Nathan Pusey Oral History Interview – JFK#1, 6/21/1967
Administrative Information

Creator: Nathan Pusey
Interviewer: Joseph E. O'Connor
Date of Interview: June 21, 1967
Place of Interview: Cambridge, Massachusetts
Length: 36 pages

Biographical Note
Nathan Pusey (1907-2001) was President of Harvard University from 1953 to 1971. This interview focuses on John F. Kennedy's [JFK] time on Harvard's Board of Overseers, arrangements for the Kennedy Library, and Pusey's friendship with JFK, among other topics.

Access
Open

Usage Restrictions
According to the deed signed December 23, 1969, 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

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
Nathan Pusey, recorded interview by Joseph E. O'Connor, June 21, 1967 (page number), John F. Kennedy Library Oral History Program.

GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION
NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS SERVICE

Gift of Personal Statement

By NATHAN M. PUSEY

to the

John Fitzgerald Kennedy Library

In accordance with Sec. 507 of the Federal Property and Administrative Services Act of 1949, as amended (44 U.S.C. 397) and regulations issued thereunder (41 CFR 101-10), I, NATHAN M. PUSEY, hereinafter referred to as the donor, hereby give, donate, and convey to the United States of America for eventual deposit in the proposed John Fitzgerald Kennedy Library, and for administration therein by the authorities thereof, a ~~tape and~~ transcript of a personal statement approved by me and prepared for the purpose of deposit in the John Fitzgerald Kennedy Library. The gift of this material is made subject to the following terms and conditions:

1. Title to the material transferred hereunder, and all literary property rights, will pass to the United States as of the date of the delivery of this material into the physical custody of the Archivist of the United States.

2. It is the donor's wish to make the material donated to the United States of America by terms of this instrument available for research as soon as it has been deposited in the John Fitzgerald Kennedy Library.

3. A revision of this stipulation governing access to the material for research may be entered into between the donor and the Archivist of the United States, or his designee, if it appears desirable.

4. The material donated to the United States pursuant to the foregoing shall be kept intact permanently in the John Fitzgerald Kennedy Library.

Signed Nathan M Pusey

Date Nov 28, 1969

Accepted James B Rhoads
Archivist of the United States

Date Dec. 23, 1969

GSA GREN 67 7016

GSA DC 67 1934.

Nathan Pusey– JFK #1
Table of Contents

Page	Topic
1	First contact with John F. Kennedy [JFK]
2	JFK on Harvard University's Board of Overseers
3	JFK's stand on Joseph McCarthy
4	JFK sponsoring a bill that would repeal the oath affidavit requirement
5	Failure of legislation
8	JFK's election to the Board of Overseers
9	Beginning of JFK's presidential campaign
10	JFK's visit to Harvard after election
12	Interest in the Kennedy Library being at Harvard
14	Discussing with JFK the possibility of his papers going to Harvard
16	Announcement about the Kennedy Library
17	Change in plans for the library after JFK's death
19	Moving locations of the library
20	Receiving an honorary degree at Boston College with JFK
21	1963 dinner for the Board of Overseers
24	JFK's charming personality
26	JFK maturing after the election
28	Relationship with Robert F. Kennedy [RFK]
29	Kennedy family's attendance at Harvard football games
30	RFK's and JFK's difference in temperaments
31	Criticisms of JFK for being detached
32	Learning of JFK's assassination
33	Changing views of JFK
35	Rose Kennedy's explanation of JFK's personality

This transcript was prepared in final form by Dr. Pusey's office incorporating changes (editorial) to the original.

Oral History Interview

with

Nathan Pusey

June 21, 1967
Cambridge, Massachusetts

By Joseph E. O'Connor

For the John F. Kennedy Library

O'CONNOR: We can begin this really by perhaps your telling me what your first contacts were with John Kennedy and the Kennedy family, how you came to know them or what impressions you had of them originally.

