

This is a complete transcript of the oral history interview **Helen Bott Lowery (CN 268, 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 created by Brittany Adams and was completed in October 2012.

**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 268, Tape 1. Oral history interview with Helen Bott Lowery by Robert Shuster on March 26, 1984.**

**SHUSTER:** ...Helen Lowery by Robert Shuster for the Archives at the Billy Graham Center. This interview took place on March 26th, 1984 at the Billy Graham Center at 7 p.m. Mrs. Lowery, why don't we start with a little bit of your family background and how your family became involved with the Chicago Gospel Tabernacle?

**LOWERY:** My parents were member [*sic*] of the Church of God, which at that time was not Pentecostal-type church [*sic*] that you relate it to now. [Clears throat] And they...they were very active in the Church, and....

**SHUSTER:** [Interrupts] Was it in Chicago?

**LOWERY:** Yes, uh-huh. And my sister and I were of course brought to church all the time...grew up in church. Sunday was for church. And I was kind of little (I was around seven, I think) and there was some kind of problem in the church, I don't know what it was, and my mother had heard about Paul Rader and had heard about the Tabernacle and wanted to visit there and of course it was very convenient because their services...their Sunday school was at 2:00 in the afternoon and then their evening service started about 7:30 and we had time in between so (and you could still go to your own church in the morning)...so, the Sunday school started at 2 and the service started about 3:00 in the afternoon. Sunday school was an hour. And....

**SHUSTER:** So there was no morning service?

**LOWERY:** No, no...no morning services. They did that deliberately so that people would not abandon their own churches and come to the Tabernacle. They...they wanted people to support their own churches but here was an evangelistic service and more and more people, I think, became withdrawn from their other churches because they were getting food at this place where they weren't getting it in their other churches. So we (my folks), we had the usual problems during the Depression. We didn't have a lot of money and whenever Mother had the extra car fare, why, we would go down to the Tabernacle. She'd pack a lunch and we would go down for Sunday school and stay through and then eat our lunch on the back benches, way in the back of the church, of the Tabernacle, and then stay for the evening service and then go home. We made a...a long day out of it. And gradually, because of the...the ministry of Paul Rader and.... He would.... He was great on preaching and prophecy and I can remember (oh, I must've been maybe nine years old at that time)...I remember him standing up on the pulpit and talking about how we would be able to have breakfast in New York and lunch in London and supper maybe in China and how fantastic that was. We just thought this was unheard of. But he talked about air travel and what we could do. [Clears throat] So we...we...we just.... Eventually my folks just dropped going to the church they had been going to and we just went to the Tabernacle then.

**SHUSTER:** You mentioned that your mom had heard of Paul Rader and the Tabernacle; do you know where she had heard of him?

**LOWERY:** No, I don't. Unless she heard something.... She was an avid listener of WMBI [Radio station of Moody Bible Institute] (and of course they were on the radio at that time), and unless she heard something there, I don't really know where she found out about it, or how she found out about it. But eventually my parents joined the choir, and my mother was a [*sic*] excellent soprano soloist and my father was a...had a beautiful bass voice. My sister was talented, she played piano, and.... We became active in Sunday school, and my sister became active in youth work there....

**SHUSTER:** Uh-huh.

**LOWERY:** ...helping out. And eventually, it was about the time that Lance Latham was there, the forerunner of the AWANA movement [a children's and youth ministry organization], with Pals and Junior Guards and Senior Guards and all of the...that group, and so we were active in Sunday school there and went to camp up in Maranatha [in Muskegon, Michigan], Camp "Chi-Co-Tab."

**SHUSTER:** "Chi-Co-Tab."

**LOWERY:** Uh-huh. Lived in the dorm that was on the...not too far from the beach but up there on the hill.

**SHUSTER:** Do you recall the date when your...when, the year, approximately, your family started coming to the Tabernacle?

**LOWERY:** Yeah it was about...oh, 1927, 1928. Something like that.

**SHUSTER:** Did you also listen at all to the radio broadcast?

**LOWERY:** Oh yes, my mother listened to that. [Clears throat] I can remember wanting to stay up at night so I could hear *The Back Home Hour* on WJBT and I can still remember Mr. Rader poking the buttons that made the.... Like the NBC signal that you hear today, you know, they...he had a signal that he used then too.

**SHUSTER:** What were the programs like, what was on them?

**LOWERY:** Oh, they were.... He had a rather...well, I shouldn't say a strong message of salvation, but he did preach salvation. But he...he preached on how to live a Christian life. And there was a lot of music, of course. He just had...just all kinds of music. And it was a.... I know, just from...from what I recall, there didn't seem to be any particular format to the program. It was kind of a loose program, and however the Spirit moved you, this is what you did. And that carried over into the days after...when Clarence Erickson took over the pastorate [in 1933] and Merrill Dunlop was the choir director and the song leader. And at that time I had the honor of being accepted into the choir. I was the youngest choir member then, I was only sixteen; they never took one before eighteen. But I had some musical ability, and of course my parents were musical, and my sister was musical, so Merrill let me into the choir and I eventually ended up

being one of the soloists there at the Tabernacle and in the radio broadcasts. [Clears throat] It would not be unusual for Merrill to turn around and say... We'd be singing a congregational hymn and Merrill would turn around and say, "Ed and Helen, why don't you come down and sing the second verse?" And....

**SHUSTER:** [Interrupts] Without any rehearsal?

**LOWERY:** Without any rehearsal. And we'd do it, or he'd spontaneously pull together a quartet out of the choir and have them come down and do it. Or maybe he would have.... There were many occasions when he'd tell me to come down and sing the second verse. Well, I was a lady contralto, almost a lady bass. Automatically the musicians would put it down into my key [Shuster chuckles] and we would take off and away we would go. And so, this is the way the services were, they were very relaxed and...and enjoyable. And there was a great deal of music; we had a lot of music. And we had a big choir, too.

