

Oral Memoirs

of

Bette Skates

An Interview Conducted by

Austin Smith

July 14, 2010

Museum of Seminole County History

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Interview Histories

Interviewers: Austin Smith

The recordings and transcripts of the interview were processed in the offices of the Museum of Seminole County History, Sanford, Florida.

Legal Status

Scholarly use of the recording and transcript of the interview with Bette Skates is unrestricted. The interview agreement was signed on July 14, 2010.

Abstract

Oral history of Bette Skates, conducted by Austin Smith on July 14, 2010. Historian of the Holy Cross Episcopal Church in Sanford, Florida, Skates discusses the history of the church and other churches in Sanford, missionaries at Mellonville and Camp Monroe, the founding of the City of Sanford by Henry Shelton Sanford, and how the church and the city has changed over time. The interview also includes commentary from Alicia Clarke, curator of the Sanford Museum, and Grace Marie Stinecipher, historian of the First Baptist Church of Sanford.

Bette Skates

Oral History Memoir

Interviewed by Austin Smith

July 14, 2010

Sanford, Florida

0:00:00

Introduction

Skates I'll tell you what, if you would like to do this—I just live up the street, we could go to my house. I've got my printer there. Do you want pictures?

Smith Yeah. We can get those. That's something that we don't even have to get today, that's something we can get whenever you'd like.

Skates What I can do is I can copy pictures of the first and second [Holy Cross Episcopal] church and, of course, the picture of the now church for the now thing, which is interesting. The way those buildings evolved tells a lot about the financial business of Sanford too, because during the very lean years nothing was done. But each time the church was destroyed it was replaced within a couple of years. And when you consider that for 19—the first church was built in 1873, and it was destroyed in 1880 and rebuilt. I think 1882 it was consecrated again. So that would be just a couple of years. And there was no money, they couldn't even afford to hire a priest. If I go too fast, stop me.

Smith No. No problem. That's the good thing about this.

0:01:22

Fire and rebuilding the Holy Cross Episcopal Church

Skates So that was—I'm trying to think. So the rebuilt church from the storm, rebuilt in 1880, in 1923 it burned to the ground—everything that was in it. We saved a few—they saved a few things, and we have records of those things still now in the building.

Smith Do they know what 'Caused the fire?

Skates The fact—they think it was started—I'm trying to be succinct here. In the 1920—late 1800s till the 1920s—they used those buildings for a community center for the whole city of Sanford, because it was the only institution that could do that. There was no YMCA [Young Men's Christian Association] or that sort of thing. And it was for the young men of Sanford. They came there in those years—let's see 1918—it would have been the 1900s to 1920. I didn't say that right, but anyway—they had a—what did they call it? They had a moving picture machine, and they had a bowling alley. They had a library they were going to build on just before the fire. They were getting ready to build a basketball gym. I'm trying to

use the words they used but I can't remember them all, but that never happened. So when the church burned in 1923, it was a disaster for the whole city because of the way everybody used that facility. They had a moving picture theater, but they also had a[sic] galas and theatrical plays and things like that. They must have been really a hubbub for the city it was neat. So where do I want to go from here?

Smith Really just—at that time in 1923, that church that had burned down, that wasn't located at the present location?

Skates Uh huh. That's the property that General [Henry Shelton] Sanford gave—probably that whole block—but then he donated the Methodist church property to them. That's on that same block. And then there were several private homes there, but—what was I going to tell you—how the church burned.

The church was facing Park Avenue like it is now. And right behind it—where our parish hall is now—was a rectory, a two-story building for the priest and his mother. And right behind that was a parish hall, and right beyond that, on Magnolia [Avenue], was a private home. So when the priest—and the description is in the newspaper—a great description. I have copies of that too if you really want to go into detail. The priest said he awoke in the morning and he saw a bright light, and he thought the sun was coming up. And when he looked again, he realized it wasn't the sun. It was a fire. The church was on fire, or the outbuildings probably first. He got his mother out, tried to save some of his books, but he had a very extensive library in his home and lost most of it. He ran to the church and tried to save his vestments. I don't know how successful he was at that. The fire department came, but when they put the hoses on the hydrant there was no water pressure.

Smith Oh, wow.

Skates So there was nothing they could do. All the buildings burned, including the house that was back there on Magnolia too. The man who lived in the house—Alicia [Clarke], I put your papers underneath—no. Alicia, underneath—right there. I tried to put them someplace where they wouldn't...

Clarke Thank you so much. [inaudible]

Skates [laughs] Yeah. Sorry.

