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Esther Milhous Dodson (February 21, 1972)

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Whittier College

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Oral History Interview

with

MRS. ESTHER MILHOUS DODSON

February 21, 1972
Chandler Heights, Arizona

By Dr. C. Richard Arena

For the Richard Nixon Oral History Project

ARENA: This is interview #1 with Mrs. Esther M. Dodson in Chandler Heights, Arizona. M. stands for Milhous. Mrs. Dodson formerly had a middle name, Emily, which she does not use any more. The date is February 21, 1972, Arena interviewing. May we begin Mrs. Dodson by my asking you where and when you were born?

DODSON: I was born October 23, 1900, at the Milhous farm in southern Indiana, near Butlerville, the farm which I believe Jessamyn West used as the setting for Friendly Persuasion.

ARENA: And how is it that you found yourself later in Southern California?

DODSON: We moved from the farm to Plainfield [Indiana] my mother's home, before I was a year old and lived there until 1917, when we moved to Yorba Linda [California]. My father had invested in a small orange grove there in Yorba Linda, largely because the rest of the family had already moved to California and he wanted to go too.

ARENA: And to be precise, your father's relationship to President Nixon would be what?

DODSON: I suppose you'd say a half-uncle. He was an older half-brother of the President's mother.

ARENA: And if I'm not mistaken, correct me if I'm wrong, he would be the firstborn son of Mr. Franklin Milhous, because I believe he did have another son later on by the name of Ezra [Charles Milhous].

DODSON: Yes, that would be correct.

ARENA: Would he also be the oldest of all of Mr. Franklin Milhous' children? Was he the firstborn child as well? Maybe we could check that in your genealogical study.

DODSON: I would have to.

ARENA: Then as you check your records, it is correct that he is the oldest, and since you have that open, would you mind giving the date of his birth?

DODSON: May 8, 1873.

ARENA: That's an interesting coincidence. May 8 happens to be my birthday also. Do you mind if I ask you what your own education has been and where you attended school and, if you remember, the names of these different schools you attended beginning with the earliest one?

DODSON: Well, I attended the Plainfield, Indiana, grade school and I went to Central Academy, a Friends academy in Plainfield for three years, although I didn't take a full course the third year. Then we moved to California and I finished high school at Fullerton [California] which was near Yorba Linda, and we had to go by bus, of course. Then I went to Whittier College.

ARENA: Do you recall your graduating year in Fullerton?

DODSON: That was 1919.

ARENA: I am just wondering if possibly you knew at the same time in school Miss Jessamyn West, who I know also attended Fullerton High [School] and also took the bus from Yorba Linda. Were you contemporaries by any chance?

DODSON: We graduated from college in the same year, so we must have been contemporaries in high school too, but I don't happen to remember much about that relationship. She went on to Fullerton Junior College and came to Whittier her last two years and, of course, I remember those years much better.

ARENA: Thank you. And may I ask you when you entered and then graduated from Whittier College?

DODSON: I entered in the fall of 1919 and graduated in '23.

ARENA: And may I ask you what your major was and your special interest in college and after, from the standpoint of a career?

DODSON: Well, in those days we had two majors. I had history and French. I suppose neither of them had much to do with what I did afterward because my father being a music teacher wanted me to be a musician, and I had been taking music lessons all my life. I went ahead with music for two years, teaching a course in History of Music at Whittier [Collegel] the year after I graduated and a course in Harmony the second year. After that my musical career practically stopped.

ARENA: May I ask you what you do recall of your father's [Griffith William Milhous] education and his music career? As you know the President did take lessons from him for a while and I would appreciate whatever comes to mind from your own recollection about your father's musical education and his career.

