

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW
WITH
THE REVEREND THOMAS G. MELTON

AUGUST 18, 1989

INDEPENDENCE, MISSOURI

INTERVIEWED BY ANDREW DUNAR

ORAL HISTORY #1989-2

This transcript corresponds to audiotapes DAV-AR #3588-3589

HARRY S TRUMAN NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR





THE REVEREND THOMAS G. MELTON

18 August 1989
HSTR Photograph



EDITORIAL NOTICE

This is a transcript of a tape-recorded interview conducted for Harry S Truman National Historic Site. After a draft of this transcript was made, the park provided a copy to the interviewee and requested that he or she return the transcript with any corrections or modifications that he or she wished to be included in the final transcript. The interviewer, or in some cases another qualified staff member, also reviewed the draft and compared it to the tape recordings. The corrections and other changes suggested by the interviewee and interviewer have been incorporated into this final transcript. The transcript follows as closely as possible the recorded interview, including the usual starts, stops, and other rough spots in typical conversation. The reader should remember that this is essentially a transcript of the spoken, rather than the written, word. Stylistic matters, such as punctuation and capitalization, follow the *Chicago Manual of Style*, 14th edition. The transcript includes bracketed notices at the end of one tape and the beginning of the next so that, if desired, the reader can find a section of tape more easily by using this transcript.

The Reverend Thomas G. Melton, Andrew Dunar, and Jim Williams reviewed the draft of this transcript. Their corrections were incorporated into this final transcript by Perky Beisel in summer 2000. A grant from Eastern National Park and Monument Association funded the transcription and final editing of this interview.

RESTRICTION

Researchers may read, quote from, cite, and photocopy this transcript without permission for purposes of research only. Publication is prohibited, however, without permission from the Superintendent, Harry S Truman National Historic Site.

ABSTRACT

The Reverend Thomas G. Melton [28 November 1919—25 September 1997] lived at 305 North Delaware, across from the Trumans since 1964. Melton recalls his first meeting with Harry S Truman, daily walks, and neighborly visits with both Trumans. Melton describes other Truman neighbors and changes in the neighborhood's physical appearance. The interview concludes with Melton's opinions about the park service's stewardship of the home and the importance of tourism in Independence and the public service funeral he presented after Harry S Truman's death in 1972.

Persons mentioned: Harry S Truman, Bess W. Truman, Mike Westwood, Polly Compton, R. Luke Choplin, Margaret Truman Daniel, David Melton, May Wallace, Grace Minor, Pat Paulsen, Gerald R. Ford, Rufus Burrus, John W. Snyder, Charles G. Ross, Dwight D. Eisenhower, Tricia Nixon, Rosalyn Carter, Natalie Ott Wallace, Valeria LaMere, Flo Warren, Wallace H. Graham, Barry Goldwater, Grace Carvin, and Benedict K. Zobrist.

**ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW WITH
THE REVEREND THOMAS G. MELTON**

HSTR INTERVIEW #1989-2

ANDREW DUNAR: We are meeting at his church, First Presbyterian Church, in Independence, Missouri. Today is August 18, 1989. Reverend Melton, to start out, I think, maybe if I could just ask you about when you first came to Independence and about the first time that you met the Trumans?

THOMAS MELTON: [chuckling] A very interesting experience. I moved here from the suburbs of Chicago, Waukegan, Illinois, to accept the pastorate. I moved here twenty-six years ago next week. And so the first thing I did, the first, the second day that I moved here, I went over to meet my neighbor. At that time it wasn't a big deal. You could come and go, go up to the house and ring the doorbell, so I went over and introduced myself. And the president came to the door, and I said, "I'm your new neighbor." And he said, "On which side?" And I said, "Over there." And he said, "Oh, I am so glad, because," he said, "now I'll be able to look out my window and I can see if your paper's in your lawn. If the paper's there, I know mine is, and I can go out and get it." And so I often thought, I have practiced that many times since. I watch my neighbor's lawn to see if my paper's out there. [chuckling] That was my first meeting with the president, and we sat and laughed a lot about that.

DUNAR: This was in 1964?

MELTON: Sixty-four.

DUNAR: I know that you have occasionally taken some of these famous walks with the president. Could you tell us something about that?

MELTON: Yes, quite often by accident. No one in the community, at least I don't believe anybody in the community, ever butted into Mr. Truman's life. Mr. Truman lived a private life, and everybody that's a citizen in the town respected that. I never tried to manage to walk with him. But quite often it would be by accident that we would come out of the house at the same time, we'd meet at the same time, we'd walk along with his Secret Service man that always walked with him. And we would talk about many things, and he was a rather fast walker which I enjoyed, and he would comment about a lot of things we went by. And he would comment about the people that lived here, the people who lived there, or he remembered this. I've told this story before several times about the old ginkgo tree, which is on Maple, which is an enormous, beautiful ginkgo tree, commonly called the maidenhair, I believe. It's very tall, it's a very handsome tree, and when it's leaves turn, they fall practically all in one day. It didn't want to dribble and blow away; all at once the ground is covered with them. And one fall day, we were walking over to the church, and the ground was covered with these beautiful aspen-colored leaves. And he looked at the tree, which is sort of a historical thing here in town . . . It has a plaque on it; somebody had put a plaque on it years ago. And he said, "You've done a good job." I've told this several times, and people say, "You mean to say he talked to trees?" No, not that. He didn't talk to the tree and expect an answer. He merely was part of nature. And he

appreciated this, as everybody that lives on this street loves that tree. And so, that's always been an interesting experience. That's one of the things we did in walking.

He always carried a cane with him. I asked him one time if he needed it, and he said, "No, that was to keep the dogs away." [chuckling] And he always had a lot of dogs: I don't know whether the dog ever bothered him or not, I don't know, but he always carried a cane, I guess, from a long time.

DUNAR: How many Secret Service men went along on the walk?

MELTON: Only one.

DUNAR: Just one?

MELTON: Just one, but they had some that lived across the street. They had a changing group—there was twenty-four-hour watch over there with cameras—and I don't know how many they had but they were fine people. And I never slept so good in all my life, knowing that they were a twenty-four-hour watch on that corner; because they protected not only Mr. Truman, but they sort of protected everybody in the area.

But one of the funniest things happened one day with this. Mr. Truman was talking with them. I happened to be standing there. The Secret Service were on the front sidewalk, and they were complaining. Somebody had broken into their squad car during the night and stolen their radio. [laughter] And here they are, if they could do this right in front of the president's home—it was sitting in front of my house, in fact—if they can do that, I didn't feel so safe after that. [chuckling] But they were complaining

because somebody stole their radio out of their car at night.

