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Interviewee: Fred Yerkes

Interviewer: Emily Ring

Date: February 24, 1987

Father Fred Yerkes is pastor of the Melrose Episcopal Church. He was born and raised in Jacksonville, Florida, where he attended the Church of the Good Shepherd and its day school. His recollections of these childhood days offer delightful reading.

Because of his asthma, he went to Washington, DC for a few years. There he worked as a Senate page and sang in the St. Johns Church boys choir. From Washington, DC he went to prep school in Manassas, VA, and on to St. Johns College in Annapolis, MD.

There he majored in classics, which was easy for him, since his mother was a Latin teacher and he had been exposed to the classics at an early age. While in Maryland, Yerkes took the opportunity to do some lay reading in various churches. For a time, he did some mission work in Sewanee, TN.

Yerkes returned to Florida in 1934 and went to work teaching Latin and Greek in the Tebeau School in Gainesville and working with Holy Trinity Episcopal Church. Remembrances of the Tebeau School are most vivid, and Yerkes speaks in detail on the daily workings and workers of the school, its relationship with Holy Trinity, and its eventual demise into a city parking lot. Also, during this time there was a strong need for pastoral leadership in numerous small churches in northeast Florida, and Father Yerkes served churches in Trenton, Newberry, High Springs, Cedar Key, Starke, Waldo, and Melrose – sometimes as many as five churches concurrently. Here, too, Yerkes' recollections are abundant, and he pays particular attention to the churches in Cedar Key, Starke, and Melrose. Cedar Key has had problems keeping a church building intact, due to storms

and fires, and he has been of significant help providing the needs of these people.

During World War II, Starke's population exploded because of the military facility at Camp Blanding, and Father Yerkes led them through this challenging time. Melrose experienced a parish house fire in 1984, and Father Yerkes was conducting a boys choir rehearsal in the building when the fire broke out.

"I do not think I was really called [to the ministry] – I drifted into it." Father Yerkes' acclamation is understating his own contributions. He has lived through and served churches and schools during the Depression, World War II, storms, fires, and the many other challenges the years have offered.

R: Today is February 24, 1987. [My name is Emily Ring, and] I am at Holy Trinity Church. I am doing an oral history with Father Fred Yerkes who has just come over from Melrose, where he is currently a pastor. He is going to tell us something about his life. Father Yerkes, what year were you born and where was your birth place?

Y: March 5, 1910, Jacksonville, Florida.

R: March 5, 1910, Jacksonville, Florida. You are two years younger than I am.

Well, we are both getting on, aren't we. What was your father's name?

Y: I am a junior, [so his name was] Fred Yerkes.

R: And what was your mother's name?

Y: Frances Rebecca Huddleston.

R: Did you have brothers and sisters?

Y: An older sister, Cornelia Yerkes, and a younger brother, Francis Huddleston Yerkes.

R: Are they still living?

Y: Both.

R: Do they both live in Jacksonville?

Y: Yes, within a few miles of where I live.

R: Where do you live in Jacksonville? Where is your home?

Y: King [Street] and St. John's Avenue, right in back of St. Vincent's Hospital.

R: If anything happens to you, they can rush you right over.

Y: I hope not. [Laughter]

R: Now, can you tell us where you went to elementary school, or grammar school, as we used to call it?

Y: There was no school in that neighborhood, so I went down to Riverside School, which was about three or four miles away.

R: Did you walk, or did you ride a pony?

Y: Well, I walked some. I was asthmatic as a child, and I did ride a pony sometimes when I was short of breath.

R: Well, good. Jacksonville was not such a big city then.

Y: No.

R: That was a very exclusive part of Jacksonville, wasn't it?

Y: Yes.

R: I understand that your father was in the hardware business.

Y: Yes, ma'am.

R: What was the name of his hardware store?

Y: Florida Hardware. It had been in the family for several generations.

R: Is it still in the family?

Y: It is still in existence, but it has just recently passed out of the family hands.

R: Oh, I see. Now, after you went to elementary school, where did you go? Did you go to New Mexico for high school?

Y: As an asthmatic child, they were always trying to find away places where I would not have asthma. At that time there was not much they did for it except send you somewhere else, so I went to Washington [DC]. Senator [Duncan U.] Fletcher was a great uncle, and he wanted me to try Washington. I went up and lived with them for three or four years. [While there I] was a page in the Senate and sang in St. John's Church (16th and H) as a choir boy. It was a very happy experience, and I did not have asthma there.

R: You did not have asthma in Washington?

Y: No.

R: Well, that sounds like a wonderful experience for a growing-up boy, to be a page in the Senate and to sing in a big boy's choir. Is that where your love of music began?

Y: Well, I had had some music lessons in Good Shepherd choir before I left. I guess the musical love came from [my parents]; both of them were fond of music. Mother especially was accomplished in music, more so than my father.

R: After you went to school in Washington, where did you go?

Y: I came back then because all the things I was interested in were in Florida.

Although I had enjoyed this experience, I came back. I went one-half year to John Gorrie Jr. High School, which had just been built then. I was in the first half-year graduating class from John Gorrie. Then I went down to Old Duval, which was the only high school in Jacksonville at that time, and I did a year there. Then I began to be short of breath again, so I was sent to a preparatory school in Manassas, Virginia – the Swagley School. It had been the old army and navy prep school in Washington and still prepared for the two academies principally, although they prepared for academic institutions, as well.

R: You did not go to a military academy, did you?

