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Memphis E. Nixon (July 16, 1972)

Evlyn Dorn

Oral History Interview

with

MR. MEMPHIS E. NIXON

July 16, 1972
Stayton Island, Oregon

By Evlyn Dorn

For the Richard Nixon Oral History Project

DORN: The date is July 16, 1972, Evlyn Dorn reporting. We are in an automobile, approaching Stayton Island, Oregon, to attend the reunion of the Nixon relatives. We are just off of Highway 22 on a small dirt road outside of Salem, the capital of Oregon. Stayton Island is located in the Santiam River and has been reserved this afternoon for the Nixon reunion. Mr. Memphis E. Nixon has enthusiastically originated the idea of this gathering of the Nixons and has had a response from approximately one hundred Nixon descendants who plan to attend.

This is an interview with Mr. Memphis E. Nixon of Tillamook, Oregon. The place of this interviewing is Stayton Island. The date is July 16, 1972, Evlyn Dorn interviewing. Mr. Nixon, would you please tell me where and when you were born?

NIXON: I was born October 25, 1924, in Virginia.

DORN: When did you come to Oregon?

NIXON: When I was five in 1930.

DORN: And so you did come with your parents.

NIXON: Yes.

DORN: And where did you receive your education?

NIXON: At Bridge, Oregon, and I graduated at Tillamook [Oregon].

DORN: Would you please give me the names of your parents.

NIXON: Henry Delbert Nixon was my dad and my mother was Lula Tiny Nixon or Thacker was her maiden name.

DORN: And what was your father's occupation?

NIXON: He was a farmer and a logger.

DORN: Also let me have the names of your grandparents.

NIXON: Boston Allendar Nixon and Lucy Christian.

DORN: Your father was a grandson of George III, right, the same as [Francis Anthony] Frank Nixon, the father of the President?

NIXON: Yes.

DORN: In other words you and the President had the same great grandfather.

NIXON: Right.

DORN: George Nixon III. So this makes you a third cousin to the President.

NIXON: As I understand it, yes.

DORN: Have you had any direct contact with President Nixon? Do you recall the first time you ever met him, or have you met him?

NIXON: I've never met him.

DORN: What about his parents, Frank and Hannah [Milhous] Nixon?

NIXON: No, I never met them either, no.

DORN: You stayed in Oregon instead of coming to California.

NIXON: Yes.

DORN: And Donald [Francis Donald Nixon] and Edward [Calvert Nixon], the two brothers. You've never met them either.

NIXON: No, I've never met them either.

DORN: Well Frank Nixon had two brothers, Walter [Wadsworth Nixon] and Ernest [Leland Nixon], and a half-brother Hugh [Henry Nixon]. Did you happen to meet any of those?

NIXON: I never did, no.

DORN: Do you recall any reaction that the Nixon family had or showed when Frank Nixon left the Methodist Church and became a Quaker when he married Hannah Nixon? Was there ever any conversation in the family about that?

NIXON: Nothing adverse.

DORN: He came to California and he met her as she told me, at a taffy pull, and he joined the Quaker Church for her. She was a birthright Quaker. How about your family? Did anyone in your family ever seek public office, run for Mayor or anything like that?

NIXON: I was elected as Water Commissioner on a write-in ballot, November 1971. I did not actively seek this office. It seemed so trivial compared to the office of President.

DORN: And you do live in Tillamook now but none of the family members have been interested in politics.

NIXON: No.

DORN: I believe you were responsible for instigating this Nixon reunion. What inspired you to do this?

NIXON: We had a little gathering here a year ago I guess it was and then the idea was born to have a Nixon reunion. Well, we couldn't keep it to a family, to one small segment of it, so we decided to open it to everyone. So that's how it all came about, so we set July 16 of this year for that gathering.

DORN: And why did you choose Stayton Island, because of its beauty and being away from everything?

NIXON: Seclusion, yes, and the climate.

DORN: Did you have any problems in locating the relatives?

NIXON: Yes, I sure did.

DORN: I know you sent that letter down to the Chamber of Commerce to be delivered to Don [Francis Donald Nixon] and then Don gave it to me and I answered it for you. Did you run into the same problem when you were trying to locate other relatives?

NIXON: Yes, in Ohio. I was unaware of it but Kess [Winford Kessler Nixon] had contacts there.

DORN: I see.

