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Arkansas Democrat Project

Interview with:

Michael Dougan
7 March 2007
Fayetteville, Arkansas

Interviewer: Jerry McConnell

Jerry McConnell: This is Jerry McConnell. This is March 3, 2007. I am sitting in Tom Dillard's office in the library at the University of Arkansas [Fayetteville] preparing to interview Michael Dougan on the history of the *Arkansas Democrat*, and we will also touch on the *Arkansas Gazette*. This project is for the Pryor Center for [Arkansas] Oral and Visual History. And the first thing I need to do, Michael, is ask you if I have your permission to make this tape recording and turn it over to the archives and the Pryor Center.

Michael Dougan: You have my permission to make this recording and turn it over to the archives at the Pryor Center.

JM: Okay, let's start out now. Just tell me your complete name and spell it for me so they'll be sure to translate it properly.

MD: Michael. M-I-C-H-A-E-L. B as in Bruce. B-R-U-C-E. Dougan. D-O-U-G-A-N—not to be confused with the lesser Irish ones.

JM: Okay. [Laughs] Michael, you, I believe, have just retired as a professor at Ar-
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kansas State University [Jonesboro]. Is that correct?

MD: That is correct.

JM: Okay. And we're going to come back a little later to your background and everything, but amongst other things, you've written books and done a lot of historical research and everything, and you wrote a book in which I'm particularly interested named *Community Diaries* on the History of the Arkansas Press and the Arkansas Press Association [*Community Diaries: Arkansas Newspapering, 1819-2002*]. Is that correct?

MD: Yes.

JM: And in that, I know from reading—and I've read it and enjoyed it—that you read a lot of Arkansas newspapers and you went back and looked at the history—as I say, the history of the press. And over a period of time, you read a lot of the newspapers and I assume—I'm pretty sure you read a whole lot of the *Arkansas Democrats* and the *Arkansas Gazettes*.

MD: And I have never stopped reading them since, and I've read more that I could bring to bear on this project.

JM: Well, that's terrific. That's one reason [laughs] that I wanted to interview you because this is an oral history project, and so we're doing a lot of interviews of what other people thought of the two newspapers and read in the two newspapers, which does not leave us tons of time ourselves to read [laughs] a whole lot of newspapers . . .

MD: [Laughs]

JM: . . . although I've been doing some myself. I've been doing some—going to the library and looking in the microfilms and everything. So I want to get your take

on that, and I don't know exactly where to start on this, but one thing that I've found of interest, Michael, was your take on the papers—the two papers back in the nineteenth century, and in particular, say, in the last twenty years or fifteen—ten or so—leading up to the end of the century before the sort of the changing of the guard, and I don't think a lot of people realize this, but what I gather from what I've heard and particularly from what you've said, that at that point in time, the *Arkansas Democrat* may have been more progressive than the *Arkansas Gazette*.

MD: Oh, there's no question about that in my mind. But I think to get the chronology right—and I don't have my own book in front of me, so I can't pull out the dates—but there was no connection between the *Arkansas Democrat* of the 1870s and the *Arkansas Democrat* of the 1840s, that [William E.] Woodruff had founded after he sold the *Gazette* and did so to advance the cause of Chester Ashley, and later bought the *Gazette* back, and he just didn't want to see it shut down and combined the two and then disposed of the property. But the one in the 1870s came about because of a split in the Democratic Party, and that has to do, I think, a lot with the personality and character of James Mitchell. The Mitchell family, which was from northwest Arkansas—Mitchell's father had gotten involved in a lawsuit and would not let it go. He thought he was right, and he didn't care what it took to win it. I don't know that he ever won it, but the result was that he had joined the trek of people that went to California. And among those—he was not yet a newspaper editor, but had already written extensively for newspapers—was William Minor “Cush” Quesenbury. [Note: MD pronounced it as Cushionberry] So there's a lot of interesting material because both Mitchell and “Cush” kept dia-

ries, and you can compare their entries on a number of things. But the son grew up in that atmosphere. He was from the beginning a very literate and educated child and I seem to remember that he taught, I think—was it at the Arkansas Industrial University [now the University of Arkansas, Fayetteville]? I think—yes, because he was always called Professor Mitchell.

[Tape Stopped]

JM: Before we go any farther, Michael, maybe you ought to spell Cushionberry for us.

MD: Okay. William, first name. Minor, M-I-N-O-R, middle name. Q-U-E-S-E-N-B-U-R-Y. Now, the Quesenbury side of the family is not well-known and not particularly distinguished in Arkansas. His father appears just to have been more or less a plain farmer. But the mother's side—that's all the Beans—Mark Bean and William Bean and Richard Henderson Bean, and Robert Bean, and this family's enough to drive you crazy because they used those names in successive generations, and you never can quite be sure which one you've got a handle on. And they were the salt merchants—had the salt springs that they lost to the Cherokee, and so this is—"Cush," as he was called—C-U-S-H—grew up—he was actually born in Arkansas Territory. You know, very few of these people were in the early period, and he's about the youngest to have been counted as a native. And Mitchell, if I'm not mistaken, was one of his pupils when he taught school briefly at Cane Hill. Well, anyway, Mitchell came down to Little Rock and worked at the *Arkansas Gazette*. And the *Arkansas Gazette*—you have to get involved in the complicated issue of who actually owned it, which is a bit tricky in this period of time because during Reconstruction, in order to protect it from the Republicans, they turned it into some sort of joint stock company so that it didn't have the

individual proprietorship. But for whatever reasons—and I've never been sure what those reasons are—that's a research point worthy of some consideration—anyway, Mitchell fell out with his colleagues there and started a second newspaper entitled the *Arkansas Democrat*. And a fair amount is known because there's some correspondence on how he managed to keep the paper and get it out, and how he invested in Arkansas warrants. This is a long and complicated story, but the state didn't operate on cash, and if you wanted ready money, you had to sell your warrants. And so there were always people buying these and holding them, and so he was kind of a warrant broker. And it was—you can look at, physically, the two papers, especially in the 1890s, because there's a considerable change of ownership in the *Gazette* from the 1870s through the 1880s and the 1890s up until [J. N.] Heiskell bought it in the early twentieth century. And the quality of printing is greatly superior on the part of the *Democrat*. The layout is greatly superior. But, most importantly, the elevation of moral tone is greatly superior. Now, it's interesting if you take some of the critical events in that period of time and compare the two newspapers, they're not necessarily that far apart on what they're saying, but they're certainly far apart on how they're saying it. And, of course, the critical issue was the rise of the farm labor movement, which threatened the Democratic Party, and the farm labor union reached out to black voters, and black voters were allowed to vote as long as they voted Republicans, and Republicans couldn't win anything. But if, in fact, the white vote became divided, then the black vote became important, and the black vote had to be destroyed. And that's what happened to black civil rights in Arkansas in the late 1880s and early 1890s. And you find both of these newspapers defending that, so there's not a difference

on that. But if you follow some other issues, there are some differences. Do you want me to give you some examples on that?

JM: Yes. Yes, I do.

MD: Okay. One of the editorials—and I’m sorry I don’t have this one right at my hands to quote from—from the *Arkansas Gazette*, during the time when the banker was nominally the owner of the newspaper, W. B. Worthen. And Dickson Brugman—you remember little Dickey, of course . . .

JM: Yes, I know who he was.

MD: Okay. [Laughter] I thought you went back to his time. [Laughs]

JM: No, no, not quite. Well, almost. [Laughter]

MD: Dickson Brugman was the official editor. This was after James N. Smithee had departed, and if we want to get onto Smithee, I can certainly do that. But the whole South—in fact, almost America generally—in the late 1890s and early 1900s was ablaze in lynchings. And Brugman said—this is the official voice of the *Arkansas Gazette*—that “no respectable Negro was ever lynched.”

JM: Hmm.

MD: Well, if we compare the *Democrat*’s position on that, they had rather—Mitchell had rather a lot to say on that. In the first place, there had been a lynching in Texarkana where they had burned a boy, and that was defended by the local editor down there. And his comment on that was, “Shame!” And there was a second lynching in Pine Bluff . . .

JM: That was Mitchell’s comment—“Shame!”

MD: Yes, “Shame!”

JM: Yes, okay.

MD: And there was a second lynching in Pine Bluff, and the *Graphic*, one of Pine Bluff's newspapers at that time defended that as well. And it's—he quoted what the *Graphic* said. “The best of order prevailed throughout. The citizens met for a common good, and did it effectively and fearlessly.” And Mitchell's take on this, and I'm quoting him here, “It is time to halt. The *DEMOCRAT*—” and he always put that in caps [capital letters] when he printed it—“will always be found fighting on this line. To defend the mob is to invite ruin and utter destruction of every interest of society.”

JM: Oh, very good.

MD: And, of course, the other thing that Mitchell was most noted for was women's rights.

JM: Yes.

MD: And on one point turning the *Democrat* over to women to put out a women's issue.

JM: As I recall, the two papers greatly disagreed on that particular issue . . .

MD: Right.

JM: . . . that the *Democrat* was in favor of women's rights and the *Gazette* was opposed.

MD: Right. He called for the abolition of the convict lease system, and that had always been a sticky issue because the state had privatized the prison, just like Walter Reed did with the veterans they were waiting to dispose of after they got out of the “hospital.” And they privatized the prison system, and there was a good deal of competition, all of it under the table, for who got the leasing of the prisoners. In fact, what the leasers did, then, was sublease them to railroads and mines and

everything else. And one of the people who figured in that, who is still commemorated by a little building down on Markham Street, was Zeb Ward. Zeb was highly thought of, apparently, at the *Gazette*, and I'm not so sure in other circles that he was. And, of course, the biggest issue of this period—and no one in modern times has delved into this—but it was the charge that William E. Woodruff, Jr., had defrauded the state of millions of dollars as state treasurer.

JM: Hmm.

MD: And he was never convicted on that, but Mitchell led the attack on that, and Mitchell called his escape from conviction a travesty of justice. But no one—there are documents and documents—piles of stuff—but, of course, unless you know the arcane way that this accounting was done—warrants brought in, paid off, and then they were supposed to be marked off and destroyed. Apparently, what had happened from time to time was the same ones [laughs] were being recycled and paid multiple.

JM: Cashed in again. [Laughter]

MD: Yes.

JM: Okay. Let me inject here that William E. Woodruff, Jr., is the son of the founder of the *Arkansas Gazette*.

MD: Right, and had been—if you look at Woodruff, Jr., who took over the *Gazette* after C.C. Danley died at the end of the Civil War, really—and breathed life—considerable life into the paper.

JM: Yes.

MD: But, even at that time, there had been these divisions within the party, because Woodruff represented one wing and then there was another wing, they styled

themselves the conservatives, which appeared to have been more aligned with ex-Whigs. So there's a lot of complicated material involved in all this. And the other thing is that the person who in the 1890s had the *Arkansas Gazette*, as he had had it earlier in the 1870s, was Smithee. And Smithee . . .

JM: What was it, James?

MD: Yes.

JM: And that's—spell Smithee.

MD: S-M-I-T-H-E-E.

JM: All right.

MD: Lawrence County boy—got his start in journalism barely before the Civil War.

JM: Okay.

MD: But I've never quite—Smithee had a long-running war with Opie Read, and that's one of the great moments in Arkansas history, sometimes called the last duel. When Smithee and John D. Adams met more or less accidentally on the streets of Little Rock, and more or less started firing at each other. [Laughs]

JM: Yes.

MD: And Read reported it in a way that did not make Smithee look good, and . . .

JM: And Read was working for Smithee at the newspaper.

MD: And Read was working for Smithee. Yes.

JM: Yes.

MD: And I turned up—Read did not long stay in Arkansas journalism. His penchant of writing fiction disguised as stories did not go over well at all times, although there's some really classic stories involved in that. But Read went on and founded another newspaper devoted to humor, the *Arkansas Traveler*. And he

moved that to Chicago [Illinois], but then he found it was more profitable to turn out these novels.