**SHUSTER:** Did that also apply to the services at the Tabernacle?

**LOWERY:** That was at the Tabernacle.

**SHUSTER:** Uh-huh.

**LOWERY:** Uh-huh. We had probably 150-voice choir, and we did...we did a lot of interesting things. We did...we didn't do a lot of Bach, but we did Mendelssohn's *Elijah*. We did the *Messiah*, of course. And we did.... I can hear the music but I can't remember what the name of it is now. A lot of oratorios and cantatas, things of that nature.

**SHUSTER:** Did you do.... I know that Rader wrote some music, did you sing that as well?

**LOWERY:** We did a lot of Rader's music. "Old Time Power," "Only Believe," and.... I know there was a couple of others that we did all the time too; it's been so long now I'd have to get out my old hymnbook and go through it. One of the interesting things that we did and I...I think it was in the (I'm not sure now exactly when it happened, but it was in the interim between the time Mr. Rader left and Mr. Erickson came)...but we did...we did a Passion play. I remember it was during the Depression times. And it was...it was.... We just...we packed that place out, and it ran for several months, as I recall. On the weekend....

**SHUSTER:** [Interrupts] Was that on Sund.... Oh.

**LOWERY:** No, it would have run on a weekend and maybe one performance during the week or two performances during the week, sometime or other. And it was...actually it was...it was the par.... It started with the birth of Christ and went through the crucifixion and hit the highlights: the child in the temple, the overturning of the tables in the temple, little bit of the trial of the...of Jesus, the crucifixion (we didn't actually have the crucifixion but that part of it was implied), and the Resurrection. And the reason I remember these so well is because my father was Peter, my mother was the innkeeper's wife who said, [in a deep voice] "No, you cannot come in!" And I

have pictures at home of these. And my sister was Salome [Shuster chuckles], and I was just a little pilgrim; I must've been about 12 or 14 years old, I think.

**SHUSTER:** Do you recall who played Christ?

**LOWERY:** I don't remember his name anymore. And it was directed by a man who I think.... Now I'm not sure whether he had worked in California but he had had something to do, I think, with the Passion plays in Zion [town in Illinois]. Now whether he came from there or he went from our place to there, but he was well-versed in theatrical presentations. And this was.... You know, we had everything. We...we had the donkeys and the stable, we had the animals there, of course we had the dirt floor and the furnaces around the side of the Tabernacle so it was no problem bringing in animals.

**SHUSTER:** Well, how long was...how long was the play, about?

**LOWERY:** It ran...it ran several months.

**SHUSTER:** No I mean how long was it....

**LOWERY:** [Interrupts] Oh!

**SHUSTER:** Two hours, or [unclear]...?

**LOWERY:** Oh, oh yeah, a good two hours, probably. A good two hours. Another thing that we did at the Tabernacle was we did...we dra...did a dramatiz...dramatized version of the *Elijah*, and we had Raymund Koch, who at that time was a very well-known baritone soloist, as Elijah, and he came and did *Elijah* with us several years as the primary soloist. And that was dramatized complete with the robes and the prophets and the beards, and the whole bit. So there was a lot of.... You know, there was very interesting activities going on, and a variety of activities.

**SHUSTER:** Now was the Passion play something that was organized while Rader was still there?

**LOWERY:** Well that's what I don't remember; I don't remember whether that came.... [Sighs] I don't remember Mr. Rader being there or making an opening prayer or a closing prayer or taking up the offering or whatever it was that did. I just [?].as I was saying, it was around summer of '18, between 10 and 12 years old, and I...I really don't remember too much about that part of it.

**SHUSTER:** Now what were your parents' names; you mentioned they were in the choir?

**LOWERY:** Yeah. My mother's name was Helen Bott, and my father was Stephen Bott.

**SHUSTER:** B-A....

**LOWERY:** B-O-T-T.



**SHUSTER:** B-O-T-T.

**LOWERY:** My sister eventually ended up working in the office in the Tabernacle.

**SHUSTER:** As...a secretary?

**LOWERY:** One of the secretaries there. And she also traveled for a while with the White Shirt Brigade [a young boys' choir] as their pianist, and traveled with Peter Deyneka for a while as his soloist because in those days you traveled with your own music because musicians were not as bountiful as they are today. You know, you couldn't go into a little, small town and expect somebody to sit down and play the piano and...and make it....

**SHUSTER:** You wanted to be sure you were getting somebody who could [unclear]....

**LOWERY:** That's right. You just never...you just didn't find those kinda people. So Frieda traveled with them for...for a while. Then Mr. Erickson came in and he con.... He.... Then we had the afternoon radio broadcasts. I'm trying to remember; I don't...they didn't call it *The Back Home Ho*.... Oh, they ha.... They changed the name then to *The Heaven and Home Hour* and we would go on the air right after the morning service. On at 12:30, we were on from 12:30 to 1.

**SHUSTER:** Did that also include a sermonette, or was that...

**LOWERY:** [Interrupts] Yeah.

**SHUSTER:** ...mainly music?

**LOWERY:** The format was very similar to.... Well, they...they kept that pretty much.... There'd be several musical numbers and then Mr. Erickson would have maybe a ten-minute sermon. And, and then a closing number or two and that would be the end of the program. It was a pretty standard format, and we had all kinds of music in there too, and Mr. [Merrill] Dunlop was the director of it. And we had some...we had some terrific musicians. That had...some of the people on the radio, of course, had been with Mr. Rader, had been in the Tabernacle then. In fact, I saw some of the pictures out here of some of those folks.

