

Claude E. Hooton, Jr. Oral History Interview – JFK#1, 03/24/1966
Administrative Information

Creator: Claude E. Hooton, Jr.
Interviewer: Charles T. Morrissey and Ronald J. Grele
Date of Interview: March 24, 1966
Place of Interview: Washington, D.C.
Length: 35 pages

Biographical Note

Member, John F. Kennedy's Presidential campaign staff (1960), discusses personal relationship with the Kennedy family, and JFK's campaign in West Virginia, among other issues.

Access

Portions closed.

Usage Restrictions

According to the deed of gift signed March 17, 1969, copyright of these materials will be assigned to the United States Government upon death of the donor. Users of these materials are advised to determine the copyright status of any document from which they wish to publish.

Copyright

The copyright law of the United States (Title 17, United States Code) governs the making of photocopies or other reproductions of copyrighted material. Under certain conditions specified in the law, libraries and archives are authorized to furnish a photocopy or other reproduction. One of these specified conditions is that the photocopy or reproduction is not to be "used for any purpose other than private study, scholarship, or research." If a user makes a request for, or later uses, a photocopy or reproduction for purposes in excesses of "fair use," that user may be liable for copyright infringement. This institution reserves the right to refuse to accept a copying order if, in its judgment, fulfillment of the order would involve violation of copyright law. The copyright law extends its protection to unpublished works from the moment of creation in a tangible form. Direct your questions concerning copyright to the reference staff.

Transcript of Oral History Interview

These electronic documents were created from transcripts available in the research room of the John F. Kennedy Library. The transcripts were scanned using optical character recognition and the resulting text files were proofread against the original transcripts. Some formatting changes were made. Page numbers are noted where they would have occurred at the bottoms of the pages of the original transcripts. If researchers have any concerns about accuracy, they are encouraged to visit the Library and consult the transcripts and the interview recordings.

Suggested Citation

Claude E. Hooton, Jr., recorded interview by Charles T. Morrissey and Ronald J. Grele, March 24, 1966, (page number), John F. Kennedy Library Oral History Program.

GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION
NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS SERVICE

Gift of Personal Statement

By CLAUDE E. HOOTON, JR.

to the

John Fitzgerald Kennedy Library

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

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

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

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

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

Signed

Claude E. Hooton, Jr.

Date

March 12, 1969

Accepted

James B. Rhoads
Archivist of the United States

Date

March 17, 1969

Claude E. Hooton, Jr. – JFK#1

Table of Contents

<u>Page</u>	<u>Topic</u>
1	Meeting the Kennedy family through Edward M. Kennedy [EMK] at Harvard
2	Meeting with John F. Kennedy [JFK] in his Senate office
4	EMK's wedding
4	Agreeing to campaign for JFK in West Virginia
5, 28	Organization of West Virginia campaign
7	Taking over campaigning in five Northeastern counties
9	Poverty in West Virginia
10	Visiting families living in poverty
13	Contact people in small counties being threatened by community
15, 20	Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Jr. speaking at various events
17	Working with a Presbyterian minister to calm the religious issue
19, 27	Roosevelt talking about service in the war
22	Election night and results
24	Hubert H. Humphrey's reaction to the results
27	EMK speaking for JFK in West Virginia
30	Public reaction to Kennedy win
31	Personal contact with Robert F. Kennedy
32	Press in the five Northeastern counties
33	Uniqueness of West Virginian people
34	Volunteer groups in West Virginia

WITHDRAWAL SHEET (PRESIDENTIAL LIBRARIES)

Document Type	Correspondents or Title	Date	Restriction
OH	<p align="center">Page Containing Closed Portion</p> <p>Page 22 Reviewed and Determined to Remain Closed 3/9/2015</p> <p align="right">Created/ Updated: 04/10/2015</p>	3/24/1966	C

File Location:
John F. Kennedy Oral History Project
Claude E. Hooton, Jr., Interview #1, March 24, 1966

- Restriction Codes**
- (A) Closed by applicable Executive Order governing access to national security information.
 - (B) Closed by statute or by the agency which originated the document.
 - (C) Closed in accordance with restrictions contained in the donor's deed of gift.

Oral History Interview

With

Claude E. Hooton, Jr.

March 24, 1966
Washington, D.C.

By Charles T. Morrissey and Ronald J. Grele
Also present David F. Powers

For the John F. Kennedy Library

MORRISSEY: How did you come into the Kennedy orbit?

HOOTON: I met Ted Kennedy [Edward M. Kennedy] playing freshman football at Harvard. And I guess the reason we got to be closer friends than ordinary was the fact that his accent was worse than mine. Ever since then we've been very close friends. The first time I met John Kennedy [John F. Kennedy] was up at the Cape. I was a freshman at Harvard at the time, and he and Jackie [Jacqueline B. Kennedy Onassis] had just returned from their honeymoon down in Mexico. I recall that I was completely impressed by the fact that I was going to meet a Congressman. I was not too familiar with the family background of his father [Joseph P. Kennedy, Sr.] and all. But the story I told during the campaign is that I walked in, and Jack actually had just stepped out of the shower, and I didn't know whether to call him Congressman or Mr. Kennedy or what. But when I shook hands with him,

[-1-]

I always said that if you met John F. Kennedy you had to call him Jack, which I did thereafter until he was President.

But the second time I met Jack was when Ted and I used to go by the hospital and sing some of these Irish songs "Born down on A Street, Raised up on B Street, Southie South

Boston is My Home Town.” And the guy was so thin then. Then I did hear him when he was running for the Senate one time at a ladies club.

But the first time that my wife Libby [Libby Hooton] met him—I think this was probably why she was such a dedicated Kennedy follower—we were up here in Washington. He was in the Senate at that time. We had just been married six or eight months, and I asked Libby if she’d like to come over and meet Ted’s brother. She said, “Yes.” So I called up there. I said, “I don’t know whether he even remembers me or not.” And I called the office, and they hesitated a moment and said, “Just a moment.” Then they said, “Well, could you come right on over now?” And I said we’d be delighted.

We went on over and I was impressed, and of course my wife was, my young bride, with my knowing such high officials in Washington at the time. We walked right in the office, and there were people waiting that looked like they’d been there for months with cobwebs on their briefcases. And we went on in.... He asked us right into his office, and he opened the door and said, “Hello, Claude.” And as Libby came through the door with me, he said, “Is this the little lady I’ve heard so much about?” And of course, Libby just immediately was “Whatever you want”—you know, the way he did it. Evidently, I guess Ted had talked to him. He knew quite a few of the details of the wedding, you know. Of course that impressed Libby no end. And that impressed the heck out of me.

And he said, “Where are you staying?” I said, “Well, we’re over here at the Sheraton.” He said, “Why don’t you stay at my home? It’s right there in Georgetown. It’s really a nice place.” I said, “Oh no, thank you very much.” And he said, “Well, it’s really nice. It’s even got a swimming pool.” Actually, I think it was his house in Virginia at

[-2 -]

that time. And he said, “It actually has a swimming pool. You’ll really like it.” And he really was as if we would look down on accepting his hospitality, and then he insisted that I use his automobile. I said, “No, we’d just really get lost with a car.”

Then he walked us out of his office and down the front steps and put us in a cab and said, “I’m going to send my car over.” And I said, “No.” We got up to the hotel and went to the room, and as soon as we sat down, they called from the garage and said, “Your car is here, Mr. Hooton.” And I always kidded him about the fact that it was out of gas when he got it there. But that impressed me no end, the fact that he had a memory like that—and a wit. Of course, I’ve always thought the guy had one of the finest wits and quickest wits of any person I ever met. And the next time I guess, I’m trying to think when the next time....

