

**James R. Ketchum Oral History Interview – JFK#2, 04/13/1978**  
Administrative Information

**Creator:** James R. Ketchum  
**Interviewer:** Roberta W. Greene  
**Date of Interview:** April 13, 1978  
**Place of Interview:** Washington, D.C.  
**Length:** 60 pages

**Biographical Note**

James R. Ketchum (1939 - 2024). Historian, U. S. Department of the Interior (1960 - 1962); Registrar, White House (1962 - 1963); Curator, White House (1963 - 1970); Curator, U. S. Senate (1970 - 1995); Curator Emeritus (1995 - 2024) This interview focuses on the history and staff of the White House Curatorial Office, donations and offers to the White House, Henry du Pont, Stephane Boudin and Sister Parrish, Jacqueline Kennedy's role in managing the White House restoration, White House art collection and the Fine Arts Committee, among other topics.

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James Ketchum, recorded interview by Roberta W. Greene, April 13, 1978, (page number), John F. Kennedy Library Oral History Program.

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James R. Ketchum – JFK #2

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Oral History Interview

with

JAMES R. KETCHUM

April 13, 1978  
Washington, D.C.

By Roberta W. Greene

For the John F. Kennedy Library

GREENE: Well, why don't you begin by telling how you got to the White House and, the one thing I'm kind of curious is to whether Molly Thayer's biographical sketch of you is, is accurate in terms of the route you took to get there.

KETCHUM: Yes, it is -- it may stretch a point a bit. Ah, I had come to Washington to go to graduate school, to go to law school at Georgetown. And my means to an end to pay the bills was a job with the National Park Service, what was then the Custis-Lee Mansion, which is today known as the Arlington House again. So that's really where I began. It was the end of the Eisenhower [Dwight D. Eisenhower] Administration, and in 1961, as the curatorial program was growing at the White House, and in response to a piece that *LIFE* did in September of 1961, there was a need for someone to week the mail, someone who had some museum experience and could consider some of the offers, ah, give

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some preliminary screening, and also do in general which the staff does but under the title of curatorial assistants work. And a friend of mine on the staff at the Custis-Lee Mansion was asked if he was not interested in going over for an interview. And I'd already been to the White House to interview for Bill Elders' [William H. Elders] job.

GREENE: The registrar?

KETCHUM: The registrarial position. I'd been asked, maybe, late summer, early fall, one of a hundred. And I went over and realized what the job was, and knew that my qualifications were zero for something like this. Anyway, my friend then went over for the curatorial assistant's job, and came back, and was soon drafted into the Army. So that job was open. And having been there once before, and feeling that this might be a little bit more something that I could offer, I went back again. I don't know quite -- it was Mr. West [J. Bernard West] I think, turning to the Park Service each time, ah, and the Park Service then turning to the museum staff at the Custis-Lee Mansion. So I went back in the fall of, oh ah, '61 and was interviewed again, was given the job, and waited for security to be completed, or the preliminaries and was going to go over in late '61 but it really wasn't until January that I finally

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signed, in ah, in '62 with the, with the White House staff. Although I remember going back and forth, ah, to try to get a better idea of what some of my duties would be. Initially, it was looking at box after box after box of mail which had been answered by form letter, but had not really been properly processed beyond that, beyond that point.

GREENE: So it was some kind of automatic, ah, response to these letters, but they hadn't been screened for real value?

KETCHUM: That's right. That's right. The letters were being answered up, ah, in the Social Office by, ah, the secretaries, ah, that were assigned to Tish Baldrige [Letitia Baldrige].

GREENE: How much of the.... Well, let me ask you this, because I've never really been clear. Are the Curator and Registrar's Offices together, as a sort of one unit?

KETCHUM: One unit. Just one unit, yeah. It, ah, in the very beginning -- the intent might have been whether on Tish Baldrige's part or on Mrs. Kennedy's [Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy] part, to have a good bit of the mail, although no one anticipated how much there would be, but a good bit of the secretarial work done by the East Wing staff. The first person really hired to concern themselves with a curatorial program was not a museum professional but a woman who had been a classmate of Mrs. Kennedy's at the Chapin School, ah, Janet Felton [Janet Felton Cooper],

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whose family had a, a holiday holiday spot down in Boca Grande, Florida where Mr. du Pont [Henry F. du Pont], ah, family, ah, spent a part of every winter season. And who would kind of serve as a buffer between this group known as the Fine Arts Committee and, and Mrs.

Kennedy. And would be, ah, ah, perceptive enough and have, ah, by virtue of her family background, enough ties to some of the worlds and some of the ah, the examples of the American decorative arts and fine arts that, that would be, ah, considered for the White House. So she was really the first employee. Then a museum professional, in the form of Lorraine Pearce [Lorraine Waxman Pearce], was hired. She was not on the White House payroll though; she was on the Smithsonian payroll. It caused a lot of problems for her. The Smithsonian wanted to get into the act, and so they would make her report to them at least once a week, although her supervisor down there preferred to come to the White House and have her report to him there. In the meantime, she was also trying to report to Mrs. Kennedy. But she -- there was friction, and perhaps a sense of rivalry between Lorraine Pearce and Janet Felton. Ah, Janet may have felt somewhat inadequate vis-a-vis the profession, although she didn't need to. She was a very talented and a very perceptive person, and, ah, had a, a fine sense of

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what was appropriate as far as, ah, the White House program was concerned. But from almost the very beginning, you had this split in the Curator's Office. And so when Bill Elder was hired in October of 1961, you had two people vying for his affection in the office. He sided with Janet in the sense, I don't want to say he actually sided with her, it was perhaps easier for him, their families, they were cousins, mutual cousins, in the [Gibson Island] Baltimore area. Ah, Lorraine was still, I think, Miss CCNY [City College of New York] ah, to Janet and -- as a result, you had a -- Lorraine Pearce on one side, and Janet Cooper, Pam Turnure [Pamela Turnure Timmons], Tish to an extent, although I always felt that Tish was kind of in a class by herself, and, and ah, was not necessarily the kind who ever sided -- not saying that the reasons might have been very good that people were somewhat turned off by Lorraine. Because it was pretty heavy business, and Lorraine was being besieged by a growing community of museum and historical groups that, that ran the gamut. Ah, ah, the people who were very desperate for public speakers, and who finally saw, ah, that their day had come, that they could tie into the White House, and that, ah, something very exciting was going on. And you would begin to believe some of the great things that were being said. You were being introduced to these groups and giving your hour, ah, show-and-tell presentation.

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You can't, can't quibble with that at all. But by the time the guidebook was to be a reality, it was obvious that once Lorraine had completed that, that she would perhaps be retiring from her, from her, her White House duties. And, in a way, it was sad. Because she worked very hard and very diligently; but on the other hand, I don't think she was as sensitive to the fact that it was really the Kennedy White House, and a program that should really reflect the President and Mrs. Kennedy as much as possible. She was never quite able to bring, ah, into line and under the umbrella of the White House some of the adulation that she has begged. And perhaps it bothered someone like Pam who was there to protect Mrs. Kennedy and

found that, ah, some of the things that were being done and said by Lorraine were somewhat outrageous. Ah, some of the types of things that...

GREENE: Do you mean public statements?

KETCHUM: Well... public statements. I don't mean that they themselves were outrageous, but they were giving more of a sense of likes and dislikes. The kinds of things that, that Tish, for example, was saying when she was being interviewed before she really -- ah, before the administration really took over about, ah, what, ah, types of

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furnishings and what specific things were, were ah, seemed to give evidence, in terms of personal possessions, which Mrs. Kennedy had, had brought with her, what pieces had been in her family that she particularly liked. And would this be the kind of piece that, that she would be looking for, for the State Rooms and things of this, this type. Which gave more of a picture backstairs than, than Mrs. Kennedy or Pam, ah, felt was appropriate. There were lots of things that, that were, ah, at work here. The, the yeast was, ah, the ingredients were there to give raise to a, a fair amount of dissension, no doubt about it.

GREENE: What about -- did that lead to an unhappy relationship with Mrs. Kennedy and yourself or did you stay behind the scenes?

