

Music at MIT Oral History Project

Charles Yardley Chittick

Interviewed

by

Forrest Larson

January 11, 2007

**Massachusetts Institute of Technology
Lewis Music Library**

Transcribed by: University of Connecticut, Center for
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Contributors

Charles Yardley Chittick (b.1900) graduated from MIT in 1922 with a Bachelor of Science in Engineering Administration. He worked as a patent attorney until his retirement in 1985.

Forrest Larson, Library Assistant at the Lewis Music Library has attended training workshops in oral history methodology and practice at Simmons College and by the Society of American Archivists, and is a member of the Oral History Association. He is also an active composer and violist.

Interview conducted by Forrest Larson on January 11, 2007 at Pleasant View Retirement in Concord, New Hampshire. Duration of the audio recording is 1:07:51.

Music at MIT Oral History Project

The Lewis Music Library's *Music at MIT Oral History Project* was established in 1999 to document the history of music at MIT. For over 100 years, music has been a vibrant part of the culture of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. This history covers a wide variety of genres, including orchestral, chamber, and choral musical groups, as well as jazz, musical theater, popular and world music. Establishment of a formal music program in 1947 met the growing needs for professional leadership in many of the performing groups. Shortly thereafter, an academic course curriculum within the Division of Humanities was created. Over the years, the music faculty and alumni have included many distinguished performers, composers and scholars.

Through in-depth recorded audio interviews with current and retired MIT music faculty, staff, former students, and visiting artists, the Music at MIT Oral History Project is preserving this valuable legacy for the historical record. These individuals provide a wealth of information about MIT. Furthermore, their professional lives and activities are often historically important to the world at large. Audio recordings of all interviews are available in the MIT Lewis Music Library.

1. Biographical introduction (00:00)

FORREST LARSON: It's my distinct pleasure to interview Yardley Chittick, MIT Class of 1922. You were in Course Fifteen, which was Engineering Administration. And I guess it first started out as Course Three, is that correct?

YARDLEY CHITTICK: I have no recollection.

FL: Okay, that's what they say. So, your full name is Charles Yardley Chittick, but people call you Yardley. And I'm Forrest Larson. We're at the Pleasant View Retirement Home [Editor's note: correct name is Pleasant View Retirement] in Concord, New Hampshire. It's January 11th, 2007.

So there's some biographical things that I want to clear up. You were born on October 22, 1900, correct?

YC: Correct.

FL: And where were you born? Some places say Boston, and some places say in New Jersey.

YC: Newark, New Jersey.

FL: Newark, New Jersey, all right. Do you have any other siblings, brothers and sisters?

YC: I had a brother.

FL: What was his name?

YC: His name was Gervaise Squire Chittick.

FL: Cool.

YC: You might want the spelling of that. Gervaise is G-E-R-V-A-I-S-E, Gervaise Squire Chittick.

FL: All right. And your father James Chittick was in the silk mill business, right?

YC: For a time.

FL: Right, and he wrote a book called *Silk Manufacturing and its Problems*.

YC: He did.

FL: Yeah. Tell me a little bit about his—his involvement in that profession, and what he did.

YC: [cough] When my father and mother were married, shortly after the—I think it was in 1898, my father was working in the manufacturing of silk cloth. And—as I understood it he'd arrived at the point of the General Manager of the factory. And [cough] shortly after I was born, in—in, say 1902 or '03, the whole factory was sold to other people, and my father was discharged from his position as the General Manager. And of course, in those days there were no other jobs like that available, so business was a very limited specialty.

And so [clear throat] starting around 1903, '04, or '05, Father had no back-up money, and he had a very hard time for about eight or ten years maintaining his—apparent position, because he was pretty well-paid before he had been dis—discharged. And he started writing technical articles for the trade papers, which were accepted and published, but they didn't pay much. And then he—he, uh—he, you know—after about five years or so, he was able to use his [clear throat] technical knowledge of the silk business so that people would come to him for advice.

So he set himself up in New York City as a consultant in—for the technical business in the trade, not only the silk business, but the woolens and cottons, and any other clo—any

other fabrics that were being made. And—uh—that gradually took hold, so that by 1915 and from then on, he gradually became the leading consultant in the textile industry in New York City. And the lawyers, when they needed an expert witness in any litigation they might have related to textiles, they called upon my father. And by 1920 he was the leading expert on textiles in New York City. He spent a year at Columbia University teaching on the subject, and also at the YMCA in New York City. And so by the time I—uh—was in MIT and graduated, he—he was well-settled in that position.

FL: So was it with your father that you got interested in engineering and business? Is that how you got interested in that field as well?

YC: Uh—I didn't quite understand the question.

FL: Well, you're, you're—at MIT, you, you got a degree in business engineering.

YC: Yes.

FL: Did you get interested in engineering and business through your father?

YC: No.

FL: No?