Y: Well, all of my closest friends there at school had gone to Annapolis, and I used to go up and visit them. There was a small but old college, Colonial College, right across the street from the naval academy in Annapolis and St. Johns [College]. Once when I was up there visiting some of my friends, I went over and asked them about their academic program and if they would accept me. I had not graduated from prep school yet, but they told me they would accept me on probation and that if I made good I could remain, which I did. So then I did my four years of college work at St. Johns, Annapolis, and I majored in Latin and Greek. My mother had taught Latin. In fact, she had taught all the Latin that was taught in Duval County at one time, so she had started us early. When I went to college, the easiest thing to do was major in the classics.

R: At St. Johns in Annapolis?

Y: Yes.

R: I think the little news article that I read about you said that you had gone to Johns Hopkins. Is that right?

Y: That is probably mistaken. I did take a course or two in advanced psychology [there] my senior year. St. Johns and Johns Hopkins had some relationship, and they let senior students go up there and do a course or two at Johns Hopkins, which I did, but I was not really a student at Johns Hopkins.

R: Well, St. Johns College is still a unique and very fine college.

Y: Yes. They have a plan of their own which is more like the English schools.

R: You had a tutor and you just more or less met on your own?

Y: That is right.

R: That must have been a wonderful experience.

Y: It was especially helpful in my case because Mother had started us early in Latin, and by the time I got to St. Johns I had not only read all the things that are customarily read in high school – Caesar, Cicero, and Vergil – but I had read a good many other things that would have been offered in freshman class. My tutor in the classics was a newly graduated, very energetic and creative, interesting Harvard student who had earned a good many distinguishing marks himself. He told me, "Instead of taking classroom time here, suppose you just come down to my [house]" – he lived in on Prince George Street, just below the college there – "and we will read some interesting Latin authors in front of the fireplace at night." So that is the way I did most of the reading.

R: You read Horace and Lily?

Y: Yes, and other Vergil books and a great many of the plays that had been taken over from Greek literature and translated or paraphrased into Latin.

R: So you really had a firm foundation in the classics.

Y: I really had, more than generally, I guess.

R: And then you came back to Jacksonville?

Y: During these years, Bishop Murray of Maryland, who was another wonderful person, had permitted me to minister as a lay reader to three little churches along the electric railroad that went to Baltimore from Annapolis. While I had done some lay reading before I left Florida, it confirmed me in a conviction that I had that I wanted to go to seminary, so I came back and asked Bishop Gerran if I could go to the Virginia Seminary, which was close to Alexandria, Virginia. I could have gone there and commuted on Sundays to these lay churches I had taken care of in Maryland. But Bishop Gerran thought there would be a lot more commuting to Maryland and much less seminary study, so he said, "Fred, if you go one year to Sewanee [Tennessee] to break the sequence, then I will let you go wherever you like." So I went to Sewanee for one year and got involved in the mountain missions that Sewanee took care of. These Maryland churches had already been taken over in another way, so then I went on and completed my work at seminary.

R: Perhaps we should explain here that the Bishop Gerran was with the north Florida diocese at that time.

Y: The Diocese of Florida, it was called.

R: And the cathedral in Jacksonville was the seat of that bishop.

Y: That was long before there was any cathedral. The cathedral did not come until the 1950s, I think. But he was bishop of the diocese and a wonderfully fine man. We did not always agree, but I always respected and honored his counsel.

R: What was the mother church before we had the cathedral?

Y: Almost no Southern diocese had a cathedral at that time.

R: What year are we speaking of?

Y: Well, I came here in 1934, so this was 1933. His work, as he conceded, was largely missionary work. He spent a great deal of time in the country churches and in places where churches needed to be established, as Bishop Reed before him and Bishop Brown before him had done. The idea of a complete cathedral, a structured great church in Jacksonville, was not [a reality as of yet]. The diocese at that time included Pensacola, so it was much bigger than it is now.

R: Yes, and Florida was still considered something of a frontier as far as the church was concerned. So you went to Sewanee for your freshman year.

Y: Yes, I did go there for three years.

R: And you decided to stay?

Y: During that time there was another training school for the ministry. It was not exactly a seminary; it was a plan to train mountain boys to go back to minister to their own people. It was at Monteagle, six miles from Sewanee. It also trained older men who decided to go into the ministry, so it was a little bit different from Sewanee. During that particular time, Dr. Logan did not have anybody on the faculty there to teach ancient languages. The seminary faculty from Sewanee used to commute sometimes back and forth to help him, but they persuaded me

that, along with my seminary work, I could teach Latin and Greek at Monteagle. I did not do very well, but I tried. When I graduated, by that time Miss Maggie was quite infirmed. They still had older girls who wanted to go, and I really came to this section to teach Latin and Greek at the Tebeau School [in Gainesville, FL], which I did for a good many years.

R: Now, Miss Maggie [Tebeau] was the head mistress at the Tebeau School?

Y: Yes.

R: Her sister was Miss –?

Y: Miss Alice Thomas was the vice principal, but they were not blood sisters. They had some sort of a blood connection, but they were not sisters.

R: And that is [inaudible].

Y: [Inaudible] years right after the war between states. It was first established in Fernandina at St. Mary's priory when Miss Tebeau came down from Charleston. Then they had a bad fire there, and Bishop Young persuaded them that perhaps it would be better to place it here, nearer the center of the diocese and not at one edge. Miss Alice had this big house. I do not know whether she had taught up there or whether they were simply academic friends, but at any rate, the school was established in the Thomas home, Miss Alice Thomas's home, and they added something to it. It was a huge house at the time I taught there.