KETCHUM: I think Mrs. Kennedy tried to rise about it. Ah, Mr. West was also very involved, but I think because Mrs. Kennedy wanted him to be involved. Ah, he was kind of the -- he would play the devil's advocate. He had a wonderful way of jollyng everybody. Ah, he came to Washington, ah, having been the shorthand champion of Iowa, a, the senior in, in high school, and found himself working in the Veterans Administration, ah, as being the only male with maybe a hundred other women. I think his whole professional career in the government had been, ah, "Let's make the girls smile at the girls." So that he, I think he would do his,

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his very best, although when there comes a point that the lack of harmony, ah, continued to, ah, to cause a fair amount of rankling and that, ah, a fair amount of, ah, difficulty with say, Pam or Tish or Janet, and this would get through to Mrs. Kennedy, he would have to counsel with her on, on what to do. I can remember a memo called "Hail to the Chief Memo" one point to iron everything out. What we have, ah, up here at the, the Capitol? As the open door policy in which that, they, the supervisor and member of staff are having their differences and they can't iron them out then the, ah, staff member puts down his, his grievance on a piece of paper and the supervisor then does the same thing from his standpoint, at least things are exchanged. Lorraine was invited to put down her thoughts on her job, how it should be run, and she did a very lengthy memo of which I am sure is in the Library. Ah, which went on and



on and on and on and on and on forever and it got out at Mrs. Kennedy an even longer memo or an equally lengthy memo, ah, in which it analyzed what some of Lorraine's problems were. And part of them were her, I think her sense of, ah, of herself. But this did not, this did not appear supposedly to solve the problem, this did not solve the problem, but really rather spelled out the, the, ah, feelings that, ah, that Mrs. Kennedy had, and it also spelled out I think what was, was Lorraine's incorrect and improper

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sense of, of White House employee.... So from this vantage point.... it was something that I learned a little bit about. I learned how, how Mr. West responded to Mrs. Kennedy and I also learned, ah -- that the best thing usually is not to take yourself all that seriously in what you were doing. Take the job as seriously as you possibly could, very seriously, but for gosh sakes don't take yourself seriously and wherever you can inject a note of good solid strong humor, please do it. And it was soon obvious to me that the one who was injecting more notes of humor (than all others) was, ah, Mrs. Kennedy herself. Ah, nobody was, was able to, ah, thrive on the, the, ah, humor of the situation and could look for the most outrageous way of describing the situation than she could. And I think it was a great salvation. Because we worked closely together, there was always a sense that you won't hire any more people, ah, but rather you'll work seven days a week simply because we were conscious of not wanting to build up what looked like some kind of a small empire. And while you go around to beat the bushes with interns who will volunteer their services heavily in the summer time, even that was a little difficult when you started to acquire how much it would cost to get somebody through the full, field security investigation and even then the cost was, was really high. The point is that you get into, ah, to compensate both the hours and the, they type of work that you are asked to do

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you were made to feel that there was, you weren't made, there was, it was pretty obvious that, that there was always room to both laugh at your mistakes and to laugh at what sometimes seemed to be intense pressures. And this, there were a variety of ways that have been detailed by many who have commented on the, on the Kennedy [John F. Kennedy] years and, ah, I think that any that I have ever seen in print I guess probably J.B. West viewed this, ah, more than, than anyone else. But, they're all very true and, ah -- whenever, whatever you felt, whatever frustrations, ah, at the moment they were often times felt by Mrs. Kennedy before they were at any other time. The series of pieces that Maxine Chesire wrote for the *Post* [*Washington Post*] the summer of 1962 is a good case in point. This consists of some pretty damaging stuff that she was writing. Ah, -- things which -- appeared in print -- that would gain only by misrepresentation on her part: showing a White House press pass and telling, ah, someone that she was assigned to the White House (their assumption being she was a White House staff member and introducing a photographer.) The Blue Room was not going to be the Blue Room anymore but was going to be the White Room I suppose, the

color was going to be the choice, but it had been quite carefully researched. But there was fear expressed by President Kennedy as well as, as Mrs. Kennedy that a room that

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had been known as the Blue Room since the Van Buren [Martin Van Buren] administration which now -- to start it as a fether contrast to the center of the three state floor parlor between the Red Room and the Green Room will also be white, would be taken back to the way the walls were created during the Madison Administration, a period quite close to, ah, the Monroe refurnishing of the room. Pieces that were again being selected were to be placed in the room. So, Frank Scalamandre in New York under threat of mortal sin was not supposed to tell anyone what he was doing until the whole story could be properly presented. But that was not good enough for Maxine Cheshire. She went up and introduced a photographer as someone assigned to the White House (a *Washington Post* photographer). And so Franco Scalamandre was very happy to be photographed with various examples of fabrics, even Red Room fabric which may not have necessarily been shown yet at that point and that the, what the Blue Room would look like. And, I've not seen the series since it first ran so I'm not totally clear on some of the other interviews, but there were a number in which people mention how much they had paid for things. Information which was not necessarily, ah, wrong to share, but was given in a way and under conditions which, which

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were not correct, in which were not honest to Maxine Cheshire...

GREENE: Wasn't it primarily that it made it appear that this was all public money that was being used? It was not...

KETCHUM: Definitely. Definitely, one of the, one of the major, major, problems, right.

GREENE: I wanted to come back to that somewhat later, but was, was there any concerted effort made to try to correct it? Was there any way in which to correct the impression after it was...?

KETCHUM: Well, there was certainly a knowledge in the White House that a series was going to run because many of the donors, many of the people who had been caught in this web started calling up and asking, ah -- they realized that, that the thing was not presenting itself quite as, as matters, but they didn't quite add up two and two when they were talking to her. And, there was an effort with the *Washington Post*, for example. I can recall -- being stretched out on a mantle shelf, see the mantle had yet to be installed, and was stretched out on the floor with something called the Map Room, which we were no longer using as an office, and talking to Janet Felton who was sitting behind the desk. This was during a, a noon time break, about some of the feedback we were getting from

the Maxine Cheshire series. And suddenly the door opened, it was President Kennedy. He was going to or coming

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from, ah, the, the West Wing. Probably coming from and, and going up, ah. It was... Mrs. Kennedy was not in the White House at that point. I don't know whether she was out on ah, holiday but it would have been the earliest of July of, '62 -- and wanting to comment on what he had heard. And it seems to me that somebody...

GREENE: It had already appeared at this point...

KETCHUM: Hadn't really already appeared, but it was about, we were getting, we were getting flashes what was going to appear. And there was, there was considerable concern at the White House about this. And, I do know afterwards there were many denials from Pam. Ah, a lot of the materials ran the same time, or within a few days, in an abridged version in *Newsweek*. I think that was the most devastating and the most damaging. It had more to do with my -- disinterest in cooperating morning, noon, and night with, with, with the press. Ah, condemning them really...

GREENE: Well, was Maxine Cheshire an exception to this? She was...

KETCHUM: I think she was. She'd been a police reporter and she still saw this as the same kind of a beat. Ah, and this was before she was doing a regular column for the, the *Post*. And, she in private life collected -- examples of, of, of, ah, of American decorative arts and frequented every gallery in the Washington area.

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Another example of making things sound so awful was going to Michael Arpad, a dealer in Washington asking him about the Scenic America paper which was produced about the end of the first quarter of the 19th century in Alsace by a, the firm of Zuber which was the most eminent firm in scenic papers, scenic panoramas. And, this was a gift to the White House from the NSID [National Society of Interior Designers], a group that had given furnishings to the Diplomatic Reception Room at the end of the Eisenhower administration and was interested in continuing to give to the White House. It had been removed from a house up in Thurmont, Maryland and there was a fair amount of publicity. But, she somehow again made it appear that it was strictly tax money going into it, it was, the cost was exorbitant. It was a unique, ah, example, ah, a very fragile gift at best, but one which had survived, an example that had survived through the years and could not have been a more appropriate addition to this Oval Room.

GREENE: But if somebody thinks that that by the way of paper that you had already selected and when... I guess NSID is the National Society of Interior

Designers or Decorators.

KETCHUM: It's now merged with something called the AID which is the American Institute of, ah...

GREENE: Was it something that you suggested that when they wanted to give a gift which could be something or did they stick it out at...?

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KETCHUM: No. It was, it was if memory serves me, it was suggested to them. It was suggested to them. But, the point is that -- what got into a whole series of when did you stop beating your wife type of, of, of articles and I'm not sure when and how the public started to perceive, and if they ever totally perceived that it was not federal funds that went into... Certainly federal funds were going into maintaining the White House, and as such some of the maintenance money.... Gifts by and large were not. The, the amount that the Federal Government sets aside for each President to put into redecorating and, and changing, ah, White House once he moves in is a drop in the bucket compared to the plans and compared to what certainly was, was, was done. And that's, ah, that's where we.... no-one estimated the response of public would have either in somehow in participating -- whether we're talking about the piece *Life* did in the fall of '61 or the CBS [Columbia Broadcasting System] taping of Mrs. Kennedy's White House tour which, ah, was telecast in, ah, in mid-February of 1962. But it's amazing, even this many years later -- I still travel the Chautauqua circuit -- how many people want to talk about, ah, the Kennedy program. They still see it as the Kennedy program, even though there was a tremendous effort, I suppose, by, ah, the Nixon administration to put their own imprint on and that's

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understandable. But, ah, it, it just is still and I suppose always will be associated with, with us and yet it was, it was kind of a fly by night operation in the beginning when you had one person on the White House payroll, ah, responsible for coordination, I'm going back now to Janet, to Janet Felton, and then two people and then three people. But, not at all, ah, the kind of, of full blown, ah, museum effort that, ah, that most people would, would have thought. But yet she had her museum effort by attracting a group of advisors who were mostly museum curators, directors, what have you, who would fly in or who would serve, ah -- they were all over the place, scattered all over the country -- would serve, ah, as drop of a, of a hat, ah, to go out and vet a piece which might be in the Chicago area.

