

This is an interview with Howard Kester. The interview was conducted by Jacquelyn Hall and William Finger on July 22, 1974 and was transcribed by Susan Hathaway.

Howard Kester: . . . that one right over there. She was a real angel and after she went away I started pulling out the boxes, I knew they were here in the files and when I got to 80 boxes, I quit counting (Laughter)

Jacquelyn Hall: Well, is the book based mostly on your own papers, the ones that are now on microfilm?

H.K.: No. I have papers that are in Chapel Hill, but others that still haven't been microfilmed. Papers from many people in all walks of life.

J.H.: You have a whole . . .

H.K.: Like papers from people concerned about all the things I was attempting to do, Elizabeth Gilman, Niebuhr, Dorothy Dexter, and so forth and so on, that I saved out, because they are sort of personal.

J.H.: Is there a collection of Fellowship of Southern Churchmen papers besides what you have, or are you . . .

H.K.: I've got them all.

J.H.: You've got everything? Great. Well, why don't you start by telling us a little bit about your family, where you came from.

H.K.: Well, I was born in Martinsville, Virginia. That's in Henry County, just across the line from North Carolina. My mother was of Scotch-Irish ancestry, and my grandfather was the Manager of the John Daniel Plantation, which was partly in, if I remember correctly, in Amherst County about where Sweetbriar College is, and in Campbell County where Lynchburg is.

And on my father's side . . . the Kesters lived in or around about Cologne in Germany. And they became Quakers, left Germany, went to England and struck up with William Penn, who in turn, got them to survey parts of Pennsylvania. Now the records say . . .

J.H.: May I smoke?

H.K.: Please do because I am going to. Maybe I ought not to. (Laughter)

J.H.: Well, don't let me tempt you.

H.K.: Matches? Half of them don't strike. . . There were two brothers who came to this country, Johannes, and Praetorius, and from all I can get, Praetorius was the stronger of the two brothers who came. And he signed the first written protest against slavery in America. He's well remembered by Quakers even today, and then I've seen a plaque, at least one plaque erected to him, in Philadelphia.

J.H.: Did you know about that?

H.K.: Years ago. No, I didn't know a thing about it at the time.

J.H.: When you were growing up?

H.K.: Didn't know a thing about it. My father, he had some Quakerism in him, but Mama was a Presbyterian, a Southern Presbyterian, and he joined the Presbyterian Church, became an elder and a Sunday School teacher in Church . . . and a member of the Ku Klux Klan, too. (Laughter)

J.H.: Was he/^{an} active member of the Ku Klux Klan?

H.K.: Well, he was never a leader, but people relied on him, they had so much respect for him. He was the kind of man who rarely, if ever, signed a contract. He said, "My word is as good as my bond." And there are some people around like that today, too, who, if they give you their word, that is all that is necessary, and . . .

J.H.: Were you aware of him going to Klan meetings, or being involved in disciplining . . .

H.K.: Yes, through my mother. My mother found the regalia.

J.H.: Oh, she didn't know he was in the Klan?

H.K.: She found it, yes.

J.H.: She didn't know it until she found the Klan regalia?

H.K.: Yes, and it nearly broke her heart. She didn't like any part of it, and I don't believe that Papa ever engaged in any violence. He had a fierce temper. (laughter) It was his principle, he told you to do something once and that was all. You'd better do it. And for the survey of Pennsylvania, I don't think the two brothers did that much, some of the relatives say that they surveyed the whole state. Well, I just can't believe it. And they were given land. I guess that after all Penn had to give them land . . . in what is now Chestnut Hill near Philadelphia. And either Williams . . . Williamsburg, I believe or Williamstown, in Pennsylvania and my father was a merchant tailor, it had been the great tradition. Some say it goes back five hundred years to a merchant tailor. Do you know what a merchant tailor is?

J.H.: No.

H.K.: A merchant tailor is a man who makes men's clothes . . . has the whole cloth, and he fits them and puts the garment together and they come in for fittings to see that everything is all right, you know. And my father didn't want to be a tailor, but his father wouldn't have it any other way. The tailoring trade had been in the family for generations. My Father wanted to be an engineer and he had the mind for it. You go to Cologne today, or at least it was the last time I was in Cologne and you can see the names and they are all tailors.

J.H.: They are all tailors?

H.K.: Yes, and my father wanted to be a mining engineer, but my grandfather said, "No, absolutely not, you're going to be a tailor." And he attended school. He went to what they called a Cutting School, in New York City, and became a first-rate tailor.

J.H.: Did he have a shop in his home, or where . . .

H.K.: Before I was born they lived in Bristol, and Roanoke and finally Martinsville, and then he ran into financial difficulty and we moved to West Virginia; Beckley in Raleigh County. And I have a brother, who is retired, living in Florida, near Orlando, and a sister who has the old home place in Beckley, and that's it. I came along in 1904.

J.H.: He was a tailor when you were born?

H.K.: Yes, he was a tailor, never anything but a tailor.

J.H.: Beckley is a Mining community.

H.K.: That's right, and I caught on while . . . Mama inadvertently, I suppose, showed us the regalia as children. My mother was really an angelic woman, and I don't ever remember her whipping me. (Laughter.) I couldn't say that about my daddy.

J.H.: Were you rebellious?

H.K.: No. Well, I was when I went to college and on into seminary, and got into trouble.

J.H.: You went to Lynchburg?

H.K.: I went to Lynchburg College and got an A.B.

J.H.: To be a Preacher?

H.K.: That's right, and I got a certificate in Bible, and a certificate in Greek, which means you had four years of it. And we had some good teachers, good teachers.

J.H.: How did you become a pacifist?

H.K.: Well, I suppose in 1923 there were about 15 boys who were selected through the YMCA, the World Student Christian Federation, to visit the war-torn countries of Europe, and the idea being that when we came back, we would raise money and clothes and get books, and this that and the other, for the European students. And David Porter, who was the National Secretary of the Student YMCA made a visit to the College (we were having a student meeting or something) and he asked me if I would be the Regional Director of the European Student Relief here in the South. And I was going to school and carrying a pretty heavy load, but I didn't feel like I could turn it down. So I didn't, I took it, got paid for it. (Laughter)

J.H.: That helps.

H.K.: Yes, it helps, you bet it does. They offered me a lot more than I would take ' cause I didn't feel like I could be honest about it, you know, and I got a telephone and a secretary, and did a lot of traveling. And the amazing thing is that I asked the, had the temerity to ask the Dean if I could make a two month trip through southern colleges, Negro and white, telling the story about what I had seen in Europe. And we were, in several instances, the guests of governments . . . of France, for example. Entertained, for example, in Verdun, and the same man who took Woodrow Wilson over the battle~~o~~field, took us over the battlefields. I don't know, I saw the hellishness of war, and I decided I didn't want anything to do with it.

J.H.: The other people, the other 23 students who travelled with you, did any of them go on to become pacifists?

H.K.: I don't know, I don't know who was that foolish.

J.H.: So you wanted to go on a two months speaking tour?

H.K.: Yes.

J.H.: What made you think of going to Negro colleges as well as white colleges?

H.K.: Well, Channing Tobias, did you know him?

J.H?: Yes.

H.K.: Channing Tobias and William Craner asked me if I would visit Negro colleges. They said, "You won't get much money, or anything else, but the Negro students ought not to be left out." So it made no difference to me. I went to the white colleges, where I did get money, and girls brought out fur coats, dresses and everything you could think of and gave them to me, and I would ship them to New York, and off they'd go to Europe, I hope.

J.H.: Were you aware at that time of the Interracial Commission? The formation of the . . .

H.K.: I knew Alexander well.

J.H.: Did you know him that early, in 1923?

H.K.: Dr. Will used to live right over there.

J.H.: Is that right?

H.K.: That's right. He used to live right over there, and I knew . . . I can't be certain when it was, but I don't think I really knew Dr. Will well until I was at Vanderbilt, and he's an old Vanderbilt man and the Dean, Dean Brown, would invite him up each year to speak to us, and I got to know him fairly well. He laughed at my socialism (laughter). He thought I was an absolute nut.

J.H.: I bet. So the Dean of Lynchburg College was willing to let you take two months off from school?

H.K.: That's right, and he said "Get your assignments, and if there

are papers due, you send them in, and some of the professors may require special work, after you return." So I went, and only one of the professors had me to ^{come} / to his house every afternoon at five o'clock. But I made it.

J.H.: So you organized an interracial student group at Lynchburg College.

H.K.: I certainly did.

J.H.: Was that. . .

H.K.: That was the first one in the South.

J.H.: Was that a YMCA?

H.K.: Well, it was composed of students of Lynchburg, Randolph Macon, and Lynchburg Theological Seminary and College, which was a Negro institution, and as soon as I came back from Europe, well, when I saw the ghettos in Warsaw and Krakow, particularly Krakow, you know the Jews had to be in by sundown and there was a tremendous chain, larger than a regular 109 chain, clear across the gates, and every Jew had to be inside that before sundown. And when I saw it something turned over inside of me, and I came to feel that - "Well, by golly, this is what we do to Negroes in the South. We put them in restrictive areas, and exploit them in every way that we can think of." And I felt that the time had come for Negro and white students to get together, and I went over to see one of the students . . . no, I spoke, I spoke at the College, and afterwards met a man by the name of Jackson. He was studying for the Ministry just as I was, and I liked him, and trusted him, and vice versa. And we began talking about the formation of a student group, and at first we met over at the Negro college, because in those days it was hard to find a white college that would welcome us, and so Is this what you want?

J.H.: Yes, I want the story.

H.K.: And then the Negro students said we ought to meet in a mutual place, and . . .

J.H.: Rather than meeting at the black college?

H.K.: Yes.

J.H.: Why was that?

H.K.: Well, it was a natural, yet unnatural thing to do. Why not swap around a little bit? So I went to the President of our college, John Hundley and asked him if I could bring the Negroes from the college, Lynchburg Theological Seminary and College, over to our college for a concert, declamations and orations, and debates and this that or the other, you know, and he said, "Yes, go ahead," and I did. Most of the students and the faculty turned out as long as the Negro students were singing, and when they started the declamations, etc. they began to leave, a few of them, and I became un-stuck. I went to the door and I asked one or two of them, a particular fellow by the name of Stone, who said "I'll listen to a nigger sing," excuse the work but that's what he said, "but I ain't going to listen to them talk," and he kept going. Well, then we decided that we ought to find a white place to meet in. We went to the YWCA, central YWCA of Lynchburg and they were gracious and they welcomed us, but Lynchburg was a very conservative town, and it was no time at all until pressure began to be brought against the Directors and the Secretaries of the YWCA, so they had to say - "I'm sorry." They were, but we had to find new quarters.

J.H.: You went to the YWCA instead of the YMCA?

H.K.: Lord have mercy, yes. You'd never get anything out of the YMCA.

J.H.: I was just talking to Grace Towns Hamilton . . .

H.K.: I know Grace.

J.H.: And she told me the same thing.

H.K.: The YWCA was always way ahead of the YMCA.

J.H.: How do you account for that?

H.K.: Well, I think for one thing, they were more adventurous, and saw the agony through which Negroes were passing more quickly and deeply than did the "Y" Secretaries. Now, that isn't true of all of them. The Secretary at the University of Virginia, Madison Hall, Kyle Smith, Carl Zerfoss of Washington and Lee, Dag Folger at Emory, well . . . I need not mention them all here, but they were concerned, and they were committed Christians.

J.H.: Who were some of the women? You went on then to become involved in the National Student Council and the Regional YM-YWCA.

H.K.: Well, we had a dickens of a time getting a Regional Council organized. When I first came to Blue Ridge as a student, it was a secretaries movement. The secretaries made the decision.

J.H.: Were the secretaries hired staff?

H.K.: They were employed by the individual institution, by Clemson or Emory, or whatever. But they felt, they truly felt that . . . most of them, not all of them by any means, I'm not sure I can even remember them all . . . that it was really a secretaries movement, and we were not exactly a nuisance, but we were to be tolerated and not allowed to participate in making decisions.

J.H.: You mean people who were just members of local YMCA and YWCA Chapters did go to Blue Ridge but you really couldn't become part of the leadership unless you were a hired secretary?

H.K.: Yes, that's true.

J.H.: And were they usually hired by the university rather than by the local chapter or by the National "Y"?

H.K.: Harry Comer was at Chapel Hill. Paul Derring at VPI. These men together with a few others saw that they day had come when students should have a voice in what kind of program they had.

J.H.: Oh, the secretaries were adults?

H.K.: Oh sure.

J.H.: Oh, I see.

H.K.: I'm sorry. So the students, not all of them, decided that they wanted a Field Council, what we called a Southern Student Field Council and they picked a boy from N. C. State by the name of Springer and me to be the goats.

J.H.: Springer?

H.K.: Springer, and we asked the secretaries for a meeting, which they granted, and we met over in Lee Hall, and down in one of the classrooms. And Springer, I remember so well, came marching into the classroom with a great armful of milk bottles to illustrate the difference. Here were all these students, but they had no representation, and no voice, and that's what we wanted. And then I followed and I had a way of talking myself into trouble, and sometimes I had to talk my way out of trouble too. So I said the Secretaries were our servants, not our masters, and we ought to have a voice in everything that transpired at Blue Ridge. A couple of secretaries got so mad they didn't know what to do. One was Malcolm Guess of Ole Miss.

J.H.: Did you know that, Bill?

B. F.: No.

H.K.: And after the meeting . . . well, to me it just looked like it

was going to break up into a riot, and a student from VPI, Mel Williams, M. C. Williams, got up and said "Let us pray."

J.H.: That is always a good strategy. So did you get representation? Did they change the structure?

H.K.: We did. We . . . it was somebody, I don't know the name, I ought to, I doubt if he is even in the records, but one of the secretaries moved that our concern should be granted, and it was voted upon and passed.

J.H.: So what kind of structure was set up then?

H.K.: Well, we elected a President, a Secretary and each State had one, or two, or three representatives on the Field Council. And each year thereafter, we had what we called a pre-conference retreat. John Bergthold, who lived right over here, he was the central figure in it and he thought the time had come for students to participate in decision making. He came from Red Bird, Minnesota.

J.H.: Now was this the National Student Council?

H.K.: This was part of the National Student Council.

J.H.: So it involved women as well as men?

H.K.: Not yet.

J.H.: When did this meeting happen that you are talking about?

H.K.: It was around . . . it was either '24 or '25, I can't be certain, but . . . if I had the energy to dig through all my notes I might come across something, but roughly, it was during that period. And the girls, the women, YWCA met just before the men students. They preceded us, they met before we did. And one year, around 1926, we decided to have a joint meeting of the women and the men down at Sky Camp. It was known then as a boys camp, Sky Camp at Blue Ridge, and that's where I met Alice my future wife . . . well it was one Sunday afternoon that I met that girl.

J.H.: You met Alice at the first joint meeting?

H.K.: My first love.

J.H.: Is that right?

H.K.: That's right, and it was mutual. I stayed with John Bergthold and Mabel, his second wife, who later died of cancer, a wonderful woman. They lived in High Top Colony during the summer. The regional office was in Atlanta and they had a home in Atlanta, and they were going down and said, "You stay with us, we'll take you to Atlanta to see Alice," and Mrs. Bergthold loved Alice. And when her father heard that I was going to Tuskegee because we had had Dr. Carver up at Blue Ridge and I was going to study under him . . . Do you know about Dr. Carver.

J.H.: Yes.

H.K.: And Ms. Bethune, but they had provided no place for them to eat or sleep. And we had a large delegation from my College, Lynchburg College, and I said, when this business came up, here were two guests coming, you know, notable figures, that we'd be glad to have Dr. Carver stay with us. We rented a cottage, there were so many of us . . . Craggieview Cottage over here at Blue Ridge, still there as far as I know, and Dr. Carver became our guest. We determined that he would not be alone, that we would share his meals, they would send the meals over from Lee Hall, from the dining room, and we decided to see that he was properly cared for that we would keep him company. He got up at four o'clock each morning, and I usually got up about that time too.

J.H.: You usually got up about four o'clock in the morning?

