



INTERVIEW WITH
Mrs. Fred Seaton

by

Dr. Maclyn P. Burg
Oral Historian

on

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for

Dwight D. Eisenhower Library

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This interview is being taped with Mrs. Frederick A. Seaton of Hastings, Nebraska at the Eisenhower Library on October 17, 1974. Present for the interview are Mrs. Seaton and the interviewer is Dr. Maclyn Burg of the Eisenhower Library staff.

DR. BURG: The first thing that I'd like to know is where were you born?

MRS. SEATON: Outside of Wichita. I'm a native daughter of Kansas, and my mother was a native daughter of Kansas because my grandfather came from England in 1871, I think it was. And he was always just a little bit worried about the fact that other people came in 1870 and he didn't get here until 1871.

DR. BURG: What had brought him over here?

MRS. SEATON: Honestly, I don't know.

DR. BURG: He didn't go to Victoria, did he? He wasn't in that group that came over with [George] Grant and was connected with cattle?

MRS. SEATON: No, I think he came directly to Kansas, and all



I actually know is some things I've overheard my aunts and uncles say. He was a landscape gardener and when he came he chose an area which was good farm land, because he knew about soil and plants. He might well have chosen a spot which would be in the middle of Wichita and very, very valuable now, but that wasn't a good place to raise things. So he chose another area. And the family still owns that property now.

BURG: This was outside Wichita?

SEATON: Yes, south and west.

BURG: Then your elementary school and high school education would have been in Wichita?

SEATON: No, we lived in the country, actually, and I went to a country grade school, and then I went into Wichita in the ninth grade and finished my junior high and high school education in Wichita.

BURG: What school were you attending there, the high school?

SEATON: There was only one at that time, East High was the only one. And then I went to Kansas State College.

BURG: When did you enter KSU, or KSC then, I guess?



SEATON: Yes, it was KSAC then, Kansas State Agricultural College. And then it became Kansas State College of--oh dear, I've forgotten what the rest of it was but it was a long string of things. Then they eventually turned it into KS-- what is it now KSC; Kansas State College?

BURG: KSU [Kansas State University] now.

SEATON: KSU now, yes. Well, it changed titles so many times I've lost track. Yes, in the fall of '28.

BURG: That was when you entered?

SEATON: Yes.

BURG: Now was your husband there already, or did he enter--

SEATON: Yes, they lived in Manhattan; his father owned a newspaper in Manhattan. And he had moved to Manhattan; I think he was five years old when his father bought that newspaper. His father was executive secretary to Senator [Joseph] Bristow who was defeated in his second try for the Senate. And so then Fred's father bought this newspaper because he

had always wanted to run a newspaper. He had worked on a newspaper before he went with the senator and they moved to Kansas.

BURG: Was this the son of the Bristow to whom Eisenhower had written for his appointment to West Point?

SEATON: No, it was that senator.



BURG: It was the same man?

SEATON: Yes. He wanted to go to Annapolis actually, and it wasn't possible to get him in Annapolis so he settled for West Point.

BURG: So that senator's career had spanned quite some period of time.

SEATON: I think he only had one term in the Senate; I'm not sure.

BURG: Because Eisenhower would have written to him about 1911, or thereabouts, to get the appointment and Bristow was a senator at that time.

SEATON: Yes. Well, I think he had only one term in the senate, and my father-in-law was his aide at that time and actually was quite instrumental in arranging for this young Eisenhower boy to go to West Point.

BURG: You were a freshman in 1928. Was your husband ahead of you in school?

SEATON: Yes, he was one year ahead of me.



BURG: Then you met on campus?

SEATON: Yes, I was a journalism student, and that's how I happened to meet him, you see. Actually that didn't have anything to do with it. The story of our first meeting was something he never ceased to tease me about. It was a very rainy day and I was walking onto the campus and he came along in a car and offered me a ride, and I wouldn't go with him, because I didn't know him. But the car was being driven by a young man whom I did know; so I got in the car, and that was the beginning of our romance. He always teased me because there I was, paddling along through puddles and everything else, just as happy as though I had good sense.

BURG: Now were you married while you were still in school or did you wait until you finished?



SEATON: Yes. I never finished school. I got burned; I took up journalism in a more practical way. And he didn't graduate either, but that was not because he didn't have time to; it was because he disagreed with the administration as to the curriculum of a journalism student. In those days, a journalism student was required to take so many hours of science-- fifteen, I think, we were supposed to have; maybe it was only nine--and he didn't think that he was going to have any use for science, and so he refused to take it and the college refused to give him a degree. I think it was shortly after we went to Washington that they changed their curriculum, and they wrote him and offered to give him a degree, . . . If he would take examinations in certain subjects, they would give him the credit, even though he had never been to class. He decided that he had got along pretty well without that degree so far and he thought he could continue to. Besides, he didn't have time to fool around with a thing like that then.

BURG: And within a few years he's being given honorary degrees by college after college after college, if my recollection is right.



SEATON: He had twelve, twelve honorary degrees. The first one came from Kansas State. And of course there was a lot of fun about that--he never graduated but they gave him a degree anyway.

BURG: That's a good story! Well, when you left KSU did you then remain for a time in Manhattan?

SEATON: Yes, yes.

BURG: And he was with his father's paper for that period of time?

SEATON: Yes, yes.

BURG: Now, I notice that he was active in Kansas politics during that period of time, in various positions.

SEATON: Oh, quite active. As a matter of fact, he took up politics when he was still in college. And then he got interested in this Young Republican movement and he was chairman of the Kansas Young Republicans, which automatically made him vice-chairman of the state organization and a delegate to the convention in '36. Now, I can't tell you



exactly what year he was president of the Young Republicans, but that's in the records somewhere.

BURG: Yes, it is. I think Who's Who carries that record.

SEATON: Yes. And there's some other biographical material that I've come across that also gives that.

BURG: During that period of time in his life, what was your role? Were you equally interested in politics and taking part in--

SEATON: No, to be quite frank about it, we were then in a financial position in which only one politician could be supported. So I stayed home. I used to say that he was the politician in the family and I took no part in it, because one politician was all one family could tolerate. That is no longer true, I guess, but we were just getting started. We didn't have money to pay my expenses; nobody was going to pay for me. He got his expenses paid, but we couldn't afford to pay mine.

BURG: My recollection is that you'd only been married in



1931, so this was in the first five years or so of your marriage. Now in '36, for the national convention and for the campaign, did you have to remain in Manhattan while he went off to take part in political activities?

SEATON: Yes, yes, I stayed there. He was quite deeply involved in the '36 campaign, [Governor Alfred M.] Alf Landon's. Of course the family had know Landon for many years, the Seaton family had, and then Fred's activity in the Young Republicans automatically drew him into this campaign, and so he was gone quite a long time; I frankly don't remember how much he was gone, but practically all the time during the Landon campaign.

BURG: Now were any functions held in your home? For example, did Mr. Landon ever come to your home during the campaign period?

SEATON: No, I don't think Alf Landon was ever in our house. He was in Fred's father's house.

BURG: Had you met Mr. Landon?

SEATON: Not before that campaign; I don't remember that I did.

BURG: You did meet him during the campaign?



SEATON: Yes.

BURG: Do you remember at this date what your impression might have been of him when you met him? This would have been the first big political experience for you, wouldn't it?

SEATON: Yes, it was. I thought he was a delightful person; I still think so. This is telling tales out of school, I guess, but Governor Landon smoked, but he never seemed to have a cigarette of his own; he was always cadging from others that were with him and then, when that person ran out of cigarettes, he dug around in his pocket and found his own.

BURG: They were there all along. [Laughter]

SEATON: Yes! We used to laugh about that because, as I said, we didn't have any great amount of money at that point and

he had lots of money, you know; he made a lot of money in oil. Fred would complain about that some days. [Laughter]

BURG: Taking your cigarettes when he had plenty of money to buy his own, if he wanted to do it!

SEATON: I was very fond of Governor Landon.



BURG: He was a personable man?

SEATON: Yes, yes.

BURG: And kind to you. Is there a particular reason why you remember him with affection?

SEATON: No, I don't suppose there is; he was just a person that I liked.

BURG: Just the way he came across, the way he came across to you.

SEATON: And I thought he was very capable and was very disappointed that he didn't make President, but then he did not put himself across well in making speeches. That was part of his trouble, and the other part of the trouble was his opponent.

BURG: A little unstoppable at that stage.

SEATON: Right.



BURG: Do you remember if your husband assessed Mr. Landon's chances as being pretty good, or was your husband a little dubious?

SEATON: No, he didn't think he'd make it.

BURG: So when the election results were in, your husband probably was disappointed, but--

SEATON: Well, one is always disappointed if one is defeated. But he wasn't surprised; he was a little bit surprised at the depth of the defeat. You remember, he [Landon] took only two states. But his popular vote was far better than would be indicated by the electoral college vote.

BURG: Yes, right, the electoral vote would be skewed off and the popular vote was much closer. Now after that campaign, did your husband remain active politically over those next years, or what happened?

SEATON: No, it was 1937 that we moved to Hastings. And this was another interesting story. Fred had learned that there was a newspaper for sale there and had gone to Hastings to look at it, and he thought it was a good prospect, but he couldn't convince his father of it.

BURG: This was the Hastings Daily Tribune?



SEATON: Right. So with Arnold [R.] Jones and his wife, we took off on a trip to Mexico and we were gone for three weeks, which was the normal time for vacation. I think it was in May probably, latter part of May. And when we got back, we found out we didn't live in Manhattan any more. In the three weeks that we were gone, Fred's father had gone to Hastings and decided that it was a good idea to buy this newspaper, and the arrangements were all made, hinging only on our willingness to move to Hastings. So we got home at eight o'clock one evening and at eight o'clock the next morning Fred was on his way to Hastings.

BURG: Let me ask you, did you approve of this move? Did it trouble you in any way to leave Manhattan?

SEATON: No, I had no particular feeling for Manhattan; I went there to college and I had lived there five or six years but no, I have never been particularly attached to any one place in my life, except as I am now to Hastings, but the idea of moving to another town was alright with me. And I've done a lot of moving; I did a lot of moving in the forty-four years and I don't remember that I ever objected to any of it. This was a new experience, a new challenge, something else to learn about.

BURG: Did your husband become editor and publisher of the paper?

SEATON: Yes, immediately.



BURG: Financially this would have perhaps left you in a little better circumstance than you had been in Manhattan?

SEATON: Well, yes, he had more responsibility and so he had more salary.

BURG: How about your life? Did your life change to any great degree in making this move, and with these new responsibilities?

SEATON: Yes, as a publisher's wife I had to be a little more public and belong to, oh--the women's club and what-not, and take part in various civic activities.

BURG: And did you find that to your liking?



SEATON: Yes, I enjoyed that. I did all of it, the whole bit. In the years between 1937 and, actually, 1951--it was in December of '51, that we went to Washington the first time-- I worked in the PTA, I was president of that one year; I was Girl Scout commissioner for two years and worked with the scouts in all their activities for a good many years. Oh, I did things like Community Chest, and I was a Girl Scout leader and I had a Cub Scout troop, and everything there was to do, I was into. This was good; I liked it.

BURG: And your own family was growing up through this period.

SEATON: Yes. Well, no. Don was born in '40 and Chris was three and a half years later and so, of course, I had a couple of youngsters to take care of. But in those days one got baby sitters; it was easy. I had a favorite girl who came for twenty-five cents an afternoon and took care of two kids. Nowadays you pay two dollars an hour.

BURG: You sure do.



SEATON: And I worry about my children, who can't find baby sitters; they have to take their youngsters around with them all the time. And then, when we moved to Hastings, Fred didn't get involved in politics for almost two years; it was a wonderful time for me. But by the end of three years, he was into it again in Nebraska.

BURG: Say about 1939, approximately, or 1940? There would have been a--

SEATON: Well, he was a state legislator in 1945-1949, I think, those two sessions. Well, he didn't plunge into it to that degree all at once. Then he got active in the county organization and then the state organization; he just couldn't stay out of politics, that's all.

BURG: It interested him.

SEATON: Well he had grown up with it you see; his father was interested in politics and his mother was interested and so it was just a normal part of life to him.

BURG: Now let me ask if, as he began to be drawn back into it, did you have time or inclination to work in Nebraska politics?

SEATON: No, I didn't. As I said before one politician was enough for one family.

BURG: And that remained your view.



SEATON: I went to the big deals, the annual Republican day in Nebraska, what do they call it now?--Founders' Day. Those things I went to and sometimes people asked me, "Why don't you go around with your husband?" But there were children and I didn't think I should go off and leave them very much, even though I could get baby sitters. I did occasionally go off on trips with him but I didn't feel that I wanted to go away and leave them as much as he did. One of us had to be there; so I never did get involved in politics, actually, except on the fringes as a kind of a decorative item. [Laughter] Every once in a while they take their wives along to decorate a dinner or something!

BURG: The delegate does have a wife and here she is! Yes.

[Laughter]

Now his appointment as U.S. Senator from Nebraska, can you explain to me how that came about? I know that it did, but I'm not sure of the circumstances.

SEATON: Well, Senator [Kenneth S.] Wherry died and Val Peterson was governor then. Val was a good friend of ours, and he and Fred had worked together in politics in the state, and so he appointed Fred to fill out this unexpired term, which actually was just one year. And so Fred sat in the Senate for this one session and then he did not run for re-election. He announced, actually, early on, that he would not run; so the election proceeded in the normal manner. And of course as it turned out, he wouldn't have wanted to do that anyway, because it was in '52 that he first became acquainted with Eisenhower.

BURG: You moved the family to Washington.



SEATON: No, I didn't take them there in '52; they stayed at home.

BURG: When he was senator?

SEATON: No, I went but the family didn't. We had a friend

who stayed in the house and took care of the children, because this was only to be for about six months.

BURG: Let me ask you where you lived in Washington while your husband was there?

SEATON: At the Wardman Park.



BURG: Oh, you did.

SEATON: We had an apartment there. A funny thing happened in that apartment. Fred always nicknamed people and his secretary, [Homer] Gruenther, he called the "bishop", and if you have ever met Homer Gruenther, you'd know why. One day he brought Homer and the other man who was with him, [Lorne] Kennedy, to the house at the close of the working day. And they were very kind, "How are you?"

And I said, "Well, I'm still just a trifle upset; the bishop's wife came to call today and I was working on these clippings and they were all over the floor."

And they laughed and said, "Well, I don't see why you'd mind if Bess came." Bess was Homer's wife, but it wasn't Bess, it was the bishop's wife, Mrs. Darmouth. [Laughter] And when I

finally got it through to them who had been calling me, they were a little startled, too.

BURG: They were as used to the nicknames as you.



SEATON: Oh, yes.

BURG: Now during that period of time did you have particular friends, special friends in Washington, that you'd see more, let us say, than others?

SEATON: I didn't know anybody who lived in Washington when we went there. Mrs. [Andrew] Schoepel was very kind; her husband was senator then from Kansas. And she took me to the senate ladies' group which I promptly joined. Now this is wives and widows--and I suppose daughters, if they want to--of senators, past or present. Now that was one of the groups that I enjoyed when I was in Washington. They met every Tuesday, all day long, and a lot of them carried their lunches in paper bags. They wore Red Cross uniforms and Red Cross veils over their hair and they spent the day folding bandages and talking, of course. And they were all very nice to me, but then I wasn't anybody, you know; I was the most junior of

anybody in the Senate. And this is the story I've told many times and it still amuses me. I do not remember the name of the woman involved but she was from the East and she overheard me say that my grandmother was a Hitchcock. And, "Where did she come from?"



"Massachusetts." No, what she overheard me say, mostly, was Massachusetts, because nobody out of Massachusetts says it that way. But my grandparents came from Massachusetts and she heard me say Massachusetts. So then I told her that my grandmother had been a Hitchcock and she thought this over for a few minutes, then she said, "What town do you come from?" So I told her. She thought about that a minute and she said, "Did you ever have codfish cakes at your house?"

And I said, "Yes, that's one of our favorite dishes."

"Well, how do you cook them?" And for once my mind was working; I knew.

I said, "In deep fat." And from then on, I was in like Flynn. [Laughter]

BURG: Isn't that remarkable?

SEATON: And you know, I had never paid any attention to

ancestry before. Fred used to say, "It's like potatoes; the best part's underground." But then I realized that some places in the world this is an important item.

BURG: And particularly, Massachusetts, I can imagine.



SEATON: People from the East really do pay attention to it.

BURG: And you had measured up to a set of pretty high standards, I suppose.

SEATON: Well, and then they wanted to know if I was a DAR [Daughters of the American Revolution]; well, I had never got around to doing that. It didn't impress me much; I still haven't as a matter of fact. But I learned a lesson from that, you see; what I learned, actually, is that other people have other values.

