

Frances Condell Oral History Interview – 7/31/1966
Administrative Information

Creator: Frances Condell
Interviewer: Joseph E. O'Connor
Date of Interview: July 31, 1966
Place of Interview: Limerick, Ireland
Length: 18 pages

Biographical Note

Condell was mayor of Limerick, Ireland from 1960 to 1967. In this interview, she discusses John F. Kennedy's (JFK) 1963 visit to Ireland, later meetings with Kennedy family members, and JFK's legacy in Ireland, among other issues.

Access Restrictions

No restrictions.

Usage Restrictions

Copyright of these materials have passed to the United States Government upon the death of the interviewee. Users of these materials are advised to determine the copyright status of any document from which they wish to publish.

Copyright

The copyright law of the United States (Title 17, United States Code) governs the making of photocopies or other reproductions of copyrighted material. Under certain conditions specified in the law, libraries and archives are authorized to furnish a photocopy or other reproduction. One of these specified conditions is that the photocopy or reproduction is not to be "used for any purpose other than private study, scholarship, or research." If a user makes a request for, or later uses, a photocopy or reproduction for purposes in excesses of "fair use," that user may be liable for copyright infringement. This institution reserves the right to refuse to accept a copying order if, in its judgment, fulfillment of the order would involve violation of copyright law. The copyright law extends its protection to unpublished works from the moment of creation in a tangible form. Direct your questions concerning copyright to the reference staff.

Transcript of Oral History Interview

These electronic documents were created from transcripts available in the research room of the John F. Kennedy Library. The transcripts were scanned using optical character recognition and the resulting text files were proofread against the original transcripts. Some formatting changes were made. Page numbers are noted where they would have occurred at the bottoms of the pages of the original transcripts. If researchers have any concerns about accuracy, they are encouraged to visit the library and consult the transcripts and the interview recordings.

Suggested Citation

Frances Condell, recorded interview by Joseph E. O'Connor, July 31, 1966, (page

number), John F. Kennedy Library Oral History Program.

Oral History Interview

Of

Frances Condell

Although a legal agreement was not signed during the lifetime of Frances Condell, upon her death, ownership of the recording and transcript of her interview for the Oral History Program passed to the John Fitzgerald Kennedy Library.

The following terms and conditions apply:

1. The transcript is available for use by researchers.
2. The tape recording shall be made available to those researchers who have access to the transcript.
- 3; Copyright to the interview transcript and tape is assigned to the United States Government.
4. Copies of the transcript and the tape recording may be provided by the Library to researchers upon request for a fee.
5. Copies of the transcript and tape recording may be deposited in or loaned to institutions other than the John F. Kennedy Library.

Frances Condell

Table of Contents

<u>Page</u>	<u>Topic</u>
1	John F. Kennedy's (JFK) visit to Limerick, Ireland, in 1963
10	Reaction in Ireland to JFK's assassination
12	JFK's 1963 visit to Ireland
13	Meeting members of the Kennedy family
15	Sinead De Valera
16	JFK's legacy in Ireland
17	Religious tensions and ecumenism in Ireland

Oral History Interview

with

Frances Condell

July 31, 1966
Limerick, Ireland

By Joseph E. O'Connor

For the John F. Kennedy Library

O'CONNOR: Mrs. Condell, I wonder if you could tell us something about the arrangements, perhaps, for the trip, or how you found out about John Kennedy's [John F. Kennedy] visit to Ireland, and when you first heard about it.

CONDELL: Well, naturally, President Kennedy's visit got wide publicity here, and I happened to be mayor of Limerick at the time, and on the distaff side I felt that we had some claim on President Kennedy because his mother's people, you see, came from County Limerick. And the famous Rose Fitzgerald [Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy], where we claim great relationship with her, on behalf of the county. Once we sort of established this in our minds, we women of Limerick, we decided that we must have him visit the city. But, unfortunately, by this time his schedule had been arranged, and according to the Ambassador, there wasn't a hope of our getting him to come to Limerick.

O'CONNOR: Ambassador Thomas J. Kiernan.

CONDELL: No, no. No.

O'CONNOR: Or the Ambassador to our...

CONDELL: To our...

[-1-]

O'CONNOR: Oh, I see, yes.

CONDELL: Yes. And we hadn't a hope of getting him here. However, I felt very strongly about it, and I visited him four times in Dublin... [Laughter]

O'CONNOR: The Ambassador.

