

Oral History Interview

with

KENNETH M. BIRKHEAD

Associate Director of Public Relations for the Research Division of the Democratic National Committee during the 1948 presidential campaign.

Washington, D.C.

July 7, 1966

by Jerry N. Hess, Harry S. Truman Library

The Harry S. Truman Library

Independence, Missouri

November, 1966

NOTICE

This is a transcript of a tape-recorded interview conducted for the Harry S. Truman Library. A draft of this transcript was edited by the interviewee but only minor emendations were made; therefore, the reader should remember that this is essentially a transcript of the spoken, rather than the written, word.

RESTRICTIONS

This oral history transcript may be read, quoted from, cited, and reproduced for purposes of research. It may not be published in full except by permission of the Harry S. Truman Library.

Oral History Interview

with

KENNETH M. BIRKHEAD

Washington, D. C.

July 7, 1966

by Jerry N. Hess, Harry S. Truman Library

[1]

HESS: Mr. Birkhead, would you for the record, give me a little of your personal background: Where were you born, where did you go to school, and a brief resume of your career?

BIRKHEAD: I was born in St. Louis, Missouri, November 15, 1914. I lived in St. Louis for about two years when the family moved to Wichita, Kansas, where I also lived very briefly, and went to Kansas City, Missouri in 1917. I lived there until 1938. My father was a Unitarian minister at the church in Kansas City. I went to grade school,

[2]

to high school, and took some work at the University of Kansas City, in Kansas City, Missouri. In 1937, about, I quit college and went to work for an organization called Friends of Democracy which did research work in the field of anti-democratic propaganda. We did a great deal of work at that time in studying native American fascist groups and in 1938, or possibly it was early 1939, I'm not sure which, the organization moved its headquarters to New York City, and I moved to New York City at that time with the organization. I stayed in New York City working for Friends of Democracy until I went into the service in 1942. I came out of the service in '45. I went back to work for Friends of Democracy and stayed with the organization until 1948 when I came to Washington to help in the Truman campaign of 1948. I'll have to make one correction here, I guess

[3]

I was in the service until 1946, not 1945.

I first ran across Mr. Truman in Kansas City when he began his political career in Jackson County. I know that I did not know him personally, although I may have met him a time or two during that period. I was active in politics. I became twenty-one in 1935 and was able to vote for the first time in the elections of '36, but I had worked in politics before I became eligible to vote and had always been a strong supporter of the Democratic Party in Kansas City. I was concerned, as I guess many people were, that the Democratic Party there was under the control, I guess you could say, of Tom Pendergast, but I had possibly different feelings about Pendergast than some others. I felt that actually he did a lot for Kansas City during the difficult days of the depression. I know many people in Kansas

[4]

City today who probably were kept alive because the Pendergast organization would bring them food baskets from time to time, and in the winter he would bring them some coal to keep the house warm. I know friends of mine who were trying to make it through school at the time who would from time to time visit Mr. Pendergast's office down on Main Street, around 19th and Main, and go in and tell him that they needed a few dollars more to get through the rest of the semester and he seldom asked exactly why they needed it. He was a pretty big-hearted guy in many ways. And it's my further feeling that he built some things like the Municipal Auditorium; he built a great street system, and a lot of other things which were -- have always been -- and still are, of great value to Kansas City. This is not to deny that possibly in building streets or the Municipal Auditorium,

[5]

he didn't make a few extra dollars out of using his own concrete, and some things like this. Nor does this deny that some things occurred under the Pendergast regime which maybe some people didn't favor, but I thought, personally, myself, that he did a lot of great things for the city. And he, of course, always turned out a big vote for Mr. Roosevelt, who was a great favorite of mine, and I was willing to help to the degree that I could in his work. I know at this time you would hear of Mr. Truman, although he was from Independence, which in those days was not quite as close to Kansas City as it is now -- not physically I mean, but it was just a little further. The roads weren't as good, the cars weren't as good, and you used to think of Independence as being another city off someplace.

We all knew of Mr. Truman, and some people

[6]

were terribly disturbed that he had Mr. Pendergast's support, but I don't think that anybody ever raised the question that I knew of that somehow he may have been a party to any of the unpleasant things or unsavory things that were alleged to have been undertaken by Pendergast, or that were carried on under Pendergast. In 1948, as I say, I left New York City and came to Washington at the urging of William L. Batt, Jr., who at that time was setting up a group to provide research and rough draft speeches and speech material for the President in the 1948 campaign. I originally was contacted by Batt, who is a longtime friend of mine, because it appeared early in the year that the Wallace movement -- the Henry A. Wallace movement -- the Progressive Party, was going to be a major problem in the campaign and that it had a lot of the extreme left-wingers in the country associated

[7]

with it, and a good part of my work with Friends of Democracy was devoted to the subject of Communists and Communist-type propaganda in the country, and Batt wanted me to, in a sense, advise and help to develop material which might be useful in the campaign, essentially, I guess you could say, in combating the Wallace movement. I think possibly I was the first person that Batt brought in, although several of us came together at roughly the same time in an office that he set up away from the Democratic National Committee...

HESS : This was what came to be known as the Research Division?

BIRKHEAD: This was what came to be known as the Research Division. My remembrance was that I was carried on the payroll as an assistant, or something to the public relations director...

[8]

HESS: Associate Director of Public Relations.

BIRKHEAD: ...Associate Director of Public Relations, and this was my remembrance. Basically, we were called the Research Division, and Batt was the director, and brought in a gentleman by the name of Johannes Hoeber from Philadelphia; a fellow named Phil Dreyer, who

was from the State of Oregon (I'm not so sure whether he brought Dreyer in at my suggestion or whether he had known him before, but Batt, Dreyer and I had been associated together in the American Veterans Committee about that time); Dave Lloyd, who later became executive director of the Truman Library Corporation, was brought in as a member of this little group. They were looking for an able writer, and a close personal friend of mine who was living in New York by the name of Frank Kelly, who is now vice president of the Robert Hutchins group in California, which was first

[9]

called the Fund for the Republic -- I can't remember the exact title now -- was, I knew, looking for a job, so at Batt's urging I called Kelly one Sunday night and he arrived in Washington the next morning on the train and went to work for the group; and we had John Barriere doing some of our leg work for us. John is now an assistant to the Speaker in the House, and was, for many years, one of the staff directors of the Housing Subcommittee in the House. This group was basically started as a research group. It was thought that we would try to provide a lot of information for the President. It was thought, I think in the early days, as I remember, that a lot of the President's speeches for use in the campaign would probably be written by the White House staff and some in the departments of the Government, but they found out that the speeches turned out in the departments of the

[10]

Government, were in many instances, little more than long, lengthy recitations of statistics and tended -- as many things turned out by the executive branch -- tended to be rather long and turgid and not very forceful and just really didn't fit what Mr. Truman thought he needed in the campaign, and so we were in a sense -- this little research group that was sitting off in a very hot office up by Dupont Circle -- given the job of not only researching a lot of material, but we were given the job of writing drafts for the President's speeches, both his whistlestop speeches and his major speeches. We probably devoted more of our time to his whistlestop speeches than we did to his major speeches.

HESS: What type of speech did you write, an outline or a complete type of speech?

[11]

BIRKHEAD: We cast around at the beginning of our operation, this was probably along in, oh, late June or early July, trying to work out a format. Finally, I think, it was Charlie Murphy, who is now head of the Civil Aeronautics Board, who was then a counsel to the President, who came up with an outline of the kind of thing that they wanted for the whistlestop speeches. It started off with material on the principal people that the President should mention at each stop. There was then a section on local color. Then a section on some comments or some suggestions for comments on the particular burning issue in the area or this community in which the President was making the stop, and then finally, I guess you'd sort of call it a peroration at the end, some comments about looking forward with the Democratic Party and that kind of thing. We drafted the whistle stop speeches -- I guess there were over

[12]

three hundred of them, in my remembrance, following these specific heads, and we would be in touch with the local political groups, wherever the president was speaking and find out who the principal people were who were going to be there. Of course, we generally knew who the candidates for the principal offices were. We'd list these, then we'd try to come forth with the second and greatest source of this kind of material, and the '48 campaign was loaded with material from the WPA Guidebooks. Then we, through contact with members of Congress or wherever we could get a feeling of the principal issue the president ought to hit in a particular place, would then have a little section on this, sort of closing off with a peroration of some kind. We dial one of these for each of his stops. We tended to divide up. We seldom tried to take more than -- any one of us -- more than two or three stops at a

