

This is a complete transcript of the oral history interview **Herbert C. Downing (CN 251, T1)** for the Billy Graham Center Archives. No spoken words which were recorded are omitted. In a very few cases, the transcribers could not understand what was said, in which case [unclear] was inserted. Also, grunts and verbal hesitations such as “ah” or “um” are usually omitted. Readers of this transcript should remember that this is a transcript of spoken English, which follows a different rhythm and even rule than written English.

. . . Three dots indicate an interruption or break in the train of thought within the sentence of the speaker.

. . . . Four dots indicate what the transcriber believes to be the end of an incomplete sentence.

() Word in parentheses are asides made by the speaker.

[] Words in brackets are comments made by the transcriber.

This transcription was made by Robert Shuster and Jonathan Easterling and was completed in May 1995.

Please note: This oral history interview expresses the personal memories and opinions of the interviewee and does not necessarily represent the views or policies of the Billy Graham Center Archives or Wheaton College.

Collection 251, Tape 1. Oral history interview with Herbert Downing by Robert D. Shuster on June 14, 1983.

SHUSTER: This is an interview of Mr. Herbert Downing by Robert Shuster for the Archives of the Billy Graham Center at Wheaton College. This interview took place at 11 o'clock, on June 14th, 1983, in the offices of the Billy Graham Center. [Pauses] Mr. Downing, perhaps you'd start off with a description of your family background?

DOWNING: Well, my parents (Lee Harper Downing and Blanche Hunter Downing) went out to Africa in nineteen hundred and one. My sister...my older sister was born on the mission field in 1902 and I believe was the first child of missionary parents born on the mission field. After the station was opened at Kangundo, in what was then British East Africa, my father was asked to go up to a new station (Kijabe) that was just being opened. And moved up there about 1903 (I'm not sure whether it was the later part of 1903 or early part of 1904) But he was...from that point I believe it was that he was appointed field director under the general superintendency of Charles E. Hurlburt.

SHUSTER: Field director of Kenya?

DOWNING: Field director of the Kenya work. My brother and I (Kenneth E. Downing, my brother) were both born at Kijabe and grew up there. I was among the first to enter RVA [Rift Valley Academy] as a child born on the field, my sister and I were. And we got most of our high school and...most of our training up to high school level right there at Rift Valley Academy. In...during the intervening years we had times in the...the [United] States when we attended school for one winter during our years furlough and then went back to Kenya. So my record for crossings of the ocean...I think the last time I went out was in 1974 or [pauses] 1981, and I think I have about twenty-five crossings to my record. I'm not just sure what would be of most interest to people who are contemplating going to the field with respect to the experiences that I had, but my brother, and sister, and I always look back upon our time on the field as the happiest periods of our life. We were on the mission field during World War I and experienced some difficulties in getting food, at least the right kind of food, because of a long drought followed by a long heavy raining season, so that there were several years there was not...very little food produced right in Kenya. I remember one of the things I thought I could never look at again was rice and tomatoes. [Chuckles] Raised tomatoes by irrigation and there was an Indian storekeeper at the railway station who provided us with rice. But I have since then learned to enjoy both rice and tomatoes.

SHUSTER: Tell me, what are your earliest memories of Kenya?

DOWNING: I think the thing that stands out most clearly is when ex-President Theodore Roosevelt came out there on his hunting trip. I was only about five years old, but.... The...Mr...Mr. C. E. Hurlburt (the general director) invited the white settlers of that area to come to the station at Kijabe for the purpose of meeting the ex-President and also for a time together with a luncheon. And that was quite a gala day, seeing the settlers coming in driving ox-carts and what they call mule garies [?], a gary [?] is a sort of anglicized word in African language for a vehicle. But that was quite an affair. Then before Theodore Roosevelt left the station, they laid the cornerstone for

the Rift Valley Academy. And many of the tourists or a lot of the tourists that come to Kenya and want to see a mission station usually come to Kijabe and that is one of the points of interest. That's.... [coughs] The cornerstone is rather rough hewn, but I venture to say that there are few cornerstones of buildings that have had more photographs taken of it.

SHUSTER: We...we have some photographs in the Archives of that...

DOWNING: Occasion.

SHUSTER: ...event. And a copy of Roosevelt's speech.

DOWNING: Well it was...there was a picture taken of that crowd that day and my sister and my father and mother and my baby brother were in it, but I was too interested in things that were going on behind the scenes [chuckles] to appear for the picture.

SHUSTER: Do you recall anything about Roosevelt or his talk?

DOWNING: No, I just remember that he was quite an imposing [pauses] character, speaker, and as a boy I found a lot of interest in reading the book that he wrote after his trip there called, called *African Game Trails*. I've been even trying to find a copy of it, but I have been unsuccessful so far.

SHUSTER: How did...how did Hurlburt know Roosevelt?

