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Kiekintveld, Donald Oral History Interview: Class Projects

Sue Vanden Brink

Jennifer Marcia Morsink

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Sue: My name is Sue Vanden Brink. Today is October third, 1977. This is going to be an interview with Mr. Donald Kiekintveld. The time will approximately be about 2 o'clock. The place will be Ninth Street Christian Reformed Church. The purpose of this interview is to discover the workings and possibly the history of the bells in this church as well as perhaps a new individual, a new personality, new ideas.

Mr. Kiekintveld: This is the complete unit here (he refers to a metal, brown, box approximately 6 ft. tall, 4 ft. wide and a goot to a foot and a half in depth.) and oh behind the facings here are a numerous amount of electronic gear that pickups the bell tones as they're amplified and they go out over these big stentors that go out of the bell tower and the music is played off 'n a roll as you see here, looks like the ole' piano player.

S: Uh um

K: Then its perforated and when the striker goes through the perforated area it strikes that particular bell tone. Then its amplified.

The sets that we have here now, they come in many different types of sets actually there's a twenty-five bell set here and its the English type bell. There are Flemish bells and things like that. We do have a harp background system too. Now this is a roll made of very good highgrade vinyl paper and it'll last for many, many years with care. It rolls around and goes right around
K: and goes right around. It's programmed on a programming dial which you'll see here it tells the time, the day, and these program sticks tell this machine when to click in. See when it clicks in ah then it punches through this first hole here which is the start button and the music keeps right on going. They're numbered and we know just exactly which number this is going to be. Now this number here is 495 and on this here slip 495 will tell us that "Guide me oh thou Great Jehovah" is the song that plays.

S: Ah, uh

K: See so if someone wanted just one number played we'd set it so the machine'd play that particular number. Now you can play any number of numbers at one time automatically. Now this roll has one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine selections on it. However, what we're using right now so it doesn't get to be too monotonous for the public and we've had some complaints too, believe you me; we've had a lot of fine remarks but we've had some complaints too and its set for three numbers at a time. We always have it programmed at twelve noon for the downtown area people on their lunch hour. People tell me they sit in Centennial Park and you can hear them in Centennial Park.

S: Uh, um

K: But there are a few people that are anti-religious and if
Ka: it was something else if it was some pop music or something like that I'm sure they'd be all for it. We've had some complaints of some of the college kids too, I'll be honest about that.

S: Really?

K: Yeh they just wouldn't like it and uh they said it was played too early in the morning. We've had it checked out for a noise tolerance level and it meets all the standards in the city. We play it at certain given hours that are allowed by the city to have this type of thing going on so its met all those conditions. But, we had a few of the college kids call us up and said that they didn't appreciate it being woke up in the morning with that music and stuff like that. We were within range we've never yielded to anybody on it and ah we keep playin' it. The number of fine you know, comments supersedes those that are negative by so many different ones.

There's any number selections we ah get. Special rolls made up woth the selections we want, in fact we've ordered allot of them. We have patriotic music which we play on patriotic days. We have Easter music, Christmas music and quite often some of the people in the church will contribute a role in memory of somebody. Like one man contributed a roll here lost a little grandson that died of muscular dystrophy a number of years ago.
K: The consistory in honor of one of the consistory members that died and he was a very fine Dutch gentleman and loved Dutch music, bought a roll of Dutch psalms which we sometimes play. Quite often we get comments out of some of the older Dutch people, they love that Dutch psalms and ah they just comment how nice it is to hear that ah played over the downtown area. Fact, I saw one fella out here one day with a tape recorder recording it on a tape recorder. (His laugh as if in memory) So we get a good variety of music and good variety of selections and ah we change 'um maybe once or twice a week. Ah I happened to be out of town for about ten days so I thought I'd better get over here today and change it. But ah this one had nine particular numbers so it wouldn't be every noon the same numbers it'd be changing around from time to time.