**SHUSTER:** Do you recall anything about the *Breakfast Brigade* program?

**LOWERY:** No, I was too young. I don't remember anything about that.

**SHUSTER:** What...when you think of Rader as a preacher, what comes to mind?

**LOWERY:** [Pauses] He was a happy man. Even when he was preaching about hell, he never seemed to be...give you the feeling of being depressed. It was always.... As a kid, hearing him preach about if you didn't accept the Lord, you were bound for hell (and he would describe hell occasionally).... But he never did it with (how shall I say it?) with a real dark cloud. He was...he was such a vibrant man that you believed him when he said hell was a terrible place, and you

don't know why he bothered describe it because you...if he said it was terrible, it was awful and you didn't want to go there. But he...he moved around the pulpit quite a bit. He didn't really stay put in one place, and he didn't always need a microphone. He was very dynamic. He had a way of reaching into your.... Oh, if he had a project going, like when he started collecting money for HCJB [evangelism radio station located in Ecuador], if he had a project going and he wanted a certain sum of money, he had the faith to believe that it was going to be there and he made you believe that it was going to be there and you dug deeper whether you had it or you didn't have it.

**SHUSTER:** How did he do that?

**LOWERY:** He had...he was a master. How else do you say it? He just knew how to approach it. He presented the need, and he made you feel like you were responsible for the world's salvation. And here he was for [?] this idea and he knew it was going to work but he had to have help with it and you were the only one that could do it. And, by golly, you did it. You did it.

**SHUSTER:** Do you recall any particular sermons or maybe anecdotes or stories that he told?

**LOWERY:** No, the...the only thing I remember was, that I remember very vividly, was him talking about flying from...around the world and getting your meals. He preached a lot on...on prophecy; he didn't hesitate to tackle Revelation at all. He talked about the Second Coming a lot. He talked about the Rapture; he talked about tribulations and [pauses] all the things that were going to happen to the world.

**SHUSTER:** Did he relate that at all to current events?

**LOWERY:** Well, yeah. His feeling was that, at least what he presented (as I remember as a little kid) was that the time was really very, very short; we didn't just have much time. And he was sure that he would still be alive when the Lord came, he just...he was so sure of that. And there...there was a real urgency in every message that he gave, a real urgency. He wasn't afraid to ask for two offerings, or three, either, if he needed them. But he didn't do that very often.

**SHUSTER:** Uh-huh. Did you have any contact with him as a person?

**LOWERY:** No. My sister did, but I didn't. And it's too bad; she could probably tell you a lot of things if she were alive, but....

**SHUSTER:** Did you recall at all some of her descriptions of him as a [sic] individual?

**LOWERY:** No, except he was a very.... When he talked to people, he was...he was, what I can remember her telling us about him, was that he was a gentle man, really [unclear]. At least he was with...with her relationship, because she worked in the office [motor noise heard in the background] while he was s...still there. [Unclear, as noise still very loud] He was just a very kind person, someone you could talk to any time. But also very intense. He...when he...when he had something he wanted to do, or he wanted you to do it, you had better get busy and do it. That was the impression that I got from what she told me about him. But I can remember, I...it would

be such a long service, and I could remember going way in the back of the Tabernacle and if we were lucky there would be maybe a vacant place on one of those wooden benches and I would (because I was seven or eight when we first started going there)...and I would lay down and go to sleep. My mother always sat up close to the front, so there was never any room up front; it was always crowded.

**SHUSTER:** You described a little bit of a typical Tabernacle service; was there any participation at all by the congregation?

**LOWERY:** Oh, yes. You know I said the music was spontaneous, and if the audience...if you sang "Everybody Ought to Love Jesus," for instance (because there were a lot of choruses)... When Homer Rodeheaver was there and when George Dibble was there, and they would be leading the singing, maybe you'd start out with a hymn in the hymn book, but as.... Maybe in the middle of the song, maybe you only sung two verses. One of these men would start singing a chorus that related to it but was not part of the hymn at all, and they'd go from one chorus to the next chorus. And sometimes we'd be singing for ten, fifteen minutes, one chorus right after the other and you just didn't even use your hymnals. And the pianos went along with whoever was leading the singing, and they just take off, and Homer would get up there with his trombone and start tooting away on something. And the organ and the pianos would take off with him and the congregation would go and if you were especially moved or blessed you'd clap your hands, and.. and there would be.... The thing I think that I enjoyed most about the services (and I couldn't understand how people could do it) and that was the "Hallelujahs" and the "Amens" that came from the congregation and in the songs and how they appreciated the soloists and the choir music and always everyone was applauded when they finished. It was not uncommon to applaud in church. You just did it; this is what you did in the Tabernacle. You clapped when somebody was through performing. And that...that was warm.

**SHUSTER:** Uh-huh.

**LOWERY:** That was warm.

**SHUSTER:** Was there applause to...during the sermon or after the sermon?

**LOWERY:** With Mr. Rader, I don't remember that too often, but I remember the "Amen"s and the...and the "Glory to God"s and the "Hallelujah"s that went on. And then there was Joe Ankerberg who shouted "Hallelujah" with just about everything. Have you talked to the Ankerbergs?

**SHUSTER:** No I haven't, not about Rader. I've met Floyd Ankerberg.

**LOWERY:** Yeah. Floyd was in the White Shirt Brigade.

**SHUSTER:** Did...how many people did the Tabernacle hold?

**LOWERY:** I think it held pretty close to 3,000.



**SHUSTER:** Was it used...was it often filled?

**LOWERY:** You went to church early to get a seat, yes. And in the wintertime you wanted to sit over on the side where the furnaces were, 'cause it was cold. And sometimes when the weather was real bad, they...in the middle of the service they would have to check on the furnaces but they...they tried to keep them going pretty well so that they wouldn't have to stoke them during the...while the service was going on. But once in a while they would have to shovel them out, two shovels full of coal or shake the damper down or something. But that was part of the service. You.... It just didn't bother you.

**SHUSTER:** How would you describe the congregation? Who...who made it up? Where did...where did people come from?

**LOWERY:** Well my folks had friends that were considered at that time quite well-to-do. There were businessmen there. In fact, in the later years I...I used to clean house for one of the couples who came there and he was one of the vice presidents of the U.S. Gypsum Company.