[13]

time. We would tend to take -- if he was in Oklahoma, and was going to make six stops during the next day, I would take three, and one of the other members of the staff would take three, while somebody else was working then on stops maybe he was going to make the next day in Texas or New Mexico or wherever he was going at that particular time. I would draft this material. Sometimes we would get together at sort of a staff meeting and discuss it, or I would discuss it with Bill Batt, and we'd refine it down to what we thought it ought to be, get it typed up, it would be delivered to the White House, and would go from the White House to the train, sometimes by plane, or if we were ahead of him, and the President was in town, it would go to the White House and wait there preparatory to another trip. We tried not to draft these up too far ahead of his appearance in a particular place, because

[14]

we tried to keep the comments, particularly the section on the burning issues and the peroration as up to the moment as we could, so that we tried never to be drafting these speeches more than three or four days ahead of the time he appeared at a particular place. When they got to the train they were delivered to a little group on the train composed of Charlie Murphy; Clark Clifford, the attorney; and George Elsey, who was on the White House staff, and basically the three of them went over the material and would refine it depending on the situation as they knew it on the train. Sometimes one of our speeches would go, it seemed, directly from us to a plane, to a train, to the back platform, and Mr. Truman would practically use it word for word. I don't mean that he read it, but he would follow the points that we put down right straight through. Other times, we couldn't recognize anything that we had prepared

[15]

for a particular stop. Very often it would happen that something we had prepared two or three days before in Washington for a particular stop didn't turn out to be usable at all because something had happened in the meantime which changed the whole tone of what he was saying. But I would say that of the probably sixty or so that I worked on during the course of time -- of

the whistlestop type, back platform type speeches -- that probably he used thirty or so of them pretty much as they were prepared. The other thirty I couldn't recognize at all.

Then in addition to the whistlestop kind of things we worked on basic drafts on his major speeches. These tended to be the ones that he delivered at night after he was on the train all day. I remember I worked quite hard on one that he delivered in Indianapolis, Indiana, on human resources, and I guess I became, although

[16]

we all worked on all different kinds of things in a small shop, I tended to work more on, or collect material on and advise with the others on human resources. Phil Dreyer tended to be our expert on natural resources. Dave Lloyd tended to deal more with foreign policy matters. Frank Kelly sort of ran across the board, but he helped us a lot in polishing up some of our phrases, and in addition to writing some of the speeches, and Johannes Hoeber, I guess, he was more in the human resource area than he was in any others. But it wasn't too long after I came to Washington with the group, when it appeared that the Wallace movement was not going to have the impact that we had originally thought it was going to have, and so I spent very little time really, in fact it was decided, I think, as a basic policy of the campaign that Mr. Truman just wouldn't pay much attention to the Wallace movement,

[17]

would hardly mention it. So I was occasionally called upon to, give some advice and counsel to the national committee or somebody on what was the significance of this activity in the Wallace group or who was this person, was this person well-known in the left-wing movement or something, but I really provided practically no services for what I had sort of originally come to Washington for.

HESS: Was there a time when that decision was made, as such, to sort of disregard Wallace?

BIRKHEAD: There was a time. I was not that close to Mr. Truman or the top side to be able to point specifically to a time, but I don't think there was any question but that there was a decision made some place along the line, that the less said about the Wallace movement the better. Because I had, originally, as I say,

[18]

been brought to Washington -- and it was quite definite, and Batt indicated to me that this was what he had discussed with the people in the White House and the national committee -- specifically why I was coming to Washington was to be an advisor and consultant and preparer of materials and whatever it was, in connection with the Wallace movement. It wasn't too long after I came to Washington that the Wallace movement was just dropped, and I don't remember that I was ever told "Forget Wallace, we're not going to mention him," but it was obvious what had happened.

HESS: He was just downplayed.

BIRKHEAD: He was downplayed and seldom, if ever, mentioned. There was obviously a lot of interest in what the Wallace movement was doing and what they were saying, and we followed the Wallace movement activities and what they

[19]

were saying quite carefully and in areas where we thought they might have some strength, like New York, we would try to develop material for speeches which would have some impact in combating what they were saying. I'm sure -- I was never privy to it -- that there was a point when the Wallace movement -- the decision was made that the Wallace movement and the Progressive Party and -- what was his name -- Taylor -- he was vice-presidential candidate...

HESS: Glen Taylor.

BIRKHEAD: ...Glen Taylor would not be mentioned.

HESS: You mentioned that you wrote the draft for the Indianapolis speech. Was it given pretty much as you wrote it? Do you remember off-hand?

BIRKHEAD: Offhand, I would say that the basic

[20]

approach that I developed was used. As with all these major speeches which all tended to go through several hands, it was considerably changed from what I had prepared. I say with the off-the-cuff, or the ad lib, back of the platform kind of speeches, sometimes, I think they were probably so busy on the train that they never really had a chance to look at them, and they were just sort of handed to him for guidance in his comments. But his major speeches, such as Indianapolis, and others, always went through quite a few hands and I had worked on one for -- I worked on the major speech for Chicago, and some other places, I can't remember exactly which ones they were now, but they tended -- mine tended to be one of the very first drafts. Occasionally I'd get it back on the second or third draft for some checking of figures or refinement of some area that was sort of originally mine and had been changed by somebody else and

[21]

I'd get it back to do some further work on it, but I could not honestly say that any of his major speeches I can claim great credit for. Of course, he ad-libbed even in major speeches a great deal, and I must admit, improved them usually from what the copy was when he got it, although the copy went to the press and was very often what was reported.

HESS: I think that pretty well covers the job of the Research Division as far as speechwriting goes, doesn't it?

BIRKHEAD: I think so. Of course, you could go on and develop a lot of the kind of physical set up we had and a lot of things like this, but I think basically this was what it was, generally how it worked, and major parts of it.

HESS: Is there anything else you think that would be important to put in on this? My next question is

[22]

on the development of the "Files of the Facts."

BIRKHEAD: "Files of the Facts?" Was this a thing that we developed at the Research Division?

HESS: I thought it was.

BIRKHEAD: This is what eighteen years does to you.

HESS: Here's a copy of a note that I have drawn out. It's from Bill Batt, and dealing with the "Files of the Facts."

BIRKHEAD: This is what eighteen years does to you. I remember these, I worked on them, and we prepared these files. In fact, one of them I know here in the notes that you've handed me, "The Record of the 80th Congress," I spent a lot of time on that. I spent some time on the one on "Veterans Benefits," and considerable time on the one on "Thomas E. Dewey." I'd forgotten these completely. What they were

[23]

were just fact sheets -- briefing books, I .guess you might more nearly call them -- which gave all the facts about these various subjects which might be useful at the national committee and on the train. They had a set of these on the train, they had a set at the national committee, and as I begin to recall this now, I think we sent these out to candidates around the country. I'd forgotten "Files of the Facts" completely.

HESS: Did all the members of the Division work on the "Files of the Facts" as well as write speeches?

BIRKHEAD: Yes, we all did. Frankly, in a sense, well, we actually went out and dug material for these, but as we were developing speech material, we gathered a lot of this material as we went along. When I went back to the national committee in 1950 and we set up a

[24]

Research Division under Phil Dreyer, who had been with us in '48, we went back and updated the "Files of the Facts," and we put out some of these in printed form in '50. I remember

particularly the one on "Foreign Affairs," because I worked real hard on that one, and it was tough work, because I don't know much about foreign affairs. I can't remember that we ever printed one in 1948. There was a printed document that was put out mostly under the direction of Senator Clinton Anderson of New Mexico, which had the record of the administration. I can't even remember the name of it, it had a red cover on it.

HESS: It sure did.

BIRKHEAD: And someplace, I'm sure among my papers at home, I've probably got a copy of it because I know I worked some on it, too. But I'd forgotten

[25]

the "Files of the Facts" completely.

HESS: Just how were those drawn up? From newspaper accounts or...

BIRKHEAD: Well, we used the morgue at the national committee, or the library at the national committee, which is run by Mary Clynes, their clipping files. We got a great deal of material from the departments, the problem of material from the departments, which had been a problem earlier in the campaign when they sort of disregarded the departments preparing the President's speeches and one thing and another, there was just too much of it, and it was sort of overwhelming and our biggest job with the departments was to boil out the key material, the useful material, in developing the "Files of the Facts," and to pull out that material which would be useful in the campaign. A lot of the facts

[26]

that the departments gave us were interesting, but really didn't have very much political impact in the campaign. These were collected in a lot of different ways. Some of the basic material was prepared by people in the departments. It was a catch-as-catch-can kind of thing to get together the best possible files. I'm trying to recall. I remember the name "Files of the Facts" and I remember these subheads generally, and working on them. I don't remember what they looked like but it seems to me they were loose-leaf, notebooks with the various subject headings, and we could change them, use them in loose-leaf form more easily. When we found new figures or figures became out of date we could put new figures in - new facts in.

