

INTERVIEW WITH
Miss Mabel Mellor

by

Dr. Thomas Soapes
(Oral Historian)

on

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for

Dwight D. Eisenhower Library

GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION
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Malcolm M. Mellow

Donor

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This interview is being conducted with Miss Mabel Mellor in her home in Los Angeles, California on July 21, 1976. The interviewer is Dr. Thomas Soapes of the Eisenhower Library. Present for the interview are Dr. Soapes and Miss Mellor.

DR. SOAPES: You're a native of Abilene?

MISS MELLOR: Yes, a native Kansan, I'll say. I was a native of Butler County. I was born in Butler County and came to Abilene with my parents and great-grandparents very early--I would say six months old approximately. And my great-grandparents had homesteaded south of Abilene at Belle Springs. They homesteaded there right after the Civil War, were given a land grant from Rutherford B. Hayes, in his administration. So we're old south county people and I'm a long-time resident of Abilene, was until I moved from there in 1956 when I went overseas. I spent my entire time in Abilene, in the area. Knew everybody in the county. I was, at various stages, very active in county workings of one kind or another. And during the war I worked with the ration boards in Abilene and with the civic-community things because our automotive finance business was practically nil. There were no cars to finance, and so I had all kinds of time for civil duties.

[Interruption]

DR. SOAPES: Now you were employed in Abilene?

MISS MELLOR: I started my employment in Abilene after I came out of the University of Colorado as a journalist. I found I was not



physically fit for being a journalist.

SOAPES: You had a journalism degree from Colorado?

MELLOR: From Colorado University. So I took a course in stenotype down at Wichita Business College. And during the course, the last part of the course, I came up to visit at Abilene, to visit my grandmother, and saw one of my friends on the street and they said, "Mabel, you're taking a secretarial course. Emmett Graham needs a secretary, why don't you stop by on your way to the bus depot and see what you can make out." So I did. And it turned out within a very short time, oh, three days I guess it was, he called and said, "If you can start the first of the month, we'd be glad to have you." So I started as a stenographer. I was taking shorthand by machine, which was a new thing within that area and was called upon on several occasions to go in and take court recording because I was qualified as a court recorder and had thought when I finished the secretarial course that I would go into court recording. But my only offer of a job came from Houston, Texas, and I went down to see about it and I couldn't stand the climate. I had spent a number of years at Norton Sanitarium flat on my back with tuberculosis; so I was really pressing about where I would be stationed and stationing my life and Texas wasn't it. So I went back and started to work for Emmett. Emmett, his parents and my grandparents had been very good friends out in the Belle



Springs Community, and my grandmother had made his first pair of long pants. So the knowledge of the families was over a long period of time, more than his or my lifetime.



SOAPES: Now this was what year that you went to work for him?

MELLOR: 1939. And in 1939, see '39? '37, 1937 is when I went to work for him and I went to work for him in January, January 15th I believe it was when I finally went there from Wichita. In 1937 he was the secretary-treasurer of an automotive finance company that bought retail time sales contracts for automobile dealers. Did very little that would substantiate the name Home Securities Company because there was very little appliance business at that particular time and his business was ninety-nine and ninety-nine hundredths percent automotive financing. So I became the stenographer for a four-person office. And I didn't know about being a secretary until I got out of the entire area of Abilene because secretaries were few and far between in those days. Everybody that took dictation was a stenographer and we didn't have any highfalutin names that they have now.

The war came along in December '41. I attempted to enlist in the first WAC army corps and passed everything except the interview portion which was being held in Omaha, Nebraska in June of '42. We went up to Omaha, Nebraska on the train. I went into Kansas City and up to Omaha and on the other side of the river from Omaha was a little town of Cedar--. It's Cedar Falls or something else--little town of four hundred people. And the river was at flood stage and we sat there for five days and I got

a strep throat, and when I got to the interview portion of it I could hardly talk. So they asked me to come back for an interview and I went back for six months trying to get into the WAC corps. Then, of course, couldn't pass the physical then because they wouldn't take anybody with a strep throat. Didn't have anything like penicillin to give me, and I found out I was allergic to it after I did take it in the '50s; so it was just as well. The work at the office was going on but lowering in degree so that we all became interested in whatever we could do. The fellows tried to enlist; they were either too old or too under accomplished in the things they needed in the army so were not accepted. Two of the people were let go, and Emmett and I ran the office through the rest of the war. We did our stint of duty on Chamber of Commerce activities and any war bond sales and everything else that we could do to fill up our time. And it was during this period in early '42 that Charley Harger, the editor of the Reflector-Chronicle, had lost his secretary; she'd moved with her husband to the army. And so he came into the office one day going to lunch next door at the Hotel Sunflower and he said, "Mabel, I'm in desperate need of a secretary who can fill in for a short time until I can get a permanent secretary to take my editorials and my correspondence." And I couldn't off-hand think of anybody except myself who had a lot of time. And I offered to take it and he offered to pay me, and I wouldn't take any money from him because he, too, had been a long-time family friend from his days at Hope, Kansas as a teacher and my



grandfather's days there in the area. So this was gratis again to Mr. Harger, and practically the entire war I took his editorials and his correspondence.



One of the people that he was corresponding with was Albert T. Reid of New York, who was a Kansas and a noted artist, had made his way in early scenes of Indians and Kansas history scenes and so on. And he had a tremendous drawing, black and white, pen and pencil drawing ability. And Albert T. Reid was quoted in practically every art magazine of the time, and he was really somebody. I was quite impressed because I'd never known an artist as such, and he sounded so friendly in his letters to Mr. Harger. And they wrote voluminous letters. Wasn't anything to write more than five or six pages about twice a week or month to Albert T. Reid about the conditions within the state, politics in the state, the educational system within the state, because Mr. Harger was on the board of regents, and many things about the bordering state of Missouri, because Kansas City seemed to have a great influence upon Kansas activities, even as far west as Denver. So it was a very interesting conversation that they had back and forth. And the war, of course, was on their minds and they talked about the war and the war efforts and the things that would be expected to come out of it and the changes there would be. They were very forward-thinking men, and it was intriguing to me to be able to sort of take these thoughts that they had and hear about these things.

And one of the things that they got into early was the men and women of World War II, something very special would have

to be the outcome of their effort. And it was, in general, the men and women of World War II. Then as Ike came into prominence in army circles in their leadership, then they began to specify that Ike should have special recognition within Abilene particularly, but it shouldn't be a Tom Smith boulder up in the cemetery or it shouldn't be a boulder in front of the post office or a flag pole somewhere, but something extra special would have to be formulated to honor him as the leader of the three million men that he was leading, and that it should be in Abilene because of the home being there and his association. This was always his place of residence, designated upon all records. And Mr. Harger and Albert T. Reid were talking of this particular thing from early in '42 until the middle of '43. And finally I couldn't stand it any more and I said to Mr. Harger, "Mr. Harger, this is such a great idea that you and Mr. Reid have presented here, even gotten it up to the national and international levels, which piqued my interest tremendously, but we needed to be doing something concrete at home here in Abilene now, and to my knowledge you've never breathed a word of this to anybody."

He said, "No, I haven't."

And I said, "Don't you think you should?"

Well, no, it was sort of a pipe dream and he just thought I was star gazing a little more than I should be and so he sort of dropped it.

But it preyed upon my mind to a great degree and I finally



said to Emmett one day, "Would you be surprised or think I was disloyal if I discussed with you some of Mr. Harger's correspondence that's personal?"

Well, no, he didn't think so, but I told him about it. And he was more and more fired up and enthusiastic about it and he said, "Mabel, it is something that we need to be getting done and getting onto." He said, "Would you have any objection to telling this same thing to Sam Heller across the street at the trust company. He's a neighbor of Mr. Harger's and apparently has great influence with Mr. Harger and maybe Sam can think of something. Some approach that we can talk to Mr. Harger and get this thing out in the open."

So I told Sam Heller about it, and Sam was almost enthusiastic. He thought something should be done, but Sam was never a very exuberant person. He was always very careful and cagey. He acted to me like he was never really very positive about some things until they were the rage and it was all right to accept them then.

SOAPES: Was this a sharp contrast of personality with Graham and Harger?

MELLOR: No, not at all because Harger and Graham were very good friends and enjoyed each other, and they both knew the same long-time people in the south county. Mr. Harger felt that he had at one time perhaps taught Graham in school and so he felt like he knew him, as a boy and as a man. And they liked each



other very much. And their ideas on Chamber of Commerce things were pretty much right down the line. There was never any discussion that they didn't come to an agreement on--this is what should be done and this is the approach that it should be and the manner in which it should be handled. And with Sam Heller, Sam was always--he wasn't really an advocate, but he was posing negative, pessimism more than a constructive situation. He could always see the worst points first. They differed in their personalities on that basis. Sam caught the spirit however of "we need to do something."

So, as I recall, it was probably December of 1943 that Sam happened to be over at our office and it was about noon time and Mr. Harger came by as usual to go to lunch at the Sunflower Hotel, and he stopped in to leave some things for me to look over and then he'd come back and dictate on his way back. Well Sam and Emmett were in the little boxed-off office there and, of course, the partition was a little higher than their head but you could hear everything that went on with the door open or closed. So they asked Mr. Harger to come in and join them, that they were just discussing some of the things that were going on. And Emmett brought it up to Mr. Harger that, "We've got such a prominent individual in the armed forces from this particular area that Sam and I were wondering what might be done?" And it was just one of those easy things that led Charley Harger into telling all of this material that he had been writing back to Albert T. Reid. So he never really did know that I was a traitor to his cause. And when I told him afterwards, he said,



"Well, that was all right." [Laughter] Said, "Turned out all right that time." But I always felt rather, shall I say, like a traitor because one of the things you don't do is discuss somebody else's personal conversations with another one in writing.

So Mr. Harger got in the habit of stopping in since he knew that Emmett knew about it and that Sam knew about it and he would call up and say, "Is Emmett going to be in the office at ten minutes of twelve?" And I'd say, "I'll see." And so we would call Sam Heller and see if Sam Heller couldn't come into the office about that time. Ostensibly, "I just thought I'd go to lunch with you today and wondered if you can go with me?" or something of that nature. So he'd be in on the conversation. And Sam was quite frequently out of town so that he couldn't be in on all of the conversations. But it got so that Mr. Harger really looked forward to those noontime sessions, which would last maybe forty minutes to an hour, discussing some of the peoples and some of the things that could be brought into it and where it could go from Abilene to the county, to the state, to the nation, to an international situation. And these things were discussed in great detail and with a, shall I say a range of thought that really put us all into the star gazing situation. And of course after Emmett and Mr. Harger and Sam Heller talked about it on the very first occasion they would say, "Mabel, do you have to go to lunch now? Why don't you come in and listen to this and see how this strikes you?" Well I was, golly I was.



