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Harry A. Schuyler (December 13, 1971, second interview)

C. Richard Arena

Second Oral History Interview

with

MR. HARRY A. SCHUYLER

December 13, 1971
Whittier, California

By Dr. C. Richard Arena

For the Richard Nixon Oral History Project

ARENA: I think in our last interview, Mr. Schuyler, we were discussing your own personal background and questions about the neighborhood of the Nixon grocery store. Let me ask about the matter of the Japanese, did you say there were also Japanese at that time?

SCHUYLER: Well, I came with the Leffingwell [Ranch] people in 1916. The orchards had been in production for some sixteen or eighteen years. The most of the work regarding orchard care, irrigation, et cetera, was done by Japanese. These Japanese also did the picking and packing of the fruit in the Leffingwell Packing House on the property. Mexicans were beginning to come into the area but they were the old peon families from northern Mexico mostly, a very fine class of people. Later as the production increased, it was necessary for us to employ more Mexicans and a camp was built to accommodate not only living quarters, but we fed them as well.

ARENA: Was there anything like a church or a chapel built or could they get to church?

SCHUYLER: They could get to the Catholic Church, which was readily accessible. We tried, during the walnut harvest at that time, we were compelled and very gladly so, moved families into the orchards and set up schools among these workers who were under the direction of the local school district, but we did not have any church facilities at that time.

ARENA: Let me ask you in general about your direct contact with the President. I think in the first interview we went more or less over the general background of the Leffingwell Ranch, the Nixon grocery store, [Francis Anthony] Frank Nixon and Hannah [Milhous Nixon], and now I'd like to concentrate on you and the President. What is the very first time you had met President Nixon?

SCHUYLER: Well, of course, when my wife [Edith Schuyler] and I were married, October 20, 1920, and I think the records will show that Dick was about five or six years old at that time. Now, I don't remember the exact date, but during the 1920's, the Nixons acquired the corner of Santa Gertrudes [Avenue] and Whittier Boulevard, which was the location of their store and home and also gas station. So it was sometime in the early 1920's that we became--I'm using plural because my wife and I--we became acquainted with the Nixon family which at that time was Dick's older brother Harold [Samuel Nixon], Donald [Francis Donald Nixon] and Richard. One boy was born later but did not live to maturity. So we became quite intimately acquainted with the Nixons in the 1920's.

ARENA: Did the President as a young boy ever work around your ranch or do anything for you or the farm?

SCHUYLER: I don't think they did. I think you asked me that question before and I answered it in this way, that there was always enough around the Nixon grocery store and the gas station to keep the boys employed all the spare time that they had.

ARENA: How about the job of lighting the smudge pots, or did your ranch not have them?

SCHUYLER: Yes, we prefer not to call them smudge pots. We prefer to call them orchard heaters. The reason they were called smudge pots was because they did emit a lot of smoke and the skies became clouded with the amount of smoke that came from these heaters. No, the Nixon boys to my memory never did help with the lighting of the orchard heaters because it was a night-time job, they were young fellows and we probably could not have hired them legally anyway, so they did not enter into ANY of the activities as I remember of the citrus production, per se.

ARENA: While the President was attending school, were you aware of what he was doing through the parents, through other neighbors, such as the now Mrs. [Annel] Gillmore's father, Mr. [William Frederick] Mundt; were you aware from these neighbors as to what type of a young man he was growing up to be?

- SCHUYLER: Well, of course, we were kept constantly aware of the intelligence of these boys, because their father was very boastful, and from as long as I can remember after Dick began to show that he had education possibilities, the abilities to absorb education, Frank, his father, kept repeating, "My boy will be President some day," as long as I can remember. So, [Laughter] we were well aware of his activities in school, in playing the violin and the piano and organ and his part that he took in the class plays, as well as the positions he held in the student body. We were well aware of all of this and, of course, we couldn't help but believe that Dick was an exceptional young man.
- ARENA: Did you personally ever see and hear him play any of these instruments, the violin and the piano?
- SCHUYLER: Oh, yes, we were thrown into some of those school activities where he did play these instruments, yes.
- ARENA: Did you ever meet his music teacher? One was an uncle, Griffith Milhous, possibly, the other certainly was his aunt, Mrs. Jane Beeson.
- SCHUYLER: No, I don't think so. Of course, we have known the Oscar Marshburns for many years, many years, and I am very happy to say that Oscar Marsuburn's son, Theodore [V. Marshburn], is now treating my eyes for different ailments.
- ARENA: Were you aware that the Marshburns were living in the President's grandfather's [Franklin Milhous] home?
- SCHUYLER: Yes.
- ARENA: And were you ever inside?
- SCHUYLER: No, I was never inside. Of course, most of the people in those days who were active in the community were in some way connected with the citrus business because it was the prominent business in the community. Although there were other agricultural endeavors and other agricultural productions, citrus was predominant, and the Milhouses and the Nixons owned citrus property.
- ARENA: Did you personally recall that although the President grew up in Whittier in a grocery store family, did he ever do any farm work for his grandfather or anyone else at all?
- SCHUYLER: I don't think so. As I said before, it was a closely knit family and the family business was a family business and they all contributed in their efforts to make it a success.

