

INTERVIEW WITH
Mr. Joe S. Sheldon

by

Dr. Maclyn P. Burg
Oral Historian

on

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for

Dwight D. Eisenhower Library



Gift of Personal Statement

JOE S. SHELDON

to the

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This is an interview with Mr. Joe Sheldon in Mr. Sheldon's home in San Antonio, Texas. The interview is being taped on November 6, 1972 by Dr. Burg of the Eisenhower Library staff. Present for the interview are Mr. Sheldon and Dr. Burg.

DR. BURG: Now what I'd like to do, Mr. Sheldon, is ask you, first of all, you're a native born Texan?

MR. SHELDON: Yes.

DR. BURG: And educated here in Texas?

MR. SHELDON: Yes.

DR. BURG: Where was that, sir?

MR. SHELDON: At TMI and University of Texas.

DR. BURG: What was your major field of study?



MR. SHELDON: Well, just an ordinary liberal arts course at first, and then I left there and went to a school in Washington.

DR. BURG: In Washington, D.C.?

MR. SHELDON: Yes. It was a private school to train people for the army, and I was ambitious at that time to go into the army.

DR. BURG: And when was that, by the way?

SHELDON: That was about 1914, and later I changed my mind and came back to Texas. Then I went into the army in World War I through the first officers' training camp, and I was a captain in the infantry of the 90th Division.

BURG: I see. And I notice a purple heart with a cluster on it.

SHELDON: I served overseas.

BURG: And you were wounded twice over there?

SHELDON: Yes.

BURG: Where was that training carried out?

SHELDON: First officers' training camp at Camp Funston as it was known then. It's known as Camp Bullis now. It's about twenty miles north of San Antonio. And then I was assigned to the 90th Division at Camp Travis, and then we were trained for overseas here.

BURG: And, to the best of your knowledge, during your army training here, you did not encounter General Eisenhower who was at that time--



SHELDON: No, I did not.

BURG:---briefly training. O.K. So after World War I was over and you returned home, your decision was not to stay in the army?

SHELDON: That's right.

BURG: And you entered civilian life in what capacity?

SHELDON: Well I started first in the automobile business; I was a salesman. Then after a few years of that, I went into the real estate business. And remained in the real estate and insurance business until I retired about six years ago.

BURG: I see. And settled here in San Antonio?

SHELDON: San Antonio, yes.

BURG: Now let me ask you, when did you first get interested in politics, actively interested in politics?

SHELDON: Shortly after I got out of the army in 1920.



BURG: And do you remember what keyed that interest in you?

SHELDON: Well, my father was a Republican, and I had a natural tendency to get interested to some degree. Then, at that time, I was interested in public affairs to some small degree. Then I got interested in the Republican party, principally due to the protective tariff which they don't go into much now.



BURG: You were interested in that aspect, the tariff aspect.

SHELDON: That's right.

BURG: Now did you take an active part in presidential campaigns in the 1920s?

SHELDON: Yes, I did.

BURG: In what capacity, may I ask you?

SHELDON: Well as a local worker, I started. Then as I became more interested, I took a very active part in running Congressman [Henry McLeary] Wurzbach, W-u-r-z-b-a-c-h, at that time, and he happened to be elected in that election in 1920 when Harding ran. Then I ran his campaigns thereafter here in

Bexar County.

BURG: I see. So, rather than being a precinct chairman, you were directing a particular congressional leader's campaign for him.

SHELDON: That's right.

BURG: How long was Mr. Wurzbach elected? Do you recall?

SHELDON: Six terms.

BURG: For six terms!

SHELDON: He was a Republican congressman here for twelve years. He died in office at the peak of his political career.

BURG: Was it your impression that had he lived he could have gone on to greater things?

SHELDON: Yes, oh, yes. I think so.

BURG: Now, Mr. Sheldon, I don't know that much about Texas politics, but for a Republican candidate to win so consistently, isn't that rather unusual for this state?



SHELDON: Very unusual.

BURG: Was that to be attributed, do you think, to his personality and character?

SHELDON: Yes, I do. Very definitely.

BURG: San Antonio normally goes for Democratic candidates?

SHELDON: Yes, and then at that time they had a very strong county and city machine here who were always against us. We had to overcome that handicap every time we ran.

BURG: Now who was the state chairman for the Republican party in the '20s, let's say, serving in 1920.

SHELDON: Well, Eugene Nolte, N-o-l-t-e, but Mr. R. B. Creager, C-r-e-a-g-e-r, was the national committeeman. At that time in Texas the national committeeman ran the party, and he was the one that everyone looked to as the leader in those days.

BURG: This is Rennie--

SHELDON: Rennie [Rentfro] Creager, right.



BURG: Now you first came in contact with him, let us say, about 1920, Mr. Creager?

SHELDON: Yes.

BURG: Can you give me your own personal evaluation of him at that time? Might I ask you this, too, about how old a man was he in 1920?

SHELDON: I'd say at that time he was in the fifties.



BURG: I see. Well, that's something that I had not known. Somehow I pictured him as being a younger man at that stage.

SHELDON: No, I think that was about his age at that time. He could have been a few years younger, but I think not much.

BURG: You, yourself, by the way, in your twenties at that time, late twenties, perhaps.

SHELDON: I was perhaps twenty-four at that time.

BURG: Now you're seeing Mr. Creager then from the viewpoint of a young man. Do you recall how he impressed you when you first met him?