W.F.: Each morning? (Laughter)

H.K.: Every morning, and he and I became very close friends, and he'd take me on walks at daybreak, and he poured out this knowledge of plantlife . . . this flower or herb and what it was good for. So I decided that

summer that I was going to Tuskegee and study under Dr. Carver, and the invitation was issued, and I went down; but when Alice's father heard that I was going to Tuskegee, he, like my own father, hit the roof.

J.H.: You weren't married then, but you were courting.

H.K.: Courting, yes, but when we were married, and I am not sure I have ever told this before, her father disowned her 'cause she was marrying the kind of guy that I was.

J.H.: Did he stick to that?

H.K.: Yes he did.

J.H.: What did that mean?

H.K.: Well, when we married, we married just a little ways outside of Decatur. That's where they lived, on Adams Street in Decatur, Georgia. And he and his second wife refused to come to the wedding, and I guess that was the last time I saw any of them . . . that summer was the last time that I ever saw him. But Alice's first, her own mother, was a tremendous person. She had no racial prejudice and color didn't mean a thing in the world to her, and if anybody was sick, Miss Ruby looked after them.

J.H.: Did she live in Decatur?

H.K.: Well, she died before Mr. Harris moved his family to Decatur . . . died at childbirth. They lived way out in the country. Do you know where Warrenton, Georgia is? Well it was just beyond that, and Mr. Harris was running and managing a plantation with a view to selling it off into smaller plots 100, 200 and 500 acres. It was a huge plantation. That is where Alice was raised and that is where her father lived.

J.H.: So Alice didn't have anything to do with her father again after she married?

H.K.: She couldn't. He wouldn't let her in the house. She went and

lived with her sister, Buelah, who was the second daughter, and that's where we were married, in their home. This was pretty hard.

J.H.: I bet. So was it after you had married that you went briefly to Princeton and . . .

H.K.: No, before I was married. I had always had a great admiration for Princeton because Kyle Smith, who was Secretary of Madison Hall, which was the YMCA at the University of Virginia won my admiration and respect. He was born in Brazil, I believe, his parents were Missionaries there. And I thought it had a name, you know, Princeton had a name, and I thought that I could get the kind of training that I needed for the Ministry at Princeton. Well, I got everything else but that.

W.F.: Did you have any contact with Unions when you were up there?

H.K.: Well, I did later.

W.F.: But not that first time?

H.K.: Not that first time. Wait a minute, I did, once I did. I went to Yale more than I did to Union to talk to professors whom I knew, and whom I was certain would understand my point of view; at least I hoped they would, and they did, and helped me a great deal.

W.F.: How did you know those Yale professors?

H.K.: Pardon.

W.F.: Did you know the Yale professors through your YWCA work?

H.K.: No. I knew them personally and through their books.

W.F.: Through their books, and you just went out to see?

H.K.: I went up to see them and to talk with them.

W.F.: Did you go to see Reinhold Niebuhr too?

H.K.: No, Reinhold Niebuhr was one of my closest friends but I did not know him until later on.

W.F.: Did you go out to see him then? That early.

H.K.: No, I didn't see Reinhold until I started working for the Fellowship of Reconciliation in 1928.

W.F.: Was he at Union already when you went to Prenceton?

H.K.: I am not sure that he was. I can't be too certain when he came, but the first I ever saw Niebuhr, I do remember this - it was in Detroit at a National Student Conference.

W.F.: When was that?

H.K.: It was at a student conference in Detroit, and Reiny, you know he says he cut his eye teeth on a Ford, and I can't remember that we actually went to a Ford plant, and I doubt it very much. But through him, we learned what Ford was like. There was Bennett who really ran the plant. Old Henry was too old to do so.

W.F.: Do you remember what year you went to that student conference?

H.K.: Let's see.

W.F.: I was just curious on how you got interested in Reinhold Niebuhr and how you became friends.

H.K.: Well, yes. I got interested in Reiny and he in me when I was working with the Fellowship of Reconciliation in New York. Reiny says he was never a pure pacifist, and the question came up some years later in the FOR, regarding the extent to which we were involved in the class struggle, and I took the position, because I was working with the coal miners in East Tennessee and they wouldn't let me go out day or night without a guard.

W.F.: Was this at Wilder?

H.K.: At Wilder, and I think John Knox said that I shouldn't let the matter bother me. But I reported it at our national conference, FOR conference, and some of them hit the ceiling and said, "You've got no right to have these

miners guard you." Well, they (the miners) wouldn't hear of me going without them.

J.H.: That was easy to say by somebody up in New York.

H.K.: And I said, "Whether you like it or not, we are already involved in class struggle. Every time you eat a loaf of bread or buy a ton of coal, you are participating in the struggles and the agonies of the workers or the miners, and unless you try to do something about it, you are a sinful person." Well, that didn't set very well, but many of the members agreed with me.

J.H.: I just read a little piece written by John Niven Sayre? Someone who was a Simon Pure pacifist and a good firend.

H.K.: John Nevin Sayre.

J.H.: John Nevin Sayre. A little history of the Fellowship and I was struck by the way he talked about the controversy over the relationship of the Fellowship to the labor movement, and he quoted . . . he said, "One of our revolutionary members said that maybe one reason we weren't, didn't want to involve ourselves in the class struggle was because we own too many dividends."

H.K.: (Laughing) Heavens . . . He's still alive.

J.H.: Is that right?

H.K.: And he's up in his nineties, upper nineties, I think.

J.H.: Did the Fellowship . . . it supported the labor movement in a general kind of way.

H.K.: Yes, that's right, but that began when J.B. Mathews, and later A. J. Muste became Secretaries.

J.H.: Was J. B. Mathews a southerner?

H.K.: Yes.

J.H.: Where was he from?

H.K.: He came from Kentucky. His father was Chief of Police in some little town in Kentucky, and J. B. was, I suppose - J. B. Mathews at one time was one of the most respected and beloved Professors and Teachers in Nashville.

J.H.: He taught at Vanderbilt?

H.K.: He taught at Scarritt, and he almost single handedly prevented a race riot at Fisk by calling a judge, the Governor, and other prominent people and telling them not to send the police or interfere with what was happening.

(End of side 1, Tape 1)

J.H.: Was it in 1919, that wave of . . .

H.K.: No.

J.H.: Much later than that?

H.K.: It was later than that. It was in the . . . it must have been sometime in the late twenties. I can't be certain about it, but he was a man of great courage, and like Roger Baldwin, he was a spellbinder.

J.H.: A spellbinder. It seems to me that Scarritt College had an unusual number of people like that in comparison with Vanderbilt.

H.K.: That's right. Chancellor Kirkland ruled Vanderbilt with an iron hand. I got fired from Vanderbilt.

J.H.: When you were Associate Secretary at the "Y".

H.K.: And the Secretary got fired along with me.

J.H.: I wondered. I read about that incident and I guess it was John Egerton who said that you were censured?

H.K.: Um hum.

J.H.: By all the presidents of various universities, but was it Dr. Kirkland who was most upset?

H.K.: They all met together . . . here is what happened.

J.H.: Including the President here?

H.K.: It was around 1928-29 when the western powers, France, England, Germany invaded China, with a view to carving it up. I decided we ought to have a meeting about it. We had no business in China, and I went to the Dean, Dean Brown, O. E. Brown, and asked him if I could call a meeting of all the students in Nashville to talk about this situation. We had a Missionary, the name I don't recall at the moment who was in Nanking when it was bombed. We had Mathews from Scarritt, and we had a student, a very brilliant student from Fisk from Trinidad, British West Indies, whose father occupied a position of some importance and Malcolm Nurse this Negro student from Fisk, was a brilliant person . . . really brilliant, and the three of them spoke, and in those days students didn't have automobiles. They had to use street cars, and we had no intention of segregating anybody, but they came in by schools because of the street cars. It was a problem with transportation, and they sat together, and I think my wife and a girl by the name of Catherine Butler, who came from Binghamton, New York were the only white women sitting next to Negroes . . . I am interested in these names coming back to me . . . (laughing.)

J.H.: You have an incredible memory. I am interested in all the names you can think of because I'm trying to locate as many of these people as I can.

H.K.: Catherine Butler, she may not be here. I think she had to leave the YW at least for a while because of tuberculosis, or something of this sort. Anyway, they . . . Catherine and Alice, were the only two people, girls, white girls, who were sitting next to Negroes. I'm sure of that, and the Curator of the Museum at Vanderbilt, he lived in Wesley Hall, which was the School of Religion, he came by and saw all of these Negro and white folks, you

know, and he called the papers . . . that it was a white and black meeting, and there were quotations. I think it's in The Tennessean "that big buck Negroes . . . niggers were sitting next to white women."

J.H.: Front page news.

H.K.: Front page, and Chancellor Kirkland called all the Presidents of the Colleges, including Scarritt, Peabody, Fisk, eight or nine were included, and they held a meeting, and the Chancellor said, one of the professors later told him, he said, "I don't mind the jackasses braying, I just don't want them braying on my campus." So the Dean called a meeting, he was forced by the Chancellor, as I understood it, of the student body of the School of Religion the next day . . . he had been a Missionary in China, and he talked about the improvements that the English and others had brought into China, and we were quite wrong in our condemnation, and when he got ready to close he said "I want to see Mr. Kester in my office immediately." Alice was sitting right by me, we were married then. We were married in February and this was in March, I reckon.

J.H.: What did she think she had gotten herself into!

H.K.: She never protested, never protested. She felt that I did what I had to and it had to be. And she sat right beside me, and I went in and talked to the Dean, and he was quite angry. His face was flushed, he said, "You did not tell me you were going to invite Negroes," I said, "Dean Brown, I said all the students, and that's what I meant." And I said, "You've known me long enough to know that I wasn't going to exclude the Negroes." He said, "In any case, you are fired." So I was.

J.H.: Did you get any faculty support?

H.K.: Except from a few of the professors at the School of Religion, Dr. Kesler, Alva Taylor and one or two more.

J.H.: Albert Barnett?

H.K.: Well he was at Scarritt. I got support from him.

J.H.: But not enough to keep them from firing you?

H.K.: Mathews was fired from Scarritt.

J.H.: He was fired at that same time over that same issue?

H.K.: Over the same issue.

J.H.: Was he a teacher?

H.K.: He was a teacher and a good teacher.

J.H.: He was fired because of this meeting?

H.K.: That's right, and there were a lot of repercussions. The girl, who was Dr. Jones, secretary, he was President of Fisk, Margaret Fuller was her name, and he called her in to his office. She was the Chairman of our Student Interracial Group. We met every Saturday down at the Negro Baptist Publishing House for lunch and talk and fellowship, and he said, "You have to resign as my secretary or resign this position you hold." She called me in tears, "What should she do." I said, "There isn't but one thing you can do, stay at Fisk." Because she had a mother to support, the only support her mother had, and I said, "Nobody is going to think hard of you."

J.H.: Were there repercussions for the black students involved?

H.K.: (Shakes head negatively)

J.H.: Why is that?

H.K.: If there were, I never knew about them because there were too many professors at these Negro schools who felt the time had come when we should act together and there was great sympathy for all of us who got moved out.

J.H.: So you left Vanderbilt and became the student Secretary for the Fellowship of Reconciliation?

H.K.: That's right.

J.H.: How?

H.K.: The year I came back. I stayed in New York for two years, and then I came back as the Secretary of the FOR in the South, Southern Secretary.

J.H.: Was that the first Southern Secretary they had?

H.K.: That's right.

J.H.: How did you happen to get involved in the FOR, when it seems that it was very much based . . . a northern-based organization. Why did you move into that rather than working . . .

H.K.: Well, I got an invitation from a man by the name of George Collins, who lives now somewhere in California. He'd been Lieutenant in the Marine Corps during World War I. He was about, I want to say six feet six, that wouldn't be missing by much, and he had been to Blue Ridge to the Student Conference and he had met me, and he had met Alice, and we liked George. "Shorty" is what everybody called him.

J.H.: "Shorty" Collins.

H.K.: "Shorty" Collins.

J.H.: This little history says that you were discovered and converted by Shorty Collins, and that's when you joined the FOR.

H.K.: Yes, he had had a profoundly significant experience in the War, but the New Testament is what converted me.

J.H.: How would you describe your . . . what was it that you believed in that determined these kind of activities that you engaged in, and the organizations that you joined?

H.K.: I think it was the New Testament.

J.H.: But a lot of people believed in the New Testament.

H.K.: Not just the New Testament, but the prophets. "A man is worthy of his hire," for example. "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself," and I started to tell you about my mother not whipping me. . . when we did something wrong, there was a large closet, a clothes closet in her bedroom, and she would take us, all three of us or two of us, or maybe just me into the clothes closet and talk to us and pray. And when I learned, I was about six years old that women could be sinful . . . there was a sex scandal in town, and you know kids hear everything . . . and when I discovered that, I guess it was about the greatest shock of my childhood because my mother had been so perfect. I think it was . . . I remember one time, we had . . . when we were children, we had to take naps in the afternoon. We had to go to sleep. We'd lie down, usually stretch out in the living room on the carpet, or maybe on a quilt or something, and we had a great big family Bible, like this dictionary over here, and there was a picture in it of the Slaying of the Innocents, do you remember that?

J.H.: Yes. I sure do.

H.K.: And I was looking at the Bible, and I saw that picture and I started . . . I guess I was a little fellow, to beat the Bible, this picture you know, and my sister saw me and she thought it was an outrage, you know, and of course she told Mama. Then Mama came in to see what it was all about, what I was doing beating the Bible, and as soon as she understood what it was all about that was the end of it.

W.F.: Did you think your mother would punish you or something?

H.K.: I didn't know what was going to happen.

J.H.: You couldn't stand suffering?

H.K.: No, I just couldn't, and the Negro people we had around our place were really wonderful People. Their homes were always open to us, they were

employed by my father, as cooks and caretakers of the animals and all of that sort of thing. I got to know them, and I developed real love for them because they were good to me and my family. And my father and mother had a habit of . . . habit isn't the right word . . . if they found a child, who was orphaned or having a difficult time, they would take him in, and he became a member of the household. I don't remember a girl, but boys, little boys to do the chores. He had to do the chores.

J.H.: What was traveling and organizing for the Fellowship in the South like in the twenties? How successful, how many members were there, or local chapters?

H.K.: Not many.

J.H.: What did you comeup against? You spoke on college campuses mostly?

H.K.: Altogether I think I spoke in over 250 colleges and universities from the University of Minnesota to the University of Texas across the South. There were some places I couldn't even put my foot on the grounds, I was poison.

J.H.: What did you talk about?

H.K.: I talked about war, race, industry, the sort of thing that was agitating the students in those days.

W.F.: Did you talk about the New Testament too?

H.K.: Sure, sure, that was the basis for it all. I felt the church, you see, ought to be involved in the troubles of the Family of Man, and when I say involved, I mean trying to do something about it, not just preaching sermons. And there wasn't many people who felt that way about it.

J.H.: Did you think of yourself as a Social Gospel . . . did you read Harry Ward?

H.K.: Oh yes. I read Harry Ward. I knew Harry Ward, but Harry was too close to the Communists to suit me. You didn't know him.

J.H.: No. What do you mean? How was he close to the Communists?

H.K.: He was a fellow traveller. I am almost certain.

J.H.: In what sense?

H.K.: As Reiny told me . . .

J.H.: Who did?

H.K.: Reinhold Niebuhr.

J.H.: Well, what did he do that made him. . .

H.K.: Well, he was an ally to . . . with the leadership in the Communist party.

J.H.: He was finally kicked out of the Union Seminary, wasn't he? It got too difficult for him to stay there.

H.K.: I guess so, because he and Reiny were almost like this . . . warring with one another.

J.H.: Did you think that at the time?

H.K.: I didn't know too much about it. We had a meeting of the Fellowship of Southern Churchmen in Chattanooga. It was interracial, interdenominational at the Third Presbyterian Church of which T. B. Cowan was the Pastor. And the people of Cowan's Church in Chattanooga took us into their homes and the women of the church prepared the meals, and it was almost an unheard of thing, and it was well written up in the press. George Fort Milton was editor of the Chattanooga Times, and he gave us good space. We had workers who were on strike down around Rome Georgia, and well, we just became involved in everything that gave people trouble.

J.H.: You didn't, were you able to form local chapters of the Fellowship?

H.K.: A few.

J.H.: Where were they?

H.K.: Well, Nashville was the central place, and the members were widely scattered.

J.H.: Who were some of the local leaders or people involved with the Fellowship?

