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## George R. Irving Sr. (April 3, 1973)

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ABSTRACT

Oral History Interview

with

MR. GEORGE R. IRVING, SR.  
MR. GEORGE R. IRVING, JR. present

April 3, 1973  
Butte Falls, Oregon

By Evlyn Dorn

For the Richard Nixon Oral History Project

DORN: This is an interview with Mr. George R. Irving, Sr., of Butte Falls, Oregon. This interview is being held in Medford, Oregon, on April 3, 1973, Evlyn Dorn interviewing. Mr. Irving, I understand that you were with the Bishop Candy Company in Los Angeles, California. In what capacity were you with them?

IRVING: Salesman.

DORN: Where were they located?

IRVING: East Seventh Street, Los Angeles [California].

DORN: First of all, tell me where you were born, and when.

IRVING: I was born in Ansonia, Connecticut, March 5, 1900.

DORN: And you were with the Bishop Candy Company as a salesman, and they were located in Los Angeles. When you were with them, was candy the only commodity you sold, or were there other items?

IRVING: Candy, peanut butter, chocolate, novelties, jams, cocoa.

DORN: That old saying, "You can't do business from an empty wagon" didn't include you, did it?

IRVING: We had everything in the confectionery line, practically.

DORN: I see. Then you drove from East Los Angeles out Whittier Boulevard. Of course, you made other stops before you got to the Nixon market in East Whittier. There weren't too many along there, though, were there?

IRVING: Well, Whittier proper, and then clear to Nixon's was the next stop at that time.

DORN: Who did you sell to in Whittier, do you recall?

IRVING: Oh, Orcutt's and several of the drug stores, all grocers, Alpha Beta chain, any outlet where confections could be sold, anyone that would handle any of that line, you know. Soda fountains used our ground chocolate for hot cocoa. Then of course, restaurants used peanut butter.

DORN: What was Whittier Boulevard like in those days when you drove out there?

IRVING: A two-laner.

DORN: Was it paved or blacktop?

IRVING: I think it was just blacktop.

DORN: You came through Belvedere Gardens [California], right?

IRVING: Yes.

DORN: And how about it in the winter?

IRVING: No trouble.

DORN: You don't recall any flooding in there, that sort of thing?

IRVING: Well, sometimes if we received a lot of rain, some sections of it would flood. Nothing serious, no.

DORN: Did you know many of the neighbors along Whittier Boulevard out by the Nixon store, for instance?

IRVING: No. You see, I was only there one day a week, and maybe I'd be there for fifteen minutes . . .

DORN: Oh, you were a fast salesman.

IRVING: . . . or twenty minutes. Well, we had racks. I'd sell them a rack, and I'd sell them with the idea that I took care of it. I'd walk in and I didn't even have

to pay any attention to the people who ran the store. I just went and arranged the rack and wrote up an order and went on.

DORN: I see. Where did you live at this time?

IRVING: Pico Rivera [California].

DORN: Which is about six or seven miles from Whittier, isn't it?

IRVING: I think it was about four miles from Whittier. Three to four miles.

DORN: Yes, west of Whittier. What type of candy was it? Hard candy, chocolates? Did it require any refrigeration in those days?

IRVING: No. We carried a full line of candy, hard candies and chocolates, candy bars, everything in the candy line, similar to Hershey's. Bishops had everything of that kind.

DORN: Were there packages put up, like Christmas packages and Valentines, and that sort of thing?

IRVING: A complete line of candy, boxed chocolates, marshmallows, Christmas candies, Easter candies, Halloween, and so forth.

DORN: I was going to ask you if anyone in particular took care of the candy department, but apparently YOU did.

IRVING: That is, after we came out with the rack. Before that they used to buy bulk candy, you know, chocolate drops and French cremes, peanut brittle, stuffed or filled candies.

DORN: How are they displayed in the stores? How was that bulk candy displayed; was it put into jars?

IRVING: We sold them in little jars, and then later we sold them in cans and put them in a rack with removable lids.

DORN: What range of profit did they make on candies, approximately?

IRVING: Well, of course, we tried to get them to sell it as reasonable as possible, but they'd make thirty percent, twenty-five percent.

DORN: That's pretty good.

IRVING: And on some things they'd make more.

DORN: Were the Nixons hard to sell to?

IRVING: No, very easily sold to. Mrs. Nixon once in a while would buy some from other lines, buy from somebody else, but I'd soon unsell her on that, and Don [Francis Donald Nixon] was also sure to help me. He'd say, "Oh, no. Bishop takes care of us all right."