DODSON: He had no formal musical education that I know of until he persuaded his father to let him go to Earlham College for a year to study music, and I suppose he crammed into that year all he could. After that he did take some private lessons in Indianapolis [Indiana]. He taught himself largely I think to play a number of instruments, so that when he went to work at the Indiana Boys School near Plainfield as Director of Music, he could teach the boys practically any instrument they needed to know in order to be in the band and the orchestra. He also led singing, of course. He was the director of the choir in the church at Plainfield, the Friends Church where we went, and he led a community chorus for a number of years. We gave programs. I remember we gave Handel's oratorio "Queen Esther" one year. He had a male quartet which he was very interested in and which continued, I guess, all the time we were in Plainfield. Before we

left for California, my mother suggested that he take a course in tuning pianos, which he did, and that was fortunate because he found quite a bit of tuning to do in California.

ARENA: Just to be sure, did I understand you to say the Indiana Boys School was in Indianapolis?

DODSON: No, near Plainfield.

ARENA: And would this have been a school for delinquent boys? Was it that type of school?

DODSON: That's right.

ARENA: And do you mind if I ask you if you ever heard of your father and Mr. [Frances Anthony] Frank Nixon, the President's father, volunteering some work with any other boys' school like that in California? I've heard that Mr. Frank Nixon, from his medical doctor, did that with some other gentleman but the other gentleman's name does not come to mind. And your father with his background might have been that missing link that I am looking for.

DODSON: If he was, I don't know about it. He did apply for a job at the Boys' School [Nelles School for Boys] near Whittier once but didn't get it. And I don't know whether he ever volunteered there or not.

ARENA: May I ask you now to describe in your own words your father's personality? How do you see him, as a daughter looking back?

DODSON: Well, he was a very kind, thoughtful man, not too aggressive, very interested in his self-made career of music. That was his chief interest I would say, apart from his family. He was very attached to all members of his family. He kept writing to the California people until we moved there. There was a cousin's letter that came around every so often, but I'm not sure that was altogether Milhous cousins. Anyway he kept in touch with his family on both sides.

ARENA: And to be sure, your father's middle name is William?

DODSON: That's right.

ARENA: Griffith William Milhous.

DODSON: Uh huh.

ARENA: Do you recall anything concerning his interest and his background as a teacher at the John Muir Junior High School in Whittier?

DODSON: I recall that he wasn't very happy there. Mrs. [Susan] Johnson got him the job, I think. She was on the board and he was thankful to have the job, but the years that he spent there were not too happy for him.

ARENA: Do you recall, maybe from talking to some of his students, either then or later, his method of teaching? Did he have any particular method or any particular approach to teaching music?

DODSON: Well, I know from my own experience as his pupil that his method was pretty mechanical. He knew the rudiments of music, as far as the notes and the time and so forth went, but he didn't teach interpretation very much.

ARENA: I do recall that one of his former students mentioned that he did give an assignment to her--and I am just wondering if you ever heard this regarding other students, and she enjoyed this particular assignment very much--of doing some biographical work on famous musicians or famous men in music. Did you ever come across that in any way?

DODSON: No, no.

ARENA: She said this was one reason why she enjoyed having him at John Muir Junior High School, as a matter of fact.

DODSON: While he was there.

ARENA: Yes.

DODSON: No, I didn't know that.

ARENA: As a matter of fact would you know or recall if he had any personal interest in writing himself? Do you know if in his later years or at any time he kept any notes with that idea in mind?

DODSON: No, I don't. You don't mean writing music. You mean writing history.

ARENA: Well, writing history, yes, and checking up in libraries for whatever reason. I am just wondering if there is a connection between his making these assignments to the students and his own personal interest?

DODSON: No. He liked genealogy and kept records on his relatives but as far as writing them up, not that I know of.

ARENA: While we're on that point of keeping records, would you mind summarizing what you, yourself, have in the way of records, including this personal genealogical work and those of your father and where these papers are if you know. For example, any correspondence dealing with the President or other members of the family, such as Mrs. Hannah Nixon or your other aunts, Mrs. Jane Beeson. In other words, I am trying to get for the record and future historians what you have in the way of a collection of papers that would be of interest to historians some time.