DOWNING: Well, I don't know...I don't know whether in the archives of the African Inland Mission whether they kept a record of that story, but I remember...can remember my father on deputation tours in this country telling the account of how that happened often enough that it seemed like I had almost...would almost be there. The mission was actually started (as they have that already written up) by Peter Cameron Scott and after he died Reverend C.E. Hurlburt was appointed general director. He made a trip to the field to access the possibilities of continuing to work as a mission and was very enthusiastic about it when he came back...when he came back to this country [the United States]. He got together a group of Bible school students from the Bible Institute of Pennsylvania, I believe was the title of it, in Philadelphia, and went out with this party and began working the program that Peter Cameron Scott had envisioned. Then he came home to report on it and essentially to raise money, although they didn't make appeals. He was scheduled to speak to some churches in Washington DC, and the ex-President either saw in the paper or had called to his attention the fact that a missionary from British East Africa was to be in Washington DC giving talks and he sent a message to Reverend Hurlburt and asked him if he could come to the White House to...for an interview. And he went. They had the interview, and the ex-President was interested in knowing about the climate and the sort of things that he should plan in his paraphernalia for going on this trip. And Mr. Hurlburt was quite happy give him...to answer the questions that asked, and then when they were finished Mr. Hurlburt [pauses] or the President...the ex-President said to Mr. Hurlburt, "Now I want you to know that I am very grateful for the help you have given me in planning my trip to British East Africa. Is there anything, by the way, that I could do in my...while I am still at my position as President that would be of help to your work." And he said...he hadn't thought of it before hand, but Mr. Hurlburt thinking very rapidly

remembered that they were trying to get into Belgian Congo. And the local officials, it being a different religious persuasion [Roman Catholic] than a Protestant mission would be, had just flatly denied the permits to go in. So Mr. Hurlburt told the President what the situation was and he said "If there was any way that you could help us get a permit to continue our work westward toward Lake Chad," as was the ultimate goal of the mission organization, "It would be very much appreciated by us." And he says "I think I can do something about that." So it's reported that the President subsequently saw the ambassador from Belgium and the permit came through in writing from the...whatever the top official was in Belgium that African Inland Mission had the rights and privileges of entering and establishing mission stations. So that was the introduction...the...what transpired between Mr. Hurlburt and the President and then when he came to the field, of course they got in touch with each other and what I just told you was what transpired then.

SHUSTER: Did he visit again on other trips or was that his only time that you recall?

DOWNING: I don't know about any subsequent trips to British East Africa. His son Kermit who was out there later and...(that is the President's son, Kermit Roosevelt). But after the hunting, touring interest of the world focused on Kenya, most of these trips were so tightly planned that unless a person had arranged something ahead of time it was almost impossible for them...for us to have guests that we would hear were there after they got there.

SHUSTER: What do you recall of your early home...early home in Kenya?

DOWNING: Well, it would probably be rather interesting to people in this country [the United States] to see the...the kind of house that my folks lived in when my brother and I were born. It was made of brick that had been burned there on the place with fuel from the forest and had a split-shingle roof, I think you call them shakes in this country (maybe you pay three prices for it) [chuckles], but it was...it was very primitive. And I remember that the ceilings in the room, there partly to keep the draft from blowing down that came through the roof and partly the insects that would collect there, they sewed together strips of unbleached muslin. They called it Americani, that was the trade name for it. And then it would be fastened with strips on the four sides of the room, but tended to bag down in the middle and that was held up with a wire coming down from the roof with a...the lid of a tin can on it so that it didn't tear in there. But we had one room in the house that had a wooden floor, that was Mother and Father's bedroom. And the dining room was rammed earth, you know, tamped, earth with a piece of canvas stretched over it. The kitchen, as I recall it, was just hard clay. So...and over the windows...eventually we had some glass in the windows, but first there were just this muslin over the windows.

SHUSTER: And it was all one story?

DOWNING: All one story, yes. And that building stood there for a good many years. Father built a house that we...we moved from that house when I was five years old, moved into it 1910. That was a two story brick building with all wood floors and cor...corrugated iron roof and glass windows. The window sash and doors were shipped out from the States and the wooden floors came from, I believe...it was deal lumber it came from India, it was tongue and groove. That



building now is...has been taken over by church workers and the Church in Kijabe, as some other buildings on the station have been.

SHUSTER: Now, was your father and mother the first missionaries at the station?

DOWNING: They were among the first, there were others that came up. Mr. Hurlburt had his family there for a while. And you know, my father had some really very interesting diaries that were in my possession for a while, but in 1952 we came home on furlough, and were here two years that time. We had...one of our children was born during that period. But while we were gone the house burned down and all of these things that I treasured were...went up in flames. But I rec...I do recall that father had recorded there the people who were on the station there, and many incidents that were really a lot of interest to us and might have been to other people too.

SHUSTER: Uh-huh.

DOWNING: But they were...they were lost.

SHUSTER: How many people, when you were growing up, were living on the station? How many buildings were there?