**SHUSTER:** Do [unclear] their names?

**LOWERY:** Yeah, his name was Castor [?]. His wife's name was.... His...his name was Frank Castor [?]. And.... I remember a Mr. Olson [?], a Charlie Olson [?], who came. Now, he was...he was Born Again and he was Protestant but he was married to a woman who was Catholic, who always came with him; she wouldn't miss the services at the Tabernacle for anything in the world. And he...both of these men were (I think) on the official board of the Tabernacle. Missionary rallies were something else. They were...they were fantastic. Nobody has a missionary rally like the Tabernacle [unclear]. Because Mr. Rader was very interested in...in the outreach. And Mr. Erickson was too, but I can remember the missionaries coming in when Mr. Rader was there and giving a speech.

**SHUSTER:** What happened during the missionary [unclear]?

**LOWERY:** They would have pictures and...and slides of what the missionaries were doing. They would have.... Missionaries would have a turn to speak at the services; they would have maybe two or three speaking during the course of the services. One would take maybe fifteen or twenty minutes. Services were always at least two to two-and-a-half hours long.

**SHUSTER:** During a missionary rally, or just...?

**LOWERY:** Oh, anytime, anytime. Church would start at...church would start at 7:30 and never got out before 9:30. And if there was a long altar call it'd be quarter to ten. That was not uncommon. When.... This was about the time Mr. Rader left (I think). They had a cafeteria there, too, and I don't know how many people we fed in that cafeteria but I worked there when I was in high school, and even when I was in grammar school I would work there, and that cafeteria was open between the afternoon and evening services so that you wouldn't have to go out and find a

place to eat. You could eat right there and the meals were quite reasonable, and we had good variety and the kids in the church worked and you were real happy because you got your dinner for it. You didn't get paid but you got a good meal.

**SHUSTER:** Uh-huh.

**LOWERY:** And you had fun, and everybody pitched in and did the dishes and.... We didn't have automatic dishwashers; they were done by hand. And sometimes the service (the afternoon service) would run over a little bit and you'd have to hurry up to get your meal and...and get back out there so you could get a decent seat for the evening service because the evening service was always crowded.

**SHUSTER:** You...you mentioned that there was no...nobody has ever had missionary rallies like the Tabernacle had. What did Tabernacle [*sic*] do that was so different? I mean, you say that they had missionaries come in and speak, but most missionary rallies have that.

**LOWERY:** They do. But somehow or other they don't speak now like they did then. Maybe it was because there wasn't.... I don't know, we're so refined and so polished today, and we're so afraid to let down our hair, and back in those days, it.... Maybe it was because it was a newer thing. We're...we're quite accustomed now to people going out to the corn field and presenting the gospel. I think we get rather blasé about people going to foreign countries. And back then, this was something that was new and...and different and we were raising support for these people. And you realized that here was somebody that was in China, and China was far away, and they spoke a very different language. I think it was because it.... There had always been missionaries but I...I think it was fresher, newer and different from today, and I think that's why they were so awe-inspiring. And here these people were in Africa with all these black people and...and living in huts and...and, you know, who ever heard of white people doing things like this? And then going to China where they have all this different culture and you sat on the floor when you ate. And...and this was very different. And the missionaries came back and of course it was a new fertile field and...and they were...they were having many problems with language and...and...and...they were pioneers. And so it was exciting. And Mr. Rader had a way of raising money for these missionaries. Like you did.... They...they put up these thermometers and these big graphs and they.... I can remember being...raising the money for the first HCJB transmitter and they had it set up on the side of the platform. When they finally got enough money he said, "This is the transmitter that we want to send down to South America. We've decided...." How exciting it was when they decided what the call letters would be. "Heralding Christ Jesus' Blessings," and it started out with the Howard and Clarence Jones brothers, is the way it started out. And he...he had a way of showing people what they were spending their money for. And I think this was what he presented when he had his missionary rallies. You were willing to give because you saw what these people were doing and they were producing something. And he made you feel very responsible. He just...he had a way of warming his way into your innermost being that just.... There aren't very many people that do that.

**SHUSTER:** You were, though, talking earlier about who made up the congregation.



**LOWERY:** Right.

**SHUSTER:** And you mentioned there were several well-to-do. I'm sure there were other elements too.

**LOWERY:** Oh, there were all kinds, there were all kinds. I think it...it ran the gamut...

**SHUSTER:** Uh-huh.

**LOWERY:** ...of the kind of people who were.... At that time it was kind of unusual to see black folks in your congregation, and you didn't see too many, but you did see them. And they came. Everyone was welcome, literally [clears throat].

**SHUSTER:** Do you have much...any contact with the black folks who came to Tabernacle?

**LOWERY:** No, not a lot. And I don't remember...I don't remember the...the...them being in Sunday school. I don't remember.... They would come for the services, but I don't remember them being in Sunday school. One thing, has anyone told you about the food program they had at the Tabernacle during....

**SHUSTER:** Was it [?] ....

**LOWERY:** ...the Depression?

**SHUSTER:** ...Paul Rader's Pantry?

**LOWERY:** Yeah.

**SHUSTER:** I heard the name, but....

**LOWERY:** [Speaks over] When they....

**SHUSTER:** ...but not much more than that.

**LOWERY:** Well, my...my...my father had been out of work during the Depression; I don't know how many years he'd been out of work.

**SHUSTER:** What did he do?

**LOWERY:** My father was a painter and a decorator. And a very good one. He learned his trade in the old country, you know, he was an apprentice for so many years. And...and he had worked in...in many of the homes in the North Shore and worked in the big mansions on the South Side, so he was...he had an excellent reputation. But....

**SHUSTER:** You say "the old country."

**LOWERY:** Hungary. But there was no work. And, so.... And we didn't live too far from the Tabernacle; we lived about three blocks away. So it was easy for us to walk to it. And they brought in herring, and they canned herring.

