

*Gazette* Project

Interview with

James O. Powell,  
Little Rock, Arkansas,  
3 February 2000

Interviewer: Ernie Dumas

Ernie Dumas: This is February 3rd.

James Powell: Right.

ED: And I'm Ernie Dumas. And we're talking to James O. Powell, Jim Powell, who was the editor of the editorial page of the *Arkansas Gazette*, from 1960 until 198 .

..

JP: Well, actually, it was 1985.

ED: 1985. And subsequent senior editor and columnist for the *Arkansas Gazette*.

JP: Couple of years . . .

ED: Jim, first I have to explain to you briefly that this is for the Arkansas Center for Oral and Visual History. And we need your permission to tape this interview with the understanding that your remarks can be used for research and whatever other purposes. It becomes a kind of a public document.

JP: Okay.

ED: You consent to that.

JP: All right.

ED: All right. Let's start with your war record, I guess. You were born in Andalusia, Alabama.

JP: Right.

ED: And, went to University of Florida.

JP: I went to the public schools in Andalusia. And went to and graduated from the University of Florida, although there were two lapses. My sophomore year I transferred to the University of Alabama for one year, then returned to Florida for my junior year. Then, before my senior year, I laid out and worked for a year, first on the *Alabama Journal* in Montgomery and then on the old Columbus, Georgia, *Free Press*. I returned to Florida for my senior year and graduated with a B.A. J., one jump ahead of the draft board.

ED: Did you go to the *Tampa Tribune* right after that? Was that your first job?

JP: No, the first job after that, when I came back from the Great War [laughs], when I came back from the Great War, I went back to work on the *Alabama Journal* in Montgomery, where I had worked the year I was not in college. I went back there in 1946, and worked there in Montgomery about six months, and then I went off to Cuba, just knocking around, and came back and went to work for the *Tampa Tribune* late in 1946.

ED: What did you do for the *Tampa Tribune*? State capital reporter for awhile?

JP: I started as a city beat reporter. And then they sent me off to open the Sarasota/Bradenton Bureau --- you know the grand language we use. I went down to cover Sarasota and Bradenton for the *Tampa Tribune*, and they called me a "Bureau." You know how the system has always worked. And I worked there a couple of years, and then Red Newton, who was a flamboyant and fairly

celebrated managing editor of the *Tampa Tribune*, sent me to Tallahassee, to open the first capital bureau of a major newspaper in Florida, as distinguished from the Associated Press. Where I got notorious was in investigative reporting in Tallahassee covering the State Capitol.

ED: How long did you cover the Capitol?

JP: I covered the Capitol, oh, I guess five or six years, and then for about six months I went to the *Miami Herald*, which lured me in for a little more money. In those days, you would jump jobs for just a small sum.

ED: Ten dollars a week?

JP: Ten dollars a week, you'd leave town. Well, I didn't have to leave town.

But, you would jump jobs for very little money in those years, as you might recall, although you came along later. Anyway, I worked for the *Miami Herald*, covering the state capitol, about six months, and then I did about a year with George Smathers, as his administrative assistant. George Smathers was one of the United States senators from Florida, at the time. I did about a year with him in Washington, and then I had an opportunity to go back to the *Tribune* as an editorial writer, and did because I wasn't really comfortable with the transition from journalism to politics. At the time, it was a little too strenuous for me.

ED: And that would have been in about what year, when you went to the editorial page?

JP: I went to the editorial page in 1956.

ED: OK. So, you wrote editorials for the *Tampa Tribune* for about three years or so.

1960, well late 1959, I suppose, is when Harry Ashmore, celebrated editor of the *Gazette*, left and became editor of *Encyclopedia Britannica*, or wherever Ashmore went, when he left the *Gazette*.

JP: Right.

ED: How did you come to be the editor of the editorial page of the *Gazette*? Did J. N. Heiskell contact you? Did they advertise it? How did you get together?

JP: Well, in those years, newspapers didn't go through all the razzmatazz they go through now, having tests, advertising and all that business. I really think that's extreme. In those days, it was very informal. There were two things involved, I suppose --- about three things. The key factor was that J.N. Heiskell was wintering in Sarasota. This was after I had left Sarasota as a newspaper reporter, and I was in Tampa as an editorial writer with James A. Clendinen, who was a pretty famous editorial editor --- editor of the editorial page, and later editorial director of the *Tampa Tribune*. At the time, I was writing editorials and became associate editor with Clendinen on the *Tribune*, when Mr. Heiskell was wintering in Sarasota. At that time, I believe, Mr. Heiskell had learned that Harry was leaving --- or subsequently learned that. Anyway, he had read the *Tampa Tribune* editorial page and liked the editorials. So, when Harry made his decision to leave, and, of course, I'm not privy to all that, when he made his decision to leave, Mr. Heiskell was the reference for me and my work on the *Tampa Tribune*, which set the whole business off. The first I knew about it was that one day, Hugh Patterson was on the telephone and wanted to talk to me about coming to

the *Gazette* as editor of the editorial page. I'm not sure if it had been announced or not, the impending departure of Ashmore. So he wanted to talk to me about doing that. I hemmed and hawed some about it. But quite soon after that, he came to Tampa and we had lunch at the famous Columbia restaurant in Tampa, and visited at my house for awhile. Pretty soon after that, they asked me to visit Little Rock with the Heiskells and the Pattersons, Harry Ashmore and Jerry Neil. They offered me the job and I took it. I went to work November 1, 1959, I believe, or it might have been October 1st. It was in October or November of 1959. In any case, that was the way it developed. I remember that it was an extremely difficult decision because I was really pretty happy at Tampa. Florida, of course, is a very difficult state to leave, and I had graduated from the University of Florida. Except for my very young years in Alabama, my whole association was with Florida, the University and the Florida newspapers. So, it was a very difficult decision. After I came out to visit in Little Rock, they offered me the job, and subsequently by telephone, they offered it formally, and I accepted it formally. One afternoon afterward, I went out in my backyard at Tampa, and we had a gorgeous hibiscus tree growing, and it was in full bloom. I lived not far from Tampa Bay, Bay Shore Boulevard, a gorgeous drive. I got to regretting the move, and I sent word to Little Rock that I couldn't come. Well, Hugh called up, and I softened and came.

ED: Well, did you talk mainly to Hugh, or to J.N. Heiskell about it?

JP: It was initially Mr. Heiskell's interest in the *Tampa Tribune*, and me as one of the

editorial writers that set it off. But, all the conversation and negotiations, except for my visit with the whole group in Little Rock, were with Hugh.

ED: What did they ask you? Did they ask you about your philosophy, and whether it would match those of Mr. Heiskell and Mr. Patterson and Mr. Ashmore?

