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Biographical Note

William F. Hopkins was the Executive Clerk of the White House Office from 1943 to 1966. This interview focuses on the administrations of the various presidents that he worked for and the workings of the White House staff, among other topics.

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William J. Hopkins

William J. Hopkins

December 26, 1972

Date

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William J. Hopkins– JFK #1

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**INTERVIEW OF WILLIAM HOPKINS
FOR THE JOHN F. KENNEDY LIBRARY**

INTERVIEWER: FRED DUTTON

DATE: June 3, 1964

Fred Dutton: This is Fred Dutton, Assistant Secretary of State for Congressional Relations, I'm going to be interviewing William Hopkins on his years in the White House primarily the Kennedy Administration touching briefly on some of the other presidential administrations while he was there. We're doing it at 9:30 in the morning. I'll complete all the other material on transcriptions finally typed up. Bill, could you give us your full name, where you're born, when you first came to Washington.

William Hopkins: My name is William J. Hopkins. I was born in a small town in Northeastern Kansas, Netawaka in 1910.

F.D.: You'd better spell Netawaka.

W.H.: Netawaka. That's an Indian name. I came to Washington in 1929 and came to work for what was then the Naturalization Service in the Department of Labor. In those days, the White House had details from many of the departments and agencies -- most of its clerical employees. The Naturalization Service had a young fellow detailed to the correspondence section. He finally decided to take another job. I believe he went to teach Spanish at Cornell University. Incidentally, I think he was related to the late Chavez. When the White House turned to the Naturalization Service for a replacement, the Commissioner asked me to come over. In fact, he brought me over personally and introduced me to the then executive clerk, Mr. Rudolph Forster, who took me up to the correspondence section and put me to work.

F.D.: How many people were working on the White House Staff in those days?

W.H.: Well, it was relatively small. There were about

45 people on the White House Office rolls and maybe as many as that detailed in addition. The entire White House Office in those days was housed in what is now the West Wing and the West Wing at that time did not have as much floor space it has today. In other words, what is now the top floor was then merely a storage space. They had only what's now the main floor and the ground floor level.

F.D.: Was President Hoover the first chief executive that you met when you were over in the White House?

W.H.: Yes, I came to Washington in 1929 and was detailed to the White House in 1931 and he was the first President-- He was President when I first came to Washington.

F.D.: What were the general circumstances under which you met him? What type of an affair was it?

W.H.: Well, in fact, the first time I ever met President Hoover was when I got in line in the New Year's Day reception for the public. In those days, the Chief Executive greeted the general public on New Year's Day. That was a tradition that been going on for many years and I think that when I got in that line I was probably down about the neighborhood of the Corcoran Art Gallery and moved up very slowly. Of course, that was before I came to the White House. When I was detailed to the White House, I, on occasion, had to take shorthand from him. He did a great deal of his work at night. In fact, he did a great deal of his own speech writing. When he got ready to send a message to Congress, he would work in his study at night, and there would be a representative from the correspondence section over there to sit in one of the rooms next to the room in which he was working to type in draft form his longhand notes. Usually he wrote his speeches out in longhand. His writing incidently was quite hard to read unless you were accustomed to it.

F.D.: Of the various Presidents that you've worked for at the White House, which probably had the most illegible handwriting?

W.H.: Probably President Kennedy. That was an amazing thing about President Kennedy, particularly his signature. No other President, that I knew at least, had such variation in his signature and I think that was due

to some extent to his great facility for action. In other words, President Kennedy would sign his name once sitting at his desk, maybe another time standing up, maybe another time reaching out at a distance when he was in a hurry, and that sort of thing. In other words, he did it from many different angles. And I think that had something to do with the variation in his signature.

F.D.: A common attitude at least among many members of the general public--it certainly was with me--is that Presidents actually have signatures that appear to all but a few official documents done by signature machines or something like that. I'm speaking not of just Government papers. That is not correct, is it?

W.H.: No, it is not.

F.D.: I think it's a very common assumption on the outside. Bill, when did you get your status changed from detail to the White House to, let's say, being a full-time regular employee there?

W.H.: Well, that took quite a while. As I say, I went over to the White House in 1931 and at that time the Naturalization Service was in the Dept. of Labor. Later the Naturalization Service and the Immigration Service were combined into what is now the Immigration and Naturalization Service and, subsequent to that, the service was transferred to the Department of Justice. I was then on the Department of Justice rolls and as a matter-of-fact, I think, part of the time, so they would find a spot for me, they even had me on the field office role in Baltimore. I did not come on the White House rolls until 1943. There were two executive clerks in those days, a senior executive clerk and a junior executive clerk; but the senior executive clerk died in 1943--that was Rudolph Forster; the junior executive clerk, Maurice Latta succeeded him and I was brought on the White House rolls as Mr. Latta's successor, in 1943. Incidentally, those two gentlemen had been in the White House Office since the time of President McKinley.

F.D.: Could you describe each of them very briefly as you recall them?

W.H.: Yes. They were very high type gentlemen, both of them. I think their idol was Theodore Roosevelt. In fact, they came to the White House as stenographers. I believe they both came from the Interior Department. I'm not too certain about Mr. Forster, but I know Mr. Latta did. He was in the General Land Office. They travelled a great deal. Mr. Latta did at least, with Theodore Roosevelt as one of his reporters and in those days they took much of Theodore Roosevelt's dictation. Mr. Forster, under Theodore Roosevelt was, at one time, an Assistant Secretary to the President and later assumed the title of Executive Clerk. In those days the President's staff was very small. In fact, President Hoover was the first modern President to have more than one secretary so the work that devolved up on the executive clerks in those days was probably more diversified than it is now. Among other things they kept the President's calendar, because there was no appointment secretary as such. They undoubtedly had more contact with the cabinet members and members of Congress and that type of thing, than the position has today. They were both very modest and unassuming men. In fact, they had a reputation for being very circumspect. I well remember when the classification act went into effect--it was before my time but I was told of this. In 1924, representatives of the Civil Service Commission came around to write up a classification sheet on these two gentlemen and Mr. Forster was one of the last ones he went to. When the representative asked for a description of his duties, he received the cryptic answer, "I do what I'm told."

F.D.: Were they both career men or had they originally come in under political appointments?

W.H.: No, they were both career men.