R: According to Mrs. Pound, who was a student there, every Sunday morning the girls were taken down to Holy Trinity for the service.

Y: Oh, yes, they all were. They – Miss Maggie and Miss Alice – always thought of it as the parochial school of Holy Trinity church, although academically it was on a

higher plane.

R: I see. Miss Anne actually had a little leaflet, a little catalog, telling the courses that were taught.

Y: I imagine I had some of that sort of material, but I would have to search for it.

R: It is probably at your house somewhere. Do you have a big attic where you keep things?

Y: Yes, ma'am.

R: Well, you probably have some treasures up there.

Y: While I was there, the Reverend Mr. Stoney, the rector here, accepted a call to Morganton, North Carolina, I think it was. At any rate, he left, and during the interim, before Mr. Wakefield came from Palatka, I filled in at Holy Trinity.

R: I must have just missed you, because my husband John McLaughlin and I came in 1938, and Mr. Wakefield was the minister when we came.

Y: Yes, he had come I think in 1936 or 1937.

R: I did not realize he was so new. It was such a small congregation there, and I was young. It seemed to me that most of the people in it were very old families in Gainesville, and it was a rather stiff and formal church then. It is so different now; it is a real swinging church now. [Laughter]

Y: Most Episcopal churches were fairly Victorian in their approach at that time. Mr. Stoney was a very loving soul. During the Depression years and the years when the boom burst in Florida, there was a whole group of little churches in the area, some of which were still alive, but many of them not, and he tried to minister to them Sunday afternoons and on weekdays and nights. Some of the vestry here,

Mr. [Wade] Hampton in particular, felt he was giving more time to the mission churches than he should, so when Mr. Wakefield came, there was an understanding that he was to minister only at the Holy Trinity altar. This is a sort of restriction that clergymen would not receive today, but he did.

Then Bishop Duran asked me if I would pick up [the slack] and try to help these little churches around. At one time I had sixteen of them. I did not go to them all every Sunday, of course, but I tried to give them the support they needed. Most of these little churches had been left. The lumber industry, a big mill would come there and when the [gap in tape] attached to the mills there. But when they would go build there, would be almost no [gap in tape] Fairbanks. There was a great big mill there and a beautiful little chapel. In fact, the church in Starke was building their [inaudible] at Rocky Point, if you know where that is.

R: I understand you grew up at Rocky Point. It overlooks the prairie.

Y: Yes, that is right. There was one in Micanopy which had perished, and I was able to get it together again after [gap in tape] and Trenton and Newberry, and [gap in tape] and High Springs and Melrose and Waldo [gap in tape] that used to go on. St. Johns had been taken off [inaudible] Jacksonville to build ships for the First World War. So there were eighteen little churches between Mayport or Fort George. The city that [gap in tape] load and unload passengers and freight and that sort of thing. People would go out and tap the chapel bell [gap in tape]. Then he would touch the whistle, and the missionary would come back.

[Gap in tape] and a Mr. Brayshore. He was another Maryland clergyman; I knew him up there. He [inaudible] years was down here, and he was going to

[inaudible]. After they took the riverboats off, he did not have any means of getting from place to place because many of these chapels did not have roads to them. The river had been their highway. Of course, later there were roads built to them. The Florida Hardware Company had a boat which they called a napta launch. It was really [gap in tape] . . . chapels when he could not get there any other way. As he got older and [gap in tape] little church at McBerland. When they wanted to put me in my place, they used to show me a little box with carpet on it that had been built [inaudible] to read for Mr. Bernie Shore [laughter].

R: That was a wonderful experience.

Y: It really was. Some people said they were called to the ministry. I do not think I was really called – I drifted into it, from churches and some images also, of course. I had lived in that part of Jacksonville that had been strongly influenced by Good Shepherd in its mission days. It had been the little vertical-board church at first. Then Mr. Wersham moved that building out to Stockton Street. He had a very strong conviction about a seven-day-a-week church, a children's church. The first building they built over there was the gymnasium. The second building was from a gift from Mrs. Cummer, and they built a swimming pool. Then they built the parish hall, and finally they built the church.

R: Oh, my. What was it a day school? Did the church run the day school?

Y: No. Along Park Street down there I guess there must be ten or fifteen churches now, including Methodist, Baptist, Presbyterian, Latter Day Saints, and Roman Catholic, but there was not a single church in that area then except Good Shepherd. It drew the children with the swimming pool and gymnasium. In fact,

Mother always said that if we were not at home, she knew where we were – at Good Shepherd.

R: Well, that was wonderful for the children growing up.

Y: Yes. I sang in the choir there, and I was much attracted to Mr. Wersham and others, so I sort of grew up under the wing of it.

R: Yes, you did. Now, you have come to Gainesville as Mr. Wakefield's assistant.

Y: No, I was a teacher at the Tebeau School. Holy Trinity did not want me on its staff. I was not their obligation.

R: But you attended.

Y: Yes, I used to attend with the girls, and I spent most of my weekends in the mission churches around here.

R: About how many girls did the Tebeau School have in your day?

Y: I guess there were about ten or fifteen boarders, and then there were a good many day-school girls – and boys – from Gainesville; they had little boys as well. They did not take boys after about the third, fourth, or maybe fifth grade, but they had a good many older girls from Gainesville.

R: Now, at no part in your life history did you take one church permanently, did you?

Y: No, I do not.

R: It was with Bishop John Clancy that you would be a [priest].