JM: Yes.

MD: This enormous list of novels. Well, I ran across another piece of Smithee's—after he had left the *Gazette*—this was around 1900—he was still gunning at Read.

JM: [Laughs]

MD: Read had gotten up North—had gotten associated with the gold [standard] people—he was not sound on silver, and then Smithee went back and fought all this—some of this other stuff over—had some very sarcastic things to say about this tramp printer that arrived in Carlisle back at, what, thirty-plus years before. Anyway, to that end, there's a cryptic—I don't call it cryptic—I think a pretty obvious comment that Frederick Allsopp made that I quoted in *Community Diaries* about how on occasion he had taken the whole package of *Gazettes* to be mailed, and carried it down to the post office himself, and Allsopp was just a little squeak of a person—how he defined himself was he was no Sandow—the world's strongest man—in strength. And, of course, this was the Mr. Atlas of the early twentieth century. And if you look at the newspaper—the *Gazette*—in the Worthen years in particular, it's just held together by baling wire, to use an airplane metaphor. [Laughter] And that's the kind of wreck it was in when Heiskell bought it.

JM: Yes.

MD: And, of course, what's interesting is—I'm guessing—now, this is speculation, but it would seem most evident that Heiskell did not blame the staff. The fault lay in the fact that no one was putting any money into the paper, and, thus, Allsopp, who

was business manager, and Brugman stayed on for the next fifty years, nearly.

JM: Yes. [Laughs]

MD: I mean, you'd certainly overlap with Allsopp, right?

JM: Almost. Almost.

MD: Yes.

JM: Yes, he died, I think, maybe in the late 1940s or he left in the late 1940s.

MD: Yes.

JM: And I went to work in Little Rock in 1951.

MD: Okay.

JM: Okay, now, but Allsopp—that's—and he did have a prominent role in—and that's double L, right? A-L-L-S-O-P-P.

MD: A-L-L-S-O-P-P.

JM: And I assume that's who Allsopp Park in Little Rock is named after.

MD: Yes.

JM: That family and everything. And then Brugman is B-R-U-G-M-A-N, if I remember.

MD: Right.

JM: And it's Dickinson, is that right?

MD: No, it's Dickson.

JM: Is it? Okay.

MD: Yes, I'm pretty sure. D-I-C-K-S-O-N.

JM: Okay.

MD: I would probably need to verify that.

JM: That's okay. We've got—I can check that later. But, at any rate—okay, but—so

at this time when Heiskell—that there were, as I recall from your book, there were two significant events that happened in Arkansas newspapering in 1902; one of was Mitchell died. Is that correct?

MD: Right, Mitchell died.

JM: And then the Heiskells bought the *Arkansas Gazette*.

MD: Right.

JM: Okay.

MD: And to comment on that, what we, I suppose, have to reflect on in the first place were the dynamics of the Mitchell family. And the traditional newspaper role up to the late nineteenth century was that putting out the newspaper was often—and ideally on the part of many owners—less important than the job printing. And one advantage to getting a—or having a newspaper—was that you would get the so-called “legals”—the governmental notices that laws required to be published. And a lot of these little county newspapers, of course, just existed to get the “legals,” and then do as much job printing as they could. Well, what breaks that down is when you create a daily, you need different presses. You’re operating in an entirely different world. And, of course, both the *Democrat* and the *Gazette* were dailies, and most of them were five-day-a-week dailies at this point, and there’s these wonderful complicated issues, which I don’t think anybody has written too much about, on the morality of Sunday papers, and when we got Sunday papers, and all the rest of that.

JM: Yes.

MD: And there’s a certain irony in it because the preachers objected violently to Sunday papers, which, of course, were printed on Saturday.

JM: Yes.

MD: [Laughter] But in the late nineteenth century the preachers objected to everything, unlike today when they—you know, just embrace modernism and are happy with the world as it is. [Laughter] But in the case of the *Democrat*, the profitable element, obviously, was DP & L—Democrat Printing and—what?

JM: Lithographing.

MD: Lithographing—I couldn't remember which way that went. And, essentially, after 1902, that split off, and that left the newspaper on its own. Then they had a fight over the union, but none of the Mitchell heirs really stepped up to the plate, so there was no moral tone—morally high-toned successor to Mitchell.

JM: As I gather—and correct me if I'm wrong on this—that maybe the Mitchell family kept DP & L . . .

MD: Right.

JM: . . . but sold the paper.

MD: Ultimately, yes.

JM: Yes.

MD: Ultimately, that's what happened.

JM: Okay.

MD: Now, in case you don't know this—I'll get those things—maybe you don't know.

[Laughs]

JM: Well, I know some of this because I read your book.

MD: Right. One of the people who had gone to work with the *Democrat* in the 1890s is worthy of some comment and a story. And now I've got to remember his name because, you know once you retire you don't remember anything anymore, and

you immediately go blank. That's why I wish I had the book in front of me.

[Tape Stopped]

MD: Okay, now that we've fixed those problems, let's pick up the story of Harper, who was a part owner of the *Democrat* in the early twentieth century. His father was a Union Army veteran.

JM: Okay, what's his first name?

MD: Clio. C-L-I-O. I don't know whether it's [CLI-oh or CLEE-oh] in pronunciation.

JM: Yes, okay.

MD: It's sometimes spelled with an E by people who weren't sure.

JM: Okay.

MD: But I know who would know, so—it's Lawrence Harper.

JM: Yes, okay.

MD: The family's still around. But he was a poor boy growing up on the farm, partly in—several different places in Arkansas, because as it turned out, his Union Army father had two things that were—or at least three things that were wrong with him: addiction to alcohol, addiction to drugs, and addiction to other women.

JM: [Laughs]

MD: And as a child, Clio grew up oblivious to all this around him, apparently, because finally one of his, I think, older siblings sat down and explained what was going on. But, early on, he had started writing—taught school and wrote and did some things. And the editor of the Boone Banner thought that the newspapers of Arkansas ought to be covering the Columbian Exposition in Chicago [Illinois] in 1893. And so a fund was raised to send this young reporter up there. I'm not sure he was twenty-one yet—I don't think he was. We could check on that for good

measure. Well, half the newspapers or more didn't pay [laughs] like they were supposed to, and he found work sweeping things out. But he kept supplying these weekly accounts. Now, I've not taken the time to run all those—or any of them—down. But who should come—? In fact, I'd say half or more—certainly, two-thirds of the established newspaper men in Arkansas—and women—made it to Chicago, because, I mean, all these expositions were very big, important events. If you look at the papers in 1892, there's a ton of stuff on what's going to be done and all the—a lot of build-up for it. And the Mitchells came. And Mitchell told him, "I've got a job for you in Little Rock when this is over if you want it." And so back in 1893—of course, now, realize in 1893 is the year of the worst depression in American history. Posey lost a—well, we won't go into Uncle Posey, but [laughs] he was a newspaper editor—lost the family house in that, and never would live in it again, even though the family got it back.

JM: Who is this we're talking about?

MD: Posey Woodside.

JM: Oh, okay.

MD: Of Oregon County, Missouri.

JM: Okay. Is this your Uncle Posey?

MD: Uncle Posey, yes.

JM: Yes, okay. All right.

MD: So—James Posey, to get his full name.

JM: Okay.

MD: But, be that as it may, when Harper got to Little Rock—and all this is detailed in his diary, so we've got very extensive commentary—but, good gracious, he was

the city editor, the crime editor, the theater editor. He was literally putting out the daily newspaper coverage himself.

JM: At the *Arkansas Democrat*?

MD: At the *Arkansas Democrat*. And it was very much of a challenge, but, of course, it was also an education. And it's certainly observable—I quoted this in *Community Diaries* from Walt Whitman, that working for a newspaper was the equivalent of a college education. And Harper became a very literate, educated book collector, writer, and the first person I know of in Arkansas—I'm fairly positive of—to die of ALS [Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis]—Lou Gehrig's Disease.

JM: Hmm.

MD: Which wasn't in the books then because, of course, they couldn't classify—you can't classify a disease until it's gotten an official international classification.

JM: Yes.

MD: So through all the ups and downs of that—and one wishes his diary covered all of that—he stayed at the *Democrat* and then became a part owner. But they couldn't—they lacked the resources that the Mitchell family had had from the success of the printing and all the other things. And, of course, they're up against the much stronger competition that Heiskell was now providing at the *Gazette*. So that's the story of the nineteenth century. There are a couple of other things—I mean, I can mention all kinds of things, but what else out of the nineteenth century might you want me to mention?

JM: Well, I think we've pretty much covered it then because I was—one thing that I did want to ask you, though, about—do you have any idea—is there really any way to tell what the circulation of the two newspapers was—say, like in the

1890s—which paper had the largest circulation?

MD: Oh, I know the material that that might be in was collected by Bob Meriwether and is at the Arkansas History Commission. There are these—called Ayers [pronounced: ires]—A-Y-E-R-S, if I remember correctly—a newspaper directory, and similar ones—but there’s no ABC—Audit Bureau of Circulation.

JM: Right, yes.

MD: So—liar, liar, press on fire . . . [laughs]

JM: Yes.

MD: . . . might be the . . .

JM: Everybody says what they’ve got, and they don’t always have it in those days.

MD: Right. And I have seen from that—and in other places—claims made for the circulation of Arkansas newspapers that were very short lived, and I seriously doubt had anything like those numbers.

JM: I did—and I didn’t know whether there was any other information to reflect on that—I did go back through the Ayers publication—well, actually, I had some people here at the library go back and look it up over a period of those years . . .

MD: Yes.

JM: . . . [] and everything. And I think maybe that the *Gazette* still always had the lead back then. Of course, they had a much bigger state circulation than the *Democrat* did and everything—or at least these figures reflect that the *Gazette* had the lead. But now I’m interested in what happened to the newspapers after 1902—after Heiskell bought the *Gazette*, and what kind of newspaper it became and why, and what kind of newspaper the *Democrat* became.

MD: Well, the interesting thing here—and this doesn’t reflect on the historical record,

but it reflects on my problems with this—is that until the 1990s, Arkansas State University has no run of these on microfilm, and now we've got early and late. We don't have anything in the middle.

JM: Okay.

MD: In fact, in the early period, any time I wanted to use the *Democrat*, I had to go to Little Rock.

JM: Okay.

MD: And, as you know, this is a time-intensive operation, and you throw travel and things into it, and it's a—so I'm lacking. A lot of my information is mostly secondhand . . .

JM: Okay.

MD: . . . as opposed to firsthand. On the other hand, we do have a run of the *Gazette*, so I could follow this, and certainly one of the things that's interesting is how the ads—by the early twentieth century, a daily paper—and even a better weekly—should not have ads on the front page. Well, if you look at the *Gazette* at the time that Heiskell bought it, they have ads which you could easily confuse with headlines, since they're all over the place on the front page. [Laughs] And Heiskell had this experience of working for a number of better newspapers east of the Mississippi, and he was a cultivated, methodical, almost professor-like—in fact, in many ways his personality would seem much like that of James Mitchell. Had he ever taught school, he would've been called Professor Heiskell.

JM: Yes.

MD: And is that safe? Now, you know him better than I did.

JM: No, that sounds correct. I think so. I've even heard—I had one guy I interviewed

who called him pedantic.