CONDELL: The Ambassador, yes--in an effort, you know, to get him around to our way of thinking. So eventually he rang me up one night about a quarter to one, at least, one morning about quarter to one, and he said, "You've got your wish, now will you get off my back?" [Laughter]

O'CONNOR: Oh, my goodness!

CONDELL: But, however, then the trouble was, you see, that we had only one week in which to make all the arrangements for his visit, and his time schedule was so tight that he wouldn't even have the time, the President wouldn't even have the time to come into the city. Now where were we to find a venue that would be large enough you know, to accommodate all those who would wish to see him and to afford him a welcome, and as well as that, you know, would be suitable for acceptance as to some presidential level. So we finally decided on a race course, of all things.

O'CONNOR: Very appropriate.

CONDELL: And that day we had about sixty thousand people waiting there. It was a wonderful experience for me. Especially being a woman, and I felt that we women of Limerick had at least achieved our wish.

O'CONNOR: Why hadn't they thought of Limerick before that? What had happened...?

CONDELL: Well, the President had arranged to go to Galway, you see, and they were affording him a civic welcome in Galway and the freedom of the city;

[-2-]

and then there was a welcome afforded him--at least arranged for Shannon Airport--on his way out. And he had such a very tight schedule. But Limerick--you see, I think that in most American minds that Limerick and Shannon are synonymous, you see, but we're not really. And actually we're on very different local authority control. One is County

Clare, that is Shannon; and Limerick City is under its own, our own. So eventually some of the big whigs from Dublin came down by helicopter on the previous Sunday.

O'CONNOR: Do you remember who any of the big whigs were?

CONDELL: Yes, I remember Mr. E. G. Salinger [Pierre E.G. Salinger] and a few of these, you know, so they were all down here. I had met Mr. Salinger at a luncheon about two weeks before that, and I had sat next to him in a bus coming in from Grand Rathe Castle. And I pleaded with him, you know, to try and arrange this visit, and he said, "No, you haven't a chance."

O'CONNOR: Oh, really?

CONDELL: Yes. He said, "We're just tight on schedule."

O'CONNOR: Was there anybody else that you had to fight with? You mentioned the Ambassador, and now you mention Salinger. Was there anybody else you had to work on to try to...?

CONDELL: No, no. I think that these were my two main victims. But it was all very, very exciting. I mean, you know, even the build up of it was terribly exciting. I think that the victory in the end was very well worth it.

O'CONNOR: Well, how was the visit here? Could you tell us any details about...

CONDELL: Well, he arrived by helicopter and, as I said, we'd only got a few days in which to make suitable arrangements at the race course, you see, and naturally the security arrangements were a great headache to all of us. But the Department of External Affairs had done

[-3 -]

wonderfully well, and, then, of course, the President's own people--you know, those who were responsible directly for him, body-guards and all those--all of those came down. I had another phone put into the house, and the phone never stopped ringing because there were so many things to be done. Then, you see, we were affording him the freedom of the city as well, which meant that a casket had to be made for him and this wonderful scroll, you know, with his new title on it, the freedom...

O'CONNOR: A casket?

CONDELL: Yes, it was a mahogany casket which contained his scroll about the freedom, free man of Limerick City. And then there were gifts to be purchased and I was.... While we understood and accepted the reason why the lovely Jacqueline [Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy] couldn't accompany him, you know. We

were very sad that we hadn't an opportunity of seeing her. Because, indeed, both of them were extremely popular here, and I think everybody here, and I think everybody, especially all the women, felt a little cheated to see that Jacqueline hadn't come.

O'CONNOR: And the men felt a little cheated as well.

CONDELL: I should say so, perhaps, more so than the women. So eventually, on that day, or for that day, the festival, you know, we had arranged different tickets. You see. We had a V.I.P. area, you know, where the dignitaries of the city and the county and the adjoining counties, where they would sit; and then there was the general public area outside of that. We had a platform, you know....

O'CONNOR: You mean, where the speakers would stand.

CORDELL: Yes, where the speakers would stand. When I went up that way, of course, I was quite disgruntled because I had been to Cork for the Cork Freedom, you see. I was an invited guest there. Everything there was done so beautifully. They've a lovely city hall there, and they had such wonderful flowers.

