

Peter Cronin Oral History Interview—2/15/1973
Administrative Information

Creator: Peter Cronin
Interviewer: Robert E. Stocking
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Biographical Note

Cronin, a reporter for the United Press International (1958-1968), discusses his January 3, 1961 interview with Robert Frost concerning Frost's thoughts on John F. Kennedy's election.

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Oral History Interview

Of

Peter Cronin

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Oral History Interview

With

Peter Cronin

February 15, 1973
Boston, Massachusetts

By Robert E. Stocking

For the John F. Kennedy Library

STOCKING: I'm with Pete Cronin in his office at New England Telephone [New England Telephone Company] in Boston, and we're going to discuss the circumstances surrounding his interview with Robert Frost at the time of President Kennedy's [John F. Kennedy] inauguration. Why don't you just go ahead from here.

CRONIN: The background is that I was a reporter with the United Press International [U.P.I.] in Boston from 1958 to 1968, and in 1961 shortly before President Kennedy's inauguration, our London bureau sent a message to the Boston bureau asking that we get in touch with the poet Robert Frost, who lived in Cambridge, and obtain from him his thoughts on the occasion of the President's inauguration—how he felt about it, what it meant for the country, things of that sort. So I was assigned to go to Frost's home over in Cambridge, which is right near the Harvard University campus, and spent several hours in the Frost home trying to get a statement from Mr. Frost.

The problem was that he was a very close friend of both President Eisenhower [Dwight D. Eisenhower] and President-elect Kennedy. And consequently he didn't want to say anything in a statement that would offend his good friend Mr. Eisenhower. By the same token he didn't want to have a very blah-ish, pablum-like statement about Mr. Kennedy. He wanted it to have some punch in it.

So, he would give me a statement, and I'd take it down dutifully, and he'd say, "Well let's change that." And I'd say, "Fine," and I'd scratch out the words and we'd start all over again. We'd get halfway through and he'd say, "Well, let me start all over again." And then he'd give me another full statement and I'd think I'd be all finished and he'd say, "I don't think that's quite what I wanted to say."

Well, this went on for several hours in between telephone calls for Mr. Frost and also a group of visiting students from India. In any case, when I began to get writer's cramp from changing my notes so frequently, I finally

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said to him, "Well, Mr. Frost, if you'd like, I'll put down what I think you're trying to say and I'll type it for you and then you can look it over and if you see anything you would like to change, fine." He said, "That would be wonderful if you could."

So I went out to my car and got a portable typewriter and typed it up for him, and he did pencil in a few changes. I figured that this was almost a collector's item since obviously it was a momentous occasion in history. So I asked him if he would autograph it. He not only autographed it, he also said that it was for me, for Peter Cronin, and he dated it. I guess anybody who reads the statement would be able to tell that it was rather prophetic in terms of what happened in history later on.

To my knowledge the statement was never used in the United States, since it was sent on a message wire between the Boston bureau of U.P.I. to London and then relayed by cable to.... Let me say that again. It went from Boston to New York and then relayed by cable to London. Though it appeared on a wire that the Boston newspapers probably had at that time, it was sent in a message so they would have had to take the message and convert it into the form of a news story. As far as I can recall, it was never used anywhere in New England.

STOCKING: Did you see it used in...

CRONIN: I've never seen it used anywhere.

STOCKING: This statement that I have in hand you typed. This is your typing?

CRONIN: That's correct.

STOCKING: And the additions are Robert Frost's own?

CRONIN: Right. I think there's only one word on there that I wrote in myself where it was a typo on my part, second to last sentence that says, "There's a fresh spirit in the young to try leading from our strength." And I noticed afterwards that the word "young" was misspelled so I put that in in my writing. The other changes are Mr. Frost's.

STOCKING: You say that Robert Frost he tried his hand at several drafts of such a statement....

CRONIN: Well, he tried my hand at several drafts—more than several; it turned out to be many. It really did take a considerable period of time. I think if I'd taken that long to write a story for U.P.I. I would have been fired, but of course there's quite a difference in the writers.

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STOCKING: Do you have other drafts that you wrote at the time that might have been rejected by Mr. Frost?

CRONIN: No. It was just in the form of notes. And when he would tell me that he didn't like it I would just scratch off the notes so that I wouldn't be confused in my own mind as to exactly what he intended to say. So I threw out all those notes afterwards.

STOCKING: At this particular time, or at any other time that you might have met Mr. Frost, did he recollect anything that he said concerning John F. Kennedy as a man or as president?

CRONIN: Well, I know that he deeply admired John Kennedy. He was a great fan of Kennedy's. And what he said about the fresh spirit in the young, I think he really meant that. He was excited about the prospect of a man of Kennedy's youth becoming president. This was really—you could read it in the expressions on his face. He was very friendly chap and it was a most interesting period for me just to sit with him.

STOCKING: I don't really think I have any further particular questions.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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Peter Cronin Oral History Transcript
Name List

E

Eisenhower, Dwight D., 1

F

Frost, Robert, 1, 2, 3

K

Kennedy, John F., 1, 3

A general statement on President Kennedy's inauguration
by Robert Frost:

Our new world diplomacy has been too timid, too
afraid of its ^{own} responsibility. The prediction is an era ~~of~~ ^{of} ~~more~~ ^{of} confidence in our power and the right to assert it.
There is a fresh spirit in the ~~you~~ ^{young} to try leading from
our strength. A proud moment for us all.

Robert Frost

Mr. Peter Lerman

Jan 3 1961