Charles M. Love, Jr. Oral History Interview—7/14/1964

Administrative Information

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**Biographical Note**
Love, a delegate to the Democratic Convention in 1956 and then to the Democratic Convention again in 1960, discusses his influence in gaining support for JFK in pre-primary activities, the 1960 Democratic primary in West Virginia, and the New Frontier programs Kennedy passed after his inauguration as president, among other issues.

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Oral History Interview

with

Charles M. Love, Jr.

July 14, 1964
Charleston, West Virginia

By William L. Young

For the John F. Kennedy Library

YOUNG: This interview is being recorded in the Daniel Boone Hotel, Charleston, West Virginia, July 14, 1964, with Charles M. Love, Jr. Mr. Love was a delegate to the Democratic Convention in 1956 and then to the Democratic Convention again in 1960.

Mr. Love, would you tell me how you first became interested in the political career of Senator Kennedy [John F. Kennedy]?

LOVE: Mr. Young, my first knowledge of John F. Kennedy came at the 1956 Democratic Convention in Chicago. I was a delegate-at-large from West Virginia. We heard, as all delegates heard, a recitative which accompanied a film presentation on the accomplishments of the Democratic Party on the first night, I believe, of the Chicago Convention and the recitative or lecture that went with the film was done by the then Senator Kennedy. He was magnetic in this presentation and attracted much attention—so much, in fact, that he would have been nominated for vice president to run with Governor Stevenson [Adlai E. Stevenson] except that some of the older heads at the convention stopped it because they did not think it was in Senator Kennedy’s interest or in the party’s interest for him to be nominated for vice president at that time which, of course, was exactly correct. Nevertheless, some of the West Virginia delegates, including me, liked Senator Kennedy and we never changed. For one reason, we did not know and had not been requested to change by anybody in whom we had any interest or reason to follow. Now—
after becoming acquainted with Senator Kennedy—and we met him at that convention in 1956—I did not hear much about Senator Kennedy until late in ‘58 or early in ‘59 when Honorable Robert P. McDonough of Parkersburg, West Virginia, another delegate from West Virginia and later State Democratic Chairman, came to see me and asked me if I was still interested in Senator Kennedy, and I told him that I was. He asked me if I would join him in an effort to present for consideration by prominent Democrats of the state the cause of Senator Kennedy as a presidential candidate, and I told him that I would with the reservation that I was not making any commitment myself

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and that I would not ask the persons who attended a luncheon I was to give make any commitment and I would say so when I invited them but that we wanted to present Senator Kennedy and have him considered. With that understanding, I gave a luncheon for Senator Kennedy which, I believe, was the first meeting held in West Virginia to further Senator Kennedy as a presidential candidate, and I can give you the date of that luncheon, I think…

YOUNG: Could you say a word about the way in which the guests at the luncheon were selected—whom did you choose?

LOVE: This luncheon was held on April 25, 1959 at the Daniel Boone Hotel. I made up the list from prominent Charleston and state people—they were not all Charleston people.

YOUNG: That was 1959?

LOVE: That was April 25, 1959—I have the list—would you like to know who was there?

YOUNG: Well—if you would give a—select at random selection—yes—of the kind of people who were invited.

LOVE: All right—A. B. Koontz [Arthur B. Koontz], former National Committeeman—he was National Committeeman for 20 years; H. D. Battle—he was a prominent Charleston lawyer and president of WCHS, that’s the local radio and television station, and he’s a brother, by the way, of Governor John Battle [John Stewart Battle] of Virginia and Bill Battle [William C. Battle] who is at present in the State Department—I’ve forgotten what country he’s ambassador to; R.C. Andrews, who was secretary of West Virginia Coal Association, former State Banking Commissioner, former sheriff of Kanawha County, former candidate for governor; Harry Hoffman [Harry G. Hoffman], who was editor of the Charleston Gazette, the leading West Virginia newspaper; and W. E. Chilton—no, Ned [Ned Chilton] did not come—he was out of town; Charles R. MacElwee, who was president of the Young Democrats of the state or of Kanawha County; Paul Werhle, county clerk of Kanawha County—both of these men are very prominent in politics; Sam L. MacCorkle, who is presently assessor of Kanawha County, West Virginia and probably was at that time—I don’t remember; Senator J. Horner Davis, a state senator;
Edward Hiserman [Edward W. Hiserman], who was the Charleston City Democratic Campaign Chairman; and Kanawha County Democratic chairman, Luther Carson [Luther H. Carson]; Ivor Boiarsky [Ivor F. Boiarsky], member of the House—altogether 25 or 30 people of that caliber.

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YOUNG: Was Senator Kennedy himself present for this luncheon?

LOVE: No, he was not. This luncheon was attended by a team of Senator Kennedy’s supporters, including Ted Sorensen [Theodore C. Sorensen] and Wallace and Governor Daniel of Rhode Island—former Governor Daniel of Rhode Island, and one or two others whose names I can get for you.

