

**G. Gould Lincoln Oral History Interview – JFK#1, 01/11/1966**  
Administrative Information

**Creator:** G. Gould Lincoln  
**Interviewer:** Joseph E. O'Connor  
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**Biographical Note**

G. Gould Lincoln (1880-1974) was a journalist and editor for the *Washington Star* from 1909 to 1974. This interview focuses on John F. Kennedy's relationship with the press during his time as senator and president and his selection of Lyndon B. Johnson as his vice president, among other topics.

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by G. Gould Lincoln

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## G. Gould Lincoln– JFK #1

### Table of Contents

<u>Page</u>	<u>Topic</u>
1	Meeting John F. Kennedy [JFK] in 1946
2	JFK's refusal to sign a petition for James M. Curley to be released from jail
4	JFK's relationship with John McCormack
5	Clash between JFK and McCormack over control of the Massachusetts state delegation
6	JFK serving on a committee to recognize five historically significant senators
9	Impressions of JFK as a senator
11	1957 Civil Rights Bill
13	JFK's insistence that Lyndon B. Johnson [LBJ] would be on his 1964 ticket
15	JFK's sensitivity to news stories
17	Impression of JFK
18	1956 Democratic National Convention
19	Travelling with JFK's 1960 presidential campaign
20	JFK's selection of LBJ as vice president
21	Speaking with LBJ about the 1960 campaign
22	Relationship between JFK and LBJ
23	Rumors that JFK had not wanted LBJ as vice president

Oral History Interview

with

G. Gould Lincoln

January 11, 1966  
Washington, D.C.

By Joseph E. O'Connor

For the John F. Kennedy Library

O'CONNOR: This is a taped interview for the John F. Kennedy Oral History Project with Mr. G. Gould Lincoln. The interviewer is Joe O'Connor. The date is Tuesday, January 11, 1966. The interview is being conducted in the sound studio of the National Archives Building.

LINCOLN: I first knew John Kennedy when he first came to Washington as a representative from Massachusetts in 1946. I was a

correspondent at that time for the Boston Globe. I sent in for him in the House lobby, and he came out -- a young man. He looked almost a child with his shock of hair. But he was very friendly and very pleasant. At that time John McCormack, now Speaker of the House, was circulating a petition among members of the Massachusetts delegation urging that the former mayor and governor of Massachusetts, and representative of Massachusetts, [James M.] Jim Curley, be released from jail. He had been indicted and convicted of using the mails to defraud. The FDR [Franklin Delano Roosevelt] Administration had been hot on his trail for some reason or other -- I think because he had broken away from them when Franklin Roosevelt was seeking a third term. John was

trying to get Curley released from jail. So I asked this young congressman, thinking, of course that he would say yes, whether he was going to sign the petition. But he said, "No," very firmly. To my mind, this was a rather courageous thing to do because he had just been elected from Curley's old district in Boston. There never was any love between the Curley family and the Kennedy family, especially old [John F.] "Honey" Fitzgerald who was Jack Kennedy's grandfather. He was a very likable young man at that time, and he remained that until he died.

O'CONNOR: Did he ever tell you exactly why he chose not to sign the petition?

LINCOLN: No, he didn't tell me why. He just said he wasn't going to do it. And that's what I reported.

O'CONNOR: Did McCormack ever talk to you about that?



Did you ever get McCormack's reaction to Kennedy's refusal?

LINCOLN: No. I have talked to McCormack several times about John Kennedy. It was later on when the question was whether Kennedy was going to have McCormack as Speaker after he had been elected President in 1960. Then there arose the question who would be Speaker. Mr. McCormack has always told me that he and John Kennedy were friendly. At one time -- I think it was in '62 -- the question arose as to whether the President was going to support his brother, [Edward M.] Ted Kennedy, for Senator. McCormack's nephew, Edward McCormack, was a candidate and had been Attorney General twice. Of course, Mr. McCormack, the Speaker, wanted very much to see his nephew nominated and elected to the Senate.

It didn't happen that way. But even after that, McCormack insisted that he had kept his hands off and the President said he did, and that the relationship was good. As of today, McCormack would still maintain that he had been entirely loyal to the President after he came in, and that there's no reason why the Kennedys and the McCormacks can't work together.

