

An Interview with
James Ed Reeves

at his law office in
Caruthersville, Missouri

16 September 1998

interviewed by Will Sarvis



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PREFACE

In my gathering of oral history about politics around delta Southeast Missouri, the Ward and Reeves law firm in Caruthersville has been second in legendary status only to J.V. Conran himself. James Ed Reeves makes no claim to this status, but for the first time explains some of the reasons that lie behind this reputation. To begin, both Mr. Reeves' father and uncle were interested in politics, and took an active part in campaigning and attempting to rally votes for particular candidates. Mr. Reeves continued this tradition and, for instance, acted as Tom Eagleton's Pemiscot County campaign manager during the 1968 U.S. senatorial race. Also, Roy W. Harper, once a law partner in the Ward and Reeves firm, joined J.V. Conran in delivering a substantial and crucial number of Southeast Missouri votes for Harry S. Truman during the 1940 U.S. senatorial race. Out of gratitude, Truman later made Harper a federal judge, and desired to make Conran a U.S. attorney. And finally, I suspect the Ward and Reeves law firm's participation in political matters has been strongly complemented by a remarkable degree of legal ability. The fact that Mr. Conran, a very gifted attorney himself, would rely upon the Ward and Reeves firm to handle his own legal affairs (those that time and other interests prevented him from dispensing with himself) testifies to this.

The primary focus of this interview was J.V. Conran, whose youngest daughter Sally sat in on the session. She asked Mr. Reeves a few questions herself, and generally helped facilitate the conveyance of information. So the following transcript naturally contains a wealth of description about Mr. Conran. But Mr. Reeves also discussed a great many other Southeast Missouri political history topics, and here his law firm's traditional involvement in politics really reveals itself in the breadth of knowledge displayed here. Topics of interest include identification of political leaders in the various Southeast Missouri counties, the county court's power in drawing precinct lines (illustrated by a Pemiscot gerrymandering event surrounding the 1964 Hearn-Bush primary), some observations about the judicial politics that permeate the mis-named nonpartisan court plan, and some humorous narratives relating to certain Dunklin County political topics. In fact, a great deal of highly entertaining and informative narrative characterizes this entire session.

The Ward and Reeves law firm is situated in a deceptively inconspicuous brick building on Ward Avenue in Caruthersville, just down and across the street from the county courthouse. We sat in a small conference room to conduct the session, just off a hallway decorated with historic pictures of founding law partners. During one recess in the interview, Mr. Reeves showed us some other historic photographs in his office. One depicted the area's elite of the 1930s and 1940s, including Neal Helm and others who supported Harry Truman. Another depicted a young and crestfallen Mr. Reeves about to shake hands with President Truman during one of his visits to Caruthersville. The circumstances of this latter photo are described quite delightfully in the following pages.

The interview was recorded on Sony type I (normal bias) audio cassettes, using a Marantz PMD-222 manual recorder (set on automatic recording level) and a Shure VP64 omnidirectional microphone attached to a floor stand. Audio quality is excellent.

The following transcript represents a faithful rendering of the entire oral history interview. Minor stylistic alterations -- none of factual consequence -- have been made as part of a general transcription policy. Any use of brackets [] indicates editorial insertions not found on the original audio recordings. Parentheses () are used to indicate laughter or a spoken aside evident from the speaker's intonation. Quotation marks [” “] indicate speech depicting dialogue, words highlighted for the usual special purposes (such as indicating irony). Double dashes [--] and ellipses [. . .] are also used as a stylistic method in an attempt to capture nuances of dialogue or speech patterns. Words are *italicized* when emphasized in speech. In an effort to avoid cluttering the transcript with brackets, details surrounding complete proper names are not always found in the transcript itself, though the index contains, when possible, their fullest spelling. And although substantial care has been taken to render this transcript as accurately as possible, any remaining errors are the responsibility of the editor, Will Sarvis.

WS: I'm in Caruthersville, Missouri, and with me here is Mr. Jim Ed Reeves of the famous Ward and Reeves law firm; and also Sally Conran Maxwell, who played tag with me down from East Prairie, where we just came from.

Of course, I'd like to focus quite a bit on Mr. Conran and politics, if we could, in Southeast Missouri. But, to get started, the Ward and Reeves law firm is, to my knowledge, probably the most noted law firm in Southeast Missouri, and I thought maybe you could give me some history.

JR: Well, I'm not so sure we're the most noted, but we've been in existence in Southeast Missouri for a number of years. I think the firm was founded by my uncle, Everett Reeves and Robert L. Ward back in about 1910 or 1911, when my uncle Everett Reeves came over from Fulton, Tennessee, and met Mr. R.L. Ward, Sr. They formed a partnership, and it has been continuously known as Ward and Reeves down to the present time. Among its partners were my father, and Everett's son, George K. Reeves; Everett Reeves' grandson, Eugene Reeves, and also Roy W. Harper, who was the United States district judge in St. Louis for so long. The current members are myself (I'm the senior partner) and my son, Edward Reeves, and a lawyer by the name of Gary Brewer. We practice general law here in Caruthersville and over the Southeast Missouri area. So that's a brief background. We've been in the same town, in the same county, and in same state since 1910, '11, '12 (I'm not sure of the exact date).

WS: Before I forget, could I ask you your birth date.

JR: Yes. June 6th, '27. I'm seventy-one.

WS: And where did you go to law school?

JR: University of Missouri-Columbia.

WS: Is that right?

JR: Oh yes sir. I went to undergraduate school. I graduated, got my bachelor's degree in 1948, and I'll tell you who the commencement speaker was: General Maxwell D. Taylor. Have you ever heard of General Maxwell D. Taylor?

WS: Yes sir, I have.

JR: All right. Well, he was the commencement speaker at my graduation from undergraduate. As kind of a historical side note, I had the distinction -- I don't talk about it; but I'm very proud of it -- I attended West Point as President Truman's appointee. I went there. He had appointed me as a cadet. Back in those days, fortunately, you didn't have to take any competitive exams. Otherwise (laughing) I'm sure I wouldn't have gotten the appointment. Each congressman, senator, president, and vice president were allocated a certain number of appointments. When President Truman was Vice President Truman he appointed me to West Point. I'm sorry to say I didn't last at West Point very long. I was discharged (laughs) because of a physical disability, that being flat feet. After I had run all over West Point for about three months, my arches fell. At that time, at least, West Point had very high physical standards. If there was anything wrong with you at all, out you went.

I remember very well coming back to Caruthersville. That was in the fall of 1945, which was at the time of then-President Truman (who had taken over as president upon the death of Roosevelt in, I believe, April of 1945). Truman, who had a custom of coming here to our American Legion fair each fall continued that custom for one time

after he became president. So he came to Caruthersville in 1945 in the fall. And my father was a great Legionnaire; you know, one of these all out guys, "God Bless America," (laughing) and all that. One of these flag waving guys. And he just worshipped Harry Truman. They were great friends over the years, dating back to the 1930s and on through.

But anyway, Dad just insisted on taking me down to the old Majestic Hotel here in Caruthersville where President Truman spent the night. And he just insisted that I go thank President Truman for appointing me to West Point. (laughing) I said, "Oh Dad, please don't do that. I'm embarrassed enough that I got kicked out because my feet went flat. Don't make me go down there and face the president of the United States and tell him!" He said, "Well yes you are." So he jerked me up and I went down there.

[tape meter, 50]

And on the front porch of the Majestic Hotel, I was waiting in line with everybody else. Dad grabbed me and said, "Mr. President, I want you to meet my son, Jim Ed, who you appointed to West Point. But unfortunately he didn't last very long. He got flat feet." I hung my head down and started shaking his hand. I said, "I'm sorry, Mr. President."

I felt that firm grip of his hand, and I looked up. I still remember those steely blue eyes and those round rim glasses. He looked at me. He said, "Young man? *Don't* let that bother you. They wouldn't even let me in the damn place and look what happened to me!"

(much laughter)

So anyway, that bucked me up a little bit.

WS: Do you have any idea how Mr. Truman got into the habit of coming down here?

JR: Oh, I sure do! I sure do. You're going to have to bear with me on the accuracy of my dates, because a lot of this happened when I was a child. I grew up in a politically active family; my uncle and my father, and also Roy Harper, back in the '40s. I know about it through history and listening to them. But I can't vouch that I'm completely accurate on these exact dates. But I think it was in about 1934 that Truman first ran for the United States Senate. I believe that was the time. He campaigned in Southeast Missouri and met my father and my uncle and Roy Harper, and they took a liking to each other. Both of them, basically, had similar backgrounds. My family all came from rural Tennessee. They were tobacco farmers over there. Truman was raised on a farm. They were just basically common, country folks. So they kind of hit it off. They liked each other.

The significant time, I think, when things *really* began to happen insofar as Truman's love of Southeast Missouri, was the election in 1940. That was the three way race. It was Truman. Am I correct, a fellow by the name of Milligan?

WS: The one who put Tom Pendergast in prison.

JR: Yes. That's the guy. He ran for the Senate. And I'm thinking there was one other. Maybe it was Lloyd Stark.. I'm not sure. But anyway, I think it was a three way race.

WS: I think it was Lloyd Stark.

JR: Again, this is history. I can't remember. 1940, I guess I was about thirteen years of age. At that time, Truman was sadly in the rear. He was lagging. J.V. Conran -- her father, the man the subject of your interrogation -- and Roy Harper (who, at that time, was a member of this firm and very active in politics) made a deal with a faction of the

Democratic Party in St. Louis headed by Bob Hannegan. And Bob Hannegan later became, I think, Truman's postmaster general during his first term. And what the deal was, that Southeast Missouri as represented by Roy Harper and J.V. Conran -- later I will tell you, as best as I can recall, through listening to J.V., my dad, Roy Harper and just generally being raised all my life here -- how the political system worked back then. But anyway, J.V. Conran and Roy Harper made a deal with the Hannegan group of Democrats in St. Louis, that Southeast Missouri would support the Hannegan group's choice for governor. I think it was Larry McDaniels, maybe; I'm not sure. But anyway, the St. Louis politicians were very interested in getting (I think it was) Larry McDaniels elected for governor.

[tape meter, 100]

Southeast Missouri was very interested in having Harry Truman be reelected. Because Harry Truman identified with the people down here. Harry Truman helped put through the first farm bill that allocated cotton allotments to Southeast Missouri. The deal had already been made with Jim Eastland's committee, who was then in the Senate from Mississippi, that Southeast Missouri wasn't going to get any cotton. And back when they had that first farm bill, during the Depression, that would have been a ruination for Southeast Missouri. Well, through Truman's help -- working with the people and the Democrats in Southeast Missouri -- we got a cotton allotment.

So Southeast Missouri was indebted to Harry Truman. Harry Truman *liked* Southeast Missouri; he identified with them. And so Southeast Missouri wanted Harry Truman back in as the senator. Okay.

Well, the deal was made (and there were a lot of other details I've heard, but that's kind of immaterial). But the deal went through. And lo and behold, let me tell you what happened. Truman won the election, and the majority by which he won the election was approximately the majority by which he carried Southeast Missouri. So Harry Truman being (laughing) a very intelligent man and a good politician gave Southeast Missouri the credit for reelecting him to the Senate in 1940. Out of that grew the continued good relationship the people in this area had with Harry Truman.

One guy from Caruthersville, Neal Helm, attended a meeting of the Democrats in 1940. Neal Helm's home is still here. Neal's been dead, what? Thirty years? Twenty-five years? Neal Helm was a local businessman. They had a meeting, I think, in Sikeston. And Truman was out of money. You know, they didn't have PACs back then, (laughing) and they didn't have all of this money in politics. Of course, they didn't have TV and media and all the other stuff you have to pay for now. But Neal Helm, at this meeting -- Truman was present -- got up and pledged to give Truman \$10,000 for his election campaign. Now that doesn't sound like a lot of money, but that was a *hell* of a lot of money in 1940. And Harry Truman never forgot that. And Neal Helm made good on it. He paid the \$10,000. And Truman was -- I won't say flat broke -- but he desperately needed money. He was trailing. He needed the money. And after that, every time Neal Helm went to Washington, the president's limousine (laughing) met him at the airport. And he spent the night at the White House free of charge. He didn't have to pay to sleep at the Lincoln bedroom at the presidential mansion.

(much laughter)

So that's some interesting background. But J.V. Conran, her dad, really was the powerhorse that engineered that deal. Of course, Truman has been criticized about being too loyal to his old friends, but he was loyal, absolutely, and he never forgot it. Until the very end, J.V. Conran and Roy Harper were just tops with President Truman.

Absolutely.

WS: Did you have any idea how Mr. Conran and Judge Harper got to be friends?

JR: Yes! J.V. Conran, as long as I've known him or heard of him, was interested in politics. That was his life, really. He was a well educated guy. He was a *good* lawyer, a great prosecuting attorney -- a *great* man -- but his interest in life was politics.

