

FNP 1

Interviewee: Bill Mansfield

Interviewer: Southern Oral History Program - Chapel Hill

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[There were two unidentified interviewers which will be referred to as I and I2]

I: This is an interview with Bill Mansfield, Capitol Bureau Chief for the *Miami Herald*, Tallahassee, Florida, May 16, 1974.

M: Well, I got here at the last throws of the Pork Chop Gang. I am sure you are aware of that. I actually came up for two weeks. Supposedly I was the bureau chief of the Palm Beach Bureau and came up for two weeks to cover Palm Beach and Broward. Bob Sherra decided he would quit in the middle of the session and I never got back except to clean out my desk down there. So I was not as attuned as I might have been. The real leader in the Senate at that time was the pork chop gang and the pork chop gang, I have since discovered, was only a Senate organization. They talk about people as being pork choppers but to be technically correct it was only a group in the Senate. It had to be only twenty odd members. I think there were forty-eight in the Senate or forty but you only had to have this much to control everything and there were lots of people attuned with them in the House. But as long as you control the Senate that was all you had to do and they worked as a very close-knit group.

I: Were they known in those days as the pork chop gang?

M: Yes.

I: Who coined that name?

M: Jim Clendenin, a man you ought to talk to, who is the editor of the *Tampa Tribune* now. He coined that phrase. He had worked here.

I: What is his name?

M: Jim Clendenin. He was here at the last one of these meetings but I do not believe I saw his name on this one. I do not know what is wrong with this particular gathering but it looks like most people are sending their second team. Do not quote me on that. I will get in trouble. He coined the term.

I: Is that a locally owned paper, *Tampa*? Or does Richmond own it?

M: Yes, they are a part of the Richmond chain, whatever it is. But he could give you background back past that time. In fact, one of the better things that I could probably do for you is maybe tell you some people you ought to see. Alan Marge, you ought to talk to, and a guy I just ran into in the hall might not be bad on it and that is Harry Friedman. He is the first real government PR guy that ever

came here. He has been here almost as long as Alan and has always been with the Education department and has gone through all of this and has also been interested.

I: But you have really been here during the time of the real change, right?

M: Yes, I think that that is probably true and I guess to get back to where I was going, the real leader in the Senate at that time, the guy everybody told me listen to him and he will give good directions to everybody and you will know what is going on, was Dewey Johnson [President of the State Senate, 1959]. Dewey is here now, you might want to talk to him. He is a court of appeals judge now in the court that sits here. Dewey, unfortunately, both of us obviously at that time, had to learn objectively. He spoke with one of these regime type things and at that time there were four dangled out in the ceiling lights in the Senate and I never understood anything that Dewey was telling anybody to do. But the President of the Senate and the example that I was getting to, I guess of how the pork choppers really work was Nick Conner [James E. "Nick" Conner, State Senator, 1952. Now Nick Conner was from Brooksville in Hernando County, a rural county in central Florida. He decided that he would like to have the next state mental institution there despite the fact that all the studies said you had to have them in urban areas so that they could have visitors and whatnot and this was way in the boondocks. I think the bill went in the Senate with everybody in the Senate as co-sponsors, including those who had served on all those study groups that said this was exactly the wrong thing to do and they went whipping through and they went over to the House where E.C. [E.C. Rowell, Speaker of the State House of Representatives, 1965, 1966], you ought to talk to E.C., E.C. is now lobbying for the truckers but was at that time Speaker and for a couple of sessions after that was chairman of the Rules Committee which here is the powerful committee because you do not get anything through the floor without the rules committee. E.C. is of the old school. It must have been a great time to be a reporter when there were really pork choppers here because, if you came from Brooksville, or E.C. comes from Wildwood, you could tell the reporter exactly what you were doing and how you were nailing all of the urban people. He could report it there as a great investigative reporting job and everybody was happy because nothing would be better, or Nick Conner, or E.C. Rowell on the home council saying we are doing it on the big city boys.

I: E.C., what is his last name?

