

**Edward A. Culley Oral History Interview—2/14/1965**  
Administrative Information

**Creator:** Edward A. Culley  
**Interviewer:** William L. Young  
**Date of Interview:** February 14, 1965  
**Location:** Wheeling, West Virginia  
**Length:** 13 pages

**Biographical Note**

Culley, co-chairman of Citizens for Kennedy in Ohio County, West Virginia (1960), discusses Ohio County, West Virginia's 1960 Citizens for Kennedy group, John F. Kennedy's 1960 campaign visit to Wheeling, West Virginia, and the religious issue in the West Virginia primary, among other issues.

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**Suggested Citation**

Edward A. Culley, recorded interview by William L. Young, February 14, 1965 (page number), John F. Kennedy Library Oral History Program.

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Mrs. Edward A. Culley

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Oral History Interview

With

Edward A. Culley

February 14, 1965  
Wheeling, West Virginia

By William L. Young

For the John F. Kennedy Library

YOUNG: Ed, can you tell me how you first became interested in Senator Kennedy's [John F. Kennedy] candidacy for the presidency in 1960?

CULLEY: I received a call from John Ruckman [John L. Ruckman] and Arch Riley [Arch Wayne Riley] stating that they had a visitor in their office by the name of Ted Kennedy [Edward M. Kennedy], and they wondered if I would like to meet him. I went down to their office, met Ted Kennedy, and was then told that his brother Jack had intentions of coming into the state of West Virginia to run in the presidential primary. At that time I took Ted Kennedy up to meet Archbishop Swint [John J. Swint]. However, there were no arrangements made, and nothing was said, about when Jack would ever get his campaign started in the state of West Virginia.

I later told my wife that I had met Ted Kennedy and was asked whether or not I would be interested in furthering the campaign of Jack in the state of West Virginia. I asked her if she thought I ought to do anything to help him along, and she very jokingly said, "Anything that you can do for a hometown boy, please do"—because Jack is a native of Massachusetts and so is my wife.

However, the Senator's campaign started in the area of Ohio County really after the New Hampshire primary. One of his representatives came in from the state of New Hampshire and called several of the people that had met Ted Kennedy here on a previous

visit. It was at that time that John Kamlowky [John H. Kamlowky] and myself were set up as co-chairmen in Ohio County for the Citizens for Kennedy movement.

[ -1 - ]

The Democratic Party in Ohio County did not back Senator Kennedy for the presidential nomination. I believe that the Democratic Party here and elsewhere in the state was, at that time, primarily interested in Senator Johnson [Lyndon B. Johnson] being the presidential nominee. So whatever group that the Senator would have to call upon in this area to try and aid in his election in the primary would have to come from outside the Democratic Party. This was the reason for the growth of the Citizens for Kennedy group, not only here in Ohio County but throughout the state of West Virginia.

YOUNG: Ed, you mentioned a minute ago that the Senator's brother was taken to call on Archbishop Swint. Do you know that substance of the conversation, or was this just simply a courtesy call?

CULLEY: This was just a courtesy call. John Ruckman and another gentleman by the name of Jim Clowes that was in his office at the time thought that it would be a matter of courtesy if someone took Ted up to meet the Archbishop.

YOUNG: Well, as the campaign got under way, the primary campaign, what particular aspect of the campaign did you take charge of as co-chairman? What were your detailed responsibilities?

CULLEY: About the only thing that we could do after we were set up—by being set up I mean that John Kamlowky and I were it—we solicited about eight or ten volunteers who were interested in seeing that Senator Kennedy would be able to put together an organization. We were to set up a headquarters, and we were also to solicit any funds that we wished in order to maintain a headquarters. This we found rather difficult to do.

YOUNG: What do you attribute this to? Was there active anti-Kennedy feeling in the area?

CULLEY: No, there wasn't any anti-Kennedy feeling in the area. However, it appeared at the outset that there would not be too much political activity, particularly at the primary level, when we first started out. It was only after the national interest that was raised as a result of Kennedy running in the state of Wisconsin. And then, realizing that his next state would be West Virginia, more and more people became aware of Senator Kennedy and also aware of what a victory for him in the primary in the state of West Virginia would mean.

[ -2 - ]

YOUNG: Would this have the effect, then, of bringing more people into your volunteer organization?

