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Ernest R. Lamb with Ashton Otis and Myra Barton (May 5, 1971, second interview)

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ABSTRACT
Second Oral History Interview

with

PASTOR R. ERNEST LAMB
MR. ASHTON OTIS
MRS. MYRA BARTON

May 5, 1971
Quaker Gardens
Stanton, California

By Dr. C. Richard Arena

For the Richard Nixon Oral History Project

The interview began with a brief discussion of Whittier area history, then progressed to the following discussion of the Nixon family:

* * * *

ARENA: Do you recall you and Mrs. Hannah Nixon attending any social, or what you would do for entertainment in that time in the 1920's?

BARTON: Well, you see, they didn't come back there until '22, and then I left in '25, so there was just that period in there when I was associated with her in East Whittier [California], until many years later.

ARENA: When you say you left, does that mean you went into Whittier?

BARTON: I went to Yorba Linda [California]. I was married and went to Yorba Linda. And I didn't get back to East Whittier for nineteen years. And during that time Richard had his schooling and was married, I guess, or was about ready to be.

ARENA: Do you recall Richard's interest in music? I understand he did take lessons fairly regularly from

another aunt, I believe it was Mrs. [Jane] Beeson. But do you recall Mrs. Hannah Nixon's referring to Richard's taking lessons, and how much time, and so forth?

BARTON: I don't remember that. Of course, that was all over before I got back there.

ARENA: Do you recall ever hearing him play, possibly at home or at the church itself?

BARTON: I don't remember of it.

ARENA: As far as you know, was he the only member in the family that had that musical training? Did Mrs. [Hannah Milhous] Nixon play the piano, by any chance, or sing, outside of the regular church choir, possibly?

BARTON: No, I don't believe so. Not that I know of.

ARENA: I see. Pastor Lamb, I was wondering if you recall his organ playing, and were you the pastor at the time Richard played in the church?

LAMB: No; you see, I came to Whittier in '23 just for a week or ten days, and then went to take charge of the church in Alhambra [California]. We were living in Rosemead [California], so that I wasn't too much in touch with Whittier except at Yearly Meeting time. But later when I became a superintendent, I used to go up to Lindsay [California] to spend some time with Harold and Jane Beeson. Now Jane Beeson was a musician. She loved to train children. In fact, she still gives music lessons. She had a little orchestra that used to play kitchen utensils and that sort of thing. And I know Richard received some piano lessons there. Now, whether he ever learned from the organ, I don't know. It is very possible that he did.

ARENA: Do you know if Mrs. Beeson, who would be Mrs. Hannah Nixon's sister, did she do this for income, or was it out of a hobby or just an enjoyment in teaching others?

LAMB: No, she had to supplement the salary or the income. There were many children around there who wanted piano lessons.

ARENA: So she did receive compensation.

LAMB: Oh, yes. Not too much in those days, I don't suppose. In those days it was much simpler than today.

ARENA: Do you recall possibly the professional training that she had?

LAMB: No, I don't.

- ARENA: It never came up. Do you recall her playing while you were visiting in her area, if she played regularly for the church?
- LAMB: Oh, yes, she played regularly for the church, and children sometimes came to her home in the country. Her husband had a farm. And she would go into Lindsay at certain times and go to the church and youngsters would come there to get their music lessons.
- ARENA: Would just the piano be involved or other instruments besides the piano?
- LAMB: I think the piano would be the main instrument. In this kiddies' orchestra with kitchen utensils--pans and one thing and another--of course, they used all kinds of things. But the piano was the basic instrument that I am sure she used to train these young people.
- ARENA: Do you recall ever the question of her mentioning how long she had been interested in music? Had this been ever since her early childhood or possibly she didn't bring that up?
- LAMB: I didn't know her until she was past middle age.
- ARENA: Would you happen to know if any of the other sisters also had any musical ability or teaching ability like that, Mrs. Edith Timberlake who is in Riverside [California], for example?
- LAMB: No, I wouldn't know Edith Timberlake. I know [Rose] Olive Marshburn quite well, but I'm not sure of her musical interests.
- ARENA: Would you happen to know if Mrs. Beeson has ever done any missionary activity as has Mrs. Marshburn, either long distance--I believe Mrs. Marshburn has been to Africa--or even in the immediate area?
- LAMB: Well, if she did, it would be in the immediate area. However, I am sure she was a leader in what we call the Women's Missionary Society of the Lindsay church, because they get together pretty regularly, once a month, probably, and that would be one of her interests.
- ARENA: Do you recall possibly Mrs. Hannah Nixon being involved in the same sort of group?
- LAMB: I can't say personally, but I am quite sure she would not have been a member in East Whittier those years without being interested in the good work women were doing; wouldn't that be right? Yes, I think that's it.