M: Rowell. You can, probably any day, go up to the rotunda in the House there and ask somebody for E.C. and he will probably be around and he probably would talk to you. I swear I really began to feel like I was old. He called me dad earlier this week and I decided I am going to have to do something about the gray beard. He is not particularly defensive about what the likelihood is. He

could give you the broad outlines of it if he does not want to go into some of the messy details and give you some feel of the Florida people. Anyway a guy over there, one brass freshman representative from Palm Beach got out to say that it was terrible the way he was being railroaded by the Speaker and by the next day he got up and formally apologized because you did this or you did not get anything through. There had already been, by that time, a series of small reapportionments which had made things a little tighter and it was probably really in the next election where we got to the point where really the urban areas began to take control. They did pass it in 1966, the reapportionment, which was not bad. It was thrown out by the courts and they accepted the plan of Dauer [Manning J. Dauer, Distinguished Service Professor of Political Science, 1933-1987] at the University of Florida which, it seemed to me, was not really as good in a lot of respects because of the strange districts in Dauer's plan. As it was it may not have passed but the courts were just tired of playing around with it and they went out and accepted what was there but regardless of whether the courts had done it at that time. But the tide had turned and they had managed to tick off a couple of guys who were traditionally pork choppers and I think regardless, at that point, what happened is we were going into reapportionment. The change really has not been dramatic and it is difficult to say that things had really improved at a time when we seem to be indicting everybody in the state, but things really have improved. At that time we had just a multitude of news and they met kind of scrabble-fashion and rarely had, because you might have a guy on three committees who were meeting at the same time, we rarely could get a quorum of people actually sitting. So they had this proxy system and the chairman of the committee could get proxies. Ralph Turlington [Speaker of the State House of Representatives, 1967,1968; Commissioner of Education, 1974-1986], another guy you ought to talk to who has just been appointed Commissioner of Education, recounts the story of when he once had a bill when he was very young and when he was appointed he beat out twenty-four years of service. He came up and he went before a committee chaired by one of the old Pork Choppers with this bill he thought was very good and there was nobody there but the chairman and he got up and made this passionate plea for the bill and he really thought he had done good and the chairman said that was just very good and you have convinced me and he said, Secretary call the roll and the Secretary called the roll, they got the proxy and he votes no and he votes no and he votes no and it got down to the chairman and he voted yes because Ralph had convinced him.

I: Do you recall what the bill was about?

M: No, but Ralph will and I am sure he would be glad to tell you and he would be full of great stories.

I: What is his name?

M: Ralph Turlington.

I: That is a marvelous story.

M: He was one of the greats, you know. Ralph is kind of an obtuse former economics professor from Gainesville who decided he wanted to get into politics and when he got in back in that era he was involved in all of the fights on the reapportionment and on interposition and on all of this and was kind of famous for some of his stories. You should get him to tell you the story of Brer Rabbit and the Briar Patch which he used to fight in one of the segregation bills. He went and recounted the story and said exactly what the Feds want you to do is to do this so they can bring troops and all of this and he said Brer Rabbit did not want to be thrown in the Briar Patch, but extremely skillful guy at that time.

I: And he is now what?

M: He is now Commissioner of Education. Our [former] Commissioner of Education [Floyd Christian] was indicted on 19 counts.

I: Was he removed on the basis of the indictment?

M: Well, he resigned the day they were to start hearings on that.

[Break in tape]

M: . . . the first Speaker under a really reapportioned legislature that could begin to cope with some of the real urban problems.

I: Was it the guys who ran for the legislature in the reapportionment [who] did it just to attract a lot of this progressive kind of people?

M: I think a really great fortune is [that] there was one election in Dade County where I think there were 300 candidates for the legislature.

I: For one seat?

M: No, for whatever seats they had then and that has changed and I do not remember the exact number. It would be easy to research, but it was just such a vast number that it is really unusual that Dade County came out of that with a very good percentage of good legislators. They got some dogs but they got a number of very good people.

I: Do they now have single-member districts in the legislature?

M: Some but most are in the big counties [and] are multi-member but not

county-wide. I suppose one of the reasons that they probably, at that time, came out with as good a caliber as they did with that many people running, and I philosophically favor single member districts, was that they were running county-wide. There were so many that the papers' endorsements and other endorsements of that type were probably controlling in many cases because you just could not know all those people and fortunately they chose pretty good.

