

Southern Voices Oral History Project  
Florida Southern College



**Interviewee:** Richard Yates, Class of 1952

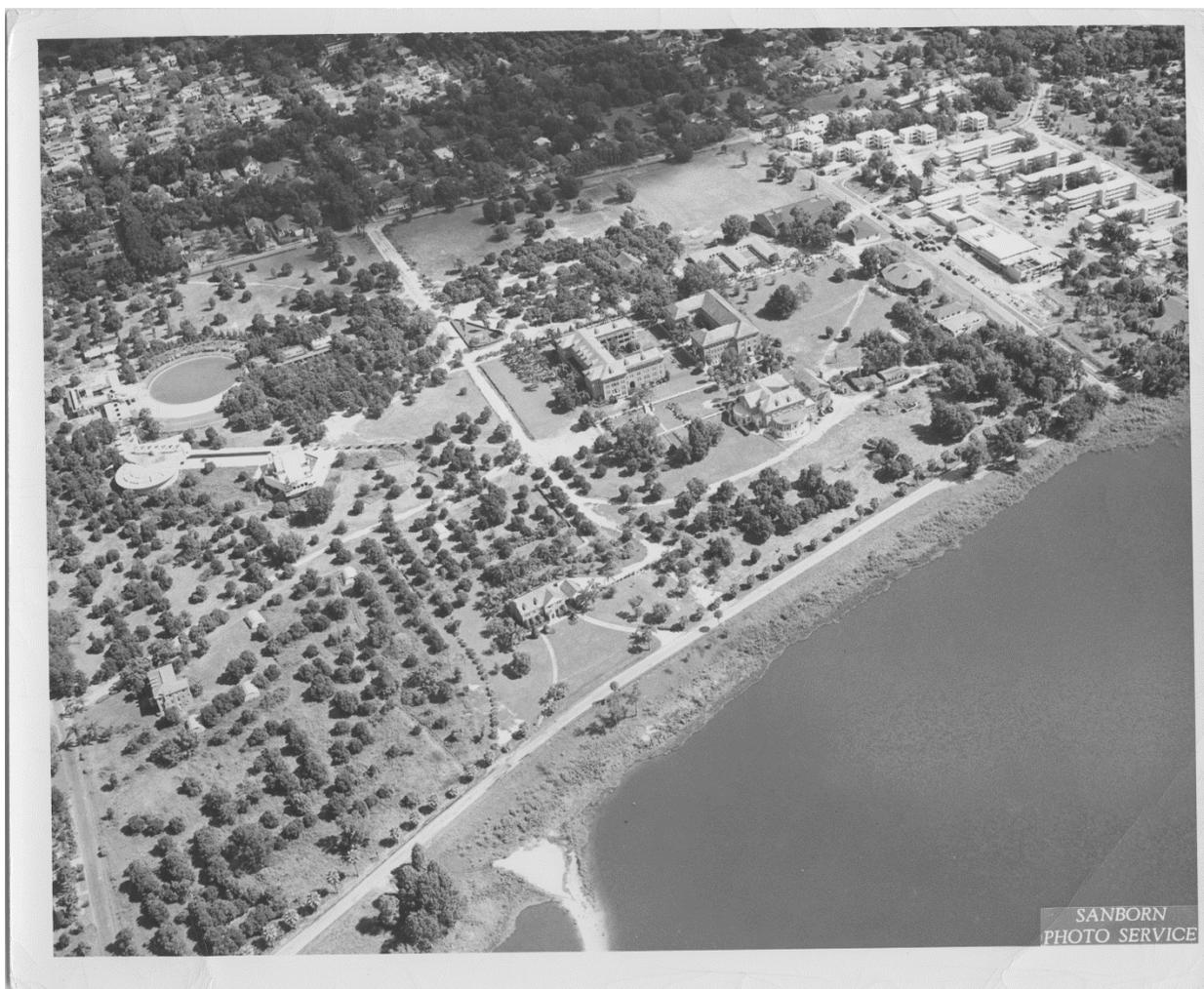
**Interviewer:** LuAnn Mims, College Archivist

