

Union Church Oral History Project
John King recorded by Harry Rice 2-23-01
Tape 2 of 2

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J.K.: They shouldn't handling forestry affairs but one of them, if you want me to go into that darn trivia, is Bob Pettis.

H.R.: Well we -

J.K.: He was working under Carl Warming, the vice president in charge of lands and business activities. He wrote me a letter giving me order to do this and that. It burnt me up because he had no business to even write me a letter. I wrote back and I said, "Now I was hired on to try to take care of this mess. I have a wage of \$100 a month. I have no job description. I have no one to tell me who is my boss or anything." I said, "Now if you get me a job description and clear up this thing and work it in a manner ... " I sent the letter to him. That's the last I ever heard of him. He was an artist type. He didn't know a thing about forestry but he was trying to tell me to do things I knew were wrong. Now if he'd give me a job description and put the dollars behind it ...

J.K.: That was in 74. I still have the title Coordinator of College Forest Activities. I still have that title, but in March with the fiscal people, they cut that \$100 off, but I'm still on the books.

H.R.: My goodness.

J.K.: I'm just sitting back and laughing, but these are things about the college that ... It's been great.

H.R.: Well, let's try to get back to ... Before we go to sleep here ...

J.K.: You're not going to get me to sleep on that college floor.

H.R.: Right. No. We got up as far as Harley Patterson then when he left in 1975, Dale Crockett came. What can you tell me about the Reverend Crockett?

J.K.: Dale was ... Well I think he was Baptist training and so forth. He had that background. He was short, fat fella just like I am. He was versatile, but he resented when you'd go ahead and do things without ... Several times they got me up on a pulpit there, recognizing something, and you could see him getting itchy, you know?

H.R.: What were you doing?

J.K.: Oh, say I was introducing or complimenting someone for a job that I'd been involved in, like Lawson Hamilton. Then pretty soon he'd just take the darn reigns out of my hands

and let me ... I didn't appreciate that but ... I don't think he was the best one for the church. They finally got ...

H.R.: He was there about nine years, I think.

J.K.: Yeah, they bought that house down there on ... Just below the church there. They fixed it up -

H.R.: For the church, for ministers?

J.K.: Yeah. I think that was through the coal miner. His wife was very dominant. She got a lot of her in ... I think -

H.R.: In the church, is that what you mean?

J.K.: Well, in church activities because she was ... Somehow ... I just got a story. It had an attic up there. Someone went in there to check on things and they found the darn attic was just a mess. I think they had cats and all that stuff. That started a darn ruckus, but it finally got so that he wasn't doing the best job in the world, I don't think. He went ...

H.R.: Were there any particular disagreements or issues that people disagreed upon while he was here?

J.K.: I don't think so, no. He was a nice talker. I didn't have the same feeling I had with Scottie Cowan versus ... Although he wasn't obnoxious or anything. I think he was trying to do a job, but I believe he wanted to be recognized as running the show, which is really not present now. There's more activity in that church now with all of the people, all these committees and so forth, which it's really astounding to me. Of course I went through revising the darn documents and all that stuff.

H.R.: The ...

J.K.: The rules of the church.

H.R.: Constitution?

J.K.: Yeah, constitution. A lot of it I didn't agree with but finally -

H.R.: When was this now?

J.K.: Now this would've been ... Let's see. We were in the ... We haven't talked to one of the last ones, have we? Let's see. We had the ...

H.R.: This was Crockett. Then well, William Binkley was here for a little while I think. I don't know. He must've been an intern.

J.K.: Binkley ... Well, let's see. He was an older man. I don't think he served as pastor.

H.R.: He just filled in, I believe.

J.K.: Yeah, yeah, yeah. That's right.

H.R.: Then Charles Murray came.

J.K.: Now there's another Scott and ... Yeah, he -

H.R.: Was this when you were working on the constitution and bylaws? Is that during those years?