DOWNING: Well, there was.... Mr. Hurlburt had a house at the time, which had been built before the one that we lived in. And then there was one, a small house that would have been built for a single worker and then later housed the mission printing press, it was a flat press. And they built a chapel. My father wrote a very interesting dedication speech regarding the building of that chapel, in which he pointed out the number of different backgrounds of nationalities of the people...of the missionaries that were...were there, and he said that as you looked at the whole you could realize that everyone, every builder did that which was right in his own eyes. [Both laugh] So then later, along about 1906...I have a letter...a record that Mrs. Westervelt wrote for me some years...years before she died regarding the opening of Rift Valley Academy. Later the...the chapel...part of the chapel was used for classrooms for the first school on the station.

SHUSTER: So there were two or three families living there then?

DOWNING: Yes, yes. I don't remember who the others were, they.... Of course as soon as the school got underway there were children who came from other places, other mission stations, to attend school. That was a rather interesting and was a difficult time regarding the school. The home council here in the States....

SHUSTER: I suppose you are talking about when the school just got started?

DOWNING: Yes. Rift Valley Academy. Josephine Hope was the young lady who came out there. She had been a teacher in this country and she realized that just the children on that station for who was no education at all any more than the parents along with everything else they did would be able to give them. And so she felt that this was a must, that there be a school for the children of missionaries. For the parents if they were going to do what they came out to do were really unable



to take care of the education of their children. But in the...this country here [the United States] the home council for many years held out that the education of those children was not the responsibility of the mission, that it was the responsibility of the parents. And I think that this has been a standing point of debate with many other mission...missions and there are...to the extent that in some places, I understand, that when children arrive at a certain age they must be left at home. So this was really the beginning of Rift Valley Academy. And even when I went back...my wife and I went back in 1933, that major question had not been solved. And it was impossible for anyone to volunteer to go to the field to teach as a teacher of missionary children. But eventually we...after a good many years, we got that taken care of. Now the work has developed from that.

SHUSTER: What was the reasoning behind not having...the mission not supporting the school? What were the arguments against it?

DOWNING: Well, frankly being a school man I don't know. [Both laugh] Even when I went out, I had been a...a junior high school principal in this country for two or three years...two years, I guess, and I assumed I would go into African school work. And then when we got out there, my wife and I were called before the field council for assignment, we were faced with the challenge, by the council, that the school was there, and there were about thirty-four, thirty-six (I don't remember the number exactly) children in the school and they had no teachers. And up to that point, up to 1933 from 1906, the only way they were able to handle that at all was to assign new missionaries who were supposed to be learning the language to prepare for a missionary assignment, they would assign them to the school to teach it. Just an illustration of what happened, that's the part that I grew up under, and practically that every teacher, [chuckles] every new teacher that came we would get the same Bible lessons, because those were the things that were most interesting. And I particularly remember the physiology book that we had. We always began at the beginning of the book with each new teacher and I finally memorized the first hundred pages [laughs] of that book so that I could almost take anybody's examination on that part of the.... Well, those were the problems that we had.

SHUSTER: So there was a constant turnover?

DOWNING: Constant turnover.

SHUSTER: What about the principal or head of the school. Wasn't there...?

DOWNING: Well, that was another problem. We didn't have people on the field experienced in education. When I was very small I don't know how they handled it. Of course, Mr. Hurlburt eventually assigned Josephine Hope to the school. She came home and told the story at home and got money, came back with money to build a building, and that was the building which was known as Rift Valley Academy for years and years. A building 150 feet long, about 36 feet wide with dormitory spaces, divided dormitory above for boys and girls, separate living rooms, a central dining room, a kitchen, and classrooms. But they never had...up to the time we went out they have never had more than thirty-six to forty students there. So the work did go on under Mrs. Westervelt. She later married Theodore Westervelt.



SHUSTER: So that was Miss Hope?

DOWNING: Miss Hope married Theodore Westervelt, that's right. And together they managed the school for a number of years. But it wasn't until we went out and we were given the mandate to organize a first...

SHUSTER: You say, "We." Do you mean you and your wife?

DOWNING: My wife and I, were given the mandate to organize a first squad...first rate [?] high school and so we got underway with that...

SHUSTER: And when was that?

DOWNING: ...after that I was appointed principal.

SHUSTER: When was that?

DOWNING: 1933. I believe they had...had teachers that they had appointed principal, but there was no real what you could call school organization. So that from the time we started that...fulfilling that mandate, we had a school board elected by the parents on the field, that is married couples that were expecting to use it, married couples that already had children that would enter, and married couples who had had children in the school there. So that was the...really the beginnings of a regular school organization.

SHUSTER: What do you think are the benefits of a mission running a school for the children?

DOWNING: Well, I think this has shown up in particularly in recent years with other missions and as we have conversed with other parents. If a child leaves the...the surroundings of home life at the age of, oh, we'll say before they enter their teens, that's the break-up of the home, because even letter writing doesn't maintain the parent-child relationship. They are really strangers. Although there may be love and respect, in some cases there is resentment on the part of the children as they grow up. We've known several cases of that where kids have said, "I literally hated my parents for leaving me, I needed them and I couldn't have them." The other thing is the adjustment to...to living with peers is a definite plus in the life of children, and I...I feel that after over thirty years of having kids in boarding school that the youngster who makes his way in boarding school has something for life that it's a lot harder work to get when you're older. And as I have written recommendations for children that are graduates that have come home to this country to school, I have always felt that one of the leading points in that sort of a recommendation is the fact that so-and-so has been in this school (a lot of them from first grade through twelfth) and has learned how to get along with others, with teachers, on the playground, in the dorm, in the class room. What more can you ask?