HESS: Were these the two main jobs that the Division did: the "Files of the Facts" and writing the speeches?

[27]

BIRKHEAD: The two main jobs were the "Files of the Facts" and writing the speeches. I guess I sweat so over the speeches -- and when I say sweat, both mentally and physically, because that was the hottest office I think I've ever worked in in my life. We had no air-conditioning, and it was at the time when they were rebuilding Dupont Circle and making the underpass under

Dupont Circle, and you had to have a window open to get any air at all, and outside were pile drivers driving piles, and it was not conducive to very concentrated thinking. I guess I worked so hard trying to put together what I thought might be useful material for the President's speeches that that's the reason I drew sort of a blank on the "Files of the Facts." These were the two principal jobs.

HESS: Was this the first time that such a thing as the Research Division had been set up?

[28]

BIRKHEAD: It's the first time that people who had been around the party for a long time remembered any such concentrated effort of a group specifically devoted to research in this way. Of course, during the days of Mr. Roosevelt, leading up to this, Charlie Michelson had been sort of a one-man research operation at the national committee. There had not been this kind of a thing. Some of the people who had been around, as I say, for years in the party did not remember that there had been several people brought together specifically into this kind of a setup. I'm sure in the past there had been somebody called a Research Director or something, but this, as we understood it, was the first time.

HESS: As a research division, didn't it lapse after the '48 campaign?

BIRKHEAD: It lapsed after the '48 campaign. There was considerable discussion about it and concern

[29]

about it. Dave Lloyd, who was one of the members of this division, went from the campaign after Mr. Truman's election, to the White House as an administrative assistant to the President. In the White House Dave was always concerned that the national committee had cut off the research operation. He felt that the national committee ought to be thinking about the 1950 campaign, and that they at least ought to keep a modest or small -- maybe even two or three people, continuing to keep things like the "Files of the Facts" together so that when we came to the 1950 campaign all this material would be ready. But the national committee did not continue the research operation. Dave Lloyd did some at the White House, and Ken Hechler, who is now Congressman from West Virginia, joined the White House staff and collected a lot of material during the time that he was at the

[30]

White House, and then in the spring of 1950, Dave Lloyd kept pressing the President, or pressing Mr. Truman, about the need for the Research Division, and finally they reactivated the Research Division under Phil Dreyer. I came back when I finished my master's degree in '50 at the University of Missouri -- came back to Washington in July, I guess it was, or maybe early August, and joined Phil Dreyer and a couple of others that we brought together in the Research Division.

HESS: Who were they?

BIRKHEAD: Let's see, Mike Gorman worked for us some. Mike Gorman now runs the Committee on the Nation's Health and works for Mrs. Albert Lasker. He has an office here in Washington up on Connecticut Avenue -- Mike Gorman. And then there was a young fellow who I see

[31]

occasionally around Washington who is a representative -- a lobbyist -- for a West Coast operation of some kind. I can't remember his name or what he does. But I think there were four of us: Phil Dreyer was the director, myself, Mike Gorman, and this young fellow. Frankly, we were not the most fully accepted operation at the national committee in 1950 and I don't think if Dave Lloyd had not talked to Mr. Truman -- well, I don't know that he talked him into it -- but if Mr. Truman had not supported Dave in this, I don't think the national committee would have set up a Research Division. I remember we were housed in an inside room at the Ring Building where the national committee had its headquarters...

HESS: This was in '50?

BIRKHEAD: ...'50, yes. It was a room without

[32]

any windows in it. In one corner of the room was the ticker, the Washington city news ticker. So we were trying to do research in a windowless, small room; four of us, plus a secretary, with a ticker banging in the corner. We were never really accepted by the committee. We did try to bring the "Files of the Facts" up to date. We did some material -- some speeches for congressional candidates and prepared some material for the national committee. But we were never very well accepted.

HESS: Why do you think that was?

BIRKHEAD: I can't honestly say. I think that the feeling was that this was not a year when the national committee ought to put out a big effort; that the President wasn't running; that the candidates themselves could put together the material that they needed -- the congressional

[33]

candidates could -- the national committee would give them a little bit of assistance, but I think there was just a feeling that there was no real need for a Research Division. And in fact, in early September, I guess it was, Tom Hennings, who was running for the Senate in Missouri, wanted somebody who had some Washington experience and knew a little bit about Missouri to help him, so I left Washington, after only having been here about a month, and went back to Missouri and ran Tom Hennings' campaign in '50. The Research Division continued to function with Phil Dreyer and Gorman doing some work and this other fellow, but they didn't turn out too much

material. I know I was then on the receiving end when I was out in Missouri working with Hennings, and we did get some help from the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee, but little or nothing from the national committee.

[34]

I can't really answer why the Research Division was never well accepted in the campaign, but it wasn't.

HESS: Did you feel that it was accepted in '48 by the committee?

BIRKHEAD: It was not accepted in '48 by the committee, no. I think that some of them felt we were interlopers.

HESS: Who felt that way?

BIRKHEAD: I think the chairman of the committee did. I know that the publicity director did. Of course, we were in a slightly strange situation. We were on the payroll of the national committee but we were not housed at the national committee. Our basic contacts were not with the national committee; our basic contacts were with the Truman campaign train, and they

[35]

sort of wondered about exactly who we were, sitting off in this building up there, and exactly what we were doing. You had a feeling when occasionally -- and it didn't happen very often -- when you went down to the national committee headquarters that they sort of looked and said, "There goes one of those guys." We never really felt a part of the national committee staff, although we were paid by the national committee, we were members of the national committee staff. Whether this was some jealousy that we might get some credit which they thought they should get or whatever it was, we were never sure.

HESS: You mentioned that Batt hired you people.

BIRKHEAD: Yes.

HESS: Who told Batt to set up an organization like this? Where did the idea come from?

[36]

BIRKHEAD: Basically, I think the idea came from Bill Batt himself, to an extent, and from some people who I think were contributors to the party who felt there ought to be some of this kind of activity, that there had not been enough in the past

HESS: Do you know who? Anyone in particular?

BIRKHEAD: I know of one individual, a guy named Clarence Low in New York City, who had some money and contributed to the party. He was part of the reason I got into the Research Division because he was terribly concerned about the Wallace movement, and he was convinced that if Mr. Truman was going to be defeated it was, going to be because of the Wallace movement. He was making many contacts -- with whom I do not know exactly -- in Washington, urging that the national committee have some

[37]

specialists on its staff to deal with Wallace, and do a lot of research on the Wallace movement -- somebody who knew who these people were and could prepare material about them. I know this was one individual, and I happen to know Mr. Low, and I think at some point there was probably contact between Low and Batt who I think knew each other, about my coming on board. I'm not sure exactly what brought on the setting up of the Research Division in '48 but I know we were never really accepted by the committee itself. We were considered sort of outsiders if you can put it that way. We were not in the traditional political sense of raising money and putting out press releases. I guess to some of them they thought we were some kind of thinkers or something. We were not politicians in their mind although all of us at one time or another had been

[38]

closely associated with politics. In fact, Batt had run for Congress in '46. I had worked in politics in Kansas City and in New York and the others had all been in one way or another associated with politics. In fact, Phil Dreyer, who was on our staff, before he joined the staff, had filed for the state legislature in Oregon and then got this offer and decided to come back here, and really didn't campaign except for the last few days of the campaign. Obviously, the last week or so of the campaign, we didn't have too much to do, because all of our material, our speeches and material had been prepared by that time. So we took one day -- the whole group of us -- and wrote several short speeches for Dreyer and he jumped on an airplane and back to Portland, Oregon, and in the meantime some of his people back there had lined up all the engagements they could for him

[39]

and he took our speeches and ran all over Portland speaking to anybody he could. Although he had never campaigned except for the last week and had been in Washington during the whole campaign period, he got elected to the state legislature. But we were a thing apart from the national committee. I think part of it was that they never really had anything like a Research Division. We were maybe too erudite for them or something. They weren't sure what a Research Division really did.

HESS: Did you ever hear J. Howard McGrath make any statements about the Research Division?

