Tape No. 17-2A-3-88

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

William F. Quinn (WQ)

1985

Honolulu, O‘ahu

BY: Chris Conybeare (CC)

Joy Chong: The following is another interview conducted with William Quinn. The interviewer is Chris Conybeare. The interview deals with statehood. It was never transcribed [before], and it took place approximately in 1985. Date is unknown.

CC: Basically, we want to know why you worked so hard for statehood, and why did you think it was important for Hawai‘i?

WQ: Well, why did I work for it, and why did I think it was important? I worked so hard for it because it was, not only important, it was absolutely a necessity for Hawai‘i to become a state. It was the only thing that was consistent with the character of the United States, it was the only thing that the people of Hawai‘i were really deserving of. You got to remember, and many of us don't, that in those days, the governor was imposed upon the people by a presidential appointment. The judges were imposed upon the people by presidential appointment. We didn't have any vote in the Congress of the United States, although we paid the taxes. So, it was a very fundamental matter of Democratic, Republican philosophy that these people here, in these islands, were deserving of statehood, and were first-class citizens and should be treated as such.

CC: Now, there were some opponents to statehood. Who were they, both here and in the Mainland, and what were their reasons for opposing statehood?

WQ: Well, I guess right after World War [II]—well, going back even before the war, I guess the first thing was that it was out of the question that anything that wasn't connected to the other forty-eight states should be a state. The non-contiguity argument was there for a long, long time.

And then, after the war, I think there was—well, we got so many, quote, Japs, unquote, out there, and why would we want to have them as a state? We just fought a war with them. And I think that was effectively overcome when the 442nd [Regimental Combat Team] and the 100th [Infantry Battalion] gathered here after the war, and of course, their record became better and better known as outstanding—in World War II—great American patriots. And then they took a trip to Texas and had a reunion with the Texas group that they had rescued in the war and so that, gradually, was overcome.

And then finally, it was a matter that there was a strong Communist influence. And that was due to the ILWU [International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union] and Harry Bridges as being thought in the Mainland to be the nation's leading, one of the nation's leading Communists. And there was a strong feeling that the ILWU was Communist-dominated. We had a Smith Act trial here, as you may remember. And that was really the problem that I was faced with, and had to deal with when I was going back, talking to Congress and so forth. I had to tell them that I thought that we—I may have been wrong when—I certainly wasn't wrong when I said we weren't Communist, but I may have been wrong when I said we're a strong two-party state. (Chuckles) Because at that time, I thought we would be. But at any rate, we finally overcame that one also.

CC: Speaking of the two-party state, what was your biggest disagreement with Jack Burns over the strategy for bringing Hawai'i into the union?

WQ: We really didn't have any disagreement in, I guess it was in early spring of 1958. We got together, Jack and I, and members of the statehood commission and so forth. At that time, it was urged by Jack and others that Hawai'i and Alaska ought to be separated. We didn't want to join the enemies of both against either, and [felt] that each should go its own way, and that maybe Alaska should be pressed first. And I think we all agreed with that strategy, that Alaska had less opposition at that time. But that once Alaska passed, it would open the door for Hawai'i.

Where we came into disagreement—and to this day, I don't know the answer to it—when the Alaskan bill passed, in about, let's say June of 1958, and it looked to us that there was another eight, ten weeks of Congressional session, and we knew that we had the votes in the House and we felt we had the votes in the Senate, we thought that we really ought to move then. And that was under the urging and advice of many of the strong Democrats in the House and Senate who were our friends, who said that if you let it go this particular congressional term, and it goes into the next, it's liable to get all jammed up with the Civil Rights Act debates, and so forth. Everybody knew that we [Hawai'i] would be strong for civil rights, whether we were Republican or Democrat. And at that time then, Lyndon Johnson and Jack Burns and the House leadership, all took the view that they weren't going to touch Hawai'i in the end of that term. And that's where we had a fundamental disagreement and rather a strong one.

CC: What do you think really led to the fact that you were able to defeat Jack in that first election afterwards? What were some of the major factors that were going on then, in terms of that campaign?

WQ: Well, I think there was a couple of things. One, when I became the territorial governor, I was very uneasy about it because I had felt very strongly that the president shouldn't—we should have a voice in our own selection. And so here I was, all of sudden, thrust into the very position without the choice of the people that I was representing, and I really made an extra effort in those two years to go all over the territory and to meet all of the people, and to try to give them a feeling that, even though they hadn't selected me, I was really representing them and not representing Uncle Sam's government in Washington.

I guess the other part of it—and so therefore, I think I had done more than maybe Jack and his supporters thought I had. And part of that then was that the ILWU, which was a very

strong supporter of Jack's, and very strong then, particularly on the neighbor islands. And in that 1959 election, they didn't think I had a chance. And therefore, I had a lot of friends in the ILWU on the neighbor islands, all of whom had their Quinn signs in their yards, and they went out working for me, and nobody interfered with them. And next thing you knew, I was strong in the neighbor islands and I won. Nineteen sixty-two came along, the same people came out to try to support me, and they were very quickly disciplined. And that was the difference—a difference.

CC: What about the whole question of the—what's known as the quote, unquote, Second Mahele issue?

