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"Stonehenge" and the Venables in Georgia
(A history of former Venable home located at
1410 Ponce de Leon Avenue in Atlanta, Georgia, and
now a part of St. John's Lutheran Church)
This presentation by Frank Eldridge was made as part of the
135th anniversary celebration of St. John's Lutheran Church
as a congregation

Video opens with a series of black-and-white photographs of "Stonehenge," the former Venable home, which was purchased by St. John's Lutheran Church in 1959. The photograph is overlaid with the title, "Stonehenge Mansion," followed by "How the Venables came to DeKalb County, Georgia. May 2005

PASTOR'S VOICE-OVER: We're celebrating our 135th anniversary as a Lutheran congregation in Atlanta, so we've been thinking a lot about history in the last several months. So this is exciting for us to host something like this, because we feel like this building is part of our ministry. We talk about this house as our great gift and great challenge. [*Audience laughter*] Great gift, because just by itself [*Scene changes to show Pastor ___ addressing an off-camera audience inside the former "Stonehenge."*] it draws people into the church, who then join our congregation. It's a great challenge, because we get to keep it up [*Audience laughter*] and pay for this building. But tonight we're really delighted to welcome Honorable Frank Eldridge, here to talk about the history of the Venable family and a little bit about what it was like to grow up in this house. [*To Mr. Eldridge*] So we welcome you and look forward to hearing what you have to say. [*Mr. Eldridge approaches, they shake hands, and Mr. Eldridge takes his place at the podium. The audience applauds.*]

MR. ELDRIDGE: Thank you very much. Let me tell you a little bit of how I'm going to approach this. I'll first tell you a little bit about the Venable family. And without knowing or understanding something of their history, then Sam Venable does not come into context or does not come into focus, because he is one of those figures that's larger than life. And you can't understand why or how he came to be without understanding a little bit of his pride and also his arrogance. So it's one of those things that—[*Pastor appears with a stool so that Mr. Eldridge can place his cup of water on it and briefly speaks to Mr. Eldridge*.] That's all right. Oh, OK. [*To audience, flailing his arms around*.] Yeah, you know, gesturing so much, he doesn't want me to baptize you. [*Audience laughter*] But then I will go into the Venables in DeKalb County and their early history. And that gets, to some extent, talking about Sam Venable and the city of Atlanta, and then the building of this house and who lived here, and that gets into my reflections. And if we've got enough time, and if you haven't begun to glaze over [*Audience laughter*]—I can

see your eyes, so I can tell when you've had a surfeit. If that hasn't happened, then I'll start telling you some of the Sam Venable stories.

You know, and, of course, it's like all stories. They get embellished with time. I thought my brother was going to come--I invited him. I told him that he better come to defend himself. [*Audience laughter*] He always swears up and down that I distort the stories, but it's really he that's done it. He's got such a terrible memory. [*Audience laughter*] He's younger than I am, and so he doesn't remember it quite as accurately as I do. Anyhow, he didn't come, and, you know, without having him as a straight man, it's not as much fun. [*Audience laughter*]

So anyhow, the Venables trace their ancestry back to Charlemagne. They were a French family originally, and somehow or another they got mixed up with the Norsemen or the Vikings, and they lived in Normandy. They lived in upper Normandy, and they came from a town called Vernon. Downstairs in the card room [in the Venable home] there used to be a motto there saying, "Vernon de—uh, Venable de Vernon," indicating that that was their home. And Vernon is near Giverny, which is where Renoir—not Renoir, Manet [sic] was—his home, and that's where the famous lily pond in his garden was. Venable was one of the barons that went with William the Conqueror to conquer England. William the Conqueror was the Duke of Normandy. The Venables, in turn, were related to four other barons of—or Norsemen [sic], and so they became a major force. The five barons, they were interrelated. That's Lacy, Mowbray, Mandeville, Bohun, and there's another one; I can't remember—oh, Montgomery [sic]. And they all of them were living there together at different places.

Now, in typical English fashion, where you have the rule of primogeniture, where the oldest gets the land, the second goes to the clergy, the third goes in the military, the fourth may go into the army, and the fifth, he's in terrible shape. So that's how a lot of people came to this country, that populated it, and that's also how the Venables came. It was one of the younger sons that came into Virginia in the early 1600s. It was already a colony, but he became one of the First Families of Virginia, so if you look through the history.

Now, that brings us to the time of the American Revolution. Abraham Venable was the patriarch there at that time, and he had about seven sons. He became the quartermaster general; he was also a member of the House of Burgesses. He and Patrick Henry served together in the House of Burgesses. And when war broke out, he [Venable] became the quartermaster general of the Virginia Militia. And he got into trouble—typical Venable fashion—because he expropriated a Tory's cattle to feed the troops, and he paid him off in Continental scrip. And the man felt like he had been robbed, and he didn't think he'd ever get his money back, and so he brought a lawsuit against Venable, and Patrick Henry defended him—defended

him successfully. Needless to say, there wasn't a Tory on the jury. They were all patriots, and they found appropriately for their fellow patriot.

After the war, the Cherokees and the Creeks both had occupied this area of Georgia, and all the way up to the Savannah River to Lake Hartwell, what was then Franklin County. That was a brand-new county that was carved out of land that was taken from the Cherokees and from the Creek Indians, because, again, they had fought on the "wrong" side; they were on the British side. And so that land, between 1786 and 1790, was parceled out as Revolutionary Land Grants. And so the Venables came down—Abraham Venable and his sons came down—to what was then Franklin County. It's now Jackson County. It was around the middle branch of the Oconee River, and they settled there.

They had—or intermarried with another group from--that came out of Revolutionary Land Grants, and that was Montgomery. You all heard of Montgomery's Ferry. Well, I'm going to tell you a little bit about Montgomery. James Montgomery was a Revolutionary War captain, and he came to Franklin County; and he was one of their neighbors. And they began, as happens quite frequently, to intermarry. And so William Richard Venable, which was the first of the Venables that came to DeKalb County and later Fulton County, was his nephew. And he was the nephew of William McConnell Montgomery, and William McConnell Montgomery was the first to come into this area.

In 1823 this [territory] was ceded by the Creek Indians, because they had fought a disastrous war. The British persuaded them to go to war during the War of 1812, and it was called the Creek Indian War of 1814. That's when Andrew Jackson was made a lieutenant general [inaudible—could be "a regular commission" or "irregular commission"], and he took the Tennessee Volunteers down to Muscle Shoals [Alabama]. He was going to trap, with the help of the Georgia Militia, the Creek Indians. And the problem was that the Creek Indians didn't cooperate. They defeated the Georgia Militia, and so he had to winter alone. Well, one of the things he was supposed to do—that was supposed to happen—William McConnell Montgomery was quartermaster general for the Georgia Militia, and his job was to bring supplies to Andrew Jackson. And the way he was going to do it was he built a road down an Indian trail, which was a game trail, which is now called Peachtree Road. And they came down through Buckhead, and in Buckhead at Pace's Ferry, they turned right, they widened the Indian trail there, they went down to where Moore's Mill is, they widened that, and they came down to Bolton, which is where the Atlanta waterworks is. Matter of fact, there is a replica of the fortifications of the fort that was built there. And they built the fort, and they started bringing supplies down, and they were supposed to raft it down the Chattahoochee River. And they took too long, and so

Jackson had to winter without food or supplies. And that's how he got the nickname "Old Hickory"; they had to subsist on hickory nuts. And when the spring came, they got the supplies down to Columbus [Georgia], and they carried it inland. And the Georgia Militia now has regrouped, and they go in, and they trap the Indians at Horseshoe Bend and defeat them.

