

Oral History Interview
with
FRANCES R. BENNETT

Accountant for Vendo Company and for AT&T.

Blue Springs, Missouri
September 17, 1992
by Niel M. Johnson, Harry S. Truman Library

Harry S. Truman Library
Independence, Missouri
September, 1994

Oral History Interview
with
FRANCES R. BENNETT
September 17, 1992

Summary Description:

Mrs. Bennett discusses the Democratic political picnics held near Cameron, Missouri. Some of Mrs. Bennett's relatives were friends of Harry S. Truman before he became President.

Individuals mentioned in the interview include the Wogan family, Vincent Wogan, Morris Francis Wogan, Joseph Charles Wogan, Leo Wogan, Harry S. Truman, Isabell Audley, Liberty Oil Company, Margaret Truman, Vivian Truman, Tom Pendergast, Jack Malloy, Ted Sanders, Bernard Dieckmann, Harold Slater, Marguerite Slater, Buck Purcell, John Bynum, Ike Skelton, Lloyd Stark, and Maurice Milligan.

Donor:

Frances R. Bennett

Access:

Both the transcript and the tape recording are open without any restrictions.

Copyright:

Donated to the Government of the United States.

Oral,History Interview
with
FRANCES BENNETT

Blue Springs, Missouri
September 17, 1992

by Niel M. Johnson, Harry S. Truman Library

[1]

JOHNSON: Mrs. Bennett, I'm going to start by asking you to tell us when and where you were born, and what your parents names are.

BENNETT: I was born in St. Joseph, Missouri, February 18, 1922. My parents were Joseph Patrick Reardon, and Rose Wogan Reardon.

JOHNSON: They lived in St. Joe?

BENNETT: Lived in Easton, which is just east of St. Joe.

JOHNSON: I see. Were they out in the country then?

BENNETT: Yes.

JOHNSON: What were their occupations?

BENNETT: Farmer.

JOHNSON: He was a farmer. How large a farm was it, do you

[2]

recall?

BENNETT: Really, the only recollection I have of the farm is my grandfather's farm. My parents had 160 acres out by Clarksdale and were proceeding to build a home out there when my father was killed.

JOHNSON: How old were you when your father died?

BENNETT: I was three.

JOHNSON: Just three years old. Do you have brothers and sisters?

BENNETT: Yes. I have two sisters and a brother. My mother was carrying my brother when my father was killed. I was the oldest of the four of us. I was three. There was the baby, and he was born after my father was killed.

JOHNSON: Did your mother remarry?

BENNETT: Never did.

JOHNSON: What are the names of the brothers and sisters?

BENNETT: My sisters are Eileen and Joan, and my brother is Joe.

JOHNSON: I suppose the Wogan name, in particular, is important in the Truman story.

[3]

BENNETT: Yes.

JOHNSON: Before we get to that, how about your education. Where did you go to school?

BENNETT: I went to grade school and high school in Easton, Missouri.

JOHNSON: Did you graduate from high school?

BENNETT: Yes, sir. And Gard Business School in St. Joseph.

JOHNSON: Your mother then was raising the four children by herself?

BENNETT: That's right.

JOHNSON: On the farm?

BENNETT: With my grandfather, yes.

JOHNSON: Okay, your mother's father?

BENNETT: Yes.

JOHNSON: Was he the one that actually farmed the land then?

BENNETT: Yes.

JOHNSON: Mostly by himself?

BENNETT: By himself and another uncle, Vincent Wogan. They ran a dairy.

[4]

JOHNSON: Your mother had how many brothers and sisters?

BENNETT: She had six brothers and one sister.

JOHNSON: Six brothers and one sister. Which of them took an interest in politics?

BENNETT: Two of my uncles, Uncle Leo and an uncle I grew up calling "Uncle Father."

JOHNSON: Uncle Father?

BENNETT: Yes.

JOHNSON: Because he was a...

BENNETT: Well, when he was ordained, it was a family gathering and we would all call him one thing. But they thought that we children should show him due respect and call him Uncle Father, instead of Uncle Frank or Uncle Franz, as his brothers called him.

JOHNSON: His given name was Franz?

BENNETT: No, his name was Morris Francis.

JOHNSON: Morris Francis Wogan. So, he became a Catholic Priest, and then he had another brother that was...

BENNETT: Leo.

JOHNSON: Leo was active in Democrat politics?

[5]

BENNETT: Yes, very.

JOHNSON: Were there any other Wogans that participated in politics?

BENNETT: Not like those two did. Not like Uncle Leo and Uncle Father.

JOHNSON: Do you have any idea why they were politically active?

BENNETT: My grandfather took an active part in politics.

JOHNSON: Okay, your mother's father.

BENNETT: Yes.

JOHNSON: Do you remember what his involvement was at all in politics?

BENNETT: Well, it used to be that neighbors and everybody would always come to old J.C. to see what his thoughts were on politics, and they pretty well went along with everything he said.

JOHNSON: J.C., what did that stand for?

BENNETT: Joseph Charles, but they called him J.C.

JOHNSON: Did he ever serve in any local office? Was he ever elected or run for any office?

BENNETT: Not to my knowledge, he didn't, but he was active

[6]
in clubs and...

JOHNSON: He helped organize some rallies?

BENNETT: Yes, and things like this. Yes, he did do this.

JOHNSON: Do you have any idea when he first got acquainted with Harry Truman? Either your grandfather or your uncle.