YC: Well, partially, but not—uh—I didn't spend special time with him, and have him teach me anything. I just was associated with the business because my father was in it. But—uh—I—uh—personally didn't like the business very much, and, so after I graduated from MIT, my father secured me a position in a textile manufacturing plant, and I worked in a couple of those for a couple of years, to find out, or learn something about the textile business. And it also settled my mind, because at the end of those two years working in these textile plants, which I didn't like, I had to tell my father I would not join him. And through all that time I never tried to get a position elsewhere. So after—by 1924, I was penniless, so to speak, living at home all the time with my mother and father, and, where I didn't have to pay anything.

FL: [laughs]

YC: So then I started to find a position someplace that was unrelated to the textile business. And then my career changed considerably. [laughs]

FL: I hear that you had worked for a while for a golf club manufacturer? Is that correct?

YC: Yes.

FL: So that was after that, right?

YC: That was after that.

FL: Um, Do you want to tell me a little bit more—what company was that?

YC: The name of the company was the Kroydon Company, K-R-O-Y-D-O-N, Kroydon Company.

FL: So you've been a big golfer for a long time? That was a real passion of yours, right?

YC: Well, I started to play back in 1920. I was playing golf even while I was working in those textile plants, because they didn't run weekends, and I could play golf then. But that was before I joined the Kroydon Company.

FL: I see. Tell me a little bit about your mother. What was your mother's first name?

YC: Margaret.

FL: Margaret. Tell me a little bit about her, and her interests, and profession, and anything that she did.

YC: I know very, very little about her. She was interested in these—organizations relating to our history, like the Daughters of the American Revolution, and that sort of thing. And she worked with my grandmother, Mrs. Charles B. Yardley, who was one of the founders of the Federation of Women’s Clubs in New Jersey. And my mother was interested in that. She also played cards at great length; she was pretty good at bridge.

FL: Did you play cards with her much?

YC: Very little.

FL: [laughs] Was she, she was a lot better than you?

YC: Yeah.

FL: [laughs] So your wife, Ruth Gardener, tell me about her—um—her interests and profession?

YC: Well, it wasn’t Ruth Gardener. Her—my, my wife’s maiden name was—are we talking about my wife?

FL: Yeah, I had read that it was Gardener. That’s not correct.

YC: No, her name was Dorothy Breingam, B-R-E-I-N-G-A-M. Dorothy—I’ve forgotten what her middle name was; she had a middle name—but she was just Dorothy Breingam, and she was native of Newark, New Jersey. And when I was in the high school in Newark, she was in the same high school at the very same time. And after I graduated from Newark High School, which was known as Barringer, B-A-R-R-I-N-G-E-R, the Barringer High School, she also graduated at the same time. And she went on to Wellesley College for four years while I was at MIT for four years.

FL: So what did she major in at Wellesley?

YC: I don’t know.

FL: So, but you were still in the same city. That’s nice.

YC: Well, we weren’t in the same city. We were close.

FL: Yeah, close, yeah. Right.

YC: Close, right. And she must have studied something that she knew quite well, because later on in Pennsylvania she worked for a year at a girls’ school there. That was before we were married.

FL: Do you remember the name of the school that she worked for?

YC: No, I don’t.

2. Career as a patent attorney (11:17)

FL: So, in 1934 you got a Juris Doctor degree from George Washington University, right?

YC: When?

FL: Your law degree—1934, is that correct?

YC: Yes.

FL: And it was George Washington University?

YC: Yes.

FL: Yeah.

YC: In Washington, D.C.

FL: Right, right. So you spent your—most of your career as a patent attorney?

YC: Yes.

FL: And that was mostly in Boston?

YC: Um—yes, the majority of the time, but also spent quite a bit of time in New Hampshire, from about 1972 until 1985, when I finally stopped working at patents all together.

FL: Did you have a specialty, a particular area of patent law that you specialized in?

YC: It was mechanical work, not chemistry or electricity.

FL: Were there any particular cases or patents that you recall that were interesting, that we might want to know about?

YC: Well, I can think of one in particular which was a very small invention, but very successful. You want to know about that?

FL: Sure, yes! Yes.

YC: Well, back in—the twenties and—the early thirties, houses all over the United States were beginning to be heated by burning oil in a furnace in the cellar, which heated hot water, which ran the radiators throughout the houses. And to operate those furnaces in the cellar required the presence of a large tank in the cellar, which was periodically filled with oil as it was burned. [hallway noise]

And the problem of the supplying oil to the cellars of houses all over the United States was a real problem, because the customary procedure was for the basic oil supplier was to have a truck with a tank on it, and the tank would be filled, and the truck driver would drive to the house where the oil was to be sold, and then carry the operation on. He would stop his truck at the—on the street at the house, and then go to the front door, or a door, knock, and ask to see the, the cellar. Usually he just spoke to the wife, who would be the most likely person in the house at the time.

Then he went to the cellar, saw the two hundred and fifty gallon oil tank, unscrewed a cap on the top of the tank, and then with a large wooden gauge he would stick that into the tank. And that gauge was marked, so that when he pulled the gauge out of the tank, he could tell just how many gallons of oil were in the tank, and that left him the knowledge of how many more gallons could be put into the tank from his truck, which was waiting on the street. Then he went to the truck, and got out a long hose, which ran from the pump on the truck to a outlet that—on the side of the house, which outlet had a pipe that ran through the wall and into the top of the tank. So the driver knew exactly how many gallons of oil he could pump into the tank.

