

Interviewee: Ernest May

Interviewer: David McComb

May 27, 1969, Waggoner Bldg., 8th & Houston, Ft. Worth, Texas

Mc: Let me identify the tape first. This is an interview with Mr. Ernest May. I'm in his law office in Fort Worth, Texas. The date is May 27, 1969. It's 2:20 in the afternoon, and my name is David McComb.

First of all, I'd like to know something about you and your background. Where were you born?

M: I was born in Navarro County, Texas, on December 16, 1898.

Mc: When did you get to Weatherford?

M: 1903. I got to Parker County in 1903.

Mc: Where did you get your college education?

M: At the University of Texas.

Mc: And you went through law school there?

M: Yes.

Mc: When did you graduate?

M: 1920.

Mc: In Fort Worth?

M: In Fort Worth, yes.

Mc: You have been practicing law here ever since?

M: Well, with intermissions. I was Assistant Attorney General of Texas from 1925 to 1927. I was in the Army in World War II, and was a little more than two years in the European theater.

Mc: But in between that you were practicing law here?

M: Yes.

Mc: Was this all with your own law firm?

M: Well, I began as an employee of the firm of Goree, O'dell, and Allen.

Judge Frank Culver and I were partners for a short time before he was appointed district judge in 1928. Since then I have been by myself.

Mc: When did you first get an interest in politics?

M: Oh, when I was a kid--very early.

Mc: You were raised to it.

M: Very early. I remember particularly the state campaigns beginning in 1910.

Mc: Did you have any connection with Sam Rayburn?

M: No, sir. I knew him, but that's all.

Mc: What kind of connection have you had with Lyndon Johnson?

M: Oh, none. I met Mr. Johnson a long time ago. I voted against him and for him, and that's about it.

Mc: Did you ever do any campaigning for him?

M: No, sir, I think not.

Mc: Did you do any campaigning for anybody else?

M: Running against him?

Mc: Yes.

M: In 1948--that's when he was first elected to the Senate--

Mc: That's right.

M: I was for George Petty in the first primary. George Petty was a class-mate of mine, and a very dear friend from Houston. And I did campaign a little, very ineffectively, for George.

Mc: And that was the race that Johnson had with Coke Stevenson?

M: Yes, that's the one he got the "landslide" in--eighty-seven votes--in second primary.

Mc: Do you remember any of the issues of that campaign?

M: No, I really don't. In fact, there weren't any issues so far as I could see.

Mc: Just run on personality?

M: Everybody ran on personality, yes.

Mc: And your man didn't do too well.

M: No, sir, he ran a bad third.

Mc: Do you remember any speeches that Petty gave against Johnson, or anything like that?

M: No, I never heard him speak against Johnson. In fact, he supported Johnson in the second primary, as I remember. He told me he would.

Mc: Did you participate in any other campaigns of the period?

M: None in which Mr. Johnson was interested. I was a roommate of Dan Moody's, best man at his wedding. His campaigns I always took part in. But his last successful campaign was in '28, and then he ran again--ran for the Senate in '42 and was defeated--ran third.

Mc: Have you had any connection with John Connally?

M: No, sir.

Mc: Have you had any participation in national politics?

M: Well, I guess you might say so. I was strong for Stevenson, and strong for Kennedy.

Mc: Did you do any campaigning for Stevenson in Texas during--?

M: I don't recall that I did, no, sir.

Mc: I remember Allan Shivers was opposed to Stevenson.

M: Yes, sir, I remember that.

Mc: Did you have anything to do with that fight between Rayburn and Shivers over control of the State in 1956?

M: No, sir. Now in '48, there was some sort of fight, and I represented the State Democratic Executive Committee in the lawsuit that was fought on to the Supreme Court in the case of Carter vs. Tomlinson. I won that case--I might as well tell about one that I won.

Mc: Good.

M: I won it in the Supreme Court. I lost it in the District Court and the Court of Civil Appeals.

Mc: Did you have anything to do with the hearings that came up in regard to Stevenson and Johnson on the votes?

M: No, I went before the committee representing the Carter delegation. The committee turned us down, I think, but the convention sat our delegation.

Mc: Did you have any great difficulty persuading people to your point of view?

M: Oh, yes. In this county it was impossible.

Mc: What was the difficulty here?

M: This county had turned against Roosevelt--turned against the New Deal. And there was a great deal of bitterness. I was surprised. I had been in Europe for two or three years, and I was surprised when I came home to find how much bitterness there was among these people. All of them had been good friends of mine and I hope continued to be good friends of mine, but they were very bitter at each other.

Mc: Why was that?

M: I never knew. It was the matter of the New Deal, I think--a good deal of unhappiness about the developments under Roosevelt.

Mc: Lyndon Johnson was sort of a Roosevelt man.

M: Yes.

Mc: Therefore he must have had trouble in this county.

M: I don't remember how this county went in that election in '48. I don't remember whether it went for Stevenson or Johnson.

Mc: Well, have I fairly well covered or touched on any of the political connections you had in this period of time?

M: I expect so, yes, sir.

Mc: I have nothing else to ask you unless you--

M: I have no observations of my own. Thank you very much.

Mc: Thank you.

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