PUSEY: Well, I'm not sure that I can remember exactly, but I must have met him very shortly after I came back here to be president, which would have been in the fall of '53. I guess about the time he was married. We gave him an honorary degree in June of '56, and I saw him, or wrote to him, in advance of that. On that occasion and from that time on, I saw him now and then, but not very frequently. The following year he was elected

to the Board of Overseers, and from '57 to '63 was a member of that Board. But after he became president he didn't attend meetings. No, that's not true. He attended the one in January before he was inaugurated. That was the last one he came to until May of '63. Normally I would then have had a dinner in my house for the Board of Overseers and the members of the Harvard Corporation. This is an annual occurrence at which members of the Board of Overseers whose terms end at that time receive mementos in token of their service. It is a kind of relaxed dinner. He asked specifically that we have that party in his last year in the White House, and we did.

I saw him when he was a senator and several times when he was president, and had a sense slowly of becoming one of his friends, though I was never an intimate friend. Still I am sure we got on very well.

O'CONNOR: Well, the period really between when you became president of Harvard and the conferring of the honorary degree was a very,

very critical period in Kennedy's history, Kennedy's life because it was the (Joseph P.) McCarthy period as well as the period during which he was extremely sick. I wondered if you had any contacts at all with him or had any impressions of him during that period?

PUSEY: No. I don't. I'd have to dredge my memory. I had my own involvements with McCarthy, let's say, in that period; but I had no sense of any connection between my concern and any relationships with Kennedy at that time.

O'CONNOR: Did this ever bother you later on, the idea that John Kennedy had not taken a more forthright stand in regard to McCarthy?

PUSEY: Well, one time, in one way I did raise the question. This was after the enactment of the National Defense Education Act in '57. My recollection is very vague here. But as I recall I found myself upset by the oath affidavit requirement. I got involved in a discussion of this in the Association of American Universities and felt some responsibility to see what

we could do to get the requirement removed. In this effort I felt free to talk to both Senator Kennedy and Senator (Joseph S.) Clark, both of whom were members of the Harvard Board of Overseers. Together they agreed to sponsor a bill that would call for a repeal of this requirement. I remember talking with Senator Kennedy in his office at the time and asking him if he was sure he wanted to do this because, I suggested, this could conceivably subject him to a good deal of criticism from various quarters. It was quite clear then that he was aspiring to the presidency. I thought sponsoring this bill might hurt his chances, and I did not want him to do something reckless. That was presumptuous on my part; he wasn't doing things recklessly but he said "Forget it, it was all right." So he and Senator Clark did agree to sponsor that piece of legislation which the conservative, extremely conservative people in the country would have opposed very much.

O'CONNOR: Well, I can understand very easily your going to Senator Clark because he had, at that time, and still does, I suppose a very

strong liberal reputation. But I wouldn't have thought--I would have thought you'd go to John Kennedy with a little bit more trepidation simply because his liberalism was, if you will, somewhat suspect.

PUSEY: Well, no. It was just the other way around. I guess maybe I was reacting like a politician here, but I thought Clark would not be the best sponsor, that he's too predictable, and that Kennedy would be just the man to be more convincing to the whole middle range of opinion where we had to get votes. And actually, as for votes, Senator Clark didn't get any; that was the problem.

O'CONNOR: President Kennedy carried this on after he became President. It failed, of course, the first attempt that you made to . . .

PUSEY: Yes, and that was one point--and I suppose the record should show--in my personal relationship with Kennedy, this is a place where I felt disappointment in him. That was because when this matter came on the floor, he wasn't there. And I felt personally aggrieved, which may have been a silly reaction,

but I felt that he'd let us down and had just not produced. It took me a long while to recover from that feeling. But obviously at the time he was busy about other things: and I'm sure in the total perspective of what he was doing, it was right for him at that time. But when the issue came to the floor, Senator Clark was the active sponsor, and he was not effective. So it took us at least another year--I've forgotten how long it took, more than that I guess--before we finally got the requirement repealed, though even then it was a dubious victory because though we got rid of the affidavit, we did not get rid of the oath.