Where was I? Oh, um. So when they, um, couldn't get any—also the man that owned the house got his water hose out—his garden—and he tried to wet his hose down, he had no water pressure.

So after the smoke cleared and all the finger pointing started, it was determined that it was the City [of Sanford]'s fault, because of the water pressure. The mayor of the city at that time was Forrest Lake, which you've heard that name before. After many meetings—and I guess different kinds of haggling with the insurance

company and the City – they also had several attorneys in the congregation. That helps. But they had the insurance money, and I think they got something like \$30,000 from the City to replace the building. So after all of that, by 1924, they had started work on the new building. And by 1925 they had – I don't think it was consecrated, because I don't think it was paid for. I'd have to look that up, but that's the story of the fire. And of course, that just took out that whole Fourth Street side of Magnolia and Park Avenue – those blocks. Let's see, what else...

Smith And you said it got rebuilt in [19]24?

Skates '24. I think actually it was in '24 – '25.

Smith I think it's raining.

Skates Yeah. It's going to rain. It's one thing you can be sure of.

Smith And then did the church take on all those old roles as a community center and all those things again?

Skates No. They didn't, because they didn't have room at the time. They built the building that's there now, but they lost all that community that they had with the young men. We didn't have a parish house until 1926. What's there now was built in 1926. Of course, it was a matter of money, and keeping a priest too. Because with no money, that was difficult. Those were boom times though back when we got into the later '20s, as I recall. So they could finally call a priest and have one that was there. I list – I have a Holy Cross folder and I have a Historical Society folder, so I don't have that one with me. That was an interesting time, so what's there now, that takes care of that hunk of Sanford. I mean if you're going to do one hunk, there you go you've got that.

Let me see, what else could we – where could we go with that?

0:09:20

First United Methodist Church and the First Baptist Church

Smith When did the – there is Methodist church directly next door...

Skates Next door to us. It's First United Methodist Church [of Sanford].

Smith And when was that building built?

Skates It was in the '20s. I don't remember the year exactly.

The First Baptist Church [of Sanford] – Grace Marie [Stinecipher] could tell you exactly when – when the brick building – that was another very old building, but not the – the brick building is the old church, Grace Marie?

Stinecipher Yeah?

Skates When was the Baptist – when was the brick building built?

Stinecipher One time in 1914. The other time in 1920.

Skates 1914?

Stinecipher Yes. It was built in two parts.

Skates Oh, it was. I didn't know that. This is Grace Marie Stinecipher. She's the historian at First Baptist—I was going to say Holy Baptist [*laughs*]. This is Austin [Smith]. She's another former teacher.

Go head tell him about the Baptists, because we've been talking about that block. Because that's going to give him a block and he can deal with that whole block. Well, no. The two blocks. I'm sorry you're not Methodist. You're Baptist. We'll have to find a Methodist.

Stinecipher It was built under Reverend Harman who was here, and he went off—they built the front part, which was the Sunday school part.

Skates Oh. Those two side parts?

Stinecipher The front part of the building is a Sunday school and it has four Sunday school rooms in the back and it has three floors.

Skates Oh. So that's when the chapel—I mean the auditorium...

Stinecipher And then in 1920 they added on the auditorium. He [Harman] went off to war—this is 1914. It may have been finished in '15. We're not really sure. And he went off to war as a chaplain, and then came back. And then they built the other part.

Skates What did they do without a minister? Did they have somebody fill in?

Stinecipher Yeah.

Skates The next—was Reverend Brooks the next one that came?

Stinecipher No.

Skates He wasn't for a while yet.

Stinecipher He came in '29.

Skates 'Cause they had one minister there that was there for 50 years.

Stinecipher No, no, no. 33.

Skates Excuse me. You see, I better stick to what I know. [*laughs*] Didn't he live in that house by me for 50 years?

Stinecipher Yes—no.

Skates 33?

Stinecipher Yeah. I guess so.

Skates I guess I'm giving out bum information. When was that house built? Do you know?

Stinecipher It's probably in my book, but Alicia can't find it here.

Skates Grace Marie wrote a book. A real book with covers on it.

Stinecipher And I won't do another one. They keep asking me.

Skates Bring it up to date. That was – well, that house next door was built in 1923, because it was built a year before my house I think.

Stinecipher The one – our building?

Skates Your building. The rectory.

Stinecipher I'm sure it's in the book, but I can't remember.

Skates Well, I wish I'd bought that book before they got away from us. You know anybody we could borrow one from?

Stinecipher I've got some at home, but it keeps looking like she lost this one here.

Smith What's the title of your book?