Jackson forces not only the Creek Indians, he had allies with the Cherokee Indians. But he forces both groups to sign a treaty that they will remove themselves at government expense to the west. And you know, that started the "Vale of Tears" [sic]. And the Creeks were moved out long before the Cherokees. As a matter of fact, in 1823 was when Jackson's treaty went into effect, and they were removed from DeKalb County in this area.

AUDIENCE MEMBER, *off-camera*: And that's when DeKalb County was founded, was 1823.

MR. ELDRIDGE: That's right, and that's why it was founded then, because it was originally Henry County, then subdivided into DeKalb County [sic]. And so DeKalb County came into existence, and they had a land lottery. And Revolutionary War veterans, veterans of the War of 1812, the veterans of the Creek Indian War, widows of those, all got lottery numbers. And what you did—most of the people would never take up their land that they were allotted. Well, Montgomery did not get the land that he wanted, which was where he knew the fort was, and he knew it was going to be a good supply place because it still had the buildings there. And so he went and bought from somebody who had gotten the land lot, sight unseen, and so he ends up with his original fort and supply depot and everything.

Gilmer was the regular army officer that was in charge. Gilmer later became governor of the state of Georgia. And needless to say, he and Montgomery got along quite well; and he gave to Montgomery a ferry rights at where now South Atlanta Road comes in there at the waterworks. He had a ferry across the river. Now, on the other side of the river was the Cherokee Nation; and that was one of the entry points of the Cherokee Nation. And one of the things Montgomery did was he got a trading license to set up a trading post, so he had—on both sides of the river he had a store. He got a U.S. post office, so he was pretty well fixed. So he was one of the early residents of DeKalb County, he was sheriff, he was a justice of the peace, he was a state representative, he was a state senator. And then when DeKalb and Fulton were separated, after Atlanta came into existence, he ended up being—but at that time it was all in Fulton County—I mean, all in DeKalb County.

So when the railroad was going to be built in Atlanta, and that was another one of those times when capitalists get involved with government, they didn't want—the rail--people wanted to build railroads, and they wanted to build railroads to the west, to link it up with the Tennessee

River so that they could transport farm commodities to the Tennessee River to the Ohio River to the Mississippi and Missouri River and be able to transport it, and they felt that everything would prosper as a consequence. Now, the railroad magnates did not want to build the most difficult part of the railroad that was through the river areas and the mountains and tunneling that would go from Atlanta to Chattanooga. Well, Chattanooga was not in existence at that time; it was called Ross's Landing. So what ended up happening was they got the state to build the railroad. And so today most trackage between here and Chattanooga are owned by the state of Georgia, and [trackage in?] downtown Chattanooga is owned by the state of Georgia.

So they did build this. And one of the things that was happening is that they're building a railroad without any linkage. The first engine that was brought had to be brought in by oxcart so that they could have the section hands carry it up the road as they built it. And Atlanta was built in the middle of nowhere. The reason, of course, they tried to get Decatur to do it; and Decatur did not want the problems. One of the things that happened was that for the first ten years of Atlanta's history, when it was Terminus, Marthasville, and then finally Atlanta—you all have seen Westerns? You've seen the boom towns. That's exactly what Atlanta was like. It had a lot of prostitutes, it had a lot of gambling dives, it had liquor. It was a real wild place, and DeKalb County citizens of Decatur did not want that in [sic] their doorstep. So they forced them to go somewhere else, and they ended up building from Milepost Zero, which is right there under Underground Atlanta, or right there at Underground Atlanta; and it's down in the railroad valley.

Montgomery being the shrewd businessman that he was, he says, "All right, I'll give you right-of-way through my land, and you can build a bridge across here." And he made it possible for them to come through there. He also decided to set up a store at the Milepost Zero. He had the second store. Kyle had the first store. Kyle does it up there where the springs are. At Five Points there's an artesian spring that's now capped. If you look at any of the old photographs of Atlanta, there used to be a water tower there; and that was the reason for it. And that was why the focus from all different points. Game came there, the Indians came there, and then the settlers did, too, to that point.

Well, Montgomery, down what is now Marietta Boulevard or Bolton Road, put on an oxcart a cabin. And he skidded it down, had oxen drag it down to the end of the railroad. And when the train crewmen got off the train every night, having been laying rails all day long, they wanted refreshments. They wanted tobacco, they wanted alcohol, they might have wanted some food. Well, he had them all there. He had everything for them. He put his son-in-law, James Collins, in charge of that store. And the business thrived, and they had to build a bigger business; so he needed some help. So he sent back to home; and William Richard Venable,

my great-grandfather, came down to work. So here all of them here are interrelated. They're either nephews—Collins was a nephew, Venable was a nephew.

So Venable came very early on, somewhere in the late 1830s or early 1840s to work. He became the second clerk of the Court of--the Superior Court, and he missed it by two years. The man who took over didn't like the job and quit, and so he [Venable?] kept the job until his death in '73. One of the things that he did was he put Collins, his former boss's son, and his first cousin, as a deputy clerk. When he died, Collins kept the job as clerk until 1904. He also hired one of—Collins hired one of—when he became clerk, hired Walter Venable, one of William Richard Venable's and one of Sam Venable's brothers. So you have this nepotism that all went on, supporting everybody and taking care of each other. They also had another person that was in there, and that was Jonathan Norcross. He had also married one of Montgomery's sisters-in-law, another Venable. And Norcross—Jonathan Norcross was one of the early mayors of the city of Atlanta. And then finally he got fed up with politics here and moved out and started his own town in Norcross, which was also on a different railroad. And he thrived better there, because he got in when the land was cheap.

So you have now the Venables ensconced in what has now become Fulton County—no longer DeKalb; it split off—and they live there. And they survived through the Civil War. They were one of the few families--three hundred families--you always hear about. One of the first things Sherman did after he took over the city was to give everybody a choice. He said, "I'm not going to feed and protect you. But what I will do is I will give you free passage to either north or south. I'll put you on the train to Chattanooga, or I'll put you on the train to Macon. But you got to make your choice." And so everybody else was evacuated except three hundred families, and one of those families that did not get evacuated were the Venable family, which is [was] out now out Marietta Boulevard. It was at the edge of town; it's out near where Coca-Cola Company has its offices.