MD: Well, I was about to use [laughs] that very word. But to that end, then, he set out—I'd almost say with, like, a five- or ten-year plan. "Going to do this. Going to do this. Going to do this." And it was a combination of things. For instance, the comics—I mean, he did not neglect, even though he had no use for them—and even though he'd been briefly a sportswriter, but he knew that sports sold newspapers—I was a little surprised to find in the 1930s in the *Gazette*, some sports stories on the front page. Of course, they were important, critical things, like the University [of Arkansas] losing—actually, it wasn't a loss—it was actually the time they played George Washington [University] Colonials, and it had rained cats and dogs, and the one team had a running game and the other had a ground game, and neither one of them could do anything, and the score was zero to zero, and that got on the front page. But you can watch the rise of the separate sections, which in the nineteenth century—well, you could say there's some degree of sectionalization in the nineteenth century paper. It was, of course, much more pronounced in the weeklies than it was in the dailies, because the dailies—often the first dailies were just four-column—cribbed by the editor and his wife—I mean, taking Searcy for an example. They go down to the train station and get the papers and crib some stories, and print them off and get them out.

JM: Get them from some other newspaper that came through here?

MD: Another newspaper, yes, because it cost big bucks to get telegraph service. But, certainly, in the case of Heiskell, I would—I'm inclined to look at the 1930s as almost sort of a golden age. The competition of radio has only started to come in, and radio was still localized. I mean, the organization of networks and national

programs is emerging in the 1930s, but it's not dominant. Of course, television is not even yet in its infancy—it's in the womb. But the Arkansas—this would be an interesting question, because in the 1930s, both the *Gazette* and the *Democrat* had magazine sections.

JM: Okay.

MD: Now, who came first? This, I don't know. The magazine sections—you can almost take The *New York Times* as a case in point and study everything that they're doing, and find that Heiskell and the *Democrat* are following this as best they can.

JM: Emulating them.

MD: Emulating.

JM: Yes.

MD: And there were elements of that which were much stronger in the *Gazette* than they were in the *Democrat*. Now, of course, you have to recognize the answer to defining what that means presents a certain amount of bias. To wit, I don't know that any of you all had much use for the bird woman at Morrilton, but I read her religiously. [Laughter]

JM: I can—I remember her, but I didn't read it.

MD: [Laughs] Well, it's also interesting, too, because when her articles first appeared—I mean, now, recognize an important part of English newspapers as well as the *London Times* was the Country Diary, and the first sighting of this, that, or the other bird, and all the rest of that.

JM: Yes.

MD: So she's plainly—in an international literary tradition—about what the weekly

Sunday—and the weekly and the Sunday paper become the same in the twentieth century, which . . .

JM: Which paper did she run in?

MD: In the *Gazette*.

JM: In the *Gazette*.

MD: In the *Gazette*. Yes, I have forgotten her name, but it's buried in here somewhere. It's Ruth Thomas.

JM: Okay.

MD: When she first appeared in there, it was in the much older tradition of being anonymous, and one of the major problems in writing newspaper history is trying to determine who wrote what. A lot of nineteenth century work is done under pseudonyms. And my favorite—Colonel M. L. DeMahler [pronounced Dee-MAY-ler]—M-L-D-E-capital M-A-H-L-E-R, as opposed to Mahler [pronounced MAW-ler]—wrote under the pseudonym most of the time of Potomac.

JM: Okay.

MD: But a lot of them don't even get identifiable pseudonyms that you can associate with a person.

JM: Track down.

MD: That you can track down. And I think there was just a little initial, if I remember correctly, under the bird woman. And after World War II, she actually got her own name on the thing.

JM: Yes.

MD: And I know the *Democrat* followed with its own magazine in that period of time, but I've not examined nearly as many of those. And this—I mean, on Heiskell's

part, this meant shelling out money, because this was all done by freelance people. Most of it—ninety percent of it is done that way.

JM: Now, I gather that you started seeing the *Democrats* again along about the 1930s, then. Is that correct?

MD: Yes.

JM: From the 1930s. Can you contrast the two newspapers, say, in the 1930s and 1940s? What was the difference in them in that period of time?

MD: Well, I would put that this way: the *Arkansas Gazette* had been a state institution, not merely a newspaper—since 1819.

JM: Yes.

MD: First on the ground, and it was the one always quoted. There's a wonderful cartoon based on an observation of Governor Jeff Davis in the early twentieth century, that the *Gazette's* the lead dog and all the little ones follow.

JM: Yes.

MD: But that was, to a large extent, true. And to that end, the *Gazette* could be found circulated in all the counties of the state, as far as I know.

JM: Yes.

MD: And the *Democrat*, in the late nineteenth century, may or may not have matched that. Now, one of the things that's interesting—I would be more inclined to trust as reasonably semi-accurate the circulation figures that Mitchell might have given in that period as opposed to those of the *Gazette*. [Laughs]

JM: Yes.

MD: But the elements that—let me phrase that this way because we always wish to be careful and get these things down just [MD makes a tapping noise on the table]

perfect—the *Arkansas Democrat* of the late nineteenth century was indeed a state newspaper, and as such, was technically the superior of the *Gazette*.

JM: Yes.

MD: Now, they both circulated, they both competed, they both differed. I expect a lot of rural and small-town subscribers took both. Well into the twentieth century you should also recognize it—I mean, you do know this—the [*Memphis*] *Commercial Appeal* was an active coverer of Arkansas events extending even to the legislative sessions in Little Rock.

JM: Yes.

MD: And their last great coverage of that—George Moreland, whom you may or may not remember—their Arkansas correspondent actually lived in West Memphis. And you could find—amazingly, or maybe not amazingly—you could find a fair amount of Arkansas material in both the Kansas City [Missouri] and the St. Louis [Missouri] newspapers. I don't know if there's an equal interest in Texas, but there's a surprising amount—well, actually, it's not surprising. The news followed the rails, and the Kansas City Southern Railroad ran through western Arkansas.

JM: Yes.

MD: So the Kansas City Star and other newspapers picked up stories from Oklahoma, Kansas, Missouri, and Arkansas.

JM: Yes.

MD: And a number of people in Arkansas had some previous affiliation or connection with Kansas City, and the case in point there is the *Baxter Bulletin*. And I'll pull that family's name out of the . . .

JM: Shiras.

MD: The Shiras family, the founder of that. Yes. Tom, who did freelancing for the *Star*. And, of course, the same was true of the St. Louis papers following what would have been the St. Louis Iron Mountain and the Missouri Pacific and the Cotton Belt and others.

JM: Yes.

MD: So the *Democrat* and the *Gazette* operated in this state—web is not too bad a word to phrase it. And there's some just wonderful stories that I don't know all the ins and outs of—in the early 1920s, because I know the *Democrat* was on top of this story, because Shiras said it was, so he's getting from that and from other sources as well—there was this lawsuit in Searcy County over dogs, and it got statewide attention because the man who sold these so-called hunting dogs and the man that bought them said they're not really—so there's this great dog case.

JM: Yes.

MD: And I know it's a good one. I just don't know—it was settled out of court. But it exemplified a lot of—I mean, today a story like that would not probably get the coverage that it got back then.

JM: But dogs were probably more important back then. [Laughter]

MD: Well, dogs were a lot more important back then. Yes, there was money at stake on these dogs. They had them measured up. They chased rabbits—that's what the problem was. [Laughs] They were supposed to be good dogs, and they ran off and chased rabbits.

JM: Yes.

MD: I mean, this hunter's nightmare. But the *Democrat* had this same network of

country correspondents, and they had that in the 1890s and that continued well into the twentieth century. I remember reading one of them in the 1890s who predicted with regard to pecans—that the nut industry is going to become important in Arkansas, and this . . .

[End of Tape 1, Side 1]

[Beginning of Tape 1, Side 2]

JM: Now, this is side two of this tape, and I'm continuing here with Michael Dougan. Michael, you were talking about somebody talking about the nut industry.

MD: [Laughs] Yes. That was the *Democrat's* correspondent from Elmo.

JM: And what county was that in?

MD: Independence County.

JM: Independence. Okay.

MD: Yes.

JM: So that's where Batesville is at—Independence County—right?

MD: Right.

JM: Somewhere near Batesville. Okay.

MD: So things got so bad at the *Democrat* that at one point Heiskell bought it—Heiskell and Allsopp.

JM: Yes.

MD: This was denied for many years. Margaret Ross, I think, had the complete paper trail down.

JM: I think that's right, and I need to see that. But that's around 1907 or 1908 or somewhere in there, as I understand it. And as I recollect from your book—and Allsopp obviously was involved in that, but there have been reports that the He-

iskells were involved in that, too, and then they sold it. Mr. Heiskell, I gather, always denied that the Heiskells were involved, but Margaret Ross says that she found records proving that they were. Isn't that correct?

MD: Right. And there was a way—I was going to see if I had quoted that because it was a very—his denial was phrased in such a way as—I think he left himself some maneuver . . .

[Taped Stopped]

JM: Okay, Michael, you were talking about the sale of the *Democrat* in the early twentieth century and whether or not the *Gazette* at one point actually owned it.

MD: And—oh, there's—you'd have to ask it—it's almost like a sex act. Now, what do you mean by owned?

JM: Yes. [Laughs]

MD: And the evidence plainly indicates that—well, to get the chronology—the *Democrat* had been hit by union activities—strikes and the like—by trying to run an open shop, and so in 1906 the heirs sold it to something that was called the Little Rock Publishing Company. And Harper was the secretary and, I think, really, the prime knowledgeable press person involved in this. And the other one was George C. Naylor. And 1906 was not a good year because the following year was the panic of 1907, which brought down any number of Arkansas businesses and must have greatly reduced advertising revenues and the like. And Naylor had, I think, a massive stroke of some sort, and he was not very old, and [he] died. And the Naylor family sold their interest—nominally, at least—to Fred Allsopp. And we don't think that this was really Allsopp's or certainly all of Allsopp's money that was involved in this. And, essentially, not wanting to work under these con-

ditions—then Harper, who had a minority share of stock, sold out. But what happens, then, in 1911 is that two other people—John M. Branham and Elmer E. Clarke purchased the paper.

JM: Let me stick this in right there. As I remember, Branham is B-R-A-N-H-A-M, and Clarke is with an E.

MD: It's with an E on the end.

JM: C-L-A-R-K-E.

MD: Yes.

JM: Okay, right.

MD: And their business manager, [K.] August Engel, is the critical and key person here.

JM: Yes.

MD: What happens is that DP & L remains a prominent printing firm, but the *Democrat*—it is fair to say slowly—well, put it this way—it never regained the status it had in the 1890s.

JM: Okay.

MD: Which were its peak years. Now, Harper had made the observation that Mitchell ran the paper on the cheap, and cut at everything too close. He chaffed at the restrictions imposed upon it. I guess—and you should know this better than I would—he should've worked under Engel.

JM: Yes. [Laughs] That's true. But it was at that time when Allsopp nominally bought the paper that there's some suspicion that the Heiskells also were owners of the *Democrat*. What was the quote that Heiskell made later on that you . . .

MD: Well, that he did not—I didn't exactly quote it—it did not rule out that those as-

sociated with the *Gazette* may have made the purchase. Now, that's how Dougan phrased it.

JM: Okay.

MD: And I think that's the wiggle room so that he could always say—as he would say later—“No, I didn't own it.”

JM: Okay. And so the best that your information is that after Clarke and Branham bought the *Democrat* and they started running it, that it did not regain in that period of time the prestige that it had under Mitchell.

MD: No.

JM: But I think Mr. K. August Engel bought out the others along about . . .

MD: Along the way.

JM: . . . 1926 or 1928 or somewhere in there.

MD: Yes.

JM: And then, starting probably from that point or at least from the 1930s on, you are—you do know how Engel ran the paper and what kind of paper it was and everything, so I wish you'd tell me about that—what kind of paper it was under Engel.

MD: Well, in the first place, we have to recognize the milieu in which the news operated. Before radio and television, informed people liked their news arriving twice daily—the morning paper and the afternoon paper.

JM: Yes.

MD: And a lot of this in the twentieth century will have to do with international news, and that was, in fact, something of benefit for evening papers. But you'd have a paper with breakfast and then you'd have the other paper come in the afternoon.