[tape meter, 150]

He met Roy Harper shortly after Roy Harper joined the firm. And Roy Harper became very interested in politics. And, of course, New Madrid and Pemiscot County are adjoining counties, so they got to know each other. They had similar personalities. They were kind of individual men. They spoke their mind. But they liked each other. Neither one of them liked weak individuals. They liked somebody that would speak up and wouldn't back down. After all the hell raising, why (laughing) they'd put their arm around you and, "Fine. That's what we're going to do."

So they hit it off and became great friends, starting back in the 1930s. And that continued on up until J.V.'s death. Judge Harper died about three or four years ago. He's buried here at Steele. He was a federal judge in St. Louis for years and years. Harper and Conran were the two Democrat stalwarts here in Southeast Missouri, back in that day and age.

Now let me explain to you how politics generally ran down here during those years. First of all, Southeast Missouri had a heck of a lot more people than we do now. Secondly, we didn't have the mass media, the newspapers, and most of the people in this area were -- and, to some extent, still are -- not very well educated. And I'm not speaking down about them. It's just a fact of life. They're good people, they're hard working people, but they didn't have much education, and they didn't know hardly anything about state or national politics. It's just a simple fact of life. They were poverty stricken. We were still coming out of the Depression in this area. They lived, basically, on farms. They got their food and clothing at general stores; these little crossroads stores at these little communities. And they really relied on the people who owned the farms that they farmed, and the store keeper who would give them credit to draw for the essentials of life until they could get a paycheck, to advise them about how they should vote. There wasn't any vote buying. It was just the fact, "Well, I don't know. What do you say?" And they'd print up sample ballots and hand them out. And they'd go into the polls and say, "Here's the way I want to vote." And it would already be marked up, so the election judge would just mark it and vote it. It wasn't a question of *buying* votes or coercion for anybody to do something -- it was just the fact that they took their leadership or their knowledge from the leaders in the community.

Now, in the case of New Madrid, in *my* opinion, the reason J.V. Conran was so successful -- the main thing was what his enemies called a machine, but what others called good political organization. And simply this: contrary to J.V. Conran's reputation, J.V. Conran was no dictator. What J.V. Conran did -- and it was a wonderful system --

J.V. Conran had a group; twelve, fifteen (the number varied from year to year) of leaders, farm owners, store operators, the people who are at the ground level, the people who are dealing with the great majority of the voters in New Madrid County.

[tape meter, 200]

They would have a meeting, a fish fry. Remember some of those fish fries? They would have a fish fry sometime in May or June to decide who they were going to support for the various county offices. J.V. Conran laid his hands off of it. He said, "No, I'm not supporting anybody. We're going to make that selection at this meeting." And at the meeting, this fifteen or twenty -- it varied from year to year, but it pretty well represented the people who could produce the majority vote that it took to carry an issue -- would vote. But the understanding is, you're going to be bound by the majority. Now don't you go off here and say, "Well, I disagree. I'm going to do this." The deal was, if you're going to participate in this meeting, you're going to be bound by the results. And J.V. never tried to influence anybody. He would start it out and reiterate it. "This is up to you all." And they would select who they wanted for the county offices.

Then, J.V. Conran -- who made a lifetime career in dealing in state and national politics -- he took the lead in dealing with the state political scene as well as the national political scene, and for a very simple reason. Again, these local leaders knew nothing about who ought to be governor or United States senator, and they weren't interested. Back in those days that was just remote. What they were interested in was, "Who's going to be the sheriff? Who's going to be the tax collector?" Those were the important issues to those people back then, and they didn't give a damn about the governor. You know;

hell, the governor couldn't do anything for them. And the same as far as United States senators were concerned. So that system operated in New Madrid County for years and years and years. Of course, after J.V.'s death it slowly disintegrated, because there wasn't anybody who could replace J.V. Conran.

WS: When you mention this group, this fifteen to twenty people, would that all be New Madrid County landowners.

JR: Yes.

WS: Not from the neighboring counties.

JR: No. It was just a New Madrid County operation. We didn't have it in this county. When that group met, that, in effect, was the election. When J.V. Conran picked somebody to be for in the governor's race, the U.S. Senate race, or any of those other state or federal offices, you could pretty well count on a landslide vote coming out of New Madrid County. And back in those days they had lots more votes than they've got now. Of course, people on the other side of the spectrum thought that was just horrible. You know, it was terrible, rotten politics; and "That terrible machine," and all of this stuff. And you see vintages of that attitude in the Kansas City and St. Louis newspapers. Every time there was a little dribble in a newspaper about something happening in Pemiscot, New Madrid, or Mississippi County, "Oh my God!" (laughing) "Terrible Bootheel!"

[tape meter, 250]

But J.V. Conran, when he gave his word, he kept it. And he delivered the votes, so you could sure county on New Madrid County coming out with a heck of a majority for whoever he said, for those offices.

WS: You mentioned the group being focused on county candidates, like clerk or the sheriff.
What about sort of an intermediate level, like state senator or state representative?

JR: J.V. handled all that.

WS: Anything above the county level.

JR: Anything above the county -- because the people in the county are just interested in the county. Hell, they didn't go to Jefferson City. They didn't give a damn. Of course, today is a different environment. You've got to understand -- I'm sure you do -- that today obviously nothing like that could work. Because we have direct bombardment all the time from the national media. But in those days we didn't have that. Hell, no one hardly even took a newspaper, especially a St. Louis newspaper. So, they got their information and relied on J.V. primarily.

WS: I found one old newspaper account, and I'd like to get your reaction to this. When Senator Lawrence died and Senator Patterson.

JR: He was from Caruthersville, Senator Patterson.

WS: Right. And they claimed Mr. Conran chose Senator Patterson, J.F. Patterson, and therefore "He was going to be the senator, because Mr. Conran had chosen him."
(laughs)

JR: Well, I don't doubt the accuracy of the article, but I don't think it was quite that simple. Before J.V. Conran did anything he would consult the other people. Don't misunderstand me. He spoke for New Madrid County, but where New Madrid County didn't have the say, he was very wise and judicious. He talked to the other leaders. For example, in the case of a state senator. The state senator back then probably represented six or seven

counties. J.V. Conran would never make an announcement for New Madrid County, "I have selected the state senator for six or seven counties," whatever the senatorial district was back in those days. Would J.V. Conran would *do*, he would talk to the leaders in those counties and build a consensus. And after he had built that consensus, only then would he announce who he was for. But before he spoke, he wanted to make sure his guns were loaded. In other words, he didn't go off half cocked. (laughing) When he said something, you'd better believe it. Now somebody might not do it, or try to undo it, but at the time he said it, why, he had it all arranged. And I don't mean that in a derogatory sense. He was just a good politician who didn't get his way all the time. Many a time he'd be overruled. Well, that's just part of the game. I'm not saying that he got his way every time. But he would build a consensus around and try to get everybody together.

[tape meter, 300]

He'd deal with his political adversaries as much as his friends. He was one of these guys who had the good judgement to be a consensus builder.

WS: He knew how the system worked.

JR: He knew how the system worked, and that's what he loved. (laughing) He'd do it night and day. Didn't he Sally?

SM: Yes.

JR: And he kept in touch with them -- not [just] during elections -- I mean all the time. If he could do them a favor, why sure, he'd do it. And vice versa. That's the way it worked. It's kind of like, I guess in some sense, the famous Democratic organizations in the big cities. They take care of their group all year long between elections, not just when there's

a campaign or an election going on. They stayed in touch and communicated with each other. And J.V. didn't get his way all the time.

WS: Well one of the things I'm trying to do is identify the leaders in the various Southeast Missouri counties that would have been the people he consulted with in these kinds of things.

JR: Okay. Roy Harper from here. Of course, himself (laughs) in New Madrid County. In Scott County, where Sikeston is, the guy is dead, but he was the editor of the Sikeston *Standard*. His name was Charlie Blanton. Charlie died ten or twelve years ago. But he was the editor of the Sikeston *Standard* in Sikeston. Poplar Bluff? Butler County?

WS: Would that be Mr. Steward? Lefty Steward?

JR: Yes. Thank you. Lefty Steward. And Dunklin County, I don't think he had any one man in Dunklin County. I know he dealt with Flake McHaney, who is now a retired circuit judge, and others over there. Dunklin County is always kind of split up among different groups. But Lefty Steward from Butler County. I can't recall anybody from Mississippi County. Of course, later, with Warren Hearnes as governor it was Warren Hearnes. But we're talking about long before Warren Hearnes became governor. But I can't recall anybody.

SM: What about Billy Love? Was he politics?

JR: I'm not sure. That name sounds familiar, Sally, but I just can't . . .

SM: Because he was Charleston.

JR: Yes. Could be. I'm not saying that he wasn't; I just can't recall who it was in Charleston.

[end of side 1, tape I; tape meter, 350]

WS: When I get up around Mississippi County, some of the people they identify as being prominent leaders -- and I don't know if they were that involved in politics -- but the families; the Story family and the Bryant family? Maybe W.C. Bryant?

JR: I can't say whether J.V. Conran ever had any dealings with them. I know in a congressional race that he was interested in, one of the local, when a local man from Caruthersville ran for Congress -- you remember? '69? Hot Rogers?

SM: Yes. I remember him.

JR: J.V. dealt with the Rolwing family in Charleston, but that's in later years. That's up in 1968 or '69, which is a long time ago, but for the time reference we're talking it was kind of late in the political career of J.V. J.V. died in 1970. I can't say that Rolwing was the point man for Mississippi County in prior years. But I remember one of the Rolwings ran for Congress. A local man, B.F. Rogers, who was the mayor of Caruthersville, ran. And Bill Burlison (who you may remember), who was from Pemiscot County but had moved to Cape Girardeau -- "Breakfast Bill" as he was (laughing) known as, in some quarters -- was the prosecuting attorney of Cape Girardeau County. Those three ran, and of course Burlison got the nod.

You've got to give Burlison credit. He won by sheer force of going door to door shaking hands with everybody, and then calling them up on the telephone afterwards. He did a masterful job. It took him about two years. He got criticized. Being the prosecuting attorney of Cape County, he didn't try any cases (laughing) for those two years, but he politicked and won.

I got to observe first hand how J.V. operated in 1969. Of course he was in kind of declining health then. It was the year before his death. But he had pretty well put together a coalition that would have elected B.F. Rogers as the U.S. representative to succeed the fellow from Dunklin County, Paul C. Jones, who was the ex-state highway commissioner who ran right after Orville Zimmerman died. But the deal that J.V. had worked out among the leaders was that Rolwing was going to pull out, and then all the Rolwing support was going to go for Rogers. And Rolwing did pull out. But, like so often happens in politics, I guess from J.V.'s point of view and my point of view, you can say J.V. was double crossed. He got out, and then he got back in. And when he got back in, that split the vote and broke up the coalition that J.V. had put together. As a result, neither Rolwing nor Rogers won, but the "dark horse" Bill Burlison was the successful nominee and won the election.

WS: Going back to the county level leaders, I'll bet you remember the so-called Briney-Lawrence-Prather "machine."

JR: Oh yes! That's Stoddard County. Oh gosh, yes. Kip Briney, Yewell Lawrence. Oh yes. I remember. I had no dealings with them, but I remember the name. That was back when I was still real young, but I heard about them from Roy Harper and my dad. They were quite a triumvirate. But I have no personal knowledge of them. I knew Yewell Lawrence and I knew Kip Briney. Kip Briney's grandson is prosecuting attorney up there at Bloomfield now, and he's doing a real good job.

I remember a story that they tell on Kip Briney (laughing) and I don't know if it's true or not. They said Kip Briney said that he was looking forward to having the perfect

estate. And someone asked him, "Kip, what is the perfect estate?" And Kip said, "That's the estate where the lawyers get all the property." (laughing) I don't know whether it's a true story or not, but at least that was the story. Old Kip Briney.

[tape meter, 50]

But I can't attest to the truthness of it. I'm just repeating something that I have no personal knowledge of.

WS: Would you have any idea if those gentlemen would have been allies of Mr. Conran?

JR: Oh yes, I think they would be. Yes. I think so. They were contemporaries of J.V. Conran. They were, in many respects, like him in personality. I think they would have been among J.V. Conran's people that he would count on from time to time. But J.V. never really had a unanimous coalition of all of Southeast Missouri. He got his way some of the time, and some of the time he *didn't* get his way. But since he was so good at it, and since he made, really, a full career out of it; why, he was more successful than most. If you exert all your time, energies, and talent to one thing, why, you're going to be more successful than a guy who does it on a seasonal basis.