H.K.: Constance Rumbow, Albert Barnett, John Knox, who is now at Alexandria. He used to be at Union, one of the finest New Testament scholars in the world. Well, I think he has become an Episcopalian now, he used to be a Methodist. But they were few and far between, they really were.

J.H.: Why were you not able to organize more students?

H.K.: Pacifism was way over on the left, you know?

J.H.: Yes.

H.K.: Well, at this meeting in Chattanooga there were three or four of us, Francis Hanson, Geroge Strether, and myself, and I think there was one other student, Irving Brown? Wasn't Irving Brown the AF of L representative in Italy that put on this post card campaign for Italians to out-vote the Communists? Do you remember that? I think Irving was with us, I can't be certain. You know, we decided that things were in such a mess . . . see, this was right at the bottom of the Depression, and if the Communists had anything to offer, we better find out about/ it. Well, who would we see. Alice said "We'd always go to the top, we'll see EARl Browder," and we called him and he said "Don't come to my office, but come to my home." He gave us the address and we went. Within fifteen minutes after Browder had started talking, I knew that Communism was something that I wanted nothing to do with. I guess I proved it too.

W.F.: You felt that strongly, right at the time? Or was it later on?

H.K.: Right then. When I left his house.

J.H.: Was it Browder's personality?

H.K.: His disregard for truth, his position that the ends justifies the means the goal was the main thing, and what you did to try to realize the goal didn't matter.

J.H.: When did you start thinking of yourself as a Socialist?

H.K.: I believe it was in 1932.

J.H.: How did that come about?

H.K.: Norman Thomas.

J.H.: You were converted again?

H.K.: I knew him from committees on which we served. I had met Norman while I was in New York with the Fellowship of Reconciliation. We were on the same committees together. I had great admiration for him, not only for his heart, but also for his brain, and he had enormous integrity and honesty, and I held meetings with Norman in Nashville and Little Rock and of course, he was very, very up on the organization of the Southern Tenant Farmers Union. But he never tried to politicalize it . . . he never. He wanted a bonefied labor union, and I admired him greatly for that, you know. Because, well, I worked for Walter Reuther; I didn't know Victor too well, but I knew Walter very well, and John L. Lewis.

W.F.: How about Van Bittner? John Wright . . .

H.K.: Those names are familiar.

W.F.: They didn't influence you as much?

H.K.: No.

J.H.: So you joined the Socialist party about 1931.

H.K.: I ran for Congress (laughter).

J.H.: Well, you did all right, didn't you? You beat out the Republican.

H.K.: I beat the Republican.

J.H.: Who did you have working in your campaign?

H.K.: Myself and others.

J.H.: Is that all?

H.K.: That's all.

W.F.: Didn't Norman Thomas come down and campaign with you?

H.K.: We had a whistle stop for Norman, and when the train stopped Norman came out on the rear platform to speak. Of course, we had a lot of Socialists there, and . . . really not lots, maybe 35 or 40, maybe 50. The engineer turned on a steam valve, you couldn't hear a thing.

/Interruption - Mr. Kester has moved a good ways from the machine making transcription extremely difficult./

J.H.: Alva Taylor.

H.K.: Alva Taylor.

J.H.: Tried to start a labor church.

H.K.: That's right. He was Professor of Social Ethics and the Chancellor at Vanderbilt never did like him because he would take his students to not only labor meetings . . . I was . . . (interruption) I was in his classes and he would have us go over to Fisk. We'd go over about once a week, and have a seminar with one of the Negro Professors running the seminar . . . Dr. Charles Johnson, Frazier, what's Frazier's first name?

J.H.: E. Franklin?

H.K.: E. Franklin, and he would chew you into the tiniest morsel and spit you out.

J.H.: I can imagine.

H.K.: But what he said was true. He was fed up with southern bigotry. Excuse me I'll be right back, I want to get some water. [Interruption.]

W.F.: You and Norman Thomas had just been interrupted by the steam whistle.

H.K.: Yeah, and . . .

W.F.: You didn't hear a word he said.

H.K.: Hardly a word he said, and we did have a large meeting for Norman in Alva Taylor's Church, and my wife, Alice, assumed responsibility. It was at the evening meal, is what it was, and I remember Norman liking the biscuits and strawberry preserves, and he really was a tremendous guy.

J.H.: Did you have a Chapter of the League for Industrial Democracy in Nashville?

H.K.: No, what we did have, we didn't have a chapter, but Alice and I . . . you know, they had lectures, lectures and we ran those in Nashville for I don't know how many years, and I was on the circuit myself, and I was out mostly in the Mid-West.

J.H.: What did you think of Norman Thomas as a leader of the Socialist party?

H.K.: I thought he was the best man for the job.

J.H.: But the party declined his leadership?

H.K.: Well, that was one reason I left the Socialist party, because it is split all to pieces. There were too many factions and I joined it because I thought it was a unit, you know? If you had disagreements, you settled them peaceably by talking them out. And some of those guys, particularly around New York, I just couldn't talk to them. They had the last word on everything. I can't remember those boys' names.

J.H.: Were you involved in the expulsion of the Trotskyites?

H.K.: Yes.

J.H.: That was really disruptive.

H.K.: Yes.

J.H.: What was that all about?

H.K.: Well, I was a member of the National Executive Committee. And the question came up that they wanted to join the Socialist Party, and Norman was afraid that if they did, they'd really destroy the Party.

J.H.: Why?

H.K.: They would exercise a great deal of influence and power and there were a lot of very intelligent younger men, students . . . Francis Henson, for example. I always liked Jay Lovestone, very much, who was a Trotskyite, and . . . no, I don't know whether Jay was or not. He was a leader of the Communist Party opposition, CPO, I think I may be mistaken about his being a Trotskyite, but he was certainly no Stalinist. And when the two of the men met me in Minneapolis and the Trotskyites and talked to me, I listened to them. But I didn't make a commitment one way or the other. They wanted me to commit myself that I would vote for their inclusion. And when the time for the vote to be cast came, I voted against them.

J.H.: Was that mostly because of Norman Thomas?

H.K.: Yes, mostly.

J.H.: When you were working with the Fellowship and the Socialist Party . . . when you joined the Socialist Party, did you drop out of Fellowship about the same time?

H.K.: I dropped out of Fellowship in 1934, and I ran for the Socialist Party in 1932.

J.H.: And you left the Fellowship over the labor problem, etc.

H.K.: Yes.

J.H.: Tell me a little bit about ~~Wilder~~, Tennessee.

H.K.: Well, Wilder was one of, I think I could find you an article. . . have you read the article written by the Nashville Tennessean by . . . I forget the girl's first name.

J.H.: Recently?

H.K.: No, written back in 1933 or 1934, somewhere along in there. I'll get you a copy of it. I can find my copy upstairs. Well, there were three coal mines. Wilder, was the chief coal mine, and Davidson and Tipton, and Tipton was up at the top of the mountain and Wilder was down at the bottom. And Alice and I organized what we called Aid Day, and when we first went in there, we simply knew that they were in trouble, and wages had been cut and cut and cut. You worked 16 hours a day, and the maximum pay was \$2, and by the time the rent was taken out, the electricity was taken, out bath house, what are you going to live on? So we went up, at first they know whether we were on the level or whether we were really representing the company. And I could understand their attitude.

W.F.: You didn't know anyone when you first went there?

H.K.: Not a soul.

W.F.: You just knew the conditions?

H.K.: I knew the conditions.

W.F.: How did you know about the conditions?

H.K.: Well, I had friends who lived in Allendt which was just a short ways from Wilder, and through the grapevine. I think Albert Barnett first told me a good bit about Wilder and he was instrumental in getting me to go up there, and offer our help.

J.H.: Is Albert Barnett alive?

H.K.: No, Alva died several years ago. I think he changed a little bit in his attitudes.

J.H.: When he got older?

.K.: I think he became more conservative after he went to Emory. Well anyway, they accepted us and at the first meeting, it was a Sunday afternoon, Barney Graham, the President of the union introduced me, he told the story about Lafayette coming to this country to help us, and here was another Lafayette coming to help them.

W.F.: You were another Lafayette?

H.K.: (Laughing)

W.F.: What did you think you could do for the mines? You weren't working for a union or. . .

H.K.: No. We could feed them. We usually went up on a Friday and we would get students from Vanderbilt, or Scarritt. Those Scarritt girls were always willing to go, and we were going to have Aid Day, and my wife kept a strict record of everything, second-hand clothes, almost anything that you could name, we had, and canned goods for desperate families.

W.F.: You took those things with you?

H.K.: Sure. Canned goods, even the Rabbi at the Jewish Temple there in Nashville just opened the room where they kept all the canned goods and said, "Take what you want."

J.H.: Were you in contact with Highlander Folk School?

H.K.: Yes.

J.H.: Did you go up there for workshops?

H.K.: Well, not so much for workshops, I got interested in Highlander in the very beginning but it became too close to the Communists to suit me like Commonwealth.

J.H.: How was Highlander connected to the Communist party?

H.K.: Well I think Jom Dombrowski, do you know Jim?

J.H.: Yes.

H.K.: I think he was a fellow traveler . . . I won't say, I certainly don't want to be sued. I don't think he carried a red card, but I think he was a fellow traveler, and Myles seemed to . . . Myles Horton seemed to impress me as being very sympathetic to the Communists, and Don West, you know. He became a member of the Communist party and his sister married the district organizer of the Communist party here in the South. Nat Ross, I think was his name.

J.H.: Well, it seems to me that the work that Highlander was doing with labor organizers was very much the kind of thing that you were doing.

H.K.: Yes, but I didn't, I didn't want to be associated with the Communists.

J.H.: Why was that?

H.K.: I just didn't believe in them.

J.H.: You didn't see them as part of a movement, as one part of the larger movement that you were part of, as doing some constructive things, or as being worth supporting anyway?

H.K.: Well, I think at first I felt that way. That was one reason why I went to New York to see Earl Browder but I got to know, not by name, but by face, a lot of Communists.

J.H.: In the South?

H.K.: In the South, and they just didn't strike me as the kind of people that would push along the basic ideals and ideas of the Christian faith, and that is what I was concerned about.

J.H.: How strong was the Communist Party in the South in the thirties?

H.K.: It was pretty strong.

J.H.: Stronger than the Socialist Party?

H.K.: Well, I can't say, but it was pretty strong, I expect that it was stronger than the Socialist party because they were revolutionaries, you know. I went to many meetings, I was invited to a meeting in Birmingham, to a Negro church on Easter afternoon . . . Easter Sunday afternoon, and it was about the time of the Scottsboro Boys . . . it might have been Angelo Herndon, I can't remember. But it was a protest meeting, and the place was so jammed packed I could hardly get up to the pulpit where I was to speak.

J.H.: Who had called this meeting?

H.K.: The Communists, and after it was over, two of the men came to me and said, "We'd like to take you and your wife around to where we live." And they did. They drove us all over Birmingham, so we wouldn't be able to locate their headquarters. And the thing that I remember about them, was that they were both tall and thin, and had a swanky apartment in a swanky area in Birmingham, and they appeared to have ample means to live on, you know, and it looked like to me their clothes were very expensive, you know, probably tailor made and expensive, and I was amazed at the literature that they had stacked all about the apartment.

(End side Two, tape 1)

(Begin Tape 2, Side 1)

H.K.: . . . and I don't think they ever told me their names, if they did they would have been fictitious.

J.H.: Where were you in the controversy within the Fellowship of Reconciliation, over how much to emphasize Christianity and whether they should espouse broad humanism . . . were you very much . . .

H.K.: Ahhhh.

J.H.: Did you think of yourself or talk about yourself all through this period very clearly as a New Testament Christian, and not as a . . .

H.K.: Yeah. I joined Niebuhr's Socialist Christians because I thought they had something to say, and something very important.

J.H.: What did it mean to think of yourself as a Socialist? In what sense were you a Socialist? What kind of changes did you want to see come about?

H.K.: Well, the only thing that I was concerned about . . . The thing that I was concerned about was justice for all people, and I was struggling to achieve the goals.

J.H.: But what did you think it was going to take to bring about that?

H.K.: Well, I thought the only way we could do it was by word of mouth, and by writing about conditions, exposing conditions, and I became interested and concerned. In '34 I investigated my first lynching for the NAACP.

J.H.: Was that the Claude Neal incident?

H.K.: Claude Neal.

J.H.: That was incredible.

H.K.: That was a horrible affair.

J.H.: I read the piece that you wrote. How did you happen to do that?

H.K.: Walter White had asked me to do it - undertake an investigation of the lynching.

J.H.: Why did he think of you as someone to go and investigate a lynching?

H.K.: He knew of my concerns through the student movement, and whenever I went to New York I always went around to see Walter. I went to his

home, had dinner with him, I knew the family, and I suppose that he just thought that I was foot loose and fancy free, and I could get off and go, and I would go. And I did, and I almost got lynched. I just did get away in time.

J.H.: What happened?

H.K.: When I told Walter I'd go, he wrote the President of the Negro school in Tallahassee. What's that called now . . . Tallahassee University, University of Florida.

W.F.: Is that Florida Union?

H.K.: Florida Union, that's right . . . and that I was coming and please give me all possible aid. And I went straight to Tallahassee, and it was on a Saturday night when I got there and Neal, I believe, was taken down from a limb on Sunday, I believe. And he called his faculty together . . . and I understand his feelings, I probably would have done the same thing if I had been in his shoes, and told them to have nothing whatever to do with me, because the legislature was going to meet and determine the funds the school was to receive, and if they found out that they were in any way mixed up with this investigation into this lynching, they'd (the college) be in trouble. And he was right. And I didn't know it of course. When I went there I saw a girl that I had met at Kings Mountain - a member of the faculty. And she came over to ^{me}/hesitatingly, and she told me very quietly what the President had said, and she said, "But you go outside and you stand at the far corner of the porch, and I'll see if I can do anything to help you."

J.H.: Who was that?

H.K.: No, I can't remember, I wish I could. So many of the people I worked with are gone now, and I just can't remember them all. I remember the face, I know exactly what she looked like.

J.H.: So you stood at the corner of the porch?

H.K.: Yes, and in a minute or two she brought a Negro over, a young man, who was the Pastor of the Negro church in Marianna, and she said to me, "He might be able to help you." He and I talked in subdued tones for several minutes. I told him what I was trying to do, and I asked him if he thought he might help me and he said he didn't know. And I said, "Will you meet me at the church, would you meet me at the church maybe with some of your elders, or just by yourself on Sunday afternoon?" (The following Sunday afternoon, it was a weekend). And he said "I'll try to be there." When the time came for me to go to the church . . . now something told me . . . I have a little bit of woman's intuition . . . not to go in my car, to walk there like I was taking a late Sunday afternoon walk, and when I got there nobody was there, no lights or anything of that sort, and I decided to stay on the outside of the church. And just about dusk, cars began to come up the road into the church yard. Now, how they knew I was around there, I don't know, but they did. There was a ravine that led from the church down to Marianna. The church was up on a kind of a hill, and the ravine was full of briars and bushes and everything, They were looking for me, and they had flashlights and the lights from their cars, and there wasn't anything for me to do but crawl down the side of the hill to that ravine. I had told one of the Negro porters at the hotel what I was doing. I thought I could trust him. Had to trust somebody, and I didn't dare go in the front of the hotel, so I went around to the kitchen and he was there and let me in, and he took me upstairs, washed me and fixed me up, and then just as soon as I changed my clothes, I went down and spoke to the clerk at the desk, you know, and then went out on the front porch, just as if nothing had ever happened. But if they had laid hands on me that night, it would

have been the last of me. I am sure of that. The next morning a fellow, a filling station operator where I traded, from whom I bought the picture of Neal hanging on the limb of the tree, I bought it from him . . . when I went over on Monday morning he said, "You better get out of town, they are looking for you." He didn't have to say it, but in a matter of thirty minutes I was on my way to Nashville.

J.H.: Where had you gotten your information?

H.K.: I talked to all kinds of people. I bet I ate a hundred hamburgers at hamburger joints, filling stations . . . those are the places that I got my information from, just listening, and some of the people wanted to brag about the lynching.

J.H.: Didn't people realize that you were a stranger?

H.K.: What?

J.H.: Didn't people wonder . . .