So they divided the market. Virtually everything else they duplicated. I was struck, in fact, that in 1938 the *Arkansas Democrat* ran two of the most popular comics of the period, “Henry” and “Blondie.” Well, those popular comics, I think—I don’t know the complete mechanics of this—probably cost more than some other [comic] strips, and it’s almost fair to say that you could—in most metropolitan markets you could look at the stronger paper by the number and greater popularity of the strips that they monopolized. So there’s a comics war going on, and Engel was willing to spend money on “Henry” and “Blondie.” Secondly, all of the things that were going on at the *Gazette* were echoed in one way or another at the *Democrat*, which ran, for instance—and this was a popular theme in the 1920s and 1930s—cooking schools. And, of course, ultimately this will lead to having typically a woman as a cooking editor and a food section. And, of course, that will allow for the organization of grocery ads on a given day. These are things which develop in this period, as opposed to the random grocery advertising. I can tell you what grocery advertising consisted of in the early nineteenth century is that you’d get these small notices that they had received flour and salt and stuff, and now had coffee again. I mean, that was it.

JM: Yes.

MD: This was quite a bit different from the feature kind of advertising and layouts and prices and the like, which you begin to find in the twentieth century. So the magazine section, although not as good as, was nevertheless a copy—food section, sports section, business section—but I was struck, in fact, by still in the 1930s how much state news there was, and the notion that the *Democrat* was just a Little Rock newspaper does not bear out.

JM: Yes.

MD: Not in the 1930s and 1940s, and probably not even in the 1950s. That may fit the 1970s, but that's a different milieu, and we'd have to approach that from a different structural background. Now, the great event—or maybe it's the sad event—is the shrinkage of the editorial. And what begins to take its place in the twentieth century is nationally syndicated editorial writers. Also, any editor that wanted to do this [laughs] could take from every single organization their promotional literature on bicycle safety day and fix up an editorial on the subject. Engel—I have this on authority, and, again, you're a better authority than I am—was strong against parking meters. But you don't find a strong editorial presence in the *Democrat*. The point is in this 1930s-1940s milieu, you don't find much of one on the *Gazette* either. And Heiskell, who was a southern Conservative, opposed, for instance, repealing the poll tax. When you consider the shifts that took place after [Harry] Ashmore came onto the scene . . .

JM: Yes.

MD: If you compare the last decades when Heiskell was an active editorial writer, the change from conservatism to so-called “liberalism” is striking.

JM: Okay. And the—both papers—the *Democrat* or the *Gazette*—say, in the 1930s and 1940s, at least until Ashmore got to the *Gazette* in about 1947, they were not taking strong editorial stands for the most part. Is that correct—that they were pretty [laughs] noncommittal, so to speak?

MD: I think that's true. One would have to look issue by issue, but I certainly do not remember coming across any references, either in my own research or of others, to flaming causes of one sort and another.

JM: Yes.

MD: And I do know—I do recall—that, for instance, after World War I—I'm assuming this was Heiskell—at the *Gazette*—this is all unsigned material—but was, like almost every American newspaper, all worried about the “Red Threat.” But he still somehow thought the “Red Threat” had something to do with the ex-Kaiser. International events—not the strong suite.

JM: Yes.

MD: And the local issues—we certainly had them, but I guess what they had discovered—I think this is probably true in the Jeff Davis days—was the strong editorials tended to backfire. Strong editorial policy made enemies. Enemies hurt advertising. And it actually gave promotion—I mean, Davis was very adroit in using newspaper opposition to further his career.

JM: Yes, he actually ran against the *Gazette* and the *Democrat*, as I recall.

MD: Right—both of them at the same time.

JM: Yes.

MD: You could find editorials—I'm not saying that they were extinct—but they were very mild compared to what they had been before. I made the observation in the book, and I think it's probably true, to a large extent, that what Heiskell took the *Gazette* away from was any discussion of personalities. It was issues, and issues merely. And it's, of course, ironic that we will in the late twentieth century—late and unlamented twentieth century—return to a journalism which has much of the overdriven personality assassination that marked nineteenth century uncontrolled newspapers.

JM: Yes.

MD: There has not been progress in the field, but rather the reverse of the same.

JM: There was a time, I take it from your book and from some of the things I'd hear—particularly in the nineteenth century—that the newspaper just existed to take the cause of one party or one candidate.

MD: Had one candidate—one person []. Yes.

JM: That was the whole thrust of it almost, was that, “Okay, we’re promoting our people to hold the governorship and everything. But after . . .

MD: And a good deal of gutter-sniping.

JM: Yes.

MD: And, ironically, to say that is a feature that returns to the Arkansas newspaper world in the late twentieth century.

JM: Engel—and I don’t know that was the case—it seemed to me to be Engel in particular—but Engel—his papers just did not take strong editorial opinions very often, did they?

MD: That was not my impression, no.

JM: Yes.

MD: But I can’t say that there was any lack of coverage in terms of issues. And there were a number of ways in which newspapers could approach this, and I’ve always thought it was greatly useful for me as a historian, and that was that someone would be assigned to read what the better weeklies’ editorial writers were saying. And so you’d have a collection once a week from opinion around the state.

JM: I remember that.

MD: And in that sense that kind of worked as a substitute for the newspaper itself having an opinion. If they could find that it was coming out of Harrison or Hope or

[laughs]—of course we're thinking of Alex Washburn [laughs] and some other people.

JM: Did you see any big difference in the news coverage, say, in the 1930s and 1940s that would up and leap out at you?

MD: No. And in essence, the wire pictures, which were, of course, an innovation in this period of time—when one gets it, the other has to—they were all connected to the wire services, so I believe—let's see if my recollection is correct—the *Gazette* was Associated Press and wasn't the *Democrat* United [Press] or . . . ?

JM: Well . . .

MD: Did they have AP, too?

JM: It may have been that way a long time ago, but by the time I got there they were AP also.

MD: AP also. Okay.

JM: Yes.

MD: But there were several different news services you could subscribe to, and . . .

JM: INS, as I remember—International News Service.

MD: Right.

JM: And some of the others.

MD: And you had the necessity of buying new presses from time to time, and I think the *Gazette* stayed ahead of the *Democrat* on the technical side, at least into the 1970s or 1980s.

JM: Including air-conditioning! [Laughs]

MD: Including air-conditioning, yes, as the observation was made by many a former *Democrat* staffer, that the *Arkansas Democrat* building, which was not built as a

press building, but was the old YMCA [Young Men's Christian Association] and smelled of the same—became acutely revealing of its origins in the heat of summer.

JM: In hot weather, yes. Yes, when I went to work there in 1951 it did not have air-conditioning, and it got very hot up there in the summertime. So—and this is not—this is mostly supposedly about the *Democrat*, but I'm interested as well in the *Gazette* because of the war later on.

MD: Well, you can't separate the two.

JM: Yes.

MD: This is kind of a Bobbsey Twin relationship.

JM: Yes. So how did the *Gazette* change when Ashmore came?

MD: Well, a lot of that derives around the fact that Harry had staked out a claim as a major editorial writer with a bold, new idea, and that the South was Americanizing—that southern differences were—that had distinguished the South from the rest of the country—it's not that they would disappear, but they would become secondary to a general American citizenship brought about by the second world war. And his *Epitaph for Dixie* proved to be a major, bold statement that ignored the enormous underlying capacity on the part of especially the plain people of the South to rally around the banner of race.

JM: Yes.

MD: They could not get past race. And, of course, it is a heavy irony in the fact, as you well know, that with Ozell Sutton the *Democrat* led the way in having the first African-American reporter, albeit assigned to—I suppose we called it at the time the “colored beat.”

JM: That's correct. Right.

MD: But you've read, doubtless, his story on that.

JM: Yes. Well, I was there.

MD: And you were there, which was even more to the point. [Laughs]

JM: Yes, I worked with Ozell for about four years.

MD: Yes.

JM: He was there about a year before me, and, in fact, I've interviewed him for this project.

MD: Okay.

JM: But, yes, that was something of an irony that the—and he was either the first or the second—I think the second in the South—the second black who had gone to work for one of the major southern metropolitan newspapers. I think there was one—maybe a Nashville, Tennessee one was first.

MD: Yes. What's interesting there—a number of things, of course, are interesting, and I'm not following that up because you've gone to the source and have gotten more than I have on it—but if you looked at a lot of the weeklies, they had columnists—country correspondents from the black communities. They ran—and about everybody I've interviewed on this topic said that—of course, prior to the just total decimation of the world economy and the end of sharecropping and the end of family farms and all, that these were their best and most reliable customers. I think I'm virtually quoting—what's her first name—Schexnayder?

JM: Charlotte or Ted?

MD: Charlotte. Charlotte.

JM: Okay. Charlotte.

MD: Yes, Charlotte. I had the last name. That was the great sobriety test in the APA [Arkansas Press Association] if you could do Schexnayder and Wulfekuhler and Bindursky. [Laughter]

JM: Yes. I completely . . .

MD: I interviewed two of the three, and overlapped in time, but never interviewed Esther Bindursky.

JM: Yes.

MD: But in that way—in a lot of ways, ironically—sometimes these county weekly local papers were ahead of the metropolitan papers . . .

JM: Yes.

MD: . . . who were so structured with their social page. And, of course, if you don't have a social page you don't have to worry about [laughs] structuring it. But, yes, that was an interesting step for Engel to take.

JM: Did you see much change in the news content of the *Gazette* after Ashmore went there? And I might say that at about the same time, that Hugh Patterson had sort of taken over in the business department from Allsopp. But was there much change reflected in the news content? I don't think he actually was a head editor for a few years yet.

MD: Yes. No, not that I could see.

JM: Okay. You saw it mainly on the editorials.

MD: Yes.

JM: Okay. What—and I don't know whether you paid much attention to this or not—during the 1930s and 1940s—the time we're leading up to—was there much difference in the way that they could say that the two newspapers covered sports?

MD: Not that I could tell. We ought to say a word about that because what occurs in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is the rise of academic journalism programs. And, of course, just north of us in Missouri was the flagship journalism program in the nation at the University of Missouri, Columbia.

JM: Yes.

MD: But that was quickly emulated in Arkansas, both at the university—well, by the 1920s it was—and it's significant because, of course, the newspapers precede the creation of journalism. And colleges had been putting out newspapers without journalism departments—in fact, would continue to do so. And there were all kinds of issues connected with that—I mean, how the journalism—the editor was chosen and the freedom they had to write, and the like. But, really, the first crop—I guess this is fair to say—yes, the first crop of university-trained journalists are hitting in the 1930s.

JM: Yes.

MD: And I noted in passing—of course, I was clued into this—that a young man in south Arkansas who had a strong high school background—whose father worked for the railroad, and the railroads, although off and on bankrupt, still paid their workers—was able to attend the university in the darkest days of the [Great] Depression, and that was Ernest—as he was then—Deane.

JM: Ernie Deane, yes.

MD: Ernie Deane. [Laughs]

JM: Yes.

MD: And I didn't interview Ernie, but he had been interviewed. If you've ever heard his tapes here, they're fun listening because he was a great storyteller.

JM: Yes.

MD: But one of the results is that young graduates, of course, get—go to work on the metropolitan newspapers. And I'm assuming—I don't know exactly—as many names out of the *Democrat* as I could pull out of the *Gazette* out of that period.

JM: Yes.

MD: Do you know? Have you . . . ?

JM: Yes, I would know them. I'll have to think about it for a minute, but I do know, say, from the *Gazette's* standpoint, of people who had gone to the university—that in the 1940s you begin—Bob Douglas.

MD: Right.

JM: Bill Shelton.

MD: Yes.

JM: And then a guy—Mort Stern, who went to the *Denver Post* [Colorado] and was the head editor out there for a while. He went to the university—he came to the *Gazette*. But, at any rate—and then over on the—the people—when I arrived at the *Democrat*—most of the people there I don't think were—were not a lot at the university—well, there were some, but not the University of Arkansas [Fayetteville].