BURG: That impress them.

SEATON: Yes. Another thing that I learned during those first months in Washington was that people couldn't understand me, the way I spoke. I went there with a typical middle western flat twang, you know, and I'd go into a store

and ask for something and I couldn't make the clerk understand me. And subsequently many people have asked me if I'm a southerner, which I am not; I'm a Kansan. But I had to learn to speak in a different way if I wanted to make myself understood. And I still do sound southern; not as much as I used to.

BURG: Did you have to slow your speech down a bit?



SEATON: Yes. That's another thing; I tend to talk fast.

BURG: Yes, I've found that out there you have problems if you are a little bit staccato with it; it's not going to be picked up. You have to slow it--like turning a record down a little bit.

SEATON: Right.

BURG: How large was that group of senate ladies?

SEATON: Oh, it varied of course, but I'd say the attendance usually was around thirty. We had--let's see, how many people--possibly forty people folding bandages and another group of ten who ran sewing machines and made baby clothes for the hospitals.

BURG: Now did the entire group all belong officially to the Red Cross, as volunteers?

SEATON: Oh, no, no. We didn't have Red Cross membership but we were doing Red Cross work, so we had to wear the Red Cross uniform. This is a matter of hygiene, you see.

BURG: Did you get the impression that it was almost incumbent on you to at least attend a session of that as the junior senator's wife?

SEATON: Oh, no. No, not at all. It was simply a social group to which I was eligible to belong, that's all. Some of them never went at all.

BURG: You were taken to it and enjoyed it and stayed with it.

SEATON: Yes. Some of them came occasionally; some of them were very regular and faithful. And all those little bandages that we folded were checked and counted before they were turned over to the Red Cross. It was Senator [John C. "Chan"?] Gurney's wife [Evelyn?] who did that. So we were really doing something quite useful, which is one of the reasons that I enjoyed it.



BURG: People brought their own lunch or would step out for lunch.



SEATON: Yes, or we could order up from the senate restaurant.

BURG: That was the next thing I was going to ask you. Where did you meet?

SEATON: We had a room in the Old Senate Building in the basement. And I don't think anything else ever went on in that particular room.

BURG: And you would see these ladies every Tuesday. Did you make any friends in that group with whom you might go shopping, for example, or attend a concert, or was that basically where you saw those ladies?

SEATON: Well, mostly that was where I saw them. Of course, I wasn't there long enough, you see, to develop a close relationship. Mrs. [Leverett] Saltonstall was one that I particularly liked and she invited me to lunch at her house one day, and she said to come on a certain day because that's the day her accommodator came. Eventually I discovered an accommodator was a part time maid, but that was the expression

they used. And oh, there were several others with whom I became quite friendly. I remember there was one--and I can't remember this name--a senator from I think, South Carolina, from the deep south anyway, and she was a very lively person and chattered quite a bit. And one day I overheard her say she was going to take the bus to go to the club. Eventually it dawned on me she was going to take the bus to go to the club, but this was an accent that I hadn't heard before so it stuck in my mind. If you look through your records you'll probably find out the name of this man; [Senator Olin D. Johnston?] he was an older man and had been a senator for a long, long time. But he not only had this deep south accent, he had a speech impediment, and so nobody ever listened to his speeches. But the recorder for the Congressional Record could understand him--and his speeches were good, very good, but nobody could understand them--so they just waited until the next day and read it in the Congressional Record.



BURG: Her accent, you know, sounds almost Canadian.

SEATON: Well, she wasn't a Canadian; definitely southern.

It might have been a hangover from the old English that is spoken in the hills in the south.

BURG: Yes, it could have been.

SEATON: Maybe that was it; I don't know.

BURG: Now did you drive, Mrs. Seaton, at that time?

SEATON: You mean drive a car?

BURG: Yes.

SEATON: Certainly.

BURG: And so in Washington you drove back and forth to these meetings?

SEATON: Oh, yes. Well, that was easy enough from the Wardman Park. And then, of course, we left Washington; actually, I left in July and Fred had left sometime before that, and I was sort of debating about what I was going to do, you know. And then he determined that he was going to go on campaign with Eisenhower. By that time, I had all four children there; so I packed up the children and got a driver and went back to Nebraska.

BURG: This was July of '51.



SEATON: '52.

BURG: July of '52. Yes.

SEATON: See, we brought these two children over from Germany in June of '52. We got in from Germany, well, we were delayed in the port of New York, got into Washington--

[Interruption]



SEATON:--and promptly had to transfer ourselves into a larger apartment. And the other two children came to Washington the next day, so that between June 4 and June 6, I acquired four children, which made it a little bit tricky!

BURG: Well, who were these children, Mrs. Seaton?

SEATON: Well, the children are Donald, who is now publisher of the Hastings Tribune; and Christine, who is married to a most interesting man who is a farmer and one of the group who call themselves "Germans from Russia", Mennonites.

BURG: These were the Volga Germans.

SEATON: Yes. Now these two children we had adopted when

they were babies. And in '52--well, actually, it was '51--we started talking about taking two more. There was a good deal of a story in the papers and magazines about these displaced persons in several countries. And I don't think we ever did discuss it. We happened to be reading the same magazine one evening in which there was this story about these displaced persons' children and how desperate they were for somebody to take care of them. And Fred looked at me and he said, "Do you think we ought to try it?"

And I said, "Yes, I think it's a good idea." That was the extent of our discussion on it. So we started making application and the application was something; I know more about those children than I know about myself. And we couldn't get any action at all.

BURG: A particular organization was handling the placement of these children then?

SEATON: Yes, what they called the Displaced Persons Commission, I think, or something of the sort. And then he was appointed to the Senate and so he had enough official clout in that position to get some activity. And we had started out by



asking for another girl, and then they sent pictures of two children and asked if we couldn't take the two, a boy and a girl. And so at the end of May we flew to Munich, first, and we saw the children. And then Fred had been asked by various Republicans to talk to General Eisenhower--who had already been approached on the matter of running for the presidency and refused the Democrats--and see if he could add any weight to the arguments. So we flew to Paris and we went up to Eisenhower's house and Fred talked at length with the General. And then we went back to Munich and picked up the children and flew home with them.



BURG: Let me ask you then several questions. First of all, what were the ages of the children?

SEATON: According to their official records, they were both four years old.

BURG: But not related on to the other?

SEATON: No relationship. But I have always thought that Monica was older than that and so I arbitrarily set her age at five and started her to school. And this has caused some

trouble subsequently because her entrance permit shows her as being a year younger than she actually is, according to my records. Well, it didn't make any difference anyway.

BURG: Now, they remained in Munich; you went on to Paris. Was there a particular reason why your husband was selected to put additional arguments before General Eisenhower?



SEATON: I don't think so. I don't know of any beyond the fact that we were going over there.

BURG: Right, you were going to be there. Now did you go to the General's headquarters, or did you go to their home at -- Marnes-la-Coquette, I think, was the residence?

SEATON: No, he went up to NATO, Fred did, and in the meantime Mrs. [Alfred M.] Gruenther took me sightseeing.

BURG: General Gruenther's wife?

SEATON: Yes, Al Gruenther's. He was Eisenhower's immediate aide or whatever, at NATO. And then, later that day, we went up to Eisenhower's house and I met the General and Mrs. Eisenhower for the first time then.

BURG: Since this was your first contact with them, do you happen to recollect what your initial impressions were of both of those people?

SEATON: No, I don't particularly. I was just a little overwhelmed by the whole thing, you see. It was the first time I had been on an overseas flight; the first time I had been on the Blue Train; the first time I had been in Paris, and the whole thing was just piling in on me, you see. So that I came away with no definite impressions about anything, except that the General obviously was an enormously capable person and Mrs. Eisenhower was very pleasant to me. There wasn't any reason for her to do anything beyond what she did. I was in her home and the men were talking and she took care of me.



BURG: Did she take you around the house and show you anything of it?

SEATON: No, I don't believe she did. We'd seen quite a bit of the countryside as we drove out there, you know, and I honestly don't remember. I think Mrs. Gruenther was there,

too, and I think it was just a kind of chit-chat session. I think she did show me parts of the house, actually, the reception rooms.



BURG: I can fully appreciate the impact of the first trip over to Europe, and seeing Paris for the first time, and then coming into the home of the NATO commander and his wife. Do you look back now and think that perhaps she made you feel at ease? Was that conversation, in your recollection now, a strain, or was it very easy?

SEATON: Well, yes, it was easy enough. And I think we both understood quite clearly that the men were doing business and we were supposed to entertain each other. And I was a complete stranger to her as she was to me. And I don't remember that the feeling I had was any different than I have had on many other occasions when I have entertained the wife of some person that Fred was talking with; because you can't just leave a wife sitting out there in the car or something, you know.

BURG: But there was no strain connected with this conversation?

SEATON: I don't think so; she was easy in her associations with other people.

BURG: Did your husband, either before or after that session, the session at the office and the session at the home; did he make any observations to you about the task that he was embarking on and how he planned to handle it, or did he remark afterwards as to how things had gone?

SEATON: You mean in regard to the campaign, or to interviewing the General?

BURG: Well, speaking to the General about accepting the nomination.

SEATON: Oh, I think he was a little apprehensive about making this approach, because he didn't really know how he would be received. But if I've ever seen a case of love at first sight I've seen two; my husband and myself, and my husband and General Eisenhower.

BURG: What a nice way to put that.

SEATON: Because he, after that one interview, was completely



and wholly devoted to General Eisenhower and he's not the only person that felt that way about him.



BURG: Yes, that's right. Do you remember now, did you have the Gruenthers with you when you got back in the car to go back into Paris?

SEATON: You know, I believe it was the Gruenthers who drove us out there to Marnes-la-Coquette; I think that was it. I think they drove us out there and then drove us back, and then I think we went to their house for a while. Al is such a remarkably friendly person. Do you know General Gruenther?

BURG: He's been here with General [Lauris] Norstad several times; I've not yet been formally introduced to him, but I've seen him here in the corridors, in action.

SEATON: Well, he has the most magnificent smile of any person I have ever known. It just booms, just pops up there like a balloon. And he is friendly and he is fun and he is exceedingly confident, I'm sure, or he certainly wouldn't have been where he got to be. And so any time Al Gruenther is around, you're having fun unless he happens to be working.

and so I really fell in love with Al Gruenther, too. That is the reason our youngest son is named Alfred, after Al Gruenther and Alf Landon, and we couldn't have two better namesakes.

BURG: Very interesting.



SEATON: We were in Paris then, only, I suppose, three days, and then we went back to pick up these children and bring them to the States. And Fred was in a great rush to get back because the Senate was in session; he didn't want to miss too many votes. So we had quite a time getting back.

BURG: Now as you drove back into Paris, do you happen to remember whether your husband--since we know that he was very much impressed and stayed that way--started saying anything about how he felt, or did he reserve that for after you were away from the Gruenthers?

SEATON: Well, I think the conversation was pretty general. Of course, Al Gruenther was devoted to Eisenhower, too. And I don't think Fred had any intention at that point of going into the campaign.

BURG: Oh, you don't think so?

SEATON: No. I don't think that was in his plan at all. And after we got back to Washington, he had a call from Abilene and was asked to come out for a few days; this was in the latter part, oh, the middle of June, I suppose.

BURG: Of '52.

SEATON: Yes.



BURG: Who had called him from here? Do you remember?

SEATON: Well, it was the organization. I don't know, but I think that Eisenhower had asked for Fred to come out to handle, perhaps, something to do with Kansas; I don't know. I know that Fred intended to be gone just maybe three or four days, and then he came back and said that he had been asked to go with the campaign. So he packed up and charged off again, and that was in July, so then I took the children, all four of them, back to Hastings.

BURG: From Washington, D.C. They had been there a very short period of time.

SEATON: Yes, we wanted the older children to see Washington,

you see; that's why they came there as soon as school was out. And I took them around sightseeing and I found a German-speaking baby sitter to take care of the young ones. They both spoke no English when they came. It was quite a problem sometimes to get through to them, especially after Fred left, because Fred spoke German, but I had no German and they had no English so it was sort of like training a puppy dog, you know.

BURG: Gosh, yes, a four year old and a five year old. Well, I was going to ask you, too, before we got away from Paris, did your husband tell you what his estimation was of his success in talking with General Eisenhower?



SEATON: Yes, he was a little doubtful; he wasn't sure that this was going to work out.

BURG: So that was what he was going to have to report to fellow Republicans when he got back to Washington, D.C.

SEATON: And I remember how elated he was when he learned that Eisenhower had accepted the invitation of the Republican party to run as their candidate for our President.

BURG: Now when he got that call to come out to Abilene, it would seem to me, looking at it as an outsider--he's going out to Abilene, and when he comes back, he's been asked to take part in the campaign--this is going to be a sacrifice for all of you, isn't it? His term in the Senate would be finishing?

SEATON: Well, that was finished. And he was not going to go on with it.



BURG: And his own business affairs; he's been away from those for the six months that he was in the Senate, and now he will have to let that go for an additional two or three months. You are going to have to manage back in Hastings with two non-English speaking youngsters to take care of; it's quite a family sacrifice, then, that has to be figured out here. Did you talk about this?

SEATON: Well, I don't think we ever considered it that way.

BURG: Didn't look at it that way at all.

SEATON: This was a marvelous opportunity to get a wonderful man into a job where a wonderful man was sadly needed. I

didn't object to it. I mean after all, this political thing had been going on ever since we had been married; I was accustomed to it. Sure it was a job for me, but it was my job so I handled it--that's all.

BURG: Was there any family discussion, finally, in the sense of the two of you talking about this opportunity that your husband was now looking at, or was it merely, "They've asked me; I'm happy to do it."

SEATON: We just took things as they came along. Of course, it was not difficult for him to leave his business. One of his particular talents was either selecting the right man for a job, or making him the right man for the job after he had selected him. I never did decide which it was. But he had good publishers in each one of the papers, and he had a particularly good man as, well, we called him office manager in Hastings, because as a matter of fact, he ran the business while Fred was gone and oversaw all of the operations. So there was no problem there. And as far as I was concerned, he had been gone on campaigns before and I was quite capable of taking care of the children and the house and the yard



and the farm, and so I did--that's all. We didn't ever discuss these things at great length as some couples do. And we always seemed to understand each other without a lot of talk.

BURG: You'd had, by then, a little better than twenty years, about twenty-one years, of married life and plenty of chance to make all the working arrangements that a couple in love would make in handling their affairs.



SEATON: Yes. I felt sorry for the little ones, because every time a man came to the house for anything, they'd run up to him and say, "Are you my daddy?" [Laughter] It was somewhat embarrassing at times if it happened to be the plumber or something like that!

BURG: Yes, indeed it would be! Now did your husband take part in the convention in '52, or--

SEATON: Oh, yes.

BURG: So he was there. What kinds of tasks did he do there at the convention?

SEATON: I would have to look that up. I don't know exactly what his assignment was. During the campaign, the '52 campaign; he was ostensibly traffic manager, which he used to laugh about because he said, "I don't know why they made me traffic manager; I can't even read a timetable." But again, he got in two excellent men, one for air travel and one for train travel and, as a matter of fact, they took care of the transportation arrangements and he served as a personal advisor most of the time.

BURG: Some of the records make it sound as though he was, in effect, a deputy to [Governor] Sherman Adams during that campaign.

SEATON: Yes, that's true.



BURG: Sort of second in command. That speaks very well for your husband, it seems to me. It speaks very well, indeed, that he would be picked for such a responsible position, and the impression I get is that he has just come into Eisenhower's orbit only a matter of one or two months before.

SEATON: That's true, yes.

BURG: And certainly the General had a great deal to say, as did Henry Cabot Lodge and others, about who was going to be brought in to help with all of this.

SEATON: I don't think anybody had anything to say about it except the General himself.

BURG: You think so?



SEATON: Nobody gave him orders. They gave him advice; they made suggestions, but when it came down to making the decision, there was only one person who did it. He was very good at delegating, of course, but he picked his own men.

BURG: Let me ask you to overcome modesty for a minute and tell me--do you have an opinion as to why the General picked this man, your husband, who had just come into his camp?

SEATON: Yes, I do, because I saw it happen in other cases, too. To begin with, Fred had great charm and his chief talent was communication. And they used to say of him that he could tell you "no" to something you really wanted and make you like it! And he always impressed people that way. From the day when he started working in the back shop of the

Manhattan newspaper--at the age I think of six, sweeping out-- he had influence, and it didn't make any difference how old or how young, or how rich or how poor, or how important, people loved him. As his mother told me one time, he was the boss of the block at the age of three. I think she was prejudiced. [Laughter] At any rate he was one of those people who just automatically, naturally, assumes control and other people recognized it. And it had nothing whatever to do with his confidence really, however he was exceedingly confident. But when he got into anything, when he entered into any kind of an organization or an activity, almost immediately he became the leader of it. He was the president of every organization he ever belonged to and almost without exception he was the youngest president they ever had. And he did as good a job as any president they had ever had. And this came as natural to him as breathing. And at first it was his charm, I mean, a first impression was that he was charming. The second was that he communicated well. After anybody had listened to him for a little while they realized that this was a really competent person, who was competent enough to do the job and to take command. Now of course, he was an awful lot to me, but until I started reading his papers I



didn't realize how much he impressed other people. But there are stacks and stacks of letters that say, "We're glad you have this appointment because we need men like you in Washington." And these came from all over the country.