GREENE: Go out and what was the word you used?

KETCHUM: To VET, ah, to look at a piece and authenticate it.

GREENE: Yes.

KETCHUM: And to consider its provenance, its history and say yes indeed this is exactly, ah, it from all appearances...

GREENE: I was wondering about that, ah, group because you get the feeling sometimes that it was sort of window dressing, that they didn't have too much of a real role. But you make it sound like they...

KETCHUM: The museum people had a very definite role. Ah, I think

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everybody had a everybody had a very definite role but the, the roles were quite different and I think Mrs. Kennedy must have taken this into consideration in the very beginning. That first you need the money, and if you can wed the money to people who have had a, a very a, a definite interest in, in the arts in America then it would even be better. So that beginning with Mr. du Pont, and whether we're talking about Jane Wrightsman or Jane Engelhard [Jane Reis-Brian Engelhard] or Bunny Mellon [Mary Conover Mellon] or whoever, ah, these men and women were, they all had had and had demonstrated, ah, tremendous interest and knowledge. But then on top of that, you got the people who had none of the money but had spent a few years...

GREENE: The advisory group...

KETCHUM: Yea, and this was an advisory group which, ah, would draw from people at the Henry Ford Museum, would draw from people at, at Winterthur, ah, from the Metropolitan Museum in New York, ah, from the, ah, Palace of the Legion of Honor in San Francisco. It, it didn't stop, anywhere. And these were those, the people who, when you saw a letter or you had heard through a grapevine or a dealer called in Chicago and said I have something, you

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could call somebody who had said, who had previously served on the advisory committee, somebody in Chicago, and they would be there.

GREENE: And they would sort of be your surrogate eyes, I guess.

KETCHUM: Exactly. Some...

GREENE: Do you think that's a good point for you to jump off from and describe some of the possible routes that these things took to the White House, because I imagine there must have been several....

KETCHUM: Oh sure. They came from any and every route -- and people -- the money followed every conceivable route as well. It was not just something which someone could tap their wife on the shoulder and say, "Let's dip into the old inheritance," type of thing. The letters from youngsters alone -- I remember a wonderful story from out in the St. Louis area with a youngster, his name was Joseph Helbroner. I only remember it because it's still clear in my.... I think about it quite often because I was opening up in the mail at that point. This was after the television tour in '62. There were, there was some kind of a campaign in St. Louis whereby the children of the city were going to be, were solicited to contribute an elephant to the St. Louis

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Zoo. I kind've recall that there, this had been a campaign that had gone on once before and the elephant had died so the same thing two generations later was being rekindled. But Joseph Helbroner saw the television tour; he had been selling lemonade as his part of the bargain for the St. Louis Zoo but decided, no there will always be elephants and there would always be a St. Louis Zoo, but as far as he could understand -- this was all spelled out in the letter, ah, seven or eight years old -- there was only one White House. And there were \$5.62 all wadded up in tissue and kleenex and so forth all jammed in, ah, to this little package that came along with it. Another man down in, ah -- it was a couple, but the man wrote -- believe it was Kentucky, very quivering hand writing, but almost done entirely in script. He offered his bedroom

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furniture. He and his wife had been married more than sixty years and this had been something they had had since their wedding. But they really felt it was Victorian and it belonged in the White House. And the mail just was slow in being answered after the television tour that it took a good long time to get back and before he was even, his, his letter was answered another letter letter came I can remember it was really funny, but it was sad at the time. It would effect still the same way. He wrote to say that he hadn't heard from us but if there was any problem at all he wanted us to know that his wife had died the week before and we now could have it and he would take care of sending it to us, ah, he would take care of the shipping himself. These seem to be unusual letters...

GREENE: Would this sort of thing fall within your domain officially initially that you would have to respond and get Sandy [Sanford Fox] to respond?

KETCHUM: We would have to respond, yea, no, not for something like this, ah, you wouldn't. Ah, there were all kinds of extreme cases but there was no standard reply. People that were writing letters to the White House, and specifically to Mrs. Kennedy, did not understand, ah, the process of how anythings being acquired. There was a farmer in West Virginia who literally wrote us that he had gone out and cleared a section next to his barn because he knew

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that she would be so interested, I do not particularly remember what the object was that he was offering, that she would be so interested in it that she would obviously want to come down in her helicopter. He associated her transportation being a chopper so he cleared a spot and he drew a small map, someplace up the library has to be a letter, ah, or it could still be at the White House, but there is a letter that I recall with the 'X' marking the spot type of things, ah, where the treasure is buried but rather where he had, he had cleared the land for the helicopter, yea, to land. So that was, what the whole conception. But things came in, ah....

GREENE: And you were handling the mail at that point, that sort of thing?

KETCHUM: That was one of my initial jobs, of screening, right. Of screening, uh, mail that came in after the, uh, after the television tour.

GREENE: How could you just look, or perhaps it was obvious, how could you distinguish right away from a letter whether it was worth pursuing or whether it was a course where...

KETCHUM: Well -- usually you could. If someone was, was interested enough in offering an object, either for sale or as a donation, they were usually interested enough in telling the stories that went along with it and you could, you could check this out. Not saying that there were not a lot of

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things that didn't check out. But, the more detail and the...

GREENE: Often photographs?

KETCHUM: Quite often. If not, if there was anything that was being offered that, that, uh, gave us even a glimmer of hope that it might be what the person thought it was we would immediately ask for detailed photographs. Polaroids were usually available to most people and so it was not a problem. We would suggest a polaroid photograph as long as it was clear. But we don't, we also ask them for measurements and more documentation. And by the time you were through, ah, anything that looked like it might be, ah, what was being offered usually wasn't by the time the, the second go around, ah, you'd gotten to the second plateau. On the other hand, people would offer things the very beginning and they would be so thorough and so detailed in their description and in their, their uh, uh, details that the provenance was, was there for the asking but you would still tear it apart. you had to play devil's advocate no doubt about that.

GREENE: What would you say the ratio of objects for donation as opposed to sale was and how much did that affect how it was handled and the chances that it would be acquired?

KETCHUM: Far more for sale.

GREENE: Really.

KETCHUM: Yeah. Everyone had something but most wanted to sell it.

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GREENE: At outrageous prices?

KETCHUM: Yea, quite often. But perhaps not to them outrageous but everyone thought my gosh this is my chance to win the Irish Sweepstakes. They really saw it as that one lucky moment that, uh, was going to come in their life. We soon got use to this and discarded it. If someone was offered something which was, would have been a valuable addition to the collection and the price was outrageous you would explain this to them quite early on.

GREENE: Would there be negotiations often to bring prices to be more reasonable?

KETCHUM: Well, yeah, we were in that difficult position of not wanting to set up prices or not wanting to appraise either. And usually we would refer them to dealers who were recognized as reputable in the area to such an appraiser. Now granted, we're dealing -- if its an object which had White House association we were looking, ah, for examples which have either once been in the White House or particularly had presidential association. We are dealing with a factor which is awfully hard to put dollars and cents, ah, and attach dollars and cents to it. But, usually you could winnow the thing down so that the, if they were still interested enough in selling it, that the price that was attached looked reasonable and you could then turn this over to one of the members of the Fine Arts Committee

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saying look, we have this and we know that you have had people who have offered, ah, to underwrite, ah, any another object, ah, which has been considered appropriate for the collection, and so these marriages would be made. But....

GREENE: Would you, oh go ahead.

KETCHUM: Sure, go ahead.



GREENE: No, I was going to ask you if you had used the Fine Arts Advisory Committee in the, somewhere in the negotiations perhaps as an appraiser?

KETCHUM: Well, we all knew what market prices were for, ah, an Empire sofa, ah, an American, ah, Empire, ah, 1825, um, sofa. What we didn't know really always was how much more we should associate with it because it's something which Dolly Madison had had. And, we were dealing sometimes with that and, and, or even so, you could establish in your own minds, you are always having to keep one step ahead of, of ah, market appraisals. But you still did not want to put yourself in the position of, of offering appraisal and really, what, you were discouraged by IRS [Internal Revenue Service] from offering any appraisals because of the conflict of interest that we would have because of the, ah.... The, sometimes our desire to something would be very strong and you would think my gosh no matter how much is, is paid for it or no matter how much a tax write off a prospective donor takes you

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really want it very badly. Well, obviously, ah, if the value is considerably less than that, ah, you have, ah, heightened the value in such a way that it, it is totally dishonest and, ah, the ethics of a situation like this are, are reprehensible at best.

