

Elizabeth A. (Betsy) Stanton Oral History Interview—JFK #1, 4/5/1976
Administrative Information

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Interviewer: William Hartigan

Date of Interview: April 5, 1976

Location: Fitchburg, Massachusetts

Length: 20 pages

Biographical Note

Elizabeth A. (Betsy) Stanton (1909 - 1982) served as a Democratic National Committee Member from 1956 until 1962, as a Massachusetts State Senator from 1952 until 1962, and as postmistress of Fitchburg from 1962 until 1979. This interview focuses on Stanton's role as a member of the Democratic National Committee (DNC), her support for John F. Kennedy (JFK), and her evaluation of the Kennedy administration and its legacy, among other issues.

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Suggested Citation

Stanton, Elizabeth A., recorded interview by William Hartigan, on August 18, 1964, (page number), John F. Kennedy Library Oral History Program.

Oral History Interview

Of

Elizabeth A. (Betsy) Stanton

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Oral History Interview

with

BETSY STANTON

April 5, 1976
Fitchburg, Massachusetts

By William Hartigan

For the John F. Kennedy Library

HARTIGAN: Betsy, when did you first meet President Kennedy?

STANTON: I think the first time that I met President Kennedy was at a tea that the Democratic Civic Committee ran for him in 1952. In fact, I'm very sure it was in June of 1952.

HARTIGAN: What do you recall of that meeting?

STANTON: Well, I know I was very impressed with him. He was so young and he seemed to inspire the people. And of course all the women were delighted to meet him, of course, we were very happy to meet his mother and his sisters who came at that time. Everybody was there and it was really my first, what would I say, meeting of all of these big celebrities, because of course as I say I had worked in politics with my husband but I had never been a candidate and had never been in a position to meet the upper crust, as you might say, of the Democratic party.

HARTIGAN: You were running for election that year yourself, is that correct?

STANTON: I was running for the state senate at that time.

HARTIGAN: And that was the seat that was held by your late husband.

STANTON: That's right.

HARTIGAN: Do you recall any events during that campaign that involved President Kennedy?

STANTON: Well, of course, everywhere I went I, being a new candidate and having had a little experience in politics, I tried to probably ride on his coat tails a bit because I did say that I felt that we had a young man coming along who was running for the United States Senate and I had hoped that he would be successful because I was going to be successful in my try. And so, for that reason, I felt very definitely that.... The people were very receptive everywhere I went when I spoke of him, very receptive.

HARTIGAN: So, you actually campaigned for yourself and also campaigned for....

STANTON: It was a selfish and a mutual kind of campaigning.

HARTIGAN: And you were both successful.

STANTON: We were both successful. I hitched my wagon to his star.

HARTIGAN: Very good. After the election in 1952, you were in the state senate. Were you aware at that time of the political infighting with the Boston politicians? You were safely out here in Fitchburg, but you were in the Senate.

STANTON: I was in the Senate, and there were, of course, only fifteen Democratic senators in the Senate at that time, so I was aware of some of the infighting there because, of course, the Boston people we used to sit around and chat because we didn't have very much clout in the senate other than just to override a governor, and the bond issue and things of that sort. So, we were always, you know, talking about what was going on. And so I was aware, probably not as much as you might think, as I might have been had I been living closer to Boston. But I was aware of the factions that were there.

HARTIGAN: Do you recall any of the activities in, I'm talking about the state activities now, for the Democrats, during the time that Pat Lynch [John M. Lynch] and Bill Burke [William H. Burke, Jr.] from Greenfield, Massachusetts, were having it out for the chairmanship of the party?

STANTON: I remember there was a great deal of campaigning between the two, but I was not involved because I was not a member of the state committee. However, I do remember a great deal of activity in this area here with Bill Burke, you know, attempting to get the group from here, and also Pat Lynch. I don't remember, I assume that the crowd that was out of the.... The state committeeman and state committeewoman at that time, I think they supported Pat Lynch.

HARTIGAN: Were you contacted by anybody to go to your committee people on behalf of any of the candidates?

STANTON: I don't remember at that time, no. Because I was not that national committeewoman and that was the beginning of the change in the Democratic regime at that time.

HARTIGAN: Did you have, as a state Senator, did you have any contacts with the newly elected Senator Kennedy?

STANTON: When I first went in, no. But, I would say after I became a national committeewoman or prior to becoming a.... I remember saying to Paul Dever at one time that I'd like to be Democratic national committeewoman. That, I think was April of '56 or maybe it was earlier than that. But, I remember calling Paul and saying, "I'd like to be the Democratic National Committeewoman." And he said that he was very interested in my wanting to be and wanting to try, and that he'd get back to me. And he did. That was how I happened to....

HARTIGAN: Wasn't he, at the time, responsible for your predecessor being there?