O'CONNOR: Well, did you approach him later on, after that, on the second attempt.

PUSEY: We talked mostly about other things after that. But in that particular incident his mind and heart just were not in the issue the way that I had hoped they would be. But that was the last time I ever felt qualifications about him. From then on my fondness for him grew.

O'CONNOR: I'm surprised--getting back to this old issue of McCarthyism--I'm surprised that that didn't create a more difficult hurdle for you because you had, of course, in Wisconsin, I think contributed to or . . .

PUSEY: Yes, I don't remember ever talking to Kennedy about McCarthy. I don't remember that ever.

O'CONNOR: I would have thought that would be the biggest hurdle for the academic community to overcome in improving relations with . . .

PUSEY: Well, you'd have to take that up with some of the people in this academic community who were working with him and helping him in his elections. They would qualify, but I just don't have any basis for expressing any opinion of what he thought or didn't think or why he behaved the way he behaved in that period of time. I just wasn't interested, really, in his view and knew nothing about it. I was concentrating on McCarthy.

O'CONNOR: Well, how about the . . .

PUSEY: Had I been here early in that game, I think I would have been critical of his not standing more forthrightly against McCarthy.

But there again, I guess he was . . . I feel the outsider really hasn't any right to pass judgment on the man who's an active politician running for office.

O'CONNOR: Do you have any particular memories about the appointment of John Kennedy to the Board of Overseers? Was there any . . .

PUSEY: The first time he ran he was not elected. I've forgotten now whether that was '56 or as early as '55. I'm not quite sure. I guess it might very well have been '56. But then that summer when he was almost nominated for the Vice Presidency of the United States--that was '56 wasn't it the date?

O'CONNOR: Yes.

PUSEY: Then he ran for Overseer the next year and won by the largest vote anybody's ever had.

O'CONNOR: No kidding. I didn't realize that.

PUSEY: This represented a tremendous shift in sentiment about him in the Harvard population within a year's time, or two years at most. But he set an all time--no, set the highest record up to that time.

O'CONNOR: I would have thought there might be some objection to the fact that he was an Irish Catholic.

PUSEY: Well, he wasn't in the running the first time he ran. But people, the Harvard constituency was really converted to him by his behaviour, I think, in the summer of '56, so that all the publicity he had that summer, or something, created a situation in which he got the Harvard votes the next time in very large numbers.

O'CONNOR: Did you have any contact with him during the period of the campaign?

PUSEY: You mean 1960?

O'CONNOR: 1959, '60. His campaign really began in 1959.

PUSEY: No, I didn't, but, of course, many people here did. I stood on the sidelines and watched and was rather amused by some of the members of this community who were so eager to get aboard. It was an amusing time, that is in the months just before the election and in the weeks immediately thereafter, because there was a lot of running around here then by people who were not adverse to going to Washington.

O'CONNOR: May I ask where your sympathies lay during that period or with whom did they lay?

PUSEY: Well, my sympathies were always with Harvard. I had some fun joking with the newly elected President in December of that year when it became clear that he was planning to take people out of here in numbers. I don't remember all of the joshing back and forth. But I would be asked opinions about people and would have a chance to register my views with people around him, and generally said "Why don't you look someplace else?"

He came back to Cambridge for a meeting of the Board of Overseers in January of '61. That was a very memorable occasion around here. The students, the whole community, were excited by his coming. . . He spoke in the Board of Overseers that day. He joked about what Harvard meant to him as a place where he had found the men who were going to contribute to his Administration. In doing so he gave a long talk about the problems of staffing a presidential administration. This

was moving to all of us who were there. I don't remember the exact figures, but he talked about how they had begun searching for people even before the election, in the possibility that he was going to be elected, and carried on a search across the nation. He said, as I recall, that there were something like fifty key positions into which one had to get ideal people, with about five hundred beneath them, the second echelon, and that if these were not staffed well an administration would fail. Then he went on to say, the job of identifying fifty good people wasn't so hard, the problem was to fit them into the right slots.