[-4-]

You know, from a woman's point of view, all these little things are necessary, you see. I came home quite despondent. But before I left, I said, "Now what am I going to do with this race course?" You see, there isn't--as you know--there isn't even a stand on which to hang anything.

O'CONNOR: At the race course.

CONDELL: At the race course. So I thought of a bright idea. I said, "Well, they can only refuse." So I went to the city manager, and I went to all the people who mattered in Cork, to the Lord-Mayor, of course, and I said, "Look, please may we borrow, beg, borrow, or steal some of these beautiful flowers for Limerick?"

O'CONNOR: So you got the flowers from Cork for...? You didn't tell your public this, did you? [Laughter]

CONDELL: Well, I think it leaked out eventually. So anyhow, he said, "Oh, yes, yes." But they were really beautiful. And the city-manager looked me in the eye and he said, "Provided you can arrange transport for them." This was, you know, such a garden of flowers, I'd never be able to describe it. So then I suddenly saw out of the corner of my eye, a colonel, the army colonel. I said, "Here's my man." So I went up to him and I said, "Do you think you could afford to give me transport for these flowers?" You know, they were all done in beautiful frames, you know, depicting various forms of welcome. And we had one glorious flag of America done in floral arrangements. You know, this was beautiful. So when the President came and when he had walked out, you see, he was

very taken with this floral arrangement of the flag and when we were coming back from his being mobbed, you know, by the welcome of the people, he saw this, you see, and he turned around, and he said, "Haven't I seen this somewhere before?" [Laughter] And I said, "Yes sir, we borrowed it. We knew that you liked it so well." But

[-5 -]

we found him a very easy guest and terribly appreciative of the welcome afforded him, and most anxious indeed to establish contact, I think, with the Fitzgeralds, who were there en masse.

O'CONNOR: Yes, I see he said something about that when he was up on the platform, didn't he?

CONDELL: Yes. He suddenly saw a man who was a relative of his, who was very alike to his own grandpa, and he spotted him, you see. He turned around to the Ambassador, and he pointed, you know; and he said, "Isn't he the image of grandpa?" So, of course, he had to go out and shake hands with him, you know. And when we thought of the security arrangements which we had made, and then to see him going out, and the people were almost on his back.

O'CONNOR: Yes. That's a problem all the time.

CONDELL: But they adored him here.

O'CONNOR: You said you had to deal with someone in the Ministry of External Affairs, who did you deal with?

CONDELL: Well, it was Mr. Frank Aiken, of course, our minister.

O'CONNOR: Now that name has been given to me five times, Dave Powers [David F. Powers] gave that to me, and I had been given the name Hugh McCann when I got into this. Then somebody mentioned the name Aiken, and no one could think of his first name. And I couldn't find him. Do you know what his first name is? Do you know where I might reach him?

CONDELL: Yes, he's in the Department of External Affairs. He's our minister.

O'CONNOR: Is he still there?

CONDELL: Oh, yes, of course.

O'CONNOR: He's not the Minister of External Affairs?

CONDELL: Yes, he is the minister.

[-6 -]

- O'CONNOR: I thought Hugh McCann was the Minister of External Affairs.
- CONDELL: No, no, no. Mr. Aiken is the Minister for External Affairs.
- O'CONNOR: Well, that's very interesting. Well, do you know Hugh McCann. Do you know who he is?
- CONDELL: I've met him, yes. I don't know exactly what his title is at the moment, no, no.
- O'CONNOR: Well, that's a little bit of misinformation I had.
- CONDELL: He was a TD at the time; he was a parliamentary secretary. He's now Minister for Education. Mr. Donoh O'Malley [Donogh O'Malley] was, of course, as keen as I to have the President visit Limerick and he was most helpful. He came too, with me to the Minister for External Affairs, and he came with me to the Ambassador on a few occasions, and....
- O'CONNOR: Helped you fight your battle.
- CONDELL: Oh, he did, yes.
- O'CONNOR: What's his name?
- CONDELL: Donoh O'Malley. D-o-n-o-h O'Malley.
- O'CONNOR: O'M-a-l-l-e-y ?
- CONDELL: O-M-a-double l-e-y. He was the Minister for Health up to a month ago. He's now Minister for Education.
- O'CONNOR: Of Limerick?
- CONDELL: No, of the county.
- O'CONNOR: Oh, of the county? Well, maybe I'll be able to get in touch with him then later on.