DUNAR: What was the relationship like between the Trumans and the Secret Service?

Because I know that they didn't particularly want Secret Service protection.

MELTON: Well, there wasn't anything contrary that I know of. I've never seen them . . .

I think Mr. Truman understood and I think he appreciated it, and the gentleman that always walked with him was on the police department of Independence. I don't think he was Secret Service; I think he was police protection. I think perhaps the city may have partially provided this. He's now dead.

DUNAR: Was that Mike Westwood?

MELTON: Mike Westwood, yes. And there was never any problem between them.

When they would go somewhere in a car, of course, they followed right behind in their car, and I never heard Mr. Truman or Mrs. Truman either ever object to this. Maybe inside their own mind they may have, but they never made it known outward. But the Secret Service never bothered them. They stayed in their room with their little blue lights on and watched with an eagle eye through the cameras and . . .

I saw them once really spring into action. A car had turned off of Delaware onto Truman Road and had gone too fast. And it isn't an uncommon experience, but this car impaled itself on their fence. And it was driven by a young kid. Well, I was standing in the yard and saw the whole thing occur. Well, instantly, up on that fence this steaming, noisy car's . . . front wheels off of the ground and on top of their fence. The Secret Service

were there in just a jiffy. Well, so was I. And I was mad at this kid, because he could have done damage, because he didn't stop at the stop sign, lost control of the car. Here he is sitting in the car, Secret Service people running towards him. The Trumans, I know, were at the window, and I went over there and I said, "What do you think you're doing?" And his retort was classic. He said, "I didn't do it!" [laughter] He had little evidence to disprove it. And Mr. Truman came out, but that was . . . he didn't say anything, he just wanted to make sure he was all right. But the Secret Service were very well appreciated in the community, and I was always glad to talk to them.

DUNAR: Was it Mike Westwood that always went with him on these walks?

MELTON: Yes. Yes, Mike was very quiet, never said a whole lot. Everybody liked Mike; he was a good man. And always went with Mr. Truman, drove his car, those kind of things, you know. Mr. Truman would always go to work, usually went in his green Chrysler—I think it was green, sort of an old car. And you'd see him every morning or almost every morning, Mike driving him down to the office. And it was a thrill. I didn't appreciate the relatives that would come to see me, that would always want me to get them in to meet him. And I never once ever did that, because I did not want to take advantage of this relationship. I wouldn't do it. So I never had any of my relatives ever meet him, which I'm sort of sorry about now.

DUNAR: Would President Truman walk to his office at the Truman Library in the morning?

MELTON: I have seen him do that. I've seen him walk to his office, but he mostly rode. And I can't say that he did that all the time, I don't know. But once or twice I've seen him walk down.

DUNAR: Now, one other thing about his walks, would he stop and talk to neighbors on the walks?

MELTON: Oh, yes, he would. There had been a lot of turnover in the neighborhood, and if he didn't know them he wouldn't necessarily stop and talk. But somebody like Polly Compton who, long gone now, would be out, or Mr. Choplin, which lives across the street, or lived across the street from me. He would always stop and talk. He would stop and talk to my children. I had two boys—well, he had two grandsons, and the same age. And so it was always nice to . . . He'd come over and he'd pick up a ball once in a while.

When we first moved there, my kids didn't know anything about a president. One was not in kindergarten yet and the other one was in third grade or so, and they kicked a football, and it went toward the president. And they ran toward the president to get that ball. They didn't care anything about the president. And Mike Westwood was *right there*. So he wasn't asleep. [laughter] When they had no intention . . . Of course, that made friends. From that time on, if they were playing with the ball he'd pick it up, if it came his way, and throw it to them and go on down his way. He wouldn't break stride even.

DUNAR: Would the grandchildren come over and play with your children when they came?

MELTON: Strangely, no. This never happened. And we often invited them because they were very lonely, locked up inside of a fenced yard. We often invited them, but they were never sent over. And I think perhaps Mrs. Truman Daniel did not desire to do so, rather than think the Trumans did. And we were sorry about that because these young men were in need of a playmate and we had two right there ready-made.

DUNAR: Sure.

MELTON: My one son, my youngest son, my son David, was their paper boy, and for years he delivered the paper. And an interesting thing on the day he died, the newspaper got a picture of him throwing the paper. And he was skilled, he could throw it over the fence, over the gate, and land it almost always on the porch. He was a pretty good shot. And here he is, the paper had just left his hand, and this reporter got his picture. And it went all over, evidently, the world in the papers. “Truman’s last paper.” And we got all kinds of things from Australia, people that read this in their newspaper, and wanting to know about my young son. And that was sort of nice. Of course, he always went back to the kitchen to cash his check. You know, they pay the paper boy. This is a good way for the newspapers not to have to lose money, to let the little guy get it. So she would always pay in check. And he’d be in the kitchen and she’d give him a cookie, and he never would cash the checks. And I don’t know how many checks he has—since he never cashed them—of Mrs. Truman, because he had her signature on every one of them. And so I don’t know, she may have gotten her paper free all these years. [chuckling]

DUNAR: Pretty shrewd for a young man, I think.

MELTON: Well, he thought a lot of her, and she was very nice to him. Always a cookie, and she offered him something to drink. And they would sit on the porch while she'd write out the check, and they had a good relationship. But that picture—you can see it in the news files—if you look, of him doing this and how it went around the world. It was sort of unique.

DUNAR: Does he talk today at all about the time when he was a paper boy for the president?

MELTON: Not to my knowledge, and not to me he doesn't talk. I don't know, he's busy now, a manager of a K-Mart store and he doesn't talk to anybody much about anything except exchanges. [laughter]

DUNAR: Right. We wanted to know a little bit, too, about some of the other neighbors in the area. And you mentioned Polly Compton before. Could you just say a little bit about him?

MELTON: Well, Polly Compton was a man of the old school. He thought I burned too many electric light bulbs, for example. He always would tell me, "You got too many lights on over there. Why don't you turn it . . ." Because he could look out and see all my lights. [chuckling] And, well, it just so happens that one light will light up three windows, you know, so he thought there was a light in each window. But he would always . . . He was from the old school and a nice guy. The nice thing that he did, he had in his basement an ice cream maker—freezer, big, one of these professional ones. And he would make ice cream and take over to the Trumans and he would take it over to us,

and I really appreciated that. I thought it was a neat thing to do. I always wanted to do something for Polly because I thought a lot of him. And after his wife died he was a lonely gentleman, and I felt like there was so little I could do for him. He'd come out and sit out on his lawn in a chair and just sit there. But I really failed in trying to do what I should for him. But Polly was a good friend with them and I think had a lot of relationship over the years together.