BIRKHEAD: Only once. Once there was a meeting at the national committee. As everybody is aware of, financing the '48 campaign was pretty rough, because all the polls showed that Truman was going to be defeated, and they had a meeting

[40]

down at the national committee one day, to discuss finances. They invited both Bill Batt and myself to this meeting. McGrath ran the meeting and there were, oh, eight -- it seems to me, as I remember it, Averell Harriman was there, Jim Forrestal was there, and some other people. There were about fifteen I guess in the conference room. These were people who either had money themselves or who had contacts with money. I did have, through some work I'd done in New York, some contacts with some money, like Mr. Low. We had this meeting to discuss where we could possibly find some additional funds, but at the end of the meeting, McGrath and some people were sort of standing around, Bill and I were talking to somebody, and McGrath walked up and said, "Well, you guys better get back up to that ivory tower of yours up there and waste some more of our money." This is not exactly what he said,

[41]

but this is it in substance. So I don't think the chairman had a real good feeling about us. And, as I say, there was this one time when I remember him making this crack about going back up to "waste our money."

HESS: Did you ever hear Redding make any comments about the Division?

BIRKHEAD: No, I didn't, actually. Jack was an old friend of mine. I'd known him before this. This is, I guess, intuition or something. I didn't really get down to the Ring Building where McGrath, Redding and the others were, too often. Occasionally, when I did I'd stick my head in to say hello to Jack or something. It was intuition, I guess, or a feeling -- a "gut" reaction -- that he just wasn't real sure what the dickens we were doing up there in that other place. He never said anything

[42]

or made cracks about it but I never had a feeling that he was real happy about it.

HESS: Did they ever come up and see you very often, or see the operation?

BIRKHEAD: While I'm thinking about the other, I was trying to think back, and I really don't remember seeing any, at least any of the high officials of the committee up in our office. Now maybe they were there and I just don't recall, but I don't ever remember seeing anybody like McGrath and Redding or any of these people there. I'm sure you'll be interviewing some of the others and they may remember that they were there. I don't recall ever seeing any of the high officials of the national committee up there. It wasn't a very pleasant place to come to. It was an awful hot summer in Washington and it was an awful hot place,

[43]

and awful noisy.

HESS: What building was it? Is it still there?

BIRKHEAD: Yes, the building is still there. It had a bank downstairs. It was just maybe three stories tall. We had the second floor, and the address was 1367 Connecticut Avenue, I believe. I'm probably real wrong with this, but I believe it was. There was no building name. You just walked in. There was a bank on the corner. At the present time, or there was the last time I was by there, it's been a month or two ago, a temperature and time sign on the corner for this bank that was downstairs. You walked in a little entrance alongside the bank and walked up the second floor. I don't think there was an elevator going up. For whatever reason it was the second floor was vacant. Apparently Batt found it and got ahold of it. We were

[44]

a very Spartan setup. We had nothing but a desk and a chair. I don't know where they found the desks, but they were Army surplus from about the Civil War.

HESS: Did you have any more room than the group in '50, though?

BIRKHEAD: Yes, we weren't quite as crowded as we were in '50. Although it was as hot as Hades, we could at least look out the window occasionally, although, as I say, they were building the underpass in Dupont Circle and the pile drivers were driving all day and it was pretty noisy. Oh, yes. Well, Bill Batt himself had an office all of his own, actually. The offices could have been better with some expenditures for paint and a rug or two and a picture on the wall, but all we had on the walls were items that we scotch taped up there. They were sort of a memo pad.

[45]

It was a pretty Spartan operation. I don't remember ever having seen any of the officials of the committee there. Charlie Murphy and George Elsey were by occasionally when they were in town. I don't remember Clark Clifford being there, but Elsey and Murphy I remember being there.

HESS: From the White House staff. Were they the only ones from the White House staff?

BIRKHEAD: Again, this is going back eighteen years, now there may well have been others there, I don't remember. Maybe it's because George and Charlie are old friends of mine and I remember them and there may have been others that I don't remember.

HESS: Did any of you people get over to the White House?

[46]

BIRKHEAD: I was, probably, in the course of the campaign, in the White House, only two or three times. Bill Batt got down there quite often, and Frank Kelly and I believe Bill -- maybe a couple of the others were, actually were out on the train a couple of times. I was never on the train. I stayed pretty much glued to my chair in the office, but some of the others were, from time to time, actually out on the train.

HESS: What did they do the times they were on the train?

BIRKHEAD: They, in a sense, picked up speeches that we were shoving into the train and helped revise them or update them or dig up another factor figure that maybe the train needed.

HESS: During this time, did you talk to Mr. Truman?

[47]

BIRKHEAD: I don't remember of actually having physically talked to him during the campaign. No, sir. I may have. I don't remember it, and I think I would have remembered it. Ninety percent of the contact we had with the White House was through Bill Batt. I don't remember of having talked to him during the campaign.

HESS: I have a list of names of people who worked on the White House staff during this time, and...

BIRKHEAD: I'd like to recall some, go ahead.

HESS: ...and I wonder if you could tell me just what their jobs were and your evaluation of how good they were in that, and if their work was in conjunction with the Research Division. What about Charles Ross?

BIRKHEAD: Very little contact with us that I

[48]

remember. I knew him, but I don't ever remember of actually having contacted him during the campaign.

HESS: Matthew Connelly.

BIRKHEAD: Very seldom. He was another person I knew but not because of my relationships with the Research Division. I'd known him before. He was never in the office -- I'm sure of this. And I never remember contacting him during the campaign. I'd known him before; never well.

HESS: Clark Clifford -- we mentioned him before.

BIRKHEAD: I didn't see him a lot during the campaign. I did talk to him occasionally on the phone from the train or when he was in Washington, but he was a very key person in this

operation, because, as I said, he and Charlie Murphy and George Elsey were sort of the guys on the train

[49]

that got the material and put it into final form for the President.

HESS: Charlie Murphy, whom you have mentioned several times.

BIRKHEAD: Well, I have not really known him before except I knew he was on the White House staff, but I got to know him pretty well then and we've been close associates ever since. In fact, he was Under Secretary of Agriculture up until recently, and I worked for him here in the Department. All through the Eisenhower years I was very closely associated with him in many pursuits. I was finance director of the Democratic National Committee in '57 and '58 and talked Charlie Murphy, who was then in private law practice, into being one of my key consultants in helping to try to raise money for the committee during that time. We've been close personal

[50]

friends, beginning really at the time of the campaign.

HESS: James Sundquist.

BIRKHEAD: I did not know Jim well then. I do know him now and he and I are very close personal friends and as a matter of fact, he worked in the Department of Agriculture here recently for a while before he went down to Brookings Institute. He was in the Bureau of the Budget really and came over and did some work at the White House but I really don't remember of having had much contact with Jim at that time, although since we've become very close, personal friends, but this really came later.

HESS: What was his job in the White House at that time?

BIRKHEAD: He was doing speechwriting at the White

[51]

House itself. Jim and I've talked about this in years since, that really it was funny that we never were very close. Now, Bill Batt had more contact with Sundquist than I did and we were not a bureaucratic operation, obviously, small as we were, but rather than having all of us calling the White House back and forth, we funneled a lot of questions and things through Batt to the White House, so that he had more contact with Jim than we did. I touched base with him occasionally, but not very often. We really didn't know each other.

HESS: What about George Elsey?

BIRKHEAD: Well, George was, a good part of the time, on the train and we had quite close contact with George. He was in and out of our office. I think George probably -- this is my remembrance and somebody else will set me straight on it,

[52]

but I think probably, George was in and out of our office more than any other person from either the White House staff or the national committee. This was my remembrance, and recalling eighteen years ago, I'm not sure about this but it just seemed to me that I saw more of George than I did anybody else.

HESS: What seemed to be his major functions at that time?

BIRKHEAD: As I knew George, his principal function was another one working on the President's speeches and material, and I think in the line that the material we prepared tended to go to George first on the train, and he would have a first crack at changing it or doing whatever, and then Murphy was sort of second and Clark Clifford was sort of third. Clark Clifford was the last hands it went through before it got to the President. I don't mean George was on

[53]

the train all the time but I know he was a good part of the time.

HESS: What about David Niles?.

BIRKHEAD: I had known him before and he and some people I had been associated with in Friends of Democracy were close because Dave had been concerned with anti-Semitism and things like this. So I used to have some contact with Dave occasionally on this. We talked during that year on the question of Israel, its recognition was coming up and I had some contact with Dave in trying to develop material for use in the campaign to get the most impact out of the recognition of this new nation and this kind of thing.

HESS: Was that in itself a pretty important issue in the campaign?

BIRKHEAD: Yes. It was used, and I think well used,

[54]

properly used, in certain areas. I think Mr. Truman's early and quick recognition of Israel as a new nation probably, had more impact than anything, in the success he had in states like New York, et cetera. I think Dave could take a great deal of credit for this because a lot of Jewish people were for various reasons attracted to the Wallace and the Progressive Party and Mr. Truman's quick recognition and his praise for the nation of Israel, I think, pulled a lot of these people away from the Progressive Party and in some close districts might have made the difference. So I think it was an important factor in the campaign.