BURG: That tends to confirm what I told you about the Senate committee that passed on his appointment as Secretary of the Interior--that even in the brief time that he had been the appointed senator from Nebraska, he clearly had impressed many of his colleagues, men that I think might have been very tough with somebody else, but their recollection of him seems to have been so high that he got very little difficulty in going through that particular session. I'm interested in this and I think scholars will be interested, too. Here is a General of the United States Army, now moving into a career he has never had before. You have a campaign manned by very capable, competent men and women and, naturally, we historians like to know, in every single instance--Why her? Why him? And you of course are one of the best judges of why your husband was brought into that very competent team of men and women.



SEATON: And most of them had had experience on the political scene or experience on the national scene, politically, which he had not had until he went in to the United States Senate. He was known, even so, because of his Young Republican activities. And of course when he went on the Landon campaign, he came to know a lot of people and he never forgot anybody he knew. If he didn't encounter them for ten years, he recognized them immediately and he remembered what association he had with them and he could go immediately into a meaningful conversation. So that there was never this matter of getting acquainted all over again or anything like that.

BURG: Let's take a look at that in a reverse view; he does not forget those who knew him. It's quite conceivable that around General Eisenhower were politicians, national reputations, long service; they would be presumably thinking back, too. They would remember 1936 and his support for Landon. Had he taken a part in the '40, '44, and '48 campaigns?

SEATON: He was a delegate to all the campaigns from '36 on.

BURG: I see. Then there would also be the question of to



whom had he lent his support in those conventions, for example. And I presume that in the eyes of those surrounding the General and aiming at '52, he had no associations with any groups within the Republican party. Let's put it this way: they would not connect him with [Senator Robert A.] Taft, for example; I would assume.

SEATON: No, he never was connected with Taft, although he had intense admiration for Taft. He said that Taft would be a poor candidate because Taft did not project himself. In spite of his remarkable ability, he could not project that feeling in his speeches and Fred felt that Eisenhower could. Of course, he had this great big beautiful smile, and Taft didn't smile. Taft was a good speaker and Eisenhower was not, although he learned pretty fast. He was not a good speaker at the beginning. But Eisenhower was so friendly, outgoing; Taft was withdrawn.

BURG: Yes. A little too coldly intellectual.

SEATON: And that's a very poor kind of candidate to present to the public. We've got one running for governor in Nebraska



right now who is a very competent man, but he's not going to get elected, I think, because he simply cannot project himself. He doesn't smile very much and he has a kind of cold personality.

BURG: Others have spoken to me about that with respect to Mr. Taft in '52. I was thinking too, your husband perhaps was not identified with Thomas E. Dewey either, in any strong way.

SEATON: I don't think so. Well, of course, Fred hadn't been active on the national scene, you see.

BURG: Except at convention.

SEATON: At convention he was, I think, sergeant-at-arms most of the time, I think that's what his badges say, so that he knew everybody. But he was kind of running around making everybody happy and effecting compromises and that sort of thing at these conventions, and he hadn't associated himself clearly and definitely with any particular candidate, until he did with Eisenhower.

BURG: I believe that they are waiting for you so we'll break for now.



[Interruption]

BURG: We're now back in session. Mrs. Seaton has just reminded me that I'd asked why her husband had been recognized, I suppose we could say, as a highly competent person, and you were going to say--

SEATON: I was going to say what you had just mentioned-- that halfway through that hearing they stopped calling him "Senator" and started calling him "Secretary." Now, this is an example of the effect he had on people.

BURG: Yes, it probably is.



SEATON: You just can't picture it; you can't describe it, but there you have an example of it.

BURG: We've been talking about the senate hearings on Mr. Seaton's appointment, his nomination to be Secretary of the Interior. I had pointed out to Mrs. Seaton that about halfway through the record of the committee hearings, the senate committee hearings, they had been calling him--and laughing

about it--they were calling him senator, harking back to his appointment as senator from Nebraska. But about halfway through the hearings, I noted that they began to refer to him as secretary--they would address him as secretary even though the committee hearing was nowhere near complete at the time that they began calling him that.

SEATON: Well, of course, he had been secretary, had been "Mr. Secretary" in his job in the Defense Department.

BURG: Was he Assistant Secretary?



SEATON: Assistant Secretary of Defense in charge of legislative liaison. And then he went into the White House, so he was no longer a secretary, he was just Mr. Seaton.

BURG: Well, I think you're probably right. I suspect they're calling him secretary because it is becoming more and more clear to them that they are going to approve his appointment as Secretary of the Interior. And it's funny, because it was "Mr. Seaton;" then somebody slipped and recollected the past and called him senator; then several called him senator; then the next thing you know, they're all calling him secretary.

SEATON: Well, that's what he did to people.

BURG: Yes, and that's an interesting example of that.

SEATON: Yes, it is.

BURG: Well we had been talking before we broke for lunch about 1952 and we had him pretty much established in the campaign. You told me that he was traffic manager and laughed because he had been amused--he knew nothing about traffic, but he had picked a couple of good people to help him. Do you remember who the two were that he named?



SEATON: Well the rail man was named Kelly, Clarence Kelly, [Ed. Note: L.S. Kelly, director, Transportation Commission; Clarence H. LaFond, deputy director, Transportation Commission] I believe, and the air man was [D.] Walter Swan, who was the vice-president of United Airlines. I don't know what's become of Kelly; Swan is retired now, of course, and I still keep in touch with him.

BURG: We might want to talk to both of those men about their experiences in handling that.

SEATON: Oh, Walter Swan would just love to tell you about it, I'm sure. And I'm going to see him in November. I'll tell him.

BURG: Are you? Will you please tell him that?

SEATON: Yes. And I don't know what's become of Kelly; he's retired, too. And I don't even remember which railroad he was with.

BURG: Well, I think we should be able to run him down.

SEATON: But that you should be able to find out in your materials.

BURG: Did your husband--I can hardly imagine he would have the time--but did he have time enough to call you, occasionally, from the campaign train, or to write to you?

SEATON: No, I didn't hear much from him.

BURG: He sort of disappeared in the misty blue for that hectic period.

SEATON: Well, it wasn't exactly in the misty blue; there was



a good bit in the newspapers about it. I knew where he was and all that. But, no, when they stopped at a city, they immediately had telephone connections.

[Interruption]

BURG: We can continue where we were.



SEATON: They had an arrangement whereby telephone connections were made to the train immediately. And then, everybody, I think, everybody got on the telephone that could, because they had the telephone books from all the major cities. And the one time that I traveled on the train with Fred, those telephone books occupied the upper berth and I had to move them all down when I went to bed at night; so I remember those telephone books very well. [Laughter]

BURG: Now when was it that you joined the train for a period of time?

SEATON: Oh, I suppose it was midway through the campaign. I think I went to Denver and got on the train from there. And I don't remember where we went; I was only on there

about two or three days. I remember sitting with Mrs. Eisenhower a couple of times when the train went through a tunnel; so it must have been up in the mountains. And I was on the train at the time the hassle about [Richard M.] Nixon's fund took place.

BURG: Oh, you were?



SEATON: Yes. Do you remember when he was charged with using campaign funds for private purposes or something of that sort?

BURG: Yes, they raised a fund for him in California, and I think the odd thing about that fund was that it did apply to matters between campaigns, which made it a slightly different kind of fund than the normal fund.

SEATON: As I remember the fund was actually intended for his private use, and somebody objected to the idea of his being helped. But I was on the train when that story broke and when the "Checkers" speech was made. And I remember all the excitement on that train! We were close to Nebraska at that time. All I really remember about it is that Fred got off the train and went to a pay phone booth to call a friend

of his named Jack McKnight--and I believe his home was in Auburn, Nebraska--to get Jack to help. And then, of course, there were conferences all over the place about what was to be done about it. And in the beginning, I think, I'm not sure, but I think Fred was the only person who held out for keeping Nixon as the candidate.

BURG: They all wanted to--



SEATON: They all wanted to fire him immediately, regardless of the consequences, which they didn't even think about, of course. And nobody had any idea about how to handle the situation. Fred got off the train; he was gone for the better part of a day and then rejoined the train. And of course, all the reporters were "psst, psst," all kinds of questions. They asked me. Well, I knew nothing; I didn't even know he had left the train. And after Fred got back on the train, then they made the decision about keeping Nixon as the candidate. And I'm sure it was Fred's idea to do this "Checkers" speech and to explain to the country at large what this was all about. But it was a situation comparable to the [Senator Thomas F.] Eagleton one recently, which I

thought it was--well, I shouldn't venture an opinion on that. I didn't agree with them though.

BURG: With regard to Eagleton?

SEATON: Yes.

BURG: This is the trip that you took which initiated, for you, in Denver?

SEATON: I think so.



BURG: It was on that one?

SEATON: I think I flew to Denver and spent a day or two in Denver and then went on the train.

BURG: Did the train hold where it was--you think it was in Nebraska?

SEATON: I think it was in Nebraska.

BURG: Did it just simply stay where it was for the balance of that day?

SEATON: As I remember they kept right on their schedule.

BURG: So your husband got off and then had to catch up and rejoin later on?

SEATON: Yes.



BURG: May I ask why he called Mr. McKnight for his help?

SEATON: I can't give you an answer to that except that he had worked with McKnight in Nebraska politics and he was close to McKnight, and he thought McKnight would be able to contact some people about it, and he wanted to get Jack's reaction to the whole thing. Now he is another person who might be able to give you some information; I don't know.

BURG: Yes, I would like to contact him and see what it was that he and your husband discussed and how their conversations ran. Now, your impression about everyone wanting to dump Nixon, with the exception of your husband, that was drawn from your observations of how people were acting around you, their conversations at meals, and this sort of thing?

SEATON: Yes. Well, I overheard a good deal, yes, not necessarily at meals. And then, of course, I heard about it

later from people who were involved in it. I can't give you names; I can't give you dates; I can't give you places, but there was this thing, and you'll find further reference to it in your reading about that campaign and about Nixon's career. I have seen that referred to quite recently in something I was reading.



BURG: Well, you're the first person that I've talked with who was actually there on the scene at the time that this occurred. I was trying to think who would have been on that train, certainly Sherm Adams was there--

SEATON: Oh, yes, and Rachel, she was on it all the time.

BURG: And his wife was on. And I wonder if Senator Carlson, Frank Carlson, was also on the train?

SEATON: Well, he was at one time. I don't know whether he was there then or not. Another person who probably knew quite a bit about it is Katherine Howard, Mrs. Charles P. Howard, from Boston.

BURG: Yes, I think the Columbia project has done interviewing

with Mrs. Howard. I've not yet checked to see if she happens to talk about that incident. Did your husband--he must have been hard pressed when that news broke--did he have the opportunity to discuss this with you on that day that it broke?

SEATON: No.



BURG: Was he able to tell you much about it later on, or--

SEATON: No, actually I left the train very shortly thereafter and, of course, he never had time to talk to me when he was on the train anyway. They were running eighteen hour days. I'll tell you a funny little story; he did something that the General liked very much and said, "What can I do for you in return?"

And Fred said, "Knock off those six-thirty in the morning meetings!" [Laughter] From there on, Fred was not called to the office on the train until about seven-thirty or eight.

BURG: Did the General crack up when he told him that?

SEATON: Yes, he laughed. And there was another time when the General--I don't know whether he cracked up or not, but it was about

two-thirty in the morning and Fred had just got to sleep. He didn't like getting up in the morning, but he could work all through the night. And he had only just got to sleep and there was a knock on the door of his room and he wasn't happy about it; he roared out about, "Who in the so-and-so's that?"

A very gentle little voice said, "It's me, Ike." Well you can imagine Seaton crawled out of that bed pretty fast! But Ike was like that you know. One of the things about him that impressed me was that, in spite of having been a VIP for ever and ever so many years, he never acted like a VIP. And a rank has its privileges and, in a personal way, he never demanded those privileges. Of course, when he was in the office, that was something else again. His very closest personal friends never called him "Ike" when they were downstairs. He was "Mr. President." When he went upstairs to private quarters, that was "Ike," but downstairs, that was "Mr. President." And it wasn't the person; it was the office that was important. But as an individual he was very easy, when he wasn't working. But Fred used to say at home sometimes, he'd be pretty tired, and he say, "The Old Man sure



chewed his teeth today," which meant that the President was not pleased with something that was going on and he was expressing his displeasure, and it got taken care of.

BURG: You get the impression as you read Sherm Adams and Robert [K.] Gray, and some of the others, that there were those days. He's reputed, of course, to have this fiery temper, which he struggled with manfully to keep under control, and which he may have used, very carefully, when he felt it was the thing to do. He may have lifted the lid on it and let it blossom forth for the effect that it created, and just as carefully pulled it back inside and tucked it away.



SEATON: I would not think of him as being a man with a high temper. Of course, I didn't really know him, but when he made up his mind about something, that was that. And he wanted action; he wanted it now, and he got it now.

BURG: Yes, yes, he seems to have.

SEATON: I sometimes used one of the White House drivers to take me home in the summertime. And he would take a leave and drive me and the children to Nebraska and then fly back

and use that as part of his vacation time. And he was a White House driver, and he once told me how difficult it was to keep up if you happened to be toward the end of the line, because when the General got ready to go, you went at sixty miles an hour, and if you are perhaps twentieth car in a cavalcade; you've got to go about seventy miles an hour to catch up into your place in line. And sometimes the highway patrol took a dim view of your exceeding the speed limit to that extent. But that was the General, "We go."



BURG: We go, that's right. Let me ask you this with respect to your going on that campaign train, you joined it at Denver, you went down to the main railroad depot to join the train?

SEATON: Yes, I think so.

BURG: Yes. Do you happen to recollect how big a train was that, four or five cars, or did it run longer than that?

SEATON: Much longer. I'm not sure of the number, it seems to me that somebody said eighteen cars. But as I recollect the trains that ran through our town during the war time, they carried much longer trains than that, and yet I was told

that this was as long a train as the railroads would permit on the tracks. If they could have added another car, they would have cheerfully done so, and they sure needed the room.

BURG: Now when you stepped on board the train, was your husband able to meet you when you got there?

SEATON: Oh, no, I'm sure I went out with the cavalcade to get on the train. You know, they went in a convoy of automobiles. No, he didn't have any time for me.

BURG: This was a cavalcade?



SEATON: Well, when the whole party transferred from one location to another. They were in the Brown Palace in Denver, that was headquarters, and when they went on the train, oh, at least half the headquarters, I'd say, also moved onto the train, and so somebody arranged cars to transport everybody and they all went out at one time.

BURG: I had thought that perhaps the train was coming through and Denver was a stop, but I see what you mean now.

SEATON: Well, no, when I got on, it was not a campaign stop.

BURG: It was starting out, in short, to make some campaign stops.

SEATON: I think they had been in headquarters for a few days. But really I'm just guessing; I don't remember.

BURG: When you got on the train itself, who took you in charge? You had accommodations on that train?

SEATON: Well, I slept under the telephone books, if you call that accommodations. [Laughter]

BURG: Under the telephone books! Was this a roomette or was it simply berths that were made up?

SEATON: It was a roomette. And of course there were a lot of people who didn't even have that much accommodation. His secretaries and what not were lucky to get a berth.

BURG: So somebody guided you to your quarters. Was that the first thing that happened to you?

SEATON: Well, somebody must have taken me there--

BURG: Showed you where you were going to be quartered, and you could drop off your bags.



SEATON:--where I was going to be. From then on, I was on my own.

BURG: Did they give you any kind of a data sheet to tell you what the routine of the train was? For example, I assume there were dining cars or a dining car on it. Did they list meal times, or tell you that--

SEATON: I don't think so; I think the dining car was open all the time.

BURG: Now, did you have to pay for the meals that you ate in that car?

SEATON: I think so.



BURG: Were any cars off limits to you, Mrs. Seaton?

SEATON: Only the private ones, the General's car and Mrs. Eisenhower's car.

BURG: Do you remember if those were carried toward the front of the train or the back of the train? I presume the back of the train.

SEATON: I think the back.

BURG: Because they were able to come out on the observation platform--

SEATON: Yes, that's right.

BURG:--pretty readily.