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**Location:** McKay Archives Center, Florida Southern College, Lakeland, FL

**Transcription:** LuAnn Mims, April 2012

**Mims:** *Hi Mr. Yates I am so glad you were able to talk to me today and that you are here for our Founder's Weekend in 2012. You and I had been looking at aerial pictures and I wanted you to tell me a little bit about what we are looking at. [looks at aerial image of campus]*



**Yates:** This round building you were wondering about, I do remember was definitely the art building and Donna Stoddard was THE artist. I was just never in or around it much because I didn't have any interest in it. And I am pretty sure that this rectangular building was the infirmary, which I was also never in.

**Mims:** *This is Ingraham, right here?*

**Yates:** Yes.

**Mims:** *Do you remember the band shell?*

**Yates:** Yeah, the band shell was there. I don't remember ever seeing anything in it. There were no concerts or anything that I know of. The gymnasium ...

**Mims:** *I think so, there is probably another view, somewhere, yeah that's the gym.*

**Yates:** Yes, that was the gym.

**Mims:** *Jenkins? Or Gilbert?*

**Yates:** No, no Jenkins.

**Mims:** *Jenkins, okay.*

**Yates:** Yeah, Jenkins Field House and the Jackson Building over here. The old buildings.

**Mims:** *And we were talking specifically about this complex here. What did you call it?*

**Yates:** It was just the cafeteria building. And the cafeteria was considerably smaller than the current cafeteria; they have obviously enlarged it. Do you see there are in particular? It had an open breezeway, walkway through it, which is now part of the cafeteria.

The southern end of the building was a lounge that was used by the president for dignitaries. It was not open, as far as I know it was not open for anything except his, his use. And that is now part of the cafeteria. We were over there looking at it.

And below that was the "C.T." the College Terrace. Polk County was dry and out on the west on the county line was the "C.T." the Cedar Tavern. When the students talked about the "C.T." and no one ever knew which one they were talking about. That's still where that shop is now except it's all been opened up a great deal more.

**Mims:** *Like the Moc Mart, where you can buy stuff? The student store?*

**Yates:** No, across from that where there's food and a sandwich shop.

**Mims:** *Oh, now you said as a student you worked there? What was your first job?*

**Yates:** Yes, I was hired to basically keep that building clean. I did not do the interior of the cafeteria. I did all the walkways and cleaned the restrooms. That's how I learned how dirty women could be in the restrooms. And I did not do the soda shop down there either. I basically swept and dusted and so-forth.

I was hired for four hours a day and I don't remember if it was five or six days a week. And with the understanding that I had so much to do and it was up to me to get it done. If I could get it done in four hours I could quit early. If I didn't get it done in four hours I was to go right on and get it done.

And usually, I started at one and was usually through by 3:30, 4:00 o'clock. They paid me seventy-five cents an hour, which in those days basically covered my tuition and room and board.

**Mims:** *And you said that the next year you moved into another position?*

**Yates:** Then I moved into the cafeteria and worked behind the serving line. Mostly it was women who really served the plates of food and I was mostly lifting the hot pans and serving a little, talking a lot to all the students going through the line. That was VERY enjoyable.

I got to know the dietician; I suppose was her title, got to know her fairly well. And one of the workers in the cafeteria developed some serious illness; I don't remember what it was. And I went to the hospital and gave blood for her. And when I came back the dietician had pulled out a really nice steak and cooked it for me.

**Mims:** *When you were here, who was President of the College?*

**Yates:** Dr. Spivey, Ludd Spivey. And as far as I was concerned he had been president forever. He was really an external man, out fundraising; he didn't have much to do with the day-to-day operations or with students. As I told you I do remember the one party raid we had here. The girls were on the east side of Spivey [Hall] waving panties out their windows and throwing some of them down.

And it got exciting and Dr. Spivey heard about it, now this was after dark, and he heard about it. And he jumped in his Cadillac and drove up there in his pajamas. Now all this area east of Spivey was very sandy, native grass area out there and he drove-up across it and jumped out of his car. "Stop this! Stop this!" "Go back to your dorm!" "Behave yourselves!" Which, of course, had no effect at all.