Across the street directly is what was Mr. and Mrs. Choplin. Mr. Choplin is now deceased. Mrs. Choplin lives there. Tremendously delightful people, very challenging people. They were good friends of the Trumans, I guess. I hope they don't ever hear me say this, but they have a porch out of their . . . it comes out of their living room around the fireplace, and it's a double-decker. Also it come out from their bedroom. Well, every time we were having a big wheel here, like the president of the United States coming to see . . . and all the presidents came, well, they would want to take pictures. So they would rent the top of their porch, not rent but . . . And one day they decided they'd better fix it. So the photographers fixed the roof so they could not fall through, and they would have the perfect shot for the television camera. And we always got a kick out of that, because they got a new top for the porch because of that. But they were fine people and friends of the Trumans, of course, for years. They've all lived there so long. That house is a very old house, like a lot of the other houses in the neighborhood, but that's the oldest I think.

DUNAR: Could you just say a little bit about May Wallace?

MELTON: May Wallace, a lovely lady. She's the kind of lady that would take a trip to Alaska and lose all her luggage en route, and still enjoy Alaska. This, I think, actually happened. But anyhow, May Wallace was a good neighbor to all of us. A little bit upset with me because I was Presbyterian and she was not. But all in fun and jest and like, and very, very pleasant. I always enjoyed her. I didn't have as much to do with her just because that's across the street, and you'd be surprised what a boundary a street can make. But we'd always speak and talk when we were together, thrown together socially lots of times. And she's still quite active, and very virile and nice. I enjoy May.

DUNAR: You mentioned the traffic on the road and how the road could be a barrier. I imagine that has changed a lot since 1960.

MELTON: Well, when I came here that was a one-way street, and it went one-way to the east. No, I'm sorry, it went to the west. Maple here was one-way to the east, and that was sort of nice. And I was appointed chairman of the historical committee, the heritage commission, and I had that for several years until I resigned from it because of a conflict that would affect this church if I didn't, so I resigned to protect this church. And we worked out plans. . . Of course, living there was a little selfish. We were going to develop magnificent concepts, sort of similar to the Lincoln home, only not quite so restrictive, but keep the one-way streets. In fact, we even talked about stopping traffic on Truman Road, which, of course, didn't set well with the city. But we weren't going to allow traffic into Delaware, that was going to be a dead-end, with

plantings and trees at the end so that you would have a nice vista as you stopped there. And that was drawn, an architect's drawing. It should be somewhere in the city files. They put it in a drawer and left it there, somebody did, and it never was accomplished. I did get some trees planted along their house, on both sides, these linden trees, ash, and the new curb, which was limestone. That was specially cut for the Truman home. Before we did that, it had this crushed limestone—not crushed, but sawed limestone like the fence posts out in Kansas—and it had just crumbled away, and it was not, I didn't feel, up to the quality we should have in front of the president's home. So we put that in.

DUNAR: That was along Delaware?

MELTON: Along Delaware, the whole length, in front of the Truman home. And all those, that beautiful sidewalk that's there, we had that all picked up, taken up and re-sanded and put back down again and replaced all the broken ones. And do you know how we got the broken ones? You know, that sidewalk goes for a block, so the city or whoever did this—I don't remember who it was at the time—came around and stole all the good ones from the rest of us to patch the broken ones. I supplied several out of my sidewalk. Well, I didn't intend for that to happen, but Mr. Truman was proud of that sidewalk, often commented about it. I don't know how come it's there—I never have known—but whoever put it in put it for the entire block. And it's sort of a pretty thing, octagon stones. But it was pretty well broken up until we did that in the heritage commission some years ago.

DUNAR: Was the heritage commission supported by the city or was that an independent . . . ?

MELTON: The heritage commission was formed by the city. It was a commission to protect the area from misuse. I think this must have been sometime in the early seventies. Most of the United States in this area never thought about saving anything until the late sixties and early seventies. They destroyed everything. This town had many neat things, but not until then. This church was restored, one of the first things we restored in 1970. This church was a disaster, and we thought about tearing it down and building a new one. And about that time everybody began thinking, "We ought to save this stuff." And so we started in saving it. Some of it was too late. The old blacksmith shop was gone and a few other things, and that was when the heritage commission was formed by the city. I'm not sure who the mayor was at that time. I can't tell you, we've had so many mayors. But it was to protect the city or the community or the world from destroying the Truman district. And it was a magnificent plan. We paid, I think, \$45,000 to have the architect draw it up. It was gorgeous. This was to be the end of it according to the United States department that set up the heritage district. This was called the "swing corner," and it went that way, and that was our task, to protect that. And we had some great plans but it never came to fruition.

DUNAR: There was a dispute, and this might have been what you referred to before, too, in terms of resigning your position on the commission over, I believe, turning some of the area within the district into a parking lot. Is that correct?

MELTON: No, I resigned before that or it wouldn't have happened. I would have fought that with quite a bit of vigor. No, the reason I resigned is because we tore down the house across the street, to make our parking lot. [chuckling]

DUNAR: Oh, I see, okay.

MELTON: So I couldn't very well say that you can't tear down the house that Truman walked by, the one I tore down for our church here to have a parking lot, and won't let another church do it. [chuckling] So, I resigned rather than to have a conflict. I didn't want that to hurt the church. And I was sorry because I really thought I had something there of value to try to do. The conflict that arose with that was over the Baptist church who were buying property up everywhere and no one ever knew their plans. They didn't share this well with us, and there was quite an argument over this as to what would be done, and many hurt feelings and a lot of hot meetings went on. The city council, however, recanted and backed down and let them go ahead, and that's why we have the parking lots all around us behind there.

Now, I don't know that that's really bad, I'm not saying that at all. In fact, along with what we talked about before we started the taping, that's where the tourists should be able to park—it's perfect for it—and walk right across and come in. It's just a natural.

DUNAR: Was there in that solution then, did the city just concede the right to tear those down, or was there a compromise?

MELTON: No, as one city councilman told me that time, he said, "I'm scared to death of any Baptist." [laughter] And they backed right off. Scrub that on the tape,

will you? [laughter] But they were afraid to fight, typical situation of politics. And I don't think it would have been that bad . . . The Baptists are fine people. They wouldn't have, certainly, held a parking lot against a good man in office. Who knows, though? But they backed off.

