

Charles H. Earl Oral History Interview –JFK#1, 1/14/1964
Administrative Information

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Biographical Note

Charles H. Earl, (1908 - 1974) Arkansas political figure, member, Post Office Advisory Board, discusses the Post Office Advisory Board and JFK's campaign in the Southwest, among other issues.

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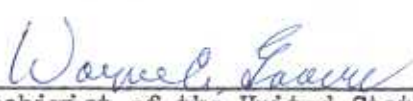
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Oral History Interview

with

CHARLES H. EARL¹

January 14, 1964
Washington, D.C.

By Charles T. Morrissey

For the John F. Kennedy Library

MORRISSEY: Mr. Earl, we are interested in your relationship to Mr. Kennedy [John F. Kennedy] and the Kennedy Administration. Could you tell me what this relationship was and when it began?

EARL: Mr. Morrissey, I first met the late President when he was a Senator from Massachusetts, at which time he was putting up this trial balloon, I guess, for the possibility of his being elected Democratic candidate for Presidential Office. He came to Arkansas as a guest speaker for the Arkansas Bar Association convention in Hot Springs. I am a lawyer and was a member of the reception committee to greet the Senator. And I was impressed with his

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vigor, with his enthusiasm and with his excellent speech. Later on I met Bobby Kennedy [Robert F. Kennedy], who was a good friend of my friend, Senator John McClellan, when Bobby was a member of the investigative staff of the Senator's Committee. So knowing the two gentleman because of my contacts with them I was, of course, for the President when he ran for office.

MORRISSEY: Could you date this visit of President Kennedy to Hot Springs?

¹ One of a series of interviews with members of the Post Office Advisory Board.

EARL: That was – let's see, he was elected in 1961?

MORRISSEY: He was elected in 1960.

EARL: 1960. That visit was in 1958 on '59, to the State Bar convention in Hot Springs, Arkansas.

MORRISSEY: Did you have any relationship to Mr. Kennedy after he was inaugurated as President?

EARL: Only that I was invited up to the Inauguration. I was invited up to the Inauguration, and, of course, attended parties and then stayed over and represented our National Committeeman at the Democratic National Committee meeting, where the

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President appeared and made a talk and we elected John Bailey as the Democratic National Chairman. I was there by proxy for the National Committeeman who had to go back home and couldn't stay over. So I saw the President at that time and then later on I received this call from Larry O'Brien [Lawrence F. O'Brien] at the White House offering me this position on the Post Office Advisory Board. But prior to that time they asked me what I wanted when the election was over. I had been instrumental in helping them financially and politically in getting the campaign down our way underway. I told them I didn't want anything – I didn't want to move to Washington. I couldn't afford to and didn't want to. Then I received this call from Larry O'Brien who said, "Well, I don't have anything much. I have this honorary appointment as a member of the President's Post Office Advisory Board." Of course, I didn't know about the Post Office Advisory Board but Larry said, "Before you turn it down, think it over." Of course, when I did,

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I knew a Presidential appointment with Senate confirmation was an honor that you couldn't pass up lightly. Of course, I accepted and have been very happy that I did because I have met some very fine people and also, I think, it's been interesting work. It's been a working committee and I hope we have done some good helping to solve some of the problems that the Post Office has in this voluminous volume of mail they are trying to handle.

MORRISSEY: Could you enlarge a bit on this last comment and tell me something about the work of this Advisory Board?

EARL: We are here, of course, as an Advisory Board to the Postmaster General, and since we are from all over the country and from different walks of life, we can throw maybe some unbiased or unprejudiced

viewpoints on some things that might be helpful. We've been studying the automation problem that the Post Office is getting into, trying to handle

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this large volume of mail that they are taking up. You know, we handle more mail in New York City than the whole British Empire handles, so you see what a lot of mail there is to be distributed. We meet quarterly or earlier at the will of the Postmaster General and, of course, this will be the second Postmaster General I will have served under because Ed Day [J. Edward Day] has just resigned. This is our second meeting under the new Postmaster General. I am the only one from my part of the country. I guess I would be called the one that's from the South and the West. We have one man now from Minnesota. He just came on recently. But most of them are from the East and I guess I probably represent the small Western atmosphere of viewpoint that they might have in the South and the Southwest, being from a smaller state and a smaller town, and a smaller lawyer than are my colleagues from Boston and Washington. They are both lawyers.

