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Thomas W. Bewley (July 30, 1971, first interview)

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Oral History Interview

with

MR. THOMAS W. BEWLEY

July 30, 1971
Whittier, California

By: Mrs. Evelyn Dorn and
Dr. C. Richard Arena

For the Richard Nixon Oral History Project

ARENA: This is the first interview with Thomas W. Bewley, former law partner of Richard M. Nixon, in Whittier, California. The date is July 30, 1971. Interviewers are Mrs. Evelyn Dorn and C. Richard Arena. Shall we begin Mr. Bewley by asking you what, if any, family relationship exists between the Bewleys and the Nixons and Milhouses and what is the first connection between the families that you know of yourself?

BEWLEY: I was born in Cincinnati, Ohio, and the first remembrance I have of any of the Milhouses was when I was about five or six years old. My father and mother took me up to Butlerville, Indiana, which was the old Bewley homestead. My grandfather, Thomas Bewley, ran a general store, a sawmill and a lumber yard, and a chair factory there, and he was well acquainted with [Franklin] Frank Milhous and his wife [Almira Milhous] and the family. My father and mother were the same generation as the President's father and mother. And I remember when I was in Butlerville that time that we met Frank Milhous. It didn't mean a thing to me then, but later when I came to California my father told me that we had seen Mr. Milhous when we were in Butlerville.

We came to California in 1914 and I became ill with pneumonia here in Whittier. We settled in Whittier, went to Whittier Friends Church and, of course, the family renewed their acquaintanceship with the Milhous family. Dr. Homer Rosenberger, the father of Dr. Homer Rosenberger, Jr., who is on the Board of Trustees of

Whittier College, was my physician and he told my folks that they should take me to a drier, warmer climate. Frank Milhous had five acres or ten acres, I don't know which now, of citrus at Strathmore, California, which is between Tulare and Fresno. He got my father and mother to go up to Strathmore to take care of the ranch. I have a very clear recollection of Frank Milhous and Almira Milhous. We went to Strathmore and lived there for about two years, irrigating, cultivating, taking care of the citrus ranch that the Milhouses owned. Then we came back to Long Beach [California] and while the family, my parents and the Milhouses visited, I have no clear recollection of the Nixon family as such. I remember Griffith Milhous and some of those, but I don't remember the Nixon family particularly until after I had gone to college. I came to Whittier College in 1922, and needing some money to get through college, I worked in the citrus smudging during the winters. I can remember driving out Whittier Boulevard in the evenings going out to smudge and seeing the Nixon store and service station out there.

ARENA: This would be the one at Santa Gertrudes [Avenue] and Whittier Boulevard today?

BEWLEY: That's right. The old two story garage with the store in front of it and the living quarters there.

ARENA: Would you describe what is meant by smudging--doing the job of smudging?

BEWLEY: Well, when it got cold in the wintertime, got down to around 28 degrees, the citrus orchards had to be protected against freezing. We had what they called smudge pots which were filled with crude oil and when it got to 28 we would go out and light these smudge pots and have them burn. They gave off considerable heat and you could raise the temperature in a grove three or four degrees.

ARENA: And your job actually consisted of seeing that they were filled with the fuel, and lighting them and putting them out at the proper time.

BEWLEY: Yes, and putting them out when the temperature came up in the morning after sunup.

ARENA: Do you recall what the pay was?

- BEWLEY: Yes, we got ninety cents an hour for that, and that was terrific pay in those days.
- ARENA: I'll bet it was. What is done today for that same problem, Mr. Bewley?
- BEWLEY: They have wind machines, and then the citrus is practically all gone around here so we have no smudging, very little anyway, except over maybe in the Pomona Valley [California] or out toward Riverside [California], very little. Then during the war I remember the Nixon place quite well, because they didn't have help at the lemon and orange packing house, which was right down the road near the Nixon place. I'd go out after work, after I had shut up my office, and truck lemons into the box cars to ship East, and help to get the crop packed in the cars and off to market. There was an interesting story which I remember quite well about the Nixon family. In 1930 we had low economic conditions, and I was not making too much money then. Mrs. [Evlyn] Dorn was my secretary. I love pie, and Mother Nixon had the greatest pies on earth.
- ARENA: This would be Hannah [Milhous Nixon], the President's mother?
- BEWLEY: Hannah Nixon, the President's mother, and in those days she baked pies and they were sold in the store. On Saturday she got up around 4 o'clock in the morning and baked these wonderful pies. Either I or my wife would rush out there about 10 or 11 o'clock before they were all gone, and we would get a great big cherry pie. You could cut it in eight large pieces, and it cost thirty-five cents. She finally raised it to forty cents for a pie. They were the most delicious pies I have ever had.
- ARENA: Were they also served as part of restaurant cuts?
- BEWLEY: Not that I know of.
- ARENA: Do you recall when President Nixon was with you? Would you describe that relationship? Was he a partner? Was he a junior partner?
- BEWLEY: I want to go back and tell a story about Almira Milhous.

ARENA: Fine.

BEWLEY: Almira Milhous was the President's grandmother. She was one of the most interesting persons I have ever met, including the President. She was small of stature, was rather thin, dark sparkling eyes, very alert, very keen, a fine mind, and she wore the white ribbon of the WCTU [Women's Christian Temperance Union]. Now in the Quaker church we have the local monthly meeting, and it has a business session once a month. We have the Quarterly Meeting which meets every quarter for a group of churches, and then we have the Yearly Meeting which meets once a year for all the churches in California Yearly Meeting.