And the students went over and let the air out of his tires. He just got madder, and madder and madder and finally he couldn't even talk. And he jumped in the car and stomped on the gas and went roaring away on his flat tires. Clunk, clunk, clunk ... [laughter].

**Mims:** *What dorm were you in?*

**Yates:** I was in one of the dorms on what they called the east campus, east of the cafeteria, that were built immediately after the war.

**Mims:** *What was the name of it?*

**Yates:** It didn't have any name, they were just numbers. I was in Building 2. And I had an address that was 2A-1-4 or something like that, not certain about it. They were built in anticipation of married Veterans, which never materialized, but they were built as apartments. They had a living room across the front, and then two bedrooms, yeah, those, [looking at image], two bedrooms and a bath and a little room that was supposed to be a kitchen. It had a sink and faucet in it so you could brush your teeth in there but was otherwise useless. We stored luggage in there.

**Mims:** *Did you stay in the same dorm, residence hall the whole time you were here?*

**Yates:** Uh, I started in probably the same building, but was up on the top floor. And then very quickly, I started in June, and I think even by the fall semester I had become friends with a crippled student, a polio student, from New York. And moved down, he couldn't go upstairs, so moved down to ... he and

my dear friend of mine, the three of us were very close together. We moved down there to take care of him and to live with him.

These had two students in each of the bedrooms and then somewhere from one to four out in the living room, depending on how crowded the housing was. When they had eight in them the one bathroom it was very crowded.

**Mims:** *What was your area of study?*

**Yates:** Mathematics. Dr. Reinsch was THE mathematician then. There were quite a few people on the faculty but he might have been the only one with a PhD. And very, very serious, he didn't joke, but also very concerned, very helpful. And when I graduated, I had been in secondary education with math, and did practice teaching, and when I graduated he called me in and I think I would have just graduated and become a high school teacher. And he called me in and said, "I have arranged for you to have an assistantship up in Gainesville, if you want to accept it?" "Sure, why not?" So then I went to Gainesville and got my Masters and my PhD. And have taught at university level most of my life.

**Mims:** *Where did you teach?*

**Yates:** Mostly at Purdue – Indiana. I started at the University of Houston, then moved to K-State, Kansas State, which is where my wife and I met. She was a graduate student at the time. We were there ... I was there seven years, you were there eight years. And then we moved to Indiana, there until I retired.

**Mims:** *When you were at FSC were you part of any of the Greeks organizations? Any clubs?*

**Yates:** No, not at all, no. I was ... I was invited to join one fraternity, I don't even remember their name now, but I simply didn't have the money to do anything like that. Professor Ogden, J. Gordon Ogden started a ... I don't remember what it was called. It was a group that did choral speaking. We didn't sing, we talked. I was in that and enjoyed it very much. Otherwise between working and studying I didn't have much time.

**Mims:** *Yeah, working and studying. What did you do for fun?*

**Yates:** Fun?

**Mims:** *I mean ... there was a lake right here, did you swim or ski?*

**Yates:** Yeah a few times, no I never learned to ski. We went in the lake a few times but just to go in on the shore. But to go swimming ... it was [grimaces] yeah, you know what Florida lakes are like? A foot of mud on the bottom ...

**Mims:** *... alligators ...*

**Yates:** Yep! We'd go down there and sunbathe occasionally in the spring when it was first warming up.

**Mims:** *On the docks? I have these pictures of students on the docks. Well, what brought you to Florida Southern?*

**Yates:** [laughter] In my family it was always assumed that I would go to college but I had done nothing about it. And I graduated from high school in June of '49 and very soon after that ... one Sunday noon

after church we were eating dinner and my father said, "We probably ought to think about you going off to college." And I said, "Yep." Next thought he said, "I wonder if you could start in the summer?" I said, "Sure, I don't have much to do this summer."

So he picked up the phone and called Dr. Spivey. And said, "Do you have room for one more?" and "Oh, we do, classes are starting tomorrow. Put him on a bus and I will have a student meet him at the bus station and bring him back to campus and find him a place to sleep." And the next day he can register and that was it.

