

Oral History Interview

With

ROBERT P. WEATHERFORD, JR.

Mayor, Independence, Missouri, 1950-58.

Independence, Missouri

June 11, 1976

by James R. Fuchs, Harry S. Truman Library

The Harry S. Truman Library

Independence, Missouri

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FUCHS: Mr. Mayor, you might begin by giving a little of your background; when and where you were born, and perhaps something about your education, bringing us up to the time that you made your first acquaintance with Mr. Truman.

WEATHERFORD: I was born here in Independence on September 2, 1911, grew up here, went to all of elementary and high school. I graduated in architecture and became a registered architect

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in '42. I became a member of the American Institute of Architects in 1950 and I am still a member.

As far as my acquaintance with Mr. Truman, it goes back to the time when I was about 18 or 19 years old, and he was Presiding Judge of the County Court. I used to visit him in his offices there. Then when he ran for the United States Senate I did a little campaigning for him against Mr. [Jacob L.] Milligan.

FUCHS: This was in 1934?

WEATHERFORD: '34. I remember going to Harrisonville with Rev. J. D. Robbins, who was a very prominent Methodist minister and had served Harrisonville, and we joined Mr. Truman there at the time that he made a speech in Cass County for the Senate, his first run at the senatorial office in Washington, which he held until he became Vice President.

It was quite a campaign, rather furious, loud, and long, and tiresome; but Mr. Truman was always very alert and a man of high integrity, and this is the message that came across to the people of Missouri. That's why they elected him, and that's how he was selected by the President of the United States to become Vice President.

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I can say this for Mr. Truman from my personal acquaintance with him, he never acquired a dishonest dime in his life. He was dedicated, historically and personally, to the service of humanity. And I think he proved that throughout his career following his first admission to the Senate of the United States.

FUCHS: How did you happen to visit with him in his office when you were a young man in your teens?

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WEATHERFORD: Well, they were building the courthouse and I was working in a store--you couldn't get a job in the engineering field or architecture here in Independence and I sold the contractor the linoleum that went in the courthouse after the remodel was finished, and it brought me in contact with the Presiding Judge of the County Court.

Of course, I'm a Democrat of four or five generations from the old South and Mr. Truman always attracted me, his contagious personality, and his concept in the service to people. It probably affected my life after that because it was in 1950 that I was drafted to become a candidate for Mayor of this city. I always kind of used Mr. Truman in my earlier days as a model to follow

because the example he set under the political situation that he served, was almost phenomenal to me.

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FUCHS: Did you have an early interest in politics even when you were studying for architecture?

WEATHERFORD: Yes, I always had an interest in the Democratic Party. My profession was of my own choice. That's what I wanted to do, that's what I did do, and I still am practicing for Arizona Public Service Company. We build all over the State of Arizona and some in New Mexico.

But this was a situation, when I became Mayor, Mayor Roger Sermon, who I held in extremely high regard, passed away and before daylight the next morning I was the nominee. At the time I was president of the Independence Chamber of Commerce, active in civic affairs, had no intention of ever entering the field of politics; but when I got up that next morning after his passing, here I found myself a candidate on the Democratic ticket for Mayor of Independence.

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I knew Mayor Sermon real well and it was said after he had passed away, by the City Clerk, that I was his personal choice. If that was the case I never knew it.

FUCHS: Do you recall any conversations you might have had with Mr. Truman? That is, as a youth in visiting his office?

WEATHERFORD: No, he and I were always interested in Southern history. I made a specific study of General Robert E. Lee and President Truman's hero was Stonewall Jackson of the Civil War era. And I remember one time down on Proctor Place, when I was in high school, he made a speech on the life of General Stonewall Jackson and I made one on General Robert E. Lee. That's the first public appearance that I ever had with Mr. Truman, sharing any kind of a social, or

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historical reference point.

FUCHS: About what year was that?

WEATHERFORD: Oh, it must have been in 1928, '29, possibly '30.

FUCHS: What was your feeling about his knowledge of history?