SHELDON: Oh, yes, I thought he was a very smart man, politically and otherwise. I didn't think he was too interested in building the Republican party in Texas, but that was always my opinion; from my observation, he seemed more concerned about running the show along his own lines. In those days, as you may know, people who had charge of delegations going to national conventions, particularly those delegations from the South, had a great deal of influence and opportunity to throw their delegation any way they wanted it because they did not have the type of citizens on those delegations that they have today.



BURG: Oh, they didn't?

SHELDON: No.

BURG: What was the difference, Mr. Sheldon?

SHELDON: Well the difference was most of them were either officeholders or ambitious to be officeholders, and they were controlled by the national committeeman who had the jobs to hand out. And Mr. Creager was, in my opinion, not interested in building a strong Republican party.

BURG: And you drew that inference from his actions--

SHELDON: Yes.

BURG: You never did try to pin him down and ask him, "Are you going to build this party or are you just going to--"

SHELDON: Oh, no. After a while I had enough political experience to observe for myself and make judgment on those things and not rely upon what some ambitious person politically would tell me.



BURG: Now those years were years where some patronage would come to Texas.

SHELDON: Oh, yes, indeed.

BURG: Now was it something more than postmasterships that were coming here?

SHELDON: Well, postmasterships, United States attorneys, collector of customs, and any other governmental position, United States marshals.

BURG: Now I've never asked anyone else this, but can you give me a rough estimate, looking back at those days, on about how many such positions might be available say in a given year? Are we talking in terms of twelve to fifteen jobs or--

SHELDON: Oh, no.

BURG: --twenty to thirty jobs?

SHELDON: There's two hundred and fifty-four counties in Texas, and I'd say that every county had one or more post offices. And then there were four judicial districts where they had federal judges and then United States attorneys. Those were the plums.

BURG: And there were more plums than I had realized there were in this state.

SHELDON: There were many in a state the size of Texas. For instance, this one county had, I'd say, seven or eight post offices.



BURG: Let us say that a man wins a postmastership when Harding is elected. Coolidge is elected; that same man stays?

SHELDON: As a rule. If he was a Republican, he generally stayed because, in the meantime, he had probably maintained his connections with the powers that be.

BURG: And now, suddenly, it occurs to me Mr. Creager could also say, "Play ball or you--"

SHELDON: Oh, indeed he could and did.

BURG:--"are no longer the postmaster."

SHELDON: He did.

BURG: So that keeps close control.

SHELDON: Oh, yes. The state conventions, in those days, the delegates were mostly federal employees.

BURG: They were?

SHELDON: Oh, yes. It's not that way now, of course. Texas has a different type of Republican membership now than it did in those days. At the present time, the state committee and



many of the delegates are of the best citizenship.

BURG: And in those earlier days, it was more those who were out to take care of themselves.

SHELDON: Correct.

BURG: Let me make a guess, or let me put it to you in the form of a question, were you one of those young men who came out of World War I with some pretty strong ideals about what government should be?

SHELDON: Yes, oh, yes.



BURG: And you found yourself somewhat disappointed?

SHELDON: Well, yes.

BURG: Now what did you personally do about it in your political career? I see one thing that you did. You seemed to have lined up behind a man for whom you had a great deal of respect and ran his campaign successfully a number of times.

SHELDON: That's right.

BURG: Were there other things that you could do at that time, Mr. Sheldon, to make things better within the party?

SHELDON: Well, yes, we tried to make things better. As a matter of fact, we were always fighting Mr. Creager after that, and Wurzbach was reelected several times to a great degree on that issue of being mistreated by the leadership of his own party. That attracted sympathetic Democrats to vote in the general election for Congressman Wurzbach. For instance, he did not live in this county, Bexar County, but he carried it every time against the strong Democratic political machine through the sympathy of the independent voters for him.



BURG: Now was there anything much you could do toward building a permanent Republican voting base in this city and county? You've spoken of the fact the Democrats crossed over to support Wurzbach.

SHELDON: Yes, we worked at it pretty hard, but we did not accomplish too much as you would term a real strong political organization because the county was predominantly Democratic, and they voted for Congressman Wurzbach just on those personal issues and their regard for him as a congressman.

BURG: I see. Now let me ask you this, in '24 and in '28, did you take active part in the presidential elections of those two years and--

SHELDON: '24 and '28?

BURG: Yes.

SHELDON: Yes, I always worked in every election for the Republicans.

BURG: And again, may I ask you, in what capacity?

SHELDON: Well, just in the local organization. We helped raise money, and then we worked trying to get people to vote through the press and that sort of thing.

BURG: In those days, that is in '24, '28 (I merely single them out so I can stay on the far side of the depression) did any of your money for this county come from large donors or was it more from small contributors?

SHELDON: Well, I'd say both.

BURG: You got some from larger donors. Was there, as you



think back on it, any particular pattern among the large donors? That is, were they cattlemen? Were they oil people?

SHELDON: No, particular pattern at that time such as there is now. We got it from people who believed in the candidate who was running, mostly.

BURG: All right. Did you receive much in the way of financial aid from the state party?

SHELDON: No, we did not.

BURG: Was that because you were, as far as say Mr. Creager was concerned--

SHELDON: We were persona non grata with the state organization.

BURG: I see. The next question that comes to my mind is, at that time, and again I'm staying on the far side of the depression, was there ever a time, Mr. Sheldon, when you and your associates here in San Antonio contemplated moving Mr. Creager out?

