James R. Ketchum Oral History Interview – JFK#3, 04/17/1978
Administrative Information

Creator: James R. Ketchum
Interviewer: Roberta W. Greene
Date of Interview: April 17, 1978
Place of Interview: Washington, D.C.
Length: 38 pages

Biographical Note
James R. Ketchum (1939 - 2024). Historian, U. S. Department of the Interior (1960 - 1962); Registrar, White House (1962 - 1963); Curator, White House (1963 - 1970); Curator, U. S. Senate (1970 - 1995); Curator Emeritus (1995 - 2024) This interview focuses on the criticism of the White House restoration, renovation of the Blue Room, Henry F. du Pont and Stephane Boudin's roles in the restoration, and working with Jacqueline Kennedy among other topics.

Access
Open

Usage Restrictions
According to the deed of gift signed March 6, 1990, 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 The copyright law extends its protection to unpublished works from the moment of creation in a tangible form.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
James Ketchum, recorded interview by Roberta W. Greene, April 17, 1978, (page number), John F. Kennedy Library Oral History Program.

NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS ADMINISTRATION
JOHN F. KENNEDY LIBRARY

Legal Agreement Pertaining to the Oral History Interviews of
James R. Ketchum

In accordance with the provisions of Chapter 21 of Title 44, United States Code, and subject to the terms and conditions hereinafter set forth, I, James R. Ketchum, Jr., of Washington, D.C., do hereby give, donate, and convey to the United States of America all my rights, title, and interest in the tape recording and transcript of personal interviews conducted on 3/18/65, 4/13/78 and 4/17/78 at Washington, D.C. and prepared for deposit in the John F. Kennedy Library. This assignment is subject to the following terms and conditions:

(1) The transcript shall be made available for use by researchers as soon as it has been deposited in the John F. Kennedy Library.

(2) The tape recording shall be made available to those researchers who have access to the transcript.

(3) I hereby assign to the United States Government all copyright I may have in the interview transcript and tape.

(4) Copies of the transcript and the tape recording may be provided by the Library to researchers upon request.

(5) Copies of the transcript and tape recording may be deposited in or loaned to institutions other than the John F. Kennedy Library.

James R. Ketchum
Donor

February 22, 1990
Date

Archivist of the United States

3/6/90
Date

James R. Ketchum – JFK #3

Table of Contents

Oral History Interview

with

JAMES R. KETCHUM

April 17, 1978
Washington, D.C.

By Roberta W. Greene

For the John F. Kennedy Library

GREENE: Um, I've read some criticism -- I'm aware of some criticism, that perhaps the committee was too anxious and too fast at first. Now of course this would have been a period when you were not yet there, but you're probably aware of it anyway. But the Green Room and the Red Room were practically acquired of a piece through dealers in New York, and that…

KETCHUM: Yeah, I think some of that criticism perhaps is justified, although there was no attempt to totally -- we left, to remove pieces in both of those rooms and substitute better pieces

as they might be acquired. But, I don't think that if there was a great deal of hate that it had harmed those rooms. It was decided after considerable discussion that one room, mainly the Green Room, would reflect the first half of the classical revival, mainly the Federal period. And that the second half, the American Empire period, would be the setting provided by the Red Room. So I can't say that the haste was detrimental. But there was a urgency, or there was a desire, to set some time limits and some goals. And yes, certainly New York dealers, and I'm thinking of Ginsburg and Levey for example, uh, David Stockwell in Wilmington, Delaware, they were perhaps favored a bit more than others. Although, again, if your looking

for a diamond and you're in New York you may end up at Tiffany's before you end up at any place else including Madame Wellington's. I'd have to…. I can see and understand that criticism, but I

[-2-]

don't think it's going to work to any disadvantage, really.

GREENE: Was there any disagreement or substantial disagreement about how these rooms should be done? A general consensus?