MD: Yes.

JM: But there was one guy named Joe Crossley who was a news editor, and I'm told was a Harvard [University] man.

MD: Hmm.

JM: But by the time I got there, a lot of their reporters had come from the University of Arkansas, including myself. And then Gene Herrington, who later became the

city editor and then the managing editor, was a University of Arkansas graduate. So were Bill Secrest and Dorothy Menard.

MD: Yes.

JM: And so, yes, there were a lot of college graduates beginning to get in at that period in time.

MD: And I look at the backgrounds—I don't know as much about the people who were writing before. As near as I can tell, most of them had simply worked their way up from county newspapers—sometimes as owners—and then decided that they'd rather have a regular paycheck. [Laughs]

JM: Yes.

MD: It was all on-the-job training.

JM: Yes.

MD: I know that one of my favorite people in the book, E. Irwin Funk of the *Rogers Democrat*, took correspondence courses on journalism writing. And learned in that way.

JM: Well, there's, of course, Joe Wirges, who was the *Gazette* police reporter for, I guess, almost fifty years.

MD: Yes, yes.

JM: I'm sure—yes, I don't [laughs] think he had any college training. He probably learned on the job, and Joe and I worked opposite each other covering the police beat for a while, and then we worked together on the same paper for a while. But there was an old city editor or managing editor at the *Gazette* that I've heard a lot of people tell that—he would tell people, “There's no sense in you going to college. You don't want to go to college and take journalism. Hell, you can learn

more here in six months than you can learn in four years of going to journalism school.”

MD: Yes.

JM: And that’s what they—that’s back in the 1930s. This was a guy who was there in the 1930s [that I know?].

MD: Yes.

JM: So we’re getting up, I guess, close to the time—the big battle of the integration crisis at Little Rock Central [High School] and across the South and everything. But what’s your reaction to how the two newspapers handled all that?

MD: Well, that’s an interesting story, and history is shaped by an awful lot of accidents. We—people would like to, and I know the philosophers of history think in terms of [great?] movements, that those of us who get into the trenches find a lot of rats and unexploded shells and all sorts of things down there. And I am inclined to think—and this is in part based, I should say, on recently reading Betsy [Elizabeth] Jacoway’s new book [*Turn Away Thy Son: Little Rock, the Crisis that Shocked a Nation*] . . .

JM: Yes.

MD: . . . where she spends a lot of time on Harry [Ashmore] and, in fact, all the other players as well. And I think, to a large extent, Harry miscalculated, because he wasn’t from Arkansas, and he’d always—I mean, even with his North Carolina background, he had still always been very much the cosmopolitan internationalist. The picture I used deliberately in *Community Diaries* is where he’s sitting back in his chair with his feet on the desk. [Laughs] The only thing that’s missing is the bottle. [Laughs] And, to that end, what the *Gazette* did that attracted the notori-

ety—caused the boycott and led to all these other things—was, in many cases, a major, severe miscalculation in the beginning on what public response might be on what position the newspaper could best take to affect or modify it. And once this thing becomes a barrel over Niagara Falls, they're already in the barrel.

JM: Yes.

MD: They did not leave themselves enough wiggle room to get out in a timely way. Now, the *Democrat*—Margaret Ross, of course, was famous for saying about the editorials that the *Democrat* posted that were every bit as strong as the *Gazette*'s—yes, and they wrote one a month, and we came out with one day after day after day. [Laughs] I'm sure you've got that.

JM: Yes, I saw that.

MD: You've got that somewhere—was, to a large extent, true.

JM: Yes.

MD: But the irony of this is that [*Arkansas Democrat* photographer] Will Counts didn't get the Pulitzer [Prize].

JM: Yes.

MD: And, in one sense, that's a product, I think, of Harry's international connections—that they were giving away two for this coverage of it, and they weren't going to do three, so the *Democrat* got the bottom end of it. And you had—Will Counts' pictures are more on the scene and gripping than those by the *Gazette* photographer . . .

JM: [Larry] Obsitnik.

MD: . . . Obsitnik.

JM: Yes.

MD: I had his daughter in class. A daughter? No, I had a sister, I guess it was, in class years ago.

JM: But as I recall, both papers after the 1954 decision [*Brown v. Board of Education*], said, “Whether we agree with it or not, it’s the law of the land, and we should obey it,” and the *Gazette* sort of stuck with that.

MD: Right.

JM: The *Democrat* sort of—I gather may have begun to waffle on that a little bit at some point in time.

MD: Well, there’s a—the *Democrat*—now, I’m taking this from—we started off with him—the yellow dog . . .

JM: Oh, John Robert Starr?

MD: John Robert, who had this friendly reporter with the direct line to Orval, which benefited them from the news stories, and I’m not sure but what that did. Did that influence editorial policy?

JM: I doubt it. That was George Douthit.

MD: Yes.

JM: And he was one who, you know, was—he always got the tips from Orval Faubus. But I doubt that that influenced the news policies. And then this is something that you’re not aware of that, I just recently interviewed by telephone because he’s ninety-five years old and in very bad health—Sam Dickinson.

MD: Yes.

JM: And Sam was an editorial writer at the *Democrat* at that time, and he said that we—well, we first came out and said, “You know, it’s the law and you have to obey it.” And I said, “Were you all for or against integration?” And he said,

“Well, we were against it, but we couldn’t say it.”

MD: [Laughs]

JM: And I said, “Well, why couldn’t you say it?” And he said, “Well, we didn’t think that we could tell the people that they should defy the federal government.”

MD: Yes.

JM: But he does say, as time went on that, you know, they were not—that from the tone of the editorials, that all the people in Arkansas thought the *Gazette* was pro-integration, and that the *Democrat* was anti-integration. [Laughs]

MD: Yes. Well, of course, one thing—the *Democrat* had at that point—and, again, refresh me on his name. I can remember everything but his name—oh, the old boy that came down from Melbourne in Marion County.

JM: Oh, Karr Shannon.

MD: Karr Shannon.

JM: Yes.

MD: That was an interesting move, if I can go back and back up on that.

JM: Yes.

MD: Karr was one of the most-read and quoted country editors almost in America, I would guess, during the late 1930s and early 1940s. Now, the problem was the county up there could hardly support such a newspaper. I know they dedicated the new WPA [Works Progress Administration]-built courthouse, I’m going to say, in 1940 or 1941, and he put out a special edition—ninety-six pages or something that—handset . . .

JM: Yes.

MD: And then couldn’t get any paper during the war [World War II]. The labor force,

such as it was, was gone.

JM: Correct me—is it Melbourne— is that . . . ?

MD: Melbourne.

JM: Melbourne, Arkansas.

MD: Yes.

JM: And what was the name—*Melbourne Times*? Was that the name of the paper?

MD: I think so.

JM: I believe it was the *Melbourne Times*. Okay.

MD: So, essentially, he was unemployed, and Engel brought him down to Little Rock, so he generated kind of folksy columns. I guess you could compare—well, no, I guess he more nearly followed Will Rogers or something along that line. But, any-way, it was folksy columns.

JM: Yes.

MD: And by the 1950s, it's really sort of sad—if you're going to write folksy columns, you've got to be amongst the folks or you're going to run out of material.

JM: Yes.

MD: And he'd, in effect, done that, but he took a new lease on life writing columns against integration—I mean, so much so that he was so proud of them and he collected them and put them into a book.

JM: Yes, it was almost a daily, as I recall—daily that he was talking about the Supreme Court, you know, had usurped powers . . .

MD: Yes.

JM: . . . and that they didn't have—and it was unconstitutional, as I can recall.

MD: Yes, and he didn't have the legal background for that, and he didn't know the case

law. It was all pretty superficial stuff.

JM: But the effect being, though, that day after the day the *Democrat* did have a writer on their editorial pages decrying the federal government, right?

MD: You have exactly made the point I was trying to get to. [Laughs]

JM: Oh, okay. Sorry.

MD: [Laughs] That's fine. We just needed the point in there because that's . . .

JM: Yes.

MD: I don't care who makes it.

JM: Yes.

MD: And you were there reading it, and I'm just recapitulating it from having . . .

JM: Well, by that time I was at the *Gazette*.

MD: You were at the *Gazette*. Well, you were still reading it.

JM: Yes, I was still reading it.

MD: Well, you mean somebody at the *Gazette* actually read the *Democrat*? [MD says with a sarcastic tone.]

JM: Oh, yes. I [laughter] know that story. But I was at the *Democrat* from 1951 through late 1955, and then I went to the *Gazette*. So by the time of the integration crisis, I was at the *Gazette*.

MD: Yes.

JM: But, yes, I'll probably have a lot to say later on about how much attention they paid to each other, but . . .

MD: [Laughs] Yes.

JM: But I know there's a lot of sentiment that the *Gazette* sort of turned up their nose at the *Democrat*. But, at any rate . . .

MD: Well, I mean, there were some people there—let's see—that didn't know any more of Arkansas past the bar on—let's see, what [laughs] street was that? What-ever.

JM: Which paper are you talking about?

MD: The *Gazette*.

JM: Oh, okay. Well, you may be talking about Markham Street, I don't know.

MD: Oh, it could have been.

JM: Or then there was—the Press Club was on Third Street for a while, but there was the Brass Rail or something on Markham that used to be a famous place. And then the Gar Hole down in the old Marion Hotel.

MD: Yes.

JM: It was a famous watering hole.

MD: Yes, maybe it was the Gar Hole. I've been there long ago.

JM: But so—I have heard, and going back to this other thing, that the—one of the committees of the Pulitzer Prize committee actually voted the Pulitzer Prize in Journalism to Will Counts—Wilmer Counts.

MD: Yes.

JM: And then when it came before the full committee, they said, “No, we've already got two that's going to the *Gazette* for their coverage of the integration thing. We don't think that we should make such a big issue and overruled it.”

MD: Yes, overrule them. I've heard that, too. Yes.

JM: Yes.

MD: And I think there should've been three.

JM: I'm told—and I don't know whether you've heard this or not, and I can't even

remember for sure, but I'm told by some people that no—or [I should've?] known—I do know, I think, that Wilmer was using a thirty-five millimeter camera at that time, and that the *Gazette* people were still using speed graphics. And that Wilmer, with the small camera, was able to wend his way in amongst the people out there and get pictures without being so noticeable.

MD: Yes.

JM: Whereas some guy with a big speed graphic—they say, “Oh, there’s a newspaper photographer.”

MD: Right, and “Let’s beat him up.”

JM: Yes, and “Let’s find out what paper he’s with.” [Laughs]

MD: Yes.

JM: And so they weren’t always welcome.

MD: Well, that’s interesting because, you know, Wilmer’s pictures—as I’ve even said earlier not even knowing that—had much more of the sense of being in the trenches.

JM: Yes.

MD: Now, I’m very fond because of the heavy symbolism in the Obsitnik picture of the federal troops arriving over the bridge on Broadway . . .

JM: With the big sign in the background.

MD: Yes, “Who will build Arkansas if her own people do not?”

JM: Yes.

MD: I think that’s one of the great pictures.

JM: Yes.

MD: But, I mean, you have to balance that with mobs and violence and kicking and all

the rest of that that Wilmer captured.

JM: Yes, he did get some great [photographs]. Did you see—? And I don't know how close you read the papers—the news columns during that time—how much difference was there between the news coverage of the Central High crisis and the two papers? Now, I'm talking about the actual reporting.

MD: I don't think there is all that much. That is consistent with both of them covering events.

JM: That's—it depends on which newspaper you talk to, you get a little diversions of opinion on that. And most of the people at the *Gazette* will say at first that they both hit it really heavy.

MD: Yes.

JM: And they both . . .

MD: Well, yes, I've seen that, and then the *Democrat* slacked off of the thing.