And I'm not suggesting that J.V. Conran was not a competent lawyer. He was a brilliant lawyer, and I'm going to tell you about a lawsuit that he tried before a Republican judge in Poplar Bluff, who later became a federal judge appointed by Nixon (not Nixon; yes, maybe it was Nixon) to the federal bench. Judge Randolph Weber. Have you ever heard of Randolph Weber? Well, anyway, Judge Randolph Weber was a Republican judge over there at Poplar Bluff.

J.V. Conran had a lawsuit in which he was personally involved, and it involved the Girvin lands. This was a boundary line dispute over where the boundary line between Pemiscot and New Madrid County is. And it arose because in the legislation defining the boundaries of Pemiscot and New Madrid County, they didn't use a surveyor's description. They just [wrote], "The major's mill race." I remember that term. And then you go to somebody else's something. You know. And it's all gone and no one can remember where that was or what it was or anything now. Of course, that legislation was passed over a hundred years ago. But basically the issue was over where those county boundary lines were.

And this was a tremendously complicated lawsuit. It involved maps from the Corps of Engineers, all kinds of deeds and records and this, that, and the other. And J.V. Conran tried that lawsuit by himself. It took several weeks to try; a voluminous transcript. The case is reported in the Supreme Court of Missouri. You can read about it. It's *Girvin versus Conran* or *Conran versus Girvin*, one or the other. (I'm sure you've got access to the law library over there).^{*} J.V. Conran tried that case without taking a note, without writing anything down; all of it in his head. And Judge Weber commented after that was over that he had never seen that done by anybody (laughs) in his life. You know, most of us (laughing) lawyers are shuffling these papers all the time, writing here, writing this and that. No, not J.V. He just reared back in that chair and away he went. (laughs) He was brilliant. That guy was really a brilliant man. Had he devoted his energies to the active practice of law, why, there's no doubt in my mind he would have

^{*} This case, indeed quite long and detailed, may be found in *Conran v. Girvin*, 341 SW2d 75.

been the best lawyer in the state of Missouri. At the time, I'll tell you one thing, in my opinion he *was* the best politician in the state of Missouri. The one man that could get more done, back in his day.

WS: I'll bet he was pretty charismatic in the courtroom.

JR: Oh he was! Oh, he could make a speech. I don't think I ought to tell this story. Can we turn that off just a second?

WS: Sure.

[tape recorder momentarily off]

SM: I've seen him do that, too.

JR: He could get pretty forceful. (laughs)

[tape meter, 100]

WS: A while ago you mentioned these cotton allotments. I think for a while that created some competition among the Southeast Missouri counties.

JR: Yes. But the competition I'm talking about is for Southeast Missouri to have *any* allotments. In other words, the Southern states had agreed among themselves: Mississippi, Arkansas, Louisiana, maybe Georgia and [Alabama] -- their senators had all gotten together and worked out among themselves how much each state was going to get, of the original cotton allotment. Missouri got none. And it's only the Bootheel of Missouri that grows cotton. In other words, cotton is not a major crop in Missouri. It's not now. It wasn't then. But it was life and death for the people down here in the Bootheel.

Back in those days, hell, we didn't even know what a soybean was. Soybeans weren't grown here until starting about 1946 and '48. They used to call them peas. But they were not grown. Nobody had ever heard of the soybean until the late 1940s. Our crop was cotton. And if you prohibited Southeast Missouri from growing cotton, that is a major disaster. Under the agricultural bill they prohibited growing of cotton unless you had a government allotment. So Truman worked with Roy Harper and J.V. and other people in Southeast Missouri to get Southeast Missouri a part of that allotment. If they hadn't gotten the job done, well hell, we *still* wouldn't be growing cotton; unless they'd gotten something through Congress to change it.

WS: So once they got that allotment that was kind of the climax of that topic?

JR: Yes.

WS: And afterwards--

JR: There were arguments, then, among the counties, "How are you going to split it up among the counties. But the big battle was getting Missouri *any* cotton. It wasn't something that you would think a United States senator would be interested in. But Truman went to bat. And I think Truman, in background, was kind of like this senator from Mississippi, Eastland. They were country folks. I don't mean that as a derogatory term. They didn't go around with their nose in the air. They were just common, everyday folks that had come up not necessarily the "hard way," but out on the farm. They just did not lead a privileged life. They were very outspoken and they said what they meant, and they stood by their word.

WS: Obviously the cotton is a cohesive aspect of Southeast Missouri. I wonder if the Little River Drainage District also kind of functioned to unify the counties that were involved with that; when it came to overlapping with politics?

JR: No, I'm not aware of that. The Little River Drainage District was a very important, major project to drain the Bootheel. We used to be known as Swampeast Missouri. And it's through the building of the Little River Drainage system as well as the connecting systems in each of our counties that drain into it. We've been able to drain this land and turn it into agricultural property. I'm not saying that it didn't happen, I'm just not aware of any role that the Little River Drainage District had. They may have had a role, but I'm not aware of it.

WS: A while ago you mentioned how Dunklin County was split among groups. And I get the impression Dunklin County does kind of stand off.

JR: Yes, they do.

WS: It's quite different from Pemiscot and New Madrid.

JR: Absolutely.

WS: I wonder why that is?

[tape meter, 150]

JR: Well; I've got a theory. (laughs)

WS: I'd like to hear it.

JR: I'm not saying this is it, but I've got a theory. Dunklin County had a number of *very* intelligent, independent minded people that some people call arrogance, conceit, or whatever. But they just wanted to do it their way. I could name you some of them -- one

of them was Earl Jones, the founder of the bank over there; his brother, Senator Langdon Jones. And just because they were brothers, hell they didn't always get along all the time. Then you had Flake McHaney who is a Harvard graduate, and no one ever lets him forget about it.

I've got to tell you a funny story about Flake McHaney. He was chairman of the local, Dunklin County Democratic Committee back in the year that John F. Kennedy was elected president, 1960. Flake McHaney talked Sam Rayburn, the speaker of the House, into coming down at a barbecue or fundraiser for the Democratic Party. So Sam Rayburn showed up over there at Kennett. Flake McHaney was presiding officer. And Flake made a stirring speech about the Democrats and party unity, and he turned around and said, "And Mr. Speaker, I can promise you, Dunklin County is in the Democratic column, and it will *forever* stay there!" "Hooray! Hooray! Hooray!"

Okay. Come election time, the Southern Baptists of Dunklin County (laughing) came in and voted and whooped the hell out of John F. Kennedy for president. (laughs) There's a strong core of Southern Baptists. I don't know what your religion is, and I don't mean this to be a slur on anybody's religion, but they got a romped ready group of folks over there; Southern Baptists that, by God, they are agin anything and everything. Catholics, drinking, having a (laughing) good time and everything else. And if you turn off your machine I'm going to tell you--

[tape recorder momentarily off]

WS: St. Paul. Were they unique as far as a black community in Southeast Missouri?

JR: Yes. Because that black community was controlled by a black leader. And the other areas, the blacks are pretty well controlled by the whites, the people who employed them. But not over there in Dunklin County. Their black community is pretty well concentrated at St. Paul. That was a distinct group. And so were the Southern Baptists. Then you had some other people in the north end of the county who detested Kennett, because Kennett's the county seat. You know; that's local. People hate Caruthersville and Hayti because we've got the county seat. So, Dunklin County has always been pretty fragmented.

WS: And they also have the township form of government.

[tape meter, 200]

JR: Oh yes! And they can't change it. They tried, and they cannot change it. I think they're about the only county left in the whole state that has that. And that's, again, this local influence that, "We just want our own thing here. And we don't want to join nobody else." (laughs) So they are unique, and that's just the way it has been. To some extent it still is.

WS: I don't know what your knowledge of county government might be in regard to this, but I understand one of the reasons St. Paul came to control that bloc of votes was, their precinct lines were drawn that way. And I just wonder how those precinct lines got to be where they were?

JR: All right, I'm going to tell you a story about drawing precinct lines. This happened in Pemiscot County, but it will illustrate how precinct lines are drawn. This happened during the Hearn-Bush [primary election of 1964]. About a week, ten days before the election the county court of Pemiscot County had a meeting. They redrew the precinct

lines. The county commission has the power to do that. They gerrymandered the south part of the county and made the polling place for Steele, Missouri -- practically all the south end of Pemiscot County -- over there at a little gin known as the Dolphin Gin right on the Dunklin-Pemiscot County line, for the obvious purpose of keeping the votes from south Pemiscot County to be cast for Warren Hearnese. And that precinct was controlled by Dick Simcoe. He was a big Republican. He lived in Kennett, farmed in Pemiscot County over there right on the county line. Understand, I'm not blaming him. If you've got the power, by God there are some times you'd better use it. So anyway, they used that power to change the historical voting precincts. Okay.

Well, the Hearnese forces went to court, here locally. I was one of the lawyers for the Hearnese forces, and so was Flake McHaney (he wasn't a judge yet). We filed a petition, a suit for *mandamus*, against the local county commission to require them to reestablish the old precinct lines. That case was heard by our local circuit judge on Friday before the election on Tuesday.

[tape meter, 250]

Our circuit judge ruled in favor of the Hearnese forces, that the county court did not follow the correct procedure. And I've forgotten what it was. There was a statutory basis that the county court had not followed, and I think the big issue was whether that was material or important enough to undo what they had done. But admittedly, they hadn't dotted all their i's and crossed all their t's. And the local circuit judge ordered that the old boundaries be restored.

On the Monday before the Tuesday election the Bush forces flew over to Springfield with a writ of prohibition to prohibit to local circuit judge from carrying out the order that he had entered on Friday, which meant that the new boundaries stayed the same. Now at that time there were just three members of that court over there. They issued the order. And when they issue an order like that, under the civil procedure, they are required to have a return date. You don't prohibit somebody permanently without giving them a chance to hear it. So they set the return date on the 20th of August, some two weeks *after* the election.

Well, when that time came, let me tell you what the Court of Appeals did. Instead of writing an opinion or allowing a writ to be filed or anything in opposition, they dismissed the whole thing as being moot, and there wasn't an opinion written, there wasn't a record -- nothing -- that ever came out of that. If you go over there to Springfield, if you look in August of whatever the year was, you'll find those damn papers. So what the Springfield Court of Appeals -- the Dalton court; he had appointed (laughing) the majority of the judges -- they by God just played power politics and just undid what our county [judge] had done.

So that illustrates the power that these county commissions have in setting these precinct boundaries, if they do it right. The example I gave you was a situation where, at least arguably, they didn't do it right. We didn't think they did it right. But I *know* the court of appeals didn't do it right, by issuing an order, then ducking even writing an opinion about why they had done it. Just dismissed it. They talk about nonpartisan court

plan. Hell, it's nonpartisan, all right; it's the politics of the few instead of the politics of the people.

(much laughter)

WS: Judicial politics.

JR: Exactly. You've got it.

WS: I've heard about this.

JR: Yes, I'll bet you have.

[end of side 2, tape I; tape meter, 308]

WS: I don't know if I should ask you about Pappy Brown.

JR: Oh, I know Pappy Brown! Oh, heck yes. Let me tell you about Pappy Brown. You know the guy who taught Jet Banks of St. Louis his politics? Pappy Brown, down at Hermandale. Jet Banks was a protégé of Pappy Brown. Yes. Absolutely. Pappy Brown was one of the big political leaders in this county, and he had his precinct. His precinct was one of them that the county court changed so that all of them would have to travel about twenty miles and go up on the Dunklin County line to vote.

Pappy Brown. He had a reputation, at least -- I don't know this personally -- of voting his votes down there the night before the election (laughing) or the morning of the election, then close the polls because everybody had voted. But he ran into some serious trouble; I think it was about 1970, or maybe it was '72. I think it was around that time, where they got in an argument down there (laughing) probably about how they wanted the vote to go, and they started writing and scratching and made a damn mess of the poll books. Here comes the FBI in.

WS: Oh, that suit. I didn't know he was involved with that.

JR: Oh yes! Oh yes! That was Pappy Brown down there. Sure. (laughing) They got drunk down there and tried to undo something. I've forgotten. But I saw those poll books over there, and that was a disgrace. I've got to tell you. They marked through and tore out [pages] and it was just a blooming mess. They got down there and decided -- I've forgotten the details -- it ought to go the other way, or something. You know, (laughing) they tried to undo everything, and hell, didn't have enough sense to try to make a clean copy of it. They just took it up there in all it's nakedness. Yes, I knew Pappy Brown.

WS: Was that the Holland precinct?

JR: Yes! Holland #2 I think they called it. That's Pappy Brown. That's Jet Banks old precinct. So Jet got his training under Pappy. (laughs)

WS: I've forgotten the name, but they tell me there was another landowner maybe in northern Pemiscot County.

JR: Yes. Well there were several of them. Byars Orton was one. And I'll tell you the one you're thinking about, Henry Tanner. Is it Henry Tanner?

WS: I think it might have been Byars Orton.

