

Walter Sheridan Oral History Interview—RFK#5, 5/1/1970
Administrative Information

Creator: Walter Sheridan

Interviewer: Roberta W. Greene

Date of Interview: May 1, 1970

Place of Interview: Washington D.C.

Length: 100 pages [**Please note:** the page numbering in this interview is not contiguous with Sheridan's previous interviews]

Biographical Note

Sheridan, a Robert F. Kennedy (RFK) campaign coordinator in 1968, and a government investigator, discusses RFK after John F. Kennedy's assassination, and Sheridan's work in upstate New York on RFK's 1964 senate campaign, including interactions with the mafia and political bosses in Utica, RFK's campaign trips through upstate, the campaign staff, and political allies and enemies, among other issues.

Access Restrictions

Open.

Usage Restrictions

According to the deed of gift signed April 5, 2004, copyright of these materials has been assigned to the United States Government. Users of these materials are advised to determine the copyright status of any document from which they wish to publish.

Copyright

The copyright law of the United States (Title 17, United States Code) governs the making of photocopies or other reproductions of copyrighted material. Under certain conditions specified in the law, libraries and archives are authorized to furnish a photocopy or other reproduction. One of these specified conditions is that the photocopy or reproduction is not to be "used for any purpose other than private study, scholarship, or research." If a user makes a request for, or later uses, a photocopy or reproduction for purposes in excesses of "fair use," that user may be liable for copyright infringement. This institution reserves the right to refuse to accept a copying order if, in its judgment, fulfillment of the order would involve violation of copyright law. The copyright law extends its protection to unpublished works from the moment of creation in a tangible form. Direct your questions concerning copyright to the reference staff.

Transcript of Oral History Interview

These electronic documents were created from transcripts available in the research room of the John F. Kennedy Library. The transcripts were scanned using optical character recognition and the resulting text files were proofread against the original transcripts. Some formatting changes were made. Page numbers are noted where they would have occurred at the bottoms of the pages of the original transcripts. If researchers have any concerns about accuracy, they are encouraged to visit the library and consult the

transcripts and the interview recordings.

Suggested Citation

Walter Sheridan, recorded interview by Roberta W. Greene, May 1, 1970, (page number), John F. Kennedy Library Oral History Program.



ORAL HISTORY AGREEMENT

This will confirm my understanding and agreement with the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) with respect to the use of the oral interviews conducted by the Oral History Program of the John F. Kennedy Library with Walter Sheridan.

1. The interview(s) will be taped and a transcript of the tapes will be made by the Library. A copy of the tape and a transcript (collectively called the "Work"), will be maintained by the Library and made available to the public in accordance with its rules and general policies for research and other scholarly purposes.
2. As soon as the transcription is complete, the Work will be made available to researchers as part of the John F. Kennedy Library Oral History Program.
3. I hereby grant, assign, and transfer to NARA all rights, title, and interest in the Work, including literary rights and the copyright.
4. This agreement contains our entire and complete understanding.

Name Nancy T. Sheridan

Address 17026 Catalpa Court
Bermont, Md 20855

Signature _____

Date 02-15-04

Signed: John W. Carlin
JOHN W. CARLIN, Archivist of the United States

Date: 4-5-04

Walter Sheridan—RFK #5

Table of Contents

<u>Page</u>	<u>Topic</u>
1	Robert F. Kennedy (RFK) after John F. Kennedy's assassination
8	Relationship between RFK and J. Edgar Hoover
9, 14	Working on civil rights cases in Jackson, Mississippi
11	Edward M. Kennedy's 1964 plane crash
16	Forming RFK's 1964 Senate campaign organization
19	Working on RFK's campaign in Oneida County, NY
21, 30, 33	Utica, NY mafia and political machine
24	Anti-RFK literature from the Teamsters and Kenneth B. Keating
28	RFK-Keating debates
31	Labor
35	Oneida County Democratic political leaders
37	Gerald J. Bruno
38	RFK's continued involvement in Utica politics
45, 57	Paul Corbin
51	RFK's political allies in upstate New York
59	Rome, NY and Griffiss Air Force Base
63	1964 campaign organization in Syracuse, NY
72, 84	1964 campaign elsewhere in upstate New York
80	1964 campaign staff
91	Campaigning by Kennedy family members
95	House Judiciary Committee's investigation of the Justice Department's handling of the Jimmy Hoffa and Roy Cohn cases
98	1964 election results

Fifth of Six Oral History Interviews

with

Walter Sheridan

May 1, 1970
Washington D.C.

By Roberta W. Greene

For the Robert F. Kennedy Oral History Program of the John F. Kennedy Library

GREENE: Well, I was going to ask you first of all what your recollections are of Robert Kennedy [Robert F. Kennedy] shortly after the assassination, both of his personal frame of mind and so on?

SHERIDAN: The first I saw him after the assassination was, I'm pretty sure, on Thanksgiving Day.

[-1-]

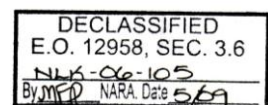
But whenever I think of that it seems that that's too soon. The assassination was what, the 23rd?

GREENE: The 22nd.

SHERIDAN: The 22nd. And Thanksgiving had to be before December 1st.

GREENE: It was that weekend—the weekend after the funeral.

SHERIDAN: I guess that was it. Well, of course, everybody was in great shock. Everybody wanted to do something and didn't know what to do; it was



one of those things. You didn't want to bother them and you didn't want to intrude. So finally, on Thanksgiving Day, we got word—and I don't remember how we got word—that we were supposed to go over there. Then he had a brunch. There was probably twenty people.

GREENE: All Justice Department people?

SHERIDAN: Most of them. I'm trying to remember whether my wife [Nancy Sheridan] went or whether I went.... I think the wives went. They served bloody marys, and he and Ethel [Ethel Skakel Kennedy] were putting up their usual good fronts. I guess

[-2-]

I should say great front. I remember Mary McGrory coming in and throwing her arms around him. [Interruption] But I do remember Mary McGrory coming in and throwing her arms around him. I remember John Reilly [John R. Reilly] being there and—it's so hard to remember this—Joe Kraft [Joseph Kraft], I think. I think it was a mixture of newspapermen and Justice people, which most of his social phalanx were. Everybody was trying, I guess, be reasonably gay and cheer him up, but as usual, it was he who wouldn't let anything be other than gay. But you could tell, looking at him, of the strain, and he wanted....

I remember telling him what Jimmy Hoffa had said when John Kennedy [John F. Kennedy] was killed. I think I just brought it out, or he had heard it. Anyway, I know I didn't want to tell him, but he made me tell him. And what had happened was: Hoffa was in Miami in some restaurant when the word came of the assassination, and he got up on the table and cheered. At least that's what we heard. And Harold Gibbons [Harold J. Gibbons] and

[-3-]

Steinberg [Lawrence N. Steinberg] at the Teamsters' [International Brotherhood of Teamsters] headquarters had lowered the flag and sent everybody home and closed the door. Then they had called Hoffa and told him what they did. He just screamed and hollered at them and called them a bunch of hypocrites, which caused a falling-out between Gibbons and Steinberg and Hoffa. They quit but of course, as usual, they didn't stay quit.

I remember asking him when he was coming back to the Justice Department, and I remember saying, "We need you, you know." And he said, "Yeah, I know, but I don't have the heart for it right now." And we were all there about, I guess, an hour, an hour and a half and then we all left. And then it was just a matter of waiting to when he would come back. Finally he did come back, I think right after the first of the year. And I didn't see him between those times. I don't remember whether I talked to him on the phone or not. But all of a sudden he was back. We took off right after that to go back to Chattanooga, because we were starting the grand jury investigating the jury tampering. And so I was gone—this is '64, right?—then from January till March 4, '64, when Hoffa was convicted, except I might have been home a weekend. But during the trial he kept in pretty good touch with us.

[-4-]

There were frequent conversations where I'd call him or he'd call me. One of the funnier ones was when we were in a... John Hooker, Sr. [John Jay Hooker, Sr.] was the trial lawyer and Jim Neal [James F. Neal] was the second lawyer. Did I tell you that story?

GREENE: No.

SHERIDAN: We were in John Hooker's hotel suite, and they were trying to decide whether to put me on the witness stand on direct testimony. It was a pretty important decision. We were having a few drinks, and he called and I talked to him and he heard the glass tinkle. And he said, "You drinking?" And I said, "Yeah, we're having a couple of drinks." He said, "You shouldn't be drinking when you're making a decision like that." He was very funny that way...

GREENE: Was he serious?

SHERIDAN: ...in certain ways. So it turns out that after we hung up, he called Jack Miller [Herbert J. Miller, Jr.] who was head of the Criminal Division and Jack is at home at night having a beer and Bob kind of comes on the phone and says, "Jack, Jack, they're drinking down there." And Margo Cohn, who was one of the girls, later made up a picture; it was a photograph of Bob Kennedy and then she had a thing going out to the side, you know, and it said, "Jack,

[-5-]

they're drinking down there."

GREENE: Was that, do you think, serious or half-serious?

SHERIDAN: Oh yes. No, it was serious.

GREENE: When he called up?

SHERIDAN: Oh, no. He had nothing against drinking but he was against drinking when it could interfere with anything important. I'll give you another example of that. Bill Hundley [William G. Hundley] who was head of the Organized Crime section of Justice.... He was against drinking at lunch because he felt that it cut down on your effectiveness during the rest of the day, which, you know, with many people is right and with everybody, I suppose it's right to some extent. Well, one day Bill Hundley was up in his office and he was showing him something and he had to lean over his shoulder and Bob smelled—it was St. Patrick's Day and Bill Hundley had been out and had had a couple of beers—and he asked Bill, you know, "You shouldn't drink at lunchtime, it reduces your effectiveness." And Bill got mad and he stormed out and then in a couple of hours went back up and apologized. But then it became a joke.

Anyway, when Hoffa was convicted, the first thing I did was call him. I left the courtroom—not knowing I wasn't supposed to—then went and called him. He wasn't there so I told Angie [Angela M. Novello].

[-6-]

He was at some luncheon and she sent word over. Then I called Jack Miller. Then he sent a Customs, a U.S. Customs plane down to bring us all back and had a party for us at his house. No, no, that was.... No, we came home on our own that night or at that time, the next day. But then we had to go back for the sentencing which was on March 12th, and that's when he sent a Customs plane and brought back everybody back for this party at his house. And we had gotten a leather-bound thing, and all it had in it was the sentencing, the transcript of the sentencing, you know, the verdict really, the verdict not the sentencing.

Just another aside on that: there were two FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation] agents who worked with us through the whole Hoffa thing in Tennessee. One was Bill Sheets [William Sheets] and the other was Ed Steel in the national office. When the trial was shifted to Chattanooga, they came over and worked with us and they were just great, particularly Bill Sheets, the best FBI agent I ever knew. So I invited them to come up to the party but because of the way the Bureau is, they had to decline because they would have to explain to J. Edgar Hoover

[-7-]

what they were doing at Bob Kennedy's home.

GREENE: Was it obvious to you at that time that there had been a real deterioration in the relationship?

SHERIDAN: Oh yes. The deterioration started before the President's death. But then, the day the President was killed just changed everything. I think I told you that. They started going around Jack Miller, going around the Attorney General and Hoover was going directly to Johnson [Lyndon B. Johnson]. And then they would meet socially and Hoover would snub the Senator, the Attorney General.

GREENE: Who else was involved in that?

SHERIDAN: In what?

GREENE: In that kind of treatment to Robert Kennedy after the assassination.

SHERIDAN: Oh, I don't know. But I can remember him saying once, "Nobody wants to talk to me anymore." Of course, you know, he had gone from the second most powerful person in the country to a lame duck attorney general. There were little references to it along the line. I'm sure a lot of people who took his calls without hesitation, if they were caught in a squeeze between

[-8-]

he and Lyndon Johnson, weren't as accessible.