And the community, when that happened, the spirit went out of the Truman district. People moved away. We were having young people come in and fix up the houses, and, oh, there was great spirit! It was going to be gung-ho because everybody was excited to live here. They came around and raised my taxes, said, "Your property's going to be worth more." [chuckling] Well, that killed that spirit, because the city didn't support the area.

And then, of course, some quick things came out of Washington. And Washington would do this, and Washington would do that. And that sort of . . . no one believed any of that, but it didn't stop it. And so, we have the parking lots. But I am not really violently objecting against the parking lots. I think they can add a lot. I exchanged a yard full of weeds for blacktop—that's what it amounts to—because it's right behind my property. But tearing down houses was a problem, and they didn't know where they would stop. I think sometimes communications are the problems with life. No one knows what you're doing, and that would raise a problem.

DUNAR: Did the Trumans get involved at all in that issue?

MELTON: No, I don't think anybody probably ever talked to them. The Trumans never got involved in politics, period, in this town. I never saw them get involved. Maybe they did and I wasn't aware of it. But there were a lot of people that

always wanted to run and they would run with some insinuation that Trumans are backing them. Which, maybe is true, but I doubt it. I don't think the Trumans ever did anything like that at all. They were too up and up, at least, in my opinion.

DUNAR: Sure. Well, I can see why they'd stay out of backing an individual, but were there any other, any civic projects that they might have gotten behind, anything of that sort?

MELTON: Civic projects they might have gotten behind. I think they probably supported most everything that was done within reason but they never took a leadership role, not in my knowledge, and I knew them for two decades. I never saw them do that, but that doesn't mean they didn't. That I was not aware of, I never saw them do it.

DUNAR: Were there other changes that took place, not only in the historic district but, well, including maybe the square, that you think they had some reaction to?

MELTON: I'm not sure that the Trumans really cared for the historical district. I'm not sure they did. That really sort of happened toward the end of Mrs. Truman's life. I don't know if she even knew it was happening. I would have a guess that if the Trumans were asked about it they'd say nix, no. I'm just guessing on that, because they never wanted anything done, that I'm aware of. But you have to sometimes go beyond what the individual wants for the good of the whole, and we have to do this for the nation for the years to come, even though the Trumans aren't here to say yes or no. And I think it probably would not have happened until they did come to die. Being chairman, I could

have easily asked Mrs. Truman her viewpoint, but I never did do that. First place, I would think that she probably didn't want to fool with it. I don't think so.

DUNAR: Were you a member of the commission, then . . . Was it before the president died or after?

MELTON: I can't give you the date of it. I think the commission was formed after the president died. I don't think it was there before . . . I'm not sure of that date, but I think he was deceased.

DUNAR: I know that in her later years that Mrs. Truman relied a great deal on you. Did that relationship, that close relationship, between you and the Truman family where you might have been called over to help with something, was that already formed?

MELTON: Yes, well, I don't know when that was formed, but it happened a lot. [chuckling] Well, Mrs. Truman, you know, was a normal neighbor, but every time there was a fire engine that went by or an ambulance, and if they stopped in our district, my phone would ring. "Pastor Melton, what's going on out there?" [chuckling] I'd say, "I don't know, Mrs. Truman, wait and I'll find out." So I'd go to see what's burning or something. But she always wanted to know. And one time she called me and said, "Would you please cut that noise out over there. The cars going by are just bothering me." I said, "I wish I could!" Eighteen thousand cars a day, you know, they wanted me to stop the noise, but I was helpless to do that. Mrs. Truman was . . . When she was in the hospital, I would go to see her. At that particular time, the Episcopal

pastor was new, and I don't even know that he knew that he was . . . I'm sure he knew that he was pastor to the Trumans. But, anyhow, I had word through the grapevine from her attending nurse, who was a close friend of mine, that no one had been to see her of ecclesiastical status. So I went, not only as a neighbor, but I went as a pastor because of this request. And, of course, the Secret Service wouldn't let me in until they saw me. They knew me, at that time they let me in. And I had prayer with her and a nice discussion. She said to be sure to send greetings to my son who delivered their paper. And I did that and I visited with her. The last time she was in the hospital I didn't go because I had received the information that she was not capable to even talk or something or other, but I had nice visits with her in the hospital. And I have it from the nurse that took care of her at Research Hospital that she was an ideal patient.

So it was a good relationship, I thought a lot of Mrs. Truman. And she gave us the picture . . . This is the Truman room. That's where they went to Sunday school. And the picture, we have one of their age bracket when they came here, when they were about this high, in that room, and she gave us that and said, "Please don't name the room after us." We asked her if we could name it, and Truman said, "Please don't name it after us, but we want you to have this picture for the room of when we went there." And she had it framed and gave us this picture, and we turned right around and named it the Truman Room. [chuckling] Well, what else are you going to call it?

So, one of the neat things, Mr. Truman, when he was in the

presidency, went to . . . was it Central Presbyterian Church in Washington? Once in a while he would go there. Anyhow, they built a new one, now, out by American University, a big cathedral-type thing. So they have a chapel. This chapel has a pew that was used by each president of the United States. I don't know how far it goes back. I don't know if it goes to Washington, but it goes back a long ways. So they asked if they could put this pew in for Truman, and Mr. Truman wanted us to do it. And so this church put the pew in that chapel of that church, and it was called the Truman Pew and this church gave it. And this pleased him tremendously. And every time I take a group to Washington, D. C., I always take them out there to the church where they can see this pew which we gave. That meant a lot to him.

Let me tell you a story. I've told this before. And I don't think it's ever been printed or anything. This, I think, is a very touching story. I have a lot of funerals, or have had, and buried a lot of people, and it was not uncommon to see Mr. Truman at funerals. This always fouled me up a little bit, having a funeral in the presence of a president of the United States. But he'd always come, and he'd always seemed he would sit close to where I was. And in some of these funeral homes in the olden times, you were right on the people, you were on the deceased and also right above the people. And Mr. Truman always seemed to sit . . . Well, one time in February, in probably '65 or '66—I'm not sure of the year—a terrible blizzard in February, a man died. His body was shipped in here from Wyoming. Only Mr. Mitchell who was the undertaker and myself were at the funeral home. He said, "What are we

going to do?” So we took the casket, loaded it into the hearse, and went out to the Oak Lawn Cemetery. Now the blizzard is raging, really cold, really miserable. And we stayed around there and waited until time that was said for the funeral, and no one came. And I said to the undertaker, “We need to go ahead and close this and get it over with because there’s no sense standing out here.” And then, about that time, in came a car into that cemetery with that new-blown snow, coming down to where we were, and I recognized the car. It was the Truman car! And so, we waited and Mr. Truman got out of the car. And I said, “Mr. President, you do not belong out here! This is bad weather!” He was an old man, and he should get back in his car and leave. And he said, “Tom, I’ll tell you this. Mr. Truman never forgets a friend.” I sat there flabbergasted. And we had the little service, only Mr. Truman at the service. I think that’s pretty good. That’s the kind of guy he was, at least the kind of guy I knew.

