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## **George Louis Corcoran (September 6, 1972)**

C. Richard Arena

ABSTRACT

Oral History Interview

with

MR. GEORGE LOUIS CORCORAN

September 6, 1972  
Whittier, California

By Dr. C. Richard Arena

For the Richard Nixon Oral History Project

The first part of the interview establishes where and when Mr. Corcoran was born, his education, and establishes his family background and their move to California close to Patricia Ryan's family in Artesia.

Mr. Corcoran's first contact with the Nixon family was when he visited the Nixon grocery store on Whittier Boulevard. His first contact with President Nixon was when he attended a meeting of a men's Sunday school class where Richard Nixon was introduced and announced he was running for political office.

He discusses seeing Richard Nixon and Pat Nixon riding in a parade in Whittier and on another occasion, at the dedication of a building in Whittier. He recalls seeing the President's parents.

Verbatim recollections follow:

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CORCORAN: Well, I believe the second time that I recall seeing him was when he came out to be in a parade. As I recall, it was a college homecoming parade, or something of this nature. Thelma, who I understand is now Pat [Patricia Ryan Nixon], was riding in the seat and they were riding in the back waving, and at that time, Thelma waved her hand and said, "Hi, George!" That's the only other time she recognized me, and we were on the street, on North Greenleaf [Avenue], as a matter of fact. I don't know what the occasion was, but that's the second time, and those are the only two times that I can recall.

ARENA: I see. How about other immediate members of the family, like the parents and the brothers, such as Harold [Samuel Nixon], who is deceased, but [Francis Donald Nixon] Donald, as you know, is still living?

CORCORAN: Oh, yes.

ARENA: And so is Edward [Calvert Nixon]. Any contact with this part of the family?

CORCORAN: Not too much, other than I was a member of the civil defense group as radiation monitor, and at one time I recall that we had a call up for the dedication of the City Hall of the City of Whittier, as a matter of fact, and as I recall at that time Arthur Mallory, who was the Chief of Police, and all of us were gathered at the dedication of the City Hall, and he had sent out to get the elder Mr. [Francis Anthony] Nixon and Mrs. [Hannah Milhous] Nixon and brought them in, and Dick spoke from Washington at the dedication of the hall, and I was in close proximity. No close personal contact other than that, except that the wife and I used to occasionally go out and eat at the Nixon restaurant on Sunday afternoons. A nice place to eat, and of course, when Donald had the restaurants, we ate in them many times.

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Later in the interview he is asked for recollections of the President's wife.

Verbatim recollections of Mrs. Nixon follow:

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ARENA: I wonder if I could ask you now to go back to that other general area we were talking about, your recollections of the President's wife, and whatever comes to mind regarding that period in Artesia.

CORCORAN: Well, as I recall the Ryan family and particularly Mr. [William M.] Ryan, my first time was with [Thomas Sanford Ryan] Tom and [William G. Ryan] Bill. Being a boy, we used to play football and this sort of thing, and baseball. And it was common, inasmuch as there were some neighbors as I recall named Vivian and Paul Raines, who had a couple of girls and a boy, and it was possible to go out and get a baseball game going out there. And since the two Ryan boys were very close in age, I being a little older didn't make that much difference than the two boys, but we were able to get some baseball going. As I remember, also, there was a family close by whose name was [Floyd] Hodge, who lived not too far away, and we would go out there. And my recollection

of Thelma as I knew her was that she would occasionally make lemonade, since they had lemons available, and furnish us with some cold drinks, and of course, being a youngster you remember these things. I also remember that she had a half-sister by the name of Neva Bender, and it so happens that my wife is named Neva. I recall that as being sort of a coincidence in later years. I since have seen it in the paper sometimes as Eva, but as I recall it was Neva. And I can remember that she used to--the older sister, the Bender, would--play the violin. I remember that that was one of the things that my father wanted me to be, a violinist, and I can recall her practicing on the violin as we were out there playing, and this sort of thing.

I also remember, too, that the Ryans grew a lot of corn, and occasionally [William M.] Dad Ryan, who was a rather thin, Irish-looking type of person, rather tall and slim, would occasionally come on out and caution the boys that there was shucking of corn to be done, and there was a lot of ranch duties that needed to be done, and playing ball wasn't among 'em. And he would then get some volunteer help and occasionally would slip us a fifty-cent piece or a dollar for helping the boys. It got to be such that, "If you want to play ball, you got to sucker a few rows of corn." And I recall that the boys were pretty good irrigation fellows because that seemed to be their duty. And as I recall Thelma's dad, anytime I was out there he was always with a shovel in hand or a hoe, hoeing weeds, and was a real dedicated farmer. I personally could always be sure he was working in the fields at any time that I was ever there.

ARENA: By the way, from the standpoint of a non-farmer like myself, what is the meaning of sucker the corn?