SEATON: They were right next to the observation platform. I remember one time we made a whistle stop in the middle of the night and Mamie was most gracious on that occasion; she got up, put on a pretty robe and put a pink ribbon in her hair and came out on the back end of the train, quite obviously having gotten out of bed.

BURG: That may have been the one--I think they got a photograph, on that occasion.

SEATON: Yes, there was one somewhere; I've seen it.

BURG: Now, there was at least a car or more devoted to the press, I assume.

SEATON: Oh, yes. I think possibly only one car for the press,

although there might have been others. Then there was a car for the secretaries. And of course, they tried to stop every two or three days or five days for an overnight, so the girls could wash their clothes and everybody could get a good bath, and that sort of thing. And they made up a song that they called "Ode to the Road", and I can't remember it. I know I sent a copy of it down. The only line that I actually remember now is "When it's a week or more//Mum's the word they're saying." But you know, they had a lot of fun on that car, too. This is the thing that I would like people to understand, because there were some delightful people on that train and they did things like making up this song, and they had parties once in a while. And, oh, if anybody had a birthday, they had a birthday cake, you know, and got together on that, and they made quite a production out of this song. Then Rachel Adams ran around taking pictures of everybody and everything. And she got left behind once.

BURG: Oh, she did?



SEATON: Yes, they had a club of people who had got left behind. If you weren't on board when it was time for the

train to pull out, that was your hard luck. And Rachel was one of several who didn't make it back when the train was ready to pull out, and those people had to find their own way of catching up to the train.



BURG: And hope that some local Republican would put them in the car--

SEATON: Well, yes, because there'd be another stop a few miles down the line, you see. I think Rachel got the local sheriff to drive her on to the train. And they did all kinds of funny things. For instance, the press corps had a lot of pinups in their car, and Rachel got an idea one day and she went out and she bought some ruffled pink curtains. And when the press was all out at something or other, she went into that car and she took down all the pinups and she hung up the ruffled pink curtains, or whatever it was. I don't know; it's probably in her book. And another thing they did was to put a "jackelope" in poor [General Robert] Bobby Cutler's bed--"Bubby", they called him. He was Bostonian; they have that clipped manner of speaking; Robert Cutler, "general", no less. And so somebody gave him a "jackelope", which is the

head of a jackrabbit with antelope horns fastened to it. And so Rachel slipped down there one night, and she put this thing in Bobby's bed and then pulled the covers up over it. So you see it was a lot of fun, a lot of good nature. And there were a lot of scraps, too, but they always managed to get settled peacefully. And, I think, that's where Fred became known as Ike's trouble shooter, because he always seemed to be able to get people back into a good humor again.

BURG: Do you remember the kinds of things that might cause friction on that train, the sorts of incidents that would arise?



SEATON: I don't remember anything specific, but there was generally a hassle about which local dignitaries were going to board the train, at which stop, and how long they were to be allowed to ride on the train, because they were limited as to space. And there were always discussions about politics in each place where they stopped, and what would be the best approach, and all that sort of thing. But these things are routine with any campaign; even if you are just running for dog catcher, you run into these discussions. So there wasn't

anything particular about that. The one thing that one should remember, I think, is that this is the last campaign that was made by train, that the next one was by air, and the use of radio and television was actually just beginning in the '52 campaign.

BURG: So, many places, television would play no part whatsoever.

SEATON: That's right.



BURG: It might in the larger cities, Chicago, New York, or Los Angeles, but not to any degree in most other areas of the country.

SEATON: And this was strictly a whistle stop campaign. Now there was some flying done, and certain portions of the party would fly on to another city. And then, of course, the advanced people, quite a lot of them flew to get there ahead of time, in order to make the arrangements. And then of course, there was the big balloon; did anybody ever tell you about that?

BURG: I'm not sure that I know that story.

SEATON: Well let's see, there was a group of young people, and I've forgotten what they called themselves. But they got this giant balloon from Goodyear, I think, and they carried that thing around the country in a truck and--no, that was Firestone--because one of the Firestone daughters was the moving force in this group. And she was, oh, in her early twenties then, I think, and they just had themselves a ball. But they had this balloon on a truck, and they had to have a winch on it, because sometimes they would have to roll it down to get other things on the highway. And then they'd drive on through the city with it and winch it up into the air, and there it hung, for as long as the party was in that city.

BURG: Vividly painted with "I Like Ike," or something like this, all over it?

SEATON: I'm sure it was.



BURG: So it was quite an eye catcher. And as I think about it, somewhere on that tour of theirs, they incurred the wrath

of some local political group, because the thing absolutely dominated this particular city.

SEATON: Yes. Well, I'm sure that happened more than once. Betty Firestone was a charmer, and she could get publicity doing most anything.

BURG: And of course, Leonard Firestone, I believe, was very much involved in this campaign, too. On the train, what might a typical day--in those two or three days you spent on the train--how might a typical day go for you, personally?

SEATON: Well, I spent most of my time in one of the cars where they received people, because they were not made up into beds, you see. And I just sat there and watched people come and go, and talked to the secretaries or reporters, or whoever came along to sit down for a minute.

BURG: These cars were set up for the benefit of people who might board the train for this short period of time and leave it again, local dignitaries, as you call them.



SEATON: Local people who were brought on board to meet the candidate and travel with it from, oh, maybe a hundred miles or so.

BURG: And members of the press would drift in there, too, from time to time to relax a little bit--and secretaries on the train?

SEATON: Yes.



BURG: Then you would take your meals in the dining car?

SEATON: I went to eat whenever somebody said, "Let's go."

BURG: Your husband might sometimes be able to join you, and perhaps more frequently couldn't join you.

SEATON: Well, I really didn't see much of him, that's true. He would try to get off some time in the evening. And then of course, there were special occasions going on, like somebody's birthday, and they were having a little party; I was with him then. Actually, I was on the train twice, I think, and I can't remember where I was except that I was in Texas and it was time for me to go home, and Walter Swan was trying

to get me a reservation on commercial airlines, and he couldn't get one. And I was all ready to go to the airport and he picked up my bag and he took me up to the campaign plane. And I questioned it, and he said, "Well, we couldn't get you reservations, so we're just going to take you on to New York with us; I can get you a reservation home from there." So in order to get home from Texas, I went to New York. That's the sort of thing that got done, which is an illustration, I think, of the fact that they were resourceful. And if one idea didn't work, they had another one right quick, and there was a lot of playing it by ear, really. And this is true, mostly in campaigns, because you don't know what the public reaction is going to be, and you've got to get a glimpse of that before you know what to say next.



BURG: Right. Now how much contact did you have, during these times that you were on the train, with either General Eisenhower or Mrs. Eisenhower?

SEATON: Well, not any with him, at all.

BURG: None with him at all?

SEATON: No. With her, some, yes. Of course, she didn't see much of him either. And so she would ask various people to come into her car, and as I said; she didn't like going through tunnels; she always wanted somebody there with her when that happened. And she asked various people in for tea, or sometimes for lunch, or that sort of thing. She was pretty well surrounded by people of whom she was fond, although I think nearly everybody on the train was an utter stranger to her when the thing started. Still, she soon had her favorites.

BURG: Can you tell me who some of these people might have been?

SEATON: No I can't; I'm sorry; I just don't know that. The only woman that I remember on the train was Katherine Howard--

BURG: And Mrs. Adams.

SEATON:--and Rachel Adams--well, Katherine was a member of the campaign party. And of course, she paid some attention to Mrs. Eisenhower, but she had duties. And Rachel, I think, paid more attention to Mrs. Eisenhower, probably, and of course,



during the two or three days I was on the train, I did, too. But then Rachel was pretty busy, too, what with her high jinks and her pictures. She must have had thousands of pictures.

BURG: Now you saw General Eisenhower, I'm sure, from time to time; you'd see him passing by, or see him at a distance, and you saw and talked with Mrs. Eisenhower. You saw both of them at two different points in time, since you were on the campaign train at two different points in time. Did you notice any difference in their behavior on these two separate occasions? For example, I might ask you did either of them show signs of fatigue at one time, and not at the other, or did their temper--

SEATON: Well, toward the end of the campaign, everybody was getting worn down. I don't think they were any more so than anybody else, but that was a long campaign. They were on that train for what--six weeks? And you have a map; you know how many miles they traveled. That campaign started right after Labor Day, didn't it?

BURG: I believe so.



SEATON: That's a long time to live out of a suitcase on a train. And everybody was showing the strain, and yet nobody was showing it unduly. And I don't remember that anybody was getting short-tempered, or anything of that sort, but there was less spring in the step and not quite so many smiles.

BURG: Yes, I suppose that the five hundredth time you walked out on the platform to talk to a small group of people in a small town, the bloom was off the rose by then.

SEATON: Sure it was, by that time.



BURG: Do you remember whether the Nixon affair and the Checkers speech left any--I don't want to use the word ill-feeling, exactly--I think the word I want is--did it leave any sign of strain that you happened to observe? Were there some people--

SEATON: I don't think it did, and I'm not speaking only from my own observation. I think the problem was how to handle that problem. And once that solution had been arrived at, and there was a public reaction to it, everybody was very happy

about it. It was my impression at the time, and that's the impression I've gained from things I've read since. It wasn't that anybody was mad at Nixon; it's just that everybody was very concerned about how this was going to affect the whole campaign. And when the speech had been made and the result assessed, then everybody just forgot about it; they had more important things to worry about.



BURG: And he was campaigning of course separately, and you could go back to concentrating on that aspect of the campaign that you had in front of you. Let me ask you this question. Now, as you look back on it, does any person on that train stand out in your mind as an obnoxious personality? Was there anyone on that train that irked you in any way?

SEATON: [Laughter] There was one photographer who annoyed me. He popped me on the top of the head and said, "Move over, sister."
[Laughter]

BURG: To get a place to sit down, or so he could shoot, from a better angle?

SEATON: Oh, I was in his way when he was taking a picture. And that is the only time anyone of those people ever offended

BURG: What did "sister" do when she was rapped on the head?

SEATON: "Sister" moved, believe me! [Laughter] Well, I didn't realize I was in his way, and he was in a hurry, because the thing he wanted to photograph wasn't going to stay there very long, and I didn't blame him. I was annoyed at the moment. Then when I realized what was going on, I was sorry, more than anything else, that I had got in his way.



BURG: Now did you ever go out and observe, from the viewpoint of the people standing at track side, the little speeches, little remarks made by the General or by Mrs. Eisenhower, or did you stay on the train?

SEATON: Well, I used to go--back, wasn't it?--to the end of the train. I never got off the train because I was scared I'd get left, and I was so unimportant nobody would have found me if I had. But I could get to where I could see the reactions of the people who were down there. And I was always amazed at the number of people who came down to those railroad tracks, which in any town are the most unattractive part of the town; and often they waited for a long time; they

saw the General for, oh, two or three minutes, no more; Mrs. Eisenhower didn't say anything, and yet they were so enthusiastic; this was the thrill of the year!

[(Interruption) (Tape 2)]



BURG: I was going to ask you, too, one photographer turned out to be obnoxious. Who do--

SEATON: I want to point out that later I got acquainted with that man and I liked him very much.

BURG:--when he wasn't trying to get an angle somewhere. Do any people stick out in your mind now as being exceptionally gracious people, and kindly people, from that train?

SEATON: There was one secretary that I enjoyed and I don't remember her name. But the outstanding woman was Katherine Howard. I mentioned her a few moments ago, a really delightful person, and a true Bostonian. She invited me with a group of other women to her home on Beacon Street one day for luncheon. And we went in on the ground floor and we were shown upstairs to the reception room, and later we were

shown upstairs again to the dining room. And we had clam chowder and deep dish apple pie.

BURG: If that doesn't sound like a Boston luncheon,



SEATON: Yes. And another time when I saw her she told me that they had had a fire in the top story of their house, and they were then in the process of rebuilding. And her comment, I thought, was typical. She said, "You know, we're the kind of people who want everything to stay just exactly the way it was." And she was having some difficulty in reproducing exactly what she had had before. She got it done though.

BURG: From what I know of her career, I'm not surprised that she got it done. She would see to it that she got it done.

SEATON: She's still quite active. It's a small world, you know. I went to Mexico last winter, because my brother-in-law takes a house down there in January and I went down to stay a few days with them. And I met there a woman from Boston. And of course, all these people were completely strangers to me. It's a very social group; I went to something

like six parties in eight days. And to make conversation is something else again, but I instinctively turned to this woman to talk with her, and I told her that I had only known one person from Boston in my life and that was Katherine Howard. And she said, "Oh, yes, I worked on a lot of committees with her." So it's a small world.

BURG: Yes, it's remarkable how you do run into people. So she stands out in your mind as--

SEATON: Oh, yes. And she had the room next to Fred's and they had a lot of fun about it; they brushed their teeth at the same time, you know, so neither one would bother the other with the noise and that sort of thing, because the partitions were something less than adequate. And another thing that has impressed me is that wherever we went--of course I didn't travel anything like as much as Fred did--all over the world, there was always somebody from Nebraska there doing an important job. So Nebraska exports a lot of their talent apparently. One time, I went to the South Pacific with him and he always took his secretary along; she was a very competent woman.



BURG: Who was this, by the way, may I ask?

SEATON: Her name was Leola Tise. She died about '64 or '65, I think, so you can't get anything from her, unfortunately. But we got off the plane in one of the tropical islands and there was a party there to meet us of course, and Lee spotted this one person and said, "Hello there, good to see you, I haven't seen you since Alaska." Well, it was a department employee who had been transferred from Alaska to the South Pacific and it was a matter of six months or so since Lee had seen her, and that was in Alaska. And Lee was another person who never forgot anybody she had ever met, which of course was very valuable to the Secretary.

BURG: Oh, yes, it's a remarkable talent to have.



SEATON: But he didn't need much help in that department either, he knew them all.

BURG: Now, when the campaign was over and the election night came, was your husband able to be with you that night?

SEATON: No, he was up in headquarters.

BURG: In New York?

SEATON: Yes. We had a suite and I was being hostess for whomever came in for a spot of rest, or a spot of refreshment, or whatever.

BURG: I see. So you were there in New York, too. And did you call this something like a "Nebraska" room, or was it just an informal--

SEATON: No, it was Seaton's room, that's all.

BURG: Seaton's room.



SEATON: And this is one of my minor treasures. I got a bouquet of roses that day, because election day was the fourth of November I think, and my birthday was the fifth, so of course the results were not all in until the fifth. And with this bouquet of red roses was a little card which said, "Darned few people I know ever get thirty-eight states for a birthday present." Signed, [Warren E. Burger]. And I came across that the other day; I think I'm going to have it encased in plastic or something.

BURG: Yes, wouldn't that be nice.

SEATON: I thought it was particularly thoughtful of him, because of course he was as involved in this thing as anybody. And yet he remembered it was my birthday. And of course, nobody paid any great amount of attention to anybody else; we were all hanging over the radio and the TV, listening to the returns as they came in.

BURG: Now, when it became evident that you had won--and you got a chance to see your husband again after all this time--

SEATON: Oh, well, I didn't see him until Thanksgiving; there was a lot of mopping up to do you know, after the campaign was over.

BURG: --Oh, you didn't! What did he do during that period of time?

SEATON: I don't know. But, you know, there were things scattered all over the countryside that had to be cleaned up; offices closed and all that sort of thing.

BURG: The sort of thing that we don't think about.



SEATON: Yes. You think about the returns and that's it.

BURG: Yes, and all the housekeeping and the financial details that have got to be wrapped up.

SEATON: Yes, it takes a long time to do all that.

BURG: And he was involved in that, too?

SEATON: Oh, yes, sure.



BURG: So around Thanksgiving time, presumably he would be free. But was he, or had offers been made to him?

SEATON: Yes, then he relaxed. He did not accept a position in the cabinet; I don't even know that he was asked to go back to Washington at that time. But his father was dying of cancer, and so we both decided that he shouldn't leave at that point. As a matter of fact, his father died in December. So by that time, of course, the cabinet had all been arranged, and so he was not included at that point. But the first time there was a vacancy, he was called. So I think it was in September, probably, of '53, when Eisenhower called him and wanted him to come back to Washington.

BURG: The President called him himself?

SEATON: Yes, I think it was Eisenhower personally that he talked to.

BURG: Did that call come into his office, or did it happen to come at home in the evening, for example?

SEATON: You know it was earlier than September, because he was still up in the Black Hills and I had come home to take care of some things at the house. And I remember he called me and said that he had this call that wanted him to come back to Washington. And he said, "What do you think about it?"

And I said, "Well, you helped get the guy in the job; I think you'd better go and help him do it." So that was that. So then he was back and forth a couple of times reorganizing his business affairs and getting acquainted in Washington.

BURG: Did he tell you what it was that he was to do when he went back there?

SEATON: Yes. This was all laid out when they called him.



