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Cleatus Alven Nixon (July 16, 1972)

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Oral History Interview

with

MR. CLEATUS ALVEN NIXON

July 16, 1972
Stayton Island, Oregon

By Evlyn Dorn

For the Richard Nixon Oral History Project

- DORN: This is an interview with Mr. Cleatus Alven Nixon at Stayton Island, Oregon on July 16, 1972, Evlyn Dorn interviewing. Mr. Nixon, would you please tell me where and when you were born?
- NIXON: I was born June 14, 1924, at Neola, West Virginia.
- DORN: When did you come to Oregon?
- NIXON: We came to Oregon in 1930.
- DORN: Did you come here with your parents?
- NIXON: Yes.
- DORN: Where did you get your education, and give me a little resume of your education?
- NIXON: I went to grade school at Bridge, Oregon for a while.
- DORN: Is that near Portland?
- NIXON: That's near Coos Bay, just above Myrtle Point. And then we moved up to Aumsville about three years later. It must have been about 1934, somewhere around there. And I went to school in Sublimity, Oregon.
- DORN: That's close here?
- NIXON: Yes it is, it's just north.
- DORN: Give me the names of your parents.

NIXON: My dad's name was David Palmer Nixon and my mother's name was Birchey [Combs] Nixon.

DORN: And your grandparents?

NIXON: My grandparents were Boston [A.] Nixon and Lucy [Christian] Nixon.

DORN: Boston was the son of George Nixon III.

NIXON: Yes.

DORN: The grandfather that is buried at Gettysburg.

NIXON: Yes. That's right.

DORN: So that's the same grandfather that Richard Nixon has.

NIXON: Yes.

DORN: Have you ever had any direct contact with the President; have you ever come face to face with him?

NIXON: No, I never have had that privilege of meeting the President. I've followed him closely on T.V. and the papers.

DORN: But you never happened to be in a gathering where he was speaking personally?

NIXON: I never had the privilege of being there.

DORN: When you follow him on television like that, which I'm sure you've done for years, how do you feel about his personality now as compared with perhaps when he was a congressman or a senator? How do you feel about a change in his personality?

NIXON: Well, I think that he's matured a lot. I feel that he's in a position, that he's doing as good as any man in his position could do. The shape that this world's in today I don't think that there in any one man that could do any more than what he's done. I don't see how anyone could do any better in the times that we have today.

DORN: I agree. Did you ever meet his mother and father, Hannah and Frank Nixon?

NIXON: I never did get to meet them.

DORN: Nor his brothers?

NIXON: No, that's why I was hoping he'd be here today.

DORN: I'm so sorry, because Donald [Francis Donald Nixon] really wanted to come today, and the death in his family of his aunt [Edith Milhous Timberlake]. . . . She was buried yesterday afternoon. We tried to find out about air flights in here, but the only one that could come through from Los Angeles to get into Salem would have arrived here at 9:00 tonight. Don said he would be home and he asked me to telephone from the island here so he could talk to you people, but unfortunately there was no telephone, so we couldn't do that. Do you recall any conversation in your family about whether or not Richard Nixon should have practiced law or gone into politics?

NIXON: No, I can't recall any conversation like that.

DORN: Was there any member of your family that had any aspirations for a political career in your own immediate family, like the city council or the mayor or something of that sort?

NIXON: Not that I know of, no.

DORN: Mr. Frank Nixon when he married Hannah Nixon--this is the father and mother of the President--left the Methodist Church and joined the Quaker church. Was there ever any criticism that you have heard in your family about the fact that he had done this?

NIXON: No, I've never heard any criticism like that.

DORN: Regarding this marvelous Nixon reunion here today, did you say you lived close here to Stayton Island? Where do you live now?

NIXON: I live in Aumsville.

DORN: That's not very far from here.

NIXON: About six miles, approximately. We're six miles west of Stayton Island.

DORN: What do you think about this reunion, getting together and meeting your relatives?

NIXON: Well, there's some here I haven't seen for a good many years, but I was hoping for more close to the President could have been here. Uncle Kessler [Winford Kessler Nixon], he's done more traveling than any of us. That's the reason I know if you interview him you would find out a lot more than we can tell you.

