

Allen Byron Oral Interview  
August 8, 1973

Timothy Mattiga...: August 8, 1973. This is Timothy Mattigan interviewing Byron Allen of Detroit Lakes, Minnesota. This is being recorded by the Northwest Minnesota Historical Center at Moorhead State College. First of all, Byron, where were you born and in what town?

Byron Allen: Well, Mr. Timothy Mattigan, I think I will first compliment you on a brief outline you gave me. It suggested certain topics that I tell about and explain. Perhaps if I went through this biographical material that you've outlined, then we can get down to asking some questions and. to perhaps save time, rather than to put it on a question-and-answer basis. Is that okay with you?

Timothy Mattiga...: Well, as you're going to ...

Byron Allen: On the other hand, I can see that with this very good outline that you have that it would serve as subheads on a subject matter and be perhaps more useful in the future rather just a plain dissertation. All right. You've asked me in my place and date of my birth. Now, I'm a Hawkeye, a native of Iowa, and I was born at Laurens, L-A-U-R-E-N-S, in Pocahontas County on Friday the 13th of September 1901. That was a relatively new community at that time.

Timothy Mattiga...: Had your parents immigrated there or had they been residents for a long time?

Byron Allen: Both of my parents were born in Iowa, but their parents had migrated from the East. My father's parents had come to Marshall County, Iowa, and located on a farm near Marshalltown at a very early date. At this moment, I can't give you the exact date. When later, following what they called panics, the Panic of '71 and then the Panic of '96 and so on, '93, '96, along there, we call them recessions now or depressions. They sold out what they could and migrated to Pocahontas County.

In the meantime, my father had been a student at the University of Iowa and then had served in the Spanish-American War before he returned to Pocahontas County and married my mother. Now, my mother was Grace Gilchrist. Her father and parents came to the Middle West by way of Pennsylvania and West Virginia. Incidentally, my father's family were Quakers and there was a Quaker settlement near Marshalltown. My mother's father was a school man and I sometimes describe him as being a Johnny Appleseed for colleges.

For example, he was one of the founders and I believe the first president of what is now known as Fairmont State College of West Virginia, which incidentally about three or four years ago was the National Small College Football Champion in the United States. He had to do with the founding and I believe he was the first president of California State College of Pennsylvania. You, as a native Pennsylvanian, have heard of both those schools. It'd be much like Moorhead State

College or Bemidji State College present time.

Then he came to Iowa in an effort to and was recruited to come to Iowa in an effort to establish some similar type normal or teachers training schools in Iowa. In the course of events, they did make an effort that subsequently failed at Algona. But then, at Cedar Falls at this time, incidentally it goes back to the 1882, I believe, there was a civil war state orphanage at Cedar Falls, Iowa. There were some buildings there that had some utilitarian value, and they can see the other establishment that was in a normal school or teachers college at Cedar Falls making use of those buildings.

In fact, this is, I believe, before the 1880s. This can be checked out, and I do have a lot of literature on it. But, at any rate, the legislature finally established the Iowa Normal School. Later, it became Iowa State Teachers College and now is known as the University of Northern Iowa. It is the third of the universities that the state of Iowa supports. In that state we did not have many small colleges as they do in North Dakota and Minnesota, such as Bemidji and at Minot and so on. I think there's one at Minot, as I recall.

Though my grandfather at that time believed that there should be many small teachers colleges because travel was more difficult, it did end up that Iowa had a large teachers college and it is now a university and a part of the university system. Now, then my grandfather finally, in his older years, bought some land in Pocahontas County, Iowa. That was to be his Social Security. It didn't work out too well, but he bought this land and came with his older sons to reside on that farm. Now, my father and his parents had come to Pocahontas County and so had my mother's family in the manner that I explained.

They met and were married. Now, my mother went back East to Wellesley for one part of their education and was also a schoolteacher. That seemed to be a family tradition among the Gilchests.

Timothy  
Mattiga...:  
Byron Allen:

You mentioned that your parents had been Quakers.

My grandparents on the Allen side, yeah, they came over very early from Europe probably by way of Holland and so on with the Quaker migration. My grandparents that I never knew because my father was the youngest son, they used to speak in the manner of King James Version of the Bible, thee and thou, "Thee forgot thy hat. Thee should learn to control thy temper," and so on and, of course, the old Quaker adage of, "Hark thee, thy still small voice." That was a family tradition and admonition in all the time that I was growing up, which means, "Listen to your conscience."