Miss Mabel Mellor, 7/21/76

twenty-one, and these things were new and I had secretly married and sent the young man overseas with the Red Cross and he was killed at Salerno, and so I had more than enough energy to put into something that would be a memorial for World War II people, and he was one of the men. So I devoted a lot of time to it and the regular blood, sweat, and tears that one would have to do on a gratuitous basis. I've re-read some of my letters to some of my family saying that, "Well, I went home at 3:30 this morning because I was working on letters for the memorial," or that I went home at 1:30 and got up at 6:00 and started over so I could still do my normal job between 9:00 and 5:00. And I spent from 1943 through 1956, those first thirteen years, without even a vacation because I was dedicated to the foundation after it really got started.

And the foundation really was a group of Abilene men. I'm sure you have a copy of the charter somewhere, which I helped write, and compose even--not just type, but helped compose. See I was just a little gal who didn't know what she was really getting into and didn't know what she was doing. If she had known what she was doing, she would have been afraid to attempt it. But I never would let it drop and even when everybody in town and in the state wanted to let it drop between 1948 and 1952, I said, "No way. We've still got to do this and we still got to work at it." So I worked just as hard, if not harder, than ever during that period because I felt like now it was something, that I had sort of sprung the leak on it; I better



hold my finger in the dike to keep it together. And I did work hard with that in mind. And because I got so involved in it-- everybody knew I was involved in it in the town group. We begged our first monies, I think, through a Chamber of Commerce situation.

SOAPES: This would have been about what year?



MELLOR: This would have been about 1944. And as I recall, through a general solicitation, through the Chamber of Commerce, we might have gained six hundred dollars to use for postage purposes. Emmett agreed that he would furnish the stenographic output, and he hired a crippled girl part-time who had worked for me. I was also the drivers license issuing agent for the county, Dickinson County, Kansas. I'd taken that on during the war because it was something else that'd keep me busy, and they issued those every two years. That's how I got a greater acquaintanceship with all the county people, because they all had to come into Abilene to that office to get a drivers license. And for two months of the year, the year that it was being issued, I'd hire some empty store building and move two desks or four desks and four typewriters and get the typewriters either on loan from somebody or rent them from Vic Burbach or whatever-- however I could set it up for the rush period. So we did have a lot of, shall I say, acquaintanceship throughout the county and limitedly within the state because I, too, had been the county secretary of the Republican Central Committee for several

years and went to the state meetings, you know, January 29th, Kansas Day, always gathered in Topeka for the week or ten days before and so on. So politics was sort of a sideline. And it ran into various and sundry other groups of peoples and we got interested in state projects. Kansas Industrial Development Commission had several in which we were interested. It was a varied time. And I don't know anyplace that I could have lived in the whole of the United States that would have afforded me the opportunity to have personally gotten such a great acquaintanceship with so many varied projects that were worthwhile than I did living over there in Abilene. I happened to be at the right place at the right time in the right space of time. And that I'm always sort of amazed about every now and then when I look back, particularly today when I'm looking over all this material and seeing the names of the nation's leaders that eventually came through in that thirteen years to become interested and help underwrite and devote a great deal of their valuable time and effort and money. The volunteers of America built that museum. And it was, really was something to behold.

[Interruption]



SOAPES: In these conversations that Harger, Graham, and Heller were having, what were the ranges of considerations of the type of memorial that was going to be built?

MELLOR: They felt very keenly that it could not be as elaborate

as a Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C. or if they went to an obelisk it could not be as large as the Washington Monument, but neither need it be as small as the obelisk which was in the center of the Abilene cemetery at the turnaround point that was there. But Mr. Harger felt, because of the virile strength of the Eisenhower family and the input that they had had nationwide in the six sons, being so successful in every range of business that they had gone into, and they were accepted as being outstanding contributors in each occasion, that this should be more of a living memorial than a cold stone. But how do you evolve a living memorial? And as I said, he was on the board of regents. And he said one of the things that had been brought home to him so vividly in some of this period of time that he was serving on the board of regents and in his going to and fro across the country and across the land was the depth of patriotism and Americanism and a concerned citizenry, and that he felt that chairing university scholarships and underwriting them would be a continuously living memorial that the family could relate to and therefore they might give their name to that kind of a memorial. In other words, we would set up scholarships at the major universities and maybe we would have one in each state to endow a chair for a four-year or a six-year scholarship for some outstanding person--and that it was really bringing home the teachings of mother and father Eisenhower about their belief in God and country, and that it certainly



would not detract from Arthur's being a banker or Roy's being a pharmacist or Milton being in education and in government service, which he was on occasion several times, or Ike's being in the army, or Edgar's being an attorney. There was nothing that would cause them to back off was Mr. Harger's feeling. And Mr. Harger knew the family fairly well. I think he'd employed every one of the boys at sometime or another as a delivery boy for the Reflector, and that was before it become the Reflector-Chronicle.

SOAPES: I think Milton had actually done some reporting and writing.

MELLOR: Yes, he had. He had been on the staff under Mr. Harger's direction.



So it was actually Mr. Harger's dream that came out in the living memorial kind of thing--that we won't settle for an obelisk or stone monument of any kind. And I really felt this was, again, an admirable thought and it was roundly pursued in discussions and how did we go about setting them up, and Mr. Harger assured us that he could get the help of the University of Kansas. We also knew that there were people at Kansas State that would help us and that at one time Abilene was quite proud--and I think this was about 1948 or 9--of having three university presidents, major university presidents; Kansas State, Columbia, and Cornell where the presidency was held by boys who had been born and reared in Abilene.

SOAPES: Who was the man at Cornell?

MELLOR: Mallott, Dean Mallott was the president of Cornell. And that seemed like a striking thing for a town of five thousand people, and it really was, that there would be such influence and such dedication and such knowledge and such thirst for knowledge. And this may have had something to do with, while Dean Mallott still wasn't the president of Cornell at this particular time--Mr. Harger was thinking of this in '43. This may have been one of the things that he realized about these three people, that they were always on the influential side of pursuing greater knowledge and people having a better education and thus being able to give more to your country and more to your little firm if you're an individual in business, whatever, you could always do a better job with just a little bit more knowledge. And Mr. Harger was great in wanting this to happen. Not just for the kids of Abilene, but for the kids of the nation and probably for a lot of the servicemen who would not be returning. They would still have families that they wouldn't be there to be able to see that the kids got to go to college and this might be one way. They thought about restricting it to veterans of World War II and then they felt no, that would be a biased situation because there were still veterans of World War I who might have eligibility needs to be fulfilled as well and we might be in future wars and this would crystalize it to an extent that it would



only be in this one generation, and that wasn't what it was to be about. It was to be a moving-forward thing. Well we wrote that into the charter, more or less, and for the sake of democracy, you know, it was to go forward. And this particular part of it was one of the things that eventually caught the eye of Joyce Hall. And Joyce Hall was brought into the organization by several means. Harry Darby was one, during his term as appointed senator to the United States Senate came to the foreground quite prominently and had a lot of influence. And we had had lots of contacts with Harry Darby during the war because of his Republicanism, because of his war effort, because of his bond--he was a driver on the bond sales always, and we'd had a lot to do with Harry Darby. So we worked through Mr. Darby a lot on the Eisenhower Foundation after we had finally got going on it. But he was a friend of the community to begin with. The second thing is that Joyce Hall had been a salesman of his own card company somewhere in Nebraska, and he came through Abilene one trip on his card selling deal--I think first he had been a Grolier Society salesman. Know what The Grolier Society is?

SOAPES: I've heard of it.

MELLOR: Used to be through the country as much as Britannica, Book of Knowledge and so on. But that's what he started out with in my remembrance, and he came through Abilene about



setting up this card company. And he stopped in at the Chamber of Commerce and stopped in at Bert's Bookstore which was Burback's Store later, and he asked them and he asked Shellhaas Drug if they would sell his cards of this particular nature if he could get them printed up and get them to them in any supply for any season or fair or the rest of it. And they all said they would back that kind of a card situation. So Joyce Hall had a tender spot in his heart for the community, too. This was my understanding. And he really was busy trying to get Hallmark Cards established more than area-wide; it was really going into a nation-wide thing in the '40s, and he was struggling a bit to get it across and get it over. He did a fabulous job, as usual. And Joyce Hall came out several times and was each time more and more intrigued about this citizenship idea-- what Americanism is and what our democracy is and how do we get that message across to other peoples that were not born here, that are not here, will never visit the United States. And out of this beginning came his People to People program which was more or less, what do you want to call it?--Vista program? Shriver was the head of it.

SOAPES: Peace Corps.



MELLOR: Of a Peace Corps. This was the beginning of a Peace Corps move which he underwrote. And after we limited ourselves to the reconstruction and opening of the Eisenhower home as phase one of our program, the building of the museum to house

the mementos of World War II, and then as Ike became President, it housed the mementos from the presidency. And our third step that was incorporated into the charter was to be this citizenship, progressive program. And that is the third part that Joyce Hall picked up and took into his People to People and expanded it, because we found that that would take considerable amount of time and money, and we were spending eight years at this approximate time in trying to gather money for a building program. And we didn't see how any of us would be alive long enough to get it written down because we became too ambitious, I guess.

SOAPES: When did they first settle on the idea of a museum, that that would be what would be built?

MELLOR: We had a little discussion with Milton--this was before the death of the mother and I think that was in 1947.

SOAPES: '46.

MELLOR: '46? Okay. It was before she died--in the summertime? June, was it?

SOAPES: I don't recall the exact date.

MELLOR: All right. Before she died Milton came to the office, to Emmett's office one day. Home Securities was a glass-fronted building which was on the alley-way right next to the Sunflower Hotel. It was just east of the Sunflower Hotel. And T.L. Welsh owned our building. There was a flower shop on the corner,



then Joner Callahan's confectionery and soda store and news stand and so on right next to the flower shop. And Milton came to pick up some flowers to take to his mother when he was going to see her and he saw that the office was open, and this was a Saturday afternoon. We were open all day Saturdays at that time; we worked six-day weeks. And Milton stopped by to say hello to Emmett before he went into the flower shop. And he was talking about, "Mother is getting old and Naomi Engle was with her". And he said, "It's difficult and I can't be here as much as I need to be or I feel like I would like to be to make things run smooth for her, but we're going to be faced someday with disposal of the home. What do you think it might bring, because maybe we will have to have mother moved to a hospital and so on. We can contribute, but perhaps we should be thinking about selling and move mother to hospital care." They weren't called convalescent hospitals in those days but there were homes that they had that would take them in as private peoples who needed the income and were competent. Emmett said he had no idea, but he would be glad to go down and look the matter over and take it up with his good friend Ben Stewart who was a realtor in the area and do it on the Q.T. and let Milton know. And so Emmett did that, finally, with Ben Stewart and it was all on the Q.T. and all, and Mrs. Eisenhower didn't know what they were doing. I mean it didn't matter. They weren't really trying to keep it from her except they didn't want to disrupt her or disturb her in any way. And it



got Emmett to thinking about, well here is a natural. We want to do something about a living memorial. It isn't like the Washington's Mount Vernon, you don't have to go in and refurbish with period pieces.

