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## Guy N. Dixon (November 2, 1971)

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Oral History Interview

with

MR. GUY N. DIXON

November 12, 1971  
Whittier, California

By Dr. C. Richard Arena

For the Richard Nixon Oral History Project

ARENA: This is an interview with Mr. Guy N. Dixon in Whittier, California. The date is November 12, 1971, Arena interviewing. This is interview #1. Shall we begin Mr. Dixon by my asking you where and when you were born?

DIXON: I was born in Dayton, Ohio, and the year of my birth was 1894.

ARENA: What circumstances brought you to California, and what part of California did you come to?

DIXON: My father died when I was quite young and my mother as a widow brought me to California. We landed in San Francisco, or across the bay on July 2, 1906. We were able to tour the city of San Francisco which was shortly after the earthquake. Later we came to Los Angeles and that's where we resided for many years.

ARENA: When did you first settle in Whittier?

DIXON: Actually, my mother bought a piece of property on East Whittier Boulevard and my grandparents came from Ohio, and we erected a house which now would be the southeast corner of First Street and Whittier Boulevard. That was 1908, and during the years of 1908 and '09 we lived in or close to Whittier, one year in East Whittier going to the East Whittier School. The

second year was here in Whittier on Pickering Avenue going to the Bailey Street School, the last year of grammar school.

ARENA: While you're on the subject of education, Mr. Dixon, what further education did you have?

DIXON: Two years of high school, one in Los Angeles and one in Porterville, California, and later I went into the University of California at Davis in the agriculture division, but I only was there one term.

ARENA: Just to be sure about that remark you made earlier on landing in San Francisco, had you come by boat to that area?

DIXON: No, by train to Alameda, and in those days the fare was very cheap. They were bringing people almost for free to California. And we also had a trip from Los Angeles back up to Spokane, Washington, which was included in our fare. You see, my uncle was there and his family. That was near Spokane. When we came back we went to Seattle on the train and took a ship from there to San Francisco and then back down by train to Los Angeles.

ARENA: On that date that you gave concerning your moving to Whittier around 1908, just to help fix that with some of the key dates of President Nixon's history, he was born in 1913 and his family--of course, he was born in Yorba Linda--but the family moved to East Whittier in 1922. Around that time his father set up his gasoline station and grocery store. As a matter of fact the President himself went to East Whittier Elementary School. Do you have any personal recollection of the Nixon grocery store, of the Nixons themselves and of the President in particular, about that era, that time, 1922?

DIXON: In 1922 I was working with the Standard Oil Company here at Whittier and was driving a tank truck which went to La Habra and out to the Murphy Coyote Hills and to the East Whittier ranchers. I remember the store and I stopped, as most everybody did, and bought something, maybe some corn or tomatoes or berries, but that's all that I do recall of that.

ARENA: You don't recall the Nixons personally from that period?

DIXON: I recall just his parents but not the President.

ARENA: Just to get an overall picture before we go into the details about your recollections of Mr. and Mrs. Frank [Francis Anthony] Nixon, possibly you might have even known some of their relatives, say the grandparents, the Milhouses. There was Franklin and Almira. But before we go into that, I'd like to ask you to give a kind of general summary of all of the contact you've had with the President first. For example, it was you, I understand, who was the City Clerk at the time he was sworn in as the Assistant City Attorney of Whittier. Maybe you came into contact with him in connection with his law practice. Maybe you saw him appear in court handling cases. Although we're not going into the political phase of his life at this point, you could give a general idea--not in detail--but a general idea if there was any contact with him after he got into politics. That would be after 1945 and up to the present. So, in general, what has been your direct contact with President Richard Nixon before he got into politics and since, in a general way?

DIXON: Well actually I heard of Richard Nixon when he was in high school. As I recall he was the student body president and I attended a meeting, open to the general public and that was about my only actual contact to see him and hear him until later. I had heard much in the meantime about him. But it was only the year 1938, November, that he became a member of the firm of Bewley, Knoop and Nixon, and at that time Mr. [Thomas W.] Bewley was the City Attorney of Whittier, drafting the ordinances and carrying on all the legal aspects of city business.

Naturally, as City Clerk and having many of the duties of other matters such as licensing, assessing and so forth and carrying out the necessary duties relating to ordinances and resolutions, I had to contact Mr. Bewley. When Mr. Bewley came in he said, "Well, you go and see Dick" [Richard Nixon] as he called him. And he said, "You and him can work out matters concerning city business." So I did and that's how I came first to really get acquainted with him. And in the interviews that I had with him on city affairs one thing that I noticed from the beginning was that he was a real student, a real thinker. He didn't answer just off the cuff. He deeply considered each subject matter before he answered and we worked out fine. We never had one bit of trouble. And I think that one of the main standouts in his life is that he does not jump to conclusions without thinking clearly and thoroughly.