I can remember that in philosophical terms my father remained a Quaker all his life. There was no Quaker meeting places at Pocahontas or Minnesota and elsewhere where they lived. My mother's parents were Methodist.

Timothy                      Did you think this had any impact on you?

Mattiga...:

Byron Allen:

Oh yes. I frequently say to myself, "Hark thee, thy still small voice. What does your conscience direct you to do?" The Quaker philosophy being that every individual, in a sense, is his own priest or rabbi or minister or pastor in a sense, that his pipeline to God is his conscience. I think that it's a very interesting philosophy. My father later followed with the Methodist Church in Iowa and with the Congregational Church at the latter part of his life in Minnesota.

Timothy

Mattiga...:

Byron Allen:

Where did you receive your early education, in the-

My early education was received in Pocahontas, Iowa public schools for the most part. Some of it, for example, a year in primary grade or kindergarten, in a sense, was in Des Moines because that was a year when my father was in the Iowa State Senate and was on some interim committees that worked long and hard for a period of time. So he thought that the family should reside in Des Moines, and we did for practically that whole year. A few years after that, the same thing was repeated. So I did receive some of my education in Des Moines.

And then in my senior year in college, I was away in the ROTC or the effort, the student connection with the military at a military academy. So I put in a part of my senior year in West Des Moines High School. Otherwise, I was educated in the public schools at Pocahontas, Iowa. [inaudible 00:10:14] there were a period in 1919, I attended the University of Iowa in Iowa City for one quarter and then transferred over to Ames Iowa State. That's now Iowa State University. Then it was known as Iowa State College. I finally got my degree at Ames in Iowa State rather belatedly because some of my political activities caused me to run afoul of the faculty.

They didn't see fit that I should graduate with my class, which should have been 1924. Instead, I graduated in the Great Depression year of 1932 when the faculty people decided that all would be forgiven and I might return and take a course or two and graduate at the end of it, summer school 1932.

Timothy

Mattiga...:

Byron Allen:

What type of activity were you involved with?

Well, I was told I was a student agitator. One of the incidents had to do with 1924. That was after my class graduated or later that fall, but it didn't endear me to many in the faculty, including Dr. Raymond Alan Peterson, the president. I had become friendly with those who were attempting to establish the La Follette Progressive Party. I had been agitating for that during the school year in the summer and later in the fall. Now, down in fairness, I should say that I was politically active enough to have disregarded some of my scholastic responsibilities, but it was a mixture of semi dropout-ism and being in a state of rebellion.

The agricultural depression was on and had begun. I was very much disturbed about that and it was during this period of time that I fell into the influence of, which I've always been proud of, a man known as Fred K. Holley who was a Pocahontas County pioneer, self-educated, was known as the Iowa farmer/orator

of his day. He and others, including John D. Dennison of Iowa, a lawyer, Des Moines, Iowa, was also active in that. They recruited me as well as Senator Smith W. Brookhart's son to barnstorm in the state for La Follette candidacy.

There was a time when La Follette might have carried Iowa and some other states. As you know, he did carry the state of Wisconsin, his home state, but failed elsewhere in the nation. But by fall, he had drummed up a great deal of concern about the terrible radicalism of Robert M. La Follette, which we look back on now as rather tame. He was really a good liberal, except that he was an isolationist and, on that score, I differed with him.

Timothy  
Mattiga...:  
Byron Allen:

Was your father involved in any farm organizations?

No, he was not directly involved in farm organizations, farm bureau, farm union, things of that kind, except that he was quite a supporter of the extension service, as was Fred K. Holley. Incidentally, I should say my father remained a Republican all his life, but deserted the party on frequent occasions to scratch the ticket and vote for a Democrat or an Independent or someone. This is a period of time there was great flux and change in the political thinking.

It was the pre-Depression, in the Roosevelt era. It was an interesting time to live. The country banks were closing at the time. My father owned some land in South Dakota and in Iowa. But in his effort to assist in some country banking activities in other ways, his mortgages and so on, came home to roost. He subsequently lost those holdings and when I got out into the world after, well, in the summers of 1922, '23, and after college in 1924, I went out to the Iowa farm and Minnesota and the South Dakota farms in an effort to save them and to salvage what we could in the agricultural depression.