DUNAR: Who was it that you buried?

MELTON: Well, I’ve tried to remember what his name was. He was a friend that evidently that he knew here in this community. And he’d moved to Wyoming and he died in Wyoming and they shipped his body back from Wyoming.

DUNAR: I see.

MELTON: And I really can’t tell you unless I have Mr. Mitchell’s records, I can’t come up with what his name was. But, he must have been an old crony [unintelligible] because he was an elderly man.

DUNAR: I guess we are about done taping. We can pause here for a moment. Give

Mike a chance to turn the tape over.

MELTON: We've gone through a whole tape? I'd better slow down. [laughter]

[End #3588; Begin #3589]

DUNAR: Was President Truman involved in the affairs of this church in any other regard?

MELTON: Well, he had spoken here a couple of times. He really wasn't involved in any church. He belonged to the Baptist church in Grandview, I believe. And his wife had been very active in this church, until her later twenties when she went to the Episcopal church to be, I think, music director over there. And as you can see by the records here, we baptized her in 1880-something, whatever it is. And the family, the Wallace family, was very active in this church, being choir director, being Sunday school teachers. We have a fund in the church called the Ott-Wallace Scholarship Fund, which they left. And we have one called the Gates Fund, which the Gates family, which is part of . . . We have a scholarship fund of quite a big sum that we give away each year to high school students from the Gateses. And so they were very active in this church, and this is the only church of consequence that Mr. Truman mentions in his memoirs. We have a copy of it in the other room. And I never talked to him much about church. I tried to play the role of a good neighbor. I didn't want to do something that would embarrass him. It wouldn't embarrass him, of course, it would embarrass me. But I often took liberties of letting him know I appreciated being his neighbor. Let him know we cared.

DUNAR: There was some concern on the part of the Trumans, I think, for souvenir

hunters carrying away the house. Can you tell what there is about that one?

MELTON: [laughter] Oh, yes. Well, I saw one pick up one of the concrete blocks on the sidewalk and take it. And, you know, that's a neat gift. I think one of the reasons—I'm not sure of this—the fence had been put there just before we came. And I think the reason they put the fence in was because they were taking things off the house. He didn't want the fence, I understand. Now, that was there before I came, so I don't know for sure, but I heard this. But I have seen them do this, I've seen them take pieces of the sidewalk, I've seen them cut flowers, lilacs off the bushes, and I think this is an unfortunate, normal tourist reaction. I guess that's just the way it goes. I don't know how they felt about it, but they did acquiesce to the fence. And I think the fence is important. I think you need it. I think it adds class.

DUNAR: Did the Trumans ever come out in the yard, other than on the back porch, or did they stay inside?

MELTON: No, Mr. Truman once in a while would come out and walk in his yard, but he didn't do that very much. And I never saw her out in the yard, never. She was always on the back porch, though. And, of course, the way the back porch is arranged and the way my back porch is arranged—I don't have a back porch but a back yard—we could hear everything they were saying. [laughter] We weren't eavesdropping, not at all, but it just happened to be that's the way it was. And I don't even know what she said, but she had a lot of fun with her . . . I guess, her friends on the back porch. And sometimes it would be rather loud.

DUNAR: Her bridge group, maybe?

MELTON: I imagine so, yes.

DUNAR: Did you ever talk to any members of the bridge group at all?

MELTON: Yes, several of them belong here to the church. One of them is still alive, Grace Minor. She's in a rest home and she doesn't have her faculties right at the present time. She's quite old. But, yes, they used to talk about it, and talk about being with them, and I think maybe Grace is the only one left. She's ninety-nine or so. I think the rest of them are all gone. I'm not sure of that. But she loved that, she loved her friends, and quite often had them at the house. They always had some guests.

The interesting thing about living next to the Trumans was the massive attention the world gave him. It would be exciting, and when we would hear the sirens come and they didn't go to a fire, they would be bringing, escorting a big vehicle up to the front of the house. And, of course, everybody'd come out. I have two telephoto lenses—I didn't want to miss a thing—but it wasn't necessary, I could just walk right over there and be with him. Because there was no danger, no one was afraid, no one tried to keep you away and, I think, every one of them I have met, except Paulsen, Pat Paulsen. Remember him? He ran for president?

DUNAR: Yes.

MELTON: Well, the year he ran he came here and made his first speech right in front of the house.

DUNAR: Did he?

MELTON: Yes, and he had two people listening to him, me and another person. [laughter] But the giants of the world had been here to see Mr. Truman, and that's been exciting because I've had a ringside seat. Of course, they were never announced. They would appear. The community didn't know about it, and I would be able to learn quickly and be right there. And that's been very fruitful. My children have grown up having a concept of government because of this, because every time I'd explain it. And I think it's been worth the effort living here.

DUNAR: Are there any visits of dignitaries in particular you remember?

MELTON: Yes, I remember them all well, but the one with Ford is the one that I remember more than anything else. They were going to dedicate the statue up here, and Ford, President Ford was going to come. Now, they had just shot at President Ford in San Francisco, and I'd told the people that were putting the seats, I said, "Don't put me next to Ford, because they might miss and get me!" So they put me in the second row because I was going to have all the prayer businesses that they had. They put me in the second row, and guess where? Right behind him. And I figured this was just as bad as being over to his side. So I was very glad when President Ford got through that without somebody trying to assassinate him. Well, it was all in our minds. The whole town was concerned about it. But that's the one I remember the most because I had that experience with that assassination. The others were just very fine to have them here.

DUNAR: So you participated in . . . Did you read an opening prayer then for the

dedication?