[Interruption]



MELLOR: Well Emmett's idea more or less caught hold of the attention of several others after we discussed it between us, Emmett and I discussed it. And we fully discussed many things that were never brought up otherwise or that were brought up and never went anywhere. He and I would pick things to pieces and the pros and cons, because if anybody was going to ask us about what was going to happen, we wanted to know and have the advantage of having--We thought of that but it was for these reasons that it didn't go anywhere or that it's temporarily held in abeyance for the need of more backup work or advance information or something else. We would spend hours and Corinne quite frequently would join us, and she is a very sharp woman--Corinne Graham was Emmett's wife--and she, too, was a KSC graduate. And Corinne would quite frequently cut across lines with an idea to get to a better point than we had built to at that particular time. She was extremely good on occasions. And then, unfortunately, as time wore on and Emmett got more involved with this thing and their lives got more scattered and he got to drinking more; she got to drinking more; they had difficulties that drinking enhances one's opinion of the other and vice versa. And the degree of sharpness on both of them began to show under

the stress and strain of the constant and heavy drinking.

SOAPES: About what year did this start to show?

MELLOR: I would say 1950?

SOAPES: That early.



MELLOR: Began about that early and I began to cover for Emmett in '51 to a tremendous degree in excuses for his missing bank meetings his own business affairs unattended unless I could attend to them. I think it was--well I know it was in 1952 that I called in for help his brother-in-law, Herb Gish, and Herb was a very cold, calculating--he was no help. He was only interested in "Emmett has Dad Graham's money invested in his company. My wife is his sister and she will not get her share unless things shape up." And unless it had something to do with the monetary business, he had no interest in helping Emmett. And I could never forgive Herb Gish for this impersonal, cold attitude about money was everything, and it was very distressful, four years later, I'll tell you. Anyhow, Emmett did have a very open quality, he was honest about everything except his drinking. And his drinking got to the point that he would come in in the morning at maybe ten o'clock and the first thing he would do was go in and unlock his desk drawer and go into the bathroom and turn the water on and you knew he was having a drink, just to begin the day. And he used to come down at seven or eight o'clock and work through the whole day and just be as fine as could be.

And in the final analysis of the thing--I'm getting ahead of the story--but in the final analysis of the thing I was again the one who was a traitor in that I heard him talking on too many occasions to too many people at a time when he was slurring in his speech and he was caustic in his manner and yet we were trying to make friends and being friends for the foundation. And so I called Bob Schulz at Augusta--they were there during the summertime--I said, "Bob, something has to be done because Emmett isn't competent to handle this anymore and I can't tell anybody here at home. I've called in the doctor, called in his family to try to get help for him. I can't see the foundation suffering because of his inattention and yet attention to matters that he shouldn't be attending." And Bob, of course, kept it off the record but we started to ease things around a bit. And yet Bob was always very fair and square with Emmett. And in all of his dealings Bob Schulz was an outstanding performer and extremely open and honest and above board with everything that was done. And I have gained the respect and admiration and friendship with Bob that I thought there was nothing too small or too big that I couldn't take to Bob Schulz and he would guide me in the right direction without anybody else ever knowing.

SOAPES: Who started taking over some of these responsibilities? Who did you start moving things to?

MELLOR: We tried to move them to Sam at first, but Sam would not take the responsibilities on many occasions.



SOAPES: He was quite old wasn't he by this time?

MELLOR: No, Sam was the same age as Emmett.

SOAPES: Oh, they were?

MELLOR: They were the same age. They'd both been Donegal, south Dickinson county, was where Sam was born, been reared, and that wasn't too far from Belle Springs where Emmett was born and reared. And so they used to kid each other about being south county boys, but Sam was never proud of it. He was always a little chagrined because Dorothy, his wife, expected him to be the dapper, cosmopolitanite that she tried to build him into. [Laughter] But that was part of Sam's problem I finally determined in my own mind, that he was not who he thought he was. He was uncomfortable in his spot; he wasn't confident of himself. But at any rate we tried to direct them to Sam. And Sam for instance--I think it was Jock [John Hay] Whitney who called--and Sam brushed him off and did not return his call for some ten days. And Jock kept calling out and I would give him the information, bits and pieces of information that I knew it was all right to give him and I wouldn't be betraying anything.

SOAPES: Whitney was concerned with things like fund-raising?

MELLOR: He was interested in doing something in New York and and Sam should have been right on the ball in getting with him. But it took him six weeks to properly acknowledge Jock Whitney,



and in the meantime Jock got teed off at Sam and would have absolutely nothing to do with him, that if he isn't any more interested in the project than that he shouldn't be president of the foundation. And he raised quite a fuss in several directions. One of them was with Ed Bermingham who was in New York as well. And Ed Bermingham was a very good supporter, and Clarence Dillon was another. Ed Bermingham apparently was a partner with Clarence Dillon. And Clarence Dillon and Jock Whitney and Ed Bermingham all got off Sam Heller because he was too busy or too big or something to return their calls or to answer their queries, and so they didn't want to have anything to do with Sam. So then we tried to steer them to Earl Endacott and Earl Endacott had been my history teacher in high school, and Earl was a World War I veteran and World War II, navy. He was a Seabee. And I had suggested to Emmett that when they were looking for somebody to replace Herb [Rohrer]-- oh, I can see him now, married Theo Nuss's [?] daughter. He was a top Bell Telephone executive and moved back to Abilene. And Herb was an interim appointment of Sam Heller's, and Herb was not the least bit knowledgeable about anything and he was brusque in his manner and not very friendly; he was cold. And we were trying, again, to get people to help us in underwriting various phases. And Herb was a detriment in the capacity in which he was active. And Sam was another obstacle that was to be covered. So we tried to get Endacott, whom I had suggested to Emmett would be a perfect man because he was interested



in history all the way through. He was a veteran of both wars; he was an extremely friendly, open fellow, and we were trying to get people interested in underwriting history for kids, and history for older people and he got along well with both elements.

[Interruption]



SOAPES: One of the items that I've seen in the manuscript materials we have on the early years of the foundation was a plan, very elaborate plan for a kind of a recreation center that involved tennis courts and a stadium and a golf course. What was the origin of that idea?

MELLOR: There was a gentleman connected with Sun Oil Company in New York, whose first name was Hugh, and I may be able later to recall his full name, but he was introduced to us by telephone by Bob Schulz who says, "Sun Oil is very interested in doing something to be helpful. They have the architectural services available and they would like to come out and make a presentation of what they would propose, and set it up at your convenience and he'll be in touch with you. You tell him when." So I canvassed to see who would be available at what time and what dates would be better than other dates. And then when Hugh called from New York, he wanted to come out and make a talk presentation, see the layout, where everything was going to be, whether it was hilly, flat, what was there and what would need

to be done in the way of contouring and so on. And then he would like to come back with his drawings and make a presentation of Sun Oil underwriting the most of the cost as a gift to the memorial honoring General Eisenhower. Well we didn't say no to anybody when they said underwrite. And so we said these were the dates and he came out, and the second time he came out he came out with some very elaborate plans as you've said. And the building itself would have been run on a contour basis of curved walls, waves in and out and around, and been much as the modern design of the Pasadena Museum, the Norton Simon Museum of Pasadena now, which was built within the last ten years. But when I saw the Pasadena Art Museum, which is now the Norton Simon Museum, this was along the same wavy outline of traffic flow supposedly and of introducing subjects in various manners. And because they wouldn't always be interested in the items that would be presented within a museum we should have something that was moved from the Eisenhower Park, which was City Park before it was renamed Eisenhower Park, that we would have playgrounds; we would have a fair grounds if we wanted to go into a more expansive thing and have horse races and the rodeos and the golf course--because Ike was a golfer we had to have a golf course in connection with the plans. We might even go into equestrian barns and trails because it was at the edge of the city and the lands could be acquired and landscaped and so on, so they would blot out the mills at the east, the alfalfa mill at the east and the other mills to the



north and it would be a very beautiful spot--be attractive nation-wide because it was the center of the United States. Most people passed either north or south or east or west on Highway 81 going through the heart of Kansas north and south or on U.S. 40 east and west from New York to San Francisco or to Los Angeles. And Milton Eisenhower was somewhere on the fringes of this. He either knew about the plans, had seen them, or something of that nature. And Milton took one look at it and said, "Emmett, it's out of character with the person who is being honored, the type of thing we're trying to build to honor the military group. It is totally out of character with the community in which it's to be placed. Even if Sun Oil pays for the whole thing, turn thumbs down on it." And that's what happened. The board turned it down. "Sorry, Hugh, it's not what we want. If you can come up with something else that would meet the approval of the people back east who seemingly want to have a cosmopolitan situation within a country community, bring us something else." And he didn't show with anything else.

But here we thought we had, to begin with, something that, oh, this buoyed our spirits up tremendously that here was somebody who wanted to do something that wouldn't be costly to us and it would meet the needs of what we were trying to do and yet it was totally rejected when it was presented because of the feeling that the Eisenhowers had. And this was not only Milton's feeling; apparently he had talked with some of the others about-- Arthur was very much opposed to it. And so we didn't ever plan



to go into anything except a museum or a building to house the mementos of World War II.

SOAPES: My notes indicate that about 1946 a fund-raising operation involving the veteran subscription program--

MELLOR: Right. This was at a time when the Veterans of Foreign Wars and the American Legion, the state level through the local levels asking, had endorsed the foundation, the idea of the foundation, and had passed a resolution in their formal meetings that they would, shall I say, approve of the foundation's going out to the veterans' meetings, or soliciting from the families of veterans, a ten-dollar subscription to have the name of the veteran himself or herself, the name of the person serving in the armed forces placed in perpetuity within the Eisenhower War Memorial. And we did raise, by ten dollars per name, what we considered then a great amount of money, considering that it was taken outside of Kansas on the same basis that the Kansas delegation, each VFW and American Legion, didn't get anywhere with their acceptance outside of Kansas. And so we didn't really get any contributions from--we got a few from Colorado, some from Nebraska, and a few from Missouri, fringe towns. But the publicity didn't reach anybody outside of our own state. And so it was not a successful fund drive. But through that means, that was the first time that I set up a thirty-five millimeter, kodachrome slide grouping that could be shown to show what we had in mind and how we hoped to go



ahead and get a building to house these other things. And among the things that we would house would be the names of the contributors, or not the contributors particularly, but we would publicize the names of the service personnel that were being placed. Through that organization we gained a lot of publicity through the state because Emmett and Corinne and at that time my good friend that I'd grown up with, Marilyn Fritz, who had been with the Loan Investment Company for many, many years. She and I tried to go into the service at the same time. She was not accepted because she had not had further than high school. I was accepted, I would say, primarily on the basis that I had had college. But I wasn't qualified physically to go through with it and she was, so she was accepted for an enlisted personnel and she entered the WACs very early and then went through their officer candidate school at Fort Des Moines. And she served overseas in England with the 8th Air Force as a cryptographic security officer. And when she came home, I have in this 1945 ledger here, that Marilyn sailed for home on the Aquatannia [?] in October and arrived home and we put her to work the first of November as the first paid employee of the Eisenhower Foundation. Up to then we had had all of our help donated or Emmett had paid one boy and one girl out of his own pocket and they used the machinery of the Home Securities Company. It was no longer a corporation then; he was doing business as the Home Securities. He'd bought out the five original investors, so he owned his own company. And



Marilyn and Corinne Graham and Emmett canvassed with my slide file the state of Kansas for seven months to publicize the activity and what we were trying to do. That's when we gained a great deal of momentum and publicity. But again money wasn't coming in. And of course all the fellows said to Emmett, "You go and do this; you're the designated person from the foundation to go and do this. It'll probably take half a day a week." Well it didn't. It took five days and six days and seven days a week and they would not be gone more than seven days. Might come home for two days. He'd catch up on whatever I could tell him about the business and then, soon after that, we rehired a fellow that had been let go for war services. And Emmett paid his own expense, Corinne's expense and Marilyn's expense, the car expense, without a penny of anybody helping him until T.L. Welsh said, "One man should not have to contribute that much."