STANTON: Well, that I wouldn't know, Mrs. O'Riordan [Margaret M. O'Riordan].... I don't remember that, but I know that I went to him and I think there was, there had been a breach there. There had been a breach, I guess, between Mrs. O'Riordan and many of them down there. But, I know I had said to him I want to be the candidate for it. And so, I assumed that he probably was going to have to talk with the powers that be to see who they would like to have. And so then the next thing I knew he called me and said that he thought it would be a very good idea and for me to start moving, which I did.

And I went to Johnnie Powers [John E. Powers] and John Fox and then they began to guide me as to who I should go to see in order to get the votes for this contest that took place, I think it was in June.

HARTIGAN: Did you contact any of the Kennedy people on your behalf for the national committee?

STANTON: I think I probably did. If I didn't directly, I did indirectly. I think that probably Johnnie Powers might have. I know that one night we were having a late session in the senate and there was a meeting over in the....

HARTIGAN: Belview?

STANTON: No, not the Belview. The apartment I guess that Kennedy had in that house....

HARTIGAN: On Bowdoin Street.

STANTON: Yes, on Bowdoin Street. And I know they were forever coming back. And I was a little bit irate. And when Johnnie showed up, Johnnie Powers showed up, I was furious. I started to jump all over him and he said to me, "What's the matter with you? We were trying to take care of you." And he said, "The senator was there," and he said, "and this is something." He said, "That's what we were doing." So that was when I found out that he was interested in me, interested in this change.

HARTIGAN: Well, I asked that question because I know that the Kennedy forces on the committee were very much in favor of your being a national committeewoman. The division evidently, in terms of the national committeewoman, your predecessor Mrs. O'Riordan, must have stemmed from her McCormack [John W. McCormack] contact then?

STANTON: I would say so because at the time Johnnie Powers gave me a list of people who were on the state committee who were eligible to vote at this meeting. And so I went to a number of them and there were some of them that I remember who were for Mrs. O'Riordan because Mr. McCormack had approached them.

HARTIGAN: Did you have any meetings with Mrs. O'Riordan?

STANTON: No.

HARTIGAN: Did you have any difficulties with her?

STANTON: I never had any difficulties with her. No, because I... Way, way back I remember we ran a tea here in Fitchburg for Governor Dever and she came up. And at that time it was a strange thing but after she left I remember saying to my husband, "I want her job."

HARTIGAN: You really had your eye on that job?

STANTON: I had my eye on the job and for no--at that time I was not involved in politics other than working in the field, you know. This is all coming back to me.

HARTIGAN: Did the McCormacks come to you at any time asking you to forgo the endeavor?

STANTON: No, I would have said no, I'm in it to stay.

HARTIGAN: Because I believe that the thought was that the McCormacks were quite anxious to keep Mrs. O'Riordan, but in talking to various people at this time, it's difficult to find any strong support.

STANTON: I don't think they.... I didn't find.... Nobody directly from Mr. McCormack came to me, in fact nobody came to me. I think it was because they knew that I had stepped into the thing and I had intended that I was going to go the whole way regardless of what came. Because somebody said to me once, "What if you lose?" And I said, "I lose, I'll be back in '60."

HARTIGAN: Did you participate in the teas during the 1952 campaign?

STANTON: Not to any great extent, but I did participate in this area. Because, of course, I was building my fences here, and so that.... We have always, at least I always worked for the entire ticket whenever I went out on the campaign.

HARTIGAN: In the 1958 campaign, you were still a state senator?

STANTON: I was still a state senator.

HARTIGAN: And you were on the national committeewoman. What were your functions, or did you, were you very active in the Kennedy '58 campaign?

STANTON: Probably, as I remember back, probably not as active as I had been when.... Because.... When was that, the time that.... No. The senator was up for re-election, that was it, yes. We functioned, as I say, as a team going around. And I think we had started a women's organization called The Women on Wheels. And although it had--it didn't catch on actually until '60 and that was when we went from one end of the Commonwealth to the other.

HARTIGAN: How effective was that in the final analysis, the Women on Wheels?

STANTON: I think it brought a great deal of publicity to women and they sent out many women who had at one time served in positions of honor. I remember that the ambassador, I believe it was to Denmark--I don't remember her name but it was a woman ambassador--who was a Democrat and she came around, and the women were very impressed with the type of women that were going around on this Women on Wheels. They were very impressed with Katy Louchheim [Kathleen Louchheim], she was the head of the--she and Paul Butler I believe it was--were the head of the Democratic National Committee. She was a very active woman. And the women were quite pleased whenever we showed up at any of the campaigns. And they were very anxious to meet these women. And....

HARTIGAN: You're talking about the Kennedy women now?