GRELE: Could we go back for a minute?

HOOTON: Yes.

GRELE: You saw him in the hospital?

HOOTON: Yes, up in Boston.

GRELE: Do you recall what your impressions were of how sick he really was at that time?

HOOTON: Yes. I thought he looked pretty sick. He looked very, very, very thin, you know. And Jack used to be pretty thin anyway, but he looked.... Well, Ted told me at the time, he said it was a touch and go situation at that time, whether he was going to be able to get out of bed or not.

GRELE: Had he begun to work on *Profiles in Courage* when you first met him?

[-3 -]

HOOTON: I don't know. I think he had started. I'm not sure whether he.... I think he went from that hospital down to Florida, and I think that's actually where he started on that. But I was trying to think what the next time.... Well, actually the next time I saw Jack was in West Virginia, I guess, after that. No, I saw him at Ted's wedding. He used to razz me all the time. Ted and I used to get into a little trouble occasionally. I remember at Ted's wedding I was standing up there at the altar waiting for the bride to come up and, well, that was when he leaned over and said, "Hooton, you're not doing so badly for a Protestant." This was when they had the Cardinal and everyone there, and I was a little bit [laughter] worried about what I should do next. But he had an uncanny knack of doing things like that which always made it a little bit easier and a little happier occasion.

After the wedding I guess the next time I saw him was in West Virginia, and I talked to him on the phone. Do you want me to go into that campaign and how I got up there?

GRELE: Sure.

HOOTON: Well, Ted called me one night at midnight—in fact, I was sound asleep—and eventually got around to saying would I like to come to West Virginia. And I said, well, it was a very trying time for me. I was right in the midst of leasing a shopping center in Houston. But I just thought, well, I can't say no. That's the first time the guy's ever asked me to do anything, and when I was at Harvard, the family had always been so nice to me. When your best friend asks you, you do it. I think that's what most of those guys did.

Well, I went up to West Virginia. I arrived up there, and I expected to have a delegation at the airport—at least someone to meet me at the airport. You read all about this well-oiled Kennedy organization in Wisconsin. When I got out of the airplane, there wasn't anyone there, and I had difficulty even finding a taxi to get into the town. It was

[-4 -]

the Kanawha Hotel. I'll never forget that day because I walked in the lobby.... And Ted had said, "Larry O'Brien [Lawrence F. O'Brien] will meet you and square you away and get you all set and tell you what to do and how to do it." Well, I checked in the Kanawha Hotel, and I

expected it to be at least reasonably plush spot, and my impression of it was that it must have been the worst hotel in the city. The room I had I remember had a rug, one of these old worn-out rugs, and the commode was not in the room itself, but the lavatory was. I must say it was a disappointment. And then I couldn't find anyone that had ever heard of Larry O'Brien at the desk. They had a few Kennedy stickers up around the lobby.

Finally, one of the people said, "I don't know. That bunch is down in the basement, I think. And some of them are upstairs." So I went upstairs, and I couldn't find out anything. So I went down to the basement and said, "Larry O'Brien?" "Yep." And that basement was worse than the rest of the hotel. Larry was sitting down there, and he had.... Oh, there were three or four people there. And it just didn't look as well oiled and greased as I had read about. So I asked Larry, I said, "Larry, I'm Claude Hooton." He said, "Hi, Claude, we've been expecting you." I said, "What can I do?" He said, "I don't know." [Laughter] He said, "Don't ask me." So then he said I should go up and talk to this judge. So I did—a fellow from Boston. I don't know whether you want me to put in here all the.... These are more personal, but I don't know whether they're in the context of what you want. They're not directly pertinent to the President.

MORRISSEY: Well, the more detailed the better.

HOOTON: Well, I've forgotten this judge's name. But I went upstairs. He said, "He'll tell you what's the general situation and all." And I walked up and sat down in front of this guy's desk, and I said, "Larry O'Brien told me to come up and talk to you and get the general picture of the campaign." And this guy said,

[-5 -]

"What picture?" He said, "I don't know anything about any picture. How about coming up and having a drink up in the room, and then I'll try to fill you in on what I know." And he was a pretty rough character, but a delightful guy. So I went on up to his room, and we sat there and had three or four scotches. And I kept wondering.... I was ready to go out and solve this whole problem of religion and get this election up and won, and I couldn't seem to find anybody that knew anything about it or what was happening. So he didn't really help me much. He said, "Well, we'll go to dinner."

And I think we went downstairs and sat in on a meeting. I think John Bailey [John Moran Bailey] was there—Ken O'Donnell [Kenneth P. O'Donnell] was not there, but John Bailey was there. I think Lem Billings [Kirk LeMoyne Billings] was there. Larry O'Brien was there. Gosh, I can't think who the others were. At that particular meeting that afternoon I distinctly remember and recall—always will—the fact that John Bailey repeated over and over, he said, "He's made the worst political mistake in history." He said it was just ridiculously stupid to go to West Virginia. He said, "We don't have a Chinaman's chance in a hundred of winning this state." And I was a little bit upset—first of all, the fact that there was no organization that I could determine; and secondly, that here was a guy that was supposed to be the political pro and he said, "political suicide" was his expression. He said, "This campaign is political suicide."

MORRISSEY: Was this right after the Wisconsin Primary had concluded?

HOOTON: Right.

MORRISSEY: Was the judge from Boston named Frank Morrissey [Francis X. Morrissey]?

HOOTON: No, it wasn't Frank Morrissey. It was..... I can't think of the name of him—I doubt that I'll ever recall his name. But, anyway, after

[-6-]

that meeting we went over to dinner. There was a club, a press club there, and we started to go in. And this judge was with us and I've forgotten whether it was Larry O'Brien or who it was. But this little man said, "You can't come in here. No, you're not coming in here." And I thought, "Well, boy, they're well liked, well organized, and they're optimistic." And it turned out that this judge who was from Boston had.... Evidently, someone had made a comment the night before, and he'd slugged him, held him up against the wall, and he was just not allowed in there anymore. So we had to go into some hamburger joint—we couldn't get a drink or anything—and have a hamburger.

We went back to the hotel that night, and the next morning I still didn't know what I was going to do. Evidently, Paul Fay [Paul B. Fay, Jr.], Red Fay, had these five counties which I eventually wound up with. Bob [Robert F. Kennedy] came in that night, and they sort of revamped the campaign strategy. And again Bailey was talking about the black chances that we had of doing anything there. I think that night they said, "You're going to be thinking about whether you'd like to stay. We have some of these areas right around Charleston, or you can go out and take these five counties."

After I'd been there that long, I just thought anywhere I'd go would be better than around the Kanawha Hotel. There was more confusion than I'd ever seen anywhere in my life. So the next morning Red Fay came in, and I did decide and told Larry I'd just as soon go on out to these counties. So I had a rented automobile and I had a big discussion with Red Fay who had decided that he had to get back to California. He'd been there over the weekend, and I think I know why he had to go back. Once I got to Elkins, I knew. I was looking for an excuse to get out of this place. But I drove on up, and I was impressed at the time by the beautiful countryside in West Virginia. I had always imagined West Virginia as coal mines and soot.

So I got up to the first stop; it was in Webster Springs in the county [Webster]—I can't recall at this time. But it was the county seat, and Webster Springs was the name of the town. I was to check in with a lawyer there who was the local representative. And Ted had told me, he said, "Whatever

[-7-]

you do, don't bring any coats and ties up here. This is an informal state. They'll think you're big-shotting if you wear coats and ties." So this guy took me to dinner and he said.... At

dinner I noticed he had on a coat and tie, and I was there in a sport shirt. So I asked him finally, how I should dress, and he said, "Well, generally we all wear coats and ties around here." So I had to send home to my wife for a complete new suitcase full of clothes. I had no suits at all. I had one suit and all sport shirts and slacks.