Stinecipher [A] *History of First Baptist Church, Sanford Florida, 1884-1984*.

Skates Well, so it was – but you didn't have a building in [18]84?

Stinecipher One was built by the end of the – I think, by at least early 1885. A wooden building.

Skates Was it? 'Cause if Holy Cross was built in [18]73, we're only 10 years older than you.

Stinecipher You were organized in 1890?

Skates That first church was built in 1873.

0:13:31 Missionaries at Mellonville and Camp Monroe

Skates Actually, the missionaries down here on Mellonville Avenue when Mellonville was the city of Mellonville was here. That's another area that might be interesting to you.

Smith If you can talk about it that would be great.

Skates I can't talk about it. I don't know enough about Mellonville. *[laughs]* It was just a strip of buildings where the fort was, what is now called Fort Melon, but in those days it was called...

Stinecipher Monroe. Camp Monroe.

Skates Monroe. There you go. It was Camp Monroe. And you have to say it that way too, you can't say "Monroe," you have to say "Monroe." *[laughs]* But we could find information on it that won't be so bad.

Smith But Holy Cross was, in addition to being set up by [General] Sanford – also those missionaries from Mellonville that came over.

Skates Yes. The first priest there's name was Holeman, and he was the "missionary at large" is what they called him. And he also came and started the church along with General Sanford – Henry Sanford. There was another guy too. I can't think of his name right now. I'll have to look at my notes at home. I would say the city of Mellonville was probably only about two blocks long – and Alicia could probably tell you more about that than I can.

Clarke Yeah. We have a file on Mellonville. We have a lot about it. That's a little before Bette's time though. *[laughs]*

Skates Yeah. A little before my time. That was back when the Indians were still...

Clarke *[laughs]* If someone's asking you about Mellonville, it's time you'd died.

Skates *[laughs]* It's time I put the cane away and dyed my hair, huh? Oh, dear.

Um, so that was, um – but he was up and down. Those Episcopal – I'm sure the other church too, but I don't know about those. But the missionaries were sent here from places like Connecticut and New York, and places like that. When they came here they didn't know whether they were going to get shot by an Indian or eaten by an alligator, or killed by a mosquito bite, because it was a pretty wild place.

I read some of the diocesan records of the Episcopal priests and how they tried to get their little boats across Halifax River with sails on them. Of course, you can't sail very well on a river. And what they went through – the thunderstorms would come and they'd get down and pull the sail over their heads and sleep in the boat all night. Tales that you read and you think, *And they stayed? Why didn't they all just say "goodbye!"* But I guess God was stronger than the weather.

0:16:54

Henry Shelton Sanford and the founding of the City of Sanford

Skates Alright. Let's see what else – where do we want to go here? I'm trying to think if there's anything else. But I do think that Holy Cross, and because of Henry

Sanford, was instrumental in building the beginnings for Sanford. Henry Sanford also had his orange groves, and that's what helped the area become agricultural; because of his orange groves. His first orange grove was down on the lakefront over here. He called that Street Gertrude [Grove].

Clarke Once again, you're getting off in territory where we can look that up.

Skates Yeah. I'm getting out of my – when I get away from Holy Cross, I'm kind of lost. [laughs] But that was one of his first groves and then he had his big grove – and I guess the one that was really productive – was out at Belair [Grove], which was where Chase Groves [Condominium] housing development is now. That might be an interesting thing for you to – that's not an old development, but the Chase family had finally died out and they sold all their property, or it's in the process I guess of being sold. But where Henry Sanford actually put down his citrus grove – Henry Sanford didn't spend a lot of time in Sanford. He spent a lot of time writing letters telling other people how to do things, but – what else?

Clarke I'm just trying to figure out where Grace Marie's book went.

Skates Well I wish you could find it, because I'd like it...

Clarke I'd heard her mention it, and we can't figure out where it went.

0:18:34

Other churches in Sanford

Smith How would you say – the congregation, in those early days – what was the general make-up? Because obviously Sanford himself was Episcopal, but very early on you had a Catholic church in the area, and a Methodist Church in the area.

Skates Yes. And Baptist.

Smith It seems so soon off even in 18...

Skates In the 1880s-90s.

Smith There were already three or four churches in the area.

Skates But remember, this is right after the Civil War. So a lot of these people that were coming south were looking to make their fortunes. And I hesitate to call them carpetbaggers, because that's very unkind. But a lot of men – that's when [Henry B.] Plant came. That's when [Henry] Flagler came. So there were a lot of northerners coming down trying to make their fortune.