The reason they were still there is because there was a Yankee colonel. That Yankee colonel happened to be a second cousin, came down from Connecticut. One of the—William Richard Venable's wife was a Hoyt. Her father was an ordained minister and had been a missionary to the Cherokee Indians. And needless to say, he was thrown out of a job when they sent the Indians west on the Vale [sic] of Tears, and then he became a seminary professor in Cleveland, Tennessee. And so you have some very interesting parallels. Here you have Yankee blood that has come in from Connecticut, these ministers, and these ministers who were ministering to the marginalized, the Cherokee Indians. And then you have the Venables, who had somewhat racist views about everything and very arrogant. So you have a very

strange mix, because here you have Grandmother Lucy Bogle Hoyt Venable, who has these different ideas about how things should be, and her daughter—I'm sorry, it was—that was the grandmother. So you have a strong Congregationalist or reformed theology that permeates this. And so you have very religious views from the female side, and you have very worldly, very pragmatic or materialist from the other. Now, after William Richard died, he died with leaving five sons and two daughters. My grandmother was born after his death. And she was Elizabeth Richard, was named in part for him.

So what you had were a very tightknit family. And Sam never married. He liked his women, he liked his alcohol, but he didn't want to be tied down. He didn't mind living at home, because his sisters and his mother spoiled him rotten as a child, and in later life they doted on him. When—before he built this house, they lived on Courtland Street near Ralph McGill Boulevard. They had a rather large house there. He had my grandmother; and later on when she married, her family lived there. He had his other sister, Leila Ellis, who was a painter, and Dr. Ellis, who was a graduate of the Medical College of Virginia. Now, one of the interesting things about Aunt Lee, as she was called, when Dr. Jack [her husband]—they didn't have residency programs in this country. And the way you went about learning to be a doctor was that you would go to a foreign city, and you would live there and work in one of the hospitals under the tutelage or mentorship of a physician or physicians, and you learned that way, hands-on. And when they went abroad to do this, Aunt Lee took her younger sister, Lizzie Richard, my grandmother, and so they lived in Paris. And while they were in Paris, to keep the women occupied, they went to the Sorbonne, and they studied art. You'll see around this house many of the murals that were done by Aunt Lee. She was a very accomplished artist, but it was one of those things that it was women were not, at the turn of the nineteenth century, either before or after, accepted as artists; so she had to do things privately. She never showed or never sold, but here she had a great deal to do in showing her skill, both in the paintings that adorned the house as well as the murals that were painted around it, even to the point of the entry hall in the great hall. You can see the ceiling was painted by her and also in the library. In what we called the "Oriental Room," which is to the immediate left as you come in from the sanctuary, she painted on the rice cloth those Oriental pictures around the wall. So she was a very accomplished artist. But they spent six to nine months in Paris, they spent equal time in Berlin, in Vienna, in Moscow, and in London. So they had a very worldly view of the Victorian Age. They spoke French fluently. Matter of fact, they were very French-ophiles [sic], and that was a very big factor that they were focused on.

Now, you have all of these together with the mother living in one house. They also had brother Walter; he was also a bachelor. So you have two sisters and their families, you have the mother, you have Sam and Walter in this house on Courtland. And it was a good-sized house, Victorian house; but it was not big enough for their vision—or I should say Sam Venable's vision. By this time—by 1912, Sam has—his brother's died. His brother was a lawyer, was in business with him. He was also the accomplished politician; he was a state senator. He rose to the point, at the time of his death, to be what was the equivalent of the lieutenant governor; it was called the President of the Senate. He was a presiding officer. His portrait hangs outside the senate chambers in the capitol.

So it was somewhat demoralizing; Sam couldn't do as good a job without his brother and without his political connections, and so he more or less retires. And here he looks for something that can show off his success, because he thinks of himself as pretty much a self-made man. He had not had a formal education, although he was well-read; and you can see the size of the library. It was a very complete one with a lot of history, a lot of poetry, a lot of things on political theory, religion—although he and his brother were not religious people; but their mother was.

One of the things that she did, she coerced the boys when they belonged to—or were—she and my grandmother and her mother were charter members of First Presbyterian Church. And they decided that—in 1900—or 1898, the [Atlanta] city limits were—actually the church was started in 1898; the city expanded in 1894, the city limits. And the way they did it back then was they took a protractor and put it at Milepost Zero. The first city limits of the city of Atlanta was one mile, the second one was somewhere in the 1870s, was two miles; and the third mile took you to about just past the Fox Theater to what would be a third street, although it's not called Third Street. It's before you got to where First Baptist used to be, just short of that. Anyhow, this is where the suburbs were going. And, of course, you've got Inman Park, which was developed in the 1880s; but that was a deviation from the concentric movement. But what the church thought—North Avenue—they needed a church; they needed a missionary church. So they created North Avenue Presbyterian Church. Central Presbyterian Church and North Avenue [Presbyterian Church] was created by First [Presbyterian Church]. Now, Miss Venable was—or Mrs. Mason and her mother—coerced the brothers into giving the stone for North Avenue Presbyterian Church. And they had their own railroad around Stone Mountain, and also they had railroad rights onto the railroad. And so they were able to bring up to where North Avenue intersects the railroad tracks. And then they had to by mule, they carried all the stone up to where the church is, and that was one of the things they built. I'm not sure if Sam ever

darkened the doors of that church, though; and that would have been fairly typical for him. But his mother and his grandmother and his sisters all were regular members of that church and very active. My grandmother was active, until she became an invalid, in that church. She used to take me as a child to Sunday school every Sunday morning to make sure I had my proper religious upbringing. It took a long time before I got to seminary, though; but I got deviated along the way. [*Laughs*] I guess that's some of the Venable blood in me.

But anyhow, what happened was that Sam has all this money—this is before [income] taxes—and he wants to show off. And here he thinks he is a aristocrat--he has all this English heritage--and so he commissions the grand house that you see here today. And he wanted it to reflect his English heritage, reflect that he's descended from five different barons at Runnymede, because they were part of the ones that coerced John--King John at Runnymede to sign the Magna Carta. And so he wants to reflect this heritage of his. And you notice they still—over the fireplace you have the coat of arms. Where you have those blanks, that's where, in the front hall, that's where you had the coat of arms also; and you see various heraldic emblems around the—this house that reflect it. He hired a architect—and I can't remember his name—he was a very prominent architect. [The architect is cited in several sources as Edward Bennett Dougherty.] He [Venable] sent him [the architect] to England to look at what was called "domestic Elizabethan gothic." This was back in the period when you were building grand mansions in England when they were wealthy. They no longer were forts, but they were the great house. So he sent an architect to England to find the house that was suitable and to copy it or scale it down, which he [the architect] did, to bring it here.