BENNETT: Well, my Uncle Leo and my Uncle Father had acquaintance with Harry, and I think it was through Uncle Leo's wife, that they had met him or knew him. She was from Kansas City. I really don't know how, but they became very good friends.

JOHNSON: Okay, Uncle Leo's wife, what was her name?

BENNETT: Her name was Isabell Audley.

JOHNSON: And she was from Kansas City.

BENNETT: Yes.

JOHNSON: So, it was the Audley family you think that somehow got first acquainted with the Trumans?

BENNETT: Yes, through her brother; that's how. Uncle Leo and they were introduced to the Trumans.

JOHNSON: Do you know if the Audleys were ever elected to office in Kansas City, or had any involvement in

[7]
politics?

BENNETT: No, not to my knowledge.

JOHNSON: Do you have any idea when they first met Harry Truman?

BENNETT: No, because my first recollection of meeting Mr. and Mrs. Truman and Margaret was the following Christmas after my father passed away.

JOHNSON: What year would that have been?

BENNETT: In 1925.

JOHNSON: Then the year after that he was running for Presiding Judge. In 1926 he was running for Presiding Judge of Jackson County.

BENNETT: And they remained friends.

JOHNSON: So they got involved as far as you know; they had gotten involved in that campaign in 1926.

BENNETT: Oh, yes. Yes.

JOHNSON: You're talking about Leo.

BENNETT: Leo and Uncle Father.

JOHNSON: When did your uncle become a priest? Do you have any idea when he was ordained?

[8]

BENNETT: He was ordained in 1927, about June.

JOHNSON: In other words, he had gotten involved in politics before he was ordained.

BENNETT: That I couldn't tell you, because he was in the seminary, and he was away, and when he came back then he and Uncle Leo got together and he met Truman and they became very good friends.

JOHNSON: Mainly through Leo then?

BENNETT: Yes. Yes, mainly through Leo.

JOHNSON: Where did he go to seminary?

BENNETT: Creighton in Omaha.

JOHNSON: Oh, yes. So we're talking now about 1926-27-28, the first time that they got acquainted with and involved in politics with Harry Truman.

BENNETT: Yes.

JOHNSON: Your Uncle Leo was living where?

BENNETT: Liberty, Missouri.

JOHNSON: What was his occupation?

BENNETT: He had the Liberty Oil Company at that time. It was called the Liberty Oil Company.

[9]

JOHNSON: So he was not in Jackson County then, but he took an interest in Jackson County politics anyway?

BENNETT: Oh, yes.

JOHNSON: Did he have a lot of business here in Jackson County? Would that be one reason he was interested?

BENNETT: Well, I just couldn't tell you why, but his wife, and I call her Aunt Bella, she was from Kansas City. I know that he got involved in it.

JOHNSON: It would be interesting to see, you know, if the Audley name is in the records, in the early campaigns. He probably did quite a bit of business if he was in, you say, the oil business.

BENNETT: Yes.

JOHNSON: Quite a bit of business in Kansas City, no doubt.

BENNETT: Well, that was the time when you took a truck out and filled up farmer's tanks and that sort of thing.

JOHNSON: Oh, one of those.

BENNETT: Yes. And he had...

JOHNSON: Was he involved in the road building? Do you think that he was promoting the building of these concrete roads, paved roads, in Jackson County, your uncle?

[10]

BENNETT: No, I don't think so. He wasn't in that kind of business, because he was in more or less the delivery.

JOHNSON: But it would have made it a lot easier for him, to have concrete roads to drive on, at least part of the way.

BENNETT: Oh, yes.

JOHNSON: So he never talked about Truman as a road builder?

BENNETT: No. However, I knew he was.

JOHNSON: Well, where did your uncle have his first church, his first parish?

BENNETT: It was at Liberty. He was sent to Liberty.

JOHNSON: The Catholic Church.

BENNETT: The Catholic Church. He wasn't there too awfully long, like maybe two or three years, a short time.

JOHNSON: Then he went...

BENNETT: Then he went to Cameron.

JOHNSON: Was this the Catholic Church in Cameron?

BENNETT: Yes, St. Munsons. He was there a good while, a good while.

JOHNSON: When do you think he would have taken that parish,

[11]

about when? Let's see, he's ordained by 1927, he was in Liberty, what, a year or two.

BENNETT: Two or three.

JOHNSON: Two or three years. So maybe we're talking about 1930 or so?

BENNETT: Probably. About 1930, '31.

JOHNSON: All right. He took the parish in Cameron, and in the meantime he'd become acquainted with Harry Truman through his brother.

BENNETT: Oh yes.

JOHNSON: But you don't remember what involvement, or know what involvement they had prior, let's say, to 1934?

BENNETT: No.

JOHNSON: That was his first Senatorial campaign, in 1934. And, of course, his big project as Presiding Judge was to get this road system built along with a few things like a hospital for the poor. He took an interest in that.

BENNETT: Well, I'm sure my Uncle Father did, I'm sure; and Uncle Leo, too.

JOHNSON: Did you ever hear them talk about Truman's personality, or his character, what they had to say

[12]

about Truman's character.

BENNETT: They always thought he was just like on a pedestal, they just...

JOHNSON: Did they ever mention Pendergast? Did that ever bother them, that Pendergast connection with Truman?

BENNETT: I don't think that ever did bother them.

JOHNSON: Do you remember them ever saying anything about Pendergast or Truman's connection with the Pendergast machine as it was called?

