

INTERVIEWEE: EMMA GUFFY MILLER

INTERVIEWER: DAVID G. MC COMB

February 12, 1969 (please note in records and lead lines of interview  
that Emma Guffy Miller was 94 at time of interview)

Mc: Let me ask you first something about your own background.

M: My own background is very political.

Mc: That's what I understand.

M: I come from a family that raised liberty poles for Jefferson. And we first fought Indians. [We] came over to this country in 1738 to Philadelphia. Then we went into Lancaster County for a little while, and then we crossed the mountains about the end--some of our ancestors were there first--but we crossed the mountains, I think, at the end of the French and Indian War. There were still Indians out there, and we fought Indians. Then we fought with the British to oust the French, you see, from Pittsburg. Then we turned in and fought the British till we won our freedom. I had a number of ancestors in the Revolutionary War. So we began then as soon as Jefferson became very popular. Washington was okay. They didn't like Adams, and so they raised liberty poles for Jefferson. Then when the Whigs started, they became of course then the Democratic Party--the Republican-Democrats, it was called then. And they fought the Whigs until the Whigs were finished. And we've been fighting Republicans now ever since.

Mc: Are you related to Joseph Guffy?

M: Who was in the Senate?

Mc: Yes.

M: Oh yes, he's my brother.

Mc: He's your brother.

M: Yes.

Mc: Then you do come from a political family.

M: And my father was the county leader in Old Westmoreland. We always speak of it as Old Westmoreland. That was the first county west of Bedford, Pennsylvania.

And I had an uncle, James M. Guffy. They called him Colonel. We say he was the first Kentucky Colonel. But really that is very interesting. I found a letter from him to his father. When he was twenty years old, he went down to Louisville, Kentucky, and took a position in the Louisville Nashville Railroad. He had had a business education of some sort, as they had as early as that. He was only twenty at the time. He went home for his mother's funeral in 1860 or '61. And he wrote his father after he got back. That was my grandfather, and of course he was in politics. Although he didn't run for office, he just ran--. They elected Democrats wherever they were. And so he said, "Don't think there isn't going to be a war." He said, "They're drilling here all the time, and I have been offered a commission." And he said, "I am busy, but I got out of it by telling them I was physically unable." Well, he was a slight man. He was tall, but he was slight. But he lived to be ninety-two. But he didn't want to fight.

He was always then known as Colonel Guffy. And I said to my father once, "Where in the world did Uncle Jim get that 'Colonel' tacked on him?"

"Oh," Father said, "some place down south," and just passed it off. And it was this letter now that showed that that's what they wanted him

to do. Oh, he would have made a dashing figure in a uniform!

Mc: You went to your first convention in 1924?

M: '24, and I've been at every one since.

Mc: I understand that you were nominated for the Presidency.

M: I was. The only woman who has ever been nominated for the Presidency by a legal party. There have been women that got themselves up by some other party. Belva Lockwood (?) was one, and I can't think of the other one, but she was backed by Mrs. Leslie. There used to be a Leslie's Weekly. But I'm the only one that was ever nominated for President at a great convention, you know.

Mc: This was 1924:

M: That was 1924. I was there voting for Al Smith.

Mc: There was a big fight--

M: Oh, my! We had one hundred and three ballots. Jim Farley and I were both at the last convention, and Jim and I were the only ones that were present at the 1924 convention. Whether there are any other delegates living, we don't know.

Mc: There was talk in 1924 that that convention would be the last for the Democratic party--that the party would just fall apart.

M: You see, what we were trying to do was to kill the Ku Klux Klan; and forty years later, we did put a resolution in. It still exists, of course, down in Georgia and, of course, I suppose Mississippi and Alabama.

Mc: Who nominated you for the Presidency?

M: A young man from Massachusetts. He had been an Underwood supporter, I believe--or a McAdoo. They wanted him to change over to Smith.

"Well," he said, "before I do that, I'm going to vote for that woman that seconded Smith because she made the best speech in the convention." So that's how I was nominated. But I've forgotten his name.

And then Will Rogers--do you know who he was?

Mc: Yes.

M: And then Will Rogers got half a vote. Will and I met at the White House later in the Roosevelt Administration, but at that time we laughed at each other and said we'd combine our votes and maybe one of us could be nominated.

Mc: How many votes did you get?

M: Just the one, but he only got half a vote. I was ahead of Will. He was a great comedian.

Mc: Was that 1924 convention more difficult than the one in 1968?

M: Oh, I would say it was. I would say it was much more difficult. People got very angry at times, lost their tempers. The Texas delegation sat directly in front of us--the Pennsylvania delegation--and they were split. One day a man came up talking to the man who was anti-McAdoo, and my brother said, "You see that man there?"

And I said, "Yes."

He said, "He's a coming Democrat all right. His name is Garner."

It was John Garner. That was the first time I ever saw John Garner.

Mc: When did you first meet Lyndon Johnson?