Basically this the machine that's full of electronic gears it's programmed to do alot of things. Ah we can have it so its just played in here and not out of the bell tower. We have a manual keyboard at the organ here, where the organist sometimes'll play just for in the church sanctuary.

S: Ah, uh.

K: And ah the bells ah chime the hour I'm sure you ah picked that up and when its a real precise piece of equipment, really it is, its nothing*chinsey* about it. Like I said to you before
K: on the phone the bell tones are perfectly piched. Ah they're cast at a certain degree where metal has a different ring on the sound to it and different temperatures. While this is controlled right in here and ah it's the same all the time.

S: You mean the bell tower is heated?

K: No. When they cast the bell tones the striker hits this particular thing it is perfectly in pitch. Where if it was metal that was up in the bell tower and it was twenty below zero the sound would be different then if it was 85 or 90 degrees which it could very well be up there in the bell tower. It all comes out of this machine as amplified.

S: Uh um.

K: Some people said how many bells you got in the tower? There's no bells in it, there's one great big large bell, the original bell of this church is up there in that tower. There's four large speakers that point each direction and that how it amplified out of this machine there.

S: Is this any way hooked up like to the organ, that comes through the organ?

K: It can come through the organ, yes, we have a manual keyboard at the organ. The organist plays it sometimes ah at the end of a service plays a number ah on the bells. And the tone quality is much richer than chimes it really is ah there's
K: something about a chime that doesn't have the richness of and beauty of a bell tone.

S: These are called the Carillon bells?

K: Carillon bells that's right, put out by the Schulmerich carillon company.

S: Uh, ah

K: Ah the finest installations throughout the country are put out by carillons. We investigated a lot of them. We had a committee on this, I was on the committee and I bet we served ah seven, eight months investigating. We had all kinds of letters from different ones and from different people down here putting in systems and telling us about it and hearing the tones and everything else. This is really the finest set we could come up with and they're not cheap I'll tell ya that (chuckle) they're expensive.

S: Uh, um

K: But it is a good quality piece of equipment. Very, very little maintenance, occasionally we have a fuse blow, we have extra fuses here which we can put in ourselves. There's a regular maintenance man that makes a maintenance call ah to service the machine and ah we have a little power failure once in a while and then we have to set the dials on that manually. It doesn't go back and spin itself into the right cycle again. But ah basically its on a automatic and ah we have one of these types of clips that you can't pull the cord out by yourself.
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S: Good

K: (chuckle) Very sensitive to dust, in fact we have too much paper in here. We've had a little trouble with dust build up into the machine, kinda clogs it up a little bit. Otherwise its very, very low maintenance very low maintenance.

S: You mentioned that it had there's one bell in the belfry?

K: That's the old original bell that was with the church. That bell is a stood on the corner here before in the yard before the church tower was up. Then they moved the bell up there. It was cast in Troy, New York. I don't know the exact year. But its a large bell weighs well over 300 pounds.

S: Because I, let's see, I talked to somebody and they said uhm, uhm the first uhm hardware department guy or the Vander Ven I guess or Vander Veen something like that uhm he was the one that dedicated it or gave it or somethin'.

K: That could be in the old history of the church a somebody maybe gave the bell. It stood across the street here where this is in the yard and ah they tolled the bell for a certain occasion ya know a death and things like that.

S: Uh, huh

K: But that bell was installed up there. There's only one bell and there's a rope in the back which we use that bell every Sunday for...

S: "calling people"
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That's right calling to worship, that's right. Now we'll also use this one here just as the church sounds a starts the bell plays a bell selection.

Whmp, that's interesting umm let's see so there's no, there's no set amount of bells its like a keyboard?

Well actually there's metal that has the bell tone on see and a striker comes up through these perforated holes and it hits that particular bell sound. Then its picked up by an amplifier and its amplified and goes through the speaking system out over the top of the bell tower see?

It's computerized?