STANTON: Yes, the Kennedy women. I mean this was the group that was going around for Kennedy in '58 and '60. '60 they were much more active.

HARTIGAN: Betsy, when Senator Saltonstall [Leverett Saltonstall] was running against Foster Furcolo for United States Senate there were several statements made--I believe it was also in the newspapers--that President Kennedy, or the then Senator Kennedy, who had already secured his spot, sort of leaned back on the oars and then did no help to Furcolo. Now, this is part of Furcolo's country. Were you aware of any such attitudes?

STANTON: No, I wasn't because I know that some of us who were in the senate at that time and I remember myself going on the air, on TV, with Kay Furcolo and I can't remember who else. But, we went on for Foster Furcolo. And I don't remember that the Kennedys ever pulled back. I wouldn't be as aware of the workings in around Boston because, of course, I was working around, up in through here. There didn't seem to be any.... They'd supported Furcolo in this area.

HARTIGAN: Were you aware of any dissention between the Furcolo people and the Kennedy people?

STANTON: Not any more than what was between probably some of us Democrats and the Furcolo people in his office. I don't think there was as much antagonized to Foster Furcolo as there was to some of the people he had surrounded himself with.

HARTIGAN: Would you care to elaborate on that?

STANTON: Well, it was what we found was that--at least I'm speaking from my own experience--but I went all out for Furcolo. I always supported every Democrat that was endorsed that was a legitimate candidate for the Democratic in the Democratic party. But, I remember myself being very upset at times with some of the people that he had, that he had surrounded himself with, and his office staff. I never went in to see Foster Furcolo that I could sit down and talk to him alone.

HARTIGAN: This as a state senator now?

STANTON: This was as a state senator. I had to sit down with him and there was always somebody in the background maneuvering. And as I say, that was the one thing but as far as treatment of me otherwise.... And then another time we were kept waiting. I remember senators complaining about being kept waiting to see him when they wanted to go in to see him. But as far as I was concerned, he did that to me just once.

HARTIGAN: Did you bring this to his attention?

STANTON: Oh yes, sure, sure.

HARTIGAN: What was his reaction?

STANTON: Well, he accepted it in good grace, but I don't think there was ever too much of a change. Actually, my trouble with Foster was not in--it was something on a piece of legislation I think I wanted, and he vetoed it. And I think it was the time that I filed, and I could be wrong, I filed this legislation to put a woman on the Department of Public Utilities Board and I fought so hard for it and then he vetoed the thing. And then a couple of years later he came back and filed the same legislation, but he filed for two more members on it. He expanded the membership of the board, one of which would be a woman. And that was the one thing that, I mean, I was always a little upset about. But it never entered my feelings, as far as support for him, when it came to.... I can't put my finger on anything with the Kennedy group. This was all individual things that, you know, they, the individual senators would be upset with him about.

HARTIGAN: While you were a state senator, President Kennedy was a United States senator. Did you track any of his legislative activities of some of the, any of the legislative programs that he participated in, in Washington?

STANTON: I can't think of anything in particular. If something came to my mind, I mean, if I could remember something that he had been particularly interested in, I would.... I was always interested in what he did because I always felt that he was destined to be more than just a senator.

HARTIGAN: Did you ever have the occasion to contact him with regards to any legislation that you felt was of interest to you or your constituency?

STANTON: No, I never did.

HARTIGAN: Do you recall any of the events that took place during the time that the St. Lawrence Seaway legislation was up?

STANTON: No, I don't remember too much about.... I vaguely remember something of the activity, but you see we're actually too far away from the St. Lawrence Seaway in this particular area to actually, probably, feel that it was of any great, would have any great impact on us.

HARTIGAN: Your constituency wasn't too much concerned about these activities?

STANTON: No, no.

HARTIGAN: There were some thoughts that it was bad for New England, that it was....

STANTON: I didn't have anybody contact, I didn't have anybody contact me on the thing at all at any time.

HARTIGAN: In this 1958 campaign for his re-election, were you up again for re-election that same year?

STANTON: Yes.

HARTIGAN: Did you, you didn't have the time though to participate as fully as you mentioned, something about not being as active in the '58 one as you were in the...?

STANTON: Well, I think that time I had a candidate running in opposition to me and I always felt that probably what I should do is, you know, tend to my own backyard. However, whenever there were meetings, Democratic meetings throughout the state, open meetings--by that I mean if the western Franklin County we'll say was going to have a Democratic meeting, I was always invited as the national committeewoman and I went. And I talked for the senator and for the party. But, there didn't seem to be as much activity at that time as there was a little later. I think we were building toward the '60 campaign but I went to several of them. I remember going out to Pittsfield one Sunday night, and down in Blackstone another time, and out into Arlington another time for the ticket.