YOUNG: Well, what was the general reaction of that group to the possibility of Senator Kennedy entering the West Virginia primary?

LOVE: It was good. That meeting was largely exploratory but the idea was well received. You see, the situation was then that while West Virginia was Democratic, by and large, it had been very badly hurt by the election of General Eisenhower [Dwight D. Eisenhower] on his popularity as a national hero and also we had a Republican governor, as you may remember, so we wanted somebody who could win and somebody of whom we could be proud and go all out for as president. It was presented in that light and it began to take right away. Then we had other meetings later. It’s a little hard to get this in perspective since it was so many years ago, but the thing, I believe, that while I was tremendously attracted to Senator Kennedy—the thing I believe that actually sold me and sold many others somewhat similarly situated was the impending threat of the election of Richard Nixon [Richard M. Nixon] as president, which scared us, not only as Democrats but as citizens, and I think we could have been—in order to avoid that—induced to support almost anybody because we had some experience with Mr. Nixon here, as you may remember. It was in Wheeling, West Virginia, that General Eisenhower took him in his arms and said, “my son, my son,” and forgave him and so forth, which I think is a perfectly splendid thing, but I don’t want that kind of people handling my money or my government. And a great many people felt that way about it, and so we began to present Senator Kennedy as the man and the only man on the horizon at the time who could defeat Mr. Nixon, whom the Republicans were saddled with and could not get away from. It was already obvious that the then President Eisenhower was going to have Mr. Nixon nominated and so we knew in 1959 and even late in 1958 that we were either going to have Mr. Nixon or somebody that could beat him—and the only man on the horizon at that time was Senator Kennedy, and Senator Kennedy was sold that way to a great many people who were not sold on him at first but they were convinced

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that he was the best bet—the best chance we had to put a high-class man in the White House. Now, that is the way that Senator Kennedy was presented. Then, of course, when he began to come here—his tremendous vitality and sincerity immediately took hold. One of the things that worried us, of course, was his religion. West Virginia is a Protestant state—I think the percentage of Catholics in West Virginia is—I don’t know—5% or less.

YOUNG: Five percent, I believe.

LOVE: Now…

YOUNG: May I interrupt, Mr. Love, with a couple of questions?

LOVE: Yes.

YOUNG: Was there any feeling among the old Stevenson people that Stevenson perhaps did deserve a third try or was the feeling that, “We’ve been through this twice and it should be another candidate completely.”?

LOVE: Yes—a great many of them did—and I have some letters here from Stevenson people. And, of course, I had supported Governor Stevenson in the ’56 convention and even before that and am a great admirer of Governor Stevenson. I don’t know anybody in public life today that I think more of than I do Governor Stevenson, and I want to say frankly that if I thought we could have elected Governor Stevenson in 1960, I might not have been for Senator Kennedy. I think Governor Stevenson is a man of tremendous ability and experience and—oh, I just don’t know anything I could say that I think would do justice to Governor Stevenson, and I think that he was defeated by a popular hero without any regard for the qualifications of the men involved. It always has been shocking to me but it taught me that we had to have a man who commanded the— I don’t mean commanded—who had the color and the vitality and could project it by speeches and radio and television and so forth, or we were going to be saddled with another man without too much ability in the person of Mr. Nixon. I shouldn’t talk about Mr. Nixon that way because he’s all right but he is not my idea of a man of presidential caliber. But anyway that was the way we did it.

YOUNG: May I ask a second question now? Was there any thought in 1960 of possible Kennedy policies or were you, as you have indicated, thinking just along the lines of availability?

LOVE: At that time I was, frankly, thinking more about somebody who was decent and honorable and high-class and also had the color to carry the general election.

YOUNG: Then you did not discuss in detail the Senator’s voting record or anything like that at that time?
LOVE: At that time only insofar as necessary to protect and defend him, and that takes a little doing, as you know, but that was all. Mostly the attacks we had on us at that time were directed at the Senator’s religion. Now—in order to set the record straight, I want you to know that I am a Presbyterian elder, I’m the son of a Presbyterian elder, I’m the grandson of a Presbyterian elder—I have a brother who is a Presbyterian elder and more, so, as you might expect, I know a little about the church. As a matter of fact, I’m an elder and trustee of what I believe to be the largest church in West Virginia—the First Presbyterian Church of Charleston. It has 3,500 or 3,600 members and as far as I know is the largest church in the state. I am very much interested in the Church—I was a Sunday School teacher, a Sunday School superintendent for years—I studied religion in college—I still study it. I enjoy it and I think that I know about as much as a hardworking layman can pick up without special study about it. I also know something about the Catholic Church—I was raised in Huntington, a half-block from the Catholic Church, and while I never went to that church—I mean, I wasn’t a member of it, I was thrown constantly with the members of that church, and I remember my mother saying, when people complained about Catholics as they did more frequently in the old days…. Mother said—yes—she could see a difference between Catholics and Protestants, and the difference was that Catholics were more faithful in attending church—we lived just about a half a block from the Catholic Church—well, that’s about the way I felt about that—I knew that it would cost us a few votes. I realized also that Senator Kennedy had the personality and the background, the education and the learning to take care of himself, and also he was blessed with the color and attractiveness which a man must have to campaign over a large territory in a short space of time.