WEATHERFORD: Well, I think that President Truman was probably the best informed man on the minute details of American history that ever served in the White House.

FUCHS: Did he have a good memory, in your opinion?

WEATHERFORD: He had an excellent memory, but he had read American history over and over until dates and events were just branded into his memory.

FUCHS: Did you practice architecture up to the time

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you became Mayor?

WEATHERFORD: I practiced architecture and was very successful in my practice here up until the time I became Mayor. I kept the practice for a year or two after that, but I found that it wasn't a part-time job, it took about 12 or 14 hours a day. So I turned my practice over to a young fellow who went to the same school I did and who was coming along. I just turned it over to him, walked out, and left private practice then and there.

FUCHS: Back in November 1950, there was a luncheon held here when the replica of the liberty bell was presented to the City of Independence.

WEATHERFORD: That is correct.

FUCHS: Do you recall that occasion?

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WEATHERFORD: Oh, do I recall it: I'd been in office about six or eight months and was green at the process of public protocol.

The President called me one morning at home and I was asleep. Of course, he was two hours ahead of me in Washington, and my wife said, "The President's on the phone and he wants to talk to you." I made some kind of remark that because he couldn't sleep I don't know why the Mayor of Independence couldn't. That was just a little levity between she and I. But anyway, I went to the telephone, the President said that the Mayor of Annecy, France had given a liberty bell to Independence, Missouri and wanted to present it, and would I make arrangements to receive it? Of course, I told him certainly I would be happy to, and later on did.

I talked to the City Council about this. The fact is that this is the only city outside of a state capital city in the country

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that received one of these bells from the foundries in Annecy. It was a friendly gift to America, and this being the President's home city and named Independence, it was very appropriate.

We got to discussing it among the members of the City Council and myself, and the idea hit me why not do this thing up in a proper way.

So, I called Washington and invited the President to come and bring his staff and any members of the Cabinet that he wished, or anyone that he thought was fitting to come, and we would have a big luncheon and then we would have our dedication ceremonies. He agreed to it and came.

And I had quite a time with protocol, being green at the business. It got so hot for me as Mayor that the people of high standing in the Party and in the community in Jackson County, which primarily is Kansas City and Independence,

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got to squabbling over who was going to set where at the head table.

So, I just came to my senses, called Matt [Matthew J.] Connelly at the White House and said, "Send a protocol agent out here to place these place cards, because I'm going to be in a riot if somebody doesn't take it over for me." So, that happened.

Anyway, we had two head tables, and the President arrived and various members of the military, and members of the Cabinet. Incidentally, John W. Snyder got to be a very good friend. I loved him and respected him.

FUCHS: Where was that dinner held?

WEATHERFORD: It was held in the Latter Day Saints Auditorium. The Laurel Club ladies served it down there, it was a delightful occasion, well

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done. Probably one of the best handled dinners I've ever attended in a public function. Those ladies are experts.

FUCHS: Have you other recollections of that event?

WEATHERFORD: I don't recall the speechmaking and all that, the details of it. But the Secret Service came out a week or two ahead of time and they went over that building with a fine-toothed comb. And on the day of the dedication the Secret Service were in the crowd, of course, as they always are in the presence of the President. The only way you could tell who they were, they would have a little common ordinary pin stuck down in the seam of their left lapel with just the head of it sticking out. I was recognizing them, but they didn't know I knew that.

But, anyway, a fellow got up in the crowd

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and started toward the podium to give the President a check for \$2,000 for the Library, and he hadn't gotten three steps until he was completely surrounded, virtually inundated by Secret Service. I think it was I that recognized him and I told the President who he was and the Secret Service released him. He came on up and handed the President a \$2,000 check for this Library. There wasn't anything particularly embarrassing about it, but it just showed you the efficiency with which the Secret Service operates. It made you proud of your Government and the services and the protection that they give to the President.

FUCHS: I believe you visited the White House in December 1951 with your father and your oldest daughter? What do you recall of that visit?