- NIXON: But I didn't manage to contact one of them. I contacted the wrong Chamber of Commerce apparently. I was totally ignorant of their whereabouts.
- DORN: Well, I'll admit they're all over the country and a little hard to find. You said you had no contact with the President at all.
- NIXON: None whatever, no. Now when I say that, I did invite him, of course, to this, and he declined because of his schedule. And I can understand that.
- DORN: Oh, yes, he's at the Western White House right now and I talked to one of the staff down there Friday. Of course, he was planning to attend Edith Timberlake's funeral which was yesterday afternoon in Whittier [California] and Riverside [California]. And his time is so limited. There is so much goes on. Have you ever had any correspondence with the President?
- NIXON: Just that one letter in which I invited him to this.
- DORN: And you received a reply to that?
- NIXON: Yes, I did. Would you like to see it?
- DORN: Yes, I would like you to read it into the tape if you would.
- NIXON: Yes. "The White House, Washington, June 22, 1972.
Dear Mr. Nixon: The President has asked me to thank you for your letter inviting him and his family to the Nixon Family Reunion to be held on Stayton Island near Salem, Oregon, on July 16th. Your invitation has been held for consideration as the President's July calendar and that of his family was being firmed up. As it now has developed, however, their commitments are such that he, Mrs. Nixon and the girls will not be able to plan to be with you. The President wants you to know though that he was very pleased to hear from you and that your invitation was warmly appreciated. He sends best wishes to you and all those who will gather on July 16th for a most enjoyable and successful event. Sincerely, David M. Parker, Staff Assistant to the President."
- DORN: Thank you very much. Mr. Nixon, have you lived in Tillamook, Oregon, ever since you have been in Oregon, since you were five years old?
- NIXON: No, we lived at a little town called Bridge originally, Coos County [Oregon]. And then we lived for a while in Douglas County and then were over at Moralla for three years or so, and then I went to Tillamook and I have been there for the last twenty-seven or twenty-eight years.

DORN: And what is your occupation?

NIXON: Well now I work for Crown Zellerbach Corporation in the shop.

DORN: This is a lovely spot for a Nixon reunion, and I am sure you are proud of it all, and proud of all your young people who are roaming around here. Is there anything that you can think of that you would like to add to this?

NIXON: I want to thank you for coming and I sure wish that Don or Edward could have made it.

DORN: I wish they could have too, and I know they were very sorry. Don asked me to call him and if that wasn't possible to at least extend his best regards. He is leaving the day after tomorrow for Louisiana for the opening of a new Marriott hotel. He is Vice President of the Marriott Corporation and so their time is pretty limited. He really would like to have come up and met all of you people. So I'd like to thank you very much Mr. Nixon for this interview.

Nixon Genealogy Appended.

Boston A. Nixon b. Apr. 6, 1856, d. June 16, 1939, buried Aumsville, Oregon, m. Apr. 28, 1889, at Trout Valley, W.Va. to Lucy Christian

1. Margaret m.
2. George Thomas m. Fay Buzzard
3. Winford Kessler m. Pearl Buzzard
4. David Palmer m. Birchie Combs
5. Henry Delbert m. Lula Tiny Thacker
6. Marie m. Perce Ross
7. Tilda m. Richter Carnes

Henry Delbert Nixon b. Jan. 13, 1898, d. 1961 Eureka, California
m. Lula Tiny Thacker b. Dec. 23, 1900

1. Shirley Hope m. Albert Christensen
2. Lucy Loretta m. Joyce Badger
3. Memphis Edward m. Yvonna Kostic
4. Fezenta Matilda m. George Kostic
5. Theodore Delbert m. Ann Marie Springberg

Memphis Edward Nixon b. Oct. 25, 1924 at Hot Springs, W.Va.
m. July 27, 1946, at Forest Grove, Oregon, to Yvonna Isabell
Kostic, b. Feb. 3, 1929, Blaine Oregon

1. Dennis Edward m. Nancy Hathaway
2. Douglas Memphis m. Joan Tucker
3. Ronald David

Dennis Edward Nixon b. May 17, 1947 Tillamook, OR
m. May 25, 1968 Tillamook Or to Nancy Therese Hathaway
b. Dec. 4, 1946

1. Julie Ann b. Oct. 22, 1968 Portland Or
2. Troy Dennis b. Feb. 12, 1971 Tillamook, Or

Douglas Memphis Nixon b. Dec. 25, 1948 Tillamook Or
m. Mar. 7, 1970, Tillamook Or, to Joan Lucille Tucker
b. Feb. 17, 1949 Tillamook, Or.

1. Keri Ann b. Aug. 9, 1970 Tillamook, Or.
2. Lance Douglas b. Mar. 25, 1974 Oregon City, Or.

Ronald David Nixon b. March 7, 1950, Tillamook, Or