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Duddleson, William J. and Denise F. oral history interview

Don Nicoll

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Interview with William J. and Denise F. Duddleson by Don Nicoll

Summary Sheet and Transcript

Interviewee

Duddleson, William J.

Duddleson, Denise F.

Interviewer

Nicoll, Don

Date

December 2, 2000

Place

Bethesda, Maryland

ID Number

MOH 248

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Biographical Note

William Duddleson was born in San Luis Obispo, California in June 1921. Denise Duddleson was born in San Francisco, California on June 19, 1924. Bill Duddleson came to Washington, D.C. with Representative Clem Miller and later worked at the Conservation Foundation, the organization that helped organize and found Earth Day.

Scope and Content Note

Interview includes discussions of: coming to Washington, D.C.; Point Reyes National Seashore Bill; interactions with the Senate; visiting John F. Kennedy's casket in Washington; Denise's editorial to the *Washington Post*; Conservation Foundation; impressions of Edmund S. Muskie; and Earth Day.

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Transcript

Don Nicoll: . . . Saturday, the 2nd of December, the year 2000. We are in Bethesda, Maryland at the home of Bill and Denise Duddleson, and Don Nicoll is interviewing both of them about their recollections of Senator Muskie and the period at the end of the 1950s and into the early 1960s. Bill, I'll ask you, and then you Denise, to state your full name, spell your last name, and give us your date and place of birth.

William Duddleson: Well, it's Bill Duddleson, D-U-D-D-L-E-S-O-N. I was born in June 1921 in San Luis Obispo, California.

DN: Denise?

Denise Duddleson: But your full name is William Jefferson Duddleson.

WD: That's true.

DD: And mine is Denise Frances Leonard Duddleson, June 19, 1924.

DN: And were you born -?

DD: Born in San Francisco.

DN: San Francisco, California. Bill, you came to Washington with Representative-elect Clem Miller.

WD: That's right; following the Democratic tidal wave in the election of November '58.

DN: So you arrived in Washington at the same time as Senator Muskie who was elected in that year, and the only difference being he was elected in September.

WD: Is that right, he was elected to the Senate directly, he never served in the House.

DN: No.

DD: How could he be elected in September?

DN: Maine used to have September election, and the, I guess '58 was the last Maine September election. And actually in '54, '56 and '58, the successful Democratic candidates were taken around the country to campaign for Democrats in other states for the November election. But you arrived during that period. What was it like coming in to the House in those days? What were the relationships with other Democrats and with other Republicans?

WD: Not with other Republicans, but with Republicans.

DN: With Republicans, yes.

WD: Well, it was different of course. I was Clem's, Clem Miller's legislative assistant and one of the projects in the office that he asked me to work on was the, for example, the Point Reyes National Seashore Bill. The relationships between Democrats and Republicans were very different then than they appear to be now. The speaker, Sam Rayburn, and the House minority leader Joe Martin seemed to us, seemed to me as a staff member in the House, to be, they seemed to be friends. They spent, they saw one another frequently, they seemed to enjoy one another's company. There was none of the acrimony that seemed to, to me, to arrive in the House with Gingrich and company and that is with us today with Tom Delay and that bunch.

On the Point Reyes Bill, the Democrats, the Democrats of course were the majority party in the House, and on the House interior committee, which was the one most concerned with on national park system matters. The chairman was a man named Wayne Aspinall from Colorado, my, the ranking minority member was John Saylor of Pennsylvania.

John Saylor was remarkably supportive of this bill offered by a second, a second-term Democrat. Saylor, I remember when we were about to go, the bill was about to go to the House floor for the House vote, the final House action. I went to John Saylor, Clem must have been away in California, I went to John Saylor and asked him if he would send a letter, a "Dear colleague" letter to all the Republicans in the House. Clem had sent such a letter to all the Democrats in the House asking them to support the Point Reyes Bill when it came to the House floor. John Saylor asked only one thing. I had drafted a letter of course for him, a "Dear colleague" letter. He asked only one thing, delete any reference to Pat Brown who was the Democratic governor of California that (*Unintelligible phrase*) among the things in the letter were listing all those who supported the bill. And he said, "You know, some of the members don't like to." I don't know

whether Pat Brown was still being talked about as a possible national candidate at that point or not, but anyway that was a red flag and he said, "Take it out, and I'd sign the letter."

So of course we did that, and John Saylor indeed sent a "Dear Colleague" letter to every Republican in the House asking them as ranking members of the Interior Committee, committee of jurisdiction, asking them to support the Point Reyes Bill when it came to the floor. And it was managed by a voice vote, thanks to John Saylor in part. And so when the bill came up for a vote there was a discussion on both sides, Saylor being supportive on the House floor. And there was a few members of the Republican party, and perhaps of the Democratic party, too, who would always on certain bills would always ask for a recorded vote.

And after the House voted and it was clear the ayes had it and the, whoever was in the speaker's chair said so, some of the Republicans got up to demand a role call. Saylor stood up and with his hands signaled to the speak-, to the presiding man in the speaker's chair, signaled with his hands like a referee calling a slide safe, he signaled meaning don't recognize him. And that was it, bang, the gavel came down, the Point Reyes Bill was passed. Well, it's hard to imagine that happening today. Maybe it would. Is that the kind of thing you were getting at, Don?

DN: Yup, and when the Point Reyes Bill went over to the Senate, did you have any dealings with members of the Senate?

