

Interviewee: Charles Anderson

Interviewer(s): Alijah Webb, Elijah Williams, and Peter Townsend

Transcriber: Dyron Knick

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AW: So, how long have you lived in Roanoke? What streets and neighborhoods did you live in?

CA: I've lived in Roanoke, I'm 89 now, I think we moved here when I was about 4 years old, 85 years. I have lived on Madison Avenue Northwest, Loudon Avenue Northwest, and presently, now, on Rugby Boulevard Northwest.

AW: Let's talk about your school life, for instance, where did you attend school?

CA: I attended school in Roanoke and at the time I attended school, [inaudible] I lived in Southwest on 12 1/2 Street, I guess, about 67 years probably and at that time, there was a Harrison Annex School right at the end of 10th Street and Norfolk Avenue and it was a three grade school; first, second and third grades. I went to Harrison Annex for those three grades and then upon finishing that school, I proceeded on to the regular Harrison School on Harrison Avenue. Did you ask about how I got to school?

AW: How did you get to school?

CA: Back in those days, we walked. It wasn't bad when we went to Harrison Annex because that was about four or five blocks, but when I came to Harrison School, Middle School, I guess it was about a 2 or 3 mile trek to school one way and we had to walk across 10th Street Bridge and of course, no buses back then too. And, so we... the hardest thing was when we had deep snows, see there was no street cleaning or anything. We had to walk with snow up to your knees almost and there were railings and if you slipped you could fall through the railings right onto the railroad back in those days. It was hazardous, but incidentally no one happened to succumb to those accidents. Of course, at that time we were... found it fun, we didn't wait on the snow days, we were happy to get out and walk all the way to Harrison School on snow days and back. It was an adventure there through middle school.

PT: What year did you say you were born in?

CA: 1921

AW: What school activities and sports did you do?

CA: My main hobby was photography. I always had a little candid camera and I considered myself to be sort of a sports...I mean I took pictures of sports, but I never participated in any sports, but I took pictures and did so called interviews about athletes, I was a reporter back in those young days.

PT: What kind of camera did you have?

CA: Back then I had a little Kodak something, you know, the box job and so, I had some descent, fairly good...I never left home without it and still [inaudible] my heart now is photography and raising roses and gardening.

AW: So, how is Addison different than when you went here?

CA: When I was at Addison, it was an institution. It was almost, to us, it was almost like college, because when you go from middle school to Addison it was a great difference in the atmosphere and we really felt it. We had really moved up; a lot of steps when you left the middle school to go to high school, because [inaudible].

PT: You said that you did interviews with the sports people? Did you like....

CA: Just the kids. We had a little individual who...sport newspapers and that kind of stuff within the student body.

PT: You wrote articles and stuff about the sporting events?

CA: Just only the ones, like we had a game a particular night and we would do an article the star that night or something like that, who made a touchdown and blah, blah, blah. We were being professional back then.

AW: Did you ever meet Miss Lucy Addison.

CA: No, I did not have the opportunity to meet her, because she was at Harrison in '29 and I don't think I was that early, I mean, I wasn't at Harrison at that time and then, when she was at Harrison, well she was still young, so I didn't have any particular awareness of her status back then.

AW: Let's move on to life at home. What were the family stories that were passed down from one generation to another; for instance, did your family have stories about memories during the Civil War or about slavery?

CA: Well, not war per se, but my parents were...I don't know whether they lived on a plantation or what the living conditions were, 'cause my mother reached 105 years old before she passed and I do know that she was a great horse lady back then and she would ride from plantation to plantation to carry messages and borrow stuff and everything. She was very athletic. I do remember her playing baseball and those type things.

PT: Did she play in a woman's league or did she...

CA: Neighborhood type...even in her elderly years, she was still 103, she was out at Friendship Manor and she would still get out and run, but nobody could catch her. [inaudible] in there and we can't catch her. I guess I had the blood, but she was an athlete [inaudible]. I did have a brother who played semi-pro baseball.

PT: Tell me about your family. What was it like?

CA: As I say, we were from West Virginia. My father passed away at an early age and we came, when we moved to Roanoke, well I had two brothers and my brother and my mother worked and I got an early education in housekeeping. 8, 9, 10 years old I was able to shop, pay bills, and housekeep, learned to wash and iron at a very early age. All those things in preparation for later days of life, so I became pretty proficient in the housekeeping situation because I was the one that had to do it. I was 13, my brothers were older than I, so I would wash the shirts and pants and press them; probably get 25 cents a day to go out or something like that. It was neat. We had a very good life considering the time.