Then after that night.... If I remember, Webster Springs was terribly upset because the President had been due in there and instead Ted had come, and they'd had a torch-light parade and a band and the whole kit and caboodle prior to the time I got to West Virginia. So they really felt that they had been kind of slighted that Jack had been every other place in West Virginia but Webster Springs. Well, the population of Webster Springs was probably about six hundred, and if you pulled in all the surrounding countryside, there were maybe three thousand people in the whole county.

But I went on up to Elkins which was the central headquarters for these five counties to meet the guy who was the king-pin up there. He owned a corner walk-up hotel, along with a beer joint and a pool hall; and he officed in an ice cream store. I thought the Kanawha Hotel was bad until I got to that one. It was just unbelievably bad. It had an air conditioner in it that must have been the first one that came out. That was the only air conditioned room in it. I really had to fight this room; it had a smell to it that was unbearable. You could hear what the people upstairs were doing; you could hear what the people next door were doing; you could hear the other side. It was pretty interesting. I learned some jokes from salesmen, and the beds squeaking [laughter] and really it was enlightening.

GRELE: Who was the man who owned the hotel? Do you remember?

[-8-]

HOOTON: All I can tell you of the name now is Bob, and I should know it by heart because he was an extremely helpful guy, one of the few. When I hit those counties, there wasn't a Kennedy fan anywhere. People didn't even like to talk about the primary. The key man, for example, other than Bob, the guy who was supposed to be the number two man in that particular county, came up to me and said, "Boy, I'm with that Jack Kennedy all the way." And he pulled up his lapel, and he had a button on the underside of his lapel. Well, I found out in the next three or four days that that's where all the Kennedy buttons were. There wasn't a lapel button anywhere in those counties.

MORRISSEY: What was bothering them? The religious....

HOOTON: Religion. Oh, definitely so. And they just didn't want to get involved. "I've got friends, and I don't want to argue with them. I just like this guy." So this guy Bob had an ice cream store, and I stood up all night there.

The thing that impressed me most in West Virginia in these counties was the total poverty there. I mean I had read the stories and heard the reports, but it was there. And it's impossible to tell people how poor that area was—beautiful countryside, everything. In Elkins, for example, both the theaters were boarded up; there was only one restaurant in the whole town. And it was the largest town in those five counties. There were many boarded up places—they were just flat boarded up. And a lot of guys sitting around on the street with a

hip flask, you know. They'd just scrounge around and scrape up enough money to buy some whiskey. They couldn't go anywhere. I picked them up hitchhiking all over there.

For example, one guy I picked up had hitchhiked forty-three miles because he'd seen a newspaper ad that advertised. Some woman had advertised she needed a handyman to cut some wood for her fireplace. And he said when he got there at six o'clock in the morning, there were forty-two

[-9-]

people waiting to cut that cordwood.

There were guys just like that all over—it was just pathetic—where they'd bought a home and started to buy a TV set, maybe, and a car, anticipating, and all of a sudden they were out of work. They were singly trained for one occupation and literally couldn't adapt to anything else. And they didn't have enough money really to.... They kept thinking something would happen, that what little they had left.... Then gradually they'd take the TV set and take the automobile and then start taking the furniture. And they just kept thinking, "Well, I'll get it all back. Something's going to break." But it hadn't at that time.

So anyway this guy, I spent all night talking with him, and he was very helpful in that he gave me a pretty good picture of some of the problems there. He was a fantastic guy. He gave a lot of these guys, just gave them, free booze and things and actually had some property right out around there somewhere where he let them sleep at night. In the meantime he was buying up these small farms so that hopefully some day he could bring some cattle business up there during the season. The grass and all was there.

But in any event the key county to me as far as.... Oh, I made the tour down through my counties. I just feel stupid, I can't remember this one. But I met the guy there; the Kennedy man owned a diner. He took me out, and we met a few people at the courthouse in a very cool reception. We went out to a motel. This racketeer who had been run out of Tennessee by Kefauver [Estes Kefauver] had this fine motel. It was the nicest place I saw. The hotel I slept in there.... The coal set on my car the next morning and just literally covered it. And the hotel I slept in, I'll never forget that one. The mattress was straw, literally was straw. And the pillows were, too. It was just like sleeping on crinkly. You could just hear it cracking under you, and literally you could hear all four sides what was going on. I shared a bath with the room next to me. But it was just unbelievable. It was a new world for me. And I've been through the army and worked around and been exposed to some

[-10-]

pretty rough stuff, but never, as I say, where that's the nicest place in town.

But, nevertheless, this racketeer.... That's a pretty interesting story. He said all he did all day was, he had married this prostitute, and she fixed him steaks, and he ate steaks and drank rum and coke. And that's all he ate; and that's all he drank; and that's all he did. So he started talking and had this guy who was the county Kennedy man, and he started talking about the poverty and the conditions. And he said, "Now listen to me, now listen to me. You don't believe me, do you?" He said, "But now listen to me. I'll tell you what's wrong with West Virginia. Now listen to me. They're all worn out," he said. "That's what's wrong." He

said, "They've been interbred so much they've got one eye in their forehead, and their head's just grown into a cone. That's what's wrong with West Virginia." He said, "You don't believe me do you?"

He said, "Now listen to me. Would you believe it if I told you that a man here that lived right out here on the highway, a nice looking house from the outside, has nine children by his wife and nine children by her sister? You don't believe me, do you?" I said, "Well, that's a pretty strong story." He said, "Well, you think that's bad?" I said, "Well, that sounds pretty bad to me." He said, "It's a three room house. You know how many people are living in there? That's, let's see, eighteen, nineteen, twenty people in a three room house." He said, "You think that's bad? You know where they go to the bathroom? They pick up a board on the porch and crap right under it. That's exactly what they do. You don't believe me, do you?" And he kept, "You don't believe me. You don't believe me."

He said, "Now you think that's bad, don't you? That isn't the worst. He's got two daughters here in school, and they're both pregnant by him. You don't believe me, do you?" I said, "Well, that's getting pretty strong." He said, "Well, the doctor...." He said, "That's how it all came to light. Right here in this very town. The doctor took.... This girl was in school and pregnant, and he said, 'I had to take her out. We didn't know what to do with her. We asked who

[-11-]

made her pregnant. She said her daddy had.' He said he didn't know what.... And then the other sister came in, and she was pregnant, too." He said, "You can go out there and look at it, but you won't believe it. You'll just say you don't believe me. Well, if you don't believe me, you can check with the doctor." Which I did, and the doctor verified the story.

This fellow said, "Well, there's only one way if you want to go out there and see this." He said, "You won't believe it." And I said, "I still find it hard to believe that twenty people could live in three rooms." So I went out there. And he said, "The only way we can go is...." He said, "The last time I came out to check them over, I played like I was phone man. They have a telephone." He said, "You'll just be a phone man checking the service."

So we drove up this paved highway; there was this lovely little stone fireplace; it looked like a cute little cottage up there. We drove in, and there were two that really did look like one-eyes came walking out the driveway just kind of slobbering. We got up on the porch, and it was really a scene from Tobacco Road or somewhere. This old woman, the mother—one of them—was sitting in a rocking chair, and she had on about six sweaters, and they were all full of holes. She had one of these stocking caps pulled down over her head, and her hands were filthy. It was just sickening. And the stench! Really, it would knock your hat off. And he showed me the board that they used. We went in the house, and they were suspicious. They were mumbling around there and just didn't want us to come in. But we had to check the phone.