F.D.: Do you remember the first year that Latta came in?

W.H.: He came in, I think in either 1898 or '99.

F.D.: And the other man?

W.H.: The other man preceeded him, I think, by something less than six months.

F.D.: That really goes back. When you came to the White House, what were your principle duties the first few years?

W.H.: I was in the Correspondence Section and the duty of that group, of course, is to handle the miscellaneous correspondence coming to the President. In addition, they did lots of work in preparing in form for signature by the President, messages to Congress, proclamations, executive orders, and all that type of thing. On occasion in those days, I took shorthand, I was assigned out to some of the officers; in fact, I took shorthand from the President on a number of occasions. Sometimes there would be a detail out to some of the staff officers. We occasionally went on trips as the clerical assistant, and I would fill in when one of the executive clerks was away. I started doing that as I recall in about 1932 or '33.

F.D.: Who did you report to directly?

W.H.: My immediate superior was Charles Wagner who was Chief of Correspondence in those days. He had been at the White House since the time of President Taft. President Taft, as you recall, before he was elected President was Secretary of War and Mr. Wagner had been with him in the War Department and came to the White House when President Taft was inaugurated on March 4, 1909.

F.D.: What was the general volume of correspondence in those days? How had it grown over the years? Does it go fits and starts during the depressions and the wars? Does it build fairly steadily?

W.H.: Well, when I first came to the White House, they were complaining about the great volume of mail brought on, I think, by the depression. Up to that time, up to the time of the Great Depression, they used to tell me again this was before I came there--that it was standard practice in the White House to come around about 2 or 2:30 in the afternoon and ask "is the mail up?" The answer was always "yes" and the employees would start drifting

away even though the quitting hour was not until 4:30 or 5 o'clock. With the Great Depression, the volume of mail shot up quite drastically, at least for those days. The volume was somewhere in the neighborhood of 700 letters a day, as I recall. And of course, that is when the Correspondence Section was relatively small--we had, I guess, nine or ten people in there--it was touch and go to keep it up. That would run in the neighborhood of three thousand letters a week, something like that. The volume of Press Releases put out by the Press Secretary was running something in the neighborhood of--in the whole Hoover Administration-- eight or nine hundred releases and everybody was complaining about that. They had never seen so many Press Releases; the work was just fantastic. When President Roosevelt came in--and I might say, incidently, that the White House mailroom at that time was one man--the mail started coming in by the truck load. People had ideas how to end the depression, there was lots of good will mail, there were lots of requests for jobs and that type of thing; and I would say that President Roosevelt was getting then about as much mail a day as President Hoover received in a week. It was coming in so fast, they couldn't even get the envelopes open. And, if course, they had to build up the staff promptly and that was done by getting details in from some of the departments and agencies. The mail practically got out of hand. It stacked up, I can well remember that we had big laundry hampers full of mail that had been opened but hadn't been read at all; that had been put in there because it contained ideas about how to end the depression. Ray Moley then was considered the economic advisor to the President; I believe he was an Assistant Secretary of State at the time. It was decided finally that the only way to handle this mail was to get it over to Ray Moley. It was sent to him in trucks. What he ever did with it, I don't know.

F.D.: It's probably still in the State Department basement. How long did you stay in the Correspondence operation? When did you leave that?

W.H.: Well, I left there permanently in 1943. When the senior executive clerk died, the junior executive clerk was promoted to succeed him and I was named to succeed the junior executive clerk, Mr. Latta.

F.D.: Just for the record, to the extent that you had a general knowledge about it, after the first few months or years of the Roosevelt Administration, did the mail tend to taper off or did it steadily build...?

W.H.: I wouldn't say it tapered off. Of course, in a mail operation such as that coming to the President, you have your peaks and your valleys. But I would say as a generalization, over a period of time, that the mail was fairly steady from the beginning of the Roosevelt Administration until the end of the Eisenhower Administration. Of course, you'd have some weeks where it was relatively low and you would have a week where something would happen and it would go up well over a hundred thousand. In other words, the volume depends on current events. If you have a situation as when Isreal was made a state, the volume of mail on that was tremendous. In fact, we had a whole room full of it. Of course, it came in over quite a period of time. When President Truman recalled General MacArthur, there was 100,000 pieces received in a matter of 36 hours. When the Taft-Hartley Bill was being considered, hundreds of thousands of pieces came in. When Senator McCarthy went on radio and television and asked everybody to write to the President, there was something like 80,000 telegrams received in less than 24 hours. So you have your peaks and your valleys, but over a period of time, I think the mail volume was relatively static from the beginning of the Roosevelt era to the end of the Eisenhower Administration, and the Press Office said in those days that the President was getting mail at the rate of three thousand a day which was substantially correct.

F.D.: Is all this mail generally answered or do you open some and....

W.H.: No, it's all handled on an individual basis. Each piece gets individual attention. Some of it is handled at the White House; some of it is referred to the departments and agencies. Obviously there is some that is filed. When there's a great avalanche of mail that comes in on a subject--mail which is obviously inspired--it's a considered decision by the appropriate staff member how that's to be handled; whether it's to be handled by individual acknowledgment, whether it's to be filed, whether it's to be

acknowledged by a public statement; but it receives individual attention; every piece that comes in.

F.D.: Is a substantial amount of it crank mail?

W.H.: I wouldn't say a substantial amount is, no. There is a certain amount, but I would say it's relatively small.

F.D.: What interest have the Presidents taken over, the years over, this large volume of public mail? Do you try sampling a cross section of it; or is it usually handled by staff members without the Presidents bothering about it?

W.H.: Well, different Presidents operate in different ways. All of them have expressed varying interests in it. For instance, back in President Roosevelt's time, he had areas in which he was particularly interested and a considerable amount of mail went in to him through his private secretary, and he did quite a bit of dictating. Not so much individual letters except in things in which he was personally interested. He was personally very interested in ship models, stamp collecting, and that type of thing. He would dictate quite a bit on subjects such as that. But a great deal of the official mail went to him and he would then send it out to cabinet members or staff members, with little notes on it. For instance, "mac to ack." meant it was going to Marvin McIntyre to acknowledge. "Harold, what do you think about this" was a memorandum that would go to the Secretary of the Interior, Harold Ickes. President Roosevelt had a wire basket--it was about six inches deep--not one ~~one~~ but two of them. And those wire baskets full of letters, papers, and official documents would go back and forth from the Executive Mansion to his office each day. A great deal of his dictating was done at night. His signing was usually done late in the afternoon, and Grace Tully, or Margaret LeHand who preceeded her, would be in there with him when he did his signing. President Truman carried his work back and forth in a portfolio. He had a thick portfolio of papers every night when he went home. He did lots of reading. He did his dictating early in the morning when he first came to the office. In fact, I think he dictated more than any of the other Presidents in my time.