ARENA: Had you possibly done any foreign missionary work, Mrs. Barton, or in the different communities here in the United States? I imagine that is done on a voluntary basis, either by men or women. Does the church support the missionaries in any way? For example, if the Marshburns do volunteer, are they given any expenses or is this . . .

LAMB: It depends. They did it voluntarily, the Marshburns. They said, we are going to give a year or two and work over in the hospital in Africa. The missionaries largely under Friends are paid a certain salary and travel expenses, and so on. Now there was another sister, [Martha] Mattie Gibbons; you may have heard her name. She lived right there near the college.

ARENA: To make sure, her name is Mattie. Is that a nickname for Matilda?

BARTON: Martha.

LAMB: She passed away, oh, within the last five years, wasn't it?

ARENA: No, I did not know her, but I believe someone did mention her. Do you know if she also participated in missionary activity?

LAMB: I really don't know. I just knew her as a Friend.

ARENA: I see. I do believe that Mrs. Timberlake--I don't know if you recall meeting her personally, Mrs. Barton --but I do believe she was in Hawaii with her husband for a while, but I don't think that was missionary activity, necessarily. He worked there.

BARTON: I think so. He was what, an agriculturist?

ARENA: Yes, I think the technical term might be agronomist, and he also taught and worked for the government in the Riverside station.

BARTON: That's right.

ARENA: She is quite ill now and has been for a while. She's at the Beverley Mansion in Riverside [California]. I wonder, Pastor, if you would mind letting us know just what comes to mind in the way of participation of the Nixons from the standpoint of their attendance, what ordinarily is required of Friends? Books give different accounts as to how much time President Nixon attended at the service, whether at Sunday school. I am just wondering if you recall from the

time you had personal contact, the amount of time spent working with the Friends, either formally or these informal organizations that they belonged to?

LAMB: No; you see, I was pastor in Alhambra [California], then in Los Angeles [California], and then in Pasadena [California]. That took up most of the time when Richard was growing up, going through Duke University and getting off on his own.

ARENA: That's right.

LAMB: I do recall when he was a senator in Washington, I called at his office, or at his place in the Senate one day to see him, and he was very gracious. I spoke to his secretary and she went in and told him who was there and he came out, and you would think he had nothing else in the world to do but to visit with me. It was a very, very pleasant visit. He was a thorough gentleman. He's had a pretty hard time in some cases since, but I've always felt very kindly toward Richard Nixon, because I think he was a very sincere young man, and a man in his position today . . .

ARENA: Was that the first occasion you had ever met him personally, or had you met him briefly before?

LAMB: I had probably met him briefly when he was in the law office here.

ARENA: He had a law office in Whittier in the Bank of America building, and he also had one in La Habra [California]. I don't know if you had occasion to meet him in La Habra.

LAMB: No; the only time I saw him was when he was with [Thomas W.] Bewley and [Jefferson] Wingert right here in the Bank of America building. His name was the third on the list, so that his name didn't . . .

ARENA: He was the newer member of the firm.

LAMB: That's right.

ARENA: Then your contact would have been more with the elder Nixons, Mrs. Hannah Nixon?

LAMB: Hannah in particular. Frank [Francis Anthony Nixon] had gone before I came here, and Mrs. Beeson, those two and Mrs. Marshburn--those three sisters I knew quite well. And I also knew Mrs. [Martha] Gibbons, but not so well.

ARENA: How would you characterize the differences of the three sisters? In what way were they alike and in what way were they unlike, as far as you can recall?

LAMB: Well, that would be rather hard to say. Now take Mrs. Marshburn and Mrs. Beeson, I would say that their central interest evolved around the church and the interests of the promotion of the Christian welfare in their community and through the church. I imagine they had a good social interest in their neighborhood and in the city. I can't say very much, because I didn't know enough about Mrs. Gibbons. She also lived up there at Lindsay [California] or Strathmore [California] for some time. Mrs. Timberlake I didn't know, except I saw her at a meeting once when the four sisters were together, maybe five of them.

ARENA: I believe Mrs. Timberlake lived for the longest period in Riverside, except possibly when she went on to Hawaii. Do you recall the young sisters back in Indiana, Mrs. Barton? Do you recall growing up in Indiana, as well as Hannah, which of the other sisters do you recall?