Clarke May I ask a question? 'Cause I know the early churches were in Fort Reed and Mellonville – so I know the congregation started there, but is Holy Cross the first Episcopal church?

Skates The first Episcopal church.

Clarke There wasn't one in Fort Reed or Mellonville, was there?

Skates No, but the missionaries were in Mellonville. Reverend Holeman and...

Clarke So they just didn't have a church. But before Henry Sanford arrived, there were people from the Episcopal church looking around?

Skates Right. There were missionaries.

Clarke And are any of those churches over around Enterprise or down Altamonte [Springs] earlier?

Skates Near Enterprise – there's an Episcopal church in Enterprise, and it's an original. It would be worth the drive over there to see it.

Clarke But were those earlier than over here, because I thought that this was the mother church.

Skates You know, I don't remember. It's the mother church of Central Florida.

Clarke But we don't necessarily know if it's the oldest Episcopal congregation.

Skates Well, we don't know. I don't think there was one in Fort Reed.

Clarke That's why I was asking, because the Methodists and the Presbyterians were in Fort Reed. There's older – there's a much older – the congregations that are in the big churches on Park Avenue are older than Sanford. Because they started – like our Masonic Lodge started – in Mellonville, so it's older than Sanford. But that's why I've never thought to ask you. I'd never heard about Episcopalians meeting in a house or anything else anywhere.

Skates I never heard that either, but they did meet in Mellonville.

Clarke But as far as you know the Sanfords are the ones who started. But when you were looking through Lyman Phelps letters, was there already Episcopalians drifting around looking for a church before Mrs. [Gertrude Dupuy] Sanford started it? Or was she hoping people would become Episcopalians?

Skates Yeah. Well, because so many of their friends from the North, and that's where the money came from to build the church both times, Mrs. Sanford wrote to her friends in the North...

Clarke I had never thought about that. When we were going through things – there would have already been some people that she met with and said, "Let's build a church." So we don't know if there was a minister here, or a priest or – when did they come?

Skates We know that Reverend Holeman was here...

Clarke Did he come before the church?

Skates Oh, yeah.

Clarke I never thought to ask you that. Was there a congregation before there was a building?

Skates But he was here, and so was the Bishop of Florida – made some trips with him. And I have some diocesan records of that, which I need to look this up, because I don't know that.

Clarke I just never thought about it that way. We know some of the congregations – the people – are older than the building we're looking at, or the city. So depending on what you're talking about Episcopalians.

Skates Sanford never had anything to do with Holeman and the other guy – I can't remember his name – coming here. I don't think.

Clarke I don't know. That's why I thought maybe you'd run across that in something. So you've never seen anything?

Skates No.

Clarke There was somebody in your congregation – somebody that was already here – and said to Mrs. Sanford, "We need a church." Mrs. Sanford thought, *We need a church.*

Skates The reason Lyman Phelps came, which was a little bit later than this, was because Sanford asked him to come from Connecticut, but he also – the man also was a botanist and he was an Episcopal priest.

Clarke So there might still be a little mystery as to how exactly they got started with the Episcopal congregation.

Skates Yeah. Well, now you give us something else to think about.

Clarke I know the church, but I never thought about that.

Skates I never either.

Clarke We spent all this time worrying about church number one, two, and three, but not whether or not there were already some Episcopalians or a priest here who needed a church. I always assumed they didn't have a church, they didn't have a congregation.

Skates They met in Mellonville. I do have – I have seen that line some place. But then why Sanford – I think the Sanfords wanted the – and you tell me if I'm wrong – Henry and his wife were very aristocratic.

Clarke A social thing. Yeah.

Skates I mean, they were really very important people. After being—what was he given? I want to say a legation, but he's not a legation. He was a...

Clarke A diplomat.

Skates Well, I don't see that word as often.

Clarke He was a Minister Resident. Which most people go, "What?"

Skates But he was in Belgium for many years. And when he married, he was in his 40s. So when they came here, they were used to living in luxury in this little castle-looking house.

Clarke And for some reason the church is an important thing that was supposed to be here.

Skates And that also elevated your prestige too. I'm making this up.

Clarke That's what I've assumed from what you've found is that this was more than just "Oh, we're church people." It's a social station. "We have to found a church."

Skates Yeah.

Clarke Because Episcopalians would have been the...

Skates The upper crust. Right. So that's what I think—I think that's what he was aiming at. Thinking that this was a big time, but it was not [*laughs*]. I mean, when you get here and you see the hardships and the way the people lived, he lived very differently. And I'm sure Mrs. Sanford probably didn't spend 15 minutes in Sanford if she could get a steamboat out. Do you have the Mellonville history there?