JP: Not much, not much. I don't remember much along that line. Now, I did learn, subsequently, that Ashmore had called my old colleagues at the capitol press corps at Tallahassee and talked to them about me and my work, where I had done the most important work I did in Florida --- well, certainly the work that attracted the most attention was as an investigative reporter in Tallahassee. In any case, it was Hugh that handled the negotiation, and I don't remember much conversation about philosophy.

ED: So, Ashmore took a pretty strong interest in who his successor was going to be? Probably Jerry Neil, too?

JP: I guess so. All I really know is that Ashmore called up Tallahassee and made inquiries with reporters who were still there in the Tallahassee capitol press room.

ED: Knowing about the relationship of Hugh and Harry Ashmore, I suspect that Hugh wanted Ashmore to make sure that they found the right person to take his place.

JP: That, I just don't know.

ED: I suspect that that is the case, but of course we don't know. Ashmore is dead now.

JP: That was the sequence of events. It all started with Mr. Heiskell vacationing in Sarasota, and reading the *Tampa Tribune*.

ED: But you didn't have any reservations about going to the *Gazette*, based upon anything other than the fact that it was farther north?

JP: It was so terribly far north, out of Florida, and away from the sea. The thing that I miss most is that Arkansas is so terribly far from the sea.

ED: Did you have some impressions of the *Gazette* at the time?

JP: Well, that's really central to it.

ED: Of course, it had won two Pulitzer Prizes the year before, and it was really a celebrated paper.

JP: Well, I chose the *Arkansas Gazette* and, of course, they chose me because of its reputation in the business and nationally. The *Gazette*, I knew, was a great newspaper with a great tradition, which had just won national plaudits. At the time I was young and ambitious, and I loved Florida and I was getting along well at the *Tribune*. On the other hand, my boss Clendinen, the editor of the editorial page and subsequently the editorial director, came from a family with notorious longevity. As a matter of fact, as it turned out, Clendinen and I retired at about the same time.

ED: He was twenty years or so your senior?

JP: Well, maybe fifteen, or something like that. But he and I, as it turned out, retired at very nearly the same time. My instinct was that if I was going to make a move, I'd have to make a move to improve my editorial power, shall we say.

ED: Mr. Heiskell still considered the editorial section of the *Gazette* his prerogative, I guess going way, way back.

JP: Way back.

ED: To when they first bought the paper. He had been in charge of that part of the paper, and his brother had been over the news sections. And he still maintained a great deal of interest at that point.

JP: That's true.

ED: Finish that point on choosing the *Gazette*. The *Gazette* not only drew national attention with its heroic performance in the Central High School crisis, but had a reputation as a literate, well-written and well-edited newspaper.

JP: It had that reputation even before the great confrontation. Mr. Heiskell's department was the editorial page; that was his specialty.

ED: Talk a little about the relationship between you and Mr. Heiskell, and the editorial staff and Mr. Heiskell. I gather it was difficult at times because he had his own little peculiarities about what he wanted that page to be.

JP: There were some difficulties. Of course, he was still in pretty good shape; on the other hand, he was getting pretty old. They knew he had to make the transition, and he knew it. At the same time, he did want to keep his hand in. One of the difficulties was that he wanted to have an editorial conference every morning at nine o'clock, promptly. Editorial conferences to me have always been a terrible waste of time and energy. I think many newspapers do it; some of them don't. Incidentally, the *New York Times* didn't, but I think later, finally, fell into the pattern. Later, when Mr. Heiskell withdrew, I dropped the daily conferences entirely, as you may recall, since you came in later. Mr. Heiskell held

conferences every morning. There were at the time three of us writing editorials, Jerry Neil, and Charlie Allbright being the others.

ED: Was Charlie writing editorials?

JP: Charlie wrote editorials for about a year, but he never did care for it.

ED: He hated it.

JP: He didn't like it; he wanted to do features. Of course, much of editorial writing is heavy political stuff, and I don't think Charlie really cared for it. I had a great running joke over many years with Charlie. After that period, I would say, "Well, we're holding a job open for you, whenever you're ready."

ED: I suspect he didn't like the editorial board or the conferences. Did Mr. Heiskell preside at those things?

JP: Well, actually yes. Although I sat at my desk, which was central in the room, he presided and directed it.

ED: How long did they last?

JP: I don't know, a year or so, I'd imagine.

ED: The length of each day, 30-40 minutes?

JP: Well, I don't know, I'd say more like 15-20 minutes. Nobody liked editorial conferences, and I wouldn't have liked it with anybody. I just think it is a great waste of creative effort to have to talk a lot about what you're going to do anyway. As you recall, the only thing I did was to talk to each editorial writer about what he was planning to do that day.

ED: So, the conference with Mr. Heiskell lasted about a year or so. By that time, he

was in his mid-80s, when you came. He'd have been about 86, I guess.

JP: He died in 1972 at the age of 100, and I came at the end of '59.

ED: So, he was probably 87 at that time.

JP: I guess so.

ED: He was still pretty active.

JP: Yes.

ED: After a year or so, he gave up his editorial meetings, although he still, from time to time, complained about editorials?

JP: Sometimes he would express some displeasure. He was not one to do much complimenting, but he would express his displeasure. But, almost to the very end, he wrote editorial paragraphs, which he loved. Old-fashioned things, that editorial writers used to do. . . .

ED: These were little space fillers. You just wrote a whole bunch of them, and you'd sprinkle them at the bottom of the editorial columns.

JP: If you called them space-fillers to J. N. Heiskell, you would've left. Because the old craft was that those were thoughtful and provocative capsules of thought, and sometimes they were. None of us liked to do them, but Mr. Heiskell did them for years.

ED: As I recall, we had to continue doing them, when I went there in January 1979, because . . .

JP: By then, they were really fillers. By then, they were fillers, awfully convenient, of course, in make up, and we were still doing them, although there was no good

reason to.

ED: I found them terribly hard to write. Every now and then, you could come up with one that would just hit you. But, generally, I found them hard to write. Jerry Dhonau was able to knock out seven or eight of them when we needed them.

JP: I didn't like to have to do them.

ED: It was much better years later. You had a variety of editorials of varying length, and you could fit it in there and play around with the white space. Were his editorial paragraphs pretty good?

JP: Some of them were pretty good. One of the preceding editorial writers was also very good at it.

ED: Spider Rowland?

JP: Well, I understand.

ED: Spider Rowland was a famous editorial paragrapher back in the '40s.

JP: Yes, but the one who had written editorials for some years, and his father had written them before him, and I'm trying to remember . . .

ED: It wasn't Charlie Davis?