[-7 -]

- CONDELL: Well, he's off to Yugoslavia today.

O'CONNOR: Well, then I may not get a chance to get in touch with him. [Laughter]

CONDELL: But you'll see him when he comes back. Yes, he's a very alive young man and very forward thinking.

O'CONNOR: Well, I'd like to get a chance to meet him. Okay, that may wind up the visit, unless you can think of any other....

CONDELL: Well, after that when he was afforded the actual program, you know, was the usual procedure of affording him the freedom of the city, and then there was the presentation of gifts. And one which he liked particularly was the presentation of the little puppy, Shannon, whom his relatives had asked me to give to him. And they had a little silver disc, you know, to hang on the puppy's collar. But when I was out with Jacqueline Kennedy for lunch recently, she brought Shannon in, for me to see, because Shannon had now grown.

O'CONNOR: Did you give the puppy to--did you place him in the President's hands, something like that?

CONDELL: Yes, but he wasn't allowed to take him out, you see. He had to be sent out afterwards owing to restrictions.

O'CONNOR: I see, because I believe he was allergic to dogs.

CONDELL: Really?

O'CONNOR: Yes, I think so.

CONDELL: I didn't know that.

O'CONNOR: Oh yes, they had animals all around, and he liked them. But he was allergic to many, many things, and I....

[-8-]

CONDELL: He may have just sort of tapped his head, I can't recall this particular incident. But I remember distinctly, you know, presenting him with the little disc for the puppy's collar, and saying that the puppy would be sent out later, you see, when the restrictions had been overcome. But Shannon is there really now, and very much alive. After that, you see, we took off by helicopter again for Shannon, and I was out at Shannon to say good-bye to him. And all in all, I think that everybody just went absolutely crazy about him here, all over the country.

O'CONNOR: You wouldn't compare the reception that he had in Cork to the reception he had in Limerick, would you?

CONDELL: Well, it was a very different reception, you know. Cork was a very beautiful dignified reception. It was indoors, of course, and...

O'CONNOR: And traditional, of Cork?

CONDELL: Well, you see, they have the facilities there. They've a beautiful city hall, which we lack. We have a town hall here, but it's so old and ancient, it's falling down, and we're hoping to build a new one when we fill our coffers again. But I think actually, you know, being Ireland, and we were lucky in the weather, it was a bit blowy, but I had to explain to him, of course, that a way over the trees we had a city, you know. [Laughter] Because he was just looking at green.

O'CONNOR: At the green fields around the race course.

CONDELL: And cocks of hay. But I think that he really enjoyed Limerick. And the actual stands at the race course, they were chock-a-block with people, you see and you know, this terraced sea of faces.... And he got such an overwhelming welcome. So this was really wonderful.

In Cork, the Ambassador introduced me to him and he

[-9-]

said, "This is your hostess on Saturday, Mr. President." And at this stage I think he hadn't quite accepted there was a lady mayor in Ireland. And he said, "Oh, yes, you're the mayoress of Limerick." So the Ambassador said, "No, this is the mayor of Limerick." He looked at me for a moment and suddenly it registered with him, apparently, that he had made a mistake. And he said, "Are you Frances Condell?" I said, "I'm afraid I am, sir." So then he paid me a lovely compliment: he said, "But they told me you were a grandmother." He came back quickly like that, and recovered himself [Laughter].

O'CONNOR: It was the sort of manner that endeared him to us.

CONDELL: Yes, oh yes. But it was a visit well worth while as far as Limerick was concerned. It was lovely. Then he had asked me out to visit him the following March for Saint Patrick's Day. And this--of course I'd never been to the United States, and I'd been looking forward so much to the visit, and then, of course, the dreadful tragedy happened in November. And that was the end of it, I guess. I never got to the States until this year.

O'CONNOR: How did you hear about the tragedy? Where were you when the assassination occurred, do you recall?

CONDELL: Oh, yes, I remember quite distinctly. I was in the kitchen. I was working in the kitchen and I had turned on in the living room, I had turned on the TV,

you see, and Charles Mitchell, one of our favorite announcers was reading the news, and suddenly, you know, there was a shocked silence, you know, and his reaction was one of profound shock. He just, you know, broke away from the script and he said, "President Kennedy has been shot." The whole country went into mourning. I've never seen so many people cry. You know, we had people here, and local heroes, national heroes you know, we've held in very high esteem, but I have never seen so many people cry.