HESS: Do you think Mr. Niles was instrumental in...

BIRKHEAD: I have a feeling he was. Like a lot of things, you know, people claim that they did this

[55]

or they did that, and Dave was credited with having done a lot of things and maybe he didn't do them all, but at least he got credit for a lot of things.

HESS: I have read where several authors thought that he was instrumental in getting the President to recognize Israel.

BIRKHEAD: I think the recognition of Israel sort of fits into the person Harry Truman is. He would have viscerally done this without anybody having pushed him, but I think that probably Dave Niles maybe helped him move quicker on it and kept clear in the President's mind the full impact of what this could mean and I think Dave realized the political impact of this kind of action. I think Mr. Truman would have done it without Dave but...

HESS: Why?

[56]

BIRKHEAD: Just because -- I guess this sounds a little corny -- but I had a feeling that Mr. Truman had some strong feelings for the underdogs and I think he would have rated the Jewish people in their struggle to build a new nation -- their own nation -- sort of the underdogs and I think viscerally he would have just gone this direction. What I guess I'm trying to say is I don't think Dave had a lot of resistance from Mr. Truman, but I think he probably had fertile ground in which to try to push forward and get as much mileage out of this as he possibly could.

HESS: More or less kept the issue before him.

BIRKHEAD: Right, because there were a lot of people trying to push a lot of things before the President. I think Dave did a good job of keeping it there.

HESS: What about Philleo Nash?

[57]

BIRKHEAD: Yes. Philleo was another one, of course, who I had known slightly before, not real well, but his basic area was civil rights, or at least the contacts I had with him.. This was not divorced from the Wallace movement and also the other side of the political spectrum, the Strom Thurmond movement, and in my work in anti-Democratic propaganda, although I concentrated more on the question of Communism, I had done a lot of work in this sort of American fascist kind of thing and many of these people were revolving around Strom Thurmond and his campaign, and Mr. Truman made some strong statements on civil rights in the campaign and the

civil rights report had come out. So I did work with Philleo Nash some in trying to help in how you said this -- to have the most impact in pulling people away from the Wallace movement who were making noise about civil rights and trying to

[58]

dull the edge of the anti-civil rights kind of thing in the South where the Strom Thurmond thing was active. But I knew Philleo mostly in the work of the field of civil rights. Now I know he had other responsibilities but I'm not really aware of what they were.

HESS: On the subject of J. Strom Thurmond's States' Rights party, did the Research Division concern themselves very much with that angle, or that aspect?

BZRKHEAD: Not very much. No, we did little or no work...well, on the question of civil rights we did, but we didn't really relate it much to Strom Thurmond. We did it on a positive basis of the importance of civil rights, and of course, Mr. Humphrey had passed the resolution at the convention and Truman supported this, and the civil rights report was out and this

[59]

kind of thing, so we didn't relate ourselves or worry too much about the Strom Thurmond operation, per se. We were mainly concerned with a positive approach in civil rights. The President consciously made a decision that he was not going to win that election by being anti-civil rights; that he wasn't going to get the vote of the people in the South by coming out against civil rights. So he took a positive approach on civil rights and we just didn't worry too much about Strom Thurmond. Like the Wallace thing, we kept track of it and we'd watch what they were saying, this kind of thing, but we didn't do too much with it.

HESS: Back to our men; what about Donald Dawson?

BIRKHEAD: Yes, this is another guy that I've since gotten to know fairly well, but I did not really know Don at all in that campaign. I first met him in 1950 in the Missouri campaign, and

[60]

he was really a person that I didn't know at all. He was president of the National Capital Democratic Club for two years while I was secretary of the National Capital Democratic Club recently, and we've been associated in a lot of other things over the years, but at that time I really didn't know him at all. I don't remember speaking to him in the '48 campaign, but since then we've become close friends.

HESS: What about the gentleman that had the title "The Assistant to the President," John R. Steelman?

BIRKHEAD: This is another person that I really have had no contact with. I don't think that we had too much contact from the Research Division with him. Again, he is another person that I've come to know since then, but I did not know at that time -- I'm not even sure that

[61]

John Steelman really knew we existed, as far as I know. Now Bill Batt or somebody could tell you, but as far as the '48 campaign, no. I guess I got to know him best through the National Capital Democratic Club here, which he helped found. The Club was started really by Charlie Murphy as a luncheon club called the "Out but Happy Club" in 1953. They met every couple of weeks or periodically for lunch up at the Women's National Democratic Club and these were mostly people who had been on the White House staff under Truman, although they used to invite me from time to time because I'd been associated with the '48 campaign. Out of this grew the National Capital Democratic Club and John Steelman was one of the founders, and I served as secretary for several years. I really got to know John best then. I didn't know him in the '48 or '50 campaigns at all.

[62]

HESS: What about David Stowe?

BIRKHEAD: Dave Stowe worked some on speeches in the '48 campaign and I had some minor association with him then, some in 1950, but again, this is another person I got to know more in the "Out but Happy Club" and later in the National Capital Democratic Club, I didn't have much association with him in 1950. Again Bill Batt may have, but I didn't.

HESS: Are there any other men in the White House that I'm leaving off of our list here, that might have had something to do with the Research Division?

BIRKHEAD: Not that I can recall. Charlie Murphy, Clark Clifford, George Elsey, to some degree Dave Niles, some, Philleo Nash -- Don Dawson, Matt, the rest -- not really that I had any contact

[63]

that I'm aware of.

HESS: Just what was your evaluation of J. Howard McGrath as chairman of the Democratic National Committee?

BIRKHEAD: He was one, I think, of the few people that really thought Truman could win. And I think for that reason he was good for the national committee. As everybody felt, except a few people, Bill Boyle and J. Howard McGrath, and some people like this, Truman didn't have much chance of winning.

HESS: Did you think Mr. Truman would win?

BIRKHEAD: Did I?

HESS: Yes.

BIRKHEAD: I thought he would but I thought it was going to be a squeaker. I think if I could

[64]

have gotten out on the train and out in the country a little bit I would have felt differently and would have thought he really was going to win. Sitting in Washington, it was really a little difficult to, get a feel, but the guys that went out on the train all felt differently about it. J. Howard McGrath, from what I feel, had strong feelings that Mr. Truman was going to win this race, and this was important to have this kind of guy at the head of the national committee. Any guy, in his position, with much doubt in his mind -- this would have made it really difficult to run a campaign. He worked in the worst possible conditions for a chairman to work under. The party had taken a beating in '46 in the off-year elections; we were short as heck of money; there were times -- we got paid all the way through -- but there were times when our payrolls were delayed. I know they

[65]

had a heck of a time keeping up money to get the President on the radio and what little television he got, and keep the train going. Probably seldom has a national chairman had the difficult job that Howard McGrath had, and I think if there had been some other people heading the committee, it might have been enough to pull Truman down. But McGrath stayed in there most of the time and fought pretty hard.

HESS: Can you tell me about the events leading up to the choosing of Louis Johnson as chairman of the Finance Committee?

BIRKHEAD: I really have not very much personal knowledge of this. I heard all the rumors that were floating around, including the fact that they'd searched around, that Johnson was not their first choice, that they had searched around and couldn't find anybody that was willing to do it. Nobody thought Truman had a chance of winning. Nobody wanted the

[66]

tough job of going out and ask people to put up money on somebody that was going to lose. So Johnson was a strong man for Truman and accepted the responsibility, but I don't have any real personal knowledge on it.

HESS: What kind of a job did he do?

BIRKHEAD: I'm not the right person to give you a good evaluation of this. Really, I don't think I talked to him more than two or three times in the campaign. The only time I was really around

much at all other than just in passing was that one meeting I was invited to which I mentioned earlier. I know at that meeting he was saying, "Now look, if you guys go out and really do the job, you can get this money. There are people out there, but don't go out and apologize for coming and asking for money for Truman. Go out and get it, it's there.

[67]

And this guy is going to win," and this kind of thing. He was pushing quite hard, but I had no real -- I can't make an evaluation.

HESS: What do you recall about the importance to the campaign of the refusal of the 80th Congress to appropriate money to the Commodity Credit Corporation for the grain storage bins? Was that very important?