It was not very successful. But all of this had a decided effect upon my thinking, as it subsequently did on many, many other people who suffered and became disgusted with keeping cool with Coolidge and remaining hard with Harding. The Democratic Party and the nation, particularly in the Middle West, got a great shot in the arm during that period. Many people migrated into Democratic Party without La Follette's Progressive Party, the Nonpartisan League of North Dakota, the Labor Party in Minnesota, and the Progressive movement, of course, generally throughout the country.

There was a group known in those days as Progressive Republicans. They moved over into the Democratic Party, most of them, at the time of Roosevelt in 1932. But they began to break away from the Republican Party prior to that time.

Timothy  
Mattiga...:  
Byron Allen:

What was the nature of your father's farm management business?

Well, he owned land as an investment. He attempted to place what he thought were capable and able, and advanced the money, capable and able farm families to migrate from some of the farms in Iowa to South Dakota. He financed them. He went on some of their notes and mortgages. In Iowa, he on occasion attempted to

help some of his friends who were distressed. I recall one incident. My father was interested in a grain elevator business at Pocahontas. I remember one of my duties in my high school days and even a little later.

I was to go to the railroad office every day to see if we could get boxcars because that grain elevator held a lot of corn, shelled corn that had it have been contracted with farmers or been purchased for as much as \$2.20, thereabouts and some of it under that. But before the boxcars came, the corn had drifted down to about 80 cents. This helped ruin my father financially. So I lived through those things, shared the hardship of it and the heartbreak of it, suffered with my uncles, both of the Allen family and the Gilchrist family, who were sorely hurt during this period.

I remember while I was in South Dakota working on these farms that were subsequently lost and picking corn and doing all sorts of things in an effort to salvage something, I can remember I was writing home to my Republican family because I had only one Democratic uncle, my father's older brother, and telling my uncle who was then a member of the State Senate, Fred C. Gilchrist, subsequently a Congressman, and telling my father that they could remain with the Republican Party if he wanted to, but I was through, that I was seeking another means to political expression, that I felt the Republican Party had harmed the Middle West and the economy and social order of the nation more than I could take.

Then this is a strange thing that followed that. I noticed your next question here, "How did you become editor of the Pocahontas Democrat?" Well, this ties in right about there because I returned to Pocahontas County. There were two newspapers in the county seat, Pocahontas Record, which paper my father had once had an interest in, Republican paper, and then there was the Pocahontas Democrat. Fred K. Holley and George Hinn and an uncle of mine, Ben Allen, and a great many of the insurgent and farmer people of the community, Ben Allen was one of the biggest farmers in the whole community, of Pocahontas County, raised \$500.

I gave a man by the name of Eckenrod \$500 to give me the key and I went in and began to run a newspaper after this sojourn in South Dakota. Its name or the Pocahontas Democrat is a respected paper. I was disgusted with the Republican Party, had been brought up in it. But yet at that time, there was an interesting phenomenon. The Democrats generally could not elect a person dog peddler, a few county offices and all that sort of thing. Most of the time, the Democrats didn't fill the ticket. Many Democrats were moving into the Republican Party in the 1920s, not because they liked the Republican Party, but they went over there to help insurgent within its ranks and to have their political thoughts expressed at the Republican primaries.

For the most part, the election was in the Republican Party. Many did that, and I was talked out of my insurgency and that sort of thing. I filed as a Republican candidate for the state legislature, lost the nomination by nine votes. I was high man in the election, primary election. At that time, Iowa law required that you get the most votes and receive 35% of the total votes cast in a party primary to be nominated. I was short nine votes of the 35%. And then I was prevailed upon to run

on the Independent or nonpartisan ticket.

The incident that brought that about was the Democratic Party had not filed anyone. Democrats, for the most part, had attempted to support me in the Republican primary and because the Republican candidate was endorsed by the Ku Klux Klan. There was a great deal of bitterness about that. My schoolteacher girlfriend and I went to a political rally at Gilmore City and the fall election of 1926. It was following my return from the legislature that the Pocahontas Democrat was purchased in 1927. We came back and we went to the political rally, my girlfriend, fiancée, now Mrs. Allen.