JM: Yes.

MD: But, I mean, there were all these—you could always find—now, this is my recollection, which is—goes back—but you could always find a good eye-catching headline with something that George had picked up.

JM: Yes.

MD: “Faubus will . . .”

JM: Yes.

MD: You know, “Faubus plans—” or something like that. That may not have had the depth of the *Gazette*'s coverage. I mean, I don't know the—you would know this—the actual numbers of—in the reporting corps between the two newspapers at that time.

JM: I don't remember specifically. I would say that the *Gazette* probably had—the *Gazette* had more reporters.

MD: Right. Yes.

JM: And I suspect that they maybe delegated a few more to it. I know that Bob McCord has told me that he was, I think, the Sunday magazine editor at that time.

MD: Yes.

MD: But that because they began to feel like that they were being inundated by numbers by—the *Gazette* had a lot more people—that he pulled off and did some coverage in the Central High issue himself.

MD: Yes.

JM: And reporting on it and everything, so—and he was out in the field some, so he felt like that the *Gazette* had the greater numbers to throw into the coverage.

MD: Yes, that's my recollection, and I think I've got Bob on videotape with that.

JM: Okay.

MD: But—well, it—I don't think that there was a—at least at this point in time—a systematic plan to downplay the coverage or anything to that effect. And, again, I mean, things unfold in ways that could have been entirely differently, and in one sense Orval was—Orval Faubus was left with too much wiggle room, and he didn't want any wiggle room. I think this is a fair reading of that, because Orval spent all the last years of his life—and I mean all the last years of his life—almost trying to say, “I didn't do what I did . . .”

JM: Yes.

MD: . . . but I did what I had to do.”

JM: Yes.

MD: And that's because the Eisenhower Administration did not have a fixed policy—it was not sympathetic to the ruling—did not know what they were going to do or how they were going to do it. And they had already let this play out in the reverse of that in Texas with Governor Alan Shivers.

JM: Yes.

MD: And you had all these people assuring Orval that “We’ll repeal *Brown*, and it’s unconstitutional.” And you’ve got, of course, the rise of . . .

[01:32:52.11]

[Beginning of Tape 2, Side 1]

MD: Of course, Orval could be out . . .

JM: Okay, let me—hold on.

MD: Okay.

JM: This is Jerry McConnell here. I was talking to—tape two of this interview with Michael Dougan. Okay, Michael, now pick up where you were.

MD: Well, we'd just gotten to where Justice Jim Johnson politicizes the segregation issues, terrifies middle- and working-class people with syphilis and sex and the like, and reduces the wiggle room, I think. And it's certainly true that the *Democrat* did not—well, they covered him. I mean, the *Gazette* covered him.

JM: Yes.

MD: I remember seeing some very good pictures in the *Democrat* photographic archives, which then disappeared, so I don't know what ever happened to them. But there was a marvelous picture of Johnson down on the square at Marianna, flailing away as he customarily did. You could get confused if you were at some revival meeting with his political speeches. And a little child and a dog seemed par-

ticularly [laughs] unconcerned, and I—if you were trying to minimize Johnson and his impact, this was a good photograph to run.

JM: Yes.

MD: And I did not find it among the *Gazette* photographs, but among the *Democrat* photographs.

JM: And that was a—that ran in the *Democrat*?

MD: Yes, I guess.

JM: Yes.

MD: It was in the *Democrat* photographic archive, which if you plainly remember was not organized. It was just one big filing cabinet and kind of thumb through and see if you found something.

JM: I think I remember that picture, but I don't remember which newspaper ran it.

MD: I'm pretty sure I'm right on this point.

JM: But it could be the *Democrat*. Okay. So as things began to play out in that crisis, then—any more reflections on the role of the two newspapers and . . . ?

MD: Well, the *Gazette*, just like back in Jeff Davis's day, was the lead dog. But instead of concentrating fire on all the newspapers—in effect, what Faubus and Faubus's segregationist allies did was focus on the *Gazette* as the enemy and, of course, initiate the boycott. There was violence on delivery routes and some of the known integrationists suffered financially from this. Ted Lamb was the most obvious case in point. And the *Democrat* picked up some circulation and picked up some advertising, but not enough in the end to create a permanent reverse at that time. And there were a couple of things, obviously, going for the *Gazette*. The educated portion of the population had to read Margaret Ross's history columns. And

the rest of the state had to read the sports—Orville Henry. I once tried to get Margaret to say that she and Orville saved the paper, but, no, I couldn't get that out of her. That's, of course, an exaggeration, but it does emphasize the fact that the day-to-day reporting—the day-to-day news stories or in Margaret's case, the historical stories and the food sections and the society and all the rest of this went on. And so if you participated—people who were willing to participate in the boycott were losing more than just stories about Central or integration or the like.

JM: Yes.

MD: And, of course, as we know, Harry departed. And there's not anything, I think, you could say that really turned the *Gazette* liberal 'til we get to James O. Powell.

JM: Yes. And that—J. O. came in after—well, you would consider Harry a liberal, wouldn't you—or would you?

MD: Well, Harry became a liberal, yes.

JM: Yes.

MD: Although my primary interpretation of him in the earlier tape was of somebody who blundered on his history rather than having a liberal agenda.

JM: Yes.

MD: He had the right idea but, I mean, we still haven't been able to bury Dixie.

JM: Yes.

MD: Or even if we want to do that or not.

JM: Yes. Okay. But the—and then the *Democrat*, say, starting in the 1960s, the *Gazette* quickly recouped their lead in circulation—regained their lead in circulation. Did you start see any difference in the newspapers from that point forward—say, for the next few years or . . . ?

MD: Well, a lot of this I got from secondhand sources, and it's simply—the impact of television makes the afternoon papers superfluous. People will not sit down and read the afternoon newspaper. They will watch television instead. And—for instance, the *Jonesboro Evening Sun* reinvented itself as a morning newspaper. And, of course, all over the country evening newspapers went defunct.

JM: Yes.

MD: So the *Democrat* had that going against it. And it was during that period of time that I was first in the offices of these papers, so I can physically describe the—Margaret's library and the *Gazette* photographic library with its own curator.

JM: Was there much difference in the two buildings—the inside of the two buildings?

MD: Well, in the first place, there's a universality and ubiquity to press buildings. I don't care if it opened up prim needs and the like. It would not long remain that. And, of course, this was—one of the great controversies of this period of time is that we were right at the beginning of the arrival of computerization and the like, which did not respond at all well to an environment reeking of cigarette smoke.

JM: Yes.

MD: And I've recorded stories on that. I didn't record it at the—because I didn't know them and I really wasn't researching [] [01:40:03.21] at the Metropolitan Press, but I don't—that—this was a hard decision because so many of the owners, publishers and editors were nicotine addicts.

JM: Yes, including myself. [Laughter] Killed me to finally quit, which I did twenty years ago. But then the *Democrat*—of course, at this point in time, Mr. Engel is still in charge. He died in 1968. I don't know whether—had you discerned any difference in the paper, say, in the 1960s up until the point that he died? Had

you—the kind of paper that the *Democrat* was putting out—had it . . . ?

MD: Well, it's much more a Little Rock newspaper compared to—but this also—the *Gazette's* state news coverage was not as good as it had been. The international coverage had improved enormously.

JM: Yes.

MD: And, of course, you know, you've got a space problem, so what goes in a lot of the smaller local issues went. It's not as much of a state paper as it was then, but the *Democrat* was virtually just Little Rock's afternoon newspaper. I don't—somebody else who knew the mechanics would have to tell you how much they actually sold outside of central Arkansas.

JM: Yes.

MD: But it wasn't near, I think, what it had been, let's say, in the 1920s and 1930s.

JM: Yes. Then, of course, in 1968 Mr. Engel died and his nephews Stanley Berry and Marcus George took over the paper and they brought in Gene Foreman right away.

MD: Another university graduate.

JM: Arkansas State University.

MD: Arkansas State.

JM: Arkansas State, yes.

MD: Yes.

JM: Yes. And a great newspaperman. But did you see enough of the two papers, then, to see—did the tone of the *Democrat* begin to change at that time any? I think it was their intent to . . .

MD: Well, they were determined to—they got really, for the first time—and I think this

is a fair statement, so I'll stand by my fair statement—they got a philosophical conservative, who was also a veteran newspaperman, Robert McCord . . .

JM: Okay.

MD: . . . who actually shaped an editorial policy and developed a theoretical place on the continuum of politics and government upon which the newspaper could stand. And that had been something lacking, obviously.

JM: Yes.

MD: Now, the problem—I don't know that this is a problem—some twenty-five, thirty years later, a letter-writer to the *Arkansas Times* will denounce Bob McCord as a flaming liberal.

JM: Yes. [Laughs]

MD: I don't know that Bob has shifted all that much to the left, but public opinion—at least in some sectors of Arkansas—has moved far to the right.

JM: Yes. But [laughs] . . .

MD: But Bob didn't go that way. Yes, that's my whole point.

JM: I saw that. I remember that letter. But then, of course, at that point in time, could you—well, did you see much difference? You saw a difference in the editorial content.

MD: Right.

JM: Did you see much difference in the news coverage?

MD: No.

JM: Okay. And then I came—we'll skip over this—I came and Gene stayed—Foreman stayed three years. I came in. But in the middle of that, the Hussmans came in and—and so the next big—the really big developments came when the

Hussmans decided, "Okay, we're going to go into hand-to-hand combat." And the—as I understand it, and I didn't pay much attention to it, and I should have. But I wasn't following the circulation, you know, minute—month by month or anything and everything.

MD: Yes.

JM: But circulation was still going down, and he tried to get a—Mr. Hussman tried to get a joint-operating agreement with the *Gazette*. He approached Hugh Patterson at least twice, I think and was turned down. And then he decided to start making a lot of changes. So what was your perspective on what began to happen at that time?

MD: Well, there are two things that are critical there. The circulation battle that the *Democrat*—which had been losing circulation since the 1950s, and I don't know reliably earlier data—but that was those free want ads. And the free want ads were an advertising tool for gaining other advertising by saying, "Look how many papers we're selling." And there was, of course, a residual—and perhaps—of course, you and I know this, but there was still a residual resentment of the *Gazette* because of the Central—the crisis.

JM: Yes.

MD: And it gave individuals or concerns or companies a chance to dump the *Gazette* and have an alternative that they could justify smugly to themselves. And also connected with that in some ways are some individual stories. I mean, one of the companies that wanted—that just lived in an atmosphere of secrecy was Dillard's.

JM: Yes.

MD: And by printing some stories on any—Dillard's didn't want any publicity except

their ads, and they certainly . . .

JM: Hmm.

MD: . . . didn't want unfavorable publicity. And, of course, they yanked their advertising and never came back. But also, the *Democrat* would offer them lower rates than the *Gazette*.

JM: Yes.

MD: And there were a couple of factors that were going into that.

JM: Yeah.

MD: You know that story.

JM: Hmm. And then at the—about the same time—shortly after they started the free want ads, then they also switched to morning publication.

MD: And switched to morning publication.

JM: And then expanded their news hole that—started printing a lot more pages and a lot more news . . .

MD: Right.

JM: . . . and everything.

MD: And that gets back to where we started off at the very beginning because it's the return to personal journalism. And I wrote about that . . .

JM: With John Robert Starr, you mean?

MD: John Robert Starr and those that he nurtured and trained. And the purity of the news has been much interfered with, both with regard to printed news, broadcast news, cable news, blogs—all these things. The theoretical standards of purity—who, what, when, where—you know, get the facts and get it right—operating in a—that's passé. I mean, that doesn't sell news. And, well, anyway, I can carry

that forward . . .

JM: Go ahead. No, go ahead.