BIRKHEAD: I think it was in the rural areas. I think it was one of the reasons that states like Iowa went for the President, because all he had to do was point to that grain piled up out there in the middle of the main streets in some of those western towns and this was pretty dramatic evidence of the failure of the 80th Congress. I don't think there was any question. Well, Truman was a farmer; came from a farm; he could talk to farmers; they liked the way he talked

[68]

to them but the fact that the Congress refused to do anything in this area had tremendous impact, I don't think there's any question -- oh, guess the classic example is Iowa went for him because this grain was stacked up out there. They didn't want any more part of these Republicans who allowed this or refused to do anything about it.

HESS: In the book *Out of the Jaws of Victory* Jules Abels has it that the Democratic campaign was aimed at four distinct interest groups, labor, the farmer, the Negro, and the consumer. What do you think about that?

BZRKHEAD: I think this is pretty accurate. Labor, farmer, Negro and the consumer, yes. The truth of the matter is that most Democratic campaigns had been aimed pretty much at these but there is no question that these were groups that we

[[69]

had high in our mind when we tried to put together material; yes.

HESS: How important did you think the Negro vote was going to be?

BIRKHEAD: I personally thought the Negro vote could make the difference because I thought this was going to be a squeaker. I was particularly concerned about the Negro vote in states like New York, Pennsylvania, well, places where there is a large Negro vote. The Negroes didn't vote in the South then. And I was concerned that the Wallace movement, because of the kind of appeal it was making, might siphon off a lot of the Negro vote. I thought the Negro vote was

vital. I was a great one to continue to plug civil rights matters, I thought this was important. But I also thought, important to the Negro, was not only the question of talking

[70]

about civil rights by talking about jobs, housing, and these kind of things, which are important to the Negro -- were then.

HESS: Were there any other minority blocks that were watched with any special emphasis?

BIRKHEAD: Well, we've discussed a little bit the Jewish groups. There was a lot of effort put forth among polish -- other ethnic groups such as this. I think though that the Negro vote and the Jewish vote were the ones in which there was the greatest kind of concentration, at least as I saw it.

HESS: Why do you think Mr. Truman chose to attack the 80th Congress in the campaign rather than Mr. Dewey himself?

BIRKHEAD: Because I think he felt that the 80th Congress had a record that was attackable.

[71]

He didn't completely forget Mr. Dewey, but the 80th Congress had things like we were discussing a few moments ago; their failure to do something about grain shortage; and their failure to move as far as they should on housing; a lot of things. These were the things that I think he felt were important and were attackable. It was a little more difficult to attack Mr. Dewey because he just didn't quite have these. You couldn't quite as easily hook these onto him. He was put forth as an all-American man, a great prosecutor and this kind of thing. Attacking him and some of the things, he was alleged to have accomplished in his life was a little like attacking motherhood or something, but the 80th Congress, I think, because of the things that you could point out that it had failed to do, "The Do-Nothing Congress," as he called it, was much easier to attack. Therefore,

[72]

I think he thought this was the direction he ought to go.

HESS: One reason I mentioned that is because some authors do like to point out that the 80th Congress did pass some things that were quite valuable and that Mr. Truman will be noted for: The Greek-Turkish Aid Bill, the Marshall Plan...and things like that.

BIRKHEAD: This is right. There's no question about this.

HESS: But he did obviously still think there was enough reason even though they had passed things like this that he could attack them.

BIRKHEAD: Well, those things, if anybody tried to get him off in a corner on these, he could easily point out that the only reason they passed those was that, "I put them up there, and

[73]

they were right, and they had to do it." But he made his primarily -- that campaign -- a domestic campaign. Therefore, these other things were just not quite as important. When he did get into foreign affairs, oh, he did things like propose to send Supreme Court Justice Vinson to Moscow to talk to Stalin, and the papers loved to laugh about this, Frankly, I think things like this were things that helped get Mr. Truman elected. I know my father in making a speech down in North Carolina during the campaign -- not a political speech -- he was talking to a church group down there and somebody got off on politics and asked why Mr. Truman had done a stupid thing like send Supreme Court Justice Vinson over to talk to Stalin. It bothered Dad a little bit and he told me about it later. He said, "I just took out after him and I said, 'I happen to be a man who is in favor of peace and the way you

[74]

get peace is to go talk to people and try to find out how you, get together. Mr. Vinson is a Justice of the Supreme Court, obviously has some ability and I think it's a great idea to send somebody like this over to see Mr. Stalin and talk about peace a little bit.'" And Dad said the whole audience broke out cheering practically. So that some of these things that Mr. Truman got accused of pulling stupid acts I think were really things that helped elect him. But I felt that campaign -- maybe this was because of my limited view of it, I was working more in the human resource area -- was more a domestic campaign than it was a foreign affairs campaign.

HESS: Now, the Republicans didn't attack Mr. Truman very much on foreign policy. Do you think that might have been a mistake on their part?

BIRKHEAD: They would have some trouble in attacking him because they had been generally under

[75]

Vandenberg's direction, and had supported the administration and its foreign affairs. And they would have had some trouble attacking very much, although they -- I don't know whether Mr. Dewey did, I don't remember that he did so much of it, but things like the Vinson thing -- the Republicans tried to make capital out of the fact that Truman had no knowledge of foreign affairs; didn't know how to handle it; didn't know what he was doing, this kind of thing. That you needed a firm, hard hand at the tiller like Mr. Dewey who could deal with foreign affairs. They were a little on the spot because Vandenberg had brought on this new idea of bi-partisanship, so that they didn't attack Mr. Truman too much. As we remarked they had passed some of the foreign policy proposals Mr. Truman had made.

HESS: Looking back, what do you see as the major

[76]

mistakes in campaign strategy on the part of the Republicans?

BIRKHEAD: I think their major mistake was maybe not of their doing, although I think they helped it along. Their major mistake was giving the air of "the election's in the bag," and putting too much credence in the polls; publicizing the polls too much and letting Mr. Dewey act nearly as if he was President already, and this was just a formality they were going through. I think what it did was to slow down or diminish the efforts that the Republican Party workers made out in the country. I don't think it was per se anything that Mr. Dewey said or the way he campaigned necessarily, it was just that they played this as if it was in the bag and there was nothing really -- "Let's talk tonight about what my first act will be when I'm President," rather than "how I'm going to win." I think

[77]

this was their biggest mistake; not so much what they said or anything else, but just the fact that they played it as if they were in, and this was all over, and their workers let down.

HESS: What's your estimation of Mr. Truman's place in history?

BIRKHEAD: Oh, gee, I can't really be very objective about this. I think that he's going to have a great place in history. I think that his picking up at the end of the war and carrying it on through in a very difficult time -- his beginning of world cooperation under the Marshall Plan, and the Greek-Turkish Aid, etc. A lot of things are going to be remembered as the beginning efforts -- real meaningful efforts in civil rights and housing and many other things are, going to be traced back to the time of Mr. Truman. I think if we could all be here a hundred years from now and read a history I think we're, going to see a lot more things credited to Truman or talk about having come out of the Truman times in the White House than any of us think now. I think he's going to have a great place in history and will be remembered as one of our greater Presidents. Again, this isn't a very objective feeling about this guy. It's completely subjective, but I think that the seven years he was in the White House are going to be looked back on as quite a period in our history.

HESS: I've got a question here on Dave Lloyd's activities in setting up the Truman Library. Do you want to cover anything else on the Research Division in '48?

BIRKHEAD: You're going to be interviewing others and you're going to get a lot of material from them. About Dave Lloyd...

[79]

HESS: His activities in setting up the Truman Library.

BIRKHEAD: He actually set up the Library -- beginning after Mr. Truman left the White House -- this was the time I was on the Hill working -- I was on the payroll under Johnson, but I was

actually working for Earle Clements of Kentucky, the majority whip -- I was not closely associated -- I mean, Dave and I were close friends but I wasn't too much in on the setting up of the Library. I generally knew about it and what Dave was doing and the work he was doing in setting it up, but I wasn't working with him much on setting up the Library. So I don't really have too much. I used to see him once or twice a week. We tended to discuss other things other than the Library. The Library was sort of his and I wasn't really working much with him on it, so I can't be too helpful on that.

[80]

HESS: One final question here before we get into anything that you might add, and that's on just the general reliability of reporters. Drawing from your experience in Washington, are there any one or two Washington correspondents or reporters that you could advise our scholars in the future to use with any reliability?