Right in the midst of a political rally, which incidentally was held on the grounds of a church, Roman Catholic church, a fiery cross was burned across the road, flared up just as I took the platform. I received many anonymous letters and that sort of thing. It was an interesting time to vote. I would say that this inflamed the county and it was about as bitter a political fight as anyone was ever in. But I won the election that fall by a small number of votes, it seems to me ... Well, it was less than 100 and I served my first term in the Iowa legislature.

Timothy  
Mattiga...: How strong was the Ku Klux Klan in your area?

Byron Allen: The Klan was strong. It elected quite a few people or at least endorsed a lot of people who were elected, not only to the Iowa legislature, but to many a courthouse, sheriff's office, and the like. The hooded people of the Klan in the 1920s created a great stir in Iowa and some in Minnesota and other states.

Timothy  
Mattiga...: What did you see as the reason for this type of reactionary force in Iowa? Why was-

Byron Allen: People were terribly distressed and indignant and felt economically and socially oppressed. I went to one or two, being a, as the Klan called us, the dirty little black-hearted Protestants. I had letters that called me that, although I'd never really held any church membership in my whole ... well, since I was a child. My wife, who was brought up Lutheran, was not either. But at least we were non-Catholic, so that made you a Protestant and you were, at that time, a dirty little black-hearted Protestant if you didn't join the Klan, in the eyes of some of those people, and remained outside and especially if you opposed them.

I think my Quaker ancestry had a lot to do, as well as my mother's family who were educated people and educators. They did not approve of such goings-on.

Timothy  
Mattiga...: What types of people were they?

Byron Allen: Well, the Klan recruited some people who were politically ambitious. The Klan recruited people who were angry and embittered socially and economically. People said, "Well, the Jews run Wall Street. Wall Street's oppressing you people, as well the Jews." They bandied about the names of great Jewish banking families, Rothschilds and God knows what. Then another thing that they would bandy about was that the only way you can have a unified nation was to support some

political/educational philosophy that had to do with public schools.

In many respects, they hit pay dirt by saying that no nation that depended upon a parochial school system ever had universal education, you see. That, in high degree, is probably historically a fact. There were a lot of struggling little churches in the rural areas of the land and Ku Klux Klan used to have a ceremony where they'd go in with a bag of money or something. They pilfered it in a church service. The Klan were disturbed by some religious differences and perhaps it was spearheaded in large part by the same kind of people, because I can remember who some of them were, who had descended from families who had migrated from Ulster in Ireland.

There's always been the Scotch Irish. Now, that's not universal because, God knows, some of my family was Scotch Irish, but they fought the Klan. They didn't have any truck with the Klan. But there were many people of Scotch Irish descent who have been and were, just by inheritance, suspicious of Catholicism. Then the Irish were the ones that rose up and they spearheaded the anti-Klan idea of the day. It became rather embittered. It was an interesting time to live. God knows, I wish I had the time to go back into the old newspaper files and elsewhere and write articles about this era and this period.

Subsequently, I was reelected by the Republican Party. And then by 1932, I carried out my original thought and deserted completely the Republican Party. I felt that the one-party system with two factions, the so-called conservatives and liberals within the Republican Party, was not carrying out our true American system. We needed a two-party system. You take the Nonpartisan League of North Dakota felt hopeless about the Democratic Party. So they moved over into the Republican Party and fought as a faction in the Republican Party.

The original farmer or the original nonpartisan leaders and progressive Republicans of Wisconsin and Minnesota moved into the Republican Party and fought as a faction within the party. But by 1932, they began to break away and join the Republican Party because they were willing to go along with Roosevelt. In my own case, I supported Al Smith. That, of course, embittered the Klan element and made me a black-hearted Protestant. Now let me put it this way, there were some reasons why people where they strong protested the Protestant religious background, did not join the Democratic Party.

Many of these upper Midwest states during a period of time in the early part of this century, early part of this century primarily, looked upon the Democratic Party as the Loyal Order of Hibernians. I remember even coming to Minnesota and I was elected county chairman in my absence in 1940. I came home and found out I was elected Democratic chairman. In Becker County, you could hold a Democratic caucus or the county can ...

Timothy  
Mattiga...: Who-

Byron Allen: This just meant that Martin Luther, no matter how liberal Martin Luther might be,

he wasn't going to get in bed with the Pope. Now, I spent my life, early years in politics attempting to get people away from that viewpoint. Thank God, we've accomplished it. One of the great things we did in this country was elect John F. Kennedy, which helped destroy that. John remembered that some of that rebellion goes clear back to Blaine's election when that ignorant, I was going to say ignorant, but I suppose he was a damn fool, got up and yelled, "Rum, Romanism, and rebellion."