GREENE: But you don't know specifically who it was?

SHERIDAN: I don't know specifics, no, I don't. Then, after the Hoffa case in Chattanooga, the Chicago case was still coming up, but that was pretty much moving. We'd gotten into such a donnybrook down in Chattanooga with Hoffa and Spindel [Bernard B. Spindel] and the accusations of everything that we were doing, that we wanted to play Chicago low-key anyway. So we really didn't have enough to do. So he send me down to see Burke Marshall who was head of the Civil Rights Division, you know, said, "Go help Burke."

So the problem was that the FBI wasn't doing anything in the South in relation to the Ku Klux Klan. They had little, small offices peopled mainly by southern agents who weren't really all that concerned about it. So our whole group just went down to Jackson, Mississippi and we were deputized as marshals and had the right to carry guns. It was just like being dropped behind enemy lines at that time because nobody was on your side. You couldn't rely on any federal official being really.... And our whole purpose was just to be a presence there, a federal presence to stir things up and we got other agencies, at least on the surface, involved—like the alcohol tax unit

[-9-]

in the control of guns and things like that.

Then the three kids were killed in Philadelphia [Philadelphia, Mississippi] which really forced Hoover's hand, because if it had just been the black kid it was one thing, but there were a couple of Jewish kids from New York. So all of a sudden, Hoover opened an FBI field office in Jackson, came down and personally opened the office and gave a speech saying the reason he was opening it was because Jackson was becoming such a big metropolis that the crime problems were escalating and they decided they needed.... He made no reference to the real reason they were coming down there.

Well, in the meantime, when was Teddy's [Edward M. Kennedy] accident?

GREENE: Of course, it seems to me that the kids were killed in the spring or the summer even....

SHERIDAN: Yes. Well this is in the summer now, see.

GREENE: Yes, where Robert Kennedy would have still been in, that's right, because he...

SHERIDAN: Well, I was just going to go back.

GREENE: Let's see, he didn't leave until he was almost nominated.

SHERIDAN: Right. The first thing that happened was when Johnson told him he wasn't going to be vice president. That would be in when?

[-10-]

GREENE: July 27th.

SHERIDAN: Oh yeah. Well, going back...

GREENE: Was there any discussion before that?

SHERIDAN: ...before that, when Teddy was in his accident...

GREENE: July 19th.

SHERIDAN: June 19th, it says here.

GREENE: June 19th. You're right.

SHERIDAN: It was my wedding anniversary and I was at my house and Jim McShane [James J.P. McShane] and his wife were there. Either I called Nick Katzenbach [Nicholas deB. Katzenbach] or he called me, but we all just decided we should do something. So it ended up Nick Katzenbach and myself, Bill vanden Heuvel [William J. vanden Heuvel], one other person—I can't think who it was—flew up in a little air force, navy plane, army plane. It was a little, bitty thing. We landed at West Point because Boston or that area was fogged in. We went all the way up to Boston and went to land and they just couldn't because of the fog. We went back to West Point and landed and then drove up to where Teddy was in the fastest ride I've ever.... The army driver

[-11-]

was an enlisted man and apparently thought we had to get there in record speed. Boy, he went 85 miles an hour all the way. I was never so scared in my life.

So we got up there and Bob was there. We saw Teddy, and then Bob wanted to go for a walk. So he and I went off in a field in a park. The people followed, but then they saw he really wanted to be alone, they didn't, you know, they stayed off on the fringe of the park. We just laid down in the grass, and he said, "Somebody up there doesn't like me." Then he asked me if I thought he ought to go for the Senate or go for the vice presidency. I told him I thought he ought to go for the vice presidency.

GREENE: Was that the first time he raised the question?

SHERIDAN: That's the first time he raised it, I think. He wasn't talking very much, but

the indication was that he agreed that he should. And then the next thing I remember is the meeting with Johnson where....

GREENE: You know, I think that date is wrong. It says June 19th. I think it was July 19th.

SHERIDAN: Yes. Do you?

[-12-]

GREENE: I could check it.

SHERIDAN: No, because June 19th fits because I remember that is my wedding anniversary and it was some function...

GREENE: It fits? It's just that I.... Oh, okay. Then I've got it right here.

SHERIDAN: And it was the reason we were at my house with the McShanes.

GREENE: I've got it wrong here.

SHERIDAN: I don't think Jim McShane went with us, but somebody else did and I can't remember. It seems to me there were four of us. Maybe it was only the three of us.

But then the next thing I remember is the President dumping him and his great comments afterwards that it was too bad he had to take so many other people down with him. He was getting his sense of humor back all through this time. I remember he had that one interview with Ed Lahey [Edwin A. Lahey] which was the first interview he gave after the assassination which was captioned, "I'm sick of chasing people." It was a great interview. Ed Lahey was great.

So, anyway, when the three kids were found, when they

[-13-]

found the three bodies, Roy Moore [Roy K. Moore] who was the SAC [Special Agent in Charge] in the FBI down there—the new one, whom I had been in the Bureau with and knew from Philadelphia or from Milwaukee—called to tell me they'd found them. I asked him how and he said it was just part of the routine search. I knew he was lying. The way they did it, they had to have an informant. They had been kind of circumventing this anyway, the Bureau had; they didn't really want us down there at all. So I just got fed up with it. I called him right after that. I don't remember what the date was, but when I called him, you know, I told him, "We're spinning our wheels now because the Bureau has an office and that purpose down here really has been served. I'd just as soon come back." And he said, "Well, I am going to run for the Senate." He said, "Why don't you come up and get into that?" So we all pulled out.

And Bill French, who was there with us, Charlie—no, Charlie Smith [Charles Z. Smith] was black. He wasn't down there with us. But Bill French was there with us, and he went on the campaign. Charlie Smith from our group—he was a black guy who's now a judge out in Seattle—went with the campaign and I did and Tom McKeon [Thomas J. McKeon] who was also down there with us. So we went up to

[-14-]

see Steve Smith [Stephen E. Smith] and that's the start of the campaign.

GREENE: Did he keep in touch with you while you were down there except for the calls you mentioned? Did he follow up this investigation?

SHERIDAN: You're talking about Tennessee or Mississippi?

GREENE: Well, first one, then the other.

SHERIDAN: Well, Tennessee.... Well, both, yes. In Tennessee, you know, more particularly. This was the Hoffa case where....

GREENE: Even after the assassination he was interested?

SHERIDAN: Oh yes, yes. Ethel always thought it was *the* thing that he had, you know, to kind of keep him going, because everything else seemed to be falling apart. But the case was still there and it looked like it was good and it looked like it was going to work. So not only he kept in touch with us but I kept in touch, I just kept him advised of everything that happened. I'm sure it meant a lot to him.

Then in Mississippi, there was.... Phone calls were a very spontaneous thing. I never hesitated to call him at any time. Of course he never hesitated to call me. But I

[-15-]

never did hesitate to call him, and he would always take the call. He was, I think, always glad to hear from me because he was also interested in that, because he knew what a mess it was down there and how the Bureau wasn't doing anything. The situation did improve and the Bureau finally was forced into the thing, and of course, once they get into something, they are pretty good because they do know what they're doing. They've succeeded now in infiltrating the Ku Klux Klan the way they did the Communist Party, and they've had good success.

GREENE: Anyway you said you went back to New York and met with Steve Smith. Was this before...

SHERIDAN: Yes, we all went. We came back to Washington. Then, a couple of days later, Tom McKeon and I, we went first. No, I went first and met with

Steve. Then I suggested that Tom would be a good person to have in. Then Tom came on and then Bill French and Charlie Smith, Teresa Walston, Margo Cohn, Carol Ash—that's a pretty good chunk of our outfit.

GREENE: Was this prior to the state convention or prior to the National Convention [Democratic National Convention]?

[-16-]

SHERIDAN: Yes, it was prior to the state convention.

GREENE: You couldn't place it, how far in advance?

SHERIDAN: Not too far. I'd say about a week before the state convention because that was what was next. I remember going to the state convention and had some role but it was not too important a one. It had something to do with keeping track of delegates on the floor. Then I remember being up on the fire escape waiting for Ethel and the kids to come. You know, just kind of a handyman.

GREENE: You didn't go to the National Convention at all?

SHERIDAN: The National Convention?

GREENE: In Atlantic City?

SHERIDAN: Oh, no, no. In fact I took my first vacation in eight years during those two weeks. We and the family went down to the ocean. I heard it on the radio. I didn't even see it on the television. We didn't have a television. So I had nothing to do with that and really didn't have an awful lot of interest in it because, you know, it was Lyndon Johnson. So we went up...

[-17-]

GREENE: And did you have any contact with the Stratton [Samuel S. Stratton] forces at the state convention? Did you work on that at all? Contact?

SHERIDAN: No, I didn't work on it but I remember Stratton's speech which was a pretty sour grapes-type speech and very ungracious. He was obviously furious that Robert Kennedy was coming in and taking over. Steve had a little tent there in the convention hall. He was very preoccupied. My role in that was practically nothing except to be handy to do anything that somebody wanted done.

GREENE: Then at what point were the assignments made?

SHERIDAN: It was shortly after that. There was a meeting. Howard Samuels [Howard

J. Samuels] was there, Paul Corbin was there, Steve, Dick Gorman—I just can't remember everybody. It was just kind of taking the map and looking at it and, "You take this, and you take this, and you take this." At first, I was going to take the lower, I was going to take the area down around New York City, Westchester and that area. I really wanted to go up in my home area. A basic, very traditional Kennedy rule is: you never put a person in their own area.

GREENE: You told me once you thought that was a mistake, that it was your idea and you thought it was a mistake.

[-18-]

SHERIDAN: It was my idea to go up there and I think my going up there was a mistake.

GREENE: Yes, why was that?

SHERIDAN: Well, because you *are* in your home area. I suppose their reason for it is overall is so that somebody.... First of all, you're among people you know who can get to you friendship-wise and everything else. You're just not as objective as you would be as an outsider. You might start representing somehow your own interests along with or instead of or ahead of the candidate's interests. And I saw in my own case—I'm from Utica which is Oneida County—as the campaign went on, even though I tried consciously not to do it, I did end up spending more time in Oneida County than I should have...

GREENE: Well, that was kind of a troublesome area anyhow, wasn't it?

SHERIDAN: ...because people expected me to. You know, I was theirs and they wanted me to be accessible. I think their rule was a good one and they should not have violated it for me. What we did, we...

GREENE: Were there objections at the time?

[-19-]

SHERIDAN: Oh, at first a little bit, but it didn't last. I think they finally thought it was a good idea. I suppose, in some ways, it was a good idea and we did very well, but I still think it had that limitation which is a bad one. So I went up and I made Utica my headquarters. See, right off that's a good indication, because maybe my headquarters should have been in Syracuse which was a bigger city, although Utica was very centrally located.

And where do you want to go from there?

GREENE: Well, I was going to ask you what you did about the general organization of the whole region. You had thirteen counties.

SHERIDAN: Yes.

GREENE: Well, how does one go about setting up a...

SHERIDAN: Well, it's a lot of ground. I started in Utica first and started getting the headquarters, getting the storefront. You had a problem right away because there was a congressional candidate named Robert Castle who had a lot of money, who was a real gung-ho used car salesman or maybe new car salesman, but the wrong image, anyway, and the kind of guy who's just never going to get elected up there but was

[-20-]

very dynamic. He had already rented the best location there and he had rented it in conjunction with the organization. The second problem is the organization, which for forty years had been run by Ruffie Elefante [Rufus P. Elefante]. Haven't I told you all this before?

GREENE: No, but I've done a bit of research on it so it's familiar.

