

Stewart A. Calhoun, Oral History Interview—2/20/1965
Administrative Information

Creator: Stewart A. Calhoun
Interviewer: William L. Young
Date of Interview: February 20, 1965
Place of Interview: Welch, West Virginia
Length: 21 pages.

Biographical Note

Stewart A. Calhoun was a member of the West Virginia State Democratic Committee and Assistant Prosecuting Attorney of McDowell County. In this interview Calhoun discusses his role as an active supporter for John F. Kennedy (JFK) during the 1960 presidential primary in West Virginia, among other issues.

Access

Open.

Usage Restrictions

According to the deed of gift signed November 9, 1967, copyright of these materials has been assigned to United States Government. Users of these materials are advised to determine the copyright status of any document from which they wish to publish.

Copyright

The copyright law of the United States (Title 17, United States Code) governs the making of photocopies or other reproductions of copyrighted material. Under certain conditions specified in the law, libraries and archives are authorized to furnish a photocopy or other reproduction. One of these specified conditions is that the photocopy or reproduction is not to be “used for any purpose other than private study, scholarship, or research.” If a user makes a request for, or later uses, a photocopy or reproduction for purposes in excesses of “fair use,” that user may be liable for copyright infringement. This institution reserves the right to refuse to accept a copying order if, in its judgment, fulfillment of the order would involve violation of copyright law. The copyright law extends its protection to unpublished works from the moment of creation in a tangible form. Direct your questions concerning copyright to the reference staff.

Transcript of Oral History Interview

These electronic documents were created from transcripts available in the research room of the John F. Kennedy Library. The transcripts were scanned using optical character recognition and the resulting text files were proofread against the original transcripts. Some formatting changes were made. Page numbers are noted where they would have occurred at the bottoms of the pages of the original transcripts. If researchers have any concerns about accuracy, they are encouraged to visit the Library and consult the transcripts and the interview recordings.

Suggested Citation

Stewart A. Calhoun, recorded interview by William L. Young, February 20, 1965, (page number), John F. Kennedy Library Oral History Program.

GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION
NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS SERVICE

Gift of Personal Statement

By Mrs. Stewart A. Calhoun

to the

John Fitzgerald Kennedy Library

In accordance with Sec. 507 of the Federal Property and Administrative Services Act of 1949, as amended (44 U.S.C. 397) and regulations issued thereunder (41 CFR 101-10), I, Mrs. Stewart A. Calhoun, hereinafter referred to as the donor, hereby give, donate, and convey to the United States of America for eventual deposit in the proposed John Fitzgerald Kennedy Library, and for administration therein by the authorities thereof, a tape and transcript of a personal statement approved by me and prepared by Stewart A. Calhoun for the purpose of deposit in the John Fitzgerald Kennedy Library. The gift of this material is made subject to the following terms and conditions:

1. Title to the material transferred hereunder, and all literary property rights, will pass to the United States as of the date of the delivery of this material into the physical custody of the Archivist of the United States.

2. It is the donor's wish to make the material donated to the United States of America by terms of this instrument available for research as soon as it has been deposited in the John Fitzgerald Kennedy Library.

3. A revision of this stipulation governing access to the material for research may be entered into between the donor and the Archivist of the United States, or his designee, if it appears desirable.

4. The material donated to the United States pursuant to the foregoing shall be kept intact permanently in the John Fitzgerald Kennedy Library.

Signed Mrs. Stewart A. Calhoun
Mrs. Stewart A. Calhoun

Date October 20, 1967

Accepted Kenneth H. Danner
Archivist of the United States

Date Nov 9 1967

Stewart A. Calhoun

Table of Contents

<u>Page</u>	<u>Topic</u>
2	McDowell County, West Virginia Democratic Voter League
10	Calhoun's interactions with John F. Kennedy (JFK)
12	Hubert H. Humphrey's campaign organization
14	Effects of JFK's presidency on McDowell Country
18	Press attention to West Virginia during the 1960 primary

Oral History Interview

with

Stewart A. Calhoun

Welch, West Virginia
February 20, 1965

By William L. Young

For the John F. Kennedy Library

YOUNG: This is an interview with Mr. Stewart A. Calhoun of Welch, West Virginia. Mr. Calhoun in 1960 was a member of the State Democratic Committee and Assistant Prosecuting Attorney of McDowell County. At the present time he's Assistant Prosecuting Attorney. Mr. Calhoun, will you tell me just exactly what your role was in the 1960 primary when Senator Kennedy [John F. Kennedy] was a candidate?