DODSON: I guess I do have some old letters and things of that sort containing genealogical material. I have tried to take out what I needed for my record. I have blanks filled out for our ancestors back several generations, including collateral names. But my own interest has not been in going back but keeping up with the present, which is difficult. I've gone back to my four sets of great-grandparents and tried to trace all their descendants, which is impossible, but I do have more on the Milhous side than on any other.

ARENA: And to be sure, would you say these papers that you do have are with you presently at this address where we are now located?

DODSON: Yes, they're in a trunk.

ARENA: All right. And to go back to your father, do you recall what happened to his papers where he was making his own collection of a genealogical study of the family's roots?

DODSON: I don't know where they'd be unless they're out in that same trunk. I think they are, whatever there is.

ARENA: And as a matter of fact would anything you have of his in the way of notes, would they have come to you personally?

DODSON: Yes.

ARENA: Thank you very much. Now if I may, I would like to ask you to recall the period when you were residing in Yorba Linda, which as you know is where the President was born in 1913, whatever comes to mind, education-wise, religion, social and recreational life, whatever comes to mind about that period, and would you give the dates? If you don't recall precisely the years, about when, as you were a resident in Yorba Linda.

DODSON: We moved to Yorba Linda in the summer of 1917 and stayed until 1920, three years. My brother went to school there but I did not. While there I went to Fullerton High [School].

ARENA: Excuse me, by your brother you do mean [William] W. Carleton [Milhous]?

DODSON: Yes, he's my only brother. So my contact with Yorba Linda was largely through the church, to which the Nixons also belonged. But I was teaching a class of girls most of that time, so I was not in Uncle Frank's class as Jessamyn [West] was. I also was playing the piano for the church and I frankly don't remember much about the Nixon boys at that period. They were quite young and I just took them for granted, I guess.

ARENA: What do you recall in the way of your teaching this girls' class? Would that be the Sunday School class in your church?

DODSON: That's right.

ARENA: Do you recall, for example, about how many students you had and was there any supervision on the part of the elderly members of the church? I am thinking, for example, did persons like Mrs. Hannah Nixon or Mr. Frank Nixon have some say as to what the young teachers, such as yourself, were about?

DODSON: No, we were left pretty much to our own devices. I was sent to Asilomar to a conference for teachers one time but that was the extent of the supervision.

ARENA: Asilomar is located on the Monterey Peninsula in California.

DODSON: Right.

ARENA: I had the pleasure of attending a conference there and there's no better place to attend a conference. While you were at this age, high school, and teaching Sunday School classes, did you possibly have any more formal role with the Friends Church? I am wondering, for example, if you were too young to belong to any of the committees?

DODSON: Oh yes. No, I didn't have any other connection.

ARENA: Do you mind if I ask you if you enjoyed teaching Sunday School at that time?

DODSON: I think I found out at that time that I was not cut out to be a teacher. [Laughter] No, I can't say that I really enjoyed it.

ARENA: Do you recall what else there was in the way of religious activity on your part? I am wondering, for example, I think you mentioned this earlier, and I want to get it clear now, the part that you did play in the musical part of your church's life, and I was just wondering to what extent and when did this begin? Would this have been in this period also?

DODSON: It began in Indiana. I played the organ in that church before we moved to California and then I continued. When we moved to Whittier, of course, I did not any more. That was a bigger congregation and they already had their setup. Papa joined the choir but neither mama or I continued our musical participation there.

ARENA: Your father joined the choir at Whittier, the First Friends Church at Whittier?

DODSON: Yes, under Howard Hockett at that time.

ARENA: Under Howard Hockett and this would not be the church in East Whittier?

DODSON: No, this was in Whittier.

ARENA: Thank you. Do you recall what there was in the way of social or recreational activity for young ladies such as yourself in Yorba Linda?

DODSON: Well, there was Christian Endeavor. I didn't mention that. Although the Nixon boys were too young to be involved in that at that time. But yes, I went to that. We had parties. I remember one at my home and we also had the custom of hiking to the top of Mount Lowe on New Year's day. Mount Lowe is near Pasadena, California.