BIRKHEAD: Well, I think there's some guys that try. Obviously you think of some deans like Lippmann, Walter Lippmann, although he, like all people, is a human being and he misinterprets. I think, certainly, Scotty Reston would have to be put up close to the top of those that have a fairly good knowledge of what goes on in Washington, and try to interpret it well. These are able columnists. Marquis Childs, I think, is among these columnists. For the period back in '48 though there were people like Tom Stokes writing, and Tom, I think, was a .good observer

[81]

of the situation. Bill Blair, I believe was with the *New York Times* at that time. Blair is and was then an able recorder of what goes on in Washington and I think did a good job of digging for information -- digging for material -- and covering Washington in an able way. Oh, you can run through lots. Drew Pearson is a close personal friend of mine, but I think Drew wants to get off on causes too much and sometimes he comes up with some good material, and sometimes I think he shoots off a little too fast and doesn't quite dig into stories as much as he ought to. Phil Potter of the Baltimore *Sun* is one of the able writers and covers Washington from the news column viewpoint as well as anybody and was reporting back as long ago as 1948. There was a reporter on the St. Louis *Post-Dispatch* who is now dead, I believe, who was one of the real fine reporters...I

[82]

knew him so well, I haven't seen him for years. Yes, his name was Raymond Brandt. He was a real fine correspondent in Washington and going back in '48 period he did a tremendous job of covering stories then. Joe Short who succeeded Charlie Ross at the White House was one of the fine reporters and in fact after he died -- after he had his heart attack and died and had been working for Mr. Truman -- I hired his widow, Beth Short, and she went to work for me on the Hill. She's still working up there with Mike Monroney of Qklahoma. But Joe was a fine reporter. I can't right offhand think -- I'm sure if I'd sit down and think a little while I could think of some of the others. I never had too much good feeling about columnists like Dave Lawrence. I think he

is completely biased in his writing. I've always had a feeling that Arthur Krock was capable of turning out fine articles -- fine columns

[83]

interpreting the city -- but he tended to want to pontificate and not do very much digging into what the real facts were. I can't think of anymore right now.

HESS: That's two on the other side.

BIRKHEAD: Well, there's a lot of others that are around that I don't have much feeling...you know, people like Doris Fleeson. Doris is a personal friend of mine but I just don't think Doris is very deep in her coverage of Washington, so I don't have much feeling about it. The Alsop brothers sometimes do good work, sometimes they want to prove a point which always bothers me about people who cover Washington. They want to go out and grind an ax. They uncover just enough to make the ax grind the way they want to but not enough to show that there's another side, and I sometimes feel that the

[84]

Alsops -- well, when they were writing together -- Stewart, I guess, has left the newspaper business and Joe does a column now, and he tends to want to try to prove something and so he does just enough work to prove what his feeling was before he started. Of the standard guys, of course, I guess, the dean is still Merriman Smith and he does an excellent job of covering the White House for UP, and always has done an excellent job. And there's no question that back in '48 the newspaper guys were all for Truman -- the writers, the reporters -- but they were like a lot of other people, I guess, blinded by the polls and couldn't quite think that the polls could be as wrong as they were.

HESS: Why do you think they were for Truman?

BIRKHEAD: They liked him; they thought what he was doing was right. He was good with them;

[85]

he was friendly with them. They had an easy relationship with him. There's a guy named Eklund, who was a fellow I didn't know too well, but he was on the *Milwaukee Journal*, I guess at the time, and I know I had a long session with him once I remember back in '48. He'd been out on the Truman train and out with Mr. Dewey, and he said it was just like night and day. On the Dewey train it was formal. Dewey would make sort of appearances and you felt that you were back in feudal times when somebody would pound on the floor and another man would announce the king was coming and everybody would bow down; and on the Truman train, you'd be sitting there and all of a sudden some guy would be looking over your shoulder and say, "I didn't say that at all." And it would turn out that the President was wandering around back among the reporters.

[86]

They felt he was a human being and Dewey wasn't. And most of the reporters liked generally what they thought Truman was trying to do. But when I'd see them around town, which I did occasionally, they'd shake their heads and say, "It's too bad that guy is going to lose."

HESS: I want to check a point on chronology here. Now, Mr. Truman took a trip in June, along about the first two weeks of June in '48. Now the Research Division was not set up at that time...

BIRKHEAD: It was not functioning at that time. Part of the reason, I guess that they really got pushing so hard on it was that trip, because on that trip they depended to a great extent on material prepared in the departments, as I understand it. This material was sent out.

HESS: Speech material?

[87]

BIRKHEAD: Speech material was given to him before they left here or some was sent along on the train, and they said it was just impossible. As I was saying earlier, it was full of statistics, it didn't catch any of the feeling of Truman himself; the kind of person he is. It was probably too well done. Truman is not a master spokesman, I guess, but this was so beautifully written that the President was just uncomfortable with it. It was too loaded down with a lot of dry statistics; it had little or no reflection of local problems and it just wasn't the kind of material you can use in a campaign, particularly a person like Mr. Truman could use. I think my remembrance of the chronology was that there was thought of developing the Research Division before that, in fact, I think I was in Washington when that trip was going on. I think I had actually arrived here. Maybe I hadn't,

[88]

but it seems to me it was about that time. But then all of a sudden there was this big drive, "For God's sake we've got to get somebody else to prepare these speeches. It's impossible to use these bureaucrat speeches." So, we were sort of shoved into this breach to start preparing the speeches.

HESS: That was after they got back from their trip?

BIRKHEAD: I'm inclined to think, and Bill Batt could answer this -- you might ask him if you interview him -- it seems to me that actually during that trip, Bill may have gotten a call from Clark Clifford or Charlie Murphy or somebody saying, "For God's sakes get us some material out here," for wherever else he was going. It was during that trip that maybe some of the material actually began to be fed out. I may be wrong but I've sort of a remembrance of this. But it was just

[89]

about that time that I came to Washington.

HESS: Let's just take a couple of minutes and run down the list of people who worked on the Research Division. If you could give me just a capsule background on these people to find out who were these people who did this. Just a little bit about what you know about Bill Batt.

BIRKHEAD: Well, Bill was the son of William L. Batt, Sr., who was the president of S.K.F. Industries, which is a big manufacturing concern in Philadelphia, and his father had been associated -- although his father was a Republican -- had been associated with Roosevelt and had been appointed to some posts by Roosevelt, particularly during the war. Bill served in the war and after the war went to Philadelphia and worked, I think, some for his father but I think he worked elsewhere

[97]

and wanted to get into politics and he ran, as I say, in 1946. I think his opponent was Hugh Scott, who was the chairman of the Republican National Committee in 1948. I'm not positive about that but I think maybe he was. This was when Hugh Scott was Congressman. And Bill was defeated and continued to work in and around Philadelphia, in fact, I think he and his wife had a morning radio show there for a while. Sort of one of these husband-wife shows on radio in the morning, and Bill did some other things, and then hooked onto the campaign in '48. After the Truman victory he went to work in the Labor Department and worked with Secretary of Labor Tobin in trying to develop jobs in labor surplus areas. Then he was out during the Eisenhower Administration when he did the same kind of jobs when he was with the Government from '48 to '52 for some local

[91]

communities. Then he came back under Kennedy and worked for the Kennedy administration running the Area Redevelopment Administration in the Department of Commerce. Phil Dreyer was from Portland, Oregon. He was a young fellow who came out of the war and went to work in Portland with some organization, I can't remember what it was, the Portland Development Agency or something, and got interested in politics. Both Bill Batt and Phil Dreyer were very active in a new veterans organization called the American Veterans Committee, and Phil did some work for the American Veterans Committee, actually, on their payroll, I think, for a while, and was interested in politics and did run in '48 for the state legislature and, as I said earlier, was elected. He only campaigned the last week or so. He sort of rode in on Mr. Truman's coattails in Oregon. Then after that he left

[92]

Oregon and is now down in Southern California and is a builder and has been very successful in the building business, constructing homes and selling them. Johannes Hoeber had been in the city government, I guess, in Philadelphia where he had known Bill Batt and he came down here. After Truman was elected I think he went back to Philadelphia for a while. In fact, I think he later became commissioner of public welfare or something in Philadelphia. During many years

he served there, then when Mr. Kennedy was elected in '60 and Bill Batt came back in the Federal Government, Johannes came down and was his assistant at ARA.

Frank Kelly was from Kansas City, a newspaperman who had gone to New York, worked for the Associated Press, had been a Nieman Fellow. He was sort of tired of the newspaper business when I called him one Sunday night in '48 and

[93]

asked him if he would come to work and he came to work the next morning. The latter part of the campaign, when it wasn't sure that Mr. Truman was going to win and what anybody was going to end up with, he got a job teaching at Boston College and he did actually go there right after the campaign was over. But then shortly after this he came back to Washington and was assistant to Scott Lucas and later Ernest McFarland when they were majority leaders of the Senate, then he later went to work with Bob Hutchins of the Fund for the Republic.

Dave Lloyd had worked here in Washington. He was a lawyer with the Americans for Democratic Action, and came in from there and later went to the White House and on running the Truman Library Corporation, et cetera, before he died.