YOUNG: Well, did you ever experience any personal attacks or anonymous mail from anti-Catholics because of your support of the Senator?

LOVE: I really did. Do you want to see some? I have many in this file. They weren’t all anonymous—yes, I had lot of anonymous attacks but I also had letters that were signed by people—people didn’t make any bones about signing them and sending them to you.

YOUNG: Well, while you’re checking your file, could I ask you this question—did you have anonymous phone calls?

LOVE: Yes.

YOUNG: People just hang up—call and…

LOVE: Yes. Most of them were people apparently without much education or learning—they’d just call you up, curse you out—call you a—oh, anything—no use repeating the vile names some of them called me—
YOUNG: Did you get very many during the course of the campaign?

LOVE: Oh, yes—many of them, many of them. I have some letters that were signed…

YOUNG: Mr. Love, would you please either read an excerpt from one or two letters or summarize the general nature of the anti-Catholic attacks which came to your attention at least?

LOVE: Well, this attack came from people all over the state—I think from more or less uneducated people generally, and then a great deal of literature was mailed into West Virginia from out of the state. I had anonymous telephone calls and also people would accost me on the street and talk to me about it.

One of the letters that I received has this: “Your advocacy of the Kennedy cause indicates clearly that you know little indeed of the dark history of the Roman Church per se, brilliant lawyer though you may be. Why any good Protestant would or could advocate the cause of any Catholic for president of this great and predominantly Protestant nation, is, I confess, past my ken.” Now, I’m still quoting: “I would request that you explain to me why you would trust any Catholic after knowing that this young weakling rescinded his acceptance to be present and speak at the dedicatory ceremony of the Philadelphia chapel on orders of the Roman Catholic bishop. Might he not as president be equally dominated by the Church masters, even though world-shaking decisions were to be made. Wake up, Mr. Love, while there is yet time and vote for anybody but Kennedy,”—and so forth.

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YOUNG: Did you help the Kennedy forces in any way make their evaluation leading to their decision to enter the West Virginia primary then?

LOVE: Yes, I was consulted by all of them, including Senator Kennedy himself, and I’m sorry to say that I gave Senator Kennedy the wrong advice, and I’m glad to say that he was smart enough not to take it. In West Virginia the delegates are elected as individuals. They are not committed, they are not bound, and if a candidate runs and receives a majority vote, it does not bind any delegate to vote for him—it’s simply a popularity contest—and when Senator Kennedy consulted me about this, I advised him that I did not see what possible good he could get out of it because if he lost, he would be hurt and if he won, he won nothing except a popularity contest. Well, Senator Kennedy talked to me about this at some length and asked me if I thought he could win, and I told him that I thought he could—that I felt fairly confident about it at that stage but that I didn’t see why he would take the chance. Of course, I did not know and he did not tell me his grand strategy or his overall plan that this was to be a demonstration that he could carry a Protestant state. Of course, he was right about it—I’m sorry I gave him the wrong advice.

YOUNG: Mr. Love, would you describe any other pre-primary activity that you were
engaged in before Senator Kennedy actually filed in West Virginia?

LOVE: Well, we were continually doing all the things that you would naturally do in this kind of a situation. We were having meetings and we were getting out literature. Late in 1959 we got up a letter which went out over my signature as chairman—on a letterhead of West Virginians for Kennedy—which gave myself as chairman and Robert P. McDonough as secretary, Ralph E. Pryor, now Judge Pryor, of Wellsburg as a member of the committee, Jack Morton of Webster Springs, Ben B. Stout of Clarksburg, William Bruce Hoff of Parkersburg, Lawrence Tierney of Bluefield, Mrs. Charles G. Peters [Esther Peters] of Charleston, West Virginia. This letter was printed and sent to at least eight or ten thousand prominent Democrats. Now, when I say prominent Democrats in this connection, I mean persons who worked around the polls as well as higher officials. The result was quite pleasing. Of course, we had some vilification from the religious viewpoint but we also received a very good reaction from people who we believed were beginning to think along the lines that we were—that unless somebody better could be found, Senator Kennedy was our best bet and, of course,

the longer it went the more people were enthused and attracted to him by his sincerity and personality and so forth. The slogan on the bottom of that letter was, “For Victory in ’60 Nominate Jack Kennedy,” and that was our plan and slogan. One of the best things I did for Senator Kennedy, in my opinion, was to get other people to work for Senator Kennedy. I am not an awfully good worker myself, but I know who can work and who will work—

YOUNG: Good man to get volunteers…

LOVE: Yes—and among these people were: Mrs. Charles G. Peters, and I interested her—spent some time doing it—with her husband [Charles G. Peters], who is a very prominent lawyer in Charleston, and her son [Charles G. Peters Jr.], who is also a lawyer and who now, by the way, is one of the general officers of the Peace Corps. At that time, they did not know anything about Senator Kennedy as, in fact, most people in West Virginia didn’t. Mr. Peters had refused to attend the original luncheon that I gave for Senator Kennedy, and so it took a little selling, but Mrs. Peters became interested and she became an indefatigable worker and she interested other people. It was with the help of people like this that Senator Kennedy was nominated.