CULLEY: No, it wasn't a question at that time of trying to solicit numbers for the Kennedy movement, because we didn't know what we were going to do if we did have the numbers. What brought it to a head was—after Senator Kennedy had formally registered in the state as a presidential nominee—a visit that group of us from the state made to the home of his brother, Robert Kennedy [Robert F. Kennedy]. And at that time, we met eight or nine other men from the state of West Virginia that were responsible for the original Citizens for Kennedy movement throughout the entire state. The group over at Robert Kennedy's house was headed by Bob McDonough [Robert P. McDonough].

YOUNG: How active did the Humphrey [Hubert H. Humphrey] forces seem to be in this area?

CULLEY: The Humphrey forces were not too active. They did establish a headquarters, but they had very few people that were working or promoting the interest of Senator Humphrey. An amusing thing happened during the primary on the day that Senator Humphrey was to make his visit to Wheeling. They had arranged for him to give a talk at noontime on the steps of the post office. They had a high school band, and they arranged it at a time when a lot of people would be out of their offices—at noontime—so that they would be able to attract a crowd. They also had quite a contingent of students there from Central Catholic because this was during their noon hour and it was only a block and a half away from the school. But at the very time that Senator Humphrey started to deliver his address, right across the street Robert Kennedy was giving a talk to the advertising club in the city of Wheeling. So, once word got out to the crowd that Robert Kennedy was also inside the McLure Hotel, people would listen to Humphrey for awhile and then keep one eye cocked towards the door of the McLure Hotel to see if they could see Bobby Kennedy when he came out.

Humphrey did make a valiant attempt. There was no question about him not being interested in the presidential primary. To give you an example, down river from Wheeling there is a place called St. Joseph's Settlement, and one Saturday night they were to have a sort of get-together in this small farm community. And Ted Reardon [Timothy J. Reardon, Jr.], who was the assistant to Senator Kennedy, had established himself in Wheeling and actually headed up our Citizens for Kennedy office in the McLure Hotel.

We received a call that this meeting was going to transpire down at St. Joseph's Settlement and were told by McDonough's

[-3-]

office that someone ought to go down. So John Kamlowky and his wife, and Ted Reardon, my wife and myself went down to this get together of farmers from St. Joseph's. When we got there, the group was in a small schoolhouse adjoining the Catholic church in this area. So all the county politicians that were running at that time were present and stood up and gave five to ten minute talks. The moderator recognized the fact that there were some visitors there

from Wheeling, and introduced John Kamlowky. John Kamlowky, in turn, introduced Ted Reardon, who then spoke for about five minutes urging the people to back John Kennedy.

The meeting was over at about 9:30 p.m., and we spent fifteen to twenty minutes shaking hands with various people around the hall. Then as we were leaving, Humphrey's campaign manager drove into the yard. And we later found out that he stayed there for about an hour or an hour and a half, joining in square dancing, and so forth, with the rest of the people. So Humphrey was definitely out beating the backwoods, trying to get as many votes as he possibly could.

YOUNG: St. Joseph's Settlement is in Marshall County, isn't it, near Moundsville? A rather remote place.

CULLEY: Very remote. You almost need a horse to get there.

YOUNG: Well, could you find any distinction between the people in Ohio County—the politicians that supported Kennedy—as opposed to the politicians that supported Humphrey? Did they divide along any particular lines?

CULLEY: No, there was very little support in Ohio County by the so-called politicians, for either Senator Kennedy or Senator Humphrey. I believe the recognized Democratic politicians in Ohio County sort of were sitting back, feeling that Johnson was going to get the nomination anyway, and that is who they wanted to support. Furthermore, it made no difference to the politicians how the vote of the state went; the delegates to the national convention would vote for the candidate of their choice, anyway, in the state of West Virginia.

YOUNG: I think we might put in at this time, too, that Ohio County is normally a Republican county, isn't it, in terms of local offices?

CULLEY: Yes, it was only during the primary election that the registration in Ohio County became about equal between Democrats and Republicans.

YOUNG: Well, the assertion has been made that a number of Republicans

[ -4 - ]

changed their registration so that they could vote for Senator Kennedy in the primary. Do you think there is any truth to this statement?

CULLEY: There were probably a few, but I would say that there was nothing general along that line.

YOUNG: Could you make any estimate of what "a few" means—a hundred, a thousand?

CULLEY: Well, I would say that if there were a hundred, that was a great number.

YOUNG: It wasn't a significant number, then?

CULLEY: No.