SHUSTER: This being the case, these advantages being rather plain and obvious, why had there had been opposition to the mission running the school?

DOWNING: Well, as I said before, seeing the need, the vital need of education for boys and girls growing up, I couldn't see why the men of responsibility on the home councils at home could close their eyes to that. One other thing that we have never held to the boys or girls as we have worked with them was the idea that they should come back to the same field that their parents had. We have tried to impress on them the fact that a calling into God's work must be through the individual and not because of any...any heritage, although we've had...many of them have come back there. I think of one boy that started in school there. He was born on the field and he learned the language, the Kipsigis language, which is a very highly inflected language. He went back to take up work with his parents, because his father was having...was not well and they needed him to help out. But he literally started in where his father left off after being there twenty years or so. He knew the language, and the story is told about when he came back to the field he went with his father to a (I tend to use African terms)...it would be a council meeting of the church council. And this boy was there with his father and when the father started to talk, he [the Kipsigis elder] says, "You've had your say, you keep quiet and let's...we'll listen to him. He talks like we do" [chuckles].

SHUSTER: You...you were mentioning about the home councils. How was...What was the relationship between the home councils and the...

DOWNING: Field councils?

SHUSTER: ...field councils, and how...how were they.... Was AIM...?

DOWNING: Well, I just presumed that this was in what you would already have in your records. But the home council...the whole framework of the African [Inland] Mission since its conception is that obtaining their funds on the faith basis, in other words each individual raises his own support through people he knows, churches, Sunday schools, organizations, that he has had a contact...he or she has had contact with. And they more on the basis of their knowledge of the integrity and the ministry of that individual want to give toward the Lord's work, but at the same time in order to make it really a legitimate organization before the law, those funds have to be channeled through an organization or a corporation in this country. So the annual...the home councils were established for the purpose of more or less generally screening missionaries, establishing policy for the mission, and handling the business end of the work for missionaries in this country. So they did buying and also channeling of the funds.

SHUSTER: Well, what do you mean, "establishing policy for the mission?"

DOWNING: Well, one of the things is that it went into...really the home council in the first of their deliberations established a statement of faith that anyone from any denomination, any Protestant organization that could subscribe to that statement of faith would be acceptable to the work and as a result we had people from Mennonite backgrounds, Free Methodists, Presbyterians (and this was even before we had what were generally known as Bible churches) but from denominations and from other organizations. So then the policies on...that were seen as necessary for running the organization on the field. First it was the general director, who was really the head of everything, he came home for home council meetings, but they established orders of procedure

of organization on the field for the relationship of that...of missionaries to particular parts of the work out there, church work, evangelism, and then....

SHUSTER: Now who established that?

DOWNING: The general director backed by the home council. So that any contact with people in this country, that wanted to know about the mission, it was the home office that they contacted, and then they were put in touch with others. And they would apply to join the mission, they would apply to the home council, who screened them, check on whether they had sufficient support in view to send them out, and that's roughly the same thing with minor changes through the years that have taken place.

SHUSTER: So even a question, as you were mentioning earlier, as to whether or not the mission should have a school in Kenya for missionary kids would be decided by the home council?

DOWNING: Yeah, they had the final say in that. And they had the final say as to whether they would accept the persons who volunteered to come to [unclear]. They said no, that everyone went out as a general missionary and would be assigned according to their gifts when they were on the field. So as it...it...as you can well understand, the people that came out there thinking that they were going to be in native work, weren't getting ready to be put into a school that they could have taught in here at home according to just general principles.

SHUSTER: Looking back to your early years in Africa, how would you describe your father and mother as missionaries?

DOWNING: Well...

SHUSTER: What were their characteristics?

DOWNING: ...my father was a great man of faith. He had some wonderful answers to prayer. And...well, one time as I got older and was in my teens and was wondering just what I could do, I...I had said that if I could be the sort of man that my father was, I wouldn't mind being a missionary, but I had another program laid out for myself the Lord didn't see fit to let me follow up and eventually I became a teacher and been a school man all of my life. Just as an illustration of Father's prayer life, which everyone I have ever met that knew him remarked about, my wife and I had been on the field about four years. We had had a rather heavy go of it with handling so many things in the school and I was also doing other work on the station. Well, there is a background to that, because when I went to the field, a missionary from Kenya that was home here and telling about the work and the need for someone to head up the African schools, a person with experience in education....

SHUSTER: The African schools that were being run by the mission?