CALHOUN: My role was to assist in encouraging as

[-1-]

many voters as I could to support President Kennedy. As far as any other active designation other than a member of an executive committee and assistant prosecuting attorney, I had no special role except I was a member of the McDowell County Democratic Voters League which is a Democratic organization composed largely of a mixed group—Negroes—who work in conjunction with and support of the McDowell County Democratic Organization. In fact, we consider ourselves a part and panel of that organization. The most active role that I played was to contact voters who seemed to be not in line of support of President Kennedy and if possible to sway them to join with us in that support, and, if possible, make them active supporters of President Kennedy. In this work,

[-2-]

I'm very pleased to say, we were very fortunate because President Kennedy was an appealing candidate. He offered a future for the people of this county. At that time we were in serious need of dynamic leadership in Washington.

YOUNG: That's fine. Mr. Calhoun, I wonder if you would go on and just talk in general about any special appeals that the Senator may have made to McDowell County—any promises, anything in his talk with respect to economic recovery—keeping in mind, of course, that the county is largely dependent on the coal industries. Is that correct?

CALHOUN: That's right. That's right. I might say that President Kennedy in his addresses and talks and his whole program centered around the desire to help this county, which, at that time, was in very bad

[-3-]

circumstances as to employment and hope for the future. I think that the determinant factor was that President Kennedy's program offered hope to the people of this county. We were led to believe—and successfully so—that if elected he would give this county the necessary leadership that would put McDowell County back on its feet.

YOUNG: Well, Mr. Calhoun, were those economic difficulties a result of low coal production or automation or both?

CALHOUN: Well, I'd say both. We just needed help and it didn't look like any help was forthcoming at the present time. To most of us who had been there for a long time, it appeared that President Kennedy's program was a godsend to this county and state.

YOUNG: The conditions have often been compared

[-4-]

in the late 1950's with conditions in the 1930's. Do you think this is a valid comparison in terms of depression and that sort of thing?

CALHOUN: I don't think that the conditions in the 50's were as serious as they were in the 30's, but they were of such magnitude that it required some national help in order that the people of this county and state would survive and make some progress. But they were very bad.

YOUNG: Mr. Calhoun, much attention was focused on West Virginia presumably

because of the issue of religion—of the President’s Catholicism. How would you rate this as an issue in McDowell County?

CALHOUN: Frankly, I was apprehensive of that issue myself at first. But as I traveled through the county it was definitely determined that that was no issue of any

[-5-]

magnitude. I think it had very little to do with the outcome of the election because they were impressed with the man.

YOUNG: Were there sermons from the pulpit or was there any act of anti-Catholic campaign against the Senator in McDowell County as far as you could tell?

CALHOUN: As far as I could tell, there was very little. In fact most of the people with whom I had talked would rather not discuss the religious views of the President who had the nomination, but rather the issues as affecting the livelihood and the future of the county.

YOUNG: You said, Mr. Calhoun, that one of your jobs was to convert the wavering to the Senator’s side. As you went about the county talking to those who had not made up their minds, what arguments did you use?

[-6-]

CALHOUN: I used the argument first that Senator Kennedy, at that time, offered hope to this county. His background and his speeches were such that they caused an ordinary person to believe without much persuasion. In fact, we were all looking for help and President Kennedy had a definite program, we thought, that would help us. Once you got it over to whomever you were talking with, you had little or no difficulty.

YOUNG: Mr. Calhoun, among the voters that you contacted, how many do you think were already converted to the Senator’s side and how many did you have to persuade?

CALHOUN: I would say that at the beginning of the campaign there was a good deal for Senator Kennedy and also for Senator Humphrey [Hubert H. Humphrey], but as the campaign matured and progressed then it definitely

[-7-]

appeared that there was a slight majority for President Kennedy. As I say, the people that I

really approached, most of them, had no hard fixed views as to they were going to support except for the fact they wanted somebody that could help them. From the program and the personality of President Kennedy, they just chose him to be the man. You had little difficulty in trying to explain or trying to convert those who had never given it much thought and those who had no definite reasons for being against him. Your interviews were often very successful.