- ARENA: Did you know that the President's mother, Hannah, had a brother, Ezra [Charles Milhous], who leveled farm land in different parts of California, the Mojave, Antelope Valley, and Lindsay area? Did you know that gentleman?
- SCHUYLER: Ezra Milhous, no, I didn't know him.
- ARENA: Did you know about him?
- SCHUYLER: I knew about him, but I did not know him.
- ARENA: Were you aware that the Marshburns did live with Grandfather Franklin and that annually social affairs were held, especially around Christmastime when all the family would get together?
- SCHUYLER: Yes, I knew of those.
- ARENA: What did the outsiders, the people who were neighbors or friends know or think about these Milhous get-togethers? Was it known by the community?
- SCHUYLER: I think that that was accepted in the same manner that the Mormons and other closely knit people of the same creed were then assembling, which was an accepted fact, that the Friends who are closely knit, interested in their church affairs, their social affairs, as I say the Mormons are. And the Mormons have maintained this to this date, because we have in our area a great many Mormons who are very close in their social relations.
- ARENA: Speaking of the close social and religious relations, were you aware that the President was teaching Sunday School?
- SCHUYLER: Yes.
- ARENA: And what would you say about that?
- SCHUYLER: Well, that only coincides with the other fact that he was probably a born leader and that having acquired this knowledge, he was quite willing to impart it to his associates and Sunday School friends. That's about it. I know that in my early days in Wichita, Kansas, and later in Winnipeg, Manitoba [Canada], because I seemed to have some ability, I taught Sunday School also. That is only a natural trend in the lives of those people who assert some leadership.
- ARENA: In the case of Whittier at that time, was that Sunday School activity common with the other churches as well, not just the Quakers?

SCHUYLER: I'm not sure. At that time I was attending the Plymouth Congregational Church, and we did not have that same type of activity. My son later attended regularly the East Whittier Friends Church for quite some time, but later affiliated with the Episcopal Church and is very active today in the Episcopal Church in San Carlos, California. So I wouldn't know about that.

ARENA: Was there ever any discussion between you and Mrs. Hannah Nixon or Mr. Frank Nixon about the President going into missionary work for the Quaker Church?

SCHUYLER: No, I am not at all aware that there was any discussion about his engaging in that activity. I was not aware of it. Now that's much in contrast to the Mormon families. We live next door to a Mormon family. One boy has finished nearly two years in the Salt Lake City, Utah, college, and was called on a mission to Chile. He gladly accepted and has been out of school and will have been away two years this Christmas. The second son finished a year or so in Utah and has just accepted a mission in Quebec [Canada] and that is the regular role in the Mormon family. They are called and they go. But that's not necessarily so, I don't think, with the Quakers. However, we have had in East Whittier in the Sharpless family those who have accepted the missions and have left this country for a time and engaged in missionary work.

ARENA: All the time that you have known President Nixon from the very beginning to now, what recollections about his interest in serving the public, or serving other people, religion or non-religion, however it happened; was there any pattern that you recall about that?

SCHUYLER: Well, I think the very fact that he enlisted in the armed services showed that he had the interest of his country at heart. And then as he detached himself from the armed services, of course, he went into the cancellation and adjustment of certain contracts with the government and institutions. His willingness to serve was evident in community activities, would show that he was willing to give his time for the best interests of the community as well as the country. That was evident in his younger years, yes.

ARENA: Do you recall any particular clubs and any particular speeches at these clubs, Lions, Kiwanis, where he spoke before he went into politics?

SCHUYLER: Not particularly. He spoke before our Rotary Club at times and he is now one of the few honorary members of our Rotary Club of Whittier, which is quite an honor to us and he accepts it very graciously himself as quite an honor, being an honorary member of our club.

ARENA: Were you aware that he has practiced law between 1937 and the time he went into service, and was there any contact with him personally during those years? Were you one of his clients, for example?

SCHUYLER: We had some work done by the [Thomas W.] Bewley law firm, which I am quite positive that Dick, in his association, helped in the solving of these problems. We were aware of that, yes.

ARENA: Did you ever see him perform in court?

SCHUYLER: No.

ARENA: Do you know from your experience with other lawyers or other clients, as to how this young lawyer was performing? In other words, was he the possessor of a reputation in any way between 1937 and 1942, the few years that he practiced law before military service?

SCHUYLER: It was my recollection and opinion that he probably did most of his work at the desk in research for the solving of these various problems. I don't think he practiced much before the Bar, so to speak. I don't think so.

ARENA: Do you recall the reason for the family moving away from the grocery store area into Whittier while he was a young practicing lawyer before he became married?

SCHUYLER: No, I don't remember.

ARENA: What do you recall about his wife, Mrs. Patricia Nixon?

SCHUYLER: We never became very well acquainted with Pat. We had no contacts so we can't speak of the Ryan family, no.

ARENA: Was there any contact during the war years between the President and you in any way?

SCHUYLER: I don't think so. You're reaching back, of course . . .

ARENA: '42 to '45, including the OPA [Office of Price Administration] service that he performed.

