

Oral History Interview
With
DIXIE POLLARD

Daughter of Ted Sanders, Cattleman and Farmer; Friend of Harry S. Truman; President, Truman for Senator Committee, Cameron, Missouri, 1934.

April 28, 2009

By Ray Geselbracht
Harry S. Truman Library

GESELBRACHT: I'm here with Dixie Pollard, April 28, 2009. Mrs. Pollard is the daughter of Ted Sanders for whom we have papers, thanks to her, and an oral history interview. And although she participated in the oral history interview, I think that she has memories about her father and Fred Canfil that would be very helpful for our researchers. And so let me just ask Mrs. Pollard to start remembering.

POLLARD: Fred Canfil is a memorable person in my mind. Of all the men that my father had for friends, I think Fred Canfil probably would be the one that would stand out the very most.

I am 74. I can remember Fred Canfil going back until I was about 6 or 7 years old. He was the United States Marshall here in Kansas City and such a wonderful, dear friend of President Truman, or Senator Truman at that time. And in those years, my father loved politics, he loved campaigning, so he began campaigning for Mr. Truman, mainly in Clinton County and Caldwell County, Missouri.

Mr. Canfil used to come up and encourage my father, "Well we've got to get to this county, we've got to get to another county." And he always called the President "The Boss." Even when he was president, he called Mr. Truman "The Boss." Whatever Fred Canfil said, well that's what my father did. Mr. Canfil was a city man, lived here in Kansas City, but he loved our farm up near Cameron, Missouri. And my father was a farmer as I am. And Mr. Canfil would love to come to the farm to see the cattle and all, but the highlight of his time at the farm was when we butchered, which was usually yearly in the fall. And I can well remember when Mr. Canfil would call and my father'd say, "Well, Canfil can come" on such and such weekend or such and such day. "Those will be the days that we'll butcher."

Mr. Canfil was a big man in stature. He had a very big head, not deformed or anything, but he just had a big head, and his countenance could have been overpowering had he not been so very nice.

GESELBRACHT: Do you mean that he frowned, or...

POLLARD: No, he just talked so deliberately. And when he spoke, he had this diaphragm that just—his voice just went from the bottom of his diaphragm up. And I remember that I used to think when Mr. Canfil was coming it was always exciting, because when he greeted you or anything, you always felt like you were really special to him. And that's the way he was with my father. I can remember when he'd drive up, boy my father was so glad to see him. And he had big hands, I can remember that as a little girl. And he would always shake hands and all.

And he always dressed nicely. I can remember that. Of course for a farm girl like me this was something notable! My father wears suits sometimes, but to see a gentleman coming with a fine suit on and all, that was very impressive.

But when Mr. Canfil went to our farm to help with the butchering, he was just one of the old boys. And he loved when they cut the meat, I can still remember this, when they would cut big slabs of the meat off the hog and take it into the kitchen on an oilcloth. And Mr. Canfil always liked the slicing of the meat, like the tenderloin. And any pieces of fat with still a little meat on it, I remember he loved to throw 'em in an iron skillet and fry 'em, and he just ate 'em with his hands after they cooled. My father always laughed about that, that Mr. Canfil, didn't wait for it to be served on a plate or anything. And then when he went back to Kansas City from the farm, my father always sent meat home with him.

Many times when Mr. Truman was in Kansas City, as a senator, Mr. Canfil would call my father and say, "Ted, The Boss is gonna be in Kansas City on such and such a day," you'd better come down and see him." So my father would come down to Mr. Truman's office.

I remember my father telling about when he'd come down to Mr. Truman's office, Mr. Canfil just opened the door like you would to your best friend, and said, "Come on in." And then Mr. Truman would leave whatever he was doing and come in and visit with my father. But it was always through Mr. Canfil that Daddy would know that Mr. Truman was in town. And then I can remember one time Mr. Truman as president was here in Kansas City, and he was in the Presidential Suite at the Muehlebach Hotel. I believe Mr. Canfil told my father, "You bring Dixie down to see The Boss."

I remember that I went down to Kansas City with my father to the Muehlebach and Mr. Canfil was there and took us up to the Presidential Suite. And I remember President Truman greeting me and of course my father. And, so it was always through Mr. Canfil that my father had different opportunities.