WEATHERFORD: I was chairman of the Water Resources Committee of the American Municipal Association

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at that time. That's why I went to Washington. I took my father and oldest daughter. She was about 12 at that time. They didn't participate in my functions, but they certainly toured Washington and Arlington, and Mount Vernon. And it was probably the highlight of my father's career because she was his favorite granddaughter at that time, and they were extremely close, probably closer than she and I; and it was a fabulous experience to see those two enjoy each other as they did. We did go to the White House and visit with the President in the Oval Office. Of course, my father served as an accountant for Waggoner-Gates Milling Company here in Independence for years and years and worked with Frank Wallace and the members of the family who were attached to the mill. Because of Mrs. Truman's part ownership, or her

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grandfather's ownership in it, they had a lot of things in common to talk about back here in Independence.

FUCHS: Do you recall anything else about that occasion?

WEATHERFORD: No. It was just a casual, nice visit, which he was noted for giving, and there was no hurry, no rush about it. I think we spent 20 to 25 minutes there, and he loaded my little girl down with pens and pencils and paraphernalia that he had a desk drawer full of.

FUCHS: Was that your first visit to the White House?

WEATHERFORD: No, I'd been there before, but this was just a routine visit. When I went to Washington I always went by.

FUCHS: I believe the President came out here earlier in 1951? Was that in connection with the flood

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that year?

WEATHERFORD: Yes, the dikes on the Kaw River in the west bottoms of Kansas City flooded and they put 18 feet of water in those big warehouses in those bottoms. It wiped out the stockyards and did about 750 million dollars worth of damage. That was the time that the Kansas City Water Company lost the Turkey Creek Pumping Station due to flood and forced me to put the pressure on the Missouri Water Company to build an independent water supply instead of buying from Kansas City. Which was done and is now working and has been expanded many times since.

That was one of the highlights of my public service, getting an independent water supply for Independence.

It was a disaster area, and that's why the President came out. He flew into Independence

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over the area. The land, I presume, from the air looked like part of the Mississippi Delta.

FUCHS: You were having a city public works election at that time, and he took time to vote in that. Do you recall that?

WEATHERFORD: He always took time to vote in Jackson County, any public election, whether it was a bond election, or whether it was for the choice of persons to serve public office, the President never failed to vote. He always came to Independence, even if he just stayed for an hour; and he went into his polling place and did his duty, which he considered an honor and a privilege and he never failed.

FUCHS: In connection with the Library, there was an earlier foundation formed here in Independence in 1948, or '49? What do you recall of that?

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WEATHERFORD: Mayor Sermon and Tom Evans had talked about this. So Mayor Sermon set up a non-profit foundation, and we sold little brass medallions in an effort to raise money for the Library; and then there were gifts from various people, school children and so on, when it was first announced. I was on that committee. The Mayor had called me. I guess that was a prelude to my service directly to him. Anyway, several thousand dollars was raised and after the Library was well along and Mayor Sermon had died and I was in public office and in charge of that foundation, we called a meeting and disbursed the funds to the Harry S. Truman Library for construction of this building. So, those funds went into this development.

FUCHS: Was there any opposition at the time you proposed this foundation?

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WEATHERFORD: None whatever, there was a little controversy. The first meeting I ever attended, and the first meeting that was ever held so far as I know, was out at Blevins Davis' farm on The Lee's Summit Road, up in the billiard room on the third floor.

Well, Mayor Sermon and Tom Evans got into a little bit of an argument over where the library should be built and Tom says, "The President wanted it at Grandview." And Mayor Sermon said he didn't understand it that way, that it ought to be here in Independence. It finally wound up that we never did anything but raise funds as far as that project at that time was concerned. It was after Mayor Sermon had died that I was called to Washington and we held a meeting of the Library trustees there. I think it was in the Statler Hotel.