JR: Byars Orton and Henry Tanner. They called him Hen Tan. Let me tell you who Hen Tan was. Have you ever heard of the Tanner brothers down there at Memphis in trouble all the time? They're multi-millionaires, and then they've been indicted, and they're in trouble *all* the time.

WS: Were they involved with Mr. Crump? Do they go that far back?

JR: Oh no. They are modern. They're after Crump. I would say starting in the 1970s. These two Tanners down in Memphis, one of them sold a bank I think seven or eight months ago for something like \$100 million or something like that. Hell, he's been in the penitentiary. You know, they're always in trouble. Well, they're the sons of Henry Tanner. Hen Tan, we called him, up here. And Henry Tanner had the reputation, contrary to J.V. Conran's reputation, of by God, he wouldn't tell you the truth. Whatever he said he was going to do, you could pretty well count on him not doing it. He would flip-flop. Hen Tan. And Byars Orton went up there on one occasion, I can recall, with a pistol, looking for him. He was going to kill the son of a bitch. (laughing) You know, just get rid of this guy! He just flip-flopped all the time.

And I can tell you of my personal experience I had with Henry Tanner. It was the first jury case I ever tried, in 1951. That's been a *long* time ago. Henry Tanner was on the jury. I represented the insurance company, the defendant in the case, in which a man had gotten drunk at a local bar over at Hayti, Missouri. And on his way home he sat down on a curb in front of a person's house, fell out, drunk, on the curb right by the front wheel. And these people had their car parked out in front of the house. It was after dark. They came out of the house, got in their car and moved about two feet. It went "Clunk, clunk."

[tape meter, 50]

They got out, looked, and they had run over this guy, passed out.

Well anyway, they got them a lawyer to sue here in circuit court. My first case. My dad said, "Well surely, son, you can win this lawsuit." (laughing) "Surely you can

go over there and win this case!" So that was my solo. I went trotting over there and I never will forget, Henry Tanner was on the jury. I didn't know Henry Tanner, except he was Mr. Tanner who lived in the north end of the county. He was on the jury panel. I'd go out there in the hall during the recess. Back in those days, hell, the jurors mingled with everybody; the judge, (laughing) the lawyers, the witnesses. Henry would look around at me and go [winks] like that. (laughs) [I thought,] "Well, I bet everything must be all right." He kept giving that wink.

So anyway, I don't need to tell you what happened (laughing) when the jury came in unanimously and gave this guy something like \$5,000. I thought my dad was going to have a stroke. So, that was my first experience with Henry Tanner. But later on, I got to know him politically, and he was kind of, I'd say, a slippery kind of fellow.

WS: Now would people like that have been mostly interested in the county politics?

JR: Yes, just county. Again, these local county people, hell, they'd want to know who was sheriff. And judge. Because a sheriff can do more for you or more *to* you. And you always want the law on your side (laughs), especially if you might engage in questionable behavior from time to time. I'm sure you've read about the famous Orton ouster suit. I was in the unpleasant situation of defending Sheriff Orton during that time frame. Back in those days, like most rural counties, we had crap games. The sheriffs permitted it or closed their eyes to it. And their defense was -- it was Clyde Orton's defense (if you want to call it a defense) -- that that was the best way he could get informants to tell him something. If someone stole some money, invariably it would end up in a crap game, or

someone in a crap game would know something about it. Well, the deal was, "If you hear about any law violations, you report it to me."

So, back at that time we didn't pay informers. That was a no-no. And it wasn't just Clyde Orton. I think all the sheriffs, pretty much, in this area developed their own informant system. And that was the local crap game. It might be wrong, technically, but it was pretty effective. And by God, they could find them a lot quicker than they can now. A lot quicker.

WS: I read about that in the old newspapers, about Sheriff Orton's trouble and all. I wonder, from your own perspective -- I think one way of viewing all that, it seemed like kind of a cultural war between Sheriff Orton and Southeast Missouri and -- of course, I can't remember where Attorney General Danforth came from, but he was definitely not--

JR: St. Louis.

WS: Yes, he wasn't from Southeast.

JR: He was a preacher. Judge Harper told Danforth in open court -- I don't have Judge Harper's word for it, I have Jack Danforth's word for it -- he told the story on himself. It was Jack Danforth's first case. He was appointed. Back in those days they appointed lawyers. They didn't have this paid defender system. Judge Harper appointed Jack Danforth. And he also appointed Freddy Mayer (whom you may have heard of) in St. Louis; he was a former assistant United States attorney for years up there; damn good lawyer -- to help Jack, because he'd never been in a criminal case. Well, Jack got up to make some objections. And the defendant was a preacher accused of a ponsy scheme, a fraud scheme.

[tape meter, 100]

And Judge Harper (laughs) looked at Jack and said, "Mr. Danforth, sit down. One preacher in this lawsuit is enough." (laughs) And Danforth told the story on himself.

So I can give you -- if you're interested; maybe this is off the subject -- I could give you my opinion. *I know* what started the Orton case. I don't know whether you're interested in hearing it.

WS: Yes, I'd like to hear it.

JR: Okay. The city of Caruthersville had an ordinance limiting the number of bars that we could have in Caruthersville. And they created a monopoly. To get a license from the city of Caruthersville, you had to buy that license from one of the proprietors who was going out of business. Okay. A bar operator here in Caruthersville by the name of Jaybird. Have you ever heard of Jaybird Gatewood?

WS: He got assassinated.

JR: Yes! Well, Jaybird Gatewood was assassinated by Buddy Cook, and Buddy Cook was convicted of it, finally.

WS: Oh, I didn't know they caught the murderer.

JR: Yes. No, wait a minute. I'm wrong. It was Bo Young who they caught. Jaybird's assassin is unknown, but they all suspect it was Buddy Cook, the same guy who was convicted of assassinating Bo Young, the local Broadway music dealer.

Jaybird had just bought out whoever it was and had this liquor license. The states of Mississippi and Alabama, then, were dry states. And the people from Alabama and Mississippi started coming up here to Caruthersville to buy whiskey. Now, at first blush

you'd think that was illegal -- and, of course, the St. *Louis Globe-Democrat* and Jack Flach, their take on it was, "This is bootleg whiskey." Well, that's a bunch of crap. It was not bootleg whiskey. It was whiskey that the Missouri tax had been paid on. It was perfectly legal to sell it in Missouri. That was perfectly legal.

Incidentally, Clyde Orton wasn't convicted of that. That's what all the headlines were. But it's kind of like Al Capone, you know. "We're going to get you on something else," but not the real thing that you think he's doing wrong; except, here in *this* case, hell, what Clyde was doing was not wrong.

What happened was, the Mississippi and Alabama liquor agents started coming up here in Missouri, in Pemiscot County. And they would get their binoculars on this joint. It's down here near the riverfront. Well, it's been burned up now, but it was along the sea wall. And they would write down a license number, all these Alabama and Mississippi cars. Then they would follow them until they got in Mississippi. And of course that possession in Mississippi and Alabama was a violation of Mississippi and Alabama [laws]. It wasn't a violation of Missouri law. Again, hell, Missouri taxed it and it was for retail sale. Hell, you could buy it here and haul it wherever in the hell you wanted to.

Okay. Clyde Orton got complaints from Jaybird about those officers running his business off.

[tape meter, 150]

The custom was -- and I don't think this was disputed -- the custom was unless the sheriff himself the subject of investigation, when a state law enforcement officer comes into

your jurisdiction as a matter of comity you inform him that you're there. Of course, obviously, Mississippi and Alabama had not jurisdiction in the state of Missouri.

So Clyde went down there and he told them, "You guys have got no business being here. This is a lawful business here in Pemiscot Couty, and you shouldn't be here intimidating these people from Alabama and Mississippi. They're up here in Missouri." And Clyde made a mistake of using this phrase: he said, "And don't let the sun set on your ass tonight in this county. If it does, you're going to jail." (laughs) They went, "Whoop!" out of town. And the Mississippi agents all went back home.

Now the attorney general of Mississippi was a fellow by the name of, I think, A.F. Summers. Anyway, he wrote a letter to Jack Danforth (who was the new attorney general) complaining about the way his agents had been handled. And later on, after this thing progressed and after I got hired, I called him up and asked him about it. He said, "Oh, yes, these agents came in here crying and complaining about it. Just as a matter of form I wrote off a letter to the attorney general. It wasn't any big deal for us. Hell, those officers shouldn't have been up there. You know; it was just one of those deals."

Anyway, Danforth grabbed ahold of it. Now you've got to remember. Jack Danforth is a Republican. He's from St. Louis. And this was the nasty, dirty Bootheel. All right. Danforth then referred it to Harry Wiggins, the state senator.

WS: Who became state senator.

JR: Yes.

WS: He was in charge of the Liquor Control Board.

JR: Yes! Oh my God, he just sent in undercover agents. (laughing) I remember one particular thing that they did. These undercover agents came in from Kansas City; they were not from around this area, of course. They would come in and go to the black cafés and finance free beer and fried chicken. They would use the state's money, give it to these proprietors on some pretext -- I've forgotten what the pretext was, and how come they were doing all this, and the purpose of the money -- but of course these black cafes, "Why sure! Heck yes. Invite everybody." Well, they didn't have a liquor license. (laughs) The state is giving them the beer to sell. They didn't have a liquor license. Then they pulled their great "raid," and then they caught lots of blacks and black café owners selling beer without a license.

Then the headlines starting hitting about the volume of "bootleg" whiskey, which was bologna. And then here comes the attorney general with this ouster suit. Well, at the time of the ouster suit, when it was filed, Judge Fred L. Henley was on the Supreme Court of Missouri; who lived here in Caruthersville.

[tape meter, 200]

There is a Missouri statute that if there is open, notorious law breaking in a county, the circuit shall convene a grand jury. Well, the attorney general's ouster suit complained of open, notorious violation of liquor and gaming laws and chicken fighting down at Holland, and all this, that, and the other. Well, in my legal defense, one of my issues I raised that a judge of the Supreme Court was circuit judge during all this notorious, open violation, and surely he wouldn't violate the law by failing to call a grand jury. Well, I don't need to tell you, the Supreme Court didn't even mention that at all. (laughs) And

when we went up there and argued the case, of course, Fred had properly disqualified himself.

But back to the merits of it. Jack Danforth sent Charlie Blackmar as well as the guy who's brother was on the Supreme Court, Charlie Rendlen, as special prosecutors. And these guys believed the publicity so much that the *Globe-Democrat* had engendered about this wild, notorious gambling, law violation down here, they wouldn't even spend the night here. They went with escorted highway patrolmen from a motel at Sikeston down here to court, during the trial. Well, I don't know whether you know Charlie Rendlen or not. He later became the head of the Missouri Bar's program from drunk lawyers. Charlie was like this [imitates a jumpy, nervous, squirming person] all the time. Have you ever seen Charlie Blackmar in action?

WS: I don't think so.

JR: Charlie Blackmar is a very interesting guy. He's brilliant; very studious. Charlie Blackmar came down, and he and Rendlen were to try the case. Well, after the first half day they turned it over to some young guy; I've forgotten who took it over. He did a damn good job. He saved the day, really, because they got some guy that could really put on the evidence. But let me tell you the final blow; the straw that broke the camel's back with me, that showed just how unfounded all this was. I got up one morning before the trial (we would have a lot of pre-trial proceedings with the attorney general's forces) and read the headlines of the *Globe-Democrat*, "Orton accused of contract morning." I thought, "Jesus Christ, what's all this about?"

Well I read the article, and it was some damn jailhouse lawyer who had been convicted and sent out here, who had contacted the attorney general's office and agreed to testify that Orton promised him some money if he'd kill somebody. I've forgotten who in the hell it was. Well, to the people that lived around here it was just completely ridiculous. The people that knew that guy knew what a no-account jailbird this guy was. And here it was in the headlines.

[tape meter, 250]

Well here comes Blackmar and Rendlen down with an amended ouster suit. Now the first one had been signed under oath by them, as required by law. They started to file that amended ouster suit. I asked to look at it. I looked at the damn thing, and it wasn't under oath. I had, by pre-arrangement, got the local prosecuting attorney of Pemiscot Attorney to be present in the courtroom. And I announced to the court that this was not under oath, and before they filed it I wanted them to sign it under oath, on their oath, in the presence of the prosecuting attorney of Pemiscot County, who sent this hoodlum to the penitentiary -- that they believed this is true.

"Oh! That's entirely improper!" (laughs) Well, to make a long story short, they refused to sign the damn thing, and it was not filed. After the ouster suit was over with, guess what? The jailbird filed a writ of *habeas corpus* in the Supreme Court of Missouri asking to be relieved from his sentence because the attorney general had promised to let him go if he agreed to testify. And you know what the Supreme Court did? They didn't even grant him a hearing; just denied the whole thing. You didn't read about that in the *Globe-Democrat*.