JP: Charlie Davis did it and was pretty good at it. And he told me once that when Joseph Stalin died, he had a one-line editorial paragraph, "*Sic Semper Tyrannis*," which they used as the editorial on Stalin's death. I thought it was rather good. But Charlie Davis had done a lot of them, and his father before him had done a lot of them.

ED: I'd forgotten about Charlie's father. Had he worked there at the *Gazette* many

years earlier?

JP: Yes, he had worked for J. N. Heiskell, and then Charlie worked for Mr. Heiskell, too.

ED: Charlie left the editorial page at some point, I guess, in the 50s, and went over and became the Sunday magazine editor.

JP: Yes, that's right. I think he went over about the time I came, something like that.

ED: When I went there in 1960, he was the editor of the Sunday feature section.

JP: Yes, that's what he did. It was called the Sunday Editorial Section.

ED: He did that until they let him go. Charlie was "bad to drink," as they say, and had some lapses in judgment, and they finally cut him loose.

JP: I was acquainted with him, friendly.

ED: I think Ernie Dean had written editorials from time to time, and then, when Harry would take a sabbatical . . .

JP: When Harry went off with Adlai Stevenson in 1952, he (Dean) wrote the editorials in that period. He was editor of the editorial page in that time. Of course, I knew Dean, who was doing the "Arkansas Traveler" when I came to Little Rock.

ED: When you came, your staff was Jerry Neil, and for a short time Charlie Allbright, and then there were others who came in.

JP: Tom Dearmore was later, a lot later. Joe Stroud came in for about a year or so, in about 1961.

ED: Early to mid-sixties probably, Joe Stroud came.

JP: I'm trying to remember. It was only a year or two because Joe was very ambitious. He went on to North Carolina and thence to the *Detroit Free Press*.

ED: I think he went to Winston-Salem as the editor of the editorial page, and then wound up at the *Detroit Free Press* as the editor of the editorial page.

JP: Yes, and after that, Pat came. He had been at Pine Bluff, too.

ED: Oh, that's right, Pat Owens followed Joe Stroud.

JP: Pat was a great editorial writer. But, Pat did not acquiesce to restraints very much; you knew Pat quite well.

ED: Do have any stories about Pat?

JP: I remember when he left.

ED: This is Patrick J. Owens.

JP: Patrick J. Owens didn't get along too well with Mr. Heiskell, as you can rather imagine, and Pat didn't stay that long, either. Once I had taken a vacation, and I was in Florida with a week or two off, and I called Pat to see what was going on. "Oh yes," he said, "I've quit." Pat was a great character and a great writer. I think it was always the case with him, that probably any sort of constraint was too much, I suspect. You knew Pat very well.

ED: Yes. Mr Heiskell was unhappy from time to time with Owens' editorials?

JP: My memory is convenient as to exactly why they wouldn't get along. Pat quit while I was gone, in that week or two I was off. I suspect, he and Mr. Heiskell must have come into confrontation.

ED: That's all I remember about it, too. I vaguely remember that he had had some

sort of run in with Mr. Heiskell about something and quit.

[End of Side One, Tape One]

[Beginning of Side Two, Tape One]

JP: Jerry Neil, of course, was not amenable to much restraint either. Jerry and Mr. Heiskell were often in disagreement. Jerry was, incidentally, a great editorial writer, especially up until the '70s. But he enjoyed drinking too much, and I think it affected his work in the last few years.

ED: He always drank. He was a celebrated drinker.

JP: Celebrated drinker.

ED: I gather he drank at lunch, too, did he not?

JP: That was when he did his drinking. Well, part of it.

ED: He'd pick it up later in the evening. He'd go down to the Officer's Club, and drink after work.

JP: Finally, he couldn't handle it very well. I think it hurt his work in the last few years before he died. Suddenly, one morning, he just went out of it with what seemed like a stroke. It lasted a few days, and he died, as you recall. But Jerry was a great editorial writer, had his own style, which was different from anybody else's. Long, flowing, Ciceronian sentences, and when they were good, nobody could do it better. When he was good, nobody could match him.

ED: They were marvelous sentences. I read them sometimes, and thought, "God, I wish I could have written that sentence."

JP: He was great. In the '60s, he was really in great form. Of course, he had an

outrageous sense of humor. I believe Harry told me this story. It occurred before I came to Little Rock. It was the first time Billy Graham was coming to speak at War Memorial Stadium, his first big rally. Jerry wrote an editorial, which as I recall, they did not run, which began by saying, "We're glad that Billy Graham has come out to Macedonia," which was wonderful. We should've run it. I wasn't here to take responsibility for it, but we should've run it, really, because it was such a great line.

ED: Neil was one of the great characters of the *Gazette* in the last half century.

JP: Yes, he was.

ED: Did he do his writing mostly in the afternoon or early in the morning?

JP: Oh, entirely in the morning. He didn't write in the afternoon. He came early, he wrote early, he got through, went to lunch. And then he would come back, and he didn't do anything but read proofs in the afternoon. He didn't attempt to write in the afternoon.

ED: Was he a pretty prolific writer?

JP: Very prolific and covered a lot of subjects. Of course, as you recall, we all had certain specialties, certain subjects. One of the reasons that I never felt an editorial conference was necessary was that when you work with editorial writers for awhile, you know that there are some things that they do especially well, and that you do especially well, and you don't have to go over all that. Anyway, Jerry was great, and he had his special fields.

ED: Typically, you would have yourself and usually two editorial writers.

JP: That's right, two to three.

ED: And you would go to each office --- everybody had little cubicles there, little individual offices.

JP: That's right.

ED: And, sit down, for maybe 10 minutes each morning with each one and discuss the day's news, and what they would write that day. And what you would write, and what others would write as well.

JP: Except they may have already gotten started on it. Because it was a very informal arrangement. We didn't have long conversations. You'll remember that as well as I. I don't think we ever had any great conversations on issues we were doing that day, or that week, did we?

ED: No, we would vent our feelings about whatever was in the paper that day. Later, after you retired as editor of the page and Jerry Dhonau became the editor, he didn't like editorial conferences either. I don't know when it happened, but at some point we were told that we had to have editorial conferences again.

JP: I see. I remembered that Jerry resumed the old custom, I remembered that. I didn't know how it happened.

ED: My recollection is it was after Walker Lundy came in and we were told that there would have to be editorial meetings. Bob McCord was brought in and made part of the editorial board, so we had to have these discussions. Eventually, in the latter stages of the *Gazette*, we had a heavy emphasis on these meetings, in which, from time to time, the Gannett people would come in.

JP: Oh yes.

ED: The publisher, Bill Malone, came in and sat regularly once a week in these editorial meetings.

JP: That must've been dreadful.

ED: It was deadly.

JP: I escaped all of that.

ED: When you came in here in late 1959, it was a very volatile time, a lot of tension still, from the '57-'58 integration crisis.