CORCORAN: Well, this is where the corn would come up and there would be several shoots coming from the base of the stalk, and in order to be sure that the corn would grow larger ears and that sort of thing, you would need to cut off [the suckers] the same as you would roses. If you have a wild shoot coming from the roots you would not want that, in order to get a better rose. It would be the same with corn; in order to get better ears of corn. I'm not a farmer either, by the way. But this was part of the things, and then of course, there's always the hoeing of weeds between the stalks of corn, as far as keeping the fields looking nice, and he always had fine-looking furrows and rows and worked at it very, very hard. That's as I recall the farm.

ARENA: Would you describe the farm from the standpoint of everything on it? Was it strictly corn? What did the house itself look like? What materials, if you recall, did it consist of? Did he build it? Were you ever inside?

CORCORAN: Yes, I was inside of the house, not too many times. This was a frame house and it's still standing. And as I recall, it had a porch on it. It was the typical farmhouse that was built in California, a little on the eastern side with some gingerbread on the porch, and the round poster-type with a banister on the porch and wooden stairs leading to it.

ARENA: Was it more than one story?

CORCORAN: Not as I recall. As I think back, I remember only one story. The only times I was ever in the house was in the living room, and that was when we were being served this cold drink and getting some of the heat off. We played pretty hard. Tom and Bill Ryan were ruffians when it come to playing football or. . . . They were good athletes, as I recall, and played a pretty good game, and as a result we got pretty warm. It was common to go there on Saturdays, and not too much on Sunday, but I think Mr. [William M.] Ryan sort of had that as a day of rest and I don't think much happened around the place, as I recall.

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Mr. Corcoran gives a historical background of the community around Artesia [California], the industry, agriculture, et cetera.

The interview ends verbatim:

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ARENA: Did you have any idea as to how long the [William M.] Ryans had been there when you were there? Were they considered one of the older . . .

CORCORAN: We had the impression that they were there oh, at least years before our family came here in 1919. They had been here four or five years before we had been there and seemed to be established.

ARENA: How did they get along with their neighbors in general?

CORCORAN: Very, very fine. They were in close proximity to the Raines family. I think their houses were less than a block apart, as I remember it. There was quite a lot of going back and forth. They got along excellently with their neighbors. No problems. There were very few neighborhood problems down there. It was rather a tight-knit community.

ARENA: I believe you said Mr. Ryan was a widower at this time. Did that put him in any special category, in the sense that he was the only widower for that small town?

CORCORAN: As I remember, he was one of a very few in the town. I don't know of any other widower, unless it was a fellow by the name of William G. Mathews, who lived maybe a mile or so away from there.

ARENA: How about entertainment for you youngsters, including Thelma Ryan, Pat Nixon? Was there a theater during your growing-up years?

CORCORAN: No, there was no theater in Artesia. If you wanted to go to. . . . I can remember the closest theater being in Downey, which was quite a long ways away, really.

ARENA: Mr. Corcoran, how would you describe Thelma Ryan at that time?

CORCORAN: Thelma was, as I remember, a rather thin girl, rather tall for girls, in the sense that she was as tall as I was at the time. I'm about 5'7", 5'6", in that area. She was tall for a girl and slim, very quiet and reserved, VERY reserved. In school, she always tended to her studies. You could be sure that if there were any good grades had that Thelma would be the one setting them. As I remember, we had a teacher and her name was Miss Edith Heller, and she was very strict, of the old school, a five-by-five teacher.

ARENA: As far as you know, would she still be alive?

CORCORAN: No, she's passed away. She was elderly at that time. Miss Heller. I don't remember her first name. I can remember that one of her comments was that she wished she had more students that would tend to business like she [Thelma] did.

ARENA: Do you recall that she [Thelma] in any way was in charge of the boys, in addition to making tea and things like that, or these cold drinks for you fellows? Did she more or less seem to have any authority over them, delegated from Mr. Ryan, the father?

CORCORAN: Not that was apparent, because it was a sort of a family agreement, anything she did. I never remember her issuing any instructions or any orders or anything that way. She was very quiet.

ARENA: On the question of family understanding, how would you describe the relations between them?

CORCORAN: Having very little opportunity to study it, it appeared on my visits out there that this was a strong-knit family, in that their dad was there and they were all a part of it, and they had a lot to do with the family. As a matter of fact, I can't ever remember an argument between Bill and Tom any time. It seemed like everybody just got along, that's all. One of these kind of things. I do recall that the dad had certain chores, apparently, and the boys attended to those chores. That's the only strictness.

ARENA: One final question on Thelma Ryan: Any indication that she would go into what she did?

CORCORAN: I had no indications at that time. I wasn't that close enough to the family to know. I did not know.

ARENA: Mr. Corcoran, I want to thank you very much for this hour interview, and for answering all my questions so frankly and fully.

CORCORAN: Thank you, sir.