Well by then Emmett had already spent it and he said to T.L. Welsh, "One man shouldn't have to if this is going to be a going thing. But if you're trying to repay me, instead of paying me, put the money into the coffers of the foundation so that we can go forward from there." And T.L. Welsh made a ten thousand dollar, anonymous, contribution at that time. Well that gave us a little bit of money to underwrite a lot of postage and printing expense.

SOAPES: You could send a lot more letters those days for ten thousand than you can now.



MELLOR: Right. At three cents it was easy. And I started to work for Emmett in 1937 at fifteen dollars a month. Before I had been there fourteen days I got a ten dollar a month raise. That made me twenty-five dollars, twelve fifty for the first fifteen days that I worked for him. In the second month I got another ten dollar raise. Emmett was always proud of the fact that because of, he felt, what I had contributed to the foundation he was able also to contribute something more to me in the way of salary than anybody else in the whole town was being paid. And I was paid more money than most of the fellows were getting with families. There was only one other person that, he said, was getting more money than I, and that was Lula Demoss [?], who was the secretary of the Cruise Motor Company. And Lula Demoss was a cracker jack of a business person, and she was, I always thought, a silent partner of the Cruise Motor Company. She may not have been. But at any rate I had a great respect for her ability and her manner of doing things. It never really was one of my points of pride that I was being paid more than a lot of the fellows who were working men with families. And that didn't influence me in contributing my work to the foundation. I could have quite on the nine to five job with the same salary. But there was no quitting as far as I was concerned on the foundation because it needed me more than it needed--it needed a continuity and I was the continuity, I felt.



And I strictly felt this way that it was a continuity that I was furnishing rather than a material service of any consequence. And the veterans situation led us into a lot of publicity. When we went into other publicity, in 1948 for instance, we had kicked around the idea that we needed to go with a national campaign. When T.L. Welsh paid his ten thousand dollars into the coffers, we found through--I think Sam Heller found them--Bromley and House of Cleveland, who were a public relations firm. It actually turned out that Bromley was Mrs. House and it was a man and wife company. They got together a lot of our photographs and made big foldouts that were four times this size in a full sheet and then would--

SOAPES: About four 8 1/2 X 11 sheets.



MELLOR: About four 8 1/2 X 11 sheets in two colors, a lavender and an orangey, and a bright printing of some--maybe it was black printing but I don't think so. I think it was a colored ink. I was never stricken by the composition of that--it offended me somehow. The color combination was not in keeping with the quiet tones of, or the dignity or the character of the foundation. But anyhow they had them printed up and they had them shipped to Abilene because we had to have them mailed out from Abilene. And we had the assurance of the American Bankers Association who had said that they would, through their facilities, which meant every bank in every community that belonged to the American

Bankers Association, could be a depository for funds for the national foundation to honor General Dwight D. Eisenhower and the U.S. armed forces. And they would forward the funds then to Abilene to the Abilene National Bank or the Farmers National or whatever depository we suggested. And we suggested the Commerce Trust Company of Kansas City, which was Arthur's bank, as being the repository. Well they all bought this and we were ready with the material and with everything to go when Ike's name was being prominently mentioned as a possible presidential candidate in 1948. And he said, "No way will this veterans memorial be connected with a political issue in a political year, and you will withdraw your campaign." Well we'd spent our ten thousand dollars. We had stacks and rooms full and warehouses full of the printed material that we never did use, because after that it was of no use, it was dated material. Two years from then it wasn't possibly usable.

We tried several things that hadn't previously been tried like the American Bankers Association. I thought that was a genius stroke. I really did because anybody who wanted to contribute could just walk down the street in any little village and know that his money was going to be accepted and correctly accounted for and into the proper system, because nobody of the American Bankers Association could accept a commission for receiving the funds. And I don't think to this day anybody has ever used or ever had permission from the American Bankers



Association to do any such collection. It probably'll never happen again. But it was a stroke that, again, didn't work because we had to withdraw it.

In 1949 the Kansas Junior Chamber of Commerce came forth with the hopeful suggestion that they could put across, in Kansas, a drive that would build the building to house the mementos. Glen Muncy was the president of the Kansas Junior Chamber of Commerce in 1948. Glen Muncy was a very high-minded, outstanding Veteran of Foreign Wars fellow that we had worked with at Dodge City, Kansas. And Glen Muncy was still enthralled with the museum and helping get it built for whatever we were going to do with it, housing mementos. We already had the home open and operating; we had the first phase in completion; and our promise for the second phase was something that he wanted to help with. So Glen Muncy got together several of the growing group in the state, community-minded, spirited men, got them together, and they had General Eisenhower as a speaker for their spring meeting in Wichita. And of course it went over great big. They had the biggest convention they'd ever had. Everybody was enthusiastic about Ike. So they, by unanimous voice vote, voted to go into a total concerned effort to help get the foundation a building to house the mementos. And they announced it at that particular meeting that they were going to help the Eisenhower Foundation accomplish this for Kansas. Well they had high ideals, but they had very little know-how. And they had a gentleman by the name of John Rudisill.

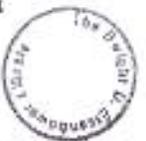


And John Rudisill was their public relations man for the Kansas Junior Chamber of Commerce. And John Rudisill lived, literally, at our office or with Emmett Graham twenty-four hours a day for eight or nine months. They were always going to do something. But what they actually did was that we underwrote six thousand dollars expense to begin with for them to get started in a printing program to go to every school. And the brochures were printed with the purpose of, they were going to the schools through the educational system, and they would disseminate down into the homes and residences, and the word would be out, and the money come flowing back, and the Kansas Junior Chamber or Commerce would be the collecting agency and they would get, I don't know, six or seven percent of the total that they collected. And they would repay the foundation, within a four or five month period, the six thousand dollars, plus gain any commission on anything else that was collected. It all sounded good, but John kept postponing the printing. And every time there was any question about it, well it was just not quite ready. It was just not quite ready. It hadn't been passed by everybody and he wasn't ready to present it to the foundation board and delay, delay, delay, delay. There were too many people in on it and everybody had to have a note of change this, change that. What we finally determined was that John Rudisill's family had to live off of the monies. But the Junior Chamber of Commerce helped underwrite to the extent that they had money in their coffers, had to pay back a part of that, but they were



never able to repay the total. They came to us again for another five thousand dollars. And of the five thousand dollars we agreed to advance two thousand with the other three thousand dollars to only be paid to the Kansas Junior Chamber of Commerce plus the people who were doing the billing, like the printer, the paper supplier, or whoever else was billing them for things that were done in the name of the foundation. We wrote off, finally, some three thousand dollars of debt that the Kansas Junior Chamber of Commerce couldn't really come up with. So that was a flop. But we got a lot of publicity. [Laughter]

SOAPES: You were finally getting some of that publicity you hadn't been able to use or get in '48.



MELLOR: We were having lots of publicity: Our name was getting known, especially around the state. And by these various organizations and these various step-by-step things we were coming up slowly into some position of moving forward if we didn't have to take two steps back every time.

[Interruption]

SOAPES: You have a story that you want to put in here.

MELLOR: Well the story I really want to put in happened at the time of mother Eisenhower's death, and this was six months after Milton had asked Emmett, "What's the value of the house if we

have to sell it?" She really died very suddenly. We were at that point and Emmett had worked it up to the point where there was acceptance within the group that we didn't have to restore a home; we could take it over in its entirety if the boys would give us the deed to it. And Milton was aware of this thought before his mother died. After the services in Abilene they all adjourned to Manhattan to Milton's home where he was Kansas State College president. All the boys stayed at Milton's house the rest of the weekend and went home on Sunday. But they had two days of horrendous discussion about the distribution of the properties and the disposition of the home, of the building as well as the lots that were there in connection with it that had been the garden plots. And they could be sold to somebody who would want to buy the house and the lots could be sold for somebody to build on or to somebody to continue to use them as garden space. But there were several things that they had to consider, and one of them was the request that the Eisenhower Foundation take over the responsibility of restoring the home and preserving it in its entirety just as it was when mother Eisenhower lived there. And there was, shall I say, a heated discussion on the part of Edgar, and Edgar's repeated this in my presence time and again, and then he has later apologized for his first thoughts--"Rather than let any group of people wander through what was our home and has tender memories, we'll burn the damn thing down." And Edgar was



adamant. I guess it was Earl who told us later that it was all he could do to keep Edgar from coming back to Abilene and setting a torch to the house before he went back to Washington. But it was a very touching thing, the respect and the admiration and the family feeling that they all had for that home. And when they each reiterated it, it all came out sounding the same way.

Arthur really said, "The money isn't what we want; we don't any of us need it."

And Ike said, "If they use the name of Eisenhower, it belongs to all of us, and we have to all agree that it can be done, deeded to the foundation, which really wants to set up a housing facility for the mementos which I'm trying to give back to the people who served under me." And he said, "They were not given to me as a personal gift; they were given to me because they couldn't give one to each of the thousands and millions of men and women who were in World War II." And he said, "I don't feel that they belong to me, they belong to the nation. I would have no difficulty in disposing of them to the Smithsonian, for instance. But here's this group out here in Abilene and they want to include a memorial to the principles of our mother and father. And if it's to go anywhere, I would like to see it go to them, but with the permission of all the boys to take care of it and use it like it should be and as they have conceived it today."

And they really had one heck of a family squabble about what to do with the home. And I think we were extremely



fortunate that they finally said to Edgar, "As an attorney you should be the one who would be most interested in having this thing drawn up so that we could have it revert to us if they did not pursue it in the manner that we felt it should be pursued." And I think that's the straw that broke Edgar's decision to burn the thing down, that he could do with it later anything he wanted to do if it didn't meet with their approval. Shall I say this was the very point of emphasis on what the charter had written. We want to preserve with dignity something of the principles of democracy and to honor these people who have fought for it. And that bore the brunt of the whole thing. It was a great, great victory for the foundation to be able to have the boys agree to deed the Eisenhower home to the Eisenhower Foundation. We later changed the name from the long, lengthy original name, as you may know.