Also, of course, after the filing date and we knew that the contest was to be between Senator Humphrey [Hubert H. Humphrey] and Senator Kennedy—there was no question then but that our strategy had been right because Senator Humphrey being the only opposition was not to be compared in stature at that time with Senator Kennedy, either in learning or background and attractiveness, and so forth, and I say this with all due respect to Senator Humphrey whom, as you know, is pretty well self-educated although he was a druggist, went to school somewhere out West and has done very well, and I respect and honor him for it. But in competition with Senator Kennedy, he did not make the attractive vote-getting appeal that Senator Kennedy did. Of course, Senator Kennedy had a great many
things in his favor. One of the things that he had in his favor—one of the things that I did for Senator Kennedy was—and I probably shouldn’t say it—I gave to him a position in West Virginia—I am a West Virginian by birth and inheritance. I formerly lived on a farm which my family received for services in the Revolutionary War—what I’m trying to say is that we’ve been in West Virginia ever since and long before it was West Virginia. We’re Protestants. I’m a corporation lawyer—my political enemies like to say that about me and about my law firm, Dayton, Campbell & Love, but, of course, the truth

of the matter is that any lawyer of any consequence must represent corporations because all business is done by corporations anymore, and if you’re going to be a lawyer and a business lawyer, you have to represent the corporations, and I’m glad to say I did—I represent some of the outstanding corporations—I’m counsel in this state for the United States Steel Corporation, for Carnegie Natural Gas Company; I’m vice president and general counsel of Lewis Hubbard Corporation, and many others. My partner, H. V. Campbell, esquire, is vice president and general counsel of the Elk Refining Company. We represent people of that class generally. While our principal business is practicing corporation law, nobody is too small for us to represent who needs help but, of course, the major part of our business is with banks and corporations. So with that background and the historical background of which I’ve given you just a little, I had a standing in West Virginia which, together with my friends that I interested in Senator Kennedy and, frankly, I could not interest all of them in Senator Kennedy but I could and did interest many of them, and they gave him a standing when he entered West Virginia, which he could not have gotten if he had not had those people endorsing his candidacy.

For instance, the luncheon that we had—and by the way, that was held in this hotel that we’re now sitting in—the Daniel Boone Hotel—the people who were there were people of some standing in the business and social and political world. I remember one of the team which came here from Rhode Island said to me, “You know, Mr. Love, this has been a delightful day. I’m sorry that we have to leave. It is different from the political gatherings in my state.” I said, “Oh, in what manner?” He said, “Well, there we don’t have this type of people interested in politics.” And I think he was absolutely sincere. I don’t think he was trying to flatter me.

YOUNG: You mentioned that some of your friends you could not interest—was this simply a personal matter or did religion enter into any of those?

LOVE: I don’t know—I don’t know. And there’s no way to tell. I had the idea all the way through, Mr. Young, that a great many people who said that Senator Kennedy was too young to be president really meant that they were not going to be for a Catholic because some of them in particular would never have been for Senator Humphrey because of his—oh, some of his ideas in West Virginia—almost socialistic—you see,
West Virginia is a poor but proud place, and while the labor unions have come to the fore here in the last twenty years and have taken charge of a great deal of the politics in West Virginia, actually there are also many other segments of our population. In fact, a great majority of our population is not connected with any union or any other particular organization. The mineworkers, for instance, have now by their own claim less than 40,000 members in West Virginia which, of course, is not too big a segment. The AFL/CIO, of course, has a much larger membership and—I do not mean to be condemning them but many of them, by the way, these labor unions were against Senator Kennedy and were for Hubert Humphrey. Many were for Senator Kennedy—they were pretty well split up over it. After the Senator’s nomination, they were mostly all for him with some exceptions.

YOUNG: Mr. Love, would you analyze the primary for me this way—what were the differences between the types of West Virginians—the kinds of West Virginians that supported Senator Kennedy as opposed to those that were supporting Senator Humphrey?