SHERIDAN: Well, Ruffie Elefante was the political arm of the Mafia. We had three people at Appalachia and that used to be a Mafia stronghold, up there. So, for years, no matter if the Republicans were in or the Democrats were in—anywhere from a third to a half the population was Italian—Ruffie had the balance of power and just controlled the whole thing. During the McClellan Committee days—which is maybe where I mentioned it before—we got into the Mafia and got into the Appalachia meeting and the fact that there were three people from Utica and for some reason Bob Kennedy took a personal interest in this Utica situation which he never let go of. So he understood very well the situation up there. We had succeeded prior to this in getting our county chairman in, with Bob Kennedy's help, and then had lost, he had lost again.

[-21-]

GREENE: This is Gilroy [J. Herbert Gilroy]?

SHERIDAN: Gilroy. And so by the time this election came around, he was out of power; Ruffie's people were back in power; and they were the organization. I just made the decision I was not going to deal with them in any way, particularly with Ruffie, not necessarily with parts of the... I did deal a lot with some of the organization. Tom Gilroy was a big help when I first went up there. There since was a problem about that but... So I got in trouble with Roland when—I'm getting ahead of myself but it doesn't matter that much—Rose Kennedy [Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy] came up. I worked with Tom Gilroy and we put together a list of people, women, to organize a thing which was mostly independents, not really the organization types. But this is really what Polly [Polly Fitzgerald] does in most places she goes. And when the Democratic women, and

Ruffie's sister-in-law who was head of the Democratic women, found out about it, they just raised holy hell. They sent a telegram, which I have a copy of, to the President demanding my removal as a coordinator.

GREENE: To Lyndon Johnson?

SHERIDAN: Oh, yeah.

[-22-]

GREENE: He should remove you as Robert Kennedy's coordinator?

SHERIDAN: Oh, they sent it to Lyndon Johnson and to Kathy Stedweitzel. Maybe they sent it to the Senator with copies to Lyndon Johnson but... Then they had a big meeting and I went over to the meeting to try to explain to them that, you know, I wasn't trying to cut them out and I did want them to come and they wouldn't even let me talk.

GREENE: You were actually trying to cut them out, weren't you?

SHERIDAN: No, I wasn't really.

GREENE: Or was it just an oversight?

SHERIDAN: I was trying to do it without using the organization because to use the organization you had to work through Ruffie's sister-in-law. So to some extent I was, but I wasn't trying to cut out the membership and some of the membership had been invited and were working on it. But I didn't do it the way you'd ordinarily do it, because I wasn't doing anything with that organization the way you'd ordinarily do it.

As the thing went on, it was obvious that Ruffie was

[-23-]

joining forces with, was on Keating's [Kenneth B. Keating] side. And Ruffie would have meetings with the head of the Teamsters up there—his name's Rocco DePerno [Rocco F. DePerno]—who was also working for Keating. The Teamsters—did I mention this phony organization they set up in New York City?

GREENE: No.

SHERIDAN: Way ahead of ourselves again but...

GREENE: That's all right.

SHERIDAN: ...when it came to the point of the debate between Keating and Kennedy—which finally ended up on the radio, didn't it?

GREENE: The Barry Gray debate?

SHERIDAN: Right. About two weeks prior to that, this literature started coming out—it's very scurrilous—that Kennedy was...

GREENE: The drive literature?

SHERIDAN: Yes. That Kennedy was against the blacks.... It wasn't really drive literature; it was put out by the Keating-Humphrey [Hubert H. Humphrey]-Johnson committee.

GREENE: I've got a copy of it.

[-24-]

SHERIDAN: And it was that Kennedy was anti-black, anti-Jewish, pro-Arab, anti-labor—you know, just terrible stuff. And so Adam Walinsky gave it all to me and then the Senator wanted me to, you know, just try and find out what I could about it. I noticed that the union label bug was smudged so you couldn't read it, but they left the code number on there which I think was 16 which turns out to Merkle Press [Merkle Press, Inc.], who are the publishers of the Teamster magazine. Then I found out that Sid Zagri [Sidney Zagri], who was Hoffa's legislative guy, was making regular visits to Keating's headquarters. So I got all that together and put it on big charts so that...

GREENE: So you actually put together that Hoffa line.

SHERIDAN: Yes, the whole thing. And we had great big charts in case it ended up on television, but it ended up on the radio, but I had them there that night. And you know, he was able to say in the debate, bring up the Hoffa thing, and, of course, Keating denied it. Then Bob said, you know, "We know that Sid Zagri was at your headquarters this afternoon. We have that current information." And it was a pretty good zing, I thought.

[-25-]

GREENE: But Robert Kennedy also issued a statement, a press statement—I would have thought it came earlier but I must admit the news clipping had no date on it and I really didn't know when it came out...

SHERIDAN: About this stuff?

GREENE: ...calling on Keating to disavow this support...

SHERIDAN: Right.

GREENE: ...and then Keating finally did.

SHERIDAN: What he tried to do first was when Humphrey came up for the garment worker rally, we met the plane at Kennedy [John F. Kennedy Airport] or at LaGuardia [LaGuardia Airport] and Bob and I got on the plane with the stuff and went to Humphrey and showed it to him. Of course he said, "That's terrible stuff." We told him who was doing it. And Bob wanted to know if he would disavow it because it was Keating-Humphrey-Johnson or Johnson-Humphrey, and he said, yes, he would. Then he [Bob] said, "Would you say who's doing it, that this is just Hoffa doing it?" And Humphrey started sputtering and stammering all over the place and saying, "Well, you know, I don't know where all the President's support is coming from." He was in effect saying though, "The Teamsters are helping us; I can't do that." And so Bob just walked away, he just walked

[-26-]

off the plane. He didn't want to beg him.

But at the rally Humphrey did hold it up and say that there was scurrilous literature being passed around and he wanted to disavow it and then he tore it up and threw it out. So it was that effect, and I suppose it was right after that that he issued that statement about it. Did he say in the statement that it was being generated by the Teamsters?

GREENE: Yes, yes, and...

SHERIDAN: I didn't realize he had done that.

GREENE: ...he also acknowledge that O'Rourke [John J. O'Rourke] had come out for him in New York and that he appreciated that and he felt that the rank and file was probably....

SHERIDAN: Yes, because O'Rourke's coming out was helpful.

GREENE: Yes. But then Keating—it seems to me it was the next day although the clip doesn't have a date on it—did come out with a very strong statement denouncing this kind of support and...

SHERIDAN: Oh, did he? Well he had to, he was caught.

GREENE: ...directly, you know, commending Robert Kennedy's civil rights record.

[-27-]

SHERIDAN: See, I wouldn't, for something like that.... I just came in from upstate, I think, three days before or two days before the debate, got the stuff all together. Then he had the debate, and then I went right back up.

GREENE: Was there preparation at that time for the empty chair debate which you thought might not be an empty chair debate? Did you get involved in that preparation?

SHERIDAN: This was for the empty chair debate. I just forgot about that.

GREENE: Oh, and then it finally took place.

SHERIDAN: You mean when he pounded on the door, yes yes.

GREENE: It finally took place, that...

SHERIDAN: Because I was following him through those back rooms of that studio. That's right. That's why we had the big things because he was going to go on television. I'm lugging them around trying to find where Kenneth Keating is. The pounding on the door and getting turned away, it was very effective.

Then I went back up, but he still had the material when it came to the Barry Gray thing. But I was in town for the Barry Gray thing, so he must have wanted me to come down to be there for this part of it because I remember being there.

[-28-]

GREENE: You're fairly convinced then that he actually wanted to and intended to go on television that night, because some people have said that he was pretty happy with the way it turned out and may even have engineered it?

SHERIDAN: Oh, it couldn't have turned out any better. The question is: Did they engineer it? I think it's a good question.

GREENE: You don't have any answer on it? Remember no one has to know for a hundred years.

SHERIDAN: Well, I think it was timed well enough. I think it put Keating in an awful spot no matter what he did, because Bob was willing to go on if he got in that door.

GREENE: So he wasn't anxious.

SHERIDAN: But he knew that if he didn't get in the door, he was in just as good shape, I think. It was just one of those things where Keating couldn't win. He

painted himself into this corner, so I think all Bob did was take advantage of the stunt Keating was trying to put on and just turned it around on him.

GREENE: Was there conversation along these lines in

[-29-]

the hotel or someplace before?

SHERIDAN: There could have been, but I wasn't there for that meeting. I was up in the Carlyle [Carlyle Hotel], you know, during this day's period, but the real nitty-gritty, here's-what-we're-going-to-do thing, I wasn't there for, so I don't know. Steve Smith would know. Keating was the one that was playing the gimmick with the empty chair, and I think all he did was take Keating's gimmick and turn it around on him. He couldn't lose because even if Keating had let him in, I think he would have been so flustered that he wouldn't have debated very well.

GREENE: Did you have much trouble from the Teamsters upstate?

SHERIDAN: Well in Utica, you know, definitely. What they did with this literature besides put it out in New York was send it to all the Teamster locals in the state. The friendly ones dumped it and the unfriendly ones put it out. And in Utica the day of the election, it was out on every doorstep in East Utica. But it didn't have any effect, it was just so obvious what it was. But the Teamsters in Oneida County joined with Ruffie against us. But this was just DePerno. Now how much of his

[-30-]

membership he really controlled vote-wise, I don't know.

GREENE: You did get the AFL-CIO [American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations] support up there, didn't you, in Utica?

SHERIDAN: Yes.

GREENE: Was that general throughout the....

SHERIDAN: Well, you say support, yes, we got some of it. The communication workers were very good; the UAW [United Automobile, Aircraft, and Agricultural Implement Workers of America] was very good; the Meat Cutters guy—and I can't think of his name—was very active. But, again, when I say very good, they were good and yet they didn't have the phone-bank type things and the real all-out support that they've had in some campaigns.

GREENE: Was somebody working at the state level, like at the AFL-CIO

convention, for instance?

SHERIDAN: Oh, I'm sure they were but I don't know who it was.

GREENE: You don't know who it was.

SHERIDAN: We had two labor guys that came up, John McNiff and—I can't think of that other fellow's name, tall, thin, dark haired fellow—who both, I think, came out of the Pulp Workers union. And they were really our labor people,

[-31-]

and they just circulated around the state, including my areas.

GREENE: Would they have been responsible for getting O'Rourke, for instance, and....

SHERIDAN: No, I think I was a little bit responsible for that and I think Bob Kennedy was really responsible and Steve Smith. I worked through Nick Kisburg [Nicholas M. Kisburg], who is O'Rourke's PR guy for the Joint Council 16, and he worked on O'Rourke, and between us all.... I'm sure Steve was probably the one that finally nailed it down. But O'Rourke was for Kennedy and didn't really care that much about Hoffa at that point.

GREENE: What about Ray Corbett [Raymond R. Corbett]? Who would have been the contact on him or did he just come out on his own? He was the vice president—oh, no, excuse me, he was the president of the state convention. Anyone help you on him?

SHERIDAN: Yeah. I don't know. I know I didn't have anything to do with those state-level contacts. In Syracuse, the unions were generally helpful. In Binghamton, they were generally helpful. The other areas, there weren't that many unions.

[-32-]

GREENE: You said that Gilroy was Robert Kennedy's man to replace Elephant—Elephant or Elefante?

SHERIDAN: Elefante.

GREENE: Elefante.

SHERIDAN: It wasn't to replace Elefante. Elefante never came out front; he always

was in the background. He always had a county chairman.

GREENE: His man, whoever it was at that point.

SHERIDAN: Yeah, back in '60, during the '60 campaign, Gilroy, I think, emerged as kind of the Kennedy leader along with Mike McGurl and the Irish group. And Gilroy kind of put the thing together and became the county chairman with McGurl's help and with the help of some of the other pro-Kennedy people.

GREENE: And then he was ousted in June of '64.

SHERIDAN: Was that when it was?

GREENE: That's what I have.

SHERIDAN: Okay. That's it.

GREENE: This guy Morse [G. Carl Morse] replaced him, who was... [Inaudible]

[-33-]

SHERIDAN: Right, right, June of '64, which would have been right before this, wouldn't it?

GREENE: Yes.