SCHUYLER: Yes, I appreciate that. No, I don't think there was any personal contact there whatever. We knew all the time what he was doing, of course.

ARENA: Aside from politics, and in this project we do not go into politics. However, even outside of politics there is the idea of a liberal or a conservative person--his dress, his habits, his tastes. How would you classify President Nixon before the war?

- SCHUYLER: Very conservative in my remembrance, very conservative, yes.
- ARENA: How would you give evidence to that effect?
- SCHUYLER: Had you been as well acquainted, of course, with the childhood and the conditions under which those boys were raised, it couldn't have been otherwise. It just COULDN'T have been otherwise, because Frank would have allowed none of that. Frank, himself, was very conservative, very outspokenly conservative and he raised the family in that atmosphere.
- ARENA: Were you aware that during the college years he was in favor of bringing dancing on the campus, which was considered bold? Do you recall the reaction of the family and the community to that position?
- SCHUYLER: No, I don't. No, I don't.
- ARENA: From your understanding of life in Whittier during the President's youth, what disadvantages or disadvantages did a young man of that background have in growing up in this type of a community?
- SCHUYLER: The individual had to show during those years particularly his ability along any line that he wished to develop. There were, as I remember, no particular advantages outwardly that they might make any special endeavor towards entering, if I make myself clear.
- ARENA: Knowing the business community as you did, without going into politics, were you surprised that President Nixon was approached by a banker, by a football coach, by other respected members of the community to enter politics in their behalf? Did that come as a surprise?
- SCHUYLER: No, not at all because I knew the banker and I knew the coach and I knew their dedication to the Republican Party. Mr. Herman Perry, of whom we are referring, was known as Mr. Republican of this city. If he wanted something done for the Republican Party in those endeavors, he'd just call you in and tell you he wanted it done, and we did it.
- ARENA: Was it common for leading members of the community to enter politics as did Mr. Perry or was that a kind of special interest because of his interest in President Nixon?
- SCHUYLER: Well, of course, now you are entering into a discussion of things which are so different now than they were then on a monetary basis, that there are entirely different standards not only of qualifications but of demands. Our

assemblymen at that time were getting about \$100 a month. No man who had a job could afford to enter politics and go to Sacramento [California] or even Washington without some means. I know, for instance, to get good men to go to Sacramento, they were given legal positions or something else with some firm which actually paid them more than they were getting in their political endeavors. I, myself, was approached to go to Sacramento. However, I was a fairly young man with a family and I couldn't afford it because I was making a living which I couldn't have made in Sacramento on the basis of pay at that time. It's only a part-time job anyway. So, Mr. Perry was very cognizant of those individuals in the community who showed some ability along this line and it was his endeavor to get them to divert such as they could to these various things, the Legislature, judgeships, et cetera.

ARENA: It seems that the big turning point in the President's political career was after the war. Did he have, from your recollection any role in active politics, supporting candidates, for example, anything like that before the war-- President Nixon?

SCHUYLER: Oh, yes, he was interested in politics and the very fact that the minute he became available that he was told in no uncertain terms that that was his duty and he MUST do it and he did do it, and we elected him.

ARENA: It's your judgment that his life up to that time made him a natural for someone that Mr. Perry was looking for?

SCHUYLER: That's right. I'm sure that's so.

ARENA: From your own personal observations, what are the qualities that stand out in the President during this early and first period that he entered politics? What was he like just at that point when he was leaving his role in Whittier and leaving his role as a lawyer and his youth behind him? What type of a person was he like just at that point? I'm not interested in politics but I'm interested in the man, his personality at that time.

SCHUYLER: Well, of course you ask a very different question there because for me to sum up . . .

ARENA: Take all the time that you need.

BEGIN SIDE II TAPE I

SCHUYLER: We go back in our political lives here, this particular era, if you please, to the caucus system whereby those individuals who thought they had some ability and

aspiration for a political job were called before a committee and were allowed to personally give their qualifications. They were then accepted or rejected; some one of the group was accepted to run for the particularly party. And to my mind, this was very fine because. . . . At this particular caucus I wasn't there where Mr. Nixon and these other political aspirants appeared. A decision had to be made of the different qualifications of the different individuals and, of course, Nixon led the band. Some others were so thoroughly disappointed that they did not support him in his endeavors, which was rather small. And so, this must have been after he had gotten his scholarship at Duke [Law School] and had gone down there and shown his ability in absorbing an education, which would later lead to a successful law course. And so he had--you talk about a turning point--a gradual induction into this particular era, where when he was approached with regard to getting into politics, he was told in no uncertain terms by his associates, by these people who had been watching him, that according to them he had the qualifications and that they would like to support him in these endeavors. Does that answer your question?

ARENA: Before we close, is there anything I have not discussed that you would like to bring up at this point?

SCHUYLER: No, when I came up here this afternoon, I solemnly resolved that I would simply answer questions. Now if, in the future, you feel that is another phase of this compilation that you're setting that I can be helpful to you in, do not fail to call on me.

ARENA: Thank you very much.

SCHUYLER: I will be glad to give to you such as I have.

ARENA: Thank you.