YOUNG: Mr. Calhoun, in your opinion, did the voters distinguish between issues as far as the two candidates were concerned? Did they seem to know that Humphrey stood for "a-b" and Kennedy stood for something else?

[-8-]

CALHOUN: As between the two men, I think that the voters would have easily gone with either one except that President Kennedy's build up, his personality, and his program seemed to have gotten over to the people in much better form than Senator Humphrey. The organizations took sides and there was little or no question as to the outcome.

YOUNG: Mr. Calhoun, both the senators had good records on civil rights. Did civil rights, as such, appear as an issue in the primary at all?

CALHOUN: As far as civil rights was concerned, I don't think that it appeared to issue between the parties. As far as civil rights was concerned, I think they would have trusted either of the parties. But somehow or another it appeared that President Kennedy just made his program a little more dynamic and emphatic to the extent

[-9-]

that they just wanted to go along with it.

YOUNG: You're still talking about the primary.

CALHOUN: Yes.

YOUNG: Okay. Mr. Calhoun, could you say a word about any of your personal contacts with President Kennedy? Do you remember any stories, any anecdotes, any conversations with him?

CALHOUN: I met Senator Kennedy several times at public meetings, particularly the one that he spoke to the people at the Welch Elementary School. My daughter, Carole Calhoun, was with me as were the other members of the family. She took his speech that evening in shorthand and as we were leaving the building and greeting President Kennedy, she mentioned the fact that she had taken his speech

[-10-]

down in shorthand. He seemed very elated and she was happily pleased. They passed a few kind remarks toward each other. She promised to send him a copy. I do not know whether she carried that out or not. I know it was a fine meeting between the two of them.

YOUNG: Mr. Calhoun, were you responsible for helping taking any other visitors through McDowell County that came in on behalf of the Kennedy campaign?

CALHOUN: Being in the position I am as Assistant Prosecuting Attorney, my work was such at that time that I was unable to devote too much time with taking others through the county. I don't recall at this time that I did. As far as local work and the mechanics of the organization, I performed them.

YOUNG: Let's go on then to something else. We

[-11-]

talked a little bit about the Humphrey-Kennedy difference, if any. I think I forgot to ask you the nature of the Humphrey organization in McDowell County. Was there much or was there any organized activity for Senator Humphrey?

CALHOUN: Senator Humphrey's organization in McDowell County, aside from the few well wishers, never appeared to be really organized or dynamic in its efforts to aid the Senator. In fact, the McDowell County Democratic organization had definitely come out for President Kennedy. Of course, having its support, there was little else for Senator Kennedy to get.

YOUNG: Well then, did the Humphrey well wishers join the Kennedy support in the fall election?

CALHOUN: They did.

YOUNG: So that the party.... If there were any

[-12-]

feelings of disunity, the party closed ranks for the fall election.

CALHOUN: In an active and wholehearted support of the President.

YOUNG: Did your work for the general election differ much when compared to your work in the primary? Could you say a word about that?

CALHOUN: My work in the general election consisted largely of visiting different organizations which I belong, also at church gatherings discussing the different candidacies for the President and others, and where I could be the most service in assisting in the program of the President. I was there to do it and I did.

YOUNG: When you say organizations do you mean fraternal organizations, lodges, that sort of thing?

CALHOUN: That's right.

[-13-]

YOUNG: Could you mention a few? Would it make any difference?

CALHOUN: I would rather say religious and fraternal organizations and not specify. It might impede the use of this in the future.

YOUNG: Okay. [Laughter] Well, we hope you have many years of usefulness. Let's move on then to the Kennedy years in the White House. Would you give a summary of the reaction as you witnessed it in McDowell County to President Kennedy's administration?

CALHOUN: From the very beginning after the inauguration of President Kennedy as president, it just seemed as though hope became brighter and everything looked forward to progress and advancement in the county. The people just eagerly waited for the next thing to happen

[-14-]

beneficial to McDowell County because President Kennedy, from the time that he was inaugurated to his death, never forgot this county. Those who made personal visits to him in Washington could always bring back to the boys something that he was going to do for McDowell County and many times did.