I: Do most newspapers in Florida endorse candidates?

M: Yes, virtually all of the major papers do.

I: State and local level?

M: Yes.

I: So the pork choppers, the organization, if there was such, was about twenty members in the Senate?

M: Twenty odd. I will tell you again somebody you could speak to is Martin Wahlburg. You have probably run into Martin, he did some pretty good research on them at the time. Martin was still here when I first came here and left shortly thereafter.

I: Are there any left?

M: No, not true pork choppers. The last of the true pork choppers was L.K. Edwards [L.K. Edwards, Jr., State Senator, 1954], a guy that I hated to see leave because when somebody said show me a Southern Senator, you wanted to show them L.K. He is a banker from Irvine, a little-bitty town and wore white suits and was very homey. He was a big banker but he was a big banker in little banks and he would always say things like [if] you want branch banking you are going to let the big fish eat up the little fish in this country. He ran against Puris. I cannot think of his first initials. The guy went by initials. They were the last of the really bonafide, certified Pork Choppers and they had to run against each other in reapportionment and out came one and then subsequently did not run again but he would be a guy that \_\_\_\_\_.

I: Did the Pork Choppers basically just represent special interests?

M: They basically represented rural interests and their own little interests and also they had an inordinate interest in what went on in their own little counties and they could be king of their little county. Now if you wanted a salary raise and you were sheriff, then you had to get it through him. This all went through special acts.

I: All localized?

M: Yes. They went through because the guy from the county said, I want it passed, and it passed. Then they would get up there and they would say okay, we are going to do local bills today and they had seventy-five local bills and they were all brought on at once. There was never any question about it unless there was a question within a delegation that might be multi-member. If they had a problem, they would fight it out and slowly this was changed after reapportionment because some of the urban members began to question certain areas. Liquor licenses for instance, Sandy D'Alemberte [Talbot D'Alemberte, State House of Representatives, 1966-1972, President of Florida State University, 1994-present] from Dade county began to automatically pull them out and say okay, we have got to look at these and this began the breakdown of the whole system.

I: It was an informal set of relationships, nothing formal about it at all, that respectively controlled the leadership positions?

M: Yes and I guess it was formal to the extent that if you did not do what you were supposed to do, you were no longer in and you could not be issued what you wanted either. There were also all kinds of interlocking and this I only know by hearsay and wall room stories. There were interlocking financial arrangements here. Doc Melton [G.T. Melton, State Senator, 1958-], who was for a long time the leader of the pork chop unit, was from Monticello in Jefferson County and he was a banker and loaned money to take care of people when they had problems and also presumably the pay-offs came through. You took out a loan with Doc's bank and somebody else paid it back. This was supposedly a tradition the way I hear. I do not know if anybody could prove that.

I: When did the last one go? What election was that?

M: L.K. was the last one and he did not run. It must have been 1969 and he did not run again and that probably was the last one. That is easy to verify.

I2: In those nine years that whole thing turned around?

M: Yes, completely. It was on its last legs in 1965 but it was still there.

I: Was it reapportionment that turned it around or aggressive newspaper coverage or the combination of the two?

M: I think it was probably a combination of the two. We would like to think that anyway.

I: My impression is that aggressive political reporting in this state sort of focused it as a public issue and then reapportionment made it tire down?

M: Yes, I think so. We began to label them and everybody started beating them over the head so that there were votes state-wide on reapportionment plans that the people rejected because they did not go far enough. They said no, this is the path, we want to go farther. So, I think it probably is true. I guess in 1966 they had a special reapportionment session. It was in the Senate when John McDermott, who is not renowned for being aggressive on this type of thing, but they had been continually, during this session in the Senate which was Constitutionally empowered and still is, to hold secret sessions when they are considering personnel type things like suspensions and this type of thing. They decided right in the middle of the reapportionment debate that they needed to do this. John said, by God, we ought not leave this. I know they are not going to talk about that and three of us who were sitting in the same cubicle area said, you are right. Don Pride [Donald F. Pride, Governor Askew's Press Secretary] was now the Governor's Press Secretary and Rex Newman was going to be our guy for the Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services. I said okay and the rest of the people went out and Dewey and tried to get back in and could not and we had this great flap where Senators offered to come up and physically eject us. He was going to call in the highway patrol to throw us out and they finally did physically eject us but they have not held that kind of a session since.