ARENA: And at this stage in your life was there a car in the family and did you and your family take any trips to any beaches or any recreational areas while you were in Yorba Linda, and possibly with your relatives, the Frank Nixons?

DODSON: No, I don't recall any trips with the Nixons. We did have a car and we took trips occasionally.

ARENA: Maybe if I mention special holidays such as the 4th of July, do you recall that these were spent in outings or picnics?

DODSON: No, I think we were not oriented toward holidays particularly. Someone else might have engineered them, but we wouldn't.

ARENA: I don't know if you were aware of the fact, but one of the founding members of the Yorba Linda Woman's Club was Mrs. Hannah Nixon. I was wondering if your own mother was a member or possibly you, yourself, and could you describe some of the meetings and sessions?

DODSON: No, no. And as far as I know my mother was not a member either. If she was, she kept it a secret. [Laughter]

ARENA: The club did continue to meet and is still in existence as a matter of fact, and in the little annual brochure and membership booklet that they print, they do mention the original founding members. As a matter of fact, I wasn't looking for any other Milhous, but it would be rather interesting to see if your mother was a member.

- DODSON: I would doubt if she was. We had her mother living with us at that time and she was something of a care for my mother and she wasn't as free to do things like that as Hannah was, I suppose.
- ARENA: Do you recall that your mother did meet socially, if not through the club with the other ladies in the community? Was there anything like a sewing circle or common shopping hikes or anything like that?
- DODSON: If she met with the other ladies, it would be through a WCTU [Women's Christian Temperance Union] meeting, and I don't remember that they had that at Yorba Linda although they may have. She might have started one, as that was her hobby.
- ARENA: Do you know if your mother and Mrs. Jane Beeson ever got together concerning the WCTU, because I do know Mrs. Beeson is still actively interested. She was making some cookies for a meeting of youngsters when I interviewed her a few months ago.
- DODSON: Well, I don't recall that, but it's quite possible. If there was a regional meeting they both went to, they would have shared that interest, I'm sure.
- ARENA: In interviewing a gentleman who was a bus driver from Yorba Linda to the Fullerton High School, I recall his mentioning, since he was also a student, that the high school used to have some interesting assemblies, and one of the guest speakers was William Jennings Bryan in 1913, which would have been before your period. But I wonder if possibly there were other equally famous characters in American history who appeared at any of your assemblies at Fullerton High School, someone of the stature of William Jennings Bryan, for example?
- DODSON: No, I don't remember that. Jessamyn would be the one to talk to about that.
- ARENA: Do you recall anything unusual that does date back to your tie with your high school years, even a bus accident possibly between Yorba Linda and Fullerton?
- DODSON: No, we didn't have any accidents. The thing that I remember most about my high school days, I guess, was that I was asked to be valedictorian when we graduated.

I prepared a very short speech and gave it and I don't know if anybody heard it or not because I don't have a loud voice, but anyway I did.

ARENA: Would you, out of curiosity, happen to have a copy of that same speech?

DODSON: Oh, no.

ARENA: Would it have been in a yearbook though, do you think? Do you recall that you saw it in print later?

DODSON: I don't remember that I did.

ARENA: I have the feeling you don't want to see that speech again, is that correct?

DODSON: That might be so. [Laughter]

ARENA: To be sure now, do you recall any specific joint experiences with the President during the Yorba Linda years? For example, do you recall that you might have been called upon to do some babysitting for the Nixons and he was one under your charge? Do you recall anything like that?

DODSON: No, I think Jessamyn did the babysitting. She lived nearer there, down in town I think.

ARENA: Do you recall the custom of having annual reunions on the part of the Milhouses at the home actually of Franklin Milhous who, around this time I believe, was coming to the end of his days, 1918? Do you recall even while you were in Yorba Linda that these reunions were held and possibly you with your family journeyed off to Whittier where the Milhous ranch was the host?

DODSON: Yes, I'm sure we did. I don't clearly recall, but I've seen pictures of them and I know that we did. That would be one thing that my family would do, go to family reunions.

