



8-10-1971

Joseph L. Seppi (August 10, 1971)

C. Richard Arena
Whittier College

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Recommended Citation

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ABSTRACT
Oral History Interview

with

MR. JOSEPH L. SEPPI

August 10, 1971
Whittier, California

By Dr. C. Richard Arena

For the Richard Nixon Oral History Project

Mr. Seppi was a pioneer resident of the Whittier area and one of the owners of Rose Hills Memorial Park, a local cemetery, where the Nixons and others of the Milhous family have several plots.

In his interview, he discusses his family background and his boyhood in Southern California. As the session continues, Mr. Seppi relates details of his involvement in irrigation engineering projects in California and Arizona and the development of Rose Hills Memorial Park.

Mr. Seppi's direct contact with the Nixon family was not extensive, to wit:

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ARENA: Before we touch on your personal contact with President Nixon and any members of his family, several of whom are resting here, first of all, can I ask you just who the members of the Nixon and Milhous families are who are here that you know of? There are more than just his own two brothers, I understand. I know he had two brothers.

SEPPI: I wouldn't know who, other than his mother and father, and I think the Milhouses are here.

ARENA: I see. The two brothers are, I believe, Arthur [Burdg Nixon] and Harold [Samuel Nixon]. Harold was the first-born of the children.

SEPPI: Is he deceased?

ARENA: Yes. They're here. And, as you say, the Milhouses.

SEPPI: I don't know.

ARENA: And the first Milhous is Franklin Milhous, the first one to come into the area, and if I am not mistaken, he would be the one who bought the original plot for future generations.

SEPPI: The records would show all that.

ARENA: Yes. Have you personally ever attended any of the funeral ceremonies involving the Milhouses or Nixons, including President Nixon's mother or father, by any chance?

SEPPI: Not to my knowledge.

ARENA: Now, can I ask you on what occasion, if any, you have met with members of the Nixon family, other than through the connection here at the [Rose Hills] Memorial Park? Were there any campaigns in which you heard him speak personally, or anything like that?

SEPPI: Oh, I've heard him talk on many campaigns, when he was running for the State Legislature--when he was running for the Congress of the United States.

ARENA: Was there ever an occasion before 1945 when he entered politics that you met members of the Nixon-Milhous family, you personally?

SEPPI: Not to my knowledge.

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There follows a verbatim transcription of Mr. Seppi's recollections of his direct contact with Richard Nixon.

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ARENA: Finally, let me ask you this, establishing that you had no direct contact with the President before 1945.

SEPPI: Oh, yes, I did.

ARENA: Oh, what would that be? What would that be?

SEPPI: Well, here's a Board of Directors meeting of the Citrus Grove Heights Water Company. The Citrus Grove Heights Water Company was organized in 1911. It was

all of this land around on the western slope, and the western point of the hill was subdivided into the Citrus Grove Heights tract, and then was subdivided into parcels of land of five acres and up, and was sold to ranchers as citrus land. And in order to irrigate that citrus land, they developed a water company called the Citrus Grove Heights Mutual Water Company, and it was organized in 1911. Now, in later years, I went on the Board of Directors of the Citrus Grove Heights Water Company, oh sometime around, I suppose it was 1916 or 1918, the secretary of the company. In 19. . . . (Let me look at the minutes here.) In January, 1941--this is the minutes of the Board of Directors of the Citrus Grove Heights Water Company on January 3, 1941. At that time, the Board of Directors were thinking very seriously, because of subdivision taking place of quite a few parcels of agriculture land into residential development. And it became necessary then for us to split up and change our by-laws. And at this meeting, Mr. Thomas W. Bewley and Mr. Richard M. Nixon, attorneys at law, appeared before the board to discuss the matter of amending the Articles of Incorporation of the water company. That was the first business relationship I had with him.

ARENA: In a way, he was your lawyer and you were his client.

SEPPI: That's right.

ARENA: Very interesting. Very interesting. Do you recall during that meeting, of personally meeting with President Nixon, and do you recall your impression of him at that time?

SEPPI: I was at the meeting, and my impression was this: I went home and told my wife, I said, "There is one of the smartest young attorneys I've ever had an opportunity to talk to."

ARENA: Do you recall why he impressed you that way? What topics he discussed?

SEPPI: The way he handled the whole situation. We had him before the board--at that time I think the firm was Wingert & Bewley--and Tom Bewley was there and he brought Dick out and introduced Dick. And, of course, I knew Dick and introduced him to the board, and he went right into the matter of all the different things that were to be set forth in this amended Articles--not the Articles, the Articles can't be changed--the amended by-laws, and they were quite lengthy. And at a later meeting on January 6, which was the Annual Meeting of all the stockholders of the company, Nixon was also there and presented the drawn-up by-laws that he had made, and at which time the stockholders passed.

ARENA: Well, he played a very key role then, evidently, with that part of the company. And you say you had met him even before that. Do you recall the occasion?

SEPPI: Well, as a child, as a younger man. I don't recall it.

ARENA: You might have recalled hearing about him, or did you, when he was debating in high school and that sort of thing?

SEPPI: Yes, I heard about it, but I knew he was a very intelligent young attorney.

ARENA: Had you known Mr. Bewley, also, before?

SEPPI: Bewley was our attorney practically ever since I was on the board. Prior to that, I really don't know. Oh, I think Fred Smith, who lived in Whittier, was a stockholder and he acted as attorney. Tom Bewley knew Fred Smith. He's now passed on.

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The interview closed with a short discussion of land usage in the Whittier area.