I: To what extent was the ejection physical?

M: We required that they grab us and drag us out. Which they did.

I: \_\_\_\_?

M: By the Sergeants [at Arms] there.

I: Was it literally by force? I do not mean that you resisted but were you...

M: Oh, yes we required that they do that and there is a great picture somewhere of John. Do you know John?

I: I think I have met him.

M: Well, he kind of looks like a Senator and I think one of John's problems was he always thought he was and was getting \_\_\_\_\_. But anyway there is a great picture somewhere in the files of John with this august look on his face being dragged out of the chambers and we made them take us out physically and the papers all supported us. At that point, we did not even know whether *The [Miami] Herald* would support us.

I: Was that the origin of the Sunshine Law?

M: We think that passed the Sunshine Law, probably. A Senator named Red Cross

[J. Emory "Red" Cross, State Senator, 1958-] from Gainesville had been putting this thing up here and it never got anywhere and of course, this was a special session, the next regular session is when they passed it and we felt that the voters would fare on that issue.

I: Did the four of you write stories about the whole thing? First-person type of accounts?

M: No.

I: Third-person accounts?

M: Barbara Frye [United Press International Bureau Chief, Tallahassee, Florida] from the United Press, we used her story and she quoted us. I sound so sanctimonious; it is terrible, in her story [that] I looked at for something else not long ago on the Sunshine Law, but we felt that we should not covert ourselves because we had been involved. But Barbara got out and tried to get back in and had a terrible time with that nice old Sergeant at the time, now dead, did not know what to do about this lady trying to get back in and she would bust through the door, [the guard] hissing at Barbara, "Go back!" That was kind of a fun time. No, I think that did it, because of the focus of attention and because \_\_\_\_\_, I think you have to say that in the state the news media has had an effect simply because it is competitive here. *The Herald* is among the least competitive on the state-level unfortunately because they still live on a very \_\_\_\_ resistance I think. But all the papers, if they do not compete in their hometown, you know *St. Pete[rsburg Times]* and *Tampa [Tribune]* are sitting there competing and we are competing with everybody and his brother and practically everybody is somewhere throughout the state. It is much more aggressive than any other state I know of, off-hand, because of that.

I: Why do you suppose that is true? Why do you have a bigger bureau than just about any state capitol bureau I have seen anywhere?

M: You mean the overall?

I: How many people are in the bureau?

M: You mean just *The Herald* bureau?

I: No, I am talking about both.

M: We have two full-time and two part-time researchers who kind of split it in half and do tele-typing and filing and what-not. Overall, in the capitol press corps there are twenty-five or six permanent and they are augmented during the session. We are second or third in total numbers I guess.

I: Why is that true? You do not have it in any other place in the South and I know of lots of states in the North where \_\_\_\_\_?

M: I think it is because of this competitive thing.

I: Also you have more medium sized cities in Florida?

M: That is right and they are dispersed. You have a great geographical **dispersment** in size between, you know I am 500 miles from home, 300 from Tampa/St. Pete, but these papers all compete in the fringe areas and you ought to talk to the guy who I was talking to at the bar. I did not realize it until he started talking because I saw he was on the program here, he is the former Assistant Attorney General, turned out lobbying, but he opened the first *Herald* bureau here in 1925, he told me. I had no idea.

I: So you explain it solely in terms of competition?

I2: I think of North Carolina, you have a lot of medium-sized cities there and you do not have any capitol press corps like that. Charlotte, Greensboro, Winston, Salem and they are all good sized cities.

I: North Carolina likes to take pride in great newspapers.

I2: Or Michigan. Somebody somewhere started a good capitol bureau, is my guess and . . .