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I remember sitting next to General [George C.] Marshall in the meeting, and Sam Rayburn, the Speaker of the House of Representatives was there. Basil O'Connor was presiding, and Vice President [Alben W.] Barkley was there. There was a number of persons of importance in the Federal Government and in the President's administration. I remember the fact that then and there is when it was established for sure that the Library would be built. But the irony of the whole thing was that it was never decided where until two weeks before this site was picked.

The general public doesn't know this, but after the President came home from Washington into private life, I had to make a speech before the Jackson Day Democratic luncheon here in the American Legion Building on West Maple in Independence, and the President and Mrs. Truman

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came for that address.

It was a rather historic thing that had been done by the Mayor of Independence for years and years, so the job fell to my lot by my holding office. After the meeting was over and we started down the stairs, the President said, "Bob, I've got a decision I've got to make in two weeks." He said, "I've got to establish where I'm going to put this Library. I'd like to put it on the farm out at Grandview, but the utility installations going to be so expensive I can't do that." He said, "The people in Kansas City want it over there, but there's so many of them that have fought me over the years that I don't want it there. The University of Missouri wants it and that's too far away; I couldn't find time to go to it nor be there." I said, "Well, Mr. President, why don't you put it here in Independence?"

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"Well, " he said, "I'd like to. This is where Margaret was born, it's been my home, it's where she grew up." He said, "I'd like to have it here."

I said, "Don't make any decision, just give me a couple or three weeks and let's see what we can develop."

"Well," he said, "I'll just leave it up to you, Bob."

Well, I felt like he did when he became President, the world had dropped on my shoulders.

But anyway, I got the Council together and discussed it with them, quietly and privately. This is one of those cases where the press wants to be in on it, but then was not the proper time to bring them in; I did bring them in at the right time. This could have affected the acquisition of properties and costs and so on, because speculation would have been rampant. And then

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he would have gotten pressure from the people in Kansas City and the University and so on. So the Council said, "Quietly do what you want to do for the President, we'll go along."

So, I conferred with him, he wanted it down on the R.L.D.S. campus, where the ball diamond is. I approached the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. I knew them well, and served them through the hospital and civic affairs and so on. They didn't particularly want to relinquish it unless I would approach the Mormon Church at Salt Lake City for a concession of land to the north of this tract. When I approached them I hit a stone wall there. They are fine people, loyal citizens, but there is a little interchurch conflict of interest that surfaced very quickly, and I backed off.

So, I told the President that that site was out, and he was rather depressed. After about a

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week I had conferred with members of the City Council, which was the best City Council that had ever served this City before or since. They were dedicated public servants, and they weren't all Democrats either.

FUCHS: Who were some of the people on that Council?

WEATHERFORD: Oh, there was Mr. Jim [J.C.] Noel, Orrin Moon, Howard Bennett, Renick Jones, Rube [I.R.] Lynch, Bob [Robert S.] Everitt, and there was Clyde DeWalt. Don Kerrick was on there, and there were several others of prominence that don't come to my mind at the present moment. But anyway they were all dedicated and they were loyal to me and I had the most delightful experience working for the people with them helping and guiding.

FUCHS: Were they unanimous in their backing you?

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WEATHERFORD: They were unanimous in the backing of me. So, I proposed to them this, and I had the City Counselor check the deeds and the dedication of the Slover Park to the City of Independence, and it was found that there was almost thirteen acres here at this site that could be

dedicated to the Library, since it was a non-profit institution; but we had to have some additional land. So the Council said, "Well, do whatever you have to do." We had some appraisals made of a block of houses that set where the Library building is now, and we actually bought those houses quietly for less than the appraisal. We asked the people what they would sell them for and we paid the price that they asked. We didn't tell them what we thought it was worth, but in every case the City saved money. We never had to do a condemnation; we had no problems. I think they seemed to sense

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there was something up.

Anyway, I got pretty tense and so did the President trying to find a site, because he was being pressured to get going and he was after me to find a site. I met him one morning at 6 o'clock at City Hall to avoid photographers and quizzing. Because of what I have previously mentioned, it would have upset the whole economic picture of the thing if the news had broken.