This was the second house that was built in this subdivision in Druid Hills. The first house is the one across the street, the A D Pi [Alpha Delta Pi sorority] house. That was the Clyde King home. And so here they had the first and second houses among the two of them. It took two years to build this house.

AUDIENCE MEMBER, *off-camera*: What year was this?

MR. ELDRIDGE: This is 1912 was when they started construction. It took two years. They would bring up to the railroad siding over there where the—I've forgotten what you call it—but it's Oakdale on Edgewood, where the MARTA station is. They would bring the side cars—the flat cars with stone and off-load it into horse-drawn or mule-drawn wagons and bring it down Oakdale till they got to this place. They would cut the stone on the premises. Now, most of his stone masons were Welshmen, because the Welsh were famous masons. And he hired a number of masons over the years and would get them from northern states and would bring

them down here, because the New England states were where most of your granite quarries were in. So he would get masons and bring them here.

So he—what he has done is he no longer is in the granite business. He leases out his Stone Mountain facility to the [inaudible surname; sounds like "Wisburn" or "Wyvern"?] brothers. And that was never his good quarry; he thought that was an inferior quarry. And he quit somewhere in the 1880s—I mean 1890s, 1900s from quarrying that. Most of his quarry was down there at a place called Flat Rock, Pine Mountain [sic; not Pine Mountain, Georgia], Arabia. Actually, between 1900 and 1910 Samuel Venable and his brother, William Richard Venable II, probably were the largest landowners in DeKalb County--Stone Mountain was two thousand acres there--when you included the quarries at Lithonia. Davidson Brothers ended up buying one of those quarries. Consolidated had another quarry it operated for a while. He owned Arabia Mountain; although he didn't quarry it, he wanted the access to it. What ended up happening, when he quit doing the work, he ended up leasing out the different quarries and got royalties for the volume of stone that was brought out of it.

Those at Lithonia were operated by my grandfather, Frank Tucker Mason. Frank Tucker Mason was a thorn in his [Sam Venable's] side. He was an educated man. He [Frank Mason] had gone to Andover, and he had gone to Yale; and he was in the business of raising oranges and grapefruit in the Isle of Pines after the Spanish-American War. And my grandmother met him, they married, and he [Sam] didn't want to see his sister stuck down there in that mosquito-ridden place called the Isle of Pines, off of the mainland of Cuba—main island of Cuba. So he [Sam] made a proposition to him [Frank]. He [Sam] says, "You come up here, and I'll give you a good lease, and I'll teach you to be a granite man." And so he [Sam] set him [Frank] up; and he was very prosperous in operating quarries up until his death.

In the middle of the Depression, 1936, he [Sam] had a thriving business. Everybody else is not in business; everybody's going under, and he was making money. One of the reasons is that the federal government was in the incredible building boom, trying to stimulate the economy, so that he was selling granite for that. He was selling granite for breakwaters, shipping great boulders that would be the size of this room. They'd put it on a flatcar and send it to Key West or to other places to build up jetties and breakwaters. So here, Sam Venable—he's got money rolling in, he's got—he's not having to work. He's just sitting back and counting the money that's coming in from his various leases. The more successful his brother-in-law is, the better off he [Sam] is, because he's [Sam] making money off of everything he's [Could be Sam or Frank or both] doing. The one thing about it he couldn't stand: he's a "damn Yankee." He [Sam] let him [Frank] know that every day. And here my grandfather [Frank] has to live with

it. My grandmother would not think of the idea of breaking up this tightknit extended family or of having her own household elsewhere. So her--my mother and my uncle both grew up as children here. Dr. Jack and Aunt Lee didn't have children, but they lived here along with this--his [Sam's] mother, for a few years before her death, and Uncle Walter.

Periodically he'd [Sam] take care of black sheep in the family, too. That brings us to Jimmy Venable. You all know Jimmy Venable if you're a—historic DeKalb County. He's been a black sheep. He has been one of the things that has caused a great deal of embarrassment. But as I was saying, he was right in the path in line of Bubba Sam. I mean, the chip's off the block; this is his nephew. He lived here for a while, and he went to night law school; and while he was in school, he lived with the family here. So one of the things that they did during their time here was to have the large extended family. They liked to entertain or show off, whichever way you want to put the perspective. And, you know, he [Sam] liked to act as the grand person, the statesman. He [Sam] was one of the—Atlanta back, oh, from about 1910—no, 1900 to about 1915, he was one of five police commissioners. They had a commission to supervise the police department, and he loved that. Anything that you could do to appeal to his ego, he'd get involved in, because he liked to be the center of attention. He liked to have—particularly by this time—he's up in his sixties. He likes to have the opportunity to show off.

I don't know if you somebody by the name of William Evans. William Evans was the founder [sic] of the Ku Klux Klan. After *Birth of a Nation* came through, that movie, it stirred up a lot of—one of the things, it glamorized the Klan. The Klan was never glamorous, even with Nathan Bedford Forrest when he was involved in it. They were cowards, they were bullies, they were intimidating. They were trying to preserve their power structure. Evans says to—"You know, one of the things we ought to do is emulate this," because it was a great deal of racial tension, there was a great deal of anti-Semitism, and there was a great anti-Catholic movement—a great deal of prejudice against any kind of immigrant at the turn of the century and well into the '20s.

And Evans, he's a pharmacist. And he decides, "Well, I'm going to [re]start this organization, and I'm going to try to get it nationally." Well, he needed somebody to be a front man, and he appealed to Sam Venable's pride and arrogance and got him to be the secretary. He's [Sam] a—you know, he really doesn't have any power. Well, the thing about the Klan, these—those in the close circle—and Sam was not in that—they made money off the Klan. The Klan was one of the biggest money-makers. All these fools that came and joined it and paid money and dues, it subsidized the lifestyle of some of those people. Evans ended up building a mansion at the corner of East Paces Ferry and Peachtree Road. The irony of all ironies: that

is where the archbishop for the Catholic Church has his manse. I mean, if you ask for any irony, that's probably one of the greatest. Here's another one that's a marble monstrosity built by another one of the Klansmen, one of the top leaders, that's on Peachtree Battle. It's a square granite—square marble structure. It looks rather modern. Well, that gives you some kind of idea of what kind of money they were involved in. At one time they had a great deal of political power, up until somewhere, '28 or '29. Some of you may have seen in the newsreels of them walking up and down Pennsylvania Avenue, about fifteen or twenty abreast. And they began to decline when [in 1925] one of the top Klansmen in Indiana got prosecuted for and convicted for a sexual offense, and people's attitudes changed. Part of that came about because people had to worry about themselves with the Depression. And they began to look at these people and what they were saying, what they were preaching.

But one of the problems that they had was that Sam Venable got caught up in it and got used in this and was a front man. His sisters tried to get him out of it and tried to persuade him not to be involved in it, but his pride took precedence. Finally he did quit. One of the things that caused him to quit, though, was not their policies and was not their violence—which, by this time, had begun to, in local groups—although that was supposedly not their policy on a national level, it was still one of those things that they winked at. The thing that caused Sam Venable to finally split with the Klan was over his friendship with Gutzon Borglum.