J.K.: Yeah, it started in and around that period. Some of the church people, and there was a lot of dissension on what would go in and what they'd take out, but they kept working at it, but -

H.R.: Why was there ... Did people think it needed to be fixed or changed?

J.K.: Well, there was conflict in thinking, actions and so forth. Some of it was antiquated and some of it was needed. I remember one fella, he's still teaching for the college, he left the church on account of they changed some of the old thinking and -

H.R.: Do you know who that was?

J.K.: Yeah, but I can't think of his name. He lives over there in north Berea. His wife works over in the music building.

H.R.: [John Crowden?

J.K.: Crowden. John was a very active person in the church but I don't know whether he goes to church now or not but.

H.R.: Do you remember the kinds of questions that he ... Things that he disagreed on, the changes that he disagreed on?

J.K.: Not really intimate, but I can't think of them, but I could see that. He was very ... We talked very freely, the two of us. In fact he still says hello to me. That's a good indication, but I didn't believe in everything he wanted, but it caused him to leave the Union Church. The reason there is ... Then of course the Scottish preacher, I liked him.

H.R.: Which one was that? They're all Scots, aren't they?

J.K.: Yeah, that last one ...

H.R.: Was that Reverend Murray?

J.K.: Yeah. He came up from the south. His wife, she was a West Virginian. I'd go in and talk to him. He said, "Well, she was from a little coal town. The railroad track was the only

road in the town. We'd go up to the railroad grade and do our courting." Just things like that, I liked the man, but something happened. I could go in there and sit at his desk and we could talk pretty serious to each other on life. He had a good approach. Then the church members decided they needed another person. They got hold of this female. They made a co-pastorate. This female ... Now there again I -

H.R.: It was Terri Sherf.

J.K.: Yeah, Terri. Well, she ... I was down in the back. I'd come to visit the church and come to visit Harley a few minutes. I'd park my car right by the doorway there. There wasn't any sign or anything. One time I parked there and out she came a running. "You can't park there." I said, "I'm sorry I took your place but there's no sign there that says you're allowed to park there." She kept rambling on. She said, "I'm always late for work and I've got to have a place to park." When she said that I said, "Okay. I'll not park there again, but yeah, I think you should get a sign and a curbstone there," but she was just a troublemaker.

H.R.: My goodness.

J.K.: Oh yeah.

H.R.: Was there some difficulty between her and the Reverend Murray or did they work together okay?

J.K.: Well, there was division, you see. Murray had been taking the whole load and then they divided the load. I think he was probably ailing somewhat.

H.R.: He was not well?

J.K.: I think he was. I don't know whether it was physically or mental but then I remember another instance where I used to handle that darn Election Day breakfast we had in the church. We arranged everything through to the Tuesday morning of Election Day. We were in there Monday night trying to get chairs set up and so forth. He came down, he said, "You can't stay in here. I have another group of people and we've got to be here." I said, "Well Harley, darn it. We're going to open up five o'clock tomorrow morning. We have all these chairs to move around." He said, "No you can't stay." We moved out.

H.R.: You mean just on that one occasion or was that the last time you -

J.K.: That was one of the occasions. Then I could see that Charlie was deteriorating, whether ... It must've been mental or something, but ... Then there was another instance where this Jim Wyker, he ran kind of a convent up there on Big Hill where he'd bring in young people. They were supposed to work in the fields and the older people were supposed to retire. The younger people ... It didn't work out. The younger people weren't going to work for the old ones. He visited the church quite a bit. He came in one day, or I came in, and here the darn doors and windows on the kitchen, the old kitchen, were broken down. Charlie come down with his hammer and so forth and tried to fix it up. He

couldn't do it. We made some more investigation and we found out that old Jim Wyker came down there. I approached him. He said, "Well I wanted to get in that kitchen to get some water." He broke -

H.R.: It didn't have anything to do with his project out the road?