SHERIDAN: But when I went up, Gilroy was very helpful to me; but by that time the McGurl faction had fallen out with Gilroy. In fact Gilroy seemed, as it went on, to have more enemies than he had friends in the political organization.

GREENE: He was totally in debt, or his administration was.

SHERIDAN: Yes. He's a funny guy. He never went to college, and he seems to have an inferiority complex about this. And yet he travels in the upper circle socially in Utica and meets at the clubs and things like that. I think it was a personality thing as much as anything else, but it became apparent while I was up there that there was this great division. Afterwards it reached the point where I started working through the McGurl group rather than Gilroy, and I'm sure he resents it to this day.

[-34-]

GREENE: There were two factions that actually walked out of the county organization. One was headed by this guy Larkin...

SHERIDAN: Dick Larkin.

GREENE: ...who was a Stratton person. Did he ever come out for Robert Kennedy finally?

SHERIDAN: Oh yes. Dick Larkin's from Rome.

GREENE: Yes, from Rome and this guy Karam [Samuel G. Karam].

SHERIDAN: Karam. Yes, well he came around too. Karam is just a very volatile, very difficult guy to deal with. He's from out in Wayne or Broome county. Larkin came around completely and is still completely. Karam was one of these guys that wanted to be kind of the center of attraction and wanted his hand held all the time, just a very difficult guy to deal with. He came around, but I think if you went up there today, he'd probably be against us because he probably thinks we didn't do anything for him.

GREENE: What about Stratton people generally? Did most of them finally support Robert Kennedy?

SHERIDAN: No, not really. They gave token. Stratton condescended once to ride in a motorcade for

[-35-]

about twenty miles with the Senator and that's all he ever did. He was obviously bitter throughout the campaign and his people were bitter. They'd talk to you, but you never really got their support.

GREENE: Did you follow through on this Utica situation after the Senator...

SHERIDAN: Yes.

GREENE: ...went to the Senate?

SHERIDAN: Yes.

GREENE: What are your recollections about his interest in that?

SHERIDAN: Well, he kept interested. Well see, after the election he asked me to be his upstate representative. He was going to open an upstate office in Syracuse.

GREENE: Right.

SHERIDAN: And I said that I would. And then I started thinking about it and decided I was too young to go to Syracuse. I wanted to get into journalism, and I

decided if I was going to do it, this was the time to do it. So I told him I'd changed my mind and he'd already announced it.

GREENE: I remember seeing that in the

[-36-]

Times [*New York Times*].

SHERIDAN: Yes. Well, the day I told him I would was the day that Lyndon Johnson was inaugurated. I stood in his window which overlooked the Capitol and listened to the whole thing. It was an emotional decision. I said I would, because he didn't push me to make the decision. So then he announced it. And I went up, I worked up through January. I even went looking for a house. But the more I thought about it, the more I just didn't want to get that far out of things at that point. So I told him one day. He was a little irked, but not really, and so he said, "Go get it out of your system. Come back whenever you want to."

Then I went shopping, I had been shopping, but I went shopping in earnest and that's when NBC [National Broadcasting Company] hired me.

GREENE: Did you have anything....

SHERIDAN: But I still kept in touch. Huh?

GREENE: I was going to say, did you have anything to do with Bruno [Gerald J. Bruno] coming in?

SHERIDAN: Yes, because then it was a matter, basically you know, get somebody to replace you. The first guy that was suggested was the marshal

[-37-]

in Syracuse...

GREENE: Do you mean Utica?

SHERIDAN: ...whose name was Byrne or Burns, Jim Byrne [James E. Byrne, Jr.], and I think Corbin suggested him. He came down and talked to the Senator. I don't think the Senator liked him because he was fat. Then I'm pretty sure that I'm the one that suggested Bruno. I'm sure I was. And the idea appealed to him. And I called Jerry—he was working over, I think, in Agriculture [Department of Agriculture]...

GREENE: Yes, he was.

SHERIDAN: ...and suggested it to him. He didn't know what to think at first, and then

he thought it was a good idea. We met and talked about it, and then he went over and talked to Bob about it. And then he decided to go up.

GREENE: In what way did you get involved in the later effort to go rid of...

SHERIDAN: Well, once Jerry was up there, Dick Assaro [Dominicj Assaro], who is now the mayor, came down to Washington and came to see me. He had run the previous time as a Republican and had done very well, almost won. And he had switched his party affiliation, became a Democrat, came down and said he wanted to run again. And I spent a whole day with him and a whole evening, he came out to the house. He seemed sincere;

[-38-]

he seemed honest; he was Italian. It seemed like a good idea. So I mentioned it to Jerry, and I really kind of pushed the idea with Jerry. And the next thing I knew Jerry was away and running with the idea and got Bob to come up there during the primary campaign. And he won.

GREENE: How did the Senator feel about getting into local fights like that?

SHERIDAN: He didn't like it at all, never wanted to. It was very unusual for him to do it, but again, it was Utica and, you know, he wanted to get rid of Ruffie Elefante. And when Bob was coming up—let me see.... The problem is Dulan [Frank M. Dulan], the prior mayor, a Republican, had been very pro-Kennedy and had actually contributed to the campaign, gave me cash for the campaign, and he was a good guy. What we did prior to the elections was to elect Dulan to avoid electing Ruffie's guy. In other words, we really round-aboutly worked for Dulan. But we always knew that eventually, you know, if you're going to build a Democratic organization up there, particularly with him senator, you finally had to get your own guy. So, when Assaro obviously became the Kennedy candidate, of course, Dulan was extremely upset and bitter and, I think, is still very bitter.

[-39-]

[Interruption] So Dulan was really upset. He had been an honest mayor, and Bob had really praised him whenever he had been up there. The police commissioner was Carroll Hamlin [J. Carroll Hamlin] and he was an honest guy. It was really a little sad, I guess, that we did it.

GREENE: Was it largely because of his party affiliation or you just didn't have enough sense that he was your man?

SHERIDAN: Who? Dulan?

GREENE: Yes.

SHERIDAN: Oh, it was because he was Republican. It was just that, you know, if you're going to have a Democratic organization, you've got to do it some time. So he had Carroll Hamlin call me and tell me that Assaro was linked in with the mob and he had all these rumors, and other people called me. So I finally called Carroll Hamlin, just before Bob went up for this rally, and I said, "I've gotta know. Do you really have anything or don't you? If you do, I'll stop him." And he said, "No, we don't" He said, "But I still think he is." So Bob went up and I'm sure it was a big boost for Assaro. I don't think he could have

[-40-]

got elected without us.

GREENE: He only won by a few votes.

SHERIDAN: Yes. In another, I had Bruno get Assaro to make a commitment that he would let us have a hand in appointing the police chief, just to make sure, the police commissioner. It turned out they made me the chairman of the committee to find a new police commissioner, and I finally found one out at the University of Indiana, who was teaching out there in law enforcement. He came in and stayed two years and went back about a year ago and brought in another guy who I don't know.

But the problem is, it appears to me, over the last.... First of all, when Assaro became mayor it soon became apparent that he wasn't the mayor, but a guy, a Syrian guy named Fred—I'll think of it—was really the power and he was kind of running Assaro. It turned out Assaro was weaker than we thought, very nice guy and all that but....

These guys became Bruno's guys. He even brought some of the out in the Bob Kennedy campaign. And Bruno kind of, you know, they were *his* guys and Fred was *his* man. Then Fred got indicted for supposedly shaking down some contractor for campaign contributions in the...

[-41-]

GREENE: This is Fred? Oh, the Syrian guy. Okay.

SHERIDAN: Yes, I can't think of his name.

GREENE: Okay. Well, we can get his name later.

SHERIDAN: They got it through wiretapping and the cops who did the wiretapping later got in trouble with the man. The whole thing got kind of messy. And the McGurls and the rest of the party became very much on the outs with Assaro, and I would try and get them together, but it never really worked. And I'm afraid that—well, in one way rightfully so, Bruno was looking forward to the '68 convention and

the delegates and all that. But in the process, these guys alienated just about everybody. It's so hard to keep all these people together, you know.

So it's really a mess again up there now. Assaro was reelected this last time, Steven Smith went up for the last go-around. But I understand a lot of Ruffie's people are back on the payroll and I think Assaro has just let them all back in. Jerry's continued to live up there, you know, and I think he's got a little fiefdom up there that he considers somehow his power base.

GREENE: How was he regarded in the Utica area with Johnson?

[-42-]

SHERIDAN: Well, I don't think too well by most of the.... But by some of them he is because he's Kennedy's man to them, and now I'm sure he's Teddy's and Steve's man to them, like Dick Larkin in Rome for one and Jim O'Shea [James C. O'Shea] in Rome and Assaro. And I think if he tells them, "Jump!" they say, "How high?" But among the other factions they don't like him at all.

GREENE: You know, Elefante came out and was behind him or in front of him—however that was at the time—for Robert Kennedy prior to the actual nomination and I guess, shortly thereafter.

SHERIDAN: Yes, well that was his move.

GREENE: Was that to, because he felt that....

SHERIDAN: That was to get on the bandwagon.

GREENE: He would have been thrown out when he became senator.

SHERIDAN: Yes, it was a smart move. It was the only one he could make. I think he thought Kennedy was going to win, and even if Keating won he had nothing to lose. But it

[-43-]

was his move to get on the bandwagon and his people all came with the same.... And of course, I rejected them and I'm sure, you know, it was a terrible affront to them.

GREENE: Did they actually change their association with Robert Kennedy publicly or just that you knew they would never work for Kennedy?

SHERIDAN: Oh no. No, they couldn't do that because they knew the Italian people were for Bobby Kennedy. In fact, the day he came to Utica was really kind

of funny because I had the route go right up through the middle of East Utica knowing that they were just going to come out in the droves and there was nothing Ruffie would do about it. And it worked; you know, he just couldn't control his own people when the candidate was Kennedy.

GREENE: What about this guy Balch, Richard Balch up there? Did he ever come around?

SHERIDAN: Yes, but not actively because he was really one of the old timers who's been in and out with Ruffie. I think he's a pretty decent guy and there were contacts with him and there were statements that, you know, he was for us, but he never really got active.

GREENE: I have some questions about Corbin's role in

[-44-]

this while thing because, on the one hand, I see a memo in your stuff from John English [John F. English] and Chairman McKeon [William H. McKeon] saying—underlined several times—that Corbin must stay out of this area. First of all, why did he have to stay out of the area and, second of all, I see letters from Gilroy to Corbin on the whole Elefante...

SHERIDAN: Who wrote to Corbin?

GREENE: ...you know, the split. Why would that...

SHERIDAN: Who wrote to Corbin?

GREENE: Gilroy.

SHERIDAN: Oh yes. Well see, Gilroy was.... Corbin and Ben Smith [Benjamin A. Smith] were up there in 1960. They were upstate New York; that was their thing in 1960. So naturally they had a lot of contacts up there and they are the ones that really picked Gilroy as their man. And of course, Corbin is, you know, Corbin is Corbin. Have you met him?

GREENE: No, but I've heard.

SHERIDAN: Oh, you've got to interview him for this thing. You know, he's priceless.

GREENE: He's got an interview for John Kennedy. We probably will.

[-45-]

SHERIDAN: Oh, absolutely. He'll try to seduce you somewhere along the line. "Hi, this is Paul Corbin." That's how he talks. He's a character, you know, but Bob trusted him implicitly and yet would disown him, you know, "Paul who?" But Paul had Bob's ear and was a thousand percent loyal to Bob Kennedy and he's a real operator. And all the time I was up there, I knew he was going around and under and over to see if I was doing things the way he thought they should be done, and his contact was Gilroy. So I'm sure he was on the phone everyday to Gilroy all the time I was up there. And he'd call around to people he knew were his friends—and he had some—and then they.... A county chairman in any country either loved Paul Corbin or absolutely despised him and I'm sure McKeon despised him.