Now, somebody came up with the idea—and I can't remember at this point in time whose idea it was—it came from the United Daughters of the Confederacy. My grandmother was one of the joiners; she joined. She was a U.D.C., she was a D.A.R., she was [a member of] Daughters of Founding Patriots [National Society of Daughters of Founders and Patriots] , she was Colonial Dames, she was Daughters of Barons of Runnymede, Order of the Crown—I mean, she had some of the same genes that Sam had [*audience laughter*]. But, you know, through them they decided, well, let's build a carving that will memorialize the "lost cause."

And they contacted Gutzon Borglum, who was a very famous sculptor; but he had never done anything like that. He had always done marble, or he had done bronze castings. And so they got him to come down, and they talked about the vision, about having across the face of the mountain [Stone Mountain] a memorial. And he caught fire, and he could see this incredible idea; and he did some working models. And his vision was grand; it would have covered the whole face of that mountain. You would have had the central grouping of [Robert E.] Lee, Jefferson Davis, and [Stonewall] Jackson, who are sitting, reviewing troops, on their steeds, with their hats on—because in combat--or in a situation like that, they would be wearing their hats. In front would be the cavalry, below would be the infantry, and behind would be the

artillery. What this was going to be was that the central figures would be far more detailed; but as you got further away to deal with perspective, you would have rougher and rougher outlines, to the point where it was just a bare—you'd just be bare marks, you wouldn't have relief.

And so he [Borglum] began that, he was preparing for that when we got involved in World War I. And they had, you know—the draft came, supplies were difficult, and they had to put it on hold. But one of the first things that happened after the war was over, he took his plans--and he was a friend of Warren G. Harding—and he took the plans, and he said, "I would like to strike a coin. Prepare to mint these half dollars, and you give them to us at cost, and we will sell them and take the money—that is, the proceeds of that—and pay for the memorial. Harding was a politician; he said, "It's a great idea. Won't cost the government anything, but the government will be involved." And so Borglum prepared the dies, and the coins were struck.

Well, you know what the Ku Klux Klan did? They packed the meeting [of the Stone Mountain Memorial Association]. To become a member of the Stone Mountain Memorial Association, all you had to do was pay the dues, and they became voting members. And they packed the meeting, and they got control of it. Now, they had the exclusive rights to sell these coins, and they made a lot of money. Well, the funny thing about it was the money just didn't quite get out of the office to the work stations. And Borglum was having problems—he had--getting the funds to carry on the work. Most of the time he lived with our family. They had a guest house down at Stone Mountain, and ultimately he ended up living there in the guest house. But he—over about a ten- or fifteen-year period—he became very close. [*Points to audience*.] I, as a child, can remember, in 1946 or '47, seeing Mrs. Borglum and [son] Lincoln Borglum. Lincoln, when his father died, came and—had been working with his father. He completed Mount Rushmore. I can remember them coming and showing us slides and photographs of the work, and this was within the eight or ten years after the—actually, though, I think they completed Mount Rushmore, maybe in '39 or '40, just before the war came. So this was quite— [*Audience member interrupts and asks if Mr. Eldridge needs a drink of water; the recording stops as Mr. Eldridge pauses and takes a drink. Recording resumes after Mr. Eldridge has resumed speaking*.] Yeah. You can't blame them.

AUDIENCE MEMBER, *off-camera*: You've given us a lot of interesting relationships, but I'm a little confused about the relationship of Venable and Stone Mountain. Did he own Stone Mountain?

MR. ELDRIDGE: All right, let me go back. I thought that was something that everybody knew. He tried being—his brother practiced law, and he tried working at a bank that his uncle owned. Samuel Hoyt created a bank after the Civil War. Neither of them worked out. So they

decided—one of the things that Atlanta had was a lot of muddy roads, muddy streets. And one of the ways that people dealt with that—or did in Europe—was they made Belgian blocks. Belgian blocks were about a foot long by about two inches—well, it was like if you took a four-by-four—I mean, a—yeah, a four-by-four and cut it into two-foot-long sections. You'd take those, you'd do it in granite, and you'd stand them vertically on a dirt road, and you had a cobblestone street. And that was how they were done. So they decided the thing for us to do—because there are plenty of opportunities in northern cities that are buying Belgian blocks, and there's certainly enough muddy streets around Atlanta that they need to have the streets paved. Matter of fact, if you go around and look sometimes when they're tearing up the streets, you'll find the Belgian blocks still in place.

AUDIENCE MEMBER, *off-camera*: Oakdale Road used to be Belgian blocks.

MR. ELDRIDGE: Well, that's why.

AUDIENCE MEMBER, *off-camera*: I can remember the chain gang paved it over.

MR. ELDRIDGE: Yeah, well, that's what's happened in most places is they paved over the Belgian blocks. Belgian blocks are still in place. They never wear out.

AUDIENCE MEMBER, *off-camera*: They were on Springdale, too.

MR. ELDRIDGE: Yeah. So they pave them. So, you know, what better way here? You've got an incredible—it takes an incredible number of blocks to pave a street, so they bought part of the mountain. And gradually they ended up owning the entire mountain and two thousand acres around the mountain, and so that was their first quarry. And then they went on to buy the other quarries. The problem they had with Stone Mountain was that it was easier if you had a lower level where you didn't have to do—go into pits. If you go around the back side of the mountain, you'll see a lot of places where they had to do pit excavation. If you could carve down like on a cake or sheet cake, that was the easiest way. And that was why Flat Rock and Pine Mountain were far more productive in producing granite. But this is how they got involved with Stone Mountain. They ended up with—they were the first owners to own the entire mountain.

AUDIENCE MEMBER, *off-camera*: Who'd they buy it from?

MR. ELDRIDGE: A number of individuals. The land was originally in land lots. There are about eight land lots that it's in. Nobody could control it, nobody could do anything with it. [Inaudible; sounds like "Clouds"?] had a tower up there at one time; it blew off. But it was really a—it was something that cost people, because what could you use it for? And you had to pay taxes on it. So I'm sure they didn't have to pay a lot to get the mountain, because it was just a—it was a white elephant. Or gray elephant, as the case may be. [*Audience laughter*] But

they found a way to make money out of it, and they used it probably for about twenty years. Then they ended up leasing it to the [Wiburn? Wyvern?] brothers, who kept the lease up until they finally forfeited and went bankrupt just before World War II. [*Inaudible comment from audience member, off-camera*.] Yeah.