J.K.: No. He wanted, I guess, to get a drink of water, but he was, boy, way in years. Then Charlie come in and he balled us out. Then Charlie come down with his hammer and saw and tried to fix those darn windows. It didn't work. I'd go up and we'd talk together but that stopped. I knew there was something wrong. Finally the church had a meeting and we defrocked that Murray. [crosstalk 00:16:19]

H.R.: You asked him to leave, is that -

J.K.: No. No. We asked her.

H.R.: Oh, asked her to leave?

J.K.: Yeah. That was a good mood but Charlie wasn't his same self. He finally just dropped out. He started to make some cabinets for his books that he had stored in the church. He went up to Richmond, went to one of the lumber yards and put this lumber on the side of his car. Coming back on 25, some of it dropped off or something and he got out of the car and tried to put it on. He was hit. It drove him wacky. That was a sad event. You can see I've had some rough experiences with men of the cloth, but I still don't resent any of them really. Probably the one I resent most is Johnson but this one we have now, he's a dandy. He's young.

H.R.: You've seen a lot of them now, haven't you?

J.K.: Well, yeah. That's the gamut of them. I never really had any violent problems with any of them, but maybe I wasn't enough of a good church member. I don't know, but I've been sitting in the back of that church, oh I guess it's 20 years. Really I'm not doing a whole lot. I'm giving people bulletins when I can stand on my feet, but it was something. I looked after the doors being closed and stuff like that. I know the new preacher, he appreciates it. Of course he has so darn much to do, but he comes in and his hugging ... We made fun of him at first but now that's him, hugging people. Any of the other ones, boy, you didn't do that.

H.R.: They weren't huggers?

J.K.: No they weren't huggers.

H.R.: Is that right? That's interesting. Not one of them? You don't remember any of them wanting to do that?

J.K.: I don't think ... I'd shake hands with them and they'd shake hands back but they weren't the same as this present one. I noticed last Sunday he got up there in the pulpit and they were singing this song. Darn it, he was using his sign language.

H.R.: Sign language.

J.K.: Boy oh boy, that got me. That type of man's hard to get. I'm afraid that he's too darn good for us.

H.R.: Oh my goodness.

J.K.: [inaudible 00:19:52]

H.R.: The few other things that, in listening back to our interview a few weeks ago, that I wanted to hope that you might say a little bit more about, I know you mentioned to me that sometimes the children's Sunday school class would come and ask you questions. I was just wondering what you remember? That's been pretty recent, has ...

J.K.: Oh yeah, yeah.

H.R.: Yeah. What they ask you and what did you tell them?

J.K.: Well they got pretty darn deep with me, a lot deeper than I thought the kids get into.

H.R.: You remember one of the questions or ...

J.K.: Oh boy. Let's see. They were a high school bunch. I don't think there were any college kids in it. Oh, let's see. Do you believe in God?

H.R.: You remember what you told them? Huh?

J.K.: Yeah. Well, I answered yes, but they were deep questions. It revealed to me that whoever their Sunday school teacher was, or parents maybe, went pretty deep into religion and church work. I was really pleasantly surprised in the questions. I thought, "Boy, this is going to be agony." There were, I think about six or seven. Then there was one lady. I don't know what her ... Apparently she had had some religious training. Maybe she was teaching the class. I don't remember, but as far as the questions, they were very intelligent questions. I don't know about the answering machine on the other end but ...

H.R.: Well I guess they asked you about God.

J.K.: Yeah.

H.R.: Did they ask you anything about particular beliefs, about baptism or the Lord's Supper or those kinds of questions?

J.K.: No, they didn't get into that. It wasn't too long a set to, probably 15 minutes at the most, but they were deep questions. I tried to give them my thoughts on them, whether they were worth anything or not.

H.R.: Well that's what they wanted.

J.K.: That's what they wanted. I liked their approach. I thought, "Boy this is going to be agony," but they were very calm and collected. I appreciated being asked. You can probably see, as you get older, a lot of these minor details slip you. I don't know.