ARENA: After that period, his being an Assistant City Attorney, and you having that direct contact . . .

DIXON: They called him Deputy, Deputy City Attorney.

ARENA: Deputy City Attorney. After that period of direct contact with him, was there any further contact between you and him?

DIXON: Of course, we were continuing contact until he left for the war. I think that was in '42 as I recall, that he went in.

ARENA: He was away during the war years.

DIXON: That's right.

ARENA: And during the war did you have any contact with him?

DIXON: No. However, after World War II, I followed him through his steps as Congressman and Senator because of my past relationship. One of the things I do recall very plainly was when he was here in the City Attorney's office, and at that period was in Congress working on the [Karl E.] Mundt--what was that other name--the scandal that was going on that Mundt and himself was carrying over the Whittaker [Chambers] affair, and they were compiling all the data in the office here, revamping it. That, by the way, is when Mrs. Dorn was working on this matter, Evelyn Dorn, and naturally he came in several times when I was present and we would talk about it. Not to any great extent as I wasn't inquiring into his affairs, only that he said it was quite a scandal and involved a lot to the country.

ARENA: Would this be the famous Whittaker Chambers and Alger Hiss affair?

DIXON: That is, Alger Hiss. Right!

ARENA: Which, of course, put him in the international limelight, and you were in contact with him at that time. Any other subsequent fact, or do you recall hearing him speak when he appeared at Whittier from time to time, maybe dedicating some of the city buildings or his alma mater, Whittier College?

DIXON: No, I didn't. I was in the meeting. . . . To begin with Mr. Nixon was a member and is a lifetime member of the Whittier Post American Legion 51, which I have been for over fifty-two years.

ARENA: Are you still a member?

DIXON: Oh, yes. I started in 1919. And we had a meeting one year of the city officials in Fresno [California] and I think he spoke there. Anyway I ran into him in an elevator with another group, and I think this was at the time that he was running for Senator and a lady was campaigning-- Mrs. [Helen Gahagan] Douglas as I recall.

ARENA: Excuse me. Just to be sure to get those dates right. That is Whittier Post No. 51 and it was about 1951 when he was running for Senator, or maybe 1950. He could be sworn in in 1951. I think that's right.

DIXON: That's right.

ARENA: And then after a couple of years as Senator he was put on the ticket with [Dwight David] Eisenhower in 1952. Just to bring us up to date. Anything since then, Mr. Dixon, in the way of direct contact with him? Good. Then, let's go back to some of the indirect contacts. How about going, say, to the immediate family first. His immediate family, of course, is his wife. Any contact along the way with Mrs. Patricia Nixon?

DIXON: No sir, I have not.

ARENA: How about the brothers, including those who died. Did you know any of the family?

DIXON: I only knew one really to speak to and have conversations with and that was Don [Francis Donald Nixon]. Of course, he was in the restaurant business at that time and was for quite a while here in Whittier. And the Milhouses, of course, we knew of them but I never was intimately acquainted with them. The one [William Alan Milhaus] has the fish restaurant in East Whittier. Other than that no other contact.

ARENA: If it isn't too personal, I should have asked this maybe a little earlier when we were discussing the political period, to which party have you belonged, or have you changed parties from time to time?

DIXON: No, I've never changed parties. I thought Ohio was a Republican state and I guess it may have changed somewhat, but my father was a Republican and it came down through the family. So I've never changed and I never have voted a Democratic ticket or anything like that. I have stepped over

the line occasionally if I thought the individual was preferable and I voted for him.

ARENA: Did you know Mr. Frank [Francis Anthony] Nixon, the President's father to speak to?

DIXON: No, I did not.

ARENA: Evidently he enjoyed discussing and one would even say arguing politics, and I thought you might recall some of these. How about the President's mother, Mrs. Hannah [Milhous] Nixon? Any contact with her over the years?

DIXON: Only at the store. I remember her when she lived out on Beach Boulevard, it would be called now.

ARENA: That is now a restaurant--the home which is now a Swedish type restaurant.

DIXON: And, of course, that was many years later.

ARENA: Maybe you're aware or unaware of some of these other relatives of the President with whom you had contact, and I'll just raise their names to see if anything rings a bell. The Marshburns?

DIXON: Yes, I know Marshburn.

ARENA: Are you aware that they are relatives?

DODSON: Yes. Oscar Marshburn.