M: I think it was when--I know I met Mrs. Johnson and the girls; they were very young--the day that Lyndon was voted on as the leader in the Senate. You know how close that was? The New York candidate--was it Javits? We were in the gallery. Javits was outside the gallery behind

the door with a resignation in his pocket for the office he was holding in New York State, so that if Johnson didn't win, he would have presented the resignation and voted. You see, that would have given the Republicans the majority. The exciting moment came when Lausche's, of Ohio name was called. You never could tell which way Lausche was going to vote. And those that were for Johnson--I forget how the resolution worded--had to vote no, and Lausche voted no. And we all broke into applause, which was not the thing to do, but that put Johnson in the chair.

Mc: Where were you? Were you in the gallery?

M: I was in the gallery, and that's where I first saw Mrs. Johnson and the girls, and I spoke to them afterwards and met them. Then I met him shortly after that.

Mc: What did he say to you? Do you remember?

M: What did he say to me?

Mc: Yes.

M: I don't remember very well. I think he knew though that I had voted for him. I'm sure he did. He said something to thank me, yes. He thanked Pennsylvania for its support, you see, because my brother, you see, was the leader in Pennsylvania then.

Mc: Did you know Lyndon Johnson when he worked for the National Youth Administration?

M: I didn't know him then, and I don't know why we didn't meet because I was so prominent in Pennsylvania in the National Youth Administration. But it just happened that when we came to Washington at various times, that we didn't happen to meet. I said afterwards, "Well, I thought that work I did, Bill, was about the best I've ever done." I think the

National Youth Administration was an excellent idea, and we did a great deal of good right at home in my village at Slippery Rock, Pennsylvania. I said afterwards, "Well, I didn't meet Lyndon Johnson at that time, but I realized from his later accomplishments what he must have done then for the National Youth Administration in Texas."

Mc: Were you impressed with Lyndon Johnson's ability?

M: His ability?

Mc: Yes.

M: I certainly was from the moment he went in, yes.

Mc: What impressed you the most about Lyndon Johnson?

M: The thing I remember is that I'm an advocate of the Equal Rights Amendment, and it came up for a vote one day. And Senator--the old man that just died from Arizona--

Mc: Yes, I know who you're talking about.

M: Well, I'll think of his name in a moment. He was always opposed to us. He had a resolution that killed the amendment, and every time it came up for a vote, he would bring up that amendment.

He brought it up one day. I think it was quite a surprise at the time--the moment he did it. I suppose he did it just because he was going to take the advocates off their feet. And Johnson left the chair and just disappeared. And I don't know who took the chair, but at any rate, he didn't get a vote that time; or if he did, it didn't amount to anything.

Mc: But you liked Lyndon Johnson?

M: Oh very much, very much!

Mc: Do you remember anything about Lyndon Johnson at the 1956 convention?

M: That was when we nominated Stevenson. I don't remember very well. I

remember Alben Barkley very well at that convention. I was for Stevenson, and I think Johnson was--yes, I know he was. But I don't remember whether he nominated or seconded Stevenson or not.

Mc: Do you remember the fight for the Vice Presidency between John F. Kennedy and Kefauver?

M: Oh yes, I did. And Pennsylvania went--at least the majority of us--went for Kefauver, yes.

Mc: Do you remember the Texas delegation voting for Kennedy?

M: I think they did. And Kennedy had some votes in the Pennsylvania delegation, but Kefauver had the majority. I recall at that time a young delegate from Iowa came up to us. Now I mean the chairman who was Mr. Lawrence Slater, Governor of Pennsylvania, and the national committeeman--I think it was George Leader, who was later governor, and myself. We were sitting there right together in the front row. And this young man from Iowa came up and he said, "Don't vote for Kennedy. We have a chance to elect a Congressman in my district which will be a rare thing. But if we put Kennedy on the ticket, the bigots--the anti-Catholics--will kill our chance for our Congressman." Well, we had already made up our minds for Kefauver. But I was thankful later that Kennedy did break that prejudice down.

Mc: This was in 1960?

M: Yes, in 1960. It took some time.

Mc: Was the Pennsylvania delegation for Kennedy in 1960?

M: Some were, and some weren't.

Oh! in 1960! I was for Johnson, because I knew him and admired him. We were on the same side of everything. The rest of the delegation--

I mean, all but four, as I recall--were for Kennedy, and they tried to get me to change to Kennedy. I said, "No, I'm going to vote for Johnson. If Kennedy gets it on the first ballot, I'll vote to be made unanimous."

So someone went to Barr, our leader then, this present mayor of Pittsburg, and said, "Can't you do anything with Emma Guffy Miller? She refuses to come over."

And he said, "Well, when Emma Guffy Miller makes up her mind, nobody can change it." And so I was one of the four, or three and-a-half, I forget which it was--not more than four--who voted for Johnson on the first ballot.

Mc: Were you disappointed that he did not win the Presidential nomination?