Well its a, yes, its all electronic gear really. What it is is all electronic gear and ah the roll as this particular roll here I'm going to take off right now. You might want to turn that off for a few seconds. This goes in one way this fits im place and the back is just one mass of electronic ah ah panels and all that is really complicated. So these stick we can change at various times if we want to change the different times to have the programming of music. Ah, before the services they're set so that about 15 minutes before the we always play three numbers see and then at a Sun. noon right after 11 o'clock service. Sunday afternoon at 2 o'clock at pays and during the week days it plays twelve noon and six.
S: Does it have to be set like during the week?
K: Yes, what we try not to do, there's a funeral home right here. You know and a the problem with that is it isn't nice to have the bells resound. That pavement out here is quite hard. (clears throat) and that sound bounces off and ah if ah there's happened to be a funeral on over there they would complain. Now I don't know if there's anybody there now or not. Let me just take a look and if there looks like there is a funeral there I won't do it, but otherwise I'll play one selection manually here. Then we'll play it right here inside the building here.

S: Oh
K: Now I'll put another roll on.
S: See what it looks like it's just like the inside of one of those player pianos.
K: It really does. Yeh it really does it's a lot similar principle see?
S: Except bigger. Do you have a library of rolls?
K: There's some right here. There's rolls of em here and ah
S: Depending on the song you can get so many on there?
K: We get six, seven, eight, nine, of em according to the length of the song. Yeh this one here one, two, three, four, five, six, ah on this roll here.
K: I don't know if this will come if we're up to the right spot but we'll go to a point here. (crinkle, pause he unbounds paper) Ah here we are this fits in here, now let me just step out the door and see if there's a funeral there if there is I won't play it.

....And the loud speaker ah through the building to get up into the tower we ah we had a real difficult time. (crinkle) This is the type of bell we have if you want to make some notes of these. Um, we couldn't get the um stentors through the church we had to go over the top of the main building (chuckle) and put it through the ah lowered ah (pause)

S: What exactly is a stentor?

K: Well it's a um speaker ah I'll show you a picture of one here its um...I must have a picture around here someplace (crinkle searches through) There were-well let's see once (search) Let's see once $search) let's see if its in there. See these um typically power stentors they're um put on a bracket with a big bolt right into the big beams. Now, that's one thing you don't know anything about this church, but there's a large beam about that wide up in that tower hard hewn beams up there. Now there's four of those that...

S: ...go out each way

K: That's right go out each way.
S: It's like a megaphone?

K: Yeh, its really what it is its the same thing as the speaker in a car, but its set up on a little different basis. Where we get the maximum out of the ah tone qualities, it's a good piece of equipment. Now, uhm the type of bell, two main types the English bell and the Flemish bell. We have the English see ah you can get it in a 25 note to 47 note range. We have a 25 note here. Some of the systems that are installed throughout the country are a whole lot larger than that. Ah, (pause) looked through material here - the committee did not encourage the study of chimes for three reasons, the Hope College Memorial Chapel has chimes and because of its proximity to 9th street serves there as adequately as it would serve here. The tone quality of a bell tone is far superior to that of a chime tone. All bell tones have a minor third, whereas the chime tone does not. The range of the chimes tone is not so great as the bell type. Of range we mean the distance the sound is carried. We have heard unfavorable criticism of some of the chimes presently installed in Holland. They don't have that ring that carries out, see. This instrument provides that produces a sound almost identical to that made by a cast bell carillon without the problem of going out of pitch because
K: of change in temperature see.
S: Uh, uhn
K: The cast bell carillon is pitched during 60 degree temp. and the notes in 0 degree weather or 50 degree weather but they will sometimes sound flat or sharp. That's what I was trying, I knew this was somewhere in here about that. Opinions of scholars of music were sought and it is their opinion that only a pianist would insist on having the genuine cast bells in preference to the miniature bells amplified electronically see. That's what we have so (pause)...
S: I can see why.
K: It's a rich tone really. Now there's no funeral over there let me I'll just turn these down to one and ah (mumble)...
you'll notice they'll light up here, these two light now all that's going in motion back there and it takes about 15-15 secs. to program through the machine get all the ah...
S: Get it warmed up?
K: All set to go, that's right.
S: Does it uh have weights in there like sorta like a balance or is it...
K: No it's all programmed for time. Ah in just a few seconds we'll hear it. What I should do - the key is here somewhere. Now you can watch that roll move. See this is the starting, the
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K: first note will resound now I've got it on full volume for outside, we can turn the tone down. Now that one ah stentor goes right out into the trees. (bells) its just a little short in here. Next time the fella comes to service it I want him to pull this off. (bells) If you look down in there you'll see a reflection. (bells) The machine will stop automatically because I just programmed one see.