BURG: Now was this his position as--

SEATON: That's when he went into [Assistant Secretary of Defense] defense.

BURG: For legislative affairs.



SEATON: Yes. And it was not very long thereafter when the [Senator Joseph R.] McCarthy problem broke; I guess it was in spring. And it was in December when I moved to Washington, although I knew I was going. He found a house before I got back there. And I put one of the children in boarding school, the oldest one, so he went back there in September. And then I didn't move until December when there was a place for me to go.

BURG: December of '53. And where was that house may I ask; was it in Washington, D.C., or was it over on the Virginia side?

SEATON: It was in Arlington at 3535 35th Street, just a block below where 35th Street crossed 36th Street, [Laughter] one of those winding kind of things, you know. So I went back in

December. That was an interesting experience too. I got there on the 10th of December and Fred left on the 11th.

BURG: Where was he bound for?



SEATON: It was Europe; I don't remember what the assignment was now; he was gone for a couple of weeks. So there I was in a perfectly strange area with three kids to take care of, didn't know a soul; he had designated his secretary in the Pentagon to look after me. I was to call her if I needed anything. Well, sure, that would be just great; only I couldn't call her up and say, "I can't find the salt shaker."

BURG: You had moved a lot of your household belongings?

SEATON: Yes. He had rented a furnished house, but then I had to bring dishes and pans and that sort of thing.

BURG: Right. Now you spoke of the McCarthy hearings. There are two things with respect to that; one would be to go back briefly to the campaign train period, because there was the matter of the reference, for example, to General [George C.] Marshall, which in Wisconsin was dropped out of the General's speech. Did your husband ever discuss that incident with you,

give you his views on it?

SEATON: No. All I know about that is like Will Rogers, what I read in the newspapers. I did know about the McCarthy trial because that was--well, I used to listen to it on the TV; we had a TV then. We didn't stay in Arlington; we'd moved into the District. Now he chose Arlington because it was easy to get to the Pentagon from there. Well, that was just fine and dandy, except everything I was doing was down in DC, and it took me about an hour to get there, which didn't turn out to be a bit convenient. But the--now this is a silly little thing--the clincher came when I discovered bedbugs in that house; I went straight up in the air. "I don't care if we got a lease; I don't care about anything; we're leaving this house!"

BURG: You had no tolerance at all for the great American bedbug!

SEATON: No, in Washington there are bigger and better bugs than any other place outside the tropics. And of course, I had an exterminator, regularly. And he assured me that bedbugs were just routine. But I had a bad association with



bedbugs in the back of my head and I was not about to live where there were bedbugs. So we were able to break that lease and move into the District, which turned out to be a darned lucky thing, because in Virginia you pay income tax on your total income, regardless of where derived, if you have lived there over six months. Well, we moved out in May; we moved in in December; we just made it.



BURG: So any of his Nebraska income would have been taxed also.

SEATON: Well, of course, yes. And what they pay an Assistant Secretary is not really adequate for living on, and certainly we had plenty of use for our income besides supporting Virginia. So we moved into the District.

BURG: And where were you living then in the District?

SEATON: Then we lived on Foxhall Road; it's a very nice area. And we stayed there for two years and Fred said, "We're leaving, don't renew the lease." We had a two-year lease. So I was already in the process of packing because I was going to leave as soon as school was out.

He was going to stay on for a little while longer, and I had rented a small apartment for his accommodations when the lease on the house had run out. And I was packing, and one day he came home and he said, "Sherm Adams called me in today--"

BURG: 1956.

SEATON: Yes, that was '56, early in '56.



BURG: Coming up on June of '56; so much for his plans to go!
[Laughter]

SEATON: Yes, yes! And he said, "Sherm Adams called me in today."

And I said, "Yes, what did he want?"

"Well, he said, 'How would you like to be Secretary of Interior? Take your time about making up your mind and let me know in the morning.'" [Laughter]

BURG: That is the Adams that I know!

SEATON: Yes. So I didn't say anything in particular at that point, but the next morning he came down to breakfast and he said,

"Well, is it yes or no?"

I said, "Well, I guess you'd better go ahead with it." So then I got into a real housing problem, because I had let go the lease on the house; I had rented a one bedroom apartment, and all the children's school arrangements had been changed. So all of a sudden, I had to do it all over again. And so I put the three younger children in boarding schools; the older boy had been in boarding school to the point where he rebelled against it. So I got him enlisted in Landon as a day student. And I managed to convince the apartment owner that it would be possible for her to get us a little bigger apartment, and so we had what I called a one and a half bedroom apartment, and lived in that for a year. When the other kids came home from school, I rented rooms at the Wardman Park for them, for the Christmas vacation.

BURG: Was this apartment in that area, or was it--

SEATON: Yes. Cleveland House, it was just about a block from the Wardman Park. And so the kids lived in the Wardman Park, and we lived in the Cleveland House during Christmas vacation.



BURG: Well, relating back to something that I asked a little earlier, you did not know about the situation regarding McCarthy in Wisconsin during the campaign period, but you did say something about the McCarthy hearings. Did your husband express opinions to you about this whole McCarthy-Army controversy?



SEATON: No. By the time he got through going over it, which would be along about midnight or so, preparing for the next day's hearings, he had had it! But he had become acquainted with a man named [H.] Struve Hensel, who was in the judge advocate's department. And so the two of them got together every night at Struve's house, and Fred took me along because I had become acquainted with Isabel Hensel and liked her very much. So Isabel and I heard a great deal about these hearings. And of course we both watched them on TV all day. And then there was this lawyer they brought in; I think he was a Bostonian too, what the heck was his name?

BURG: Joseph [N.] Welch.

SEATON: Yes, Welch. And he was there sometimes.

BURG: Oh, he was?

SEATON: Oh, yes, and I believe [James D. St. Clair, Welch aide or Darrell St. Claire, Senate Rules Committee] was there a few times too. And those hearings you know, went on for several weeks. And after spending the whole evening with Struve and Isabel every evening, neither one of us wanted to talk any more about McCarthy when we got back to the house, our own house.

BURG: Those discussions at Hensel's, were they in the nature of strategy meetings? How to cope with Senator McCarthy?

SEATON: Yes, because this was during the hearings, you see; it was a trial. And they would consider all the things that might come up the next day and what kind of answers they would give. And then they would go over the evidence of the current day. And so it was quite a project, really.

BURG: May I ask you to give me a kind of summation of how your husband viewed Senator McCarthy, Senator McCarthy's principles?

SEATON: He had known Joe McCarthy for quite a long time and he liked him; black Irishman he was, you know, wild really. But he was not in sympathy with him, in this particular instance. And so it was rather traumatic for him because he liked Joe, and yet he was so sure that Joe was wrong. But his personal affection for Joe McCarthy went out the window when it came to the trial. Personal feelings had nothing to do with that.

BURG: Were the two men ever close afterwards?



SEATON: No, I don't think so. Well, Joe very definitely went down the drain after the hearings, you know. And he had a dear wife. I came across a letter from her in Fred's papers, about Joe. And Joe had many fine qualities, but he just got carried away with this thing. And it was a bad thing for him to do.

BURG: I'm asking here for a value judgment from you which may be difficult for you to give. Did you personally feel that what he was doing, the line he was taking, was sincerely held by him, or did you view this as a kind of political opportunism?

SEATON: Well, I don't think I thought either one. I thought Joe was sincere in what he was doing, and of course he did have some points, you know. This communism thing was just beginning to be understood at that time. But I didn't like the way Joe was going about it, and I felt he definitely had let himself be carried away, to the point where he was damaging his own case by his behavior. Really, he was very rude in those hearings. And if he had conducted himself in a more controlled manner it would have been much better for his case, but he annoyed and offended people with his manner. So that nobody was sympathetic toward him, which really was too bad.

BURG: How about Mr. Welch? You saw him in less formal moments. Did you reach any conclusions about the kind of man he was?

SEATON: Not really, no. I think his personality was better displayed in that TV show he was on later. He was a bit of a ham; he was a lot of fun, was very smart. And he handled the case very well. But there was a bit of pixy in him, you know. And it was fun to listen to him and it was fun to

watch him on the air; he was such a contrast to Joe McCarthy in his manners. That was another thing that didn't help Joe McCarthy any, either. His own bad behavior was contrasted.

BURG: Of course. Would you say that Welch was the same man on the TV screen, that we all saw, that you saw there at the house?

SEATON: Yes.

BURG: Not much difference.

SEATON: No. Of course, when he settled down to work, he was quite serious about it. But basically he was--I don't know any word for it but pixy, a pixy with a brain.

BURG: Was there anything in the meetings, where you did attend, where your husband and Mr. Welch were present? For example, did Welch ever express in your hearing any very positive feelings about Senator McCarthy? That is, did you ever see him in these private circumstances--

SEATON: I don't think there was anything personal in it. To him it was a case, a challenge, a fight to be won.



BURG: On TV we saw Welch giving a display, let us say, of controlled rage. I wondered if you had seen any sign of that in private circumstances, or whether that was part of the paraphernalia of the trial lawyer.

SEATON: No, that's why I said he was a ham.



BURG: So never in your hearing was he rabid about Joseph McCarthy.

SEATON: No, no.

BURG: Just a question of how do we handle what I presume we're going to have to face tomorrow morning.

SEATON: I would have liked to have seen him in a court trial, because he must have been a magnificent trial lawyer.

BURG: Yes, I was reminded of what I had read about Clarence Darrow and others of the same ilk; the way in which they played upon a jury. Of course Mr. Welch would be one of the first lawyers to have a "jury," in effect, of millions of us.

SEATON: Yes. Well, if he hadn't gone into law, he would have

done well on the stage. A trial lawyer has to be an actor after all.

BURG: Yes, I think that's right. Now I want to ask you, too, you spoke of the fact that while you were living in Arlington, it meant about an hour's travel for you into Washington, DC, because there were the things that were interesting you at that period. Well, let's take a few moments and let me ask you, what were you up to at that stage? I've seen you now at work in Hastings, Nebraska; now what are you doing?

SEATON: What am I doing there?

BURG: In Washington, D.C. Yes.

SEATON: Well, I went to the Senate ladies' every week, that was number one.

BURG: Because you still could, your husband had been in the Senate.

SEATON: Oh, yes, I kept my membership in that. I still have that membership, I believe, unless I forgot to pay my dues. And then Mrs. Hensel introduced me to the Spanish-Portugese

study group which met every week. At that point they had, I think, three classes, two in Spanish and one in English. I had a letter recently from one of the women who was active in it then and still is, and they have increased their membership in their classes by, oh, I think, she said they had twenty classes now, something like that. This was very interesting because it put me in contact with the South Americans, and I've always liked South Americans. And I didn't actually learn too much Spanish; I had had quite a bit of Spanish in school, so it was a refresher course for me. But the interesting thing was meeting these people.



BURG: Were these people from the various legations and embassies?

SEATON: From the embassies, yes.

BURG: And was the purpose of this that they would sort of exchange a kind of practice or instruction in Spanish, and that you would reciprocate with--

SEATON: No, wait, we had regular classes.

BURG: Oh, taught by trained teachers of Spanish or Portuguese?

SEATON: Yes. Well, actually we didn't have any classes in Portugese. I don't know how that got into it. I think when they started this group there was one in Portugese but that had been dropped, but the name was still kept. There were two classes in Spanish, and the instructors mostly were embassy people, but they were people who knew how to teach a class in a language.

BURG: Which you would have to have.



SEATON: Yes. And I went to that quite a bit.

BURG: Anyone of your friends in Washington, D.C. take part in this with you, or was this done pretty much on your own?

SEATON: No, I didn't know anybody else in the class at the time I went into it, except Mrs. Hensel. And they had lived in Washington for a while and she introduced me to some people, some activities, none of which I pursued very actively. She is what I call a do-gooder, and so I did things like baking for bake sales and that sort of thing.

BURG: And it didn't really capture your interest.

SEATON: No, that wasn't anything different from what I did in Hastings. And well, I went around and saw things pretty much on my own. In those days I had enough time for it. And then of course, I had three children then, and I didn't have full time help at that point.

BURG: What particularly appealed to you in Washington as you went around to look at things?

SEATON: The National Gallery, mostly. And then I went to the symphony a few times with some people that I met in the Defense Department. And actually, I didn't have very much activity at that point.

BURG: This is while your husband is Assistant Secretary of Defense.

SEATON: Yes. Well, there was a certain amount of social activity involved with that particular job. It was necessary to maintain social contacts with the legislators, Congress and the senators; so we were out evenings quite a bit.

BURG: Now let me ask you about this. I wanted to get to it,

and would like to get to it in terms of what your husband's job was at each stage, so let's take it at this stage. Your home was not the place where you entertained then?

SEATON: No, we were not expected to do entertaining to any degree. And of course we were far enough out that people were not coming out to our house anyway; if we had been a little closer, there might have been more of it. We did take people out to dinner some, but then we took them out in the District to some nice restaurant.

BURG: Rather than over in Arlington?

SEATON: Yes. At that point we didn't belong to a club. There was the congressional women's club; I went to those meetings some; that's just like any other woman's club in any other city. And that actually was about the extent of it.

BURG: Now if you were going to entertain then socially, Mrs. Seaton, your husband would extend an invitation to one or two couples, or did you tend to entertain on a larger scale?

SEATON: No, we never have; we didn't then.

BURG: You were more comfortable entertaining one or two couples.



SEATON: I think he usually had an ulterior motive in mind when he invited somebody out to dinner to discuss, without interruption, something that he was working on, or wanted to accomplish, or to find out something, or something of that sort, you see.

BURG: Let's see how it would be done because, strange to relate, historians are interested in the social details of the life of Cabinet people and near Cabinet people. Would you know well in advance, or was your husband guilty of the sin that we husbands sometimes are of lining it up in the afternoon and calling you and saying, "Tonight we are going to O'Donnell's for seafood."

SEATON: That didn't work out too well; everybody was too busy. You didn't go out to dinner on the spur of the moment, normally.

BURG: That is with guests.

SEATON: With anybody you know that you really wanted to see. Now sometimes things did come up all of a sudden but--

[Interruption]



BURG: We had been talking about social affairs. Now, you remarked that these things really had to be set up ahead of time because of the tight schedules that everyone would have.

SEATON: Everybody was busy.

BURG: So you would know several days in advance of a dinner. What would be the typical routine--would you come from home in Arlington and join your husband?

SEATON: Yes.

BURG: Now, at the site, or at his office; that is, at the restaurant or at his office?

SEATON: Usually at his office, because he wouldn't know exactly what time he was going to get off. And I wouldn't know exactly how long it would take me to get there. So we would meet in the Pentagon. It was quite simple, actually, from

Arlington. It wasn't a complicated kind of a drive to make, but there was always the problem of how much traffic there would be. And also I could park at the--I think they called it the Watergate--at the Pentagon and go up one flight of steps and around one corner and find myself in his office.

BURG: You must have been one of the few people in the whole area that could do it so easily; because it seemed to me in the Pentagon everything was six miles from wherever you were, at any moment.

SEATON: Yes. [Laughter]



BURG: That's remarkable.

SEATON: Well, it's a difficult building to get around in; there's no doubt about it. And his office was the next beyond the Secretary's office, [Secretary of Defense Charles E.] Wilson's, so that worked out nicely. And of course I had my own pass to get in with; I couldn't go in the Pentagon without a pass even though the guards knew me. I was in and out of there often enough; it was always the same guard at that door and he recognized me; I still showed my pass.

[Interruption]

SEATON: Now as to entertaining, there isn't much to talk about there.

BURG: Well, when you got to his office, had he made the arrangements for the night; had he made a reservation at a restaurant?

SEATON: Oh, yes, he always took care of those things.

BURG: Did he consult you, or did you just have a number of places that you liked to go?

SEATON: No, I just got told when to show up. [Laughter]

BURG: So you showed up, and this would be perhaps six-thirty, seven o'clock in the evening. Would your guests, assuming a couple or another two couples perhaps, would they meet you at the restaurant? Or would they meet you at the Pentagon, or how would that be handled?

SEATON: Oh, that would depend on who they were. Now if, for instance, we were taking the Swans^s out to dinner, Mr. [Thomas W.] Swan worked in the same area that Fred did; he was under



Fred, actually, and so she would come down and I would come down and we would all go from there. On the other hand, if we were taking out Jack Jarrell, who was a newspaperman, we usually met him at the restaurant because his office was nowhere near the Pentagon. He was the Omaha correspondent for the Omaha World Herald.

BURG: And how does he spell his last name?



SEATON: Jarrell, J-a-r-r-e-l-l. There's another person that you might like to talk to possibly about Fred, and that is Philip [J.] Mullin. And I have his address in Washington, but I don't remember it; so I could send that to you when I get it.