Clarke I was just curious...

Skates No. Alright. Okay. Well, I'm rambling. How are you ever going to tie this together?

Smith No, no.

Clarke If there's anything that you all talk about if you just need the founding of a church or something, something comes up, just make a note of it and we can pull the files.

Skates Alright, because I'll research some of this church business if you want to go further than this.

0:25:00

How the congregation and the community has changed over time

Smith Sure. How would you say that the congregation has changed over the years – or even that the community as a whole – has changed over the years.

Skates Well, I think that what we have at Holy Cross today is a middle-aged, and I think this is true of most large churches today – city churches especially. Because you're not going to have as many young people. Though we do have young people, as many as they probably do out at Street Luke's Lutheran Church out there by [Interstate Highway]-4, near Heathrow, or some of those other churches. But it's a stable church. We're stable.

It's a beautiful building if you – if aesthetics helps you worship, then it certainly is lovely and also the Episcopal service is very different from any other church in town. We have the Holy Eucharist every Sunday, a processional, and a beautiful choir and a fantastic organ. It's very – people say, "Is it a high church?" No. It's not. Not in Florida. It's not a high church. It's a very formal church, but comfortable. It's – that's just one person's opinion.

Smith How has – I guess the church itself changed over the years, or different things that it has had to go through over the years?

Clarke You mean the building?

Smith Whether the – well aside from having...

Skates Fires and storms.

Smith Endured fires and storms, just any particular stories about things within the church or – that would be interesting you think?

Skates Well, right now, I'm working on a memorial for the soldiers from World War II. We have, we found a large plaque with parchment inside of it – it's not a plaque. It's a picture with a parchment inside. It's beautifully illustrated. Where they got this I can't imagine. Honoring – we had 70 members from Holy Cross that were in World War II. And we – by oral tradition, all the altar furniture that we have right now was donated as a memorial to the World War II veterans. But here's the catch: we don't have it in writing. We don't know that. Nobody knows that for sure, and I'm working on that – running that one down. But I did have the plaque reframed and put acid-free paper in it and everything, so it will be better preserved, and so we're going to hang that by the pulpit. But we have a lovely – our furniture is wooden. It's really beautiful. it's really beautiful furniture.

During the wartime, everything in Sanford was booming. We had the Navy base [Naval Air Station (NAS) Sanford] out here. Did I tell you this before? I just told someone the other day. We had a – oh, I guess Dianna [Dombrowski]. There was a big boom and so we had a large congregation, a lot of the Navy families came to Holy Cross and brought their children. Then when the base closed at the end

of World War II, then when [the] Korea[n War] started up, they reactivated the base and so that's when we had another huge influx. I have pictures of our Sunday school children all lined up all the way down the sidewalk of the church—is how active everyone was. I guess in wartime people do go to church more maybe. I'm not sure [*laughs*]. So that was—so of course, we had a large congregation, then after Korea, and after they closed the base permanently. Then of course, the congregation fell off, and I think the City of Sanford went through some doldrums there for a while.

The houses in the historic district, which is between First Street and Thirteenth Street from Sanford Avenue to French Avenue—is the historic district, where a lot of those houses were really run-down, but then we got another shot in the arm coming about in the '70s-'80s, where[sic] people started—where[sic] people started buying those old houses and realizing the value in an old house, and it was—it became trendy to buy an old house and renovate it. People coming from Orlando—and they couldn't afford Winter Park—and Downtown Orlando. They were coming to Sanford where they were much more reasonable. So we had a lot of that at that time.

But Holy Cross has held its—I don't know what our membership is. I really don't. I don't even think I can guess. We have a hundred—maybe a 150—on church each Sunday, but we have many more than that, I'm sure.

That was an interesting period the '70s and the '80s. The people were coming and buying these old houses, and then we had the [Sanford] Historic Trust—now that's another interesting group that might give you some insights. I don't belong to the Trust, but they have a very active membership and they—I think they've done a lot toward getting people to repair their old homes, and of course, they set up a few little rules and regulations that nobody likes, but you know that's the way it is with that sort of thing. Um, I don't know. You'll have to ask me a question. I'm kind of...

0:31:28

Interesting church figures

Smith No problem. Are there any—would you say, big personalities, that you can think of, that have been connected with the church that maybe there are some interesting stories about?

Skates Some interesting person from the church [*laughs*]. The only interesting person I think about in Bishop Whipple. [*laughs*] But he wasn't from Florida.

Clarke What about somebody from within your memory?