You see, this made the volatile Irishmen who migrated from Ulster or hated Roundheads of Cromwell's and all their descendants and everything that was British and English and despised people with the name of Allen, except that some Irish had the name, Allen, a few. Most of them were English or Scotch. I mean there was a polarization of thinking based on this tradition brought from the British Isles and Ulster. It's an awful shame that it happened. But now we've dispelled that.

I think some of the significant things that I saw a few years ago was when I saw some young Lutheran pastors quietly out campaigning for Eugene McCarthy when he was elected to the United States Senate. That doesn't mean that I approve of all Eugene did after that. I don't. But in the light of hindsight, I don't approve of everything that I've done either.

Timothy  
Mattiga...:  
Byron Allen:

So the ethnic differences were a real factor back at that time?

In Klan days, yes, sir, and before the Klan and since. And then you want to remember that there were families that were terribly torn and disturbed because we didn't have isolated communities of Lutherans or Irish or Catholics or German Catholics or anything. After a few years, they began to intermingle and they were close together. The automobile and so on enabled romances between Methodist Gilchists and Irish Collinses and it seemed that the embittered and bitterness would grow sometimes. I'm not necessarily speaking of my own family, but in many families, because there was only one church they could go to.

There was only one man which this biological urge and this romance could come to legal fruition, and that was going to the Catholic Church. Now, this was looked upon by many of these people as a form of tyranny, literally just tyranny. It would be looked upon the same, I'm sure, by Catholics in those days from Philly. I recall that many Bohemian Catholic families that I knew thought that their daughter, if they married a Protestant, ought to go to the Protestant Church. If a Protestant girl married a Bohemian Catholic, she ought to go with her husband to his church.

So I'd watch these things and, my God, I remember one of these fellows with a Ulsterite background back many years from what we're talking about, in the '20s, who said, "You know ..." Pope John had passed away. "If Pope John was over here and ran for president, I'd vote for him." The ecumenical movement, you see, that Pope John backed up. This was a man of family tradition of Protestant Ulster. He said, "My God, if Pope John were an American and were here and ran for president, I'd vote for him." He said it with great feeling and emotion.



So, in retrospect, I look back at these things and one thing that I impressed on my mind in those days, my father's Quakerism helped come to the forefront there. He would say, "Byron, read Foxe's Martyrs," a book. I finally got Foxe's Martyrs and read it. It was the story of the persecution of the Quakers. My God, the Quakers were persecuted by everybody. They were different. They were queer. They dressed differently. They talked like King James Version of the Bible. They dressed in a drab manner. They didn't have any pastors as such. They had Quaker meetings. You, as a Pennsylvanian, have heard about that.

They, "Hark thee, thy still small ..." They harked the still small voice and each man was his own pastor, in a sense, with proper Quaker upbringing, you see. Foxe's Martyrs was the story about religious intolerance and bigotry and how the Quakers were driven from pillar to post. Now, even in New England, in the early day that if they were found in the Massachusetts Bay colony at sundown or they, I'm trying to remember right, so many lashes were applied or cat o' nine tails or something else if they were caught the second night. Finally, the third time they were caught within the colony, they had to go. Why, their tongues were cut out.

That's so they couldn't propagandize good New Englanders and get them to be Quakers. You see, the strange thing about all these religions and these political parties too, they try to proselyte. They all got missionaries. Sometimes this zealotness gets very great, and anybody who interferes with the missionary in the place where that missionary group is a majority, there was a time when they burned the other fellow to the stake if he were a missionary. This was done on all sides.

I suppose that one of the greatest things once in my political thinking was reading about, "Hark thee, thy still small voice," and Foxe's Martyrs because I thought intolerance and bigotry has no place in civilization and ought to be driven out. This made it easy for me to be a zealot in terms of fighting the Ku Klux Klan, except that I tried to understand what made them think as they did, the economic social order of the day which said conveniently recruit for the Klan, "The Jews run the banking industry of the world, the Rothschilds and whatever."