SHELDON: Yes, we tried several times, but we were not successful.



BURG: Now how did you attempt to do that?

SHELDON: We attempted to elect delegates to the national convention. That is where the national committeeman is elected by the delegates from their particular respective states. And we could never muster enough strength at that time to accomplish very much.

BURG: You would have to have started at the precinct level, Mr. Sheldon?



SHELDON: Yes, precinct level, but they had control of the whole state through the patronage, and we just didn't get any. We were always in control in Bexar County, but not the state.

BURG: Did you have anyone from here, any of your people, on the state Republican executive committee?

SHELDON: No.

BURG: Who was the chairman in the '20s, the state chairman? The committeeman at that time ran things

SHELDON: Eugene Nolte.

BURG: That was Nolte. And this is the man who was father of Mr. Mike Nolte?

SHELDON: Right.

BURG: Now when Mr. Hoover runs in '32, had anything changed? Sorry, he runs in '28 and then runs again in '32. In the '32 election then has anything changed for your group? When I say your group, people who thought as you did and were here in San Antonio, in Bexar County?



SHELDON: Oh, yes. I would say, subsequent to that time, there wasn't too much to be done. When Hoover was defeated you remember, Roosevelt was in for many years and then Truman and then 1952 was when we became alive again here.

BURG: No, I say in '32.

SHELDON: Oh, in '32?

BURG: Yes, I wondered if in that election anything had improved for you and your group?

SHELDON: No. No, it hadn't. The party in Bexar County at that time was very dormant from '32 on. See Roosevelt was elected in '32--

[Interruption]

BURG: Yes, Mr. Roosevelt was elected in '32, and, as far as the Republican party here was concerned, you--

SHELDON: Very dormant.

BURG: --you started a bad period of time.

SHELDON: Oh, yes.

BURG: Now was it that when you went to try to line up support among people you simply couldn't get it?

SHELDON: There was no interest whatever in the Republican party when Roosevelt was in.

BURG: Now let me ask this then, what now happens to Mr. Creager who no longer has any patronage to dispose of or not very much?



SHELDON: Well, he remained kind of at the head of the party for several years, whatever activity there was. He would delegate--

[Interruption]

SHELDON: And then a man named [Henry] Zweifel came in, when Mr. Creager died, from Ft. Worth, and he remained at the head of this so-called Creager element in the party until 1952.

BURG: Now Mr. Zweifel, was he the national committeeman?

SHELDON: Yes.

BURG: Also elected to that position?

SHELDON: Yes.

BURG: When did Mr. Creager die?

SHELDON: Well shortly before that time. I don't remember, but probably in 1948 or somewhere in there near that date.

BURG: All right, I don't want to leave '32 quite yet, but



when Mr. Creager passes from the scene, you still were not able to--

SHELDON: No, because that faction of the party remained in control.

BURG: Well, if we go back then to '32, could you fill me in on what the Republican party in Texas might expect to get in terms of patronage under a Democratic administration?

SHELDON: They got none.

BURG: Absolutely none?

SHELDON: Positively.

BURG: And Mr. Wurzbach died somewhere in the early '30s?

SHELDON: Yes, he died in, I'd say, maybe '28, or '29. I don't recall exactly, but he died before Roosevelt ran. Maybe in '27 or somewhere along in there. Maybe it was '28.

BURG: Right, because you had indicated six terms.

SHELDON: Yes.



BURG: And he started in 1920?

SHELDON: Yes.

BURG: So it may have been just before Mr. Roosevelt was elected that he died.

SHELDON: That's right.

BURG: This is a difficult one, Mr. Sheldon, I don't know how to put it to you. You have worked all through the '20s. You have tried to do something with the Republican party against a national committeeman that hasn't been too eager to do much with the party.

SHELDON: Right.

BURG: You have lost a man that you respected, Mr. Wurzbach. He is no longer there. The democrats come in. What was your personal reaction to all of this? Did you, too, drop out of politics?

SHELDON: Well, I didn't drop out but I--

[Interruption]



SHELDON: When Roosevelt was elected, we couldn't get anybody that was interested much in doing anything. I took part in an organization here known as the Citizens' League, local, non-partisan. We had a lot of activity locally trying to clean out the courthouse and that sort of thing.

BURG: Can you give the names of any of those that were especially active with you in that Citizens' League?

SHELDON: Oh, yes. We ran the ticket in the Democratic primary, but I was a Republican and most of the others were Democrats. They had me in it because of my connection with the Republican element. Mr. A. B. Weakley, W-e-a-k-l-e-y, Mr. John Boyle, Mr. William Aubrey, Henry Hirshberg, Maury Maverick, at that time, and M. L. Roark--



BURG: R-o-a-r-k?

SHELDON: Yes. Dan Quill. There were thirteen on the committee, but that's a long time ago, you know.

BURG: You've done remarkably well, I think.

SHELDON: And that's about all I can remember at this time.

BURG: What position did you run for?

SHELDON: I didn't run.

BURG: Oh, you didn't run?

SHELDON: I've never held public office; I never would be a candidate for public office. I've always been active in politics and--

BURG: Can I ask you why you would never be a candidate?

SHELDON: I just didn't want to hold public office.

BURG: It had no appeal to you?

SHELDON: Had no appeal to me. The first place, it's not too profitable. Second place, you had to be nice to a lot of people you didn't care to be nice to.