LOVE: Well, Senator Humphrey had more labor support originally than Senator Kennedy did. Senator Humphrey did not make the appeal to youth which Senator Kennedy did, nor to the intellectual and semi-intellectual classes. Senator Kennedy, as you know, was a man of tremendous erudition, which was perfectly obvious, and the greater learning that his listener had, the more he could enjoy what Senator Kennedy said because he could appreciate more of the references, and the nuances and innuendoes of the things which he said. Senator Kennedy was also fortunate in this—that he had only one candidate against him in the person of Senator Humphrey whereas he might have had several and he might have had some stronger opposition. A great many people in West Virginia did not want to see Senator Kennedy nominated for president but neither did they want to see Senator Humphrey nominated for president, and between the two, the conservative people particularly took Senator Kennedy, and I think this helped him a great deal. If Senator Johnson [Lyndon B. Johnson] had entered the primary, I think he would have taken many votes from Senator Kennedy which Senator Humphrey could not get because Senator Humphrey’s image in West Virginia at that time was too liberal.

YOUNG: Well, how much of the Humphrey support could you suggest was simply a “Stop Kennedy” support—that they were not really for Humphrey either but they wanted to keep Senator Kennedy from winning?

LOVE: I think a great deal of it was—all of it—I would say with the exception of his labor organization support and a few other segments but that, you see, was a smaller portion of the electorate than the people who were afraid of Senator Humphrey. Even a great many of the labor people were afraid of Senator Humphrey at that time. I think they are a little more comfortable about him now, but at that time he was considered much more radical than he is now and there was a great deal of fear of it.
YOUNG: Well, let’s move on into the primary now if that’s all right with you. What contacts did you have with Senator Kennedy during the primary—did you continue to deal with him on a personal—in a personal relationship?

LOVE: Yes, I did, I’m very happy to say, and I had the very highest regard for him. Of course, he was active all over the United States at that time and was only in here occasionally. His brothers, Robert [Robert F. Kennedy] and Ted [Edward M. Kennedy], were here almost continually for a week or two before the primary and then they were in here a substantial portion of the time even before that. When they were not directly campaigning in the West, Robert and Ted were here and were very effective. They had their wives with them and they knew how to greet people, how to meet people, how to make people like them and they just seemed to like West Virginia, and West Virginia people liked them. It was just a very happy circumstance. Now, it may be, and probably is, that these Kennedy boys were attractive to other people as well as to West Virginians, but they were attractive here.

YOUNG: Mr. Love, you bring up an interesting point that I think was mentioned during the campaign. Do you feel that the Kennedy Harvard accent and the Kennedy Easternness was an asset or a liability?

LOVE: I think it was an asset—I think that the people, in considering the office of president, want somebody in that office that they can be proud of. They may like—oh, Uncle John for state senator or constable but everybody wants to be proud of his president and he wants to have confidence in him, and the fact that a man could use the very best English and could talk about history and science and literature as easily and as correctly as Senator Kennedy could, I think was a great asset. Of course, there were a few people who tried to make fun of him, but they were people who were against him anyway. I think that Senator Kennedy helped the American people, and I think he helped the average American boy and girl of this generation by teaching them how to speak better than they did before.

LOVE: Mr. Love, would you also then evaluate the effectiveness of Franklin D. Roosevelt, Jr.’s appearance in West Virginia during the primary?

LOVE: I am confident that they helped Senator Kennedy. Franklin D. Roosevelt was almost a magic name in West Virginia he was here many times and, of course, his magic was just as effective here as it was everywhere else, and West Virginia people are fiercely and intensely loyal and so forth, and once they take you, they never let you go—and it’s just about as bad the other way—if they don’t like you, they never forgive you. But, anyway, they loved Franklin D. Roosevelt and his son made a great impression here. Also, Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt [Eleanor R. Roosevelt] came here, and while there were people here who thought she would probably hurt Senator Kennedy, she did come
here and she did make speeches for Senator Kennedy. That was not in the primary, of course, but in the general election—she addressed an overflow audience here in Charleston.

YOUNG: What would be your evaluation of her contribution to the victory?

LOVE: After the nomination—of course, Mrs. Roosevelt was very much opposed to Senator Kennedy until after he was nominated. As a matter of fact, I thought her entrance at the National Convention in Los Angeles while he was speaking was one of the rudest things I had ever seen done. But after he was nominated, she lined up and she helped. There are a lot of people who liked Mrs. Roosevelt and a lot of people don’t—I never admired Mrs. Roosevelt too much—I thought that President Roosevelt carried a load with her—but after I got to know her, I changed. She’s almost—her personality is such that she was almost an irresistible person.

YOUNG: Well, you’ve indicated the appearance of the Roosevelts in the primary and general election, Kennedy’s charm, erudition, learning, the Kennedy organization. Are there any other factors that you could list that you think contributed to the primary victory other than the ones you have listed so far?

LOVE: Yes—one I should mention. Not only the West Virginians who were organized here like Mr. McDonough, Mrs. Peters, Mr. Pryor—now Judge Pryor—and all those people, but the Kennedys sent in a team from—mostly from Massachusetts—these people were just natural workers and they knew politics and they were here to win. I’d like to comment on two parts of this.