So then with the hose all connected from the truck to the connection on the side of the wall of the house, the driver would turn on the pump on the truck, and pump that number of gallons from his hose, and through the pipe that ran through the foundation of the house, to the two hundred and fifty gallon tank. And since he knew the gallonage that he could put in, he stopped the pump on the truck when the number of gallons had gone into the tank. And then he shut everything down, disconnected the hose from the house, went back into the

house, and put his long stick into the tank to check on whether or not the estimated gallonage had actually gone into the tank. Then he returned to the truck, and made out the bill, and left the bill for the oil. He gave that to the housekeeper or the lady of the house, and that was it.

Well, that was a very slow process, and the inventor in this case invented a device which was applied to the tank, and by means of this thing that was applied to the tank, the—oil flowing into the tank—I've gone ahead of myself here a little. The driver didn't have to go into the house to measure how much oil could be put into the tank. He just went in and inserted a small unit which was right in the vent pipe that was connected to the top of the tank. And then he connected that vent pipe at the outside with the truck, and turned on the engine on the pump, and started pumping through the hose connected to the house, and began automatically filling the tank.

But he knew from the equipment, new equipment, when to stop filling it, because the special unit was put in the vent pipe connected with the ho—with the, with the tank, and as the level in the tank came up, the air in the top of the tank when through the fill pipe, and then operated a small whistle, which could be heard all the way back to the truck on the street. When the level of the oil in the tank reached the desired height, that air going through the vent pipe—it was cut off by the rising fluid, and the whistling sound that had been going along all the time when the filling was proceeding, suddenly stopped. And that stopping of the whistle could be heard by the driver on the tank. So he immediately shut off the pump from the—on the truck that was sending oil to the tank, and the complete operation was then completed by removing the hose from the fill pipe on the outside of the house.

And the—meter on the—pump of the truck would show how many gallons had been pumped into the house, and he was able to make the complete delivery without having to go into the house at all. So he could make out the bill then, and mark on the bill the number of oils that—the amount of oil that had been pumped into the tank, and then just give it to the householder, or leave it at the door. That little instrument that went into the vent pipe just above the tank itself enabled the driver to deliver any quantity of oil in just half the time it used to take them to deliver it.

And as a result, this little unit that was put on the vent pipe in the cellar sold all over the United States. It was a very successful invention, small, but the owner of the patent was very successful with it. I was the one that had the—got the patent for them.

FL: Do you remember what year that was?

YC: Well, it went on continuously, because of improvement.

FL: The year that—?

YC: It was in the latter part of the—latter part of the thirties and forties, and then it just went on automatically.

FL: The year of the patent? Do you remember when the patent was issued?

YC: I haven't any idea. It was—I'd have to look at my records and see when they were issued.

FL: Okay, but sometime in the 1930's, probably?

YC: Well, no, it was in the thirties and forties, and then there were improvements made, which I think were patented afterwards, after I'd left the work.

3. Early musical life (22:37)

- FL: So, going back a little bit, I read that as a teenager you sang in a local church choir. Is that correct?
- YC: That's correct.
- FL: And that's where you learned to read music?
- YC: I suppose you could say that.
- FL: What kind of music did the choir sing? Was it hymns, and things like that?
- YC: The things I sung were nothing but hymns.
- FL: Uh-huh. Did the—was there an organ in the church?
- YC: Yes, there was.
- FL: Did the choir sing with the organ, and do concerts?
- YC: The organ was played by a musician who knew how to play the organ, and that was all of my connection with the pl—with the church.
- FL: I see. What other kinds of music did you hear when you were growing up? Did you listen to the radio, or play gramophone records?
- YC: Well, there was no—musical instruments when I was growing up, and up to—I can't tell you exactly, but around ten or so, there was no—record players. I can't give you any dates on when those things came in.
- FL: Uh-huh, did you, were there any musicians in the town that played? Any town bands, or things like that?
- YC: I was unacquainted with them.
- FL: Uh-huh.
- YC: There must have been plenty of them, but I had nothing to do with them.
- FL: Do you remember the first time you saw some musicians play music?
- YC: [laughs] I don't think! [laughs] I have no recollection. There was a, at the high school there was some kind of a music course there, and we had one student who was very good at the piano who used to play regularly, every morning, at the morning meeting in the, in the auditorium. I was hardly acquainted with music in those days.
- FL: I see. So tell me how you got interested in playing the mandolin?
- YC: Well, in my pocket here, in this diary of 1917, when I was starting my first year at Andover, is the entry that the—it says, and the entry was that this man's mandolin had arrived today. That was on December 1st, 1917. So one of my friends, a student in the—at Andover, living in a dormitory, living in the same dormitory that I was in, had bought a mandolin. And I didn't know how to play a mandolin, but I saw it arrive, and I made the entry in my diary that this man, a friend of mine, had, his mandolin had arrived. That was my first acquaintance with a mandolin. I didn't see it; I just knew that it had arrived. Or maybe I did see it; I've forgotten about that.