BURG: Very true, indeed. So your efforts have been, for your active political life, to try to secure elections for good people that--

SHELDON: That's right. Good government. And we were very successful in that movement. And then I became president of



the Taxpayers' League here, and I was the one that installed voting machines in Bexar County over the protest of a lot of professional politicians.

BURG: Because it was your feeling that those voting machines would keep those elections much cleaner.

SHELDON: Right. And then we had, in the Wurzbach campaign, one election stolen from us. We contested it in the House of Representatives and won it. And that experience gave me the idea that the voting machines would help a great deal. And then, too, as far as the Republicans were concerned, when they had the paper ballots, the people who controlled the city hall and the court house, they had access to the paper ballots, and they would see how their employees voted and correct things according to what they wanted to do. And I knew they couldn't do that with the voting machines. So we installed voting machines.



BURG: Was this county one of the first in Texas to go for this?

SHELDON: Yes, one of the first. I think it was either first or second, maybe the second county.

BURG: Now at the time that you moved those voting machines in, would you say that that marked any kind of a watershed here in Bexar County between the corrupt election practices of the past.

SHELDON: Oh, indeed, yes. With voting machines you only needed one watcher, and when they had the paper ballots you needed several election judges and clerks on your side. Prior to that time, any election official had to come from that particular precinct. When the voting machine law was passed, you could send anybody into that precinct from any other precinct. When you had it where you had to have people from that particular precinct, there were many precincts that we just couldn't get anybody in.

BURG: So if your Republican strength is out in this neighborhood where we now are, it's possible that many precincts on the other side of town had few if any Republicans.

SHELDON: That's right.

BURG: And therefore you had no poll watchers or too few.

SHELDON: That's right. Now you can send them anywhere under the voting machine law.



BURG: Can you think of any other, I'll use the word and forgive me for it, any other peculiarities in the Texas situation with regard to some of the machine politics that was played down here. I ask this because I think we would like to have any researcher that uses the material understand something about what Texas politics had been like. You've spoken of the addition of voting machines as being one strong deterrent.

SHELDON: Well San Antonio, at that time, had the strongest political machine in Texas. Now in some of the other cities, I presume that they had certain situations where they had combinations of various professional politicians that made things not like they should be, but San Antonio was the worst.



BURG: Now why had that been, Mr. Sheldon? Was it that long in the past the Democratic party here had become so well organized that it became self-perpetuating?

SHELDON: That's right. Then there was a large segment of our population that was controlled by the professional politicians.

BURG: Would that be the black population here?

SHELDON: No.

BURG: Mexican-American population--

SHELDON: Mexican-American.

BURG: --was pretty much controlled--

SHELDON: By the courthouse and city hall.

BURG: Now may I ask, Mr. Sheldon, what was your observation as to how they controlled it? Was it controlled through their patronage or were votes actually bought and sold?

SHELDON: Yes, they were. And, too, the politicians, holding office at that time in the courthouse and city hall made it a point to be strongly organized with those various segments of the population. They had their chiefs in among them, and they would have a lot of influence in any election. Some of those precincts over on the west side would go ten to one. Well they do that now some of them, but even more so then.

BURG: And I suppose the pattern might be what we would expect, judging from what happened in other areas, I suppose that within a precinct the Democratic precinct chairman would see to it that there were parties, picnics--



SHELDON: Oh, indeed, yes.

BURG:--the whole series of things?

SHELDON: And money.

BURG: And money.

SHELDON: And then that made San Antonio pretty well established among the state politicians because they could look upon Bexar County as pretty solid support.

BURG: To be counted upon for--

SHELDON: That's right.

BURG:--any emergency.

SHELDON: And the governor or anybody around, the attorney general they could-- The leaders of Bexar County get a lot of votes in one block.

BURG: During those depression years, things, I have to assume, were as bad here as they were elsewhere, as they were in my home state.

SHELDON: That's correct.



BURG: So were the Democratic machine people able to draw aid because of their position from the federal government, Works Progress Administration things?

SHELDON: Yes, they were. However, at that time, they had a man in charge of, oh, what did they call it, well I guess Works Progress Administration maybe, but anyway in charge of all the giveaway deals and the whole thing where they gave out all these sort of things, who wouldn't play politics very much with the professional politicians. He was a kind of an independent sort of a person, and he could have helped them a whole lot more than he did.

BURG: I see. His job was not under their direct control.

SHELDON: No, appointed by the President. WPA, that's what it was.

BURG: Yes.

SHELDON: And he was not to their liking as a director of WPA.

BURG They found it impossible to move him out however.

SHELDON: Oh, yes, they couldn't move him out.



BURG: And the President, presumably they would have complained to him directly or indirectly, and he did not see fit to remove the man himself.

SHELDON: No, he didn't. He somehow or another, held on and did what he pleased.

BURG: I see. In '36, were you a supporter of Alfred Landon?

SHELDON: I've always supported every Republican.

BURG: Each Republican presidential candidate?

SHELDON: Yes.



BURG: All right. So we know what you did then in '40 and '44. Did the coming of the war and whatever defense contracts came to San Antonio or Bexar County or the increased size of the military here, did any of that alter the circumstances with which you had to deal with regard to your Republican party?

SHELDON: No.

BURG: It didn't make any difference to you?

SHELDON: No.

BURG: The Democrats take credit for--

SHELDON: Well, of course, when the war started Roosevelt--

[Interruption]

SHELDON: Roosevelt was President you know at that time, and, of course, the Democrats had control of everything.