MELTON: Yes, I must have been the praying preacher, because every time they had anything they had me. And I don't know why. Well, I do know why, too. The man that was President Truman's lawyer, Mr. Burrus, generally was the one they worked through, and he belongs to this church. And so every time he needed a preacher, I was the only one he knew, so I had all these privileges. I was at all the dignitary tables, every time he had a banquet or every time he had . . . It was a great experience, and I'm grateful for Mr. Burrus. That's the reason that I got heavily involved with everything that they did like that, just because I was his pastor.

DUNAR: Did Mr. Burrus still continue to do legal work for the Trumans?

MELTON: Oh, I don't suppose so. I don't know that. I'm not privy to that knowledge. I know they remained friends, but I don't know whether he did legal work or not. Mr. Burrus is quite up in years and fragile.

DUNAR: Did you meet any other of President Truman's friends from the earlier days, like maybe John Snyder, for example, when he would visit frequently?

MELTON: I've met them. I think, wasn't it Mr. Snyder who lived down the street on Delaware, Secretary Treasurer?

DUNAR: I don't think he ever lived here. He visited a number of times.

MELTON: Okay, well, who lived down the street?

DUNAR: Maybe Charlie Ross?

MELTON: Charlie Ross, the secretary.

DUNAR: Yes, he was the press secretary.

MELTON: Press secretary. Yes, I've met them at different occasions, but I had no connection to them whatsoever. I mean, they don't know me and I only met . . . Because of this relationship . . . This is sort of interesting. Got enough tape? [chuckling] This is sort of interesting. In this particular church I like to take members of the church on tours. We take eleven a year and we tailor each one to the pocketbook. We have some one-day ones for a dollar, and we have some that cost a thousand. And so I always took them every year, and we've been to the White House as guests of every president that has been there since Eisenhower. Every president, we've been a guest from this church with about fifty people at the White House. Well, this was always made possible because I would always get Mrs. Truman to give me a letter to the new First Lady of the United States and I would have her let me deliver it personally to the new first lady. So I always had entree with my fifty people in the rose garden to the first lady of the White House. And she would willingly each year . . . I'd often wanted to open up one of those letters and see what she'd say. Each year she would write a letter to somebody, to the White House, to the new first lady; and that was something that she wanted to do, and I was willing to do, and this was a nice relationship. She wrote every first lady a letter, and I delivered it, with fifty people from this church. Wasn't that neat?

DUNAR: That is great, yes.

MELTON: And once when we'd done it . . . we had Trish Nixon was the one I had to give it to. Mrs. Nixon was sick on that day, so we gave it to Tricia Nixon.

But Mrs. Carter was just superbly acting towards us. She received us with such warmth. But we delivered all those letters to all those people.

DUNAR: That's nice.

MELTON: I thought that was nice on Mrs. Truman's part to be that concerned about a new first lady. And I thought it was awful nice to let us do it rather than send it through the mail.

DUNAR: Sure. Was Mrs. Truman involved then more so in the affairs of the church than the president was?

MELTON: No, neither one of them were much involved in the church. She was very involved in the Episcopal church, Mrs. Truman was, because she had gotten into the guild over there and the people. But, I think, probably the greatest number of her friends may have been connected to this church or some churches, or like us. It just happens to be the families were friendly. Some of the people baptized when she was were born at the same time, baptized the same time. So there's a connection, you see, over the years. But she never was really involved, except she was just one of the friends of us here.

DUNAR: Which members of the Wallace family have been members of the church while you have been the pastor here?

MELTON: Natalie, I don't know where that fits in. Actually, they all have . . . Even Natalie was dead before I came. They all have been dead before I came here. I'm not sure when she died, I don't know that, I don't remember. I'd have to look it up in the book, but I didn't know them. Well, we do have these funds which the family left, and the Gateses fund, the Gates and a lot of the people

that she was in the book with, listed with her, born in the same period of time, have been very active in the church. They're about all gone now, but they were very active in the church and they all knew her well. She had nothing but humility in all her bones. She fit in very well.

DUNAR: It seems from some of the things that we've heard in other history, oral history interviews and so forth, that Mrs. Truman was maybe more dependent on you in her later years, that she would call you for other things. Is that correct?

MELTON: Yes, she would do that. It was not uncommon to have a call two or three times a week from Mrs. Truman, which I didn't mind at all, and I would do what I could. She never asked for me to do anything like go get some milk or bread or anything, she never did that. But she would ask questions, "What's happening about the courthouse? What's going on in the streets?" She would ask questions about the community. She never asked me to do anything, I mean, nothing important. Like she'd always ask me to go out and find out whose house was on fire, and I was glad to do that. I wanted to know, too.
[chuckling]

DUNAR: Sure, sure.

MELTON: But that was about it. Anything she wanted to know information on, she didn't hesitate to call me. And I was glad.

DUNAR: You said earlier you had gotten to know her chief nurse. Was that Valeria LaMere?

MELTON: Her nurse was Flo Warren.

DUNAR: Flo Warren, okay.

MELTON: Yes, I know her quite well.

DUNAR: Was she in care of Mrs. Truman then for . . .

MELTON: At the hospital, Research Hospital.

DUNAR: At the house, as well, or just at the hospital?

MELTON: No, just the hospital. Now the one she had that cared for her was a member of this church. Oh my, she's dead but I can't think of her name right offhand. But she was a member of this church that cared for her for years. I just can't come up with the name.

DUNAR: Did she have the same nurse every time she went to the hospital?

MELTON: As far as I know. Well, of course, you know, you have more than one, but the nurse that cared for her the most was Flo Warren. She was always the one she used. I don't know if she chose her or anything; maybe the hospital chose her. But I was talking with Mrs. Warren just about a month ago and we were talking about the good times that she had when she was over there. She had a good experience with her.

DUNAR: Apparently Mrs. Truman insisted that she be taken to the Research Hospital. I wonder if that might have been because of the . . .

MELTON: Well, that might have something to do with it, but I think she was taken there because her doctor went there, Wallace Graham.

DUNAR: It was more his . . .

MELTON: Well, that's where he doctored. But I'm sure having a good nurse didn't hurt. And I know Mrs. Warren was a good nurse, or is. She just retired about two months ago or so. And Wallace Graham was the one that, I think, insisted on

Research. And, of course, Research had the philosophy of being one of the better hospitals around, too.

DUNAR: You made some comments earlier before we started the tape about your observations, generally, about tourism and the Truman house. I wonder if you could maybe just comment a little bit on your impressions of that.