This was a very informative account from a man who had just been through the experience, tremendously important for the nation. Those of us who had never been involved--and no one of us had at that level--could really have seen all the implications except for the clarity with which he presented the problems that day. It was very exciting.

From then on the person through whom I generally communicated with the President, in those instances where I

had to talk with him was, of course, McGeorge Bundy, because he and I had worked together here for seven years, very, very closely, and I could call him on the telephone or he could call me. We used to talk back and forth, and since he was in the White House, I did feel I had access to the President or could get word sent to him, and vice versa.

O'CONNOR: What sort of things would you talk to McGeorge Bundy about? Were you making any requests of the President, or any suggestions, I should think, in particular, with regard to education, what should be passed?

PUSEY: Well, we were interested in the business of the Kennedy Library from the outset. I think that the talk about that probably began in Washington. I'm sure that Mr. (Arthur M.) Schlesinger was involved in it, and Mr. (Paul H.) Buck up here. We were agreed before his inauguration that it would be in the interests of scholarship if the President could be persuaded at the outset of his Administration to locate all of his political personal papers in one place where scholars

could have easy access to them. And we hoped that he would persuade the members of his cabinet and others in his Administration to put their papers there, too. We felt, since he had been something of a scholar himself, that he would understand the importance of this kind of material for research. And we naturally felt that the place, the appropriate place, was here because he'd gone to college here and the family was a Massachusetts family. It seemed to be very, very logical that he should choose this place. And the materials would be much more useful if they were near a major university library. I didn't understand fully everything that was involved, but I imagined many people writing Ph.D. theses out of this material for generations to come. Also, I thought there'd be materials here for undergraduates' honor papers, things of that kind. And I thought it would be in his interest.

We also felt he would probably be reelected, serve a second term, and then go out of office as a relatively young man. We thought it not unlikely that he would like to have an office

in the Library and live in this community which he loved and where he had so many friends. Perhaps we'd make a professor out of him before we got through. This is what we were dreaming about.

I was working on that project from early spring of '61. The last connection I had with him, was in October of '63 when he and I affixed our signatures to an understanding whereby he was under no compulsion to decide to put all his papers here, but we said that, if he wanted to, when the time came, we would make available land for his Library. That was the last dealing I had with him, just about a month, I guess, before the assassination.

O'CONNOR: Was there any reluctance on his part at all to putting papers up here? What was his attitude?

PUSEY: Well, I don't think so, really. In June of '61 I sat with him in the Oval Room of the White House and talked about this. We had corresponded formally in May, and I had told him we hoped he would do this. He had replied that he would

be interested. When I sat with him in the White House the events of that spring, particularly the meeting with Khrushchev, were still very, very much in his mind, and it was hard to get him to think about the Library. But his humor was in evidence, too. He said, "I was thinking about some other places," and mentioned Hyannis Port and Palm Beach. I remember myself saying "Now come, Mr. President, you know better than that." But immediately I was shocked at the way I was talking to the President. My feeling at the time was that his father was not particularly happy about the idea of his setting up his Library in Cambridge. It may be that other members of the family also thought a place less closely identified with Harvard, that was in Massachusetts and that would be open to other institutions in Massachusetts and so forth, would make more sense. I don't know. He didn't tell me what was in his mind--what reservations may have been there. But it was perfectly clear he had thought his way through the problem and that he personally had come to favor

the idea of having his Library close to Harvard, that is close to the Widener Library. He had already asked other members of his Administration to consider putting their papers in the same location. He had an understanding of the importance for historical studies of having all of this material--we were thinking of an Administration of eight years--of having all these materials in one place easily accessible to scholars. This appealed very much to him, he thought the idea made sense. He preferred a Harvard location, I think, without any doubt. But that day he was disconcerted about the experiences he had had abroad. Still when speaking about the Library he joked a bit with me, saying "Why shouldn't I put it in one of these other places?" We had a happy time of it.