F.D.: You mentioned earlier that you'd taken shorthand from President Hoover. Can you describe a little bit his

general manner and attitude? Businesslike, personal interest in you? Was he all business or....

W.H.: President Hoover was all business. He was very formal as far as I was concerned at least. He was courteous and all that but very formal. In fact, one thing struck me very forcefully when I was working in Lawrence Richey's office--Lawrence Richey was his senior secretary. He'd gotten a book of some kind which he wanted President Hoover to autograph for him, and he had been with President Hoover at that time, I guess, for fifteen years or so. In fact, he'd been his secretary when President Hoover had been Secretary of Commerce. So it went in for President Hoover to autograph and came back, and although Mr. Richey had been his secretary for fifteen years, President Hoover had misspelled his name; he spelled it as the then Governor of Maryland spelled his. That incident made a great impression on me at that time because of President Hoover's public reputation of being very formal and more or less impersonal.

F.D.: Did you take dictation occassionally from President Roosevelt?

W.H.: Very early in his administration. In fact, the night the banks were closed, a young lady, who later became Chief of the Correspondence Section after Mr. Wagner died, Rena Ridenour and I were sent over to the Executive Mansion to stand by for anything that was necessary. And before we were through that evening, we had dictation, I believe, from President Roosevelt, from Secretary Woodin, Secretary of the Treasury, from Louis Howe who was President Roosevelt's Senior Secretary, and one or two others; and we had to come back and help type up the proclamation closing the banks. That was a very busy evening.

F.D.: And with the subsequent Presidency, you didn't take shorthand from them?

W.H.: No. President Roosevelt was very informal, very friendly and seemed to go out of his way to make you feel at home. I know you could go over there in the evening to take shorthand from him and he would want to know if you wanted a cigarette, how about having a glass of beer, something like that. He was very informal, very friendly.

F.D.: How about Truman?

W.H.: Truman, the same. In fact, from my experience, President Truman probably had the human touch to the greatest extent of any President I've ever worked for.

F.D.: How about Eisenhower and Kennedy? More impersonal?

W.H.: Ah, somewhat, as far as my experience was concerned. They were both very, very nice. I had known at some distance President Eisenhower before he came in because my wife, when I first met her, was working in the War Department and one of her bosses was the then Major Eisenhower. So I had met him a time or two before he became President. He was not as approachable, I would say, as President Truman, at least, as far as I was concerned; but he was very friendly and always treated me kindly.

F.D.: What about the working hours and habits of the various Presidents you've worked under? When, let's say, did the various ones come to work, when did they generally go home, what breaks they take at lunch? Can you generalize?

W.H.: Well, that has varied quite a bit. President Roosevelt, I don't have too much personal recollection as to President Hoover's going and coming because I hadn't been there too long at that time. President Roosevelt would usually come to the office about 11 o'clock. Before that time, his very top staff, Marvin McIntyre, Steve Early, and General Watson probably would go over--or Bill Hassett, as the case may be--would go over to his bedroom and have a little staff meeting; in other words, sort of line up things for the day. But it was usually 11 o'clock when he came to the office and because of his problem about getting around, he would customarily, I think, have lunch in the office; in other words, he didn't go back over to the house. And he would be in the office at night, something in the neighborhood I'd say of 6 or 6:30. The last thing he did ordinarily in the day was to sign his mail and that type of thing and then all this mail that he had signed, official documents, etc. would come around to the executive clerk's office about quitting time. President Truman came much earlier. He would ordinarily get to the office about 8 o'clock. He was a notoriously early riser, of course. And President Truman also had a staff meeting each morning with his staff of about fifteen men in there. He

would dictate when he first came to the office and the staff meetings first were at nine o'clock. Some of the staff complained they couldn't make it quite that early so he had to put his staff meeting at a half hour or an hour later. He would go to lunch about one o'clock and come back about 2:15 ordinarily and stay something in the neighborhood of, I'd say, six o'clock or 6:15. You could set your clock by his coming and going, and he probably spent more time regularly in his office than any of the Presidents in my time. At least when he was in Washington. In other words, he was at his desk those hours day in and day out. President Eisenhower came to the office real early, too. Many times he was there by 7:30. He would go to lunch something in the neighborhood of one o'clock. He would take a longer lunch hour than President Truman did. I think he usually, at least, particularly after his heart attack, took a little rest over in the House and I would say his normal leaving time was 6:30 or something like that. President Kennedy, I think, his routine evolved into something like ten o'clock coming over to the office; leaving for lunch maybe 1:15 or 1:30; coming back to the office in the neighborhood of four or a little bit before and then maybe being around most days until eight.

F.D.: How much did the Presidents use, let's say the oval office for their working day and how much have they gone back and used the main mansion or the swimming pool or some other place?

W.H.: The tendency has been to use the oval office for a working day. Now, as I say, President Truman used it pretty exclusively.. Now, all the Presidents, of course, have had meetings over at the House. President Roosevelt made it a practice of having many meetings in the evenings and I'm sure the other Presidents too have in varying degrees but during the daytime, by and large, they've all used the office in the West Wing.

F.D.: Can you describe a little bit the growth of the White House in numbers of its staff and how they've added positions and how it may have changed as to the titles and status of the various people in the White House Staff? Not individuals but positions.

