

Oral History Interview
John F. "Six" McDonnell
February 26, 1970

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McDONNELL: He [Joe Howe] was a wonderful man. You know I lost my father early and—

ENDACOTT: Yes, you were just a youngster when your father died.

McDONNELL: Yes. I was playing in a vacant lot there next to our place, you know, and Mr. [A. L.] Duckwall, Lease Duckwall—

ENDACOTT: Lease, yes.

McDONNELL: —and Joe would always walk home together. They walked in those days; nobody had a car—maybe one or two—but they would walk home. They were both businessmen, and they would walk quite a ways. It was ten or twelve blocks up there to their home, really. I think they lived on seventh and from their business it was about a mile.

ENDACOTT: Well, let's see, Lease he lived up at seventh.

McDONNELL: Yes.

ENDACOTT: Yes.

McDONNELL: And Joe lived along there somewhere eighth or seventh. They lived close by, that's one reason they walked home together, I guess. But anyway, we'd be out there playing ball practically every night, and they'd stop and look at us for five minutes or so. And Joe called me over and he says, "You're a pretty good ball player, what's your name?" And I told him what my name was and he says, "Well, we like to watch you play."

And I said, "Well, thank you."

And he says, "Would you like a job?"

I said, "A job, yes, I sure would, have you got a job for me?"

And he said, “Well, I run a newspaper. You come down to my place tomorrow morning and we’ll see what we can do.”

I think I was in the seventh or eighth grade. And so I went down and he hired me to seep out, open up in the mornings, build the fires—had two or three stoves, big bellied stoves, no furnace—nothing but a basement. The big press was in the basement. And I put little gasoline lamps or torch lamps of some kind under all the little job presses, to heat up the presses, to get the ink warm enough so it would be fluid, you know, light a little lamp down there and sweep out. And then it would be about time for the regulars to come, so I’d have to go to school see. He would pay me by the line and he was cheating himself all the time and I knew it, because during school, I’d make about five dollars a week. I’d set that legal stuff, the real fine type, by hand and I got so I was real good at it, you know. Just pick it up like that and stick it in. And he’d figure up what I earned, just galley proofs you know, and he’d pay me \$4.80, 4.86, 4.94, always pretty close to \$5.00. The journeyman printers were only getting \$12.00. And heck, I was only working you know an hour, an hour and a half a night, and a little bit in the morning. And I was making almost half as much as those guys who were working 48 hours. So he was being a little partial to me and it was a big help, you know. Especially when my mother died and well, no, she didn’t die, she went to Nebraska and lived with her daughter, and then I was all alone.

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ENDACOTT: Did you used to go down there when he [Dwight Eisenhower] was working down at the creamery [Belle Springs] at nights with Bud and those fellows?

McDONNELL: Yes, I used to go down a lot. He would call me to work for him. I didn't have to work, he was a night firemen, you know, on the stationery boilers. He'd get a date or something, take a girl to a show or something like that.

ENDACOTT: Who was he dating then? Ruby Norman?

McDONNELL: No, he dated Gladys Harding a lot, and a girl by the name of Hoffnell, Myrtle Hoffnell.

ENDACOTT: Yes, he dated her three times, the third time she stood him up and went car riding with Earl Briney and that was that.

McDONNELL: She was a good looking girl.

ENDACOTT: Yes, and she was suppose to be the prettiest girl in the school.

McDONNELL: Yes, she was; I think she was.

ENDACOTT: I found that out, that was the last date Ike had with her.