DORN: That sounds like Donald.

IRVING: Uh huh.

DORN: Now, did the Nixons pay cash or did they have a monthly account?

IRVING: No, they bought from Certified.

DORN: Oh, Certified Grocers.

IRVING: We billed it through there, see? We delivered it, but then they paid Certified.

DORN: I see. What was the reputation of the Nixons in the store? Were they noted for their honesty and their integrity?

IRVING: Oh, yes, 100 percent.

DORN: And what was your impression? You were a salesman and you entered, you say, Orcutt's [Market, Whittier California], and these other markets along the way. What was your impression when you came into the Nixon store? First of all, what year was this that you were selling them?

IRVING: Well, I started calling on them in the early thirties, and I stopped in about '45. And I called on them all that time.

DORN: When you walked into the Nixon store--it was a small store out there on Whittier Boulevard--what was your impression of the store? Did you think that the merchandise was displayed so that it was attractive to people, or would you have liked to go in there and change a few things?

IRVING: No. For the type of store it was, where they had credit and delivered, it was a well-organized little store. Of course, it wasn't large, you know, but it was well-organized. And Frank [Francis Anthony Nixon]. . . . I used to love to see Frank because, like you say, he was outspoken. If he wanted to call you a nut, he'd call you a nut. [Laughter]

DORN: Did you ever sit around and chat? Did you ever talk politics with Frank Nixon?

IRVING: Oh, you had to, if you were friendly at all. And he always had his opinions, you know.

DORN: Yes, he liked to talk politics.

IRVING: I'll never forget one time when I was there. It was when the WPA [Works Progress Administration] and all those different things were running, and he was very vociferous against those. He wrote a letter to Franklin D. Roosevelt, you know. Maybe this shouldn't be in here, about the Democrats.

DORN: No, that's all right. Oh, sure, that's fine.

IRVING: Boy, he couldn't. . . . He was always complaining about the waste in government during the depression. Times were in upheaval most of the time. Drastic measures had to be taken. He wrote to the President, probably telling him where he erred, and he got a personal letter back from President Roosevelt. And he REALLY enjoyed that. He didn't talk about it so much after that. [Laughter]

DORN: That's a nice story. I have gone through hundreds of the Nixon papers that the family has saved, but I haven't found that letter. But that's wonderful. Now, did you feel that they were pleasant people to do business with? Were they just sort of down-to-earth people?

IRVING: Yes, very much so.

DORN: How would you compare Mrs. [Hannah Milhous] Nixon with Frank? The President has said he got his temper from his father but his ability to control it from his mother.

IRVING: Mrs. Nixon didn't say too much, but she got her own way, you could see that. She could out-smart Frank any time. At least I think she could, just from being around her. She was very quiet, but she was very determined. When she set her jaw, you knew you were talking on the wrong angle. [Laughter]

DORN: How often did you call out there?

IRVING: Once a week. During Christmastime I probably would go back oftener, because I'd make runs then.

DORN: Yes. In comparison with Orcutt's and some of those other. . . . I remember Orcutt's Market. They were in business when I first came to Whittier. Would you

say the Nixon orders were comparable to the Orcutt orders, as far as candy was concerned?

IRVING: No. Orcutt's did more business; I think it was a larger business.

DORN: And they probably had a little bigger clientele to pull from, didn't they? Or else the people didn't have a sweet tooth out in East Whittier.

IRVING: Well, I don't know whether Orcutt's was there before Nixon's or not. Of course, I just started calling in the early thirties. They had quite a large store down town, you know. Whittier was starting to expand. And the outside store started doing the business in preference even to Orcutt's, as time went on.

DORN: Regarding the people that lived in the area of the store, did you feel they were well-to-do people and would buy an expensive variety of candy, or just. . . . Of course, they had that Leffingwell Ranch; I'm sure some of those people bought candy, but I mean as a whole, the people up in La Habra Heights. Were they good customers for candy?

IRVING: Yes, they carried our high-grade chocolates; they sold well.

DORN: Do you recall how many people were employed at the Nixon store at the time that you called there, approximately?

IRVING: Well, I can remember Lyle [Brumfield] and [Charles Leonard Milhous] Chuck, and several of the others, but I've forgotten their names. I think there was Don and Mrs. Nixon and Mr. Nixon, and Lyle was there, and one other fellow. And of course, Chuck was back with Don. There was a girl there, too, and I can't remember who she was.