O'CONNOR: Congressman McCormack and the then Senator clashed in 1956 over control of the Massachusetts state delegation.

LINCOLN: Yes.

O'CONNOR: I wondered if McCormack ever mentioned that to you or if you had known anything about that clash?

LINCOLN: Oh, I think it was publicized.

O'CONNOR: It was publicized well, but I wondered if Congressman McCormack ever mentioned it at all to you. There were rumors

that they were not on the best of terms then.

LINCOLN: Well, they weren't when they were clashing. That's very true. No, they've clashed at times. I'm not trying to say that they haven't, but McCormack's claim is that he has always been loyal to the President, after he became President.

O'CONNOR: Do you have any other remembrances of Congressman Kennedy when he was a young man, how he impressed you, or when he was a young senator?

LINCOLN: No, I knew him better when he became Senator. I used to see him quite frequently about things pertaining to Massachusetts legislation. In 1957, I think it was, he was made chairman of a committee of five senators to pick the five senators who appeared to have an outstanding effect on the history of the

country from the beginning, the five most influential in their way, their own particular way. I remember very well that I saw him, and I said to Senator Kennedy that if you are going to pick a Republican progressive as one of these five, please select old [Robert M., Sr.] "Fighting Bob" LaFollette of Wisconsin, who had been practically the originator of the progressive Republicans' side of the fence. He had fought for the progressives' interests out there as an attorney, then as Governor, and then had fought for their interests in the Senate, and that he was the outstanding man, rather than George Norris of Nebraska.

Senator Kennedy was rather favorable to George Norris. He had included Norris in his Profiles in Courage which I thought was wonderful, not only historically but

also as a literary work. It has been very helpful, I know, in bringing out the history of the country. But anyway, the committee finally decided that they would take LaFollette, and he wrote me a note in which he said he knew I would be glad it had happened. He had asked me to suggest some of the senators who might be chosen because I had covered the Senate from 1907 to 1957, which is half a century. But he went along with the committee on LaFollette although he had Norris as a second choice. Now those Senators were [Henry] Clay, and [John C.] Calhoun, and [Daniel] Webster, [Robert A.] Taft, and LaFollette. Their portraits were to be hung in the reception room outside the Senate Chamber for visitors who came there, and those portraits are hanging there now.

O'CONNOR: How would you rank Senator Kennedy? How would you rate him?

LINCOLN: When he was Senator?

O'CONNOR: Sure, you must have seen him sometime while he was Senator.

LINCOLN: Oh, yes, I saw him quite a lot when he was Senator, and he made some very good speeches, particularly about foreign affairs. He was very much interested in foreign affairs, and he traveled. Then he was out of the Senate for almost a year, as you know, on account of his back, and when he wrote the Profiles in Courage and so forth. But he was a good senator.

O'CONNOR: He had a reputation actually for missing meetings, missing committee meetings, and not attending the Senate. I wonder if you would comment on that at all. Was there any harsh feeling generated by that

attitude among other senators toward  
Senator Kennedy?

LINCOLN: Well, I've already explained that he was  
away for quite a long time, but he did  
his committee work. He was in charge of  
several important bills and helped to  
get them through. One of them, which  
he had introduced, came from the Senate  
Committee on Labor and Public Welfare in  
1959. It dealt with malpractices in  
the internal affairs of labor unions and  
with proposed amendments to the Taft-Hartley  
labor act. The measure grew out of the  
investigation conducted by the McClellan  
investigating committee, and its inquiry  
into the use of welfare funds by union  
officials.

O'CONNOR: Yes.

LINCOLN: That committee's principal counsel was  
Robert F. Kennedy, and he did a good job

on the committee. John Kennedy had much to do with getting that through. I think he also had to do with the first civil rights bill.

He strongly supported the so called jury amendment to that bill, to assure right by jury trial in civil rights cases and the right of Negroes to serve on juries.

O'CONNOR: He was controversial, at least, in the passage of the 1957 civil rights bill.

LINCOLN: Yes. So Kennedy made his mark in the Senate.

O'CONNOR: You said you talked to him several times about legislation concerning Massachusetts. Do you recall any specifics?

LINCOLN: No, that was some time ago and things would. . . .