MELTON: Well, it looks like to me, having visited every home of the president of the United States and a few other things, that this is made very difficult to visit. And that's what I'm talking about. We make it very hard for a tourist, who has come from Pennsylvania and has to be in Topeka by seven-thirty to get a hotel room, to see something. In the first place, and I know no one's ever going to be able to change this, the hours are all wrong. I mean, tourism quite often is busiest at sundown. If they're staying here in a motel, that's when they do the town. I notice this is . . . I go somewhere and they're always closed, and I want to go in and see it. What are they closed for? You know, I'm here to look at them. [chuckling] And so I think what I can sum it up is that we make it very difficult for a tourist to enjoy the flavor of Truman history. I don't have any bright answers, but I don't think that there's been much thinking sometimes given to some of the things we do. Can you believe I found a canyon closed? How do you close a canyon? [chuckling]

DUNAR: Just to sort of conclude things, I just would like to ask maybe what your most lasting impression or memory was of President Truman?

MELTON: Well, I don't think maybe most people would understand this, but I think that he was the last—and I may be way off on this—but to me he was the last one I

could believe in public office that we've had in this country. And I didn't like him when he was president. I thought he was crude and brash, but I changed my opinion greatly after I got to live here and see the history, like the world has changed its opinion. But he's the last one I believe that I could say I really . . . when I heard him speak, he didn't fib to me. I saw, "Give 'Em Hell, Harry!" three or four times, and every time I saw that I felt like I had taken a bath. I'd been cleansed. Whitmore did such a good job on it, I guess. But the way and the things he said and the things he did were what I wanted to hear from my president. And I just think that's the thing I remember about it. I felt like I really trusted him, though he drafted me. [laughter] You know, I was a captain in the army and I got drafted. So when I moved here I went in and I said, "Mr. President," and I saluted him, and he said, "What the hell are you?" [laughter] This was in his office after I met him the first time, I said, "I'm a captain in the United States reserve." "Ah, you want a picture?" and I said, "I sure do!" So he pulled out a picture and he wrote on there, "Captain Melton," you know, and wrote my name on there. And I really appreciated that. I felt like all the years I served in the armed forces had been paid for. There was a commander in chief autographing a picture to me. [chuckling] And that was the same occasion I asked him, I said, "What do you think about Goldwater?" [laughter] I said, "What do you think about him?" and he said, "He's a damned ass!" [laughter] And I said, "I understand." Goldwater was raising a lot of stink, you know, in the government and everything, and I just wanted his opinion and that was his answer. [laughter] But I felt he never lied, and

that's something I don't find freely in our government.

DUNAR: Did he sign that picture Captain Truman?

MELTON: No, he didn't. He just signed his name. It's almost faded off the picture. I've been wondering how I can get that so you can see it again, because he used a ballpoint pen and, you know, it's almost gone. It's just about faded off.

Oh, I've got time for one more. [chuckling] Well, I went to his office again. As a good neighbor I would do this, just to visit with him, had nothing, no axe to grind. And I had an associate pastor here from India in this church. I was trying some experimental ministries. This gentleman was very highly educated, Ph.D. from India, and he was going to teach in one of the colleges and be on this church's staff. I wanted him to meet the president because that was one of the reasons that he came here, so I took him down. And he has written several books. He's a very learned theologian, and he's now in charge of big stuff over in Geneva, Switzerland. We walked in, introduced him to Mr. Truman, Mr. Truman said, "I see you have a book there, you want me to autograph that for you?" And this gentleman said, "No, sir! I'm going to autograph it and give it to you! This is my book, I wrote it!" [laughter] And, you know, I don't suppose Mr. Truman has ever been told that before in his life! I almost fell to the floor. I didn't know what in the world, how he would take it, but he laughed about it. So this gentleman autographed his book and gave it to Mr. Truman. Oh, my.

DUNAR: Well, Mike or Carol, do you have any questions you'd like to ask?

MICHAEL SHAVER: Some of the other neighbors that you haven't mentioned—I

know they've been around for a long time—they may have been around during your period in the neighborhood. Mrs. Stewart, back behind you, do you know much about her? Your neighbor to the south and to the east?

MELTON: Oh, okay, all right. No, I don't know a whole lot about her. She's an elderly lady living by herself. She's been there all these years, and is a very pleasant person. I enjoy her. I don't have anything much I can tell you about her, except that she's a neighbor.

SHAVER: Mrs. Carvin, across the street, who used to live next door to Mr. Compton. Grace Carvin?

MELTON: No, I really can't tell you much about her. She never entered into all this very much, and I think a lot has to do with age. I think that's . . .

SHAVER: Yes. Back in 1971, there was a proposal by some individual to tear down the yellow house on the corner of Pleasant and Truman Road. We call it the Nate Jackson House, because of one of the individuals we know that used to live there. And there was a big petition drive up and down the street in the neighborhood to stop the zoning request. Were you part of that?

MELTON: Yes.

SHAVER: Did you sign that petition order to Mr. Truman?

MELTON: Yes, I signed it. I didn't want them to tear that house down and I didn't want them to tear the other one down that was on the other side of it. I wish they would tear down two of them down. I would like to see them not touch anything over on Spring Street. They own a couple of the houses over there,

which they're letting dilapidate. And I would like for them not to do this. I look for them to come down any day, but I have no control over that. The city is the only one that has the power to stop that.

SHAVER: What have been your impressions—and be truthful about it, and don't worry about our reactions to it—to how the park service has assumed control over the Truman home and what they've done with it since?

MELTON: Well, I've been impressed with how they've worked it. They've restored the house. The house, incidentally, that's something the Trumans never did, was take care of the house. They painted it once that I know of and that was it. But they were up in years and had lost interest and just let it go. The park service took it off board by board and stripped them, and redid them and put them back, same board. I was impressed. But a couple of hundred thousand dollars, too. I think the park service has done a superb job. I have absolutely nothing but praise for them. I just think there ought to be a better way that tourists could enjoy it. [chuckling] A quicker way or something. I still think that the office, an office or the gathering place for the Truman home, should be right by it somewhere. And I don't know that the Truman home should carry the rest of the historicity of the city of Independence. To me, when I think of the city of Independence, the tourist only thinks of one thing: that's the Truman home and the library. They don't think of these other things. And I think we don't recognize that in this town. And this is where I have my problems, but I don't do anything about it. I'm not on the tourism committee and . . . I might run for something one of these days and change all that. But I

appreciate the park service. I, frankly, liked your brighter lights better than I do these little dim ones. [laughter] You know, they had such bright lights on it that everybody was blinded; but what it did was to highlight that house for everybody that went by. I mean, that was the best advertisement you could have, those bright lights. It just glowed at night. And then they put in these little 150-watters which just don't do anything much. But, you know, I understand the problem with cost, and I don't know why you did it.