HARTIGAN: Did you ever have the occasion to call upon Senator Kennedy for any help or assistance in your role as a state senator?

STANTON: No, I didn't.

HARTIGAN: No constituents?

STANTON: No, no.

HARTIGAN: You were national committeewoman at the time of the 1960 convention.

STANTON: Yes.

HARTIGAN: You were also still at that time a state senator?

STANTON: State senator.

HARTIGAN: And you were also a delegate to that convention.

STANTON: Yes.

HARTIGAN: Would you care to comment on your activities at the 1960 convention in Los Angeles?

STANTON: Well, I know that there were a tremendous number of people who went out from Massachusetts. And everybody, you know, was all excited. And I know that the whole New England area was excited about a presidential candidate from this area. And so we all hung together. Prior to our going out, they had started this New England--I don't know what they called it--a council but it was.... The six New England states got together and banded together and it was a one hundred percent support for Kennedy so that we were going to vote as a block. We were going to.... If there was any problem, we were going to have this block that we were going to be able to.... It was our strength, it was the strength of New England against probably some other section of the city. But, it was as if we found we could do anything. I mean, we were always asked by someone of the Kennedy group why don't you go over to the--well we'll say, I'm just grabbing names--the Idaho delegation and talk with this person, they're a little bit cool to Kennedy or some other delegation and see what you can do. So, we were always maneuvering around.

HARTIGAN: Was the office of National Committeewoman an office that allowed you to participate to the extent where you could influence other delegations on behalf of Kennedy?

STANTON: Well, of course, you always felt, at least I always felt I had to go through the Democratic National Committeewoman in that particular area and we had of course, meeting in, I think we had a meeting in February, no May. We always had a meeting in May. And at that time, you know, I went around and asked some of the states how they felt their state was going to go. And I can't remember the states that were a little bit lukewarm but anyway, we would try to talk with the girls, or the women and then I know that there was one woman who was quite, well, she was quite, well, she was, you know, I think she wanted Kennedy but that probably her Democratic state committee wasn't that interested. They were interested in somebody else. And so for that reason I mean I went over and talked to her and we were able together to kind of get them squared away. I don't even remember her name. She was a very nice lady.

HARTIGAN: Do you recall any states that gave you any adverse reaction when you talked to them?

STANTON: No, no. They were all.... I think the feeling in those days was that there was a certain amount of prestige connected with the Democratic national committeeman and committeewoman. And so that whenever we went to a group we were always given very polite consideration.

HARTIGAN: You were in the 1956 campaign, the 1956 convention.

STANTON: Yes.

HARTIGAN: Did you play any active part in the vice presidential run of Senator Kennedy then?

STANTON: No, except getting very excited and wondering if we could help. But at that any particular time we were not asked to go in any particular direction.

HARTIGAN: There was some indication that the Massachusetts delegation in Chicago in 1956 were not wholly or totally supporting Senator Kennedy for the vice presidency. Were you aware of that?

STANTON: When I think back I can probably think of a little bit. But, I think the whole thing was that they were afraid that if he went for the vice presidency--they had hoped for something more for him. It wasn't that they were anti his ever becoming president, but they were looking at the presidency rather than the vice presidency. There might have been some who were not interested in....

HARTIGAN: Were you present at the meeting when Mrs. O'Riordan...?

STANTON: Oh yes, I remember that. She got up and she was anti-Kennedy. Well, I didn't expect it to be anything else because it had just been a month before when she had been knocked out of her seat.

HARTIGAN: But her tenure continued through that convention. Is that....

STANTON: Yes, yes. It was through that convention. But you see, the Kennedy group had been able to corral more support than she realized. And I think it was just like she was going to give one last blast at the Kennedys. I remember that, now, at that meeting, I'd forgotten about it.

HARTIGAN: It's been stated that some of the McCormack people were a little bit anti-Kennedy at that convention. Do you recall anything along those lines?

STANTON: I never was, what would you say, close to any of the McCormack people. I was surprised at some of the senators from around Boston who were very loyal McCormack people. That they would stay with him or stay with his philosophy as opposed to Kennedy because these were young people--that I was quite surprised at. But then, I guess, I didn't pay too much attention to them because they didn't bother me. I like John McCormack, I mean as far as being that impressed with him, I can't say I ever was.

HARTIGAN: Betsy, during the, after the convention in 1960, were you given any assignments? Did you take on any assignments or did you take it upon yourself to perform a service for the candidate?

STANTON: Well, after the, you mean during the campaign?

HARTIGAN: After the 1960 convention.