MD: . . . [] but the attempt to turn the *Arkansas Gazette* into a source of soft, mushy, human interest-type thing of gushy goo—all readers of news looked upon that disgustingly, and I don't know that it brought in any people who really wanted—for whom this was a particularly driving—"Oh, let's read some gush."

JM: You're talking, I think, about the advent of Gannett.

MD: Yes.

JM: When Gannett . . .

MD: When Gannett moved here. Yes.

JM: When the Gannett—and they bought out the Pattersons and bought the *Gazette* and operated late 1986 and operated it. And so you saw immediate change in the kind of paper that the *Gazette* was at that time.

MD: Well, and the other thing is that—and I'd been complaining about this for a long time, but then I'm an arch-reactionary—when the bird woman in Morrilton died, she was not replaced. The *Gazette* magazine and the *Democrat* magazine all became defunct and were replaced by these pre-purchased things that I can look at in about two minutes most of the time.

JM: Or thirty seconds. Yes. [Laughs]

MD: Thirty seconds. Okay.

JM: Yes. One of them—I can't even remember what they're called. One of them's called *People*, I think.

MD: *People*, *This Week*, *US Weekly*, or . . .

JM: Yes. *Parade*. *Parade* is one of them.

MD: *Parade*.

JM: Yes.

MD: We rained on that parade, and they don't even make good toilet paper. So the—I made the argument earlier that the 1930s and late 1940s represented some kind of high mark in the quality of variety, distribution—editing, even.

JM: Yes.

MD: And I might say editing even, because I only heard this at the breakfast table this morning—there's a mistake in the *Democrat-Gazette* headline where they misspelled—I forget what it was.

JM: Hmm.

MD: But some five-letter word they managed to misspell it.

JM: [Laughs] But the *Gazette* was no longer the hard news and . . .

MD: Right.

JM: . . . and a lot of features and a lot of fancy pictures and everything else. And the *Gazette*—the *Democrat*, by contrast—what was the *Democrat* like in that time—say, the . . .?

MD: Well, it's still on this hard-hitting personality business, with screaming headlines, and I'd almost call it—and I guess it's not irrelevant—yellow journalism, to refer to the kind of stuff that went on in the late nineteenth century in the Metropolitan Press in New York and other places.

JM: Now, you're talking . . .

MD: Sensationalist—well, sensationalist writing and the—I mean, I can put up with anything on the editorial page because I can turn past it.

JM: Yes.

MD: Or I can, as I normally do if there's any intelligent content to it, read it and then make up my own mind. But I don't like to find that sort of thing on—mixed in as news. And that, to me, crosses a line.

JM: So that period in time, say, from when the war was joined until the *Gazette* folded, that the *Democrat* was pretty much very aggressive and a lot of personality journalism.

MD: I think I may have even said that in *Community Diaries*, but I certainly thought, a plague on both their houses.

JM: Yes.

MD: Because I certainly couldn't stand the soft mush. Gannett, of course, didn't interfere with the editorial position—at least not—almost not to the end.

JM: Yes.

MD: But that wasn't my quarrel—things that I thought made a good newspaper had been seriously compromised.

JM: Okay. Now, the *Democrat* had a lot more news in the paper, though, than they'd had . . .

MD: Right.

JM: . . . at one time.

MD: But that's not news. Well, now, there was—and I will say this, and I think you can probably testify to this, and I'm—if I'm off base on this—in order to fill up this expanded news hole, they actually expanded their state coverage more than had been the case ten years earlier.

JM: Hmm.

MD: They—the—I will give them credit for that.

JM: Well, I can't comment on that as accurately as I could some other periods because during this period in time I was in Oklahoma City [Oklahoma].

MD: Yes.

JM: I was working for the Oklahoma City papers.

MD: *Daily Oklahoman*.

JM: And the Oklahoma City Times, when I first went there. And that was another afternoon paper that folded after about two or three years because . . .

MD: [Laughs]

JM: . . . they had no need for afternoon papers anymore.

MD: Afternoon paper. Yes.

JM: Yes. But at any rate, so that was . . .

MD: Well, at various times I took both of them, but I just—I did not find that a useful use of my time.

JM: Yes. I gather you were [laughs] not enchanted with either newspaper too much at that time.

MD: No, I—you know, the end result of all this—to jump ahead, although—of course, you've got much better people to cover this than I do—we had a subscription to the *Gazette*. Of course, the *Democrat*—the *Democrat-Gazette* it then became—honored the rest of those. But we just dropped it. They had closed their Jonesboro office completely. No northeast Arkansas news whatsoever.

JM: Who had done this?

MD: The *Democrat-Gazette* after the victory.

JM: Oh.

MD: After the victory.

JM: Okay. All right.

MD: Yes. They then reopened it later, and I know this fellow that—the stringer up there.

JM: Okay.

MD: But we had always counted on the *Gazette* to report on things in Jonesboro that the Troutts wouldn't touch.

JM: Yes.

MD: Uncle Fred Troutt was very much of the Engel mode about editorials . . .

JM: Yes.

MD: . . . and John was not anxious to get into that. John was a good newsman, but again, John had a vested interest in the community that he wouldn't disturb by reporting the bad stories. And all during the 1960s and 1970s, you could get from the *Gazette* news stories about the controversies in Jonesboro, especially of the university and its politics.

JM: Yes.

MD: That John wouldn't touch at the [*Jonesboro*] *Sun*. But after the end of the newspaper war and the demise of the real *Arkansas Gazette*, the *Democrat* would only be useful if you lived in Little Rock . . .

JM: Yes.

MD: So—and Troutt, knowing this, turned the *Sun* into a regional paper, poured a ton of money into it, expanded enormously—there's no comparison between the *Sun* of the last years of Troutt and what it was when we came to Arkansas earlier.

JM: It became a much better newspaper then.

MD: Much better newspaper.

JM: Yes. Okay. And—well, we've kind of covered a long history. What has happened—? In your view, what has happened to the *Democrat-Gazette* now that the war is over and now that it's the only paper in Little Rock and . . . ?

MD: Well, that's not relevant. Little Rock's just there to be bled for the war in northwest Arkansas.

JM: Oh. [Laughs]

MD: And I only follow this by indirection, and I know it's being fought out in Elkins and Rogers and Lord knows wherever else—all of this stuff is going on versus the *Morning News*. It's all about advertising, I suppose, and I don't know the politics—plays much difference in it. I get—from what I occasionally see when I do review the newspapers, there's more—much more international news in the *Democrat-Gazette* than there is in the *Morning News*.

JM: Yes.

MD: But beyond that, it's just an advertising war with all kinds of interesting little legal twists, you know, about what would constitute a joint-operating agreement and some other things.

JM: Yes. So that's the war between the *Gazette*—the *Democrat-Gazette* has built its own printing up here [in Lowell] now—big staff up there . . .

MD: Right.

JM: And so—and then the *Morning News* is consolidated with some of the other newspapers that—under the Stephens Group . . .

MD: Right.

JM: . . . now. It used to be under Donrey Media.

MD: Yes.

JM: Well—but at any rate—well, okay. But—so—well, we've kind of covered about 150 years of history here and everything, Michael. But has there been anything that we haven't touched on? And let me go back on some of my questions here that . . .

MD: I did make reference—and I have not done this research, other than just what I just said in the book, but it would be worth somebody's while to take a little look at that—that back in the late teens [1910s], there were actually three dailies competing in Little Rock. And I don't know anything about the *Little Rock Press*, but I think there's a run of it on microfilm. I just haven't looked at it.

JM: *Little Rock Daily News*, wasn't it?

MD: *Daily News*.

JM: I think it was the *Little Rock Daily News*. They operated for about—I think you said for about ten years.

MD: Yes, which somebody ought to look at.

JM: The interesting thing about this to me in a sense is that I interviewed one guy for the *Democrat* Project named Ralph Casey, who is still alive. He's ninety-two years old, and he worked at the *Democrat* for sixty—fifty or sixty years, I guess, almost. He started out as a delivery boy for the *Little Rock Daily News* in the 1920s, and he said they—he can still remember when they folded. And he said that somebody from the *Democrat* that knew him and knew that he was delivering it and solicited him to deliver for the *Democrat*. So he started delivering for the *Democrat*, and then about 1934 or 1935 he went to work in the circulation department at the *Democrat*. He was—went into—started . . .

MD: Okay.

JM: So he is the oldest . . .

MD: Oh, yes.

JM: . . . employee of either paper that I've run across as far as . . .

MD: Yes. It turned out he was an employee of—yes.

JM: Yes, that's been there . . .

MD: Well, I'd like to sit down and I'd like to take some of those events that I know. I mean, what—I've had two systems of research, and in the nineteenth century you just have to read what papers you can get. You find that there's something there—you go read it, and we have in the [Arkansas] History Commission things like "miscellaneous Boone County newspapers," and there's one of this and one of that and one of something else.

JM: Yes.

MD: And so you just read every single one of them, and that's that. But then where there are events of some importance, it's useful to read as much stuff as you can find that's around that date from as many papers as possible. I had the benefit in doing this that one of our master's students, Steve Zwart, had done a master's thesis on press reaction to desegregation.

JM: Yes.

MD: And it looked at a bunch of these county newspapers, and what J. E. Dunlap, of the *Harrison Times*, was saying.

JM: Yes.

MD: [02:00:31.28]. But I always loved in the old days was when all these people were collected and you could get—you didn't have to get the *Harrison Times* to know what J. E. was saying because his more controversial or better columns would ap-

pear in the collection of materials from around the state in columns.

JM: It was in the *Gazette*, I think.

MD: It would be in the *Gazette*.

JM: Yes.

MD: And Alec Washburn, from Hope, and old Mr. Burns. I forget the initials.

JM: C. F.

MD: C. F. from Fort Smith.

JM: Yes.

MD: And . . .

JM: I grew up with him so to speak and never could read him, but . . .

MD: [Laughter]

JM: Bored me to tears.

MD: Oh, yes. He was extremely pedantic.

JM: Yes.

MD: Arch-conservative, except on—that we should not spend any federal money on anything except the . . .

JM: On the Arkansas River.

MD: . . . the Arkansas River. [Laughs]

JM: Yes. Right.

MD: It was the reverse of the parking meter thing.

JM: Yes. Michael, one thing we haven't touched on here now is your background.

Where and when were you born?

MD: Well, if you get down to where I was born, I was actually born in Burbank, California.

JM: Were you really? Okay.

MD: On account that Father got this job as a test pilot at Lockheed [Burbank Aircraft Plant].

JM: Oh, okay.

MD: And he was the oldest test pilot out there amongst the—most of them were not—because he was, what, forty-some-odd years old.

JM: When was this? What year were you born

MD: Nineteen forty-four.

JM: Okay, 1944.

MD: So [Franklin Delano] Roosevelt was president.

JM: Yes.

MD: And I was born. Same month, Brother got his wings and went off to the Aleutians [reference to the Aleutian Islands] to sit out the war up there.

JM: Yes.

MD: And then when the war ended, father flew a few more years and, of course, had to retire at sixty, as they did with the pilots.

JM: Yes.

MD: So we came back to where his mother lived—my grandmother—in Neosho.

JM: Neosho, Missouri?

MD: Yes. All my schooling was in Neosho.

JM: Okay.

MD: So I always said I hailed from there, you know.

JM: Yes.

MD: Because I spent eighteen months in California.

JM: What was your father's name?

MD: Will. W-I-L-L. Will Leigh. L-E-I-G-H Dougan.

JM: Will Leigh Dougan. Okay.

MD: He shows up in Jack Hudson—I don't know if you remember Jack—used to be a dean up here at . . .

JM: At the university?

MD: Yes. He wrote a book. The U of A Press published it in the—it was one of their early books, I guess, was in the 1980s—*In Clouds of Glory* or something like that.

JM: Hmm.

MD: Americans who fought for the allied—English and French air services. So, yes, he was a decorated World War I pilot and . . .

JM: Oh, was he?