Skates Well, I don't know...

Clarke You spend too much time before your memory.

Skates I'm just lost in history.

Clarke Yeah, but about things that you remember.

Skates In my life – I’m trying to – we’ve had a lot of very interesting people...

Clarke I guess the question was: who was[sic] the interesting people?

Smith Just some interesting personalities.

Clarke I – the church – I mean you’ve got the Chase family.

Skates Well, the Chase family obviously. I guess we should.

Clarke He doesn’t know that.

Skates Well, he doesn’t know that [*laughs*]. The Chase family – actually Alicia’s the history...

Clarke No. No, it’s – the thing is: from an outside observer – from when you’ve talked about in – I mean, it’s probably oversimplifying to say that they were sort of the aristocratic. But it does tend to be the Sanfords built the church, and then were they [the Chase family] – the major benefactors afterward?

Skates Well, what happened over the years was...

Clarke What was their role in the church in your lifetime? Who were the major benefactors? Or the major players in the church?

Skates I think any time anything was needed for the church, they went to the Chase family.

Clarke That’s something I always found interesting. Before your time it would have been the Sanfords, but...

Skates See, when Henry Sanford died, his wife was trying to get some money to live on, because she didn’t have much, because he was pretty free with his money. But finally his son ended up selling Chase his – Henry Sanford’s – grove, Belair, to the Chase family for \$5,000 – 500? Oh, that’s an interesting story.

Clarke That’s another story.

Skates The Chase brothers [Sydney Octavius Chase, Sr. and Joshua Coffin Chase] came from – where did they come from?

Clarke That’s another story.

Skates I’m back. I’m out of my element again.

Clarke Well, what do you know about them?

Skates The first group of Chases, then second group. I know the second group, because Julia Chase was the last one that died that was living out there at Belair. But she was just the Grand Dam. She was just lovely. Just one of those women that, when you look at her you, just know that she's not just anybody.

Clarke Mrs. Randall [Chase, Sr.].

Skates Yes. Mrs. Randall Chase, and she was a lovely lady, but—and her family—none of her children live here, so we don't have a Chase in our church. But when Julia died a few years ago, she had her son who was a priest, he did the...

Stinecipher Randall [Chase, Jr.].

Skates Randall. Yeah. See these people I'm not that familiar with them, because I haven't—wasn't there when they were there. Then she has a daughter who's also involved in the Episcopal church up—someplace up north. Was it just the two children?

Clarke No. There's three. There's Josh [Chase], Ran [Chase], and Laura [Chase]. You didn't know any of them.

Skates I didn't know any of them, no. I've met the daughter several times when she's been at church, but...

0:34:49 Skates' personal background

Clarke Who were the leaders of the altar guild and things like? What groups were you in? I don't mean to ask questions for Austin, but I think you're thinking so much in your historian hat. You're not thinking that you've been in the church...

Skates 39 years. Well, since 1969. Whatever that is.

Clarke So you didn't grow up in that church.

Skates But I didn't grow up in that church. No. I'm not a cradle Episcopalian, and you know that is not a good thing.

Clarke That is news to me. I did not know that.

Skates No. I am not.

Clarke What church did you defect from?

Skates I grew up in a Lutheran church.

Clarke Oh.

Skates I was confirmed in a Lutheran church.

Clarke Here?

Skates No. In Philadelphia, before we moved to Florida.

Clarke Oh, so that's why you know...

Skates Yeah.

Clarke So you only know about the past 39 years.

Skates Yeah. Yeah. So that's what I can – that's what I can tell you about. And the history...

Clarke So you know about 120 years ago and 39 years ago, but nothing in between.

Skates But the in-between – I'm sort of – well, actually, I was very busy I was trying to get my education and trying to raise four children, so those are lost years.

Smith No. I understand that.

Clarke But you've been living on Park Avenue...

Skates I've lived in the same house for 53 years on Park Avenue.

Clarke That's part of what I thought was interesting about Bette. She's been living downtown. You're talking about how downtown's changed. You live in basically walking distance from the church.

Skates I always thought that I would walk to church. I never have.

Clarke And you've lived down there as downtown went downhill, and came back up again. That's why I was thinking – she's lived in the same house all this time, right in the middle of downtown. You're not in the historic district though, are you?

Skates Yeah.

Clarke You are?

Skates It's to 13th Street.

Clarke So she's been in the historic district before it was there.

Skates And also Park Avenue used to be [U.S. Route] 17-92. I think I told you that before, and that was the main street of the town. I don't know what year it was switched over to French Avenue. And then after French Avenue, they moved – well, 17-92 still is French Avenue, you still have to go around. I'm sorry I have these gaps.