KETCHUM: I can't tell you exactly uh, how the decision was arrived at that the Green Room would be that of a federal parlor. When Mr. du Pont made his initial survey, a story which Mrs. Kennedy has told which, for all I know, was quite true because I can recall Mr. du Pont referring to it afterwards, he admired a pair of card tables that were in the Green Room and said, "Ah, hah those are the only two decent pieces in this room." And they ended up, when they checked them later, that they had been given several years earlier by Mrs. Louise de Pont Crowninshield, Mr. du Pont's sister, I believe during the Truman Administration, but it could have been the Eisenhower years. But anyway, the point being that the Federal period was one

[-3-]

which he and many of the advisors ah -- would be associated with one or two of them or previously would be able to attract and acquire prospective donors for and the same is true of the American Empire period. I don't…. In the beginning there was that corner that they had gotten themselves into, as far as the periods being -- that of the construction dates of the house and not extending beyond the early nineteenth century. And that was soon to be realized a phenomenal mistake. No doubt about it. But that was still many months before the Green Room, and then the Red Room, opened to the public. And ah -- many of the pieces that were acquired came through the *Life* magazine piece in September of '61. And other pieces were being added even after the television program, even though the television program showed ah, that many of the changes in these rooms that had taken place. But throughout the rest of the Administration new pieces, new furniture were constantly being acquired.

[-4-]

Or examples from the warehouse which were enough research, enough vetting had gone into them that we could place them with a period and we could match perhaps a bill of sale with them to a point that we were quite secure in what they represented, price and so forth. So it was not meant to be a, a hurry up-lets-finish-a-room and ah put the rope across and that's it friends. It was really a continuing process and the genesis today, even though the Nixons did change the fabrics and did extensively change many of the brics and did extensively change

many of the selections in the Green Room, for example. The Green Room still is a federal parlor. Ah -- be what it may, the die was cast and it continues to be such.

GREENE: I read somewhere that Boudin was unhappy with the Green Room because it was too leggy?

KETCHUM: Yes, I recall the same criticism. But I'm afraid that Boudin's sense of perspective is getting -- and his sense of scale, is getting away a little bit ah…. I guess Mr. du Pont and others who were looking at a collection of furniture which represented the very best of the Federal period looked at it not ah -- as much from overall scale, but rather from the standards of

[-5-]

the time and selecting the best pieces of the time. I…. later on the room became totally leggy ah -- in the 1970's as far as I'm concerned personally, because I think it went to one specific type of ah, Federal piece. But Boudin had contributed, I think, the sense of color and ah -- panache from the fabric side, although his control of the Green Room was not total for fabrics or as many good documents which were generated by research at Winterthur through Mr. du Pont… But the treatments of the curtains and the cornices and so forth, the setting so to speak, for the furniture was his, and I think he should have been quite happy with it. I really do. But ah…

GREENE: In the first slide book, I think which I have with me, um -- the wall coverings have not yet been…

KETCHUM: No, that's right. Right. A much lighter and a much different green than they had been, than the room had seen in the past. The Franklin Roosevelt years and then the Truman years ah -- it was a much darker ah -- at one point almost a forest, a forest green. And a somewhat forbidding color for the furnishings. And you had, because of the ceiling height, a tremendous sense of space kind of exploded all around you in those parlors

[-6-]

if you could open up the outside and take in some of the daylight and borrow some of the natural light. And that combined with light of the walls really gave a spectacular sense of life to the room.

GREENE: Um, I again remember reading something to the effect that Mrs. Kennedy was extremely nervous about the Green Room because it was a departure from, well it was controversial to some extent. And do you remember that?

KETCHUM: I, ah, the reason I remember all this controversy over the Blue Room , yeah,

that was the one that really ah, caused, ah… I think perhaps the color green was… green, yeah…. certainly going to affect people's thinking, but my memory of fear and trepidation really is more centered on the Blue Room or the White Room, as we referred to it.

GREENE: Why don't you ah…

KETCHUM: Well, sure. What was being done, an attempt to create kind of a buffer zone between two very strong and dominate colors, the red and the green of those two state parlors. And since the Van Buren Administration,

[-7-]

the color blue had been used and the name Blue Room seemed to be about as automatic to the interior of the White House as the color white or the painted sand stone. So when Boudin's recommended doing a white on white fabric for the wall covering was made, it was made really out of an overall picture, an attempt to create a much different world between the Red and the Green Room. This was all very fine, and it was accepted conditionally and then people started to have doubts. Mrs. Wrightsman, I suppose to put some of these fears to rest, had Boudin make a model of the room and it was scaled with furniture as well as cornice details, and mantlepiece and so forth, so that wherever blue could be introduced it was shown in the model. And I think this put to rest some of the fears that Mrs. Kennedy had. Although it was obvious, I think, Mr. du Pont was not leaving a very happy feeling when he first thought or commented on it. I recall Mr. Finley also being not particularly pleased. I don't think that Mrs. Kennedy showed her fears to the President that