GREENE: What portion would you say of the, the pieces that were finally acquired came through this route? Through this public response to the whole, ah, restoration.

KETCHUM: I've never take a count...

GREENE: \_\_\_\_\_ maybe a good way is for you to, ah, note some particular people that came through that route.

KETCHUM: Well, let's yeah, yeah I have, I have in front of me something we published in 1964 called the White House Collection of Preliminary Catalogue of Furniture Furnishings Fine Arts Documents.

GREENE: That would have been the registrar's?

KETCHUM: This would have been, yes and it was really a kind of a short, ah, cataloging of, ah, short form catalog of all the items. But, let's just turn to, to any section here and, and look at them and decide what would have been listed -- one way or the other. Ah, I'm looking right now at clocks and I begin with a, there are three clocks listed on this page. The first one came as a gift through the NSID [National Society of Interior Designers], ah,

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the second one came from a large donor in Birmingham, Michigan and the third one came from someone who was just watching a television program and was considering to write in...

GREENE: Okay, now the NSID one probably was something you wanted an, an outside being sponsor, is that correct?

KETCHUM: Well, we really didn't sponsor it. But, when they were offering objects, ah, ah, as part of their gift in 1961 to the diplomatic reception room they had mentioned that one of their members had a particular clock which had presidential association. It was a clock made by the French to commemorate Washington's [George Washington] first in war, first in peace, first in the hearts of his countrymen. But I would say that that would have to be something which came in the very particular, ah, channel which was geared towards the collector and towards the, ah, the professional group that would, would be giving. Ah, the next one was strictly, ah, it was a Simon Willard White House Clock made up in Roxbury, Massachusetts which a collector in Michigan had and who, who recognizes extremely, ah, eminent collector in American decorative arts. And he offered this in 1961 as something which through his own circles he heard would be, ah, might be considered. But it was not your normal mail response. The third one, we are now talking about 1962, is a, a clock, ah, which is

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dominated by the figure of the Benjamin Franklin from a woman out in Salt Lake City, Utah. That...

GREENE: Which she wrote?

KETCHUM: Yes, she wrote. Right.

GREENE: And would that have been a donation or a...?

KETCHUM: Yes, it was, it was, it was a donation, exactly. So that's...

GREENE: It's really a mixed bag and you get item by item...

KETCHUM: It's a total mixed bag. But you can go through and you can see things, I mean the names will run the gamut from a woman in Wichita, Kansas, I'm on a page now of engravings to Mrs. William S. Paley [Barbara Cushing Mortimer Paley] of, of New York. Ah, here...

GREENE: You mean the woman in Wichita had the item and Mrs. Paley paid for it?

KETCHUM: No, no. The woman in Wichita, no, these are separate items. Ah...

GREENE: Oh, I see.

KETCHUM: We're, we're beginning, we're, yeah, ah, on this particular page there are one, two, three, four, ah engravings. Beginning with two examples from Audubon's elephant folio from Mrs. Paley, ah, a Currier & Ives print from a collector in New York, then a Stipple engraving of Washington from a woman in Centerville, Indiana and then a, an engraving, ah, showing Washington and

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his family at Mount Vernon from a woman in Wichita, Kansas. So you got... It's split right down the center there.

GREENE: Would engravings fall within the Painting Committee's domain or would they...?

KETCHUM: They did. They did, yea. The fine arts were very much handled by the second, ah, committee to be formed namely the, the Paintings Committee if you consider with which we're using the word 'committee' somewhat loosely. But you had, first of all, a Fine Arts Committee and then you had an Advisory Group, or an Advisory Committee, which were tied to them. The third, ah, by mid, actually by fall of 1961, you had a Paintings Committee, ah, which was being formed, and it's rather strange because fine arts -- usually excludes decorative arts, furniture and furnishings. But we still had a group known as the Fine Arts Committee and then you had a refinement or a group which would only handle paintings, sculpture, engravings. And then it was decided that when a group known as the AID [American Institute of Interior Designers] was convinced that they were "Gimbel's" to the NSIDs "Macy's" and that they should have a room to do what the NSID is doing to the Diplomatic Reception Room, what can *we* do to help the competition being fostered here the White House Library was selected,

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and who would make a judgment as far as the books which should be on, on the shelf. So that we had a library committee which was headed by Jim Babb, James Babb, who was then retiring librarian at Yale University. So your committees were meeting, or they were dealing with each other, ah, and to keep all committees going strong and in the air, ah, it was, ah, a never ending, ah, amount of correspondence that was being exchanged, ah, between them, between the White House, and the whole process of how donations were being handled was really dependent upon the, the need of the situation.

GREENE: And did all of these fall under the bureaucracy's umbrella equally and the procedures for screening and...?

KETCHUM: Yes. The procedures were quite different but, ah, they all did work through the

curator's office, right? And at this point now you have an office made up of -- a curator, registrar, curatorial assistant -- a liaison between the Fine Arts Committee and Mrs. Kennedy.

GREENE: Who would that have been?

KETCHUM: That would have been Janet Felton but her title was that of secretary -- to the Fine Arts Committee. And then you had another full time secretary. Then you had Park Service personnel who had been in and out of the White House for years taking inventory. And they would come and work periodically on concentrated projects, ah, helping with the

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cataloging or helping, ah, wherever they, they could be useful so that it was growing rather quickly. And by the summer of 1962, in what had been known as the broadcast room, you had a group of probably ten people working forty to fifty hour a week on the business at hand that of, of the, the mail and the various committees that, that had been organized so it was a pretty, pretty hectic, ah, place. And still always trying to keep up with just the general mail that came in from the American public was a, was a, ah, considerable, ah, considerable task and in the process of, ah...

GREENE: How did, um -- how did Mrs. Kennedy really fit into this whole picture? I mean, you almost get a circus atmosphere of the whole thing that someone who is not meant to be is fooling around in it.

KETCHUM: Uh-huh, uh-huh. This is probably truer than, yea, yeah. Well she fit into it -- she had her own contacts with the heads of the various committees. If Mr. du Pont was to come a day would be set aside for him. But it would not be, we soon learned, Mr. du Pont's ideas of the White House program and an interior designer, Stephane Boudin by name; his ideas were quite different, might be diametrically opposed. Boudin had a great sense of proportion and a great sense of scale but it might include cutting

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the legs off a table which Mr. du Pont had just spent yeoman's service trying to coax out of some New York collector. And so we realized that never the twain will meet. But, the process, when we finally got to a point of considering 'X' number of objects and where they would belong, usually it was not a case of whether they would be acceptable or not, but how they would be placed within the collection, ah, and where they might be seen to their very best advantage. Ah, while rooms took characteristics which fit a particular period or a particular, ah, ah, a particular period in terms of history of decorative arts and fine arts or a particular presidential, ah, period. The Treaty Room on the second floor of the White House which would run the gamut from say the Lincoln [Abraham Lincoln] Administration through

the Grant [Ulysses S. Grant] or the Arthur [Chester A. Arthur] Administration easy to, to figure out and deal with things. The Federal, the characteristics of the Green Room and its Federal furnishings or the Red Room with its American Empire pieces or this, this, this issue would work, but still in all they were individual questions that, that had to be asked. So Mr. du Pont would come. He would be faced with a room filled with furnishings which represented different periods

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and different, ah, associations with the White House and he and Mrs. Kennedy would make some basic judgments about where, and soon they would be picked up and carried into that particular room. She would go and hold something up over a mantle and she, and she, she was as happy as, as anyone on the, ah, carpenter's, ah, or the, ah, the moving force of the White House. I remember some photographs that Ninna Leen (*LIFE* photographer) caught of her for that September 1961 series. And I was not at the White House at that point and I thought, gee, how contrived that was. But, [laughter] I find out very quickly that she could pick up something and move it much faster than, than you could and I think I've been a better and less chauvinistic, ah, ah, male in my own household since than expecting my own wife, who is, ah, a couple of inches taller than Mrs. Kennedy, to, ah, carry out the trash and, and move the garbage around and never mind, ah, waiting for me to do it. But, the point is that everything would be, would happen would be frozen once Mr. du Pont would leave and then Boudin would arrive a week later and the thaw would set in. So it was this, give and take, ah. She was the final arbiter, she really was. And, however she would communicate her feelings, if she had to say something to Mr. du Pont which was really siding

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with, with Boudin on an arrangement, she could do it and did it, ah, did it beautifully, did it in a marvelous, ah, "don't you think maybe we'll just try it for a day or two I just."

[BEGIN SIDE II, TAPE II]

GREENE: From the background, the background of him doing that, ah, du Pont was rather a, a scholarly, ah, authority on furnishing and that Boudin was more a decorator, par excellence perhaps...