JP: Yes, one of my great memories on that is that I came in to an interview with the family and Jerry Neil and we all had a meeting out at Harry Ashmore's house. That was the weekend that they blew up the School Board Administration Building.

ED: Labor Day.

JP: Labor Day. It was Labor Day, and I was here to visit before coming here. And I always thought that blowing up the school board building was a nice welcome, a very fitting way to welcome me.

ED: Did it give you any pause?

JP: Not really.

ED: These people here are serious about their prejudices.

JP: That didn't bother me. In fact, it's just been one of my best stories, that the segregationists blew up the School Administration Building the day I came.

ED: I think maybe also they blew up the fire chief's car.

JP: Did they?

ED: I think there were a couple of dynamite targets.

JP: That episode didn't bother me. I just always take it that nothing really bad will happen to me. I think that's the way most of us act.

ED: We're all immortal really.

JP: We all think we're immortal.

ED: Any other evidences of that kind of tension that you felt personally after you came here? Harassment, nasty phone calls?

JP: Oh, sure, sure. By that time, it had settled down some, but I had plenty of that. We belonged to the Little Rock Country Club because Hugh and the Heiskells arranged for me to get in, and the *Gazette* paid for it, of course. Once, Ruth, my wife, and I were eating dinner at the Country Club. This woman whose name I now forget came over and tore into me with all sorts of invective because I was editor of editorial page of the *Gazette*. She was just violent in her abuse of me. There were a lot of episodes, a lot of unpleasant episodes, although I don't remember any more in that period than in other periods. I think I personally got more abuse at the time of the My Lai massacre, when we were editorially assailing Lieutenant William Calley for his brutality over there in Vietnam. There was tremendous controversy over that, with the right-wing military people calling in. I got a lot of abuse on the telephone and in the mail in that period and later when Judge Henry Woods ordered the consolidation of all of the three school systems in Pulaski County. That decision, if the court of appeals had let it stand,

might have spared us what has happened to the school system here. I don't know, but it was the thing to do, and we supported his consolidation order.

ED: That was 1984, as I recall.

JP: We had a lot of abuse from people in the Pulaski and North Little Rock school districts. I would get mysterious phone calls at 5 in the morning, and they'd hang up. I know there had been a lot of that in the 1957-58 period. At one time I was getting these phone calls every morning --- this was in the school consolidation furor. I was getting wild phone calls before dawn every morning, so I bought a whistle. I was going to use the whistle when someone called. One morning I had an early phone call like that, but it was actually a friend, who was calling to pick me up to go fishing, and I blew the whistle in his ear. All of which is irrelevant, except that there were periods when I had as much unpleasantness as on the segregation issues.

ED: The name of Ashmore was, I guess, a dirty word before he left. And then later the name James O. Powell, became a nasty epithet as well.

JP: I think so, right.

ED: I remember covering the state Senate, in the mid-'60s and the late-'60s.

JP: Yes.

ED: In the morning hour of the Senate session each day, there would be a period in which people would go to the floor and speak their mind about something, and usually the topic was the *Arkansas Gazette* or James O. Powell.

JP: [Laughs]

ED: There was a senator from Little Rock named Dan T. Sprick.

JP: I remember him so well.

ED: He would march down the aisle and thunder against James O. Powell.

JP: Sprick sued us for libel, as you remember, on the basis of one editorial, in which he had said something that was so outrageous that we equated it with a Nazi pronouncement. Strong language, but perfectly within fair comment and criticism. We equated it with fascist performance. And he sued us. We had a great suit to defend. It was after the Edwin A. Walker case, where the law was unmistakably on our side, and I really wanted to try it. But Sprick was on his deathbed by that time. He was on his deathbed, and his lawyer offered to settle it for \$500 with no disclosure of terms or anything like that. Our lawyers, although they knew we had the case won, figured that \$500 wouldn't have covered a half day's expenses. So they settled for \$500. Sprick despised me, as you know.

ED: And state Senator Guy "Mutt" Jones, he loved to lambaste you, too.

JP: Did he?

ED: He had fun with it, but he didn't really care. He associated the *Gazette* editorial page with Winthrop Rockefeller in those years.

JP: Right, right. Those early years pretty well covered the transition period. When I came, when Mr. Heiskell was presiding in a loose way for some years and, finally, he settled for writing paragraphs.

ED: You had a traditional idea about the mission of an editorial page, and you considered the *Gazette* a Democratic newspaper.

JP: Yes. Well, I knew the famous story of Mr. Heiskell and Harry Ashmore, who asked if the *Gazette* always supported Democrats, and Mr. Heiskell's reply was that, yes, the *Gazette* had been Democratic except in two elections, when the *Gazette* went Whig! I knew the *Gazette*'s great traditions, including its traditions as a Democratic newspaper.

ED: You were unabashed about that. This is a Democratic paper, and the editorial page is Democratic. Sometimes, we withheld our support from a Democratic candidate. Did we not endorse Winthrop Rockefeller once, in 1968--was there one year we endorsed him?

JP: Well . . .

ED: He ran four times.

JP: He ran against Faubus once, and then he was elected twice, and then he was beaten by Bumpers. In that particular period, the *Gazette* was not making formal endorsements, but we supported Winthrop Rockefeller in every way except the actual, formal pronouncement. We supported Winthrop Rockefeller in effect, certainly.

ED: In each race '64 against Faubus, in '66 against Jim Johnson, and '68 against Marion Crank.

JP: Except for Bumpers. In the end, in 1970, we supported Dale Bumpers, but that was because he had reformed — he and Rockefeller, together in effect had reformed the Democratic Party. When Bumpers took over, the Democratic Party, it became what it ought to be. Rockefeller was the great reforming catalyst. But

the *Gazette* was always Democratic, except for when Rockefeller ran and, in effect, we supported Rockefeller in all his races, except when Bumpers challenged him.

Of course, I learned a lot at the *Gazette* and developed my own philosophy on the *Gazette*. Over a period of years, I became more solidly Democratic and more liberal than when I came. I think I learned a lot on the *Gazette*, from its traditions and associations.

ED: It became more liberal as time passed on economic issues, particularly.

JP: It did, and also on this. On the racial issue itself, on the segregation issue. From 1957 on for those first few years, I think the *Gazette* said all it could say and survive, which was to argue the case for law and order and decency and the rule of law. We were still saying that in the early years that I was editor. We evolved into the actual advocacy of integration and equality in fact as well as in law.

ED: In the mid-60's.

JP: That's right, and later.

ED: You had the Civil Rights Act of 1964. In the early stages of that fight, the *Gazette* had some reservations about the public accommodation section.