W.H.: Well, as I say, when I first went there, there were

only about 45 people on the office rolls and others that were there, were on the detail basis. That prevailed until President Truman's time. At that time, very early in his administration, there was a study by George Allen who recommended that all those on at the White House be brought on the White House roll on the theory that if you're on a department roll or an agency roll and detailed to the White House, there might be a question of divided loyalty. I always doubted that personally, but anyway that was the theory on which it was done. So immediately the White House office roll jumped up from something under fifty to something in the neighborhood of 150. Prior to that time, as I said earlier, President Hoover was the first modern President to have more than one secretary. He had three. When President Roosevelt came in at first he had one secretary and two assistant secretaries, Louis Howe was his secretary; Marvin McIntyre and Steve Early were his assistant secretaries. They were given full secretary status within about a year as I remember. Then with the creation of the executive office of the President, subsequent to the Brownlow report, the President was authorized to appoint six administrative assistants with a passion for anonymity and that was the real beginning of the growth of the White House Office Staff. At that time, the two titles were, either Secretary to the President or Administration Assistant to the President. Since that time, there have been various additional titles and they vary from time to time. And the Presidential Staff has been relatively static for, oh, I would say since the latter part of the Truman Administration. The statutes provide that the President may have two assistants of such titles as he may wish to give them that are paid at the rate of \$22,500 a year; 3 at the rate of \$21,000; six at the rate of \$20,000; three at the rate of \$18,500. Of course, there are other provisions and in fact the language of the so-called Special Projects Appropriation which authorizes appropriations for additional staff gives a certain amount of flexibility so the President may have staff members at analogous levels of compensation in addition to those statutory ones. That is where he has the flexibility that the Office of the President needs. If something comes up, he needs an additional staff member, that gives him the flexibility.

F.D.: Has there often been one person in charge of the White House Staff; let's say such as, oh, that Governor Adams had during the Eisenhower Administration or usually is it more like the Kennedy Administration where at least

the principal people tie in directly to the President himself?

W.H.: I would say it's usually been more like the Kennedy Administration. Governor Adams, of course, was known as the Chief of Staff, if you wish to call him that. In most other administrations, there has always been a staff member that has been considered the senior man; at least he's the man that you looked to for answers if you needed guidance from an administrative standpoint and that type of thing. But I don't think in any of the other administrations there has been anyone that was quite in the role of Governor Adams.

F.D.: How much does, just generalizing, how much do Presidents really run the White House Staff and how much is it come so low in their priorities of the important matters before them that they just sort of run themselves?

W.H.: Well, I would say, in one way or another, they run it very definitely. Even though things may seem relatively unimportant, I am sure that most of the staff being accessible to him at any time, in one way or another that they know what's going on. Some of them, of course, are more interested in detail--how the mail is being handled, how much money have I got in my expense account, and that type of thing--than others but, by and large, I think that they run the place. No question about it.

F.D.: I want to ask you, all of them, let's say who is the most concerned about the immediate detail of the White House Staff of the various Presidents you've served?

W.H.: Well, that is pretty hard to say. I think that each of the Presidents when he comes in has many questions; basically I think because a few things worry him. For instance, President Kennedy, the first time I came into his presence was when Ken O'Donnell called me in and what was on his mind at that time was budgetary matters, principally how he could get his doctor on the rolls. And what the situation was in connection with the official entertainment and travel allowance. Each President, I think feels that here, if I'm not careful, this is going to really cost me and they want to know what's available in that regard and to make sure that those funds are watched in such a matter that their appropriate staff member at least knows what's going on and can call a halt if it's getting

out of hand. So they all were very much interested.

F.D.: You mentioned that President Truman regularly had staff meetings as a way of keeping control of his assistants. Have any of the other Presidents regularly had them?

W.H.: No, they have not. And I think--my own personal opinion is that's one of the greatest devices available to a President.

F.D.: I agree. Let's just stop and get a cup of coffee. We're going on now in the interview with Mr. Hopkins. You mentioned while we had stopped there, about the increase in the volume of mail, the beginning of the Kennedy Administration. Can you just describe that a little bit?

W.H.: When President Kennedy came in, the volume of mail coming to the White House increased drastically. In fact, it was, at first, about three times what had been coming in before and it eventually leveled off to about two and one-half times what it had been. In addition to that, of course, there was a great deal of mail brought to the White House right after Inauguration that had come to the President prior to his Inauguration and our mail room was just swamped. We had to appeal to some of the other departments and agencies to help digest it and analyze it to get it in form for acknowledgement or referral to the proper department or agency. And, of course, when a new administration comes in, you have the problem of getting mail in the right channels. You have to remember that in a change of administration at the White House today you have one set of staff officials and tomorrow you have a completely new set. The channels for referral of the mail--which staff officer has a primary interest in a particular type--changes. Those channels have to all be re-established. So that tends, in the first few days, at least, to slow down the process of handling the mail. In a short time, though, those lines of communication are re-established and it's a matter of then routing to the proper staff member the type of mail in which he is primarily interested and for which he is the President's representative. For instance, all letters having to do with appointments would go to the appointment secretary. As you recall, Fred, it developed after you'd been there a little while that all letters from State

officials were handled in your office. Now that was a new technique in the Kennedy Administration and I think a very desirable one. In other words, it tends to pull out what we consider more important mail; top level types from the vast volume and get that handled more promptly and at a higher level. And that to my mind, is the secret of handling the great volume of mail that comes to the President. Get the various types that you can in categories, in other words, everything having to do with appointments to the appointment secretary's office; everything having to do with selection of personnel that is of the Presidential appointment level, to the man that is handling that; everything having to do with Press Relations to the Press Office; everything having to do with requests for greetings, statements, and that type of thing, to the staff man interested in that. In that way, the so-called, cream of the crop mail, the type of mail where, in many cases, time is of the essence gets to the proper staff man in the first instance. He evaluates it; takes care of what he needs to take care of personally, can bring to the President's attention the type of mail in those categories the President should see. Anything that he decides can be handled in the Correspondence Section under his general direction can then go to the general correspondence group to be handled in addition to the miscellaneous residue which has already gone to them directly.

F.D.: What percentage of the mail that comes in is from young people?

W.H.: During President Kennedy's time, I think--it varies of course--April is probably the heaviest month when it sometimes run 25 per cent. In the summertime, it drops off considerably but over a period of a year, I would say somewhere in the neighborhood of eighteen or nineteen per cent is mail from people of not over senior high school level.

F.D.: Why do you think that it varies? Let's say between spring and summer; the mail that comes in from the young people?

W.H.: Well, summer I think it's because the children are on vacation and they have many other things of interest. It tends to start building when school starts again and I think that it's basically tied in with their school curriculum, matters of current events. Along toward the latter part of the school year, many of them are writing term papers.