YOUNG: Did there seem to be any difference in the nature of the platform or the appeal that the two senators made? I am thinking now in terms of policy rather than personality.

CULLEY: In this area, I think, the people considered Senator Humphrey more radical and more socialistic, if you want to say, in his policies than what Senator Kennedy was. Senator Kennedy appealed to the people on the basis that he wanted to take charge that he felt that what the country needed at that time was man that was going to lead. And Jack Kennedy was the type of man that impressed the people that he would lead.

YOUNG: Would you say, then, that he was running not so much against Humphrey but against Eisenhower [Dwight D. Eisenhower]?

CULLEY: Correct. I believe that most all comments that I ever heard the Senator make were against the policies of the Republican Party and not the policies of the Democratic Party. He was interested in seeking the Democratic nomination, but policy speaking, he was not veering too far out of line with what the overall policies of the Democratic Party were at that particular time.

His greatest appeal to the people, as a whole, was his charm and his smile. As an example, the day that he visited Wheeling we had scheduled an itinerary of places for him to visit. After leaving a Hazel-Atlas plant in East Wheeling around four o'clock in the afternoon, after he had shaken hands with some of the people at the change of shifts, we were driving back towards the city. And he wanted to know how much time he had before the news conference that he had scheduled for five o'clock.

[-5-]

We told him that it was then four o'clock and it would take us about five minutes to get from where we were to the McLure Hotel. He wanted to know if anything else was on the agenda, and we said no. So he said, "Why don't I just walk along the streets?"

John Kamlowsky asked me where I thought would be a good spot for him to get out. I said, that at four o'clock in the afternoon the lower parts of the city were pretty well deserted, and if he went on up to Eleventh Street so that he could hit either Market or Main, in or around that section, he probably wouldn't be able to get back to the hotel by quarter of five or five o'clock. The Senator said that he didn't care where he got out; he would get out of the car right where he was then, just go ahead and start walking if someone would point him in the right direction. I told John to head down Fourteenth Street. We got off on the corner of Fourteenth and Market. So the Senator opened the door and got out. Bob McDonough was



sitting beside me in the back seat, and he said, "Let's go." I said, "Where are we going?" he said, "We're going with the Senator." And I said, "What are we going to do?" He said, "We are going to pass out leaflets and shake hands with anybody that he wants us to shake hands with. But wherever he goes, we're going, and we're going to pass out leaflets.

So we got out of the car and started walking behind the Senator. I wager there were no more than three people within twenty yards of us at that particular time. So he turned around and he walked into the entrance of the Hub department store. The store was deserted. In the section that he walked into, he goes over and he started shaking hands with all the girls working behind the counter. He shakes hands with about five of them. And as we are about ready to leave the store, he looks over to another counter and there are two girls over there. One of them yells out, "I thought you were going to forget us!" So he says, "No, I wouldn't do anything like that." So he walked over and shook hands with them.

We came out of the Hub. A bus pulled up and started to discharge about four or five people. He shook hands with them when they got off the bus. He stepped into the bus, shook hands with the bus driver, said hello, introduced himself, got off the bus. By then several people had crossed the street and wanted to know what was going on over in front of the Hub. They came across.

We walked twenty yards and within three minutes about fifty people started to show up. By the time we had gone a hundred yards, there were two or three hundred people. And before we got to the McLure Hotel, it was necessary to stop traffic.

[-6-]

The police came, television cameras had come down out of the studio, and there were at least a thousand people gathered around the section of Market Street and Twelfth Street. A corridor had to be made to get the Senator into the McLure Hotel. That was a spontaneous example of the personal magnetism that the people felt and the desire that they wanted to see Senator Kennedy. Wherever he went, people wanted to see him; people wanted to shake his hand.

We had a reception at the McLure Hotel the night that he was here. We had no idea how many people would come. One of the Senator's volunteers from the state of Massachusetts had come in two or three days before his scheduled visit here and had said that we are going to send out formal invitations for a reception in honor of Senator Kennedy. So they got some names and addresses out of the phone book and tried to locate it in and about Ohio County. And they sent out several hundred invitations. We still had no idea how many people would come. However, that night there was one of the greatest crowds that they have ever had in and about the McLure Hotel. They had to regulate the number of people that were going up to the mezzanine floor and the Colonnade Room, because they were afraid of all of the weight that was up there from the number of people.