SOAPES: Right. I can't recite it all but I remember it's some sesquipedalian title.

MELLOR: Right. We sent several back and that was the name that General Eisenhower agreed would spell out exactly what we were doing. Even though he realized it was an unwieldy name, that's what we were stuck with. And we later were able to change it to the Eisenhower Foundation and go from there and shorten it then to the Eisenhower Foundation on all of our printing and so on. So it was a plus in many respects. But I thought that story, if you don't have it--



SOAPES: No. I knew that there was a problem with the family and that Edgar was the last hold out, but I wasn't aware of the exact nature of that.

MELLOR: They were a tight-knit family, and they were always, as I say, very respectful and loving of their parents, and it was obvious.

SOAPES: And that was the concern that Edgar had, was the groups of people trooping through here; it's disrespectful; it's an invasion of family privacy?

MELLOR: That's right. But he didn't want anybody to come in there and see how they had lived. Even though they lived well for the period that they lived there, it might look like they were poor by today's standards.

SOAPES: Wasn't there some feeling of being on the south side of the tracks?

MELLOR: That was Edgar's feeling more than anybody's. Ike's comment on that several times was, "The blessing of it was that we didn't know we were poor. And we didn't know we were on the wrong side of the tracks."

My grandparents lived two blocks down the Santa Fe railroad tracks--they lived at 510 E. First, or Enterprise Road, and that's where I lived. And of course as a youngster going to school we'd cut back to the back of the lot and go down the railroad tracks to Lincoln School and go in the back door to



Lincoln School. Never with the consent or knowledge of our parents because we were always supposed to go around by the street; we were never supposed to go on the railroad tracks. My grandmother and Mrs. Eisenhower, Ida Eisenhower, Ike's mother, were good friends back in the Belle Springs community. And David Eisenhower, Ike's father, and my step-granddad, David Kaufman, had both taken the same steam engineering course from the correspondence school in Pennsylvania, and they both worked at Belle Springs Creamery at the same time. And they were good friends. My grandmother sent me to school one day with, I'll say a mason jar--I don't remember exactly what its shape was--or a crock with some yeast starter in it to stop off at Mrs. Eisenhower's house on the way to school. And I must carry this very carefully: because yeast starter was yeast starter--you don't let it fall. So that day I made the mistake of going to school by the railroad tracks and I was doing my little hopscotch along the ties and I missed one and fell and broke the crock of yeast starter. Well I had plenty of time so I went back home, and I got the whipping of my life. The only one I can remember from my grandmother. And I started out again with some yeast starter. And this time I went by the street and went across the tracks on Fourth Street there by Mrs. Eisenhower's home and left the yeast starter with her. But she was a very kind--

SOAPES: That's what I was going to ask you. What do you



remember of her personal traits?

MELLOR: Very quiet and she looked like my grandmother Mellor in that her hair was pulled back rather tight and in a bun at the back of her head. My grandmother Mellor lived down by Wichita, so I didn't see her very much. But Mrs. Eisenhower had the same kind of nice smile and the nice friendly thank you and gentleness, kindness about her that I remember in my grandmother, same qualities. And she always spoke, always very friendly when we'd go home. If she was out we'd wave and I've many times seen her going out toward the hen house or come up from the hen house.

SOAPES: Where was that hen house located in relation to the rest of the house, main family house?

MELLOR: It was north and the original was a barn. I don't remember the barn, but I remember the hen house being an elongated building. And that was the building that they refurbished to become an office when they opened the home, the Eisenhower home. And that was quite a feat, to refurbish that hen house into an office. Of course as I go back the hen house looks smaller and smaller than it did to me in my youth. Of course when I was a youngster the widest, longest halls in the world were the ones in the Abilene High School, which was up on Buckeye, that was torn down probably by now. But those were mammoth halls the first time I saw them. And now later years when I went back to look at them, looked like--how could



two people walk down those halls? [Laughter]

SOAPES: What about personal traits of David Eisenhower? Did you see enough of him to gain an impression?

MELLOR: He was friendly too. The most that I remember about him was he and my granddad always adjourned to the kitchen and got out sheets of paper or something and drew--this is the way this should work or that's the way, mechanical things. And I wasn't mechanically inclined and never have been, so I had no interest in what they were doing. They'd sit there and talk for hours. And my granddad was a Mennonite and they would talk religion and so on. David Kaufman wasn't nearly as well read as David Eisenhower. David Eisenhower, when he would talk geography and things of that nature, and my having to be at home I was interested in things that were outside, and he would talk to me about travel, not about the actual going, but what it was like in other countries. And I think it was through David Eisenhower that my family started taking the National Geographic. You had to be nominated by somebody and I think it was David Eisenhower who nominated our family for that magazine. And we took it for years and years, just because of me and, being bedfast, this gave me something to look at and something different to do. And I got very, very tired of reading novels. They were all the same as far as I was concerned, even as a youngster. So I took up poetry, and he brought poetry



things to me. And then as I worked across the street at the Home Securities Company in later years, he was the janitor at the United Trust Company across the street. And he would wave and stop and chat whenever our paths crossed. He was friendly.

SOAPES: Of course Mrs. Eisenhower, Ida, is best known as the religious person in the family. Did you see this come out of her frequently?

MELLOR: No, I really didn't. I don't think at any time I was ever aware of the religion except as Dave Kaufman and David Eisenhower would sit in the kitchen and talk about the church program of the week or who had said what or how they accepted it or whatever. They're the only two I ever recall anything about church conversations. My grandmother was a Methodist and we all went to the Methodist church, and we helped build the First Methodist Church up on Cedar and Fourth? Fifth? Sixth? Cedar and Sixth. And we all helped go out and sell things to buy brick for the church. And so I really wasn't aware of any part of Mrs. Eisenhower's religion as a youngster growing up.

Of course, in later years in 1945, I remember in 1939 when Ike was home--I think he was home from the Philippines--and I was quite impressed because he was the first one I had seen other than Fort Riley military people. And he was exceedingly, shall I say, spruced up and polished beyond most of them that I'd ever seen at Fort Riley. And so I had a different impression



of the army and of the officer personnel, must be something besides army regular. Because they didn't have a very good reputation at Fort Riley for some time. So it was all quite different.

SOAPES: We mentioned earlier Eisenhower's well-known comment about how they didn't know they were poor. That area of town in which they lived, was that thought of as a poor section of town?

MELLOR: No, it was not. We didn't have a so-called poor section of town unless it was by the Union Pacific tracks by the dump. And of course they've moved the dump since then, but that was the Mexican section.

SOAPES: Now where would that be?



MELLOR: That was across the railroad tracks out on Third Street and to the south of that--it was actually on First Street, off of First Street and south on what now, I think, is the airport road.

SOAPES: So it would be in the southwest section of town.

MELLOR: There was a little--and it probably wasn't more than a block of little houses. They were always awfully clean, but they were poor people. We had maybe six families of negroes in Abilene. One of them lived within a block and a half of us, on beyond us on First Street, by the name of Helm.

SOAPES: Family is still there.

MELLOR: Yes. Nat Helm's father and mother lived there and my

brother and Nat's brother, Sherman, who is an attorney in Cincinnati or Cle eland or something. Sherman and Wayne used to catch gophers in the alfalfa field behind the house and take the gophers down to the county courthouse and I think it was a nickel a head they got for them, or two cents a head or something of the sort. And Wayne was sick one winter with the flu or pneumonia or something for three or four weeks. And Sherman went about tending the traps and took the stuff down to the courthouse and sold it and brought Wayne back the accounting of how much, he made them write it out, the accounting of how much he had taken in and what monies he was getting back. And he gave Wayne his half. And this didn't really make that much of an impression on us because we knew Sherman was honest. Sherman had been in many times having, you know how growing boys are, they'd have three or four eggs in a sandwich and then an hour later eat dinner. [Laughter] So it didn't really dawn on us that we should ever question Sherman's honesty. But apparently he felt he was having to prove something. And Nat helped his brother to go through school. He stayed home and worked. I don't think he finished high school. Always had a nice feeling about Nat though. He was a very hard, hard worker--not only for his brother but his mother had a mental breakdown. When their dad left, money was tight, there were a lot of things. And Nat put on those rubber boots and washed cars at the Texaco station for years and years and years, and he never bothered to complain about his slot and his allotment that he had to take care of an ill mother. And he knew that Sherman was bright and smart and he wanted Sherman to go ahead so he continued.



to work so Sherman could go to school.

SOAPES: Would you describe the tone of Abilene--and I'm going after this because this is descriptive of the atmosphere in which the Eisenhower family was operating and the boys had grown up, even though most of them had left by the '20s and '30s--as a homogenous community without any significant sorts of conflict in it?

MELLOR: We had, for the most part, a middle-class community. The middle-class community would make all the way from four to ten thousand dollars a year. There might be six families who would make twenty-five to fifty thousand dollars a year. They were the upper crust, the 400. There was that distinction. And yet when their children came to school, there was no distinction. And the children of the upper crust, so-called, families were, even in later years, they made no distinction about their friends.

I remember one of the Gary girls, who was a negro family of very good repute, was a very talented musician, and she was an excellent piano player among some of the musical attributes she had. She could play clarinet and saxophone and violin. She was an all-around musician, but her piano playing was the most outstanding. I can't remember her first name but I can see her. A very cute, petite little gal and always very scrubbed and gracious and sweet. And they always wanted her to come to their parties. Well she couldn't come without a negro escort; so some of the negro boys on occasion would come to some of these parties. There wasn't any discussion about the fact you're different from I, or us. It was just one of those



accepted things--you belong in the community, we like you, and whether she would play so they could all gather around the piano and sing was immaterial. They didn't really ask her for that purpose. They liked the Gary gal. And whatever happened to her I don't know. I think she went to Chicago first and then back to New York and her family sort of spread.

But we did have six very fine negro families. Herb Bell, who was the janitor and overseer of the home and museum for a number of years, his father was well respected within the community, and so was Herb, Jr. There was never any problem; they were as honest and industrious as any of the middle-class community in the area. We respected them.

[Interruption]



SOAPES: In our discussion of the fund-raising activities we'd gotten up through 1949 and the Jaycees. My notes indicate that in 1950, J. Earl Schaefer and a Colonel A. E. Howse became involved with the foundation. Can you describe for me what they were doing?

MELLOR: Yes, I can. J. Earl Schaefer was a vice-president and general manager of Boeing Company at Wichita, the Wichita outlet. It was the main Boeing plant before they moved to Seattle, they only had Wichita. And he was quite a prominent Kansas citizen and A.E. Howse had a sister in Washington who was a reporter for International News I think and also on either the Washington Post or some local Washington paper and I can't remember her name off hand. But A.E. Howse was a prominent Republican as well. And Al Howse wanted to

get some information for his sister on the foundation and its operation and so on. So he came up one time, just out of the clear blue, and I met him down at the little office building behind the home. Al Howse introduced himself but it didn't mean anything to me, the name didn't, but his interest did and the kinds of questions he was asking did. So I took him up and introduced him to Emmett because Emmett was at the office. This was a Saturday that I had off but I was down working at the office at the home. And they got together and he got his right answers and his sister came out and did an article, International News Press or something.