AW: What is your fondest childhood memory; for example, a favorite holiday event, favorite vacation spot, a favorite gift that you received?

CA: I guess as child, my favorite holiday was Christmas and my brother...I had my middle brother who was my closest friend and he would always do Christmas shopping. He admired buying stuff. The amazing thing about it, they...see those times, they would put the Christmas tree up on Christmas Eve night, it wasn't no early decorations or nothing like that, go to bed early and wake up in the morning, Christmas tree is decorated, everything is just like magic; presents under the tree and I realized at a kinda early age there wasn't a Santa Claus, because my brother would write on the little tag to Charles from Santa Claus and I recognized his handwriting, so it was a joke. He would call me, "Get up, go downstairs. See what Santa Clause"...I would go and look and I went on for years, I didn't reveal that I know who it was until much later. [inaudible]

PT: What happened when you did tell him; when he finally revealed...?

CA: It was just a mean joke and he laughed. He was basically my father figure anyway. He helped mom buy my clothes, schooling and everything like that. I lived highly, I would consider, because...

PT: What was his name?

CA: His name was Reginald.

AW: What church did your family attend growing up?

CA: When we lived in Southwest, we went to Jerusalem Baptist Church. Then when we moved to Northwest, my mother attended Loudon Avenue Christian Church. I went with her where ever she went. Then, I don't want to get too far ahead of you...a long way from the question, because I may go ahead of some of the questions you might ask.

PT: You don't need to worry about it.

CA: When we did move to Northwest and she was going to Loudon, at that time, we moved to Northwest and I began high school at Addison. That was a true adventure once you got into high school. I had a bike and living on Madison Avenue, of course, we had a lot of neighbors at that time, beautiful neighbors. I would ride my bike to church, I mean to school, but I had two girl neighbors who...they would be early class, but they would come by my house and wait and I would double them to school. We would go...At that time, all I had to do was go over 8th Street and down to Orange Avenue, which

was Lynchburg Turnpike at the time and run them down to Patterson and across the playground. We would almost be running late, even at that time. They'd get off the bus and run across the playground and go into the school. It was fun, even under those circumstances. That's when I got mostly involved in my photography and doing so-called school interviews and stuff like that. I graduated in 1939. As a little side job, I used to work for a drugstore; in the afternoon after school I would, at that time, we had delivered prescriptions, delivered on bike. I guess I had hit every street in town, because when people had delivery I had to take 'em out and that was my exercise. Sometimes you wonder, I didn't play football, track or nothing like that, but I think I put on at least 25-30 miles on that bike everyday going all over town. So I was a physical being. I've been very blessed health wise and everything up into my mid-80s. I haven't really been in major ailments or anything. I have to look back on my condition back then, unaware. Then come '43, that's when I went into the service, World War II.

AW: Could you describe your work with the St. Gerard's Catholic Church and its foundation?

CA: [inaudible] I went into the service and I went to Loudon Avenue Christian Church with my mother in '43 and when I came back, and due to the relationships with priests in the service, then I came back in '46 and 1946 is when St. Gerard's was founded. As of now, I'm the only living founding member of St. Gerard's. That has been a really wonderful religious journey for me. I have worked with all the priests in this period of time, from '46 up until today. I think we have had 30 more priests who have served St. Gerard's during this period of time. I have worked and served and thought of them. My founding priest, Father McDonald, we had worked very closely together. We had 3 locations. At one time, they met in a home on McDowell Avenue. That was a very brief time. Then from McDowell, during our time, Superintendent McQuilkin was a superintendent in the school and we were able to contact superintendent McQuilkin to secure Harrison School. We had mass at Harrison School for a very short period of time, also. We were in negotiations with buying a house for the service, we bought it on Moorman Road. That was probably '47, I believe. I don't know. But anyway, then we bought the property on Orange Avenue and started construction on the corner of 8th Street and Orange Avenue.

PT: You said that you moved it onto; you started construction on Orange Avenue?