STANTON: Well, after that I mean, of course, naturally I notified them and told them that if there was anything they wanted me to do just to let me know and call on me, and I'd be glad to do it. But it was going to be a very active year politically all over the state because the people were.... Actually, I don't think there had to be a great deal of campaigning because the people were either with him or they were against him. There was just no--you didn't have to do any persuading with the majority of the people that I was apt to be connected with and got involved with, they were all, you know, Kennedy. And all through my senatorial district and, of course, it was always, I always, whenever I campaigned I always handed out these _____ at election time. They were handed out at rallies and also where it gave every Democratic candidate.... And of course it pleased me to no end that I had a presidential candidate from Massachusetts, _____ John F. Kennedy.

HARTIGAN: Betsy, the.... I don't want to ask you an embarrassing question.
[INTERRUPTION] Betty, sitting here talking to you, I can't help but come to the conclusion that the so-called Kennedy-McCormack feud evidently centered mainly around the eastern part of the state, is this fair?

STANTON: That's what I would say. I don't, I really don't know anybody in the western part of the state in through central and the western part of the state that would have been as involved with this feud that was.... I knew about it, but I didn't realize it was as bitter as it was.

HARTIGAN: But it didn't show in your district?

STANTON: It didn't show in my district at all.

HARTIGAN : And to your knowledge in the western....

STANTON: No, no.

HARTIGAN: In 1960 were you also running for re-election for the state senate again?

STANTON: Yes.

HARTIGAN: Did you have opposition in that?

STANTON: I don't think I did as I remember.

HARTIGAN: And you were successful in that campaign?

STANTON: Yes.

HARTIGAN: After the campaign, you participated in the Inaugural ball?

STANTON: Yes.

HARTIGAN: Did you, were you on any of the committees down there?

STANTON: No.

HARTIGAN: You were still national committeewoman?

STANTON: Still national committeewoman. I didn't, I didn't resign. I had to resign when I became postmaster.

HARTIGAN: So you stayed in this, in the state senate, stayed in the national committeewoman post and then you were selected, your name was submitted for approval as postmaster of Fitchburg? Can you relate to us how that came about?

STANTON: Well, I know that Mr. Maggs [Ralph W. Maggs] was going to be seventy in the late summer.

HARTIGAN: This is of '61?

STANTON: '62.

HARTIGAN: '62.

STANTON: So, I decided that I thought I would like to have the position of postmaster, but I didn't want to do it without first consulting the president. So, I went down to one of the National Committee meetings and I made an appointment to see him. Kenny O'Donnell [Kenneth P. O'Donnell] made the appointment for me. And I went to see him because I felt that if he felt I could be of more value to him where I was in the Senate and on the National Committee, why then I would be glad to stay because I didn't have any reason not to. But I just thought I'd like to.... I've always been kind of restless and I thought I'd like to change a job. So, I went to see him and he said to me well, it was the prerogative of the representative in this area or the congressman, which was Philip Philbin. And he said, "I'll take it up with him and tell him I would like to have you receive that appointment." So, I said to him, "I think I should probably go to see him myself." Because I said, "The reason I didn't go to him first," because he asked me if I'd been to him and I said no. I said, "The reason I didn't go to him first was that I wanted to make sure that if my name was presented to you, Mr. President, that you would say, I wish she hadn't done it. But if you have no objection, then I will." So he said, "No, if that's what you would like, you go ahead." And that is what I did. I didn't want him to think that he owed me anything, he didn't.

HARTIGAN: You proceeded then to....

STANTON: I went to the congressman and he was.... The president had already got to him before I had and I think he was a little upset, but when I explained to him why, he could understand. But he didn't have any objection.

HARTIGAN: Do you think he possibly had a candidate other than the one the president wanted?

STANTON: Well, I think there were people in the post office who were currently in the post office who knew of this impending retirement and had probably started--had gone to see him. I never made any, I never, I told a couple of boys that I

knew I was going to go after it and one of them said to me, "Well, I had intended to go." And I said, "Well, I don't want you to feel you shouldn't go for it, if this is what you want to do because I have no assurance that I'm going to get this. I'm going to try for it."

HARTIGAN: So you made it quite clear that that you were going to seek this....

STANTON: Oh yes, I made it very clear that I was going to, after I had talked with President Kennedy and he said he had no objections.

HARTIGAN: Were you aware of any conflict, minor conflict to be sure, between Phil, Congressman Philbin, and the president over the fact that Philbin may have had somebody else in mind other than the one the president....

STANTON: No, I don't think so. I never knew that there was anything because the president made it very clear to me that this was the understanding he had with the members of Congress.

HARTIGAN: The Democratic members?

STANTON: Yes, the Democratic members. But if this is what I wanted he would be glad to do it. And I said well, I wanted you to advise me whether you would prefer that I didn't enter into this, that maybe there was somebody else. And he said no. So, then I said, "I'll go see Mr. Philbin." And he said, "And I'll speak to him and explain to him."