But he started to play the mandolin, and this was back in December 1917, and as I heard him play the mandolin, his mandolin, I thought, "Well, that looks like an easy thing to do! I'll get a mandolin." So I then bought my first mandolin. That was back in December or

January of '17, and the first part of '18. I have no details on just when I bought my first mandolin.

FL: And when you played at Phillips Academy there, did you play with other mandolin players? With your friend, did you play together?

YC: I didn't play at all then, because I didn't know how to play.

FL: Uh-huh.

YC: I had the mandolin, and picked away at it, but I couldn't play it.

4. Mandolin Club at MIT (27:32)

FL: Uh-huh, but you kept playing, because when you got to MIT then you played in the Mandolin Club.

YC: Gradually, over the years, I learned to play well enough to be a member of the Mandolin Club of MIT.

FL: Uh-huh. Did you—how many years at MIT did you play in the Mandolin Club?

YC: I can't answer that. It wasn't [laughs]—it was at least the last—I think it was the last two years.

FL: Yeah, that's in the yearbook, because it has you in the group photos from the last two years, and I wondered about the previous years.

YC: Yeah, I didn't even have anything to do with the Mandolin Club at MIT, I just plucked away with it back at my residence.

FL: Uh-huh. Also in the yearbook, it has a picture of you with the Banjo Club, playing tenor banjo. The tenor banjo is a little bit like the mandolin, the way it's tuned. So it's probably fairly easy to play that as well?

YC: I never had one.

FL: Ah, because there's a picture of you with the tenor banjo, and it lists you as playing tenor banjo. So that's not right, then?

YC: [laughs] Well, I've forgotten. I'd have to look at the picture, and be briefed on it. I don't have much recollection about any mandolin other than the type I had been, we used to play with.

FL: Uh-huh, well we can look at pictures of that later. We can—

YC: I'd like to know where that picture is.

FL: Yeah, it's in the MIT yearbook.

YC: Which year?

FL: For 1922, 1921 and 1922.

YC: Well, maybe I could remember something about it.

FL: Yeah, all right. So we have some more questions; we can move on here. Let's see here. There was a director of the Mandolin Club, somebody named Jame—George Lansing. Do

you remember, does that name, is that familiar to you? He was the leader of the group, the coach?

YC: I can't remember him at all.

FL: You can't remember him?

YC: No.

FL: Okay, that's fine. That's a long, long time ago.

YC: Yeah! [laughs]

FL: How often did the Mandolin Club practice?

YC: In my recollection, we would practice about once a week.

FL: Uh-huh. Do you remember where you practiced at MIT? Which building or room?

YC: It was a—one of the MIT buildings, but I can't tell you which one it was.

FL: Uh-huh. Do you remember—I know you can't remember anything about the coach's name, but do you remember the way the practices go—did he conduct with a baton, or was he there just coaching you? Did he lead you, do you remember?

YC: Well, I don't remember [laughs] the details of it.

FL: Okay.

YC: I was unfamiliar how other people did it, but he just stood in front of us, and does whatever someone conducting a group of amateurs, you might say—my recollection is very faint on that.

FL: Uh-huh. Do you remember some of the songs the group played? Any favorites that you had?

YC: No, I can't remember a single one.

FL: Uh-huh. Do you remember playing any ragtime?

YC: I didn't at that time. I didn't even know what ragtime was!

FL: Well, that was kind of new at that time.

YC: I think so.

FL: Yeah. Do you remember playing any waltzes?

YC: I didn't. I wasn't much of a musician.

FL: Uh-huh.

YC: I have no recollection of the details of it at all.

FL: Uh-huh. Do you remember if you were playing from printed sheet music, or would the members of the group make the arrangements? Do you remember that? Was it handwritten music, or was it printed music from a publisher? Do you remember that?

YC: Why, I don't know. It was sheet music of some kind, and I don't remember how it was printed, or whether it was by hand, or what it was.

FL: Okay, right. I was wondering. Do you remember if any of the members of the group made any of the arrangements for the group?

YC: No, nothing about it.

FL: You don't remember anything about that. That's fine.

YC: I don't think the members of the club had anything to do with it. It was the conductor who somehow got the music and gave it to us, and we were to play that.

FL: Okay, so he probably made some of the arrangements himself.

YC: I would guess so, yeah.

FL: Yeah, now besides the mandolins, sometimes there was a violin or a cello, or even a saxophone. Do you remember that?

YC: Well, there were other instruments who played with us.

FL: Yeah, right. Do you remember much about that?

YC: Very little. There was one fellow who played the violin pretty well who was in the same fraternity with me, and he was a fairly good violinist. And also there was a very good piano player, but he didn't play with the Mandolin Club.

FL: Uh-huh. I see a violinist listed here: William Theodore Hedland. Does that sound familiar?

YC: Bill Hedland?

FL: Yeah.

YC: The name sounds familiar, but I can't picture him.

FL: Uh-huh, but is that maybe the violinist you were talking about a minute ago, or was this somebody else?

YC: It was somebody else.

FL: I'll see if I can get that name for you.

YC: I'm not sure if this violin player in my fraternity was playing in the orchestra, for that matter. His name was Hughes, Bob—Robert Hughes.

FL: Okay.