Many of them have other projects of various kinds, and I think they're encouraged by their teachers to write to public officials and many of them do write to the President. Some of them merely out of good will; others asking questions in connection with their school work; a great percentage of them asking for photographs of the President. In fact, this mail has gotten so heavy under President Kennedy's Administration. steps were inaugurated to try to work up what we would call a children's booklet, which in addition to having pictures of the President, and other pictures of all former Presidents, some historical documents, and that type of thing, would in effect answer many of these queries that come from children. The thought also was that it would contain a letter from the President, probably over his facsimile signature, expressing appreciation for the interest in public and government affairs that the children have evidenced and encouraging them to continue this interest as they go on. Something, that in addition possibly to answering the child's queries would be a memento of interest to them to keep all their life. Now this project didn't quite reach fruition before last November but I'm still hopeful that there will be such a booklet in the near future.

F.D.: One of the interesting bits of assistance that Bill gives to Presidents, at least he gave to President Kennedy, I recall, was he would occasionally pull out of the huge volume of mail that would come in, a letter concerning a particular problem. I remember one example--a Negro who's about to be put out of their house(I think that it was in Michigan) and take this to the President and let him see/try to make sure that the problem gets solved; these people are taken care of. I think an example of compassionate side of Government, or trying to individualize it and personalize it. Have you always pulled out mail like that and tried to see where you could get--special cases?

W.H.: That's been a practice we've followed for many years and we still do it. In other words, people writing to the President that way, they look upon him as the Great White Father. Many of them are desperate, they've tried everything they can think of at the local level unsuccessfully and I'm sure that that's the type of thing

that the President wants to do whenever he can. And many times, it's merely a question of making sure that this request gets to the right person and the right agency and that it's approached from a compassionate standpoint and in doing so, we are helping the individual and we are helping the President and I'm sure that's what the President wants.

F.D.: I would just add that I think that the occasional pieces of mail that you pick out like that, have far more effect than just the individual cases. I think they really demonstrate to much of the rest of the country through the press and otherwise that Washington, Federal Government, is able to look at individual cases and everyone here is not just handled as a number in effect. Bill, another area of work that I know that you have primary responsibility for is in the handling of official documents; the President signing everything from the commissions of office to the new laws and all of the other types of documents for his signature in effect really is the decisive act that brings it into the law, makes the thing become official to U.S. policy. ---could you tell us a little bit about the handling of the documents, the records you keep of their moving through the Government, when the pieces of paper come to you and when you get them to the President? Just that side of your responsibilities.

W.H.: The handling of documents has changed to some extent over the years, too. Take legislation for instance. When the Congress has passed a bill and it comes to the White House, under the current procedure, the Bureau of the Budget co-ordinates the recommendations of the various departments and agencies. The enrolled bill itself is kept at the White House. Now there's a reason for that. Years ago there was no co-ordinating process and when a bill reached the White House, the enrolled bill physically was sent to the department or agency having primary interest. And it would then come back to the President with the recommendation of the appropriate head of the department or agency. There were a few occasions in which the enrolled bill was lost and when it is lost, the President has to send a message to the Congress asking that it be re-enrolled. This many times presents difficulties, particularly if the time for the President to take action, under the provision of the Constitution, has nearly run out. So that was the reason for the change in keeping all enrolled bills at the

White House. That goes back to the latter days of the Roosevelt Administration. Currently, when the reports from the departments and the agencies which have been co-ordinated in the Bureau of the Budget come to the White House, they then go to the President's counsel who reviews them and he is then in a position to present the enrolled bill to the President for consideration with the co-ordinated views of all interested departments and agencies. The effort, of course, is to get the enrolled bill to the President with these coordinate views as early as possible so that he will have as much time to consider his decision before the expiration of the ten days. When the President approves a bill, the current practice is to merely sign his name. That practice has varied somewhat over the years. President Roosevelt for instance wrote the word "approved", the date, and his name. And incidently, President Roosevelt had a very laborious signature; it was quite a chore. When President Truman came in, he asked that a stamp be prepared which would have the word "approved" and include the date. He kept this on his desk and if he decided to approve a bill, he would use the stamp and then sign his name. President Eisenhower asked that the stamp be kept by the executive clerk and as soon as the bill had been approved by the President, it came out to the executive clerk's desk and there the stamp was applied so that the record would show the exact date on which the bill is approved. That same practice has been followed subsequently. The Supreme Court has held that the President's signature is enough, but for historical purposes it's very helpful to have the date on there. Now if a President decides to veto a bill, he puts no notation at all on the bill. It is returned to the House in which it originated with a message stating the reasons for returning it. There were a few instances, I believe, back in President Roosevelt's time where he noted on the bill "disapproved" but that practice was discouraged because of the fact that there was always the possibility for alteration and there was no requirement under the Constitution for any notation on the bill at all. That practice has not been--none of the President Roosevelt's successors have done that so far as I know. If a President decides to withhold approval of a bill, after Congress has adjourned--in other words, give it what is

commonly known as a "pocket veto"--he customarily issues what is known as a "memorandum of disapproval" which is merely a statement of his reasons. There again this is more or less gratuitous; this is not required under the Constitution but it does set down for the record why he withheld his action. If a bill is signed by the President, if, of course, goes down to Archives for custody. If it is vetoed, it goes back to the house in which it originated. If it is given a pocket veto, it is retained in the White House. Now as to executive orders and proclamations, the practice used to be that a cabinet officer would have a thought on an executive order. He would bring it directly to the President. If the President approved it, it would be prepared for his signature and issued. There again, back in President Roosevelt's time, it was felt that there was need for co-ordination, and an executive order was issued specifying the route that proposed executive orders and proclamations should take. In other words, budget would do the co-ordinating. That is the current practice. Of course, there are some exceptions, but if the current practice is followed, a proposed executive order goes first to the Bureau of the Budget who co-ordinates the recommendations with the interested departments and agencies. It then goes to the Department of Justice who sees if there is any problems from the legal standpoint. From there it goes to the Federal Register for editing, making sure that everything is all right from the standpoint of citations, punctuation, etc. It then comes to the President and is ready for submission to him for consideration. Through this co-ordinating process, the President has the benefit of the recommendations of all interested departments and agencies and he does not take action on the basis of the recommendation from one department without regard to the views another department which might like to be heard before he acts.