BURG: And just stayed there?

SHELDON: Yes.

BURG: Well, I was wondering whether an influx of military population or any defense work that might have come to San Antonio might have brought in additional people outside of Texas that you could use.

SHELDON: Well, yes it did, but they were pretty well under the domination of the Democrats because they had the jobs to give out.

BURG: Now you stood, in '48, behind Mr. Dewey?



SHELDON: Oh, yes. I was a delegate to the national convention in '44 when Dewey was nominated in Chicago. That was the first time I was a delegate to a national convention.

BURG: I see. Now had there been anything unusual in that '44 situation here in Texas for Republicans, the precincts and up to the county and--

SHELDON: Well [Senator John] Bricker was a candidate for the nomination. But the Texas delegation, a few were for Bricker, but most of them were for Dewey.

BURG: You were one of those for Dewey?

SHELDON: Yes, I was.

BURG: Was the delegation instructed in '44?

SHELDON: No, it wasn't.

BURG: It was an uninstructed delegation at that time?

SHELDON: Yes.

BURG: Now could I ask you, since that was your first experience, as being part of the delegation to the national



convention, was there anything that stood out in your mind when you attended that convention? By now you're a man of some considerable political experience at this local level and running a candidate for congress. Anything new or startling about the national convention as you attended it as a delegate?

SHELDON: At that time?

BURG: Yes, in '44.

SHELDON: Well, no. As I say, I was for Dewey although I liked Bricker very much, but we were for Dewey. We started out for Dewey, and there wasn't anything of unusual interest in that convention. The thing that struck me is, for the most significance, is [Governor Earl] Warren's playing to the grandstand. He was the keynote speaker, as I recall, and it was my impression that he was thinking a great deal more of attracting attention to Warren than most anything else. That was the first time I had ever seen him or met him.

BURG: Did you ever change that opinion later on?

SHELDON: No, I never did. I never have been enthusiastic



about Warren even on the Supreme Court.

BURG: I see. Is it permissible to say that you thought he was a grandstander?

SHELDON: Yes.

BURG: Now you obviously then rate him far below John Bricker and--

SHELDON: Oh, yes.

BURG: --Thomas E. Dewey?

SHELDON: Yes.



BURG: May I ask you, did you know Senator [Robert A.] Taft--

SHELDON: Yes, I did.

BURG: --at that time? Was that the first time you had met him at the convention or had you encountered him before?

SHELDON: No, I had met him in Texas. He used to come to Texas occasionally. I had met him in Texas on various occasions however I was very impressed with him, liked him very much.

BURG: I find that from a number of people who knew him personally, and I'm of that generation that did not have that kind of close contact with him. My generation was World War II, and we were in college after the war. Our view of him probably was of a very austere and cold man--

SHELDON: Well, he was to some degree, but on the other hand he was very approachable, at least I found him so. I have had several conversations with him. And I respected him a great deal and had a great admiration for him, but the reason I wasn't for him--I didn't think he could win.



BURG: You felt that in the mid '40s during wartime, or are you thinking of later?

SHELDON: No, when the convention came up when he was a candidate against Eisenhower.

BURG: Let's then look at that period say from 1948 up to, let's say, up until about January of '52. The most straightforward thing to ask you is at what time did you yourself begin to think in terms of who might win in '52?

SHELDON: Well, when Taft started going around the country

and making talks and statements and that sort of thing, I, as I say, thought he was quite a fine person and a very able man. Then the Eisenhower picture came in at that time. I had never met General Eisenhower. I met him for the first time in Dallas when he was trying to get the nomination. But I had been for him because I thought he could win and I thought that--

[Interruption]

SHELDON: Now, where was I? General Eisenhower came to Dallas and I had met him, but I'd been working for him before that because I thought he had a good chance to win, and I thought the Republican party per se could not win. They were not strong enough. We undoubtedly had to have somebody that could get a large Democratic vote and independent votes, and I didn't think Taft could.

BURG: No, probably not. He had that identification tacked on him of "Mr. Republican" that probably worked to his disadvantage.

SHELDON: Right.



BURG: Do you remember the point in time by month and year, let us say, when you began to actively work for Dwight Eisenhower?

SHELDON: Well, I would say it was prior to June of '52. I would say in probably January of '52 and maybe the latter part of '51 when the situation first came to light that General Eisenhower might be considered.

BURG: Now as far as I was able to determine, a movement got off the ground in Dallas County at the time of the state fair. I believe that was in October of '51--

SHELDON: That's when they have it, yes.



BURG: Right, they had a booth, "Eisenhower for President," at the fair, and I was told that they were attracting hundreds and hundreds of people and were actually getting signatures from people who stated that they were willing to help the campaign. They were interested--

SHELDON: I personally think that if it hadn't been for Texas, Eisenhower would not have been nominated. Taft would have

gotten it, but that fight it started in Texas attracted attention all over the country.

BURG: You don't think that the fight or the possibilities of a fight in Louisiana and Georgia--

SHELDON: They helped, but Texas was the leading light in the thing. They got seated by the virtue of the Texas fight. See Texas really put on a fight and Louisiana did and so did--

BURG: Georgia was another one.



SHELDON:--Georgia. And but Texas really put the show on the road and got all the publicity. And they didn't get seated until after we put on the fight and were seated, then they seated them.