DORN: Lucille Parsons was a niece, and she worked in there some.

IRVING: It might have been.

DORN: It probably was Lucille. Her mother was a sister to Mrs. Nixon. Her mother had passed away. Now, did you ever meet the President? Do you ever recall seeing President Nixon?

IRVING: No, personally I've never met him. I've seen him come into the store. And I used to have the impression that he was, like some people say, aloof, you

know. But I wouldn't say he was aloof; he was more like, it seemed to me, he was preoccupied. He didn't see too much. He'd walk up to the front where his mother was, and he had his mind on something. Some people might have thought he was aloof because he didn't see anything right or left.

DORN: Was this after. . . . When he was practicing law? Well, let's see, you were there when, in '39?

IRVING: The early thirties when I started.

DORN: Well, Richard Nixon did take care of the produce there at the market as a young chap, and he would go in to the wholesaler on Central Avenue [Los Angeles] for the produce in the morning. Do you know anything about this at all?

IRVING: Dick wasn't there when I started calling on them, but I had talked to his mother about him occasionally. Different little things would come up and she'd mention Richard.

DORN: Do you think that she showed any partiality to Richard in his achievements than she did the other boys? Did she say, "Did you hear what Richard did yesterday?" or "Have you heard about Richard?" Did she ever bring that up?

IRVING: No, not so much, but I felt that he was kind of special, that he deserved the extras, whatever extras they had to give to him, to attain what she thought he could accomplish.

DORN: Yes. I have been with Mrs. Nixon on many occasions when someone has said, "Aren't you proud of your son?" And she has always replied by saying, "I'm proud of ALL my sons." So I think she tried very hard not to show any partiality.

IRVING: No, I don't think she showed it at all.

DORN: Now, how about [Edward Calvert Nixon] Eddie? Did you see Eddie around the store?

IRVING: Oh, yes, Eddie and I were quite good pals. I was the candy man, you know. [Laughter]

DORN: Oh, yes. You were like Santa Claus, weren't you? And I understand you still see Ed, that Ed still comes up through here, doesn't he?

IRVING: Oh, yes.

DORN: I know he's very fond of you people. He asked me to do this interview, and he's very fond of all you people.



IRVING: I can remember little Eddie getting up in that back part of the store, you know, playing up there. His mother wanted him to do something and he wouldn't do it. "I won't do it!" He was NOTHING like Eddie now. He was a little rascal. I used to reprimand him for talking to his mother that way. She was down in the front of the store, trying to take care of the customers, and he'd say, "I won't do it!"

DORN: How did you feel about Frank and Hannah Nixon? Did you feel that they were hard-working people?

IRVING: Yes. Very hard-working people. I admired them very much, and they were, like George, Jr., says, they tried to give the people the full value. They didn't want to steal from anyone.

DORN: Do you know anything about any stealing in the store? Any shoplifting, that sort of thing?

IRVING: I don't believe I ever heard it mentioned.

DORN: Did you feel that the Nixons were particularly friendly with their customers? It was a small community there, and was it, "Oh, hello, Mrs. So-and-so," who came in, and that sort of thing?

IRVING: Yes, very friendly community, you know.

DORN: How long did you say you served the Nixon store, about fifteen years?

IRVING: It would be in that neighborhood.

DORN: Now, I understand your daughter, Mary [Irving Biddle], worked in the store. How did she come to work in the store? You were living in Pico [California]. Were they needing someone in the store and she decided to apply?

IRVING: Well, see, we had nine children, and Mrs. Nixon and I used to talk about family, and she thought that was remarkable. They needed a boy once and so Frank asked me how about one of my boys, you know. That's how George, Jr., got in there. Then when they opened up on the other side, the little restaurant and the bakery, Don asked me if any of the girls were old enough to work in the bakery. Mary started first, then Esther, and then Winky [Janice].

DORN: Oh, you had three girls working there.

IRVING: And George.

DORN: Well, you were well represented in the Nixon store, weren't you? Do you ever see any of the Nixons now?

IRVING: Just Eddie.

DORN: How do you compare him today with the Eddie of . . .

IRVING: Oh, I never thought he'd be like he is now. He's so quiet. I thought he was going to be a little rascal-  
ion. He had a mind of his own. Maybe he still has,  
but you wouldn't know it. He might be like his mother, you  
know; he still gets what he's after.

DORN: Have you met his family, Gay [Lynne Nixon] and the  
children? He has two lovely little daughters, a  
lovely wife.