Y: Well, I had assisted briefly at Good Shepherd in Jacksonville. Mr. Wersham died and there was an interim in there, and I had helped. I told the bishop, "These people know me; they know me too well. I have stolen their plums and broken their windows. [laughter] I think you had better let me go to the country." He

said, "Fred, I would love to let you go to the country. [inaudible] Depression years and boom burst years, but we cannot afford to put a priest in charge at these country churches." I said that was what I would like [inaudible]. If I received something nowadays, it would be thought of as precious little from the Tebeau School. But he said, "Fred, if you are determined to do that, I will see that you do not starve, but I cannot do much more." I received sixty dollars a month and kept a car, and served churches between Fort George and Cedar Key.

R: This was while you were teaching at the school? You were certainly busy the whole week.

Y: It got to the point where there was not a great deal of teaching because young people wanted classics less and less. Of course, as the number of older girls gradually decreased at Tebeau School, during the Second World War years, if you remember, we had nearly 200 tiny mites there, child care center children, so there was no need at all for my training in classics.

I got Miss Florence Jennings to come. She had a Ph.D. from [Johns] Hopkins and had done a great deal of child care work; she really knew what she was doing. She came as principal after Miss Alice was not physically able to carry on. I do not know why they called me rector, because a school of that sort really did not need a rector. Nevertheless, I remained as sort of a figurehead. I did not teach. At that time we must have had a faculty of fifteen or eighteen whose talent was caring for little folks, so I spent little time there. I signed the checks, among other things, but most of my time was spent in the country churches. Of course, when the Second World War came on, they needed a great deal of help in Starke.

Starke had had a modest congregation, a loyal congregation, but when the workers came to build [Camp] Blanding – Starke was a county seat town of fifteen or eighteen hundred people – almost overnight it became the dwelling place of 5,000 workers at Camp Blanding.

R: What was the name of the Starke church?

Y: St. Mark's. It is a free parish now, but then it was a mission church. It was the largest church in the group except Cedar Key, and I usually tried to have the 11:00 service on Sunday at Starke. The evening service, which was then popular – it is not much any more – was at Christ Church, Cedar Key. In between, I would take care of the country churches at Waldo, Melrose, Trenton, and Newberry.

R: You must have worn out several cars in your lifetime.

Y: Yes. It usually amounted to about 1,000 miles a week that I drove, and it still does.

R: They charged pennies for the gasoline?

Y: There was a period when they did, and it really came out of my stock most of the time.

R: Well, you have certainly had an interesting life and have met a lot of wonderful people. Can you recall some of the individuals who were important to you?

Would you say that women usually were the foundation of these little churches?

Y: To a large extent that was true, although almost every one of them had one or two outstanding men who were intensely loyal. In Starke, there were the two Hoover brothers, who are well-known photographers, especially in children's work. In the days when the Marables were here, they were great friends. They were the two

wardens of the congregation when I went there, and they were the sort of men that you just never had service without them unless they were sick in bed, and that was not often.

R: Do you remember their first names?

Y: Mr. Joe, and I cannot think of the other one. I ought to know his brother's name; it will come to me in time. And then along with that was Mr. Joe's wife, who was a great helper, and Miss Emma Richard, who not only was the altar girl but polished the—

[Break in recording]

R: She was your altar girl?

Y: Yes, Emma Richard; the emphasis, as they pronounced it, was on the last syllable. It was in her memory that a son who became president of the a in Palatka left a trust fund that helped them become a parish over there.

R: Tell me about the Melrose church. Who was the [gap in tape]?

Y: He said one thing that he never was going to do was teach school. When he came to Earleton, the first question that was asked him was if he could teach. They had a school there and nobody to teach in it.

R: So he was pressed into service.

Y: He was pressed into service. He was warden of the church there, St. John the Fisherman, for a good many years, and from that church the Melrose church was built. The Hiltons moved to Melrose, and he remained its warden, I think, until he was ninety-six years old. He was really a wonderful person. He played the organ when we had no organist, and he worked on the building when it needed it.

He practically never missed service. He was, like many Englishmen, very opinionated and hardheaded. When I first arrived, I thought the parson usually presided at vestry meetings or mission board meetings, but the mission board meetings were always held at Mr. Hilton's dining table at his house. [Gap in tape] song hill days all during the Depression. When I first said that we would try to have service every Sunday all year around, he said it would not work. "We tried before," he said. "We can have service here between Christmas and Easter when the northern people come down. Whenever you have service, I will be there, but there will not be anybody else in the summertime." But it got better and better.

R: It is getting better now.

Y: Yes, we have good congregations now.

R: And are you still serving that church?

Y: Yes, I am. I have not done it constantly because Bishop Duran's principle was that whenever two or three of these missions would get to that point where they were half self-supporting, then he would give them [priest out of seminary]. He sent as many men as he could to seminary because he wanted a major priesthood in Florida. So whenever a large group of these boys would come out of seminary, he would organize three or four of these missions that could almost support them, and then he put them in charge. I was there for about twenty-five years, and I left in 1956, I think it was. There were four of these young men who stayed about six or eight years apiece [during that time], until they saw greener pastures in the figures. Then I guess it was 1976 that Bishop Cervany said that he had several

country churches, and he wanted to see if I would help out in Melrose again for a few weeks until he could get somebody. I said I would try, and I have been there with the country churches ever since.

R: But not every Sunday. Every Sunday?

Y: Yes, every Sunday.

R: So now you are at Melrose –

Y: I conduct a service in Hawthorne at nine, Melrose at eleven, Waldo at three, and for a good many years I went to Newberry at five and Mayo at eight. But Newberry now is cared for by St. Joseph's pretty much.