I didn't hear this story actually told but I have been told that Almira Milhous told this story, and it was so like her that I can believe it was her own story. It seems that one of our smaller Quaker churches had a need for a new minister. So the committee canvassed the Quaker ministers and they finally found a very promising young man and engaged him as the minister. On his first Sunday he came to his study and picked up his notes and his Bible. He walked from his study to the door leading to the pulpit. As he came in the door he stopped and looked over the congregation holding his head high with his Bible tucked under his arm. He looked over the congregation and then walked up to the rostrum and started the service. He preached what he thought was an eloquent, far-reaching sermon. But he noticed a few minutes after he started that the audience began to be restless, that it wasn't paying attention, and he tried harder. The audience still didn't settle down and it still was restless, and it was what some Quakers would call "the presence of a disturbing influence." He finished his sermon realizing that he had not been well received by the congregation. He took his Bible, bowed his head and walked down the steps and back to his study not stopping to visit with the members of the meeting. While he sat in his study he heard a slight knock on the door and he said, "Come in." A dear little Quaker lady put her head in the doorway and said, "Brother, had thee gone up to the rostrum as thee came down, thee would have come down like thee went up." She shut the door and left. This is so typical of the way Almira Milhous would have done that I can think this was probably a real story as far as she is concerned. It's also very typical of the thinking, the succinct way of putting things in a very nice and a very pointed way. And this was Almira Milhous. Frank Milhous, the grandfather, was a teacher and he was quite a different personality and he died before I was . . .

ARENA: You say different--different from Almira?

BEWLEY: Different personality from Almira, yes. He died before I really was well acquainted with him, so I wouldn't know too much about him. But I've seen Almira Milhous in meetings so many times that I feel like I really know her.

ARENA: You know, I am sure, that in some cases there are Quaker meetings that are called silent and others where you do have the minister address the congregation.

BEWLEY: Right.

ARENA: And I assume the ones here in California are mainly where the minister addresses the congregation, or do they use the other type as well?

BEWLEY: The members of California Yearly Meeting are all meetings with pastors and they conduct a service after the style of the Five Years Meeting of Friends in America. It's like most protestant services. There are a few silent meetings. We have one at Whittier College. It's not a branch of anything, it's just a group that meets for silent worship. But there is a meeting in Pasadena [California] and one up north of the regular old-time silent meetings like they have in Philadelphia [Pennsylvania].

ARENA: And your association was mainly with the one here in Whittier, not East Whittier. For example, the one that Almira attended, would that have been the one in East Whittier?

BEWLEY: She went to Whittier but I don't know whether she belonged to Whittier or belonged to East Whittier. I would say most of the time she attended East Whittier Meeting. I have seen her in East Whittier Meeting many times, particularly at Quarterly Meeting and Yearly Meeting.

ARENA: Did she ever hold any particular office, or could women hold any office?

BEWLEY: Oh, surely, she was on the ministry in oversight.

ARENA: What did that entail?

BEWLEY: They oversee the meeting. They oversee the members. They deal with the ministerial part of the meeting. It's like a deacon in some churches.

ARENA: That would deal in a way with the theological, the really religious aspects of the Quakers.

BEWLEY: Right. Sometimes we don't have pastors, we have what we call exhorters. Now, Almira Milhous could have been an exhorter, or she could have been ordained as a minister too, but she wasn't so far as I know. But she was this type. She spoke in meeting and she carried great weight when she did speak. We have an understanding in Quaker meetings that you don't count noses on a question where there is debate one way or the other but you consider the weight of the person who makes the comment. And oftentimes a majority will be one way but the weight of the meeting will be the other way, and the clerk who is presiding will say that the weight of the meeting causes him to enter a minute thus and so. Now, Almira Milhous was one of those persons who we would call a weighty member, and when she spoke she had added emphasis and weight just because of who she was.

ARENA: Now this might sound derogatory, but it isn't meant to be. It sounds as though she was more weighty than possibly Frank [Milhous] himself, and is that common or possible?

BEWLEY: Well, I don't know that it's common. I wouldn't say it's common. It's possible because she was a very outgoing person who took more part in the meeting than Frank did. He was a teacher; he was more quiet. I think he thought just as deeply but he wasn't the extrovert that Almira was.

ARENA: And was there a particular interest outside of these official duties, say missionary activity? As you might know, Mrs. [Rose] Olive Marshburn would be her daughter, and she went to Africa to engage in some missionary activity. Did Almira do that, either in the United States or anywhere?

BEWLEY: I don't think she ever did. I know she was greatly interested in missionary work, but I don't think she ever participated as such.

ARENA: I had the interesting experience yesterday of interviewing a Japanese-American who was approached by Quakers and said that in that way her father and mother, both of whom came from Japan, became Quakers, and she recalls that very vividly. Do you know if possibly Almira, or your own experience, what the procedure was to promote that type of missionary activity in the area? Was it just the Japanese or was it all groups and so forth?

BEWLEY: I think it was all groups. We had a very close relationship with two or three Japanese congregations or meetings. We had a Japanese mission-type church down in Norwalk [California] for years. I don't know, but I would have thought that Almira might have been interested in that. I can't tell you, but it was in her era. There was an elderly Quaker lady named Lydia Cammack, who was a contemporary of Almira Milhous, who was deeply interested in that Japanese work.

ARENA: Yes, this Japanese lady did mention that name. As a matter of fact I also recall her saying that it wasn't just a question of the meetings being conducted in English for the Japanese but there were Japanese Quaker ministers as well.

BEWLEY: That's right.

DORN: May I add something here. I recall that Hannah Nixon told me that her mother, Almira, was an ordained minister.

BEWLEY: Oh, that's good. I wasn't aware of that, but she spoke like it.

DORN: Yes, and she composed a great deal of very religious poetry, and it was during this time we were reading this over that she told me that her mother was.

BEWLEY: I can remember the President saying that he had poetry written and sent to him by his Grandmother Almira when he was in school. When he was a small boy, she used to write poetry.