BURG: All right, in Bexar County, did the Eisenhower movement, in the sense of an organized effort, get going here as early as, let us say, October of '51?

SHELDON: No, I don't think it was that early. I think it was later.

BURG: Now among the local Republicans here, the people with whom you would be working, how did the feeling run? Was it more pro-Taft among them or pro-Eisenhower?



SHELDON: Well, the county was pro-Taft due to the fact that their leaders, they had control of the county by virtue of the state organization only recognizing those that were working for them, Zweifel and those people and Marrs McLean. And we were fighting against that element, and they had control of the party machinery. So they were able to get control of the delegates from Bexar County. But when we went up to Mineral Wells, the state convention, where they threw out all of our people then we held another convention and there was the dividing line. The convention was at Mineral Wells, and there is where all the publicity originated and came out. The eastern periodicals had representatives there writing it up, of course, it was a bitter fight from then on.

BURG: Now as I understand it then, here in Bexar County, the Republican precincts remained in control of the Taft people.

SHELDON: That's right. That's right.

BURG: Which was not the picture at all in Dallas County.

SHELDON: No, it was not. But Dallas County didn't have the support of the state organization like they had here. The state organization was very strong supporters of Mike Nolte and Marrs McLean and those people. As I say, they had had control of it for two, three years, and we were not able to overthrow that control at that time. Now in 1952 we took over Bexar County and have held it ever since, our element.

BURG: Oh, you did!



SHELDON: Yes.

BURG: But not until after the precinct conventions and--

SHELDON: That's right.

BURG: Very, very interesting.

SHELDON: We took it over then and threw Mike Nolte out and all of his pals, and I became state committeeman at that time instead of Mike Nolte. And then we had control of the county and all of that sort of thing.

BURG: That's interesting. But they were simply too powerful for you at that--

SHELDON: Oh, yes, they had been in control for several years. And you'd go to a state convention, and they'd throw you out.

[Interruption]

BURG: Now, I'm sorry that we were interrupted there. You were saying that in '52 they had had control, and then you threw them out.

SHELDON: Up until then they had control.

BURG: Now could I ask you, in 1952, who are the key people associated with you in Bexar County and in San Antonio?

SHELDON: Well, I tell you the person that was the biggest factor here in Texas for Eisenhower was Jack Porter of Houston. He and I talked our plans over, what to do, and we decided, at least I suggested, that we get together and tie our star to Eisenhower's coattail because we would get these people out for Eisenhower in the May conventions. Then they would probably remain with us in the September conventions for us to take over the state, which we did. We took over the state.



BURG: Now how much new blood was there here in San Antonio. New blood in the sense of people who gravitated to Eisenhower--

SHELDON: Oh, well, it was all new blood mostly. We got out and got people interested who were interested in Eisenhower, and they came with us. And then we were able to overthrow the Old Guard, so to speak.

BURG: Now obviously from what has happened here they stayed with you.

SHELDON: Oh, yes.



BURG: All right, if they stayed with you what does that do to the story that the Taft people, of course, were handing out that all those Eisenhower people--

SHELDON: Were Democrats.

BURG:--were Democrats--

SHELDON: It's not so. Because a lot of them were Republicans. I'll say this, that at that time a lot of Democrats, or might have been independents, joined the Republican party, and many have stayed in the party. Nearly all of the workers at that time are still interested people now.

BURG: Still to be counted among the people who are now chairman of precincts and things of this sort.

SHELDON: That's right.



BURG: Well, that's something that I thought was pretty important to try to pin down because it's always disturbed me a little bit. Did all of these new-born Republicans suddenly flee back to the Democratic fold?

SHELDON: Some of them did of course. But that's when the Republican party was born again in Texas, when Eisenhower ran. And it was due to the people wanting to be for Eisenhower, and they came into the ranks, and they worked in the party ever since.

BURG: Now you lost the precincts; you, therefore, lost Bexar County convention--

SHELDON: That's right.

BURG: Did you have any delegates to Mineral Wells?

SHELDON: Yes, we had a full delegation to Mineral Wells. We

got thrown out. We went into that convention, and they kicked us out, or rather we bolted.

BURG: At Mineral Wells?



SHELDON: At Mineral Wells. We held our own convention, and they were delegates for Eisenhower, all of that, and we got seated.

BURG: In that group?

SHELDON: they got thrown out. And when we got to Chicago, of course the national committee controlled things and the other side were in good with the national committee, as the term goes, and they tried to get us to compromise and give us so many delegates, and we wouldn't do it. So they put us in about a fifth-rate hotel out in the boondocks, and we had to go in and appear before the Credentials Committee every day, and they'd keep us waiting. Kept us waiting for three or four days before they would even hear us. And of course we always felt that that procedure was to break us down and make us compromise, but we were going to sleep in parks if we had to. We weren't going to compromise. And so we got seated, and they got kicked out.

BURG: Now you were a delegate to the convention, not a delegate at large or anything like that.

SHELDON: No, I was a delegate.

BURG: You were an elected delegate to it.

SHELDON: From here.



BURG: Did you sit in on strategy sessions after the one that you described with Mr. Porter? Were you taking part in strategy between Mineral Wells and Chicago?

SHELDON: Yes.

BURG: All right, may I ask you first of all, how many such meetings were held here?

SHELDON: I just don't remember but there were several, and I might tell you this, that Justice [Warren E.] Burger

[Interruption]

BURG: I had just asked you before the phone rang whether you had attended the strategy meetings between the state convention and Chicago. You said, "Yes," there had been several and you had.