ARENA: And you don't recall likely, if you don't recall specific reunions, President Nixon specifically being present at any?

DODSON: Well I know he was because he's in some of the pictures. That's all I can say.

ARENA: I understand that on some occasions that if not during the Yorba Linda period, at any period where these reunions were held and you were present, do you recall that you were asked to perform in the way of recitations or playing the piano or any instrument?

DODSON: No, I'm afraid I don't.

ARENA: And while I'm thinking about the question of his musical background, do you recall in particular his coming to your father's home, your family home, for music lessons and what would be the earliest date, if you do recall, or year rather than date, for his coming for instruction?

DODSON: I don't. And I don't know if it was at Yorba Linda or later in Whittier. I expect in Whittier because he was only seven or eight when we left Yorba Linda. But he might have started him that early. I don't recall.

ARENA: You don't recall seeing him specifically, although it was likely that he did come to your home, but you don't recall his coming specifically?

DODSON: No, I'm afraid I don't.

ARENA: And then just to be sure, you don't recall what instruments he might have studied under your father either?

DODSON: It would have been either piano or violin.

ARENA: Would it possibly have been both in the sense that there is a picture of him holding a violin.

DODSON: Yes, it's possible.

ARENA: And I can't think of anyone but your father who might have taught him that, as Mrs. Beeson taught him only the piano and not the violin. But she has a recollection that he had had some instruction on the violin.

DODSON: That's quite possible.

ARENA: Did your father give violin lessons about as frequently as he did the piano?

DODSON: No, not as many people would have had a violin in those days as had a piano, and everybody was supposed to know how to play the piano then but not the violin.

ARENA: And if you don't mind my asking and if your memory serves you correctly, would you recall the payment, if there was one on the part of the Nixons for the instruction of young Richard?

DODSON: I don't remember. I think papa charged one dollar a lesson but whether he would have charged that to the Nixons, I don't know. [Laughter]

ARENA: On this one dollar a lesson, to be serious for a moment, how accurate do you think you are in recalling that? Was that the standard charge, one dollar a lesson?

DODSON: That was my impression, yes.

ARENA: Do you recall that your father was paid in kind, we'll say, rather than in cash, because of the hardships on the part of some of the families of the pupils, and you might have had some extra chickens or extra potatoes around?

DODSON: I don't recall that. It's possible again, of course, but I think it was mostly cash.

ARENA: To what extent do you recall that your father maintained a schedule or maintained a program for himself to keep abreast of his obviously many responsibilities? He was taking care of a farm I understand. He was doing some real estate speculating, in the sense of buying property and renting homes, as well as maintaining his interest in music, as well as his volunteer church work. I was just wondering to what extent this might tie in with the description of his personality. Did he keep these things in order and keep himself calm, cool and collected while handling these different responsibilities, if he was calm, cool and collected?

DODSON: As far as I know he was, yes. And as far as studying on his part, he took a musical magazine and read that, but nothing else that I know of.

ARENA: Speaking of a music magazine, do you recall if he belonged to a professional organization, either educational or any professional musical organization, as I believe Mrs. Beeson did for many years and still does?

DODSON: No, I don't think he did.

ARENA: And speaking of his sister, Mrs. Jane Beeson, I'm trying also to track down an account. I understand she either lived or worked and taught at a school for young black children who may have been orphaned or may have been just foundlings in Indianapolis. I wonder if you ever had any contact with that incident or if you knew anything about it and, of course, whether or not your father might have had some experience with an organization such as that?

DODSON: No, I don't remember that.

ARENA: That was told to me by Mrs. [Rose] Olive Marshburn. It seemed to come out automatically and then when I asked more questions, she didn't know too much about it. The person I should ask, of course, is Mrs. Beeson herself. I thought maybe you might know something about it.

DODSON: She may have been studying in Indianapolis for a while.

ARENA: That is definite, yes, Indianapolis Conservatory as a matter of fact.