We went in the house, and there was a little entry kind of hall where the stairs had to go upstairs for the third room. As we came in the door, a boy and a girl were making love in the bed in this bedroom in here. And there was trash all stuffed around the sides, and in this room to the right, right in the center of the floor was a telephone with this cord running out.

And that's all that was in this room except some trash around the edges. But it was the cleanest

[-12-]

room in the house. So we checked the phone on out and left. I must say that was an enlightening experience. And they said that was just typical of a great many, and it changed my whole outlook. As you drive by and see a pretty little cottage up there, just what in the hell is up there.

But then I went from there on back to Elkins, and Paul Corbin, who was sort of.... Oh, a great big fat guy had gone through and kind of semi-organized the state and picked out some key people.

MORRISSEY: Matt Reese [Matthew A. Reese, Jr.]?

HOOTON: Matt Reese had gone in there and done preliminary work. Well, there were some counties that he wasn't able to find a contact person. And Parsons was one of those. It's Parsons, Parson's annex—it's Parsons. I'll get the name straight on this. But I was back in Elkins that night, and Corbin came in about 11:30 and he said, "Well, I've got it organized." "What do you mean?" He said, "Well, I went over to Parsons, and I've got a woman over there who's going to handle literature." He said, "That Matt Reese doesn't do a damn thing. I went over and got it organized." And so I said, "Well, fine. What should I do?" He said, "Just pick up the phone and call her. Just pick up that phone and call her right now." So I did. He said, "it's all set, all set. But you ought to follow right up. That's politics. Follow right up night or day. It's better to wake them up that to catch them during the day."

So I called this woman. I said, "Hello, Mrs. So-and-so?" "Yes." "This is Claude Hooton speaking. I will be working with you here on the Kennedy campaign." She just broke into tears. She was hysterical. She said, [Hysterical sobs and crying imitated throughout woman's conversation.] "Just come pick up that stuff. Just get it out of my house. I don't want to ever see it. I'm even sorry I.... Just plain pick it up. Can you come tonight and pick it up?" And I couldn't understand what.... And finally I said, "Well, madam, you caught me a little unaware there. Perhaps you could...."

[-13-]

"My husband came in here to practice medicine, and he said they'd threatened to just destroy his practice. And he only makes a little money, and all he wants to do is play golf and get a little practice to afford it. Just come pick it up, please. Just come get it." She was literally hysterical. And evidently, in talking to her, two people had called and threatened her bodily. So I told her I'd be over the next day and pick it up. I said, "You did a great job, Paul. You really got that one organized." So he said, "Why, what's wrong?" So I told him the story. So the next day I went over there. Of course, Corbin hit for the woods then; I don't know where he went from there.

I went over there the next day and drove into town, and I stopped at a drugstore to have a Coke and asked where this lady.... Maybe somebody might know where she lived. So I walked in, and there were two fellows sitting at the end of this bar in the drugstore talking to this girl who was behind the counter. So I went in and sat down. They looked at me when I came in, and I waited and just absolutely nothing happened. So finally I said, "Ahem, Miss, could I please get a Coke?" And I might as well have been talking to the wall; they didn't even flicker an eyelash. So finally I got up and I moved down where they were and I said, "Is it possible to get a Coca-Cola in here?" They said, "We're all out of Cokes." And I said, "Well, Seven-Up, anything?" "Why don't you try across the street at the service station?"

And they literally wouldn't talk to me and would not serve me in that drugstore because they saw my Kennedy car. I had all these stickers all over it. And I was flabbergasted. I had never witnessed anything in my life like that. I was relatively new to politics, but I just couldn't imagine that they wouldn't sell me a Coke. But they wouldn't.

So I finally did find this woman's house, and as I pulled up in front of her house, she went out the back door at a dead run. Her husband had put this material underneath the sofa in the living room. He'd hidden it underneath the sofa in the living room. He wouldn't even come down the stairs. He told me from the stairway, he said, "That stuff's under the sofa. Just please remove it from my house. Just please remove it

[-14-]

from my house. "I said, "Well, I was hoping that possibly I could discuss it and find out what..." "Just get it out of here. We don't want to hear another peep about it. Don't want to ever hear about it again. Just please don't disturb my wife. She's almost had a nervous breakdown. Just please get that out of my house." So that's what I did.

I went from there by the local Democratic county chairman, who was a woman, and I said, "I'm Claude Hooton on the Ken..." "Just stay out of here. Just stay out of here," she said. "I wish I could help," she said, "but just stay out of here. Don't stir up that religious issue in here. Just leave it out. We'll do a lot better. Just don't leave any literature. Just stay out." And I thought, "Well, this is a heck of a note in the United States of America where the county Democratic chairman refuses to let you put some literature out in her county." So I obviously was going to get nowhere with her and get no cooperation.

So I went back, and as far as I could determine.... I talked to a lawyer in the courthouse there, and he said to me, "I'm embarrassed, but there's nothing I can do." Which meant he wasn't going to do anything. And he wasn't. So I didn't know what to do with that county.

And then a day later, I think it was, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Jr.... We were touring through a couple of counties, and he was going to go on down to Webster Springs to represent Jack again. They never did get to see Jack in any of my five counties. But while we were driving down, I explained this situation. I said, "It's impossible." I said nobody would even talk to me; no one will take any literature; I can't get a bumper sticker on anybody's car. And he said, "Heck, that's easy. Just find a minister, a Protestant minister—preferably Episcopalian because that's what I am—to invite me to his home for dinner. I'll answer the questions." And Franklin Roosevelt said, "And if you can get somebody to throw a tomato at

me, we've won it. We've won the state." And I said, "It might not be a tomato, it might be a brick!"

So we went on down to Webster Springs—one of the most fantastic things I saw during the campaign. We arrived at

[-15-]

dark. The courthouse in Webster Springs was up on this hillside, and there were these steps that led right up to it. I guess it must have been about two or three hundred feet up these steps. When we came in, they had torches going up this thing. As I say, that town only had about six hundred population. Maybe a little more than that, but it couldn't have been much more. And there were almost, I would say, three to five thousand people literally covered that whole hill. It was something to see.

It just gave me the chills because as we got out of the car, they had the high school band all there in their uniforms. I remember how some of them were hanging down. You know, in these little towns, they just couldn't buy new ones, so they'd fit them around. They struck up "Happy Days Are Here Again," you know, but they'd miss a few notes. It was just....

They started walking up these steps in front of us. It was scheduled to be in the courthouse in the room inside, but there were so many people they just set up the speaker deal outside. And walking up that hill, these old women would reach out—and crying, literally crying—tears running down their cheeks, "I voted for your father four times, and I just want to touch you." And they were just like he was some kind of god or something. Franklin Roosevelt, you know, was fantastic in that area for what his father had done, and his mother. And he looked so much like his dad. And all the way up that hill....

And Franklin Roosevelt, I'll never forget, to me was a fantastic campaigner. If somebody'd touch him from behind, he'd always reach back and grab him. And he was picking up the little girls and going up that hill with that "Happy Days Are Here Again." It was really something out of a movie, a history. I don't know what it was. But then we got up to the top up there, and he started in with his speech. He said, "When I served in World War II with John F. Kennedy, no one asked whether I was Protestant, Catholic, or Jewish." That's the way he started this thing, and then he went on through this whole pitch which was terrific. You know. And he sounded just like Franklin D. Roosevelt. The people were crying, I mean literally crying.

[-16-]

And when we finished that thing, I knew that if Franklin couldn't do it in West Virginia, nobody could in my counties. In that particular county we got the only Humphrey [Hubert H. Humphrey] button that I picked up in my five counties.