R: I can hardly believe this. You did five services on one day!

Y: Yes. On Christmas and Easter we did a lot better than that sometimes.

R: I do not see how your voice could hold out.

Y: I was an asthmatic and I gasped at them sometimes, but they were very patient with me.

R: That is really a remarkable record.

Y: The Melrose church has been a very loyal, loving church. They meant a great deal to me. I think now they ought to have better care; I think they need it. They have a beautiful rectory and a new parish hall, and they really ought to have a resident clergyman again.

R: Is it a growing congregation?

Y: Yes, it is.

R: Both Melrose and Micanopy have become very attractive to people in Gainesville since Gainesville is getting so large and noisy and crowded, and you have to lock

and bar your doors. It is too bad. I guess you do not have to do that in Melrose.

Y: No. The church over there right now is locked because one of our own youngsters who went through his pyromania that boys do of wanting to light matches all the time. We kept finding candles burning in church and burnt matches around the altar, and we were afraid we were going to lose those frame buildings, so they lock it now. The Waldo church has never been locked.

R: That is too bad. How did it come about that the parish house at Melrose burned down? Was that two years ago?

Y: It was in 1984, I think, that it burned, and it was replaced last year. You remember, it had originally been a chapel building at Camp Blanding. They had forty-five of these great big buildings. There were 100,000 men over there to provide religious care for. Afterward, the government said that these buildings could be had for a nominal sum if they were used for a community building or a public facility.

R: Are those the buildings that we brought here [to the University of Florida] to make Flavet Village East during the war?

Y: No, those were day rooms and barracks. You may remember the old Christian Science church, the building that was on the street there past the hospital. It was one of those chapel buildings, a huge building; it was a much bigger building than the Flavet Village ones. We happened to get one in Melrose; that was rather unusual, but we did. That building had been wired at Blanding, and then it was rewired when it came to Melrose. It has been rewired at least once after that in the years that it served. We have always thought that the fire began under the

stage where there was a good deal of electrical circuitry and that it had a good start before it was observed. We were having choir practice in there for the boys choir, and suddenly this cabinet that was built into the stage sort of burst open, and there was this blast of flames going up there. It was like a chimney. The fire had a good start and was terrible hard to put out.

R: You were not there at the time, were you?

Y: Yes, ma'am. I was practicing with the boys.

R: You were right there with the boys when it started?

Y: Yes. One of the boys went over to the firehouse, which was about a block away, and another one went and telephoned. I went with two of the boys to find fire extinguishers, and we worked on it with fire extinguishers from back and front, but it just did not make any impression. The blast of flame [was just too much for us to handle].

R: So you were not able to save the building at all, and it was demolished, right?

Y: Yes. They thought they had it controlled by about 10:00 at night. The frame of it was still standing and we thought we could repair it, but early in the morning sometime – nobody knew exactly when – the fire department was still patrolling and it burst out again, and that time it finished it.

R: Well, thank goodness they were able to save the little historic church. It is such a beautiful little board-and-batten building. I suppose it is now on the [National] Register of Historic Places.

Y: It has not been placed yet. We have talked about it, but we have not done anything about it.

R: I cannot recall just how close the parish house was to the church.

Y: It was almost half a block away. We had placed it that way because the chapel building from Blanding was such a big building that it dwarfed the church, so we put it back at one corner of the lot so that it would not detract too much from the church. It turns out that that was a wise thing to do. When we built the new parish church, they wanted to connect it with the church, but I said no. It would be more convenient that way, but it would be dangerous to do it.

R: You know, I have never been in the little Episcopal church at Cedar Key. Is it a historic building? Is it very old?

Y: It is the third building on that site. This one is a masonry building that was built to replace one that was blown down flat in the street in 1949 during a tropical hurricane. The first building on that site was the only church building in Cedar Key for many years, and it was built of cedar. It was a beautiful building with a tall spire. You could go in there in the afternoon and –

R: It would smell wonderful.

Y: Yes, the sun would shine on it, and it would smell wonderful. But that burned before my day. I think it was destroyed by fire in 1916.

R: What is the name of that church?

Y: Christ Church. It was the church in Cedar Key and Levy County for a good many years. It was a self-supporting church in the days when they had a great deal of cedar down there. There were pencil factories there, and it was very lucrative. Cedar Key was a port, and there was a customs house there. But, of course, that day passed, and it became sort of a fishing village, and Christ Church became a

mission church.

After the first building was burned, they used a storefront down on the main street. Then Bishop Reed tried to get the Waldo congregation, which had a huge old church that had been damaged by another storm, to let him move it to Cedar Key to replace this building. The Waldo people, quite understandably, did not want to do that. But finally the city fathers said that this building was dangerous. It was a large building and a tall building with a tall spire on it that had been thrown out of plumb by this storm, and there were some heavy bells in it. Finally he offered to buy for them the Presbyterian church there. The Presbyterian congregation had gotten smaller and smaller, and finally disbanded. Our church was over in the old railroad shops. Waldo was a railroad town. The Presbyterian church was in much more of a residential section, and they finally consented. They took the old building down, loaded it and took it to Cedar Key, and built a frame building to replace the 1916 church. Then that building, in turn, was blown down in a storm in 1949, so then we built a masonry building there.

R: I would think so, after having had two blown down by storm. Dr. Andrews and Ellen, his wife, used to be active in Holy Trinity. I think they moved down to the Cedar Key church. I suppose they became active.

Y: Yes, they were very helpful there. The lighting in the new church is a gift in memory of Dr. Andrews.

