is little mention of Teddy after Nettie’s death, other than one photo of him as a teenager.¹⁴ His collection does not include much personal correspondence in general. In fact, he only mentions any of his children once, when he quoted his daughter Harriet in a journal entry in 1939. His collection documents only his work with the Amoy mission; his personal life remaining mostly unknown. The collection does possess a number of photos of his early days in Amoy, when Nettie and Theodore accompanied in China; however, there is little information about his personal life after Nettie’s death.¹⁵

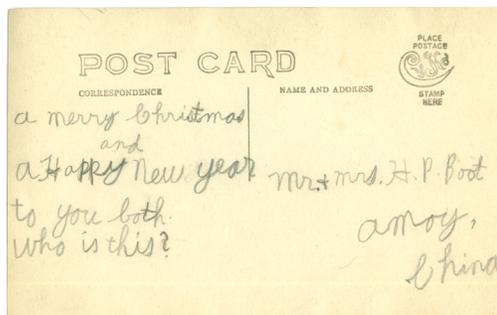


Front of Teddy’s holiday postcard, ca. 1910

Theodore experienced an incredible amount of trauma throughout his childhood. According to photos from Theodore’s childhood, the family with which Theodore stayed lived on a farm.¹⁶ Herbig remembers Theodore describing his experience on the farm as anything but happy. Although the family took him in, he never felt a part of the family and explained that the family forced him to do much of the difficult work around the house and farm. Herbig also stated that Theodore experienced emotional abuse while on the farm. During

this time, Theodore and the family he stayed with sent postcards to his father and his new wife, Anna. In the postcards sent by Theodore with his photo on the front, he wrote in child-like

cursive about the occasion and often, “do you know who this is?” One can assume that he felt alone as a



child and unwanted by his family.¹⁷ Herbig stated that he also kept a box of correspondence between his father and him throughout his childhood. She did not read these letters, as another family member warned that they “were full of pain and hurt.” Why Theodore had possession of these postcards, photographs, and letters sent to Amoy, China, remains unknown. It is possible that Harry returned the letters or that Theodore never

sent them. Theodore seemed to continue a relationship with his extended family and also sent postcards to his Aunt Annie and Uncle John, Nettie’s siblings.¹⁸

Harry and Anna had six children. Anna gave birth to Harriet Evelyn in 1912, Ethel Adelia in 1913, Marion Genevieve in 1914, Beatrice Anna in 1915, Ernest Raymond in 1916, and Eugene Wilbur Boot in 1919. Earnest Raymond’s birthplace listed on his enlistment papers for World War II indicates that the family temporarily lived in Cedar Grove, Wisconsin, in December 1916. They must have sought out Theodore, as he returned with them, according to a passport application from September 1919 that lists his permanent residence as Cedar Grove. The family returned to Amoy with Theodore on December 29, 1916, as Theodore’s passport application states. He lists Harry and Anna as his parents with whom he resided between 1916 and when his passport was approved on May 14, 1920.^{19,20,21,22,23}



Teddy and Bertha, wedding day, 1929

A May 30, 1920, California US Arriving Passenger and Crew List documents Theodore returning to the United States. An obituary for Teddy states that he graduated from Hope Preparatory school in 1924. The same obituary states that he graduated from Hope College in 1928. The Hope College master list of alumni confirms this.²⁴ Theodore married Bertha Nienhuis on August 31, 1929. On the marriage certificate, Theodore listed his parents as Harry P.

Boot and Annie Kleinheksel, revealing an alternate nickname for Nettie that lived on after her death.²⁵ Bertha graduated from Hope in 1929.²⁶ Bertha and Theodore did not have any children, but Leslie Herbig, Bertha’s niece, noted that the couple was like her loving grandparents. Herbig also stated that Theodore made a career as the principal of a high school in Holland.²⁷

The Harry and Anna Boot family returned to the United States from living in Hong Kong on June 3, 1925; however, there is no evidence that they all stayed in the United States. Harry and Anna definitely returned and continued their mission, based on Harry’s files. According to the master list of Hope College alumni, all six of the younger Boot children graduated from Hope College in the 1930s and 1940s. Harriet graduated in 1934. Ethel and Marion followed in 1935. Beatrice graduated in 1937, and Raymond and Eugene Wilbur graduated in 1938 and 1941, respectively.²⁸ Raymond and Eugene Wilbur joined the army in 1941 and served in World War II.²⁹ Unfortunately, Raymond suffered heat stroke at his home in Arlington, Virginia, on June 27, 1943, and passed away.³⁰