So that's what that kind of a memo would be, because they'd hear that he'd talked to somebody and so they'd raise holy hell with the state chairman. "What's Corbin doing there? I thought he was out of this." And so, just like in the '68 campaign, where it was "Colonel Scholfield" out in San Francisco, he wasn't supposed to be involved at all and yet he's involved all the time. I like Paul Corbin very much and I think there's maybe three or four of us that do. He's a very controversial guy. Kenny O'Donnell [Kenneth P. O'Donnell] just hates him with a passion and that whole White House crowd

[-46-]

hate him and the reason they hate him is because Paul Corbin went to Robert Kennedy shortly before the assassination and gave him a list of the people working for John Kennedy, that were stealing and Bob Kennedy believed him. From that point on, a guy like Dick Maguire {Richard Maguire} would have nothing to do with Robert Kennedy.

GREENE: Was there any truth in this or was it just a concoction?

SHERIDAN: Do you want my opinion or....

GREENE: Well, what you know...

SHERIDAN: My opinion is yes, there was truth in it.

GREENE: Were these people at the top level?

SHERIDAN: Yes.

GREENE: Who?

SHERIDAN: Dick Maguire was one of them. Here we get into who.

GREENE: Don't worry about it.

SHERIDAN: Huh?

GREENE: Don't worry about it.

SHERIDAN: Well, the people he alleged were on the take were Dick Maguire, Chuck Roche [Charles Roche] – those two in particular – Bernie Boutin [Bernard L. Boutin] who I've heard it from

[-47-]

other sources... In whose favor were they supposed to be? Who were they taking the money from?

SHERIDAN: Anybody, anyway they could get it. Maguire was, of course, the money man for Jack Kennedy. He was the one that collected money and Corbin's information was that quite a bit that he collected never got to where it was going. I think there were Post Office deals. You know, any contract that built into it because if you want to get it, you can get it either on the merits or you can get it if you pay for it.

GREENE: Was anything done on this? Did they follow through on it?

SHERIDAN: Well, according to Paul, he had several discussions with Robert Kennedy about it, had affidavits to back up what he was saying, and spoke to Bob just before the President, no, the day the President went to Dallas. Bob said when the President got back, he was going to sit

[-48-]

down and talk to him and then he was going to get rid of these guys or they were going to be indicted. And of course, then Paul says that after the assassination, the next time he spoke to Bob about it, he said, "Forget it. We aren't on Pennsylvania Avenue anymore."

GREENE: He said? I didn't hear that last...

SHERIDAN: "We don't have 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue anymore." So there's a lot of bitter feeling because this crowd knows that and.... You talk to Kenny; Kenny O'Donnell says the first fight that Lyndon Johnson and Robert Kennedy had was over Paul Corbin, and I'm sure it's true. Because they wanted him out of that National Committee [Democratic National Committee] and Bob didn't want him out of the National Committee.

GREENE: But they finally overruled him?

SHERIDAN: Oh sure. The President was the President; he got him out of there. But you must talk to Paul Corbin.

GREENE: Yes, I think we'll try to do that.

[-49-]

SHERIDAN: Have you talked to Seigenthaler [John Seigenthaler] yet?

GREENE: We've been trying awfully hard. Maybe you can give us a hand on that.

SHERIDAN: Well, he's tough. But see, Corbin's in Nashville all week. He's home on the weekends.

GREENE: No, Seigenthaler's been tough to get to; you know, when we finally did get in touch with him, he said yes, he'd be glad to do it and wanted to do it with Larry [Larry J. Hackman]. Of course, he's been in a couple of times because he's...

SHERIDAN: The best thing to do is to go to Nashville and you can get Seigenthaler and Corbin and John Hooker, Jr. [John J. Hooker, Jr.], if you want him.

GREENE: Just go without an appointment?

SHERIDAN: What?

GREENE: Just go without an appointment?

SHERIDAN: Oh yes. Because if you're down there, you'll get to him. Corbin will get you to him. Corbin will get you to him. You get to Corbin and Corbin will get you to Seigenthaler.

[-50-]

GREENE: They've remained pretty close?

SHERIDAN: Corbin's very close to Seigenthaler and very close to Steve Smith. Steve might not admit it but....

GREENE: How would guys like English and McKeon do in an area like Utica? How would they be working with upstate people, particularly English?

SHERIDAN: Well, John English had nothing to do with upstate, but Corbin was close to English and...

GREENE: Well, why would English have done these memos that I find in your books?

SHERIDAN: Well, I don't remember them. What do they say?

GREENE: Well, they seem to be county by county, an evaluation of the area, and what should be done, and who should be avoided, and who should be contacted.

SHERIDAN: I suppose—I didn't know that—English had his own concept of the state and his own friends throughout the

[-51-]

state because he was a pretty big clout on his own—just like McKeon did—and Corbin would have been in this channel because he was close to McKeon and Steingut [Stanley Steingut], the guy in Buffalo, and Gilroy in Utica, and what's-his-name in Syracuse.

GREENE: Van Lengen [George H. Van Lengen].

SHERIDAN: Huh?

GREENE: Van Lengen.

SHERIDAN: No, Van Lengen was really a Stratton man but he...

GREENE: Do you mean Scotty Campbell [Alan K. Campbell]?

SHERIDAN: No, Scotty Campbell was, you know, he was very helpful. No, the guy I'm trying to think of is just a wonderful guy.

GREENE: Larry Silvich. He was a, Samuel's [Howard D. Samuel] guy.

SHERIDAN: No. I'll think of it in a minute. He just couldn't do enough, you know; he had all his kids out working for us. But he's another guy that Corbin would call and who'd trust Corbin and they would get along

[-52-]

fine. Like getting the headquarters open in Syracuse; he was out there at six o'clock in the morning with his whole family putting up the sign and painting, just couldn't do enough. He's a—is he a judge now? I think so.

GREENE: I should know that. I'm from Syracuse.

SHERIDAN: Yes. He's really a key...

GREENE: That's my alma mater.

SHERIDAN: What? Syracuse?

[BEGIN TAPE 5, SIDE 2]

[-53-]

GREENE: George Cregg [George W. Cregg] was the fellow that helped you so much?

SHERIDAN: Yeah, and who had previously helped Corbin. You know, when I was going up there I got names from Corbin, I got names from Howard Samuels, I got names from whoever had names of people to contact, and then you just contact them and then start shuffling them out in your own mind just as to who's going to be really helpful and who isn't. And George Cregg was a Corbin name, but George Cregg turned out to be, you know, just great.

GREENE: Before we leave the previous subject, do you want to say on tape what you just said about Judge Keogh [J. Vincent Keogh] then?

SHERIDAN: Well Judge Keogh is a Supreme Court state judge in New York and his brother was Congressman Gene Keogh [Eugene James Keogh]. We got into a situation in the southern district in New York in early '61, which led to corruption in the U.S. attorney's office in

[-54-]

Brooklyn, which led to the fact that Judge Keogh had taken a thirty-five thousand dollar payoff. And I was just in it in the beginning but it got to the point whether he was to be indicted or not, and of course there was a lot of pressure from Jack Kennedy's White House people on Robert Kennedy not to indict him because he was a very close friend of the President's as well as a supporter. And Bob Kennedy finally decided that he should be indicted in spite of this, and I think it was the most difficult decision he ever made as attorney general.

GREENE: Who in the White House particularly was putting the pressure on him?

SHERIDAN: Kenny O'Donnell, Dick Maguire.

GREENE: It was Maguire that came up to you and said that? Couldn't it have been...

SHERIDAN: Well, Maguire, afterwards came up to me at a party and said, "I can't believe that you couldn't have fixed that case." And I said,

[-55-]

“Of course we could have, but that’s the difference, you and us.” I remember there was a party at Kennedy’s shortly thereafter—one of these big summer parties—and Jack Miller, who was head of the Criminal Division, was there and the White House crowd wouldn’t even talk to him. They were just furious. There was a judicial conference in the White House which happened right about that time, so it must have been November, I think. I just don’t remember the date. But there was an argument right on the steps of the White House—inside, off to the side—about it.

It was very difficult for Robert Kennedy and it made these people pretty bitter. There have been efforts since then to get the Congressman and Bob Kennedy back together which I think worked. John Reilly was the one that was always trying to get them back together and I think it worked to some extent, but as recently as last week there was a meeting to help

[-56-]

Kenny O’Donnell to arrange for a fundraising dinner or fundraising cocktail party in New York for Kenny O’Donnell, which I couldn’t go to because Gene Keogh wouldn’t let me. So this bitterness is still very much there, and I’m identified with that effort.

GREENE: You also mentioned off this tape when I asked you about what kind of proof Corbin had on this other matter, you said that he had affidavits, or he claimed. Did anyone ever see them or...

SHERIDAN: He said that he had affidavits from people who had been either approached or shaken down or who paid, and that he presented the whole thing to Robert Kennedy just before the assassination, and Robert Kennedy said that when the President came back from Dallas—it was the day he went or was the day before—that he was going to sit down and talk to them about it, and that these

[-57-]

people would either have to resign or they were going to be prosecuted.

GREENE: Was O’Donnell involved in this at all?

SHERIDAN: No. Not that I know of. These guys were O’Donnell’s friends so O’Donnell was a little bitter about it. You know, I like Kenny O’Donnell very much and I don’t consider him corrupt.

GREENE: Has that damaged your friendship with him too?

SHERIDAN: No, but I’ve always been quite outspoken about my friendship for Paul Corbin and, you know, that I think Paul Corbin’s a good guy who was very much for Robert Kennedy, so everybody knows it, but they don’t hold it against me—except somebody like Judge Keogh or his brother. They do.

GREENE: Are there other instances...

SHERIDAN: Dick Maguire does.

GREENE: Are there other instances like this of things that came up in his sleuthing?

[-58-]

SHERIDAN: Yeah, there was something involving the Post Office Department where he found money involved in the post office contracts but I don't know the details. I don't know who was involved, except one of them was Ruffie Elefante because the Post Office Department in Utica, until Bob Kennedy stopped it, was running a garage for the trucks for Ruffie Elefante.

GREENE: It's one big happy family, isn't it? The head of the clan. Well, before we leave Oneida County, I wanted to ask you about Rome. They had some difficulties there because of their closing of the air force base.

SHERIDAN: Oh yeah, well that—Roma, I guess they call it. Griffiss Air Force Base has always been one of the big issues up there. It still is because every time there's an economy drive in the Department of Defense, one of the potential targets is Griffiss Air Force Base. So one

[-59-]

of the big issues was saving Griffiss Air Force Base. Both Keating and Kennedy were for saving Griffiss Air Force Base were both going to do all they could to do that. But there were a lot of hard feelings. I mean there were some people who were really just fanatic about this issue and I can't remember.... I do remember, there was some factionalism because of this in Rome. But again in Rome you have the Ruffie crowd and the non-Ruffie crowd; and the Ruffie crowd were in the final analysis with Keating. But Larkin and O'Shea who were the leaders and are the leaders were with us and were very helpful.

GREENE: Was there a lot of pressure on Robert Kennedy, through you, to do more on the Griffiss thing or was his statement....

SHERIDAN: No. Well you know, he knew very well that it was one of the major issues, and he knew that he not only had to make statements about it, but that he had to try and do what he could if he

[-60-]

became senator to...

GREENE: And I think he did, didn't he?

SHERIDAN: I'm sure he did. I don't know really afterwards what he did. But the idea to open an office up there, I think, was a great idea. And you know it gave that follow-through. Then also right after he was elected he made a trip up through the whole upstate area again, showing how he wasn't just going to be elected and go away, that he was coming back. Then he opened the office.

GREENE: Was that one of your suggestions, or did he consult you on that?

SHERIDAN: Was that my idea? I'd like to say it was because I think it was, but I'm not that sure. I know we talked about it, yeah, we did talk about it. But he didn't ask me to be that until after the election when we went back up in that swing and we went to Utica and he had asked me. He was in the bathtub when he asked

[-61-]

me; we always had meetings in the bathroom, because he'd come back and he'd just get in the bathtub and then he'd call you, and you had to sit there. That's when he asked me if I'd do it.