0:36:49

How Sanford has changed over time

Smith No problem. In your time as someone just living in the — so close to downtown — so close to the church — I don't know if you went into this a lot in the last interview, but how has the area around you, that you've seen, changed?

Skates It has, because the houses, at least — if you drive up and down those streets of the historic district, basically every house has been occupied and renovated and sold, and occupied and renovated. I mean, there's a lot of that that's gone on. It's interesting to — and I don't do it on purpose, but sometimes I find myself over on Myrtle [Street] or Elm [Avenue], which are the streets between Park and French Avenue, and I'm always kind of amazed, I think, *Oh my gosh! Somebody's fixed that house up.* They've done a lot of in filling in Sanford, which is interesting. Lots that were vacant — they built houses on those lots, and the houses look a lot like my house, or other, you know, houses that are already there. So they've done a good job. There's only one house in that district that I could show you that is not of era of the [19]20s-'30s, even '40s. It's — somebody was doing something in the '60s that it's just one of those real modernistic looking buildings.

But — it's changed, and Sanford probably right now is in a very good place I think, because they have so many of the younger crowd. I don't really think — I don't know this to be true — I don't think we have a lot of church people in this area. We have the old [All Souls] Catholic Church is right there on Ninth [Street] and Oak [Avenue], but the Catholic school is there. Now they moved the Catholic — they have services now on First Street. It's the big church. You've probably seen out on First Street — a big Spanish church. But the old church there was built early on. Not as early as Holy Cross, but early. Actually, it's a replacement too, because their first church burned. Because I know when our church burned, they gave us stuff, and when their church burned we gave them stuff, because we have some letters saying thank you for different things we gave them. But then they built the Catholic school over there, which has been a real boon to that church I think. It's at capacity, I'm sure. It only goes to seventh or eighth grade, then they have to go to Bishop Moore [Catholic High School] in Orlando. But eventually, on their property on [Florida State Road] 46, they're going to build a whole new church — I mean a whole new school and high school and everything. With the economy with the way it is, who knows when that will happen.

We have a convenience store in my neighborhood and my friends — and they're used to be two or three houses on that property — my friends will say to me, "Bette, how did you let that happen?" I'll say, "Y'all, I was busy." When you're raising a family and doing all those things — I wasn't out there standing with my picket sign saying, "Down with 7-Eleven." It was a 7-Eleven. It's not anymore. Now it's something — I don't know what. But, so now they've got two filling stations on the corner of Thirteenth Street, which used to be filling stations, and then the convenience store, which is across the street down one block from me, which is not desirable. But since I didn't get out there and picket them, I don't

know what I can do now. But that's a danger in a neighborhood of letting those types of buildings in, because that does ruin the family atmosphere of the area. Now, that's not being snobbish, I'm not saying that, because, you know – it's[sic] just doesn't belong there. If that had been a little small grocery store or something maybe – maybe, I'm not even sure about that. But once you bring that element in, then you've got a lot of trash and things. But it's not like that – I mean, it was like that at a time. Every morning, I used to go out and, on my way to school, I would go and pick up the cups, and the paper, and stuff out on my front yard, but I don't have that anymore, because they seem to be – I don't know why not, but it's just not. But that's not good for a neighborhood.

0:41:51

Crime in Sanford

Smith One thing that I've heard about Sanford – and some people say that it continues on even today – is that there is a high crime rate in the area, or at least in the past 5-10 years, there had been a much higher crime rate. And that's the picture – at least certainly as someone that lives over in Orlando and only hears about Sanford – that's the picture that's painted.

Skates Yeah. And that's, you know – let me give you my theory on that. And now I have to go back a little bit. [*phone rings*] I have a new granddaughter and I have to answer my – excuse me.

Smith No problem. I can put this on pause.

0:42:27

RECORDINGS CUTS OFF

0:42:28

Crime, migrant labor, and desegregation

Smith The crime rate in the area and your theory on that.

Skates Well, for one thing it annoys me that that's Sanford's reputation, because that's not fair. Because Orlando has its areas that are just as bad. It just doesn't seem to get as much publicity as Sanford does.

Here's my theory, Sanford – when Henry Sanford – I wonder what my doodles mean. I'll stop it. When Henry Sanford came here, this was going to be the thriving metropolis – the "Gateway to South Florida. I'm sure he envisioned all kinds of buildings and everybody coming to these stores and buying things and then moving on down south, which for a while it was like that. Of course, a lot of this has to do with fluctuations in the country's economics too. Seems like things, you know, are up or down – are up or down.