ARENA: Would you mind describing your relations and your opinion of the Marshburns, so that one could get an idea of the type of relatives that the President had. Just to clarify this, I have interviewed them already. But it's always helpful to the historian to know what others think about people as well as what they, themselves, say, of course.

DIXON: Well, I was acquainted with Mr. Marshburn. We always called him Doc Marshburn and I never could figure that out, but anyway. . . .

ARENA: Could it possibly be tied in with the idea that his father was a doctor?

DIXON: That's right. I think so. That might happen.

ARENA: But as far as you know he didn't study to be a doctor?

DIXON: Not as far as I know. But he is one of the finest men that we've ever had in Whittier. I am sure he's highly thought of, the whole family and himself. He's very dignified and honest and a well mannered gentleman, and the family is the same way.

ARENA: Do you recollect and were you in the Whittier area during World War I?

DIXON: No. I came into the Whittier area after World War I, in March 1919.

ARENA: From the standpoint of a member of the American Legion, were you surprised that a Quaker--in this case it happened to be Richard Nixon--but were you surprised that there were Quakers who had participated in combat during the war, in his case World War II, of course. And did that ever come up? Do you recall, for example, the President himself bringing that point up with you personally?

DIXON: No. The only thing was that Whittier College after the first World War, and the group as a whole was kind of looked down on or ostracized, I'm sorry to say. There were few students that were in World War I. They were pacifists in other words, we called them.

ARENA: From your own knowledge on that point, would you say that was more the case of World War I than World War II?

DIXON: I was going to add that in World War II it was just the opposite. They had probably more students in World War II than any other small college with the same number of students than any place in the United States.

ARENA: Do you happen to have any statistics, either specifically or general, in your mind as to the number or percentage of Quakers who are members of your American Legion Post? And may I ask, is that the only one in the Whittier area or the city of Whittier in particular?



DIXON: No. I don't have any recollection, because one thing in an American Legion Post, regardless of religion or what your political convictions are, this never enters into the discussions at any time. So, I'm sure that a lot of them. . .

ARENA: Offhand could you give a general idea from the standpoint of those who are Quakers who are members?

DIXON: I think that they are like most of the older ones, that they stand firm for our country, even though we may have a lot of problems I think they are ready to help along just as much now as any time. In fact, if you follow the legionnaire program which includes--I'm a veteran also of the Foreign Wars--you'll find that following World War I they set up through their congressmen and senators a program that provided the Bill of Rights, the GI Bill of Rights. That's known as the number one bill of this country which gave them an education when they came back from World War II, which we did not have in World War I, and also gave them a training and this has been going on ever since, and it's rated as one of the most wonderful acts of legislation that ever happened to veterans.

ARENA: Were you possibly a charter member of your post, Mr. Dixon?

DIXON: Well, that's a good question. Yes and no. I was on the charter committee and recognized first here in Whittier, but we found out later that a group even before we were back home had come to the Chamber of Commerce here in Whittier and got them to sign up a group, which they did. They signed up but most of the members lived in Los Angeles, but there were several that did live here. The only one I can remember is a Legionnaire by the name of Hosler. I was looking at the Charter recently and he was on the original Charter accepted by the State and National organizations.

ARENA: Excuse me. Do you know his full name and would you spell his last name, please?

DIXON: His last name is H O S L E R, and I think it's Charles Hosler. I'm not sure. I talked to him recently, too.

ARENA: While we're on this point of the American Legion and the fact that the President is a member, would you discuss the image that the American Legion has had over the years and whether or not in your experience Whittier falls in that category. For example, Life and the news always used to depict the Legionnaire conventions as being, to say the least, a happy time, and drinking very common. Would you say that that is true right now, 1971, and has the Whittier Post itself ever been associated or has it ever had that type of a swinging membership?

DIXON: Well, of course, any group will have members that want to have a drink or two of alcoholic beverage, but we've never run into any real problems. We were noisemakers in our Post over the years because we had what was called the Shotgun Squad which would raise a person almost out of the ground. But other than that, as noisemakers, I know a great many of our people in the Whittier Post are teetotalers.

ARENA: As a matter of fact, does your Post have a bar in it?

DIXON: No, we have no bar in our Post.

ARENA: Does it have social affairs to which women are invited, by the way?

DIXON: Oh, yes, of course, the Auxiliary. We have an Auxiliary and they meet almost every meeting night after our meetings are over, and we join together and have our coffee and doughnuts and dessert.

ARENA: Would you mind giving the address of the Post?

DIXON: I can't think of the number. They have changed these numbers, but it's South Greenleaf anyway. Correction, it's 7743 South Greenleaf Avenue.