While their children established their lives in the United States, Harry and Anna Boot evidently returned to China. In a 1940 census, the couple was listed as still living in Amoy.³¹ Leslie



Anna and Harry Boot, 1954

Herbig recalls that in the late 1950s or early 1960s, Harry and Anna returned to Holland, moving into a house on the same block where Theodore and Bertha lived.³² This memory aligns with Harry's personal collection at the Joint Archives that documents his mission participation in Amoy lists his last year in Amoy as 1957.³³ Herbig noted that Theodore had some sort of a cordial relationship with his father; however, still struggled with the pain of his childhood as he relayed to her when sharing his story. She stated that Harry and Anna seemed to be closer to the younger six children than to Theodore and Bertha. Herbig explained that Theodore and Bertha had a close relationship with Eugene Wilbur, the youngest of his half siblings. She also stated that Ethel lived in Holland; however, Theodore and Bertha were not close to her.³⁴ Anna Meengs Boot passed away in 1959 while Harry died in 1961.³⁵ They are both buried in Pilgrim Home Cemetery. Ethel is buried next to her parents.

Over 30 years after Theodore lost his parents, George Kraft was born in Chengdu, in Sichuan province, China. At the age of six, Kraft's missionary parents left him with a German family in Shanghai for 18 months as he waited for a boarding school to open. He recalls little interaction with this family and only remembers them feeding him and giving him a place to sleep. He was constantly alone during this time and described feeling traumatized by his parents leaving. Kraft entered boarding school and did not see his parents for four years. During his time in boarding school, his brother joined him. However, the pair of brothers did not meet their sister, born in 1949, until she turned two years old. When George was 12 years old, the mission sent him and his siblings to a hostel in Illinois that housed missionary children. They attended Wheaton preparatory school. He noted that he experienced a level of verbal and spiritual abuse throughout his childhood, as the mission preached incredibly strict doctrine. At 12 years old, this doctrine made him believe that he was forever damned for stealing a set of stamps from a friend's locker and failing to confess his sin. The boarding school also censored the children's letters to their parents, limiting their messages to communicating that they were "fine," in order to limit any distraction to their mission. Kraft explained that his father never admitted any guilt for the trauma his children endured, but noted that his mother experienced intense sadness in leaving her children, but felt it necessary to fulfill her call to her faith and husband.³⁶

When I interviewed George Kraft, I felt like I had a window into the feelings of Theodore. Although I am unable to talk with Theodore, speaking with George gave me the opportunity to imagine what Theodore must have felt with similar experiences. One theme that proved impactful for Kraft was his explanation of never feeling like he had a home. He constantly moved, never establishing a home for him and his siblings. He found himself with a German family at six years old, a boarding school, a missionary home, at Wheaton College, but never was grounded in one place. He didn't even really have a country to call home. He not only lacked a geographic home, but he also lacked a familial home that would travel with him. He also felt extreme loneliness throughout his childhood, as he was constantly separated from his family. Even his brother, who attended the same boarding school, felt less like a brother than his friends in his grade, specifically boys sharing a bedroom with him. Within the boarding school, students of different ages did not interact with one another. This made George incredibly reliant on his ability to make friends and participate in school activities. He mentioned that his personality as a high energy extrovert served him well to deal with his situation, as he filled his need for family with his interaction with his peers. However, despite his ability to cope, the lack of stability he experienced would be traumatic for any young child. It wasn't until he became a professor at Hope College that he truly felt that he had a place to call home. This important theme inspired his upcoming book, *A Place to Call Home: A Missionary Kid's Tale*.³⁷



Dick and George Kraft during their last summer at the school in Kuling, 1950

As Theodore lived with his foster family in Overisel, he had to feel isolated geographically from his family. I am unable to assess his sense of home without speaking with him and I cannot ask him how he dealt with his situation psychologically; however, Kraft's experiences and reflections on his similar experience might provide insight on what Teddy may have felt in his situation. With his father an ocean away and without ever having a family home in the United States, one can assume that Teddy felt the same feeling of loneliness that Kraft described. In addition, his experience of emotional abuse would have left him traumatized as a young boy, making the feeling of acceptance and sense of having a loving home impossible. When Teddy later joined his father, Anna, and their children as a teenager, this transition to what was supposed to be a family setting might have been just as difficult. He may have questioned his sense of place, both in China and with his father's family. He wrote a poem that speaks to the possibility of feeling lonely throughout his early life:

“Oh that I were them
In that land beyond the sea
And once again your smile could see
In that big old Morris chair

For it seems as though we never
Will be given the looked-for chance-
But not always will it be forever;
To view each other with a glance

The time is long since last we met
And shall not be so soon forgotten
But there are times when I regret
That our meetings were not often

So you can see that though apart
We often wish that you were here
So ghostly [greatly] stir my sluggish heart
And fill the lonesome days with cheer

And if not that then I were there
If only for a day or two
Where'd be a happier pair
Provided I'd be near to you?

But school goes on and moments fly
So letters we can use to say-
And sure they must us satisfy
What in our heart we do display

So I do only ask and hope
That you will weekly use
A well filled cheery envelope
Would you, dear, my heart refuse?”³⁸

Theodore did not address this poem to a certain person; however, communicates a sense of loneliness reminiscent to me like that of George Kraft. He also seems to feel a sense of loneliness in China, despite being with his father and his family. In order to cope, Kraft stated that he threw himself into his friendships with his peers and involved himself in every activity that he could. He mentioned that he didn't want to slow down enough to think about his trauma. There is little evidence to suggest how Theodore coped throughout his life.

Although not all missionary children had negative or traumatic experiences growing up, there seems to be a theme that remains consistent through Kraft's and Theodore's experiences. Kraft noted an important aspect of the religious culture within his father's mission that took the call of the Bible to spread the gospel above all else incredibly literally. To Kraft's father, the call to save souls took precedence over the care of his children. Kraft described him as an incredibly driven man, deeply committed to the call in the book of Acts that called followers of Christ to leave their families to take up the cross and follow him. This scripture inspired logic held by missionaries such as Kraft's father and potentially Harry Boot. This logic also explains the way that Mrs.

Talmage addressed Harry when calling him back to China.



*Bertha and Theodore Boot,
50th wedding anniversary,
August 31, 1979*

principal, but had lots of respect for him. She described him as a well-loved, no-nonsense man. He inherited the spirit of his mother, who loved selflessly despite hardship and loss.⁴⁰

Based on the letters, photos, journal, and trinkets within the Nettie Boot collection, one can find fragments of a painful family history. With the help of government documents found through Ancestry.com, the path of the Boot family becomes a bit clearer. But further analysis of another missionary child's experiences allows a researcher to grasp at the actual emotions possibly experienced by members of the Boot family. Theodore, Nettie, and Harry all had their own opinions and experiences; however, examining the culture of missionaries in the 20th century through another perspective provides insight that official documents can't communicate. While Theodore and Nettie can't share their experience, their story deserves to be told. I acknowledge that I have a very limited understanding of the Boot family story. I am unable to interview any of the family members to best understand their perspectives. However, this limited scope of information makes sharing Nettie and Theodore's story even more important. They deserve to be part of our history, although it may be easy or tempting to only recount the official documents of the successes of missionary work. Their experiences communicate another side of American missionary work that must be addressed in order for healing to occur for those children who remain.



About the author:

Grace Pettinger is a December 2021 Hope College graduate planning to attend the University of Maryland in the fall of 2022. She is pursuing a dual-masters degree in History and Library Sciences and hopes to work in a university archives setting.

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Discerning My Vocation: My Internships at the Joint Archives and Van Wylen Library

By Mackenzie Rhode

This spring semester, I had the opportunity to intern at the Joint Archives of Holland and the Van Wylen Library as part of my psychology degree. At the Joint Archives of Holland, I worked under the supervision of Geoffrey Reynolds, the Mary Riepma Ross Director of the Joint Archives. For my internship with the archives, I worked in three-hour blocks on a variety of small projects affiliated with archival science. Over the course of my internship, I had the opportunity to process collections, implement archival standards and preservation strategies, create finding aids and biographical notes for collections, and learn about the technologies/digitization efforts aimed at making information resources more accessible to the general public. It was a really great opportunity to gain applied experience in the field prior to attending graduate school. This fall, I will be attending the University of Wisconsin-Madison with an interest in further exploring archives, cataloging/metadata, and academic librarianship.