IRVING: No.

DORN: Can you think of anything else, Mr. Irving? Any  
little anecdotes at all, or any little stories about  
the Nixon store and about selling candy to them?  
Did you come, hell or high water, in rain and sunshine?

IRVING: Oh, yes, I had a regular route.

DORN: They knew you'd be coming on that day.

IRVING: That was one of my principle attributes. Some of my  
customers used to say that they could look up at the  
clock and say, "Well, Bishop will be here in two  
minutes." I never skipped any of 'em. I wasn't a high-pressure  
salesman. I was just there, and they knew I'd be there and  
they'd save me the business, you know.

DORN: Yes. Well, that was a nice service, especially when  
you set up the rack and they didn't have to worry  
with all of that.

IRVING: That was really a godsend when I got the rack. That  
was easy work.

DORN: Easy for you, yes.

IRVING: Just rode around and filled 'em in.

DORN: Did people have to pay a deposit on this rack?

IRVING: No.

DORN: It was just a place to put it. How did you feel about  
Hannah and Frank Nixon, I mean as far as their person-  
alities and their hours of working in the store? Did

they put in about the same amount of time, do you think? Mrs. Nixon had a family to look out for, too.

IRVING: Well, she was usually there when I called. Like I say, I only called once a week. Oh, there might have been times when she wasn't there. And there were times when Frank wasn't there. He was going someplace. He might have been out on the delivery when I arrived. They shouldered it together pretty evenly.

DORN: I understand that Mrs. Nixon used to bake a lot of pies, as you (George Irving, Jr.) mentioned in your interview. This is just a cute little story about that: I interviewed Lawrence [Nixon Anfinson], Don's daughter, the other day. She said she couldn't make the meringue whip up, so she called her father. He said, "Go outside and whip the breeze into it and you'll have good meringue. That's the way your grandmother did it, and she had the highest meringue in town." So I thought that was a cute story, and maybe that's something for us to learn.

Well, I think we've pretty well covered it, Mr. Irving, since you didn't work in the store, but came in there all the time, and I am trying to focus this on the early Nixon store and the area around there. Did you know any of the ranchers around there, like [Robert] Gillmore? I think Frank bought some land from Gillmore. I guess their place was right next to the Nixon store. Then there were the Harry Schuylers. Did you know any of those people?

IRVING: Of course, at that time too, a lot of those ranchers were losing their places. You couldn't give 'em away.

DORN: I noticed here the smudge pots out here with the pears like we used to have the citrus down there.

IRVING: Yes, they have to smudge here quite often. Of course, up at Butte Falls [Oregon] you'd have to smudge every night.

DORN: I want to ask you, too, about your daughter, Mary [Irving Biddle]. I understand that she and Ed went out together. I shouldn't ask you how you felt about it, but were you pleased that she was out with this young man?

IRVING: Yes, very pleased, and her mother was, also. We thought a great deal of Ed. She pulled a boo-boo when she. . . . [Laughter]

DORN: Well, that's the way it happens sometimes.

IRVING: Well, we never tried to push her into what we thought was . . .

DORN: You were being a good parent. I didn't ask you whether or not you had met [Patricia Ryan] Pat Nixon. Have you ever met Mrs. Nixon?

IRVING: No. Not even in the store. I don't remember her being there when I called. I do remember Richard coming in occasionally.

DORN: When he greeted his mother in the store, was it just, "Hello, Mother," or did he show any particular affection? Of course, going in there every day, he probably didn't. But in later years when he'd be in Washington, when he'd come he'd always kiss her and show some affection.

IRVING: I don't recall. He always seemed quite preoccupied when I happened to catch him at the place, walking up and down the aisle.

DORN: I worked for him as secretary when he practiced law in Whittier, and I know how he does. He looks like he's passing everybody by, but he's really very preoccupied.

IRVING: He gives the impression he's got the world on his shoulders.

DORN: That's true. He has now, hasn't he? Well, if you can't think of anything else, any little anecdotes or anything, I'm going to thank you for this interview. I especially appreciate you coming. . . . I bet you came all the way down from Butte Falls, didn't you? I really appreciate that. It was very nice of you.

IRVING: You came a lot farther.

DORN: Well, that's true. Thank you very much, Mr. Irving.

\* \* \* \*

The conclusion of the interview is a discussion of the large California camilla tree, one of the largest camillas in existence situated in front of the Irvings' home, that was a landmark in Pico Rivera, California.