SOAPES: Is it International News Service?



MELLOR: INS, I guess that was it. Al Howse wanted to know how he personally could get involved in doing something in the Wichita area and we told him that the only one who was interested in the Wichita area, who had shown an interest, was Earl Schaefer, and Earl Schaefer had become interested in it through conversations with Harry Darby and Ed Arn. Ed Arn was governor, and Ed Arn was a Wichita man. And Earl Schaefer wanted to do something. So after Ed Arn agreed to become the chairman of the fund-raising committee, Earl Schaefer and Al Howse came into the picture through Ed Arn's financial campaign to raise funds for the foundation. Somewhere in this stack of material I have the contributions list of the Arn-Darby-Hall-Roberts campaigns, and part of that was the Howse-Schaefer campaign in the Wichita area, Sedgwick County. And the actual

fund-raising plans started taking shape in late 1950. But they came to fruition in June and July and August in 1952, which was coincidental with Republicanism in 1952.

SOAPES: Eisenhower going on the national scene as a Presidential candidate was invaluable to you, I assume.

MELLOR: It was just before the convention. See the convention was the middle of July, and then those who rode the bandwagon in June were really mostly Kansas City, Kansas-Kansas City, Missouri and western Kansas people.



SOAPES: Roy Roberts, I assume, was important with getting those people.

MELLOR: Darby and Roberts and Arn was also very instrumental in getting people who today would be looked upon and probably questioned about their contributions to anything contributed to the foundation. We've got one here for instance, Earl C. Sam's Foundation by Dean Porter, Brownsville, Texas. Had nothing to do with anything except that Ike was a presidential candidate. But they were interested because Mrs. Dean Porter was a Kansas girl. And we had had early indications that Texas, Sid Richardson and Clint Merchason [?] wanted to build and did everything they could to apparently entice Ike to let them build his museum at Denison, Texas, the birthplace. And they wanted it very badly in Texas. And so Kansas really had to get busy. And that's when we got, let's see, Andrew Schoepfel had been governor, he was senator; Frank Carlson had been governor, he was senator. Ed Arn was governor, and he was doing something about a campaign. The

others had talked about it, but had never gotten around to it. Another contribution we got was five thousand dollars from Chrysler Corporation. But that didn't come in until February of '53. One contribution we got was from--this was early, when the Eisenhower for President headquarters were opened in New York--I got a call one day from Jim Hagerty saying, "Who is Hugh Clinton?" or something like that is the name I pick out of the air now and I'm sure this is close to it. "He is attempting to raise thirty thousand dollars for the Eisenhower Foundation and send it to you, and we want to know who authorized him to make the approach here in New York and to solicit the funds." And of course I was well acquainted with all of the names from over the country of people who had been interested, and nobody had been authorized to raise any money singly. It was always a group. And so I was well acquainted with the fact that there was no Hugh Clinton authorized by the Foundation and it must be some error or his association was with some Republican club or something else, but we had nothing to do with it.

Well we finally got a thirty thousand dollar check from Hugh Clinton to the Eisenhower Foundation. And that check, the minute I got it I called Bob Schulz and I said, "Bob, Jim Hagerty--was asking about this some six weeks ago. We now have a check for this amount from this individual. How do I handle it?"

He said, "It's a hot potato; send it back. He's buying an ambassadorship and it won't sell."

So we sent the check back. That was the biggest contribution we had ever had proferred and this was heartbreaking.



SOAPES: And you had to turn it down!

MELLOR: Again. It was like the last ten thousand dollars for a bunch of material you can't use and finally had to burn.

SOAPES: Were these contributions reported to General Eisenhower in any way? Did he know who was contributing?

MELLOR: No. We never really gave him the names of people at any time. We didn't give them to Bob Schulz. He said, "I prefer not to know."

SOAPES: Schulz had said this?



MELLOR: Schulz had said this. So they never knew that Phillips Petroleum gave us the first thousand dollars and that on down the line we had contributions from steel, United Aircraft, Lockheed, Ford, Republic Steel, Skelly Oil, the Wolferman system in Kansas City, Kansas City Southern Railroad, Trans World Airlines, Katz Drug Company, Interstate National Bank, Rothschilds, grain companies, Cook Paint & Varnish, Joyce Hall, Harry Darby, some of our own group of trustees. But they could all have been looked at because they had government contracts and it would not have been fair to them. Firestone.

We never did pass the information along as to who. We passed the information along as to how much toward our goal have we accumulated and that was the information that they got. We kept these records quiet from our own people. I did the typing on these always. The checks that Sam would get, he would bring down to me and I would deposit. And most of the information was taken from the check itself

as to the donor, and I would write the letters of acknowledgement and forge somebody's name to them, either Emmett's or Sam's, and get their acknowledgements on their way. And I was busy. There were various and sundry things of that nature.

At that time too we were having all kinds of inquiries from, oh, for instance Sports Illustrated wanted to do an article on presidential sports through the ages and they wanted the loan of materials that he had given to us--golf club, a fly box, fishing tackle, lots of things that would do. And they wanted us to ship it back at their expense and under their blanket policy tell them how much it would be and so on that they'd have to insure it for if it disappeared. We didn't go for that kind. Where we could give them photographs that were already nationally published, we would do so. But anything of this kind the policy was finally established that we had clearance from the White House to do it under the Eisenhower Foundation but without any involvement of their knowledge. And we determined that that wasn't the way the foundation wanted to get its publicity. On loan to a museum for a specific occasion, yes. We sent back the Ethiopian sword and shield and spear and there was one other item that I--four items in that Ethiopian group that Haile Selassie had given. When Haile Selassie made his state visit, we sent it back to the White House to be on exhibit. They loaned it to the Smithsonian under the auspices of the Eisenhower Foundation at Abilene. We did that on heads of state items always. When King Paul and Queen Fredericks of Greece were here on a state visit in



Washington, we sent the items, the head gear and the gold nugget jewelry and the items that they had given us which actually were Greek antiques and should not have, under their laws, been out of their possession. But their parliament did permit Ike to have them.

So, to get back to the contribution section, Ed Arn raised, with his own endeavor as governor, raised over fifty thousand dollars toward our building. I got the idea, I was writing so many letters, why not write letters of solicitation for commitments for materials for the building itself. And through probably five to seven hundred letters I wrote, I got maybe ten very generous commitments from the company; Johns Manville on building materials that were fireproof; Owens Corning Glass on the acoustical tile ceilings for the museum building; the fixtures that we had, the lighting fixtures. There were lots of expensive contributions that finally evolved out of those letters of solicitation and follow-up of any printed material that we had so that they would know that we were still interested and a going concern. But this took a period of at least two and a half years to fruition.

SOAPES: When did you start sending these letters?



MELLOR: In '49.

SOAPES: So by the time they were ready to have the groundbreaking for the museum, you had gotten some response.

MELLOR: Yes. We had gotten some response; we knew where we were going. Also through letters of solicitation that I think I mentioned

to you that we had asked in this particular period, and I was really impressed about writing to Bob Hope and asking for something of an indication that he would participate in a fund-raising enterprise for us nationwide. We got absolutely no response and I was crushed. I thought well anybody like Bob Hope would be interested in this. And then, of course, later on he got on the bandwagon for Ike all the way and went a different direction, by building the hospital down there in Palm Springs, which was good. But I sort of felt like we prodded him into it, but it was at a later time. Then we wrote Ben Hibbs, editor of the Saturday Evening Post, for some articles by him or through him or published through him. Didn't get a reply from Ben Hibbs, but one of the correspondents who came out was Quentin Reynolds, he was a free-lance writer. And Quentin Reynolds came out and did a wonderful story on the Eisenhowers of Kansas. And he was a fabulous Irishman. Helped immensely in our publicity. At the same time almost that he was there, Roy Elston was the editor of Life magazine, and Roy Elston came out and sent John Dominus and many of their top Life photographers to give us extra publicity. And this was very beneficial, I feel, in letting the people like Johns Manville and Owens Corning Glass know that we were trying to be a substantial agency, establishing itself.

SOAPES: It gave you credibility.

MELLOR: It did. It really did.

SOAPES: One thing that strikes me, we've noted that in '52 the campaign for the presidency, the political prominence of Dwight



Eisenhower helps you immensely now with fund raising. In '48 he had asked you to cease and desist from fund raising because of the campaign. In '52 he doesn't.

MELLOR: We didn't tell him in '52. Governor Arn said, "This is a Kansas project. This is my responsibility; this is not on a national basis. This is a Kansas project and if we can underwrite our favorite son, we should do so. We need to get moving on it now!" And, as I said, the plans were laid in 1950 when Arn first was elected in November, 1950. He was already well aware. Another fellow who was well aware at that time was Franklin Murphy.

SOAPES: Chancellor of the University of Kansas.

MELLOR: Chancellor of the University of Kansas and now chairman of the board of the Times Mirror in Los Angeles. And Franklin Murphy was exceedingly gung-ho on the educational program.

[Interruption]



SOAPES: You told me when we were off the tape a little while ago that you were involved with the organization of the 1952 homecoming.

MELLOR: Right.

SOAPES: So would you tell me your role?

MELLOR: Well again my role was synonymous with no assignment in particular, but everything in general. Our office was the clearing house. Specifically, Emmett was assigned to the traffic committee as chairman. There wasn't anything that was onimous sounding about that

to begin with; we thought it would be a breeze. But when we finally got into it, everything evolved around traffic, the movement of people, movement of vehicles, the movement of food and supplies. We were the center, the hub of everything. Meantime, I often had written letters for the hotel, the Sunflower, which was the main hotel in town. And so Mike Biggs, the manager, said, "Mabel, we're going to have a lot of inquiries in here. I don't know about handling them. I want to line up your help in advance."

And I said, "Okay, Mike. I'll not be too busy and involved; I'll be glad to be helpful."

Bob Gemmill was the co-chairman. It turned out that Mike Biggs just raised his hands after while and said, "It's too much for me. I'm going to refer everything to you because you've got your finger on the pulse of every other situation."

We were having calls for reservations from all over the world practically because of press that wanted to be in attendance. We worked back through the traffic department through the state and took it through the National Guard situation to the state, through Fort Riley to the Department of Defense. We worked backwards through Harry Darby again, to various and sundry fields that he could call upon. We called in Salina and Junction City and Manhattan and the surrounding towns--Clay Center where it wasn't too far to drive to and from. We tied up their hotels and people who were in automobiles could drive. We would assign them if they were coming in from the west to the Salina area. We tried to be reasonable and not send them



across and then back and so on. And so in housing I was exceedingly involved, in traffic we were exceedingly involved. The highway patrol set up their headquarters in our office with their sound system. I was always involved in what was going on there. We had housing, sleeping quarters, food, and police officers as one section; so we had already started a little nucleus of what we knew was going to be involved. Kansas Peace Officers Association, the highway patrol, sanitation came under that because they certainly had to have provisions, drinking water, bad weather and vehicle breakdowns, parking. We had it. So we couldn't help but becoming involved with those two major committees being handled out of one office. We finally became the clearing house for everything.