[-10-]

O'CONNOR: What do you think the explanation for that is, and I want to ask you also, in the same connection really, what's the explanation for the reception, the warm reception that he would receive?

CONDELL: Well, he himself, you see, was an extrovert, you know. Sometimes we got the impression that the Americans were--they didn't care very much, you know, about us and that perhaps we weren't as forward in many aspects of life as you of America. And sometimes we felt that perhaps, they, you know, their appreciation was given to us with their tongues in their cheeks, you know. But this seemed to be so spontaneous, this welcome of President Kennedy, this appreciation by President Kennedy was so spontaneous, that we felt this, and we appreciated this spontaneity, you know, of his. And then he, himself, was so genuinely appreciative, I think, of his Irish ancestry. Then, you see, Ireland, also is a Roman Catholic country, and I think it was a great boost, you see, to Ireland to have....

O'CONNOR: A Roman Catholic, an Irish Roman Catholic...

CONDELL: ...a Roman Catholic, an Irish Roman Catholic especially, as President of the States.

O'CONNOR: Was there much interest in John Kennedy before he came over here?

CONDELL: Yes, oh, yes.

O'CONNOR: Because of this?

CONDELL: Because of this, yes. I mean it was a great surprise, I think, to everybody, you know, that this should happen, that he should make the election. Oh, yes, he was quite a household word here. And then he was so young, you know: I mean normally your presidents were, well at least, they looked mature. But he was so young, and then of course his attractive Jacqueline was a great hope for the Irishman.

O'CONNOR: People go a long way in trying to explain the reaction all over the world to his death. And the reason I asked you where you were, a friend of mine,

well, not really a friend, but a man I interviewed in connection with this, he said, in a very nice way, "People always seem to remember where they were when they first

[-11-]

heard the news." He said, "I can't remember where I was when my father died, or when my mother died." But he said, "I can remember exactly where I was and what I was doing when John Kennedy died." And that's so strange.

CONDELL: Isn't it, yes.

O'CONNOR: He was a great man, but he wasn't--you know, there's no explanation...

CONDELL: No.

O'CONNOR: ...to all of that. But I really--I'm trying to find out what cause it is.

CONDELL: Actually I think your injecture right there now, when you did that. I think that this really signifies what he meant to us. You see, when he came he was shy. That night that he arrived and was met by the President [Eamon De Valera] and all the national level, the governmental level, he was a very shy young man. And I think he was a little hesitant, you know: he didn't quite know how he would be received. Then gradually he opened up, in the end. Just this gesture of yours now. "Well here I am; take me," you know which we did, of course. We took him to our hearts straight away. And I think that he loved his visit to Wexford.

O'CONNOR: That's what everyone says.

CONDELL: Oh, yes, I think he did, yes.

O'CONNOR: A few who have been with him many, many years said that they had never seen him as relaxed.

CONDELL: As relaxed, yes. Actually he was very relaxed in Limerick, too. You know, for the short time he was there.

O'CONNOR: Yes, they were talking about the whole visit, not just...

CONDELL: The whole visit, yes.

O'CONNOR: ...the whole visit. You know, he's gone on many, many state visits, but...

CONDELL: But this was even so noticeable from his first night right down through these visits to many places. And, you see, he was never too big to meet,

you know, even the poorest of his, well, his people, here, I suppose.

[-12-]

O'CONNOR: That's the comment that's made about him in the United States as well: that he very often made the least person in the room feel most welcome, and most at home.

CONDELL: Oh, yes, most welcome. Oh, yes. I met his little son [John F. Kennedy, Jr.] John-John, too, when I was out.

O'CONNOR: This last time you were...

CONDELL: This last time, yes. I'd say that he was a family man; at least this was the impression that he gave us, you know, because he was very concerned that his wife was not with him. He seemed very attached to his father [Joseph P. Kennedy]. He talked quite a bit about--well, quite a bit, I should think; not a lot, but quite a bit about him. And whatever fascination this old man had for him, this grandfather; because even when I was with [Edward Moore Kennedy] Ted now, Ted had a photograph of the grandfather.

O'CONNOR: You're speaking of Teddy Kennedy?

CONDELL: Ted Kennedy, yes. And he said, "I want to show you something". He brought me over here, and written on a photograph was, "Look at Grandpa's jowls" you see. And actually, you knew, the cheek, the facial structure--you know, the way he sticks out his chin--it was exactly the same as the old man, you know, to compare the two photographs, which he had hanging on the wall.