H.K.: It was a tourist area, Mariana, and a nice hotel. Lots of people just came for vacation, and I figured if I could get to the Alabama line I would be safe. I thought they followed me, I don't know, I can't swear to it . . . and I finally stopped at the home of an Episcopal Minister, who was an elderly and wonderful man, I believe it was in Eldorado, but I can't be sure, and he understood the situation. That's one of the hard things, investigation of a lynching. The Episcopal Minister was the first Minister I went to see.

J.H.: Wherever you went? Why was that?

H.K.: Because they always knew what was going on.

J.H.: Why not the Methodist Minister?

H.K.: One Methodist Minister in Gastonia . . . his son is now the Chaplain at SMU, Grady Hardy, his father understood I was at Kings Mountain

and sympathized with the strikers. I was in Gastonia, you remember? On the night the blow-up came. The Sheriff had been shot and fires were breaking out, people shooting . . . sometimes in the right place at the right time . . . or the wrong time.

W.F.: Was that the right place at the right time?

H.K.: Well, Liston said he would give his eye teeth for my notes, but I could never find them when he was writing his book. I told him everything I knew, but that wasn't much . . .

J.H.: What were some of the other lynchings you investigated? How many did you investigate?

H.K.: Well, I was thinking about that today. I would judge in the neighborhood of between 20 and 25 for the ACLU, the NAACP, The Workers Defense League, mostly for the NAACP. And one of the most atrocious ones occurred near Duck Hill, Miss. The Neal lynching was bad enough, . . . in between what, in Mississippi, is known as prairie the / and the delta, is an area, or was, now I haven't been there in 25 or 30 years, known as the Piney Woods. It was an area of very poor whites.

W.F.: North Mississippi?

H.K.: Yeah, and they didn't . . . that's where the clay eaters were to be found. You drive down a country road and you'd find these holes on the side of the road from which the people would secure clay. The clay contained minerals which the people thought helpful toward their health. It was also the big corn liquor area in Mississippi, and it was controlled almost completely by white people. It was controlled by white people, and one Negro man, I can't give you his name at the moment, decided that if it was good for white folks, it ought to be good for Negroes, and so he started a still, and the white folks just rose up in revolt, and they took this

man and chained him after they caught him, to a large pine tree. There he was bound with a chain, as close as I am to you, and they chained him to the tree, and they started tormenting that poor thing with blow torches, and they said you could hear the man scream for five miles and finally somebody picked up a five gallon can of gasoline or kerosene and poured it on him. And an Episcopal Minister was with me to make this investigation, Charlie Hamilton of Aberdren, Mississippi.

W.F.: Did you ever investigate any other lynchings?

H.K.: Yes, Arthur Raper and I investigated the lynching of a small Negro boy not far from Nashville, and neither one of us knew that the other one was investigating. A small boy was accused of molesting a girl in a community near Nashville. The parents, of course there was a real possibility of trouble, you know, being accused of molesting a white child or white woman, or something of that sort, and Alva Taylor, Barnett and various other people became interested in this thing being investigated and arranged for a meeting, I think, and I can't be certain, but I think it was in the Court House in Nashville where the reports were to be made. And what the family of this little Negro boy felt, was that he would be the object of terror and maybe lynching, and they sent him to his uncle's home in Nashville. And the uncle's home was right across the street behind the dormitory, the men's dormitory on Fisk campus, but the mob broke in there and got that child and hung him, if I am not mistaken, on the flagpole at the Court House. I investigated it, Arthur was there and I didn't know that he was investigating it, and of course I was glad because it confirmed everything that I said and vice versa.

J.H.: When you went into these places, how did you go about getting information? Besides going to the hamburger joints . . .

H.K.: Sometimes you'd find somebody . . . hear somebody who was outraged by what had happened.

J.H.: White person?

H.K.: White person, and I'd always go to the Negro folk and talk to them.

J.H.: Who would you go to to talk to in the black community? Is that where you got most of your information . . . from blacks?

H.K.: Blacks and whites. Sometimes it just fell into my lap. For example, it was reported that the farmers, cotton farmers in Warren County were forcing Negroes to pick the cotton at a price much much lower than they could get in other counties, but they couldn't get away. This was in Georgia. Warrenton is the County seat, and Alice was with me. It was not too far from where she was raised as a child, and we thought we'd go down to see the old plantation and maybe meet some of the older people who were there when she was a child, which we did. And we went to the hotel and registered, and after we came out I wanted to get acquainted with the town, you know, a little bit. A man passed us . . . well dressed, and he stopped, he went by us and he stopped and started walking toward us. I sensed it and he came back to where I stopped . . . Alice and I had stopped, and he came back and said "Aren't you Alice?" He had been the manager of the plantation on which Alice was raised. Well there was nothing we could do but go over to his home for dinner, which we did, and while Alice was with his wife he told me the whole story about what was going on in Warren County. I didn't ask for the story, he just gave it to me of his own free will. I can't remember his name, and that is one reason why I relied so much on Alice.

J.H.: To remember people's names?

H.K.: Names and faces and many things. If there were 15 people sitting in this room, she could tell you where each one of them sat and what each one of them said. Now that is the God's truth, it's amazing, really incredible, and when I would go off on these long trips and would come back one of the first things she would do would be to tell me about who had been there, what they said, and all about them.

W.F.: She kept you in touch with things?

H.K.: Yes, Yes.

J.H.: How did she feel about the amount of traveling you did?
You were on the road an awful lot.

H.K.: Well she was very lonely and sometimes I can hardly forgive myself, but I doubt if she would have had it otherwise. She was dedicated to our work. Anyway, while she was in the kitchen talking to this man's wife, he took me out on the front porch and we sat together in one of those swings, and he told me the whole story. He was the Mayor of the town and the head of the Ku Klux Klan, and I felt almost miserable, and I had to ask him why he was telling me the story. He said, "Well, I'm telling you, because I am very proud of it."

J.H.: What kind of patterns did you see in the lynchings that you investigated? What caused them, who was responsible for them, what class of people?

H.K.: Well, a cross section of the community - some well to do, poor people, whites, there was a strong feeling, as you will find in some of my papers that if a Negro had a job and a white man didn't, that was wrong, and he should be gotten rid of. So, but often times the entire community including some of the highly placed people in the community participated in these things.

J.H.: Did you find instances where plantation owners were directly responsible for having one of their tenants lynched?

H.K.: On the Dibble Panatation, I believe it was in Cross County, I can't be certain, Arkansas, a man from Kentucky moved down and he didn't know too much about farming, but when settlement time came, he refused to settle with his tenants, and they wanted a settlemen, they needed a settlement to buy food and clothing, and he just refused to settle with them. Of course, he kept the books and he was head man, and he evicted them, and it was in January.

J.H.: What year.

H.K.: This was around 1936, I reckon, I just can't be positive. It is in the STFU notes. I called James Myers of the Federal Council of Churches and Norman Thomas about what was happening. And we got Sam Franklin, you know from the Delta Cooperative farm to go out to the church where we had moved the people. He had been out in Japan and worked with Kagaiva as a Missionary, and we wanted him to go and try to comfort the people, you know. Here they were, some of them in tents . . . we secured money for food, medicine and necessary clothing, but we put the women and the children in the church . . . St. Peter's Baptist Church, I believe, and the other folks took quilts and blankets or wahtever they could lay their hands on, you know, and made some kind of protection for themselves. Sam had to go back to the farm, and somebody threw, we can't be certain, I can't be, three or five or seven sticks of dynamite among all those people who were out there in the church yard, but it didn't go off. They would have killed every last one of them probably, and Dibble was certain that he had every right to evict them, and if you didn't have a place to to on the tenth of January, you just didn't get located. One of the hard things to believe though, was that there was a Negro woman plantation owner, and she

was just as hard as nails.

J.H.: Plantation owner?

H.K.: She was a plantation owner, and she wouldn't let us come on her place.

W.F.: I was interested in Sam Franklin . . .

H.K.: Yes.

W.F.: When you were working with National Sharecroppers raising money, with Norman Thomas and Arthur Raper . . . did some of that money from the Sharecroppers . . . most of it went to the STFU, right?

H.K.: Yes.

W.F.: Did any of it ever go to the Delta Farm? What was the relationship of the STFU and Delta Farm?

H.K.: That I don't know, except that it was pretty close. Sam was a member of the Fellowship, Jean Cox was a member of the Fellowship, and we had occasional meetings then and later at the Delta Farm, and at Providence.

W.F.: How many farmers were on the Delta?

H.K.: I don't know it varied.

W.F.: In those early days when it got started?

H.K.: I would say in the neighborhood of 15 - 18 families.

W.F.: Didn't they have a little protest . . . some of the farmers themselves didn't like the way they were being . . .

H.K.: Yeah, that came up at a meeting at Blytheville, Arkansas, and I knew that because they asked me if I'd accept the Chairmanship, which I did.

W.F.: Chairmanship of what?

H.K.: Of a committee to hear their complaints, and I did it for one

reason - and I've got to tell Sam this, because he doesn't understand it - to keep it from falling into **the hands of a person who** wanted to be the Chairman, and he was going to soak the Delta for it.

J.H.: Who was that that wanted to be the Chairman?

H.K.: I believe it was Mascop, I believe he was the one.

J.H.: Was he a farmer?

H.K.: Member of the union.

J.H.: Member of the STFU?

H.K.: Executive Committee. He tried to kill Mitchell one time and I stepped in between them.

J.H.: What do you mean he wanted to soak the Delta Farms?

H.K.: Well, he had a feeling that somebody was misusing the funds. He had the same feeling about Mitchell, that Mitchell was taking money, and he shot at him on two occasions, and the second time I wasn't there. He used a shot gun, but the first time I was there, and there was a long table . . . we rented a little place in Raleigh, which is outside of Memphis, it has a store and a few homes, and when people had no place to go we'd bring them there, feed them and look after them, and we were having a meeting out at Raleigh, and Mascop was accusing Mitchell of taking dues and using them for his personal use, which I knew as well as a man could know, that that wasn't so. And it wasn't.

W.F.: What did Mascop say?

H.K.: Nothing, well . . . Mitchell was at the end of the . . . it was a long table, conference table, and Mitchell had his satchel down by his side, and he reached into the satchel to get some papers and Mascop thought he was reaching for his pistol, and I was Secretary, keeping notes, and when he did this, when I saw Mascop draw his pistol, I jumped right in front of him

because I knew Walter wouldn't shoot me.

J.H.: Why not?

H.K.: He respected me I think.

J.H.: Well, are you saying that the grievances of the Delta Farm workers, you didn't think they were legitimate?

H.K.: No. I first of all, thought that people, if they had a grievance, they ought to be heard, and if there was anything we could do about it, do it, and Sam didn't think so. He didn't think they had any grievances, any legitimate grievances, and he wrote Reinie Niebuhr, and Reinie in turn wrote me for serving as chairman of the Committee. Reinie was in Scotland, I think, at the time, and he kind of took me over the coals, but I later explained the whole matter to him.

W.F.: Why didn't Sam Franklin want to hear the grievances? Or want them to be heard by the Committee?

H.K.: That I can't tell you because I suspect the reason for it was that Sam thought it was business that ought to come before the Delta Representatives, Trustees, etc., and it was their business and they ought to have looked into it, and it shouldn't be broadcast.

W.F.: It shouldn't be what?

H.K.: Broadcasted.

J.H.: What came of the hearings of the Committee?

H.K.: Nothing.

J.H.: What were the problems that the Delta Farmers . . . complained about?

H.K.: Well, as I recall, it's been a long time, as I recall maybe too long hours, not enough voice in the management, not enough voice in the government seat. Sam had too much power and so on and on and on. Sam was really a hard working man.

W.F.: Did he make this major decision about the farmer's settlement?

H.K.: Well, for the most part.

W.F.: How much to pay people, how to market the crops, that type of thing?

H.K.: Yes. I think he and the Trustees made the major decisions, but I think he was right in saying it was a problem they had to work out. They had to resolve it themselves.

J.H.: It wasn't a co-operative in the sense that everybody had a voice.

H.K.: That's what Sam wanted. He wanted that very much, but I am not sure he ever achieved the whole idea, you know.

W.F.: It seems like some of the . . . what you were talking about earlier about talking to Browder in New York City. From what I understand he had to use any means to keep the farm alive.

H.K.: Yes, in a way, but Sam and Gene Cox were completely honest.

W.F.: In interracial situations?

H.K.: Yes, absolutely.

W.F.: So he made decisions himself?

H.K.: Occasionally he had to, but he had the endorsement and backing of the Trustees. Mitchell and I wanted to do the same thing, start the same kind of farm over in Arkansas, and when we went to Washington to secure a government grant or loan, Rex Tugwell was in office. We went up on a Friday to see him, and we asked him . . . we wanted to borrow \$60,000, we figured we could handle that, and we could get the land, and there was enough timber on it to build houses, and so on and so on and so on, and Tugwell, he just looked at us and said that we were complete nuts. He said,

"You can't do it," and at first he wanted to give us, lend us something like \$250,000, and we said that we had always gotten by on a shoestring, and we wouldn't know what to do with \$250,000, and he said, "I'll tell you what you do." This was his last day in office, and the one thing that I noticed was a tremendous bouquet of red roses was all that was on his desk, and he said "You boys come back in the morning, Sautrday (which was unprecedented, you know,) and I'll give you my answer." What he wanted to do I think, he never told us what he wanted to do, but I think he wanted to contact some of the resettlement people down in ARkansas as to whether we were reliable and so on, which he has every right to do, and we, Mitchell and I, were very much surprised that he was going to come back on a Saturday ~~when~~ he had served officially his last day. But we were there and he was there, and he had evidently satisfied himself and I think, I can't be certain, and I'm not sure Mitchell even remembers, but it was somewhere in the neighborhood that he agreed to settle around \$150,000, and we said that is still too much, but we had no choice.

W.F.: You were trying to barter him down?

H.K.: Yeah, we didn't want all that money . . . Lord have mercy . . . and when we got back to Memphis . . . when Mitchell and I got back to Memphis, we found that Sherwood Eddy, and William Amberson, who was Professor at the School of Medicine, University of Tennessee at Memphis, an able man, had been a colonel in the ARmy and had gone to some real estate agency and gotten this piece of land down in Mississippi, Mitchell said "They couldn't of picked a worse place." It was in Bolivar County.

W.F.: Real poor land, wasn't it?

H.K.: Oh yes, mostly gumbo and buckshot soil.

W.F.: Little foothills?

H.K.: You had to go clear . . . there were cypress trees, you know what they were like, with the knees on you know, great big things that you've got to be able to build platforms to cut them down up ten feet maybe. It was oblong right on the levy, and copperheads, rattle snakes, cottonmouths, were everywhere.

W.F.: So you all wanted to get a farm in ARkansas?

H.K.: Yes.

W.F.: And they had gone ahead and bought one in Mississippi?

H.K.: That's right.

W.F.: With that same hunk of money. The same money that you all were granted by Tugwell.

H.K.: No, no, no. Sherwood (Eddy) started around to the colleges talking, trying to get individuals or college student bodies to buy an acre of land, and I don't know how much money he raised, but he raised a good bit.

J.H.: How did the Delta Corporate Farm last as long as it did? Was it ever very prosperous?

H.K.: No. See the Delta FArm, as you pointed out, was really poor land, and Will Alexander used to kid me about it as being gumbo and buckshot and not fit for farming, and so this farm was disposed of, and we went to Holmes County and a much much better, at least farming-wise location situation, and a David Minter, a Dr. DAvid Minter from Texas, he's in Tucson now, I believe his father was a Presbyterian Minister . . . came down and started the clinic, and the medical society of Mississippi said it was the best rural clinic in the state. They used an old dairy for the clinic, and . . . /Interruption/ The second farm was known as Providence.

It was in Holmes County, and Sam went as a Chaplain in the Navy, and Dr. Minter and Gene Cox and their wives and children ran the clinic and the farm. Gene Cox's wife Lindsay Hale Cox, was a registered nurse.

W.F.: They lived down there?

H.K.: They lived right there, and . . .

W.F.: They were all white, weren't they?

H.K.: White, but people from all over Mississippi, rich and poor, came to get treatment because they had such confidence and faith in the skill of Dr. Minter and Lindsay Cox.

W.F.: Gene Cox was white?