Then you said that there was some particular thing that you wanted to say about strategy.

SHELDON: Well what I was going to say was that Burger, now who is on the Supreme Court was then from Minnesota, was one of our advisers. He was a lawyer.

BURG: Warren Burger?

SHELDON: Yes.

BURG: And he was here--



SHELDON: No, no, at the hearing before the Credentials Committee.

BURG: Oh, yes. So you had some terrific legal talent, too.

SHELDON: Yes, we did. We had talent from Texas, and he was helping us.

BURG: Now did the national Eisenhower people, and I think now of Henry Cabot Lodge, Herb [Herbert] Brownell and people of that level, had they come down here prior to the delegation going?

SHELDON: Yes, I'd known Herb Brownell for several years before the convention. And he was down here during the campaign for the nomination several times.

BURG: And you were taking part in those discussions?

SHELDON: Oh, yes, I had known Herb anyway, and so he and Jack Porter were over here together a couple of times.

BURG: Now the impression, Mr. Sheldon, that I have, and you may correct me if I'm wrong in this, I'm getting an impression of ineptness in the Taft people from before the precinct meetings. I get the impression that they let the Eisenhower people get a head start. I get the impression that the Taft people thought they had things sewed up. Then I get the impression that when the precincts in many parts of the state demonstrated that they had nothing sewed up, that they handled the rest of it in a poor fashion. For example, Mr. Sheldon, I've run across some remarks made, well, Marrs McLean made one and others made similar remarks. They were asked, "Well, what about the Democratic process?" They're snowed under in the precinct meetings and then they bolt. They refuse to recognize the Eisenhower majority, and Marrs McLean, I believe,

was quoted as saying something in effect, "To hell with the majority and majority rule." All of that seems to smack of kind of a political ineptness.

SHELDON: Well, I wouldn't say they were politically inept because they had more political experience on their side than we had on ours. They had a lot of people on their side who had had political experience, and a lot of ours had had none. And Jack Porter and I had had some. But where they made the great mistake was they had steam-roller ideas. They were just not going to give recognition to anybody where they could prevent it, right or wrong. That was their big mistake. And then when they found out how people were, they didn't care who was for Eisenhower. If they could throw the Eisenhower crowd out, they were going to do it, and they did do it at the convention at Mineral Wells. They just went in roughshod, and that was their big mistake, and it gave us an issue.

BURG: It doesn't sound like Mr. Taft was too astute in this situation.

SHELDON: Well, he wasn't there, but he had this fellow, it was his cousin. What was his name?



BURG: Not Mr. Ingalls, was it?

SHELDON: Yes.

BURG: David Ingalls.

SHELDON: He was there, and he was one of the ringmasters at Mineral Wells. Taft was not there, but they had, as I say, Ingalls and several others there.



BURG: Now did you people have your advisers from the national level? Was Mr. Brownell at Mineral Wells?

SHELDON: Brownell was there, yes. He was there. Fact of the matter is, he and I stayed in my room pretty much that morning while the other thing was going on. I had gone up there sick, and I stayed in my room most of the morning, and Herb was in there with me a good deal of the time. They held that convention and kicked us out, and I was too sick to go to that morning convention to be kicked out, but I was able to muster enough help to get ours in the afternoon.

BURG: Do you remember at what stage the decision was reached that this was actually a very fine opportunity for the Eisenhower group, an opportunity in the sense that you could take

a moral stand?

SHELDON: I can't remember the date; it's a long time ago but--

BURG: I wondered if you had talked about that with Mr. Brownell?

SHELDON: Jack Porter and I were having lunch in either Houston or Dallas, I guess it must have been Houston, where we began to lay the plans by just what I said a while ago of continuing. Now they had offered Marrs McLean the job of state chairman and Zweifel remain as committeeman. He was telling me that that was the proposal that was made to him and wanted to know what I thought. I was against it because I told him that he would amount to nothing in the party with those people running it, and that he should go after the main job, national committeeman, because in those days the national committee ran the party, and Jack did run the party after he became national committeeman.

BURG: So your advice was he was going to have to go for Zweifel?

SHELDON: That's right.



BURG: And clear him out of there.

SHELDON: Yes, get him out. If we were going to take over the state organization, he as the state chairman would be under the jurisdiction of Zweifel. That's the way it was operated, and that's not necessarily the law, but that's the way it was run.

BURG: Did this pledge, you recollect that, the pledge that delegates were supposed to sign indicating that they were Republicans, they would work for the Republican party, did that pledge cause you any particular difficulty?

SHELDON: No.



BURG: Not state-wide as well as Bexar County it didn't cause you much trouble?

SHELDON: No. They tried to work that. That was their idea, the opposition, to try to keep other people out that were coming in, the new blood. That was the objective of that-- to frighten them away.

BURG: And it did not work?

SHELDON: It didn't work because the Supreme Court of Texas had, several years prior to that time, ruled that a fellow would vote in the general election or any other election according to his own conscience. He could change as many times as he wanted to.

BURG: So actually you had a beautiful issue here literally handed to you by the Taft forces and which you then used.