My golly, our economic situation here has brought the foreclosure of our farms and homes and the closing of our little town banks. They were owned by local people. They weren't owned by the Jews of Wall Street. So it's the Jews that are at fault. And then who else was at fault? Well, the Catholics are at fault. You couldn't be tolerant, you see. One thing that they claimed, you see, was that they were protecting the public school system. Of course, we still have a struggle on for tax support of the parochial and private school system.

To my mind, that is a holdover from, again, the Irish of Ulster and the Protestants of Ulster. I quite agree with Louis Murphy who was the first Democratic United States Senator from Iowa, he was tragically killed in an automobile accident, a great friend of mine. I worked with him, Democratic senator. His family and his father would never support the parochial school system. That helped elected that Irish Catholic to the United States Senate in Iowa, and he did it on the basis of his father,

came to the United States as a labor man, the miners, I believe.

It'd be interesting to look it up again. It's the reason I'd like to write a book. This old man, then a young man, couldn't read and write. He'd grown up in Ireland. Family was poor. The school system of Ireland was all parochial. He didn't get to learn to read and write, so he came to the United States when he was a grown man, 18, 19, 20. He went to public school and he learned to read and write. He went on and he became a printer. He become the editor of the Dubuque newspapers in Iowa. And then his son became United States senator.

I can remember a story of those days when, this was in 1932 that Louie Murphy was elected a United States senator. He came in and the father and Louie, who was then a boy, went up to one of the Catholic churches in Dubuque. Well, the pastor got up and assailed a public school bond issue, that this was a bond issue for Protestant schools, not public schools necessarily, Protestant schools because Protestants go to them, but no good Catholic goes to them. They go to the parochial.

If you're going to tax people in this community to pay for those schools and the bond issues, we should have some of it. You see? Now, Louie Murphy, his father took his wife and kids with him. They marched out of that church and went to another one, Catholic church. They attended and did remain, as far as I know, good Catholics, but they went to the other church. When Louie Murphy ran for the United States Senate in 1932, this was only three or four or five years after the heyday of the Ku Klux Klan. Now all that thought hadn't completely died out as yet.

So some of us were campaigning for Louie Murphy and we were decrying the oldest form of bigotry of any kind, color or description. He'd arranged to go out and tell some of the old-time Klan leaders, "Right here is a Roman Catholic running on a Democratic ticket for the United States Senate who stood up and fought for the public schools and his father succeeded. He and his father succeeded in passing a bond issue in a predominantly Irish and Luxembourg and German Catholic city to modernize the public schools of Dubuque, Iowa."

That did as much as the Depression, in my opinion, to elect Louie Murphy to the United States Senate. Turn it off. I didn't mean to go far afield, which I've done. But, as near as I know, there hasn't been much written or said publicly of the nature that I've discussed with you now about the Klan days. Many in this generation are not aware that the Klan was active. Some people do not realize this and it might be good that it be recorded somewhere in the archives. The thing that I've always been proud of is that I thought I had a hand in at least driving the Ku Klux Klan out of the upper Midwest states and, in particular, my section of Iowa. Now I think you want to ask me another question here.

Timothy  
Mattiga...:

What were your duties as secretary to Senator Brookhart?

Byron Allen:

Well, you understand the questions you've raised are not chronological in terms of my biography. But that's all right. That's all right. If anybody ever wants this and

perhaps on the end of it, we can put things in perspective by a chronological statement of what happened, just a mere outline of it. But it's all right because it isn't scrambled so much that it does violence to the whole story. Now, my duties as secretary were these. This being secretary to Senator Brookhart came about after I had served three terms in the Iowa House of Representatives in Pocahontas County.

Timothy  
Mattiga...: Why don't we talk about that for a minute?

Byron Allen: All right. And then go back to Senator Brookhart. Now, then after my first term I went back to Pocahontas and had been married just to Elsa Elianora Erickson of Marathon, Iowa, who taught at Laurens, Iowa, on the 18th of December 1927 or '26. That was just shortly after the election, you see, about five or six weeks. Our honeymoon was to go to Des Moines as the young couple who happened to be the youngest member of the Iowa legislature at that time. That was the time, as I said, I was elected as an independent because they wanted to defeat the Klan-endorsed Republican candidate.

Timothy  
Mattiga...: You said you had ran on nonpartisan ticket?

Byron Allen: Yeah. Independent or nonpartisan.