CA: Yeah, I figure, I'm thinking 1951. As I stated, I don't know I was [inaudible] building the community at that time. It was the community; it was very, very close. All over the catholic church we had, on our board, a Jewish fellow, Dr. Downing, we were very multicultural at the time. Then, [inaudible] Our Lady of Nazareth was over on Campbell Avenue at the time and they supported us 100% because of the sisters that came and helped us, services. Of course our high school was very, very cooperative because we were of real strong community. We had all types of activities supported by the school. We had plays and at that time, we had the Academy of Music on Salem Avenue, almost like a opera hall. Our teachers from Addison would help to produce plays and we'd have plays over at the Academy of Music. Miss Alta May Thomas was first teacher at Addison. She was a member of St. Gerard's and she taught music there and we had musical concerts in each one of the study groups. As time progressed the church grew very rapidly. It was originally built to be for the black residents of Roanoke, but we became very integrated and really became the kind of church that's supposed to be universal anyway. We were actually the most universal church in the city because we had, always had many cultures in the beginning and up to

this date. We had about 7 or 8 cultures at St. Gerard's as of this date. I have held almost every office in the church, pastoral counseling, Eucharistic minister is almost like a deacon, I have done that, serving the sick in the community of church and home of many years. I have attempted writing a history of the church, that's where my photography came in, because I had a great photographic history of the events that went on with the church back in the day. We have progressed to such a great extent; we've been recognized throughout out diocese as one of the most universal churches. As Catholics we have a great choir, the Catholic St. Gerard's Gospel Choir, sings throughout the city during the holidays. We are just proud of our history and Knights of Columbus Council with over 80 members. It's very active and supportive of the church and the neighborhood or where ever the needs comply to. In and about what the church, in the '90s, Of course during all this time, as a hobby, roses have been in my heart. I mean I have many roses and never get tired. I have over 200 roses now. I took a course out at the VPI extension course on Brambleton Avenue; I'm a master gardener. That happened in...I've been a master gardener now for between 12 and 15 years. I'm on the board of the Roanoke Rose Society of Virginia, also. I've been involved with the Society for about 4 or 5 years, but I have been growing roses for 40 years or more. In connection with the Master Gardeners, we had to do a project. We worked with Hurt Park School. We had a garden project up there for about 8 or 9 years. We had some beautiful crops, even in the real hot seasons. We had beautiful stuff, dig those heads. (shows picture)

PT: Is this with the garden society that these were taken?

CA: Yes, it was with the Master Gardeners, yes.

PT: You took all of these pictures yourself?

CA: Yes. This is, he was a teacher at Hurt Park at the time. The guy behind him, Phillip Fulcher, he's a retired vice president of a bank called Wachovia. He and I worked together on the project about 8 or 9 years until it wasn't anymore. Then, that was one of my really prized...we really enjoyed doing this. This is just a...I have a bunch of these because this went on for about 7 or years, we were into this little deal. That's really a great community project and everything. We have another civic organization that we did was Faith Works. Faith Works came to Roanoke, it was a garden-based civic organization based in California. We worked...they were recruiting neighborhood activists to work on different projects. One of the guys recruiting came into St. Gerard's and asked our Priest who he would recommend to get into this project. I was selected. That was in '99. We went to San Francisco and Los Altos, it's about 34 miles from San Francisco. It was a beautiful retreat center where we went for training. It was almost like a paradise, it was so landscaped, it was just a beautiful city. We were there for a week. We came back to put into practice what we had learned at the workshop. Even in the workshop, they taught us the approach to City Council members, if you wanted to go do...a case to prepare for the council, we had a step procedure to get to the council appointments. We would go to them or they would be invited to our organization. We would carry our please to them. Our first project was, we had the council meet at St. Gerard's and we offered some suggestions and projects for that particular year. The overgrowth was, the sidewalk was just covered from Orange Avenue, 8th Street all the way down past, from 8th Street up there to Hurt Park. At that time, the school traffic light would not work; it hadn't worked, I guess, for 20 years. At that time, we had our meeting here with the City Manager, Chief of Police and everyone.