[-8-]

much. I don't recall. But I do recall in conversation wanting to make sure that as much could be done to present it in historic light as well as the sense of design…

GREENE: Are you referring now to when it was about to be opened to the press and…

KETCHUM: Yeah, I'm referring to how one writes the press release. These were always issued from Pam Turnure's office. And it was known that the coverings had been, prior to the Van Buren Administration, there was a period when the walls had been painted white although the fabrics in the room were red. This was the time of the burning in August of 1814. So a tie-in with the Monroe furniture made by the Parisian cabinet maker Bellange to the Madison-Monroe period was attempted in the press release. An the point being underscored was that the Blue Room had not always been blue was also mentioned and stressed. And then we had, I can recall the day of the preview, and my sense of time is not the very best here, but I believe it was about January of 1963. I could be off on this. But Mr. du Pont, David Finley, some of

the others who would hopefully say good things to the press in explaining the room, were invited enough ahead of time so that they could be taken in. And they seemed to be particularly pleased. Or at least they, if they had any reservations that they had expressed before they had disappeared now. And I can't remember ah -- oh I remember all kinds of descriptions that floated around and I don't remember whether they were in interoffice memos or where, but hearing it would look like a French bordello, for example, being one of the fears. Somehow it seemed to work. I think there were some who were critical of it, but most of the comments from the press were very favorable.

GREENE: In the interview you did with Pam Turnure years and years ago you say that there isn't historical precedent and that this is used. But Elder, but one of the things he said in his interview was that you could, that it wasn't entirely wrong. You could find a precedent, but it was wrong from a historical point of view. A room like that never existed in the White House. But you're saying…

KETCHUM: Oh, no, no. A room, that room in fact, you can go to the Smithsonian today and see a model of that room in a very detailed and very accurate model in the First Lady's Hall showing Dolley Madison and a man sort of removing some of the slides and materials from the windows and putting them in… A room indeed ah -- the furnishings were very similar, actually there were pieces designed by Benjamin Latrobe. But of the same ah, same Empire ah, overtones, same details which were evident in those pieces were not atypical from what Belange was similar. There was never, you didn't have all those elements coming together in that room at one time…

GREENE: But that must be true of most…

KETCHUM: Oh sure, that's true of the entire house. There was never any attempt in the restoration of the White House to totally duplicate a room. You just did not do it. Unless you want to consider what has been left alone such as the East Room and its affinity for white things. Because there you still have walls which are the same

color. You still have banquets and you still have mantelpieces. You have many of the elements that had been put in place in 1903 and 1904. But no. The Lincoln Bedroom, there was never a Lincoln Bedroom. The Lincoln Bedroom was down the other end of the family quarters. That was Lincoln's Office and Cabinet Room. Ah -- there was never… the Treaty Room, in a way, could be an extension of use of space, but those pieces, although they're all, most of them are from the White House first. They were never gathered in one room in one setting. No, it is not an attempt to say this is the room that Dolley Madison or Martin Van

Buren or anyone else know, received, entertained -- as in historic preservation where we're looking towards recreation. Here we were restoring many diverse elements, putting them in a setting where they were in some type of harmony, and it was a kind of kaleidoscope where every time you turned and changed the prism slightly you could evoke a slightly different period. But they were -- they held hands over, say a twenty year period. And they had that kind of harmony and

[-12-]

that kind of agreement. But that was it. So you can argue that either way. But it would be wrong to say that this was Dolley Madison's Blue Room or White Room.

GREENE: That's a borrowed element…

KETCHUM: That's right, that's right. And in the sense its saying that this had been done before as far as the wall coverings are concerned, hopefully that would get you over that hurdle of all those who had always seen only blue walls in the room.