In my internship with the Van Wylen Library, I had the opportunity to work in conjunction with Jeremy Barney, the Assistant Librarian for Metadata and Digital Collections, and Kelly Jacobsma, the Geneva Thome Begg Dean of Libraries at Hope College. I really enjoyed having the opportunity to explore

different areas of librarianship and to discover more about myself and my own interests before beginning graduate school. I greatly enjoyed learning about the typical workflow of a technical services librarian and for being introduced to the existing cataloging and metadata standards. I also appreciated gaining experience handling rare books and learning more about the history of bookmaking. It was very interesting to learn about how the materials of a book contribute to its greater historical significance and reveal social norms of the time the piece was written. For my project, I created a slideshow presentation introducing the field of library and information science. I wanted to create a resource that would be helpful for students interested in LIS (library and information science) to discover more about the career opportunities available within the discipline and to discover whether they may be interested in pursuing their MLIS degree in graduate school.

I am very grateful for having had the opportunity to have two internships affiliated with library science during my senior year at Hope. The faculty and staff were extremely supportive and were always willing to answer any questions I had about graduate school and my aspirations for the future. I am excited to further explore my interests in archives, cataloging, and academic librarianship at the University of Wisconsin-Madison this fall!

Reynolds Retires (continued from page 1)



Geoff Reynolds during his first year at the Joint Archives, 1997

While change certainly came to the archives, there were many things that from year to year did not change, including the never-ending flow of records and record processing, the superb support for researchers, both local and far-flung, and the mentoring of volunteers, Hope students and interns.

In addition to the never-ending and somewhat thankless task of processing archival records, he has provided critical support for other's research and publication, including numerous books published by the Van Raalte Institute and faculty research projects.

He embraced the move to the digitization of archival records, resulting in the digitization of almost all college publications, a massive local postcard collection, RCA publications; and made our archives available to researchers world-wide. Those collections are some of the most downloaded in the institutional repository.

Geoffrey has a long record of publishing and speaking, including keeping the *Joint Archives Quarterly* newsletter going these many years and mentoring student and volunteer writers. He has authored at least 61 publications (mostly about boats) with titles such as "From Woods to Water," "Keep 'Em Fighting: Chris-Craft's Contribution to World War II," and "Fifty Years of Making Fun: the History of the Slick Craft Boat Company." "Plastic Fantastic: The Fiberglass Boatbuilding Industry in Holland, MI," a chapter included in the book *Michigan Modern: Design That Shaped America* was designated a 2017 Michigan Notable Book by the Library of Michigan; and, in 2018, he published his book *Boats Made in Holland: A Michigan Tradition*. He has also given over 94 presentations to state and local organizations.

Geoffrey has devoted significant time and talent to local historical organizations, including the Holland Historic Trust, the Holland Area Historical Society, the Association for the Advancement of Dutch-American Studies, the Dutch Heritage Coordinating Council, the Holland Museum and the Meijer Garden History Advisory Council. He is one of our community's local history experts and has spent his career promoting local history in print and through community presentations and media. He received the Michigan Historical Society Award of Merit for the Michigan Media Film, "Tulip Time in Holland"; the Michigan Association of Broadcasters-Best in Broadcasting Excellence Award and the State History Award for Best Article in *Michigan History* magazine. Tangible evidence of his support for local history is the extremely successful annual fundraising campaign, which initially funded administrative support and more recently has funded student summer research projects and digitization efforts.

In 2014, in recognition of his long and excellent service, Geoffrey was appointed the Mary Riepma Ross Director of the Joint Archives, an endowed position.

One of Geoffrey's greatest and lasting gifts is as a mentor to scores of Hope College student employees, interns, and Mellon Scholars, many of whom have gone on to graduate school. In 2014, he received the Mellon Scholars Mentoring Award.

We are going to feel the loss of Geoffrey for many years to come, but I'm confident that he is leaving the archives in good shape for the next generation.

*—Remarks made by Kelly Jacobsma,
Genevra Thome Begg Dean of Libraries
at Geoff's retirement celebration*

The Joint Archives of Holland



HISTORY RESEARCH CENTER
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Contact us at (616) 395-7798 • Fax (616) 395-7197 • E-mail: archives@hope.edu • hope.edu/jointarchives



Photo by Eric Hoffman

*Geoffrey Reynolds is retired and not looking back!
(in his restored 1957 Skippercraft on Lake Macatawa, 2009)*

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