SHAVER: Speaking of lights, do you ever recall seeing his study light on in the evening when he was still alive?

MELTON: Yes, I've oftentimes taken pictures of the window with him sitting there reading. Oh, I don't know whether I can lay my fingers on but I've done it, but not being nosy, not at all. You know what, when they were toward their earlier days, tourists would come and sit on my lawn, and they'd sit here, you know, like you're sitting. [chuckling] And pretty soon you'd see a shade go down. [laughter] You couldn't see in the house but the shade would go down, and the tourists would get up and leave. They wanted to see some action. And we knew where they were all the time in the house. We could tell by the positioning of the blinds and the lights, we knew where they were. Not that it made any difference.

I frankly felt like I was to watch for them; I felt the desire to do that, to care for them. I don't know why I felt that way. But I thought so much about them and so I did. And I always watched. And then, one time I saw an ambulance pull up in the back, and who was the first one there? I was. They

took Mr. Truman to the hospital. But they came in the back door. You know, there was a fence back there in the back. They didn't go down the alley, I don't know why. Maybe they didn't know. But I was the first one over there because that's my neighbor. I'd do it for anybody. Of course, they didn't want me, "Get out of here!" [laughter]

DUNAR: I'm curious just here, you mentioned the lights in the study. Did he sit in that study in the winter? We were talking to the security guard who stayed there just the last couple of years and he said it was really cold in that room.

MELTON: Well, I can't speak about the time of the year. I have seen him there lots of times reading. Now, I can't tell you, but it must have been summer because I wouldn't have been outdoors in the winter either. So maybe it was summer, I don't know about that. But I've seen him in there lots of times. You asked a question a while ago, had I ever seen them out in the yard? I've never seen them in their yard. They never came out in the yard. But when they had guests, they would always come to the front door and greet them, always. They never went to the fence, they stood on the front porch, and I always thought that was interesting. Because I would sometimes, if I had a guest, I would go out to the car. They always came out.

SHAVER: Talking about tourism, you've been there from the time he was there until the present. Has tourism changed, have you noticed, the quality or the character or the number of tourists changed over the course of the years?

MELTON: Well, there's a different attitude because there are different ways you have to do it. When he was there, it was sit and wait and watch and take pictures,

hoping he'd come out, a lot of that. Nowadays it's psst psst because that's not going to happen. So that's been a change, and I've noticed that. But the kind of tourists, I think they're probably all alike, I don't see much change. They used to have picnics in my yard, there was not many places to eat, and they'd come to the door and borrow our can opener. [laughter] And we would loan them our can opener. I have often thought of putting some benches out in my yard and letting them use them. There was supposed to have been a marker in my yard at the corner, sort of marking off that Delaware-Truman complex there. Well, that never happened, and it's just as well because I'd probably end up having to take care of it. But there have been a lot of things . . . Some good plans have been made that never were implemented, some excellent plans. I don't know why. I couldn't say. I could venture some guesses but they just never happened.

DUNAR: Is there still now, today, a historic district commission?

MELTON: Yes, a historical commission. It's been cut down. The district has been cut down to one street. When I was chairman we enlarged it to include three streets both ways, to protect the area, and that was changed as soon as I got off the commission by whoever came on. Ben Zobrist had been on the commission with me at that time, and Ben is a very dedicated man and he agrees with sometimes what you see. But that's the way life is.

DUNAR: Carol, any questions?

DAGE: I don't think I have any.

DUNAR: Okay. Well, I think that's all I have.

SHAVER: Thank you very much.

DUNAR: Well, thank you so much for the interview.

MELTON: Glad to do it, glad to do it.

[tape is turned off]

. . . Memorial Day, and I always had to have the prayer, and then, here we go again, see. In a way I resented it, because it always took my holiday. But the last time he spoke, now I'm not sure which holiday—it was hot, the sun was out. It may have been the Fourth of July, the last time he spoke publicly, and he tried to read his speech and it was just so sad. And when he was through, I went and stood by him. He was quite feeble, I said, "Mr. President, that was a fine speech." And he said, "If it hadn't been for that damn sun shining on my paper, I could have read it better!" [laughter] And because it was awfully bright—it was hot, it must have been the Fourth of July—and I knew what was his problem because I could tell what he was trying to do, because I've been there. But, oh, it was so sad, and everybody was just pained to see him to do this. He just suffered trying to get through that speech. No one knew what he was saying. He wasn't incoherent, he couldn't read the thing, you know, and I remember that damn sun, I love it. [chuckling]

DUNAR: How old was he then? Do you remember when that was?

MELTON: Well, he was toward the end of his life. You know, that's another funny thing. I sort of am an ESP believer. I'd have to define ESP, but I sort of think . . . Christmas, I've always spent Christmas Day in the Amana colonies in Iowa. You know where I'm talking about? And I always leave . . . I have a

midnight service here with a thousand people worshipping, and I always get up next morning or late that night after we're through and take off for Amana. I want to get out of town, and the only place I can go where there's no one around is Iowa. And, of course, having gone to the University of Iowa, I know that area like a clock. So we got in the car and we started off. And, I don't know, we were somewhere up close to the Iowa border, and I said to my wife, "I've got to go back. Something tells me that I must go back." We turned around and came back, and Truman dies. I mean, it's strange, isn't that?

DUNAR: Yes.

MELTON: And then, of course, they ask me to have the public service funeral, which we had in the RLDS Auditorium because we wouldn't . . . And I always write my sermons out anyhow, three times every week, plus putting it on tape the fourth time, so that I'm pretty well prepared. So I wrote this sermon out, and I made fifteen copies—that's all there are—and I gave them to my family and said, "Save these. Someday somebody's going to want the funeral sermon." And so there's fifteen copies of that sermon lying around. One's at the library. One Mrs. Truman had and one the daughter had, and my three sons have them. So that leaves about six copies out there somewhere.

SHAVER: How much are those worth? [laughter]

DUNAR: Well, thank you so much.

MELTON: Well, I'm just glad to be of help. And don't think I am critical of the park service. Not at all.

DUNAR: Oh, no, not at all. No . . .

MELTON: I even contribute to you. I have a little sticker in my car.

DUNAR: . . . that's part of the story.

MELTON: I just want things as good as possible.

DUNAR: Sure. That's your business, to keep us honest.

END OF INTERVIEW