So I went back on up, and I went over to a phone. We had a guy who was supposed to be a Kennedy man whom I'd missed the first trip over to Parsons. I went back over there and talked to him and said, "I'd like to talk to the ministerial conference here—whoever's in charge of that." He said, "Well, that's so-and-so right down here at the bank." While I was talking to him, somebody went running out and evidently ran down to the bank. I went into

this guy's office, and I said, "I'm here to find out if there is an Episcopal..." And he said, "We don't have an Episcopal minister." I said, "Well, if there's a minister here in town who would invite Franklin Roosevelt here for dinner. And anyone who cared to find out anything about Kennedy could come on by afterwards, and he'd be glad to talk to them." "Don't want any of that in here," he said. "And, furthermore, I've just resigned from that post, and the new fellow, he's not here." The Chamber of Commerce was one approach I had.... And there was not one member of the Chamber of Commerce in that town. I mean, nowhere in the.... They couldn't have gone anywhere. They were there, but none of them would see me. So that was one approach I had tried and failed—for them to recommend a minister. So this guy said, "Just stay out of here. You're just going to come in here and create problems and troubles and have people fighting and create a disturbance in our town, and we just don't want it. That's why we don't want you in here with those stickers and things. We don't want to create a problem. We're real happy the way we're going here, and we just don't need all that commotion." About that time I just sat there and thought, "Well, this is utterly unbelievable. Franklin Roosevelt can't even come by and eat dinner here."

While this was going on, boy, word must have spread through the town like wildfire because in walked a Presbyterian minister who had a halo on his head as far as I

[-17-]

was concerned. But he came walking in there, he just stormed into that office, and this guy jumped up. He didn't know what he was doing. "Now, John, you just go on out of here. Now just let me handle it." And this guy said, "Let you handle it, my foot!" He said, "I am hereby extending an invitation to Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Jr., to have dinner with me any time he pleases. I have never been so ashamed of any place or any people as I am today of this town. I don't know where I failed in my duty and responsibilities, but this isn't America where this sort of situation exists." He said, "Mr. Hooton, I'm John Finley. I'm the Presbyterian minister here. I just want to apologize for myself and for the people in this town. They just are not this kind of people. Something's wrong here. I don't have very much," he said, "but I want you to come and have lunch with me now if you will. My wife's in the car and we weren't planning on having anybody. I don't have a lot of money, but if you will, we'll just stop by the grocery store here, and I'll pick up some bread and sandwich meat, and we'll come on over and have lunch." "John, you better not do that. John, I'm warning you right now. John, just don't get mixed up in this thing. You've got your church to think of." So he just stormed out of there.

He had about, I don't know, five or six children. We went in this little grocery store. He wouldn't let me buy the loaf of bread. I said, "I'll buy the..." He said, "Nope, you're my guest in my house, and I'm proud and honored to have you." So he didn't have enough money for mayonnaise, but he got some sandwich meat and some bread. We went back to his house—a very sparsely furnished house, but very neat and clean. We were sitting down. His wife had fixed up these sandwiches, and it was just really a paper plate, practically, but it was just like to me the best meal I ever ate in my life.

But while we were eating, the phone started ringing. I heard him go to the phone, and I heard, "I don't care. That's what I'm going to do. Furthermore, I don't know why you have

to call me.” These people were calling and threatening him. Then this guy who had been at the bank came over,

[-18-]

and he had another guy. He excused himself from dinner, came outside, and they went out on the porch, and I heard all this shouting. He said, “I don’t care what you say. You can have your church. I’m going to do what is right.” So I just couldn’t let him do it. I said, “My heavens, you’re not going to do it. There’s got to be another way.” I said, “What I’m going to do is just get a sound truck and come in here and say that Franklin Delano Roosevelt.... Anybody that wants to listen, come listen. If they don’t, they can all stay home.” “No...” I argued with him, but to me he was a saint. In that area he was a.... It made me proud to be an American that there was a guy like that around. In any event, that’s what we did.

I had a sound truck. I got a sound truck, and I put the biggest Kennedy stickers all over it I could find, and we paraded around the streets for about three hours prior to the time that Franklin was due. Then we set up with the sound truck. We stopped and pulled up in front of the courthouse, and there wasn’t a soul anywhere. There was not a person anywhere. You could see them. They were back around sort of in the service station fronts and in the drugstore—just jam-packed with people. But not a soul on the streets. The spookiest thing you ever saw in your life. Occasionally, somebody would walk down and go into one of these doors around this little square. And then Franklin finally arrived. He was late. He got out of the car, and then a few people kind of drifted out. We gave him the introduction, and a few more people wandered out.

Then he started speaking, and the whole street just filled up with people—just from nothing to there must have been two hundred people, which was a pretty good crowd, about most of the population of that town. When he got through there, he said, “When I stood on these very steps with my mother in 1936, I remember this town and these wonderful people, and I...” and went on through that thing. And evidently he has been there with his mother. When President Roosevelt was touring, he had happened to be on these very steps. Of course, he just made a tremendous hit. Heck, he got an ovation you could have heard for miles.

[-19-]

And then from there on, I didn’t have any trouble. People came over and picked up bumper stickers and the story of the survival. God knows how many of those we gave out.

MORRISSEY: Were they especially effective? Since West Virginia had lost so many people in World War II?

HOOTON: I thought they were. And the fact that they were Reader’s Digest. You know, it was an authenticated story which we didn’t write, had nothing to do with. Then we had that stuff with Pat Twohig [Patricia Twohig] there. We went back to Elkins, sent an invitation to all five counties for a coffee, a big coffee which was going to be on Sunday morning. And it was fantastic. These people who had nothing got together the money to pay for the envelopes. This is where Pat Twohig did an amazing job.

But they would come up on their way to lunch hour, taking off their lunch hour from work to come by and address envelopes. They got all the money for the stamps. We mailed out, I think, five thousand invitations. They paid for some flowers, and they had this thing all organized.

Well, at the last minute that morning about 9:30, I walked into this guy's ice cream store, and he said, "Got a call. I don't think the Senator's going to make it here." And I said, "Please, don't. Just don't tell me that. That's happened to me in every one of my counties. He's promised to come and come, and then they organize and nothing happens." And he couldn't, just literally couldn't get here. But he said that Franklin Roosevelt was over at so and so, and he's on the highway now. I called in to Charleston, and they said, "It's all right. Franklin's coming in there. He's in transit right now. He left here; he should be there. He'll be a little bit late. See if you can rig up a phone so he can call in and talk over the phone to Jack." So that's what we did. We hurriedly rigged up, got the phone man, didn't tell anybody about it, and got a phone line hook up. Then we announced that.... Franklin called and said, "I'll be there in thirty minutes," or twenty, I've forgotten

[-21-]

now. So the President called, and he said over the phone how much he regretted not being able, that he understood that it was a lovely, lovely breakfast, and how much he and Jackie regretted that they were not able to make it, but the fog there settled on those airfields, and/just literally couldn't get in. Then Franklin came in and made a terrific talk, and the thing really got a send-off.

But the amazing thing to me was—I was there three weeks—the first week I was there, you couldn't find a Kennedy bumper sticker; you couldn't find a Kennedy button, you couldn't find anything. You couldn't find anyone for Humphrey, but you couldn't find anyone who would even say Kennedy. The second week the campaign got a little better and a little better, and the second week you started to see a few Kennedy bumper stickers and a few buttons, you know, on some of your key men. The third week, after this breakfast, the buttons started coming out and the bumper stickers, and then you could see a few Kennedy signs in the windows. The whole thing loosened up tremendously. Franklin had these radio programs on, these spot announcements going all the time. We got those newspaper things—what's the word?