BENNETT: Oh, yes, I had heard about it, but I didn't think...

JOHNSON: But they weren't that negative about Pendergast, as far as you know?

BENNETT: No. From what I always heard Pendergast was always good to people and when people were starving he saw that they had something to eat. I remember this, and I remember them talking about that.

JOHNSON: He had his own welfare system, so to speak, for the needy?

BENNETT: Yes. I mean I've heard this.

JOHNSON: Well, how about the needy around Cameron? How did your uncle deal with them?

[13]

BENNETT: Well, I don't know, but everybody up there liked him, and they pitched in and helped.

JOHNSON: That was during the Depression then, of course.

BENNETT: Yes, they put this picnic together and he would have a picnic every year and would be...

JOHNSON: When did that start, do you have any idea?

BENNETT: Oh, goodness, I couldn't tell you what year.

JOHNSON: Was it your uncle, the priest, Father Wogan initiated the annual picnic?

BENNETT: Yes.

JOHNSON: Who were invited to that picnic? Who was it for?

BENNETT: Well, of course, the whole parish put on the picnic, and then he'd try to get any dignitaries or anybody that would come, and they'd have a podium and get up and make speeches.

JOHNSON: It was like a potluck? I mean, anyone who wanted to come would be invited, were they welcome?

BENNETT: Oh, yes. It was open to the public.

JOHNSON: Okay. Sort of a potluck type picnic I suppose.

BENNETT: Well, I think they would make a menu, and the ladies all got together and did the cooking, and

[14]

decided what they would serve, and of course, they charged so much per plate.

JOHNSON: Oh, so you didn't bring your own food?

BENNETT: No, you didn't bring your own food.

JOHNSON: Well, then it would be a kind of a money-raiser for them.

BENNETT: A fund-raiser, sure.

JOHNSON: Maybe that was the main reason for this.

BENNETT: It was. For funding of the different things that they needed for the parish.

JOHNSON: Do you have any idea what their membership was of that parish?

BENNETT: No, I wouldn't know.

JOHNSON: Where were the picnic grounds? Where was that located?

BENNETT: Well, as far as I can remember, it was a little east and south of Cameron.

JOHNSON: East and south.

BENNETT: I used to think I could find that, but of course, the highways have changed, and being away from there, you know.

[15]

JOHNSON: Did you know Ted Sanders from Cameron?

BENNETT: Yes.

JOHNSON: I interviewed him about eight years ago, when he was in his early '90s. He didn't have the name of the Catholic priest who was very active in politics, but he said there was a grove south of town where they had these picnics.

BENNETT: Well, that's what I said, south, maybe a little east. As I remember it seemed like you came out of Cameron and kind of went at an angle, but...

JOHNSON: To the east of Cameron.

BENNETT: As I remember it.

JOHNSON: Now, Interstate 35 -- what direction would it be from the interstate.

BENNETT: I would say it's east.

JOHNSON: East of the Interstate.

BENNETT: Yes.

JOHNSON: Yes, he said that Truman made a speech there, as did the St. Louis Mayor, Bernard Dieckman. Do you remember that name?

BENNETT: Yes, I do. I remember there were several people

[16]
that made speeches.

JOHNSON: And you were there to hear it?

BENNETT: Yes, but you know, a kid wasn't paying any attention to that.

JOHNSON: How many people were there, do you think? How many people are we talking about?

BENNETT: I'd say there would be several hundred at it.

JOHNSON: Is that right. It was in a grove and there were trees surrounding it, sort of?

BENNETT: Oh, yes, it was a real pretty place.

JOHNSON: Just a clearing, a clearing among some trees.

BENNETT: Yes, and then there were shade trees also on the place, it was just kind of a pretty grove.

JOHNSON: Was this off of a country road?

BENNETT: I think so.

JOHNSON: You said that it was donated by somebody, that land right there. Did I hear you say that earlier?

BENNETT: The man who owned it gave permission to hold this picnic on it. It wasn't just one picnic; it was an annual thing, and the man always let them use that grove.

[17]

JOHNSON: So there were other groups that used it for...

BENNETT: I couldn't tell you about that, but that church did.

JOHNSON: Let's see, you were born in what year?

BENNETT: In 1922.

JOHNSON: Okay, so in 1934, that would be the year that Truman ran for the Senate the first time, and you would have been 12 years old.

BENNETT: Yes.

JOHNSON: Do you remember attending a picnic in 1934 when you were about 12 years old?

BENNETT: Oh, yes. I attended them...

JOHNSON: And Truman was a speaker?

BENNETT: Yes, I sure do.

JOHNSON: There wouldn't have been much reason for him to be a speaker before that because he was running for office in Jackson County.

BENNETT: Yes.

JOHNSON: Do you know if that was his first time there in 1934? Do you know if that was Truman's first time?

[18]

BENNETT: I couldn't tell you. I doubt it. He probably attended the picnic and...

JOHNSON: Oh, even before that time.

BENNETT: Well, yes, I imagine.

JOHNSON: Because of his friendship with them.

BENNETT: Oh, yes, I remember him making the speech. I couldn't tell you what he said. You're twelve years old and you're going to a picnic and you haven't been away from the farm for all summer. That was a big day.

JOHNSON: After you got out of the Gard Business School, what occupation did you take up?

BENNETT: Accounting.

JOHNSON: That's been your profession ever since?

BENNETT: Yes.

JOHNSON: In 1934, I guess we'll go back to that. You have big recollections possibly of that 1934 campaign.