One thing was: I was sitting in my office in the Security Building and the receptionist said, “There’s a Mr. Peabody [Endicott Peabody] here to see you.” Well, this was before the primary and I said, “Well, send him in.” So this very attractive young man came in—as you may suspect, he’s now the governor of Massachusetts. At that time, he was the attorney general of Massachusetts. And he said, “Mr. Love, I was asked by Bobby to come here and help you organize the 14th Ward.” Now, they had asked me to participate in the organization of the 14th Ward—that’s the ward I live in. But frankly it was my intention to leave the organization of the 14th Ward to the people who did that kind of work which I did not particularly like to do. But Mr. Peabody came down from Massachusetts to help in that. And I thought—well, if Mr. Peabody came down from Boston to do that kind of ward and precinct work, the least I can do is help him—and I did. I took the voters’ list and I picked out the people and we got an outstanding group of people, and that’s just the way they did everywhere. Now, Governor Peabody is not the only one on that team—he was one of dozens.

Now, I want to say something else. A great many people say that Senator Kennedy came in here and bought West Virginia. That is not true. Now, Senator Kennedy did not come in here as a poor boy with his shoes half-soled and the seat of his pants out. He did have money to send his people in here and they came in here and he came in by airplane and
so forth himself. He did spend money on advertising of all kinds and on meetings of all kinds, and I have no doubt made contributions to committees here and there, but Senator Kennedy did not buy West Virginia and, furthermore, you cannot buy West Virginia.

YOUNG: This is the end of Reel No. 1 with Mr. Love. Reel No. 2 will follow. [Interrupted] This is the second reel of an interview with Mr. Charles M. Love on July 14, 1964.

Mr. Love, as the last reel ended, you were talking about the statement and the charge that was made that Senator Kennedy bought West Virginia. Would you continue with that subject, please?

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LOVE: All I was going to say was this—that you cannot buy West Virginia, in my opinion. There are precincts which are for sale in certain counties and maybe even some counties are for sale—but in order to do this, you first have to buy the organization, or in some other manner control it because it doesn’t make any difference whether you have a billion dollars or a hundred dollars—if you don’t have anybody to spend it who knows how to spend it and where to put it and when to put it, you can’t do anything with it. Now—in a West Virginia primary, which I must confess is the most crooked of all elections held in West Virginia—I probably should say more crooked because there are only two kinds of elections held in West Virginia, primaries and general elections—but the primaries are crooked in West Virginia in many instances and corrupt, but it is not by money—it is by conniving and conspiracy between the officials in the precincts, or maybe at even a higher level, in the county, but it must include the officials in the precincts and this is particularly true where you have voting machines such as we do in the big counties in southern West Virginia because unless the officials conspire and work the machines themselves, nobody knows whether they are getting their money’s worth in an attempt to purchase votes. Of course, that happens—but it did not happen with Senator Kennedy. Senator Kennedy sold himself to the people. Actually, the precinct workers in many instances were more interested in who was going to be nominated for governor and who was going to be nominated for the school board and who was going to be nominated for judge and sheriff than they were in who was going to be nominated for president. And the fact that Senator Kennedy had a majority of the delegates to the convention was not the result of corruption but the result of having the people for him who could, on their own account, elect themselves as delegates to the convention. This is saying a little too much perhaps for myself, but look and see who the delegates were. They were largely reputable, high-class people and while Senator Kennedy won in the primary, what got him the nomination was the fact that the people who were elected as delegates were for him. Now, I could go on and talk about the use of money in politics all afternoon, but I think that probably explains the situation.

YOUNG: Mr. Love, let me ask one more question about money in politics. Just assuming that Kennedy-Humphrey forces had been evenly matched
financially and in terms of organization, do you still believe that the victory for Kennedy would have been the same?

LOVE: Oh, yes!

YOUNG: Senator Kennedy would have won anyhow?

LOVE: I don’t think that the money had any effect on the primary whatsoever. If anything—no, no—the majority which Senator Kennedy had is a demonstration of that and where it came from—I mean the counties and the precincts in the counties where it came from. I don’t believe that Senator Humphrey with twice as much money could have defeated Senator Kennedy, and I think Senator Kennedy could have defeated Senator Humphrey in that primary if he had not had any money except that which was raised locally, which was very small.

YOUNG: The victory for Senator Kennedy then was not a victory of ideologies, political philosophies necessarily but more a personal victory of the personality—is that putting it too strongly?

LOVE: I think it is—I think it was a lot of personality, largely due to personality—but also Senator Kennedy sold himself to the people. However, first, he sold himself to the leaders or to a substantial block of the leaders in West Virginia.

A lot of the other leaders were not for either him or Senator Johnson—or Senator Humphrey—and they stayed out of it, which helped Senator Kennedy because Senator Kennedy had a devoted band—before we got through, we had a really working organization which Senator Kennedy inspired with his ideology. He was never wrong, in my opinion, about the position he took on public matters prior to that primary. Nobody ever caught him. I, at times, wished when I was with him when he was campaigning that I was a little closer to him when a question would come up, because I pride myself that I know about state history and state politics, but he answered and I was always relieved—he knew the answers. He knew that portion of state history which applied to national politics, and he was always right about it.