R: Did he stay in practice down there?

Y: Yes. He had a big, old house down there which I think had been built as an inn. It was really bigger than a residence. He envisioned at one time having a sort of a

convalescent hospital there.

R: Now, we are speaking of Dr. Edwin Andrews and his wife Ellen.

Y: Yes. His father had been a doctor, too, and lived there. That was Dr. Dan Andrews.

R: He had been a doctor in Cedar Key?

Y: Yes, ma'am.

R: I did not know that.

Y: He had a brother who was a dentist, also. They had come from Gary, Indiana, where I think they had run a big hospital. [Gap in tape] was a very healthful place to live, and that is why Dr. Edwin wanted to have a convalescence hospital there. It really never quite worked out because it was so remote; I guess that was one thing.

R: Do you think you would like to live in Cedar Key? Are you ever going to retire, Father Yerkes?

Y: According to the diocese, I am retired, but I have not stopped. I just have not learned when to stop. I lived in Cedar Key for twenty-five years.

R: Oh, you did? I did not know that.

Y: Yes. Part of it was during the summer while I was still teaching at the Tebeau School, and I had a room at the hotel there.

R: That wonderful old Allen hotel?

Y: Yes. We received room and board for \$24 a week at that time.

R: And those meals. The meals alone were worth better than \$24.

Y: Yes. The bishop thought it would be better for me to live in Starke, so I moved to

the rectory in Starke and was there during the Blanding years.

R: Did many of the soldiers come to church?

Y: Yes. Considering the number that were out there, you could say only a few came, but since there were 100,000 men there, if twenty or thirty came into Stark to church, that was many. Of course, that made a large congregation for St. Mark's.

R: Did you perform any weddings?

Y: Yes. In fact, I was looking the other day at the Waldo register. I filled up the married section of the Starke register. The rest of the book was full, so then I began to put them in the Waldo register, and I just put a note in the Starke register that such-and-such weddings were in the Waldo book.

R: I see. And I guess you officiated many baptisms and countless funerals.

Y: Yes.

R: How do you feel about the new prayer book? Do any of your little churches still use the old prayer book? There was such a controversy about it, and so many people wanted to hold on to the old one.

Y: You ought not ask me for opinions on this subject [laughter]. I am a conservative, but I try to be loyal. The bishop asked us to use the new book, and we have always used the new book, although the choir boys in Waldo say I read the old service out of the new book [laughter]. We use that Rite One over there, and pretty much the way it used to be used. I did that deliberately when I went back there. We had a couple of young clergymen who had been very aggressive for the new rites, the new liturgy and all. They went around without explaining and without being tactful; they approached people as though "if you were not so

ignorant, you would know better and would accept this." That attitude does not draw people close to the church. We had a modern approach in Keystone just six miles away, and we had a modern approach at Hawthorne nine miles away. But it seemed to me that in that area, for the older people at least, there ought to be a conservative altar, so we have always had conservative services in Melrose.

They are not what I grew up with as a child or what they grew up with as children, but, compared to Holy Trinity, they would be conservative. It has been happy.

I deliberately set about to find the people who had been lost to the church. There was a large group of Keystone and Palatka people that had formed a new congregation in Palatka, and I was good friends with all of them. In fact, I helped provide some of the furniture for their chapel and other things. But I could not help them as a priest; the bishop said so, and I told them so. I did not try to injure their work, but our own people who had gone down there and should not have I did try to encourage to come back. I do not think we lost a single family in Melrose. There was a number of Keystone families that could not seem to be ministered to in Keystone that have come to Melrose, and one or two from Hawthorne. There were even a couple of people from Holy Trinity who come there regularly.

R: My dear friend Elizabeth Simpson is a member of your congregation.

Y: She is a wonderful person.

R: She still comes to St. Mark's?

Y: Yes.

R: I did an oral history for [inaudible] of her sister Ila, and they had wonderful lives.

Y: Both of them. Of course, I had known them long ago because the Roundtrees

lived in Waldo for many years. Of course, Miss Ila's husband was the physician in Waldo, Dr. Pridgen.

R: We are speaking now of Miss Ila Pridgen, who was librarian of the University of Florida law school for many years. Her sister, Elizabeth Simpson, was Dean Simpson's wife, and before that she was Mrs. Yates.

Y: And before that she was a Roundtree.

R: Right. She served for many years as secretary of the English department at the University.

Y: And all of them are musical. She sang and Miss Ila played the old pipe organ in Waldo for a great many years.

R: And now Elizabeth Simpson's daughter, Margaret, is your choir director, right?

Y: Well, Dr. Stryker actually directs the choir.

R: Dr. Stryker is the organist and directs the choir.

Y: Yes, but she helps him, though; a great many times when he is not there, she fills in. All three of those persons have been great help to us.

R: We are speaking of [Philip] David Stryker, who used to be the organist at Holy Trinity. He is a retired professor of English, and he is now the organist at Melrose. And Margaret Rice used to be the choir director at Holy Trinity. We are so closely connected by people coming back and forth with the Melrose church. We now have an organist and choir director, David Benson.

Y: Who lives in Melrose.

R: Yes. He was the choir director, right? No, he was the organist [in the Melrose church], I think.

Y: No, he was organist and choir director at the Presbyterian church between Melrose and Keystone [Heights].

R: Oh, I see.

Y: But he had always worked very closely with us. His wife is Episcopalian, and he loved the Episcopal church. They had developed this Melrose music theater that did the Gilbert and Sullivan operettas each year, the madrigal dinners, and those things. Of course, our parish house was the only building in town that was big enough for these things, so they [did them here]. He plans to do another Gilbert and Sullivan operetta there this spring.