**SHUSTER:** Who did?

**LOWERY:** People in the neighborhood, members of the.... Well, there weren't...there was no membership at the Tabernacle. If you came three times you were a member. That's the way the Sunday school worked too. [Clears throat] But they would...they took the cafeteria which had been used for meals between the services and they brought in large cookers and they brought in canning equipment and they canned.... [Laughs] They...they brought...they got neck bones, pork neck bones, and they would cook them and pull the meat off of them and can the meat. And they canned herring, fresh herring. I don't remember anything else that they canned. But then they brought in lots of bread (they could get bread from the bakeries, the day old bakeries), and they would go to the market....

**SHUSTER:** [Speaks over] This was donated by...?

**LOWERY:** It was all donated. And they would go to the market and buy fruits and vegetables; I can remember seeing huge piles of apples, and oranges, and potatoes, and cabbages.... Oh! And they made sauerkraut. [Shuster laughs] And they...I don't know how many people they fed (because I was little), but I can remember both my mother and dad working there.

**SHUSTER:** Now you say they canned them. Did they...so they didn't just feed people at the cafeteria?

**LOWERY:** No, no, they canned this food and then....

**SHUSTER:** [Interrupts] How was it distributed?

**LOWERY:** I don't know, I...I don't...I don't know how it was distributed. People came, I know, with shopping bags, because I can remember my mother telling me about the long lines. There were people waiting to get food.

**SHUSTER:** Was this just for members of the Tabernacle?

**LOWERY:** No, I think they fed anybody who would come. And I...as I say, I don't think they fed them there; they may have...they may have at one time. But I just remember the canning operation.

**SHUSTER:** Now Merrill Dunlop, in his interview, had mentioned there had been some criticism of that. Do you recall anything?

**LOWERY:** Yeah I...the only thing I heard was that Mr. Rader went ahead and did it, and there were a lot of people in the church that didn't feel that the church should get into that kind of

thing and that it was going to be too costly. And, of course, the place smelled; you know, [Shuster laughs] we had this fish and all this sauerkraut and the rotten cabbage and all...the whole thing. You came in there and...for services and it...it smelled more like Fulton Street Market than a...than it did like God's house of worship and I think a lot of people objected to that. But I'm sure there were a lot of people that were s...saved from starvation by that.

**SHUSTER:** And you....

**LOWERY:** [Speaks over] They....

**SHUSTER:** ...say your family too benefitted from that?

**LOWERY:** Oh yes, yes. Because we were...we were really young about.... It was a time when I couldn't go to school because I didn't have the clothes to wear. And...we were very grateful. My mother put in a lot of time there and for that she would get some of the fresh fish and some of the neck bones and...and...the bread, and the.... That was many a meal for us, too.

**SHUSTER:** Was any clothing distributed?

**LOWERY:** There was clothing. There was as much clothing as they co...could collect. They took the whole east side of the Tabernacle, which about a third of it probably was where the cafeteria was and then the other...the rest of it was connected to the main auditorium by sliding doors like a garage door that goes up. And they put down the doors and they just used that for distributing the clothing and the...and the food. And the rest of the Tabernacle they...they left for services which.... And they needed all of that room, because the place was jammed.

**SHUSTER:** Who.... You mentioned, of course, Rev. Rader and Merrill Dunlop. Who else did you have contact with on the staff of Tabernacle [*sic*]?

**LOWERY:** Well there was Lance [Latham], and.... Richard Oliver died [in 1930]...oh, I must've been...I don't remember now how old I was but I remember hearing about Richard Oliver. I remember hearing him play the piano and [clears throat]...and the organ. And there was Clarence and Howard Jones, and Cliff Benson, and Jimmy Nielson [?] back in those days. Later on with Mr. Erickson, there was Jack [unclear], who had been converted. He'd been a dance band drummer and traveled all over and he joined the Tabernacle band. There was Wes Hartzell, who...who was with the Herald Examiner, Chicago Herald Examiner [a Hearst publication] at that time. He was band director, too, for a while. And he played French horn. There was Charlie White, who at...for a short period of time was pastor of the Tabernacle.

**SHUSTER:** This was after Erickson?

**LOWERY:** This was after, yeah. There was...people in the choir that were there way back when, Estelle Marriott [?] and Bob Marriott [?], who were old-timers. Estelle is now gone; I don't know about Bob. He lives...he was living in California. I don't know if he's still living or not, but Harold could tell you about all those folks, because they were very close friends of theirs.

**SHUSTER:** Of those people, who stands out most vividly in your mind [unclear]?

**LOWERY:** The one thing I remember were the four piano concerts, and so there was Merrill and Lance, and Eleanor [?] and Sherri [?] later on, but then there was June Sells[?], who directed the Ladies' Glee Club. Oh! They had so many music organizations. They had...they had a Ladies' Glee Club that was...that...and.... Oh, and another thing that we did was with these musical groups, we went all over the city, various churches, giving concerts. And...similar to what Moody Institute does with their chorale groups and their bands, and...and....

**SHUSTER:** What were some of the places you gave concerts at?

**LOWERY:** One of the places I remember was a church, a black church, a very large one, on South LaSalle Street [in Chicago, Illinois, USA], and I don't remember where it was but it was a...I remember it was a very beautiful edifice and it was my first introduction to any kind of black worship or black church. And our Young Ladies' Glee Club went there and we had probably, I would guess, maybe forty, forty-five members in this glee club. And I think, if I recall, Merrill was there, too. And we put on an evening's program for them, and it was very interesting because we got the typical black response, you know, with the clapping of the hands and the "Hallelujah" and the "Preach it, brother"-type thing and....