BENNETT: Yes.

JOHNSON: In which Truman made a speech there at the picnic and your uncle, your two uncles, were actively involved in promoting his campaign. What else do you remember about that?

[19]

BENNETT: I'd say my grandfather was too, because he was in a little different area of the state, but he...

JOHNSON: He was living...

BENNETT: He lived in Easton, Missouri.

JOHNSON: Up by St. Joe.

BENNETT: Yes.

JOHNSON: Do you remember the name Harold Slater? He was a newspaper reporter.

BENNETT: Oh, I sure do. He was with the St. Joe paper.

JOHNSON: Yes. I have interviewed him. He covered activities in that area for the newspaper then. How did you get acquainted with him?

BENNETT: Oh, my goodness. I don't know. I've known him because my sister worked for the newspaper for a while, but we just knew Harold and Marguerite Slater as long as I can remember.

JOHNSON: Was he a friend of your uncles?

BENNETT: Yes, I think they were friends. And he's always been friendly with the family.

JOHNSON: What's your first actual recollection of Harry Truman? You say that you do remember Truman speaking

[20]
at the picnic, but you don't remember what he was saying.

BENNETT: Yes.

JOHNSON: Do you remember when you first actually met him, or when you were introduced to him? Do you remember when that would have been?

BENNETT: Yes, I was three years old.

JOHNSON: Oh, when you were just three years old?

BENNETT: Yes, sir. Well, I was about three and a half.

JOHNSON: How did that happen?

BENNETT: It was the Christmas after my father was killed. Uncle Leo and Aunt Bella had my mother and her little group, and Mr. and Mrs. Truman and my grandfather there. We were all there at Christmas time for a meal, a get-together at Christmas, and Mr. and Mrs. Truman were there.

JOHNSON: It was your Aunt Bella, you call her.

BENNETT: Yes.

JOHNSON: But they were living in Liberty.

BENNETT: Yes.

JOHNSON: And her parents were living in Kansas City?

[21]
BENNETT: I think her parents were deceased. I think she had a brother, maybe two brothers, living in Kansas City, but I...

JOHNSON: This was a Christmas dinner?

BENNETT: Yes, probably wasn't Christmas Day, but it was the Christmas season.

JOHNSON: A round of parties, so to speak.

BENNETT: Yes.

JOHNSON: Do you remember the address there in Liberty?

BENNETT: I think it was 111 Brown Street. It was on Brown Street, and I think it was either 111 or 110, something like that, Brown Street.

JOHNSON: Yes. We're talking mid-20's. We're talking 1925 or '26.

BENNETT: Yes, sir. Christmas of 1925. Because my dad was killed the 7th of April in 1925.

JOHNSON: So that's probably when he also talked about running again, running for Presiding Judge here in Jackson County.

BENNETT: Probably, but, of course, that was...

JOHNSON: Did they always talk politics?

[22]

BENNETT: Of course. Of course. But then who was paying any attention to that at that age. That was grown-ups, kids were supposed to be seen and not heard. And the kids went out and played.

JOHNSON: You may be the only source of information for that Christmas party that they attended. Did your uncles keep a diary, by the way?

BENNETT: I wouldn't know.

JOHNSON: We mentioned papers and albums before, you know, scrapbooks or albums, and you don't know of any. But if you do come across snapshots...

BENNETT: If I find anything, I will let you know...

JOHNSON: Yes, we'll be glad to copy them. All right, I have this book by Margaret Truman about her father, it's called *Harry S. Truman*, and on the back -- actually on the jacket -- there's this picture of the family together and you're saying that this picture was taken...

BENNETT: In my uncle's grape arbor. He had a grape arbor out behind the house, that, well, to me it seemed pretty lengthy from the sidewalk down the center. He had benches, about four

along the walkway, and at the end of it he had his garden and yard tool shed, at the end of that, and an arbor, grapes all over it. And

[23]

that's where that picture was taken.

JOHNSON: Do you have the year that this was taken?

BENNETT: I really don't have a year.

JOHNSON: You know, Margaret was born in 1924.

BENNETT: Yes, and I was born in '22, so I'm two years older than her.

JOHNSON: Does she look like she might be ten years old in those photos that were taken in the 1934 campaign?

BENNETT: I would say that's about when it was taken.

JOHNSON: Do you have any idea who took the picture, or what it was taken for?

BENNETT: Just snapshots.

JOHNSON: You think it was for that campaign, to be used in the campaign?

BENNETT: No, I don't think so. I think it was just, you know, that the family had cameras and were taking pictures.

JOHNSON: So, maybe one of your uncles could have taken these pictures?

BENNETT: Very easily could have taken it.

[24]

JOHNSON: I'm not sure that we have a credit line or anything on that. Is there any reference to that in the book?

BENNETT: I couldn't find any reference to it.

JOHNSON: So that's in the back yard of your uncle's home in Liberty.

BENNETT: Yes sir.

JOHNSON: And we have the address on that. What's the address again?

BENNETT: It's either 110 or 111 I think, on Brown. I know it's on Brown Street. I could go there.

JOHNSON: That's a good picture. I wonder if that was actually a snapshot, or whether the St. Joe newspaper would have taken that.

BENNETT: No, I don't think so. I think that was just a snapshot.

JOHNSON: How well acquainted were you with Margaret Truman at that time? As an adolescent.