GREENE: One thing I thought was interesting, I think again, it's J.B. West who talks about President Kennedy coming out of there and Mrs. Kennedy being very nervous about the outcome, his saying, not with great pleasure, "It's alright but darken the floors and put in a big blue rug."

KETCHUM: Right, ah he had seen the room, and that's why, I think, it was after Christmas holiday in 1962. She had given him a preview of the room, and she was extremely nervous then. I think that once she got over that hurdle all was well. I was not there at the time he saw it so I don't know exactly quite what his

[-13-]

thoughts were.

GREENE: Well, all the floors were dark?

KETCHUM: All the floors were dark except for the East Room. That suggestion had been made from time to time. And I don't -- I kind of recall, I think that the floors of the State Dining Room might have been darkened. But the East Room never was. Those floors were never darkened. And then of course, that was a perpetual problem with upkeep after that because the tourists would walk -- we always rolled the ah, carpeting, the carpet towards the center of the room slightly and put walk-off mats on either side so that you could have two traffic patterns (on either side of the room.) And these were two lanes abreast so you had four columns of people going through these rooms. And just the wear and tear on the walk-off mat, ah, on the darkened floor underneath was enough that

there was a constant need to touch that up. There was no technique of just simply putting stain on top of the surface varnish, but you had to take off the surface barnish each time and restain and then go back. That posed a problem. It might have

[-14-]

been very easy to take care of it at Georgetown House but not particularly at this situation.

GREENE: What is that stuff? Polyurethane?

KETCHUM: Polyurethane was very much known and developed at that point. I'm not sure what the -- that would have been the last -- the varnish -- they would not have been putting a tinted polyurethane but they would have been putting a wood stain and then a clear coat of the plastic sealer over that. But you have to add layers and then it….. And you can, if you're going to provide new stain in the worn area, then you've got a mottled effect. So you've got to go back and remove it…

GREENE: One thing that occurred to me in this little anecdote about President Kennedy's reaction is did they take out the rug that they had in there and put down what he wanted…

KETCHUM: No, I don't…

GREENE: In one picture in the foreground I noticed there is a very dark blue rug in there.

KETCHUM: The rug in that Room had given anonymously by Mary Lasker.

[-15-]

GREENE: Savonnerie?

KETCHUM: It's a Savonnerie, right, with shades of blue and pink and -- yeah, and it was not ah -- no, I'm -- that rug if memory serves me, was there from almost the very beginning, and it was a statement in pastels more than any strong, definite color.

GREENE: So there's no sense that just because the President says it, you have to do it?

KETCHUM: No. I don't think you ever had that sense at all.

GREENE: He wouldn't follow through on that?

KETCHUM: No, he would not. Ah -- there were times, I know in talking to people who

worked around his own office, that things needed to be done as far as painting and upkeep. And GSA, who was in the picture at that point, would pass the buck onto the Park Service and they would go back and forth. No, you never really had the -- it was not like later on in the fifteen months of the Nixon Administration when Haldeman was literally standing there with a long switch or you felt that Siberia or the next mountain beyond Camp David would be your place to spend, to fill out the rest of your days. I don't, I never had

[-16-]

that feeling. You did it, and you did it quickly and as ah -- if the request was within reason from President Kennedy. But that was obviously a decision which Mrs. Kennedy wanted to think about for a while before anything like that happened. And I guess Mrs. Laskwer was always very good about giving us those things that nobody else would give; was always a sort of "let George do it", "let Mary do it." She would do it. And ah -- Jane Englehard was somewhat the same type person. But it was -- Mrs. Lasker seemed very selfless about her own participation and her secretary would be called and Mrs. Lasker would be consulted and the next thing you knew it was taken care of.

GREENE: Who would deal with her? Would someone from your office?

KETCHUM: Usually someone -- in the beginning it would be someone like Janet Felton dealing directly. And then if the word was she would do it, Mrs. Kennedy then would sit down and write a handwritten note which would say, "Dearest Mary, I've had the best news that you are going to do such-and-such and how sweet of you, you always do too much, and I don't know how we will ever be able to…" and "to know that

[-17-]

you want to do it anonymously is just not to be believed and…" but the thing was checked out ahead of time, usually, so that Mrs. Kennedy was saying what it was usually in the form of a thank you before she… But things were -- the cards that she held in terms of the people that she was dealing with were fairly close to her chest. Mr. du Pont was the one that she deferred to, usually, in terms of acquisitions. She really did. And, ah, if things came in that she had any questions about they would be set aside over in the Map Room or down in the Storage Room downstairs, and we would wait until Mr. du Pont came. And when he found a piece it would be brought upstairs and we would go on… And that was still the way decisions were being made, even at the very end after the Administration, shortly before they left the White House when the decision to locate and place a painting in memory of President Kennedy.