So I had Danforth down to take his deposition. He's a nice guy. I've gotten along with him since. But this was an adversarial proceeding. He was a part, so I took his deposition. I asked him a question. He was frank about it. But the funny part about his deposition was, when I asked him, (I've forgotten what I called him; General, Attorney General, or Mr. Danforth, or whatever it was), "In your opinion, was it against the law to sell whiskey at retail out of these licensed liquor dealers here in Pemiscot County with Missouri tax paid on it?" Immediately Charlie Rendlen jumped up, "Object! Object! The attorney general cannot render his opinion." I said, "Why *can't* he render his opinion? This is what this lawsuit's all about. This is what started it." Charlie said, "The attorney general can only render his opinion in writing." And I said, "All right, I've got a yellow pad." (laughs) I threw in front of Danforth. I said, "All right, Mr. Attorney General, how about writing your opinion out?" Up came Charlie Rendlen again, "Oh! Object! Object!" I said, "On what grounds?" He said, "Well, you're not an officer or a public official authorized (laughing) to receive the attorney general's opinion." So I never got an answer out of him.

The trial was held. What they convicted Clyde Orton of was the chicken fighting down there at Hermandale. And Clyde Orton swore that, by God, that's one thing he didn't know anything about.

[tape meter, 300]

And Clyde Orton *admitted* to me that he did do one of the things that they had charged against him, but they couldn't prove it. He got so damn mad the night the county voted down the election to build a new county jail, (laughing) that he opened the jail doors and

let all the convicts out. (laughs) But they couldn't prove that. He's dead now, so I can tell it. He said, "Well hell, I did that. But I'll be *darned* if I knew about the damn chicken fights!" Down at Hermandale. Harry Brown's precinct down there.

And it went up to the Supreme Court, and of course the rest of it is history. But that was, in my view, strictly a politically motivated assault on Southeast Missouri. And we're still being bombarded by Kansas City and occasionally the St. Louis media. We're ugly, bad people down here.

WS: Yes, I've come to appreciate that, and even as we were discussing, some of the depictions of Mr. Conran -- they weren't exactly negative, necessarily; but it was the tone.

JR: Yes, yes!

WS: And he would have to respond. They would quote him sometimes. Obviously they had said, "You control this vote." And he would say, "The only vote I control is my own."

JR: Yes.

WS: But they would call him "boss."

JR: Oh, Boss Conran. Absolutely.

And an interesting thing about it, a follow-up on Jack Danforth, to tell you what kind of a guy Jack was and is. About five or six years later, when Clyde Orton got reelected sheriff, Jack Danforth next door [in front of the courthouse] got out in front of a big audience and told everybody that Clyde Orton was the best sheriff (laughing) in Southeast Missouri. And you know, I appreciated that.

WS: Somebody read me an excerpt from a speech he had given; I guess after he'd become senator. And he talked about that case and how he had been an over zealous young man and all that.

JR: Yes! He was actually sorry that he did it. And I saw Jack Danforth at the swearing in of Judge Wangelin when he became a federal judge. I introduced Judge Wangelin. I was one of the lawyers that got up. I stayed at Cheshire Inn in Clayton. I parked my car there and went to bed. By God, the next morning my car was gone. Yes. I got a taxi up to the federal building and introduced Judge Wangelin. And I met Jack. I said, "I want to tell you something. (laughing) I have lived in Pemiscot County all of my life, and by God, I have never been a victim of crime.

[tape meter, 350]

I spent one night in your hometown of St. Louis and my car was stolen. I want you to file a ouster suit against all these law enforcement people." And he just laughed. He had a good sense of humor. He did.

Oh boy. And I've later grown to like and respect him. He's a nice guy. Nice guy.

Well, so much for that.

[end of side 1, tape II; tape meter, 362]

WS: I know at one point State Senator Patterson I guess decided to bow out after they redrew the lines.

JR: Yes. But what had happened -- well, first of all, you know Pat Patterson ran J.V.'s bank over here at Hayti.

WS: Oh he did?

JR: Oh yes! Pat Patterson was an interesting guy. He had a lot of ability, but he never really got a chance to show his ability until he got to the state Senate. His job was, he was head of our local chamber of commerce, for years. And I want to tell you, that ain't much of a job now, and it sure as heck wasn't much of a (laughing) job years ago. It was only later, when the president of the Bank of Hayti -- which J.V. owned; he inherited it from Aunt Effie. You remember that?

SM: Yes. I had forgotten that.

JR: Yes. Aunt Effie, Bank of Hayti. J.V. got Pat Patterson to run the bank. And Pat Patterson was not a banker, had no experience. But J.V. needed somebody over there. And, of course, J.V. wasn't interested in banking either. It was something like, "Well hell, I own that, but I'm not interested in that. I just have to have somebody sit over there and watch it." And (laughing) what Pat Patterson did, practically all of the loans that he made was loaning money to local politicians. That's the truth. I've seen the records over there. Those are about the only loans the Bank of Hayti ever made while Pat was over there.

Well anyway, there came a vacant seat. Pat got it. And Pat stayed on. Pat got his first real contest with a local guy by the name of Jack Hutchison, a local farmer who, like most of the farmers we have around here, had a lot of inherited wealth. If you don't have inherited wealth, especially in today's environment, you don't farm. Because it just cost too doggone much to *start* farming. Well, it was a hard fought campaign, and Patterson almost lost. And he never had to run in a contested campaign. J.V. was for him, and everyone just laid off of him. Anyway, this fellow Hutchison here in town, he decided it

was a long shot, and he ran and spent a lot of money. And Pat won, but I think that kind of demoralized Pat. I don't know how long after that election was that he just quit.

He was a good senator. He became -- what was it?

WS: Chair of Appropriations.

JR: Yes. And also he was -- oh, heck, what do they call it? The President *pro tem*?

WS: Oh right! He was. He was *pro tem* for a while.

JR: (laughing) They tell a funny story on Pat, locally. If you're interested, I'll tell you.

WS: Sure.

JR: Pat was quite talkative. And, of course, I think that's maybe one of the qualities politicians ought to have to a certain extent. They ought to be a little more judicious in (laughing) what they say sometimes. But Pat was rather talkative. You go to the local coffee shop. You know, every little town's got a little place where everybody gathers at ten o'clock to drink coffee and shoot the breeze. So, at the local café emporium -- it used to be at the Majestic Hotel before it burned down -- when Pat was home, they invariably asked Pat what was going on in Jefferson City. And no matter who asked the question, Pat would start out basically with this, "Well, I'm glad you asked me that. The governor called me last week, and the governor says, 'Pat, blah blah blah blah blah blah blah.' And I said, 'Well Governor, blah blah blah blah.'" And that went on (laughing) back and forth between Pat and the governor said, Pat said. (laughing) One time Pat ran out and he turned around and said, "What was that question you asked?"

So Senator Pat was quite loquacious, if that's the word. But he was a nice guy. Everybody liked him. I liked him. He was a heck of a decent, honest guy.

[tape meter, 50]

And he just never had much of an opportunity in life, and this state senatorship was the crowning jewel in his career. But he was J.V. Conran's banker over there when he was appointed.

WS: Would Mr. Conran have been in favor of Nelson Tinnin when he ran for state Senate?

JR: I don't know. That's Dunklin County. That's kind of out of his territory. New Madrid County was not in that district, and I would doubt very seriously that J.V. would have anything to do with a senatorial race in an adjoining district. He didn't try to control everything. He knew what his limitations were, and what his jurisdiction was. And I doubt that he would have anything to do with that Tinnin race.

WS: If I remember correctly, they were in adjoining districts, but then when they redistricted it put Senator Patterson and Senator Tinnin against each other.

JR: If that happened, of course I know J.V. would have stayed with Patterson. But I didn't know Patterson ever ran against Tinnin.

WS: He didn't. I think he bowed out.

JR: Oh, that's the time. That was the thing that bowed him out. Yes. Right.

WS: Yes, and a lot of people who knew Senator Patterson -- the way I heard it was -- they admired him for that, because he was too much of a gentleman to want to scrap it out.

JR: Yes, that's right. He wasn't used to doing battles. The one battle he had I think kind of demoralized him. I remember he stopped me on the street, all incensed at me because, "my friend" Jack Hutchison had filed against him. I said, "Pat, I didn't have anything to do with it. Don't blame me!" He just kind of carried it on his shoulders. Pat wasn't a

politician. He had no experience in politics. Unless you can say that head of our (laughing) Caruthersville Chamber of Commerce equipped him. And I don't mean that derogatorily. Pat was raised up in hard times in this impoverished area, and some people just don't have the opportunity. Pat had ability. He *demonstrated* that when he went up there to the state Senate.

WS: Right. That's amazing to go, to make such a huge step.

JR: Yes! And he did it. Boy, he was a talker, now. (laughs) He could sure talk.

WS: Now Senator John Noble, he would have also been over in Dunklin County.

JR: Yes, he was over at Kennett. And John Noble was known as Mr. Fix It. If you had a client that wanted a parole from the state penitentiary -- and this was common knowledge -- you sent them over to John Noble. John Noble would get your client a parole -- or at least he would try. And John Noble had a large retainer list. This was before all the reform legislation that took place, what, in the last twenty or thirty years. John Noble was a very successful senator. He made all of his money out of attorney fees or lobbying money, whatever you want to call it. And he was chairman of the Appropriations Committee. And he and John Dalton were at loggerhead with each other. You know, it was question of "Who's head is the highest?" from Dunklin County. He was a very successful politician financially. He combined that law business with his politics. Of course, he couldn't do that today because they closed up that complex -- as they *should* have done. But he made a lot of money when he was up there.

WS: Speaking of Governor Dalton, wasn't there some kind of falling out at one point between --

JR: Oh yes, Noble and Dalton.

WS: --I was thinking between Governor Dalton and Mr. Conran. They didn't exactly get along, did they?

JR: No. They did not, and that was over the Warren Hearnest governorship.

WS: Oh, well naturally Dalton would be for Bush.

JR: Why yes. Sure. After that, they didn't get along. Of course, they didn't have much contact anyway. As I said, Dunklin County was not a county that J.V. could deal with, really -- or anybody else. You know, when Flake McHaney gets up there and says, "We're all (laughing) going to vote for President Kennedy," and here comes the Southern Baptists and just blew it out of the water. So Dunklin County has always been kind of a wild card.

[tape meter, 100]

And while we're on the subject of Governor Dalton, I'll tell you a couple of interesting stories. Governor Dalton ran for public office several times in Dunklin County. For the most part, he was always defeated. There was one campaign, he ran for prosecuting attorney over there. His opponent was a lawyer by the name of Elbert Ford. I don't know whether you've ever heard of Elbert Ford. Elbert Ford was the epitome of the old, Southern, country lawyer; over weight, dressed kind of sloppy, just a country boy, and a hell of stump speaker. (laughs)

Most days they would go from township to township or from country store to country store in July and early August before the election and make stump speeches to everybody. Well, at one stop, Dalton and Ford appeared. John Dalton was a rather

reserved, dignified type of fellow. You know, he wasn't one of these back slappers. He was a kind of reserved type man. He had money and his wife had money. So back in those days, they were way above average insofar as income was concerned. Old Elbert, he was just an old country boy just barely getting by. And John Dalton, well dressed, had a coat and tie on, and Elbert was out there, open shirt, all wrinkled; just looked like the rest of us.

Anyway, Dalton got up and one of the points that he made, he said, "Ladies and gentlemen, you are selecting your county attorney to represent you. And I want you to just look at me and look at my opponent, Elbert Ford. Now I ask you (laughing) who would you pick to represent you, me or Elbert Ford? I leave it to you ladies and gentlemen." And sat down. Here comes Elbert Ford up on the stump. He said, "Ladies and gentlemen, the truth of the matter is, if you had enough money you wouldn't hire either (laughing) one of us to be your lawyer. You'd get a good lawyer." (laughs) Of course, that just broke the crowd up and deflated John Dalton. Oh boy.

And another occasion -- and I along with a number of other lawyers; I think including Flake McHaney was present at the coffee joint (it was off the courthouse square) when Dalton was governor. He was home. He came home about every weekend. Usually he would go around the courthouse circle and chit-chat and have coffee over there. Well, what had happened, Dalton had just appointed a fellow from West Plains named Hogan (you remember Hogan?) on the Springfield Court of Appeals. Well, no one had heard of Hogan. He was the secretary of the Missouri Reciprocity Commission. Now if you know what that job is, you're better than me. I had never heard of it, [nor

had] anybody else. (laughing) Dalton appointed him as a judge of the Springfield Court of Appeals.

And what had happened was -- we're talking about the nonpartisan court system, now -- there was a well respected judge that *everybody* was for, in this area, by the name of Marshall Craig. He just recently died. You may have heard the name. Judge Marshall Craig was really a judge's judge. He'd never been in politics. He was just a grand fellow, straight as an arrow, honest as the day is long; hard working, good judge. *Good* judge.