HARTIGAN: So somewhat, a little bit unorthodox, you had the president of the United States interceding for you to a congressman, for a job...

STANTON: Yes. Yes.

HARTIGAN: ...that the president was going to appoint.

STANTON: Yes. Well, it was; I just felt that in fairness I should consult with him. Maybe he would have preferred.... And if he had said to me no, I would prefer you to stay in the Senate, that's where I would have stayed.

HARTIGAN: You wouldn't have been unhappy?

STANTON: No.

HARTIGAN: As long as you were doing what you thought you were doing to help Kennedy?

STANTON: My one main interest was to make sure that he had, that he had a good tenure of office as president of the United States.

HARTIGAN: What was your experience now that you've entered the administration of President Kennedy as a postmaster? What was your experience then?

STANTON: I enjoyed every minute of it. I found that the post office work was a fascinating thing to do. I am very happy I went into it. At first I was a little bit unhappy because I was unable to, under the Hatch Act, probably, be as vocal and as active as I had been in the political field. But, I'm going to be honest and say I was probably shrewd enough to know how to manipulate and get into the fracas, and I did.

HARTIGAN: Backing up a bit, did the president or the then Senator Kennedy, while you were in the state Senate, ever call you asking you to help him on anything he was concerned about in the state legislature?

STANTON: No, he didn't. I think he probably went through Mr. Powers, who was the Democratic floor leader and then became the president, and I think he was president of the Senate then, which, of course, was probably what he should have done. And Johnnie always used to come to me if there was something he thought I might be, you know, not too interested in or probably had a little different idea, he would always come and say the president is interested in this.

HARTIGAN: Did he ever indicate to you that he was contacted by Senator Kennedy?

STANTON: Yes, he would.

HARTIGAN: Do you recall any of the legislation?

STANTON: No, I couldn't. It's some time back.

HARTIGAN: So the then Senator Kennedy did keep in touch?

STANTON: Oh, he kept in touch with the Democratic regime in the state.

HARTIGAN: The reason I ask is that there's been indications he lost touch with the state activities while he was in the Senate. Do you subscribe to that?

STANTON: I don't know how he could lose touch with us, because actually he was in a different field from what we had. Let's face it, state politics is a very small part of the overall picture that you have when you get into a national field of political thinking and the supporting of legislation. You do have to come back sometimes and probably say I'm interested in this, that, or the other thing. But I never found that he got to the point where he was overbearing on that. Maybe he indicated to them on certain pieces of legislation.... But, actually, I don't know of anything that would have affected him in the national field.

HARTIGAN: But you, you do, you subscribe to the fact then that he did maintain an interest in the state activities rather than the opposite view, which has been expressed, that he lost contact with the state.

STANTON: Well, I think they always like to accuse anybody who has gone upstairs, in their upward mobility, seeking higher office or seeking higher honors, that they forget those down below, but I never thought that John Kennedy did. I never did that. I don't say that he probably maybe he should have come to Fitchburg a little more frequently or maybe he should have done this or he should've done that. But I didn't function that way. I mean I felt that here was a man that I was totally interested in and I wanted him to do a good job in what he was elected to do. But if I could help him I would do it. And I had the feeling that if there was something he wanted me to do he'd contact me. And as long as he didn't, I figured I was doing--that I was satisfying him.

HARTIGAN: Betsy, do you recall any other experiences that you had during the Kennedy era that you might like to comment on? Humorous or otherwise?

STANTON: Oh, I don't remember. I can't think of anything right now. I suppose I'll think of a hundred things after you leave, not a hundred, but several things. I used to enjoy, of course, listening to him when he would talk because he had such a flair. I remember once too, when he first started talking--this was before he ran for the presidency, I think it was probably in '58, he was starting then, or maybe it was '57--he was starting then to move and I remember thinking, oh I hope he can get himself together so that he'll give a smoother explanation of what he wants to do, and that he will smooth out his talks. And I think it was Sorensen [Theodore C. Sorenson] I was sitting beside one night, at some dinner that was in Washington, and the president got up and spoke. He wasn't president then, but he did a magnificent job. I don't even remember what it was, but I remember turning to Sorensen and saying, "That's the best I've ever heard him." And he said, "Do you think he's improved?" And I said, "Positively, a hundred percent."

Do you remember when he first started he used to be kind of jerky? But, then suddenly he began to smooth it out.

HARTIGAN: But you actually.... It was quite noticeable to you then, in the various speeches that he made?

STANTON: He seemed.... Well, he was young and he had a different type of presentation and it seemed to be a little jerky. But this particular night, he really.... I was very impressed, and I thought he'd done an excellent job. And I remember saying that to Sorensen. And he said, "You think?" "Yes," I said, "he has." He said, "I think it's the best he's done too."