GREENE: Did he stay involved, by the way, through the Johnson period?

KETCHUM: Yes, he did. Mr. du Pont, who mumbled, ah, had such a terrible speech

impediment that you

[-18-]

had to put your ear up to his mouth. And I remember the first time he came during the Johnson Administration, he couldn't quite catch on to Mrs. Johnson's accent, and she couldn't understand a word he was saying and I spent -- you felt like a Polish interpreter in this whole thing, wondering if you were getting the right remarks. I had no difficulties with Mrs. Johnson but I did continue to have great problems with him. And after a period of time you finally found out that what he was saying instead of "[garbled noise]" was "let us try that piece of furniture in that room."

GREENE: Did Mrs. Kennedy have a problem with him too?

KETCHUM: She -- I don't know -- she seemed to be able to work it out, somehow. Ah, I'm not certain but it was -- I think she had not at all the problems Mrs. Johnson had.

GREENE: I think I read that Mrs. Johnson also had problems with Boudin.

KETCHUM: Mrs. Johnson did not really -- well it didn't last. I think their worlds were totally different,

[-19-]

although she had been living in a house that he had done from top to bottom over at "The Elms." [Vice Presidential residence] But, again, it's the difference in style and the difference in personality. Mrs. Johnson often times would want to commit herself 80 percent of the way to what she was getting from someone, whereas Mrs. Kennedy might only take 15 percent from Boudin on a particular visit and 25 percent from Mr. du Pont and the rest from herself. And she was not uncomfortable in doing this because her selection, her method of taking, based on her knowledge of what she was dealing with, was certainly more extensive. And she had more faith in her own judgment and her own decisions. Sometimes she would take a great deal more, if it was -- if she felt right about it. But Mrs. Johnson did not have that kind of assurance. In the beginning; she did develop it, and I think later on in many ways. But she didn't have it in the beginning. And so when she would take Boudin she would take all of Boudin in the language of the song, "all of me, why not take all of me." And he was giving all. And prancing about with some of his assistants, which I think might have

[-20-]

made her uncomfortable also, a bit. Again, and Mrs. Kennedy had been used to dealing with people who, I suppose at face value, may have looked as if they had a starring role in Peter

Pan with Maude Adams at some point. And that was no big problem. But with Mrs. Johnson things were never ran -- things were not quite done that way. And it was ah-- when she went to Boudin's house over at the Elms, she just had taken it lock, stock and barrel and never really had to know the process. She knew the….

GREENE: I'd like to come back later to a little bit more about the comparisons. But, I was wondering if there's really a governing intelligence in this place. Is it Mrs. Kennedy…

KETCHUM: Oh, sure it is.

GREENE: It is. And du Pont is the authority in certain areas, Boudin in others……

KETCHUM: Yeah, yeah. But she -- but she let everyone know that she was -- it was her own self-assurance. It didn't, it wasn't as if she didn't say, "gee, I'm really a little bit uptight about this and maybe we're not going to get this one to work." But it

[-21-]

was, in a way, it reminded you of the spirit that must exist, that I remember existing, in your first neighborhood block club. A group of kids got together and really were going to show your independence and your sense of how to live kind of apart and above and beyond. And there is going to be one president, who is going to provide the lumber behind somebody's garage to build this thing, and you can come and join the spirit and join the forces, and we'll have falling outs along the way -- they're inevitable although you don't think they are in the beginning -- but because one person has the determination to say, "We're going to make this thing work," that was in many ways the controlling force. And, I guess, maybe the built-in sense that if you fail you really do it in style, and there'd be an awful lot of humor that would accompany any misgivings that you would have. And because Mrs. Kennedy had this sense, and didn't mind people, people could poke fun or could express in a humorous way… One of the things -- again I hate to harp on the differences between Mr. du Pont and Boudin -- but Boudin was scale, du Pont