DODSON: Yes. I can remember her coming out to visit us, but I don't know beyond that.

ARENA: Now could I ask you to think back again to the years at Whittier. Let me begin by asking you if you recall any direct experiences with the President during this period when you were living in Whittier, which I assume would be mainly for the purpose of your attending school, or had the family moved into Whittier?

DODSON: The family moved to Whittier in 1920 I believe it was. Again I suppose during that period the Nixons, after they moved, had their store and kept Richard pretty busy there, and since I left Whittier in 1925, I don't think we had too much contact except maybe to go to a few family reunions.

ARENA: It might be of help to remember that Mr. Frank Nixon moved there in 1922 and, of course, he was in East Whittier. Did your family live in East Whittier and belong to the same Friends Church there?

DODSON: No, no. We were in Whittier itself and they in East Whittier and we went to different churches.

ARENA: That would be another reason why there would be less likelihood of direct contact.

DODSON: Yes.

ARENA: By way of continuing with this period of your moving to Whittier now, Mrs. Dodson, and also let us make that correction that your brother kindly brought to our attention off the tape a moment ago, that rather than take hikes to Mt. Lowe [Californial], it was more likely where?

DODSON: Mt. Wilson.

ARENA: And this is located?

DODSON: Well, it's near Mt. Lowe. You start up a trail from Sierra Madre and as my brother reminded me also, we did start up the night before in order to see the sunrise New Year's day that would be on the top of the mountain. And I know that Uncle Frank Nixon went with us various times because it was for any members of the church that wanted to go, but I doubt if Richard would have been old enough while I was going. He may have later.

ARENA: Thank you. Do you recall any occasion, especially during the Yearly Meetings when not only the Friends of the First Friends Church but also of East Whittier Church got together? Do you recall meeting with Mrs. Hannah Nixon or other members of the family, Frank Nixon for example, in any way? I am just wondering what you know of their personal involvement with the Friends' church activities.

DODSON: I was not an attender at California Yearly Meeting to any great extent and I don't remember. It would have been Aunt Hannah if anybody did in that family.

ARENA: On that point do you ever recall that Mrs. Hannah Nixon, or again Mr. Frank Nixon, referred to the hopes of Mrs. Hannah Nixon that the President would some day be a missionary? The basis for that question is, I might have mentioned this to your brother in the interview, that in his book Six Crises where the President makes some autobiographical references, he

points out that his mother had hoped when he was a youngster that he would some day be a missionary in Central America, and I am just wondering if anywhere along the line you had ever heard anything like that yourself?

DODSON: I seem to have a vague impression that his father hoped he'd be a minister. I think that's the closest I would get to it.

ARENA: Thank you, and on that point, what do you recall of the activity of your own father as a member of the Friends Church? Did he belong to any of the formal committees? Maybe we discussed it in connection with music but now I am thinking of the administration of Friends Church, especially during these Yearly Meetings. Did he play an active role in any of the committees, we'll say, or anything like that?

DODSON: I would doubt it because we were newcomers to Whittier, so to speak, in the days when I lived there at least. He might have later, but I don't remember.

ARENA: This question will deal with aspects of the President's religious life and although you might not have any direct association, it's a kind of general question and will help to throw some general light on his religious conviction, which as we all know is that of the Friends Church. We hear nowadays of the term generation gap and with that in the back of my mind, I'm asking you, what opportunity was there for the youngster, especially the person high school age up, to work with the mature members of the Friends Church in committees? Was it mainly through, as you did yourself, the Sunday School program, or were there other committees or other opportunities, although I believe you said you did nothing yourself; but you were speaking of your own case. Were there opportunities for youngsters to have a hand in some of the administrative aspects of the Friends Church, especially when the Yearly Meetings took place, say being a spectator or participant maybe with no official function when the various members of the California Friends community--maybe the whole West Coast--would meet. What opportunity was there for the youngster to identify with the administrative aspects, the governing aspects of the Friends?