He valiantly shook hands with everyone in the reception lines, had a smile for everyone, and the tone of his voice never changed. He was exceedingly gracious. He had that ability of being able to transmit a feeling to the person he was shaking hands with that he was primarily interested in them and that it was a pleasure for him to meet them.

YOUNG: Well, Ed, other than personality, did the Senator make any appeal to this area

as an industrial area? We don't associate the appeals that were made, perhaps in Welch and the more depressed sections of the state. Can you think of any special pitch for this area?

CULLEY: No, there was no special pitch for this area, as far as I could see, other than the fact that he wanted to increase the employment in the area. He thought it was time that some interest was taken in Washington as far as the state of West Virginia was concerned, but there was nothing in particular that I recall that he said about this particular section.

YOUNG: Before we started putting this on tape, you mentioned a speech that he made at Bethany College. I believe you went with him on that trip. Could you say a word about that?

[-7-]

CULLEY: Yes, that was a speech that was supposedly nonpolitical in the sense that he was invited to address the college in conjunction with a series on political science that they had inaugurated at the college. However, when Senator Kennedy went up there to give his talk, he had a busload of national news media people following him. So everything he said was being plastered in all the newspapers and magazines and also over T.V. news throughout the country. I don't recall the general text of his speech now, but after his talk was over, he opened the meeting to questions. At that particular time, his Catholicism was a very sore point, and it was a sore point in the state of West Virginia. But this was being brought up more and more frequently now, as to whether or not a Catholic should run, what his attitudes were as far as birth control, and several other items, and just how close was he to the pope.

Well, there was one questioner at Bethany who—we found out after several questions had been asked—was not a student of Bethany, was in no way connected with Bethany College. As a matter of fact, he was following Senator Kennedy around the country, and he had come from the state of Wisconsin. So he attended this meeting at Bethany and tried to embarrass the Senator with the types of questions that he would ask—one being what was the Senator's attitude as far as birth control was concerned. The Senator answered, I believe at that time, that his moral beliefs were his own personal property and had nothing to do whatsoever, as far as he was concerned, in carrying out the office of the presidency.

YOUNG: Well, Ed, this is normally considered to be the most Catholic section of West Virginia. Did feeling between Protestant and Catholic run high? Did any of the Protestant ministers preach against the Senator because of his religion?

CULLEY: I don't believe so. I don't think so. No, I don't recall any formal objections to the Senator's religion.

YOUNG: Were you aware of any whispering campaigns or jokes or underground, undercover anti-Catholic feeling at the time?

CULLEY: Yes, there was some. But after the Senator's visit to Wheeling, the objections, religious-wise, began to die out. As a matter of fact, I think that there were quite a number of Catholics that didn't like the idea of the Senator running.

YOUNG: Why was that?

[ -8 - ]

CULLEY: Well, for the simple reason that the Catholics were, and still are, a minority group. I believe that there were some of them that didn't like the spotlight brought to bear that Kennedy was a Catholic and was running as a Catholic, and so forth—and if they were a Catholic, they were automatically for Kennedy. And they just didn't want to be associated with him. I think we received more cooperation from non-Catholics that we did from Catholics.

YOUNG: You mean in terms of volunteer work?

CULLEY: In terms of volunteer work and also as far as talking in favor of the Senator.

YOUNG: Ed, you were talking about the attempt of Senator Kennedy to win labor support in this area, in the primary. Would you repeat that for the record, please?

CULLEY: Yes. At various times during the primary campaign the Senator had his so-called labor specialists. They had worked with him on the Senate Labor Committee [Labor and Public Welfare]—a gentleman by the name of Ralph Dungan [Ralph A. Dungan]. Ralph came into this area at various times to try and promote organized labor to back Senator Kennedy in the primary. But this didn't meet with very much success as far as getting any of the organized labor's formal support, because formally organized labor preferred Senator Humphrey to Senator Kennedy.

YOUNG: What is the reason for that?

CULLEY: Why, I feel that they thought Senator Humphrey would be kinder to organized labor than what Senator Kennedy would be. That is, the general overall feeling was that Senator Humphrey at that particular time was more radical than Senator Kennedy.

YOUNG: Well, let's go back to something else. What role, then, in summary, would you say that the clergy, both Protestant and Catholic, played in this area, in the primary rather than in the general election?