Anyhow, coming back to what happened was with Borglum. You have a situation in which Borglum has successfully completed the head of Lee, and to show the completion they had forty people at the dedication; they had breakfast on Lee's shoulder. I mean, and they weren't at risk of falling off. I mean, that's how mammoth it was. And so by about 1928 they'd gotten a lot of work done. If they'd just left what was there, if you go back any time looking at the mountain, you can see the bulges above where the carving is now. Those were the original heads of Lee and Jefferson Davis. Well, the Klan had him fired, because he was making too many noises. And here again, it was another of those "damn Yankees" coming down here, meddling with how they were doing things; and they were causing problems. And so they got him fired. And so what he did, he took his models, which belonged to him, with him; and he left only the clay models, the working models. Well, they didn't know how to protect them, which meant that you had to water them every day or put wet cloths over them. And so they dried out, and they were ruined. Well, the Klan in revenge had a warrant sworn out against Borglum, and Borglum had to be spirited away by Uncle Sam at night by car to get him out of the county so he wouldn't be arrested. And then he went on, you all know, he went on to do Mount Rushmore afterwards. So the type of grand vision that he had was something that could have been effected.

But anyhow, when Sam Venable sees the evil that was there, he finally opens his eyes and sees what kind of problems are there; and that's when he broke with the Klan. Had it not happened, he probably would have been a Klansman till the day he died. But one of the things that was—he had one of those fancy silk robes. My mother was an Atlanta debutante, and she went to a masquerade ball that the Nine O'Clocks had at the Piedmont Driving Club; and she went, wearing those robes. And it was really a scandal. Well, what happened, the next day, those robes mysteriously disappeared. Nobody knew what happened to them or how, you know—they think maybe somebody else by the name Venable had something to do with their disappearance. One thing I can say about Jimmy, he was consistent. He was a black shirt, a brown shirt before World War II. He was a fascist. He actually belonged to that organization—those organizations. He was consistent throughout. One of the heights of irony was when he was—he became senile, and he was put in nursing home in DeKalb County. His roommate was an African American. His roommate also heard him because he used the N-word about every

third or fourth word, I'm told; but his roommate was very tolerant of him, realizing that he didn't know what he was talking about and that his mind was gone. But here you have some of those same things that carry on.

It's one of those things that—this is the first time I've ever talked publicly about the Klan and the Venables, because as a elected public official, that was the last thing in the world I wanted to have anybody associate my name with the Klan, because you know how the newspapers are or the TV or any of the other media. I would have seen anything that I did, it'd always be prefaced with, you know, Frank Eldridge the such-and-such relation of the Venables and the Klan and all of that. So I have Jewish friends that knew about it, but they were kind enough never to say anything about it publicly, and the same thing about African-American friends; they were aware of it, but they knew it was a sensitive topic with myself and my immediate family. So it was one of those things we just didn't talk about. So for the—I know a lot of people ask you about that for the tours [of St. John's Lutheran Church] or in association with the home, so this is the reason why I tell you about the involvement, how he got involved, and his—the family's attitude about it. It's one of those things that was always a very sore point and can't—when you have a family who has a tradition of ministering to marginalized people like the Cherokees and have come from a missionary stock and then have a member of the family that is a out-and-out racist, it created a little tension. But then again, that was one of those things in a family, you live with the people the way they are.

Now, my brother and I enjoyed growing up very much in this house. We played *The Count of Monte Cristo*, we played *The Three Musketeers*—you know, any of those, all of the classics, *Robin Hood*, you know, the Bastille. We scaled—we did rappelling off of the upper balcony [*audience laughter*]. Oh, my mother had fits! I mean, you know, luckily, one thing we never did was swing from the chandelier out there in the front hall. We couldn't reach it. We never could figure out how to get hold of it. If we could have, we would have done it. We did swing from the front steps—[*gesturing*] you know, those steps that come—we hung rope down, we'd swing out. So we had a very good time. Matter of fact, one of the things we were always looking for is secret passages. And the front porch is no longer there, but there was a front porch that was about three feet off the ground, and we found how you got from the furnace room—there was a little opening at the top of the furnace room, and we crawled through there. We crawled underneath a lot of the front of the house in various places. And we kept trying to figure out ways to—you know, out there where the—near the front fireplace, there's a—benches that are built in. We kept trying to find a way to get those hinged and under it so we could use that as a entryway into the access point. If you notice, if you've ever been in the wine cellar--the

wine cellar was still stocked. And one of the things that I can remember the day all of the garbage men were very elated, because my mother threw out all of the wine that was there. And it was—many of the—much of it was twenty, thirty years old and terribly encrusted, dirty-looking. But, you know, I'm sure it was good wine [*audience laughter*].

But Sam Venable hated Prohibition, because he liked his whiskey. And my father used to tell a tale about Sam Venable, and—because the bootlegger, about every three months, would bring a five-gallon keg. Maybe it was only once a month. I'm not sure how long—how much he drank. But anyhow, he had a five-gallon keg--oaken keg, he had his special bootlegger that would bring it in from North Georgia--bring it in in this old Model-T Ford, and he'd bring it in in the rumble seat. And he was bringing it in the back door. And he was making his weekly delivery, and my father was out there helping him unload the car. Well, bless Pete, there's a captain and a lieutenant of the Atlanta Police Department at the front door, and they [Mr. Eldridge's family] had [employed] this old African American that used to work in the quarry, and he'd fallen off the train and lost a arm and lost a leg, and he had a wooden leg, and his name was Lij [*Spelling? Pronounced like the second syllable of "Elijah"*]. And Lij went to the front door, and he saw the police officers out there. And he knows, and he looks out that big window right outside there, and he sees my father and the bootlegger unloading the [*Voice trails off; inaudible*] [*audience laughter*], you know, and he gets worried. And so he goes, and he says, "Mr. Sam, Mr. Sam! The police are at the front door, and the bootlegger's at the back door. What do I do? What do I do?" [*Audience laughter*] Well, Bubba Sam said, "Take it to the attic." Well, they took it to the attic. And then he thought better: "No, better take it to the basement. No, take it outside, and I'll keep them busy. And show them into the library." And he kept them busy, and he sat them with their backs to the window so he can watch what's going on outside, and he keeps them—tries to charm them to death. And he's telling the story after story and everything else, and he's got them smoking cigars.

He's, you know, "Would you like a drink?" You know, "Iced tea?" [*Audience laughter*] You know, he is—finally, when he sees the bootlegger going down the back driveway with the cask of whiskey, "Well, what was it you wanted to ask me?"