But one of the things my father did with Mr. Canfil, which he always told about— Mr. Canfil being a United States Marshall, it was his responsibility often to take prisoners from Kansas City to some different places. Well, one time he had to transport a prisoner

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from Kansas City to Washington D.C., I don't remember for what reason. Mr. Canfil called and invited my father to come with him, come to Kansas City and meet him, and together they would

drive this prisoner to Washington D.C. And I remember my father saying that they put the prisoner in the back seat, and I suppose he was in shackles, I don't know. But my father always said that Mr. Canfil was so kind, he'll never forget how very kind and thoughtful he was to that prisoner. That was one experience.

The clippings that the Library has tell of the different times that my father went someplace with Mr. Canfil, for reasons having to do with politics. Also, Mr. Canfil brought my mother once a pretty ruby glass cream and sugar set. I have them. He knew that my mother liked pretty dishes. My mother always felt he was so thoughtful to come by and bring her some presents.

He was very brusque, he was very controlling. He gave you an appearance of being very controlling. But my mother always said that she thought Mr. Canfil was one of the finest men she ever knew as far as being a true gentleman, and thoughtful.

And I remember when I graduated from high school my father said, "Now you should send a graduation invitation to Mr. Canfil," thinking that that was just a nice way for him to know that I was graduating. We had an auditorium in our small town, and the parents and friends of the students were there. And all of a sudden, we—my mother and dad and I—looked up, and there came Mr. Canfil down the aisle to sit with us.

So that means he drove 60 miles in one evening to come up to my high school graduation. And he brought me a little gold bracelet. I remember how my father and mother were so impressed with it because my mother said, "Well, Dixie, that came from Jaccard's." And Jaccard's at that time was the jewelry store of Kansas City. And, so my father always reminded me how very thoughtful it was of Mr. Canfil to do this.

I will tell you this, we never met his wife. My father and mother never met Mrs. Canfil. Mr. Canfil always spoke very highly of her. One time he brought me a book of fairy tales, and, I remember him saying, "My wife picked this out for you." But my father never knew anything about Mrs. Canfil other than that she was Mr. Canfil's wife.

I'm not bragging, but I really think Mr. Canfil liked me a lot when I was a little girl. Maybe I was one of the few little girls he was ever around. Then when I got into high school, he would send me letters and notes and say, "My very best to your family. I really and sincerely mean that." I have a letter from Mr. Canfil that he wrote when he was at the Potsdam Conference with President Truman. He had been at our farm butchering shortly before he left for the conference, and he had told my father to tell my mother that she might get a telephone call from Washington D. C., and if she did, he certainly wanted her to take it.

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Well my mother always told the story that the phone rang and she picked it up. She was at our home in Cameron, about eight miles away from our farm, where Mr. Canfil was. It was the White House calling, and they wanted to talk with Mr. Canfil as soon as possible. She knew that they didn't want to talk on a party line—we had a party line out on the farm—so she said, "I can reach Mr. Canfil in 15 to 20 minutes and I will get him to a telephone where he can call you."

She was very concerned to do the right thing about this. So she got in the car and drove out to the farm. Mr. Canfil, she always told me, was in the kitchen cutting up meat and she said, “Mr. Canfil, you have just received a phone call from Washington D.C. and they want to talk with you as soon as possible.” She said he just dropped the knife, he dropped everything and he said, “Folks, I’ll be seeing you and you will hear from me from where I’m going. But I can’t tell you now.”

And then it wasn’t many days ‘till we heard that the president had gone to Potsdam. And my father knew then that Mr. Canfil had accompanied him. Of course what I’m about to say is just an opinion, my father’s opinion. He always felt that Mr. Canfil made it very clear that he would lay down his life for Mr. Truman. I imagine that Mr. Truman was one of Mr. Canfil’s dearest, dearest friends, and Mr. Canfil was and most loyal to him. I can remember when Mr. Canfil died—I was in college—and how grief-stricken my father was when he called to tell me that his dear friend, Mr. Canfil, had died. My father went to his funeral.

If you were going to describe Mr. Canfil you might say that at first he seemed a very unusual looking person, because he was very big, and he had a face that was very expressive. It showed sternness. It showed determination. If I were to choose the five or ten most memorable people I have ever known, I would say that Fred Canfil was one of them. And I was very honored as a young girl to know someone like that. I think that Mr. Canfil would have done anything for me because he always showed that he had an interest in me. He was interested where I was going to college—just interested in me and what was happening in my life.