- DORN: I talked with Don, as I say, and Ed [Edward Calvert Nixon] said that he was very sorry--and Don too--that that part of the family couldn't have been represented here, and they were very sorry that they were not able to come.
- NIXON: I was kind of on edge, I'm that way, because I haven't mixed with people high up like that. I was kind of nervous, but at the same time I would have still liked to . . .
- DORN: Oh, you never need to be nervous with Don and Ed Nixon.
- NIXON: When they said the President's former secretary was going to be here, that shook me up, but I find that you're just common folk like everybody.
- DORN: Well, of course.
- NIXON: But I tell you, I'm wishing that my wife would have brought a picture of my dad and my brother next to me who couldn't make it, he's in Idaho, but it was a picture of my brother when he come home on leave from the Navy in World War II of him, myself and dad. And it just resembles President Nixon. Dad really favors President Nixon. I would want my wife to bring that picture and she didn't do it.
- DORN: Mr. Nixon, do you have any other documents in the family or any other pictures? Do you have any letters from relatives or anything like that that you can think of? We are collecting documents and particularly pictures of the Nixon family which will go into the Nixon Library. If you have any pictures at all we would be delighted to have you even loan them to us long enough to have them copied. We do have the facilities to do that, and then could return them to you.
- NIXON: Well, let's see. I have a picture of Roy Nixon; he has passed away.
- DORN: Now, what's his relationship?
- NIXON: Dorothy, have you got any pictures at all here?
- D. NIXON: No, I didn't take time to bring any. The only thing I did happen to have along is this here, I don't know whether you've seen anything in that order. That dates way back to the history of some of the first Nixons.
- DORN: This is a coat of arms of the Nixons. No, I haven't seen this particular one.

D. NIXON: Well, this is one that was sent to us.

DORN: Mr. Nixon, will you look and see what pictures you have and will you contact us about them or we can contact you, because we really would like to get as many documents as possible.

NIXON: Do we have any old pictures?

D. NIXON: Well, just more or less family pictures that you had taken when you were kids growing up at home; you had pictures of your mother and dad and so forth on it.

DORN: Get them together and we will contact you again from this tape. We would like very much to get . . .

NIXON: We have some letters from Roy Nixon's wife. His wife usually did the writing. They wrote back and forth to us quite a bit.

D. NIXON: He just passed away this last April.

NIXON: He went elk hunting with me when he was seventy-some years old.

D. NIXON: Seventy-seven, was it?

NIXON: He went way down this big canyon with me, and he really got a thrill out of this, and that's the last time I seen him.

D. NIXON: In fact, he's got the ivory teeth out of the elk you killed.

NIXON: I give him the ivory teeth out of the elk. But, he's dead now. I don't know if you saved any of the letters from him or not.

D. NIXON: Yes, I've got all of the letters from him and everything. I've got all them if they'd be of any use.

DORN: Well, get together whatever documents you have so we could look them over, because all of these things that come from relatives are important in the library for future historians. This library is going to be built so that students, historians or people writing books, or whatever, can come there and get their information. Now, these tapes will be typed up by our girls in the office and a copy will be sent to you. And then you may add to it or delete, or correct, and then send it back to us, at which time we will have it typed in final form and it will be bound and put into the Nixon Library for future generations. Can you think of anything, Mr. Nixon, that you would like to add to this?

NIXON: I wish I could. When I was younger and dad was still alive he used to tell me stories way back there when he was a boy. He probably told me things Uncle Kessler probably has already told you. I just wish I could tell you more. I wish I could have traveled more and found out more. But I just haven't been able to do it.

DORN: I certainly thank you, Mr. Nixon, for this interview and it was a great pleasure to be here and to meet you and your wife, both.

NIXON: I'm glad to meet you.

DORN: Thank you.

D. NIXON: You should have a chance to come down and be with us. This has been very enjoyable and exciting to each and everyone here.

DORN: Thank you. It's really been wonderful and I do appreciate the invitation to attend.

D. NIXON: I wished there could have been more of them, because there are a lot more relatives that we had expected and they weren't able to come.

NIXON: There were more that couldn't make it.

D. NIXON: His sister from California couldn't make it. He's got two brothers . . .

NIXON: One of the boys wasn't able to come. He was in the Air Force; he's spent four years in the Air Force.

DORN: We have a pretty good group here that knew a few of the interesting things.

D. NIXON: Actually Kessler Nixon is our last source to really get any information. There are seventy-four of us here today.

DORN: Thank you folks, very much, for this interview.

NIXON: You're welcome.