BENNETT: We were just little kids. Every year mother would let one of us go down and spend a week at a time with Uncle Leo and Eileen, their only daughter, and Margaret was Truman's only daughter. Each year one of us kids --

[25]

we couldn't all go at once, but one at a time -- mother couldn't spare but one of us at a time. I got to go down there, and when I was there Uncle Leo had made a sand box for Eileen, his daughter, for all of us to play in. The grown-ups were yakking and talking, probably about politics, and the kids were playing. Margaret scooped up, as kids would do, a handful of sand, and got some in Eileen's eyes. We had to go pronto to the doctor and get her eyes washed out.

JOHNSON: Was that before this picture was taken?

BENNETT: Oh, yes, we were all smaller than that. At the time we were just little kids playing in the sand pile.

JOHNSON: So, once in a while in the summertime, you and Margaret would be playing together in the backyard of your Uncle's home up there.

BENNETT: Yes. Like when I'd be down there, they would come over to Liberty and the kids would all get to play. Play in the sandpile.

I've often wondered if Margaret ever remembered any of that, you know.

JOHNSON: Yes. Well, some time you'll have to get in touch with her.

BENNETT: Of course, her father was President, and you didn't get close to her.

[26]

JOHNSON: After he was elected to the Senate, they went to Washington, of course.

BENNETT: Oh yes.

JOHNSON: But they did, sometimes in the summer, come here to the home in Independence. Do you remember if, after 1934, that you ever met her at your Uncle's home? Did you ever play in the summer?

BENNETT: I think one time. But it's kind of vague. Here's another picture that was taken there in Liberty also.

JOHNSON: This is the family, kind of leaning against their car, in the summer of 1934. Yes.

BENNETT: Okay. This is the same time. They were taken together.

JOHNSON: Yes, they are dressed the same way, right? And that had to be the same time.

BENNETT: And I don't know what kind of car that is.

JOHNSON: We are assuming that's Truman's car, but it could have been somebody else's.

BENNETT: I think it's Truman's because my Uncle Leo had a Buick, and I remember it had the wooden-spoked wheels.

JOHNSON: Yes.

[27]

BENNETT: I remember him and Truman talking about their cars, you know.

JOHNSON: It's right outside your Uncle's home, you think?

BENNETT: Yes. It's on the driveway.

JOHNSON: The driveway of your Uncle Leo's home?

BENNETT: Yes.

JOHNSON: Well, good. I like to pin those down when we can.

BENNETT: I'm sure that's where that one was taken, and I know this was taken in that grape arbor.

JOHNSON: But you don't have a family album of photographs, I understand. In other words, you haven't seen the snapshot in an album, a family album anywhere.

BENNETT: I had seen this picture, and this one here before.

JOHNSON: You've seen them before.

BENNETT: With Uncle Leo's and Aunt Bella's house.

JOHNSON: In an album?

BENNETT: I couldn't tell you if they were in an album, or loose, or what. But I would not have had those. Their daughter had all of their belongings like that.

JOHNSON: This cousin. What's her name?

[28]

BENNETT: Eileen, and she's passed away. She passed away about a year and a half ago.

JOHNSON: But you haven't found out what happened to the album?

BENNETT: I don't know where.

JOHNSON: Did she have children?

BENNETT: Yes. She moved to Wisconsin.

JOHNSON: But she had been living in Liberty up until that time, or until she moved.

BENNETT: Oh, she's lived in Wisconsin every since she married.

JOHNSON: Who did she marry? What was her married name?

BENNETT: Malloy.

JOHNSON: Oh, then she moved to Wisconsin after she married.

BENNETT: Yes. And her husband was a professor at Northwestern University.

JOHNSON: Do you remember what town, or city, in Wisconsin they lived in?

BENNETT: Waukesha.

JOHNSON: That's probably just above the Illinois line.

[29]

Did he commute to Northwestern?

BENNETT: Yes, I think he did.

JOHNSON: By the lake.

BENNETT: Yes. Not too far out of Milwaukee.

JOHNSON: So the Malloys might have the albums or scrapbooks.

BENNETT: Jack might have it.

JOHNSON: Do you have an address?

BENNETT: Oh, goodness.

JOHNSON: If you can come up with a name and address, we could write to them and inquire about that.

BENNETT: When he was a professor...

JOHNSON: Jack Malloy was her husband.

BENNETT: Yes.

JOHNSON: And they had children?

BENNETT: Yes.

JOHNSON: Do you remember the names of any of their children? They're the ones that might have whatever was passed down.

[30]

BENNETT: Ann and Kevin. And one of her boys is named Leo.

JOHNSON: Leo. Irish Malloys, right?

BENNETT: Oh, yes.

JOHNSON: Wogan. What's the nationality of that?

BENNETT: Irish.

JOHNSON: That is Irish.

BENNETT: Sure. And so is Reardon.

JOHNSON: Reardon, of course, that I knew, but Wogan is not very common is it, not a very common Irish name?

BENNETT: No, it's not very common, at least in this country. My mother went to Ireland and she said that she went through a cemetery and she said they were just loaded with Wogans.

JOHNSON: They are probably from a certain area there. So you remember these incidents, playing with Margaret there in the backyard of your Uncle's home and your Uncle's talking politics while you were young. Did you have any particular interest, or did you pick up any particular interest in politics because of that?

BENNETT: Yes, I probably did later on in life, but not at that time. I remember how excited everybody was when Mr. Truman got to be a judge and then, of course, when

[31]

he went on to the Senate, and how elated we were, and all that. Then I remember when President Roosevelt died and Mr. Truman became President. I remember Aunt Bella and Uncle Leo at mealtime; I was living with them at the time when Mr. Roosevelt died and Mr. Truman became President. They were living in Kansas City then; they had moved to Kansas City.