JP: I remember there was an evolution, for me, in that period, and I'm afraid that on the public accommodations thing I made the mistake because I had some instincts against the government intervening in some areas.

ED: The private market place . . .

JP: Private market place. I think I was totally in error. I wrote an editorial on it, and

I remember that Hodding Carter in Greenville, Mississippi, was doing the same thing, at roughly the same time. That's Hodding Carter the elder. I was totally in error. But that suggests the development or evolution of my own thoughts on that issue because it was in that period that the *Gazette* was moving into the advocacy not only of desegregation and integration as a point of principle and morality and not just as a matter of following the national law. I think it was the editorial on public accommodations that, fairly soon, I became embarrassed about having written it. When we evolved, we went past all that and we became stout advocates of desegregation and integration and full opportunity under the law. Even and including affirmative action, the whole and entire repertoire of the liberal position. I don't know how the *Gazette* in 1957 could have argued on stands of morality and principle, other than the rule of law. I'm not sure the *Gazette* could've survived it. Do you think they could've?

ED: Probably not. It lost about 1/5 of its circulation.

JP: Lost 20,000 subscribers as it was. But we did go through that evolution. I think I learned a lot in that period, though I made some mistakes. The piece on public accommodations was one of them.

ED: I think the *Gazette* wound up supporting the '64 Civil Rights Act.

JP: Oh, yes.

ED: And then, of course, the Voting Rights Act of '65, open housing legislation in 1968.

JP: I feel sure. I know we supported the 1964 Civil Rights Act.

ED: I think we did. And, of course, all the other civil rights legislation of the Lyndon Johnson years.

JP: Right. So, there was a period of evolution in the *Gazette's* positions. During that period, of course, well in the very early period, Hugh Patterson and Harry Ashmore were key figures in the *Gazette's* position. Because Mr. Heiskell had certain conservative instincts and he owned the newspaper. I'm not privy to exactly what went on, but I know that Hugh and Harry and Mr. Heiskell made those early critical decisions. Hugh's role in those years has probably not been given its full due. He and Ashmore together were decisive in the influence they brought to bear at the paper.

ED: They probably brought Mr. Heiskell around on the specifics of it.

JP: That's right. Mr. Heiskell had certain "Old South" instincts, which many of us may have had, recurrently, at the time, like in my own lapse on "public accommodations" at a later period.

The city had desegregated the Little Rock swimming pool, the public swimming pool, which you may recall, and we hadn't had any trouble endorsing it, but Mr. Heiskell got very upset about all those white girls out there in the pool. We thought it was funny. He was upset with us.

ED: This was after the fact.

JP: We'd already done it.

ED: You already had it in the paper.

JP: Yes, it had already been in the paper.

ED: I can hear him. I can hear his voice.

JP: All I remember was that he was upset with our views on that issue.

ED: Tell me what impact the *Gazette* had upon Arkansas in that era. How significant was it? A strong voice, enlightened social policy, integration, equal justice. How did that influence the condition of the state?

JP: This is self-serving, in the sense that I spent 25 years of my career as the editor of the editorial page. But I think that the *Gazette's* editorial influence was enormous. Because we were arguing for all of the unpopular, unSouthern things over the years. Ben Allen, for example — of course, he may give more credit than is due — he thinks that we fashioned the course of Arkansas's history.

[End of Side Two, Tape One]

[Beginning of Tape Two, Side One]

JP: Ben thinks that the *Gazette's* role in those years was the most powerful thing that happened in the state. Ben was in the legislature for many of those years.

ED: Did it help avoid the course of Alabama and Mississippi?

JP: Absolutely. During those 25 years that I was on the editorial page, there was only a handful of what I regard as good newspapers in the South. Others were arguing the same old lines that the South had always argued. When you count the good newspapers, there was Little Rock and for a while there was the *Nashville Tennessean*, and the *Atlanta Constitution* before Ralph McGill died. Down in Florida there was the *St. Petersburg Times*, consistently one of the best in the South. In North Carolina, there were the *Raleigh News and Observer* and the

*Charlotte Observer*, good newspaper. But most of the big newspapers in the South were pretty bad in the years I was on the *Gazette*. Memphis, Jackson, New Orleans, Birmingham, Mobile, and Richmond — all spoke for the bourbon South. They are a little more presentable now, but that's another story.

Anyway, the *Gazette's* influence on Arkansas was profound, critical. In the *Gazette's* last years, when Walter Hussman was driving us to the wall with cut-rates and giveaways, subsidized by his media chain, I was talking to Dale Bumpers in his office in Washington one day, and he said that if the *Gazette* fell, Arkansas would get like Mississippi and Alabama. It's already happened, a decade later. The *Democrat-Gazette* has the wildest, most radical Republican commentary in the South, and Arkansas politics is shot to hell.

ED: After Faubus, after the 1966 election of Winthrop Rockefeller, you had, largely uninterrupted down to a couple of years ago, a succession of progressive governors.

JP: Right.

ED: One progressive Republican governor and progressive Democratic governors, uninterrupted, except for brief lapse of 1981-82.

JP: Frank White.

ED: Would that have happened without the *Gazette*? If the *Gazette* had been a different kind of paper?

JP: I don't think so, I don't think so. I think the *Gazette* was also in a most peculiar position in being the only paper in Arkansas with a big voice, with a big

circulation. So, I don't think it would have. In the other Southern states, you would have three or four large newspapers. Like in Alabama: Birmingham, Montgomery, and Mobile. I don't think the political history of Arkansas would have been the same without the *Gazette*. Certainly, Dale Bumpers argues this point powerfully.

ED: And David Pryor.

JP: David Pryor, yes. At one time, we had some combat with David, when he had his lapses like the Coon Dog Plan, which you remember.

ED: 1977.

JP: Was that the year? And you remember we got after him terribly hard on that because he was arguing that every county should be able to set its own tax schedule, so that if somebody wanted to buy a coon dog or a fishing rod with his tax money, he could do it. It was utter nonsense.

ED: He was going to cut the state income tax by 25%.

JP: That's right.

ED: And then give these counties permission to levy their own taxes.

JP: It was one of David's real lapses. He was an excellent senator and an excellent congressman, but as governor he had his lapses. But we'll forgive him for the "coon dog" plan. George Fisher had a wonderful time with the "coon dog" plan in his cartoons.

ED: I think that was Pryor's only lapse.

JP: Yes.

ED: He tried to do some things as governor --- a new Constitution, for example --- and we supported him.

JP: That's right. We got after him on the "coon dog" plan; but, otherwise, we had a great relationship with David over many years.

ED: Did you ever think about leaving the *Gazette*?