F.D.: Do you remember any specific signing ceremonies or hitches that occurred meeting deadlines and so forth like that in particular--over the years?

W.H.: Well, many times there have been close shaves. In other words, a signing ceremony has been set up and you wonder whether the document is going to be there in time. In fact, I can remember one time back in President Truman's time when there was a bill signing ceremony and the evening before the bill had gone into the counsel's

office to be looked over; next morning they couldn't find the bill. In fact, they haven't found that bill to this day. And it so happened that then Congress was not in session, but they had given the presiding officers authority to sign but there was no authority, as I recall, for re-enrolling it. But they did get facsimile copies and flew them to where the presiding officers of the two houses were and got them signed. It was signed later but that just goes to show what can happen. The signing ceremony, of course, had to be cancelled.

F.D.: Is the signing ceremony as Presidents have it now' does that go back to before the Hoover Administration where Presidents sign and give away the pen?

W.H.: Well, somewhat. I think they have more of them today than they used to, and I do know that they use more pens. The pens, the type of pen that is now used is a dip pen and these particular pens were first used in President Truman's time. Prior to that the pens used were of the old ten cent store variety which every school child has used, and President Roosevelt, at a signing ceremony, that was the type he handed out. In those days, the pens that were handed out were given principally to those in attendance who had been instrumental in the passage of the bill, or were very much involved in it one way or the other. Over the years, the tendency has been to give more and more pens. I think President Truman, the most he ever gave was in the neighborhood of thirty which we thought was a tremendous number. President Kennedy gave upwards of sixty one time, and I'm sure President Johnson is doing at least as well. The tendency has been more and more to give the pens to all who have been invited. President Truman, for instance, used to keep in his desk either cotton batting or cheesecloth or something like that and he very meticulously would wipe the pen off each time before he would hand it to the man. Some of his successors didn't do that, so we had to make sure that we had some boxes so that they would have something to put the pen in when they carried them away. Then President Eisenhower got to using more pens and it was necessary to fix up some kind of a little holder so that they could be under control. We had the carpenter shop make a nice little holder to put these pens in so

that they would have a holder for them when the President used them to sign.

F.D.: Do you remember any particular signing ceremonies where interesting situations, misunderstandings or bits of humor developed at all?

W.H.: No, I can't say that I do. Most of them go off very smoothly. Of course, the gentlemen there--usually these bills are something of either national importance or sometimes in an election year they are important to the sponsors who are brought in to witness the ceremony and have pictures taken; usually everybody's in a good humor.

F.D.: Is there any ground rule as to when the ceremony is in the President's oval office and when it's over in the treaty room in the mansion itself?

W.H.: Nothing specifically, no. I would say it's a matter of circumstances. The great majority of them, of course, are in either the President's oval office or the cabinet room. The tendency, I think, is more and more to have them someplace other than the President's own office. One reason for that, I believe, is that when you have a ceremony in the President's own office, he's more or less a captive of his audience. And it takes more of his time. If it's in the cabinet room, for instance, he can excuse himself and leave sometime before some of the visitors do.

F.D.: Now I wanted to move out of the general area of the documents and talk about the regular, semipermanent staff that stays on in the White House. Besides yourself, how much continuity, how much of, let's say, of a professional staff does the White House have from one administration to another?

W.H.: Well, the White House Staff, what we call the White House Office, the number of people on the rolls has been fairly static in the last number of years--it's in the neighborhood of 270. Of those, I would say in the neighborhood of 180, comprise what we call the operating units, who operate in the general area of the Executive Clerk's office. You have the executive clerk, our correspondence section, the mail room, the file room, the messenger and miscellaneous services unit, administrative office, the records office, the telephone and telegraph room. They compose about I would say 180 or 185 of the

270 odd and the history has been that they stay on pretty much from administration to administration. Of course, that isn't necessary that it be that way, but that's what has happened. In other words, the turnover is the President's staff and their immediate assistants, the girls in their offices. Of course, sometimes some of the girls stay on. I first went to the White House, as I indicated, and most of the people were on detail. At that time, when President Hoover was defeated, the word went around, anybody that wants to go back to their departments and agencies, we'll be glad to see that they are returned and that there is no problem. If you wish to stay here and take your chances, that's up to you. Some went back; some stayed. It worked out very well. In fact, one of the top girls who worked for the gentleman who did some of President Hoover's greeting work decided to go back to Commerce. She was back over in the White House within two weeks and was Marvin McIntyre's top girl all through the Roosevelt Administration, was Matt Connelly's top girl all through the Truman Administration, and stayed on through part of the Eisenhower Administration.

F.D.: Do these people have civil service status; are they protected--rights and things like that?

W.H.: Yes, most of them do. They come from the departments and agencies. The chances are they got into the departments and agencies through Civil Service. Occasionally, someone is brought in from the outside, or from the Hill and they do not have status. But there is a provision in the Civil Service Regulations whereby a person who works at the White House for two years and immediately transfers to one of the departments and agencies without a gap can acquire civil service status. So some few acquire it that way, but by and large, the people in our operating units have civil service status which they acquired before being detailed to the White House. And I might say that it's been my experience that all administrations have treated the semipermanent staff very fairly in that regard. The first real problem that we were fearful of was when President Eisenhower came in because the Democratic party had been in power for a great many years, and this was the first time that most of our employees were on the White House rolls rather than on the detail rolls. But a representative of the Eisenhower Administration sat down with a representative of the Truman Administration and they worked it out very amicably. They made a gentleman's agreement that any of those who the incoming administration didn't wish to keep but who needed jobs would be taken care of by finding spots

for them in the departments and agencies. It worked out very well on much the same basis when President Kennedy came in.

F.D.: In the brief time that I was in the White House, I thought one of the interesting aspects that occurred; the permanent work, the permanent people is that I think they had great affection and respect for the particular President they worked for both let's say for President Eisenhower and President Kennedy, the two that I saw. Complete sense of loyalty and everything else like that and yet they were entirely professional and objective, and there was no question of wanting to go back to the prior system. I thought the general psychology really couldn't have been better. And it's not an easy switch when you have a change in Presidents.

W.H.: No, but, of course, our whole purpose is to serve the President and his staff loyalty and to the best of our ability. I think all the permanent staff approach their job with that idea in mind. In other words, their loyalty to the President and the staff is there regardless of whoever he might be. To do that, of course, you can't get too emotionally involved with any administration, but their purpose is to serve loyalty and I'm sure they try to do that to the very best of their ability.