[-22-]

was authenticity, history, decorative arts as they reflected certainly the best and the best should mean good aesthetic values. But, when we did in a very impromptu skit once this was in November, late October, no, it was November of 1963. It was a birthday party for Nancy Tuckerman down at the White House theater. And a woman with whom I worked, Nancy Hough, was a kind of a second Mrs. Kennedy in term of looking at her from a distance, ah -- dark hair and she would put on a pair of sunglasses. And we always loved to take Nancy, when the Kennedy's weren't home and there would be an Easter egg roll, we'd take her to the Diplomatic Reception door, and she was only twenty years old and we told her her job

was on the line, and make her wave at the youngsters rolling the Easter eggs out there. And then, before the youngsters would get to close the door to see what was going on, we'd whisk her back into the office as quickly as possible, and always played good games along this line. So it seemed inevitable that when we were suddenly trying to think of something for entertainment value for Nancy Tuckerman's birthday

[-23-]

party that we would do, we would do a bit of impersonating. I would be Stephane Boudin and Nancy would be Mrs. Kennedy. And my whole bit was, we kept "sawing legs off everything" in the movie theater, everything -- every piece of furniture that we would come in contact with until suddenly everybody was sitting on the floor in the most expensive framed cushions because the legs were nonexistent. And it was this she loved, you know -- never had -- was left with the feeling that you were doing something which was shocking and you would really be sorry for the next day. Ah, as you…

GREENE: Did you ever do that for the President….

KETCHUM: Never did. No. We never did. But you know, the funniest thing about this was that it taught me something that I've done since then -- did it in the White House and have done it up here from time to time. When you're getting on each other's nerves in a small office, and you realize that you are probably the one who is the cause, give everybody else in the office the chance, give them a chance to impersonate you. And you'd be amazed at what you'll see as a result.

[-24-]

And it just clears the air. You sit back and you roar at how really obnoxious, pompous or whatever else you want to be, you can be sometimes in, ah, dealing with other people. And Mrs. Kennedy; obvious, breathless, little-girl, ah, stance, we'd do that. Or with Mr. du Pont it was anything that Eloise at the Plaza… it was totally the ah -- opposite extreme of that. But that's what was done and that she totally seemed to…

GREENE: How different was she in a normal work situation with you. Was it the same kind of "breathless little-girl" sound?

KETCHUM: I think you got used to it, ah, but I don't think it's, it's certainly not quite the same. It really wasn't but, ah -- in fact, in a one-on-one -- I can remember one morning she called the apartment over in Arlington where we were living and it was fairly early in morning, on a weekday morning, but maybe 7:30, much too early for her to be on the phone. But something that Bill Elder was to have done -- I guess he had not understood the time sequence and he had gone off on vacation -- and she asked me, she

[-25-]

started out the conversation by saying, “Jesus Christ, Jim” and I said, “I’m sorry, but Jesus Christ is not here at the moment but if you’ll just wait a minute I’ll see what I….” I don’t know, some kind of play on that kind of expression. She was so exercised about something to begin with that just to get her off on a slightly different tangent was enough to make her laugh and realize that she was sounding a little bit ah -- more than she should have been. I don’t think there was any -- you never had a dealing with her, any problem in trying to express your own feelings and your own… You were deferential, yes. You respected, yes. You recognized the line, the 38th parallel, that had to exist between you, certainly. But I don’t think that there was this business of nodding and agreeing just for the sake of agreeing all the time, that many people suffer say, in the presence of a President over in the West Wing. It was a more honest, as honest as those relationships can possibly be. It’s obviously not going to be 100% honest. But she was easy and again, I think, frankly, it

[-26-]

is a combination of her humor and knowledge or her taste was -- it was almost impeccable many times. So you really learned to trust her. It was not a question of being on her wavelength, it was a question of maybe more of trust and also of knowing that when she said that we were going to undertake a particular project she usually had five times the organizational ideas of how to get something done than the people who you could pay in the profession to bring in and help you out. And that sense of organization reinforced the feeling that, of trust -- that the project could be completed and it could be done in a right way. But she never left anyone out. She never left the profession out. She let everybody have a feeling that they were participating. But when she would consult, ah -- it was a fairly narrow, limited world through the Mr. du Pont’s, the Jim Fosburghs, through, if we’re talking about books, maybe the Arthur Schlesingers or Jim. But she did not pick up the phone and call routinely. She did expect that the staff would have done this, and she would make suggestions. But she used,

[-27-]

she used her staff. There was overlapping. As I said before there was often the same request given to two people in the Social Office, one person in the Housekeepers Office, and two people in the Curator’s Office.