R: The new parish house is big enough for that sort of thing.

Y: Yes. It actually is a little bit bigger than the old one. We had not planned on that, but it turned out that way.

R: So you can still put on musicals?

Y: Yes, ma'am.

R: I guess David Benson was attracted to Holy Trinity because Holy Trinity had become known for its music written by our dear Earl Page, whom we just recently lost. You know, Fred, I had always wanted to do an oral history of Earl Page, but then he had his heart attack and then he had his stroke, and I just did not want to impose on him. Maybe Anne can tell us someday about his life experience.

Y: Yes, that would be wonderful.

R: Would you like to comment on any of the other unique features of these small churches where you have served?

Y: Well, I suppose I have served the Waldo church longest and most constantly. It

had a few little breaks when I could persuade a clergyman to come down from the North and help them in the wintertime or something. But, by and large, they have had to put up with me for fifty-two year, which is bad [laughter]. They need a change. I have tried hard to get it for them, and will soon, I hope.

R: Is Waldo growing like these other towns?

Y: Not really. Although it is a dormitory village for Gainesville like the other towns, it has been in a different way. The jobs or positions that people find around here with the big institutions – the University, hospitals, Sunland, and such – are usually manual jobs or that sort of thing. They come in elsewhere from the country and get a job in Gainesville. They cannot pay Gainesville rents, so they get a flat or a cottage or something, usually in one of these big, old rambling houses in Waldo, and live there until they find a place or can afford a place in Gainesville, and then they move in. It means that we constantly have these nice people with wonderful families with children, and just about the time we get them in Sunday school or get them in scout troop or Brownies or something, they tell us that daddy has found a house and they are moving to Gainesville.

R: That is discouraging.

Y: Then we start in with another group that would come in. Actually, there were more than 100 children who probably use the parish house in Waldo every week in [Boy] Scouts or Cub Scouts or Brownies or Girl Scouts. Actually, in the church there we have almost no children. It sounds as though I have not done a very good job. I know these children or nearly all of them, and their families belong to the Baptist church; that seems the right place for them to go. Occasionally they

visit us, but it is not right to proselytize them, to draw them away from their families. St. Paul's has not grown as the others have, and whether it will as things build up that way [remains to be seen]. Fairbanks and the area in between [there and Waldo] has built up. It may be that there were one or two housing areas built in Waldo, but they were principally for low-rent groups and were often occupied by black folks. We do not draw any line. We have plenty of black children in the Cubs and Scouts and occasionally in church, but, by and large, they prefer to attend their own churches. In fact, the pastors of those churches say that we are trying to get their most talented children to come to the white church, which leaves them with no leadership in the black churches. Sometimes that is true. It is quite unfair to them.

R: I was so glad to see that we took in a black couple, a man and his wife, at Holy Trinity last Sunday. We have had a hard time getting black people to come to our church.

Y: That is true. When they first wanted to merge St. Augustine's with Holy Trinity, I said that I thought it would be a great privilege for those trained Episcopalians, like the Bill Taylor family and those others who had been at St. Augustine, [to attend church here]. However, I am afraid the missionary work is going to stop, because it is not as easy for black families to go to Holy Trinity as it was for black families in the neighborhood to come to St. Augustine's.

R: Yes, I can understand that.

Y: And it has happened to some extent. I guess maybe I hope it will be overcome, and I am glad to hear that a family was taken in.

R: It seems to me, [from my experiences] growing up in Mississippi and then [spending] the rest of my life here in Gainesville, except for my schooling in North Carolina, that actually black people become much more attached to their churches than white people do. They are so loyal to their churches.

Y: Yes, this is true, and that is true at St. Augustine's. I have served there and have taught in the school there for a long time, and I grew to be very fond of them. There was a loyalty there that is not always true in our white churches.

R: You have never served in Alachua or High Springs?

Y: Yes, I served in High Springs for a good many years. There has never been an Episcopal church, to the best of my knowledge, in Alachua. We have had college services there a time or two, but, in addition to the Methodist and Baptist churches and the Church of Christ, there has always been a strong Presbyterian church there which seemed to minister to our sort of folk.

R: I taught in Newberry one year, and I remember there was a young Episcopal clergyman there in Newberry. That was in 1960.

Y: That would have been John Vinton.

R: Yes, I believe it was. I never went to church there because I was not there on Sunday's, but [inaudible] that was the year after my husband died suddenly. Are there any other churches that you would like to comment on that you have served? We have covered a large territory.

Y: Speaking of Newberry, something ought to be said, it seems to me, not so much about the church there now, but about the one family that kept the church alive there for so many years. The Westons were a South Carolina, low-country family.

He had come to Newberry about the turn of the century (or maybe a little before) as a factor manager for the Cummer interest there, the mines and the timber and other things. Mr. Franz Weston was not only a wonderful person, but a splendid churchman. He and his two maiden sisters, Miss Florence and Miss Alice, lived together in a house that had been built by the Cummers for them. If there were no other place to have church, church was always at the Weston's house.

Sometimes when things got a little bit stronger, we would have it in the Methodist church. We had had a church building or two there, but storms and fires and things seemed to be our enemies in Newberry. We just could not seem to keep a building.

R: I know they had a rectory the year that I was there.

