

Dobson Remembers TR May 31, 1958

By JOHN M. GREENE

Meade C. Dobson of Kew Gardens—"Mr. Long Island" when he was managing director of the Long Island Association—dropped in for lunch at the Garden City Hotel the other day, looking like a man of 50.

Back in 1899, when he was a cub reporter on the old New York Evening Journal, Dobson was 18. Simple arithmetic reveals that he is now 77.

Most of his years have been spent with the association and its predecessor, the Long Island Chamber of Commerce. He nursed the chamber from a one-man organization, buried in a remote corner of the Pennsylvania Railroad Station, into a potent factor in the growth of Nassau at a time when the county was just about to reach the long pants stage.



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DOBSON KNEW—and was known by—all the key men who pioneered the development of the county from a potato-growing farm area into one of the wealthiest in the nation. He was active in its transition. When he closed up shop with the association, the county was in the midst of the boom that has skyrocketed its population to its present estimated 1,200,000.

It has been a long, long time since Dobson quit the newspaper field to go into chamber of commerce work. Yet he has never thoroughly gotten rid of the odor of printer's ink.

So it was only natural, when the talk turned to politics and the names ran from Leonard W. Hall of Lattingtown to Theodore Roosevelt—and the centennial celebration of TR's birth—that Dobson dug into his mental archives and came up with an appropriate story.

He'll vote for Hall in November if Hall gets the nomination. If Hall doesn't, he'll probably vote for the man the Republicans name because, as he put it, he was "kidnapped" into the Republican Party and Roosevelt was the cause of it.

"I'm the only member of generations of the Dobson family of Virginia and Missouri to turn into a Republican," he said. It was in the nature of a boast.

It happened in the summer of 1899. Dobson was assigned to go to the barge office and get a statement from Roosevelt, then governor, on New Jersey's protest that the city's garbage was floating onto its beaches. Jersey was threatening to sue the state and the city.

Roosevelt was to make an inspection tour with the commander of the Port of New York. Dobson found an Army tug at the barge office, learned from the captain that he was awaiting the commander, though he didn't know why, and got permission to stay on board until the commander arrived.

"Always fascinated by the ships moving in and out of the harbor," Dobson said, "I went over to the starboard — that's the outer-side — of the tug to get a good look at the ships. I was enjoying myself when the tug suddenly pulled away from the dock."

The commander wanted to put him ashore but Gov. Roosevelt intervened. "Never mind," the governor said, "he might just as well go along with us."

Dobson said "I was so surprised and flattered that I completely forgot that I was expected to get a report back to the Journal immediately."

While the tug plowed down the harbor, he and Gov. Roosevelt sat in the pilot house. "The governor asked me several questions about myself," Dobson recalled. "Especially he was interested in why I came from Missouri to work on the Journal."

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HE REMEMBERED the dinner of fried steak and onions, boiled potatoes, baked beans, hot biscuits, apple pie and doughnuts, eaten at the same table with Gov. Roosevelt, the port commander and the three deck hands.

"The governor talked freely to all of us," Dobson reflected.

"When the trip was over," he said "Gov. Roosevelt gave me a statement, wished me well with a hearty handshake and I hurried to phone the Journal. I had been on an exclusive tour and had scooped the World, the Sun and the Herald. It was a big day for me.

"And that," said Dobson, "is how I became a family exile, politically, and why I voted in 1904 for Teddy for President."