GREENE: That’s a Kennedy technique, and I might be able to -- throughout the whole on the Robert Kennedy -- and the President’s people too. Was there resentment of that?

KETCHUM: Not once you found out what was going on. There would be resentment in the very beginning, but you soon learned. I think it -- it really -- it created, as I saw it -- a more cohesive staff because staff tried consulting staff. And staff no longer -- if you feel this was your, only you could do this particular job and do it well -- ah,

that there are other people who obviously could or at least it was brought upstairs to do it just as well and…

GREENE: Would you get together and decide who was going to do what?

KETCHUM: Yeah, you did. Yeah, you sure did. You divided and conquered until you knew you had found the solution or had taken on the problem. You then went back to the other

[-28-]

people and said, "Look, this is what I've decided based on this information, and I think it can be done best this way." And when she asks you, you can tell her this, but if you feel differently say so… So in a sense, you were -- it was a play, percolation, ah, system. The request was coming down through the ground. But then you got on a horizontal plain and there was a lot of kind of regurgitation at that level before the thing fed back up thorough the system again.

GREENE: So she was satisfied with that? It wasn't as if she….

KETCHUM: Yeah, I think she must have gotten, I'm sure she must have realized sooner rather than later that the network was set up on the staff level and "watch out here comes another one." Because it was interesting everyone was saying that Pam -- we were talking about how she made her request known. And the initial way was on long notes on yellow paper or just on White House memo, ah, clean sheets of paper that she would write and attach to a folder. It would come down and the folder would say, "Curator's

[-29-]

Office" one one side, "Lorraine Pearce" on one side, and then on the other side it would say, "Mrs. Kennedy." And these things would go back and forth with Mary Gallagher or the Usher's Office seeing that they got delivered. She would also stop and visit the office quite regularly when she was coming in and going out because it was on her travel path to the South entrance of the White House. But later on when she would be sitting by poolside someplace, she would call up the Signal Corps and they would record these things on dictabelts. And then they would play the dictablets back. One story was that she developed this with Tish so that it could be a one-way street because Tish -- if Mrs. Kennedy had five ideas Tish often had fifteen ideas on something. And everybody loved Tish, a) for her enthusiasm. But there were times that it was, I guess, a little, it could be a little bit wearing. Although I don't -- in the long haul when the whole Kennedy period is analyzed, what made a good of Mrs. Kennedy's image, success or however you want it, you want to paint the picture of Tish deserving a lion's share

[-30-]

of the credit. Anyway, these things would just be listed bing, bing, bing and played and finally after a -- if it was a lengthy dictabelt you would ask them to play it more times, we finally got them to come over and give us a machine that we could play in the office. And, sad to say, after all was said and done, about three years later, we discovered some of those dictabelts and they had shrunk, they no longer fit on the machine. I don't think -- we sent them back to the Signal Corps, this is during the Johnson Administration, to see if anything could be done but they didn't seem to be able to, to do anything with them. I'm just always sorry that they were not retained because it would have given the best sense of how -- well her memos show this. In fact in someways better because you have these little _____ type, ah, almost child-like drawings on them, but very real, to show how a table should be set up someplace or how she wanted a piece moved or

[-31-]

changed. And she didn't… She had enough of Boudin's sense of scale combine with her homework she had done vis-a-vis the association pieces in the White House, ah, almost like she had a good enough grounding in terms of the pieces of her, shall we call them Americana: the best in decorative arts, best in cabinetmaking, but there's no true White House Association. That she could combine these and oftentimes have done in her own mind's eye before she ever started to express herself on paper at all. But she was open to change and she realized things the only way she really visualized was by physically placing a piece someplace and moving it around, as much as she would try to think on paper, she was never always… And she sat up there considering some of these questions, knowing the pressures that she was getting from the President's staff. We were very conscious of running the White House from the West Wing as opposed to Tish. And this was