KETCHUM: Boudin was a decorator. The Paris firm of Jansen, was a very, ah, acceptable and the acceptable firm if you were, ah, Mrs. Randolph Churchill [Pamela Digby Harriman] and had left your husband after the birth of your first and only child and found yourself living in Paris and wanted to, ah, be still, find the acceptable job as, as, as, as Pamela Churchill you would go down to Jansen's and, and sign up. It was a socially, ah, acceptable both in their New York offices as well as Paris. I'm not sure how many connections that Jansen's and Boudin had with various members of the White House

Staff, or the White House, ah, Fine Arts Advisory, the Fine Arts Committee, none perhaps of the Advisory Committee

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a lot with certain members of the Fine Arts Committee. I think with Jane Wrightsman is a case in point. She certainly, ah, would have been one who could have, ah, had had bridges to, ah, Boudin. Mr. du Pont was absolutely the, the opposite side of, of the coin. He stood for a great deal, ah, to collectors and museums, ah, as a whole. There was no, no doubt about it.

GREENE: Did, em, Mrs. Kennedy seem more sympatico with Boudin than with, ah, with ah, du Pont? I get the impression that maybe she respected du Pont's authority and, and, and acknowledged, but that in terms of the way she wanted the whole thing to look when it was all through it was Boudin who was influential.

KETCHUM: Yeah. No, it was certainly, certainly.... it was not Mr. du Pont's recommendations -- while historically correct would not begin to please the eye. And, I think that was ultimately what Mrs. Kennedy was, was looking for in many of the areas of the House which were not the so-called public rooms in, in the, in, in the family quarters although she was interested in the best sense of history possible. And, and the Lincoln Bedroom she didn't touch at all. It ah, ah, was not changed in the least from things which had been started, ah, ah, by Harry Truman. On the other hand, the Treaty Room was strictly the White

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House attic, except that the pieces which were drawn from, ah, materials that were stored first out at, ah, facility at Fort Washington, ah, across the Potomac from Mount Vernon and then later a warehouse was secured down by National Airport. But, it was a room filled with White House "junk." But, Boudin's sense of how and where in terms of the sense of proportion worked extremely well and, ah, was, was very successful there. Mrs. Parrish [Sister Parrish] was the first person, really, she came in, in the very beginning. Ah, there had been an association, ah, pretty giftly.

GREENE: I was going to ask you how she fit in? But in how did she fit in with Boudin and...?

KETCHUM: Not well, not that well. She's a little bitter today, I had dinner with her in New York in August, and it was interesting because I was playing twenty questions with her. And I think she has felt that, ah, the world kind've passed her by after a while. Here's a woman who was very successful and was very dedicated.... really did do a lot. Ah, had done both for Glenora, for the Georgetown [N] Street House and in the beginning did a, did a, did a great deal at, at the White House.

GREENE: In the family quarters primarily, right?

KETCHUM: In the family quarters primarily, right, right. The Yellow Oval Room is a, is a tribute to her although there

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were some, ah, changes in that room which, which Boudin had suggested. But, it was interesting to me that Mrs. Kennedy knew, and I don't want to say instinctively, but I think she, she rationalized full well that it was the greatest opportunity to acquire a collection of objects which would, as pleasing as they could be to the eye perhaps, would also represent both an association with the other families who have been resided in the White House. I mean really an umbrella which was, was, was almost all encompassing in terms of the history, but at the same time could represent some of the best examples of decorative arts. And she would put these people, museum people and Mr. du Pont, in rather strange, ah, awkward positions. Ah, pieces which they would have normally wanted to acquire for their own institution and maybe even found out, ah, about them and, at the time when they were off looking for something for their own institution and there's a table in the Red Room, ah, with a trompe-l'oeil inlaid marble top -- which caused du Pont great problems because that was a table he insisted should be at Winterthur and, ah, is in the Red Room. And this kind of thing was a, it's a difficult... but, what you need is, ah, somebody who is kind've a combination P.T. Barnum, Dale Carnegie, Emily Post, and, and, ah, a fair dosage of Machiavelli...

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GREENE: Well, yea.... Now that's exactly the impression I have and I wonder how much of this burden Mrs. Kennedy took upon herself to meet, you know, to keep these pieces from crashing into each other and how much of that responsibility she passed on to Mr. West or to any number of other people...?

KETCHUM: Well, she passed it on She passed it on, ah, quite often but there were often times when she was able to deal with it in such a way that there was never anything to pass on. And I think she rather thrived.... well, she rather thrived, it's like Nancy Drew, "can we really solve this situation...." She really thrived on living dangerously. She loved the, the, the sense of, of ah, having something going on in three different rooms that were diametrically opposed. Ah, having a meeting in one room with one group and knowing that tomorrow at the same time.... No, she just was, ah, an honest to goodness operator as far as all the good motives in mind but certainly, ah, doing it in ways which, I'm sorry, but I, I, they were often times extremely funny. I mean it was a hilarious situation you see because you knew that she was not taking it as seriously as, ah, ah, or taking the means to an end as seriously as some people although she was, again, I think totally convinced and had given every sense of whatever the thought process was to

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develop a philosophy of taste and the philosophy of what would be acquired. Are we on or off?

GREENE: We're on.

KETCHUM: Okay.

GREENE: But I, I, I was thinking you know like she is in the driver's seat, so she sort of can afford to lie back to kind of sit and enjoy watching...

KETCHUM: Oh, she did. She did. She didn't lie back and enjoy it from the standpoint about being lazy about it.

GREENE: No, no I know but...

KETCHUM: She was forever driving everybody crazy with how many words she could fit on her yellow legal pads. But, at the same time she would inject, you could see it in her memos, ah, the fun of getting a David Findley who had forever in a day been tied up with the National Trust and the National.... getting keeping him mollified in one corner and keeping Mr. du Pont in another and keeping Boudin, and getting into the best from all of them because she, I think she realized from almost the very beginning that she would exercise the final judgment. She would know when to blow the whistle, but if she could get.... I don't ever remember any time that, ah, something -- that, that there were great differences between say Mr. du Pont and a Stephane Boudin which could not somehow, she could not somehow solve.

GREENE: That's what I, I was wondering about is the sensitivities of

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these people you're dealing with people of status and, and, ah, ego who are used to being, ah, treated with great deference and here they are being played one against the other.

KETCHUM: She didn't say no to people. Ah, if she found that there's a, a situation which she could not turn somebody down, ah, she would suggest reasons to others for what they might say and take it from there.

GREENE: But for instance, what happens a woman like Mrs. Parrish whose an associate of a.... comes in to the family quarters. I don't know how much she did in the Blue Room but I know she did that gold drape with the fringe I believe on the table, on the big round table and Boudin hated it and it was removed and replaced. Em, you



see, see there has to be hurt feelings in this and how does, how, how are they mollified and, and, or aren't they hurt maybe I'm wrong?

KETCHUM: Well, no, they are hurt. Mrs. Parrish today is not happy, ah, about a lot of things that went on and I think I can understand some of this. Mrs. Parrish.... I remember being invited that.... she was invited to the White House for a reception or a state dinner during the Johnson [Lyndon B. Johnson] Administration and she went around telling everybody could you believe it but that this was the

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first time I've ever been invited to a full blown state occasion at the White House. I think sometimes we, we really didn't do our job in perhaps recommending that she be.... we just accepted that everybody was thrilled to death that, to be participating and to be, it was honor and flattery enough to be asked to contribute your, your two cents worth and your services to the White House, and maybe, ah, we didn't push the other side as far as, ah, a night on the town for it or a night at the opera at the White House.

GREENE: Did she kind've fade?

KETCHUM: She did face because she was immediately, ah, out of the picture by the time, ah, Mrs. Kennedy moved out of the White House and by the time she purchased, ah, the house in Georgetown which she, ah, that she had for awhile.

GREENE: So they, they don't have any contact now?

KETCHUM: They've had contact I think since then. I think Mrs. Parrish may have done other things for her. But, things that really got into the, the, ah, front and center, ah, after she left the White House were, were jobs that were done by people like Billy Baldwin and even there.... Mrs. Kennedy, if you want to be cruel about it, had a way of extracting and, ah, using, ah, people and maybe, ah, not always letting them realize how much they

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were, ah, they were appreciated. Ah, I don't know, to me -- I don't recall that happening at the White House in any way that was really intentional. It's obvious with, with as many objects which came in and as much helter skelter that you would ever end up having everyone feel that they had, ah, they had been totally, totally satisfied. And I'm just, I'm hard pressed to characterize ruffled feelings as something, ah, which was either intentional or which, ah, there was any, any premeditation involved.

GREENE: Can you think of occasions where somebody's feeling really were ruffled and

it was pointed out to Mrs. Kennedy? Do you know how she would have handled something like that?