MD: Yes—all that stuff.

JM: Oh, okay.

MD: So, yeah, got—among other things, I'm doing the aviation entry for the Arkansas encyclopedia. [Reference to the Encyclopedia of Arkansas on the Internet]

JM: Was he from—was he born in Missouri?

MD: Yes, he was from Salem.

JM: Okay.

MD: Dent County. And his great-grandfather was Judge John R. Woodside in Oregon County who brought the first press into Oregon County. His—one of his sons, James Posey, who was a Confederate veteran, captain in the [Sixth?] Infantry or something like that—edited that for a time. And so I've had a certain newspaper background . . .

JM: Yes.

MD: . . . to that. My own Grandfather Dougan—Archibald Dougan—was in his latter years circulation manager up at Fargo.

JM: North Dakota?

MD: Yes.

JM: Oh, was he? Okay.

MD: Oh, he was a character. Well, of course, they were all characters, and I'm a character, too. He was eighty-six years old, and they did an interview with him, and he was lamenting the fact that "these ball players are no good. I could get out there and—" [Laughter] He had a—he had a tryout with the professional St. Louis Browns [baseball] team in St. Louis [Missouri]—I'm going to say about 1880 or something like that.

JM: Yes.

MD: This was before the Cardinals. You have to know your baseball history to . . .

JM: Yes, I remember the Browns.

MD: Yes. Well, I—the later Browns are not the successors.

JM: They're not. Okay.

MD: They're—yes, it's a different Browns.

JM: Okay.

MD: Anyway, they told him to put on some weight and come back, but he married my grandmother instead.

JM: Yes.

MD: And that was a terrible disaster for both of them.

JM: Hmm.

MD: But there were three children, and she ended up in Neosho in the home that had formerly housed Colonel Thomas R. Freeman, Confederate commander in the Trans-Mississippi—Freeman's Brigade.

JM: Hmm.

MD: So that's—and we moved into town after Grandmother died. Of course, moving into town, you know, in Neosho—that's about half a mile.

JM: Yes.

MD: But one of the family buildings—she bought the buildings on the square. That was her income.

JM: This is your grandmother?

MD: Yes.

JM: Yes. Okay.

MD: She had one on each side of the square, and the one on the east side had housed the *Neosho Times*.

JM: Okay.

MD: And that was a weekly in the late nineteenth century. There's a run of them. I've had the great benefit of being able to read those in the bound volumes, which, you know, beats microfilm all to hell. But A. M. Sevier, the owner/editor of that, was a kin—cousin to all those Seviars in Arkansas.

JM: Yes.

MD: So just like old home week.

JM: Yes.

MD: And you can see right up there. When I started writing I knew all this stuff intuitively. You could see where the old press had sat and the skylight right above it.

It was all gone but there was all the marks in the floor from all this.

JM: Hmm.

MD: And I got some of the remnants out of that because they were always sending publishers copies of books and reports and stuff.

JM: Yes.

MD: And I got a framed picture of John Marshall and all sorts of other loot out of the *Times* office.

JM: Where did you go to school, Michael?

MD: Undergraduate was at Southwest Missouri State [now Missouri State University].

JM: You went there to Neosho schools?

MD: Yes, yes.

JM: For twelve grades?

MD: Yes.

JM: Okay. And your undergraduate was where?

MD: Springfield, Missouri—Southwest Missouri State.

JM: Okay.

MD: And then I went to Emory [University] in Atlanta [Georgia] for my master's and doctorate [degrees]. And I wanted to do a Civil War topic because I had—well, the famous Civil War historian Bell I. Wiley [was my advisor]. I wanted to do it on Missouri. And, of course, the University of Missouri had been turning out stuff, and so Wiley said to me, "Well, what do you know about Arkansas?" And I said, "Well, not a whole lot." Of course, Uncle Posey picked up a Bumpass in Randolph County, so there must be some kin there somewhere—you know, a few little stories like that. And Uncle E. D. pastored a Methodist church outside of

Fayetteville, and so "let's do Arkansas." So the master's thesis was the Little Rock Press during the Civil War.

JM: Hmm. Okay.

MD: And that's when I just stopped in and met Margaret, and she took me under her wing.

JM: Okay.

MD: And then that led to the dissertation, which was "Confederate Arkansas: The People and Policies of a Frontier States in Wartime." So, I mean, I can remember . . .

JM: That was your doctoral dissertation?

MD: Yes. I can remember sitting in—the History Commission was still in the Old State House, and I stayed at the Capitol Hotel—I never could afford the Marion [Hotel], although I was in and out of it.

JM: Yes.

MD: But the Lafayette [Hotel]—and on one trip when I was especially impoverished, I even stayed in the capitol. Of course, other things were going on in the Capitol Hotel at that time.

JM: Yes. [Laughs]

MD: As you doubtless remember.

JM: Yes, I remember.

MD: But there was a little black and white television, and I can remember—I always tell my students this—looking at that black and white television, and Justice Jim was on there, and his eyes would get real big and he'd—he would point his finger right at you—he knew you—he knew how to use the camera.

JM: Yes.

MD: "They call me Justice Jim, but I want you to know, there's not a neutral bone in my body." [Laughter]

JM: Yes. [Laughs]

MD: And before I took the job—if you remember, the late Carl Reng years, there were a lot of disturbances up there in Jonesboro.

JM: You're talking about the Carl Reng.

MD: Carl Reng.

JM: President of Arkansas State [University, Jonesboro].

MD: [The board?] [02:09:15.04] and firing . . .

JM: R-E-N-G, as I recall. Carl. Yes.

MD: And so I stopped—I was offered the job there—first, made sure—well, of course, this was all a political fix anyway, so I had the job, unless I had a beard or if I didn't want it.

JM: Yes.

MD: But anyway, I stopped in Little Rock, and there was a conference of war, and I forget who was in on it, but Heiskell was because, you know, he was still in the office.

JM: Yes.

MD: Every day. I don't think I ever missed seeing him, virtually when—in the late 1960s when I was down there. And Margaret—I don't know who—whoever did northeast Arkansas—and then so the question was, "Could Michael safely take that job?"

JM: Hmm.

MD: And the general consensus was, "Yes, but when you get up there, call on Bill

Penix."

JM: Yes.

MD: So that's what I did, and things went from there. And, of course, Bill was an old newspaper . . .

JM: He was an old newspaperman himself. Yes.

MD: Yes.

JM: Yes.

MD: So that's in a sense how all this got started. And, of course, the book itself was contract history.

JM: Yes.

MD: But, good Lord, I mean, this is a book I'd been collecting material on, knowing I was going to write it.

JM: Yes.

MD: And it's a—it's very much me. I mean, I just tell all the stories that I knew to tell.

JM: Okay. That's—now, two things I want to cover. One, you went to work at Arkansas State as a—teaching history. Is that correct?

MD: Yes. 1970.

JM: 1970. Okay. And then this book, *Community Diaries*, you said contract history—the Arkansas Press Association . . .

MD: Paid for it.

JM: . . . paid you—paid for you to write a history . . .

MD: Right. Yes.

JM: . . . of the Arkansas Press Association, which didn't just cover the Arkansas Press, but all of them.

MD: Right.

JM: Because most of the papers belonged to the Arkansas Press Association.

MD: Right. I examined other state histories that had been done, and then I decided how I was going to do mine.

JM: Okay.

MD: And the thing is that most of the people who'd written them didn't know the history.

JM: Yes.

MD: And I didn't get—I mean, this thing ended up being—C. Dennis Schick would have to tell you how much longer than it was supposed to be because I just kept generating copy. And no one was riding herd on me, and I'd—and we'd send it off to people, and no one wanted to cut it. People kept giving me more stories to [laughs] go in it. And it gets tricky, like any—the closer you get to the modern period the trickier it is, because, I mean, I had to leave the northwest Arkansas war in the middle of the war.

JM: Yes.

MD: And we're still, I guess, in the war.

JM: Still in the middle of it, I think.

MD: So there are a lot of issues like. But the fundamental strength of the book is that two-thirds of the time I'm writing from the newspapers themselves.

JM: Yes.

MD: What they actually said—what the biographies and lives and stuff of these people. And the other thing that was enormous fun in that was I knew the equipment intellectually, but I just loved running down old printers and going through it me-

chanically.

JM: Yes.

MD: And I was at a convention at Mountain View at the folk center. They've got a re-stored printing press there, and Van Tyson and I went through all that, and I'd asked him this and that. And we had this and that, you know.

JM: Yes.

MD: And all that sort of thing. And you need to know that.

JM: Oh, yes. Yes. Yes, I enjoyed some things. You were talking about people bought these Mergenthalers and Bunnells and, you know, and they started bringing them and everything. You—besides the *Community Diaries*, you have written other books.

MD: Oh, yes.

JM: And so—you've got one called *Arkansas Odyssey*.

MD: *Arkansas Odyssey*, yes, which covers the history of the whole state.

JM: The whole history of the state, and I've had people tell me that that's an excellent history of Arkansas, and I'm going to read that before long.

MD: Good luck. Don't try and take it to bed.

JM: Yes. [Laughs]

MD: It'll lay you down and you might not [laughs] wake up in the morning.

JM: When did you publish that? When did that come out?

MD: 1994.

JM: Okay.

MD: And we ended that with [President Bill] Clinton. That was one of my great goofs—Clinton going of to Washington [DC]. And I said, "Well, this'll be the

end of Arkansas's image problems." [Laughter] So . . .

JM: Well, it depends on what kind of image you're talking about.

MD: Well, exactly, yes.

JM: Yes. [Laughs]

MD: But then I've got—the dissertation is the Civil War history of Arkansas, called
“Confederate Arkansas.”

JM: Yes. Okay.

MD: So I . . .

JM: And that was published as a book.

MD: Yes.

JM: Okay. Okay.

MD: So I've got a stack of books and things and articles and all this other stuff.

JM: Yes. Okay. But did—you just retired at Arkansas State? Is that correct?

MD: Yes, at the end of June.

JM: All right. So you are now retired. And what are you working on now?

MD: I've got all these entries for the Arkansas encyclopedia.

JM: Okay.

MD: And I need to bring out a new edition of *Arkansas Odyssey*, so I'm . . .

JM: Okay. Is . . .

MD: . . . working on that.

JM: Who's in charge of the Arkansas encyclopedia?

MD: Well, it's done out of the Butler Center [for Arkansas Studies].

JM: Okay.

MD: And the editor-in-chief is Tom W. Dillard.

JM: Tom W. Dillard.

MD: [Laughs]

JM: I thought that was the case.

MD: Yes.

JM: In whose chair I'm sitting right now.

MD: Right.

JM: All right. Now, that's great. Okay. Michael, I've really enjoyed this, and I just wonder if there's anything else that we haven't talked about that you've thought of that we might cover?

MD: Is the plan just to make the tapes or is the plan to try and come up with something more substantial?

JM: Well, we'll—we don't know the answer to that yet, and I have asked that question. And I have not been given an answer yet.

MD: Because why I say that is—just because I am retired—actually, just because I am retired means I'm always looking for work.

JM: Yes.

MD: And some remunerative job in which I took some of these critical years and dates and actually read more microfilm and produced a report based on those years . . .

JM: Yes.

MD: If anybody were going to do this, I'd be the logical person to do that kind of spot-checking.

JM: Okay.

MD: Because I—you know, I never looked at Presley's—that's the Little Rock—what was it, the *Daily News*? I've never looked at that . . .

JM: Okay.

MD: . . . and I always liked to.

JM: Okay. Okay. We're going—I've got a few things to discuss with you here, but on this interview I think I'm going to go ahead and stop it right now and just say that, again, I really appreciate this, Michael, and I'll be in touch.

[End of Interview] [02:17:24.12]

[Transcribed by Cheri Pearce Riggs]

[Edited by Jason Pierce]