DORN: She was a great influence in his life.

BEWLEY: Very much so.

ARENA: Did she remain living in the original Frank Milhous home that I understand was built about where Painter [Avenue] and Whittier Boulevard are now?

BEWLEY: When I knew her she lived there. I don't know how long before she passed away that she moved. I don't remember that.

ARENA: I was wondering what opportunity there was for close physical contact other than, you know, visits between the President and Almira. For example he, of course, was born in Yorba Linda and at that time, of course, I imagine the grandmother was still living in Whittier.

BEWLEY: Well I've heard the President say that they visited Almira and Frank Milhous, his grandparents, frequently. I would gather from what I have heard him say over the years that there was considerable sociability and visitation between them.

ARENA: Would you be so, excuse me, would you be so, I won't say bold, but would you be so forthright as to think that possibly there was more contact between the President than any of the other brothers with Almira, since he was the oldest after Harold [Samuel Nixon], the firstborn son, died?

BEWLEY: Well, I never knew Harold, but as between the President and [Francis Donald] Don Nixon and [Edward Calvert] Eddie Nixon, I would say that Almira had more influence on the President and there was more contact.

DORN: When the President graduated from Duke University, the family went back and Almira went with them in the car and she was over eighty, and they drove clear back there to Carolina.

ARENA: Mrs. Dorn, would you have any idea as to who might have the poetry that she has written, or do you think it is fairly scattered among various members of the family, or do you think one daughter, possibly Mrs. Olive Marshburn, might have been collecting it and might have the largest single stock?

DORN: Well, she might have, but I'm sure there is a book of her poetry with those articles that we put into storage recently that Mrs. Hannah Nixon had, and it's catalogued, and I'm pretty sure there is a book of her poetry in there.

ARENA: From the standpoint of keeping this in a historical setting and not going into the President personally yet-- I hope you'll grant me future interviews, Mr. Bewley-- could I go back to some of the early points that you raised, just to explore them a little more, because obviously many other sources confirmed this idea that Almira had this great influence on the President, and this is written in several books about him. Her great respect for Abraham Lincoln, for example, must have been carried over to the President. So if you don't mind, I would like to go back to that. There is the story often told that Frank felt that this was a wilderness country when he came in 1897 and loaded supplies onto a freight car and then personally built the home that is around this area of Whittier [Boulevard] and Painter Avenue. Would you add to that or confirm it?

BEWLEY: No, I can't, because I was so sick when I got to California. The family were close to the Milhouses but I didn't get there. I was in bed for something like two months and then we left for Lindsay [California]. So I don't know anything about what he did when he came here or what may have transpired when we first came to Whittier.

ARENA: But do you agree that his home is still standing?

BEWLEY: Oh, yes, I've seen it many, many times.

ARENA: I believe it was picked up and moved a bit but it is still in the same general area.

BEWLEY: I remember going into the home at one time when I was quite young--that is the home here in Whittier. The thing I remember about it is a hat rack. And I can't tell you whether it was near the front door or in a hall or hung there in the living room. I have a picture of this hat rack because I remember my father hanging his hat on the old Milhous hat rack in that house. That would have been 1914 sometime.

ARENA: Speaking of hats and what goes underneath them, I have heard the story that Mr. Frank Milhous wore a wig and

that was a common subject of interest. Would you add anything to that story? Is it true?

BEWLEY: It is true. And I remember one time when he came to Lindsay to see their grove that he took his hat off and the wig came off with the hat, and so I saw him both bald headed and with his wig on. I have heard my mother tell this story that when that happened my younger brother wanted to know what was wrong.

ARENA: Was he prematurely bald, was that the problem?

BEWLEY: Yes, he was quite bald.

ARENA: And I imagine in those days, unlike today, it was much more unusual. Today even young men, especially some of the Army fellows have long hair; it is much more common for men to wear wigs. That must have been a topic of conversation.

BEWLEY: It was. And in those days the wigs couldn't compare with what they are today.

ARENA: What do you recall of his formal education or that of Almira?

BEWLEY: Nothing, because they were all educated and grown persons when I knew them.

ARENA: If I'm not mistaken, the only one of the Nixon brothers, that is Donald, the President and Edward, to have been born in that home was Donald himself.

BEWLEY: I don't know that.

ARENA: I've heard that. I'll have to put that to Donald. Because the President, of course, was born in Yorba Linda and Edward, I believe, was born in the hospital.

DORN: Murphy Memorial Hospital.

ARENA: Murphy Memorial. And I'm almost sure that one of them said he was born in that home and I believe it was . . .

DORN: It was Don.

ARENA: Thank you, Mrs. Dorn. You mention Frank [Milhous] as a teacher. Was he also a nurseryman or was he mainly a nurseryman and maybe a teacher on the side?

BEWLEY: That I don't know. I was too young. I was only ten or eleven years old at that time. I knew he had these agricultural interests, and I've heard that he had a nursery down not too far from the house, I think, anyway in East Whittier, but I don't know anything about that.

ARENA: And this land that he owned that you worked, was that one of many properties or just the only one?

BEWLEY: No, he had other properties.

ARENA: What do you recall, if anything, of his business ability and the extent of his property holdings? Did he have a reputation as a shrewd businessman or a kind of . . .

BEWLEY: Well, I was never in a position. . . . I was too young to know whether people considered him a shrewd businessman or not. This grove that we tended was a beautiful grove, and at that time it was just coming into bearing. It was probably the most beautiful country I have ever seen--the wild poppies and lupine surrounded the grove in the vacant fields by the acre, and the ground was covered with these flowers. The house was built so you looked off to the Sierra Nevadas and on a good day you could see the top of Mt. Whitney and the pine trees up there on the ridges. They were short of water, but there were several Quakers who had citrus groves in this Strathmore area.