**Mims:** *No tests, no come and view the campus.*

**Yates:** At that time, that was before SATs. But the state had a test very similar to SAT that all public school graduates had to take. But I don't think the College ever had results from that. It had nothing to do with my being able to come.

**Mims:** *And where were you from?*

**Yates:** West Palm Beach.

**Mims:** *West Palm. What other options was there for you to go to at the time?*

**Yates:** Oh, probably Gainesville. My brother went to Gainesville. He was five years younger. Then FSU had become co-ed, so I could have gone there, but very few boys did yet. I think it was '47 that it became co-ed.

**Mims:** *Post war years.*

**Yates:** Yes, this was '49 and it was still pretty new.

**Mims:** *Did you play any sports? Or do any intramurals when you were here?*

**Yates:** No, never had any interest in sports. I knew a lot of the Pi Kappa Alpha that were in this building back in here [pointing to aerial image]. I don't think I was ever over there in their fraternity house but I knew most of them and enjoyed being with them and chatting with them.

**Mims:** *When we were looking through your particular annual earlier there was a picture of Frank Lloyd Wright making a speech here. Do you remember hearing him talk? Or seeing him on campus at all?*

**Yates:** He came every year and they always had a reception for him in the Eleanor Searle Drawing Room, in Joseph-Reynolds. And all of the students were invited. He was reasonably gracious about talking to students but it was clear he considered himself "god." He usually gave a talk at convocation.

Once, on one of those visits I asked him why he had designed the entrance to the Roux Library [now Buckner Building] with a ceiling so low I had to stoop over to go in? And he just looked me in the eye and said, "Nobody has any business being as tall as you are." [laughter]

**Mims:** *That is a frequent question we still get asked including the Esplanades and archways.*

**Yates:** I soon learned not to bump my head on the Esplanades but you easily could.

**Mims:** *You were here when they were still actively building; there was construction of the Frank Lloyd Wright buildings going on?*

**Yates:** I watched the Ordway building going up. It was air conditioned. And as I remember the administration building was the only other building on campus that was air conditioned. I had an art class over there. It was really nice to go to that because it was really cool.

**Mims:** *The Fletcher Theater, the little theater they have over there, did they have performances there? Do you remember anything about that?*

**Yates:** I don't ever remember having performances there. But the building was only in use my last year. Other than that it was under construction. But the commencement was held in that building, on the south side of it. At that time it was just a big open space, so commencement was there.

**Mims:** *Was Polk Science built then?*

**Yates:** No, it was built after I left, but very soon after I left. The Seminar Buildings, across here, were three separate small buildings and they have gone back and filled in between them.

**Mims:** *What were some of your favorite subjects here?*

**Yates:** Oh, math, of course. And English, I was an English minor. My interest was in grammar and history of the language. The language rather than literature. Mrs. Fugitt taught English and she was marvelous. And her husband taught history and was the typical "reading from the old notes he had for 50 years."

**Mims:** *You said you kind of came here spur of the moment, was there any type of orientation or indoctrination into the campus?*

**Yates:** No, in fact I had nothing resembling an advisor. I went to the Administration Building to officially enroll. "What course are you going to take?" Well, I didn't know. And one of the women that was working in there, I suppose the admissions office said, "This is a very interesting religion course and you always need freshman English." So that's what I took.

**Mims:** *Could you remember any of the religion professors?*

**Yates:** I don't think so.

**Mims:** *There was a gentleman here that we are researching, Shirley Jackson Case. He was brought in from the University of Chicago and taught here for a few years.*

**Yates:** No, I don't recognize the name. I remember a philosophy teacher I had, but I can't remember his name. He announced at the beginning of the semester that he didn't want to be concerned about grades. And all the girls in the class would get B's and all the boys in the class would get C's and that's the way it was going to be unless you did something to convince him that those were too high. And that's the way it was. Can you imagine a professor getting by with that now days, someone would sue him?! [laughter]

**Mims:** *In the archives I have these little beanie caps that I have been told were worn by freshmen.*

**Yates:** We wore freshmen beanies.

**Mims:** *Were they given to you when you signed up? What do you remember about that?*

**Yates:** I did not wear a freshmen beanie that first summer. It was in the fall when most of the freshmen were coming in that we had beanies. They must have been given to us, I don't remember buying one. But we had to wear them. It was the sort of thing that was enforced by the upper classmen.