Timothy  
Mattiga...: With this-

Byron Allen: In other words, in Iowa, everything is by party column, Republicans, Democrats, socialists, vegetarians, Prohibition Party. And then there's clear over to the right on the ballot, there's an independent column where people can file by petition. Now, that's a little different form than they use in Minnesota and many other states. I think it's the form you have in Pennsylvania and New York State. North Dakota has something similar and so on. But anyway, my name was on that column clear to the right or on voting machines rather than the column reserved for independent candidates.

I was nominated and put up under a petition system following a rally or a convention informally called Fund Iowa. The principal issue that brought me out was not only that people were disappointed who'd been my supporters and that I was high man in the primary but lacked nine votes to be nominated. And then the county convention of the Republican Party nominated a Klan-backed candidate. Now, many people were endorsed by the Klan who were not Klansmen. I know it was said that Justice Black of the Supreme Court, at least he was endorsed by the Klan apparently even though he was not a member.

Membership was secretive, so rather difficult to do. But at any rate, many men were endorsed by the Klan. Now, then I defeated the Klan-endorsed candidate. Now, the next time the Republicans came around and said, "Now, your family are all Republicans. We want you to run as a Republican." There was still this situation in Iowa and some of the other states and had been in previous to the creation of the Farmer-Labor Party, such as [inaudible 00:49:19] Minnesota.

If you were a Progressive or a Liberal and you were running with the Republican Party, whereas a faction you might win the nomination and almost automatically be elected. So the various groups, including those that bore the label, "Stan Patter," or "Conservative," or "2 Wall Street," or on the other side, "Liberal," or "Progressive," or "Left-winger," or "Progressive" or just plain "Radical." So there were factional fights within the Republican Party in large part.

It was only in the presidential election field that you ever really had to struggle between the Republican and Democratic Party. I mean as it is now, you have a bonafide struggle between the DFL and Republican Party, although I think the Republicans are now trying to get rid of it because the so-called "conservative" legislators want to caucus as "independent Republicans." Now, this is a kind of an abortive thing to say I'm a member of a political party, but not quite. Of course, that's too different from an era that I went through myself when I was a damn poor Republican but I wore the label.

So the mechanism and means by which you fight these struggles vary, but we have pretty largely moved into a two-party system and I think we should sustain it. Now I got far afield again. My duties as secretary for Smith Brookhart-

Timothy I was wondering-

Mattiga...:

Byron Allen: ... I can tell you, or the legislature, yeah.

Timothy What were the main issues or the problems?

Mattiga...:

Byron Allen: The main issues in the legislature, some of the main issues in the legislature was whether we could hard surface main roads in the state, now known as primary roads or US highway roads and so on, the main arteries, put a hard surface on it by the floating of \$100 million bond issue. This was advocated by one faction of the Republican Party. Now, at that time, the faction of the Republican Party was we called Stan Patters or now they'd say the conservatives or the establishment, I say "establishment."

The MacNider family, Hanford MacNider was subsequently the national commander of the American Legion. His father headed a cement company at Mason City, Iowa, which was a part of the Cement Trust, so-called. The Cement Trust did a lot to finance candidates to the legislature and the governors in all these states who wanted to build cement highways. Here in Minnesota, it was thought that some people who were interested in the asphalt business, they're now known as blacktop, were interested in elections and they financed people and so on. But, for the most part, the northern Iowa had for that day and age a pretty fair system of gravel roads.

Southern Iowa did not have gravel. They could get some crushed rock, but it was very expensive in those hillier regions and clay hills of southern Iowa to get an all-weather road, relatively easy in some of the northern counties where you did have

access to some gravel. Minnesota, there was the same problem, but more gravel. At any rate, this became an issue. The progressive Republicans and the antiestablishment, Republican establishment candidates and so on, they were representing northern Iowa.

They were opposed to the \$100 million bond issue. They campaigned for it on the basis of pay as you go. Tax and build as many roads as you can while the interest rates were considered very high at that time. They were made lower during the Roosevelt administration. God knows they're hiring [inaudible 00:54:09] since the 1880s or so. But at any rate, that was an issue, \$100 million bond issue. Another issue was bank guarantees, guaranteeing bank deposits. This was considered a terrible thing on the part of conservatives that anybody would think of interfering with private enterprise and business by having the government interfere to the point they'd guarantee deposits in banks.