ARENA: Frank Milhous came in 1897, ten years after the official founding of Whittier which was 1887. Nevertheless, he would be considered one of the original pioneers, or was there some automatic cutoff point? Were those who came in 1887 a particular group, a charter group, so to speak?

BEWLEY: They were a charter group, right. I would consider the Milhous family as pioneers though because if you recall the history of Whittier, the town went off with a bang for a while and then a slump came, and it went clear down, prices fell and sales of land stopped practically. So in that beginning period, that ten years, I would consider the Milhous family pioneer developers here.

ARENA: Do you think there might exist, if there is such a thing, the original charter setting up the community of Whittier by the Quakers and if so, where would it be? I am thinking in terms, say, of the existence of something like the Mayflower Compact, and this could be of interest to historians since we're so close to it now, but one hundred years from now it might be much more difficult.

BEWLEY: Well, the only place I think it could be would be in the original minutes of the First Friends Church here. Merritt Burdgs, who by the way came from Butlerville, Indiana also and knew the Nixon family back there could help you.

ARENA: From your knowledge of the many people in this area, although you yourself, as you say, were not born here and did not go to the schools, would you say it would be relatively easy to find descendants, although not the original people, of course, of the original signers or original Quakers who opened the community in 1887? Would that be relatively easy?

BEWLEY: It would be very difficult because most of those people in my lifetime have died and their children have moved away. There are very few of the old settlers here.

ARENA: Would these names be accurate? People like the Johathan Baileys, Seth Pickering? Would these be names that would be worth looking into?

BEWLEY: That's right, the Pickerings are one of the few families that still have descendants here. Baileys are gone as far as I know. Then you get to [Fred] Hadleys and they have largely gone. There's a few. The [Amos] Maple boys live here.

ARENA: I believe you are aware that your cousin--I believe he's your cousin--Mr. Bewley Allen's wife is a descendant of the Hadleys.

BEWLEY: That's right.

ARENA: I understand there's more than one and this would be the Washington Hadley, who was one of the original founders.

BEWLEY: That's right.

ARENA: Is there anything you would like to bring up concerning the very early pre-President Nixon period? The President was born in 1913 which isn't very far from 1897, when his grandfather came. Anything in that period up to 1913 that you would like to mention that I haven't mentioned, concerning the roots of his family and the Quakers?

BEWLEY: No, I couldn't add anything to that except what might be hearsay. I start about then.

ARENA: Do you recall somewhat the nature of Whittier College curriculum, the nature of religious courses, the nature of chapel?

BEWLEY: It was compulsory chapel and I always liked chapel. We had visiting people who spoke or members of the faculty. I never objected to chapel.

ARENA: Were they all Quakers?

BEWLEY: Who?

ARENA: Who spoke at the chapel?

BEWLEY: Oh, no, we would have all sorts of people speak. In 1922, Dr. Paul Smith came as a young professor just out of college and took over the head of the History Department. And he was marvelous. We all immediately loved him because his lectures were out of this world--the most fascinating and interesting lectures.

ARENA: That's been said by many people and if I couldn't just stop for that at this point, and this will probably finish this tape, and it's worth looking into. What is it about his lectures that even now I notice you recall with enthusiasm?

BEWLEY: I'll give you two stories. We had a class in Representative Americans, and he was getting ready to lecture on [Abraham] Lincoln. He got into the classroom early and had a little book in front of him. He sat on his desk at the head of the classroom and as we walked in, he said, "Don't look at

this. Don't look at this. This is scurrilous. You mustn't look at this." It was a story of Abraham Lincoln written by an author not too laudatory of Lincoln, but Paul lectured on Lincoln and gave you all parts of his life. We were all anxious, of course, to see what was in the book.

In American History I remember a lecture on the War of 1812. In those days the girls had these vanity boxes. They'd be about eight inches long and six inches high and three or four inches wide. If the lecture was a little dull, the girls would get their boxes, remove their powder and lipstick and then fuss around with that box. About half of the time they would fall on the floor and spill. But Smith would start lecturing--I remember this first on the War of 1812 lecture--and he would walk around through the classroom lecturing and picking up these boxes and opening them. He looked through them, and the girls were so embarrassed, but he would lecture continuously as he was going through the boxes.

Or I remember when he lectured on Peter Stuyvesant, he pulled up his pant leg with his sock showing and said, "Now, Peter Stuyvesant, I want you to remember, was one of the most practical men we've ever had. He had a wooden leg. So he put a thumbtack through the sock. Smith's lectures were fascinating and you didn't need to remember the dates. He taught movements and objects.

ARENA: What were his tests like? Were they essay rather than the objective type?

BEWLEY: Yes, you wrote an essay type of examination and the question with him was, "Do you have a basic knowledge of history and can you relate it? Does it mean anything to you?" He wasn't interested in a particular date because he said that isn't important. The important thing was what happened and what was the result.

ARENA: How big was the History Department at that time?

BEWLEY: Oh, I don't know. I suppose we had 100 to 150 people in the whole department.

ARENA: Was history popular, since you are a lawyer now, and I presume you went in as a pre-law student? Was history a pre-law subject?

BEWLEY: No, I just knew that was a good thing to take.

ARENA: Of all the teachers you had in your whole four years, is there one man--I think I know what you're going to say but I have got to ask it--that stands out as the most interesting lecturer to you?

BEWLEY: Well, of course, that would be Paul Smith. But there was another man who was probably one of the greatest professors in Southern California and that's [Gustaf E.] Gus Ostrom who taught chemistry. He had a terrific Chemistry Department, a tremendous reputation and his classes were great. Ostrom spoke in chapel, and the last time he spoke was on the subject, "Polish the Heel of your Shoe." That was almost a sermon.

ARENA: Do you remember the theme of that?