Well, what the commission did -- "nonpartisan" commission -- as you know, they have to select three people. Let me tell you who they selected.

[tape meter, 150]

Marshall Craig -- which everybody thought, "That's it. Marshall is going to go over there. It's Southeast Missouri's turn, anyway." The judge that retired, he was from Southeast Missouri. It was old Judge [James Clarence McDowell] from Mississippi County. But it was obviously Southeast Missouri's time. Also, they selected Joe Crain from Ozark, Missouri. And if you know Ozark, Missouri, that is rock rib Republican territory. Joe Crain was the circuit judge over there.

WS: Wright County.

JR: There you go. You know what I'm talking about. Conservative, rock rib Republican. Good man. I assume good judge. But no one had ever heard of him either. Then, the third member was Hogan, the secretary of the Reciprocity Commission. Hell, not only (laughing) had no one ever heard of Hogan, they sure as hell hadn't heard of the secretary of the Missouri Reciprocity Commission.

SM: You're going to be tired from laughing.

JR: (laughing) I just think about it. It's funny. So Dalton picks the secretary of the Reciprocity Commission to go on the Court of Appeals over there at Springfield. And Hogan served for years and years, and did a good job, by the way. I mean, hell, he rose to the occasion. (laughs) He did all right. And he died, I think, only a couple of years ago.

But anyway, back to the point of the story, after that happened, we were all sitting around a table at the coffee joint at Kennett. The governor was there. And of course, somebody had the effrontery (I guess you'd call it) to ask the governor, "Governor, why didn't you appoint Marshall Craig?" Governor Dalton said, "I'm not going to be dictated to by the Nonpartisan Commission. They thought they were not giving me any choice, that I had to pick Marshall Craig. I was entitled to three qualified people that I could appoint. And they tried to stack the deck on me, so I had to do it. So I had to teach them a lesson." And I thought about that, and I thought, "By God, it makes sense to me." You know, if I were the governor, I couldn't find any great fault with that.

But that again demonstrates the newspapers and the opinion leaders of the state think so much of this nonpartisan court plan. They don't know what they're talking about.

I can tell you *another* example I have. "Walking" Joe Teasdale, when he was governor, I had a law school friend by the name of Dave Collins. He practiced law at Macon, Missouri. There was a vacancy on the Supreme Court. It was the vacancy that Warren Welliver -- remember, he was state senator? -- got on the governor's nod. Okay. Well, after the panel was announced, it was my law school friend, David Collins, Warren

Welliver, state senator, and I've forgotten the other fellow's name. Anyway, at Dave Collins' request, I went up to see Teasdale. I had supported him and raised some money for him, so governors will open the door if you contribute money.

So I made an appointment to see him on behalf of Dave Collins. I walked into the governor's office. I was ushered right in, not in the outer office; ushered right in with the big oval table and all that. There was Walking Joe.

[tape meter, 200]

To one of his aides he said, "Go out and get us a bucket of Kentucky Fried Chicken." (laughs) He brought his leg up on this oval table. In a couple of minutes, here came the Kentucky Fried Chicken. (laughing) We sat in there and started eating fried chicken out of that bucket. And I said, "Governor, I guess you know why I'm here." He said, "Yeah, I do. You're here on behalf of your friend, Dave Collins." I said, "Yes sir, that's right. And I want to tell you why I think he ought to be judge." He said, "Now wait, I've got to tell you something. Yesterday the president *pro tem* of the state Senate, Norman Merrell, came to my office. And here's what he told me. He said, 'Governor, the Senate wants our colleague Warren Welliver appointed to the Supreme Court. If you don't appoint him, I want to tell you that the Democrats in the Senate will take that as a person affront.'" Teasdale told me that, and then he said, "Now what do you think I ought to do?" I said, "Governor, I'm sorry I wasted your time. (laughing) You ought to appoint Warren Welliver." And left.

But Teasdale was honest enough, he told it like it was. The state Senate put the squeeze on him. And if I were a senator, I guess maybe I'd do the same thing. But my point is, that this so-called nonpartisan court plan is bologna.

WS: You know, I think it was Judge Welliver who first described this to me, and I think the words he used were, "When you make political decisions like this secret they just become more vicious." (laughing) That's what he was talking about, judicial politics.

JR: (laughs) Yes. That's right. More vicious. Exactly. Well that was vicious; I guess it qualified as vicious. It would in my book. Well, I've about run down. Is there anything else you want to ask me?

WS: Well, a while ago you were talking about the black vote being pretty much controlled.

JR: Yes.

WS: Were there any, what you might describe as, black leaders?

JR: The only one that I ever knew of back in those days was St. Paul, over there. Now Jet Banks later became a leader, when he went to St. Louis. But he wasn't a leader down there in Pappy Brown's precinct. The blacks were unorganized, if you know what I mean. They didn't live in a community *together*. They lived pretty well isolated out on the farms. They formed the basis of the farm labor. They didn't live in one town or one area where you could have easy access and a leader could come up. They just were scattered, and they were dependent upon the landowner and the general store operator for their very existence. And it wasn't important to them. Politics, they didn't care. It was no big deal for them to say, "I don't know nothing. Whatever you say is fine." It's only in the 1960s that the Civil Rights movement really gained momentum, as it should have.

But no one ever thought or heard of civil rights back then. Hell, we had separate but equal and all that stuff. Segregation, it was the law of the land.

[tape meter, 250]

WS: That makes me think, of course, of Governor Wallace, who just passed. Did you ever hear Mr. Conran talk about Governor Wallace?

JR: No.

WS: What was the reception to Governor Wallace in this part of the country? Was he pretty popular?

JR: Yes. Especially his racist views. We had, back then, a lot of racists here in Pemiscot County. And we aren't unique. My God. At least we never had any race riots.

WS: I've asked a lot of people, and no one said there was ever any organized KKK, or anything like that.

JR: No.

WS: So it wasn't exactly like *parts* of the Deep South, anyway.

JR: No. I did see an old picture, made -- I'm going to say, oh; back in the early 1900s -- of a KKK hanging, lynching, out here at Braggadocio. But that was in 1910 or 1911. And I think that's the only thing that I've ever heard or know anything about. I just saw the picture. There was a guy with a Ku Klux Klan hat on, and there was a black man hanging from an arm of a tree out there. But that picture was eighty or ninety years old. I have no knowledge about it, whether it was a real picture. I *assume* it was a real picture. It had "Braggadocio" and a year on it.

But the big lynch thing that really stirred everybody up was that lynching at Sikeston in the 1940s. Now that was outrageous. The really turned into something. But no, we never had any of that that *I* know anything about; an active KKK chapter.

SM: Talking about hangings, why did Daddy hang that guy on the courthouse lawn in New Madrid? Did you know about that?

JR: Yes, I know why. Back in those days that's where the hangings took place. We had hangings right over here in our courthouse. I remember my dad was elected circuit judge in 1935. There was a hanging scheduled in January, after he took office, but he was not the sentencing judge. Dad borrowed money to go on a vacation to Florida to be out of town. I didn't learn about the reason until I was much older. I was just happy to go to Florida. But Dad left town. He did not want to be here when that hanging took place, right out here. They built a scaffold and *hung* the guy, right in front of that courthouse over there, in 1936. And that was *common*. That's the way they did. They didn't take them up to Jeff City.

SM: For what crimes, though?

JR: Oh, murder.

WS: [to Sally:] I'd forgotten to ask you about that, and you were telling me how that weighed on your dad's conscience.

SM: Yes. Mother said that he always hated that he had done that, or he was a part of it.

JR: He was the prosecutor, yes. Well, I hadn't heard the story, but frankly, it doesn't surprise me. Because J.V. Conran had a gruff exterior, but he had a kind heart. (laughing) He did everything in the world to cover it up.

[tape meter, 300]

And Roy Harper was the same way, too. I don't know whether that's a common personality trait at all, but they had *many* personality traits in common. That was one of them. On the exterior they'd want to convince you they were gruff, mean, and tough. But they weren't, deep down.

SM: [to Will:] Are you interested in hearing why Daddy didn't have another office appointed?

WS: Sure.

SM: Okay, because Jim Ed knows that.

JR: What's that?

SM: The thing about getting the Attorney General's office--

JR: Yes! Is that all right if I tell him?

SM: Yes. It's fine with me.

JR: Okay. All right. Let me tell you the story. Do you want to take a break?

WS: Sure, if you like.

JR: Well, *I* don't want to unless you do.

WS: Well, I probably ought to put a new tape in, because I don't want to run out of tape or stop you in the middle of this thing.

SM: This is priceless. Nobody knows the stories but you.

JR: *God*, I'm embarrassed to run on so.

[end of side 2, tape II; tape meter, 315]

JR: Judge Harper, Judge Meredith, and Judge Wangelin had a reputation among many lawyers as being rough on them. Most of those complaints come from lawyers who were

not prepared, were not qualified, really, to appear before them. And to their credit, they took no nonsense when you got in the courtroom. If you were prepared, knew what you were doing, you didn't have any problem with either one of them. Now all of this big complaint that you hear were people who just didn't get the job done. And I'm sorry to say that is no longer true in most of our courts. And that comes about by the great volume of litigation that's handled. I don't think any judge, today, especially in the federal system, can reasonably be expected to handle the case loads that they have with the detail that those judges could devote to a case.

I remember, in those days, a case load of about 100 to 120 cases per judge was considered a big case load. Now, the last county I had -- and this was years ago; Judge Steve Limbaugh (not his son on the Supreme Court), who is a classmate of mine from law school -- I think his case load was 600 or 700 cases. That's five or six years ago. I don't know how in the name of goodness that they can stay on top of it.

But back when Harper, Meredith, and Wangelin were the judges, it was small enough that they stayed on top of those cases and they moved them. You didn't say, "Judge, I'm not ready for trial. I want to pass." "Overruled. We'll try the case." They didn't take any excuses. When that case was set for trial, you better be ready. And a lot of lawyers aren't used to that. But when you got before (laughing) them, you found out what would happen to you if you weren't ready. So most of the complaints, in my view, that have been leveled at those judges was because they were real judges and didn't put up with nonsense.

WS: So it didn't have anything to do with the lawyers being from or not from Southeast Missouri.

JR: No. The worst experience I've ever had in court was before Judge Harper. And he was my dad's old law partner. He absolutely mortified me before a jury. He did it on purpose. (laughs) He did! God, I'll never forget it. So pick on the people, hell. And I deserved it. But hell, I didn't think he'd be that bad! (laughs) He dished it out to anybody who deserved it. And there were lots of them that deserved it. I'll tell you, today there's a hell of a lot more of them that deserve, and they ain't getting it.

Well, so much for an old lawyer's ramblings. Now, what do you want me to talk about now? Oh, about J.V. Yes, back on J.V.

Okay. Well, right after Truman became president in April of 1945, he asked Harper and J.V., "Is there anything you all are interested in?" You know, naturally. Hell, they had been through it thick and thin. They'd been friends and friends for years. Harper kind of toyed with the idea of maybe being a district judge in spite of the fact that then everybody thought that Truman was not going to be reelected and Dewey was going to carry the day. And Harper was kind of reluctant about it, because hell, he didn't want to be an imminent appointee and then, by God, not be confirmed and then kicked out of office when Dewey was elected.

And incidentally, as a side line, the lawyer who talked Roy Harper into taking an appointment. It was different then than it is now. When Congress recessed the president could make an appointment and they went to work, got paid. The lawyer who talked Roy Harper into talking an appointment from Truman without expectation of maybe being

confirmed by the Senate, was none other than Judge Jim Finch, Sr., the father of the Judge Finch who was on the Supreme Court, who was the area's leading Republican. And Jim Finch told Roy Harper, "Roy, take it! It would be a great experience for you. You're forty-two, and if you're not confirmed, come back in a couple years as an experience federal judge. That will help your career. You ought to jump at it!" And that was the thing that turned the balance for Roy Harper to do it.

[tape meter, 50]

But back to J.V. J.V. had been a prosecutor. His public position was that of a prosecutor. But J.V. indicated an interest in being the United States attorney for the eastern district of Missouri. Okay. Truman told him, "Fine. We'll process it." And of course it was referred over to the attorney general, Tom Clark. Okay.

J.V. Conran had been previously married. And it was a very unsuccessful marriage; apparently a pretty bitter marriage. I know nothing of the details, and you may or may not. But I know from what I've heard, it was a pretty stormy relationship. Well, J.V.'s divorced wife was the secretary to the arch bishop or the cardinal (whoever he was) up there in St. Louis; the archdiocese of St. Louis. Bob Hannegan -- the guy that I told that J.V. and Roy had made the deal with on the vote -- he was a strong Irish Catholic who, at that time (the time that we're talking about, about this U.S. attorney appointment) was the postmaster general of the United States. So when J.V.'s name was referred over to Tom Clark to go through the usual process that they went through then, before it was formally sent to the Senate, Hannegan got a hold of Tom Clark and presented the strong objections of the cardinal. He wasn't a cardinal, was he? I think he was an archbishop.