DOWNING: That are run by the mission. A lady in New England had come up to her and said that if she knew of somebody like that, she would be prepared to support them. And so this missionary

wrote to the home office and wrote to us and said that if we felt called to the work out there that this support was available. Well, the need had been presented to the donor with the idea that it would be for Africans. When we arrived on the field and accepted the job in the school [Rift Valley Academy for missionary children] as principal and teacher in the school, she said, well that wasn't the basis on which she gave...she committed herself, and withdrew it. So we were on the field without support. And we were there...that's another story as to the Lord's provision for us. But when it came time that we should be going home, my wife was expecting our third child, and there was no doctor on the station, there was really no mid-wife nurse there. And the doctor had said that we should leave by such and such a date, around the first of October. If we were going to leave otherwise we would have to stay through the time of her confinement and...and...which would probably mean that we wouldn't get away for another year. But my father took this as a matter for prayer, personal prayer, and he told us...he came over to our house everyday about, what we call tea time out there (four o'clock, it was after school was out), and he said that he was making that a matter of prayer that money would be coming forth, and I said, "You have to know that we don't have anything in view at all. We don't even know anybody who could do it." And he said, "Well, the Lord knows." So, one afternoon he came over and he said that, "Well, you're to get ready to go before the first of October," and I said, "But Father, we don't have a cent we can spend that way." He says, "Well, I know that, but you're to get ready. The Lord has given me the assurance that you are to get ready." Another thing that happened about that time.... I said, "Well I have seen this happen before," and so we were beginning to get ready, so within [coughs] a few days, I don't know how many days it would be that he came, he said.... He kept checking how we were getting ready, and not long after that we received a telegram from a shipping company that handled the shipping concerns of the American-South African freighter line, New York to the east coast of Africa. And the telegram said that we have directions from our principals in New York to provide you with passage on such and such a ship leaving on such a such date (I don't remember now the date). The ship was the *West Aliea* [?]. And I showed it to Father and he says "Well, there's our answer," and I said "Well, who is going to pay for this passage?" So I sent a telegram off, and I said "There must be some mistake in the directions that you have, that we also have principals in New York, the head of our mission, and we have received no word from them that we are to proceed to the States." Well, we got the telegram back right away. It said, "We're not interested in what your principals have said, we have our instructions to provide passage for you. You are to come to Mombasa and you will report to the captain that you have been told that accommodation is ready for you." So just on the strength of that we went to Mombasa. I don't know if you have ever tried going on a ship and telling the captain that you had a space on there. I never felt sillier in my life than when I walked up to the bridge of that ship and I hemmed and I hawed and I said, "Do I understand correctly that there is passage here for a Mr. and Mrs. Downing and child?" He says, "Oh yes, Mr. Downing, we are quite prepared for you." He said, "I'll call the head steward and he'll show you to your cabin." We came home. And we didn't know where we were going to go when we got to New York. We...the nearer we got to New York the more I wondered just what was happening. We had three days of storms before we arrived in New York and they [the ship's crew] hadn't gotten their sightings to really determine accurately their whereabouts, but when we...turned out we came into Brooklyn harbor there just at dusk. And it was foggy and it was rainy. I was standing at the rail of the ship and watching it pull up to the wharf there, and I thought, "What are we going to do?" And I...when we finally tied up and Mildred went off with the children and the steward carried off the luggage and I was the last to leave. And just I went down on this gangplank



right at the end I saw somebody (and it was late fall so it was cold), somebody in a overcoat and I couldn't see their face, and whoever this was grabbed me by the sleeve and pulled me down and says, "I just wanted you to know I am paying your way to any place in the United States that you've decided to go," and it was this lady who had cut off our support. And she had heard that we were coming home and she insisted that we were going...my wife's home was in Ohio, and she insisted that we were go by Pullman [train]. She says, "Everything is prepared for you." We went to our home office and reported in there and spent the night, and I am not sure whether it was the next day or the next evening we were on our way to...to her home. And the baby was born just less then a week after we arrived there [chuckles].

SHUSTER: What...what were your father's responsibilities in Kenya?

DOWNING: He was field director and as field director he made a trip around to the stations. There were [pauses] one, two, three, four, five, six...well, there weren't that many right at first. But from...what I remembered was him being gone on these trips over somewhere between six and ten stations counting up country and down country. But he made those trips on a bicycle.

SHUSTER: And he was continually then....

DOWNING: He would do that about twice a year, but then he had office work and voluminous kind of correspondence that you have in your file [in the Billy Graham center Archives Collection 81] there began somewhere around 1904, 1905 and lasted until 1944, '42.

SHUSTER: So he was mainly an administrator?

DOWNING: Yeah, but then he was...he was a teacher, a born teacher, and he used to come over to Rift Valley Academy to teach Latin to the kids we had after the high school started and he called that his relaxation, his teaching Latin. But he also learned Kikuyu and he...he headed up the church there, more or less a station superintendent as well as field director.

SHUSTER: Now, what does a sta...station superintendent do?

DOWNING: Well, they are more or less are responsible for coordinating the work of the different missionaries. Any sort of discussion that would arise or difference of opinion, they are supposed to be the mediator. I don't know if you have ever been on a mission station or not, but I think one of the heaviest jobs of administration in the Lord's work is the mediation of differences [chuckles].