S: Uh, huh

K: Then the next number will come up (showing it "this is the one that'll trigger it when it gets to the right spot?) then watch the lights go off. Hear all the clicking all the systems are gone off.

S: So it's like, it's got like a little needle and it catches the hole in it?

K: It comes up through the hole and it hits this here particular bell tone. See that's why there's no variance in this paper clothes. It's fit right in between this when that striker comes up it hits right through. You'll notice this isn't a bit frayed and I don't know how many times this roll has been on here this is one of the original rolls. It's in very good shape, but we keep we have six, eight well actually about 15 different rolls but there's no date on here. This is one of the original ones its about 9 years old so its been used very
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K:  frequently but its very, very precise.  You don't see any tears or anything.  It's just like on a film alot of film the first fifteen or twenty feet is torn up and distorted because it's not accurate.

S:  These were put in eight years ago?

K:  I think it was, I see a note down here this is February '68. Um, I think the contract was in...it came in we put it in just before tulip time we wanted to use them during tulip time.

S:  Ch

K:  Yes it was put in....the bell was installed for a two week period without obligation.  So then I wrote to them it was put in April of '68 so its nine years this April or this May. It was installed two days before tulip time.  Then we played it the first time so it was right the first part of May its nine years old, nine years old.

S:  Those little rings that fit on them are they...

K:  That's tells the machine what not to play, that's a program stick.  Another words, ah we can have ah another one four or five on there but at six o'clock its going to strike the hour.

S:  Uh, huh

K:  It's going to play some selections and lets see it'll be three numbers on that one at six o'clock.
S: They're at different levels?

K: That's right ah what they expect see there's a hole in here that goes in here see? Now some of them it's just to strike the hour. Some of 'em to play selections. Now we debated on playing more often, some peolple say why don't you play the bells more. I'd love to hear em every hour, however, there are people that ah just don't have any use for church music and they'll complain about it see. They say They're entitled to their own thoughts. We feel this is a mission activity in itself, without anybody at the keyboard or piano or the organ to play those selection, but sometimes people just detest. Most of the comments are favorable. Down at the Warm Friend Hotel some people just love it. We had them in here a few weeks and they hust kept on calling, just beautiful just love to hear that music how come it plays such a few times a day can it play more often. (chuckle)

S: Is there one of the sticks for each day or does a group of songs...

K: Well its set on time. See ah now on different times how it says never attempt to rotate counter wise when the clock indicates anytime between 10 at night and ah two at night. There's a period of time in there where we don't have anything programmed on now ah certain city ordinances are different in different areas, where you can allow to play music of this type—ạn сам ring it until 3 o'clock
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K: type. We can ring it until 8 o'clock see at night that's our last striking at 8 o'clock! Now some cities allow it to go until 10 o'clock, we don't start until 8 in the morning. It'd be nice to make it seven o'clock but we didn't want any trouble with anybody. So we've repeatedly had testing to see that the output, the amount of volume is within a range that's tolerable and within the city ordinance. See and everytime somebody complains we say check it out with the city its all set ah its all been checked out for the amount of volume we have here. Ah even on full I've zoomed it back a little bit here when I played that selection but ah we get a pretty good sound range.

S: How far is it like how far does it go?

K: What do you mean?

S: Out.