SHELDON: Oh, yes. You take right here Marrs McLean and I had a kind of a verbal newspaper battle. He was trying to invoke that among the people, and I remember I gave out a statement saying that I wanted to confirm that he was calling all of his neighbors liars. And of course he didn't like that much, and that stung him hard. In other words trying to put his neighbors in the position of signing things that they didn't want to sign and that sort of thing, in the precinct I was talking about, at that time. Marrs lived right up here two blocks from me.

BURG: Were you in the same precinct?

SHELDON: No. Different. Yes, we--no, no we were not.



BURG: You weren't? Now at Chicago, to what extent were you involved in all of the maneuvers that were taking place--

SHELDON: Well, I wasn't involved in all of them because they had us out, as I say, in the boondocks, and we couldn't get in till the bus picked us up in the morning. They had a bus pick us up. But they had some meetings, and we were in some of them and some of them we were not. I was in the Texas delegation caucuses, strategy meetings, but the Eisenhower people who were running the show, Lodge and Brownell and some of those people, had some caucuses where we were not present; we didn't get in in time.



BURG: When the caucuses were held with the Texas delegation, that is I think we're talking now about the this period of stress about are you going to be seated or aren't you, what was the general trend of the conversations in the caucus?

SHELDON: In the Texas--

BURG: Right in the Texas delegation.

SHELDON: Well, of course we were stressing the fact pretty much that we were entitled to it and what had happened, and we would

discuss what they did not do, and what we did do. All we could do was discuss what witnesses we were going to put on and that sort of thing.

BURG: Now did you take with you quantities of documentation?

SHELDON: Our lawyers did. I didn't personally.

BURG: But those were there?

SHELDON: Yes.



BURG: Your lawyers had access to them, and these were then presented to the Credentials Committee, for example.

SHELDON: That's right.

BURG: And that Credentials Committee was certainly not at all sympathetic to you people?

SHELDON: Oh, no, no, no. In fact they made a majority report against us. The minority report was then presented on the floor, and I can't remember who he was but he was a Taft man, and it surprised me very much. Said he was a Taft man and moved that the minority report be adopted.

BURG: That would be the one that would seat your delegation.

SHELDON: Yes.

BURG: And as I recall it was a fairly good margin in your favor, six hundred something I believe to--

SHELDON: Oh, yes, we were seated. I was sitting there and Marrs McLean and Carl Sterns and those people in there that walked right by me coming out.

BURG: They didn't have any seats and they were



SHELDON: No, they were kicked out right then and there. The convention had voted to seat us on the minority report.

BURG: And that seems to have marked the turning point.

SHELDON: That was the first time in a hundred years that a Republican convention had not adopted the majority report on a delegation.

BURG: I hadn't known that. That long!

SHELDON: I think I'm correct on that.

BURG: Well it's an interesting thing, and we have it on the record now. I hadn't known that. Well I can understand your great surprise at a Taft man rising. They had tried to make a bargain with you at the convention, hadn't they?

SHELDON: Oh, yes. Before the convention started.

BURG: And Mr. Porter I believe had rejected that out of hand.

SHELDON: Yes, everybody rejected that. We were there to be seated because we thought we were entitled to be seated, and we were going down the line to the finish on that question.

BURG: Now, Mr. Sheldon, this must have created a certain amount of rancor within Republican ranks in this state.



SHELDON: Well, you would think it would, and it did to some extent. But Marrs McLean, for instance, he was very bitter; he wouldn't speak to me on several occasions. I'd run into him out at the country club, and he'd see me, and he'd go off in the other direction. But most of them just accepted it and gave up the ship. They knew they were finished, and we took over the state in the September convention, and that was it.

They didn't make much effort. Mike Nolte tried to make an effort here in the convention of next year, but he got licked.

BURG: For the campaign itself then leading up to the election in November, what would you estimate the Taft group support to have been for Eisenhower's campaign?

SHELDON: Well, I think that I'd say most of them supported Eisenhower.

BURG: Now how about financial support for the campaign?

SHELDON: Over the state?

BURG: Well, let's say here in Bexar County.

SHELDON: Oh, here in Bexar County. It didn't seem to make any difference; we got their support financially.

BURG: Am I right in assuming again, you didn't get much support from the state Republican group until after September?

SHELDON: That's right, but we had control after September.

BURG: Was there much there in the way of funds to tap when you people took over in September?



SHELDON: Oh, in the party funds?

BURG: Yes.

SHELDON: No, there wasn't. We raised the money after we got started, after Jack Porter took over. Jack Porter was an unusual money raiser.

BURG: What do you attribute his facility in doing that to, Mr. Sheldon? I've not met him yet.

SHELDON: You mean raising money?

BURG: Yes, sir.

SHELDON: Well he lived in Houston for one thing. He was in the oil business for another, and he knew oil people. And the oil people were big supporters of Eisenhower, for the most part, in the election, and we raised money without any trouble. We raised money here, more than had ever been raised before by far.

BURG: Now was the return to the Texas party after Eisenhower was elected as great as someone such as yourself who had seen the days of patronage back in the '20s might expect it to be when the Republican party returned to power again?



SHELDON: You mean the people that were of the Old Guard?

BURG: Well, I was thinking of all of you, particularly the Eisenhower people.

SHELDON: Oh, yes, they all worked and stayed together pretty much.

BURG: And were there rewards with the Republican Administration back in Washington, and were the rewards commensurate with what you thought they ought to be?

SHELDON: Well, I presume so as far as I know. We got all the people in that we wanted. In Texas we got them placed where we wanted them and got the people we wanted placed. Yes, we had no problem along that line.