MORRISSEY: Tabloids?

HOOTON: Tabloids, yeah. The tabloids, we got a lot of those out. Well, on Friday night I went on back to Charleston. I thought it was going to be a landslide. I really did. I couldn't find anyone that didn't think that in my case. You know, it had just really come about. And we got on back to.... Lem Billings and I had a few scotches that night, and Lem was still, he still was worried about whether that thing.... He was on pins and needles about that whole deal. And I kept saying, "It's a cinch. It's a landslide." And kind of hoping I wasn't just as wrong as I always am. So the next morning though.... Well, actually, we slept pretty late. I remember we went down that night.

Ted had already had to go. I ran into Ted just briefly. We had a rally over in.... Jimmy Manchin [A. James Manchin]—has anybody told you about Jimmy Manchin?

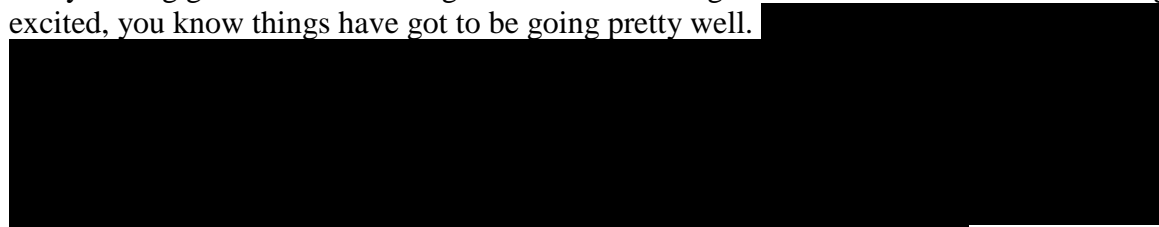
[-21-]

MORRISSEY: Yes.

HOOTON: Jimmy Manchin was a character and a half. I won't throw in Jimmy Manchin then. But Ted had already gone out to the western states. He was out at Miles City, Montana, I believe is where it was. I'm not sure the exact location that night of the election. But we went down, and they had all these phones set up. The first returns, as I recall, came in around 7:20 or 7:30. I can't recall exactly now. But we started getting just a few—Kennedy - 8, Humphrey - 3; Kennedy - 11, Humphrey - 9. Bob was down there. He had rolled up his sleeves and pulled down his tie, ready for the long night ahead.

I was sober that night because we were all.... I had just sort of drowned out my misery. It had been the first drink I'd had in three weeks. You couldn't get a drink in any of those counties really. There were no clubs. And there were no liquor stores that I could find. There was an Elks Club in Elkins, and that was the sole spot. I think I went over and had a beer one night, and that was because the daughter of some guy or senator.... It was a roundabout way that they could get me a guest card to go in because I wasn't a member of the royal order.

But anyway that night started out, and of course everyone was nervous as heck. I remember we were all down in that basement. About 8:30, as I recall, was when we started really feeling good about this thing and Bob started to get a little excited. And when Bob gets excited, you know things have got to be going pretty well.

 It just tickled me because it was one of those things—you just wanted somebody to say something

[-22-]

funny. Then we went on upstairs. I couldn't call Ted; I felt so sorry for Teddy. Here was this thing that he'd worked so hard on, and he wasn't even around to enjoy the fruits of victory that night, you know. We called Jack and evidently.... He was in the movies or something, wasn't he?

POWERS: No, he had gone. I flew up with him that day. They had this big Democratic affair at the Sheraton, and he spoke there and it was really.... Jackie introduced him, and it was a wonderful, wonderful thing

because.... It was the first time I ever heard her with this type of group. And she said, "To know how good it is to be a Democrat, you have to have been a Republican once, and," she said, "I want to introduce today the man that made me a Democrat, my husband." And, God, it brought down the place. Up until that time it was sort of a Humphrey group. He spoke there, also. And then he went to a movie and played with Caroline [Caroline Bouvier Kennedy] and had dinner, and that's when he went to the movie. So that he flew back down there, he left Washington close to midnight and what'd.... Did he arrive there about two in the morning? Were you there when he arrived?

HOOTON: Yes, I was there at the airport. I remember we were singing that song. What was the campaign song?

MORRISSEY: "High Hopes?"

POWERS: "Everyone is voting for Jack."

HOOTON: "High Hopes." [Hums] And yes, I'll never forget that night. The plane came in. Of course, we were ecstatically happy. It was just unbelievable, you know. So he came in. He was going to the television stations, so we went on back to the hotel. I was standing there in the lobby. This is the moment, and that's why I'll always like old Hubert Humphrey. We were, of course, waiting to hear him concede, and evidently we'd heard then

[-23-]

that he had tears, you know, had broken up a little bit, and I remember there was a guy on the guitar or something, and he was just completely shattered at Humphrey's headquarters. We couldn't even laugh about that, you know. It's fun to win, but I mean these poor people—it's tough to lose. And I remember we were standing there in the lobby, and Hubert Humphrey came in and he had.... It wasn't Muriel [Muriel Fay Buck Humphrey], but it was his sister or sister-in-law? Orangey red hair.

POWERS: That's right. She worked down there that entire campaign for him.

HOOTON: But, anyway, she was a little bit behind, and he saw John Bailey. I was standing right next to John. He came walking across that lobby, and you could see his eyes were still red, but he walked up to Bailey and he stuck out his hand and said, "Well, you old son of a bitch, you've done it to me again. Congratulations." And I thought, well, that guy at that moment, because he really...

POWERS: He was a good loser. Do you remember it was such a difference in Wisconsin? You never saw anyone so cocky. Even though he lost by a hundred thousand, and lost by six to four of the districts, he sort of felt like it was a moral victory. And he could not wait to get to West Virginia. Showing the difference on the returns, I'm sitting with the President at the Hotel Pfister when the returns are coming

in in Wisconsin. And when enough of them are in to know that it isn't going to be seven to three—he had hoped he might have gotten that second district and he lost it by fifteen hundred—and now it's six-four. They're all in the room again, the same crowd, and Eunice [Eunice Kennedy Shriver] said, "Jack, what does it mean?" And as he was putting on his coat to head down to the studio, he said, "I'll tell you what it means. It means we all head for West Virginia in the morning." [Laughter]

[-24-]

HOOTON: Well, on Friday night, which was the night before the campaign, that was really a night. I'll never forget that in that television station. I'd gone over with Lem to the TV station, and Jack was coming in from somewhere down South. I've forgotten where it was. But we had gotten in a little early and were watching....

Hubert Humphrey had a thirty minute program, so Jack decided just at the last moment to grab the following thirty minutes. And he got a better rate of time, I think, after 10 o'clock. I think Humphrey was 9:30 to 10, and this was from 10 to 10:30. But Humphrey had a phone answering program that was a complete farce. He was actually answering all the phone calls that rang in there. I remember the first one. As I recall, the first or second one was some guy who said, "This is [something like] Oscar Clarnick. And I want to tell you don't you come telling me about my state and how run down it is, god dang it. You don't even bother..." And he just tore into him. He couldn't get him off the phone. "Oh, thank you. Thank you very much for your inf... Thank you very much. Yes. Of course that isn't what we intended to imply, but yes." Then some woman called in and chewed him out for another twenty minutes. And the poor guy spent that whole program apologizing or trying to get someone off the phone.

POWERS: I actually felt sorry for him. It was the most disorganized thing I've ever seen.

HOOTON: Just pathetic!