MORRISSEY: A moment ago you spoke about your efforts to assist

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Senator Kennedy as a candidate. Could you enlarge on this comment?

EARL: Well, as you know, he had the problem of being from Massachusetts. Not the problem, but he was marked as being from the city and a Catholic and being, maybe, big business. I was a Methodist and a Protestant and very active in our Bible Belt of Methodist religion – Protestant religion – and had some oil interests, and it came up down our way that the Kennedys were against the oil and Western people in development of oil. Of course, oil in the Southwest is very important. And I knew that he wasn't against small business and wasn't against the Methodists or the Protestant religion. This was something that was put up by politics to throw us off down there. And, of course, when he first started he wasn't very popular as far as going to win. It looked like Nixon [Richard M. Nixon] was going to be the winner. So, my few dollars that I had I put up when he needed the money. So Bobby said when I brought the money

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up here, "I'll tell you one thing, at this time, when it counts: when the chips are down – we certainly appreciate what you have done, more so than waiting to get on the bandwagon when everybody wanted to ride in."

MORRISSEY: Was this before the Convention or after the Convention?

EARL: That was after the Convention. I talked to Bobby before. I didn't go to the Convention but I made arrangements for him to see our delegation and, of course, Lyndon Johnson was the initial choice down our way, but Bobby met with our delegation for breakfast and Teddy [Edward M. Kennedy] came down and they were impressed with the Kennedys. But the money – the political contribution – came in after the campaign started and the low ebb when it looked like he was going to be a losing candidate. But I had always made it a point to go for a fellow full out – to do my best without waiting

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until the bandwagon started. I found out that the ones that do that are appreciated probably more; your friends are those who stand by you when you're not so popular. That's the reason, I guess, that this thing came up. They wanted to remember those things when a vacancy occurred.

MORRISSEY: Do you recall any incidents or anecdotes which characterize President Kennedy as the man you recall him to be?

EARL: Well, of course, after he was elected I was very happy that he made a last swing in Arkansas. Just a short time before he was assassinated he came to Arkansas and I was on a committee to meet him when the plane landed. When he got off the plane and the band played "All Hail the Chief," he bounced off that plane with that bronzed complexion and that smile and that stride, and inspected the Honor Guard there. It was really thrilling to meet the President. Later on, just a short time later, to hear the same song, "All Hail the Chief," when he had been assassinated...I was on my way to Homecoming – University of Arkansas

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was playing Texas A&M, I believe, when I heard about this assassination. I pulled off the road – my wife and my daughter were with me – and we pulled off the road – just couldn't drive. I broke down – I hadn't cried in years. We had a little prayer for him right there at the side of the road going to the University of Arkansas homecoming football game. I think the people were that way all over the country. I remember when Mr. Roosevelt [Franklin D. Roosevelt] died and that was the same experience that the public expressed then. So, those two men, in my opinion, have been more in the hearts of our country – Roosevelt in my time, and Kennedy – of anybody else I have known or read about. And, I am sure if the President had lived he would have been even more entwined in our history. But he was a great person and a brilliant man and I think it was a terrible thing that he had to go like he did at that time. Of course, we're optimistic – Americans are – and I know Mr. Johnson and Mrs. Johnson [Claudia Alta "Lady Bird" Johnson] and I am sure that he will rise to the occasion like

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we always do in America and fill the bill.

MORRISSEY: Is there anything else you can add?

EARL: That's about all, I think.

MORRISSEY: Well, thank you very much.

EARL: Thank you, sir.

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