CULLEY: Well, in the primary, I don't think they played very much of a role at all. I know that the Catholic clergy here in the vicinity of Wheeling played no

active role. As a matter of fact, from Archbishop Swint on down they were rather hesitant in saying anything at all. As a matter of fact, I think the Archbishop was a Republican. The Catholic clergy played a hands-off policy, and also the Protestant clergy here. There was nothing organized as far as

[-9-]

opposition to the Senator because of religious reasons was concerned.

YOUNG: Ed, do you have any material of an anecdotal nature, other than the stories that you have already mentioned, in terms of your own personal contact with Senator Kennedy during the campaign?

CULLEY: Well, going back to this religious issue, I think we had a very interesting thing happen. A group of us were returning from a meeting in Clarksburg during the early part of the primary. There were about eight of us involved, and we stopped in a place north of new Martinsville to get a cup of coffee. It was about 12:30 at night. So as we were sitting around the table ordering, the young waitress brought our coffee over. And one of the men in our group told the waitress, "Well, young lady, when you vote in the primary, I want you to vote for Senator Kennedy." And this girl said, "Oh, I can't vote for him!" And he said, "why can't you?" And she said, "Because he's a Catholic." And he said, "Why can't you vote for a Catholic?" And she said, "We can't vote for a Catholic to be president of the United States; he's not even a Christian." So we thought that was quite amusing. One of the members of our group said, "Well, I am a Presbyterian myself and I would vote for him, and I don't understand you saying that he isn't even a Christian—because the Catholic religion is based on Christianity, and I don't see where you have any of..." "Well, she said, "that's alright," she said, "because if he were elected president of the United States, the pope would be running everything. We just couldn't vote for him. Nobody in my family could possibly vote for Senator Kennedy. We couldn't vote for any Catholic."

This feeling was very strong throughout the state of West Virginia. And the Senator had to overcome it, and he did. He overcame it by his own personality and charm, and people meeting him and realizing that he wasn't an ordinary human being, but he was a human being just like everyone else.

YOUNG: Do you remember that T.V. program? I believe the interview between the Senator and the ministers in Texas was shown here. I know it was shown in some sections of the state.

CULLEY: Yes, it was shown, more or less, not as a special thing. The only time the people in the valley here saw it was when it came over our regular news media. It was not used as a campaign tool.

YOUNG: Well, Ed, what role did you play, then, between the

[-10-]

primary and the general election?

CULLEY: Not too much, because I was not active in Democratic politics. Once the Senator became the presidential nominee for the Democratic Party, then the Democratic Party in the state of West Virginia was backing him as the presidential candidate. So there wasn't the great need for the Citizens for Kennedy group, at least in the state of West Virginia after the primary, because it was a foregone conclusion that Senator Kennedy was going to carry the state of West Virginia.

YOUNG: Well, Ed, in some counties in the state there was a little bit of bad blood between the volunteer Kennedy forces and the traditional courthouse organization. Did this exist in Ohio County, or did the two groups find it very easy to make peace with each other?

CULLEY: Well, there was no need for there not to be any peace, because there wasn't too much interest—as far as a lot of the Citizens for Kennedy were concerned—of becoming actively engaged in the field of politics afterwards. There was no question of the Citizens for Kennedy group trying to take over the county Democratic Party, or anything of that nature.

YOUNG: Did any of the Citizens for Kennedy people—any at all—get interested in politics through the primary and then stay on in political life?

CULLEY: I don't believe so, in this area.

YOUNG: Well, let's turn then to the presidential years. As an early Kennedy supporter, could you make some evaluation of reaction in Ohio County to Kennedy policies, foreign and domestic?—but I suppose that we are really interested in domestic policies to the greatest degree, because of the emphasis placed on West Virginia's economic problems. That is a rather long question, I realize.

CULLEY: I think in Ohio County and the surrounding area, that people thought that Senator Kennedy after becoming president would open Pandora's box and bring new industry into the area, and so forth. I actually feel that a lot of people in this area thought that once the Senator was president, things would boom a great deal in and around this area. And it was only after he was in office from a year and a half to two years that the people in the state began to realize that as far as federal expenditures were concerned, there was more federal money being spent in the state of West

[-11-]

Virginia than there had ever been spent before. We never saw any of it up here in this area, though. Now whether, had he lived longer and so forth, this situation would have changed, I don't know.

YOUNG: How would you describe this area economically as opposed to—say, for instance—that part of West Virginia south of the Kanawha River?