He [the police officer] said, "Mr. Sam, we know that you used to be a police commissioner, and we'd like to sell you some tickets to the Police Benevolent Association." [*Audience laughter*]

He [Sam Venable] said, "I'll take every damn one of them." [*Audience laughter*]

That one is true. And so, with that as a benchmark, then many others are probably true as well. Some of the earliest ones—the earliest story that I can remember ever hearing about

Bubba Sam was that he was trying to impress his uncle, the banker, so he'd be promoted, because he was just being treated like one of the other bookkeepers. And they had to stand up at these desks, and they stood there all day long, working on the books and what have you. And they had a error that nobody could figure out how to get the books to balance. So he spent something like six, eight weeks working at night and finally was able to solve it. And he took it in and told his uncle, "Here's the results, and, you know, this'll solve the problem." Well, he [the uncle] gave him [Sam] a ten-dollar gold piece. That wasn't what he wanted, and it just incensed him something awful. And so he took the gold piece and put it on the stove and heated it up and took it back and threw it to him [the uncle]. And he grabs it [*Gestures catching the gold piece*], you know, it burned his hands. [*Cries out as if burned*.] Because he wasn't going to let the money go away, his uncle. But this was the kind of mischievous, arrogant attitude that he [Sam] had.

One—another story was that he was apparently very good with his fists. He was not a big man—I mean, he was about my size, my height, about five-eight. But then again, five-eight was a tall man in the nineteenth century and most of the twentieth century. Well, actually, today, at five-eight, I'm a short tall man [*audience laughter*]. Technically, you know, tall men begin at five-eight now, and it used to be much lower down. But anyhow, he was a pretty good fighter, a pugilist. And a professional boxer came to town. I mean, back then, boxing was illegal. And he used to hang out at the Kimball House downtown in the bar, and, you know, this professional fighter got tired of hearing Bubba Sam brag about how good he was. He [the boxer] says, "All right, one of us is going to have to get out of town." He said, "I'll fight you till neither of us can—whichever one can't get up. But whoever loses has got to get out of town." And so they went down—because the Kimball House was not far from the railroad tracks, they found a old boxcar, and they began—they shut the doors. They locked the doors from the outside, and—you know, it was bare-knuckle. And they were to fight till neither of them could stand up or until, you know, one of them was unconscious. Well, the professional boxer was beating the brains out of Bubba Sam. Of course, Bubba Sam wasn't about to quit, particularly after he had run off at the mouth so often to everybody else. But he noticed in this old boxcar that there was a rotten plank, and in one part of it a hole was there. And so he kept edging the guy closer and closer to it until finally the boxer stepped through the planks, and he stuck [*audience laughter*]. Needless to say, you know, he is now at a disadvantage; and Bubba Sam fully took advantage of that. I mean, this was just another one of those things that's characteristic of his personality.

There was another story that is told about him that, when they first went into the Belgian block production—you know, this was in the period of the robber barons and the cartels and where you had bid-rigging, and all that just was to be expected. And so what was done was he was invited—they were going to have bids given by [sic] the city of Cincinnati to pave their streets. And all of the Belgian block production people from all over the country—and there were about six of them—most of them knew each other and were from the north, New England states, and they said, well, we'll all go together, and we'll take the bids. And they were going to cut up the bid. They sat around and talked about it. Sam knew that something was going to go on, so he'd bribed the bellboys to take the trash and bring to him out of these guys' rooms to try to figure out what was going on, and so he knew that he was going to get the short end. So everybody decided how much, and they finally got around to Sam; and Sam knew that they were planning on giving him only five percent of the total job, and he was a little incensed by that. And so when they got to him, you know, everybody'd said how much they wanted. They said, "Sam, how much do you want?" He says, "All of it." Well, they threw him out of the room with that. They figured they couldn't cooperate—work with him. Well, so, he then has to figure out who is going to put in the low—the fraudulent low bid, and it was to go to the city hall. And he finds out who that is, and he goes to the city hall early that morning and takes up all the ink blotters and puts brand-new ink blotters down there. And he goes with his mirror, and he waits, fiddling around like he's going to do a bid, and the one that he finds out is going to put the bid in—supposedly the low bid—he blots his bid papers. And Sam, after he does it, goes over there, and he uses his mirror and sees what the low bid is and undercuts the low bid. So he gets the bid for the Cincinnati—well, this—the cartel starts, "We're going to put him out of business." And so they start putting pressure on the banks, they start putting pressure on suppliers, every way they can. They're going to run him out of business. And so he is—one of the things that they were doing is they were bribing the inspectors to condemn the blocks that he's doing. He would bribe some other inspectors, and he'd take those flat cars and shift them from one street to another, same ones. His inspectors are staying bribed, and so he was getting some money. But he was having incredible problems, and finally the banks cut him off from resources. So he is down to only about a month's supply of cash in the bank to pay payroll. And so he goes down to the quarry, and he's got a buckboard with a fifty-gallon keg of beer on the back. And he gets all these Welshmen—they're all big, burly fellows, and he says--tells them the story, and he says, "Will you work for me at half wages?" Well, none of them would agree to that. He says, "All right, I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll make you a wager." He said, "I will wrestle each of you. And if I throw you, then you work for half wages until I can pay you

the full, and I'll pay you all the money that's owed. And when I call a time-out, we'll all have a round of beer." And they thought this was the funniest thing in the world. I mean, this little guy and these big, burly Welshmen, whose arms were like granite and felt like granite. Well, he was nimble, and he was quick, and he was better at Greco-Roman wrestling, and he was able to throw the first one, and he couldn't believe it. Well, before they have a chance to catch on to what was happening—and one of the rules of the game was he got to pick which one, and he was picking the biggest one each time, because he also figured that they'd be more awkward and a little muscle-bound. So he throws two of them like this, and he gets to the third one, and he picks this guy out. And they—by this time, they have to have a couple of rounds of beer, and so all of them begin to feel good. And by the time he gets to the third one, it's, "No, Mr. Sam. You don't have to throw me to get me to work for you." So he was able to get all the workmen without—by having thrown two of them in this fashion to work for him. Well, later on—years later—after he's retired, he's in the New England states, and he's visiting one of them—visiting fireman, and he visits this granite quarry. And, you know, they're talking, and the guy's talking about Sam's brother. And he assumes that it must be Sam's brother that did this throwing, because this story has spread all over among the quarrymen and owners of the quarries. And Sam insists that it's him, and the guy wouldn't believe him. He said, "Well, how can I prove it?" He said, "All right, do you have any Welshmen working for you?"

He [the quarryman] says, "Of course, I've got Welshmen working. I got--my quarry's full of them." And so he goes down there, and there's this great, big, old, grizzled Welshman with gray hair. He goes over and taps him on the shoulder. He says, "I'll wrestle you for half wages."

And the guy turns around and says, "Mr. Sam! You don't have to get me to wrestle you to get me to work at half pay." [*Audience laughter*]

So you know, he was a character. He was one of these—you know, whether these things are really true or not, they've been in the family lore. I've heard them so many times. So probably any story that you've heard that I haven't heard probably still would fit and probably describe the man. Just like any person, he had his good sides, and he had his bad sides. He was loyal to a fault to his friends and to his family. His pride had a way of misleading him, just like our pride will always do with any of us if we listen to pride versus our heart. He was human. He built this great house to show off. The irony of the whole thing was he got caught up with the boom in Florida, he borrowed a lot of second mortgages, he ended up during the Depression almost bankrupt. That Yankee brother-in-law had to bail him out, had to save him, and that was the only thing that kept him from going into the dole—going into the public, you know. He knew

more than everybody else, just like so many people of this nature. So he came to a humble end. The public didn't know it, but he himself had to come to the realization that he wasn't really larger than life, that he had feet of clay. Amen. [*Audience applause*] [*To videographer*] You said you had three hours of film? [*Audience laughter*] How much have you got left?