Anyway, we came out here and I parked right about where we're sitting and got out and I said, "Mr. President, we can give you thirteen and a half acres here, and this is the best I can come up with."

"Well," he said, "Bob, this is excellent." He said, "This is the place!" And I recalled the words of Brigham Young as he entered Salt Lake Valley.

But anyway, it was so agreeable that when

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we left the President slammed my car door on my index finger and it balled about a half a pound of hide up in a knot, and I never even felt pain, I was so relieved from the decision that had been made. He never did know that happened, incidentally. He died not knowing it.

I went to the doctor after I got back to the office and got it sterilized and bandaged. That was a funny incident and my wife laughed about that and told that story on me many a time, that I felt no pain; and that is absolutely the truth.

FUCHS: Well, now, I came here in 1954 and I believe I heard some discussion at the time questioning how they could take part of Slover Park, which had been dedicated to be only a park. Do you have any comment on that?

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WEATHERFORD: Well, I had the City Counselor research it, and the deeds to the City did not restrict it to that extent. But actually it's still a park, it's the lawn of the Library. The Library was built on land that we acquired, by purchase, from that block of houses. The park is still intact, it just belongs to the Federal Government instead of the City of Independence. So, I think we

strengthened our position when we transferred the title to the General Services Administration. Anyway, it was legal and proper or I wouldn't have done it.

FUCHS: Certainly. Did the City have to appropriate any funds?

WEATHERFORD: Oh, yes, the City appropriated funds for the purchase of these homes. We cleared them off of the site and then deeded the whole site to the Harry S. Truman Library, and it was

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very shortly thereafter that we commenced excavation.

FUCHS: Did the Corporation reimburse the City for the home purchases?

WEATHERFORD: No, that was the City's contribution to having a presidential library within the confines of the President's home city. And it was so convenient. It's just about eight blocks north of his home. Many a time he'd walk down here, which he, incidentally, liked to do pretty well.

Some of the preliminaries to this involved the State Highway Department and I remember a delegation of the Council and I going to Jefferson City. Rex Whitten was Chief Engineer of the Missouri State Highway Department, and we didn't have one bit of trouble getting the Highway Department to limit the usage of land, and they acquired some land on either side of

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24 highway. The President told me, "Those Roosevelt boys in Hyde Park have made hot dog and root beer stands out of the President's library there," and he said, "I don't want that here."

So I suggested that I make this trip to Jefferson City to help seal it off from commercialization and keep this as a dignified library and research center for the world, as it now is. I'm glad we did it and I'm glad we had the cooperation of Mr. Rex Whiten, who later served as the head of the Bureau of Public roads in Washington under President Kennedy. A very brilliant man, a very considerate man; and, of course, the fact that I was trying to do something for the President and protect him and his interests in the Library I imagine had a little influence at Jefferson City. It always had.

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FUCHS: The Highway Department project which involved, of course, the overpass, and the turnouts, cost something over a half million dollars, and I think most of the property across the highway was acquired by agreement, but there were a few condemnations at the time.

WEATHERFORD: That's right.

FUCHS: Do you know the background of that?

WEATHERFORD: I don't remember what pieces of property, but that was the Highway Department's responsibility, and it was absolutely legal and within their prerogative to do that. They've done that in other places throughout the country. No one got hurt, I'll assure you of that, financially or individually. But we did preserve the beauty and the aesthetics of this site and of this structure, and it will be in perpetuity,

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and that's the thing we were shooting for.

FUCHS: Had you prior to talking with Mr. Truman, who had that deadline, discussed with the City Council about the Library coming to Independence?

WEATHERFORD: No, the only conversation I know of was between the President and I, so far as locating the Library; and finally when he said that he wanted it in Independence, I told him I'd do my best and that's what I did. This is what we came up with. And I want to reiterate, it was the finest City Council a man ever had in public office.

FUCHS: Do you recall other reasons, aside from the cost of utilities, against placing it in Grandview?