JOHNSON: From Liberty?

BENNETT: Oh, yes.

JOHNSON: Do you have any idea about when that happened?

BENNETT: When they left Liberty? I think they sold the Liberty Oil Company and that's when they moved to Kansas City. The year, I couldn't really tell you.

JOHNSON: But it was before Truman became President. This was while he was Senator?

BENNETT: Yes.

JOHNSON: Did they ever go to Washington to visit him?

BENNETT: I do not know. They could possibly have, but I don't know.

JOHNSON: What visits do you remember after 1934 when these pictures were taken?

BENNETT: I don't really remember any because Mr. Truman was

[32]

Senator and he was gone, and he could have gone to visit them [the Wogans] and I wouldn't have known it.

JOHNSON: Were you ever invited to his home in Independence on Delaware, the Truman home?

BENNETT: No.

JOHNSON: Now, you mentioned something about "If you can't stand the heat, get out of the kitchen." What was that incident involving your mother?

BENNETT: Yes. It was my mother. It was when he was testing the waters; Mr. Truman was testing the waters for the Senate seat.

JOHNSON: In '34.

BENNETT: And he came up to my grandpas.

JOHNSON: Up in Easton.

BENNETT: Yes. He came up. Uncle Leo and Uncle Father, and Mr. Truman, they all came up together, and of course, they had a meeting with grandpa and everything. So, my mother is fixing a nice meal for them. It was a hot scorching day in the summertime, and of course, she's cooking on a wood stove. If you know what that is, and a hot day, on a wood stove, and here are these three guys standing around kidding her and tormenting her. Truman says, "It's sure hot in here, Rose." And she

[33]

just turns around and she says, "If you guys can't stand the heat, get out of the kitchen." I mean she had just about had it with them.

JOHNSON: She turned that phrase back on them, didn't she.

BENNETT: Yes, and then they laughed about it later. Mother said, "Oh, I'm so embarrassed. He would have to get up and use that."

JOHNSON: Well, of course, we mentioned before that Buck Purcell, who was a fellow judge got credit for saying it first, or at least having it published first, in 1931.

BENNETT: Well, I couldn't tell you about that, but my mother sure said it to him.

JOHNSON: Did they get out of the kitchen?

BENNETT: Probably, dinner was ready.

JOHNSON: Do you remember what she might have been fixing?

BENNETT: She was frying chicken. That was their favorite.

JOHNSON: Chicken.

BENNETT: She was making fried chicken dinner.

JOHNSON: Truman's mother was supposed to be good at fixing fried chicken dinners down at Grandview.

[34]

BENNETT: My mom was a good chicken fryer too.

JOHNSON: Do you remember if your uncle ever visited the Truman farm in Grandview.

BENNETT: Oh, I think he did, but I wouldn't know for sure.

JOHNSON: Did you ever visit the Truman farm in Grandview?

BENNETT: No, not until, oh, the last few years that I've been over there.

JOHNSON: When it got reconstructed.

BENNETT: Yes.

JOHNSON: Do you remember that incident yourself, or is it what your mother told you?

BENNETT: My mom saying that to him? You better believe I remember it.

JOHNSON: You're saying you were there in the kitchen, when you were twelve years old.

BENNETT: Yes sir, I had to help out. My other sister was fixing the table in the dining room, and I'm out there peeling potatoes.

JOHNSON: Doing K.P.

BENNETT: You better believe it. I started that the summer my dad was killed. Mother put the oven door down, and

[35]

I started doing dishes.

JOHNSON: We were on the farm without any electricity in the '30s, and I remember the old wood stove.

BENNETT: No electricity...

JOHNSON: The stove had a reservoir on the side to heat water.

BENNETT: Yes. And an outdoor john.

JOHNSON: Yes.

BENNETT: And the whole ball of wax.

JOHNSON: I suppose Harry Truman talked to you, but you wouldn't remember how he...

BENNETT: I remember that Christmas time, and he was so kind and gentle to little kids.

JOHNSON: Oh, that first Christmas. Did he give you a present?

BENNETT: I doubt that. Shoot, you were lucky [to get one]. You didn't have a lot of presents then.

JOHNSON: What could you expect to get for Christmas back then?

BENNETT: You got something useful, you didn't get...

[36]

JOHNSON: An orange, an apple.

BENNETT: Yes. And you'd get maybe a little cap or mittens or something like this.

JOHNSON: No toys to speak of.

BENNETT: No. If you remember back then, you probably didn't either.

JOHNSON: That's right. It was a sheepskin coat or something else to wear.

BENNETT: Yes, something useful that you could wear to school.

JOHNSON: Or do chores with.

BENNETT: Yes.

JOHNSON: In 1935 the Trumans go to Washington. How about your contacts after that?

BENNETT: Really nothing, because well, I'm clear up in northwest Missouri, you know, up by St. Joe.

JOHNSON: You're working?

BENNETT: I'm going to school and you lose contact, but this is just things that I remember as a child.

JOHNSON: Did you ever visit Washington, D.C.

[37]

BENNETT: I have been to Washington D.C.

JOHNSON: While he was Senator, or President?

BENNETT: I was there in 1948, and it was just a very short time before...

JOHNSON: Before the election? During the campaign?