SM: Cardinal or archbishop.

JR: Archbishop. He was the head of the St. Louis diocese up there. Well, Tom Clark decided not to favorably consider him. Well, Truman notified J.V. and Roy about it and invited them up. You know, Truman didn't want to *duck* anything. He said, "Come on up. We've got a problem." And Truman explained what the problem was. And Truman said, "Boys, I've either got to take the advice of my attorney general on this issue or I've got to fire him, and frankly, I don't want to fire my attorney general over this issue. I'm sorry. But I just don't feel like I should."

J.V. didn't say a word. Roy Harper jumped up and started raising hell. (laughs) And Truman said, "Roy, just settle down and shut up. I told you what I'm going to do, and I'm sorry. But this is too controversial, and I'm not going to make a national incident over the appointment of J.V. I'm sorry it happened. J.V. has been my friend. But I don't think that J.V. wants to go through a big fight in the Senate with all the Catholics from St. Louis jumping up and down, and a big issue over something that is best left alone."

J.V. accepted it, and J.V. Conran never mentioned that to me. I know about it from Roy Harper. J.V. never mentioned it to me, and I was pretty close to him in later years, wasn't I?

SM: Yes.

JR: He *never* mentioned that that happened. He never complained.

WS: There's a story of religion and politics being mixed together.

JR: Yes. And I'm not *blaming* those people from St. Louis, I'm just telling you what happened. They felt very strongly, apparently, and they voiced that to Bob Hannegan, a

good Catholic. He had the ear of the president and the attorney general, and they just didn't want to touch it. (laughs) So, you know.

SM: I have another question. I used to hear a story about Daddy defended somebody. Was it a union man? Or a mafia man? Out of prison. They were trying to get him for tax evasion or something?

JR: I don't know anything about that, Sally. I'm sorry.

SM: There was some guy from St. Louis. I don't remember who in the heck . . .

JR: Could be, but I just don't have any knowledge of that. And I've got to say, I rather doubt it -- I'm not saying that you're misleading me or anybody -- but I rather doubt it, because J.V. was a prosecuting attorney, and that would have been a conflict of interest for him to be a prosecuting attorney and to defend somebody in a criminal prosecution.

WS: Even in a different locale?

JR: Yes, even in a different locale. At least it would by today's standards; it might not have been back in those days. I'm not claiming to know what they rules were.

[tape meter, 100]

But I can tell you now, the rules are such that if you're a prosecuting attorney, you cannot defend a criminal in any court.

SM: What about other kinds of lawsuits?

JR: Well yes, civil lawsuits. Oh yes.

SM: Just not criminal.

JR: Just not criminal, because it looks bad (laughing) to have a prosecuting attorney from one county jump up in another county and defend the son of a bitch. You know. Maybe it

happened, but that's the reason I said -- I'm not *aware* of it; it could be he defended him in some civil action up there, where there was no prohibition. I'll tell you one thing, if he defended him, he got a damn good defense.

SM: I just remember a story. It might not have been criminal, or whatever. It might have been something else.

JR: Could be. Well, J.V. had a lot of friends in St. Louis. He had labor union friends. He dealt with everybody. And, of course, we're known as anti-black and anti-union. That's what Tom Eagleton told Warren Hearnes one time. I'm sure you've heard that story. They'd had too much to drink -- that's not saying anything bad about them. You know, I have too much to drink occasionally. So they got into it (laughing) and he told Warren, "Goddamn it, the trouble with you people in Southeast Missouri, you're anti-black and anti-union." It kind of irritated Warren. (laughing) I think that kind of cooled that relationship; it was probably already cooling, but in any event, that allegedly happened.

WS: Tom Eagleton was a pretty popular candidate down here, wasn't he?

JR: Yes, he was! Everybody loved Tom Eagleton. I'm telling you. Hell, I was Tom's campaign manager down here in this area, for years and years. On that subject, let me tell you a funny story about that. When Tom first ran for the Senate, I think it was a three way race. You'll have to fill in the names of the other two; hell, the statute of limitations has run on my memory.

WS: James Symington would have been one.*

JR: Could be, yes. And then there was another -- oh, the guy from [St. Joseph].

* I got this wrong. Symington ran in the 1976 senatorial race. The 1968 race had six primary candidates, of which three were major contenders: Eagleton, True Davis, and the incumbent, Ed Long.

SM: True Davis.

JR: Yes, True Davis! The \$50 million man who said that he was going to spend \$2 or \$3 million to get elected. (laughs) You know, made it public. Well, here's what happened. Tom Eagleton had been coming to Pemiscot County regularly for years and years and years. Everyone loved him. Hell, we'd have big fish fries for him and have a big turnout and Tom would drink the beer with the boys and sit back and laugh and tell jokes and had a *hell* of a time. You know, everyone loved Tom. *I* loved Tom, still do. And that was a situation whereby sheer force of personality and magnetism, he overcame what I call the conservative attitude on social and political issues that Tom espoused [against]. In other words, they loved him in (laughing) spite of some of the damn things he did!

But anyway, back to the story. During that election, True Davis came down and paid Don Dickerson from Cape Girardeau (you may know Don; he's a lawyer up there) a bunch of money to try and carry the Bootheel for True Davis. Hell, no one had ever heard of True Davis down here. Don there somehow managed to pull off a great big station wagon. I remember. I use to rib him about it. Here he comes with his big station wagon. He comes down to Pemiscot County, Don does. This is a first hand story for the people involved. I don't want to reveal their names, because they're still alive. Dickerson comes down here and pays -- I've forgotten the amount; it was a substantial amount of cash -- to a group to go for True Davis. True Davis made one trip to Pemiscot County for a tea at a local residence. That was his only appearance. He carried Pemiscot County. He carried Pemiscot County. And I don't know, but I strongly believe there was hanky panky inside the polls.

[tape meter, 150]

I know the people that got the money. (laughs) And I have a suspicion of what happened. I'm not saying it was just like Pappy Brown's precinct, but something happened. You don't come to Pemiscot County, unknown, spend an afternoon, and carry the damn county against a popular guy like Tom Eagleton that had been coming here for years.

Well, of course, when that happened, it embarrassed the hell out of me. I brooded about that for a couple of days. What in the hell and I going to tell Tom Eagleton?" Well, I decided, hell, I'm just going to bite the bullet and call him. I called him up, and then I started raising hell True Davis people, what they'd done; this that and the other. And Tom listened very attentively. And he said, "Well hell. I won. Let's just forget about it. Next time, get them on my side."

(much laughter)

"What?! Okay!" He taught me a good political lesson. By God, if you win, shut up and don't start raising hell. Raise hell if you have to when you lose, but not when you win.

SM: I told Will earlier, at one point in time [my sister] Susie and [her husband] Douglas -- you know, Doug worked for Dickerson.

JR: Yes, he did.

SM: Yes. And they supported True Davis against Daddy [who strongly supported Eagleton], and it made Daddy madder than hell because his own daughter was . . .

JR: Well I didn't know that story, but I can understand it.

SM: But I couldn't remember who it was, and when you said Dickerson and True Davis.

JR: Dickerson, yes. Doug did work for that firm for a short time at Cape Girardeau. Right.

WS: You were talking about the labor union connection in St. Louis. I don't know if you remember this. It was in the papers. I'm sure you recall the so-called Shenker-Callanan machine.

JR: Oh yes! I visited Morris Shenker.

WS: Well this was headlines when, supposedly, Mr. Conran, Mr. Nacy--

JR: Yes, Dick Nacy. Dick Nacy's relatives lived here in Caruthersville.

WS: Oh really?

JR: Yes!

WS: I didn't know that.

JR: Oh yes! Dick Nacy was at the Central Missouri Trust Company. He was the political operator until Burleigh Arnold took over.

WS: Oh Burleigh Arnold took that over. I didn't know that.

JR: Yes, he was Dick Nacy's successor up there.

WS: He had been in the attorney general's office.

JR: Yes. And Burleigh was a young guy, and Dick Nacy died or retired or something. So the Central Bank hired Burleigh.

WS: I don't know if you ever heard about this except maybe through the papers. But apparently there was a fight in the state Democratic committee, and the way they depicted it was Shenker and Callanan was one faction, and the Conran-Nacy-*James Pendergast* was the other faction. They called it the "Battle of the Bosses." (laughs)

JR: (laughs) Well, I wouldn't doubt it. I don't know anything about it, but I think that's probably a good media description of it, yes; a popular description of it.

WS: One of these things I think I mentioned earlier, how the papers would call Mr. Conran a boss.

JR: Boss, oh yes.

WS: And one qualification I got on that, which I thought was important -- it may sound trivial, but -- Mrs. Douglas had mentioned that in *this* country they would call Mr. Conran "boss" as an affectionate term.

JR: Yes.

WS: Whereas, to me, when I was reading those papers--

JR: It's derogatory, yes.

WS: And it seemed misleading, because to me, somebody like Tom Pendergast or Crump in Memphis could be a boss -- but that's an urban, patronage phenomenon.

JR: Setting, yes.

WS: And I don't necessarily attach the negative connotations to patronage that the journalists crusaded at the time. But one thing I'm wondering -- someone like Mr. Conran in a rural area--

JR: There wasn't any patronage.

WS: There wasn't any patronage.

JR: No.

WS: So if people helped him politically or were his political friends, there wasn't really any way to reward anybody.

JR: No, except doing each other favors from time to time. It would be, "Try to go along when you can. When you can't, let's don't get mad and split up. Let's don't get all huffed up about it. Let's just stay together and talk these things out." J.V. was a team player.

[tape meter, 200]

WS: And these people he was dealing with, like this group you were talking about, the fifteen to twenty, they were powerful, well to do people in their own right.

JR: People in the county, that's right.

WS: Landowners.

JR: Landowners. They were the economic and political power in New Madrid County. And J.V. had a firm hands-off policy. And I remember -- was it Hartzell Kimes?

SM: He was sheriff.

JR: One of J.V.'s dear friends -- maybe it wasn't Hartzell Kimes; it was somebody else.

SM: Judge Wright?

JR: No, not Judge Wright. But anyway, whoever he was, he failed to get the endorsement. J.V. did not lift one finger to try and change it. He made no speeches for him or nothing.

WS: This was a county office.

JR: County office. It was one of J.V.'s good friends. I've forgotten who in the heck he was. But when they spoke, that was it. J.V. kept his word.

SM: It might have been Hartzell.

JR: Could be. He did not get involved in those local county offices. The name Hartzell Kimes as sheriff sticks in my mind.

SM: And see, Daddy went frog gigging with him and fishing and all that stuff.

JR: Yes, I think maybe it was Hartzell. I think that Hartzell reached the point, maybe where he was drinking too much and got kind of old, and kind of got sloppy, and there were some complaints about him really not being up to the job. I think it's probably Hartzell Kimes.

I can remember one occasion where your county collector -- no, your county treasurer -- came up short on a state audit. I'll tell you what happened there. J.V. called him up and said, "Get your ass out of there. You're through." (laughs) He resigned the next day. That's right. None of this business about, "We're going to go to court. We want to review all of that audit. It's political." All that stuff you hear now about the audits. These audits are a joke. I'm not blaming Margaret Kelly, but hell, they're just a joke. Hell, none of these county officials *comply* with them. They yell "politics" and hell, that's the end of it. (laughing) But when J.V. called on his candidate, boom! You're gone. Goodbye.

No one ever has accused, to my knowledge, of any corrupt business in New Madrid County. Now that county was run straight. There wasn't the slightest hint of anybody doing anything wrong. If you did, by God, you'd had it. That was it. J.V. had a high moral code.

SM: And didn't he get gambling and stuff out of the county?

JR: Yes. Hell yes. And he got rid of the thieves. (laughs)

SM: He told me this story earlier. (laughs)

JR: Yes. He wiped out that crowd quickly and effectively. No more stealing for a long time. (I'm not going to tell that story).

SM: Okay.

WS: I don't know if this is the same case where that you were talking about, where the archbishop in St. Louis got involved. Mr. Hunter was telling me this story. It seemed like it may have been that same appointment, and maybe this was just a minor aspect of it. But he said one of the St. Louis papers came down and discovered, suddenly, this supposedly big gambling operation in Gideon. And it was some of the planters there. And the headlines were, "Boss Conran's County Rife With Gambling," or something.

[tape meter, 250]

JR: I think that's probably another deal. And that involved Veryl Riddle.

WS: (laughing) I was just going to ask you about Veryl Riddle.

JR: Veryl Riddle was one of the Dunklin County guys who was anti-Conran. And I think that involved the disagreement J.V. had with Veryl Riddle, which wasn't unusual. You know, J.V. had disagreements with a lot of people. But I remember the Riddle-Conran disagreement. And Veryl is no dummy.