Within a week, those problems were corrected. They sent a crew up here and backhoed and cleaned up all that stuff on the sidewalk; the light was blinking, it's been blinking ever since. That's been 12 years ago, so when you look around and see some of the things that we had accomplished through Faith Works and, of course, you may have heard of Southeast by Design...Well, our leader was instrumental in...because we had three organizations in Southeast that was...they just couldn't see eye to eye whatsoever. So, this guy Ray Higgins was the organizer for Faith Works and he was able to get those three organizations together and working like clockwork and so, they really got this Southeast by Design program that was another big success for Faith Works. The amazing thing was we had a meeting on Southeast in St. Gerard's every Month and Southeast would come down and meet and numbers count. Another good thing in the meeting process is to get sort of a, not necessarily a real large court, so you can pack people in...you pack 10 people in it looks like you have 200 in there. It works. If we have a meeting in here, about 10 people in here, it would be packed. If you look around, you have a real good attendance. Even with the help in Southeast, they really have...Congressman Goodlatte has been at our meetings and all of those things and during the process...I never figured it out, did it ever get to the White House with Faith Works is a nationwide organization and when we have any kind of big issues, on the floor, at the White House, for our community, we just go up there and meet the Senators, meet the Congressmen, whatever, see. We went up there to lobby for, back then healthcare has been an issue for years, not only is it a hot issue now, but kids healthcare. This last year after all of these years they were able to get the healthcare complete for all the children. I never thought I'd get to do any kind of lobbying or meeting Congressmen and all of that kind of stuff and be interviewed, but it's been a wonderful organization. We have sort of figured out now, because normally with organizations like that, when you accomplish your mission, well, you gotta dig around and try to find new issues, and quite often, you don't have a lot of new issues. Faith Works, in the area, sort of dwindled down, but now I am a co-chair with the Melrose-Rugby Neighborhood Forum. It was chaired by Ms. Estelle McCadden. That's the greatest...we have about close to 40 neighborhood organizations in the city. We pride ourselves as being number one. We meet every fourth Tuesday and we do have 25-30 people and cops come in and get a report and they report on the activities throughout the area and they say they really like to come there because these other meetings get 4 or 5 people. They enjoy the group and participation and things. It's sort of a capsule of community activities are concerned, because as of now we are working on a deal with the Knights of Columbus, we are bringing the bishop here, see this is the year of the priest and the bishop will be here on the 27th of this month. We are proud of Father [inaudible] he will be getting an award and the bishop will be getting an award. This will be a really wonderful thing. At our church, we have just working on almost completing the church documented yearbook. I've done a lot of photography to contribute to the book. Because, when you leave...I still think about a whole lot of other stuff...

PT: We're getting to the point where we need to start wrapping up as well.

AW: Is there anything else?

PT: I have dozens more questions, but...

CA: Well, some of the...well a couple of...

PT: For one last one, one thing that I was wondering is, you mentioned when you went into the service how the priest in the service helped compel you to come back and start founding St. Gerard's...

CA: Not founding, but I became interested in the church. They were inspirational in me coming back and joining the church. That was the thing, because the priest just came down here, Father McDonald(?) come down from Boston to establish the church and he had a little...even on Henry Street at that time...he had an information center on Henry Street, so people would come in and learn about the church and everything. I was an information dealer and that's how I got involved with the church. We were of service to the LOC, but I guess if it hadn't been for the information, I may not have gotten involved, but since it was there I went into..

PT: Well, the priest, while you were in the service, were you in the Army or...?

CA: Yes, I was in the Pacific Theater. Went in New Guinea, in new Guinea about 3 or 4 months and from New Guinea to Manila and we went into Manila, were packed up for the invasion of Japan. We were on Manila from July until, Japan attacked, bombed...because that was the greatest miracle that ever happened when they bombed Japan, because if we had invaded at that time before they bombed them out, it would have been millions of people...normally we wouldn't be able to touch the loss that we had there. Be we did occupy. We occupied Tokyo. I was in Tokyo and Yokohama before I was discharged in 1946.

PT: That poses another 10 questions, but did you have a question?

AW: Yes, I have one last question...Did you go to college and where?

CA: No, I only went to trade school, Booker T. Washington trade School. That was after high school when I...it was beyond high school. It was a postwar situation. We had Booker T., it was affiliated with Booker T. Memorial. We had teachers come up from Tuskegee and open up this Booker T. Washington trade school. I took a couple of courses in brick laying, which I've done a little brick laying. I was able to repair my own home. The training I took I was able to utilize it myself and didn't do it in a professional way, but I was able to improve my own living conditions through training, I guess.

AW: Thank you for participating.

CA: Well, very glad, very glad to. About how will this be documented, how will you do it? Will you edit it up and everything?