YC: I have a feeling that he wasn't playing with the—

FL: With the Mandolin Club?

YC: With the Mandolin Club.

FL: I see. So the Mandolin Club was part of what was called the Combined Musical Clubs. You remember that? And you went on tours?

YC: Well, we went on—at Christmas time, I think one year, we—the musical clubs went on a tour as far as Chicago.

FL: That's right!

YC: And we went on railroad cars, and they took us from one acceptable town to another acceptable town.

FL: Yeah, someth—you stopped in Rochester and Cleveland, is that right? For that tour?

YC: I can't remember the details of that. I think we stopped at Newark on the way, and I know we went out as far as Chicago.

FL: Right.

YC: This was during Christmas vacation.

FL: Right.

YC: We didn't go out on any professional tours at all. These were just—I think, expenses were paid in some way or other, but the audience had to pay for their tickets.

FL: Right.

YC: But it wasn't a dollar operation at all!

FL: Right. Now this was the Mandolin Club. Did the Banjo Club go as well, and the Glee Club? Do you remember?

YC: I th—I think probably so.

FL: Yeah, that was—in the yearbook it says that sometimes after the concert there was dancing. Did the Mandolin Club play for the dancing, or was it some other dance orchestra?

YC: No, it was other orchestras.

FL: Uh-huh, was it like from the local town that you were at?

YC: I don't remember.

FL: Uh-huh. And it says that sometimes the dancing went late into the night, and like 'til two o'clock in the morning. Do you remember some of those dances?

YC: No! [both laugh] No. No.

FL: Um—Let's see. With the Mandolin Club, did you ever have any guest musicians play with you, any singers sing with you, or any special musicians? Do you remember?

YC: No.

FL: So when you traveled by train, and those were some long trips. Did you play, did the Mandolin Club play while you were riding on the train sometimes?

YC: I don't recall.

FL: Uh-huh, because it seems like on a long trip like that, you'd probably want to make some music and not just sit. I wondered about that.

YC: Well, you're inventing the trip for me!

FL: Uh-huh.

YC: I don't remember a thing about it! [both laugh]

FL: Yeah, yeah. The audiences at these, on these tours, were they—do you remember what the audiences were like? Were they MIT alumni that came to those?

YC: Well, they were the—some alumni, and also the parents of the members.

FL: Uh-huh.

YC: I remember that we made a stop in Newark, New Jersey, and my mother came to listen to that.

FL: Do you remember how well the groups played? Do you remember them sounding pretty good?

YC: Well, I don't reme—. [laughs] We weren't a first class orchestra!

FL: Uh-huh.

YC: We were just a bunch of collegians having a good time.

FL: Right.
YC: And doing the best we could, but there was no money involved.
FL: Right, but the audiences seemed to enjoy the concerts?
YC: Well, they were usually relatives of the players.

5. Other music at MIT (38:20)

FL: Uh-huh. Do you remember anything about the MIT Tech shows?
YC: No. I knew some of the members who played in the shows, but I didn't have anything to do with the shows.
FL: Right, did you ever go to the shows?
YC: Oh, regularly!
FL: Yeah. Can you--Do you have any memories of those you want to talk about?
YC: No, no.
FL: Were they real popular with the—did most of the students go to the shows?
YC: I don't know.
FL: Uh-huh, because they seemed pretty popular, but I wondered about that.
YC: I don't see how you can get—give any answer on that.
FL: Uh-huh.
YC: You might be able to find the records of the organization someplace in the files of the Institute, and I suppose the information would be there. But I have no personal recollection of the details of it.
FL: Okay, when you were at MIT, were there other concerts by professional groups? Do you remember any jazz bands, or any popular singers that came to campus to give concerts? Do you remember?
YC: No, no.
FL: Did you go to any concerts when you were at MIT?
YC: I don't remember. I probably did, but I have no recollection of what I did.
FL: Uh-huh. What about Tech—Tech night at the Pops? Did you go to that?
YC: Well, I usually went to the Pops every year. That was just ordinary procedure. Everybody went to the Pops.
FL: Uh-huh. Do you remember any particular concerts by the Pops that you enjoyed?
YC: My musical knowledge is very limited, and I can't answer any of those questions.
[construction noise]
FL: Okay, that's fine.

In the yearbook, the write-ups of the concerts by the Combined Musical Clubs, they talk about people being surprised at how well the students played? Do you remember anything about that?

YC: Well, I'm glad to know we played well! [laughs]

FL: Yeah, yeah.

YC: I have no recollection. We were all amateurs! We weren't professional players at all!

FL: Right.

YC: We were just, it was kind of a hobby with us.

FL: Right.

YC: And we didn't play for money, and the people that listened to us usually were friends or relatives, and they were glad to approve of what we were doing.

FL: Right. And you're also, it was a way of telling people that people from MIT could also be musical. Sometimes people seem to be surprised by that.

The MIT songs that you used to sing—did you sing the “Stein Song?” Do you remember the “Stein Song?”

YC: Only vaguely.

FL: Uh-huh, What—

YC: I can't seem to remember it at all.

FL: And then there was one called “Take me Back to Tech?”