SOAPES: Who was your principal contact with the Eisenhower campaign?

MELLOR: With the campaign itself?



SOAPES: Yes. Or with the people directly around Eisenhower in coordinating this event.

MELLOR: Well I would say most everything including the political line, I went first to Bob Schulz and got his recommendation as to where to go. But I would apprise him of everything that was coming in and going through. And then, secondarily, I would talk to Harry Darby on the national scale. If it were a Kansas thing I would talk to Arn. And there was never any problem.

SOAPES: It was a very smooth planning and--

MELLOR: Well there were always the famous little hitchups that occur.

[Interruption]

MELLOR: There is an item of smoothness of planning that wasn't really anticipated. Everything else went off very, very well and we got everybody picked up at the appointed time. We had the traffic stopped where it should be stopped. We had everybody at the right place at the right time in advance of when the actual platform people were to be there so that there wouldn't be any delay. We had it all down to a gnat's eyebrow. And the last car pulled out from in front of the hotel, which was by the office, and I sort of sat down listening to the patrol systems service that we had in our office. And I turned the volume down and it almost seemed quiet after days of bedlam. And I was just sitting there so relaxed and easy and all of a sudden I looked around and my God, the cornerstone box that Ike was to put in the cornerstone and lay was there on the desk behind me.

SOAPES: Oh, my!



MELLOR: Nobody would have anticipated that.

SOAPES: This is the cornerstone box for the museum.

MELLOR: At the museum. He was to come lay the cornerstone. Before it was actually cemented, they were to put this box in there with all these beautiful little items that someday will be opened. And of the items that I insisted should go in there was this National

Geographic insignia and decorations of the armed forces, and there were several other items in the box of course. But this I felt was emblematic of what we were trying to do for armed forces. And here were all of their insignia in color and beautifully designed by the National Geographic as only they can do. And so I picked up the mike from the highway patrol and I called for the local man, Tom Nold, who lived in Abilene. He has since become a judge of the judicial court there in the county, in the county building. And I called for Tom Nold and he answered and said, "What's your problem?" And I told him what it was and I said, "I am coming around you by way of Brady Street," which was clear on the east side of town. "I'll go north and I'll come around on Brady Street and I'll come in as I know how to get there from the Santa Fe tracks."

[Interruption]



MELLOR: Well Tom then, of course, supplied the information that I would be speeding up in my little red Chevrolet and, if there was any need to delay the proceedings of the ceremonies, that I would be there as quickly as I could make my way in the back-road effort. And so I did get there and I came swishing through and Tom met me at the tracks and whisked me through the crowds that were at the back, because the train was lined up along the Santa Fe tracks at the back and they had Secret Service and everybody out. I knew all of them by then anyway--they probably would have let me through--but some of the military guard probably would not have, because they were Fort Riley and they didn't know me. They were on special duty

and so on. So I got there in time to hand the box that was to be put into the cornerstone up to the platform just in the nick of time. And I had not planned to be at the ceremony at all. But that was the cornerstone laying.

Now when we came to the 1952, shall I say, kick-off for the presidential campaign, everything went well except that they forgot the raincoats. And it poured and it poured and thundered and lightnined and it was miserable. Again, I was too tired to fight my way in and out, and I was holding forth in the office, which again was the almost official headquarters because you could not get in and out of the hotel where the Chamber of Commerce was. And they intended to use that as the office for the affair, but it was not accessible because the Eisenhowers were staying there. The residents and those with passes could come in. And so I had to send the raincoats out with one of the Secret Service fellows who was getting on to the last courier car, and the parade had already gone out ahead of him and I had to send the raincoats out with him. So there were little things that happened, but it was a fascinating time.

The hotel set up the banquet room for the press headquarters and there was so much machinery in there and so much electrical equipment that six weeks it took them to put it in, and a half day it was gone after they'd left. And as they all had gone out of town and the press has departed on the train, for the most part, or in their automobiles, I went up to see how clean-up was coming along. And up there on top of one of the immense barrels of paper and scraps of



wadded paper and half typewritten and so on, like press room could get on occasion, working press room, on top of one of the barrels was a list that looked rather interesting and so I picked it up. It contained the handwritten sign-in of each of the correspondents, the city they were from, and the representation that they were covering. And there are fantastic names on here from all over the world, again, many of whom are now dead. We had editors of newspapers. William Randolph Hearst, Jr. has signed in on his own. The chairman of the board of the Chicago Sun-Times signed in on his own; the NBC people, Bob Considine, CBS, Pathe News, you name it. Everybody who was anybody was here in Abilene in June of 1952 for this kick-off. And here's one, Ed Murrow.

SOAPES: That's one of the giants of the journalism field.



MELLOR: I had gotten to meet practically all of them at one time or another, and many of them were very kindly disposed because of some of the things that we did which they considered extra courtesies, which actually I felt weren't extra courtesies. They were ways of making their job easier and just being plain courteous and helpful, and it was not extra in any way. But I had gone to the trouble of making up advance sheets with Hank [Henry B.] Jameson on what would be where, and the hours, if it were necessary, to have hours in conjunction with some of our eating establishments, how to get there, the items of interest on a photographic tour, and an outline of the city on how to get to these various spots. I'd put a lot of work in it before I took it over to Hank and he said, "That's a hell of an

idea; we'll print it." And so they had an advance press situation that hadn't been intended, just because I thought, in anticipation of their questions, it would be helpful.

SOAPES: Wasn't there a session in the theater?



MELLOR: Yes, that was the next morning or, yes, that was following the late afternoon presentation. And in riding around from the hotel around up to the corner, across the block, and the little half block in again to the theater, the Plaza Theater, Milton and Ike and Emmett were in the car. And Jim Stack, no he wasn't, it wasn't Jim Stack, it was--wasn't Bob Schulz, but it was one of the aides, and Sam Heller. And Amos Shivers drove the vehicle. He was the Shivers Motor Company and he provided the vehicle that was used. And going around that little short block somebody said, in an off-hand manner, and I think it was reported to me by Emmett as Sam saying, "Milton, when are you going to run?" or "What are you going to run for? President of the United States after Ike gets through?"

And he said, "No way!" Words to this effect, that there's only going to be one Eisenhower who is President and that's--if he's nominated, he'll be elected--that'll be Ike."

And Ike said, "They really are putting up the wrong man. Milton is much smarter than I, and he would make an excellent President."

And his, shall I say compliment, to his brother was really well meant. He was sincere. He had that much respect for Milton and his

abilities. Milton was a very fine gentleman. Well it wasn't too long after that that Milton called, oh, it might have been the next year, '53. I may be wrong in the year, but Milton called Emmett and I was on the phone. I'm sure Milton knew it. And it was about six thirty in the evening. And I took the call and said, "Yes, he's here." And Emmet said to stay on the line. And I stayed on the line.

And Milton said, "Emmett, I'm calling you among the first because I believe you'll tell me truthfully and sincerely your belief. What do you think if I decided to run for governor of the state? Would I have any difficulty? Would I have any problems?"

And of course Emmett was almost well in his cups at the time but he was still thinking and able to report. And he said, "Well that's sort of a surprise. Give me a minute here to think of this." And he got off the phone and he said, "Mabel, come in here and listen to it here." So I went into the middle office, or the inner office, and listened and he said, when I was coming in, said, "What do you think of this?"

And I said, "I think he would be grand, great and glorious except that he's too sensitive a man to take the beating that a politician has to take, and I would advise him, no."

Those are the words that Emmett used when he came back on, only he said, "Yes, but--" you know. In that order that "You would not have any problem being elected but the abuse a politician has to take and the--you're not open to that kind of thing. An educator isn't a politician ordinarily and it's a far different field and a



far different world. And you'll have to deal with a different grade of people than you're used to dealing with." And so he took it from there and told him, "Don't run."

SOAPES: The Kansas Republicans were wanting--



MELLOR: The Kansas Republicans had been asking him to run and wanting him to be governor while his brother was President--they could get so much done for Kansas. And we went into it later at a time when Milton came down on a Sunday afternoon when I was present then and he knew that I knew the conversation. And I think it was still that same week. And Milton said, "Well, in a way it disappointed me that you had come to that conclusion because I was a little excited about the thought and quite complimented by the idea and I thought it might have some merit." But he said, "You've been so outspoken and so frank, and I haven't gotten that from a lot of other people that I've called, that I've weighted it pro and con and you're right. I would not want to have my family subjected to the kind of scrutiny that they're subjected to in this day and age." He said, "Not that I have anything to hide. I don't. But you answer rumors and innuendos and the air is never cleared for anybody after they have run for public office." He said, "I have the same background and upbringing that they touted for Ike as President with honesty and integrity in all of my dealings, but this is not a platform that I want to defend."

SOAPES: That's an interesting story that I hadn't heard any place

else.

MELLOR: The fact that I really never would become associated with the foundation as an officer, assistant secretary, or an assistant anything, or as an outright secretary, I think I was privy to more happenings because they knew that mine was not an interest that was because of a name connected with it. There were lots of times that, as brash as I was, I am not at all surprised that on occasion I gained no friends but I wielded influence. It was because of the feeling I had that had been prompted by so many meetings and so many times in conversation with the Eisenhowers themselves, that their feeling was that this must be of the community and the community had to protect it for its own self as well as for the Eisenhowers, that it must not be something that is built by outsiders and managed by outsiders because it will not be in keeping with the character of the people who knew us and the people we know and the people that we are. And this is why they wanted a particular, shall I say, top-heavy group of Abileneites on any managing board. We had an array of names across the nation, but they never got top-heavy across the nation. You'll notice that on every occasion the Abilene group outnumbered, always, for a majority decision if it ever came to a split. And there were times it would have come to a split. Ben Fairless came in with the invitation from Harry Darby. Ben Fairless and Harry Darby were apparently on the Rock Island Railroad board together. And Ben Fairless made a trip out, and he could see all manner of things that could be done. If we would permit a U.S. Steel emblem on the



printing, they would turn their print shop upside down to produce for us. We couldn't do that. That would not be reflective of the character. And yet Sam was of the opinion that there should be some way that we should be able to do that and turn it to our advantage. And that was again where Sam and I differed, vocally, in principle. And I liked Ben Fairless; he was another Irish-looking fellow. But when he turned stern you knew that he was the chairman of the board of U.S. Steel and he might as well have been made of steel. He had a very steely look when he really got crossed to it.