KETCHUM: Ah, anytime when she would even recognize that there were opposing forces at play on something she would sit down and write... usually her letters would, would, they would they were on the childlike in their, in their simplicity. Ah, and I think it was almost the effect that when my own, ah, daughter does something wrong and looks at me and says that it would have been the last thing I would have ever thought of doing, ah, something that would have hurt you, she could convey very quickly this, this sense. But usually she realized it before anyone who ever have to.... she saw, ah, it wasn't on a collision course. A

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good case in point was a donor who -- was going to give her the world almost, for the second floor. But, unfortunately there was a big case in the Justice Department pending against him at that point.

GREENE: Who was that?

KETCHUM: It was Jules Stein of MCA [Music Corporation of America] and his, this, this just could not be accepted. And so she sat down and, yeah; wrote to him and how, I can't even paraphrase it the, ah, the letter. But it was such that, ah, you mean the most your, ah, special sense and recognition of what you are doing, ah, I don't think there'll ever be any thought on my mind which will be more in terms of, of your loyalty, and it just went on and on and on in fairly, ah, simple thought and phrases but not simple at all when it's a, a Jacqueline Kennedy signature at the end, end of the letter. And, ah, he was such that later on when the whole MCA thing was, was, ah, was finished, I think we're now into the Johnson Administration, some pieces from that original gift still came to the White House. But at the time it was, ah, ah, the Attorney General [Robert F. Kennedy] had given very strict.... ah, we just, things could not be, be given, ah, which would embarrassed he White House donor, ah, would, would appear to be selling, ah, themselves in such a way

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and buying even more importantly the influence. But, I don't know she, she always relied on the advice of people at Justice [Department of Justice.] Ah, in the beginning Clark Clifford [Clark M. Clifford] was brought in, ah, later on and also Nick Katzenbach [Nicholas DeB. Katzenbach] was really involved in the beginning setting up, ah, advising on some of the legislation. And later on I can remember, after it was all over, sitting in the Averell Harriman [William Averell Harriman] house in Georgetown in maybe January of 1964 -- and her feelings about oh its got to go on. You are the best friend, you know, your twenty-four or five years older, this is, this is just tremendous.... exactly what you need to hear. Your wife can, can be at home holding dinner forever and ever and ever.... you're the best friend in the

world... how are we going to continue this program? Of course, I was worrying I said how can I continue my job, ah, than, than, than anything else. And so she would have a sip of champagne, and the next thing I know she's over in the corner in the principal drawing room at the Harriman's house; she has Clark Clifford on the line saying yes, yes she has to do this, she has to do that and that what is needed is some definite legislation that will make this a permanent, this whole curatorial program a permanent part of the White House and Clifford was strongly opposed

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to her coming back saying that he would not advise her to, telling her this on the phone, to be, to continue her, her participation. I don't know what he was telling the Johnsons the next day when he was advising them but, ah, anyway, he was telling her she should.... she insisted that she be on an advisory committee and he somehow conveyed this because within two months, after Nick Katzenbach and Pam Turnure [Pamela Turnure Timmons] were and myself involved in some good Sunday morning at 9:15 sessions at Nick Katzenbach's house (apparently the only time of the week that he had free to, ah, consider something like this in those, those busy days early in the Johnson Administration) that when finally an Executive Order was drafted and it would be ah, ah, Committee for the Preservation of the White House, which was announced in March of 1964, also at the same time the committee members were announced and Mrs. John F. Kennedy was very much one of them.

GREENE: Do you understand, I mean do you know why he, he objected, what his concern was?

KETCHUM: I think his feeling was the king is dead, long live the king. And here was Clark Clifford who had been in a position to, ah, play go between the, ah, Eisenhower.... Well he, first of all, his experience in the White House was tremendous. And then his experience as, as ah, the equal signer, the go between the Eisenhower and Kennedy and now

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serving the same thing again with, with the transition of Johnson, of Kennedy and Johnson.

GREENE: It would seem though to be kind of a natural....?

KETCHUM: Oh sure it would, yea. None of us wanted to really think of doing anything without her. Ah, what took us a long time to understand why she would not come to every meeting or come to any meeting. But why she wouldn't.... but then we finally realized that just remained alone, ah, held a great deal. And she did. There were many donations which came in in 1964 and 1965 which were generated by people who would still write to her letters that would by that time be, would now be answered in New York City if they weren't being answered in here any longer. Ah, ...

GREENE: How much leeway did, ah, the staff have in, um, the whole selection process? Were there certain kinds of items where you would be the last word or did it always go to some cycle of consideration?

KETCHUM: Well there were some things which.... there were things.... once the patterns were established and once the guidelines, the acquisition policy was spelled out of, the guidelines were there, most things you could pigeon hole fairly quickly. I mean if this was the piece that would, would, ah, round out a set of, of furnishings that Monroe had originally ordered from Bellange Paris for the blue room it was obvious that once you

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could establish its authenticity it you sure were going to go for it full steam ahead. On the other hand, if it was something which was supposed to have been, ah, Andrew Jackson's favorite bedpan, it may have had lots of, ah, or his favorite chamber pot it may have had a lot of, of ah, if you could even improve on that what good would it have done, ah, to have that kind of a presidential association piece, ah, in the White House. Not, not very much. I remember one piece, a strange piece. It was probably accepted just to say we've accepted something which was tied in. It was a portrait of a youngster named Benjie Pierce, Benjamin Pierce, who was the son of President [Franklin Pierce] and Mrs. Franklin Pierce [Jane Means Appleton Pierce] who died in a railroad accident a few weeks before Pierce came to the White House. And it was a portrait painted afterwards by a medium -- who conjured up this is what Benjie Pierce looks like interestingly. I don't know why in God's name that was ever accepted, it was early in, in the, ah, administration that it was. It had no business being there, and it used to sit unframed down in a storage room. So there are always mistakes like that. Nothing is really one hundred percent always a certain thing that, that should and does go on.

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GREENE: Okay, there are two things that occurred to me based on that. One is, would everything that you were acquiring -- specifically for the rooms which were being set up or were certain things warehoused and kept in reserve for, ah, eventual use?

KETCHUM: No, most things you tried to think of as the, ah, the, the feeling from, from, from the beginning. From Lorraine Pearce's standpoint and Bill Elders' also and later from, ah, from mine. You attempted -- you were not trying to build up a reserve collection. You really attempted to match a, a likely place. In the beginning, the House was filled with likely places so this was not a great, a great problem. Later on -- you would think in terms of a study collection. Objects which probably would never go on display, many of the engravings, rather, they were rare enough that they would provide wonderful illustrations for that social history that sometime would be generated from within

the White House. Or, the kind of objects which if we were using them for a changing museum exhibits program which was finally under-way, they would certainly serve in that step. But not something which would be forever on a desk in the Red Room, no.

GREENE: It could be there.... I noticed in going through the book there are obvious, obviously many changes in a small period...

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KETCHUM: Sure, right.

GREENE: And you want to.... are these things that are just being moved around within these rooms or are they things that are still being brought from warehouses and...?

KETCHUM: No, no, everything is happening. Things are being moved around within rooms. Things are coming which had not probably seen the light of day since the Hoover Administration and things are also coming in which are, which are new acquisitions which are benign purchased or which are being, ah, donated directly; and so if you trace the rare, the genesis of the program going right back to the, to the very first guidebook and go through to the edition which was maybe oh, I guess.... you have to consider the Kennedy collection went on well into the Johnson Administration because you had so many pieces which were give...

GREENE: In the, in the pipeline of course.

KETCHUM: Yeah, which were in the pipeline and many pieces which continued to be given in memory of President Kennedy, ah, a year after, ah, his, his death. Ah, so probably the best time to, to look would be about 1965 and that would be maybe the fourth edition of the guidebook. But, but trace those and you'll see lots of changes. But a lot

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of.... your dealing.... in many questions.... in many instances you are dealing with the same deck of cards that are being reshuffled all over the house. Ah, in other instances, ah, it's a case of, of ah, pieces which are, are coming in from outside sources or from storage.

GREENE: Are there a lot of things that you acquired that would have had no White House history but which, um, fit in the better....

KETCHUM: Yes. Certainly, certainly. And they were pieces which really represented exceptional examples in decorative arts or in, in fine arts. When you realize

that there was not a single non-portrait painting, for lack of a better way of describing it, in the White House collection before 1961, not a single genre, not a single landscape. And while the attempt would be made if it was a street scene hopefully it would be Independence Hall in Philadelphia, ah, when it was still, ah, the, ah, the center of, of, of our, ah, early system and still create a.... That would be what you would be looking for in all of the best. Ah, or Boston Harbor at a time when it was the center of, of the age of sail. All these things were appropriate and were an extension of our history but, ah, none had ever existed prior, prior to 1961 anywhere. Not a single example. A Bierstadt, a small Bierstadt water color of a butterfly, ah, was fun to

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have, and especially when you found out that Bierstadt had done it for some Harrison [Benjamin J. Harrison] grandchildren when he was visiting the White House. Ah, here's where the White House association, ah, takes, ah, effective. On the other hand a -- giant, ah, landscape by Asher B Durand *Last of the Mohicans* which has no bearing whatsoever on White House Association was very appropriate, ah, which the father, ah, one of the most important schools of nineteenth century painting which should be represented. So, it was either the best or it was something which served as a link with the family and documents and quite often it could be both those things.