JP: Not really. I had some offers, from time to time. I hadn't been here long when Al Neuharth called from *Florida Today*. He and I had been reporters on the *Miami Herald* --- he was in Miami and I was in Tallahassee --- and then Neuharth later was in Washington, briefly, while I was working for Senator Smathers there, so I knew him. He called about the *Today* newspaper at Cape Canaveral, *Florida Today*, or whatever they call it. He said that they were looking for an editor of the editorial page who was a graduate of the University of Florida, who had a lot of experience in Florida politics. He had just recited my own credentials, you know. So I told him I'd look around and see if I could think of somebody, and I gave him a couple of suggestions, but I never considered it. In the first place, it was a small newspaper. Once, later, I had an invitation, virtually an invitation, to become Clendinen's successor. Clendinen is dead now, but at the time, he was beginning to get ready to retire. There was practically an open invitation to go back as Clendinen's associate, to become editor of the editorial page when he left. But the truth is that my own political philosophy had developed so much over the years that I would not have fit in then with the *Tampa Tribune's* philosophy. But the best offer I had was after the 1968 Democratic Convention, where I spent a

good deal of time with Nelson Poynter, the great owner and publisher of the *St. Petersburg Times*. A few weeks later, I had a letter from Robert Pittman, who was editor of the editorial page, wanting me to come there. It was in that same adroit fashion, where they list a whole lot of credentials and suggest that, maybe, I know someone who would be interested. And, of course, the *St. Petersburg Times* was and is a great newspaper. So that was tempting. I had an offer later to go with the *Gainesville Sun*, which by that time was with the *New York Times* group. None of the offers was as good as what I had. Of course, anytime someone offers you something that sounds fairly attractive, you think about it. But I never considered leaving.

ED: You retired as editor of the editorial page when you turned 65.

JP: Yes, I had just turned 65, and the year was ending. I was invited to move over and become a columnist. The next generation of the family was coming in, and it would have been difficult for everybody if I had tried to stay on as editor.

ED: Carrick Patterson was coming on as the editor.

JP: Carrick was coming on as the editor, and so they invited me to become a columnist.

ED: So, you would write a three-day-a-week column.

JP: Three-day-a-week column. I had a lot of fun.

ED: And you were doing that when Gannett bought the paper.

JP: That's right, Gannett bought the paper.

ED: What did you think about that? You knew the *Gazette* had financial difficulties,

that it had lost that anti-trust suit against the *Democrat*, the paper was shrinking, and the *Democrat* had all those free classifieds.

JP: They were just driving us to the wall.

ED: It was obvious, I guess, that Hugh Patterson and the family were going to have to do something.

JP: It certainly looked like there was no recourse. First there had been some publisher in Missouri, I don't remember his name, who owned a bunch of small newspapers. Do you remember what his name was?

ED: You said Missouri; plus, there was a place in New Jersey. I'll think of the name, but go ahead with your story.

JP: Ingersoll.

ED: Ingersoll, yes.

JP: Ingersoll, and it didn't sound good. So, when Gannett came around and completed the purchase of the *Gazette*, I was really pretty relieved about it. That was also the time that they bought the *Louisville Courier Journal* and the *Des Moines Register*.

ED: They had already bought the *Nashville Tennessean*.

JP: Yes. So they were acquiring these great newspapers and, given the circumstances, it looked to me like a very good recourse. All that happened after Gannett took over; I was not in a position to experience it, and you and so many others were. My only experience with Gannett was being invited to retire as a columnist, which I think was more economic than anything else because I was

still making a lot of money to write a column three days a week. They were trying to save money. They retired me in a very decent fashion, I'll say that. Generally, my experience with Gannett and Bill Malone was okay. For example, after retirement I proposed to Malone, and he accepted, a proposition for me to go to Cuba and do a series of articles, which they put on page one. When I was with the *Tampa Tribune*, I had gone to Havana in 1959 and wrote about Castro coming to power. Castro had his great blowout then in Havana, celebrating his coming to power, and I went down there for a few days. Then in 1988, I wanted to do "Cuba Revisited," and Malone agreed, and I went down there, spent several days and wrote about seven long pieces, and the *Gazette* gave them a great ride. So my only experience was quite good with that. But I was not there at the *Gazette* when all the conflict was going on. And I certainly was not there when Walker Lundy was the editor. Lundy was just a terrible mistake.

ED: Yes, I think Malone regretted bringing Lundy in. Everybody on the staff regretted it pretty quickly.

JP: I remember that awful episode where he went to the journalism school at Fayetteville and told them that he wanted less literate reporters. What was that line he used? "Literacy was not really important for newspapers." Incidentally, I have some knowledge that everywhere that Lundy went, there was celebration when he left. I still have friends in Tallahassee back from my salad days down there, and Hendrix Chandler, who was from Little Rock and who was the Associated Press bureau chief in Tallahassee for many years, said there was

celebration when Lundy left Tallahassee. The same thing occurred in Fort Worth, where I think he got fired. I'm glad I didn't have to deal with Walker Lundy.

ED: Any history of the recollections of the *Gazette* have to deal with that era --- Walker Lundy and his successor Keith Meyer. But you didn't have to deal with his successor, either.

JP: No, no, I didn't. Nor with Lundy. But I heard a lot about the episode where he was arguing that reporters should be only semi-literate.

ED: He said a lot of goofy things. Talk to me generally about the *Gazette*. Did you have a sense that the *Arkansas Gazette* was a special kind of newspaper, a special place to work?

JP: I honestly did. Of course, I was there twenty-seven years, and some of you were there longer than that. It was a special place. We all had complaints at one time or another, confrontations of one kind or another, arguments of one kind or another. But it was a special place, a special newspaper, and it developed a great reputation in the South and nationally. There were not many like it in the South, if any.

ED: Do you think it was because of the courage that it showed in 1957, which imbued generations that went to work there afterward?

JP: I think so. I think I heard Max Brantley once say that the reputation of the *Gazette* was what drew him here. Of course, it was the same way with me. It was the reputation of the *Gazette*.

ED: Well, that's why I came to work here.

JP: In my case, I had never been to Arkansas, except as a child, when I used to come out here with my family to take the waters at Hot Springs. So I had no connection with Arkansas whatsoever. But I simply knew the reputation of the *Arkansas Gazette* at a time when I was young and ambitious and ready to go anywhere where there was great opportunity.

ED: And we all felt like we were part of an unusual group of people, too.

JP: That's right.

ED: Most people were there for the same reason.

JP: That's true. In my case, perhaps especially, I and my family had a very close association with the Heiskells and the Pattersons, so that gave us a particular viewpoint with the owner, a particular association with the owners, as well as with the great mass of the people who got out the newspaper. We became great friends of the Pattersons and the Heiskells. That was very enjoyable for us.