BEWLEY: Yea, the theme was, it's the little things you do or don't do that make or break you in life. He was a chemist, and if you put a drop of something in that was wrong, the whole thing was wrong.

ARENA: And it was common, I take it, for members of the faculty even though they were not in the Religion Department to offer these.

BEWLEY: Oh, sure, all of the faculty members spoke.

ARENA: Mr. Bewley, I can't thank you enough and I hope you invite me back. Thank you very much.

BEWLEY: Well, do you want to tape some more?

BEGIN SIDE II TAPE I

ARENA: We were discussing your era at Whittier College. You started in 1922 and you recall living on top of old Main.

BEWLEY: It was Founders Hall.

ARENA: It was called Founders Hall at that time. When was it built, do you recall?

BEWLEY: It was the first building ever built by the college back before 1900.

ARENA: And it was going as a four year college for quite a few years before you entered?

BEWLEY: Right.

ARENA: Because I understand it started in as a prep [school] first.

BEWLEY: That's right.

ARENA: Do you recall, if at all, the city or the county or the state or any government agency gave any aid to Whittier College? The city I'm thinking, maybe in terms of land.

BEWLEY: No. The city never gave us anything but goodwill. They gave us protection and a few things like that. We never had any outside help like that until we got into this modern era when the government helped out with scholarships, etc.

ARENA: The NYA [National Youth Administration] program and things like that. Do you recall the nature of the different levels of operation? I'm thinking in terms of the administration, the faculty and the students. What do you recall, you might not too well, of the nature of the trustees at that time?

BEWLEY: Well, the trustees were mostly people in the Whittier area, businessmen and professional men who were interested in the college. I would say that the students, when I went to Whittier in '22, knew more about the trustees than the students now know about the trustees. The faculty was small, it was cohesive. They were all similar type people except for one or two exceptions. They were very cohesive. And they had few, if any, faculty problems. Dr. [Harry N.] Wright was President. He was a very scholarly man, a very fair sort of person, a brilliant mathematician. He ran the college in a very easy way--none of the problems that we have today.

ARENA: Do you think there existed anything like a Public Relations Office at that time?

BEWLEY: No.

- ARENA: And what was there if anything in the way of faculty organization that you might think of? Was there something like the AAUP [American Association of University Professors] then?
- BEWLEY: No, the faculty had faculty meetings and they had a party or two during the year as I remember, but there were no fancy organizations.
- ARENA: Do you recall, since especially that you entered during the depression era, that the hard times hit the faculty and the students? I know of private schools where credit was extended to the faculty by local department stores. Do you recall anything like that happening in Whittier?
- BEWLEY: Yes, the faculty in the depression had its salaries reduced and then for a time the college paid no salaries. I don't know what the faculty lived on unless they got credit at the stores and things like that. But they were so dedicated, and they so believed in the college, that they took voluntary cuts in salary. The students knew about that at the time. They were the most dedicated group of people I have ever known.
- ARENA: Was there ever any danger, from your own personal experience, either before or after when the college came close to closing because of problems?
- BEWLEY: Yes, I've heard Howard Hockett who was the Treasurer and the Financial Officer of the college--he also taught music and was a tremendous public relations man for the college--say that he didn't think we could open up next week, but they got through.
- ARENA: Now if we can move on to the other level--the students. What was there in the way of student government? As you know, President Nixon did quite well in this area himself. Was there such a thing as student government?
- BEWLEY: Yes, we had a very good student government. We had an organization called Associated Students of Whittier College and all the students belonged. Students were cohesive also. We had our own student body parties. Now these were quite different from today. Those were parties--for instance on May Day we all took off for the mountains and had a picnic. Or we

would have a football banquet, in which case the girl students would peel the potatoes and fix the vegetables, and we'd get the cook over at the dorm to roast the meat. The girls decorated the tables, they made the favors. The boys set up the tables, set up the chairs, and we had a football banquet. Now this was the type of social life. At the girls' dormitory, at Redwood where we ate, we had a good lounge and I think almost every night there would be four or five tables of Rook--that is the name of the card game. The students that lived in the dormitories on spring evenings or early fall evenings would go out on the campus and play Hide and Seek. We'd run all over the campus with simple games like that. But the students provided their own social life. There was nothing sophisticated like going to the country club or some fancy dining room. I can't remember but two students that smoked on the campus in those days.

ARENA: Which was outlawed, I presume, to begin with.

BEWLEY: Oh, yes.

ARENA: Even by the faculty?

BEWLEY: Oh, the faculty never smoked. I never saw any faculty member in my four years at the college smoke a cigarette or a cigar. I suppose they did, but the students never saw it. The faculty didn't believe in it. There was never any drinking problem. We had two boys on the campus who would have a sociable weekend now and then, say, three or four times a year. We had a couple of boys in the Glee Club who drank rather heavily out on trips. Outside of that, we had no drinking on the campus or none by the students.

Besides the student body, we had societies. I belonged to the Franklin Society and the girls had the Metaphonians and the Palmer Society. These societies had fifty or sixty or seventy students. They met monthly, generally in the evening and had some social life. So this provided social life.

I remember one of the first changes. We always had a woman secretary of the student body but the minutes were not well done. So a bunch of us got together and we ran a president who we were sure would get elected and I ran for secretary against a girl and I won. This was one of the changes in the conventions of the constitution, shall we say, of Whittier College. The sports--football and basketball--were terrific sports and well supported by all students. We had good teams.

ARENA: Was there anything like athletic scholarships or recruiting of students or that sort of thing?

BEWLEY: We recruited students for football particularly. The businessmen in town would take a boy and sponsor him. One of them was [William] Bill Rich who was manager of the gas company, and he gave the football players work digging ditches. We got four dollars a day for eight hours of digging ditches.