YC: Yeah, I know that one well.

FL: Oh! Well maybe in a little bit, would you maybe want to play that for us?

YC: I can't play it very well, but I can sing it.

FL: Oh, cool! That would be really nice. So after you've finished MIT, I understand that you bought a saxophone, and attempted to play that. Do you have a story about that?

YC: I bought a what?

FL: A saxophone.

YC: Oh, well I didn't buy it; I was loaned it by a friend.

FL: Uh-huh.

YC: He had a saxophone, and I took it over my house, my father's house in Newark, and tried to learn to play it, and I never succeeded. Then I returned the saxophone to him.

FL: Uh-huh. Now, after you finished MIT, did you, you kept playing the mandolin for a while?

YC: Hardly at all.

FL: Uh-huh.

YC: Hardly at all, no.

FL: But you're now playing it again. When did you start playing again?

YC: Oh, I have no recollection of when I started again. It seems to me I abandoned it. I didn't play it at home, and I didn't know any other people that played mandolins. And it sort of just disappeared.

FL: Uh-huh.

YC: And after that big trip that we went on, why, things faded away, and we left the school. And I think all these continued with current students, but the graduates just faded away; they didn't have all musical groups that kept on playing as alumni. Or at least if they did, I didn't know anything about it.

FL: Uh-huh. So after you finished MIT, and when you were a lawyer, did you ever go to any concerts? Do you remember going to concerts, or any music that you liked, later on?

YC: Oh, very occasionally. I can't remember details of any of that.

FL: Uh-huh.

YC: I was not a first class musician by any means! I was a rank amateur.

FL: Uh-huh.

YC: Most of us in the musical clubs at MIT were better than that, but we were hardly professional by any stretch of the imagination.

FL: Were there any popular singers that you liked to listen to on the radio?

YC: Well the radio wasn't going in those days.

FL: Well, after MIT, though, there was some stuff on the radio. Did you ever listen to music on the radio, like in the thirties and forties?

YC: Oh, yeah, I did, yeah.

FL: Yeah. Are there any singers that you remember liking to listen to?

YC: Not particularly, no.

FL: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

YC: I'm not a musician by any means.

FL: That's okay!

YC: I'm really on the sidelines.

FL: Yeah. When you were at MIT, there was a couple music appreciation courses. Did the students ever talk about those classes? There were two courses that were taught by the *Boston Globe* music critic. Do you remember about that?

YC: No, I have no recollection.

FL: No recollection about that. I wondered. Because it was in 1922 that the first music appreciation courses were offered there.

YC: No, I had nothing to do with them.

FL: Uh-huh. Um—so you said you know how to sing “Bring me Back to Tech.” [Editor's note: correct name is “Take me Back to Tech.”]

YC: Yeah.

FL: Would you like to sing that?

YC: Is this an appropriate place and time? [laughs]

FL: I think so! I think this would be a nice way to—

YC: [clear throat] Well, I'll give it a try.

FL: Okay.

YC: [sings] "I wish that I were back again at the Tech on Boylston Street, dressed in my dinky uniform, so dapper and so neat. I was crazy after calculus; I never had enough. It was hard to be dragged away so young; it was horribly, awfully tough! Hurrah for technology, -ology, -ology, oh! Any old kind of -ology, -ology, -ology, -ology, -ology!"

Back in the days that were free from care in the -ology varsity shop, with nothing to do but analyze air in an anemometrical top. Or the differentiation of the trigonometric powers, and the constant pi that made us sigh in those happy days of ours! Take me back on a special train to that glorious Institute. I yearn for the inspiration of a technological toot! I'd shun the physical, quizzical profs and chapel and all that, but how I'd love to go again on a scientific bat! M-A-S-S-A-C-H-U-S-E-T-T-S, I-N-S-T-I-T-U-T-E, O-F-T-E, C-H-N-O-L-O-G and Y comes after G. The Massachusetts Institute of Technology!"

FL: Wow, that's great! [laughs] [applauds] I was looking at the words to that last night, and you got all the words! You got the whole song—that's great!

YC: [laughs]

FL: That's great! So I'm looking at a list of other members of the Mandolin Club, and you mentioned this violinist, Robert Hughes. I see him here.

YC: Bob Hughes, yeah.

FL: Yeah, right, this is, this would have been 1922. There's some other members; I'll just read out their names and see if any of them are familiar with you. Let's see: Lee Wingate Carroll?

YC: Carroll, Lee Carroll.

FL: Yeah.

YC: He was in the same category as I was.

FL: Uh-huh.

YC: We had a very fine piano player at our fraternity named David Minton. He didn't play in any of the school bands, but he played so well that the band that used to play in the—in the—what's the theater there on Broadway? Well, it'll come to me. David Minton, and oh God.

FL: I've got some other names here. Miguel Fernando Amezaga—does that?

YC: I don't recognize that, no.

FL: Or Henry Langdon Haltermann?

YC: No.

FL: Richard Jackson?

YC: No.

FL: How about John Keck?

YC: No.

FL: Let's try a few more here. How about George Cook?

YC: No.

FL: Or Carl Ecker?

YC: Carl Ecker—vaguely, but not much.