O'CONNOR: Well, it was announced quite early, though, wasn't it?

PUSEY: Yes. Well, no. That was in '61, and it really wasn't until the summer of '63, I think, that we were in a position to say that this was going to happen. Then, of course, after the assassination everything changed very, very sharply.

He had come to Cambridge and looked at various possible locations, and given a clear indication that he meant the Library to be located in this community. There were two or three possible locations that we said that we could consider. The one he preferred initially was one we couldn't make available. I was not here the last time he looked at these sites (I don't know just when it was), but in the fall of '63 we agreed on a site near the Business School and signed the paper. So it looked as if that was all definite, and that would have been the site had he not been killed.

O'CONNOR: Was there, then, much difficulty, much reluctance on the part of other members of the family now that he had died to arrange, to agree on a site?

PUSEY: The situation changed sharply after the assassination because all the people close to him felt that to have just another presidential library would not be adequate. We all wanted a more vital kind of memorial for him than just a presidential library. Very early, the idea arose of adding some kind of

educational institution. I became worried because those who had the matter in charge were talking about an independent educational institution which would be run here by a board of trustees other than the Harvard Corporation. I just didn't want an educational institution, one open to people from political life, run here by an independent authority right in the midst of Harvard. I began then to discuss with Robert Kennedy the possibility of their giving this responsibility to us on the ground we had more experience in operating educational institutions than any other available group, and that his brother's memory could easily be injured if the proposed institution fell into the hands of contending politicians. If he would entrust it to the Harvard Corporation, it would be run independent of politics over a period of time, and so provide a worthy memorial.

All of us felt there were two things especially to be remembered about the President. One, the fact that he was an active, practicing politician, who was also perfectly at

home in a university community. The world of politics and the world of scholarship joined in him. We wanted to remember this as an inspiration for the future. The other was the tremendous appeal he had for young people as a symbol of courage and hope and daring. We wanted to keep that alive, too. Once everyone began to talk about a large memorial it became perfectly clear that the site we had had in mind would not be large enough. However the enlarged plan was not Harvard's responsibility but the Kennedy Trustees'. At this point the Commonwealth of Massachusetts agreed to make available the much larger site, really the much better site, now decided upon. This appealed especially to Mrs. (Jacqueline B.) Kennedy, who, I believe, had never really liked the other site by the Business School.

O'CONNOR: The Harvard University site?

PUSEY: Yes, the one across the river. I don't know why; you'd have to talk to her. But I think she was very happy when they decided to move to this other one. The site we had in mind,

however, would have been perfectly appropriate for the Library as we had thought of it when he was alive.

O'CONNOR: I was just going to ask you about some of the meetings that you had had with him--for instance, the time he was up here. For example, he and you both were given honorary degrees at Boston College, I believe.

PUSEY: Oh, yes, . . . I had forgotten that. There was a strong wind blowing that day and I remember joking with him about the aerodynamic properties of mortar boards. We were sitting there together. I don't think he had a mortar board, though I did. I remember most happily his opening remarks when it came his turn to speak when he said he was so happy to be back in a place where they pronounced the words the way they were spelled. He was a master in that kind of a situation.

O'CONNOR: I had mentioned down here, you also attended a dinner 1962 at the White House for Nobel Prize winners.

PUSEY: Oh, yes.

O'CONNOR: And I didn't know whether you had any--these are just, you know--

I was hoping to stimulate your memory a little bit. I don't know whether you had any particular memories of these instances or not.

PUSEY: What I remember from that occasion was meeting Ethel Kennedy, whom I hadn't known or really talked to before. But I don't have any recollections of any special conversation with him on that occasion.

O'CONNOR: And the other thing I have mentioned here, of course, was the dinner in 1963 for the Overseers . . .