WQ: That was a term that I cannot blame anybody but myself for. I had lots of ideas on the utilization of state lands, and I still do. And some of them have been put into practice, some of them were passed during my term as governor, but, like a fool, I was coming back from the Mainland, I was going to make a speech in Maui, and was thinking of something to call it. And that was the term, and it was a bad term. (Chuckles) And they were able to take that just as a slogan and use it against me. There was some publicity that had been put together in connection with it, one with fifty bucks an acre and that sort of thing, which was really not part of my program but was used as a promotion stunt, and it was a bad one.

CC: So you really felt that it came home to haunt you in the second campaign.

WQ: Yeah, I think, yes, it did. And I had to spend a lot of time explaining it. Although as I say, the basic concept was that you sell state lands for appropriate social purposes and sell them at an appraised value on a drawing by lot instead of letting people bid it up to whatever value. And we did that. We did that for the farmers in Lālāmilo, and we did it for the victims of the [Hilo] tidal wave, and we did it in several instances. But still, the term was a bad one.

CC: Let me get on a little lighter side. You remember any humorous stories about those campaigns, or the days before statehood involving yourself or Jack Burns, or some of the people who we all think about?

WQ: Oh, I don't know. When you ask me, suddenly, to say something funny, you know, that's a little difficult. (Chuckles) We had a good time. You and I talked earlier about Gardiner Jones, and one thing that I remember very well was when I was running for the first time—and this was in '56 for the territorial senate. Although I lost, I then was appointed [governor] because I'd run and run well in that campaign, I guess. But I'll never forget that. I was totally a neophyte in this whole political picture. And so, unlike the Republicans for the fifty years before me, I would go out, and I'd go into the public housing areas and so forth, and I'd knock on every door, you know, and say hello, and try to meet as many people as I could. And one day, Gardiner was writing for the *Advertiser*, thought that, well, this is that new kind of Republican. We haven't seen this sort of thing before. And he sent somebody out, and who was with me for the whole day. And they did a whole page in the Sunday *Advertiser*. You couldn't buy it [i.e., publicity] for anything, and I think that was probably one of the things that led to my being appointed governor.

CC: One other thing I've heard that if a speech didn't go so well for you, you could always sing a good Irish song. Do you remember that?

WQ: Well I did. I'll tell you how that started. Again, it started in that senatorial campaign which was '56. And one of the first rallies we went to was at 'Aiea Park. And we, the senatorial candidates, were at the very end of the program that time, so it was about eleven-thirty at night when we got up. And there was nobody there but the kids who were going to fold up the seats again, a few dogs, and the musicians, who always followed [us] around, and these were to follow on the Republican rallies. And so when I got up, I guess [George] Peppy Cooke got up first, and he had his guitarist with him, and they did the "Moloka'i March," or something. So I got up, and I turned to the girls, I said, "Does anybody sing 'Ke Kali Nei Au?' " Well they looked at me, you know, a little bit askance, but the soprano stepped forward. I said, "Key of C." So I sang it, just for our own amusement really. But then thereafter when I'd go to a rally, even if we're at the top of the program, I'd do my three minutes worth and this gal would step forward and hit the key of C, and we'd sing. So I sang at every rally, (chuckles) I think. But it was mostly, "Ke Kali Nei Au," not an Irish song.

CC: Oh, 'cause I remember an ILWU person told me, he remembered you singing, "When Irish Eyes are Smiling" at the end of a speech.

WQ: Yeah.

CC: What do you see today? What's in the future for Hawai'i, given twenty-five years of statehood, what do we have to look forward to for the future?

WQ: Well, I think statehood has proven itself a good thing. I think that the economic and social complexion of the state is changing, and maybe changing pretty rapidly now. In my day, I used to say that Hawai'i stood on four strong legs—sugar, pineapple, tourism, and federal spending, the way we call it, and that was the most important one then. Now, of course, tourism has taken over far and away, the leading export industry, if you will, since it brings dollars in. And sugar and pineapple and agriculture all lumped together. Sugar's going to have a bad time all the way through. I don't see any way in which we could just hope that all these lands will continue to be devoted to sugar because we continue to get some help and support from the federal government, it's vital. I think that there's an increase in agriculture—mixed varieties of agriculture. I think we're going to develop more and more export crops. I think fresh pineapple and fresh papaya—I hope we can overcome the problems with papaya—will continue to grow, I think ornamental plants, and things like that.

And I'm not one to say high tech [technology] is going to be the answer because every state is looking at that. But I think that if we can strengthen the University [of Hawai'i] and its leadership and focus the university in the areas in which it belongs, that that would gradually bring additional factors here. This is a great place to live, it's a great place for companies to have regional headquarters and so forth, just because it's so lovely.

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

JC: This is a continuation of the William Quinn statehood interview. Slight overlap.

WQ: This is a great place to live, it's a great place for companies to have regional headquarters and so forth, just because it's so lovely, but we've got to keep our university and school system up to warrant that. Now, I'm optimistic for the future of Hawai'i.

CC: Good, thank you.

JC: Okay, that is the end of all the Quinn interviews. Thank you very much.

END OF INTERVIEW

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: William F. Quinn

liam F. Quinn was born in Rochester, New York in 1919. He was educated at Saint Louis versity High School and Saint Louis University.

erved four years in the U.S. Naval Reserve, and graduated from Harvard University in 1947. the next ten years he practiced law with the Robertson, Castle and Anthony.

ai'i's last Republican governor, Quinn was appointed in 1957 and became the state's first elected rnor in 1959. He served until 1962 and then returned to private practice with Quinn & Moore.

nn was the president of Dole Company from 1965 to 1972. He became a senior partner at dsill Anderson and Quinn in 1972.

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