BURG: All right, we'd appreciate that. What was his job? What did he do? In what association did he--

SEATON: I think he was probably the secretary's bird dog. He had been associated with Fred in one way or another for quite a long time. And Fred got him to come to Washington to help him. I don't remember whether he was--I think he came when Fred was Interior. But they had worked together



in one thing or another, had known each other, for a long time. He had been secretary to Senator [Gordon] Allott and maybe he was with Allott before he came to Fred; I don't know. But their association goes way back beyond that. I mean, during World War II, when people couldn't travel, Fred had an arrangement with a theatrical office in New York and Denver to bring shows to Hastings. You see, we had a lot of military in Hastings then. And the traveling artists would come to Hastings--and play a one-night stand--from Chicago; then they would go on to Denver. And it was geographically fortunate that we were able to get them because the train they took from Chicago to Denver went right through Hastings. And Mullin was then working with this entrepreneur. He's had a variety of jobs, but he's an interesting man.

BURG: So I'll be talking to a man who has known your husband for a long time, since the 1940s.

SEATON: Phil, I think, is not employed on anything regularly now, but for quite a few years he was the manager of the Kennedy Center in Washington. So he's got a lot of background, a lot of stories to tell, I'm sure.

BURG: Now when you got to the restaurant, supposing that you had with you a congressman and his wife, or a couple of congressmen and wives, one of the purposes that your husband has for doing this is to acquaint these people, perhaps, with programs that are coming up in defense, where he is going to need legislative support--



SEATON:--Or possibly just to develop good relations; to make an opening, whereby he can make an approach to this individual.

BURG: Were you warned ahead of time about the nature of that particular dinner affair?

SEATON: Not usually. I could guess somewhat by who it was, whether he was working on something or just out for an evening of fun.

BURG: You had to adapt to the circumstances. Now you're in the position of being charming to ladies that, perhaps, you don't know; you're just meeting them for the first time.

SEATON: This is true, yes.

BURG: And how did you feel about that? Now some people

would be totally relaxed about that kind of a situation;
were you?

SEATON: No, I wasn't. It often disturbed me somewhat. For one thing, these people were almost invariably older than we. See, as I told you, Fred was always the youngest man to do anything he ever did. But then, it wasn't any particular burden because these were women who were familiar with Washington and the Washington scene and had been in politics for a long time, and they were quite capable of entertaining themselves and me, too, if necessary.

BURG: Were you a little shy, Mrs. Seaton?

SEATON: Yes. I think I still am, really, only I don't allow myself to be. I'd rather go off in a corner and let somebody else do the talking. [Laughter]

BURG: Yes, I can sympathize. Anyone listening to you would think that you were not, but I can understand. It's not always easy for me to face a class, for example, the first time. I'm exceedingly nervous about it, nervous any time I meet new people. And I was thinking that that would be part

of your job that you would have during this period of your husband's public service, and I wondered how you felt about that.

SEATON: Well, I hadn't done that sort of thing before, you know; I had to learn. But practically all of the women that I came in contact with were socially adept, so that there was no strain on my part, really. When we went to Washington the second time, in 1953, for instance, I went around and called on all the women--and I didn't find them all at home, of course, but quite a few I did--upon whom I should have called, according to protocol. Now very few people were doing that by that time. Protocol had been much relaxed, but I thought this was one way to get acquainted with some people. So I went around and made calls on them, and you know, they liked it.



BURG: Who were these people, Mrs. Seaton? What would protocol require of you had it been really nailed down the way it had been in the earlier days?

SEATON: Basically, the wife of every man who outranked my husband.

BURG: In the one department, Defense?

SEATON: No, in all the departments, you see. That would be the wife of every Cabinet officer who outranked my husband's department. And then everybody who outranked him in the department. Oh, this is a little complicated to explain, I think. And then he also asked me to call on the wives of the chairmen of the service committees in the Senate and the House, Armed Services Committee. And also the Joint Chiefs of Staff. And, of course, automatically everyone called on the White House every year. But that was simply a matter of driving up and leaving your card at the appropriate gate; you didn't expect to be received. But in the days when my mother-in-law lived in Washington, it was a far different thing. You know, Fred was born in Washington, D.C.

BURG: I hadn't realized that.



SEATON: Yes. And she had to do a great deal of calling, and then most women had afternoons, "at home" afternoons, in those days. When Mrs. Bristow had hers, she always had to go and help Mrs. Bristow. It was much more difficult in those days, but of course in those days there weren't so many people either.

BURG: Now when you did this, what did protocol demand of you; that you call ahead or write ahead to say that you were doing this, or did you just--

SEATON: No, you'd take your calling card and two of your husband's calling cards; you put on your best hat and your white gloves, and you get a car; you drive up to the house. If you are admitted, you lay your cards on the little table in the front hall which is provided for that purpose. You visit for no more than thirty minutes; that's the absolute limit. And you thank her and leave; that's it.



BURG: Now--if you will forgive an Abilene, Kansas, perspective on this--I take it then that the wives of Cabinet officers in the afternoons in Washington DC--one does not expect that they will be there in their house dress with the vacuum cleaner running, hair in curlers or anything of this sort. Evidently the routine demanded that in case somebody showed up, you were fit and presentable.

SEATON: And you had the tea table laid. And they used to do it that way, you know. People go around calling and

everybody knew whose afternoon it was to be at home. And the woman who was at home on Tuesday expected to be called on and she was prepared for that. Of course, if you went on some other day, the maid answered the door and either told you that the lady was out or she was indisposed.

BURG: So if she had been vacuum cleaning some place, the maid would tell you she was indisposed.

SEATON: Well, in those days, everybody had a maid.

BURG: And in '53, when you were doing this, it still worked that way. You could knock on that door and be received, and would you say that usually you were received by the lady?

SEATON: No, no, they were mostly out.

BURG: More frequently not.

SEATON: So that was no problem. But it didn't matter that they were out; what mattered was that I had taken the trouble to leave my card.

BURG: Was it required of them, by protocol, that they return your call--



SEATON: Oh no! Oh no!

BURG: Because they were your husband's superiors--that is, their husband was--it was not required that they return the call.

SEATON: Right. All this protocol business was some kind of a problem for me when I went to Washington, but one of the girls in the Department of Defense promptly procured for me a copy of the "green" book-- [The Social List of Washington and Social Precedence in Washington]

BURG: At your request, or because she thought you'd need it?

SEATON: No, I didn't even know about it-- Which is published by a woman named Caroline Hagner Shaw, and it lays out on a line all the social rules. And it is marvelously helpful. Some people used to complain about that thing and I always said, "I think it's great, because I know exactly what I may do and exactly what I must do, and I know how to avoid stepping on somebody's toes." Because some people in Washington still were quite conscious of rank. There was instances of people leaving parties because they had been seated at the wrong place at the dinner table; they wouldn't stay.



BURG: Was that, too, in the "green" book?

SEATON: That was not in the "green" book, but if the hostess had followed the "green" book, it wouldn't have happened to her. Because rank was laid out one, two, three all the way down. And another thing that we used to laugh about, really, was the fact that at any party the ranking guest leaves first and nobody else leaves. And once we got caught on it, because we were invited to what we thought was a private party, so nobody was in uniform. And that's when Fred was in Defense and we hadn't been there very long, but we did know about this rule. But since nobody was in uniform, we didn't realize they were service people. And we were having a real nice evening and finally one of these young fellows came up to Fred and said, "Mr. Secretary, will you please go home; I have to be at work early in the morning?" He couldn't go until the Secretary went. Well, from there on, we were careful about such things, because it really was a hardship for that young fellow. The Wilsons had a unique solution to it. He was always, of course, the ranking guest wherever he went and they enjoyed parties; so they would go out the



front door with great fanfare; walk around the house and come back in the back door. Well, he had left officially; so anybody else could go. [Laughter]

BURG: They could go if they wanted to. At that stage when you were making your calls, let me ask you, among the women, the ladies of Cabinet members, did you have a favorite in 1953, '54?

SEATON: No, because I didn't know the Cabinet wives then, only Mrs. Wilson, who was a darling. But she was the only Cabinet officer that I knew. You see, there's another thing I haven't explained. I had several sets of friends in Washington. There were first the Senate ladies. Well, then we went into Defense and there was a whole group of people there, with some of whom I got fairly well acquainted. I was still keeping contact with the Senate ladies. Then he went into the White House and that was an entirely different group of people and I didn't see the Defense department people any more. And then he went into Interior and I didn't see the Defense people. I saw a few of the White House people, occasionally, ones with whom we had developed a personal



friendship. Of course then I knew all the ladies in Interior and we used to meet for lunch once a month, all the under-secretary's or assistant secretary's wives; it made a nice group.

BURG: Well that's what I wanted to investigate in future interviews. As you moved, I assumed that something like this would happen. In this earlier period when your husband is Assistant Secretary, the dining out at restaurants with people that he needs to contact or just for fun, would certainly be one aspect of your life. And you told me that the two of you preferred to entertain small groups, one or two couples. Did you much of that at home, the entertaining of one or two?

SEATON: No, that was all. We were too far out.

BURG: I see. It was just too inconvenient for people to come out there, and so most of it is going to be done then in Washington, DC or somewhere in the District. Now, let me ask you this.

SEATON: And another thing we had to do was go to a lot of



cocktail parties. That was the big thing, a Washington cocktail party; undoubtedly you've heard about it.

BURG: The afternoon and evening affairs?



SEATON: Oh, usually about seven o'clock and receptions for this group or that group. And we usually got together with somebody to go to dinner after the reception. But the major part of our social activity at that stage was these everlasting cocktail parties.

BURG: Yes. I'm smiling, and Dr. [Dor] Wilson is smiling; we're all smiling about the Washington cocktail party. What is there about that that elicits smiles even from those of us who haven't really taken part in many of them? Is it that it's such a highly artificial atmosphere and condition that it just strikes amusement in--

SEATON: Yes. Well they're so absolutely useless. You can hardly talk to anybody because there's so much noise. If you see six people you know, it's amazing. Of course the thing is these groups are gathered together with the idea of their honoring somebody or other, and I suppose they are.

If you come to Washington once in five years and get invited to a Washington cocktail party, that's a big deal, because they are wonderful parties. But when you've been to one, you've been to all of them. [Laughter]

BURG: And when it's a matter of one every other day or something of this sort, it's get pretty tedious.

SEATON: Yes. And it's awfully hard on one's feet, believe me.

BURG: Yes, I'll bet. Let me ask you this question. Your husband is, of course, a very busy man. I'd be interested in knowing what did the two of you do to relax; I'm not thinking necessarily of vacations, although I'd like to know about that, too. Was it an evening at home that was best for you?

SEATON: That was it, yes. And he was a voracious reader.

BURG: Of what kind of material?

SEATON: Everything.

BURG: An omniverous reader.



SEATON: --His chief interest was history, but of course he went through all the newspapers carefully and all of the news magazines. And then he occasionally read a "whodunit"; he didn't go for westerns. And there were several magazines that he read with some degree of regularity; Harper's was one and Atlantic Monthly and that's about as far as he got, in those days.

BURG: Were you, too, a reader?



SEATON: Yes, I didn't have as much time for it as he did; I had to put the kids to bed. But I got through the newspapers and Newsweek or something of that sort.

BURG: At that time did you have television; I think you said you did, say '53?

SEATON: Yes, we did. It was our first experience with television.

BURG: Now do you happen to recollect how your viewing patterns ran at that time, things that were favorites of yours? Let me ask this, too; did you use that machine frequently?

SEATON: I had three children at home; so mostly what we watched was what the children liked. And later when they were not around so much, we had some favorite programs. I don't even remember the names of them any more. James Garner was in one that we always enjoyed.

BURG: Would that have been "Maverick?"

SEATON: Yes, "Maverick." And another one that Fred liked was "The Gray Ghost."

BURG: Oh, based on Forrest. Not Forrest. The Virginian, the Virginia partisan leader; it wasn't Turner Ashby; was it?

SEATON: It was the Civil War, and I don't know if it was based on any particular--yes it was, a particular character.

BURG: [Generals Nathan B. Forrest, John F. Mosby and Turner Ashby] Mosby and Ashby are--

SEATON: Yes, "Mosby is my name, Gray Ghost is what they call me." Yes, that was a real character, wasn't it?

BURG: Yes. And he enjoyed that because of his interest in history, presumably.



SEATON: Yes. And then, oh, there weren't so many entertainment programs in those days as there are now; there were more features, documentaries, that sort of thing, which we always tried to watch.

BURG: And the ninety minute live performance, stage-like performance. Did you drive much, for example, on the weekends; did you take drives?

SEATON: That was another thing we did quite a lot when he was in the Senate, because Homer Gruenther liked to go out on a Sunday afternoon and just drive around the country, and of course, liquor was forbidden on Sunday.

BURG: It couldn't be sold in Virginia?

SEATON: That's right. The only thing you could buy was a champagne cocktail; champagne is wine. You couldn't buy hard liquor; so Bess would pack a basket with some crackers and little things in it and a shaker full of martinis, and we'd go out in the country and have a martini, and then go somewhere for dinner. And that was fun, because they had lived there for a long time and they knew all the nice places to go, you know.



BURG: Were any of those trips set up by your husband, for example, to take advantage of the fact that you were living in a state with a long history?

SEATON: Yes, yes, he liked to go around and see things. We went to Williamsburg several times and we went down to James River one time, looking at the old estates. And of course we were at Mt. Vernon and Jefferson's home; we got around to quite a few of those places before he got too busy.

BURG: Now that would lead me to the last question along those lines, for this period of time, while he's Assistant Secretary of Defense. We talked about weekends; we talked about the evening relaxation; were the two of you able to take vacations at that stage?

SEATON: No, no. I went home every summer with the children, because at that point our house was on a farm. The house is still there, but the farm isn't. Another thing that we did fairly often was to go out on the Sequoia; that was the President's smaller yacht; the big one he put in dry dock.

BURG: That was the Williamsburg that he put into dry dock?



SEATON: Yes. And the smaller one was the Sequoia and he made it free to anybody, assistant secretaries and secretaries. Fred enjoyed that; he always enjoyed water. So we took the Sequoia quite a number of times.

BURG: How could that be arranged, Mrs. Seaton; could it be arranged just for you and your husband and family?

SEATON: Yes.



BURG: Oh, it could? And how long then would the trip be?

SEATON: Oh, it would just be an evening, normally. We'd take some guests with us, or the children. But of course the children were in boarding school, so they didn't get in on much of this. But we'd take six or eight guests out on the Sequoia, and steam down the river to Mt. Vernon. And then the motors were stopped and everybody stood at attention. And I think they played "Tape". I'm not sure; I think they played the "Star Spangled Banner" and then "Taps", and then a twenty-three gun salute, right there in front of Mt. Vernon, and then we would go back.

BURG: Because the tomb was down--the crypt for General and Mrs. Washington--is down fairly close to the river.

SEATON: Well, I had forgotten about that. But what we did was steam as close as possible to the house.

BURG: And actually when you were there, that little dock jutting out below Mt. Vernon--if you remember, you come down from the house quite some distance, and that is the burial vault. So you were probably directly saluting the man who is lying there, just a few yards away, really.

SEATON: I had forgotten that. So that's the reason for that! I never knew just why it was done like that.

BURG: Would drinks be served on a trip like that, or any food served, Mrs. Seaton?

SEATON: Oh, yes. They had a quite competent cook; he did wonderful curried shrimp. So we'd have a couple drinks and then we'd have dinner on this trip, and it would take about four hours, I suppose. We always managed to Mt. Vernon at sunset, you see. That's why they played "Taps". And it made a wonderfully pleasant evening.



BURG: Now would that be handled out of the President's budget? Is that the way it would be paid for?

SEATON: Oh, I think we had to pay for it. I really don't know, you see; all the details were taken care of in the office. But I'm pretty sure that we had to pay, not for the use, but for the expense involved of using the boat. And then of course, arrangements had to be made ahead of time. And one time we took it for a weekend, and I don't even remember where we went now, but we were on the boat all the time and that was great. That was very relaxing.



BURG: I suppose you went down the Potomac and into the Chesapeake Bay and cruised there for that weekend.

SEATON: We must have.

BURG: Well, would it be your recollection that your husband would have to pay that out of his private finances?

SEATON: Yes, yes. But of course, it was all done at cost; so it was a fairly inexpensive way to entertain. And it was something that people really enjoyed.

BURG: I can imagine they would. I hadn't even thought about that. So really, during that period of time, that's about the biggest kind of vacation that your husband can have, other than a weekend, free of his duties.



SEATON: Yes. He didn't get so many calls at the house; I don't think he got any while he was in Defense, but when he got to the White House then there were more things to handle. And by that time we were living in DC; so he quite often brought somebody in for a drink or two before dinner. He never imposed on me to feed those people, although we did go out a good deal. There were several men in the White House that formed a very close association and were very friendly. There was Gerry [Gerald D.] Morgan and Bryce [N.] Harlow, who only recently left again. And those are the only two I can think of at the moment.