O'CONNOR: This was written on the photograph was it...

CONDELL: Yes.

O'CONNOR: Who had written this?

CONDELL: I don't know who had, which of the brothers. I'd say it was the President really.

O'CONNOR: When did you meet Ted Kennedy?

CONDELL: Last...

O'CONNOR: Was it last time when you were over?

CONDELL: Yes, when I was over, in March.

O'CONNOR: You met them all then?

CONDELL: Well, I didn't meet Bobby [Robert F. Kennedy], unfortunately. He was to join us that evening at half past six. And I think it was the time

[-13-]

that he and the mayor of New York were having a little conflict, so he was delayed. He rang up actually, while I was there to apologize, you know. But I didn't meet him, and I'd love to have met Bobby, because, you know, he's another figure that we admire.

O'CONNOR: Oh, certainly.

CONDELL: I saw him, of course, in the Saint Patty's Day parade. And I think that our appreciation of him--well, from the women's point of view--was, you know, his great concern for Jacqueline during the tragedy, the funeral and all this. You know, he seemed a tower of strength there.

O'CONNOR: A lot of people have commented on that. They thought that was--a lot of people who had rather mixed feelings about Robert Kennedy before the funeral, admired very much the consideration he showed during that time.

CONDELL: Oh yes, yes. Do you have such consideration, usually in the States? I mean, do you have this sort of family love?

O'CONNOR: Well, the Americans have a great reputation for the lack of that sort of thing, I suppose.

CONDELL: This is the coldness that I've been talking about. This detachment, I would describe as detachment.

O'CONNOR: You can scarcely make, with any more safety, a generalization about Americans than you can about the Irish, or about English, or about any thing else.

CONDELL: Yes, yes. I know.

O'CONNOR: And I'm sure there are families, perhaps like the Kennedy family, where there is a great deal of family love and family consideration.

CONDELL: Yes.

O'CONNOR: I've got four brothers and four sisters, and think there's a lot of...

CONDELL: Have you really, oh, that's a wonderful family.

O'CONNOR: ...a lot of family consideration in that.

[-14-]

CONDELL: Nine of you, that's wonderful, yes.

O'CONNOR: But getting--I don't want to go into, not all over the tape. But I wondered if you had any written contacts at all with John Kennedy before, or after...

CONDELL: No, no. Well, of course, he wrote to me.

O'CONNOR: Well, I thought possibly he might have written to you.

CONDELL: Well, he wrote to me to thank me, you know, for the visit; and he said that "I'll be back in the springtime", you know.

O'CONNOR: That brings back unpleasant memories, I suppose.

CONDELL: Yes.

O'CONNOR: Because he referred to that several times.

CONDELL: Yes. He did, and he had a great love of poetry, too. And Frost [Robert Frost] happened to be, I think, was his favorite poet; he was a great favorite of mine. And he seemed to have very high appreciation of the arts generally. Mrs. De Valera [Sinead De Valera]--you know, Sunon deValera, the wife of our president--I think that he took her into his heart, and she took him to her heart.

O'CONNOR: Yes, I hope very much to see her.

CONDELL: Oh yes, she's a gracious lady; she's a very lovely old lady.

O'CONNOR: I do have the opportunity to see the President, and I'm almost as eager to see his wife as...

CONDELL: She's like a little bit of fragile Dresden china, you know. But apparently he fell in love with her, because he quoted a poem which she had written. And this was all about Shannon, you know. "Shannon's side," you know...

O'CONNOR: Well, I certainly hope I get a chance to meet her.

CONDELL: "Shannon's face again..."

O'CONNOR: That's right. I remember that now.

CONDELL: Yes. And I think that he loved his stay with her. And people have told me, you know, who were present there on various occasions, you know, with our president and President Kennedy, that he paid great attention to her, and he seemed more interested in talking with her.

[-15-]

You know, she is a very clever woman, and I think it was this appreciation of the arts, which both of them seemed to have that brought them together.

O'CONNOR: I hope I can...

CONDELL: Oh, yes, you must see her. You'll see Andrew Minihan of course, won't you?

O'CONNOR: Oh, sure. Do you have any contacts with him in arranging...