**SHUSTER:** And how did you react?

**LOWERY:** We were, at first, a little shaky because, you know, "Who did things like this?" But we.... It didn't take us long to fall into the spirit of the thing and really enjoy it. And they were most appreciative. These white folks came down to this territory and presented this program, and it...it gave us many opportunities to.... I think it opened our eyes a lot. I think we were probably...suddenly realized that we were all brothers and sisters under the skin and it didn't make any difference. We used to go to a church that is now in a very Latino area at...in Logan Square, which was a Norwegian church at that time. And now it's.... I...I don't know what it is, but it's...it...near Fullerton and Milwaukee [in Chicago], where that intersection is. And we sang there quite often. And...we just went all over to different churches, usually on a Sunday night. Sometimes during the week, we.... Later on we ran into problems because too many people wanted us on Sunday nights and Mr. Dunlop didn't want to part with all his musicians, so we had to do these things during the week most of the time. [Clears throat]

**SHUSTER:** What do you remember of Merrill Dunlop?

**LOWERY:** Well Merrill Dunlop was a...was the man who gave me my start in music, really.

**SHUSTER:** How did that come about?

**LOWERY:** He was a...he was a very gentle person. I never saw Merrill lose his temper. He would get very angry and fussed at times, but he was very quiet about it and the only way you knew he was fussed was his ears would get very red; that was the only way you could tell he that he was upset about something. He was very gentle. I.... My sister had been traveling around with

Peter Deyneka and she heard a song when she was down somewhere in Indiana and she...she had a phenomenal memory for things; she played piano primarily by ear and you could tell her anything and she would play it. She picked up this song and she brought it home to me and she asked me to sing it. We were doing...we were.... The Tabernacle was very active in various missions around Chicago, too, and we were...we...the young people's group had a regular service at a mission on a Saturday night...

**SHUSTER:** [Speaks over] [Unclear] A rescue mission?

**LOWERY:** Somewhere out on Madison Street. I don't remember where it is now. And she decided that I could... I should be doing something. And she decided I should sing. So she taught me this song that she brought back, and I went to the mission and I sang it, and the bums loved it. And [laughs] she decided that maybe I should sing it somewhere else and so she just started using me and gradually I began learning more songs, and then got a little braver and sang a few more. And they were going to do some special kind of program with children (this was when Mr. Erickson was there) and she talked to Merrill and asked Merrill if he would hear me sing this song. No, I'm sorry, it wasn't Merrill. It was a man by the name of Mr. Williams, who was active there at the Tab. And he heard me and he said, "Oh, you have to do that for a service sometime. I'm going to talk to Mr. Dunlop." And he did. And I sang it first for Merrill and he decided yes, I had the kind of voice that would appeal to people and the song was beautiful. And so he accompanied me, and boy, that was...that was like having the Chicago Symphony. [Laughter] That was tremendous, you know, just to have Merrill behind you. You...you sang three times as well with him. And he coached me on; you know, "This isn't quite the right sound; you want to produce it this way." Merrill was always willing to teach. He...he never withheld from anyone; if anyone showed any degree of talent at all, he used them. And, he gave me the name of a voice teacher. By that time I was seventeen maybe, still in high school, or just gotten out of high school. And he gave me the name of a voice teacher and sent me to her and gave me a recommendation...gave me a recommendation to her...or, recommended me to her. And she took me on as a student. She wasn't taking too many, and she was very careful whom she took. And Merrill had studied somewhat with her. And.... Then, along with a lot of other people, I was used in the radio chorus, and...and made some records which went down HCJB [in Quito, Ecuador]. Had the thrill one night of hearing myself on short-wave radio, which was kind of interesting.

**SHUSTER:** All the way from Ecuador.

**LOWERY:** Yeah, uh-huh. But...Merrill was tireless. I don't know how he did all the things he did, really. Because we would have choir rehearsal after choir rehearsal, which was an intense two hours with a devotional break, at which he presented something from the Scriptures. And then after that maybe we would have an hour of quartet rehearsal, or if he was working with a special group maybe it would be a sextet or an octet. We would start choir rehearsal at 7:30, and we never got out much before 11:00, 11:30, with all the extra rehearsals we had. And Merrill was always the same way. The way you saw him in the pulpit on Sunday was the way he was at 11:30 at night after a grueling rehearsal. [Clears throat] Our recording sessions were the same way; we'd stand in the cold platform of the Tabernacle freezing to death because there was hardly any heat in there in the wintertime and make our recordings for The Heaven and Home



Hour. And Merrill was always, always the same: just...sweet. He...he...he.... When...I don't know...when...when I think of Merrill, I think of him as being a very sweet man. Not a sissy! There was a sweetness that came through. It was the Lord. I don't know how else to describe it. But that...that was Merrill. He was a....he was a real gentleman; he was a musician. He...he made you hunger for good music. We did good music. We did a lot of anthems, and things that I hear choirs do now I still remember when...from when I was a kid, singing it along with the choir.

**SHUSTER:** You've mentioned how many musical activities there were at the Tabernacle. Why do you think there was such an emphasis on music?

**LOWERY:** I think it was the music...part...I think the music played a big part in drawing people to the Tabernacle because I don't think churches at that time had as much music as they have now. I know the little church we went to before we started going to the Tabernacle...we had the traditional organist who played the hymns that were right there and...and if it wasn't printed on the page, they didn't play it. Same with the pianist. And we had a...we had a choir that sang the ordinary old hymn, and we didn't do anything big. I don't think that music became such a part of our worship, or was such a part of our worship, until.... I think Mr. Rader probably promoted it because he was rather flamboyant and he wanted all of these things going and he had these musicians and he wanted everybody to take part in everything and he just used everything he had. You know, he gave you both arrows all the time. And I think people were won to the Tabernacle, that was one reason why they came, because there was so much music and there was so much joy in the music and it was spontaneous. I mean, you never know.... He'd turn around, and say, "Why don't we do" whatever it was. And he'd...and Merrill and Lance would sit down, Lance would be at the organ, and Merrill would be at the piano, and they'd take off in a key and the congregation would start singing and away we would go. And then it just became better music because we had an educated man like Merrill who...who knew these anthems and these works of art [pauses]. And it just...it just kind of evolved, you know? I think that was the beginning really of...of real church music. I don't remember going into any churches that had the kind of music that we produced at that time.