H.R.: Yeah. Let me ask you then the question, what would you tell these young people about what the church means to you over the years, and what God and the church ... Let's say God and the church has meant to you?

J.K.: Well it's a lot of deep thinking when you try to answer that. My background, of course, was very well-placed. My mother and dad were good United Presbyterians. My Grandfather King was the founder of a large church in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. That background was a start. The preachers involved in the United Presbyterian church were top people. They come from Scotland and go to Princeton, the big universities. They were well-versed and they were really firm in their approach. You didn't sing hymns. You sang psalms. That would be probably one.

J.K.: Then as growing up, I got into church activities in the Presbyterian church near my home. It was a change from my people's church, but we got into scouting, which was pretty close to church anyways. Their laws and actions are very Christian-like, I think. Maybe I can't say that today because there is some offbeat measures there now, but living, we'd take a lot of overnight trips to the forest.

H.R.: In scouts?

J.K.: Boy scouts.

H.R.: You were in a scout troop at church?

J.K.: The church scout troop. Most of the members of the scouting group were members of the church or went to the church Sunday school. When the church work needed done and we could do, the scouters were involved. The scouting movement was housed in the church basement. They kept all their memorabilia and utensils down in the church cellar. That's another part that the church ... Of course the scout laws mention the church and God.

H.R.: Did you go through the various levels in scouting?

J.K.: Yes, I made Life and Star and I had one merit badge that I had to get. It was lifesaving. I wasn't a very good swimmer but I did swim to take the swimming test, but I never got around to taking the ... I was a Star and Life scout. Then I became assistant scout master when I got through high school.

H.R.: You didn't go to the Eagle? Did they have the Eagle then? Just one badge short?

J.K.: I just had one to make the Eagle. I had that lifesaving. That's right.

H.R.: Oh my goodness.

J.K.: Everyone in the darn outfit was trying to get me through, but I became assistant scout master. Then I graduated from high school and had to go to work. My dad told me, he said, "I can't send you to college," but he said, "You can stay at home and I'll room and board you and you can go to college that way." I worked a year and a half. I got a job in Pittsburgh as a tree surgeon, earned \$250, saved it and I went to school in upstate New York.

H.R.: Right.

J.K.: The tuition at that time as \$50 a year. I got up there in winter in the Adirondacks. The boss came down and said, "How are you going to make the rest of it?" I said, "Well I need some work up here." They put me to work firing the furnace and all that stuff, waiting on tables.

H.R.: Did you ever get discouraged enough or mad enough while you was going to church someplace that you quit?

J.K.: No, I never have had that feeling. Maybe certain people wish I would, but no, I never really had that feeling. I just ...

H.R.: What would you tell young people about that, about sticking with it, as far as the church? It seems like young people, a lot of the young people in the past few generations have got tired of the church or given up on it.

J.K.: Oh yeah. Well, of course I can see that. When I was a young lad, even in a big city, you would not do any cooking on Sunday. That wasn't our family alone. It was that whole darn neighborhood. Even the darn streetcars didn't run. We'd walk back and forth to church, Dad and I. It was a good family gathering. Going to high school, I had my choice of three high schools. I picked the one furthest away but I walked back and forth to high school every day. The grade school, it was about a mile and a half away. I'd walk up in the morning and come home for lunch, walk back to school at one and then walk back home. I made that four trips. We didn't own a car. My father never owned a car, but it was a good way of life.

J.K.: Of course after I got out of high school I got into ... Bought a Model T Ford for \$15. Then I bought a motorcycle. I left Pittsburgh and had a job in Idaho, Coeur d'Alene, Idaho. The first of March I started out in that motorcycle to get to Idaho. I went and got as far as Wyoming and I hit 10 foot snow drifts.

H.R.: Oh my goodness.

J.K.:

I had to sell the motorcycle for \$10 and take the \$10 and -