PUSEY: That was a very memorable occasion. As you know, Harvard's two Governing Boards never meet together to do business. Legally they can't; they have to be . . . But they do meet once a year at a related social occasion for which I am host. I, the president, then make a short comment about each of the five overseers whose terms are coming to an end. Then they are asked to respond, and they talk about what being a member of the Board of Overseers has meant to them. These are apt to be moving occasions. Customarily they are called on in order of seniority, the one who graduated from the College or has

his degree from Harvard earliest in time comes first and so on until the end.

This custom worked out beautifully this time because the first one to speak was the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Massachusetts, Ray Wilkins. You know the ancient Harvard joke about . . . "the President is in Washington seeing Mr. Taft." "The President" means the President of Harvard, not the President of the United States. It's a rather threadbare joke by this time, but Ray played it again calling each of us "Mr. President, Mr. President," and then he turned to John Kennedy and said, "I knew you before you were born." He had been a boyhood friend of John Kennedy's father. And he then had a lot of fun with him, teasing him as he spoke.

There were other incidents along the way, but (all of this should have been recorded and never was) when the time came for John Kennedy to reply, of course, he went after Ray Wilkins. At this sort of thing he was a master. He joked and kidded him, and we all laughed and roared although there had been

a disturbing incident in between. This came when one of the retiring Overseers, tense and nervous at being called on to speak, was apparently just overcome; he had collapsed, and we hadn't known for a short time whether he was alive or dead. There happened to be two very distinguished doctors on the Board of Overseers who took over, and then they and other White House people got him out of the room. It was soon clear he was all right. Then we moved into another room and went on with the party. That was a bit of a blemish but did not interfere seriously with the general fun. People said it was his Republicanism that had felled him. In any event, I'm sure the President had been very proud to be an Overseer. He had enjoyed the experience and was genuinely unhappy that he couldn't attend meetings regularly after he became President of the United States. He had also counted very much on coming back for commencement in '63, to march with the Overseers in the academic procession. Until the last day or two he was planning for this and so were we; though he was then getting ready to go

to Europe and something came up as the day came, and he couldn't come.

O'CONNOR: Sure. Well, that was that time, the very critical time, regarding the test ban and so forth.

PUSEY: Yes, this got in the way.

O'CONNOR: That would have . . .

PUSEY: But I think it was a disappointment to him. He couldn't face the decision not to come until the very last minute. I was talking frequently with McGeorge Bundy about the plan during that period of time.

O'CONNOR: It was amazing, though, in your discussion of this meeting at the White House of the Board of Overseers, this dinner, his ability to relax and joke and accept ribbing without losing his dignity. This man is President of the United States.

PUSEY: That's right.

O'CONNOR: And yet he can participate in this sort of thing.

PUSEY: And nobody took any advantage, or no one had any sense that he was not the President of the United States. He was a man of

great gracefulness and charm and just good Irish wit, too. He was very good. No, he was very impressive in such a role.

Everyone there. . . Well, I'll tell you another instance . . . When he came back to Cambridge shortly after his election, a staunch Republican member of Harvard's Governing Board heard him speak that day about staffing his administration, and he then, without thinking, said, "Well, Mr. President, I didn't vote for you, but I wish the hell I had." He had been converted that quickly. And then John Kennedy said, "Well, you'll have another chance" . . . You couldn't help but love him, the way he handled these situations.

O'CONNOR: Well, it's interesting that I've heard other people make the same comment, diplomats from foreign countries whose job it is to ignore a man's personal charm and concentrate only on the issues and so forth. It has always amazed me how overcome they have been, how affected they have been by the man's charm. I just can't quite understand it.

PUSEY: He had an ability both to be engaged and to be disengaged. I'm

sure of that. There was a coolness, a coldness, so that he never got so involved emotionally that he couldn't stand outside a situation, but still you never had the feeling of personal coldness. He was warm and gracious and involved. It was a remarkable gift, a wonderful gift, for someone in high political office.

O'CONNOR: Do you have any particular impression of his maturing or developing?