CONDELL: Well, I've met him, of course, since. Then I was down opening his appeal for the Kennedy Library. I went down to open this in New Ross for him. It was a midnight concert. And I must say that this took a lot out of me: I don't know why. I think it was reaction more than anything else. The opening of this, yes.

O'CONNOR: Why, because of the memories?

CONDELL: I think it was the memories of it. You know, all of this happened so suddenly and so quickly. A year later here I was on a public platform appealing for funds, you know, for a project in memory of a man who was so alive a year previous, that this was something which had a great effect on me. And I remember weeping that night just because of this reaction. And this was the general feeling. Although people are so sad about this, they don't want to get away from it, they want to talk and talk and talk about it. I don't know how you can explain that, because even I, knowing my Irish people, I find it hard to explain this. They have never grown tired of it.

O'CONNOR: You mean their preoccupation with this thing.

CONDELL: Yes, they have a preoccupation about John F. Kennedy and they talk about him at any time.

O'CONNOR: Oh, there's just so much romance connected with his figure.

CONDELL: Yes probably. And I mean, no matter where I go now in the country, immediately I'm associated with him, you know, because of this

undeserved tribute he paid me; and I think, first of all, because of the battle we had getting him here at all. This still lives, you know. This sadness and if you go into, I'd say every homestead, you know, farming homestead--I'm not talking about the immediate Wexford area now, but all over the country. You go down to the West and you'll find a picture of President Kennedy somewhere in the house. It's amazing.

[-16-]

O'CONNOR: That really is.

CONDELL: He sent me a lovely photograph of himself, too, an autographed photograph. And his presidential gift, you know, was a silver cigarette box, engraved, which I treasure now, of course, more than ever before.
That's life.

O'CONNOR: That thought is extraordinarily difficult to understand, how that feeling can be so strong. I hear that time and again, and there isn't any very good explanation.

CONDELL: Well, I think, too, of course, we've had so many emigrants, you see, to the United States, that here, at last, we felt was an establishment of Ireland, you know, out there. And we feel, in Ireland, that we have contributed in no small measure to the building up in the United States, you know. And here visually.

O'CONNOR: Finally you get proof of it.

CONDELL: You get proof of it, you know. I must say that the wealth, or anything like that, of the Kennedy family, that has never entered into the picture here. He was one of us, and that was it. And I think that, certainly, the Catholics, especially, appreciated it. And it was very good it happened when it did, it was a very good ecumenical drive, I think, too. Because--I don't know how conscious you are of this ecumenism over there, but we are extremely conscious of it here, down in the south, anyhow. We've had our difficulties in the north, and are still having difficulties.

O'CONNOR: Oh sure, sure.

CONDELL: Down here, we're one large family. Well, I mean, my own election was proof of that. I'm a good Protestant, I hope, and here I was elected as mayor of...

O'CONNOR: That's as ecumenical as you can get.

CONDELL: It is 99, and I think it's about 99.6 Roman Catholic city, isn't it? Which is something, really, that I can never get over. I'm so appreciative of it for

our minority, but then there never has been any difference here: we're one large family.

O'CONNOR: That's unusual.

[-17-]

CONDELL: Yes. Then once you cross the border, of course, you get this horrible, horrible.... I don't want to tell you that; I think it's politics more than religion really, because....

O'CONNOR: The two often get confused.

CONDELL: Yes, the two, yes. This is so sad.

O'CONNOR: Well, okay, I don't think we need to take up any more of your time. I think you're probably anxious to get off on your vacation.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[-18-]

Frances Condell Oral History Transcript
Name Index

A

Aiken, Frank, 6, 7

D

De Valera, Eamon, 12, 15

De Valera, Sinéad, 15

F

Frost, Robert, 15

K

Kennedy, Edward Moore, 13

Kennedy, Jacqueline Bouvier, 4, 8, 11, 13, 14

Kennedy, John F., 1, 2, 4, 5, 7, 10, 11, 12, 14, 16

Kennedy, John F., Jr., 13

Kennedy, Joseph P., 13

Kennedy, Robert F., 13, 14

Kennedy, Rose Fitzgerald,

Kiernan, Thomas J., 1

M

McCann, Hugh, 6, 7

Minihan, Andrew, 16

Mitchell, Charles, 10

O

O'Malley, Donogh, 7

P

Powers, David F., 6

S

Salinger, Pierre E.G., 3

Shannon (dog), 8, 9