BENNETT: Couldn't even tell you. It was more or less a drive through there, you know.

JOHNSON: In 1940, of course, he came up for reelection for the Senate, and he had a real race in 1940 against [Lloyd C.] Stark.

BENNETT: Yes.

JOHNSON: And there was a Milligan. Jacob's brother Maurice, Maurice Milligan, was in the race. The Milligans had grown up apparently in Richmond, which isn't that far from Liberty.

BENNETT: Yes, I know.

JOHNSON: That's a good Irish name too, right? Milligan?

BENNETT: Yes.

JOHNSON: How about your uncles? What was their feeling toward Milligan. Do you remember anything about that?

BENNETT: No, all I remember is they gave their word to

[38]

Truman and they wouldn't change it. That was my grandpa too.

JOHNSON: So they never spoke out in favor of Milligan or Stark, or any of those opponents.

BENNETT: You got loyalty, and you stay with it.

JOHNSON: Did they admire Truman because he stuck with his friends who were loyal?

BENNETT: Yes, I would say so.

JOHNSON: When Pendergast died, Truman came back for the funeral in spite of some of the static, and the criticism of that. Do you remember if your uncles attended the funeral of Tom Pendergast?

BENNETT: I couldn't tell you that one, but I know when my Uncle Leo passed away, Truman was in the White House and he sent a messenger to the funeral home with a condolence to my aunt.

JOHNSON: What year was it?

BENNETT: I'd have to look that up.

JOHNSON: But Truman was President when that happened?

BENNETT: Yes. And when my Uncle Father died, he was Pastor of a Gladstone parish over in North Kansas City. He started that St. Charles Parish over there. When he

[39]

passed away, Mr. Truman was out of the White House. Well, anyway, he was not able to come to the funeral but he sent a condolence to my mother, which I still have -- or I don't have it here, but it's with her things.

JOHNSON: Any other incident -- anything else you can remember after about 1934, that relates to the Trumans?

BENNETT: Not really, because I went to grade school and high school, and I spent a couple of summers with another great aunt that was my grandfather's sister; I spent those summers going up and helping her out, and then I'd go to school and have a little odd job after school. I'll tell you it was rough.

JOHNSON: Yes, this was in the '30s. The Great Depression.

BENNETT: You're not kidding.

JOHNSON: Even in '40-'41, the economy hadn't come back all the way.

BENNETT: I know, because I graduated from high school in 1940.

JOHNSON: Then you went to the secretarial school, business school?

BENNETT: Yes, after that.

[40]

JOHNSON: Who did you work for as an accountant?

BENNETT: Well, I retired from AT&T and I worked for Vendo Company.'

JOHNSON: Oh, you worked for Vendo?

BENNETT: Yes.

JOHNSON: The Pearsons.

BENNETT: I sure did.

JOHNSON: How many years were you with them?

BENNETT: Eight and a half years. After I got out of high school, Remington Arms was hiring and I came down there and got a job there. I worked there before I went back to business school.

JOHNSON: You're talking about the ammunition plant?

BENNETT: Yes.

JOHNSON: During the war?

BENNETT: At Lake City, yes. Right after I got out of high school.

JOHNSON: Doing bookkeeping, accounting?

BENNETT: I was in timekeeping then. Well, I worked there and then after the war was over then I went back and

[41]

went to business school.

JOHNSON: In regard to your uncle, the priest, you know, with some protestant churches, in particular, the pastors are more or less warned against getting involved in partisan politics.

BENNETT: Oh, yes.

JOHNSON: But this was not true apparently of the Catholic Church at that time. Was it expected that a priest, if he was going to be involved in politics, he would support a Democrat candidate? Was that expected?

BENNETT: No. No, not that I ever heard of.

JOHNSON: Was there ever any pressure on your Uncle Father?

BENNETT: Not that I know of. Not that I can remember any pressure.

JOHNSON: So it didn't bother the Archbishop, or whomever, that he was promoting one candidate over the other?

BENNETT: If it did, I never did hear anything about that.

JOHNSON: So he was permitted to do what he wanted to do in terms of politics then, your uncle, the priest. That's interesting.

BENNETT: He was the chaplain of the American Legion Post wherever that was, the state Legion. It's mentioned in

[42]

Margaret's book.

JOHNSON: Oh, it was the state Legion?

BENNETT: I think so. The Chaplain of the Missouri American Legion. Father Wogan endorsed Senator Truman.

JOHNSON: What page is this on in Margaret Truman's biography of her father?

BENNETT: On page 127, there at the top.

JOHNSON: Did he ever talk about Father Tiernan who was the chaplain of Battery D in World War I? Did you ever hear that name?

BENNETT: I've heard the name, but you know...

JOHNSON: But you don't know if they were close friends.

BENNETT: They probably were.

JOHNSON: But he never talked about Father Tiernan that you recall?

BENNETT: Not to my knowledge.

JOHNSON: Did they ever get out of politics, so to speak, your uncles, your two uncles? Did they remain active and interested throughout Truman's career, or were they...

BENNETT: Oh, they were loyal and always...

[43]

JOHNSON: Do you remember any involvement they may have had in 1940? You would have been, what, 18 years old I guess.

BENNETT: Yes.

JOHNSON: Just out of high school. Do you remember if they were involved in helping him in the 1940 campaign? As far as you know, was there another picnic, and if so, did he appear there?

BENNETT: Well, no, he was gone from Cameron at that time, when I graduated from high school. At that time he was back in the service; he was in the Army as a chaplain.