O'CONNOR: Do you remember his stand on the St. Lawrence Seaway issue? I believe he was in Congress at that time.



LINCOLN: Yes, he was.

O'CONNOR: He voted for the St. Lawrence Seaway and this, in effect, was a vote interpreted by some people as a vote against Massachusetts or New England industry.

LINCOLN: Yes, but he was a very independent fellow. When he believed a thing, he went for it -- or he went against it, he went all the way. After he became President, I used to go to his press conferences, and he handled himself probably better than any other President. I've seen eleven of them beginning with Theodore Roosevelt. In dealing with the press, he was very, very good. He rarely became angry, and he was sometimes very amusing in his answers. He was witty, quick witted.

I was watching a televised interview with him at a press conference -- only

two or three weeks before he went to Texas. At that time there had been a number of reports that he was going to ditch Lyndon Johnson and not have him for Vice President on his ticket in 1964. Almost at the close of that press conference, [Edward T.] Eddie Folliard of the Washington Post, and I was watching this very closely, asked the President whether these reports were true that he was going to ditch Lyndon Johnson and take another vice president. And the President was very emphatic in saying that Johnson would be on the ticket, that there was no truth in these reports. It was at almost the close of the half hour that was allotted usually, and before the President finished speaking to Folliard, there was a clamor of "Mr. President, Mr. President." From all

over the chamber they wanted to get recognition and to get in a question, and I think the President's full answer was not recorded. But what he said, as I heard it, and I was listening carefully, was: "He will be on the ticket even if I am not." Now I've searched the records and asked people if I heard that correctly, but I've never been able to confirm it. I didn't think at the time that the President was seeking to look into the future or that it had anything to do with his assassination or that he had thought anything about his assassination. I merely thought that it was his way of emphasizing the fact that Johnson was to be on the ticket. And that's what I still think. It is a strange coincidence, however, as it turned out if I heard correctly. And

I'm sure that I did hear correctly.

But as I say, I've never been able to confirm it. It was a strange coincidence in my mind. As soon as the assassination news had settled down a little, I went immediately to find out if that had been true because it would have been a strange coincidence. But I never considered it more than a coincidence. I never thought he was prophesying that he was going to die.

O'CONNOR: The President had a reputation for being very sensitive to news stories. I wonder if he ever commented on any of your news stories favorably or . . .

LINCOLN: Well, the only news story that he commented upon -- it was rather unfavorably. In 1960 I wrote a political column for the Washington [Evening] Star, and in it I had discussed the primary up in New Hampshire

where he was entered as a presidential candidate. I had said in the story that this was almost his backyard, New Hampshire, and that he would win overwhelmingly, probably, and that some members of his family had been up there working for him. Well, he read this story, and he wrote me a letter [laughter] in which he took exception to the fact that I had said that members of his family had been up there. Now, it was a very nice letter. He wound up by saying "Your friend, as usual, Jack Kennedy." But he did read the newspapers quite closely.

The only time that he really got incensed when he was President that I know of was not at anything I had written but at the New York Herald Tribune, which is an old story. But he blew up over that one.

O'CONNOR: You never heard of any other specific instances where he got angry at a particular reporter for a particular story, did you?

LINCOLN: No, I don't recall any offhand. I don't doubt that he didn't like some of the things that were written, but none of the presidents do. The press has been a hair shirt for every president that ever sat in the White House.

My recollections of Kennedy are all very pleasant. He was always friendly and frank. When you went to see him, he didn't hesitate to tell you. And if he didn't want you to quote him, why, he would say so.

I remember him very well just after he had been nominated out there at Los Angeles. I was at the meeting of the Democratic National Committee, and he came to see the Committee immediately.

Oh, not immediately. He'd been nominated the day before. He came to talk to the National Committee, as candidates always do after they've been nominated, and he was just as natural. Well, he didn't act as a man chosen for the nomination. He was almost humble when he came in and spoke to them all. He spoke to some of the reporters that he knew as he went in. He was most attractive.

O'CONNOR: You didn't have any contact with him, particularly, during the 1956 Convention, did you? You didn't have a chance to observe him especially?

LINCOLN: Well, I only saw him occasionally out at the Convention when he was seeking the Democratic nomination for vice president. And he nearly got it, as you well know. He is a very good worker at politics, and he almost had it tied up.