YOUNG: Mr. Calhoun, before we started the interview, you and I were talking informally about the economy of McDowell County today. I think you mentioned some garment factories and that sort of thing. Could you be specific about the economic improvement that you feel took place during the Kennedy years?

CALHOUN: I think that the economic condition of McDowell County definitely improved from the time he took his office as President. It has progressed slowly at times, but

[-15-]

there has always been advancement. I think the most beneficial thing has that has been that it has brightened the hope and enthusiasm of the people that we're going somewhere now because for a long time we just stood still.

YOUNG: In other words, you're off dead center. You're not going downhill, you're going uphill.

CALHOUN: We're going uphill definitely. About the progress I'm not able to say, but we're definitely going uphill.

YOUNG: Can you think of any specific thing other than this general statement? Coal is better, isn't it?

CALHOUN: Oh, yes, yes.

YOUNG: And where are the garment factories?

CALHOUN: Well, we have one at Kimball. They have several others, I think, around in the county or they are undertaking to bring some in.

[-16-]

YOUNG: Let's talk about things that might have happened, Mr. Calhoun, if President Kennedy had been a candidate in 1964. Do you feel that any anti-Catholic feeling that had existed, diminished or increased while the President was in the White House?

CALHOUN: There was so little...

YOUNG: Anti-Catholic feeling.

CALHOUN: Yes, that's right. There was so little anti-Catholic feeling in the County of McDowell that it's hard to determine whether it decreased.

YOUNG: Was there any criticism at all of the President in terms of his promises to West Virginia or do you feel quite the opposite—that people felt they were getting everything and maybe a little bit more?

CALHOUN: We definitely felt that we were getting everything and more than he had promised us. Best of all, the future looked brighter because every time he did

[-17-]

something it was for the betterment of West Virginia.

YOUNG: Sometimes a presidential candidate doesn't run as well his second term as he did his first time around. Do you feel that President Kennedy would have gotten an even larger vote in West Virginia had he been a candidate in 1964?

CALHOUN: Definitely so. Definitely so. He was very popular. There was no question about that.

YOUNG: I'd like to turn, Mr. Calhoun, to something else, the vast amount of attention that the press—television, radio, newspapers, *Life* magazine, *Time* magazine—gave to West Virginia and particularly that part of West Virginia south of the Kanawha River. Would you comment on the

[-18-]

portrait the press painted of this area and your reaction to—everything you have to say along this line? And Mr. Calhoun, if you'd like to say a word also about the local press and its role in the campaign, this might be important too.

CALHOUN: The local press in the county was enthusiastically in favor of the efforts of President Kennedy and his desire to help this county in West Virginia. I think that the national press at that time was in sympathy of his efforts to help us.

YOUNG: What kind of picture—how do you feel the picture of McDowell County and of the whole coal region of southern West Virginia, how was this painted by the national press? Do you feel the area was treated properly at fairly?

[-19-]

CALHOUN: I think with reference to the national press, they heartily accepted the efforts of President Kennedy to help McDowell County and West Virginia. But I think also the efforts of President Kennedy, in carrying out his program, was of such magnitude that it dulled their enthusiasm with reference to the amount of help West Virginia was receiving.

YOUNG: Mr. Calhoun, as we bring our interview to a close, do you have any broad view or any overall statement about President Kennedy and West Virginia that you would care to make?

CALHOUN: I think that from the very beginning of President Kennedy's tenure until his untimely death, that he did more for West Virginia and was better liked

for what he did and progress made than any other president I can remember. Now you

[-20-]

want to know how old I am—that's not fair.

YOUNG: I think some future historian might be interested in your age, Mr. Calhoun, if you'd like to put that in.

CALHOUN: I rather not put it in, but it's middle age.

YOUNG: Well, I interviewed a man yesterday who said "I'm one year short of being 70," so I figured it out as 69. Do you have anything else you'd like to say?

CALHOUN: No, I believe that's it.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[-21-]

Stewart A. Calhoun Oral History Transcript
Name List

C

Calhoun, Carole, 10

H

Humphrey, Hubert H., 7, 8, 9, 12

K

Kennedy, John F., 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12,
13, 14, 15, 17, 18, 19, 20