GREENE: Well, maybe we can back up a little bit. Outside of the Oneida County region, what kind of a structure did you set up elsewhere?

SHERIDAN: Well, basically we were trying to do the same thing. Ideally in every county you'd have a headquarters, a good county chairman—but you didn't in some of them—a telephone setup and a telephone chairman, and a get-out-the-vote operation.

GREENE: Voter registration?

SHERIDAN: Well, voter registration was first. But you just try to keep going around and getting them to try and get them to do these things. In some places you succeed, in some places you just never do. But there was, you know, something going every place. But again, I think, this was one of my problems; that I did spend too

[-62-]

much time in Utica, and if I had gotten around more maybe there would have been more.... Except, I still believe in playing your strengths and I think you should spend most of your time.... I should have spent more time, I think, in Syracuse than I did.

GREENE: Well he did carry that county, which was a feat of sorts.

SHERIDAN: Yeah, and he carried Utica by twenty thousand I think, and Oneida County. And Herkimer, maybe I should have spend more time in Herkimer. I was down there quite a bit, but again, I should have spent a little less time.... I should have spent more time in the strength areas which were Syracuse, Utica, Herkimer, Binghampton, Elmira.

GREENE: Where did you have good leadership, where you could.... I know you had McKeon. Where else did you have people that you could sort of leave it to?

SHERIDAN: Yeah. Syracuse was good. We had a couple of volunteers up there who were

[-63-]

good and I can't remember what their names were, and the labor guys were pretty good. John Owanocek was one. God, how easily you forget names.

GREENE: Well, I have names of county chairmen if that'll help.

SHERIDAN: That would help.

GREENE: I may not have all of them.

SHERIDAN: Now the county chairman in Syracuse was what's-his-name, Vander...

GREENE: Van Lengen [George Van Lengen].

SHERIDAN: Yeah, and he was vocally for you but not really because he was a Stratton man, and he never really lost his resentment of the carpet-bagging thing. [Interruption]

GREENE: Well, he had been very strongly against Robert Kennedy; even through the convention, I had heard that Samuels made a big effort to...

SHERIDAN: Yes, he was. He was.

GREENE: Well where did.... By then, you know, that was only what, September first. By September

[-64-]

fifth he's coming out and patting Robert Kennedy on the back, "You're my man."

SHERIDAN: Of course, Kennedy's first stop was Syracuse, and I went up for that. In fact, I missed—they had a going away party, a joint going away party, for Robert Kennedy and me and I missed it, and it was a great party, I understand. But he came up to Syracuse and it was his first foray into upstate New York. I think what's-his-name just got kind of on the bandwagon, at least wanted to be if it turned out right. I think he was an opportunist.

GREENE: Yes. One of English and McKeon's memos says that you have to cater to him and hold his hand and that kind of thing. Did you find that to be true?

SHERIDAN: Yes. But you know, my man was George Cregg and Scotty Campbell and as far as getting anything done these were the people that were really the key to it. But that first swing was very successful, and he went to the

[-65-]

state fair and almost got killed by the crowd. It was just unbelievable. That's where I really decided that the best way to control the crowd is not with policemen because they have an instinctive thing to push against the crowd and the crowd pushes back. We were ringed by state troopers with their arms locked, you know, and there was about a hundred thousand people there.

It got almost dangerous because we were almost to a point of getting crushed. So we broke away from them and got into a building and ducked them and went on our own. And we went through that whole fairground, through all that crowd after that, without any police help and just by talking and walking ahead of them. And it works and it'll always work and it's so hard to get people to understand that and particularly cops. And it was the problem in any campaign situation after that. If you could get them to understand it, it

[-66-]

would work; and if they don't understand, it won't work. But they resented that to the point where when the day was over we had a police escort to the airport and they, I'm sure, intentionally took us the wrong way because we had dumped them at the fairgrounds. We went up and down hills—took twice as long to get to the airport as it should have, and I think they were just getting even.

GREENE: Did you have any contact with Van Lengen's liberal law partner, Bill Andrews?

SHERIDAN: What's his name?

GREENE: Bill Andrews. There was also a note from McKeon and English saying that he would be a good person to work through because he was close to Van Lengen and he was...

SHERIDAN: I don't remember, I don't remember.

GREENE: On his first trip, what was your impression of the organization, and the advance, and the scheduling particularly?

SHERIDAN: In Syracuse?

[-67-]

GREENE: Yeah, well that day you visited a number of other places up there too, but I guess Syracuse was sort of the big stop—September fifth, it would have been.

SHERIDAN: Yeah, that's this one. I've got it right here.

GREENE: Well, maybe he didn't go anywhere else that day. Maybe it was the nineteenth.

SHERIDAN: Oh, he went right from there to Grossinger's.

GREENE: Right. So that's right.

SHERIDAN: All I had to do was with Syracuse, and I thought it was extremely well organized and very, very successful because I did it.

GREENE: Was the scheduling too tight, did you think?

SHERIDAN: I think the scheduling was always too tight, but you mean particularly that day? I don't know the end of the day, see?

GREENE: Well the first week or so, I had heard, was really very unrealistic in the way they had scheduled it and it just wore him out.

SHERIDAN: I'm sure it was. I'm sure it was, and I'm sure it did. But, you know, from the viewpoint

[-68-]

of what he wanted on that first trip, I thought it was extremely successful because we even got in a meeting at the airport with the newspaper's publisher and...
[Interruption] I thought it was a huge success and you know, it got good publicity. His first trip upstate he was a big, big, big hit.

GREENE: Did you have people set up for him to see, or did he do much of that then?

SHERIDAN: Yeah, we had the newspaper editor...

GREENE: Casey Jones?

SHERIDAN: Yeah, Casey Jones.

GREENE: I'll never forget Casey Jones.

SHERIDAN: Yeah.

GREENE: He was actually pretty helpful, I think.

SHERIDAN: He was. I think those kind of meetings were extremely important with him, because even if the guy was "anti" to start with, he neutralized him almost, because he was very effective.

GREENE: Jones did support him.

[-69-]

SHERIDAN: I think he did, yeah.

GREENE: Before we go on, do you remember anything particular about the registration drive—how extensive was it and where did you concentrate and how successful?

SHERIDAN: When was it?

GREENE: I'm not really sure. It may even have preceded...

SHERIDAN: Yeah, that's it, I can't remember it in that campaign which would mean to me that it might have been over with or the time might have passed. Yeah, I can't remember a registration drive. And what Johnson had done, I just don't know.

GREENE: Yeah, I just saw one note saying that it was a disaster in Utica, or in Oneida County—a flop—I guess it was a disaster, but you don't know that.

SHERIDAN: No, I don't.

GREENE: O.K.

SHERIDAN: I do remember there was very little, if any, Humphrey-Johnson organization that you

[-70-]

would run into, anyway, anyplace you went. That was always curious to me.

GREENE: Overconfident. Not overconfident, but confident.

SHERIDAN: Yeah, well, of course, they were terribly confident.

GREENE: So you didn't really link up with them at any point.

SHERIDAN: Not really. Yeah, we did towards the end because towards the end we kind of needed them a little. But there wasn't really anything to link up with. I don't recall really ever linking up with any organization that was Humphrey-Johnson. I know the literature and everything started taking that tone, but I don't remember a linking up or anything.

GREENE: Did you have any contact with Burns [John J. Burns], who was the upstate chairman for Kennedy-Humphrey-Johnson group?

SHERIDAN: What Burns?

[-71-]

GREENE: John Burns, who later became...

SHERIDAN: Oh, sure. He was mayor of Binghampton at that time, yeah, and he was great, he was great, but he would travel around a lot with the Senator. He was one of the better guys up there, and his brother was involved in the campaign in Binghampton too.

GREENE: You just barely lost Broome County, didn't you?

SHERIDAN: Yeah, as I recall.

GREENE: I think it was pretty close.

SHERIDAN: We had a good guy in Elmira. Oh, the county chairman in Binghampton was Tom Conlon [Thomas J. Conlon] and he was good. And then in Elmira—I don't remember what county that is—there were two guys, the county chairman, and I can't remember his name, but the real worker was a young—names are.... Jerry Bruno would know all these names now because he's kept working with them.

GREENE: I'm not sure which county that is either.

SHERIDAN: Elmira. It would be... Well, it's the

[-72-]

one right next to Binghamton. [Interruption]

GREENE: ...they had said was not going to be any good.

SHERIDAN: Well, and he wasn't. He was terrible. He was one of these guys that every time you'd go, he'd say, "I'll have everything set by next week," and you'd come back next week and he hadn't done a goddamned thing.

GREENE: Bill Morgan, it said, actually, ran things there. Was that the feeling?

SHERIDAN: Yeah. Yeah, and somebody else there too. But Bill Morgan was an old timer...

GREENE: Yeah, farmer man.

SHERIDAN: Yeah. This is awfully disjointed, isn't it. How about you? Where do you want to go? Doesn't matter?

GREENE: Oh, don't worry about that; that's the historian's problem. Have to make it a little hard for them.

SHERIDAN: I remember that towards the end of the campaign, there were counties he hadn't been to, and I was determined that he was going to go to them.

GREENE: Well, there were several that were scheduled out of it.

SHERIDAN: Yeah, that last trip he made—where he had to use the helicopters...

[-73-]

GREENE: On the nineteenth?

SHERIDAN: That must be the nine.... No, no. This was the one up through Utica. I'm talking about the one where he went to...

GREENE: Yeah, it would have to be the nineteenth. That's when he made that big swing through Syracuse. I've got to get it on here.

SHERIDAN: When did he go to Norwich?

GREENE: I don't really know, because I only extracted from his schedule.

SHERIDAN: I know he came in a helicopter to Norwich and met in the town square. There's something like five thousand people in Norwich and there were about eight thousand people at the rally. And Kenneth Keating had never been to Norwich since he'd been senator, and so he could get up there and say, "Has Kenneth Keating ever been to Norwich?" "No." And it was a huge success.

GREENE: Actually look on the nineteenth schedule, if he was.... You know, I may not have underlined it because I didn't...

SHERIDAN: Let's see. Schenectady, Amsterdam. That's right up through Herkimer, Utica, Rome, Oneida,

[-74-]

Syracuse—I remember all that. But then he left for Syracuse; he kept going on to Rochester. That was right near the end of the campaign. John Nolan [John E. Nolan] finally agreed that he'd do it.

GREENE: It could be that that was put in later and that these schedules were never updated.

SHERIDAN: It must be, because it was just before the election and he went to Ithaca. He went to Cortland and he spoke at the—Averell Harriman [William Averell Harriman] was with him—Cortland College, and had a huge crowd out and then took a helicopter to Norwich. It was a real puddle-jumping trip. I think that's it; I think it just wasn't on the schedule, and they put it on at the end.

GREENE: Yeah. In any case, what changes did you see between the earlier appearances and the later ones?

[-75-]

SHERIDAN: Well, the earlier ones were all glamour appearances. You know, it was Robert Kennedy, many references to John Kennedy. I think the turning point was the tape he made with the Columbia students.

GREENE: That's what I figured.

SHERIDAN: And they put that out in the storefronts. It was very good and very effective, and he was talking about issues. The last part of the campaign was more and more issues and then he started attacking Keating's voting record, and then...

GREENE: Were you consulted at all on that—on the decision to get more aggressive and to go after Keating, which happened sometime after the first week in October? Did you get much...

SHERIDAN: I don't think so. I know that the decision was made and I remember when it was made, and I thought it was a good idea, but I don't think they asked me what I thought.

GREENE: Yeah. How did he get along with people coming out there?

[-76-]

Some people have said that he was really tough on...

SHERIDAN: What kind of people?