YOUNG: In other words, the Senator was well prepared for each individual audience that he spoke to?

LOVE: Yes, he was—he was.

YOUNG: Some people have felt that perhaps Senator Humphrey had more support than was publicly apparent and that Senator Kennedy was accused perhaps of overspending and yet this accusation might be true to some degree in the Humphrey campaign. Could you comment on that?
LOVE: I don’t know anything particular about that. Now, it is true that Senator Kennedy had a great deal of paid advertising—paid support—but so did Senator Humphrey, not as much, that is true. Senator Kennedy’s advertising was greater, more extensive, and it was better done too, in better taste, and you see, Senator Kennedy—one place his money did help him, I am sure, is in his professional help. You see, he had Ted Sorensen and Larry O’Brien [Lawrence F. O’Brien] and the other members of that team, and they were just better than the assistants that Senator Humphrey had. Senator Kennedy also had the devoted, almost fanatical support of Robert P. McDonough, of Parkersburg. Mr. McDonough was smart, courageous, energetic and informed.

YOUNG: Mr. Love, I think you’ve answered this question already but because we would like to move on to another area, I’ll ask it again just for the record. You think then that the Democratic Party—both Humphrey and Kennedy people—closed ranks for the general election in West Virginia?

LOVE: Yes, I do. They closed ranks and worked together. Now, there were a few people who never forgave Senator Kennedy for being a Catholic and there are a few people who contended he was too young, and there were a few people that had other objections to him—but, by and large, the party closed ranks.

YOUNG: Did you notice any reluctance on the part of state or local candidates to be associated with Kennedy in the general election? Were they still afraid that some of the anti-Catholicism might rub off on local or state candidates?—or by that time had the religious issue been settled?

LOVE: I’m sorry I can’t answer that—I can tell you this—that before the primary, and I noticed this just a minute ago in going through my list of people here who were at the original luncheon—practically all of the public officials declined and they would have nothing to do with Senator Kennedy then. I say “practically all”…

YOUNG: You mean that a mayor would refuse to be present—or something like that?

LOVE: Yes—yes, that’s right—as a matter of fact, he did here, and my good friend, the mayor of South Charleston, even was busy—he didn’t come. Well, and some of them did—the county clerk who is more prominent than either one of them in politics, was here; the assessor was here; the county chairman was here; the sheriff was here; but a lot of them wouldn’t come and when they had another meeting a few days later in Parkersburg and invited the state officials there for the second time—by the way, I invited most of the state officials too—they didn’t come. But that was
before the primary. After the primary, as I said, the ranks pretty well closed and while some of them were still a little afraid, the ranks closed and we had a pretty solid appeal for a straight ticket. We had a very good ticket with a few bad exceptions.

YOUNG: Okay—well, let’s turn then to the Kennedy years: Which of the Kennedy policies after the Inauguration of the President do you think West Virginians found most hope in and approved of to the greatest degree?—Any of the Kennedy programs which especially helped West Virginia, such as the North-South Highway, the Food Stamp Plan, the—calling attention, at least, to the existence of—Appalachian conditions—poverty—could you comment on these things in general as a West Virginian who observed your own home state after the election?

LOVE: Well, I would say that the people of West Virginia after—some of them gave him so much help in the primary, took the Kennedys largely to heart here, at least in the southern half of the State, and they almost felt as if President Kennedy was one of their own and they appreciated all that he did and was trying to do for them. Now, of course, different people had different ideas about what was the best thing he did for them. For instance, I presume that if you were a hungry out-of-work miner in Mingo or MacDowell County, you probably would appreciate the Food Stamp Plan more than you would the North-South Highway—but I think both those things were appreciated and probably the North-South Highway more than anything else I can now think of off-hand. I always regretted, and some other West Virginians have said the same thing to me, that Senator Kennedy never appointed a West Virginian to any national office. I think he intended to…

YOUNG: You mean Cabinet level or….

LOVE: Anything of more than state-wide importance. I think Mrs. Peters’ position on the Battle Monument Commission is probably the most outstanding appointment he made from West Virginia. I don’t know why it happened—I think perhaps

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it was that the West Virginians did not go after jobs—a good many of them of the higher echelon didn’t—weren’t the kind of people who would go asking and seeking for jobs and, as a consequence, while he gave out a lot of little appointments in West Virginia, actually nothing of more than state-wide importance now comes to my mind.

YOUNG: What reaction did you observe in West Virginia to the Kennedy medical program—the proposed medical program?