DODSON: I would say not much to my knowledge. Of course, they were encouraged to attend and I am sure they worked in some ways, like helping in the dining rooms for meals,

but you're speaking of administrative ways. I would doubt that in any large gathering. In a small church like Yorba Linda that may have been different.

ARENA: Now that's so much as the formal aspects of that general question, and the general question is the relation between the mature members and the youngsters in the church. How about informally from your own recollection? What was there in the way of common communication, common work? In the Christian Endeavor, for example--which I understand was not purely a Friends organization but for other denominations as well--a place where the young could informally associate with the older people, especially during the young life of President Nixon? As we know, things do change and today's conditions might be different. But especially in the President's youth, and bearing in mind he was born in 1913.

DODSON: I don't remember about any generation gap that we were conscious of in those days. We associated according to our age naturally, but I don't remember that we were kept apart in any way. If we wanted to associate, we did.

ARENA: Getting back to your stay in Whittier at this point, as a member of Whittier College, could I ask you to describe, and taking as much time as you like, your days as a college student at Whittier?

DODSON: [Laughter] Well, Whittier was small in those days. There were only twenty-three who graduated in the year '23 as I did.

ARENA: How about the formal religious commitment? As you know Whittier College is no longer formally a church denomin-ated school, although its roots very definitely are. At that time I assume it was formally linked with the Friends Church.

DODSON: I think it was with the Yearly Meeting and I don't know just when the break came--break is not the word for it--but when the Yearly Meeting gave up formal jurisdiction. But we certainly saw ourselves as quite definitely a Quaker college. We had a class, of course, in Quaker History that most everybody took I guess. We had very active YM [Young Men's Christian Association] and YW [Young Women's Christian Association] organizations. We had an organization called it seems to me, Student Volunteers, which was a national movement at that time. Yes, there was a very active religious feeling in the college I would say.

ARENA: I wonder if I may dwell for a moment on the course that you just mentioned, Quaker History. As you know, Quakers are very much an important part of the history of the United States, and although, as you know, I am not of that persuasion myself, having gone through the public schools and having gone all through college, the history of the Quakers is very much a formal part of, I think, every American's education, especially where the thirteen colonies are concerned and one goes into the founding of Pennsylvania. What I am interested in knowing and let me continue the question on Side II of this tape.

BEGIN SIDE II TAPE I

ARENA: To continue Mrs. Dodson, what I am interested in is tying in the history of the Quakers with the political history of the United States. It is a known fact, for example, that William Penn allowed his proprietary colonists to enjoy what we would call a Constitution today, a Charter then, with amazingly liberal principles, including a certain amount of religious freedom, the right of self-government through the Assembly and so forth. What I would like to know is to what extent did your Quaker history go over this and to what extent was it a history course that was even more specialized than the typical Quaker history that the typical U.S. public school student would acquire? It's rather involved and prolonged, but I could not help as a historian myself to get your reaction to a question such as that.

DODSON: Well, I'm not sure what you mean by specialized history. It was more general than just William Penn and Pennsylvania certainly. It was the history of Quakerism, all three hundred years of it. Well, not three hundred at that time but from the beginning, and I don't remember that it did refer particularly to contemporary history in those days. We just followed the textbook which was written, I believe, by Elbert Russell, a North Carolinian professor.

ARENA: Now as a matter of fact, since you mention that particular name, through interviews I had recently in North Carolina at Duke [University], I found out that Dr. Elbert Russell, and correct me if I'm wrong, the name is spelled E L B E R T R U S S E L L. Dr. Russell was in charge of the Divinity School at Duke during the period that the President was studying law. I don't know if you were aware of that or not.

DODSON: No, I wasn't.

ARENA: Because the next question would have been, if you did know that, I was wondering if you knew whether he and the President actually got together. I assume they did, since he was an eminent Quaker scholar. Certainly Mrs. Olive Marshburn recalled him and he may have been her teacher at Earlham [College]. I believe that came up. But that's very interesting that your book was the book used by Dr. Russell, the one on Quaker history.

DODSON: I could be wrong.