ARENA: Is it your impression or recollection that practically all of the students in your period were from Whittier itself? If so, why would you have dormitories?

BEWLEY: No, I would say that half of the students were from outside the Whittier area.

ARENA: How far out? Other parts of the state of California or even further?

BEWLEY: No, we had some from back East. We had California-- Imperial Valley and up North. We had four or five foreign students.

ARENA: Was Whittier accredited at this time?

BEWLEY: Yes, it was.

ARENA: Now you know that one thing that President Nixon is remembered for during his college period is starting the Orthogonians. And you did touch on the idea of societies. Would you go back, if you don't mind for a moment, and describe the nature of these societies as they existed in your time, so that when we do get to the President, we'll understand that one better.

BEWLEY: I belonged to the Franklin Society, which was the oldest society at Whittier, and this was the Establishment. It got to be so stodgy that when the President came along, the Orthogonians were organized to get at us.

ARENA: Excuse me. Did you live all together in one building?

BEWLEY: Oh, no, we lived on and off the campus.

ARENA: I see. You didn't all live in the same building.

BEWLEY: Oh, no, none of the societies had their own dormitory or house.

ARENA: Am I correct in saying that the college did not permit national or international fraternities or organizations at that time?

BEWLEY: That's right. None of the Greek letter fraternities. Franklin Society met once a month and we would quite often have refreshments. We'd have maybe an outside speaker, but generally it was something interesting that some member of the society brought up. We would have a debate or we would have an original essay or a report on a trip or an art exhibit. We largely did our own entertaining.

ARENA: This would be on your own time, so to speak, not during your regular class subjects?

BEWLEY: Oh, no, it would be at 7 o'clock at night, right after the dinner hour.

ARENA: We'll continue now, Mr. Bewley, with your explaining what the Franklin Society was.

BEWLEY: The society would have an annual banquet at the end of the year in which we brought our girls and had a pretty good social time. But the social life at the college was all made up and performed by the students. It was not an outside activity where we went to dances. Most of the students didn't dance, but those who did dance would hold a little private party at some hotel or country club. There was some of that going on then, but there was no furor about dancing on the campus because three-fourths of the students didn't dance.

ARENA: I assume the Franklins, by the way, was an all male society. Was there an equivalent girls?

BEWLEY: Yes, the Palmer Society. It was the first and the stodgiest and the best supposedly.

ARENA: Does that still exist, by the way? Franklin still exists I know.

BEWLEY: Oh, yes, they are still on the campus at the college but I don't know the merits of the different societies now.

ARENA: From your keeping in touch with the alumni, where would they go off to? Did they go on to graduate school or most of them into business--your offhand recollection?

BEWLEY: Most of them went into business or professions, yes. For instance, the first year I was there was the first year for Regina Woodruff who taught biology and zoology. Regina was great on pre-medical students. She knew how to put courses out that they would want. Most of our men went to Stanford Medical School. My roommate was a doctor and he told me that when he went to Stanford Medical School that Whittier College students were in the upper ten percent of the medical students at Stanford.

ARENA: Now, can we go into that extracurricular aspect of the college. In your case it was debating. What were the debating rules and clubs and to what extent was it academic and to what extent was it extra?

BEWLEY: [Victor] Vic Diehl was debating coach in those days. He is the father of Richard Diehl, now on the Board of Trustees. He coached and we had about four men on the team. There was Arthur Corey, who is now a trustee. Arthur went on to be the General Secretary of the California Teachers' Association, a tremendously responsible position. There was [Albert] Al Behnke, who was a doctor, graduate from Stanford, and is probably the greatest Naval doctor on submarine diseases and the effects you get from being under water. He is now retired from the Navy but he is an authority. Then there was a little fellow by the name of Harold Cunningham who is a preacher in Pennsylvania now. And another Methodist preacher named Francis Cook. So those are the ones that were on the debating team when I was there. We debated USC [University of Southern California], Pomona [College], Occidental [College] and we had about a fifty-fifty record.

ARENA: How were relations between the college and the community besides this aspect? Was there anything in the way of attempting any common meetings or anything like that? Did the community visit the school in any set way?

BEWLEY: There was more contact then than there is now.

- ARENA: The idea being that the college was considered maybe a natural part of the community since it went right back to the very beginning.
- BEWLEY: That's right.
- ARENA: People took it for granted.
- BEWLEY: I think that's true. They just took us for granted. The students never made any trouble. They spent a few dollars here but not too much in those days.
- ARENA: A question or two more on the college-community relations, did others offer positions or were there other opportunities for work? You mentioned Mr. Rich.
- BEWLEY: Oh yes, the Edison Company did. The telephone company offered work. The merchants in town also.
- ARENA: Did just about every male and possibly some of the girls work part-time?
- BEWLEY: I'd say about one-third of the boys worked on some basis. Maybe 50 percent but one-third I would say was better.
- ARENA: A third for sure depended on that to get through--help their financial situation? And they worked with different firms and companies.
- BEWLEY: Yeah, they did all sorts of things, any kind of work.
- DORN: Picked oranges.
- BEWLEY: Yeah, they used to pick oranges, lots of picking.
- ARENA: During your era, Tom, what names stand out as unusually colorful Whittierite figures--certain people in the community and the college? For example, Lou Henry, who married President [Herbert] Hoover. Would you care to describe her and her impact on the community? Were people aware that she was a President's wife? Was their a reaction to that?
- BEWLEY: Yes, there was that awareness. Lou Henry Hoover lived here in the very early days and so the group that lived

here when she did know her well and spoke about her. She came on the Board of Trustees, but she came to meetings very seldom and there was no big splash about it. I think another thing, these Quakers if you know them never go overboard about people like that. Mrs. Hoover was the President's wife, but so what? And they don't make over people--we're kind of cold and reserved. This is the sort of thing that the people talk about the President. He doesn't gush over people. Much of this stems from the religion he was raised in. If you know very many Quakers, you know that they never gush over you. They're not extroverts when it comes to displaying their feelings or emotions. That's one of our problems.