POWERS: Usually, you'd have girls there. Like the President used to have his sisters there, and they would pass on the calls. They'd write a note, "Mr. So-and-so would like to know what you will do about lowering the age of social security." They'd screen them out, and he'd answer the ones he wanted. But poor Hubert was taking them. How many times did you call? [Laughter]

[-25-]

HOOTON: Then we left there. I remember I hadn't seen the President since, well, the time I mentioned earlier about when he let us use his car. I had not physically seen him since that time. And that had been, gosh, three or four.... Well, Ted's wedding. I guess it had been about a year? And I was standing out there in this TV station sort of insignificantly, and he came roaring by me, you know, hurrying in

to get to this program. And he stopped and turned around and came back and said, "What the hell are you doing here?" And went right on in the TV station. [Laughter] He said, "I thought you were supposed to be out in so and so." So then he went in, and I remember that the first twenty-five minutes was that film. What was the name of that film? The one of John campaigning....

POWERS: Was that the one we called "The Man For The Sixties" that opened up with PT 109 cutting through the water, and then it showed the candidate and...

HOOTON: Right, beautifully done.

POWERS: That was the best thing I've ever seen.

HOOTON: Right. Well, after Humphrey's telephone show, this professionally done, beautifully done program came on. Then the last five minutes Jack I remember sitting there—and it was completely unrehearsed—and he said, "I want to thank everyone here in the state for the courtesies and kindnesses that they've shown me." And his closing remarks were, "I want to make a promise to you here tonight that within ninety days..." Was it ninety days or thirty days?

POWERS: I think he said ninety days.

HOOTON: Ninety days.

[-26-]

POWERS: About the first hundred days like Roosevelt....

HOOTON: "That within ninety days after I'm inaugurated as President of the United States, I will have before the Congress of the United States a bill for depressed areas. Thank you and good-night."

POWERS: And he did it in the first...

HOOTON: He did it.

POWERS: It was the first thing he signed. You were speaking about Manchin. He would go around with Ted, and what a wonderful fighting introduction he could give you. You know, the Sunday before the Sunday of the election, we had this big ox roast in Parkersburg. And when the President awakened that morning at Parkersburg, he reached for a pad. He wrote two words on the pad, and he was holding onto his throat. He had lost his voice entirely. And he wrote, "Get Ted." I got on the phone right away, and Ted came in there that day and gave this great fighting talk to five thousand West Virginians. But before he did, Manchin introduces Ted. And he always looks around to make

sure there's a flag there, and he talks about that red in the flag and the blood that Kennedy shed, and the white badge of courage. You never heard anything like it.

BEGIN SIDE II, TAPE I

GRELE: To your mind was the attack on Hubert Humphrey's war record by Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Jr. at all effective in the campaign?

HOOTON: Oh, he didn't attack Hubert Humphrey. What he did, he spoke of his own war record and of Jack's. I never heard any attack on Humphrey at all in that whole campaign. The only attacking I heard was done occasionally by Hubert, but as far as any of the

[-27-]

literature or any of the speeches I heard, there was never a mention of Humphrey. He was just completely ignored.

MORRISSEY: Did you see much evidence of Humphrey workers in those five counties that you handled?

HOOTON: None, just absolutely none. As I say, I got one Humphrey button, and I still have it, that I picked up in Webster Springs. He'd been through there in the morning before FDR, Jr. was there that night that I spoke of. And there was one Humphrey button. He said he had a crowd of about eighteen or twenty people at the bus.

POWERS: Claude, did the girls ever get up there on the teas or receptions—or the President's sisters?

HOOTON: No, I was in those five counties where the total vote probably wasn't enough to....

POWERS: What they did was hit the big cities, you know. They hit one in Charleston and Parkersburg and in Wheeling and...

HOOTON: Well, the feeling was in those counties—particularly where I was they were extremely depressed counties—that it might be a little too strong and overpowering just to have a bunch of people coming in. Big teas and coffees and parties and things would just really work in areas.

POWERS: On the FDR thing, it was sort of all done by inference so that the real Humphrey people believed it would be an attack, you know. Whether it's because of the unemployment or not, but West Virginia had more boys in World War II, more boys in Korea. And working on those same statistics, as a result, they

[-28-]

would have had more killed, more wounded. And they think of their state and their men as very heroic, don't they?

HOOTON: Oh yes.

POWERS: And they really are wonderful people. So that I'd say the last two weeks almost everyone knew that Hubert.... Well, they used the word 4-F, and it really sounds like.... You know, 4-F sounds worse than it is. It just means that you were not in the service. But every time Franklin talked, he'd talk about, "I'll tell you why I'm here in West Virginia. Jack and I fought side by side." They loved the Roosevelt name in West Virginia, and he'd always bring in his dad, and he'd say, "And if my dad were alive, he'd be here, too, because my dad and Jack's dad were like that," and hold up two fingers. I used to chuckle about that one. But Senator Kennedy, you know, he would never hear of it.

I can remember one time out at Huntington it was supposed to have been said that this was the one time that FDR, maybe in the excitement of a press conference, was supposed to have brought it into the clear. I was with the President in Charleston, and he was terribly disturbed. He was trying to get in touch with Franklin to see whether he had said it or not because the newspapermen in Charleston are asking him if he had any comments on FDR's thing. And I remember trying to get a hold of Fred Forbes [Fred A. Forbes] who was handling FDR's schedule at that time. Did Fred ever say that it really was said, or that he actually said that Hubert was a 4-F?

GRELE: No, no, no. He just commented that it was comments on his war record.

POWERS: Yes, see the President said, "Well, actually, we can talk about our own." Then I think that because they talked about their own record so much and drew the comparison, that brought it out.

[-29-]

GRELE: Teddy White's [Theodore H. White] got something like this in his book.

POWERS: Because, you know, actually the President, he actually liked Hubert, and he admired his courage, and actually he thought that the luck of having Hubert to run against was the big thing in West Virginia, that if he had buried Hubert in Wisconsin and Hubert didn't go to West Virginia, then the victory would have been a hollow one.

HOOTON: Well, one of the interesting things to me was the fact that when I'd call my wife in Houston—she'd send me the clippings from the Houston newspapers that Jack was going to be clobbered—I'd tell her, "No, dear, I

think it's going pretty well." And she'd say, "It can't be going well. You don't read the newspapers, do you?" "Well, it looks like a landslide to me," I said. "I haven't found a Humphrey button or a Humphrey sticker in these five counties. I don't know what's happening in the rest of the state, but if my five counties are any indication, I just can't see how he can lose." This was my father-in-law who was actually Albert Thomas' first campaign manager when he was an underdog and beat a church guy—he couldn't believe it. He said he just couldn't see a way in the world.

So in any event, when I called Libby to tell her, I said, "We've won. It's a landslide." She said, "You're kidding me." I said, "No, dear." I told her a series of things had shaped up. She said, "Don't kid me like that." I said, "I'm not kidding. It's a landslide." And I actually had to argue with her to get her to believe. Of course, she was ecstatically happy. We all were.

Actually, I forgot the fact that Bob came into Elkins one time, and we made the tour around. One thing I remember about Bob was we went to a seamstress factory where they were sewing these work clothes, and it was fantastic. I was impressed that there were that many people working. I hadn't seen anyone working much. But there were—I guess they had at least a hundred women in this place just sewing like the

[-30-]

dickens on these sewing machines. Bob came in at the Coke break—they allowed them a Coke break—and spoke, and I remember standing there. Something I've always never approved of was Bobby with his sleeves rolled up. As I say, the impression there.... Ted told me sport shirts, and I went in there and the guy said, "Well, we all wear coats and ties." And Bob always had his sleeves rolled up and his tie pulled down. But he was standing there, and he made a comment about—he said, "It's pathetic looking at these women sewing here. Look at these working conditions!" And it hadn't affected me that way at all. I felt that they were.... I disagree with Bob on a lot of things, and in this particular instance I did. On the other hand, it was a significant thing to me that he would think of it as the pathetic working conditions, those poor women and all. My idea was completely opposite to his. I thought it was a hell of a nice thing.