WD: We had dealings with Tom Kuchel of California of course. There were two senators from California, Clair Engle who was a Democrat and who had only just been elected to the Senate, and Tom Kuchel of California. Kuchel was the senior senator from California. The relations were very good there, too. Engle handled the, on this bill as on virtually everything else, Engle handled the relationships with the state government from the senator's office. Everything else he left up to Clem Miller. The dealings with the local government, the dealings with the pros and cons. There were opponents, there were many opponents to the bill, notably land owners in the area, and but all that was handled by Clem and Engle took the cues from Clem.

The relationships with Tom Kuchel were really quite good. He cosponsored Engle's bill on Point Reyes. All but one time, he tended to be responsive to some of the landowners in the area, but he, he didn't cause any real problems. He, incidentally his assistant on this is now a member of the House, what is his name? Long Beach, California. Steve -

DN: Yes, Steve, who later was president of one of the universities (*unintelligible phrase*).

WD: That's right, that's right, I'll have to refresh my memory. Steve Horn.

DN: Horn, right.

WD: And in fact Steve Horn has asked through the present member of the House from that area, Lynn Woolsey, has said he'd like to talk to me so I'll go up there some time and talk to Steve Horn. Horn was the assistant and there was just no problem. We didn't see eye to eye on everything but it was, it was worked out and very... I think Tom Kuchel was very pleased with

the end result on the Point Reyes National Seashore Bill.

DN: On the subject of Senator Muskie, you and Denny and our family were friends, but did you have any encounters with Senator Muskie either official or unofficial during those years?

WD: Well, we had one delightful encounter. And let me ask -

DD: No, you tell him.

WD: Want me to set the stage for it?

DN: Uh-huh.

WD: Well, after John Kennedy's death in November '63, Don I think you invited us and some of our children, and I think some of your children were there, too. You invited us up to the Muskie office when John Kennedy's body was in the rotunda of the Capitol, I believe in, you know, in the casket. The lines were huge; the public was lined up to walk through the rotunda to pay their respects. It was a cold day as I recall, and I guess we were talking about going over to the rotunda in those long lines. And Senator Muskie walked in and very kindly and generously said he would take the children with him so they wouldn't have to stand in line. And that's what happened. He took the children, they went over, he of course didn't have to stand in line.

DD: And don't forget Senator McCarthy came in, too.

WD: Go right ahead, Denny.

DD: That's all right, go on.

DN: No, you go ahead, Denny.

DD: Well they both went, they went together and they took the kids -

DN: He and Senator Gene McCarthy?

DD: Before either of them was very famous.

WD: Oh I think maybe they had a, that maybe McCarthy and Muskie had arranged to go over together to pay their respects, and they just swept up the kids and took them along. It was a very generous thing for Ed Muskie to do.

DN: And later, Denise, you told me you had written a letter to the editor about Senator Muskie.

DD: I wrote a letter to the *Washington Post* after Muskie cried, as they said he cried, in New Hampshire. It was New Hampshire, wasn't it? And so I was furious about that, I thought it showed that he was a very, well it seemed like a natural thing for him to do, even though you've told me now he didn't really cry. But anyhow, it was published in the *Post*, and it amuses me

now to think that Clinton cries all the time on television and it goes over really big, so we have a kinder, gentler president or something.

DN: Did you ever have any dealings with Senator Muskie's office, Bill, on environmental legislation during your years, either with Congressman Miller or in your time later with the Conservation Foundation?

WD: Well, it only would have been at the Conservation Foundation. And I, my recollection is that we dealt mostly with Leon Billings, would that have been right? Muskie was the great environmental champion in the late sixties and seventies on air pollution, water pollution. I think he got into radioactivity; didn't he have hearings on some radioactive pollution problems?

DN: Right.

DD: Was this before most people even broached the subject as a, especially as a campaign issue?

WD: Well, yeah, the environmental movement all of a sudden blossomed on the national scene with Earth Day, which the Conservation Foundation incidentally grub staked, so to speak. They came to us from, an emissary from Gaylord Nelson's office, suggesting the Earth Day. They needed an organization that had tax status, 501C3 tax status, to raise some money in a tax-deductible way. And so we were the first recipients of whatever private funding was secured on, to finance some of the Earth Day activity.

Gaylord Nelson had taken the lead on this and so we had a Democrat in the Senate and I, I was the one I believe who suggested that it just wouldn't fly to have only one lead congressional sponsor. We should also have someone from the House and he should be a Republican to have symmetry in the partisan and bicameral sense. And Sid Howe was then president of the Conservation Foundation and I suggested Pete McCloskey, the only House Republican I knew of who was doing very much, he was fully on the environmental side.

And that's the way it worked out, Pete McCloskey became the counterpart of, of the Democrat in the Senate. We had, we also had a Republican in the House. And I think Pete McCloskey is still involved. He was involved in the Earth Day anniversary matters and I never told him about that, that, but he was, he had, McCloskey was just about the only Republican who was really out in front along some of these environmental issues.

DN: Are there any other notes around that issue or Senator Muskie that you wanted to make?

DD: Well, you know, I can't remember. Since Senator Muskie's role in the Senate in the late six-, in the sixties and the seventies, I can't remember anyone else being so out in front and being so much the dominant force on environmental matters. I may be wrong on this, I certainly haven't studied it. But I just, he was, he was it. He was the leader.

DN: Thank you very much, Bill, and thank you Denny.

End of Interview