FL: How about Somerby Evans?

YC: No.

FL: John Grabfield?

YC: No.

FL: Or how about Albert Redway?

YC: No.

FL: Let's try a few more. Sydney Strauss?

YC: No.

FL: Let's try one more here. How about Bertrand McKittrick?

YC: No.

FL: Okay.

YC: See, I was only in on this music thing for a couple of years.

FL: Yeah, yeah.

YC: I didn't get in at the beginning, and I was only in for two years, and then never had anything more to do with it.

FL: Right, right. That's, yeah, you're in the yearbook for the last two years there, right. So is there anything else you want to talk about, what it was like playing with the Mandolin Club? Any particular stories about people in the group, or things?

YC: No, no.

FL: Was it a nice break from your hard studies? Was that a good reason that you played with the Mandolin Club?

YC: Oh, no, no, no! We just did that on the sideline, and it was for those who were interested in the little music that we played. Nobody was an expert at all!

FL: Yeah, but it was a break from your studies, though, right?

YC: Well, however you put it, it was just something we did on the side. I was lucky to get in, because I was no musician, no musician at all!

FL: Uh-huh, but you played well enough to get in, though, so that's pretty good! [both laugh]

YC: Yeah, well.

6. Other stories about Yardley's life (51:09)

FL: So, there's time in the interview, and you mentioned that you want to tell your story about Thomas Edison.

YC: Oh!

FL: So you want tell that story, about how you interviewed for a job for him?

YC: Oh, are you asking me?

FL: Yeah.

YC: I don't care much whether I tell it or not! [laughs]

FL: Yeah, sure. I think it would be fun for us to hear that.

YC: Well, after I told my father that I didn't want to be a textile consultant in New York City, then I started to hunt around for another job. And I didn't have any connections with other big companies, or people that might be likely employers, because—None of the big companies went after me when I graduated, and so I wasn't hot stuff for positions at all. We did have one member of our class who became the President of the DuPont Company, however, and he was our top hot shot on business. But anyway, I was, while I was starting to look for a job, the word had gotten around in academic circles that if you wanted a job, there was a possibility you could get a job working for the Edison Company, that Mr. Edison used to conduct tests for those people that wanted to work for him, and then with the result of the test, he might or might not offer you an opportunity to work for his factory, which was in West Orange, New Jersey, just west of Newark. So, I thought, "Well, I'll take a crack at Mr. Edison's test and see what happens."

So I went up to his office. In those days, I think I had my Model T Ford. I drove up to his factory in West Orange, New Jersey, and said that I'd heard about his giving a test, and I'd like to take it. And they thought about it, apparently. I went home and nothing happened. But then I was notified to reappear and I could take the examination. So I went back at the set time to the West Orange plant, and I took that examination at the plant. I can't remember the details of where I took it there, but at any rate, I took it, and then left. And a week or two later they called me up and asked me to come up and talk about the job, so I went back up there.

And Mr. Edison was present in this room. He was stone deaf, and he had a male secretary, an Englishman, whose name escapes me at the minute, but the tall Englishman and Mr. Edison were all standing up. And the secretary would put the question to me about this—oh, they previously told me that I had passed the examination, and they were now discussing the matter with me. So we talked about that shortly, and we didn't talk about much detail, but somehow I just learned that I'd passed the examination.

And it ended up that they were going to—they did offer me a job at the factory, working in their laboratory, but I didn't have to answer it right off, yes or no. And so I left with the, with the job there ahead of me if I wanted to go ahead with it. But right at the very same time, I got an offer of another job at work that I thought I'd like much better than being in the laboratory of Mr. Edison's plant. So I thanked Mr. Edison for the attention, and told him that I was not accepting his offer of a job to work in his laboratory. So that ended everything with Mr. Edison. That was the end of the Edison thing.

FL: So which company did you take a job with?

YC: I worked for a company that manufactured golf clubs.

FL: Right, that's one we talked about earlier.

YC: Yeah.

FL: Right, okay. Your years at MIT—are there any favorite stories you have to tell about your years at MIT, memorable professors, or anything you might want to share with us?

YC: Well, the thing that most interested me at MIT was I was a runner on the track team. That was the thing that interested me the most. So I was on the track team for, as a freshman I ran on the freshman team, and the sophomore team. And then on the junior and senior team, I was a varsity member of the track team, and in my senior year I was captain of the track team.

FL: Which events did you run?

YC: I ran what they call mid-distances, usually between three hundred yards and six hundred yards. And I was reasonably good at that.

FL: Wow!

YC: In fact, in my senior year at MIT, well I had taken up the hurdle races. I won the New England Intercollegiate low hurdle championship in 1922. The meet was held at the Worcester Polytechnic track in Worcester, and our team again won the championship for New England. We tied Boston College, which also had a good track team, and we kept the cup because the rule was: in the case of a tie, you kept the cup if you'd been the winner of the cup the previous year, which we had won in 1921. So we kept the cup through 1922, when I was the captain. That was far more interesting to me than the Mandolin Club.

FL: Uh-huh. Are there any memorable professors you had when you were at MIT? Any teachers, or professors, that you enjoyed?