SOAPES: This leads me into my next question on the last subject I wanted to take up with you. Eisenhower is inaugurated in January, 1953. When's the first mention you remember regarding the presidential library?

MELLOR: I would say it was in July of 1952, and the first mention of it was by a backdoor again. One of the things that bugged me in going to high school and being taught history by Earl Endacott was the thoroughness with which we had permitted our government to be historically recorded on the judicial side as well as the congressional side with the Congressional Record and the judicial things that are handed down in a formal manner. But never had we ever had the third side which was a complete round of government to report on. And in civics this really bugged me. So one of the people I talked to about this was our fourth congressional district congressman, Ed Rees, who was a personal friend of my aunt and uncle, but he didn't know the connection that I had with them or they with me. And that was Charley



and Jean Reeser, and they lived down by Emporia where Ed Rees lived. And I had talked to Governor Schoeppel as governor about, "Well, we don't have a rounded situation, but we didn't have a presidential candidate that year either." I talked to Ed Rees about it in the congressional district election reporting system in the election of November of the previous year. I said, "It looks like we're going to have a candidate from Abilene." And see I was still in the inner circles of the Republican Central Committee. And we talked about it limitedly, about what could we do about start preserving some additional history. We might need another building. Ed Rees went off kind of scratching his head like, "Well, yeah, that's something new." It turned out that Ed Rees and Carlson finally got together, and Ed Rees had been prompted by my aunt and uncle in personal visits down in Emporia, and he said, "Somebody talked to me about that idea once before."

And they said, "Well, don't you think it's time to get moving on that idea. Something's going to have to be established and it's going to have to be on a national scale because it can't be just on a Kansas scale of preserving the presidential papers wherever the man happened to be from."

So that started some of the ball rolling about a presidential library, and it took off by coming home to us. Ed Rees apparently took the idea to Washington with him and eventually we heard through Frank Carlson, Senator Carlson, about the fact that we have a probable President but we don't have a vehicle by which we can save the papers.



I'd been in touch with Wayne Grover of the National Archives and Records Section of General Services Administration: "How do you preserve papers of this nature and how do you manage them? And he said, "We don't; we would like to." Well Wayne Grover worked very hard on getting up the bill that finally passed to make it possible for any President any time in the future and to cover all of those in the past, if they were still available, which covered Harry Truman and his library at Independence. And the bipartisan bill actually went from Ed Rees forward in Washington, then came back to us. Matt Guilfoyle, who had been the senior partner of the law firm there in Abilene, Matt Guilfoyle had been in on some of the discussion early of how extensive a museum must we build to cover the fact if Ike's papers are preserved there if he becomes President. And the idea had sprung in various places, and it was Wayne Grover who really brought it to fruition because he was extremely interested in establishing that arm.

SOAPES: Of course 1955, the act was passed, and in the few minutes we've got left on this tape, did fund raising begin immediately then for the building?

MELLOR: Yes, it did. From the time Ike became President we started on that. I had already given my resignation. I said, "When we reach the end of the museum building and the needs for fund raising for that particular thing is passed, I am no longer going to continue on the same kind of basis that I've been working, because I had had a stroke by then and it was telling on me at a young age that things were



really pressing and I was doing far too much physically than I had strength for. So I wanted to, shall I say, retire and go to Europe and see the places that I'd been reading and writing and labeling about and doing all of the things for the museum about in the areas, and that's what I did. I started out to go for a year. I spent all my money in sixteen months, didn't have enough money, felt I hadn't seen all I wanted to see so I went to work for the Air Force in a non-appropriated fund job and moved around and stayed for several years. Saw thirty-nine countries. All prompted by being associated with the items of major interest that came into the museum. I wanted to see the peoples and the kinds of peoples that presented these things in gratitude and it was a great thing.



In retrospect, at one time I was offered a job, not only in the museum but in the library, and I thought perhaps I really would like to take it; I might contribute something more. And then I know how I am, that if I get interested I totally obliterate living for the benefit of the project that's so fascinating. And knowing my total dedication to the foundation, as it was, and I would probably continue with it under government circumstances, that I felt I didn't have any business back there, working like a silly--I worked all these years gratuitously. I had one of the first letters that Ike wrote in the White House after being President, January 20th, was to me in thanks. And I cherish it.

[Interruption]

SOAPES: You were going to tell me the story about going to the Doud home in Denver to pick up items.

MELLOR: Right. Mrs. Doud lived at 750 Lafayette in Denver, and it was a brick house with a porch swing on it, large brick house. Very nice, sturdy, Denver-style upper class residence. And she had called. I talked to her at least six weeks before we finally arranged to make the trip. And since Ike had become President, she was more and more concerned about the items that she had in her possession that somebody might want. And we didn't get the significance of this until we arranged to go out. I went out with Emmett Graham and Earl Endacott, and we took three cars and we went down the highway and arrived and checked in and so on. And then we had to check in with the Secret Service. And the Secret Service, two gentlemen at the time were very friendly but they kept us out on the porch until they were certain that we were who we said we were. And that took about twenty minutes of questioning and answers, right answers, and checking and so on. And finally we got to go into the house and meet Mrs. Doud and she was a very gracious, vocal person, and it was fun to meet her. And she was having fun about it and was very pleased and proud that we were going to take these items that she had in her basement back to Abilene with us. Her daughter, Mike Gordon, is it Gordon? [Moore] Anyway, Mike was there and we met Mike, Mamie's sister and she wasn't as happy to see us as Mrs. Doud.

Well, we finally got the amenities over with and some story to Mrs. Doud about what we were planning and we brought her some literature



and so on, and she was aware of part of it. She was not aware of other parts of it. And she became very, very friendly with us and said, "Well, now I guess it's time to go down to the basement." Our basement at home was sort of a dusty furnace room and I don't know what I expected, but her's was just like an upstairs family living room with a fireplace and the whole thing. And in the side of the brick wall, in the fireplace, was a safe, in the center of the room. She opened the safe and we all stood back and it was quite a sizeable safe; it was almost walk-in size. And Mrs. Doud said, "You're the smallest," to me, "Why don't you step in here and I'll show you what there is and I'll give you these paper things and then the fellows can come in when we go out and they can pick up these other items." Well she had the certificates from Ike's promotions for the first thing, paper items. She had uniforms, both Ike's and John's. She had days of the Philippines materials there. She had various and sundry things that she was showing to me and giving to me and I was passing out for them to stack in the boxes and so on. She finally came to two little boxes that were there, sort of like jewel cases. And she said, "Now this will startle you. This is one of the things that I want to get out of my house because we are not safe as long as these particular items are here. We have been told that due to the Cold War the Russians want their Order of Suvorov and their Order of Victory medal and the Russian flag that was carried into Berlin that was given to Ike. They want it back and they'll get it by any means." And she said, "I've been afraid to have them stored



here."

Well by that time our eyes were open and ears pricked up, too. The Order of Victory as you know is seventy-one diamonds and numerous rubies and a gorgeous thing and in platinum. If it were melted down and the rest of the items sold, it would turn out to be a twenty-five thousand dollar medal even in those days, in the '50s. I don't know what it would be today if platinum's gone up and diamonds and so on.

Then she had the two little booklets for the Moscow subway that were given to him for his lifetime use. And she had Marshal Zhukov's dagger. These items were the ones that she really wanted to get out. So we packed them in the three cars and we took two additional cars, one in front and one behind without anything that were manned by the Secret Service to be sure that we got back to Abilene, and we drove the five hundred miles from Denver at night. We called ahead when we got to Hays, called ahead to Sam Heller who was supposed to have the vault open at the United Trust Company and he went down and had the vault open, and it was a great big box deal which everything would fit in. But when he found out what they were and the story behind the Russians wanting them back, he said he couldn't accept the responsibility for the trust company in receiving the goods. And they had the only big storage boxes in a vault that were in Abilene. None of the banks had one big enough. So what were we to do? We went over to our office which was across the street. It was about four-thirty in the morning. We got the people outside where we could see the cars and see that nothing was being taken or moved



or anything. Nobody was about. And we sat and discussed it til five thirty in the morning. And I finally said, "Well, here are the keys to my car. You can unlock it and move it wherever you want to; I'm going home and go to bed." And I had no sooner gotten upstairs on my seventh floor apartment at the hotel than the telephone rang and Emmett said, "One of the Secret Service men has suggested perhaps you could keep it. That you're the least likely suspect of having this material of anybody."

I said, "Well I don't have any facilities for protecting it. I live in an open manner. I've got a screen door that's usually the only thing between the hallway and the apartment. And of course I've got Jill, the little toy terrier dog that weighs about ten pounds who lets everybody know when there's a stranger on the floor."

And he said, "That's exactly what we're talking about."

So I said, "All right. I'll put them up on the closet shelf or wherever you tell me." And they came up and they looked and they decided that a little closet inside to the left behind the kitchen was a very regular clothes-size, small closet. There was a high shelf and it was deep and we wrapped everything in the Kansas City Star newspaper for that day so that we would disguise all the packages. And it stayed up there in storage until they displayed it in the museum, and it was open on November 11 for that display purpose because that was when Ike came out to dedicate it.

Meantime the Cold War was still on. The Truman Administration said no way could we display it because they were items of contention and should not be controversially in the Eisenhower Museum. And



they could not help us protect them if they were there. So we called back one more time and didn't get an answer but they said they would get us an answer from the President. Since we had gone around the secretary of state we were to get an answer from the President. And I got a call at about ten o'clock in the morning, our time, from the White House in Washington and it was Matt Conley. And he introduced himself, and I was there all by myself because everybody was down at the museum that was getting ready to open. I was covering the office situation when the--

SOAPES: This is November 11, '5--

MELLOR: Was it '52 when the--

SOAPES: '52 is the election year.



MELLOR: Well it was when they dedicated the museum and Ike and the family came out, and I think we opened it in April and the dedication was in November.

SOAPES: The museum opening was '54 which was while Eisenhower was President; that would have been after Truman.

MELLOR: '54, okay. But we got the answer from Matt Conley.

SOAPES: Okay, so that would mean it would be '52 or earlier.

MELLOR: Yes, '52 or earlier. "Yes, you can display this," he was

saying, "the President has said that the Cold War shouldn't matter in this." Ike didn't give the answer, so it was before that. "Yes you can display."

And about that time another voice came on the line and he said, "Who's this?" And I said who I was and that I was taking the message for the secretary of the foundation and he said, "This is Harry Truman. Those things were given to Ike for another purpose and another reason than the Cold War that's going on, and they should be on display to the American people. You tell them I said it's okay." [Laughter] And with that we had an okay to display. So we ordered cases for them. And in order to get them on display, we had no backing material for these things when they came up for display. Couldn't find black velvet which the decorator wanted to use. So I brought a black velvet, long skirt down of my own and we cut it up and we used that for the backing material on which all these fancy items were displayed the first day that they were on display. And they stayed there until you redid the museum, which by the way is like a government museum now instead of the simple character that it started out to be. It's beautifully done, but it's not in the chronological manner that we were charged to give it during Ike's lifetime.