H.K.: Gene Cox was white, and /Interruption/

(End Tape 2, Side 1)

H.K.: But trouble was not long in coming, and this is my understanding of it. They built a wading pool for the children, and someone passed by and saw these children wading in the pool, black and white, and it nearly blew the lid off of Holmes County. The white citizens were angered by this and they called a meeting in Tehula. I guess it was the Klansmen and the white Citizen's Council - also the Sheriff of Holmes County.

J.H.: This was in the fifties, wasn't it?

H.K.: Yes. If I hadn't sent all my papers away I could give you the exact date, but the story I wrote was called the Mississippi Story. Have you ever seen it? You get the whole business there. I may have a copy of it, but I'm not sure I have.

J.H.: Who wrote it?

H.K.: I did.

W.F.: The farming had stopped by now as most of the equipment . . .

H.K.: Well it was the clinic and the cattle and some farming, but mostly the cattle and the clinic, and they called a mass meeting in the high school to talk . . . that is the people in Holmes County, and Cox and Minter were there, and it looked like it was going to be a lynching party, and one man actually said, "If we had a rope, we could end this business right quick."

W.F.: Were you there?

H.K.: No, I wasn't there, and a professor at Stillman Institute in Tuscaloosa, Alabama wired me about what had happened, and that the Minters and the Coxes needed help. In the meanwhile, I had promised Rosalee Oaks at the University of Texas to come out and talk, and Alice and I went to Austin and . . . oh we were there for two or three days, and other people were going to Providence in Holmes County, Will Campbell among them, to try to give the Coxes and the Minters comfort. When Alice and I came by, a barricade had been placed around the road leading to the homes . . . it was one of these "U" shaped roads, you know, and the deputies would take the license of every car that drove up and call the University of Mississippi for example to know what Will Campbell was doing there. Will was the "Y" secretary at Ole Miss.

W.F.: You were with the Fellowship of Southern Churchmen then?

H.K.: Yes, that's right, and so Alice and I spent . . . well the Sheriff had laid down the deadline, "You've got to be out of this county by a certain date" and we were there. Alice and I went there and were there when the Minters left for Arizona, and we stayed with Gene and Lindsay and the children until they decided to move to Memphis, and then we came home.

W. F.: Sam Franklin . . .

Kester: He was one of McArthur's chief interpreters.

W. F.: Did you ever hear of the . . . ?

Kester: Yes.

W. F.: Did they try to with any of the . . . ?

Kester: Yeah. We hoped to see those kind of things springing up all over the South, if we could ever get the people and the money, you know. It was . . . we wanted to do for the people down there, what Gene Smathers had done for the people at Big Lick near Crossville, Tennessee. Gene was an ordained Presbyterian minister, and he . . . when he married, he took his bride there and lived there throughout his life and died as the moderator of the United Presbyterian Church.

W. F.: Did you ever travel to the country?

Kester: No.

W. F.: . . . Gene Cox and the other folks being run out of Mississippi in the fifties after being able, after the farm was able to survive all that time. It seems typical . . . a lot of people started working . . . it seems to me a lot of organizations of people who started in the thirties survived the post-war reaction, got into the fifties and then this incredible backlash just wiped out the work of a generation.

Kester: That's right.

J.H.: You traveled around the South, didn't you after the 1954 Supreme Court decision?

H.K.: Yes.

J.H.: How did you see the South then in comparison to the South in 1934 say? The difference that 20^{years}/had made.

H.K.: Well 1934 looked like it was hopeless. 1954 gave us hope. There was something of real significance that was going to occur then or so we thought. On the day following the decision of the Supreme Court, I decided to go to Black Mountain and just interview as many people as I could. I'd say "What do you think of the decision of the Supreme Court," and it was almost all affirmative. I remembered the manager, shop foreman, that's the word I wanted, shop foreman of the Chevrolet place, and I asked him, and he said to me, "If you read your Bible, you can't come out anywhere else."

W.F.: It's hard for me to believe that most people the day after that decision in the South thought that that was good.

H.K.: Well, I didn't say most of them.

W.F.: Most of them that you interviewed.

H.K.: I said that most of the people I talked with . . . the decision of the Court was acceptable. In the thirties, there was no hope, or very little hope, but after the decision of the Supreme Court, we had hope. Do you see what I mean, huh? You see, it did make a difference. We knew trouble was here but at least we had some solid ground to stand upon.

J.H.: I think there was a lot of acceptance of the Supreme Court decision after it came down, and there was a long process of the Southern politicians and seeing their interests lie in the direction of massive resistance, and a lot of things went on by the time . . . before that kind

of massive opposition developed. It wasn't just a spontaneous response of white people all over the South.

H.K.: There were always, in my judgement, there had always been a small minority of white folk in the South who had deep sympathy for the Negro.

W.F.: So you thought that was a hopeful sign primarily for racial justice?

H.K.: Yes.

W.F.: When you were talking I was thinking. I've been talking to some labor leaders, and they . . . comparing the same two years, they saw a great deal of hope because of the Wagner Act.

H.K.: Yes.

W.F.: And in 1934 they were full of despair . . . the combination of the Taft - Hartley Act and then the NLRB under Eisenhower, they had the opposite feeling about labor.

H.K.: I was invited to speak in Washington . . . can't give you the year, but James Myers of the Old Federal Council of Churches, and Gardner Jackson, I think were the main ones who put up the money to invite a large number of prominent Washingtonians to this dinner at the Cosmos Club in Washington and for reasons completely unknown to me, I was the chief speaker, and Senator LaFollette and other Congressional leaders were there. What we were trying to do was to get LaFollette to establish a Civil Liberties Committee, a Senate Civil Liberties Committee was what we wanted, and John L. Lewis was there too, and after I spoke, John L. Spoke, but after I spoke there was sort of a spokesman for the planters, and he tore into me . . . did he ever! And Brooks Hayes, whose father had been Governor of Arkansas and he

was a Congressman, wonderful, wonderful man . . . this man hadn't gotten in his seat and poor Brooks was up and tore into him. I never saw Brooks so mad in my life. He was a gentleman, but he was really stirred to the depths, and then LaFollette agreed to form the Senate Civil Liberties Committee.

W.F.: An investigating committee?

H.K.: Yes. Many theses have been written about this business, and people . . . they'd been here to see me and talk to me about it with a good bit of disbelief because they said "If you were responsible, or partly responsible for getting LaFollette into this thing, why didn't he come down and help you sharecroppers, and I said, "Because the need was greater among the industrial workers, and I understood it perfectly, and we had no fuss with LaFollette."

J.H.: That reminds me of something I wanted to ask you which is: why you did so much more of your work with the tenant farmers than with the industrial workers?

H.K.: Well, because they were in such great need, and they had no voice except that of the Southern Tenant Farmers Union.

W.F.: Textile workers were in great need too.

H.K.: Sure they were, everybody was in great need. This will illustrate. A Mrs. Lawrence from Kansas, whose husband belonged to the Union of Locomotive Engineers, is that right, yes.

W.F.: Railway worker?

H.K.: Railway Engineers. She called me and asked me if I was coming to Chicago anytime soon and if so she would like to talk to me, and would I let her know, and I happened to be going to an Episcopal Convention of some description, and I wrote and told her I was coming to Chicago and that

I would be delighted to see her. Mrs. Una Lawrence, that's it, and I saw her, and she said to me . . . I guess we talked together for two hours, and she said to me, "The reason why we wanted to talk with you, or they asked me to talk to you, was to see whether you were radical enough or not, to speak to the Young Women's Auxiliary up here at Ridgecrest." When she used the word "radical," she meant it in terms of the Christian faith.

J.H.: Did she mean a radical Christian, or just a friend of . . .

H.K.: NO.

J.H.: What did she mean?

H.K.: She meant that it was New Testament Christianity and I believed in it, and I could and would . . . I never tried to hide anything from anybody, and they had about four thousand girls to come from all over the South.

W.F.: To Ridgecrest?

H.K.: To Ridgecrest.

W.F.: What kind of girls?

H.K.: They were textile workers, factory workers . . .

J.H.: Was it the Summer School for Southern Women Workers?

H.K.: No, no, no, that is something else. This is called, it still goes on, the Women's Auxiliary . . . Young Women's Auxiliary of the Baptist Convention, Southern Baptist Church. I'm sorry, maybe I'm getting . . .

J.H.: Well, we got it mixed up.

H.K.: Leaving things out.

W.F.: So you went to speak.

H.K.: So I went to speak at Ridgecrest.

J.H.: And Una Lawrence, she really knew about you, what your politics were and that's what she wanted?

H.K.: They wanted me to speak about working conditions here in the South. And they gave me a little room, not much larger than the kitchen for the first meeting, assuming that would accommodate us. There wasn't even standing room, and the second day they put us out on the porch . . . front porch of one of the larger buildings, and again we had the thing filled. On the third day they gave me the largest classroom at Ridgecrest, and it was packed. Know why? Because these young women were hearing the gospel as they knew it but never heard it from their preachers.

W.F.: What were you talking to them about?

H.K.: I was talking about wages and labor conditions, you know, hours, all the conditions that were confronting southern workers, particularly women, and some of the things that ought to be done about it, and they listened gladly because they had never heard it from the pulpit, you know, and they felt that was what the church ought to be saying.

J.H. was in Jessie Daniel Ames organization
The Association of Southern Women for the prevention of Lynching?

H.K.: Yes.

J.H.: There was an incident. Do you remember an incident in which Mrs. Alfred, a Mississippi woman, gave you some information about a lynching that you investigated, and Jessie Daniel Ames didn't want you to use it?

H.K.: No, I don't remember.

J.H.: You don't remember that? Did you know her?

H.K.: Yeah, sure, I had great respect for her.

J.H.: Did you run into her organization at any of the places where lynchings had gone on?

H.K.: No, I can't be sure about that.

J.H.: You never got any help from her?

H.K.: Alice worked with that group.

J.H.: She did?

H.K.: And she worked more specially with a Mrs. Tilley in Nashville.

J.H.: Atlanta, Mrs. Tilley was in Atlanta.

H.K.: Well, later perhaps.

J.H.: Well, she probably came up to the

Did Alice go to Atlanta to the meetings of the Central Council? She worked in Tennessee?

H.K.: Yes. She would go with me if I was going, but she traveled rarely alone.

J.H.: But you never really worked very closely with the Interracial Commission?

H.K.: No, Will Alexander was scared of me.

J.H.: He was?

W.F.: Why was he scared of you.

H.K.: Thought I was too radical.

J.H.: I'm sure that's right.

H.K.: That's right, I know it's right.

J.H.: Does that mean that he didn't want you to work with him, he didn't want you in the Commission?

H.K.: I suspect so.

W.F.: On the kinds of industrial things you talked about.

H.K.: Yeah, and Socialism. He used to make jest, fun of me.

J.H.: Did you argue with him?

H.K.: I expect I did.

W.F.: While we were mentioning lynchings, did you ever, do you remember Arthur Raper's book on the Tragedy of Lynching? Did you think after investigating so many lynchings that it was a very important book in its documentation or its impact?

H.K.: I don't know what I thought. I always had great respect for Raper, but that doesn't matter, and he was a real force for good.

J.H.: How would you compare Arthur Raper with Alexander and Jessie Daniel Ames?

H.K.: I'd put Raper above all of them.

J.H.: In what way?

H.K.: In intellectual capacity, and grasp of events, and courage to say what was on his mind, and I think I'd put Mrs. Ames next and Dr. Will next. That is just a personal feeling, you know, there is no proof for it.

W.F.: It is interesting you told us that in that book he got clippings in all the major newspapers said it was a wonderful book. Although the white newspapers . . . he claims that the regular white establishment from women's clubs and Rotary Clubs that they accepted this book, and that lynching stopped after that.

J.H.: That book was published in 1931, and this whole struggle started to happen (laughing) after that. Lynching, about 1940, or the late thirties, when the NAACP was campaigning for federal anti-lynching legislation; there was a lot of discussion going on about whether lynching had disappeared and was declining of its own accord, and there was no need for federal intervention, and the NAACP was arguing that lynching was going underground . . .

H.K.: That's right, they were right. They just disappeared. Negroes would just suddenly disappear, and nobody would know where they were. Maybe he had gone to Detroit or got killed quiet-like. Some people would get out

a report that he had gone to Chicago or New York or something of that sort, and he probably had chains around him at the bottom of the river.

J.H.: Did you actually see that happening more often in the late thirties than you had seen it happening earlier . . . that just kind of quiet murder?

H.K.: Well, I knew it was going on.

J.H.: Well, why did people quit carrying out spectacular lynch parties so often. Why did that change?

H.K.: I think it was a matter of well, just plain strategy, like the White Citizens Council, you don't have to kill him or murder him or lynch him, but you can just drive him out of the countryside, and that's what they did by terrorism and by threatening people who traded with them, and that sort of thing.

J.H.: Did you investigate any incidence of disappearance?

H.K.: Yes, we did in the union.

J.H.: In the STFU?

H.K.: Yes.

J.H.: Well you saw that process happening?

H.K.: Yes, yes. The prologue to my book, Revolt Among the Sharecroppers points this up. I am going to have to stop a minute.

J.H.: Okay, well, you've gone beyond the call of duty.

H.K.: Did you know that?

J.H.: No, I don't.

H.K.: Well you are not educated (laughing).

J.H.: I know. Those who revolted among the sharecroppers, yes I know that, I was looking at the overall title. I didn't know that Arno Press

had brought it out as a resale. I had read it in its original form.

H.K.: Yes. I finally got a little contract through the Microfilm Corporation for five percent, it was either three or five.

J.H.: Let me ask you something. What difference do you see between the Fellowship of Southern Churchmen when you were head of it and the Committee of Southern Churchmen with Will Campbell as head of it?

H.K.: Well, for one thing, we had members and each member had to rejoin each year. And it was our feeling that when you were a member of the Fellowship of Southern Churchmen, you were expected to work in your community or anywhere you could, and dues of course were so low that half of the time we didn't have money to carry out the program. Will Campbell didn't want to have members the way we did it. It was a chore because Alice did it, keeping up with the membership, and the Executive Committee insisted that you had to sign up every year. Well, a lot of people just wouldn't go through that, you know. So we had far more people who were really dedicated to the Fellowship of Southern Churchmen than the rolls which are in Chapel Hill would indicate. "I joined the Fellowship once, but what's the sense of joining it again," they would say.

J.H.: He didn't really spend time cultivating local members, and became just pretty much the little group of people.

H.K.: Well, that's one thing. Will was trusted and still is by Negroes, and he is one of the few white men that Martin Luther King trusted, and would have in his councils because, you know, there was a period there when they didn't want any white folks around, and he was one of the few that they asked to come to their councils to confer with them.

J.H.: What about a difference in ideas?

H.K.: No real difference.

J.H.: No difference? Will would never call himself a Socialist.

H.K.: No, I guess not. The funniest thing that Will ever did was to administer Communion to a bunch of Klansmen and used corn liquor. He is such a sight.

J.H.: The only . . . last question that I had was can you remember some of the . . . I am interested in the YWCA during the twenties and early thirties. The work that they did in the Interracial movement. Can you tell me who some of the young women leaders of the YWCA were . . .

H.K.: Of that day?

J.H.: In that day . . . who were active in the interracial efforts?

Katherine Lumpkin?

H.K.: Absolutely.

J.H.: Grace Lumpkin?

H.K.: Grace Lumpkin. And many more, I can't remember them all.

J.H.: Grace Lumpkin? Right.

H.K.: Katherine was in the YWCA. The last time I saw Grace she was in the Cavalry Episcopal Church in New York City on Fourth Avenue.

J.H.: You just ran into her there?

H.K.: I knew her from years back, so I went around to see her. I have great admiration for her book To Make My Bread. And Lillian Smith was another one, and oh, the girl who worked with her.

J.H.: Paula Snelling?

H.K.: Paula Snelling. There is a woman over here. She has worked around in numerous southern cities, Elizabeth Jones. She was in Nashville as Secretary, I suppose, of the Industrial Workers of the YWCA, and Alice

was Chairman of her committee. There is a funny problem. Do you remember (laughing) the Board wouldn't let me speak to the girls. Elizabeth said "Well, we'll let him pray," and there was no sense in denying that right. So I heard her tell this the other day to a group of people . . . I prayed and she said "You told the Lord everything." (laughing)

J.H.: Does she live around here?