BARTON: Well, of course, I knew them all there, but you must remember that I was nine years old when they moved out here, so what I remember is not too important; that is, I don't remember too much about their dispositions or anything that way. We were just youngsters together. I didn't see them too often, at Sunday school and we visited occasionally, but I couldn't describe them.

ARENA: Actually, I believe it was Mrs. Hannah Nixon who had the most difficult of economic times. Would you say that would be a correct statement of the marriages, that one was the most difficult, economically speaking? She had to work the hardest, including the making and selling of these pies and looking after the extra medical expenses for Harold [Samuel Nixon], whereas the others had not that much difficulty, possibly especially because of the illness of Harold, which even caused a separation from the family while she was in Arizona.

LAMB: I hadn't heard that, but I can readily recognize that may be the actual case.

ARENA: Well, there was that period when they were looking after Harold in Arizona that the father, Mr. Frank Nixon, and Richard Nixon remained in East Whittier, and from time to time, possibly during the summers would visit with Mrs. Nixon. But that must have been very difficult.

LAMB: Well, I think Richard Nixon used to go up to Lindsay and probably stayed for an extended time in the summer vacation period, maybe to help a bit on his uncle's farm and take his music lessons.

ARENA: Oh, Mr. [Harold C.] Beeson--I meant to ask--was a farmer, also?

LAMB: Yes, he had largely citrus there and some walnuts.

ARENA: Was he also from Indiana, do you know, or was he a gentleman that Mrs. [Jane] Beeson met out here, I wonder, as was Mr. Frank Nixon himself?

LAMB: Do you know where Harold Beeson came from? Was he a Californian?

OTIS: No, I don't know where he came from.

LAMB: One thing I remember about Richard, it was along about 1951. I was appointed to raise enough money to put up a new office building in Richmond, Indiana. We had to raise \$75,000. Well, I wrote to Richard Nixon--I think he was a senator at that time--or maybe Vice President, but anyway it was in 1951. But he responded immediately and enclosed his check, which was more than some of the other people I had written to. But I think he was like that. If he thought it was something he ought to do, he would do it, and certainly a very aggressive man. He was a fighter. He wanted to put his whole life into a thing and win, and he usually did.

ARENA: Were there occasions, did you recall Mrs. Barton, where he did speak in the church itself, other than as a Sunday school teacher? Did he address the congregations on any subjects, do you recall?

BARTON: No, I don't. I wasn't there much at the age when he would have been doing that.

ARENA: I was just wondering what the nature of his participation in the church was. I think he tends to say that he keeps his own counsel when it comes to religious beliefs. But being members of the congregation, you might have recalled some occasion when he did participate actively. I believe he still considers himself a member of the East Whittier [Friends] Church, and when he invited Pastor [T. Eugene] Coffin to the White House he was inviting him as his minister.

LAMB: That's right.

ARENA: And I had the pleasure of meeting the pastor not too long ago.

LAMB: The last time I met with Richard Nixon was at the wedding of his niece, Lawrene Nixon Anfinson. You know who she is.

ARENA: The daughter of [Francis Donald] Donald Nixon.

LAMB: Yes. I had an opportunity just to talk to him then. He was making a little talk to the group there that had met for the reception after the wedding.

ARENA: Was he not Vice President at the time, or am I mistaken?

LAMB: Oh, no, the time of the wedding was only a year ago. No, he was President. Tricia [Nixon] was there and also Mrs. [Patricia] Nixon, and Mrs. [Jane] Beeson was there from Lindsay, so the family was pretty well represented at that wedding occasion.

ARENA: And were others there who were not members of the family? Did they seem to crowd the President and keep him occupied.

LAMB: Yes, he was pretty well occupied. Charles Ball, the former pastor of the church, was there and his wife. Oh, it was a full church event. It was in a Presbyterian church. A Presbyterian minister had charge of the service.

ARENA: Well, concerning Mr. Frank Nixon, I understand he did suffer a great deal from arthritis and was in considerable pain. I wonder if you were conscious of the fact that he did.

LAMB: I never met him.

ARENA: Oh, you never met Frank, but you had met Mrs. Hannah Nixon.

LAMB: Oh, yes. I visited her when she was in the convalescent home there in East Whittier.

ARENA: Would that be called the Beverly Manor, because I believe that is where the sister, Mrs. Edith Timberlake, is located in Riverside? It is called the Beverly Manor, also.