ARENA: When President Nixon became a member, when there were events, would it be that same Post that he did attend?

DIXON: That's right. It's always been there.

ARENA: You always have been there.

DIXON: Almost always, yes.

ARENA: Certainly while he was a member.

DIXON: Right.

ARENA: And again from the standpoint of the person who doesn't have direct contact with the Legion, the student of history who will be studying this some day, what are the dues, what are the obligations of the American Legion and this Post, and would I be correct in stating that the American Legion is chartered by the Congress of the United States?

DIXON: That's right, and I have the Preamble in my pocket but it's a long one. I can't memorize it, but I would be glad to give it to you. But the help to the community, state and nation is one of the main priorities of the Preamble to the Constitution of the American Legion.

ARENA: If I'm not mistaken, would this be one of its qualifications, that it does not enter into politics, in the sense that it does or does not endorse particular candidates?

DIXON: That is absolutely right. Everybody is free to their own choice. We never even. . . . Well, we might say we don't like so-and-so, but that's about it. It wouldn't make any difference what party he was on. Nor is it allowed in our regular meetings.

ARENA: Do you happen to know if President Nixon ever was an officer in the Post?

DIXON: No. He was here too short a time.

ARENA: Do you recall, as a matter of fact, when he became a formal member? Obviously it would have been after 1945.

DIXON: I think it was '46.

ARENA: Right after he came back from overseas?

DIXON: We have the record because he has a lifetime membership in our Post. And I've always felt free to correspond with him, although I felt no need, but I've had a letter or so from him, you know, on certain things. For instance, right now--maybe this is not apropos--but right now we're drawing a resolution in our Post which will be sent to Congress and to

President Nixon and to our own legion groups, state and national, which has to do with our Veterans Administration hospitals. The Veterans Administration on the West Coast, here in Sawtelle and at Long Beach [California] are outstanding hospitals with fine personnel, doctors and so forth, but at present they are taking in applicants other than veterans. While the motive may be good it is forcing the veterans to be standing in line waiting to be admitted. We have plenty of veterans on the waiting list which were in the Korean War, the Vietnam War, and even a number of us from World Wars I and II. Non-veterans that are being brought in are to be helped on the drug abuse problem, which the hospital personnel are among the best there is in the country. We feel that the veterans should have first choice, not the second. I think it's a reasonable resolution.

ARENA: Would you happen to know if that's a resolution exclusively coming from your Post, or are you joining with other veterans?

DIXON: Right now, we're going on our own, and we'll introduce it to the county council and the state and all. But we're going to send this one through right away, because it should be drawn to the attention that the veterans may need immediate assistance, like veterans from Vietnam which certainly need every help they can get, and being put on a waiting list while others who are non-veterans, even though the purpose is good, we feel that the veteran should come first.

ARENA: Is there anything else about the President's connection with this American Legion Post that I have not mentioned that you can think of to bring up at this point? Did you ever see him--but did you ever meet him here as a speaker at that one or on a social level?

DIXON: No, I haven't. But I feel certain that in the Post the members that regularly attend certainly think highly of President Nixon. We don't expect him to do just what we want or anybody else wants. We don't expect that. But a person that is a clear thinker and tries to be fair never needs to worry about reelection or anything else, whether he does the thing we want or not, because it may not be the best thing.

I know when I was in political life that a councilman once or twice--one member especially, a close friend of mine--he was one that was always afraid to say no and I used to tell him,

"Well, look, if you are fair about this thing and explain how you arrived at your conclusion on this particular issue, the opposition may be sore for a couple of weeks at least some of them, but they'll come right back on your side in a few months." And they always did. And he was re-elected for many years. And that's the way I feel about a President or any official, because my idea might not prove to be for the good of the majority, so I think we have to look at their decisions in an open minded way.

ARENA: And to make it clear then, in other words, this particular Post, the one in which he is a member, whether they have favored him or not favored him on particular issues, has never taken a stand against him or anything like that. There is no resolution along those lines?

DIXON: Absolutely not. Never. No sir.

ARENA: Do you mind if I ask you if you can recollect any connection with the President as a young man, say back in high school years or even earlier where he might have won an American Legion oratorical contest, which has sponsored contests for many years, I know.

DIXON: No. I don't think he ever was in one. We have them every year and I don't recall that he was one of the speakers.

ARENA: And I do want to make that question clear. You do maintain oratorical contests, you still do?