I don't remember when we quit wearing them, but it was some specific date. You had to wear them for the first six weeks or something like that.

**Mims:** *I have notes that freshmen were called "rats?" Do you remember that at all?*

**Yates:** No.

**Mims:** *Okay. That the upperclassmen seeing a beanie they would be able to ask you questions and you had to answer them or there would be some repercussion.*

**Yates:** They tried to be pretty bossy.

**Mims:** *I have in one of the student newspapers that Spivey got a couple of so called "rats" that didn't know the school alma mater so he made them sing it at convocation. Do you remember convos, convocations?*

**Yates:** Yes. They were not required but most of the students attended them anyway. They were not religious, they were speakers.

**Mims:** *Were they held at Pfeiffer?*

**Yates:** Yes. The girl I was going with then was a ... she had been an organ major but she developed bursitis and couldn't play, but she was still taking organ. And I spent many, many nights, evenings in that choir loft up there, sitting there and studying while she practiced on the organ. That's where I learned Bach's D minor "Tocatta und Fuge."

**Mims:** *Yes, well I am trying to think of anything else ... in looking through these pictures or just coming back on campus that makes you think of your time as a student here? Do you remember going into the library and using the library?*

**Yates:** Yes and I remember how early the girls had to be in the dorms. They could sign-out to go to the library in the evening, but then that was checked to make sure they were really there. It was something like 7:30 they had to be in the dorm during the week. Friday night and Saturday night they could stay out later, but that got them up to 11 o'clock or something like that. It wasn't late.

**Mims:** *Do you remember going to downtown Lakeland?*

**Yates:** Oh yes! We walked down there I don't know how many times.

**Mims:** *What was the big draw to the downtown?*

**Yates:** Mostly movie theaters. I remember the ceiling in there that was dark blue with sparkly lights so it looked like a nighttime sky.

**Mims:** *It's still like that, the Polk Theater.*

**Yates:** Is it? Uh-huh. And there was another theater over farther east over toward the lake, I don't remember much about it. It was the B-grade. We would occasionally go there if it was something we really wanted to see otherwise we would go to Polk. That was our main form of entertainment.

There was a pizza place on or near Ingraham, up about where, I think, 98 [Highway] comes in. And we'd walk up there to get pizza once in awhile.

**Mims:** *You did a lot of walking then?*

**Yates:** Oh yeah, no one had a car. There were a few veterans who had cars, even most of them didn't.

**Mims:** *How about a bus? Would you take a bus?*

**Yates:** I was never on a bus, just walked.

**Mims:** *And I am sure you never went too far away. Like I told you I found the Publix in the 1952 annual so I know it was open then. But it probably would have been too far to walk unless you really wanted to go to Publix.*

**Yates:** Someplace around Lake Hollingsworth, I'd say off the southeast side of it, there is a little stream that runs out of the lake. One Saturday afternoon we started out hiking up that stream to see what it was. It was like being out in the glades. You couldn't see a house or anything out there. I don't know if there were none or whether it was just hidden. Lakeland was a much smaller town then.

There were times, as you know, it got pretty cold, by West Palm Beach standards anyway, and the dorms that we were in over there had hot water heat. But Spivey would not let them set the boilers any warmer than 80 degrees. And that doesn't provide much heat. We would turn the shower on and just let it run, it would get awfully steamy in there but at least it warmed it up a little inside.

**Mims:** *That makes me think of another question. There are still a lot of citrus trees on campus, comparing today with when you were here, was there more?*

**Yates:** Oh yes, it was practically a grove then. No one was harvesting or doing anything, but we had a lot of wars using oranges and tangerines. Some would try to use grapefruits but we ruled them as too lethal. [laughter]. I was telling my wife, we never ate any citrus, but we would cut the top off and suck the juice out of it.