LAMB: No, this wasn't in Riverside; this was in East Whittier.

ARENA: I believe they have the same name, but I don't know if it is the same company.

BARTON: They do have the same name.

ARENA: Would they possibly have some connection with the Quakers, I wonder, or do you know?

BARTON: I don't know of any.

ARENA: Discussing the differences among the sisters, or likenesses, was there one that seemed to be particularly capable of being a preacher, in a sense that one liked to discuss the Bible more than the others? Does one stand out in that sense, or none of them, possibly?

LAMB: I would say Mrs. [Rose Olive] Marshburn probably has done more preaching and leadership in missionary groups and visiting the distant centers. I would say that all of the women were very closely tied to their Christian beliefs of sharing.

ARENA: They were definitely not the type who, say, practiced it just on Sunday. It was a daily, total and natural participation, and one couldn't say that they were just a Sunday school type of Christian.

LAMB: I saw Mrs. Marshburn yesterday at a funeral. She had just come back with her husband from Jamaica and some of the islands there, and I think there was a Christian concern in that particular journey. It wasn't simply for a holiday. No, they were a fine family. There is no question about it. They were the type that the Quakers presented to the new settlements out here in the West, and I like to think of them as representing some of the best of the Quaker settlers the last one hundred years.

ARENA: Was there the impression that they were conscious of the fact that this was a new settlement? Did they seem to remember and discuss the idea of Whittier being a new Quaker settlement and having a kind of frontier spirit about it? Was there that element, did you notice, in talking with them at any time? Maybe Mr. Frank Nixon.

LAMB: Frank might. But anyway, I think nearly all the Friends during that fifty-to-seventy-five-year period were impressed with the thought, "Well, we have come out here to California and we are going to develop this and make it (Whittier, for instance) a Christian center." The First Friends Church in Whittier they call the Church of the Founding Fathers, because of the Friends who came out here and purchased land and built their homes and established worship.

ARENA: Can you comment on the idea that there hasn't been a successful historical society, and only now is there an attempt to start one? This might be the second or third one. Is there any possible reason why there hasn't been an active historical society, from your own point of view?

LAMB: Well, I'm not sure that there might not have been quite a number of records kept. I just haven't run across them.

ARENA: I imagine there are an awful lot of records, and there is this new interest, and possibly people will have records that they have been saving or keeping to give to some local history group to perpetuate these early beginnings, since there's not the people living now who can recall the very early years. Do you recall, also, the nature of building a new church? Would it be a question of the members participating, physically, actively; I am thinking of actually helping to build? Did Mr. Frank Nixon help to build some of the early Quaker churches that were in this area? I understand he did where Yorba Linda is concerned.

BARTON: I imagine he did.

ARENA: You don't recall anything specifically beyond that. You don't recall when the churches were built?

BARTON: No, I don't know.

ARENA: One gentleman said, as a matter of fact when I was with Lawrence [Nixon Anfinson] a few months ago, that various denominations would cooperate together in Yorba Linda. It wasn't just the Quakers building their own church, but actually they recalled some of the other denominations cooperating. I wonder if you might recall anything like that yourself. If not here in Whittier, on any occasion, that sort of thing?

LAMB: Well, you take the church; one of the more recent ones that we have was built at Diamond Bar [California]. That's a little distance as you go east. Now that church was probably 50 percent built by the volunteer labor of people around there. Many of them were not Friends, but probably joined the church there because it was centering in a new community. Now that was quite a practice. Now we are considering building a new church here in Whittier but that probably will be almost entirely a contract job, because . . .

BEGIN SIDE II TAPE I

BARTON: I was just going to mention about Frank Milhous coming to California. His children were growing up, and I've heard others say, or heard him myself, I don't know which, that he thought this would be a good place to come and educate his children here at Whittier College--Whittier College or [Whittier] Academy, whatever it was at that time. He thought they could live at home and go to school. They got part of their education here and then they went back to Earlham [College] to finish up back in Indiana where they had lived before.

ARENA: I am not sure that Whittier College was a full four-year college when they first came out. It did start as an academy, I believe.

BARTON: I imagine it was.

ARENA: Do you recall the reason for Mr. [Franklin] Milhous coming here? Was it through friends, through relatives that had preceded him to the Whittier area, Mrs. Barton?

BARTON: I don't know.

* * * *

The interview concluded with a brief discussion of the personal backgrounds of the participants.