I think this is all of them...and John Barriere was sort of our leg man and, oh, if we

[94]

needed something from the Library of Congress or somebody to run down to one of the departments or something. John had just come out of the University of Chicago, he just graduated from the University of Chicago when we picked him up, and he then later went to the Hill and for many, many years was associated with Albert Rains, a Congressman from Alabama, on the Housing Subcommittee in the House, and then recently went as an assistant to Speaker McCormack, helping the Speaker in some of his work. He didn't graduate from the University of Chicago, he's from Massachusetts, Worcester, Massachusetts, and graduated from Brown University, I believe. But he was just a young fellow and had just come to Washington. In fact, he and another young fellow by the name of Ray Scherer, who is now White House correspondent for NBC, were living together during the '48

[95]

campaign. Ray had just come to Washington with NBC and was traveling with Truman on the train. But I think that's all. We did have two sisters from Connecticut, whose name I don't remember; a very beautiful girl from Delaware, whose name I don't remember, who was my secretary; and one other girl, or maybe two other girls, because we had a tremendous amount of typing -- typing up speeches and all this other material.

We had four or five girls that worked in the office, and that was it and briefly who the guys were.

HESS: Do we have anything else left to cover on this subject?

BIRKHEAD: I can't think of anything else.

HESS: I can't either.

BIRKHEAD: I'll suddenly, about midnight tonight,

[96]

when I get ready to go to bed, I'll think of something I ought to have said, but...

HESS: If you do, call me and let me know.

BIRKHEAD: I'd be glad to.

[98]

INDEX

Alsop, Joseph, 83-84

Alsop, Stewart, 83-84

American Veterans Committee, 8, 91

Americans for Democratic Action, 93

Anderson, Clinton P., 24

Barriere, John, 9, 93

Batt, William L., Jr., 6, 7, 8, 13, 17, 36, 37, 38, 40, 43-46, 47, 51, 88, 89, 91, 92

Birkhead, Kenneth M.:

- as Associate Director of Public Relations, Research Division, Democratic National Committee, 1948, 8

- biographical data concerning, 1-3

- Democratic National Committee, rehired by, 1950, 23-24

- "Files of the Facts," work on, 22-27, 29, 32

- as finance director, Democratic National Committee, 1957-58, 49

- Hennings, Thomas C., Jr., 1950 Senate campaign, as manager of, 33

- human resources, specialist in speeches on, 1948 presidential campaign, 15-16

- newspaper correspondents, evaluation of, 80-86

- and the 1950 congressional elections, 31-33

- Pendergast, Thomas J. (Tom), opinion of, 3-5

- presidential election campaign, 1948, speechwriter for H.S. Truman during, 6-21

- Research Division, Democratic National Committee, employed by, 1948, 6-10, 36-39

- Research Division, Democratic National Committee, returns to work for, 1950, 28-33

- Truman, Harry S., evaluation of as President, 77-78

- Truman, Harry S., first association with, 3

- White House staff members, recollections of, 47-62

Blair, William M., 81

Boyle, William M., Jr., 63
Brandt, Raymond P., 81

Campaign, presidential, 1948. *See* presidential campaign, 1948

Childs, Marquis, 80
Civil rights, 57-59
Clements, Earle C., 79
Clifford, Clark M., 14, 48, 52, 88
Clynes, Mary, 25
Commodity Credit Corporation, 67
Congressional campaign, 1950, 29-33
Connelly, Matthew J., 48

Dawson, Donald, 59-60

Democratic National Committee Library, 25

Democratic National Committee, Research Division:

- Democratic National Committee headquarters, relations with during 1948 campaign, 34-41
- "Files of the Facts," 22-27, 29, 32
- members of, 89-95
- offices of during 1948 presidential campaign, 43-44
- organization of, 8-10, 28-32, 34-35
- and the Progressive Party campaign, 1948, 36-37
- staff members, visits to White House during 1948 presidential campaign, 45-46
- White House, liaison with during 1948 presidential campaign, 47-62

Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee, 33

Dewey, Thomas E., 70-71, 75, 76, 85-86

Dixiecrats, 57-58

Dreyer, Philip, 8, 16, 24, 30, 33, 38, 91

80th Congress, 67, 70-72

Eklund, Laurence C., 85

Else, George, 14, 45, 48, 51-52

"Files of the Facts", 22-27, 29, 32

Fleeson, Doris, 83

Forrestal, James Y., 40

Friends of Democracy, 2, 7, 53

Gorman, Thomas F. (Mike), 30, 31, 33

Harriman, Averell, 40

Harry S. Truman Library, 78-79

Hechler, Kenneth, 29

Hennings, Thomas C., Jr., 33

Hoeber, Johannes, 8, 16, 92

Humphrey, Hubert H., 58
Hutchins, Robert M., 93

Israel, recognition of by the United States, 1948, 53-56

Johnson, Louis A., 65-66

Kansas City, Mo., 4
Kelly, Frank, 8-9, 16, 46, 92
Kennedy, John F., 91
Krock, Arthur, 82-83

Lawrence, David, 82
Lippmann, Walter, 80
Lloyd, David D., 8, 16, 29-30, 31, 78-79, 93
Low, Clarence, 36, 40
Lucas, Scott, 93

McCormack, John W., 94
McFarland, Ernest W., 93
McGrath, J. Howard, 34, 40, 63
Michelson, Charles, 28
Municipal Auditorium, Kansas City, MO., 4
Murphy, Charles S., 11, 14, 44, 48-49, 61, 88

Nash, Philleo, 56-57
National Capitol Democratic Club, 61
Niles, David, 53-56

"Out but Happy Club," 61

Pearson, Drew, 81
Pendergast, Thomas J. (Tom), 3-6
Portland, Oregon, 38

Presidential campaign, 1948:

- civil rights as an issue in, 57-59
- Democratic party campaign finances, 39-40, 65-66
- 80th Congress as a campaign issue, 70-72
- foreign policy as an issue in, 74-75
- foreign policy, preparation of HST's speeches on, 16
- human resources, preparation of HST's speeches on, 15-16
- interest groups, importance of in Democratic party campaign, strategy, 68-70
- Israel, recognition of as an issue, 53-56
- minority groups, Democratic party campaign strategy concerning, 68-70
- natural resources, preparation of HST's speeches on, 16
- Negro vote, 68-70

- press coverage, 80-86
- Republican party campaign strategy, 74-77
- speech by HST on human resources, Indianapolis, Ind., Oct. 15, 1948, 15-16, 19-20
- speechwriting for, 20-21, 87-88
- and Vinson to Moscow proposal, 73-74
- Wallace, Henry A., Democratic party strategy regarding campaign of, 16-19
- Whistle-stop speeches, preparation of, 10-21
- WPA Guides, use of in drafting HST's whistle-stop speeches, 12

Press, the, 80-86

Progressive party, 1948, 6, 16-19, 36-37, 54, 57

Rains, Albert, 94

Redding, John (Jack), 41-43

Republican party, 76-77

Research Division, Democratic National Committee. *See* Democratic National Committee
Research Division

Reston, James, 80

Ring Building, Washington, D.C., 41

Scherer, Raymond L., 94

Scott, Hugh, 90

Short, Joseph H., 82

Short, Mrs. Joseph H. (Beth Campbell Short), 82

Smith, Merriman, 84

States' Rights Democrats (Dixiecrats), 1948, 58

Stokes, Thomas L., 80

Stowe, David, 62

Sundquist, James L., 50-51

Taylor, Glen H., 19

Thurmond, J. Strom, 58-59

Tobin, Maurice J., 90

Truman, Harry S.:

- Birkhead, Kenneth M., first association with, 3
- domestic issues in 1948 presidential campaign, emphasis on, 73
- 80th Congress, attacks on, 1948 presidential campaign, 70-72
- evaluation of as President, 77-78
- human resources, speech on, 1948 presidential campaign, 15-16, 19-20
- Israel, recognition of, 1948, 53-56
- and the Pendergast (T.J.)
- political organization, 5-6
- press, relations with members of the, 85-86
- speaking style, 87
- speeches delivered on June, 1948 Western trip, preparation of, 86-87
- speechwriting for during 1948 presidential campaign, 10-21
- Western trip, June, 1948, 86-87

See also presidential campaign, 1948

Vandenberg, Arthur H., 75

Vinson, Fred M., 73-74

Vinson mission to Moscow (proposed), 1948, 73-74

Wallace, Henry A., 6, 16-19, 36-37, 54,69

White House staff, 9, 47-62

WPA Guidebooks, 12