**SHUSTER:** You mentioned that music was one of the things that drew people. What were some of the other ways that they used to draw people to the Tabernacle?

**LOWERY:** Well, I think...I think the...the...the gospel that Paul Rader preached and his prophecy, messages on prophecy.... People were eager to know what was going to happen. This was Depression times, and, "What is this world coming to?" and "God can't let it go on much longer." And he...he talked about Israel becoming a state, and we just...you know, that was...how could that be? And yet he pinpointed all of these things, and people were eager to hear this because most...most churches were not preaching this kind of thing. They were holding to their traditional liturgy and...you just didn't venture out into these things. And to a lot of people, I'm sure Mr. Rader was sticking out his neck when he...when he preached some of these things. And people were hungry. They...they wanted to hear these things. That's why they came.



**SHUSTER:** How would you describe his impact with...with Chicago? Apart, of course, when people came to the Tabernacle. How well-known was he in the city? What kind of influence, impression did people in general have of him?

**LOWERY:** [Speaks over] Oh, again, I was pretty young. I don't really...I can't really relate that. But I know in later years if people would...people would cross my path, would [?] ask me where I went to church and I said, "Oh, I go to the Chicago Gospel Tabernacle, Paul Rader's Tabernacle," everybody knew who Paul Rader was. [Clears throat] But exactly what impact he had on the city, I...I really...I was too young to be aware of that.

**SHUSTER:** 'Course, a lot of evangelical fundamentalist preachers today are involved in politics in one way or another. Did Rader involve himself at all either from the pulpit or otherwise in politics?

**LOWERY:** I don't remember. I.I... Somewhere along the line I thought maybe he...that he had gotten into politics someplace or was going to or was running for an office. But I...I don't really remember that.

**SHUSTER:** Did you recall his ever relating his sermons to political topics of the time or to any other kind of...?

**LOWERY:** No the sermons that I remember were...were plain old-fashioned Gospel messages [unclear], a challenge to Christians for mission and his prophecy. He preached on what the world was coming to, how we had to prepare ourselves, that kind of thing. That's primarily what I remember about his preaching.

**SHUSTER:** Did you or any members of your family belong to World-Wide Christian Couriers [a Christian organization started by Rader]?

**LOWERY:** Oh, my...my folks were very active in that. We had Bible classes in our house. And we studied the Mystery of Mysteries [the handbook of the organization]. And I wish now I had all those things that tossed [*sic*] when my mother broke up housekeeping.

**SHUSTER:** What...what was involved in being a Courier?

**LOWERY:** Oh, well, you had your Bible studies and I think you did a lot of [pauses]...I think there was a...if I remember now there was a...quite an emphasis on propagating the Gospel, whether it was giving out tracts, knocking on doors, inviting people into the Tabernacle. The idea of World-Wide Gospel Couriers [*sic*] was to give out the Gospel any way you could do it. And I know my...my mother didn't do it, because my mother was...had very impaired vision and eventually went blind. But my sister went out, knocking on doors, just ringing doorbells. "Can I talk to you about Jesus? I would like to present...." And they would present some of the chapters from this Mystery of Mysteries, and explain what was going on in the world and what was going to happen, and...and this drew a lot of people too.

**SHUSTER:** What kind of response did they get from...from knocking on doors?

**LOWERY:** Oh, you got the usual. There were a few people who were scared to death of you because they thought you were some kind of a kook. And you got other people who were very interested. And you got some people who came. And...it was a very interesting period.

**SHUSTER:** In what way?

**LOWERY:** That again was pioneering. People didn't do that kind of thing. And it was...there were many things that...that you did...that the Tabernacle started that were...that were just brand new. Whoever heard of people going door to door and saying, "I want you to hear about Jesus"? "Do you know what's going to happen when the year [laughs] 1984 comes? Have you heard about what's happening in Israel? Did you know that Jesus was coming back to Earth?" And you presented these things to people. This sort of thing was just not done. I don't know of any place that did that. And there were the...the usual reactions. Some were afraid. I went a few times with my sister and we had doors slammed in our faces. And you had some people that [sic] were really very interested.

**SHUSTER:** You mentioned Lake Harbor, Maranatha. How many summers did... Did your family go there during the summer or...?

**LOWERY:** Summer camp. Camp was always ten days long.

**SHUSTER:** The whole family went up....

**LOWERY:** [Speaks over] No.

**SHUSTER:** ... or just...?

**LOWERY:** The camp was divided into age groups. I think you could go to camp when you were seven. You had to be seven years old. I think the groups were seven to nine, and nine to twelve, twelve to fifteen, and...and high school camp. But I went, probably.... I think I started going to camp when I was nine. I was thinking about that on the way over here and I can't remember how my folks paid for it or if they did pay for it or I get in on a scholarship basis [sic]. Because as I said, we were...we were really very poor, we didn't have much money. How I got to camp I don't know. But I remember the first time I went and how horribly homesick I was. But the activities...and the counselors were...were.... They would rival any clown from Barnum and Bailey. They were absolutely crazy. [Shuster laughs] They did everything. They kept us entertained from morning till night. We had our Bible studies. We were...we had our handicraft classes, we had hikes, we had initiations. We had our camp fires. We lived in one huge dormitory. None of these cottages that we have now, with maybe six or eight and a counselor. It wasn't that sophisticated. We had bunkbeds and we brought our own sheets and our own linens and everything. And we had this huge dormitory. And maybe there were, I don't know, maybe forty-five, fifty kids. And every so often there would be a counselor. They'd be right in there with us. They would put on entertainments for us, in the evenings have a campfire [?], and they

would do...they had the craziest skits. And.... But it was always with.... And the other thing was, we...a couple times, I remember, we went over on the boat, we got on the boat down on Michigan Avenue [in Chicago, right off Lake Michigan], the S.S. Grand Rapids and sailed across to Muskegon. And buses met us at Muskegon and took us up to camp. That was fun, and you don't do that anymore either. [Pause] They had swimming lessons. There...they just...it was a...it was a beautifully organized camp.