ARENA: What you're saying is. . . . I'm trying to think of some very famous Quakers. Of course there is Jessamyn West. I believe there was another president, wasn't there?

BEWLEY: All right, you take Jessamyn West. Now you know her fairly well.

ARENA: Yes.

BEWLEY: And Jessamyn is an outgoing. . . . But you wouldn't rush right up to Jessamyn West and throw your arm around her and kiss her on the cheek and say, "How are you, Jessamyn," would you?

ARENA: That's true.

BEWLEY: And this is because there is a reserve there that you respect. This is what I am trying to say. One of the greatest men in Whittier was David White, the undertaker, who was on the college board, and a great Quaker. And I knew David like his own son. We were very close. I would never go up and say, "David, let's go fishing," or "David, what's new?"

DORN: Yes, that's true.

BEWLEY: There was something about David White that you didn't put your arm around him and say, "Well, Dave, how is everything going today?"

DORN: The same way with Hannah Nixon.

BEWLEY: Same with Hannah Nixon.

DORN: She had that reserve about her and as well as I knew her, I'd say half the time she called me Mrs. Dorn instead of Evlyn.

BEWLEY: That's right.

DORN: And she told me herself that I had been as close to her and she had probably told me more things about her life than she had ever told her own sisters, and yet she would call me Mrs. Dorn.

BEWLEY: Now this is one of the problems of the President. He was raised in this Quaker atmosphere. It doesn't mean he doesn't feel as deeply as you feel. Now, Dick, you're a very affable person. The first time I met you I could have said, "Dick" and felt comfortable. The President can't do that easily because there's something--I don't know what it is--which restrains from within. He feels deeply, he is emotional, he wants to be a good fellow, he wants you to love him, but there is a feeling of caution there--and I say it's because of our religion--that doesn't quite break through. You don't feel quite comfortable about it. Mrs. Dorn has illustrated it beautifully. I don't suppose anybody knew Mrs. Nixon like Mrs. Dorn. Yet Mrs. Nixon would say "Mrs. Dorn." I never heard her say "Evlyn." She's called me dozens of times and I've never heard Evlyn call her Hannah either.

DORN: I would never call her Hannah, no. But many people who knew her not as well as I called her Hannah, but I could never call her Hannah.

BEWLEY: They were girlhood . . .

DORN: Yes, but Dorothy Ryan now, for instance, she always called her Hannah.

BEWLEY: Well, Dorothy might, yes.

ARENA: Well, actually, you're saying, Tom, that not only is the President that way but that is a common trait of the Quakers of this area and possibly all Quakers. And it isn't just that he is that way really but he is a prisoner, in a way, of his past, a prisoner of his own history.

BEWLEY: Right.

ARENA: You seem to use the word religion. Could you use it in the sense that there is such a thing as a puritan religion and a puritan society, and there is a Quaker society as well as a Quaker religion?

BEWLEY: That's right.

ARENA: And the two are meshed. However, before the tape was on we were mentioning the fact that the President can be that way and I'm sure others can be too. That calls for a certain time and a certain place. Would that be, say, when everyone was at Almira's home on Christmas Eve, or when everyone got together, would there be a kind of loosening up then when the immediate members of the family were together?

BEWLEY: I have never been present at any of those occasions. I've heard people who were say there was a very happy wonderful experience at these family gatherings and the reserve is broken down. I noticed that the President changed after we closed the office at day's end. We'd sit in the library pondering some question or just bull sessions, and he would get chatty and he was different. In politics we would have a group meeting and he was very warm and friendly. You talk about Frank E. Jorgensen, you've interviewed him. I've seen the time when he'd get through the problems raised by a campaign committee and then he and Frank and maybe three or four people would sit down and the lid was off. That reserve didn't come through at all.

ARENA: Could an example be also that although the President I'm sure takes a drink and I know he smokes cigars, he would not have done that in front of his mother [Hannah Milhous Nixon] or would he?

BEWLEY: No, he respected his mother and his grandmother [Almira Milhous], and he knew they didn't care for it, and he had such a great feeling and respect for his mother and his grandmother and his father [Francis Anthony Nixon] that he would not have done that.

ARENA: It wasn't a question of being sneaky. They probably knew it. He knew that they knew it but he wouldn't do it in their presence.

BEWLEY: Right. No, he was not too prudish or too hidebound to take a drink. I know he took a drink.

ARENA: It was a respect for their feelings and their attitude.

BEWLEY: Again it ties into this Quaker feeling. You respect the elders or the people with the weight, with the experience. As we say in the meeting, "There is a disturbing influence about." Take this little session here in my office. I feel at ease. There's nobody out of sorts here. But let some stranger come in here and I can feel a difference. Now Dick is very sensitive. He knew that if he sat with a cocktail in hand, talking to his mother or grandmother that they would not like it. It would be a disturbing influence to her and he wouldn't want to do that. He respected her so much that he wanted her to feel easy with him and as a mother should feel to a son. To create that feeling, he abstained. Now he might have come from his mother's house down to the office and have a drink but he wouldn't have told his mother that he never drank. He would likely, he would have said, "Well, I've got to go down to the office and we're going to have a drink down there." If that was the case, he would have told her. But the other is equally true, he would not have embarrassed her.

ARENA: Then, again sticking to the same theme for a moment, no two people are alike whether they are Quakers or what have you, and certainly Frank Nixon must have been an interesting ingredient or an interesting member of this Quaker community in the fact that he did not come in as a Quaker, as you know. Frank was a Methodist.