H.K.: She lives in Asheville, 700 Bitmore Avenue. And I meant to tell you about that the first part of my book is true . . . absolutely true, I changed the man's name because I didn't want to get him into more trouble, the prologue. That's true, it happened.

J.H.: I wondered about that. You were in the car taking him back to his home when he told you.

H.K.: He had an uncanny insight into all our problems; he had a bladder problem. We took him over to the farm eventually we had at Raleigh, and Mrs. Muscop, Mrs. Walter Muscop, the wife of the man who was ready to shoot Mitchell took care of him.

W.F.: Mrs. . . .?

H.K.: Mrs. Muscop took care of him.

J.H.: Well, thank you for talking to us.

H.K.: You're welcome. I wish I could invite you to supper.

End of interview with Mr. Howard Kester.

This is an interview with Howard Kester on August 25, 1974. The interview was conducted by Mary Frederickson and was transcribed by Susan Hathaway.

MARY FREDERICKSON: Well, how long did you live in Nashville altogether?

HOWARD KESTER: Well, let's see, from the time I went to Vanderbilt, and was there from 1926, I reckon, until we bought this place here in 1938 and started building. Moved in on Nancy's birthday the next year of 1939.

M.F.: Well, when you were in Nashville as a student at Vanderbilt you were in the YWCA there, weren't you?

H.K.: Well, yes.

M.F.: You were always in the YW . . . YMCA, not YWCA.

H.K.: I was the Associate Secretary of the YMCA of the School of Arts and Sciences, and Secretary over at the School of Religion, and I got fired. . . (Laughing) . . . from Vanderbilt because we held a meeting . . . are you interested in this?

M.F.: Yes.

H.K.: We held a meeting in protest and I went to the Dean and asked him if I could have use of the hall, the Chapel, to have this meeting of all the students in Nashville to protest the intervention of the western powers in China. And it created

an absolute uproar in Nashville. Now the Chancellor at Vanderbilt, old Doctor Kirkland, who was a reactionary, called all the Presidents of all the colleges, white and black, together, and told the Dean to have a meeting and answer some of the questions we had raised at our meeting. And the Dean was furious because he said I hadn't included the Negroes. I said, "Dean Brown, I said all the students, and you know me well enough to know what I meant."

M.F.: Well you had worked with Scarritt, and Fisk, and A & I, hadn't you?

H.K.: Sure.

M.F.: Didn't you have an interracial student group that was fairly active?

H.K.: Oh yes. It met every Saturday.

M.F.: Was it a large group?

H.K.: Well about 25 or 30 sometimes as many as 40.

M.F.: What kinds of things did the group do?

H.K.: Well we didn't do much. We just talked among ourselves about our problems, and if there was anybody in trouble we tried to get them out, and that sort of thing.

M.F.: So he was saying that you hadn't included the Negro students?

H.K.: Yes.

M.F.: Why . . .

H.K.: That was his way out with the Chancellor because the Chancellor didn't like the School of Religion in the

first place.

M.F.: Umh, hum.

H.K.: He'd just as soon seen it go under.

M.F.: So that is what you were fired for rather than protesting the intervention in China?

H.K.: Yes, that's right because Negroes came . . . in those days, the students didn't have automobiles and they came in street cars, and there was no intention to segregate anybody. But by virtue of the fact that they came in the street cars, because they came as a group, they sat as a group, and there were maybe two or three people including my wife who sat by a Negro, but it was written up in the Tennesseean and The Banner as an interracial meeting, not the true reason for it. One of the officers at the college came by and saw all these people in there and the speeches being made and he called the ^{Newspapers.} He beat us to the phone . . . we called them later and they said we've got the story, and it was headlined the next day. The Chancellor, one of the members of the faculty said "The Chancellor said he didn't mind the jackasses braying, he just didn't want them braying on his campus.

M.F.: You left Vanderbilt after that, didn't you?

H.K.: I went to New York to the Fellowship of Reconciliation and then came back.

M.F.: You then came back?

H.K.: That was it . . . I became the Director for FOR here in the South.

M.F.: Well then when you were in Memphis did you have any contact with the Methodist Women's Missionary Council, that group . . . they had set up some black settlement houses in Nashville?

H.K.: Mrs. Clayton?

M.F.: I don't know. Mrs. Clayton might have been with it, I don't know.

H.K.: Well what happened was that the Commission on Interracial Cooperation, Will Alexander, you know?

M.F.: Right, right.

H.K.: And Arthur Raper. Dr Will got Mrs. Ames, Jessie Ames, to organize white women to struggle for equal rights for Negroes.

Alice's close friend in Nashville was Mrs. Tilly, I don't remember her first name and she was doing the same thing as the far as organization of Methodists Women was concerned as Mrs. Ames was doing generally, and they . . . the record is that there were 250,000 women, now I can't verify that, but that is what I have heard.

M.F.: Louise Young was active.

H.K.: Louise was a darling.

M.F.: She was into a lot of different things, wasn't she?

H.K.: Yes, gave me lots of encouragement, and sometimes discouragement.

M.F.: How did she give you discouragement?

H.K.: Told me I was going too fast.

M.F.: She worked with the YWCA Industrial Department, right?

H.K.: That's right.

M.F.: Was that her main . . .

H.K.: And race. She was in the field of race and industry and so on, and she was a very intelligent woman, and the people at Scarritt, the faculty folk at Scarritt were, for the most part, very liberal and some of them were radical, you know what I mean? And, I had them, especially students, working with me in strikes and coal miners, and whenever I wanted help, they gave sound advice. We had what we called Aid Day, when we would take clothes and food to the miners. People would send us clothing, etc. from all over the country and we'd take it and distribute it. Alice kept a meticulous record of everything she gave everybody. So the officers who sometimes thought because they were union officers, they ought to have prior consideration, but she (Alice) didn't think so. They were just another family in need, you know? She saw to it that everybody got their share. Whenever we wanted help, and we always needed help; it was quite a job distributing all the materials: food, canned food, and clothes, shoes, and we even got sets of false teeth, etc., students from Scarritt would help us.

M.F.: You were distributing that throughout the South.

H.K.: Mostly in Eastern Tennessee, at Wilder, Davidson, and Twinton, three coal mining towns.

M.F.: Well in Wilder did you have a lot of trouble-that strike went on for a tremendously long time.

H.K.: A long. . .twenty some months, and the union President

was killed, was shot, and they put a machine gun over his body so nobody could get to him, and he would identify his killer.

M.F.: You eventually just had to move people out, right?

H.K.: Yes, some went to Cumberland Homestead. I spoke at a meeting at which the Chief Forester at TVA was present. I think the meeting was in Philadelphia, anyway, and he came to me later and said, "If I can get an appointment for you with Dr. Morgan . . . Arthur Morgan, TVA Chairman, will you tell your story to him?"

M.F.: Right?

H.K.: "Will you go up and talk to him and tell him what you've told this group." I said that by all means I would. So he arranged the meeting and I went up and talked to Dr. Morgan. After I told him the story of what was going on, the desperate need, he said, "Will you leave the room for a few minutes?" And I knew what he was going to do, he was going to call Washington and see if he could get some help. And he got it, and the man who selected the families is living over here in Black Mountain now, Dag Folger.

M.F.: Dag Folger?

H.K.: F O L G E R.

M.F.: Was he with the resettlement?

H.K.: They were just beginning.

M.F.: I see. This was one of their first efforts?

H.K.: Yes. Yes.

M.F.: The fellow with TVA, Arthur Morgan, was he just a very interested person that. . .

H.K.: No, no, Dr. Morgan was a first rate engineer, and he is the one responsible for building Lake Norris, for example, and the dams all up and down the Tennessee Valley . . . the river, and was^a/very perceptive person. He was President of Anitoch College before he went to T.V.A.

M.F.: I see. That was after he left TVA?

H.K.: No, before, and then he went back.

M.F.: Were the mines^a Wilder closed then after everyone was moved out?

H.K.: No, there were enough people left to dig the coal, but the wages were so low, had been cut, and cut, and cut and by the time they took out for the rent, the electricity, the shower, and other items, the poor folk had virtually nothing to live on. On the night that Barney Graham, who was President of the Union was killed, it was in the afternoon . . . Sunday afternoon, Alice and I spent the night with his wife and children, and the only light we had was a string that had been dipped into a Coca Cola bottle of kerosene.

M.F.: How did you first get involved in the strike?

H.K.: Well, I knew the trouble the miners were in.

M.F.: With the Fellowship of Reconciliation?

H.K.: Yes, and got in trouble over it.

M.F.: That's when you broke with them, in 1934?

H.K.: That's right. The miners just simply refused to let me go out at night alone, and most of the time somebody was with me.

M.F.: Well had they come to you originally and asked . . .

H.K.: No, I just knew they were in trouble and needed help and went to them. At first they didn't know whether to accept me or not because I

could have been a spy for the company or something equally as dangerous to their cause. Well, it didn't take them long. They accepted me, and I was one of them. This issue the matter of my being guarded by the miners while working in the FOR, Fellowship of Reconciliation came up over the extent to raising angry arguments . . . well there had not been anything like it. The miners guarded me. Of course, none of the FOR members had been in a situation where you could get your brains blown out.

M.F.: It is very easy to talk about non-violence when you were in a peaceful situation.

H.K.: Yes, and then the whole question of the extent of one's participation in the class struggle came up, and I took the position that I think was the correct one. That whether you liked it or not, you were already involved in it because every time you bought a ton of coal or a loaf of bread, you were participating in the exploitation of the workers. And I said, "You are involved in it just as much as I am. You don't have anybody guarding you, like I do."

M.F.: So you resigned from their organization.

H.K.: Yes, I resigned. They offered it back to me though, later. Nevin Sayre made a special trip down to Nashville and asked me to come on back.

M.F.: How much later was that?

H.K.: Oh a matter of months.

M.F.: But you had already done something else by that time, hadn't you?

H.K.: I had this committee . . . wonderful committee, Committee on Economic and Racial Justice. Reinhold Niebuhr was Chairman, and Elizabeth Gilman was Treasurer. And all of them, quite a number of prominent New Yorkers, set me free to do whatever I thought needed doing in the South.

M.F.: I wanted to ask you about Elizabeth Gilman. What was she like?

H.K.: Elizabeth was a member of the Socialist party and her father when President of Johns Hopkins University said to her "Elizabeth, you are a Socialist, but everything you put your hands to turns to gold."

M.F.: What was she putting her hands to at that time?

H.K.: Investments, and she raised the money for my work. She said it was the easiest money she ever raised in her life.

M.F.: She was from a wealthy Baltimore family, wasn't she?

H.K.: Well her father was President of the University of California, Berkely^e, I believe, and then became President of Johns Hopkins, that is where he really made his name, and was universally respected.

M.F.: Was he also a Socialist, or was he upset over Elizabeth?

H.K.: No he didn't become upset, and was not a Socialist. He felt that she was intelligent enough to work out her own destiny, you know, in terms of things that she wanted to do, and kept hands off, but he did tell her about the "gold" because she told me that herself.

M.F.: Well you have had a lot of contact with her since~~d~~ she was raising money for your work.

H.K.: Yes, I saw her on numerous occasions. We corresponded and she visited in my home and I hers. She resented my leaving the Committee to go with the Fellowship of Southern Churchmen. She resented that because she thought we were doing a much needed work. Norman Thomas did too, and Reinhold Neibuhr did too, they all thought that what we were doing was too important to bother with the church, and that's what it almost amounted to. We did get some important things done though.

M.F.: You felt at the time that it was a better decision, didn't you?

H.K.: Yes.

M.F.: Why did you . . .

H.K.: Well I felt that the church should become involved in all the problems of the people. My motivation was always religious, from the standpoint of a radical Christian approach, to the whole business of living, everything, and I made this my goal.

M.F.: Did you feel that the Committee for Economic and Racial Justice was not sufficiently Christian? I mean you said the others had not bothered with the church enough, that is had not confronted the church with the total problems of life.

H.K.: Well, I felt this confrontation absolutely necessary.

M.F.: And you felt that more emphasis should be put on that?

H.K.: It's a very difficult thing to unravel because here was Neibuhr, who believed much as I did and who used to prod me because I wasn't teaching, and he was sort of the Godfather of the Fellowship of Southern Churchmen, and . . . but still they felt that this work that I was doing with the Southern Tenant Farmers Union, for example, and the miners, and oil workers, and farmers up in Minnesota, the auto workers, and so on and so on, were just of such vital importance that I ought not to neglect it, and I didn't neglect it, I just tried to get the churches to give a real bone fide Christian witness and get themselves involved in all of these troubles, you know.

M.F.: Had Neibuhr and Gilman and all his following sort of given up on the churches?

H.K.: Yes.

M.F.: I mean they felt that there just was no hope for getting the churches involved.

H.K.: Reine and I were just like that, very close together in all of our thinking. Buncombe County Ministerial Association asked me if I would speak to them about Reine, and his work. A copy of it is over there, I think, and he was a visiting Professor at Harvard that year, lived at Quincy House. I sent it to him for him to make any corrections that he wanted to any suggestions, and so he wrote me back, and I was reading the letter the other day. You know, he was partly paralyzed and . . . well, he wrote me back, almost immediately and said I had been too kind and praised him too highly, and in "the sunset of life," he "wondered if it had been worthwhile." One of the top theologians in the country, you know. He was something else. He was an intellectual giant. He and I used to go fishing together. He lived right up there one summer with his mother and sister. Whenever I went to New York, I stayed in his home at Union Theological Seminary and he woke me up by grinding the coffee.

M.F.: Was it a hard decision for you to make then to have the committee dissolved?

H.K.: Yes, it was a hard decision to make. In the first place, I didn't know where the money was coming from to support the work and in the second place, people were almost frightened by me. I went to ask for some money in New York (they had some rather distinguished people in places of leadership) and when I got through making my presentation, one of the two men that I was talking to at the moment said to me, "Kester, where you are concerned, people have long memories."

M.F.: Well that is good. . . or it might be bad.

H.K.: We were getting some money, and we had that meeting with Martin Luther King and some four hundred committed Christian leaders from every Southern State.

M.F.: This was in '36 in Nashville?

H.K.: It was later than that.

M.F.: Oh, it was '56 or '57, I'm sorry.

H.K.: The foundations thought it too early for such a conference as I had in mind. All of the foundations backed away, the Rockefeller Brothers, Ford, because they were really scared of it, you know, and I thought certainly I would get some money from Ford. They kept me dangling for months, you know, and if it hadn't been for the Paine Foundation, in Boston . . . his great great great grandfather had signed the Declaration of Independence and they were very very wealthy, and his sister, Ethel Paine Moors, gave generously.

M.F.: So they were the only . . .

H.K.: They were the only ones that made the Conference possible.

M.F.: Well what do you think the reason was, was it too early?

H.K.: Yes, and no. They were scared.

M.F.: Did you . . . I am thinking about, I read about the trip that you and your wife made through the South the year before that in '55, right?

H.K.: Yes.

M.F.: And you were very discouraged, weren't you, about what you saw . . . did you feel when the Supreme Court decision passed in '54 that you could pretty much move ahead and that that was a red flag for action?

H.K.: Yes.

M.F.: And then were you . . . was it just almost devastating after that when things . . . when it became obvious that things weren't going to move?

H.K.: Yes. The Klan, the reactionaries, the White Citizens Council, and the Church, and outside of the Church moved to unite and squash every liberal movement, and that was why the Providence Farms . . . the Delta Cooperative Farms, had the skids put under them . . .

M.F.: They had to dissolve?

H.K.: They had to dissolve in the end, yes, and my wife and I spent the last night with the Minters and Coxes before they left for a more hospitable environment.

M.F.: Before they left?

H.K.: Yes.

M.F.: Well you went on to very different things after the Conference in Nashville in '56, and started teaching, and worked as the Dean of Students of several different schools and did you feel that it was time to get out and do something different, that there was no real reason in struggling anymore?