PUSEY: Oh, no question about it. My feeling was--and this would be the kind of thing I wouldn't want said for some years--my impression was that he had not really thought seriously at all about what it required to be President of the United States before he got elected, that he had simply had his mind set on getting elected. Politics was a game, and he played it and played it with great skill. But that June in '61, when I sat with him, he was shaken by the experiences he had. And I remember his saying to me, "Well Nate, when Franklin had this job, it was a cinch. He didn't have all of these world problems. He had only to cope

with poverty in the United States, but look what I've got." I remember being somewhat amazed that he could have reached the presidency and still have been as startled and shocked as he was by his meeting with (Nikita S.) Khrushchev. This seemed to me almost incredible. But from that moment on--there's just no question--this man began to mature and within the next period of time in my opinion he was growing by leaps and bounds, that is during the last year, or year and a half of his life. I think he was then a fully formed mature person on the way to become a really great leader. That was my impression. But I think at the beginning he was almost naive . . . Naive, that is, concerning the responsibility the President of the United States had in the world and the difficulty of the job. It was desirable, you know, and a nice thing, he was working for it, and he got there, and then with realization he must have said "My God, what have I done to get into this spot?" He talked very frankly that day about how terribly difficult the office was, and the weight of the responsibility

he bore, but he did it in a way which could only suggest to me that up to that time he had not really imagined the burdens, or thought his way through the responsibility.

O'CONNOR: Did you know Robert Kennedy at all?

PUSEY: No, not then. I'd met him, but I didn't get to know him until after the assassination. I know him very well now; I've worked with him ever since on the matter of his brother's memorial. That same time in May when we were down there for our dinner meeting in the White House, we had a meeting at Dumbarton Oaks and were having a luncheon there and had invited some of the distinguished Harvard people in the Administration--Douglas Dillon, (Christian A.) Chris Herter, Bundy and others--to have lunch with us. The expectation was that the President was also going to be there, and he'd intended to come, but again something came up so he couldn't go. He called his brother, the Attorney General, and said he <u>had</u> to go. Mac reported this conversation to me, and said that when Robert was called by his brother he said, "Oh, God, do I have to!" I didn't hear that, of course,

but that was the story. Robert Kennedy did not have the same fondness for Harvard College that his brother had. His brother would have loved being with these renowned people, but for Robert apparently it was sheer torture. But he was a good trooper, and he went. I remember talking with him that day at luncheon, but I can't remember when I first met him. I wouldn't be surprised if that was the first time, although I must have met him here sometime, maybe at a football game or something of that kind.

The brothers came to football games every once in a while. I can remember the first fall I was here as President, John Kennedy (it was just after he was married) and others of the family sat near us at the first football game that fall. And whenever they could they would be there. I think the President was at a football game in the fall of '63.

O'CONNOR: I can't remember.

PUSEY: I don't remember that; I think he was.

O'CONNOR: Well, do you have any feelings or impressions about the difference

in character, temperament between the two men?

PUSEY: They're obviously quite different people. Contrary to what many people believe,--I think Robert Kennedy's public image belies the man. We're talking about another subject, and it's a little more . . . . I think Robert does get emotionally involved in things in a way the brother didn't. The brother could take a situation or leave it alone. He was interested, but he was more intellectual, cool, perhaps more calculating in a way. But when Robert gets interested in poverty or anything else, he's emotionally involved. He's for the underdog and he doesn't stand outside and see him in a cool, detached, rational way. He feels with him. This is a quite different thing. The kind of detachment of which John Kennedy was capable was one of his greatest assets; Robert just doesn't have that.

O'CONNOR: Well, it's interesting . . .

PUSEY: No, they're quite different. . . . I've always had, among my friends, a joke that said that Robert's apparent belligerence must have been owed to the fact that he was the younger brother with

two tall handsome older brothers. When he was a little kid around the home, they probably were always joshing him, and pushing him, swinging at him, and he just had to duck and assume a pugilistic defensive stance. That is how he came to look so much like a fighter. This is pure fantasy on my part. But you can imagine how his two older brothers may have played with him like a puppy dog; kicked him around, and how he'd have to strike out to defend himself. But I think he was always much more warmhearted, probably, than either of the others.