SHUSTER: How does your father approach a problem like that?

DOWNING: Well, I don't know, I never was in on any of them except what he had with me as a kid [chuckles]. But my father never punished us when he was angry. We always knew he loved us and that he didn't have much time for us. He was a wonderful man to all of us kids.

SHUSTER: When he twice yearly visited all of the stations, what...what did he do during those trips? What was the purpose of them?

DOWNING: He very often collected the...annual reports, that was the time of the year. He would get the report from whoever was station superintendent there and that would be church statistics, school statistics, a report on the number of the out...outschools that they had or outchurches. In most...most mission stations as soon as a church is established there are believers that come in from all around. And when they get a group out, they say, "Well, we would like to have service in our village," and they become satellites...satellites to the church there and that was one of the indications of growth of the work of the different stations was the establishment of these outchurches. And then the outchurches eventually incorporated outschools, [pauses] outtraining. Well, usually it would be anybody who would learn to read, they would start in to learn to read, and, of course, there were no books. They had to learn the language and so...the language being related [?] to the Bantu languages which uses syllables and they would have these syllables written on the black board or printed on the chart and they would start out by saying, "Ba, be, bi, bo, bu," which would give you a consonant with a vowel and then, "Na, ne, ni, no, nu," and many of those when you double that syllable and you get a word, "Baba" is "father" and "Mama" is "mother" and "Tata" is [pauses] "aunt" and so they would get started to reading that way. And that was one of the first jobs my father had on the station down country, would be before they moved. They had an orphanage there, children whose parents died during the great famine in 189...98 along in there. And then the reason I was looking at that letter there, one of those boys that he had in school was very clever and worked for my father for years and years up until he had a family of his own. And he would take dictation from my father in English and transcribe it on a typewriter in English, Kikuyu and Swahili and (Ki)Chaga [?] or these different tribal languages, and I just wanted to see if any of those letters...but I think evidently that was all before the dates that you have there. [Mr. Downing had in front of in some of father's correspondence from the Archives' Collection 81, the records of Africa Inland Mission.]

SHUSTER: So your father was field director, he served as superintendent at Kijabe, and also helped to orient new missionaries.

DOWNING: Then we had a inter...inter-mission council in Kenya. You see, the Church of England established a work at the [Kenyan east] coast even a good many years before our mission started in 1895 and then there were the other organizations that had come in and early in their work, instead of having the conflict where two missions would be working in the same tribe, they met together and had more or less an understanding as to who was going to work where. It was all needed. And [pauses] he was the representative for African Inland Mission on these councils.

SHUSTER: How successful were these councils, did they manage to coordinate work between the missions, or did it...?

DOWNING: Yes, they were still in operation and it was really very interesting the fellowship...where was the Scottish Presbyterians and there was the Church of England and there was...a Methodist...they never had a very big work there. And the Baptists didn't turn up until many years later, but I can remember as a child that men from these missions would come to Kijabe on visits and they always would have them speak at our Sunday service. We had a service for the Africans in the morning, and then in the after...afternoon the missionaries would meet together for a time of fellowship and...and worship.



SHUSTER: Did any conflicts ever develop between different missions or was it...?

DOWNING: I don't know that you would say there would be conflicts. There would be misunderstandings, I guess, particularly...I think.... The only thing that I think of is in the establishment of the churches sometimes there would be, [pauses] oh, I suppose you would have to call it a conflict, between the church from the Scottish Presbyterian mission and the AIM because they both worked in the Kikuyuland. Kikuyu tribe was one of the biggest tribes in Kenya. And those things and then too....

SHUSTER: What would they...what would they be in conflict over?

DOWNING: I don't think of a particular incident right now, but sometimes it would be the coming in where...where one of them would work.... Kikuyu country is almost entirely on the foothills of Mount Kenya and the drainage from...from Mount Kenya gives you valleys all the way around and in between there are ridges. Well, the people live on the ridges. If it was a big ridge and say that the AIM was there first and then the Presbyterians decide to come in and have it on the same ridge or right across where you can call across the ravine, and they begin to steal. Those things all have to be worked out. And, of course, anything like that when you follow it to its source, it depends on the personalities of individuals, and of the two, one of them wants this and somebody wants the same thing.

SHUSTER: Well, what about relations with the colonial government? Was that your father's responsibility too?

DOWNING: Yes, and then in later years when there was an...an increase in the number of organizations that were working out there, the government asked that the Protestant missions, knowing that they had already had a setup, a framework, for operation, asked them to decide among themselves who would represent, say, Protestant missions before government, so they didn't have their officials talking with the head of every little organization around. That was one of the major things that helped out in the work there, was the Kenya Church Council.

SHUSTER: How did it help?