WS: I wonder if that was before or after they contended with each other for the seat on the Democratic Committee. That was in 1954.

JR: I don't know. I can't give you a time frame on that.

WS: Did you ever know a Smoky James near Clarkton?

JR: I know the name. I didn't know him personally.

WS: I was trying to identify whether he might have been an ally of Mr. Conran's.

JR: I don't know. Do you?

SM: I don't know.

JR: I'll say this, most of the people of New Madrid were, back in the *old* days. Now, of course, as J.V. got older and less active, why, naturally I guess there was some people who decided that they weren't going to adhere to the arrangement. But I don't know whether Smoky James was.

WS: There was a Truman connection in Poplar Bluff with a doctor. Doc Blanton? Did you know who that was? He was a friend of Truman's.*

JR: Not a Doc Blanton. There was Blanton from Sikeston, who I mentioned, who was the owner of the Sikeston *Standard* at the time. I don't know about Doc Blanton. There was a doctor who was a dentist from Steele, Missouri, who somehow was a friend of Truman. When Truman was here he went over to his house at Reelfoot the following day. I've got a picture of that gathering, when they were all over there. Just a minute and I'll show you that picture.

[tape recorder momentarily off]

WS: . . . that list of county officials. I didn't know if it was appropriate to show it, but here I did note these two only served a very short amount of time. I didn't know if that had anything to do--

JR: No.

WS: I appreciate it. I was just telling Mrs. Maxwell that your illustration of that helps me, because I've heard a lot of people say that he would not tolerate inefficiency.

JR: He wouldn't.

WS: But you are the first one to give me a specific example.

* This was Dr. W.S. Brandon, of Poplar Bluff, who served in World War I with Truman.

JR: Well I *know* that happened, and it happened on another occasion too. It happened with the county collector. Bert . . .

SM: Femmer?

JR: Yes! It happened with Bert.

SM: Okay. Well, the other one I think I know too.

JR: [County Clerk Bernard] DeLisle.

SM: Yes.

JR: Yes, you know about that one.

SM: Yes.

[tape meter, 300]

JR: Well I'll tell you another one. Bert Femmer, the collector, came up short on audit. "Go!"
(laughing) He did not tolerate it.

SM: Bert Femmer is in one of those pictures I gave you. I gave him some photographs that I had, and he's in there.

WS: One thing I'm trying to get some details on -- this is something else I've gotten in sort of a vague way from various people; and it's kind of a philosophical depiction -- people will say, "Mr. Conran was kind of a pioneer for this region, and he wanted to see it advance economically." I know he was involved with the cotton allotment and was concerned about that. And when there was a drought in this area I could find letters when he would write the congressman with his concern. But I don't know if he ever tried to attract industry?

JR: Not to my knowledge, and I'll tell you why. Back when J.V. was active, hell, the thought of an industry coming to Southeast Missouri was just so far fetched, why nobody ever gave it any consideration. It was only after World War II and later that we had the boom, the river transportation, and all that; and expansion of our industrial base, that this area finally got active in trying to attract industries. That was not something that was even considered back in the days of J.V. Conran. Remember, he died in 1970. It wasn't until after that time, really, that there was much effort done to attract industry. But I'm sure, had it been a viable thing, he would certainly have been in favor of it. Because he wanted people to have jobs and be taken care of. He was progressive, but I don't think anybody ever thought of any big industry coming to Southeast Missouri back in the '40s and '50s and '60s.

WS: I guess he would have been concerned with the operation of the New Madrid Port Authority.

JR: Oh yes. I'm sure he would have been very interested in that, but of course that's a late development too.

WS: Oh, is it late?

JR: Oh yes.

SM: When did Noranda and them come in? He was still alive when it happened.

JR: I think that was in the '70s.

SM: Was that in the '70s? Then he was dead.

JR: It might have been the late '60s.

SM: He wasn't active.

JR: He wasn't active then. Noranda was Sam Hunter's deal, probably; and others. And your dad wasn't active at that time.

WS: Would train transportation have figured into the agricultural picture at all?

[tape meter, 350]

JR: No. Oh, in the sense of the complaining about the rates that (laughing) they charge for transporting it, but no. We had rail service. Cotton Belt, and in some portions, I think the Wabash. And then over in Butler County we had Missouri Pacific. Through this particular area we had the Frisco; St. Louis-San Francisco Railway. So we had adequate rail transportation, and river barges. Most of the heavy, bulky stuff is shipped by river, of course. It's a lot cheaper.

[end of side 1, tape III; tape meter, 362]

WS: I guess with industrialization being far fetched, as you said, Mr. Conran wouldn't have been really concerned with matters of organized labor.

JR: Only in a political sense because of their political power.

WS: In St. Louis.

JR: Right. He dealt with people, basically, that had political power.

WS: That who push for "right to work" came later, then, came later I guess.

JR: Yes.

WS: Because that was sponsored by Mr. Downing, from Dunklin.

JR: From here. No, you got it right. All his interests were in Dunklin County, but he lived in Pemiscot County.

WS: Oh, he's right over the line. That's right.

JR: Yes. He was our county representative. And Vic Downing -- I've told this to him to his face; and he and I are friends -- Vic was probably one of the most ineffective members of the General Assembly that we've ever had. And I'll tell you why. Vic would not deal or politic with anybody. If, for example, a pay raise came up for the chief of police of St. Louis, Vic would be against it. Now why, I don't know. Vic never had a piece of legislation that he ever got passed. He didn't sponsor anything that ever got passed. He was an "aginner." And why in the name of God would he stick his thumb in the face of the labor people in St. Louis and Kansas City by sponsoring this right to work business escapes me. Vic was Vic. (laughing) Vic, I would say, was just the very opposite of J.V. Conran. He was right and he didn't give a damn. He would not deal. And he was not an effective county representative. But I've got to say one thing, he stuck with his guns, with what he believed. But he sure as hell didn't do *us* any good. (laughs)

The guy who really represented us up there was your country's representative, Gene Copeland. If we wanted anything done, hell, we knew not to ask Vic. First of all, he wouldn't have done it, and second, if you asked him to do it, he couldn't get anything done. We went to Gene Copeland, who just recently retired. Yes, I know Vic. Vic's a nice guy. He's a man of principle and all that, but my God. He was miscast. (laughs)

WS: You probably also remember Mr. Baker? Tom Baker?

JR: Oh yes. Hell yes. Tom, the flamboyant man from up at Stoddard County who was country representative for two or three years, put on a big splash and all that, and then just fizzled out like a Roman candle that burned out. He had a short lived time in the public domain. He died here four or five years ago. He went blind later. He had a

horrible end to his life. I knew Tom. I represented him one time in a lawsuit. He was quite a guy.

WS: D.W. Gilmore, he was senator out of Scott County, wasn't he?

JR: No, he was circuit judge.

WS: I thought Al Spradling took his place in the '50s.

JR: Well, maybe D.W. Gilmore was senator at one time, but I remember him as a circuit judge up there in Scott County. It could be he was a senator. I'm not sure.

WS: I think we've pretty much covered all the state senators and state representatives I can think of.

JR: Right.

WS: Well actually, I've gotten through the main questions. Of course you remember 1948, you had the so-called Dixiecrats.

JR: Dixiecrats, sure. Strom Thurmond. I saw him make a speech up at the Boone County courthouse in 1948. I was a freshman in law school then. Yes, the Dixiecrat movement. No wait a minute; I've got the wrong race. That was Henry Wallace running for president in 1948.

WS: That was the convention where it took place, where they split. And I believe Mr. Truman had something to do with that, because he was in favor of civil rights. And I suspect that Mr. Conran would have been upset about that, because anytime you have a split in your party . . .

JR: Yes. Although I never heard him say anything about it.

[tape meter, 50]

WS: Yes. I'll be lucky to find anybody that knew that. (laughs)

JR: My guess is he *would* be upset. As I say, he devoted his life to politics, in the highest sense of the word. J.V. Conran never bought a vote. Wouldn't *think* of it. He did it by persuasion, leadership, and the friends that he cultivated. I don't think we'll ever see anybody like him anymore. He was a product of his times, and times have changed. Hell, people now can't even control what their wives or what their husbands (laughing) say, do, or vote -- let alone try to have influence over a great group of people. Hell, it's a different world that we live in. We had a simpler life than we have now. We weren't on the information highway. (laughs)

SM: The internet.

JR: The internet, or whatever you call it. We weren't bombarded with facts all the time.

WS: And misinformation. (laughs)

SM: Yes.

JR: And misinformation. Right, exactly.

WS: Well, one thing that I've learned when I come down this way -- a lot of people will talk about how they identify really more with Memphis than with St. Louis, being closer.

JR: Oh yes. Most of the people from here go to school either in Memphis, Ole Miss, or Arkansas.

WS: When it comes to politics, fairly recently I've come to appreciate that historic figure down there, Mr. Crump.

JR: Yes, Boss Crump.

WS: [To Sally:] Again, I wish I knew what your dad thought about Mr. Crump, because I'm sure he knew about him. [To Jim Ed:] I just wondered . . .

JR: He never mentioned Boss Crump. That was different place and a different set of political rules in place. Actually, at the last minute, the Bootheel was included in an act of Congress admitting Missouri to the union. As originally planned, the Bootheel wasn't going to get it. But we had an influential landowner by the name of John Hardman Walker, who persuaded the Missouri senator or congressman (whoever in the heck he was) to extend the boundaries down. So we have the little tip known as the Bootheel.

But socially, educationally, as well as shopping, most people go to Memphis. Memphis is a hell of lot shorter. It's 200 miles to St. Louis. It's about eighty-five or ninety to Memphis. It's just a matter of distance.

But J.V.'s time and energies were devoted within the political confines of Missouri. It didn't reach across state lines. I'm sure he probably knew Boss Crump, but I can't think of any occasion they could possibly have any dealings about *anything*.

SM: I was thinking, we went to Memphis with Mother to go shopping. We went to St. Louis whenever Daddy was with us.

JR: Yes.

SM: Baseball games and things like that.

JR: This was your dad's jurisdiction. Not Memphis. He didn't have anything to do with politics in other cities. That's understandable. He wanted to go within his "jurisdiction," if you want to call it, if I can't think of any other word.

WS: In talking about the various county governments, we've kind of covered this indirectly; how a lot of the counties -- especially Dunklin, Stoddard, and probably Mississippi and Scott -- tend to be individual. Whereas New Madrid would vote as a slate, and I think you've obviously illustrated how that came to be. But I've also heard that Pemiscot was maybe the closest to New Madrid. Where Pemiscot would run on a slate; maybe not as thoroughly.

JR: No. Pemiscot never was as organized as New Madrid County. As a matter of fact, I don't know of *any* county *anywhere* that was organized like New Madrid County. That was unique. Pemiscot County, I would say, in the '30s and '40s was pretty well organized.

[tape meter, 100]

But not in the sense there would be a meeting, and there'd be a pre-primary primary, and then there'd be one spokesman for the county. But Pemiscot County at one time was Republican. Pemiscot County voted Republican in 1928. We've got a lot of Republicans around here still. And the Republicans here vote in the primary. Some of them hold Democratic office here (laughing), and I could name them. I guess that's maybe not unique to Pemiscot County, but it's understandable, because we had a Republican County up until 1932.

WS: Didn't Prohibition have something to with that being . . . ?

JR: I'm not sure whether Prohibition had anything to do with Pemiscot County being Republican.

WS: I thought it was the switch out of being Republican. I can't remember, actually.

JR: I don't know.

WS: Way back when you were mentioning your dad and I guess your uncle being active in politics, would you say they were among the more prominent people -- and I assume this means getting out and campaigning and generally taking an interest.

JR: Oh yes. They took a great interest in it.

WS: Would you say Judge Harper was the primary contact for Mr. Conran?

JR: Yes. It was.

WS: But maybe more broadly the Ward and Reeves law firm.

JR: In a broad sense. But my dad, on the few occasions that J.V. had some litigation involving his personal interests that he didn't want to handle, why he'd have my dad handle it -- not because he couldn't handle it himself, hell he just didn't want to devote the *time* to it. He had more important fish to fry. Yes.

SM: Yes. His big thing was politics.

JR: Yes. Sure.

SM: That was it.

JR: No doubt about it.

WS: Well, I've taken up a lot of your time, Mr. Reeves. I sure do appreciate it.

JR: Well, I'm glad I could be of some help -- I *hope* I was some help.

WS: Tremendous, just tremendous.

JR: It was a pleasure meeting and talking to you.

WS: It was wonderful to listen to you. I feel like we've covered pretty much everything thoroughly. I may think of a few questions in the future.

JR: You call me, all right?

WS: Okay.

[end of interview; tape meter, 127]

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