WEATHERFORD: No, as far as I know that was the main thing. The farm at that time had to be developed.

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It would have had to have a sewage treatment plant. They had to have sufficient water supply, which wasn't at the site, as I recollect the situation. And then there was some topography problems, I think, drainage and so forth, which would have eaten up an awful lot of money.

FUCHS: I had heard that there was some talk within the family about the fact that if they put the Library there it would take a lot of good land out of production and it would be costly?

WEATHERFORD: I don't know anything about the family's discussion at all. I do know that the President would have liked to have had it on the farm where he grew up and plowed his straight furrows; but he was a realist all of his life, and he had been through enough construction in county road building and building of courthouses and so on. He recognized the facts of life and knew that it

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was economically unsound to insist on that. This turned out to be probably the best possible site that there could be in the state, because we're on a high knoll and he could look "down into Kansas City," as he said, which he loved to do. Well, you couldn't ask for a better setting, better

use of topography, and a more delightful and glorious structure for his whole mid western country.

FUCHS: The Truman Road project was brought up in some correspondence you had with President Truman in 1950. Do you recall anything about that?

WEATHERFORD: Yes, I recall that. For 30 years the Republicans and Democrats ran on the platform they were going to open Van Horn Road, as it was called at that time. It was named after old Colonel Van Horn who was owner/editor, I think, of the

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Kansas City *Journal Post*. He lived out there at Winner Road and what is now Truman used to be Van Horn Road. When I became Mayor I never made any speeches proposing or not proposing anything on Van Horn Road. It had been a political football for years and years. The first time I went to Washington I quietly went over to the Bureau of Public Roads to find out what could be done about it, quietly; and I found out that the whole problem was that the Republicans didn't know anything about it, and Mayor Sermon, who had been mayor 26 years, wouldn't agree to make it one-way traffic. That was the only catch--the only reason why the Federal bureau wouldn't permit Federal funds to be used by the State Highway Department to open it up through the City. It was just kind of like a strangulated vein, you had to go all around the business district virtually to get through anywhere.

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I found out that it was a little bit of, I guess you'd say stubbornness, that it hadn't been done in 25 years though it was needed, because it didn't agree with the concept that he had of where the traffic should flow.

I said, "Well, I'll sign a contract and agreement right now, while I'm here, we'll make it one-way traffic so that it can flow and let's go."

T. H. MacDonald chief Engineer, said all right and I signed the document there and I knew my Council would be behind me because I'd had a little preparatory discussion with them and they had said, "Get it done." So I figured that was enough license to hunt, so I signed the contract with the Federal Bureau of Public Roads. And about two weeks later the President called me on the telephone and he said [Thomas H.] MacDonald,

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who was then chief of the Bureau of Public Roads, had called and wanted to know if the President had any objections to them appropriating funds to the Missouri State Highway Department for this job. I said, "I've asked them to do that Mr. President, and hope it will not cause any embarrassment to you. Even though the road runs along the north side of your home, it is a technical strangulation in the traffic pattern of this city. I found out that, the Mayor had failed to do it over the years because of an argument with the Bureau over one-way traffic, and I'm

willing to go, and if you see fit to advise Mr. MacDonald that you would have no objections, I'd be most grateful."

Well, in about two days MacDonald called and said the President said it was all right with him, he just didn't want anybody to think that he was the one that was pushing it. I said,

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"Well, I'm the guy that brought it up and I'm the fellow that signed the contract, and if the President agrees to it I'm most grateful."

And that's the way that happened. I know the coldest day in Missouri happened the day we dedicated its opening, however.

FUCHS: Now it's back to two-way traffic.

WEATHERFORD: It's back to two-way traffic and as I understood the agreement the City can't get any more Bureau of Public Road funds because they breached the contract, unless Congress has changed the law. Someday they'll wake up to the fact of what they've done.

FUCHS: You don't think it was really a good move to make it two-way again?

WEATHERFORD: No, I don't. It is due to merchant pressure and they have never served anything but

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themselves, with the exception of Knoepkers only.