DOWNING: Well, we had...we had meetings. I was a representative later when I became station superintendent at Kijabe in later years. It was really the beginnings of a cooperative effort between African representatives of the different churches and the missionaries who were overseeing the work. So that we...we had these meetings and the problems were brought up under discussion and some of them had to do with proposals that government had made, others would be a united front in petitioning government for, well, procedures in the permits for land occupation. They had what they called [pauses] I can't think of the initials, it was a temporary occupation lease, by which a leasehold for the land was approved for an organization so long as that land was used for one, two, three, four schools, hospitals, church, and so forth. If they changed or if it became anything of a industrial or money making scheme, that could automatically cancel the lease. The land at Kijabe had been granted under three different land leases. First of all was the station where the proposal was to have a church, a school, and hospital. And then later on with the...the climate that we had

there was so advantageous to agriculture and to cutting timber, (the timber for practically all the buildings on the station was cut right there on the land) they allotted us four more additional leaseholds with the understanding that we would run a reforestation...a re-forestation program along with cutting timber. Well, that didn't work out very well for a good many years, because the Africans saw to it that...because they would get gardens where it was cleared, you see, and we had a hard time getting trees started [chuckles]. But all those things came under the jurisdiction of the leaders, so that you had the progression from the missionary and his relationship with the Africans. If there was any conflict there, that came under the station superintendent first and then if that were appealed, it would go to...depending on what it was. If it was something legal, it went from the...from the station superintendent to the local administrative officer. They were called District Commissioners or Assistant District Commissioners appointed by the government. And we had dealings with them later on at Kijabe in turning back some of this land to people that had settled on our land, on the mission land, had no property in the reserve at all, but were multiplying very rapidly on the mission site. And so...well that's another story as to how we mediated that.

SHUSTER: So, in fact, the mission didn't really own any land in Kenya?

DOWNING: No, no...

SHUSTER: It was all leased.

DOWNING: ...no.

SHUSTER: What was the attitude of the colonial government to AIM, the relationship of AIM?

DOWNING: Well, AIM was one of the larger organizations in the country and enjoyed a rapport with, as far as I know, with only a few minor incidents between possibly a station superintendent and a government official where there were personality frictions rather than anything else. But we have always enjoyed a very nice relationship with...and of course eventually the fact that our record in Kenya as a mission we were finally able to turn back most of this land at Kijabe and settle people on at least three to four acres of land. People who would never have owned anything themselves.

SHUSTER: Did your father have any other responsibilities we haven't touched on in his work as field director?

DOWNING: Well, he also helped on the language committees that were, let's see for instance, Kikuyu country, there was African Inland Mission, and the Church Missionary Society, and the Scottish Presbyterians were all working in this Kikuyu tribe as well as the Catholics. And the Catholics had gone their own way on orthography...

SHUSTER: On what?

DOWNING: ...orthography for the language, you know the spellings of the words. And it was for a time there that they weren't prepared to.... Well, one of the...one of the groups that came out there was an Italian brotherhood that came out there, and of course....

SHUSTER: Do you recall which brotherhood it was?

DOWNING: [Pauses] I can't say it right now, I can't say it right now. But anyway the coordination of this language business was quite a deal and we didn't get the full Bible until 1950. [Lee Downing, Herbert's father, was one of the translators of the Bible into Kikuyu.] Some of the men in the other missions had people that they seemed to be a little more free to assign full time to language work then we did in our group.

SHUSTER: And you are saying your father worked with the other missions and he....

DOWNING: He was on the language committees. My brother and I were later on revision committees before the whole Bible was...was printed.

SHUSTER: Was your father a talented linguist or spoke...?

DOWNING: Well, he had taught. Yes, he was a college graduate and had done very well, I imagine he had taught Latin and Greek at that Bible institute in Philadelphia.

SHUSTER: What about your mother? What were her responsibilities, activities?

DOWNING: Well, Mother had us as a family and both of them felt that was part of the work of keeping the home together. Mother always considered us as her first responsibility, but she had quite an interesting contact with the women of the church. I remember once a week, the women of the church, the Christian women, and she taught knitting and sewing and was very interested in teaching them baby care, because a lot of their ideas are kind of revolting to a civilized woman.

SHUSTER: And there was an interest on the Africans' part...Africans' part in getting these kind of...?

DOWNING: How is that?

SHUSTER: There is interest on the part of the African women in finding out how....

DOWNING: Particularly the Christian women, yes they wanted to learn. I believe one of the incidents that happened when Theodore Roosevelt was out there, he wanted to see a Christian home and instead of being taken...going to what he thought was going to be a hut with a thatched roof, he went into a community where there were houses built of stone and had tin roofs, and they served tea and a place that he couldn't find fault with for it's cleanliness. And I believe he recorded a statement to his gratification, seeing what was going on.

SHUSTER: What do you remember of Charles Hurlburt?

DOWNING: The most I remember about him was when he was preaching, he was a very dynamic preacher. And he was, if I am not mistaken...he was General Secretary for YMCA in Pennsylvania before he became specifically interested in that Bible institute and mission work. So he had had administrative experience before he became a missionary, which was really a [pauses] great help to the work of getting the mission started.

SHUSTER: What do you mean when you say he was a dynamic speaker?