HARTIGAN: At what point in the Kennedy era and your association with Kennedy and his organization did you feel he was destined for things higher than what he was doing? When did it strike you that, or did it, that...?

STANTON: Well, I think that I can remember the first time I met him in '52 at that tea when I first started in with the political arena thinking to myself this young man is going to go somewhere. And I thought to myself, he'll get up into the Senate, I don't know just how soon, but he'll get up into the Senate and I can always remember saying, "I hope he's the first Catholic president."

HARTIGAN : When was this now?

STANTON: This would probably be '56 or maybe before that.

HARTIGAN: After his first election to the Senate?

STANTON: Yes, after his first election I thought, he's on his way. And when the time comes I hope I'm here.

HARTIGAN: But you felt that he...?

STANTON: I felt from the beginning, he was destined. Because he had, he was smart, he had the ability to draw people to him and he had a nice rapport with everybody he met. No matter who you brought up to him to meet, he always seemed so pleased and I know there must have been times when he was exhausted.

HARTIGAN: In general terms, Betsy, what was your evaluation or your experience with the Kennedy organization as such? You've been with them for quite some time.

STANTON: I enjoyed every one of them. I thought they were young and they had a great deal to contribute. They weren't the usual run-of-the-mill type of people that I had met in a lot of years previously, when I first came into the arena, as you might say, as a worker for the party. And these were young, they were different faces, they were different names, and they had a lot of vigor, and ambition, for the men. And their loyalty was what impressed me. So many times you're apt to run into somebody, they're supporting the candidate, but they always have a "but" connected with their support.

HARTIGAN: Do you notice a difference between that group and the regular group that was...

STANTON: Oh yes.

HARTIGAN: ...in vogue at the time?

STANTON: This Kennedy group, as I said, they're young, they were vigorous, they were attractive, they were very anxious, they were interested in their candidate, and they weren't jealous of what one or the other might be called upon to do or what recognition he might or might not get. In the other, in the older crowd, there was a certain amount of sitting back and talking about it and not doing a great deal, complaining about this one or that one or the other one. The Kennedy group seemed to move for their candidate. There was never a personal thing with them.

HARTIGAN: There's been many observations made about the activities of the Kennedy women during all the Kennedy campaigns, as a matter of fact. Did you get deeply involved with them in any respect?

STANTON: With the women themselves, you mean, the mother or the--no, I met them, they were always very gracious and no, I never got that deeply involved with them.

HARTIGAN: Except when they were in your area?

STANTON: No. I remember once as national committeewoman--when Jack was running, they had the six New England national committeewomen go down to--that was that first campaign for his first television thing--down there to Hyannis. And we all, of course, met Jackie [Jacqueline B. Kennedy]. We had met her, of course before but she entertained us, then we had coffee and buns afterwards. The six New England women were there. I remember the woman from Rutland, Vermont came down and met me at the State House and we would go down and--I brought Senator Fonseca [Mary L. Fonseca] with us--we listened to Jack and his first tel--[INTERRUPTION]....

HARTIGAN: Betsy, I want to apologize for the interruption with the change of tape, but you were just describing your watching the first television appearance of President Kennedy down in Hyannis Port. Would you...?

STANTON: I said to myself, "Well, Mr. Nixon [Richard M. Nixon], you're right up the creek."

HARTIGAN: You thought it was all over then?

STANTON: I thought well, I knew there was probably much more to come but I felt that this first one was the... They always say the first impression is the best and, he did, he made that first impression, he really.... Mr. Nixon, for all his experience in the Senate and his political know-how, well he did worse than I did, I could do. I'm not the most astute when it comes to that, but he really was, I thought, quite desolate.

HARTIGAN: Did you have any, I'm asking this question because a colleague of yours now, Tom Costin [Thomas P. Costin, Jr.] the Postmaster....

STANTON: Oh yes.

HARTIGAN: Did you run into him at all during the Kennedy, were you were both active in the Kennedy campaign?

STANTON: No, I never did. I never ran into Tom until the postmaster thing, until that summer, the postmaster conventions, then when he got to be national committeeman, not national committeeman, president of the National Association, then of course, we got deeply involved. And I think I used to drive him crazy because there wasn't any woman at the head table or something like that.

HARTIGAN: The reason I thought it was interesting was that I had known both of you on and off and we all ended up in the post office.

STANTON: Yes, I know it. Yes.

HARTIGAN: Betsy, where were you the day of the assassination? Do you recall?

STANTON: I do recall. I had gone over to the radio station to make a tape for something, I can't remember what it was. But, I got in there and I was sitting down waiting and the newsman came out and he said to me, "Mrs. Stanton, President Kennedy has been shot," and I said "My lord, what was it." I said, "Is he badly...?" He said "He's dead."