YC: Well, there were—I have difficulty thinking of specific teachers.

FL: Uh-huh.

YC: What was his name? [under breath] I'd have to look at the book and tell you which were the ones I thought suited me better than most. I can't think of their names now.

FL: Is there any classmates that you want to tell about, or there's a person that you wrote your thesis with. Let me get his name here. Let's see, I wrote it down here.

YC: His name was—

FL: I wrote it down here; let me just find it here. Where did I put that? Hm. Oh, William Dickerman.

YC: Bill Dickerman, yes, I know him well. He lived in Taunton, and he was a commuter to MIT. He didn't live at the school, and he wasn't a member of a fraternity. He took the train in from Taunton to Boston, and back again at night. So I saw him only during the day, and he and I, in fact he and I wrote our senior thesis together.

FL: Right, and the name of that thesis was called *The Layout of a Small Plant for the Manufacture of Taps and Dies*. I looked at that recently. It's in the archives at MIT!

YC: Oh! [both laugh]

FL: That's quite a thesis you wrote!

YC: [laughs] Well, I was lucky at the time, because I happened to know personally one of the officers of the Greenfield Tap and Die Company, which was up in Greenfield, Massachusetts. And with that connection I was able to ask for permission to go around the Greenfield Tap and Die Company plant. So Dickerman and I were allowed to walk around there, and learn what we could about a tap and die factory, and that's how we got the information for that thesis.

FL: Right, and then there were some other factories that you toured as well. There was another one in Greenfield, and then there was a couple, I think, was it in Taunton?

YC: Taunton?

FL: Yeah.

YC: I've forgotten.

FL: Yeah, in the thesis it mentions those. I forgot the names of them.

YC: Oh.

FL: But, so, I want to thank you very much for this interview. I know you say you were just an amateur musician, but what you shared with us was really valuable, and helpful, today.

YC: Oh! [laughs]

FL: Okay?

YC: And thank you for your courtesy!

FL: Yeah, yeah, and thanks for singing the "Take Me Back to Tech." That was a great rendition! So, it's been a real honor and privilege to meet you today and talk to you.

YC: Well, I hope I'll see you again some time.

FL: That would be very nice. I would be very honored.

YC: Are you with the newspaper?

FL: No, I'm at the Music Library at MIT.

YC: Oh!

FL: Right, so this interview that we just did will be at the Music Library for other people to listen to.

YC: Oh. I wish I could think of the name of that hotel on Broadway that was so popular. It stretched for almost a block there, and they had a very good dance orchestra.

FL: Yeah. I'll see if I can—someplace they mention that. Let's see here. Hotel Somerset?

YC: Somerset?

FL: Is that it?

YC: No.

FL: How about Riverbank Hotel?

YC: No.

FL: Okay, that's the [unclear] here.

YC: Those were on Commonwealth Avenue, I think.

FL: Okay.

YC: This was a hotel—it wasn't a top-grade hotel, but it had an outstanding orchestra, and they had dancing, public dancing there. It will come to me as soon as you leave! [laughs]

FL: Did you like to dance?

YC: Well, I was—yeah, I liked to dance. Yeah. But this orchestra used to have a particular piano player who would—he periodically left the orchestra, I guess, to go to the Men's Room. And at that time they let David Minton, who was one of my fraternity brothers, come in and take this piano player's place. And so that shows how good Dave played the piano, when they let him take the place of the professional piano player who was temporarily out of the orchestra.

FL: Right, oh.

YC: And I'm trying to think of the name of the hotel. A very popular place.

FL: So over the years, there have been other MIT musicians like that, who were as good as the professionals. So—there's other people like him. That's great to hear about that.

YC: Yeah. One time after a big dance at this hotel, and Dave Minton had been playing there with—the head of the orchestra. Gosh, when I need to remember two things, and I can't do it. Well anyway, the head of the orchestra was a violin player, and a very good one, and there was a big dance there that night. And when it ended, all of those who were at the dance and performed there, of our group, came out to our fraternity house, which was out on Bay State Road. I suppose there were a dozen of us or so, men and women. And we were all in there, and not much was going on, which just happens that those things. Around two o'clock in the morning, in comes Dave Minton, the piano player, and the head of the orchestra, Louie somebody. The two of them showed up around two o'clock in the morning, and they played for us! That was the big thing of the year, to have a professional orchestra head, and our fraternity brother, the piano player, come to the fraternity house early in the morning and play for a bunch of undergraduates! [laughs]

FL: [laughs] That's great! What a special treat!

YC: I tell you, that was a big, big thing.

FL: Yeah, wow! Wow! Were they playing popular songs? Did you also dance when they were playing?

YC: There wasn't any dance floor at our fraternity house.

FL: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

YC: Hardly room.

FL: Yeah, wow. That's a great story! So, I think we'll wrap things up, and I think lunch time is coming pretty quick here, so, I'm sure you're hungry! [laughs]

YC: Well, I didn't know that I was! [laughs]

FL: [laughs] But Yardley, thank you very much for your time today. This is a real treat for us!

YC: Me too. Thank you.

FL: Okay, thank you.

[End of Interview]