Y: A big rectory. It was a house with six or eight bedrooms in it, and this is the house in which the Weston's lived. When they were getting older, they said they very much wanted this house to go to the church. It had been built by the Cummer interest on land that belonged to the Cummer interest, so I went to Wellington Cummer and talked to him. He said, "Of course, it is a big corporation, and I am only one; I cannot do much about it. But if the time ever comes when that place is available, I will let you know." He did, and the Cummer interests offered it to us at a nominal sum. It would be just chicken feed now. There were ten acres of land and this big, old house, and a little building in front that he used as an office. During the last twenty-five years or so, that little building has been the chapel; it is furnished as the chapel now. Although people are supposed to go to St. Joseph's, some of the old-timers are not very good about that because St.

Joseph's is a different kind of a church from what [they were used to]. At any rate, the Weston family was one of the early families in the section that really had a wonderful moral, ethical, religious, loving influence for the church, and the whole town loved them. Even people who never saw them now know who the Westons were. They helped a lot to get and keep that school there, although they had no children of their own.

R: It attracted boys to Newberry School, and the townspeople came?

Y: Yes, there was a time when they wanted to consolidate it.

R: I know. I well remember that because it really saved my life. I lost my husband, John McLaughlin, suddenly with a heart attack September 1. I had just gone out to Newberry to rebuild the library, which was my first job in a public school. I had been getting my certificate to teach, and it was because they insisted on having that school that I was able to get a job.

Y: That is right. And they ran a bus up to the new Alachua School for a whole year with nobody on it, I think to prove something legally.

R: It was a very enthusiastic faculty, and those children out there and those teachers really saved me when I was grieving that first year. They were wonderful to me. Well, I think you have had a beautiful life.

Y: Certainly it has been a most active life. It has not been as fruitful as it could have been because I spread it kind of thin sometimes, but it has been a very happy life, and I hope I can go on being useful. I do not want to hang on to any particular place the bishop could possibly find a younger man for, but if there are these places he cannot find any care for, I hope he will let me carry on until I get to be too

tired.

R: Oh, I am sure he will. Thank you so much for coming here this afternoon. I know you are supposed to get to the hospital to see the sick folks, and I hope I have not kept you. I appreciate it so much. I know the University [Oral History Archives] appreciates it. You have lived through so much Florida history in these little towns, and this interview is going to be very useful, I am sure, to future historians.

Y: I cannot easily see how, but I hope so.

R: Let us put a little postscript on this. [I am interested in the] demise of the beautiful Tebeau School, where you used to teach. How did it get to be a parking lot?

Y: Miss Maggie had left a very complicated and specific will – several typed pages, single spaced. First, the school building was offered to the church if they would continue it as the kind of a school that they had had there. Well, the time had passed for a girl's finishing school. There was just not any demand for it anymore, so the bishop did not feel that he could carry out [the specifics of Miss Maggie's will].

Then it was offered to the United Daughters of the Confederacy for a meeting place, but they chose to make it a home, I guess. It was to be under certain conditions: it was to be used as a park only for white people, the birds were to be fed forever, and there were some specifics about the plants in the yard, too. They felt that they could not carry that out, so then it was offered to the church to use in any way it chose. I believe Miss Maggie had said that she was very unhappy about this part. I am not clear about this because many of these things do not make a strong impression on me. At any rate, the city of Gainesville wanted a

parking lot very much, and they had promised certain emoluments to the Chapel of the Incarnation if this property could be made available for a parking lot.

R: It was sort of a property swap.

Y: Yes. So that was what was finally done. The city wanted to do it very quickly. They insisted that the old house was a fire hazard, and we had to move the school to what used to be called the Green Cottage over here because they would not even let us finish the year there. Mr. Stoney's daughter, Martha, was our principal at that time, and I remember how many trips she and I made up here in a car just to get the basic things into that building. Then, of course, there were worlds of old-fashioned double school desks that had been in a study hall there.

R: Those old school desks are valuable antiques now.

Y: Yes.

R: I wonder what became of them.

Y: Some of them were moved to St. Augustine's, and some of them I suppose people just came by and picked up. There was a square piano, too.

R: I remember there were camellia bushes that reached up to the second floor of the gallery.

Y: We used to go in at the front door, and there was a bower of Formosa azaleas that met over the top, so it was just like a tunnel. In fact, when we trimmed them, there was enough of both the dead wood and the live wood for us to burn in fireplaces. The house was terribly hard to heat. I can remember years when we burned forty cords of wood to heat that building.

- R: I guess none of the windows fitted and the wind just came through.
- Y: And it was just so big. Of course, there were stoves and fireplaces in every room, and they were not the easiest way to heat a building.
- R: They were also a fire hazard. It is a shame that they did not keep some of the palm trees and the camellia bushes, even when they made it a parking lot. Now they want to put a few trees in parking lots after they pave them.
- Y: They just stripped the yard. We did get the park department to come and take certain things out to Evergreen Cemetery.
- R: Maybe that is why Evergreen has so many camellia bushes.
- Y: There were a lot of things, though, that were lost. There was one thing there that Miss Maggie always called "Schiebemyrtel"; she gave it a German name. At any rate, it was a bush that a bit of it had traditionally for generations in Germany and on the Continent, and in England, been placed on a bride's headdress veil. You would be surprised the number of people who came by there and wanted a twig or two of this myrtle bush to put in some bride's headdress.
- R: That is a charming story.
- Y: There were a lot of other things like that that had a real sentiment about them.
- R: Does the myrtle have certain qualities about it in classical history?
- Y: Yes, I think it does.
- R: I am glad I got to Gainesville in time to see the old house and yard before they tore it down. I am glad we got that story in.