M: I was disappointed, but when another man gets such an overwhelming vote, you can't do anything but follow the party. I worked very hard for Kennedy then in the election. And Pennsylvania did a good job, too, that time.

Mc: Were you happy to see Johnson become Vice President?

M: Yes, I was. I thought it was a very fortunate thing that we had put Johnson as Vice President on the ticket.

Mc: Do you know if Harry Truman supported Johnson in 1960?

M: In 1960, yes, he did. They were alike in many respects, those two men.

Mc: How so?

M: And I'm very much amused. Truman went out of office with a lot of people saying he didn't amount to anything. Now, he's considered among the great Presidents. The same thing is going to happen about Johnson.

Mc: You went to the 1964 convention.

M: Oh yes, I've been to them all.



Mc: Do you remember what Lyndon Johnson did in 1964 about those people from Mississippi that wanted to sit in the convention, but were not delegates?

M: Didn't he do the same as Governor Ross, was he for that compromise?

Mc: Yes.

M: That's what I thought. I thought they made a very happy solution that day. A lot of people didn't like it, but--I won't say a lot of people, but some people thought it shouldn't be done. But I thought if they hadn't done that, we'd have had quite a turmoil.

Mc: Were you in favor of Hubert Humphrey as Vice President?

M: Oh yes, I was in favor of him.

Mc: Why was that?

M: I thought he was able and was experienced.

Mc: Had you met Humphrey earlier?

M: Yes, I had met him. I hadn't had any very close contacts with him, but I had seen enough of him. And being here in Washington in the winter, as I have been for a number of years, I was able to find out more about him. The people who don't follow Washington in the papers, we'll say--because I consider the Washington Post an excellent paper, the New York Times and the Pittsburgh Gazette--Post Gazette is a very good paper too. However, if you read a Washington paper, you'll find out a good deal that you don't unless you do read a Washington paper. Of course, as national committeewoman I meet people from all over the country and am in and out of the headquarters and meeting people. So I get to know a great deal about the various Senators--both Republicans and Democrats.

Mc: Do you think Johnson could have won an election in 1968?

M: I think he'd have won hands down.

Mc: Do you? Why?

M: Because he did so much for education and welfare and the things that the ordinary person benefits by. I don't know whether Wall Street liked him or not, but that didn't make a difference. I think he could have won easily.

Mc: Would Pennsylvania have voted for Johnson?

M: Oh my, yes! Pennsylvania would have voted for him, just as we did for Humphrey.

Mc: People in Pennsylvania did not mind that Johnson was from the South?

M: No, they didn't mind that at all. That makes no difference with them.

Mc: Were you surprised when Johnson refused to run in 1968?

M: Yes, I was surprised and very much disappointed.

Mc: Why did it surprise you?

M: I had an idea that anybody that had done as good a job as he had and had as many friends as he had would consider running again. Two or three months ago at the White House, I said to Mrs. Johnson: "I have one thing against the President."

And she said, "Why, what?"

I said, "That he didn't run again."

"Oh," she said, "if you knew what an awful thing it is." And then she went on to elaborate. We just ended up with a laugh.

Mc: Have you often visited in the White House?

M: I've been there several times, yes.

Mc: What did you go to--a dinner or what?

M: I went to receptions, and the meetings of the National Committee. That's the last thing. I can't tell you how many, but the last committee

meeting. And then I was there the day that they unveiled the portraits. They unveiled Mrs. Roosevelt first. I think her portrait was unveiled first. Then later they unveiled FDR's. Then the last time was the committee meeting January 15, I think it was. Of course Mrs. Johnson was there too, but the President made a very nice little talk to the committee.

Mc: Some people have said that Johnson failed to work well with state politics, the Democratic state organizations. Is this true? Such as in Pennsylvania.

M: Oh, you mean Clark. Clark was our Senator.

Mc: With the Democratic party in Pennsylvania.

M: I don't think it was the party. I think that's one of the things that defeated Clark. A lot of Democrats wouldn't vote for Clark, although he was a very good Senator in most ways. But he criticized Johnson, you know, a good deal. And I think they voted for Johnson--I mean they voted for Humphrey; and because Clark had criticized Johnson, and we carried Pennsylvania by over 212,000 for Humphrey. We just put the rest of the States to shame. If one other state had gone, we'd be in the White House again.

Mc: Do you plan to go to the next convention?

M: Well, I'll be ninety-eight at that time. I won't promise.

Mc: This is all the questions I have for you. Do you want to say anything more about Lyndon Johnson?

M: Yes, I do want to say something more about Lyndon Johnson. I think he has been most able. And I know that some of his own party didn't want him to do this or do that, not to send a message on this subject, or advocate

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something; and Lyndon Johnson thought it over and he did what he thought was right. And history will prove now that he was right. That's what I think about him.

Mc: Thank you very much.

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Signed Carroll Miller Jr.

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