JOHNSON: Oh, Father Wogan?

BENNETT: Yes.

JOHNSON: Before Pearl Harbor.

BENNETT: Oh, yes. He went from Cameron back into service. See, he was in the Navy in World War I.

JOHNSON: Oh, he had been in the Navy in World War I?

BENNETT: Yes.

JOHNSON: Oh. So he was a little bit up in years when he became a priest.

BENNETT: Yes. I really don't know how old.

[44]

JOHNSON: So he went back into the Army as a chaplain in 1940 or so.

BENNETT: During World War II. He was stationed in Omaha, and he always did laugh about that. He went back into the service and he got stationed in Omaha as chaplain for the WACS.

JOHNSON: For the WACS up there. Well.

BENNETT: He said, "Wouldn't you know I'd draw something like that?"

JOHNSON: He was right back near Creighton where he had gotten his seminary education.

BENNETT: Yes, he was.

JOHNSON: How about your Uncle Leo during World War II? Was -- was he in the service?

BENNETT: He had been in World War I...

JOHNSON: Was he too old then for service in World War II?

BENNETT: Yes.

JOHNSON: Okay. But as far as you know...

BENNETT: At that time he was working for the Internal Revenue Service in Kansas City, when he left Liberty and came to Kansas City. It was after they sold the

[45]

oil company.

JOHNSON: Was this a job that he might have gotten through Harry Truman?

BENNETT: I have no idea. It wouldn't surprise me.

JOHNSON: Is that where he retired from then, the Internal Revenue Service, your Uncle Leo?

BENNETT: I don't know if they called it retirement, but anyway, his job was completed and he took another job for a construction company at Ogallala, Nebraska. While he was in Ogallala he became very ill, and the closest hospital was Fitzsimmons in Denver. I remember Eileen, his daughter, and I got on the train and rode all night from Kansas City to Denver. I never will forget walking in the room, and he said, "I've got both my girls now." Because this Uncle Leo was the nearest thing to a father that I had.

JOHNSON: You married when?

BENNETT: In 1956. I married in '47, and my first husband died.

JOHNSON: What was his name?

BENNETT: Loren Bermond. He died in '51, and I always will think he was a war casualty.

[46]

JOHNSON: Oh, he was a veteran.

BENNETT: The Battle of the Bulge. And then I married Bennett in 1956.

JOHNSON: What was his first name?

BENNETT: John C.

JOHNSON: Did you have children?

BENNETT: We had one son, yes.

JOHNSON: And his name?

BENNETT: John Reardon Bennett. Did you ever hear the name Bynum?

JOHNSON: The name sounds a little familiar but...

BENNETT: John Bynum was his grandfather. He was Jay Bennett's grandfather. He was from Lone Jack.

JOHNSON: He was active in local democrat politics?

BENNETT: He was kind of like my grandfather was down here.

JOHNSON: Lone Jack also had an annual picnic I think.

BENNETT: They still have that.

JOHNSON: Was that a community picnic or was that another Catholic parish?

[47]

BENNETT: Oh, no, that's commemorative of that a battle.

JOHNSON: A Civil War battle?

BENNETT: Yes.

JOHNSON: I know Truman spoke at those picnics.

BENNETT: Yes. Jay always talked about his grandfather. He [John Bynum] knew Mr. Truman, and he was like my grandfather was up in that part of Missouri, that you always go to John Bynum and he...

JOHNSON: By the way, is your second husband deceased?

BENNETT: Yes. He died seven years ago.

JOHNSON: I see. Did you mention on the phone that your uncle introduced Truman, or something about a state convention?

BENNETT: Oh, in the book there, it mentions he nominated him for some thing.

JOHNSON: It's mentioned in here that at the state convention of the Democrat party...

BENNETT: He was chaplain of the American Legion, state American legion, and he...

JOHNSON: If you come across any clippings or anything like that, we would be interested in getting those, and we

[48]

could even add an appendix if there's something like an essay or a clipping or that sort of thing.

BENNETT: Oh yes.

JOHNSON: Did you ever meet Margaret again after '34?

BENNETT: No, I have seen Margaret on two or three occasions but she's always in the limelight, and she used to have Secret Service around her.

JOHNSON: That would have been in the old days.

BENNETT: I think the last time I did see her was at something for Ike Skelton. I know Ike real well. But this was something in his honor, and you don't go poking your nose in where it doesn't belong.

JOHNSON: Well, thanks very much.

We're just recalling the day, April 12, 1945 when President Roosevelt died. And you were at Lake City?

BENNETT: I was working at Lake City. I was living with my Uncle Leo and Aunt Bella at the time. I came home that night and at mealtime grace was said, and they both said, "God bless and help Harry."

JOHNSON: That was part of the grace, the prayer over the meal.

BENNETT: "God bless and help Harry, because he's going to

[49]
need it." I never will forget that.

JOHNSON: Do you know if your Uncle Leo ever visited Truman at the White House?

BENNETT: I couldn't tell you that. I guess they did, but I don't know.

Index

Cameron Catholic Church Picnic, 13-19

"If you can't stand the heat....", 33

Pendergast, Tom, 12

Truman, Harry S., 6-7, 15, 17-20, 26-27, 30-32, 36, 38-39, 48

Truman, Margaret, 24-25

Wogan, Morris Francis, 4, 6, 8

Wogan, Joseph Charles, 5

Wogan, Leo, 4-8, 20