F.D.: As the White House Staff has grown over the years, has that made the internal operation of the office more difficult? Has it become, let us say, more bureaucratic, more and more complicated in paper work and so forth like that?

W.H.: Well, possibly to a degree, but I think we still have less red tape in the White House Office than any place in the Government and I hope it always stays that way. I think that by the very nature of the place that it's got to be that way. In other words, we're there to serve the President. No two Presidents operate the same way. He's got to have as much elasticity as possible. You can't in case his operation in concrete. You can't institutionalize the White House Office, in my opinion, and the more flexibility he has in the way he operates, the better off he is.

F.D.: What's the relationship, in a general way, between, let's say, yourself really running the White House operation and the Secret Service? They merely come into the security and they have nothing to do with the internal operation?

W.H.: Nothing at all, nothing at all. Some years ago, of course, the Secret Service was the one that cleared the White House employees for security. That's now done by the F.B.I.

F.D.: Now without necessarily getting into particular personalities, generalizing; is the accessibility to the President greater or lesser with different administrations? Does this change depend upon the individual? Let's say, again I don't care about talking about a specific President; but just do some of them tend to remain somewhat removed from all except a few of their personal assistants or are some of them more readily available?

W.H.: Well, to a degree possibly. From where I sit, it's not too noticable. It's been my experience that so far as the staff is concerned, they're accessible. Of course, you have various impressions from the public press and that type of thing that one is more accessible to his staff than others, but that hasn't really been my experience. Maybe some of them are accessible a little further down the staff level than others, but the top staff, the ones that really need to see him, I think they've all been that way.

F.D.: Does the White House run more smoothly under some administrations than others? Higher level of personal friction and so forth sometimes in the White House Staff? Is this a problem, let's say, that political scientists or if you went and redid the basic--statute on the White House, something that you need to look at, would it be useful to institutionalize the personeel more?

W.H.: I don't think so. With one or two exceptions, it's been my experience that the men that have been on the President's staff are dedicated, have his interests primarily in mind. Some of them maybe have ambitions but I don't think they've let that interfere with their loyalty to the President and working together for a common purpose. I've probably known personally more members of the President's

staff than anyone because about the time I started there was when the White House staff began to build. By and large, they've been a very fine group of men.

F.D.: Do the working hours vary from administration to administration? Let's say from the early part of an administration to the latter part of it: from an eight hour day to an eleven hour day?

W.H.: Well, somewhat. I think that the tendency is to level off probably at the end of about a year and then it's relatively static, from that time on. There again some of the employees are fortunate, if you to call it that, and some of them are unfortunate. Some of them are in spots where their bosses work long hours and others do not, and, of course, that is one of the problems in the White House office; the matter of one employee really taking it on the chin and the other maybe having it a little easy for the time being, but that tends to level off, too. In the operating groups, we all understand we are here to do a job; if we don't want a little overtime from time to time maybe we should be working someplace other than the White House because that's part of it, and you have to adjust yourself to that and expect it.

F.D.: Could you just describe briefly the space problems in the White House; the adequacy of the West Wing right now in relation to the work load. Should there be more space or you'd mentioned the more special assistants the President has there; the more the departments tend to turn to the White House.

W.H.: The inadequacy of space rather than the adequacy is notorious, I think. The West Wing was originally built in Theodore Roosevelt's time. Prior to that the White House office had always been located in the mansion itself. The West Wing was rebuilt in 1934. The area was enlarged slightly; but the main addition to floor space was that the top floor was then converted into office space which before had been storage space. At that time, President Roosevelt had three secretaries. Four years later, the Executive Office of the President was created and there was authorization for the six administrative assistants with the passion for anonymity. There was no place in the West Wing for them, and it was decided that they should

be housed in what was then the State-War and Navy Building, which is now known as the Executive Office Building. Well, that became a major problem and was only settled when President Roosevelt himself went over there and moving up and down the halls, said, "I will take this room and this room and this room." That served adequately for awhile until there was need about the time of World War II for additional space at which time the East Wing was built. The thought when the East Wing was built was that right after the war it would no longer be an office, but would be used as a museum of some kind. Well, that time has never come to pass. When the East Wing was built, some of the units in the West Wing were moved to the East Wing, such as the social office, social correspondence and all the other activities relating to the First Lady. Later the East Wing was occupied by what was first the Office of War Mobilization and Reconversion and subsequently, in President Truman's time, by Dr. Steelman, who was The Assistant to the President.

F.D.: Do you generally have responsibility for the First Lady's social calendar, correspondence and so forth?

W.H.: No, she has her own unit for that. That comes under the Secretary to the First Lady. She has her own social correspondence unit and her social office, where the invitations, and all the engrossing and that type of thing is done. That is under the First Lady's wing completely.

F.D.: I just want to talk briefly about President Kennedy now. When did you first meet him?

W.H.: I think the first time I met President Kennedy personally was, as I mentioned earlier, when Ken O'Donnell asked me to come in. The President had some questions about the budget; principally at that moment I believe about the matter of putting his doctor, Dr. Travel, on the rolls because prior to that time the President's doctor had always been a military personage who was assigned from one of the military departments. At that time, they asked me also to fix up a memorandum in detail regarding the funds available to the President both as to his official entertainment and travel and as to general office funds and what was available for all purposes. That memorandum was prepared and given to Mr. O'Donnell.

F.D.: Did he ever ask you for a general briefing on how the

White House Staff had been run in the past?

W.H.: The President did not. I talked in quite some detail on that prior to the inauguration to Dick McGuire who was then representing Ken O'Donnell. In fact, I think the first contact I had with the new administration right after the election was when Clark Clifford came up to talk to me, and to say that he was going to have Dick McGuire come around. Clark Clifford, of course, was at the White House in President Truman's time, so I knew him very well.

F.D.: What was the general kind of business that brought you in direct contact with President Kennedy?