Now, this was done in the state of Nebraska under the Nebraska Bank Guarantee Law, which worked after a fashion. No thought of doing it on a national basis. The states were responsible to do this sort of thing. The national government wasn't about to do it. Furthermore, it wasn't in line with the Harding and Coolidge philosophies of those days. So the Nebraska law provided for the levy of a tax on all bank deposits in all banks. I think the national banks were also included [inaudible 00:55:20]. No, I think all of them. Some of these, I'd have to go back and dig and do some studying to get all the detail.

But, at any rate, this would be put into a fund, so many mills, you see, on every dollar, average bank account. The banks would pay that into a fund and this would be used to pay the difference between your deposit and what the bank liquidated and had available to pay you off as a depositor. Now, this was the only bank deposit theory of the day and was advocated and my kind of people advocated it. This was an issue of the day. It was defeated, never passed in Iowa. Conservatives in those days, the Stan Patters or Republicans in those day defeated it. Some few conservative Democrats joined in.

Another issue of the day was some election reform. There was some agitation in those days as to whether or not the land grant colleges were truly serving the farmers or were they primarily serving what we now call agribusiness and consumers. They were driving the farmer plumb crazy in a road race to be efficient. But the land grant colleges were not striving to get him a price. This was some dissent. I was a land grant college graduate and I was critical of extension service of my own alma mater and so on. These were issues of the day.

These incidentally I think might well still be issues, this land grant college issue and program. There were some others, in the last year ... Did you want to break in and ask a question?

Timothy No, go ahead.

Mattiga...:

Byron Allen: In the last year, and I'm just hitting a few highlights, one was a setting up a system

to encourage municipal electric systems. Now, the good old reactionary elements of that day, hell, it was a crime for a city to own a municipal light plant. My little town of Pocahontas, Iowa had a municipal light plant. Our neighboring towns, like Rolfe and Laurens and others, the public utility served them. Well, we had a little lower rate than they did. This infuriated the public utilities of the day.

We passed in the Iowa legislature while I was there a bill called the Simmer Bill, which greatly assisted the setting up of municipal light plants. Now, this was in a sense a forerunner of which later became the REA because we were preparing public opinion that you weren't going to hell in a hand basket and becoming Bolsheviks. They didn't have communists in those days. They were called Bolsheviks. Many times I was called a Bolshevik. This was a term of derision, you see, and ridicule if you were a Bolshevik. That had kind of a nasty connotation.

I don't know whether that made you a Trotskyite or a Stalinist, I would say. A cartoon came out when I was in the Iowa legislature that showed the map of the state of each county. The little cartoon represented our state legislator from that county in the House, you see. Pocahontas County was depicted by a terrible-looking Bolshevik with a bomb. I guess that was me. Anyway, I was for that sort of thing. Then in the election in 1928, I supported Al Smith and my newspaper, Pocahontas Democrat, supported Al Smith.

We also supported a progressive Republican called Dan Turner who was a candidate for governor and was subsequently elected. He was defeated in 1932 after two years in the governor's office and he was a so-called progressive Republican. But the Democratic landslide got him. Number one, he was a good governor and really would have made a pretty good New Dealer although he remained in the Republican Party all his life. Incidentally, he became one of the founders years later when he was a very old man in the eyes that you'd have. Now I'd say a few years senior than me, you see, at the time.

He was one of the founders of the NFO. The NFO headquarters are in his hometown in Corning, Iowa. He's dead and gone now. Anyway, I became a spokesman for Governor Dan Turner in the floor of the Iowa legislature. Many interesting things happened. One was that the treasurer of the State University of Iowa, who'd been a family friend of my family, was accused of getting some of his affairs mixed up with those at the university. He and others were thought to have gotten a little confused because they built some apartment housing and so on in Iowa City, Iowa from the same kind of bricks that the university was also using in building dormitories and so on.

Anyway, the treasurer of the university was found dead subsequent to this investigation in Florida and may or may not have been a suicide. I don't know. One of the men prominent in the custodial affairs of the university went to the penitentiary. But the issue of the day that created the most excitement was that the University of Iowa had been charged by the University of Minnesota and Wisconsin and Illinois and all of them of proselyting athletes and paying athletes and, my God, destroying amateurism in intercollegiate athletics and defaming the

whole system and they were kicked out of the Big Ten.

Timothy  
Mattiga...:

Let me stop you there.