GREENE: Let me ask.... I think this is unfortunate we are going to have to get final questions but um.... within your office were there rigid lines of authority so that nothing could be approved within your office for final acquisition unless Lorraine Pearce and then Elder and then you approved it or did each of you have a certain amount of this, ah, leeway in that?

KETCHUM: Well, ah, no.

GREENE: It's hard for me to picture, it seems like there must be purse strings somewhere and that that's in part, ah, keeping toes up?

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KETCHUM: Oh sure, but we didn't really have any money. It was, it was, it was quite awhile before the guidebook and the guidebook was generating funds by, ah, well from almost the very beginning but we really didn't see money that was going to be spent from the guidebook until early in 1963. Ah, but the decision-making-process I think was more tied to a good understanding of what was appropriate from the, from the beginning. But, Mrs. Kennedy would make decisions, ah, about acceptability of something which.... oh she might sent down a note saying "Dear Bill -- Dear Lorraine -- Mary Lasker has just told me about a bla bla bla which would be perfect." Well, in that sense that object is really accepted already, isn't it?

GREENE: Right.

KETCHUM: I mean it has been. If for some reason one of us could say Mary Lasker is filled with, with ivory soap and doesn't know what she's talking about on this thing. We've looked at it, I'm afraid somebody's pulling her leg or your leg then, obviously, we'd say hey wait a minute and it would.... so you had that process of, of ah, of calling a halt to something. But if it was something which fit within the general scheme and, and range of things.... from the very beginning it was a lot of controversy.

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Somebody put out the story and I think quite rightly so, the Smithsonian may have been really the heart of this thing, that the White House should only reflect that period in which it was constructed.

GREENE: Yeah, I remember. That was originally the, the charge.

KETCHUM: Yeah, yeah, yeah and this got in.... and people really were screaming bloody murder for good reason because of the.... and it would have been very sad to make it a period house for anybody. But then you deny so much that had already been done and that was good. And while she might not have really loved always the East Room it was Teddy Roosevelt [Theodore Roosevelt], it was McKim, Mead & White, Stanford White especially. And that's something that needed to be.... and she soon realized that you could have as much fun with Steamboat Gothic in a, in a Treaty Room as you could in a Federal Parlor such as, as the Green Room. And that it, it would have been a, a really a shame.... I better go down that road and get out on that kind of a limb because it would have sooner or later, I think, would have had to been sawed off, or it would have deprived the White House of soe much which, ah, today we realize, ah, was, is, is such a, a valid extension of its, of its story.

GREENE: I wish we didn't have to stop.

[INTERRUPTION]

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GREENE: We're back, by the way. We ended and then we're back.

KETCHUM: Okay. How art was brought depended upon the various channels that were leading into the White House. You had.... dealers normally wrote directly to the curator's office at the White House once things were established, a relationship. Or, they would write to someone on the Fine Arts Committee with whom they had been selling privately, with whom they had been dealing with for a long period of time. Ah, Mr. du Pont would be a case in point, or Jane Englehard would be another example.

These people in turn would contact -- in the very beginning they would contact Janet Felton. Once an office was established, ah, it would be Janet Felton or Lorraine Pearce. And there was, I suppose, some vying for favor -- how Paul Revere got the news that the British were coming -- into the White House. But ultimately it would either be passed directly on to Mrs. Kennedy, or the person, such as Jane Engelhard, would have an opportunity herself at a White House function.... People were sent out, they were given their charge after the first Fine Arts Committee meeting. They were sent out to solicit from their friends, call the countryside, set up their own channels of communication. But they always were then.... six or eight months they started to write very long letters to Mrs. Kennedy, and the first thing -- these things were usually seen by us before she would see them unless they put the special code on them, which was simply the word "special," as a matter of fact, underlined. Then they'd go to Mary Gallagher. Sometimes Mary Gallagher would give them to her directly; sometimes they would go back down to the curator's office. The point is if she had offers coming from many different directions, and the offers -- these are non-John Q. public offers now -- the offers that did arrive were soon checked out by somebody in the office or one of those advisory museum people on the advisory group. If there were any questions whatsoever, things just stopped at that point, they wouldn't go further. I can remember Susan Mary Alsop [Susan Mary Jay Patten Alsop] telling me -- she was on the (paintings?) committee -- she received a phone call from two elderly women who were in the Washington area, after they read in the *Washington Post* that she had been named to this committee to look for pictures. And they invited her to come out and see all of theirs. She rode out into the Maryland countryside, saw absolutely nothing, she said the saddest examples in the world, but found two women who were close to starvation. So what did she do? She set up a "welcome wagon" type of thing, or an early meals-on-wheels, back in 1961, and continued until both those women were carted off years later to a nursing home. She would provide them with food once a week. So it, the bridges that were built between some of the people who were obviously not necessarily dealing with some of the worldly.... Everything kind of came together I guess is what I'm trying to say. It was not that Susan Mary Alsop dealing with Herdler Gallery in New York; she was also going out into the countryside and looking.

GREENE: How many members of the committee would you say were really that actively involved? You hear du Pont and

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Engelhard and Wrightsman over and over and Shea.

KETCHUM: And Mellon.

GREENE: Mellon, of course...

KETCHUM: Gerald Shea never used to come up with that much, but he had been a friend of Ambassador Kennedy's, and, I guess, was put on in the beginning. He was



kind of a difficult person to get along with sometimes. I remember, I don't remember why. Ah, I, probably the easiest way -- and I'm doing this not even going over in my own mind's eye who the people were...

GREENE: Do you want to see the list?

KETCHUM: Yeah, yeah, okay.

GREENE: There's underlining.

KETCHUM: Okay.

GREENE: The Dillons I know gave...

KETCHUM: The Dillons certainly, and Jane Engelhard, most definitely.

GREENE: Did the Dillons do any -- do anything beyond, I mean that was an enormous contribution, the Red Room -- but did they stay actively involved, or did they basically donate?

KETCHUM: No, no they, they.... I don't remember them restoring things like Jane Engelhard would, for example. They made a great contribution, but it was more a contribution geared towards money for Empire pieces, for the Red Room. Mrs. Engelhard covered many bases, including giving furnishings for two different rooms, as well as putting the bite, trailed a lot of people. Taking people to lunch and convincing them that the greatest thing they could do, even if they were not Americans, the greatest thing they could do to improve relations between themselves and the United States of America -- strictly in a patriotic way, I'm sure, but still the honest to goodness way. I don't remember Ann McDonald Ford doing all that much. She'd come to meetings, but they were few and far between. On the other hand, there were donors from the Grosse Pointe and Birmingham, Michigan area that she may have influenced somewhat, but I don't know.

GREENE: And they gave no large contributions?

KETCHUM: No. Ford Motor Company did give a portrait, but it was.... No, it was a pummel. That's right, of Hamilton. But I don't remember anything else that.... No, I don't think so. Mrs. Lasker, yes, always available, and always, again, seemed to be working in many different circles at

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the same time, and would give anonymously quite often. I can recall her preferring not to have her name associated with...

GREENE: Now, would they usually think she found and donated, had access to the...

KETCHUM: Sometimes. but more often they were things that, the word would be given that here was something which we really needed a donor. She was kind of a silent fairy godmother of a lot of those things. Mrs. Parrish did give some Lincoln Association pieces, and also gave very unstingily of her time. I don't remember Catherine Lauren [?] doing that much. She may have.... Hers was a good name to have because of her association with Newport and some of her other restoration activities, but I don't think of her really beating the bushes. This is now on, absolutely what can you say? And the same thing about the Wrightsmans.

GREENE: Now the Mellons and the Wrightsman would do the same sort of thing where when you needed money they would provide it? Or they...

KETCHUM: Well, the Wrightsmans really took on the Blue Room as their.... And of course you had that tie with Boudin.

GREENE: Is that how he became associated with the project, by the way? Was he recommended by them?