BURG: Robert Gray seems to have come in to Sherm Adam's office at almost precisely the point where your husband--in fact, I think ten days after Gray arrived in that office, your husband was on his way to be Secretary of the Interior. Robert Keith Gray.

SEATON: I know; he's a Hastings man.

BURG: He's Hastings? I didn't know that!



SEATON: Yes. His mother still lives there. And I think probably it was Fred who got him in at the White House.

BURG: It was certainly Fred who took him in to meet Sherm Adams the first time. In fact, I think I remember from Gray's book that your husband winked at Gray, who was not looking forward to being taken into the presence, having heard quite a bit about Sherm Adams. Now when does that happen; how long was your husband Assistant Secretary of Defense? We should have that in this "staff book".

SEATON: I don't remember exactly; I think about fifteen months.

BURG: Yes, '53 to '55, it says, and then administrative--



INTERVIEW WITH
Mrs. Fred Seaton

by

Dr. Maclyn P. Burg
Oral Historian

on

April 14, 1975

for

Dwight D. Eisenhower Library

This is an interview being taped with Mrs. Fred Seaton in the Dwight D. Eisenhower Library on April 14, 1975. Present for the interview are Mrs. Seaton and Dr. Maclyn Burg of the Eisenhower Library staff.



DR. BURG: When we finished our last one, I made a note to myself that the next interview should perhaps begin with your husband's appointment as a White House staffer '55-'56, and then I note that in the little staff memorandum that I have here that after your husband was Assistant Secretary of Defense for Legislative Affairs, '53-'55, he became administrative assistant to the President in 1955. With particular special duties, Mrs. Seaton?

MRS. SEATON: Well, this was legislative liaison, mostly. His experience in the Senate, of course, gave him a bit of an edge. And because he'd been a senator, he was allowed on the Senate floor. And that is a very restricted privilege; so he was the only one of the staff that could do that. It involved a good deal of social activity at that point because of the necessity of maintaining good relationships with the House and Senate both. And in that, I was involved quite a bit, mostly standing in corners looking pretty, you know.

BURG: Trying not to say the wrong thing to the wrong person.

MRS. SEATON: Yes, to keep at least one foot out of my mouth.

BURG: And a tougher job, I think, than many people realize, that business of trying to be there, trying to help and yet not impede anything. And I can imagine the problems that would exist; of how, in heaven's name, can your husband possibly brief you ahead of time that there might be special problems; that this is no place to bring up some particular vote with which you happen to disagree, when the leader of the opposition is there.



MRS. SEATON: Oh, I never discussed politics. Oh, my no!

BURG: Stayed clear of it completely?

MRS. SEATON: Well, usually I didn't know what he was working on or what was going on. Of course, I'd follow what was going on in the Congress, but I never talked about it. I didn't know that much about it; I didn't have a good opinion to express. And I heard a good deal of it because I went, at that point, regularly to the Ladies of the Senate meetings. I don't know whether I told you about this.

BURG: Yes, you did, and that was a privilege that you could continue over the years--

MRS. SEATON: Yes.



BURG: --after you husband left the Senate.

MRS. SEATON: I still do, as a matter of fact; I still belong to it. And so I heard a good deal there, but I never talked about any of that, too. I was very well instructed as to the necessity for keeping my mouth shut about things. So my activity generally involved standing and smiling. And of course, talking to anybody--one of those Washington cocktail parties in those years was impossible anyway--you couldn't hear them.

BURG: The general uproar--

MRS. SEATON: Oh, I finally got to the point where I didn't go to them at all anymore. I had a lot of activities of my own. And you know, since I was here, I've been trying to remember what it was I did. And I remember that the first thing I got involved in was the International Student House; I really don't know who started it. It was a residence place for foreign



students. And there was--I think they called themselves a citizens' committee--and I think it was one of the senator's wives who got me started on it, and I got interested and worked on it quite a bit.

BURG: And also, after you went to Washington, it seems to me that you were active in a foreign language group--Spanish.

MRS. SEATON: Yes, there was a Spanish-Portugese study group. At the time of its inception, it had a class in Portugese. Well, that didn't last very long, but the name hung on. Recently, I was reminded of the fact that when that thing started, Mamie Eisenhower was one of the members.

BURG: Oh, she was--this Spanish-Portugese group?

MRS. SEATON: Yes. And then it was a very small group, and I don't know where it met. But this was before Eisenhower was President. At some time or other he was stationed at the Pentagon, I suppose.

BURG: I wonder if this would have been in the '30's? Do you suppose it would have been as early as that? Or it may have been

during the period when he was Chief of Staff.

MRS. SEATON: I think more likely in the '40s.



BURG: After the war.

MRS. SEATON: Yes. And the group has subsequently grown to the point where they have eight or nine classes that meet every week. I had a letter from one of the women recently and she told me about it.

BURG: Now did that group, do you think, lead you into International House--into work with that organization?

MRS. SEATON: No, I was in the student house before that. International Student House was the first thing I did. And then I made a friend early in Washington. You remember, shortly after Fred went to Washington the McCarthy hassle started, and Fred worked with [H.] Struve Hensel on that. And there were conferences at their house every night during all that trial period.

BURG: His wife was Isabel?



MRS. SEATON: Isabel. Now Isabel and I became very good friends and she got me into some things. And this study group, Spanish study group, was one of the things that she got me involved in. And then--oh, I had some connection with a cathedral. I've forgotten where it was now. I came across one invitation to judge something or other. I've been digging up things that I had stored in the guest house--things I'd forgotten I owned.

BURG: Because you can pick up so much in just a few years, and then it's surprising how much fades in your memory until you renew your acquaintance with it.

MRS. SEATON: And then I met a friend through Dawn, and I don't know exactly how that came about either, but she got me involved in things, too. I was a member of the ballet guild and the opera guild, and these were supportive groups. And, oh, the Washington Club; I was quite active in that for a while. It was rather exclusive woman's organization--high society stuff. And this friend that I'm talking about, Mrs. Hessick, was what we called a cave dweller. She had lived there, and her family lived there, for ever so long.

BURG: H-e-s-s-i-c-k.



MRS. SEATON: Yes. And I came across something when I was looking through these things. Well, I brought it down here too, the citation that the ballet guild gave me. Somebody was talking about writing a benefit show and I started remembering what I knew about doing that sort of thing. And I remembered this one benefit that I was in charge of for the ballet guild. It was a style show. We filled the Mayflower [Hotel] Ballroom and made more money on that thing than any benefit had previously. And it was a fun thing to work with, because--well, another one of my friends there was the fashion coordinator for Garfinkle's and I met her through another one of my children. It's amazing what your children can do for you.

BURG: Yes, yes.

MRS. SEATON: So she commented the show. We had one couturier from each of about twelve countries, contacted them through the embassies, and they sent one, two, or three gowns to be modeled in this show.

BURG: That's a pretty clever approach.

MRS. SEATON: I think that worked out real well, too. And then for models, we used daughters of the embassy personnel. So we really had something going for us there, you see.

BURG: Indeed you did.



MRS. SEATON: And that was fun to manage.

BURG: That assured support and attendance, plus doing a little something for the international scene by bringing in the gowns and clothing from all over.

MRS. SEATON: We had very good cooperation. Something went wrong with the communications at the French Embassy, and the couturier in that case was Jacques Fath, who was the top, right then.

BURG: F-a-t-h.

MRS. SEATON: Yes. And his gown didn't arrive. So I contacted the embassy about it, and they cabled him, and I think he must have sent it by airmail; I don't know how else it could have got

there so quickly. I very much appreciated that kind of cooperation. But the thing that I really was fascinated with, was the fact that I had a handwritten note from him apologizing for the delay and wishing us success.

BURG: How very nice of him.



MRS. SEATON: I thought that was exceedingly nice from a man who must be very well occupied.

BURG: Yes, yes. Well, one's picture of a man in that kind of work, and at that level, would be that he would be very remote and unapproachable for varying reasons, and to have him act with such courtesy in the whole things, that's quite intriguing.

MRS. SEATON: I thought so.

BURG: I was going to ask you, too, because I'm not sure that we mentioned this the last time we were talking, but on this appointment to the White House, do you recall the circumstances there--how your husband was contacted, how they put the matter to him? And of course, you would have to be asked for your opinion too, in this matter. And I'd be interested in hearing



how that came about.

MRS. SEATON: Oh, no, I really don't know. I'm sure that's one of those times when he decided to discontinue political activity. You know, I think I told you, we lived in Washington a total of almost eight years, but never for more than six months at a time. About every six months he decided to go someplace else and then Eisenhower would ask him to do something, so he'd stay on to finish that, and then he was going to leave.

BURG: So this is probably one of those kinds of circumstances.

MRS. SEATON: And I don't remember anything particular in connection with this appointment.

BURG: Yes, this would move him from Defense and into the White House itself.

MRS. SEATON: Yes. And then he had another appointment at the White House, you know which raised him in rank. And I doubt if there was very much change in activity. I think they were just recognizing what he was doing.

BURG: That moved him to deputy assistant to the President.

MRS. SEATON: And that put him directly under Sherman Adams.

BURG: And obviously, because of the influence that he would have, the friends that he had made in the Senate--

MRS. SEATON: That's right.



BURG: --and the fact that he was, I think, the only former senator in that part of the organization.

MRS. SEATON: Yes, I think he was.

BURG: There were some other legislative liaison people who had served in Congress, but I think you're right; your husband was the only one who had been in the Senate.

MRS. SEATON: And then, of course, he went into Defense. That one I do remember. I beg your pardon--Interior.

BURG: Yes, that comes later. Now this period, while he's on the White House staff, you've already mentioned to me that that involved a step up in the amount of social activity that you had

to engage in.

MRS. SEATON: Yes.



BURG: The cocktail parties, as has happened with many who've attended them, begin to pall after a while. Were you involved in any more of the dinner party kind of activity? Now, I remember that you and your husband used to take small groups--another couple or two couples--

MRS. SEATON: This was just mostly a personal friendship thing then.

BURG: You dined at one of the Washington restaurants or something of this sort.

MRS. SEATON: When he was legislative liaison, that meant all of these cocktail parties, having to do with members of Congress. And then, when he stepped up in the White House, we were relieved of some of the social obligations, which was fine with both of us. I really don't know who he was dealing with, particularly at that point, except that he had a good deal to do with patronage. I don't know if it was an assignment, or just a particular ability

he had to locate men and get them to come to Washington. I think it was a little easier, perhaps, to get them to come in those days than it is now.



BURG: There was probably a little less of it after the '56 election. I think the heavy rush had been that period after the '52 election, when the party had been out for sixteen years and everybody wanted a job. But I believe that by '56-'57, the heavy waterfall of applications and people pounding the doors had calmed down a bit, and I think too, they had evolved their techniques a little bit.

MRS. SEATON: Yes. The man, and I've forgotten who it was who handled that at the beginning, was not a professional politician.

BURG: That was Charlie Willis, Jr.

MRS. SEATON: Oh, that was Willis to begin with.

BURG: Right. He'd founded Citizens for Eisenhower with Stanley [M.] Rumbough.

MRS. SEATON: But he had not had enough practical experience in

politics to know how to handle these people who came flooding in, wanting appointments of one sort and another. I don't think that he made any particular mistakes--I didn't hear about that if he did--but he did have considerable trouble controlling it. And I think likely that's the reason they moved Fred up into that area, because he seemed to have more ability in the manner of choosing people, and also a great deal more ability in the matter of telling them no, which was terribly important, too.

BURG: Willis, I believe, was a rather blunt man. He had been in aviation--airport work and things of this sort. I think almost no political experience whatsoever.

MRS. SEATON: I think that's right.



BURG: And I believe somebody else came after him. I want to say Robert Keith Gray, Mrs. Seaton, but I'm not sure that that was the man.

MRS. SEATON: No, I don't think Bob Gray was doing that. He came from Hastings [Nebraska]. The first place where I remember

him was secretary to the Cabinet, I believe. I could be wrong about that. I know he was there for a while, and he wrote that book, you know, called Eight Acres Under Glass.

BURG: Eighteen Acres Under Glass.



MRS. SEATON: Eighteen Acres Under Glass, which was interesting.

BURG: Did you feel that book was informative and accurate?

MRS. SEATON: Not especially.

BURG: You were not the only one who drew that conclusion.

MRS. SEATON: It was light reading, amusing, and I think that's probably all he wanted it to be. I'm sure he has enough ability to write a more serious book if he had wanted to. But it was fun to read, and that was about it.

BURG: Yes, it was an amusing book. Some of his stories about Tom [Thomas E.] Stephens, of course, were hilarious.

MRS. SEATON: It seems to me that [Major General Wilton B.] Jerry Persons had something to do with patronage for a while.

But, you know, it's quite a while since I thought about those things.



BURG: Well, he might have had, and then when [Sherman] Adams left, stepped up into that job. So he would have had something to say about patronage, but that would only have been one of a number of duties that Persons had at that time.

MRS. SEATON: You know, all the way through that, I had the feeling that duties were not particularly firmly outlined. The whole group worked together on things. And while one person might have had the total responsibility for a certain area, he wasn't the only person who worked on it. There was a group in there, four or five actually, who seemed to mesh their activities, and they got along together very well.

BURG: Who were these five?

MRS. SEATON: Well, I'm not sure about the number. There was Gerald Morgan; Bryce Barlow was one; I. Jack Martin was in that group, he became a judge. Now, let's see. There was somebody else. Morgan and Seaton and Martin--those three names you know.

Well, Gabe [Gabriel] Hauge, of course, worked in that. And there was another name I can't think of at the moment.

BURG: You're not thinking of Bradley Patterson are you?

MRS. SEATON: No. He was a doctor--I mean, not a medical doctor.

BURG: Not [L. Arthur] Minnich?



MRS. SEATON: No. Kevin McCann was in that group, part of the time. Well, it is Gabriel Hauge that I'm thinking of.

BURG: Probably.

MRS. SEATON: Hagerty. [James C.] Hagerty was also in that group; he was press.

BURG: McCann and Hauge and Minnich all had Ph.Ds., and Karl Harr.

MRS. SEATON: Now, that man I didn't know.

BURG: Yes, he too had a Ph.D.; I'm pretty sure he was White House staff.

MRS. SEATON: Yes he was; I know that. I discovered that recently, but I didn't know him.

BURG: He was special assistant to the President. But that group that you described, whose were all pretty much upper-echelon White House people. And your recollection of that period of time is that these men worked pretty closely together, liked one another--

MRS. SEATON: Yes.



BURG: --and there was probably a certain amount of overlapping--

MRS. SEATON: Yes, I think there was a good deal.

BURG: --of their jobs. During this period while your husband was in the White House, who were the people on the White House staff that you were closest--the closest relationship--you and your husband and these people?

MRS. SEATON: Well, first, of course, was Sherman Adams and Rachel. And I mean you don't think of Sherman without thinking of Rachel.

BURG: What was the nickname that they gave her, Mrs. Seaton?

MRS. SEATON: They called her the Pebble.

BURG: The Pebble.



MRS. SEATON: Yes, because they called him the Rock. And this again was one of Seaton's deals; he always nicknamed everybody. Sherm was so much like that story called "The Great Stone Face," and that's where it came from to begin with.

BURG: Up there in New England?

MRS. SEATON: Yes, and you know that story.

BURG: Yes, yes.

MRS. SEATON: That was too much to say, so that got shortened into the Rock, and so Rachel was the Pebble.

BURG: I'll be darned. And you saw a fair amount of those people in a social sense--

MRS. SEATON: Yes.

BURG: --that is outside the White House?

MRS. SEATON: Bryce and Betty Harlow, we were with quite a number of times, and Gerry Morgan, and his wife then was Alice. And, on, another person that we saw occasionally and liked very much was [Lewis L.] Strauss.

BURG: Admiral?



MRS. SEATON: Yes.

BURG: And his wife?

MRS. SEATON: Yes. Liked them very much. But in all the years in Washington, I made a great many friends, but I lost contact with a great many. Because when Fred was in the Senate, I had one groups and I kept a lot of those, although in the later years, I wasn't able to keep up with them because I had too many other things to do. Then he went into the Pentagon, and there was another group. There was a man named Bill [William H.] Godell that he thought a lot of. Godell was--I never did find out exactly--cloak and dagger--I think it was defense department cloak-and-dagger work he was doing, but I never did find out

exactly which one of those groups he belonged to.

BURG: G-o-d-e-l-l.

MRS. SEATON: Yes.



BURG: Did he have a military rank, Mrs. Seaton, that you recall?