ARENA: And not necessarily that was the title of the book.

DODSON: I could be wrong about it being Russell's book. It might have been Sidney Lucas' book, but that's the name that came to my mind.

ARENA: The thing I have in mind also, in view of the President's later commitment to political life, I am wondering to what extent the question of the political heritage of the United States, the political heritage of the Quakers, especially the institutions of self-government which are so much a part of United States history, I am just wondering to what extent you found that the course that you had was a kind of reminder of something that you knew already, but a more formalized version of that information, especially where we are discussing the matter of self-government and the political history of the Quakers, as I say, and a specific example of William Penn's Charter of Privileges of 1701?

DODSON: No, I think this was my first real introduction to Quaker history. I don't remember that I had had much of it before even in Sunday School, where they sometimes teach it now, I believe. No, I believe this was my first real introduction to it.

ARENA: As you are active in the affairs of the Friends Church now and as you have had this formal education, may I put to you this question, in which I ask your opinion or your speculation. Is the self-government with which we associate the Quakers in a formal way historically in United States history, is it your personal experience as one who works within the Friends Church today, is that a prominent part of the Friends Church today as you understand the workings of the Friends Church?

DODSON: Is what a prominent part?

ARENA: This question of self-government, which is not a part of every church. I don't want to go into particular names, but not all churches have institutions of self-government and I want to more or less get this subject from the point of view of one, we'll say, who has had experience in both worlds, as a U.S. citizen where you are a part of a self-governing system but also as a member, and an active member and a serious member of the Friends Church. And it's this play of self-government in the two that I am asking you to discuss really.

DODSON: I would say that the concept of self-government, as you call it, is basic to the functioning of the Friends Church today, as it has been from the first. Each local group meets monthly to discuss and make decisions about any matters that may come before it. Each individual Friend is encouraged to take his or her right share in these proceedings. Decisions so made are binding upon the group unless and until revised by that same Monthly Meeting. Quarterly and Yearly Meetings serve in advisory and inspirational capacities rather than as sources of authority over individuals or local churches.

ARENA: I would like to tie in this general discussion if I may with the President himself, whether the President had that formal course in Quaker history. I am not sure it was still offered at his time. I believe I put the same question to another student and this would have been Jessamyn West. I don't recall her saying that she did or did not have such a course, but the point is whether you had the course or not, that your experience among the Friends Church and that of President Nixon fundamentally were similar in that his parents were both Quakers, both active participants, in a sense that they both taught Sunday School and they both were on record as being supporters of their respective churches; the one in Yorba Linda, which by the way Mr. Frank Nixon helped to construct physically, and very likely, and I don't know if he helped to construct physically the one in Lindsay, but we do know he was one of the charter founding members. The point, of course, is that the President grew up in this sort of an environment and the question is to ask you your opinion regarding his exposure to this self-government way of life, which is more than just a formal political position, but I'm asking you to dwell on the assumption that I'm making that self-government was something that was second nature to him as it would be to the ordinary Quaker.

DODSON: I think that's true that almost any Quaker has a conception of self-government, of being a responsible part of a very functioning group, and I think that Richard would have taken his responsibilities seriously just as his parents did.

ARENA: Do you happen to recall the name of your teacher for the Quaker History course?

DODSON: I was trying to remember his first name. His last name was Wood. I can get it for you, I'm sure, if you want it.

ARENA: I would appreciate that very much. And now that we've had a chance to check the sources of information, would you mind giving the full name of this Professor Wood?

DODSON: His name was W. Carleton Wood. I don't know what the W. stands for, probably William and C A R L E T O N.

ARENA: Thank you very much. Mrs. Dodson as we bring this interview to a close is there anything I have not brought up that you would like to bring up yourself for the record?

DODSON: No, you have brought more than I have thought of before so I think I have nothing to add.

ARENA: And only let me thank you for your hospitality in allowing me in your home as well as your generosity in answering all of my questions so fully and completely. Thank you very much.

DODSON: Thank you.