GREENE: ...people, particularly in the beginning—political leaders, and staff, and everybody—that he was just disgruntled and hard to get along with, hard to please in the beginning but that it improved towards the end. Did you see any of that?

SHERIDAN: Yeah, I guess I'm prejudiced. I never had any problems with him. I do remember just the physical wearing down by crowds and I'm sure tight schedules that you mentioned, where he just got terribly weary and, I suppose, irritable. But I never was the brunt of any of it and I suppose some people were.

GREENE: You didn't have any problem getting him to see people that you thought he ought to contact?

SHERIDAN: No, not really, because again I've never had that problem and I think people who have it....

[-77-]

I'm sure it was there and I'm sure that he said a lot of times, "Now why did I do that?" But Jerry, for one.... I think advance men generally were afraid, overly afraid, that he was going to say, "Why did you do that?" or, "Who advanced this?" or, "Why did I see that guy?" And I suppose when a couple of times he'd said that, then they were a little gun-shy about some other thing.

GREENE: How was the advance in general—that which you didn't do yourself?

SHERIDAN: Now let me think. The first Syracuse thing I thought was good. For one thing, I decided to take a personal hand in the whole thing because—

which I hadn't done in '60—I just decided that it should be my responsibility. And I remember the trip that he went up through the valley from Herkimer to Schenectady to Utica to Rome, I went through the whole thing myself, up to

[-78-]

Syracuse. Now why I didn't do Syracuse, I don't know. And it was a phenomenal mess!

GREENE: Whose responsibility was it?

SHERIDAN: I can't remember the guy. He was kind of a slick looking guy who I had never had that much experience with before. But there were three or four other guys who we had worked with. I just can't remember who was up—I can picture one guy who was back from the '60 campaign who was on that.

GREENE: There were a lot of new people in that too.

SHERIDAN: But this guy was a new guy and for some reason, and I suppose it was really my fault because first of all I didn't question him doing it, because they had a guy in charge of the advance men. But the whole thing was a mess. It was at Syracuse University and it was outside where it should have been inside. The whole thing was just very poorly done and the rest of the trip was great. So that was a bad one, but that's the only bad, really bad advance I saw.

[-79-]

GREENE: What about the coordinators upstate? Did you have much contact with anyone else?

SHERIDAN: Some, but not an awful lot—like Tom McKeon was over in the Schenectady area. You talked to Tom at all?

GREENE: No.

SHERIDAN: Then you have the travelers: Tom Johnston [Thomas M.C. Johnston], and Phil Ryan [Philip J. Ryan, Jr.], and who else?

GREENE: Jerry Tremblay [Gerald Tremblay].

SHERIDAN: Jerry Tremblay would come traveling through all the time, which is a good idea, because, you know, you can't do it all and what they're really doing is they are helping. Sometimes it irritates the hell out of you because the tendency is, you know, "Why don't you have this going here?" and, "Shall I tell him to go to hell? I haven't got time to get this going here." But it's good.

Tom Johnston rubbed me the wrong way a few times during that thing but I've since got to like him

[-80-]

very much, and he's a great guy. When you're going like hell and some guy comes in and says, "You don't have a phone bank in here yet," and you know damned well you don't have a phone bank in there yet. But it's good. The bad parts of it is when you'd be going, say, from one town to another and you'd call in, and you'd get a call that there is going to be a meeting which you haven't even heard of before that, down here, which is in the next territory, and so you have to stop what you're doing and go down to this meeting and it could all have been done on the phone. And that was, I thought, a problem.

GREENE: This would be a meeting with the three travelers.

SHERIDAN: This one was on the tabloid distribution as I recall. It was in one of the countries out of my district. I don't remember where.

GREENE: Did you ever hear any criticism of or dissatisfaction with the other coordinators upstate? I had heard

[-81-]

that a lot of them were totally ineffectual. They did the work around the people.

SHERIDAN: No, but I don't know that much about it. I think there's a natural tendency in a campaign like this where you have the different factions involved that you have, that there's going to be criticism, some of it petty, some of it just jealousy, and some of it well-founded. There's an awful lot of backbiting among men in political situations, like a bunch of women sometimes. Hope you're not a "lib." [Laughter]

GREENE: Let's see what you remember about these counties. It may not be much—Cayuga, which is McKeon's area.

SHERIDAN: That's Ithaca. No. Cayuga is.... What's the city there?

GREENE: That's what I was trying to remember.

SHERIDAN: Elmira?

GREENE: That might be Elmira.

SHERIDAN: No. Elmira's down next to Binghamton. It's Auburn.

GREENE: Yeah. I always tend to associated Auburn with Syracuse because a lot of the kids

[-82-]

came from there. But...

SHERIDAN: No. It's just down south. That's Auburn, that was McKeon. He had another guy there—I can't think of his name—who was his right-hand man, very helpful. We went there and I thought that was a, you know, great trip through there. When was that one, let's see? I think there was more trips than you got in this thing.

GREENE: Yeah. See that was made from their schedules which were probably advance schedules and later revised.

SHERIDAN: Because we did go to Auburn. I don't see it, Auburn, on here. We ended up I think in Auburn overnight at a motel and it was raining. McKeon's guy was very good and very helpful. There was also a Stratton guy there who was a friend of his but who really wasn't very helpful to us. I can't think of his name, he ran a hotel.

[-83-]

GREENE: In an area like that, where you'd have McKeon and his man, could you pretty much leave it to them except perhaps for trips?

SHERIDAN: Well, yeah. It was really the better part of valor to leave it to them, because if you started messing around with it too much you were just going to get a reverse spin. They didn't want you messing around with it—just like Billy Green [William J. Green, Jr.] in Philadelphia.

GREENE: Next I have Tompkins County, which is Ithaca.

SHERIDAN: That's Ithaca.

GREENE: And you had James Klein, a young guy.

SHERIDAN: Yeah. We went there too. We went to.... Is Ithaca on there? The twenty-eighth.

GREENE: Here's Auburn and I think that's supposed to be Moravia and she copied it wrong, isn't it or is that...

SHERIDAN: Yeah, but I guess the thing is you have this here, but you don't have a

separate sheet for the twenty-eighth and the

[-84-]

twenty-ninth.

GREENE: No. See, these I made up from everything I could find by researching.

SHERIDAN: Yeah, that was it. We went to Ithaca, Seneca, Seneca Falls, and Auburn. That's right. Stated out at the college. Ithaca, once there was.... They called it the robes and the something.

GREENE: Town-down controversy?

SHERIDAN: Yeah. In other words there was the school and then there was the town, and there was a cleavage between them. And the guy, the county chairman, I think, was the school guy. Of course, vanden Heuval, I think, went to Cornell [Cornell University]. I remember the speech that Bob made there was not, there was [unclear] no reaction to it. He couldn't understand it, and I couldn't at the time either, because it was a pretty good speech, but you know, when he asked for questions, it just wasn't a.... It didn't come off. It was one of the poorer

[-85-]

rallies, and yet there was a hell of a big crowd.

GREENE: And someplace I saw a memorandum, I think, written after that, criticizing the advance on that, saying that he should have been much more aware of the town-gown controversy which dominated the scene.

SHERIDAN: Well, that could be. Who did that advance? Fred Flynn?

GREENE: I don't know. I could check it though, because I have it.

SHERIDAN: Again, if it is a problem of advance, I think it was my fault as much as theirs because I was aware of that, and I always met him when he came into the area. I made it a point to tell him what the issues were. So if they were wrong, it was my fault.

GREENE: Well, wouldn't you also have somebody locally who should have briefed you on that?

SHERIDAN: Oh yeah, and I'm sure they did and I'm sure that at the time I understood the problem. Now whether I got it across to

[-86-]

him is the question, and if I didn't, I didn't. But I knew that was a flop as a rally. We had a great crowd and no enthusiasm.

GREENE: Was Klein generally pretty effective in that area?

SHERIDAN: Klein was effective in part of it. In other words he was effective with the university people, but not as effective with the town people. That was a funny rally. I remember that.

GREENE: Did you have the same kind of thing at Colgate [Colgate University] in Madison County—the split between the town and the university?

SHERIDAN: We never went to Colgate. That's Hamilton and I don't remember...

GREENE: Madison County.

SHERIDAN: Yeah. It's Madison County, but it's in the town of Hamilton—Colgate is.

GREENE: Right.

SHERIDAN: I don't remember that same thing being there, but it could have been. But we never went

[-87-]

there.

GREENE: You never went there. I thought you had. Do you remember a congressional candidate there named Bob Castle?

SHERIDAN: Robert Castle was from Herkimer. That's the one I mentioned to you, up in Utica that had the...

GREENE: That's right. It seemed familiar. I have that under Madison.

SHERIDAN: Madison was one of his counties, so he may have been there. See, his counties were Madison, Herkimer, and Oneida.

GREENE: Because it was on a Madison briefing sheet.

SHERIDAN: We did go into Madison County when we went to Oneida. I remember there again on one of those stops—I think it was Oneida—he asked me

what the issues were and I think I gave him four, and one of them was wrong. And afterwards he said, "That wasn't an issue."

GREENE: I don't think we talked about Chenango and John Ball [John W. Ball]...

SHERIDAN: John Ball was pretty good. He was a good guy, but not too effective. The effective guy there was a guy named—nicknamed—"Snuffy," "Tuffy," what's his name? I'm sorry

[-88-]

I'm so bad on names.

GREENE: Actually, you're much better than most people.

SHERIDAN: Really?

GREENE: Oh, yes. You've gotten an awful lot of them.

SHERIDAN: There's another guy in the post office who was really the key guy in Norwich and in that area. And Ball's wife worked. Ball was always hard to get a hold of because he worked one place and to get him you had to call his wife, but we did get in there with the Norwich rally. I think in a county like that, his personal visit was the most important thing. And we carried the city of Norwich too. What was the other county?

GREENE: Well, I have a couple of others that we haven't gone over where he never appeared, or at least according to the schedules he never appeared: Schuyler, Seneca, Tioga, or Herkimer who we've talked about, and Cortland.

SHERIDAN: He did appear in Herkimer.

[-89-]

GREENE: Yeah. He must have appeared in Binghamton—didn't he at some point?

SHERIDAN: Well he appeared in.... Yeah, he came into Elmira, and then went into Binghamton or—I think he went to Johnson City to the IBM [International Business Machines Corp.] plant.

GREENE: I've got that, I think. Yeah, Binghamton, Johnson City, and Endicott, September eighth. Well, then this must have been a later version of where I got this from, so he did appear there. I guess they kept updating this.

SHERIDAN: But those three first ones you mentioned were little counties up around the Finger Lakes and there's not an awful lot of votes up there. There was more activity than I expected up there and I didn't spend as much time intentionally up there. But I think we did fairly well.

GREENE: Well, the only other questions on the campaign

[-90-]

I have—appearances by other people, like Mrs. Joseph Kennedy, Jean [Jean Kennedy Smith, and Steve Smith appeared at...

SHERIDAN: Well, Mrs. Joseph Kennedy appeared in Utica—that was that blowup they had with the women. Then she went that same day to Syracuse and appeared that same night in a hotel in Syracuse. The one in Utica was more successful than the one in Syracuse. But the one in Syracuse was fine. I remember she was...

GREENE: The Smiths appeared in Utica, too.

SHERIDAN: When I rode on the *Caroline* with her from Utica to Syracuse and Vanden—what's his name, the county chairman...

GREENE: Van Lengen.

SHERIDAN: ...insisted on meeting her at the airport, and meets us in this crappy car with a trunk full of all kinds of—no place to put her bags. Luckily, Jim what's-his-name had arranged for another car to be there, just anticipating that this might happen. But this was the kind of guy he

[-91-]

was. You know, he insists on being there and then he comes, you know, in a way he must have known was not appropriate. But she was just great. God, she's an amazing woman. She got up the next morning and went to mass, and we walked to mass with her and then she came back and just went in the coffee shop and then came out. She wanted to go alone, and she said she'd like to go in and sit and listen to people because she knew they'd be talking about Bobby, and even if they were saying bad things, she thought that she'd learn something, you know. Quite a gal.