LOVE: I think it was well received in West Virginia except for the doctors. The state medical association is very much opposed to it and I think—and I tell them
this, so I have no hesitation to say it on the tape—that is because they don’t understand it. Doctors are a great group of people in their own field, but when you get outside of the field it’s something else. For instance, just within the last week the Senate, at least, has put doctors under Social Security. They’ve always fought Social Security, you know, for themselves—for everybody but themselves particularly, and they refuse to take it. So, the Congress left them out—well, now some of them have begun to read the current literature and the statements and actuarial accounts of it and they are now going in—but the same thing is true of Medicare—if you could get them to understand what Medicare is, I’m confident that they would change their view. Except for the doctors, I would say that the Medicare plan was well received here, very popular, and the people of West Virginia are for it—a great majority of them.

YOUNG: Would you comment on the Kennedy civil rights program in West Virginia?

LOVE: Senator Kennedy never really had a civil rights program in West Virginia that I know of. West Virginia has always been right on civil rights. We integrated our schools before Senator Kennedy was elected president and while we have had sporadic instances of trouble over integration, it amounts to practically nothing. We don’t have any civil rights problem—at least, in the part of West Virginia with which I am familiar, and that is the southern part where there are more colored people than anywhere else.

YOUNG: Mr. Love, did you have any further personal contacts with President Kennedy after his inauguration as president?

LOVE: After his inauguration as president, I never saw him, never talked to him, was never in the White House. I wrote him a letter or two and he answered, but I never saw the President after he was elected except one time, and he didn’t see me then—that was when he came to West Virginia and spoke in a rainstorm here at the celebration of our birthday—at the Capitol—and I saw him about 150 feet away. Other than that, I did not see him after he was elected, nor did I see Bobby, or Teddy, or any of them—I never saw any of them personally after the election of President Kennedy.

YOUNG: Mr. Love, would you comment once more just on the primary and give me any reactions you may have with respect to the role of the Catholic Church hierarchy in West Virginia in the 1960 primary?

LOVE: I don’t know anything that the Catholic Church or the Catholic hierarchy had to do with the primary, but I did know Bishop McDonnell [Thomas John McDonnell] of Wheeling, who had one of the greatest minds that it was ever my pleasure to come in contact with—he served with me on the West Virginia Crime and Delinquency Council, of which I was chairman, and he was a man of extraordinary and outstanding ability, and I am sure that if Senator Kennedy had needed any advice about West
Virginia, which he could not get from some of us, that Bishop McDonnell could have advised him. I don’t know of anything that the Roman Catholic Church did in the primary.

YOUNG: Mr. Love, as we finish our discussion of the Kennedy primary and general election in West Virginia, would you summarize both the positive and the negative results of the Kennedy era as you see them from the vantage point of four years later?

LOVE: That is most difficult to do because there are both good and bad results. The election of Senator Kennedy united, in my opinion, the Democratic Party and had quite a good effect in that it clarified the thinking of many people on the place of the Church in apposition to the state and civil rights, and Senator Kennedy had a way of setting historical facts in proper perspective and all those good things he did. Also, he attracted to politics many of the younger people in West Virginia which, in my opinion, is good. We must have young people and we must have better people and higher class people—

the kind of people that Senator Kennedy was—in politics. The things that he did, such as we’ve already mentioned—the Food Stamp plan, the road plan, the Appalachian plan, all of those things helped West Virginia. And, I think if he had lived, all of these things would have culminated in quite a benefit for West Virginia. However, inasmuch as the Kennedy era ended by “a punk with a mail-order rifle” when it did, I think that many things were done that probably were not good for West Virginia.

One thing which was not was the constant reference and painting of West Virginia as a depressed area in which people were not able to take care of themselves. In my opinion, this is not a true picture of West Virginia. I don’t know anybody in West Virginia who cannot get along if he wants to—he may have to change his home, he may have to go to a different county, he may have to change his occupation, but all of us have to do those things, and that is true in other states as well. And I think that the fact—not the fact, but the constant repetition and reference to West Virginia as being depressed and unable to care for itself has hurt it—not only it’s image in the public mind generally, but it also hurt some of our people who seem to think that it is easier to make a living by wearing a poor mouth than it is by working. West Virginians are often poor, but they are mostly proud people and the image of a miner in the ‘30s and ‘40s, with respect to age, who will not change his occupation but would rather live on a government subsidy is not to be commended nor condoned, in my opinion. Senator Kennedy did not condone these things, but he did keep talking about what he was going to do and what help West Virginia needed and to this extent—to some extent, this was bad. I think he would have corrected these things if he had lived, and I am absolutely confident that if he had lived, he would have carried West Virginia by a tremendous majority in 1964, because after he was elected president, many of the Democrats who voted against him for improper reasons, such as objection to his religion or something else improper, were remorseful about it and he would have received a tremendous majority and would have swept the entire Democratic ticket into office, if he had lived. Since he did not live, West Virginians will have to look for another leader.
YOUNG: This is the end of an interview—Reel 2 of two reels—with Mr. Charles M. Love, Jr., of Charleston, West Virginia. The interview was made on July 14, 1964 at the Daniel Boone Hotel.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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Charles M. Love, Jr. Oral History Transcript
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