Bob was pretty effective, but I would say that Bobby was not nearly as effective with the crowds or the people, as Ted. I campaigned one day with Ted where we walked down the street and introduced him as the brother of the next President and that sort of thing, did the same with Bobby, and I would say that there's a magnetic—which Jack had; I don't feel that Bob has—a magnetism with people that they immediately like him. You know, just if you can see him. I always said that anyone in this country.... If Jack had been exposed to everyone in this country, he'd have won all the votes. It was a question of whether he could get the exposure personally. It came out somewhat on television, but nothing like in person. You know the guy just overwhelmed crowds, the people. They just liked him. They couldn't dislike him once they'd actually seen him. And this was where Ted.... And I think that's how it worked out. Actually, Bob spent more time in the organizational end of it, and Ted was just out there grabbing hands and making speeches and shaking hands.

I was, of course, a hero more or less in Houston to be involved in that campaign because everyone felt that that was going to really knock him off or make the whole

victory. I personally felt, and I still do, that that particular primary was what, as far as the primaries go.... If I had to pinpoint one significant thing—for example, in Texas, from the way the people in Texas reacted—it was to take the most Protestant state and just lick the socks off the guy that was a Protestant. It effectively maybe not killed the religious issue, but it knocked it off its perch. It just wasn't significant anymore. You know, it was you don't like the way his suit fits, or you don't like the way he cuts his hair. It becomes one of those type things, rather than the menacing, big, overwhelming problem to conquer.

When I went back to Houston and tried to explain this poverty in West Virginia, no one believes it. They still, today, think I'm brainwashed by somebody, that those conditions couldn't be as bad as I know they are—or they were at that time. Generally, those are mine on West Virginia. I'm trying to think of anything else significant.

MORRISSEY: Did any newspapermen working for the large circulation papers or the news magazines come into those five counties looking for evidence of anti-Catholicism?

HOOTON: We got a story—and I don't know how they got it—but the *New York Herald Tribune* had a front page story on this Parsons affair. Where they got it.... I never actually talked to any of them as far as I can recall.

MORRISSEY: How about the local newspapers? Did you try to drum up some support there for Senator Kennedy?

HOOTON: Yes. Actually, I didn't have.... In these counties I was in, the newspapers were very small. I think we had at least an equal fair shot at anything as far as I could determine. There was not a newspaper that was cutting us up real bad. Generally,

the area I was in there are not a lot of votes, you know, and the newspapers were very small.

The most impressive single thing to me was Franklin Roosevelt's appearance in Webster Springs. It was phenomenal. You know, a town of six or eight hundred people, and all of a sudden there are three to five thousand. it was just unbelievable.

MORRISSEY: Were there local primaries going on in these five counties at the same time?

HOOTON: Yeah, I didn't get involved. Who was the fellow who was running for governor then?

POWERS: Was it Barron [William W. Barron]?

HOOTON: Barron. Barron had a party in Elkins the same day that we had the party scheduled for Jack and Jackie. I talked to him. He had a good turnout at his outfit, and his comments were, "I can't see how he can lose." He said, "Everywhere I've been it just looks Kennedy to me." And he actually stated, he said, "I think it could be a landslide." And I would think anyone though... God, I remember that night it just completely clobbered Humphrey, you know; it was just phenomenal.

MORRISSEY: Some people have emphasized to us the importance of slating candidates in West Virginia, getting the right faction behind your own presidential candidate. Did you run into this anywhere?

HOOTON: Not at all. Not at all. I think people in West Virginia were unique than any people I met, for example, in the western states. Maybe the conditions at the time made it, but they were more individuals. It was amazing to me. For example, the night clerk in the hotel that I stayed in in Elkins, a walk-up deal, was a former school teacher. He had taught school there for something like

[-33-]

thirty-one years. He was retired. His mother had gotten sick and died, and he had had to pay all the hospital bills, which wiped out his savings. And his total income with the school and with his social security was a hundred and fifteen dollars a month. So he was on from about ten o'clock at night till ten o'clock in the morning as a night clerk in this frowzy little hotel. And this was just to make a living. He said, "I was a school teacher, and you know, I feel like I may have earned more than what I've got." He said, "As a school teacher, people look up to me. I can't go out here on the sidewalk and drink out of my hip flask. I've got to maintain some dignity." And his dignity was there as a night clerk in that, well, it was a flophouse.

And you'd tell that story to people, though, in Houston, which is wealthy, booming, they don't believe it at all. Those are the things that I think are the most difficult things to make the country realize. From my standpoint, the people I talk to, no one would believe that it was that bad. It just couldn't be that bad. And it was.

MORRISSEY: Did you try a telephone campaign in your five counties?

HOOTON: We didn't have a whole lot of organized activity of that nature because my counties were small. As I say, the county seats were the only towns, really, in some of these places. And so there wasn't a real effort, you know. It was just silly to waste money on phone campaigns. We had one, I think, in Elkins. Our phone campaign that we organized was more to get the vote out, to pick up people. "Can we please pick you up?" and "if you'll come out to the highway, we'll pick you up and bring you in."

MORRISSEY: What kind of volunteers would you get for work of that kind?

HOOTON: We had every kind of person, actually. Say from old retired people.... I had a lot of those kind of people. Not a lot, but for

[-34-]

the area I thought I had a lot. Say, what really warmed my heart were those women who were working, some of them were seamstresses, who would come in at their lunch hour and have their daughters come by as soon as they got out of school to address these envelopes and do these things. You know, it was strictly their own money. We didn't spend a nickel in my counties, cash wise we didn't spend five cents. And I heard all these reports about the fortunes being spent alone in West Virginia. And the only fortune was my rented car and what it cost to print the bumper stickers.

MORRISSEY: I'm out of questions, Ron, unless you have some.

GRELE: Yes. I am, too, on West Virginia.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[-35-]

Claude E. Hooton, Jr. Oral History Transcript – JFK #1
Name List

B

Bailey, John Moran, 6, 7, 24
Barron, William W., 33
Billings, Kirk LeMoyne, 6, 21, 25

C

Corbin, Paul, 13, 14

F

Fay, Paul B., Jr., 7
Finley, John, 18, 19
Forbes, Fred A., 29

H

Hooton, Libby, 2, 30
Humphrey, Hubert H., 17, 21-30
Humphrey, Muriel Fay Buck, 24

K

Kefauver, Estes, 10
Kennedy, Caroline Bouvier, 23
Kennedy, Edward M., 1-5, 7, 21-23, 26, 27, 31
Kennedy, John F., 1-5, 7-10, 13-17, 19-33
Kennedy, Joseph P., Sr., 1, 29
Kennedy, Robert F., 7, 9, 22, 30, 31

M

Manchin, A. James, 21, 22, 27
Morrissey, Francis X., 6

O

O'Brien, Lawrence F., 5, 6, 7
O'Donnell, Kenneth P., 6
Onassis, Jacqueline B. Kennedy, 1, 23, 33

R

Reese, Matthew A., Jr., 13
Roosevelt, Franklin D., 16, 27
Roosevelt, Franklin D., Jr., 15-19-22, 27, 28, 29,
32

S

Shriver, Eunice Kennedy, 24

T

Thomas, Albert, 30
Twohig, Patricia, 20

W

White, Theodore H., 30