K: The music, how far can you hear it out? Well its according to the weather conditions. Now atmospheric pressure and atmospheric weather it's different and the wind and that. Like I said the cemetery over here I can hear very plainly in the cemetery certain days very, very good. We're hitting into alot of building and that but we're going over the top of it to get into the top floors of the Hotel. We know that but on the ground level with all the noise on 8th street and all the traffic there
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K: you don't hear it on the street down there, good. Now my office is on 13th and River across from the library and I hear it there at noon every day. I listen for it and see if there's any problem, if it doesn't go on I wonder what's wrong you see.

S: (listen for the bells) Is that within the church right now?

K: No its gone out. Its all set to go out, amplified out of the towers see amplified in the tower and gone out. See we could have a continuous peal we have atimed peal and some manual switches we could use but everythings on here. See this is the monitor speaker down here. We have an auxiliary speaker down here if you wanted to use it. See this monitoring for here if I turn it all the way off you couldn't hear it see. The day of the week is right here ah Monday see in that little round circle and the time is two thirty (pause) or a little past two thirty.

S: So it's playing a song right now?

K: It is, it is playing right out. You can hear it right out on the street. The same thing for the keyboard in the uh in the church er auditorium. Here you can play it there you can have it go out over the street there too see or you can have it just in the church auditorium.
S: How often does somebody play it?
K: Some of the organists play it more often than others. Some of them are scared of it. I'll show it to you in there. It's a regular keyboard, it isn't as large as the keyboard of the organ. You can tell the lights are on here. If we were to use this here, it takes preference to the automatic uhm programming of the machine see. The organist sits right here and plays it with a piece of music there. The only place that we could put the large speaker stentors you see them back there.
S: Uh, huh
K: There's a panel on there. We couldn't get 'em through they're too large. So we hadda put 'em on a rope and pull 'em along the top, walk over the top of the auditorium.
S: Oh
K: Then into the bell tower
S: Uh, huh. That's my friends you want to hold on a minute?
K: Oh, does she want to come in?
S: Yeh.

(Let's Jenny and Marcia in)
S: How big is the stentor?
K: They're about that round.
S: Hum, that's a good size.
K: Yeh there's four of those. They're all about that big.
Jenny: It's about three feet?

K: Well I'd say 22 or 26 inches. I don't remember which ones they were. I know that we can't get 'em through there and that's about 20 some inches cause there was a section on it. They're 22 or 26 inches speakers and they go out through the lowered portion just below the ah roaster up there. The big bell sits right around it in the middle and these are bolted on these big beams. So they go out in every direction.

S: Does the stentors do they cut down any of the sound of the big bell?

K: No, no there's plenty of space there and the big bell still has room to swing.

(all move away to the back of church)

K: This is the rope that pulls the big bell. See and ah it really takes a full size man to pull it see to ring the bell.

S: You might get pulled up.

K: We had little kids here during tulip time, when we have the church open for tours. The little kids pull on it sometimes and they hang on to the rope and it almost lifts 'em right off the ground. There's a wooden cradel it's round like this and that rope goes around it. Then there's a roller....now we have pictures of that I don't have em here but we have em on display during tulip time.
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K: That rope goes around that roller and ah pulls on that roller. Where that rope fits in is just worn and that clapper on that bell from hitting that side of the bell is just square on one side from hitting it that often.

S: Does it like does it hit once or...

K: Well its according to how hard you pull it. There's a certain rhythm you use to pull the bell to have the exact that you want see.

S: Uh, huh. Got any questions you want to ask?

J: I don't know what you've asked

S: Ah

K: Would you like to see the machine that's in the back?

J: Yeh

S: It's not bells like we think of bells (He laughs) its electronic bells. I swore it was the real bells.

J: Was that someone just playing them now.

K: Yeh, well its automatically, I just pushed a button and it ah

S: You sat down at the organ and played then.

(laugh)

K: No, everybody thinks there's a whole group of different bells. There are 25 different bell tones that produce that along with a harp system of bell ah which give that little filler you might say comes in here.