FUCHS: Was there other justification for the interchange and the overpass here, other than that the Library required it?

WEATHERFORD: The Library required it and that was the sole reason for it, and the State Highway Department and their engineering staff recognized that. The reason that they recognized it was that they could foresee the volume of traffic that would be coming through here, and surely in front of a presidential library you don't want to build a booby trap for piling up cars. I think it was wise, progressive, and was done economically.

FUCHS: The groundbreaking for the Library was on President Truman's birthday, May 8, 1955, and you were present. Do you have any recollections

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about that?

WEATHERFORD: That was quite a relief to me, and of course, he was jubilant over the prospect that we were underway. It was a very impressive situation, but, of course, the culmination of the whole thing was the day of dedication. The groundbreaking was right at about where we're sitting here, and I think a half dozen of us wore out a spade.

FUCHS: Mike Westwood, an Independence policeman, often drove Mr. Truman and acted as a body guard. What is the background of that?

WEATHERFORD: When the President left the White House we met him at the train and he and Mrs. Truman were driven to the home by my wife and I. We had about 25 or 30 thousand people lining the way to the house to welcome him home. The

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Federal Government did not at that time furnish any kind of protection whatsoever, to a former President. When he walked out of that White House and got on the train at the Union Station to come home, he again was "Mr. Citizen," as he liked to be known. He was totally without protection and this was a gross injustice by the Federal Government. I don't care whether it was him or any other President. So, when he got home I immediately recognized the need, because we had had Secret Service there in the little house back of 219 North Delaware, and they had built the fence against his wishes to protect the property. I made up my mind something had to be done, so I called my Chief of Police in and I said, "I want you to assign Mike Westwood"--who at that time was probably one of the best known officers on the force--"to be the President's traveling companion, the protector for

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he and Mrs. Truman. Detach him from official duties, but give him full authority and put him in charge of the protection for the President and Mrs. Truman and their home."

And from that day on, Mike didn't do anything for the Police Department, but he certainly served the City and the President, and he drove his car and helped Mrs. Truman. He was a great man, great servant. I grew up with him and went to school with him. Mike and I have been friends ever since we were little boys. But that had nothing to do with it. I knew Mike was dedicated and I knew the President would appreciate having protection; and that was the beginning of that relationship, which blossomed into a very close personal feeling between he and the Truman family.

FUCHS: Do you recall any particular difficulties you were involved in during the building of the Library?

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WEATHERFORD: No, I don't recall any difficulties. We had some fun here in the excavation. My oldest daughter had a Geiger counter she had gotten for Christmas; and, of course, anytime a rock was uncovered she had to be there with it. We were out here one evening after the

excavators had left, and we were walking around, and her Geiger counter went wild about eight, ten feet down in this basement area here. So, I called Brunson, a friend of mine who owns Brunson Instrument Company of Kansas City, and he brought a big one out and it went wild, but there never was any mineral deposits.

I had visions, of course, fantastic visions, that maybe we'd hit a vein of uranium or something and wouldn't have to worry too much about the economics of this construction project. But it didn't turn out that way. There was a lot of, pictures taken at the time; we had a lot of fun

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with it and the President was highly amused over the story.

FUCHS: Did you ever determine what caused the counters to act like that?

WEATHERFORD: No, had no idea what it was.

FUCHS: In 1956 the President went on a tour of Europe, and you were on hand when he came back. Do you recall anything about that occasion?

WEATHERFORD: No, that was a customary, routine thing. I always looked forward to his return, hated to see him go, but I don't recall the minute details of that.

FUCHS: You were involved in Masonic affairs. Do you have any comments about Masonry and Mr. Truman? Anything about some of the events you participate in together?