**SHUSTER:** Do you recall anything about Paul Rader's missionary trips? His round the w.... You mentioned, of course....

**LOWERY:** [Cuts in] Yeah. No. I don't remember any of those.

**SHUSTER:** What do you recall about his leaving the Tabernacle?

**LOWERY:** [Pauses] Nothing, really. Except I remember...I remember hearing my folks praying for the new man who was coming...

**SHUSTER:** Uh-huh.

**LOWERY:** ...who was Clarence Erickson. But I don't remember anything about Mr. Rader leaving.

**SHUSTER:** Or about the reasons for....

**LOWERY:** [Speaks over] And I....

**SHUSTER:** ... his going?

**LOWERY:** And I can't even remember when Mr. Erickson came. But Mr. Erickson became a...someone that I considered a very good friend. In fact, he married me. And at one time in my life, I was...when I got out of high school, I was very, very ill, and again, my parents had no money, we had no insurance or anything and Mr. Erickson arranged to get me to a hospital, because I was pretty close to being dead. And I'll never forget when he came up to get me. He came up in his own car and carried me down three flights of stairs, because we lived on the third floor, and placed me on the back seat and gave me my choice of two hospitals: I could go to Augustana or Swedish Covenant. He had connections to both places, he knew men there. And I chose Augustana because it was close to home and my folks would be able to walk to it, wouldn't have to spend the carfare. And when the nurses came to get me, he carried me up to the room and he put me on the bed. This was the kind of man he was. As a preacher.... [Pauses] He wasn't too good a preacher. We used to joke and say, "If you hear ten of his sermons, you've heard them all and all he does is repeat them." But as a personal friend and as a pastor, someone that you could go to for help and direction, he was fantastic.

**SHUSTER:** Uh-huh.

**LOWERY:** And I'm not the only one he helped, either. And he told my folks that they would probably have to pay maybe a small fee and there was never ever a bill. If the hospital sent a bill, then they sent it to the Tabernacle and the Tabernacle paid it and Mr. Erickson saw to it. But there was never any problem. We never had a doctor bill, nothing. Everything was covered. And this is the kind of man he was. And he did that for a lot of people.

**SHUSTER:** How did he come to be a replacement pastor for Rader?

**LOWERY:** I don't know. I don't know where...where the people.... I don't know who found him. I don't know if Mr. Erickson...if Mr. Rader found him or how he came in. But he was a very different man. I think Mr...it seems to me that Mr. Erickson was a businessman. He was sharp. He...he knew the ins and out of the...of the financial world. And it seems to me that Mr. Rader was the kind of man who really didn't care about any of that. He had his dreams and he knew what he wanted to do and he would say to Joe Blow, "I need five thousand dollars to do thus and so," and he would expect Joe Blow to come up with that money, no matter how he did it. But Mr. Erickson went at it in a very methodical way and.... He was just a very different man than Mr. Rader was.

**SHUSTER:** Did...was the...was there a change in the atmosphere or the program at the Tabernacle?

**LOWERY:** The music stayed pretty much the same. There were a lot of people that drifted away, because...as there is with every change of a...of a pastor, there's always that kind of problem. But the Sunday school ideas remained the same. And then eventually we went into changing the services to morning and evening, because the afternoon didn't seem to be working out any more. Well, then there was the split when Lance Latham left and formed his own church and took quite a number of people with him.

**SHUSTER:** Now what was that? I [unclear].

**LOWERY:** Well, I think that was the beginning of.... Lance.... There was friction there, and.... Lance wanted to do certain things at the Tabernacle which Mr. Erickson didn't feel was the right thing to do [*sic*]...

**SHUSTER:** Uh-huh.

**LOWERY:** ...as far as his plans for a pastorate in a church. And Lance was very youth-oriented and I don't think Mr. Erickson was at the time and I think that's where the friction was. Now there again, you can get your answers from Mr. Dunlop[?] on that. He could probably tell you more about it.

**SHUSTER:** Do you recall approximately when that was?

**LOWERY:** [Pauses] That must have been in 19 [pauses] 37? No, it must have been before that. Somewhere around in there. Somewhere in the 30s. And that made quite a change eventually,

when we dropped the afternoon services and then [?] switched over to morning and evenings and traditional times, 11 o'clock service and Sunday School at 9:30. And eventually that led to membership, because Mr. Ericksen was trying to make some improvements in the Tabernacle and he felt he could do it if...if we had a membership that would be responsible, and....

**SHUSTER:** Uh-huh.

**LOWERY:** That is how we got our cement floor and got rid of the furnaces and so on.

**SHUSTER:** Now was the size of the congregation still about the same?

**LOWERY:** No, it was not as big as when Mr. Rader was there. Eventually, of course, it became very small, even when I left. But it was not uncommon for a Sunday night service to have maybe a couple thousand people there, which was a pretty good size. No one complained [?] about that. I can remember standing in the pulpit and singing and...and seeing the center section of the Tabernacle (it had to side sections and then the center section) and I can remember seeing that a good three-quarters filled and that would be a good fifteen hundred, two thousand people and that went on for quite a while. Mr. Ericksen too wasn't afraid to take two offerings, if he needed the money and the offering wasn't big enough.

**SHUSTER:** How...how long was....

**[From this point another interview recorded on the tape was so loud as to drown out the rest of the Lowery interview]**

**END OF TAPE**