CULLEY: Well, there is probably no comparison, economically, between this section of the state and the lower end of the state. We have diversified industry here. We have a great chemical industry. We have a steel industry. We have a coal industry. And we are also situated, as such, that Wheeling, per se, is a small hub and metropolitan area that acts as a buying center.

YOUNG: Did you have any contacts with President Kennedy after his election?

CULLEY: I visited the White House once and saw Ted Reardon, but I didn't see the President at that time. I met the President once as president of the United States, on his subsequent visit to Wheeling at the time of the congressional campaign in '62. He made a visit back to this area and made a speech endorsing and advocating Cleve Bailey [Cleveland M. Bailey] as the congressional representative from this area. At that particular time, though, I was no longer active in politics and was not invited by the county chairman to take part as being a member of the reception committee to meet the President, nor to be included in the group that was going to sit on the platform at the meeting that evening at Wheeling stadium. I did, however, go to the airport, not as a representative of the Democratic Party or anything else but just as an interested citizen, to see the President of the United States come in. After the presidential plane landed, and the President got off the plane, his assistant Ted Reardon followed him. I spotted Reardon. Reardon immediately came over and joined Kamlowksy and myself and said, "Well, now how are we going to get down to the stadium?" So John said that we were going to ride down in the police car that was bringing up the rear, since neither he nor I had any kind of a pass where we could drive our own cars in the procession. So Reardon said, "Well, let's get out of here before this mob gets too big and get in the car that we are going to ride in, so that we don't get lost."

So coming down in the car, Reardon asked me if I had received my credentials. I said yes. I said I had gotten a call from the county chairman that afternoon asking me to come

[-12-]

down to Bailey's headquarters, which were then in the McLure Hotel, to pick up my credentials to sit on the platform during the President's speech. So I said that I went down to the McLure and asked the county chairman, "Why did I get credentials at this point when before I didn't even know, officially, that the President was coming?" He said, "Well, you were active with the Citizens for Kennedy movement when Kennedy was elected, so we thought that you should be present on his return visit to Wheeling as president." So I said, "Thank you very much. I will go over and I will be sitting on the platform when the President speaks."

But coming down in the car, Reardon asked me if I had received my credentials, and I said yes, and I couldn't understand how, because prior to that there had been no communication at all. "And as a matter of fact," I said, "anybody that had been working as

far as the Citizens for Kennedy movement was concerned had been completely overlooked as far as the visit of the President.” Reardon said, “Yeah, I noticed that. When we got the list in the White House of who was going to sit on the platform the day before, I saw your name wasn’t on the list, so I put it on. So when the list came back here from the White House of who was going to be sitting on the platform, your name was there. So, that’s why you got your call. That’s where you’re going, and we will sit beside each other.” So we did and sat on the platform during the President’s talk and other talks. And then, as the President was leaving the platform, Reardon said, “Come on and shake hands with the President.” And I said, “Oh, no, Ted, he’ll be mobbed and in a hurry, and it’s raining.” “No,” he said, “Come on. How often do you ever shake hands with the president of the United States?” So just as the President started to leave the platform, he stopped and said, “Mr. President.” The President turned around and Reardon said, “Mr. President, I would like you to shake hands with Ed Culley. Do you remember him? He was active here during your primary.” And the President said, “Yes, I remember. Thank you very much. It is awfully nice to see you again.” And then he went on. That was an indication that the type of people that the President surrounded himself with were men that always remembered the little individuals that tried to do something for the President, going back to the time when he was a member of the House of Representatives and also when he was a member of the Senate.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

Edward A. Culley Oral History Transcript  
Name Index

**B**

Bailey, Cleveland M., 12, 13

**C**

Clowes, Jim, 2

**D**

Dungan, Ralph A., 9

**E**

Eisenhower, Dwight D., 5

**H**

Humphrey, Hubert H., 3, 4, 5, 9

**J**

Johnson, Lyndon B., 2, 4

**K**

Kamlowsky, John H., 1, 2, 4, 6, 12

Kennedy, Edward M., 1, 2

Kennedy, John F., 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11,  
12, 13

Kennedy, Robert F., 3

**M**

McDonough, Robert P., 3, 6

**R**

Reardon, Timothy J., Jr., 3, 4, 12, 13

Riley, Arch Wayne, 1

Ruckman, John L., 1, 2

**S**

Swint, John J., 1, 2, 9