ED: Speaking of the owners of the newspaper, was there also a sense that the people who owned the *Gazette* were a special breed of newspaper owners who didn't consider the newspaper as simply a property, but as something higher than an ordinary business?

JP: There is no question about it. In the case of Mr. Heiskell, and in the case of Hugh Patterson, and I'm sure it would have been with Carrick, only Carrick had only such a short time before he got rolled out, as did so many others. There was a great sense in the family that the *Gazette* was an institution that they were in

charge of.

ED: Not simply a money-making proposition.

JP: That's right. Well, Lord knows, they lost a lot of money in the great confrontation over Central High. You can't have a good newspaper unless the owners want to have a good newspaper, or a great newspaper unless the owners want to. And the Heiskell family and Hugh Patterson were all of that tradition, as were the people who worked there for so many years.

ED: Can you think of anything else that we ought to cover?

JP: The other thing besides the public accommodations section of the Civil Rights Act on which we erred was that, for maybe a year, we went along with the Vietnam War.

ED: That was the other topic I wanted to talk about.

JP: I think reasonably soon we got off of that and started supporting Senator Fulbright and his position opposing the Vietnam War. We started out supporting the U.S. government in that enterprise, and that was a mistake. And it was mine, because I was the one who wrote the early editorials supporting that war, which was a serious lapse. Now I will say that I think we made up for it in the years afterward by opposing the war with everything we could think of. After the Christmas bombing of Hanoi, by then Nixon was carrying on the war, we had an editorial --- Jerry Neil wrote it, as I recall --- calling for the impeachment of Richard Nixon. We were certainly prophetic on that, I think.

ED: Well, Neil wrote a lot of great editorials about Richard Nixon.

JP: Yes, a major topic and great editorials. Anyway, we came around fairly soon to the great position on the Vietnam war that Fulbright was taking. I learned a lot working on the *Arkansas Gazette*. I developed my own philosophy of government and public affairs on the *Gazette*. Of course, I never had any idea that the *Gazette* would go under. It just never occurred to us in those years. I remember, in 1972 when Mr. Heiskell died, we couldn't have imagined what would happen. The *Gazette* back then was on top of everything and we couldn't imagine what was going to happen. That was about twenty years before the fall.

ED: None of us could have imagined it, until maybe two years before the fall, that there was a chance that the *Gazette* would not survive.

JP: Yes, yes. Speaking of Mr. Heiskell, I remember his 100th birthday party, which I'm sure you remember, too, when he had a big blow-out at the country club. Governor Bumpers and Senator Fulbright came, and we all gave him a big accolade. He sat there and received them in a stately fashion. He was never one to deny what was his due. The next morning I went around to see him, and he was feeling better than I. He said, "You know, Mr. Powell, you should start preparing my obituary editorial, in case I should die at an unexpected hour or on the *Democrat's* time." As a matter of fact, I had already started to formulate it, just in the event, although I had no idea that the event was so near. He suddenly got sick and died six weeks later.

[End of Tape Two, Side One]

[Beginning of Tape Two, Side Two]

ED: What do you think the future will be like without the *Arkansas Gazette*? How's the absence of the *Gazette* going to affect Arkansas? How is it already affecting it almost nine years later?

JP: In a straight political sense, Arkansas now has a strong Republican Party, which is damaging to the state because the Republican Party itself is in such decline. In any case, the politics of the state is suffering badly. With the election of Huckabee as governor, with the election of Senator Tim Hutchinson and the two Republican congressmen, the politics is already suffering. And the political climate of the state is not the same. Where we once had progressive editorials, every day now we have something that resembles the *Manchester Union Leader*. Now the paper really reflects the old South; only now it's the Republican South rather than the Bourbon Democratic South. The whole attitude of the state is suffering. And the retirements of Dale Bumpers and David Pryor from the Senate are a great loss to the state's governance and its participation in the national policy. It is a loss to the country and a great loss to Arkansas as well that they quit. I'm not sure whether Bumpers would've resigned if the *Gazette* were still there. The same with David Pryor. Of course, they had to deal with, at the end, with a Republican Congress, which was dreadful in itself. The newspaper outlook in Arkansas is, frankly, just dreadful. No one can compete with a large, entrenched monopoly paper anymore. There's no respite from the cave-dwelling policies which now prevail in that newspaper. They've even tried to scrub up Orval Faubus at Central High. They've tried to present that in Faubus's light

rather than in the way it happened. The fall of the *Gazette* is one of the great tragedies in this state's experience.

ED: How does it rank as one of the major events of the century?

JP: In Arkansas, certainly, certainly in Arkansas, beyond question. There are a lot of things that I will think about subsequently in these various contexts.

ED: Make a note of them, and we'll sit down and do this again, a little more.

JP: All right. I would say that also when you came with us on the editorial page, after your soul-searching and delay and procrastination, that was a great addition to the *Arkansas Gazette*. When did you come?

ED: January, 1979. I went on the editorial page the week after Bill Clinton took office.

JP: I remember that you had an awful time leaving reporting.

ED: I considered the State Capitol my property.

JP: Yes, that was your property.

ED: I had proprietary feelings about the State Capitol. It couldn't be covered without me.

JP: That's the way a lot of people felt.

ED: I didn't know whether I could write editorials.

JP: Well, of course, you could and did and wrote great. Let's see, you did editorials for ten, eleven years?

ED: From January 1979 until October 1991, so I guess it's about twelve to thirteen years.

JP: It was especially important to us because you did own the State Capitol. It gave a special dimension to our editorial commentary. But the loss of the *Gazette* is one of the great tragedies of the state, one of the seminal events of the last half of the century. I don't know of any redress that is possible anymore in the days of newspaper monopolies.

ED: All right, well let's wrap this up this time, and we'll do this again.

JP: I had one footnote, dealing with Bill Clinton. It was 1978, and he had been just been elected governor. I wrote this great, enthusiastic editorial, in which I made a passing reference that one of these days he might be president. That was prophetic. I did it in a way that I couldn't claim much credit, but I did think about Clinton as President in that great year of 1978. But that was one of my moments of prescience, in dealing with Clinton. I might add in reference to Clinton what's happened on the *Democrat-Gazette*. The fact that they rail against Clinton every day of every week makes it a parody of what a newspaper can become. I guess they would have said the same thing about us and Orval Faubus, but there is hardly a parallel, except that we did spend a lot of time on Orval Faubus.

ED: Mainly on a few issues.

JP: On the issues, of course. Faubus was one of the terrible figures in Arkansas in the 20th Century.

ED: The *Gazette* editorially often criticized Clinton.

JP: Oh yes.

ED: He was always calling up, chewing us out, objecting to some editorial that

criticized him for his lack of leadership on this or that or giving in too readily on a principle.