It was the only time that I've ever seen it happen that a presidential nominee did not say who he wanted for vice president, but Adlai Stevenson just threw it out on convention floor. . . . And it caused quite a row. . . . [Hubert H.] Humphrey didn't like it. He was a candidate. And [Estes] Kefauver wanted it, and Kennedy wanted it. It made the one really dramatic occasion of that Democratic Convention.

O'CONNOR: Do you have any other instances you'd like to relate, perhaps relating to the traveling you did during the 1960 campaign? You said you traveled to several states.

LINCOLN: Well, I went to New York and to Pennsylvania and to New Jersey, those three states, and I became convinced that he was going to carry New York. In fact, I had it from both the Democratic and Republican State Chairmen, and that was enough. Also, in Pennsylvania it was very clear that he had the edge, I



thought, and perhaps a little less so in New Jersey, but still he had the edge. And I was convinced -- in fact, I had been convinced for some time -- that he was going to win. I thought after that first televised interview he had with [Richard M.] Nixon that Mr. Kennedy was surely going to win.

O'CONNOR: You did your traveling after the candidates had been nominated in 1960, didn't you?

LINCOLN: Oh, yes.

O'CONNOR: You didn't travel before that?

LINCOLN: No, I went out to the Democratic Convention in 1960. I thought that his selection of Johnson was one of the wisest things he ever did. I think I've already, perhaps, talked about that. Well, I had nothing to do with the selection of Mr. Johnson for the vice presidential nomination, but I did have a very close look at what was

happening the day that the announcement was made.

I was in Lyndon Johnson's room at the hotel. This was before any announcement was made whatever, and it was early in the morning, comparatively early. Of course, it was after Johnson had been told by Bobby Kennedy that the President wanted him. I was sitting there on the bed, and nobody but Johnson and I were in the room. Johnson finally got up and walked around the room, and he said, "This is going to be a tough campaign, and Kennedy is going to have a tough time. And I've made up my mind that I'm going to do everything I can to help him win this election." Well, he didn't have to tell me what he was going to do after that. I knew he was going to accept that vice presidential nomination because

it had been in the air that he would be picked. So I left Mr. Johnson and went back to my place in Convention Hall and told the office what I thought. But Johnson had made up his mind that he was going to go through with it.

O'CONNOR: Did you ever notice any hard feelings between the Kennedys and Johnson, either before or after he became vice president?

LINCOLN: Well, there were many reports that Mr. Johnson was not going to be selected for renomination and that there was a break, but I never observed any. Mr. Kennedy used his vice president a great deal. He sent him to Germany, for example, at a very crucial moment, and Johnson did a very good job for him over there.

O'CONNOR: How about in connection with Bob Kennedy? Did you see any evidence of hard feelings?

LINCOLN: Well, there were reports. There were reports, particularly after the assassination of the President, that Bobby Kennedy was at odds with Johnson. And there were reports, too, at the time, that the President had not believed that Johnson would accept the nomination and had not wanted him to accept it but thought it was a good gesture to make friends in the South. I spoke to the Attorney General, Bobby Kennedy, at that time. This was when there were early reports to this effect, and he told me flatly that Johnson had been his brother's first and only choice for vice president. And that was the way it was. I think that Robert Kennedy has since that time said just what I have said, that his brother wanted Lyndon Johnson for the vice presidency. And it was a very wise selection because he

might not have been elected President if he hadn't taken Johnson?

O'CONNOR: Did Robert Kennedy tell you this after the assassination or before?

LINCOLN: Well, the reports, naturally, came after the assassination because, otherwise, you would have asked the President, not Bobby Kennedy. But the reports came up then. That story was circulated that the President and Robert Kennedy had not really wanted Lyndon Johnson for the nomination, that it had been a gesture merely to the South. But I think that both the President and his brother, being good politicians, knew just exactly what they were doing and that they needed Johnson's support in the South. And they got it in no unmeasured terms. He helped them carry Texas, which was a very close proposition, and several other states that

they might have lost.

O'CONNOR: Do you have any other reminiscences that you'd like to tell us about? I'm just about through with questions here.

LINCOLN: No, I think that's about all.