GREENE: People didn't recognize her?

SHERIDAN: Oh, no. You know, with her little kerchief around her head.

GREENE: And the Smiths. Do you remember their visit to Utica?

SHERIDAN: Yeah. One of the girls came to Elmira? Auburn, Elmira, Auburn. One of the girls came to Auburn. I'm not sure which one. I know Eunice [Eunice Kennedy Shriver]

[-92-]

came to Utica on a real bomb.

GREENE: Why?

SHERIDAN: Oh, it was a postal workers union and she came up for it and they had this.... You know, it was one of these sentimental things where it was all Jack Kennedy—just everything they shouldn't have done, which they didn't tell me they were going to do. And there was a beer drinking.

GREENE: Whose fault was that?

SHERIDAN: It was my fault.

GREENE: No, whose fault was it that it was all Jack Kennedy?

SHERIDAN: Oh, this guy who didn't tell me all these things he was going to do, and he came up with this portrait, I think, or something, and she cried and so when I took her back to the plane she said, "Don't call me Walter, I'll call you." But it was a bomb. Who else came?

GREENE: Well, I have a clipping that says that the Smiths—

[-93-]

Stephen Smith was to speak and Mrs. Smith was coming with him.

SHERIDAN: Where was it?

GREENE: Utica. He may not have gone, the newspaper clip saying he was supposed to.

SHERIDAN: Yeah, I don't remember that.

GREENE: Did you usually handle preparation for family visits yourself?

SHERIDAN: Yeah. Well, yeah, I did.

GREENE: Mayor Wagner [Robert F. Wagner] made an appearance at the Hotel Utica

on October nineteenth, which is the same day that Senator Kennedy...

SHERIDAN: Yeah, but that was more, as I recall it, a Johnson thing than a Kennedy thing, and he spent half the night with Ruffie over at Ruffie's Italian hangout. I pretty much stayed out of that.

GREENE: Was he any help up there, with the people he could...

SHERIDAN: I don't think so, because that was the organization's thing. And I'm sure he might have

[-94-]

said something nice about Bob at the banquet, but it wasn't our thing.

GREENE: Okay. Now the only other thing on labor—we talked a lot about that—was in the midst of the campaign or just prior to and it continued through the campaign, the House Judiciary Committee passed a resolution...

SHERIDAN: Yeah, to investigate the Justice Department's handling of the Hoffa and Roy Cohn cases.

GREENE: Did you have anything to do with that?

SHERIDAN: Just worried about it. [Laughter] No. It happened when he announced. It brought together enough voters in that committee be it for one reason or another, either because of the racial thing down South or because of this carpet bagging... Libonati [Roland V. Libonati], who is the mob's attorney from Chicago was the guy who spearheaded it. And they finally brought it to a vote, and won by one vote and voted to investigate our handling those cases. But

[-95-]

then in the election, enough of them got knocked out of the committee that nothing ever came of it.

GREENE: But they actually got a plank passed at the Republican Convention [Republican National Convention], and they tried to get one passed at the Democratic Convention.

SHERIDAN: Well, Sid Zagri went around with this memorandum from Hank Suydam at *Life* magazine about Sam Baron, and about how Bob tried to arrange an anti-Hoffa thing in *Life* magazine for Sam Baron. And then he had all this stuff from Chattanooga about how we persecuted Hoffa. I didn't know they got the plank in the Republican Party. Did they really?

GREENE: Yes.

SHERIDAN: That's amazing.

GREENE: Well, Emanuel Celler, of course, dissented from this vote and said the whole thing was simply an effort to ensure a Republican plank and he did get it. Then Zagri's line, of course, at the Democratic Convention was

[-96-]

“Let's get one here like we got one in Miami,” or wherever it was. But you didn't really do anything about it?

SHERIDAN: No. There was nothing you could do really. I know Jack Miller made some calls to a couple of the congressmen when they were getting ready to vote at the time.

GREENE: No success?

SHERIDAN: Well, I think he did have some success, I think that they did win it by one vote. Besides they had money and we didn't.

GREENE: I have it that they won by twenty to thirteen. That doesn't sound right.

SHERIDAN: No, I don't think so. I think it was one vote.

GREENE: That was from the *Times* [*New York Times*]. It could be off. What about the get-out-the-vote, did you do much?

SHERIDAN: Yes. A hell of a lot in Utica—again, maybe too much—and in Oneida County. But there was a good operation going in Syracuse, and in Herkimer, and in Binghamton. The smaller counties, they had something going, not as much as you'd want.

[-97-]

GREENE: Did you get any reinforcements around that time?

SHERIDAN: Yeah. There was Tom Johnston—that same crew, but then there were more. Two of Teddy's guys came into Utica—this was just the last day, or the last couple days—and a couple into Syracuse.

GREENE: Did you try any new methods or techniques in that?

SHERIDAN: I don't think so. Did we? I don't think so.

GREENE: No. I just wondered if maybe you had. Okay. How did the results compare to what you'd expected?

SHERIDAN: I think better than what I expected, and overall a little better, although I was more and more confident that he was going to do quite well. But I think in most counties it was a little better even than I expected.

GREENE: Was there any place that was disappointing?

SHERIDAN: Yeah. But I don't remember which ones because I remember I did go over those afterwards. Binghampton was one. I thought we were going to win Broome County.

[-98-]

GREENE: Do you think the last part of the campaign—the debate and the strengthening of his speeches—was particularly important? Did you see a lot of new support coming in in the last couple weeks?

SHERIDAN: I don't think you saw it as much as you felt it, but I think, yeah, very definitely.

GREENE: Do you have anything else on the campaign that we haven't gone over?

SHERIDAN: Well, my wife and I and two other guys rented a plane—a little, bitty thing like the one we went up there in—and flew down because he wanted us to come to the reception. Where was it? At the...

GREENE: Carlyle.

SHERIDAN: No, no. It was a party at one of these jazzy restaurants, and we got there at three o'clock in the morning, just when it was over with. So he said, "Let's go down to the...." What did they call the waterfront where he started the campaign? You know he went down...

GREENE: Fulton Fish Market.

SHERIDAN: "Let's go down to Fulton Fish Market." So Nancy though she was going to some waterfront restau-

[-99-]

rant there. [Laughter] So we drove down there, because he had said he would be back, and then we went back to the hotel. And then the next morning I was going to get up early and go back with him, up to—where was it?

GREENE: Glens Falls?

SHERIDAN: Glens Falls. But I didn't quite make it.

GREENE: I'll tell you, I have questions on nonpolitical stuff from '65 to '67, but if you're tired, we can put that off until next time.

SHERIDAN: Yeah. Why don't we. I think that's enough for today.

[END OF INTERVIEW #5]

[-100-]

Walter Sheridan Oral History Transcript – RFK #5
Name Index

A

Andrews, Bill, 67
Assaro, Dominick, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43
Ash, Carol, 16

B

Balch, Richard, 44
Ball, John W., 88, 89
Baron, Sam, 96
Bruno, Gerald J., 37, 38, 39, 41, 42, 72, 78
Buckley, Charles A.,
Burns, John J., 71, 72
Byrne, James E., Jr., 38

C

Campbell, Alan K. “Scotty”, 52, 65
Castle, Robert, 20, 88
Celler, Emanuel, 96
Cohn, Margo, 5, 16
Cohn, Roy, 95
Conlon, Thomas J., 72
Corbett, Raymond R., 32
Corbin, Paul, 18, 38, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51,
52, 54, 57, 58
Cregg, George W., 54, 65

D

DePerno, Rocco F., 24, 30
Dulan, Frank M., 39, 40

E

Elefante, Rufus P., 21, 22, 23, 30, 33, 39, 42, 43,
44, 45, 59, 60, 94
English, John F., 45, 51, 65, 67

F

Fitzgerald, Polly, 22
Flynn, Fred, 86
Fred, 41, 42
French, Bill, 14, 16

G

Gibbons, Harold J., 3, 4
Gilroy, J. Herbert, 22, 33, 34, 45, 46, 52
Gorman, Dick, 18
Gray, Barry, 24, 28
Green, William J., Jr., 84

H

Hackman, Larry J., 50
Hamlin, J. Carroll, 40
Harriman, William Averell, 75
Hoffa, Jimmy, 3, 4, 6, 7, 9, 15, 25, 26, 32, 95, 96
Hooker, John Jay, Jr., 50
Hooker, John Jay, Sr., 5
Hoover, J. Edgar, 7, 8, 10
Humphrey, Hubert H., 24, 26, 27, 70, 71
Hundley, William G., 6

J

Johnson, Lyndon B., 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, 17, 22, 23,
24, 26, 37, 42, 49, 70, 71, 94
Johnston, Thomas M.C., 80, 98
Jones, Casey, 69

K

Karam, Samuel G., 35
Katzenbach, Nicholas deB., 11
Keating, Kenneth B., 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 43,
60, 74, 76
Kennedy, Edward M., 10, 11, 12, 43, 98
Kennedy, Ethel Skakel, 2, 15, 17
Kennedy, John F., 3, 8, 45, 47, 48, 55, 57, 76, 93
Kennedy, Robert F., 1, 5, 6, 8, 10, 12, 18, 21, 23,
24, 25, 26, 27, 29, 32, 33, 35, 36, 38, 39,
40, 41, 43, 44, 46, 47, 48, 49, 55, 56, 57,
58, 59, 60, 64, 65, 72, 76, 85, 92, 94, 95,
96
Kennedy, Rose Fitzgerald, 22, 91
Keogh, Eugene James, 54, 56, 57, 58
Keogh, J. Vincent, 54, 55, 58
Kisburg, Nicholas M., 32
Klein, James, 84, 87
Kraft, Joseph, 3

L

Lahey, Edwin A., 13
Larkin, Dick, 35, 43, 60
Libonati, Roland V., 95

M

Maguire, Richard, 47, 48, 55, 58
Marshall, Burke, 9
McGrory, Mary, 3
McGurl, Michael, 33, 34, 42
McKeon, Thomas J., 14, 16, 80, 82, 83, 84
McKeon, William H., 45, 46, 51, 52, 63, 65, 67
McNiff, John, 31
McShane, James J.P., 11, 13
Miller, Herbert J. "Jack", Jr., 5, 7, 8, 56, 97
Moore, Roy K., 13
Morgan, Bill, 73
Morse, G. Carl, 33

N

Neal, James F., 5
Nolan, John E., 75
Novello, Angela M., 6

O

O'Donnell, Kenneth P., 46, 49, 55, 57, 58
O'Rourke, John J., 27, 32
O'Shea, James C., 43, 60
Owanochek, John, 64

R

Reilly, John R., 3, 56
Roche, Charles, 47
Roland, 22
Ryan, Philip J., Jr., 80

S

Samuel, Howard D., 52, 54, 64
Samuels, Howard J., 18
Scholfield, Colonel, 46
Seigenthaler, John, 50, 51
Sheets, William, 7
Sheridan, Nancy, 2, 99
Shriver, Eunice Kennedy, 92
Silvich, Larry, 52
Smith, Benjamin A., II, 45
Smith, Charles Z., 14, 16

Smith, Jean Kennedy, 91, 92, 94
Smith, Stephen E., 15, 16, 18, 30, 32, 42, 43, 51,
91, 92, 94
Spindel, Bernard B., 9
Stedweitzel, Kathy, 23
Steel, Ed, 7
Steinberg, Lawrence N., 4
Steingut, Stanley, 52
Stratton, Samuel S., 18, 35, 52, 64, 83
Suydam, Hank, 96

T

Tremblay, Gerald, 80

V

Van Lengen, George H., 52, 64, 67, 91
vanden Heuval, William J., 11, 85

W

Wagner, Robert F., 94
Walinsky, Adam, 25
Walston, Teresa, 16

Z

Zagri, Sidney, 25, 96