Now that was before it even went on the air. I couldn't cry. I couldn't talk. I couldn't do anything. I just sat there. And I said, "Well, I guess I'll go back to the office." I didn't do whatever it was I had come over there to do. I put on my coat and came back to the office and I told the boys what I had heard. So then they turned the radio on, but it wasn't until about a half hour afterwards that it came over, that he was dead.

HARTIGAN: What was the reaction of the people that you knew in the community?

STANTON: Well, in the post office everybody was--we were walking like robots, nobody knew exactly what they were doing. People were crying on the streets and the radio station called me and while I was able to give a statement.... But I didn't break, I didn't break until, I think, it was the day we had the funeral. Not the funeral, we had the service at St. Bernard's Church. And the post office people--I had a number of carriers

and clerks who came with me to attend it. It was a very lovely service. That was the day that when I got home I cried. I thought I'd never stop.

HARTIGAN: Are you familiar with the Warren Commission Report on the assassination?

STANTON: No, but I mean I read the publicity about the thing.

HARTIGAN: Are you satisfied with the results? That it was Oswald and...?

STANTON: Yes, I am.

HARTIGAN: I mean, some of these new revelations that are coming out in books and newspapers by writers, they haven't convinced you?

STANTON: I think some of these people have very vivid imaginations. And it would almost seem to me, it would almost.... I would feel that this Warren Commission had done a very excellent job as far as getting into the things and investigating and so on and so forth. Why they can't let the dead lie in peace, I don't know. What's it gonna change? That's my only question. If it would bring him back sure I'd say have all the investigations you want. It's not going to change anything, it's just going to keep that wound from healing, that so many people had felt when it occurred. 'Cause it was a very deep thing with many people.

HARTIGAN: Betsy, recently, as you are aware, there have been, there has been a slew of charges and braggadocio statements made by the just outside of the country women. Being a woman in politics, one that I've always felt had her head on pretty straight, how do you evaluate this onslaught of all these exposures?

STANTON: Well, I think it's outrageous. I can't believe it. I don't see how a man who, a man with all the problems that he had--he was married, he had children, he had tragedies in the family--I don't see how he had time to be carrying on with all the ladies that say he carried on with them. He never struck me as that kind of a man. I think he was always.... I always found him to be just a little reserved, as far as I could see. But, I think they say that about every man who's gotten to the top. Some of them seem to feel that this is, you know, an accomplishment.

HARTIGAN: Do you think this is something that they're in for the financial gain?

STANTON: Yes, I do.

HARTIGAN: And you're not the least bit disturbed by it?

STANTON: I'm not disturbed by it, no.

HARTIGAN: Betsy....

STANTON: It annoys me. And to think they would do that to somebody that is dead and can't defend themselves. And also it annoys me because it must be a very shattering thing for Jackie and the children to pick up the papers.

HARTIGAN: Betsy, is there any way you'd like to sum up our interview today and your general observations about your experiences during the Kennedy administration?

STANTON: I think I have.... It's a hard thing to sum up something that you had very strong feelings about. I was very pleased and honored to have been a part of anything that I was able to do for Jack or his family. I have always said that if there was anything that any of the Kennedys ever wanted me to do, all they had to do was pick up the telephone. Because in my opinion, I owe them far more than they would ever owe me, for being able to participate with them. Anything that I could do, I would be happy to do it for them.

HARTIGAN: What about the country? Do you think its...?

STANTON: Oh, I think the country has got to get rid of....

HARTIGAN: No, I mean his short term....

STANTON: Oh yes, I think it gave us a very--at a time when we had nothing, when we had nothing but old people at the helm--that it gave us a fresh outlook. It also showed that the young people had a great deal to offer. I'm now much older than some of these people who are starting out and I love the young people. I like to see them get out there because I think they have great deal to offer. It's a fresh outlook that they give us. And I hope that they'll continue, I don't want to go back to some of the old time politicians though, because we had a taste of something young and fresh and clean. And that was what the Kennedy administration did for me, anyway.

HARTIGAN: Betsy, thank you very much for the time you've given us today, well, this evening, it's now after seven o'clock at night, and on behalf of the Oral History Department of the Kennedy Library I appreciate the time you've given us. If by chance, while you're browsing through your memorabilia you find anything you would feel would be of interest to the library, or for students coming in to study at the library, I'd appreciate it if you'd let us know and we'll have an archivist come out and check it over and possibly you might consider donating such material to the library.

STANTON: I'd be. If I had anything I will. If I come across any I'll be happy to give it to them because I do want that to be a very strong part for the future of Massachusetts and the young people. They're the ones who are going to need an idol, and although I don't believe particularly in idols, I think he has opened the door to a new horizon.

HARTIGAN: Thank you very much, Betsy.

[END OF INTERVIEW]