So, that’s Mr. Canfil. And I do think that some people maybe have thought that he was just too brusque and all. But listen, he was a very sweet, kind man inside.

GESELBRACHT: When you were first being introduced to Fred Canfil, when he was first visiting your father, and you were quite a young girl, and you saw this big man coming into the house, and he spoke with you a few times, what were your first impressions? Can you remember how you reacted to his presence?

POLLARD: Well, you know in those days parents expected a child to be very respectful and to shake hands and not talk too much. I can remember how big Mr. Canfil was, his physique was just big, broad-shouldered. And I don’t want you to think that his head was

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grotesque or anything. It was just a large head that drew attention because he had such a remarkable countenance.

My father knew far more than I ever did about Mr. Canfil, and he always said that if ever a man had a true friend, he had a true friend in Fred Canfil. Daddy was just a country

boy, and of course a staunch Democrat. And he was always for the good of the nation. Now my grandfather, Volley Sanders, was only 18 years older than my father. And they were more like brothers than father and son.

When Mr. Truman started campaigning up in northwest Missouri, my grandfather was very much initiated into politics. My father'd say, "We've got to campaign for this man." And that's when Mr. Canfil came on the scene. And in my grandfather's letters, which you now have at the Truman Library, it is very evident that he had great respect for Mr. Canfil. And I thought it said an awful lot about Mr. Canfil when he was so prompt to answer letters.

Even when he was at Potsdam, he thought about my father, a country farmer, and wrote in his letters about the chickens and the, I don't know, crops or something. That meant an awful lot to my father. That just shows that Mr. Canfil was a very thoughtful person.

If Mr. Canfil were still alive and were to walk into the room, he would command respect. He would demand respect. But I can always remember the kindness he always showed me, and I was always anxious to see Mr. Canfil. You know he wasn't just Daddy's friend, one who said "hello" and "goodbye" to me without caring about me. I was always very happy to see Mr. Canfil. Of course if he bragged about me, that'd be alright too, you know. He was of that nature.

My mother was a very quiet speaking woman, not like me, or like my father. But I know that it always meant a lot to her that Mr. Canfil was so courteous and wasn't always talking politics and about Mr. Truman. He always talked with her. She told me once that he talked to her about the time when he was in the Army in Europe. I think that that speaks well of him.

I knew President Truman's secretary, Rose Conway, very, very well. In fact, she was my neighbor in Kansas City, only two blocks from here. I used to ask her about Mr. Canfil and she always would say he treated her with the greatest respect.

GESELBRACHT: Well, Mrs. Pollard, thank you very much. You've helped future biographers of President Truman to understand this close friend that he had who didn't leave much documentary record of his life, and you've helped me to understand, too, the community here in Missouri in which Mr. Truman built his political career.

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POLLARD: I might add that Mr. Canfil, was a true American. I mean he was willing to stand up and make a difference. We probably don't have very many people like that.

One other thing I forgot to say is that Mr. Canfil met Stalin. And my father asked, "Well how was that?" And he said, "Well he was just the same as all the rest of us." Stalin's presence, and his no doubt powerful nature, did not overly impress Mr. Canfil at all. Stalin was just one of the boys like all the rest of us. That's how Mr. Canfil felt, I think.

Mr. Canfil met some people here in Cameron, businessmen and the like. And they were always glad when Mr. Canfil came to town. In fact -- this is telling stories that my mother wouldn't approve of—but there was a man that ran a dairy in Cameron by the name of Mr. Chapman. He was an Englishman. Oh, he loved it when Mr. Canfil came to town. And Mr. Canfil and the dentist in town, Dr. Tye, and the man that ran the hardware store, C. K. Connell and my father—they would always go to Mr. Chapman's dairy, and Mr. Chapman always served up something to drink. He couldn't wait for Mr. Canfil to come.

Of course now my mother, being a teetotaler, wouldn't be very proud of my saying that. But things never got out of hand. That just shows you that when Mr. Canfil came to town, a lot of the old country boys had a good time.

GESELBRACHT: Thank you very much.

POLLARD: You're welcome.

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