BEWLEY: Right.

ARENA: And Frank I would say, from persons I have interviewed, including members of the family, and you let me know if you disagree, Frank had all the qualities that were just the opposite to the standard Quaker type society that you've mentioned. That must have produced some interesting problems for the boys themselves. And from knowing Frank Nixon personally, would you care to comment on that interesting point?

BEWLEY: That is my feeling exactly about Frank. He brought a fresh, new effervescence into the family.

ARENA: A lovable fellow, with all his loudness and argumentativeness. I have, among others, Jessamyn West's view, who had him as a Sunday School teacher, and all of those recall that he argued and was loud and had a temper, but through it all there was a lovingness about him.

BEWLEY: That's true. I would say that he had a little better than average temper and he could express himself very vigorously and strong. He had very definite ideas. They weren't always right but he had them and he believed them. But he was quite different from Frank Milhous or Hannah Nixon, well any of the children of Almira and Frank [Milhous]. He was quite different from any of them.

ARENA: Do you think that might have something to do with his going off by himself to Yorba Linda [California]. Of course, this would just be conjecture, but he didn't stay in Whittier. He stayed in Yorba Linda and then came back to Whittier, but do you know whether possibly there was a disagreement with his father-in-law?

BEWLEY: No, I don't know anything about that, but he was an independent type and I can imagine that the lure of the frontier, so to speak, or the wanting to go out into a new country--the pioneer spirit might lure him.

ARENA: Of course, when you discuss a person's personality and temperament, and we will do more of this later when we get to your firsthand contact with the President as a member of your law firm. But again, since we did get on this idea of the influence of the Quaker religion and Quaker society on the personality of the President, if we could dwell on that a moment longer and tie it in with what is going on today to this extent: President Nixon's recent decision, as you know, to visit Peking has met with mixed reactions. The so-called liberals are amazed and the so-called conservatives are amazed. From your overall knowledge of the President and the background, is it so surprising that he would come to a decision whether it is liberal or conservative, but that he thinks is correct, and this isn't his approach to something that is liberal or conservative but something that is correct and he is doing it for that reason.

BEWLEY: That's right. I haven't any feeling at all that he did this for political motives. He didn't stop, in my opinion, to decide whether it was conservative or liberal or shouldn't be done. He is so dedicated to what ought to be done that he reasons with himself. You can't ignore 800 million people, so what do you do. You must get acquainted with them. You've got to make some approach to them as this is the only right thing to do. So he did it. Let the chips fall where they will.

ARENA: Would you say that there might be a comparison with that decision and his decision back as a student in college to press against the establishment to allow dancing on the campus? He must have been considered a radical at that time . . .

BEWLEY: Same thing.

ARENA: But he thought it was right and his arguments won over the trustees.

BEWLEY: Dancing to him was not immoral as it sometimes had been taught in the church. It was a good social function that young people could enjoy--probably abused by some but what isn't. To him it was not immoral or wrong; therefore, he went out to get dancing in the college. He believed it, and he didn't care whether they liked him or didn't like him. It was right, it was honest, and so he did it. And the same thing, I think, applies to the China visit. As I said before, I can understand him because this is so typical. China is a great segment of society we have little knowledge about. We've got to know them, so he does it. It's one of the most logical steps I think he has taken in his Administration.

DORN: And this dancing in the school too, I don't think he did it just because he thought it was right. This kept the social life in Whittier College instead of these kids going over to the girlie shows or something on Saturday night.

BEWLEY: That's right. Well, that's part of the thing that he thought was right. It was better for them to dance at the college with their own people than to be running off to some Hollywood joint mixing with everybody.

DORN: Because there was nothing in Whittier. There was really no kind of entertainment here for young people. Even when I came here there wasn't a thing for anybody to do in the evening.

BEWLEY: And another thing that Mrs. Dorn brings up is true. You see, Dick was probably not too good a dancer in those days, but there was a group that wanted to dance and he championed their cause for the good of the college and the good of the students. This is typical in the China situation. Oh, it may affect his political life a little--at least he got publicity and every politician wants publicity. But the big thing about China is he is going to open the door for the whole country and for the rest of the world. And this is the same thing you are talking about with dancing.

ARENA: One final question and this will tie us up, but maybe this will take a whole tape, but we're dealing with the question of the Quakers, the influence of Quaker religion on the President. As you know from time to time people like to raise questions about the Quaker position . . .

BEWLEY: The peace question.

ARENA: Yes, the peace question with the President. From your own personal knowledge, he is a Quaker--period. And he has always been one. He is a birthright Quaker. Is there anything wrong with anything I have said there?

BEWLEY: No.

ARENA: He is a Quaker. He has always been one. He is a birthright Quaker.

BEWLEY: That's right.

ARENA: On the question of pacifism with which the Quakers are historically associated, would you care to comment?

BEWLEY: Yes, that's an important part. One of the fundamental tenets of Quakerism is that you are first honest with yourself. You listen to the still small voice within. You must be honest with yourself and God and you don't need to go to the priest or rabbi to tell you what's right or wrong. This is

important to the President because there are many, many Quakers who could not sit by and see young men go to the South Pacific or to Europe to fight and the rest of us stay home with the plush jobs, make the money and avoid the horrors of war. This is wrong. During the second World War I gave up my law practice and joined UNRRA [United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration] at a third of what I was making in my law office. I thought it was wrong for me to sit here during that time. The President has very deep convictions on this, so what did he do, he joined the Navy. He said, "If your son and my son can go out and get killed, I can do the same thing." And so he joined the Navy and went out where the going was tough, because in his own mind and influenced by his religion, he felt that that was the only right and proper thing that he could do.

ARENA: That's a very good explanation. Thank you, Tom, and thank you for letting us interview you today.