KETCHUM: I'm sure he was known to Mrs. Kennedy, but I also feel strongly that it was because of Jane Wrightsman's association with him. Yeah, yeah, quite definitely. Because I think Mrs. Mellon would have tended to be a -- quite a different role, although she valued advice from interior designers very much so, but seemed to be more of the advice that a Harry du Pont would receive, and not something as much as a Jane Wrightsman would. But even so, no one, I think, knew furnishings, and especially the French, the French Empire period as well as Jane Wrightsman, a scholar in her own right. And I don't mean to say that she restricted her deal, but that this was truly something that she could break through.... And it was a happy, convenient situation that we had. This had been a period that was so important in the history of the White House as far as Monroe was concerned. This was the first true period of furnishing after the White House was burned. Adams [Charles Adams], no. I think his name certainly helped, and he did give when we needed money to reproduce chairs for the Blue Room, which were \_\_\_\_\_ chairs that were being reproduced, but other than that, not.... It was his name that helped, and I have a feeling that a couple of times, from what he told me afterwards during the Johnson Administration, that he had done things at Mrs. Kennedy's behest that really horrified his wife afterwards because it may have been spending some of her money, I don't know, but things which were not particularly easy to live with at home for a while. Roy Davis was not in a position to give a lot of money, but he sure gave a lot

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of his time and a lot of his framing materials at cost and presented many paintings and prints in the best possible way. He was very...

GREENE: Did he kind of do all of it?

KETCHUM: Yeah, he did his, his, he really did, but frankly, it was a labor of love. He was charging next to nothing for what he was doing. He really was.

GREENE: I imagine they could keep somebody busy and work full time on this.

KETCHUM: Sure, at the rate this, yeah. David Finley, again, it was his name, but he never really -- he was there because of the historic association that he had had in the old Fine Arts Commission, had had with the White House, his ties go back twenty, thirty years in Washington. He did give a piece of furniture early on, but it was a piece which we really had severe questions about its authenticity. And, but it was something which wasn't going to cause any problems. It was what is known as a Mary piece. It was a highboy which we put up in President Kennedy's bedroom, as a matter of fact, but which he was quite certain, uh, the top and the bottom were made at the same time, but when you took them apart and examined the technique and the craftsmanship involved, it was quite obvious they had been done at different times and by different people. At least it seemed that way. But the point is that we're...

GREENE: What did you do in a case like that, now?

KETCHUM: Well, you'd accepted the piece...

GREENE: Oh, you didn't discover this until after it was accepted.

KETCHUM: No, no, no. It's, you're bound to make your mistakes, but this was not a piece that was in a state room, but a bedroom piece that it was never to be worth trying to debunk it as far as the story was concerned. There was a wonderful piece that came from a Mrs. Maurice Noun of Des Moines, Iowa...

GREENE: Yes, I was going to ask you about that.

KETCHUM: ...which came in, and it was a great piece to show everybody. It was a beautiful ladies writing desk from Baltimore. Wonderful, because it was panels reversed pane on glass, and there were two or three known examples at that point, and it was just perfection. But Mrs. Noun had always assumed that it was what everyone else assumed it to be, and that was a piece that was made early in the nineteenth, late in the eighteenth century. And when it was finally discovered that what it was, what we call a centennial piece, namely a piece that was made in 1876 to commemorate an earlier period, but it was done so beautifully, and it was done so painstakingly that it deceived -- this is no Metropolitan Museum...

GREENE: But that did create a problem, if I remember, a P.R. problem...

KETCHUM: Certainly, certainly. Because it was accepted as something which was made considerably earlier, and so then you go back to the donor and say, "What do you want to do? We would be happy to accept it from you. It is well understood that it is strictly a centennial piece, a piece which dates from 1876, and not a piece which dates from..."

GREENE: How do you recall that was discovered? Because it must have been examined fairly carefully.

KETCHUM: It was discovered because someone, after the television program, when it was pointed out -- someone who'd known about it thirty years earlier, forty years earlier --

GREENE: But it was known that it wasn't a deception.

KETCHUM: There was never any deception on her part, nor was there any deception on anyone else who has recommended that it be acquired to the White House. But somebody started putting a different picture together.

GREENE: An outsider wrote to you or....?

KETCHUM: It seems to me that somehow David Stockbar, who was on the advisory committee, got wind of it. His shop is in Wilmington, but he dealt in Maryland pieces. And somehow it came through that way. It was known, I believe it was known.... It was in the press. Once it was verified, once it was really taken apart and examined, and the decision was made after its examination that yes, indeed, we would have to go with... You know, lots of times these things are not even a ninety-ten agreement. It can be a fifty-fifty or a forty-sixty. By the time it was finally examined, the pendulum could have swung to sixty percent says it's a centennial, and forty percent still says no, it was made four generations earlier. But once the evidence seems to be such that it does appear that yes, it's a centennial piece, then your decision is made, to offer that her guidance be the will of the piece.

GREENE: Originally, Mrs. Kennedy had said, "Let's just bring it upstairs," put it in that collection, rather than go through....

KETCHUM: Yeah, yeah. This was her first reaction, but I'm not sure that Mrs. Noun had been told at that point, Mrs. Noun may not have been, not really found out about this, that were any questions at the White House until she read it in the paper.

GREENE: Well, that's another question I was wondering. She had taken a big tax deduction, I think twenty-five thousand

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dollars for it, which made the situation that much trickier.

KETCHUM: True, true, true.

GREENE: But there was a leak apparently, at least a suspected leak, that that thought.... Do you remember who the suspect was, or if there was such a thing?

KETCHUM: I don't recall.

GREENE: You don't remember anything?

KETCHUM: I don't recall. I have a feeling that it would have come through one of the members of the so-called advisory committee, someone who said to a friend, who was very proud at putting piece X with piece Y and coming up with a Sir Arthur Conan Doyle deduction, and this happened to get out, and you had, by this time you had the Maxine Cheshires combing the countryside. Maxine Cheshire in particular because she had gone to every dealer from here to Bangor, Maine and back again that had been in any way, shape or means involved in selling or donating a piece to the White House collection. And she had been putting together a great \_\_\_\_\_ sofas of \_\_\_\_\_ the summer of '62. But once it was known, and once Mrs. Noun knew....

GREENE: She sort of bailed you out by her saying, taking it back.

KETCHUM: Taking it away. Yeah, yeah. But there'd be no problem if she didn't, and there's nothing -- museum professionals, I don't think they ever had any problem in looking at a piece which was a proved and honest, a piece which was literally, this had just been cloned from the original. Because it has been. We're talking about something which someone was so, the intent was so strong to honor -- I don't know the period -- that they literally even used the same tools, used the same types of techniques, that anything that had been developed as far as dovetailing or as far as casting the brasses or whatever, in the meantime, would be scorned in favor of the techniques that had been used in 1800.

GREENE: And actually, you did that in a number of cases through the White House.

KETCHUM: Oh sure. Oh sure. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Reproductions went, but this is truly a very unique and interesting piece, but the word fake is the word that really stands out in the minds of the public, and they don't realize what a valuable lesson being able to even have a piece like this. But certainly its value -- I'd have to say that

because there was so few of these made as centennial pieces, its value would not be all that less as a reproduction because it was so unique and so special. But that's not what people remember, and that's not really what sells the story. The story is that we've been taken, and it sells great.

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Everybody loves to think that somebody was fooled. And here all the king's horses and all the king's men can't quite put Humpty Dumpty's Baltimore ladies writing desk back together again, to say it's anything but a fake. So it's a story that, it's moved and traveled awful fast. I don't think anyone would be able to keep this secret locked up in a letter in the attic for very long.

GREENE: I've heard that in some cases detectives were hired to check out certain items that had been offered. Is that correct, and if so, why?

KETCHUM: Detectives? Detectives worked for us all in the sense that... No, I never heard of that, that would be...

GREENE: Is that right?

KETCHUM: Yeah, I think somebody is using the word "detective" in the sense that a museum specialist or a specialist in a particular -- but not necessarily a museum specialist because, or you could be dealing with someone who is employed in a private gallery who knows a great deal more about a particular object than anyone who's working in a museum and city hacks who are employed or what. What they would do, they would usually be employed, but they would be asked, and most people did it very generously, most professionals, without ever asking for even transportation costs if they had traveled far. I don't know of any detectives. If so, it's something I had never heard before.

GREENE: I don't remember where I read it, but it, my impression was it was not so much because of authenticity as perhaps the offer exceeded the means of the donor and there were some questions about legitimate...

KETCHUM: Yeah, we would have questions about, we certainly would want to maze through Secret Service channels as far as...

GREENE: To name anybody?

KETCHUM: Well, if we had any questions about them, yeah. Or we certainly would want to know, again, getting back to, if something just seemed to good to be true, we did want to know what kind of an ax they had to grind.

GREENE: Can you think of any examples where you saved yourself some embarrassment by that process?

KETCHUM: Things used to come from, there was a gossip columnist who worked for the syndicated press, worked for the *New York Post*, maybe. Anyway, Leonard Lyons.

GREENE: Oh yeah.

KETCHUM: He wrote something called "The Lyon's Den" -- and it must have been very popular because he was doing the nightclub

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circuits at one in the morning in New York -- to promote people into giving things to the White House. I can't remember specific names, but I can remember instances too, including -- and I think the Jules Stein case may be one of them -- but I can remember a couple of other instances where he was recommending

[INTERRUPTION]

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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