W.H.: As I indicated earlier, I had very little direct contact with President Kennedy because the type of business that would have brought me in contact with him, and did to a greater extent with some of his predecessors was the signing of official documents and that sort of thing. That system has varied from time to time. In President Roosevelt's time, for instance, most of the official material moved in through his private secretary. In President Truman's time-- Mr. Latta at first until he died in 1948 and later I did-- took most of the official documents in personally for the President to sign. In President Eisenhower's time, I took in certain types of official material to sign and certain other types were taken in by other staff members. In President Kennedy's time, most of the official documents, except those taken in by particular staff members moved in through Mr. O'Donnell. So that has varied from time to time and that would have been my chief contact with any of them.

F.D.: What were any of the specific differences, let's say in how the Kennedy staff was set up as compared with the Eisenhower staff? One, I assume would be that Adams and General Persons were; there was a number one guy really. Were there other differences as far as organization?

W.H.: Well, that was the main difference. The Kennedy setup more or less reverted back to the Truman or Roosevelt type and from the standpoint of the operation of the office reminded me very much of the Roosevelt days. There was a little different approach--you had the feeling in the Eisenhower Administration that you were putting more material in memorandum form to get answers and that type of

thing. In the Kennedy Administration it was--tended at least to be--more informal and reminded me very much of the Roosevelt Administration.

F.D.: At the end of an administration, let's say the Kennedy one, you generally help or assist in putting all the White House records and shipping them over to the Archives; getting rid of them? I was going to ask specifically about the closing up of the Kennedy business a few days after the assassination.

W.H.: Well, that of course is a problem. It's more of a problem in a situation like in November than it is in a normal change of administration. For instance, in a change of administration, we've got at least two or three months to plan on that. At the end of the Eisenhower Administration, there was a survey of all the staff offices to see what they had in the way of files. The great volume, of course, is in our central files. That is no real problem. At the end of that survey, there was a decision as to which file would go where. Some of them were to go to the Eisenhower Library in Abilene; other were to go up to Gettysburg; in other words, the kind the President wanted close to him. Under the Presidential library act, there was then an agreement between President Eisenhower and the General Services people as to how this would be handled, who would have access to these files and at what time. And then it was merely a matter of decision by the appropriate representatives of President Eisenhower as to what they wanted to go where. Then GSA was called in, the files were boxed up, arrangements were made for shipping and by inauguration day they were all out of the White House. In other words, the actual movement took place in the last three or four days. And incidently the White House has no permanent files. When there is a change of administration, everything belongs to the outgoing President, and all we have left is a very small and meager precedent file. Now at the time of President Kennedy's death, of course, there was a somewhat different situation. There was an immediate need to make sure that the files of President Kennedy and President Johnson were not intermingled. So the first thing that was done was to advise all the staff that they were to take special steps to make sure that there was no intermingling. This presented somewhat of a problem but I think has worked out fairly good. And then since a great many of President

Kennedy's staff remained on with President Johnson they had felt at least the need for keeping physically near them the files in which they had been working. That's a situation which does not prevail when you have normal changes of administrations--at least to the same extent. Steps were also inaugurated to move from the White House as soon as convenient, at least, certain areas of the Kennedy files. Working again with Mr. O'Donnell and the people down at the Archives who represent General Services under the Presidential library act, instructions were received to move out certain segments of the files. In fact, all our central files have been removed. Files of some of the staff have all been removed. Certain areas of the Kennedy files are still at the White House, but they in time will be moved in accordance with the agreement with General Services, working, of course, with Mr. O'Donnell.

F.D.: Was the transition, let's say, from the Roosevelt to the Truman Administration where you had a President dying in office and that of Kennedy to Johnson generally similar? Were there any different problems involved?

W.H.: It was generally similar. I had a feeling, I may be wrong, I had a feeling that this latter one was a wee bit smoother. The staffs of the two Presidents worked very well together. I think that there were some of President Roosevelt's staff who were just on the verge of leaving the White House anyway when President Roosevelt died. For instance, Steve Early was just in the process of leaving at that time, so you didn't quite have the continuity between that change, in certain areas, at least, as you did between President Kennedy and President Johnson. They were both fairly good but I just had a feeling that this latter one might have just been a wee bit smoother, basically because of the circumstances of the time rather than anything else.

F.D.: Without being critical of any particular personality, either present or past, what improvements do you think could be made in the operation of White House Offices; let's say the organization of them? If they could be strengthened sometime in the future. Have you ever thought about that?

W.H.: There are, of course, many different views of that. From my experience, as far as techniques are concerned, I always felt that the staff meeting that President Truman used to have was on of the best devices that was available

to any President. There again, it depends on how a President wishes to operate. I was told that that device would not work under President Kennedy because he just didn't operate that way, and that's probably true. Those meetings did seem to be very useful. I think they conserved the President's time and I think also they tended to keep all the staff better advised as to what their colleagues were doing and tended at least to keep everybody moving in the same direction. I do think that one of the things that has to be watched at the White House is that there is not too much--as far as the White House Office itself is concerned--institutionalizing because I think every President operates differently and has to have as much flexibility as possible. For instance, back in President Eisenhower's day, he established the cabinet secretariat. I'm sure some of the people working on that felt that was an institution that was here to stay; that there was no way of changing that. We found out when President Kennedy came in that it wasn't necessary, the way he operated. So I think the more flexibility you can maintain the better off you are. And I do think also that the White House Office is a problem unto itself; that the same problems that face the White House Office are not those that face the Executive Office of the President. I think that their problems are entirely different and that has to be kept in mind. I think it's to the President's interest to keep the White House Staff as small as he can because I have the feeling that many unnecessary problems tend to generate toward the office, that possibly shouldn't, if it gets too large. So both from a public relations standpoint and from a practical standpoint I think it's to his advantage to keep it as small as possible.

F.D.: Do you have any observations that would be useful for future Presidents on the kind of people that should be brought in on the White House Staff; analysts, specialists, political, so forth like that?

W.H.: It's always been my feeling that you've got to have a few of all kinds. By and large, I believe generalists are more effective than specialists in this field, also the President needs staff composed in great degree of people who have political backgrounds. As my old boss, Charles Wagner used to say, "somebody with political instinct of the highest order"--they are the ones who have the feel for the job that must be done and can but serve the President, who-

ever he may be.

F.D.: That's all that we'll do today. We'll get the manuscript typed up and then go over and see what other questions or general areas we want to try and cover and then have a subsequent session maybe in say a month or so.

W.H.: All right, Fred.

F.D.: Thank you very much.