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WEATHERFORD: No, he was Grand Master of Missouri, which was the highest honor a man can have in Masonic circles. I belonged to the same Palestine Commandery in Independence that the President belonged to. He kept his Blue Lodge in Grandview, mine is 76 Independence, and my Royal Arch chapter is here. I later joined the Shrine, and demitted to El Zaribah Shrine, Phoenix, Arizona, of which now I am a member. I joined the Shrine because I wanted to participate in Crippled Children's Hospital work and that's really my only reason. I am not active in it.

FUCHS: Was Mr. Truman active in the Shrine?

WEATHERFORD: Oh, yes, Mr. Truman was active in all Masonic functions, and he was a 33rd degree Mason, which is a distinct honor which few men receive.

FUCHS: What recollections do you have of the Library

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dedication on July 6, 1957?

WEATHERFORD: It was the hottest day I ever lived through. It must have been 95 or 98 and the humidity was probably 198, so to speak. It was held here on the portico of the Library, and attended by a "Who's Who" of the Democratic Party, and many of the Congress were present.

I remember Mrs. [Eleanor] Roosevelt. Basil O'Connor, of course, was here, also President [Herbert] Hoover, Mr. Sam Rayburn, Mr. Lyndon Johnson from the Senate, and [Charles A.] Halleck, who was a Republican floor leader of the House at the time. Senator [W. Stuart] Symington, of our Missouri delegation was here. It was quite a day.

The thing that surprised me that day more than anything else was that when I went into the foyer about an hour before the ceremonies

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were to start, President Hoover and President Truman were standing under the place where the mural now is in the lobby and the President said, "Come over here, Bob, I want you to meet President Hoover."

I shook hands with the President, and President Truman reached in his pocket and he got out two white envelopes, one in each hand. He said, "Bob, I'm going to surprise you today."

I said, "Mr. President, anything you do this day, would not surprise me. Now what are you up to?" Hoover snickered.

He said, "This is a deed to the General Services Administration for the property and the building, and this is a deed to the Archivist of the United States for all my papers and personal mementos and so forth."

I said, "Mr. President, why are you doing that?"

He said, "Bob, these belong to the people,

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not to me. The people made me President, but this belongs to them, and I'm giving it back because I want it kept in perpetuity." He said, "The only request I have in this deed is that I have an office here in the Library for the rest of my life and nothing more."

I said, "Mr. President, that's about the biggest thing I've ever heard of, there's no historic precedent for that."

He said, "No, that's right."

But that was quite a day.

FUCHS: You didn't run for Mayor again after serving two terms?

WEATHERFORD: No, not after 1958. I had had enough of it. I figured when a man loses his sensitivity to the needs of people he's useless in public office and my sensitivity had about run out.

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FUCHS: Is there anything else you think we need discuss in relation to the Library or your career?

WEATHERFORD: No, nothing other than the fact that over the years I've treasured the knowledge that I had given some public service for the good that my city here has done for me. I love this old town, but I probably will never live here again.

FUCHS: I believe Mr. Truman once complimented you about returning some funds that you had left over from a congressional campaign.

WEATHERFORD: I ran in a primary election for the Congressional Fourth District. Union labor didn't want me because they were obligated to the man opposing me. I wasn't in opposition to him, but I didn't think he was going to run

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again and was led to believe that he wasn't.

FUCHS: Who was that?

WEATHERFORD: George H. Christopher, a very fine Congressman. But I was led to believe that he wasn't going to run again, so I filed and then he decided to run. Union labor was obligated to him and not to me, so I was defeated by, I think, two or three thousand votes. But I had some funds left over so I just prorated those back to the people who had given them to me. It didn't belong to me. I know I made some politicians mad as there were a lot of them who thought I should have just handed it over to the Party. But Mr. Truman was very complimentary on that. Mayor [H. Roe] Bartle of Kansas City had sent me some money and I returned it to him, and he said that it almost caused a heart attack;

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it had never been done before.

FUCHS: Mr. Truman wrote that he knew no precedent for a politician returning funds that were left over from a campaign.

Well, thank you very much, Mayor Weatherford. It's nice to have you here.

WEATHERFORD: Well, thank you, it's always good to come back.

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