[-32-]

good because if ever the Irish mafia needed a strong counterbalance, Tish, I think, served in that stead as much as she did as an extension of some of Mrs. Kennedy's thoughts. You really -- it is so sad to see what happened when the Nixon Administration, when you had a East Wing that was totally castrated by a West Wing and President's wife who really had no desire or any sense of the role of the President's wife. It just totally disappeared and, ah, left. What had been stage center, I suppose, for her for campaigning and was forgotten. Not that it isn't her right to do this, but there is just so much that can be generated from that institution if you have strong people. And maybe there's some abrasion, and maybe they're rubbing just slightly. But, boy, from that comes all kinds of things, including a guide book, including the type of ways to welcome and to, ah, greet -- I don't mean to be doing some listing here, but

[-33-]

just the whole sense of what is possible and what you can do to present your, your, ah, hopes and aspirations for a people. Since you can't go around doing it on a one-on-one basis, you

do it from that "bully pulpit" as Theodroe Roosevelt thought that… and to do it, and to do it with a healthy almost competitive spirit that you get from an energetic president and his committed and energetic wife. Not to be cutting ribbons, not to be doing a lot of things, but just to see what you really think you can do well and taking it on. Where else is it at? Where else can it be? And what do we still hark back to many times in terms of sense and how do you define style? What is it? So many things -- but it really comes if you have that revolving, yeah, it's a dovetailing but it's not always a very comfortable dovetailing because it has so much spirit. And…

GREENE: You know, you mentioned a little while ago

[-34-]

about Halderman getting, you know, getting involved to make the team feel inappropriate. I wonder if there was any similar involvement on the West Wing.

KETCHUM: There always -- there always is ah, West Wing involvement in the Mansion and in the East Wing. But traditionally, until the Nixon Administration, the White House had been run, the mansion itself, had been run by the President's wife. She may not have had a staff over in the East Wing but she ran the House. And by the time you got -- probably, we look at administrations and we look at, even lump three or four or five together and then you will have ah, the curtain will come down enough, there will be enough distinction that you can say it is time for a new act. Certainly, the line between the Eisenhower and the Kennedy -- it was time for a new act. No doubt about it. Ah this is something you can give -- ah -- no one knew at the time that

[-35-]

we would think that we were considerably different than the Mary Jane and Mamie Eisenhower days. But you didn't know how different, and how much of the new outlook until you had a chance to look back. And sure, you had a -- Kenny and Tish used to go at each other, no doubt about it, all the time. Or Tish would have a certain set of ideas on how Congress could best be handled. And Larry O'Brien would think something quite different. Or Jack McNally ah, was always saying the house should be run a little bit differently. He was involved because he ran something called the "tour office" ah, which took care of visiting constituents and was the beginning of VIP tour for free public tour hours at the White House… But it was a very -- because you had such a definite extension of Mrs. Kennedy, housed-in territory over in the East Wing, and because what she was doing was somehow capturing the imagination of the fourth estate as well as

[-36-]

the people who were reading, you soon had somebody to contend with. And as the weeks grew into months, more self-assurance was given. And if you had people who were fairly strong in and of themselves -- Pam probably was more of a buffer, Pam supposedly reported to Pierre, but I never felt that she did. I don't think she felt that she did. Ah --

GREENE: Were there distinctions in the way people like Pam or Janet Felton obtained as family and as friends. And came at you, as opposed to people like yourself or as an elder who came from the outside. Could you feel a sense of the difference in authority or treatment?

KETCHUM: I certainly -- I did. I personally felt it to an extent in the beginning. Although, I don't know. Once Lorraine Pearce said "Bill Elder, fortunately, is not burdened with my gift of gab." And I suppose that part of the thing of growing up in a large family is having to feel a sense

of security in that family. Not very long after -- while you knew that there had been previous associations with these people, Pam, Tish not so much, you also realized that you could play -- maybe not as important as a role sometimes as fundamental a role at supplying information and helping the decision making process along. So, I didn't feel -- I think if I were in the West Wing I would have felt differently about it.

[END OF INTERVIEW]