VIDEOGRAPHER: Uh, an hour and half [total, not left].

MR. ELDRIDGE: Oh, I didn't do too good a job. [*Audience laughter*] But I could notice their eyes glazing over.

AUDIENCE MEMBER, *off-camera*: What year he die?

MR. ELDRIDGE: He died in 1939, the year I was born. He died, I think it was April or May, a couple or six weeks roughly after I was born.

AUDIENCE MEMBER, *off-camera*: And his sister who lived here, you didn't mention her husband at all.

MR. ELDRIDGE: Yeah, I did. That's Frank Mason. That's the one that ran the business; that's the one that saved him; that's the one that went to Andover. All right, I'll tell you a little bit about Sam.

AUDIENCE MEMBER, *off-camera*: [Inaudible] relationship. Did they have a separate part of the house they lived in?

MR. ELDRIDGE: No. You had—everybody ate together. You know, they had big bedrooms. Every bedroom had a bath—I mean, it had two baths—two bedrooms per bath. [*Pointing to indicate direction*] Sam lived in this portion, and they lived in—no, they were in the middle, in the middle bedroom, and Sam was in this far wing. My parents, when they were first married, were in this wing back here. And so after he—Bubba Sam—died, they migrated forward and took up different—so that was part of it, with time, depending on where you lived in the house, you know, and who was still alive.

AUDIENCE MEMBER, *off-camera*: Then how long did you live here?

MR. ELDRIDGE: We—the house was built in 1914. My family lived here until 1960. It's only had—it only was—came out of the family to the church. So the church is the first non-family member. It went from Bubba Sam—he deeded it to my grandmother; and then she, in dividing up her estate, gave the house to my mother, and my uncle got the summer place. Any other questions? Yes.

AUDIENCE MEMBER, *off-camera*: I would like to know what this area [inaudible]--

MR. ELDRIDGE: OK, let me describe this. This is—I'm standing in the kitchen. [*Pointing*] These three windows, four windows were part of the kitchen. That was a wall that came through here. There was a bathroom by that window where the cameraman is. Those

four windows back there was the breakfast room. And you're—over here would be the back hall and back stairs. This arc here was a back porch, and through there would have been a pantry. This was a large kitchen, and the back hall had a number of china cabinets. And they also had—where the water cooler is—separating—there was a wall, but there was a built-in icebox, literally an icebox. You had a hatch or door that the iceman would come—and he came, oh, up until about '48. It was Campbell Coal Company. He would come, bring a hundred, two hundred pounds of ice and put it in that hatch, and he'd do it about every two days. And that was a series of ice compartments, or compartments that were glazed like metal, enamel metal, that would refrigerate. Now, we had a refrigerator in addition to that. After the war (World War II), when they stopped making home deliveries, they quit doing—they quit using it because it was too big a job to get ice or get a hundred-pound cake of ice.

[*Points*] The—so you had the back stairs. Over there near that door was a little room, which is where they had the telephone, and that led into the back hall. They also had a door—you had two doors that went into the—that was the dining room behind you. [*Inaudible question or comment from off-camera audience member; possibly a church member asking if the former dining room is now the church's kitchen.*] Yes, that went all the way to the bay windows. So you had a large dining room. The cabinet that's in the dining room, that probably came from [*points*] over here. But you had a long one just like it, actually two sections, that were china presses that went right along this area here. Where those two windows are was where the staircase that went down—one staircase that went down to the basement. The laundry room was right below this. There was a workroom and a tool room, there was a coal bin back underneath the four windows back there. You had the furnace room. Then you had, going down the front, you've got a small powder room, and then you've got the steps that go down into the card room next to the wine cellar. And then underneath that back room where the telephone was, you also had a connecting to get access to all through the other parts.

Now, we had—there was a range. A range was a steel or wrought-iron stove that was fired by kindling or coal. Up until about 1948 we used that. We had a cook. Needless to say, she always seemed to be glowing because of the heat. And needless to say, during the summer, it got kind of warm in there. After the war, when you could buy appliances, we got a gas stove, first time they'd had a gas stove, but before that—It was wonderful for baking, and they used to bake a lot of bread and pies and other things like that.

But I can remember many—well, let me put it another way. My family was like the English children: until they were civilized, they weren't allowed at the dinner table. And I was fed in the kitchen till I was about five or six, except on rare occasions when I was allowed to eat with

special guests, and I was permitted—Usually that—the trial area was the breakfast room [*audience laughter*]. I don't think I graduated to the dining room until I was seven, eight. But prior to that we had a butler. And the butler had—I was a very finicky eater, and to get me to eat, he told me Uncle Remus stories. I thought he was Uncle Remus [*audience laughter*]. And he would go up, and before dinner he would read and give me a new story. And he wouldn't tell me the rest of it unless I completed eating [*audience laughter*]. And he was wonderful at doing it, and very patient.

AUDIENCE MEMBER, *off-camera*: How many siblings do you have?

MR. ELDRIDGE: I have one sister, who's older—she's six years older. Needless to say, she thought it was a great impingement on her fiefdom for me to come along. And then, because I was named Frank Mason—that was her father's name—I mean, my grandfather's name—my grandmother doted on me, you know. Then I have a brother that's three-and-a-half years younger. He lives in Atlanta—or rather, in Stone Mountain. He's Thomas [inaudible—could be "Norman"] Eldridge, Jr. My sister is Leila Elizabeth [last name inaudible]. She lives in LaFayette or [*pronounces LaFayette a different way*], New Jersey, which is the mountain area of the summer resort area in western New Jersey. So she's been gone since she was eighteen.

AUDIENCE MEMBER, *off-camera*: I wonder about a question. I'm just wondering if there are any photos—photographs of, you know, the house when the Venables were alive. I go to church here, and it would be so much fun to see what it looked like, you know, when the family was actually living here.

MR. ELDRIDGE: What is the paper that is done that's for the neighborhood that uses ZIP Code?

SEVEVERAL AUDIENCE MEMBERS, *answering at once, off-camera*: 30306

MR. ELDRIDGE: They have a set of the photographs that we loaned them, and they duplicated them, and they used them at one time. If you wanted to get a set, that would be the quickest and best place to get copies of the photographs. A architectural journal—maybe was *Southern Living* or someone did a spread in the 1950s of the house, and they took about eight or ten photographs.

The video recording of Mr. Eldridge ends abruptly, as video from Stonehenge's interior is shown with explanatory text and classical music playing in the background.

END OF RECORDING

Transcribed by CS