H.K.: Well there were many things. One, we had never had any home life, and I was away so much, and Alice, of course was alone, and Neibuhr prodded me more than anybody else to teach. He said you need to share this with students, these things, which I did, and some of the things I'd tell my students, they had every reason to doubt because they hadn't been through the Depression, they knew little or nothing about the human situation. They didn't know what real trouble was and they'd go home on week-ends, and I'd say to my students, "If you don't believe what I am telling you, you go home and talk to your father, and then if he doesn't know, talk to your grandfather." They'd come back on Monday and they'd say "Granddaddy says it was exactly that way."

M.F.: Well did you enjoy the teaching?

H.K.: Oh, I had a wonderful time. Lacking three, I had half the student body in my classes at Anderson College at Montreat.

M.F.: That is quite a record.

H.K.: And I quit using textbooks, because most of them were obsolete before they even had come off the press, and I began to see all these magazines piled up here - that is just a small number of them. I took about 30 or 35 magazines . . . I couldn't read them all myself, but I took my

best students, and they would mark the passages and the articles that they thought the class ought to have, and the Secretary of the faculty came . . . went to the Dean and said "Why does Mr. Kester have ~~all~~ of this mimeographing done?" I did one of two things, I either had it mimeographed, or I put it on the blackboard; I used the blackboard a great deal because the blackboard is a good thing to use. I don't see how people teach without it, and the Dean explained it to her and after that it was perfectly all right. I used the text that they used at Harvard in Economics. In Geography I used the text that was used by the Armed Services. I came to the conclusion that the best thing to do was just to quit fooling with the text, and take it as it came from day to day and week to week through the news media.

M.F.: Was this real unusual for the teaching that was going on at that time?

H.K.: Yes.

M.F.: Now somebody in the Middle West, I think, is using newspapers, daily newspapers for teaching. A lot of people . . . I have read of someone who arranged with the Washington Post to get the newspaper brought to the classroom, and they would read the . . . they'd use one of the copies that didn't come out with the exact printing, before the corrected copy or something. I wanted to ask you a little about the Penn School when you were there. That was really your first adventure with schools, wasn't it? When you went down there in '43?

H.K.: Yes.

M.F.: You completely changed the direction . . . the organization at that school.

H.K.: Yes.

M.F.: I wonder, were you happy with the transition?

H.K.: No, it was tremendously difficult.

M.F.: Were you optimistic when you went there?

H.K.: I felt that it was an opportunity to demonstrate what could be done through teaching agriculture wise, and community wise.

M.F.: Was your ultimate goal to set up something on the order of the Delta Cooperative?

H.K.: Well, no. The goal was to see that we got first-rate teachers, which were hard to find; and make the school what it had been climbing to achieve for years.

M.F.: So you wanted to keep it as a school?

H.K.: We wanted to keep it as a school. We wanted to make the school serve the people - all the people and with the help of the faculty and workers we drew up plans for this. We finally turned the school over to the county and later Courtney Siceloff and his wife set up the Penn Community Center. He came from Carolina; he and his wife used to work with the Fellowship in the headquarters of the Fellowship of Southern Churchmen under Nelle Morton in Chapel Hill.

M.F.: How do you . . . Sis. . .

H.K.: Siceloff, and they . . . I came to the point after about five years . . . the way I felt that this was ending . . . this is what the Foundations were telling me too . . . the reason I couldn't get the money I needed, was that secondary education was held to be no business of private philanthropy, that it was a state job, and so I advised the Trustees fully about the situation.

M.F.: Did you have a good Board of Trustees?

H.K.: Mostly quite good, yes, and I still hear from several of them.

M.F.: Did you involve the community more in the school than it had been before?

H.K.: Well in a way we did, and in a way we repulsed them because

my Alice was Head of the Instruction and she took it seriously. When we went down there . . . I don't know whether they kept the rolls or not, but anyway the kids would think up excuses not to come to class, you know, they said they had to "go after the cows" . . . this, that or the other, you know. They'd always burn wood at the School, and it kept the kids and the men busy, just constantly cutting wood. They must have had 40 to 45 fires to keep going and I ordered the first coal that had ever been on the island, and the small children would ^{throw} the coal at one another and get dirty.

M.F.: How many students were there when you were there?

H.K.: Well it varied. We had from the first grade through the twelfth, we had right at 250 to 275, I guess, then at one time we had about 250 veterans.

M.F.: And the regular students didn't come.

H.K.: Yes.

M.F.: They were there also?

H.K.: All there, and we were teaching auto mechanics, blacksmithing, and leather work, carpentry, masonry, and basketry, and you know, various things that would give the veterans a chance to make a living. When they came to school I had quite a time trying to keep the veterans from playing craps all the time.

M.F.: These were all black veterans who had all been in World War II?

H.K.: Yes.

M.F.: Were most of them from around there?

H.K.: Yes, some of them came from the mainland as well as the islands . . .

M.F. Why did you feel that you might have repulsed some of the people in the community?

H.K.: Because they prided themselves on their lack of prejudices . . .

M.F.: Toward blacks?

H.K.: Toward whites, and I knew perfectly well that there was as much hatred in their hearts at times for the white man as in the white man's heart for the Negro, and I didn't hesitate to tell them.

M.F.: Do you think that they resented the school's long presence there with a white at the top?

H.K.: They resented it and at the same time we went up on tuition. It was \$1 a year, and we couldn't survive on that, you know, and I put it up to \$10 because they could afford it, their parents could afford it, and this just raised a hullabalou.

M.F.: Now the women who were there before you are the two women who had run the school. Had they supported it mainly out of their own . . .

H.K.: No. They received financial help from well-to-do friends in the North. At that time when they were there, the General Education Board, for example and other groups gave fairly liberally. There were several very wealthy trustees, and they had a singular devotion to these two women, but they (the people) didn't know what to do with a white man.

M.F.: Now the women . . . they came back.

H.K.: They lived there, right on top of us.

M.F.: Was that a problem?

H.K.: Yes, it was a problem because they thought that since they had been at the school for forty years, that it was our responsibility to look after every whim that they had, you know? If a pipe broke or faucet leaked or whatever it was, I got a call to come down and fix it. Then they had a picture made that cost over \$10,000 - one of the trustees paid for it. I have a letter in there right now from him, John Silver paid for it, and he must have spent \$15,000 to \$20,000 on the film which was in color.

M.F.: About the school?

H.K.: About the school, primarily about these two women. It wasn't particularly a good job, but I showed it at Yale Divinity, when Liston Pope was Dean, and somehow the Trustees thought I ought to show it more. I showed it at Vassar, and two or three other places, but I never got much response from it.

M.F.: Were the women . . . Cooley was the name of one of them?

H.K.: Cooley, Rossa Cooley and Grace House.

M.F.: Were they generally dissatisfied with your plans for changing, I mean this was a fairly radical program abolishing the plan that they had been working at. Were they critical or did they want you to do whatever you could, or what?

H.K.: No. They carried on a secret correspondence with Mr. Cope, Francis Cope, he was a big apple grower in Pennsylvania, and he became the Chairman of the Board after he got his MA from Harvard, then stayed there for forty years until he tried to mess up everything that I was doing, and the Trustees asked for his resignation as Chairman.

M.F.: He was at the school while you . . .

H.K.: No, he lived in Pennsylvania on his farm, and made annual trips to the school to see how we were doing. But he would go behind your back and get the grievances of the faculty members. Every faculty member has a gripe, you know, and that is all he was interested^{in,} was their gripes, and he came one Spring and after he had been down there about a week or ten days, he said, "I'd like to see you and Alice tonight," when he came in, and he just laid me low because of the way I was going about things, "too fast," he said, and he was getting a strong reaction from the faculty, well I knew what the reaction was. For example, the Chemistry teacher who was a good teacher, he and his

wife rented one of our houses, and they went away on a visit and while they were gone the squirrels ate the peaches on their place. They wanted the school to pay for the lost fruit. I refused because I didn't think the loss of the fruit was our responsibility. And when the Trustees found out about what Mr. Cope was doing, they asked for his resignation.

M.F.: Did this upset him?

H.K.: Of course it upset him. He didn't want to resign because he said he had been there 40 years and the school had gotten along fine, but they had built a halo around the school, you know. When I went there, the average yield of corn was 16 bushels to the acre. We had a tremendous daily consumption of corn and vegetables, etc. with the chickens, cows, and all the children to feed. We had a canning program during the summer time, and canned thousands of gallons of food. By changing the fertilizer, planting cover crops, and general cultivation, we raised the annual yield of corn to 68 bushels per acre, and most everything else in the same proportion.

M.F.: Were they just kind of riding along on their past reputation?

H.K.: Yes.

M.F.: Have you read Guion Johnson's book on the Social History of the St. Helena Island of The Sea Islands, as she calls it? It talks about the school.

H.K.: Well a lot of people got Black Yoemanry, do you know that?

M.F.: It was a part of the same study, right? I wondered if you agreed with their interpretation of it?

H.K.: I sure didn't.

M.F.: You didn't?

H.K.: No.

M.F.: That was about 14 years before you were there. Do you think that they were basically wrong?

H.K.: Well I think Wooster came nearer being wrong than anybody else.

M.F.: What did you disagree with basically?

H.K.: Well that he elevated the competence of the people, where it was untrue. They weren't that competent. I tried to diversify the agriculture; they had made a beginning, but they didn't have a compost pile, for example. So I started a compost pile using an old vat that they used to dip the cows in, you know, to get rid of the ticks and things. Well it was sort of summarized when Mr. Bill Cadbury (who was now chairman of the Board) a broker in Philadelphia, a wonderful Quaker. . . a wonderful man, when he heard about what Miss House was doing, and Miss Cooley, all of this draft of letters going out describing this and that and the other, you know, he wrote me back, "She is a sinful woman." Well, we made lots of mistakes, I'm not denying that.

M.F.: Well, when you left, the plan was to have a system . . . to have adult education, and to have community service projects.

H.K.: That's right. That is what Siceloff did when he took over my plan, or rather the plan the faculty and workers had agreed upon.

M.F.: Now were you happy with that, did you feel that was the best that could be done, and that was that?

H.K.: I worked at it a long time. We had meeting after meeting after meeting with the faculty.

M.F.: Also you had a committee of sociologists come in and evaluate, didn't you?

H.K.: When I presented the idea of making the school into something else. When I told the Trustees that I thought the time had come for Penn School, as such, to be turned over to the state, at \$1 per year, they would take the

buildings and everything . . . because the state was in far better position to run the school than we were.

M.F.: And they just have a regular Secondary Education program there?

H.K.: They had . . . I knew the Superintendent of Education, and the State Superintendent of Education had been my wife's teacher at Peabody, State Superintendent, and he came down about our second year to check on the school. He looked the place over and he said "You've got until September." It was April or May when he came. He said "You've got until September to get some teachers with advanced degrees - AB's and MA's. I want some people here who have had advanced study."

M.F.: You let a lot of the faculty go then?

H.K.: Not a lot, a few . . . because we couldn't replace them, but we did bring in other people who had excellent training, but as fast as I would bring in a good one . . . a good man or a good woman, Charleston would pick them up because they paid the largest salary and gave them a bonus in addition. So if it wasn't finances it was something else.

M.F.: So then you were relatively relieved to go.

H.K.: Yes. Our housekeeper said to me "Shake the dirt from off your feet."

M.F.: Well let me ask you just a couple more questions about when you were in Nashville. I was real curious, based on what Elizabeth Jones was saying about the Industrial Department there in the YWCA. Do you remember . . . from what she was saying the Industrial Department was very different from the entire YWCA in Nashville.

H.K.: That's right.

M.F.: And do you remember anything about how they were different?

H.K.: Well in the first place they were working with young women. The girls came from the factories and mills, and were frequently look down upon.

M.F.: By?

H.K.: By the Directors, I mean the members of the Board of Directors.

M.F.: Of the YWCA?

H.K.: Of the YWCA, and Elizabeth Jones was dedicated to these young women. Alice, my wife, was Chairman of her committee, and she and Elizabeth worked well together.

M.F.: It was the Industrial Committee of the YWCA.

H.K.: Of the YWCA, and it was an important work they were doing. Did she tell you that they wouldn't let me speak?

M.F.: She was telling me about a Mrs. Dressler, who was the director of the YWCA, who apparently tended to be unhappy with the work of the Industrial Department.

H.K.: Well did she tell you that they wouldn't let me speak?

M.F.: But they let you pray. Were you one of the few ministers . . . she said they had very little contact with any kind of church.

H.K.: Well, see it was a class division within the YWCA. There were girls who worked in mills, snuff factories, shoe factories, etc. you know, and they were poor and not well educated and so on.

M.F. Did they have at that time, an interracial group in the Industrial Department?

H.K.: No.

M.F.: Were a lot of the people who were also working in interracial work in the YWCA in the Industrial Department in Nashville, or was there much interracial work going on?

H.K.: We had a fine group and we organized what we called a Saturday afternoon forum in Nashville.

M.F.: Was this an extension of what was going on when you were

a student or was the same thing . . .

H.K.: Yes. We would meet Professors from Fisk and Scarritt and one or two from Vanderbilt and Tennessee A & I and all the colleges, and we just met for fellowship and to talk over our problems and what we might do. It was the President's Secretary at Fisk, Margaret Fuller, I believe was her name, who was the Chairman of our Saturday afternoon forum. We ate together, then we talked, you know. Somebody would be responsible for a speech. We'd all just chip in and share our common ignorance.

M.F.: Did you receive opposition from the YMCA for doing this, or did they mind?

H.K.: No they didn't . . . what happened was that when we had that meeting about China, the President of Fisk, Thomas Elsa Jones, called his secretary in and said, "You either resign from that group, or you resign as my secretary," and she called me in tears, and said, "What must I do?" I said "You don't have any choice." She had a semi-invalid mother to support, the only support her mother had, and I said "You've got to stand by your mother," and I said "We'll keep the thing going, so don't you hesitate one minute."

M.F.: Was she in the YWCA group at Fisk? Was that her affiliation?

H.K.: No, she was just the President's secretary.

M.F.: I see. Well Elizabeth Jones. . . I asked her about a black YWCA in Nashville during that period, and do you remember . . .

H.K.: As I remember, now this is sort of a shot in the dark, but as I remember it it was not very vigorous when I was there.

M.F.: That was what she was saying, that it was a very conservative group really.

H.K.: Later on they became liberalized.

M.F.: Do you remember a Mrs. Arch Traywick, / ^{Kate} Traywick?

H.K.: Yes.

M.F.: What do you remember about her?

H.K.: Well I don't remember much to tell you the truth, I know the name. She was a person of very considerable means, and as far as I can remember, she never stood in my way in anything we tried to do.

M.F.: She was in the hierarchy of the YWCA, YMCA, right?

H.K.: She was among the elite in Nashville and in the YWCA.

M.F.: But some of the elite in Nashville were speaking out against what you were doing, right?

H.K.: Yes, sure.

M.F.: But as far as you remember, she wasn't?

H.K.: She wasn't one of them as far as I remember.

M.F.: Do you remember what the attitude of the YWCA Industrial Department was toward trade unions?

H.K.: Well we pushed to try to get the girls organized but the AF of L, that was before the CIO. The ~~AF~~ of L, it was as stubborn as it could be about us, you know.

M.F.: About accepting the women?

H.K.: Yes, accepting anybody. I tried to get Negroes for example, who were brick masons, but they were the last ones to be put on the job, and I worked with the AF of L people, held meetings in the Labor Temple and all that sort of thing, but they just weren't concerned about giving work to Negroes. You see the trouble with organized labor was it was interested in higher wages and shorter hours, and they weren't interested in the general organization of labor, particularly Negroes.

M.F.: I see. Well, was there a fear on the part of the people in the Industrial Department about unions, or . . .

H.K.: I think the . . . so far as I can recall, there was not . . . it was not fear, it was simply lack of cooperation on the part of organized labor and the top leadership in the YW.

M.F.: What about the YMCA or YWCA generally?

H.K.: The YMCA didn't amount to a hill of beans, excuse me. The YMCA maintained a "hands off" policy toward industrial problems. The YWCA, on a whole, was far ahead of the YMCA.

M.F.: In Nashville and everywhere else in the South as far as you know? Was the YWCA elite leaders, were they opposed to unions, were they opposed to . . .

H.K.: I don't think so, because they let me speak or pray.

M.F.: What do you think was your wife's motivation, main motivation in working with the Industrial Department?

H.K.: Because she knew the conditions that these girls faced, and she thought that the best service that she could render was in working with this group.