O'CONNOR: Of course, the major criticism that was made of John Kennedy in James McGregor ~~Brown's~~ Burns' biography was along this line, that he was a very cool and unattached or disengaged man. McGregor ~~Brown~~ Burns makes the point that he really didn't have the emotional commitment or a deep commitment to the liberal policies or something of that sort.

PUSEY: I don't know. What I . . . He did have some kind of a capacity

to stand outside things, but I considered that one of his great strengths. And yet as a human being, it's maybe a less endearing quality than Bobby's warmth and compassionate interest in things and people.

O'CONNOR: That just about runs me out of questions here. Well, I really did want to ask you one other thing. Do you recall where you were, what you were doing, what the circumstances were when you discovered that he had been shot?

PUSEY: Yes, very vividly, as I suppose everybody always will until the day one dies. I was just about to enter the elevator going up to the Ford Foundation offices to ask for money and heard, just as I got in the elevator, that he had been shot. I went on upstairs, had a meeting with Henry Heald. We just sat there waiting to get some verification. We sat about ten or fifteen minutes, and the report came through that he was dead. We didn't transact any business. I don't remember what it was now that I'd come for, but I remember going down in the elevator feeling just as everybody did, shock and, first of all, mad that somebody

had done this. And then the only thing that I could think to do was to go in the . . . walked over to Fifth Avenue and into the Catholic Church there. I wanted to feel some degree of closeness to him through his faith. Well, that's where I was at that time.

O'CONNOR: Okay. Unless you have any other comments to add to this thing, we'll bring it to a close.

PUSEY: No, I don't think so. I'd say in summary that, when I first knew him, I was not one of his admirers and had reservations about him, skeptical about both his quality and his sincerity. I felt that he was an ambitious, hard-driving politician. But as I got to know him and worked with him my view changed. . . I started by saying, I never was one of his really close friends, and I never was with him except in these few sporadic times, but I was enough of a friend so that at the end I was invited with a group of his friends to walk behind his casket. So by that time, the family knew that we had some degree of closeness. But from the time of '61 when he began to grow to the end, I

would say that my views changed completely. I came to join the group of real admirers before I got through. I have had a great deal of personal interest and real determination to see his Library established here and the Institute built because I think he was a symbol and a valid one, a true one, of some important qualities, things that I mentioned before, and I would like to see his memory kept alive to keep those forces going in our society. I think this is a completely deserved tribute. Not at the beginning, but at the end of his career. I don't think there's any doubt about it.

O'CONNOR: Well, certainly the extraordinary relationship between politics and the academic community that was established during his Administration is something the Library, I think, or the Institute really keeps in mind, really will bring out.

PUSEY: And his memory will inform that and call it back again and again. The people who were closest to him . . . like McGeorge Bundy, Carl Kaysen--the people who worked in the White House with him can speak on the basis of more evidence than I, but

I would be very much surprised if they didn't all come to feel, as they worked with him, that this was an extraordinary man.

O'CONNOR: It's an amazing thing that that extraordinary fellow developed after he got elected.

PUSEY: After he got elected. This is really it. That's what I would believe. But it must have been there in embryonic form from the beginning or his quality wouldn't have developed.

I should like to add an additional note to this. Once several years after John Kennedy's assassination I was with his mother at a dedication ceremony at our School of Public Health. On this occasion I asked her how she explained the special quality of the one of her sons who had become President. She replied (the words are not exact but I believe they represent what she said accurately), "Oh, that is easy. It is because he was always in poor health. As a child and many times thereafter he had to spend long periods in bed, often on

week-ends when the others were out playing; and as a consequence he learned to love to read, and always did read much more than any of the others."

(This note was added November 27, 1969).

Reference Copy