The agriculture – citrus was great, but when the citrus was frozen out in 1895 and '96 – the two back-to-back freezes – and just ruined the citrus crops. And when you've got those trees that will have to be taken out and replaced – that was after General Sanford's time anyway. I think he died in '91. So there really wasn't anything to do, so they started plowing up the fields and we have people

in this organization [Sanford Historical Society] that are great on the celery. They started planting celery. Well, so when you get “dirt crops” – I’ll call them, ‘cause I don’t know what else you would call them – when you get crops like celery and cabbage, which is what they grew a lot of those type of crops, you have to have workers. Where do you get the workers? From someplace else, because they didn’t have – well of course, General Sanford had imported his Swedish people, but they weren’t going to do that type of work. So they got a lot of blacks coming down after the Civil War, they got people that would want to do that kind of work. When that happened, it became a migrant thing. The workers work in Sanford all through the harvest season. They would go to Upstate New York to Sodus and Syracuse, and they’d have their – well kind of like – you see the pictures of the people going west. Their cars loaded down and their children – going up north to work the fields up there. So when you have all those migrant workers, they’re not getting paid much of a wage. They don’t have a decent place to live. So areas grew up around Sanford that kind of – I mean the people were poverty-stricken. They – so when you think of poverty, you think of crime as going hand-in-hand.

That’s my theory of the reason that we have that and of course, with integration – or I should say with desegregation – it takes time. You can’t say, “Okay. Fine. You can come to my school today and we’ll make you well.” It doesn’t happen that fast. I mean, they’ve got to work the same years that everybody else does. So I think a lot of that was – this is just my theory. I haven’t read this in a book. I feel bad about it, because you feel guilty, because the people who are so distressed. But then you also feel sad that the whole city is tainted with the brush of holding people down, and so they’re angry and so what are they going to do? It’s – I don’t know. Does that work [*laughs*]? I just – it’s a sad story actually, I think, and it makes me feel bad. And I think when the first child was integrated in the school where my children went to school – her father was a local dentist – a black dentist. Mother – lovely people. And this one little black girl in this whole school of white children – God bless her. She turned out to be a teacher, and she’s done very well for herself, and her mother and father were wonderful people. What she suffered, I don’t know. I’ve never talked to her, but it’d be interesting to know her story. I’d like to think that she didn’t suffer, but then – I don’t know.

So I think that when you look at the part – and also when you take and you build like these developments, these housing projects – you’re lumping all these people that are unhappy together. And you’re supposed to be taking care of the houses. Well, sometimes the city, or whoever was in charge – like right now they’re having a big brouhaha about the upkeep of some of the project homes, so you can see what you – but Orlando has the same thing. I imagine every city has the same thing. Maybe Sanford is just more noticeable, because it’s a small town. We have a large population of blacks, but for the most part – at least the people I know – they’re educated. They’re trying to improve their families just like we are. So that’s kind of a sad tale, but that’s just what I think. I’m not sure what the question was [*laughs*].

0:48:24

Events in Sanford

Smith Well, I guess then are there any other types of events, either connected to the church or just things that you've – and they've probably asked you this as well in the last interview, but any types of events – whether connected to the church or not that you experienced – that you remember as big events that stood out in the community or even for yourself?

Skates Sanford has a lovely Christmas tour of homes and Holy Cross has been on the tour many years. The people open their homes to the – this is, I think, the first week in December, which is interesting and it's nice to go through those – the old homes, the renovated homes – but it's usually Downtown Sanford in the historic district. So that's always a big thing Sanford has every – well, one Thursday a month, they have Thursday Night Alive. I have only been to two of them, because I just can't do the walking, but they have wonderful food and drinks and dancing and all kinds of things in the street downtown. It's a very nice thing. It'd be a nice place to bring a date or something on – I think it's the third Thursday. Every month they close off the streets, and I think you pay one fee – like five or seven dollars – and then you go around and taste everything.

Smith Did they do that last week?

Skates Yeah. They did that last week.

Smith Because I was down here and they had some streets closed off and I was wondering what was going on.

Skates Yeah. That's what it is. Was that the third Thursday?

Smith I don't know.

0:50:07

Closing remarks

Skates I don't know what day it is. But anyway, can you think of anything else, I can't think of anything that's too earthshaking. Nothing. We don't have any Disney-type characters running around on the loose or anything. [*laughs*]

Smith Alright.

Skates It's very nice. No – it's something to come over and take a look at.

End of Interview