M: That may be and for that you are going to have to go to somebody like Clendenin, who was one of the early ones up here, or Ken Ballinger who is on the program. If you talk to these guys in the Democratic party. You are probably so confused I can never straighten you out.

I: How long has it been since you have been here, in 1960, that you had this size of a bureau and this kind of competitiveness?

M: When I came here we were a one-man bureau. We have gone up one since then. I have to tell you frankly, I think *The Herald* probably has less real interest in state government than a number of other newspapers.

I: Typical Knight newspaper.

M: The thing that ticks me off considerably, and I think they are making a big mistake on it but then, I would, because that is where I am. They have been very parochial and they, unfortunately, have hung on to the pork chop idea too long. If there is nothing in state government then it is because state government has become a viable source with all the problems it has got. They have

attacked and made some run at, practically every major people problem you can think of and are way ahead of almost everybody in a number of areas. This was brought home to me this summer when I was at Northwestern [University] for a seminar there that was held at the same time that one of the state legislative organizations was meeting. The guy that they had to speak on how states have coped with the problem was Dick Pettigrew [Richard A. Pettigrew, Speaker of the State House of Representatives, 1971,1972], a former Speaker from the Dade County area, and speaker after speaker said, if you go in the environmental field, Florida is ahead. The whole equality of education financing, Florida is ahead.

I: How about \_\_\_\_?

M: Well, that is going through now, of course you know, or supposedly.

I: What are they doing?

M: Well, we have got a conflict of interest bill and an ethics bill and a [financial] disclosure bill and I think the disclosure bill is probably the most important in the bunch. It finally has gotten to a disclosure by a percentage type thing which is not a bad bill and may ...

I: What do you mean by that?

M: Well, you have to disclose that it is within a 5 percent bracket, I think they have it now, and this is subject to change very quickly. Well, in fact, I do not know what it is because the Senate committee worked on it last night and somebody else covered it. But the idea is that if you have got a client, let us say you are an attorney, who is 5 percent of your business or better then you must disclose and then this goes on [for] other categories. The idea being to give you some idea of, rather than filing an income tax statement, you have a number of people that are filing income tax statements and it really does not tell you anything.

I2: This is to get out of retainers?

M: Yes, or where your core percentage of money is coming from. Florida, I guess, pioneered in the campaign contribution reporting field and we had what everybody called the bottle laws.

I: That was really what triggered the national law, was it not?

M: I am not sure about that.

I: Would they not look at that when they were considering nationally to fit Congress \_\_\_\_?

M: I think they might have. Last year, well we worked about six months on it before the session. The law was there and it was nice and you did little stories here and there and we had taken a look at the examiner officers and whatnot. So last year we did all 449 candidates to the legislature. It was a horrendous job but very instructive. We found [that] the special interest groups were financing the bulk of the stuff. We also found on the records, foreign statements, because they filed their contribution statements, there were violations of every section of the law. So we passed a wholly new law last year which we have not really seen operate yet because they have an election which hopefully will be better and set some kind of an issue \_\_\_\_ and whatnot. The ethics legislature, I think, is so weak, is so without enforcement and that was the problem with the Who-Gave-It-Who-Got-It law, [the campaign] contribution law, is that nobody enforces it. We still have to see how this new law works. We have got a reprint of that series which might be instructive for you.

I: I was going to ask you. I would love to have that.

M: We have got reprints in the office if you drop by.

I: Where is your office?

M: We are in the sub-basement of the capitol. When you get to the capitol just ask somebody where the press area is and then you have to ask. We do not have numbers on the doors down there.

I2: Bill, it is my impression that the reporters in this bureau are very active, not only in reporting things, but trying to get legislation through.

M: Yes, and I have real mixed emotions on that.

I2: But is that impression true?

M: Yes, I think it probably is with some people. All of us get caught up but I have to admit that I helped lobby that election bill but only in the sense that I put out the word that it was obviously being hung up through devious means and we were going to give all of our information on the local people to everybody else in the corps. I thought it was probably worth it for them. But I am very reluctant to get into that kind of thing. Some people do \_\_\_\_.

[End of the interview.]