DOWNING: I just...I just recall that when he spoke, he...he had a big voice. He was a big man, tall, he had a big voice and he emphasized certain words and while I wasn't very old, I was impressed. That's about all I can say about it.

SHUSTER: Did his personality make an impression on you as a child?

DOWNING: [Pauses] Yes. He wasn't really the type of man who makes a fuss over kids, you know, it was more of a case of the children on the station knowing who he was and rather marveling at the fact that he was the bossman around. But he had five children of his own that he took to Africa when he went, and then three, four...well, in fact all of them eventually came back as missionaries.

SHUSTER: When did you become a Christian?

DOWNING: Well people say that you should have a definite time, but I can remember that it was very early in my life that I realized the importance of trusting the Lord Jesus Christ. I remember my problems as a youngster that disobeyed [sic] were always related to the fact that it was ungrateful to the Lord as well as to my parents when I didn't behave. My mother used to tell the story about a bad day that I had, we had prayers at night she always had three of us there around in her room at night when we said our prayers and my prayer that night was asking the Lord to make Satan to be a good boy [both laugh] so he wouldn't bother me. But I...that's...I think that the situation that any youngster that has been born in a Christian home feels. As they grow older and as they feel like establishing their own life, we have our own ideas as to what we want to be. And I...I don't think I was ever like a number of the missionary children who just from childhood always wanted to go back. I...I always saw it as it would be going back home to me and that was why I always hesitated about really planning on that because I didn't see what I would be doing. I wanted to take engineering when I was in college, and then my senior year or my freshman year I was taken ill and out of school for several months and by that time I...turned out that I was too far behind in the math and science courses I signed up for to make out, and my parents came back to the field and I was...just about the time I was finishing my second year...or doing my second year of college and I was having to make my own way. Urbana...the home I was living in was a dentist and I had learned to do mechanical dentistry and was making his dentures, crowns, and bridges for him. He suggested that I take some work in teaching regardless of what I eventually would do and take a school to teach. So that turned up, that Christmas time there was a country school two miles from where I was staying that needed a teacher.

SHUSTER: Where were you staying? Where were you...?

DOWNING: New Concord, Ohio. And so I took the...took the training and I had to take a county examination at the county courthouse, and got the job teaching that led on to becoming a teacher and eventually getting into school administration and....

SHUSTER: Looking back on your own childhood Africa, what do you think are the advantages, disadvantages of being an MK?

DOWNING: Well, I...I think that all of us MKs...it wasn't as true of me and my brother and sister as it were most of them, because I went back to live on the same station I was born...where I was born and gone to school, but I think I developed an independence from the standpoint that I could take care of myself, many youngsters don't get until later in life.

SHUSTER: Because you grew up....

DOWNING: Yeah, it was just the situations that we were in out there. And I think too the travel that they get...an MK gets is really [pauses] very good for them. We had kids come to boarding school that lived down in Tanzania and came alone all the way from the time they got on the lake steamer on Lake Victoria, and then changed to a train at Githumu and had a night on the train as well as a night on the ship, come to Kijabe and they were just in third, fourth, fifth grade. Many of them came....quite often there would be other students with them, but then they were in a sense on their own as far as their conduct was concerned.

SHUSTER: What kind of advice, what kind of considerations should...do you think, missionaries should have for taking their children on the field or who are going to start a family on the field?

DOWNING: Well, I think it depends upon what part of the world they are going in and I am not acquainted...although after we got our school started, heads of schools and heads of missions from different parts of the world came through to see what we are doing and how we were doing it. But the climate has a lot to do with it. The climate isn't suitable in many places the missionaries have to work. But in Nigeria and other parts of West Africa they do have schools in areas where...where the climate is suitable for them, and I think it is very important that they keep a rapport with their students. When they start school....

SHUSTER: No, I mean, not students but with their own children, missionary children.

DOWNING: With their own children. You see, the way our school runs is three months at school and a month at home, three months of school and a month at home, so that every fourth month they have time with their parents, and that in most cases is very rewarding because the parents plan their...their holiday time at a time when their...their children are going to be home and it really makes a closer association for them than, well they had a situation.... Well, I have a friend, a college mate, that went to India to teach at a school for missionary children [coughs] and they ran theirs on the nine months of school, and then all summer the children were home. A lot of those kids or some that I have met and got to know quite well hated those months. Their parents were still going about their busy schedules and all they did was mark time. Many times the station wasn't where there were any other...any...any but Asian children, no one they could consider as peers. So

it's different in different parts of the world but as far as any place like East Africa [clears throat], the school is continuing out there and has been growing since we left. They had a graduating class from high school this year of ninety, and I don't know what the records are now but for the years we had high school out there ninety percent of our graduates went on to further education, and we had numbers of them that became registered nurses and doctors. I have a son who is an ophthalmologist. And...so I think that in this day and age with the problems that youngsters have, it ill behooves a parent to them doing anything that they can't have a share in their growing up [coughs].

SHUSTER: It might be a good point to stop. We're just about out of tape.

END OF TAPE