JP: After 1985, I wasn't on the receiving end of all that. But I'm sure that you were.

ED: In 1982, when he made his comeback, the *Gazette* had a really tough time making a choice. We had three candidates that we liked: Joe Purcell, Jim Guy Tucker and Clinton.

JP: Tucker, if you'll remember, had performed so badly in the campaign that you could dismiss him. Joe Purcell said a bunch of good things in the first primary and then washed out in the second. But Joe's health was so bad that he wouldn't have done at all. Clinton's and Tucker's performances in that campaign were not very good, and we got after them about it on a number of occasions. Possibly the worst thing Clinton had done as governor was to go along with Amendment 59, which disrupted the property tax system. Not much can be done to the tax system in Arkansas because of that monstrous constitutional amendment, and Clinton deserves guilt. But what he did for education, I think, in those years was just great. And, incidentally, I think he's been a great President.

I personally don't care what his private life was, but the *Gazette* was gone when he became President.

ED: The *Gazette* folded a week before or after he announced for President. I think maybe a week before.

JP: That's right. I was doing a weekly column for the *Gazette* about that time. In the last column I wrote then, I said Clinton had as good a chance as anybody else in

the presidential race.

ED: More than any other governor, Clinton had a personal relationship with the editorial staff, because he called up to complain about things.

JP: You got more complaints than I did although I had my share. I remember the editorial meeting we had once in the old Capital Club. He and Hillary, you and I, discussing some particular point.

ED: That was when he was making his comeback. He was in a runoff with Joe Purcell in 1982, and he was scared. Purcell had refused to sign a petition to put this crazy utility amendment on the ballot. It was a mammoth thing, 15,000 words long. It enshrined in the Constitution a lot of detailed regulatory policy. We thought it was outrageous. We praised Joe Purcell for refusing to sign the petition, and Bill Clinton had signed it.

JP: I see. And he and Hillary were giving us fits.

ED: We had criticized Clinton for that and, I guess, he thought it meant that we were going to endorse Joe Purcell.

JP: That would have been a mistake. Joe was sick, really, in awful health.

ED: But we met down at the Capital Club.

JP: That's right.

ED: And he brought along Hillary.

JP: She was harder to handle than he was.

ED: She was; she was tough. So we brought up this thing. Hugh Patterson was there and the rest of the editorial board, Leland DuVall or whoever we had. Clinton,

typically, was trying to get around the commitment. We kept asking him, “Will you oppose this thing in the fall?” And Hillary made the argument that Bill was the one who was showing leadership because it was obviously going to get on the ballot and that Bill, by signing it and helping to put it on the ballot, could then say in the fall . . .

JP: Could renounce it . . .

ED: He could come in in the fall and say, “I helped get this thing on the ballot. I think it is important to vote on this, but now I’m asking you to vote against it.” She made that argument, and Hugh bought it. I said, “Well, can you tell us now that you are going to oppose it?” And Clinton would not say it. I knew that Hillary had helped write the amendment with Scott Trotter, so I kept pestering them about it and they kept dancing around it. Hillary wouldn’t say, and Bill wouldn’t say. Hillary would say, “He’ll be in a better position if he does.” Hugh finally cut me off and said he agreed with them. Of course, that’s what we did. We ended up endorsing Clinton for another term.

JP: Which was the correct thing to do, in all the circumstances.

ED: That fall, of course, right before the election, the Supreme Court knocked the amendment off the ballot, only two or three days before Bill Clinton was going to have a press conference and endorse it.

JP: Oh really?

ED: Yes, he was. They avoided that. But, in the next legislative session, he introduced all that stuff as legislation, including the popular election of a public

service commission. And Hugh Patterson was outraged because he thought we had a commitment from Bill Clinton to oppose it. I kept saying, “No, he never said this.” The worst aspect of Bill Clinton, we all know, is that he can be a little slippery.

JP: Oh, no question about it.

ED: If you didn’t pay close attention, you thought he was on your side, and it would turn out that he wasn’t. Hugh called him and cursed him out during that legislative session, as I recall.

JP: Yes. What I remember especially is that we had that very abrasive meeting with Clinton and Hillary. And that Hillary was harder to handle than Clinton.

ED: She really was.

JP: She was a tough woman. Heaven knows, I hope she gets elected to the Senate of New York. We had lots of disagreements with Clinton, but, as he said, the *Gazette* endorsed him every time that he ran for governor. The *Gazette* was gone by the time he ran for President. Well, that’s a footnote, anyway.

ED: That’s right.

[End of Interview]

[What follows are some final comments added to the text of this transcript by James Powell:]

JP: I might add a few thoughts about J.N. Heiskell. Someone at some time should do a biography on him. In any case all of us remember so many anecdotes about him that we may overdo the color and the personal traits. One of the things that

fascinated visitors was his desk, which was always piled high with all kinds of personal papers and newspapers, none of which anyone would have dared fool around with, not even Mary Powell (no relation), one in a succession of secretaries. Mary was never afraid to speak up to him, but she took no liberties with his desk. He was supposed to know what was in all the clutter, but once when he changed offices, I understand they found uncashed dividend checks and an old typewriter covered up. I personally admired his refusal to have things filed away, for my own thought has been that a clean desk is a sign of weak character. Mine was always cluttered, but I was never in Mr. Heiskell's league.

It was J.N. Heiskell, more than anyone, who built the *Gazette's* reputation for good, literate, spare writing. He had vast respect for the English language and believed in using words as they were originally intended. For example, he fought battles with anyone who tried to use the word "nostalgia" in reference to anything that was past; he insisted that the word referred to a longing for home and should not be taken out of that context. He loathed cliches and would often challenge us about popular expressions. I remember he always rejected the expression "in the final analysis," for example, not to mention cliches that are worse.

Everyone who worked with Mr. Heiskell had his (her) own stories about his personality and his eccentricities. Margaret Ross, the *Gazette's* historian, has her own share of stories about him as he wrote historical columns and a history of the *Gazette* for the first hundred years (or however long it was).

Mr. Heiskell did much to fashion the *Gazette's* reputation in the decades

before the Central High crisis. He demanded that the English language be respected and that news be reported straight and fair and spare. In the Central High affair and in the years of dispute that followed, it was he, as the owner, who, in the end, had to sustain the financial penalties and the personal risk when the *Gazette* lost 20,000 subscribers. He was never much on integration, as such, but he knew that the *Arkansas Gazette* had to do right and stand for the rule of the law, and he backed up Hugh Patterson and Harry Ashmore in the *Gazette*'s heroic stand. I am glad that he did not have to see the *Gazette* fall before the rapacious practices of the Hussman chain; I am glad that he went out when the *Arkansas Gazette* was at the peak of its success and prestige.