M.F.: Did she view it . . . you spoke a few minutes ago about your feelings about working with the miners was that it was a class struggle that everyone was involved in. Did that extend into her work, did she see it as a class struggle? It wasn't a feeling . . . a mothering feeling toward the group, you know, "You've had a hard life, and I want to help you as much as I can." Which was it? Was it more . . .

H.K.: It was both, I think. Alva Taylor, does that name mean anything to you? He was a professor of Ethics at Vanderbilt, Social Ethics.

M.F.: Albert?

H.K.: Alva . . . A l v a Taylor, T a y l o r, he's gone now . . . tried

to start a labor church out in the University community. Not far from Scarritt and Vanderbilt.

M.F.: What was the name of it?

H.K.: He called it The Labor Church. He couldn't make a go of it, and many of us knew that.

M.F.: Who opposed him?

H.K.: What?

M.F.: Who was the primary opposer that he had?

H.K.: Chancellor Kirkland as far as Vanderbilt was concerned.

M.F.: Of Vanderbilt?

H.K.: Of Vanderbilt.

M.F.: Was his position at the University in danger?

H.K.: He was finally fired.

M.F.: He was fired for the Labor Chirch?

H.K.: Well because of a number of things. For example, he had all the members concerned in his classes. He would take them to Fisk sometimes once or twice a week, and we'd have Charlie Johnson, E. Franklin Frazier, and others, you know, speak to the group and the Chancellor didn't like that at all.

M.F.: Well what basically did he want to do with the Labor Church?

H.K.: He wanted to interest people in conditions of life . . . and get some of the labor people into the University community as respectable citizens.

M.F.: I see, so he was planning to have people within the University community come to the church and also draw people out of the industrial community and have them understand each others problem.⁵ What about . . . you were with the League for Industrial Democracy during this same period.

H.K.: Yes, I lectured all over the country.

M.F.: Right, for many years.

H.K.: Yes.

M.F.: Well when you were in Nashville and I guess . . . when you were based in Nashville, you travelled all over the South as well.

H.K.: I travelled all over the country.

M.F.: Tell me something about that.

H.K.: The League for Industrial Democracy?

M.F.: Yes.

H.K.: Norman Thomas, Harry Laidler, Mary Fox, John Herling, they were all interested in working conditions among labor. That was their motivation.

M.F.: Now when you were speaking, what kinds of groups did you speak to mainly?

H.K.: I spoke to all kinds of groups, labor, church etc., but they were mostly University people and concerned about conditions in the South.

M.F.: Did you speak to workers as well?

H.K.: If they wanted to come. . . if they had the money to pay the price, you know, to buy a ticket for the League for Industrial Democracy series.

M.F.: What did you talk about most of the time?

H.K.: About working conditions, economic conditions, and race, and the failure of the church to do anything about it.

M.F.: Did you use the League for Industrial Democracy when you were a member of the Socialist party as a way to give out information about what the party was doing and about what the party offered?

H.K.: Sure.

M.F.: Could you do that openly, or was that . . . you didn't have to do it under cover at all?

H.K.: No.

M.F.: And was that pretty much the case all over where you spoke for the League of Industrial Democracy?

H.K.: University of Minnesota, Rice, University of Texas, University of Maine, University of Vermont, altogether I spoke in over 250 colleges and Universities.

M.F.: In your case and in the case of Miss Jones also . . . Elizabeth Jones, because she was told . . . she said the reason she left Nashville was because she was called in and told that she would have to promise not to do anything controversial, and she said she couldn't promise that, and she left, and the "Y" kind of turned on you by firing you and essentially making her leave. Who was setting the policy for the "Y", was it local, or how much was from Nashville? Was the Nashville organization out of New York ahead of the Local?

H.K.: Not much. I was a member of the National Student Council for years, and had some good friends-among them H. W. "Red" Pope, Herbert King, and many others. One of the strongest persons was James Myers of the old Federal Council of Churches, which existed before the National Council, and he was deeply concerned with all the things that I was involved in. I could fall back on Jim Myers, and he saw things very much as I did in terms of trying to get the church involved in labor, and in race and so on, and all I had to do was to send him a wire and help was coming soon on its way.

M.F.: Well when you were in Nashville . . . I was wondering if in Nashville the "Y" . . . the YWCA would start a project, like start the

Industrial Department because of a word from the national organization and then withdraw support from that because of local opposition.

H.K.: It was part of the national policy, I think, but it differed in different places, you know, depending on the leadership, and the pressure brought against the people who were trying to do the job . . . get the job done.

Leonard

M.F.: Was Louise / (McLaren) one of your wife's best allies as far as . . .

H.K.: Well Louise . . . about all I can remember about Louise is the summer schools where I was given a free hand until I--and of course I had always done it, but I began to do it with very considerable vigor, - trying to inject radical religion before the girls at the summer school over at Weaverville College, and I think it upset her.

M.F.: You wrote in your letter that she said one time that you were off on a . . .

H.K.: "Jesus Jag."

M.F.: "Jesus jag." Who did she say that to, it wasn't to you was it?

H.K.: No, it was published. She wrote somebody else, and they showed the letter to me and I've seen it . . . "old Kester is off on a Jesus jag."

M.F.: She kept writing to you quite regularly and always asked you to come over and speak to the girls at the summer school.

H.K.: That's right.

M.F.: What did you know about her? What did you know about her background and her training?

H.K.: Not very much.

M.F.: You said you thought she was not living.

M.F.: I thought she was far more vigorous in terms of the Christian faith and concerns for the girls until she married McLaren.

M.F.: And what did you know . . . you met him one time?

H.K.: Oh several times, and I think I don't know . . .

M.F.: I don't mean to interrupt, what was his position? What did he do?

H.K.: I don't know what he did, I mean where his means came from, but he took a left political position, if I am not mistaken Now this is the way it appeared to me; I couldn't swear it, but it seemed to me that she began to change.

M.F.: Well you went to their home several times, didn't you and talked to them?

H.K.: I guess I did.

M.F.: I was reading some of the letters that you wrote back and forth to her. She wrote to you more than you wrote her, really. She was . . . well you knew her then before her marriage and also after?

H.K.: Yes.

M.F.: Was she in the YWCA? Is that where you originally knew her, do you remember?

H.K.: The summer school was, I suppose, really sponsored and financed by the YWCA.

M.F.: Now a lot of their money, from what I understand, came from the North, right?

H.K.: Right, nearly all of it.

M.F.: And their winter headquarters was in New York, and then sometimes in Baltimore. At one of the meetings, you spoke out and said you thought

this was a problem, was the feeling generally, like when you were in Nashville, that it was an organization that was not of the South, that it was . . . do you remember what . . .

H.K.: No, I never felt that. I felt that we ought to have . . . the students for example, ought to have a real voice in determining the kinds of programs we had. The people who came, and at Blue Ridge, for example, ought to be integrated, and there is a letter right there . . . it was documented . . . in which I am given credit for having made the first motion for the inclusion of Negroes in the YMCA, the student Christian movement, that really is what it was . . . you can have that, I've got several copies of it.

M.F.: Thank you. Well now the Southern Summer School wasn't integrated until years later.

H.K.: Right, that is my understanding.

M.F.: From one speech that you had with them, you said that you felt that they should organize economically all races of the South. You were working with the STFU when you said this, and they were integrated. If you were to list strengths and weaknesses of the school, do you think this was one of the weaknesses.

H.K.: Sure.

M.F.: One of the weaknesses they had.

H.K.: There was nothing we could do about it.

M.F.: Well they were . . . at the time, they were saying, they were preaching racial equality at the Southern Summer School, but they refused to take black students. Did you think they were justified in . . .

H.K.: No, I never did.

M.F.: I mean their rationale was that they just couldn't do it at the time.

H.K.: Yes. Well, they would've run into considerable opposition. I found it was extremely difficult from the early thirties until after the meeting with Martin Luther King in Nashville to find a place to meet. It really was, it was difficult.

M.F.: Well since they didn't have their own place, had to rent a place, do you think they would have been refused a lot of the camps around there? What do you think was the major accomplishment^gs of the school?

H.K.: Well I suppose it was getting these girls together, and giving them some understanding, of the class struggle by various speakers. I wasn't the only one who spoke of what economic life was all about, and what religion ought to be about.

M.F.: You didn't go for the whole six week period. You would just go over and speak and then . . .

H.K.: Well I stayed there sometimes as much as a week to ten days, something of that sort.

M.F.: Did you think they had enough religious training, or enough . . .

H.K.: Now who are you talking about?

M.F.: In the Southern Summer School . . . in the program they set up.

H.K.: Not according to my lights.

M.F.: What about political leanings of the Southern Summer School. I mean, did the Socialists have an interest in what they were doing?

H.K.: Yes, they had an interest, but I . . . so far as I can recall thay . . . none of the left wing nor liberal interpreters of economic life,

that I recall, were sought after. Now they may have dropped in for a session or something of that sort, but I never felt that they really went after them to get them, you know?

M.F.: What about the Communist party. Did they have an interest in the school?

H.K.: They had an interest in everything.

M.F.: For the summer you didn't think they sought out . . . the leaders of the school sought out either Communists or Socialists one way or the other to come and to speak. I was wondering if there was any attempt to indoctrinate girls while they were there in any kind of particular political leaning . . . any particular ideology?

H.K.: I can't say, I don't know.

M.F.: I wondered how open it was . . . they kept talking about discussions that they had and I just wondered how open they were.

H.K.: Well I suspect and my memories tell me that they were fairly open . . . fairly open.

M.F.: Now after you would speak, would you have a discussion?

H.K.: Oh yes, always.

MF.F: In 1937 and 1938, students came from the STFU to the school. Do you remember what their reaction to the school was?

H.K.: No, Mitchell could tell you, but I don't know because I was so involved in other things.

M.F.: You were involved in an awful lot of other things. I'm sorry to have to ask you about some of these things you weren't very involved in, but did you become involved in the discussion about inclusion of agricultural workers as you did in discussion about inclusion of Negro workers?

H.K.: Sure.

M.F.: Was there a reluctance to accept agricultural workers?

H.K.: Well, by and large, I think there was, for this reason, that they didn't think that the tenants or sharecroppers or day laborers could make a significant contribution because they were so oppressed and generally inarticulate.

M.F.: So they were worried about the contribution that the student would be able to make to the school?

H.K.: Well, maybe so . . . maybe that is fair, I can't be sure.

M.F.: Was the concern perhaps what agriculture workers would get out of it? I mean do you think it was possible to have a school that would serve both agricultural and industrial workers?

H.K.: Yes, I think so.

M.F.: Did you see their needs during this time as basically the same?

H.K.: Yes. A worker is a worker regardless of whether he's in a high steeple church or grubbing around for a living.

M.F.: Certainly during this period so many of them were moving to industrial centers. The transition was going on from the farm to the mills. So many . . . we were really talking about many of the same people. You wrote in Revolt among the Sharecroppers about the craving of education on the part of a lot of sharecroppers and tenant farmers and their just complete lack of opportunity to receive any kind of education. I read that while agricultural workers sometimes were sent to various camps and schools, and I think STFU members were sent to Commonwealth College to study labor conditions.

H.K.: That's right, except they went on their own. The Union per se never sent them.

M.F.: It was reported as an unhappy experience for many of them.

H.K.: Well, Commonwealth, at that time, was way over on the left politically.

M.F.: I see.

H.K.: Until it finally became completely under the domination of the Communists, and we didn't send them. If they wanted to go, it was there, they had a right to go. We had a couple of meetings at Commonwealth. . . the Union did, and Mitchell almost got killed at one of them, if it hadn't been for me, he would've been killed because I stepped in front of the man who had the gun.

M.F.: And he didn't kill you?

H.K.: I knew he wouldn't kill me or I wouldn't have done it!

M.F.: Well then did the STF^U eventually break completely with Commonwealth? I mean, did the union stop meeting there or did it remain kind of open?

H.K.: Well, you know we finally decided it was best not to be involved with Commonwealth. Claude Williams became the Director of Commonwealth, and he was also a member of the STF^U, and we had a big fish fry somewhere, I believe this one was in Oklahoma, do you know what I mean when I say a Fish Fry?

M.F.: yes.

H.K.: We just sent a bunch of men out on say a Friday or Saturday and they would catch the fish by the hundreds and then we would have an all day meeting on Sunday.

M.F.: You'd eat 'em by the hundreds!

H.K.: Yes, and the President of the Union, J. R. Butler was about the same height as Claude Williams, and wore a coat similar in color to that

worn by Williams and Butler left early in the afternoon, after we had had these series of speeches. See what we would do, we'd have the speakers remain at one point and this would be their platform for the day and the group would move from one speaker to another one, to another one, to another one etc.

M.F.: To speak to different groups?

H.K.: Yes, and so he (Butler) picked up his coat or what he thought was his coat - his coat was almost identical with Williams' coat, and he picked it up by mistake, and when he got home he discovered it, and then he found Williams' red card.

M.F.: So it wasn't well known at all that this was a Communist plot to take over the Union.

H.K.: No.

M.F.: What was the reaction when they found he was a Communist?

H.K.: He was tried and expelled by the Union and Butler called the meeting and presided over the trial.

M.F.: Expelled from the union?

H.K.: From the union, and he has hated me ever since.

M.F.: When they set up . . . now the STFU did raise money to send a couple of girls to the Southern Summer School, I mean, girls, I guess. Did they feel that the Southern Summer School would be better or a better place for workers to get an education on labor?

H.K.: Oh yes.

M.F.: Training them in Commonwealth?

H.K.: I never felt that Commonwealth made any significant contribution at all.

M.F.: I see. Did you know Louise Ingersoll?

H.K.: Yes. Doctor?

M.F.: Yes.

H.K.: Yes, in Asheville.

M.F.: Right she was the Doctor at the school. Did she remain active?

H.K.: So far as I know. She and Alice were fairly close, I didn't know her too well.

M.F.: Now where was she politically? Was she fairly left?

H.K.: I don't think so. I don't have any recollection, I never heard of her leaning on the left or to the right, I just knew she was concerned about all the problems confronting the people.

M.F.: She was just a good doctor.

H.K.: She was a good doctor, and that's it.

M.F.: Do you remember anything about the labor conferences that the Southern Summer School would have sometimes during the session, would they invite labor organizers?

H.K.: None that I remember, they may have, but I am not sure about it.

M.F.: Did you have any feeling when you were there that they were too oriented to organized labor? You mentioned one time that they should cultivate allies outside of organized labor. You suggested that the churches and the Universities could be cultivated.

H.K.: Well, certainly Commonwealth was. It had very little appeal.

M.F.: To organized labor?

H.K.: To organized labor. Some very good reasons, because organized labor was scared to come in this school, as I was. I went to Chattanooga for the Fellowship of Southern Churchmen. We were all confused in those days, you know. We didn't know which way to turn, and there were three or four of us who decided that we'd go to New York and talk to Earl Browder,

talk to the top man, which we did. I called him and he said "Don't come to the office, meet me in my apartment," which we did. Earl Browder started talking and talked about 15 minutes, and I knew that I didn't want to have one thing to do with Communism, except to fight it, and I did.

M.F.: Did you have any . . . from what you said you had no inclination that there was / ^{any} kind of Communist affiliation with the Southern Summer School. Did you, or do you remember any? The reason I ask is that I ran across some letters that were written by . . . one that was written to you by a student who was an STFU member. I have a copy I want to show you, and she was . . . this is why I ask because I was very puzzled by it.

H.K.: I see, the place is, as I guess you know, subtly, but definitely Communist. Harriet Young is dead.

M.F.: She's dead?

H.K.: Yes.

M.F.: Now she was at the Southern Summer School?

H.K.: She had means, private means, and she could go where she wanted to, do what she wanted to. She's been dead about two years I reckon, sudden, right sudden, cancer, as I remember.

M.F.: Do you remember anything about that, any uproar about . . .

H.K.: I don't remember about that, but this is when . . . go back now, I think . . . this is 1938, I don't know when Louise married, but this is when the change came, was beginning to come, I think. Of course, she may have been going with McLaren all the time. She was right, they certainly did need to get out from under the hands of the Communists.

M.F.: Well, when you were speaking over there, you had no indication that . . . it wasn't . . . you wouldn't have gone to speak there had you known that they were oriented toward Communism?