DIXON: Absolutely, we still do. We come up pretty high, but you know that's a job to get a national citation. We can get them up to an area runoff and probably once in a while we get them up to a state runoff, but it's difficult. We have some very fine high school students that are really exceptional. The teachers are some of the graders of these students, because we don't try to grade them ourselves. We have people who are knowledgeable on the subject that they are talking about and their diction and everything, who do the grading. Our next one will be starting a little after the first of January for the new year's oratorical contest. We try to choose one from each high school but a lot of times the schools do not care to participate, so the Post is fortunate to bring out about four or five student speakers.

ARENA: Just to be clear about this idea of the composition of the members of your Post. Would you say that they are made up from men from all walks of life, that is the professional man, are there doctors, are there teachers, are there regular mechanics? In other words, is it a cross section of the community that makes up your Post?

DIXON: That's right. A cross section, absolutely.

ARENA: Now I wonder if I could get back to that one area of direct contact between you and the President. What do you recall about the nature and all the details about the swearing in ceremony in which he became the Deputy City Attorney of Whittier?

DIXON: I don't recall too much of the details. I do know at the time that we had a fairly good audience.

ARENA: Excuse me. An audience is common at these affairs?

DIXON: At Council meeting, yes.

ARENA: This is done during a regular City Council Meeting?

DIXON: Yes. The swearing in is done at a City Council Meeting and, of course, you bring the candidate forth and go through the oath of office. I know many others were there that night, but I don't know how many or anything like that. But there were a number there and as our Council chambers was small at that time--we were on North Greenleaf then--it's possible there was only one hundred twenty-five persons present.

ARENA: Do you recall that his immediate family--his parents--and of course, he was not married at that time. . . .

DIXON: No, he wasn't. But I don't remember, know of any. I just don't.

ARENA: What does the ceremony itself consist of? Does he swear on a Bible, for example, and is there a prescribed oath?

DIXON: No. It's just the oath of office, "I swear allegiance," etc.

ARENA: Oh, there was no Bible involved then? There wasn't the question of his bringing the family Bible or anything like that?

DIXON: No.

ARENA: What do you recall of his own appearance and demeanor at that time? Was he serious? Was he relaxed? Was he wearing a suit and tie, to the best of your knowledge?

DIXON: He was wearing a blue suit and tie, and I think you might say that Mr. Nixon, I always viewed him as being a relaxed individual. I think though he took things into deep consideration when he made any statement.

ARENA: On that question--and this will probably finish the interview--what overall description would you give of this man, especially before 1945, not only this moment when you swore him in, but as you dealt with him, either when he came to the City Council Chambers or you visited Mr. Bewley's office and dealt with Mr. Nixon? How would you describe him and where you can, give examples illustrating what you mean.

For example, if you say he was honest, if you can think of an incident. If you say he was relaxed, maybe you can think of a situation where there might have been tension and he was relaxed. In other words, wherever you can give specific illustrations to describe your general point, whatever it happens to be.

DIXON: Well, I don't have any real recollection except that I did think from the first that--I still do--he was an exceptionally good student on our Constitution of the United States. I think one of the outstanding things that struck me was when I came to question a law of the city and to the Constitution and the other laws that pertain to state, city and so forth, he was exceptionally good.

ARENA: What makes you say that, say, as compared with other lawyers whom I'm sure you've met over the years? In other words, is it your recollection that he would bring this up, that the Constitution and the interest he had in it he would make references to in the individual cases, or when you were discussing things with him he would make reference to the Constitution, is that why you say that?

DIXON: He would make reference to it but he never used a book to look at. I mean, that was just normal.

ARENA: Concerning his direct relations with you, the fact that you did not have a complete college education, the fact that you did not have a law degree, did you ever have the impression during that period when you were dealing with him, and of course ever since, that he was over your head, that he could not talk in a way that, you know, was comprehensible to the average man such as yourself without college and without a law education?

DIXON: No. That never entered into the situation at all.

ARENA: Do you know if that entered into with others? Do you ever recall others say that he isn't clear, he's over my head, he's too bookish, or anything like that?

DIXON: Nothing like that. Absolutely not.

ARENA: As we bring this interview to a close, Mr. Dixon, is there anything at all you would like to touch on that I have not brought up at this interview?

DIXON: I think you've brought up most everything that I know about. As I said at the beginning, Mr. Thomas Bewley was the City Attorney and, of course, he started as City Attorney just a year or some few months before I started as City Clerk. Mr. Bewley and I got along exceptionally well, and he used to say, "Well, you go ahead Guy as your decisions make good common sense so I'll go along with you and I'll back you." And that's the way this whole thing went from beginning to end.

ARENA: And Mr. Nixon had the same policy?

DIXON: The same policy.

ARENA: Mr. Dixon, thank you very much.