**Mims:** *Back when you carried a pocket knife with you and nobody arrested you.*

**Yates:** That's right! Everyone had a pocketknife.

**Mims:** *So when you graduated was the commencement at Ordway? Okay.*

**Yates:** Yes, and any processional was just within that end of the building, it processed down the aisle.

**Mims:** *Do you remember opening the Water Dome? That would have been 1949 filling the first time.*

**Yates:** No. I was here in the summer of '47 at a Methodist summer camp before Leesburg was built. We, the boys stayed in Spivey and the girls stayed in Joseph-Reynolds and the east campus hadn't been built at all then.

**Mims:** *But the Water Dome ... nothing.*

**Yates:** I don't remember the Water Dome. But in '49 just two years later, the whole east campus had been built and the Water Dome was just sitting there as just a big pond.

**Mims:** *No jets?*

**Yates:** Nothing like that. And it hadn't been concreted over then either.

**Mims:** *Do you remember any building towards the lake? Where they were going to build an amphitheater? They call that area "The Sump?" What was happening down there, do you recall?*

**Yates:** I remember The Sump, but it wasn't a building at all. Well, that was just swimming and sunbathing and there was water skiing. And there was a rowing team – crew – that practiced down there. [looking at aerial] I can tell you exactly where The Sump was. As I recall it was father east than that.

**Mims:** *Here's the president's house ... now there is a recreational pathway that goes around the lake, I don't think that was there then.*

**Yates:** No and I don't think there was any sidewalk on Hollingsworth.

**Mims:** *Do you remember any other students being impacted by Dr. Spivey. I read a lot about him trying to help students specifically if they didn't have the financial means to attend the school that he was very open to helping students.*

**Yates:** I think that is true. No so much in terms of scholarships but in terms of putting them on a work study, the sort of thing that I was doing. He did a lot of that then. He had a big crew of ... I think it was all male, maybe just because I was in it on the janitor side of it, but I don't remember if any girls were working.

**Mims:** *I have also heard stories told about if someone's father was a farmer and their child was able to be a student here in exchange for services or goods. You worked in the cafeteria do you remember anything like that? I heard that he took in a bunch of chickens once and then the cafeteria served a lot of chicken on the menu. Do you recall any stories like that?*

**Yates:** No I don't, but I would certainly believe it. It sounds like Spivey. And the cafeteria served chicken every Sunday and OH! it was good. People came from all over town to eat at the Florida Southern cafeteria.

**Mims:** *Was it fried chicken?*

**Yates:** Uh-huh, yeah. We didn't have any Thanksgiving vacation; we had the day off, the Thursday off. So many of the students were from up north and they really didn't have time to go home over three or four days, rather just stay and get out a little earlier in the spring.

So at Thanksgiving they served a real banquet too with turkey and all the trimmings. They worked hard at producing good tasting food. Students always moaned about their food but ... they're students.

**Mims:** *What about at Christmas as the holidays came around can you recall anything special events that were held on campus?*

**Yates:** No because we all just left. I do remember freshman year I had to take phys ed and a big part of that was calisthenics. And just before Christmas the coach said, "I want you to continue doing your calisthenics all the time you are gone over Christmas." And you know how much attention we paid to that! And the first day back, we spent a full hour doing strenuous calisthenics. The next day all the freshmen men were walking around, bent over their stomach muscles hurt so!

**Mims:** *Any military impact here with returning GIs, maybe when you were here it wasn't as prolific as it would have been five years earlier.*

**Yates:** There were still a lot of veterans. They had an influence. But if anything it was a maturity influence. They were good. They didn't provide leadership like wanting to be president of the class or something. They wanted to get their degree and get out into the real world. But just in terms of behavior around the dorms and so forth, they were a strong, positive influence.

**Mims:** *Well, this has been wonderful to talk to you.*

**Yates:** Kind of rambling.

**Mims:** *That is okay; we are just collecting memories, so that works. Can you think of anything else?*

**Yates:** I will tomorrow.

**Mims:** *Of, course! Thank you.*

[END]