MRS. SEATON: No, I don't remember that he did. Now, that's possible that he did. I remember we went to a party at his house one time, and it was a very informal arrangement, and we were very new in Washington--not too well acquainted with the rules of protocol which the military observed so carefully. We were having a great time, and there were young people there, and everybody was lively, and it was real fun, and so we were really rather overstaying. And one of the young men came up to Fred and said, "Mr. Secretary, would you mind leaving, because we've got to get to work early in the morning."

BURG: Oh, I remember you told me about that, and you hadn't realized that, because of your husband's rank in defense, nobody could leave the party until you two had left the party.

MRS. SEATON: And we didn't know they were military. They were in civilian dress, you see. And so I think Godell must have had some kind of military rank to do that, but I never heard it.



BURG: Your husband never mentioned it and Godell never mentioned it.

MRS. SEATON: No. Godell used to come to our house after work on his way home, frequently, and there was a very lively conversation between him and Fred. He was a very pleasant person to know, and not exactly self-effacing, but neither was he forward in any way. And it wasn't until I'd known him for some time that I realized he was crippled. And the reason he was crippled was that the Chinese had tortured him. They put his leg in a fire, and it was so badly burned that he never fully recovered. So he'd been in this secret service, whatever it was, for a long time.

BURG: This had occurred perhaps as early as World War II?

MRS. SEATON: I should think so, yes. And he worked under a

man called Wild Bill [Major General William J.] Donovan. That must have been military because Donovan was a general.

BURG: Yes, that was Office of Strategic Services, the OSS. And if he was with Donovan, it's very likely that it happened, let's say, prior to '45--

MRS. SEATON: Yes, I think so.



BURG: --or at the latest, maybe, 1948, if he was still on the China mainland when the communists took over.

MRS. SEATON: Yes.

BURG: He must have an interesting story to tell himself, if he's ever free to tell it.

MRS. SEATON: I should think so, and I don't know what's become of him. The last I heard about him he was in serious trouble for having misappropriated funds. Fred and I both always thought this was a cover story, because it was a small amount, something like three or four thousand, which they would not normally raise such a row about. But I think he was in prison for awhile on

that, and I know that Fred was trying to defend him and was not able to make any progress, which is another reason to make me think it probably was a cover story. And I don't know what happened to him after that--found nothing in the records about him.

BURG: Were you still in Washington when that occurred?

MRS. SEATON: No, this was shortly after we came back.

BURG: So it was sometime after '61?



MRS. SEATON: Yes, I should think it was probably '62 or '63, or maybe even late in '61, that this story came out. And I do know that Fred was not able to do anything for him and was not even able to get very much information. So it's just one of those mysteries, and I haven't heard anything about him, actually, since then.

BURG: That's an interesting situation.

MRS. SEATON: And it might be that somebody else you would talk to would know about it, but then, you see, all my information is

so fragmentary. It's bits and pieces I've picked up listening to conversations, because, as I told you, Fred never told me any of these things, on the theory if I didn't know anything, I couldn't say anything, which was quite correct.

BURG: So while you were smiling at a cocktail party you could always keep your ears active.

MRS. SEATON: Yes, if I could hear anything.

BURG: If you could hear it. That's right.

The picture that one has of Sherm Adams, of course, from his own book and from other books, that kind of a nickname, the Rock, seems quite suitable. But clearly, you didn't find him a forbidding kind of character at all.

MRS. SEATON: No, I didn't--



BURG: You didn't seem to--

MRS. SEATON: He didn't impress me at all. And that might be because my father--well, my father was born in Missouri, but my grandfather came from Massachusetts. So this kind of a philosophy

toward life was quite familiar to me. It didn't scare me.

BURG: Now, you say "philosophy towards life"; do you refer now to Adams' reticence, for one thing?

MRS. SEATON: He was very careful with the use of words. I never, never was convinced that he did anything wrong, even approximately wrong in accepting what he did, the things that got him into trouble eventually, because he just wasn't that kind of a person. I don't know if I told you this story about inviting him to dinner one night. By that time I knew that he was very precise on timing and that sort of thing; so when they came to dinner I had planned to serve at 7:00 and I had everything ready by a quarter 'til and we were sitting in the living room. He looked at his watch and said, "Supper about ready?"

I said, "Five minutes." And we sat another five minutes. I was just being stubborn about it, and then we went in to the table.

BURG: Did he kid you about it?

MRS. SEATON: No, but he caught it. He just didn't have anything



to say. But, when we had finished and were ready to leave the table, he came around behind my chair and kissed me on the back of the neck, "Thanks for supper."

BURG: So there were a number of occasions then when Adams and his wife were at your home on this kind of social--

MRS. SEATON: I think that's the only time we had them at the house, and we were over at their house one time. But there just really wasn't very much time for personal socializing, and toward the end it got so we didn't do any of it at all.

BURG: That is the end of the White House period.



MRS. SEATON: No, toward the end of the Interior period. Fred was most meticulous about taking me out to dinner every other week and we enjoyed that--just the two of us. But there were so many social things that were almost command performances that we just didn't have very much time to get together with people. We had friends in the White House. And then when we left the White House I sort of lost contact with those people, because there were all the wives in the interior department toward

whom I felt a certain responsibility. I used to take them out to lunch, I think once a month, the whole group of them, which was a very nice thing because, aside from that sort of thing, we didn't know each other very well. And of course, their husbands didn't know each other socially, only in the building. And they seemed to enjoy that. I even arranged for them to take a tour one time of--I think it was [Henry Francis duPont] Winterthur [museum] we went to. We chartered a bus and drove up there and spent the whole day.

BURG: Up to Delaware?



MRS. SEATON: Yes. And that was a fun thing to do, too.

BURG: That museum must be a fabulous place.

MRS. SEATON: Well, it has a very high reputation. It's expensive and it certainly was interesting.

BURG: And they all enjoyed that. While you were in the White House, there were some opportunities for you to meet socially with the Adamses and perhaps the Morgans, the Hauges, others.

The President and Mrs. Eisenhower, I would presume, also saw to it that there were some social occasions in the White House that you attended.

MRS. SEATON: Well, yes. It used to be the custom that all cabinet officers were invited to every state dinner.



BURG: How about before the cabinet period now? How about while your husband is assistant--

MRS. SEATON: Little cabinet they called it then. White House invitations were confined to evening receptions--ten o'clock, white tie. Imagine going to a reception at ten o'clock at night!

BURG: Now was that the typical way that that would be handled?

MRS. SEATON: Yes. Now that was Eisenhower's way of doing it.

BURG: How large a group would be at one of these ten o'clock--

MRS. SEATON: Hundreds, hundreds.

BURG: And that would include some from the White House staff, I suppose, in some kind of rotation so that they all were included in these things.

MRS. SEATON: But there was a large body of people whom they entertained like once a year. I believe the routine was that they had one for chief justice. If you really want to know about this, read Mr. White's [J.B. West's?] book, Upstairs in the White House. Have you seen that?

BURG: No, I don't think I have. We've got it here--

MRS. SEATON: Well, I've got it in paperback copy and that would give you a very good insight into White--

[Interruption]



BURG: One can place a certain amount of reliance then in West's book, Upstairs in the White House--

MRS. SEATON: I thought so, yes.

BURG: --as portraying what White House life was at that time from your own personal experience.

MRS. SEATON: I saw nothing in that book that would be contrary to what I observed. And that's a lot better than having me tell it to you, I think.

There was an interesting routine in regard to dinner parties, and I don't know whether that was a White House tradition or whether it was something that Mrs. Eisenhower instituted. I think it was probably a little bit of both. To go into the state dinners--and those were white tie, too, of course--to begin with you were expected to be there at a certain time. Well, in order to assure being there on time you got there about fifteen minutes early, or in some cases half an hour early, depending on the traffic. And then the cars all drove round and round and round that square. And if you got there twenty minutes early, for instance, you would be able to observe which cabinet officers were at that dinner, because they were driving around and around too. And then when the time came to arrive, in turn, the cars pulled up to the front door. And we were allowed to alight, and go in through that great lobby where the Marines were playing, and to leave our coats. And then, not in the lobby, but in the great hall that goes from the Gold Room into the dining room, there was a table set up and there would be a chart of the table settings on this table. And each man was given a little tiny plain envelope, in which



was a little card on which was written the name of his dinner partner. Then he was supposed to locate his dinner partner after we got into the Gold Room. And then one of the ushers, who was generally a serviceman, actually, in full dress, would escort the lady in. And in this one case, the only one that I know of in regard to that, the husband followed. Normally, in all these occasions, the husband went first, and always the wife sat on the left-hand side of the car, because he was ranking. And I protested that. I said, "By gosh, in other countries a man puts his wife on the righthand side; his mistress goes on the lefthand side." It didn't do me any good. And then the usher, and I don't think that's the right term for him either, would escort us to our proper place in the receiving line, and that was done according to cabinet rank. And we came along about sixth or seventh, I believe. Well, this would always be at least half an hour in advance of the time that the Eisenhower's came down the stairs. And we were expected to just stand right there, you know. But Fred and I never could do that. We'd go around the room talking to people we knew. And I can remember one evening when the usher escorted me back to my place twice. I knew where I was supposed to be, and I knew when I was suppose



to be there and I was going to be there, but he didn't believe it. And then the Eisenhowers came down and headed the line, and then the guests came in and went through the receiving line, which was at one end of the Gold Room, and then mingled at the other end. It's a very large room you know.

BURG: Would only the Eisenhowers and the cabinet members and their wives be in the receiving line?

MRS. SEATON: The guest of honor would be, too. But I learned, after going to one or two of those sessions, that I'd better look on that chart, too, and find out where I was supposed to sit and who was supposed to take me there, because sometimes these men got so intrigued by what they were doing, that they forgot to look up their partners.

BURG: And if that room was swarming with several hundred people, it would be quite a task to find somebody.

MRS. SEATON: And of course they never gave up talking business. And they would be lost in some big discussion when it was time to go in. Where you've got, say, like a hundred people, it's



not too easy to find one particular woman in a hurry. So I decided the best deal for me was to find out with whom I was supposed to go into dinner, and keep track of that man, because that's about all I had to do and he had things on his mind.

BURG: Let me ask you, your dinner partners must have varied quite a bit over the course of your husband's secretaryship. What kind of partner would be assigned to you? Was there any particular pattern to that?

MRS. SEATON: Well, there had been, yes. At formal dinners, people are seated according to rank, which would have put me always with [Ezra Taft] Benson, Secretary of Agriculture. He came after Interior, I believe, or may before, I'm not sure. But Mamie was perceptive enough to realize that we would get a little bored with all that--sitting with the same person every time--so she would shift them around, and my dinner partner was always a cabinet officer. And, of course, cabinet officers were generally pretty high in rank, so we usually had seats very close to the head of the table. She used a u-shaped table, and she and the general sat side by side--which is quite a good arrange-

ment when you have a large group like that--at the bend of the "u". Then they could see all the way down the table.

BURG: Right, see both sides.

MRS. SEATON: And sometimes there were enough guests that there were two rows on each side, and sometimes it was only a row around the outside of the table. And, of course, under her the service was quite formal, but all that is in Mr. West's book, so I won't go into it.

BURG: If we imagined that "U" and we ourselves are at the base of the "U," looking up the arms, the Eisenhowers would be seated then, from our vantage point, looking out at the "U".

MRS. SEATON: Yes, this is true.

BURG: Would anyone be placed on the other side of the base of the "U", across from them?

MRS. SEATON: No, no.

BURG: So nothing impairs their view down the table.

MRS. SEATON: If you have a u-shaped table, they are sitting here



and there are guests here and here and sometimes inside, but never inside the bend.

BURG: I see. So one of two ways--either people seated on the outside of the arms of the "U" or, in some cases, on the inside of the arms, but never are they seated on the inside of the base during this period of time.

MRS. SEATON: No. And that really was a very good arrangement, I thought, because there were always toasts and what not, and everybody could see the person who was speaking, in most cases here. And you knew when to stand up, and raise your glass and so forth, without having to look around and see what other people were doing.



BURG: Really, their conversation is going to be limited to the people immediately on their right and on their left, and not with any of you who are seated down the bars.

MRS. SEATON: No, you couldn't talk across the table because there was too much space.

BURG: The tables were too broad then to permit any cross-table

conversation.

MRS. SEATON: I don't remember having seen this in the White House, but the flower arrangements, or whatever was used for decoration, generally went down the inside of the arms, because the tables were not particularly wide, but they were far enough apart. And I remember going to one state dinner, which was not in the White House; it was done by the chief of protocol, who was Wiley [T.] Buchanan then, and he had pots and pots and pots of money, and I think he spent quite a lot of his own money on some of these entertainments. It was the most beautiful table arrangement I ever saw. They used white lilacs and white orchids, and there was a great mass of them. It was a u-shaped table again--a great mass of them in the bend of the "U", and then they went down of the edge of the table onto the floor. And there was something at table level, I think, in that arrangement. But at any rate, I've never seen such a mass of flowers in one place in my time, in any time, and it was really beautiful. That's why I said that Wiley must have spent a lot of his own money, because his allowance for entertainment wasn't enough to allow for white lilacs and white orchids in that quantity.



BURG: In profusion, yes.

MRS. SEATON: He was a very charming man with a delightful wife, and she did all of these arrangements for the dinners. He had enough to do without arranging menus and decorations, because there was a lot of interchange of state visits, that sort of thing. And of course, he had the responsibility for seeing to it that the guests were properly taken care of and escorted and housed and transported and all that, which ran into quite a lot of detail.

BURG: Do any of those state dinners, for example, now stand out in your mind for any particular reason? Now this dinner which you attended clearly did, because of the flowers--

MRS. SEATON: I think that one must have been for DeGaulle; I'm not sure about that. The other one that I remember most particularly was the one when Queen Elizabeth was there. And it wasn't actually much more of an occasion than any of the others except that Elizabeth and Prince Philip were such delightful people. I do remember when they were announced, as they approached--I'm not exactly sure how they referred to her--but I thought they

would say Prince Philip, but they didn't. They said, "The Prince, Philip."

BURG: The Prince, Philip.

MRS. SEATON: And of course, he was a consort and so his title was Prince, although she was Queen. And I remember a reception for Julianna, and that was not at the White House. I think that was in one of the services buildings, at one of the forts. I've forgotten now where it was, but it was an enormous reception room and a very large reception in the afternoon. And this one intrigued me. She's a rather commanding--was then--rather commanding personality.

BURG: Julianna of the Netherlands.

MRS. SEATON: There was absolutely no doubt about who was Queen. But she passed the word--had her aides pass the word--down the line that the ladies might remove their gloves. I think the way they announced it was, "The ladies may keep on their gloves." It's a long time since I've done this and I've sort of forgotten whether the proper thing to do was keep your glove on or take



it off, but in any case, whatever she said was the opposite of what the rule was, which made it nicer for the guests; so it was a thoughtful thing on her part to do that.

BURG: Now, did you have any opportunity to talk with Queen Elizabeth, for example?

MRS. SEATON: No.



BURG: Just merely a formal presentation to her?

MRS. SEATON: She did visit with a good many of the guests, but as it happened, I was not one of those, although I was in the room. But she sat on a sofa--now this is the seat of honor, you know--on the sofa. I don't know why, but that's the custom. And she sat on the sofa, and one by one, the guests were brought up to visit with her for just a very few minutes, and then somebody else was brought in. But there was a large group and there just wasn't enough time for her to talk to everybody, but she was so charming, so gracious, and it must have been difficult, too.

BURG: I would expect it to be a strain.

MRS. SEATON: Although, of course, she had been raised and trained to do this sort of thing, which her mother hadn't been. She never expected to be Queen, you know.

BURG: Or the wife of a duke for a lifetime I think is what she--

MRS. SEATON: Yes, that's exactly what she had expected.

BURG: No one could have predicted Edward's move.

MRS. SEATON: No. Let's see, Elizabeth's mother was not royal blood anyway, I think.

BURG: I don't think she was, no, no. I can't recall the father's position, but--

MRS. SEATON: I've forgotten what--



BURG: --fairly highly placed in terms of the society of that time; but I don't think that he was--

MRS. SEATON: And furthermore, they came from Scotland, you know. So she grew up in a different kind of tradition.

BURG: Bowen, I think, was the name.

MRS. SEATON: I don't remember that.

BURG: They might have been minor Scottish aristocracy; I don't recall either.

MRS. SEATON: Well, they were pretty high aristocracy in Scotland, but not so high in England, as I understood it. I didn't go into it very much, but she saw to it that her daughters were raised in the royal tradition, and of course their grandmother saw to it, too.

BURG: I would imagine.



MRS. SEATON: She was still functioning then.

BURG: I would imagine so. She was that kind of a woman.

MRS. SEATON: Yes, oh, yes.

BURG: I want to thank you so much for this session, Mrs. Seaton.