

**Paul G. Donelan Oral History Interview – 4/7/1964**  
Administrative Information

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**Biographical Note**

Donelan, artist, member of the Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr. Post, American Legion, and aide in John F. Kennedy's 1952 Senate campaign, discusses the Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr. Post, and John F. Kennedy's 1952 and 1958 senatorial campaigns, among other issues.

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Paul G. Donelan

Table of Contents

1	Donelan's role in the 1952 Senate campaign
1	The Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr., Post
3	1952 Senate campaign
6	1958 Senate campaign
8	John F. Kennedy's best personality trait

Oral History Interview

With

PAUL G. DONELAN

April 7, 1964  
Boston, Massachusetts

By Ed Martin

For the John F. Kennedy Library

MARTIN: Paul, you worked with President Kennedy in his 1952 Senate campaign, is that correct?

DONELAN: Yes, it is.

MARTIN: In what role did you work for him?

DONELAN: Originally, I started to work as an artist, as a layout man. That is, laying out flyers brochures, and the like, doing cartoons when necessary and things in that line.

MARTIN: Well, how did you become associated with President Kennedy? Was it right at the time his campaign began, or was it before that?

DONELAN: No, I met the President a few years before as a member of the Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr., Post, of 1952, at the request of a friend of mine, I was doing some preliminary layouts for political stationery and brochures

[-1-]

and fliers for the President's senatorial campaign which was just getting under way. My regular job, incidentally, was as an artist for a public relations firm, one of whose clients was

the Republican State Committee, and in the daytime I was doing layout for Lodge's [Henry Cabot Lodge] campaign—that is, the same thing: news releases, letterhead designs, and so on.

MARTIN: Your talents then were bipartisan at the time?

DONELAN: At that particular moment they were because of the necessity to make money.

MARTIN: So, Paul, you are a member of the Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr., Post. Of course, that was named for the president's brother who was killed in action in World War II.

DONELAN: Yes.

MARTIN: The President was commander of that post at one time?

DONELAN: Yes, he was; I believe he was our first commander.

MARTIN: You attended meetings at which the President presided over the members of that post?

DONELAN: Yes, whenever he was available for meetings. Of course, as a Congressman he was not always in Boston and able to preside at the meetings, but when he was available, he would be very conscientious about being at the meetings and taking charge, as the commander would normally do.

MARTIN: There was an occasion there when a squabble arose over membership. Can you tell us about that, Paul?

DONELAN: Yes, the intention of the group that formed the Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr., Post was to make it a post for what we considered young, rising businessman, and we hoped to keep it that kind of a post. It was almost

[-2-]

a young gentleman's club here and intown Boston. But the VFW, being a national organization, has a policy whereby any veteran who has served overseas, and otherwise qualifies, can join any VFW post he so chooses. We felt that this was forcing us to accept anybody, and we had hoped to keep it, as I said, for you, rising businessman. In the course of one of the discussions I rose and said that we must remember that there were many heels among the heroes, and I recall that this broke up the President. He thought that was terrific.

MARTIN: Well, actually his '52 campaign didn't get under way until sometime in mid summer, July or so?

DONELAN: Officially, yes, but a few months before that, I think it was May, April or May, there were the beginnings of the organization, the getting together of small groups to start organizing and forming policy.

MARTIN: Where were some of these meetings held, Paul?

DONELAN: Some of them, I recall, were held at the President's apartment on Bowdoin Street, and others were at the office of Mark Dalton, who was at that time running the particular group I was involved in. There were only about four or five of us at that time. I was unaware, of course, that there were other groups from his congressional campaign that were also active at the same time.

MARTIN: Well, Paul, your specific group, and you being a professional artist, was concerned primarily with what phase of the actual campaign?

DONELAN: With, as I said, the designing of the campaign letterheads, the literature, what we called throwaways, flyers, banners, billboards, and the like. One of our big jobs at this time was that we wanted to put out a tabloid sized newspaper. And with the writer, who was John Galvin [James Galvin], we got together and started to lay out that paper.

MARTIN: And this paper was eventually distributed.

[-3-]

DONELAN: This eventually came into being, but not as we had originally envisioned it because later on the advertising agency took over the greater part of the design. Of course, the mailing was one of the big jobs for the volunteers. All kinds of literature was being sent out, and letters were being typed constantly. This was one of the features of the campaign, and one of the new features of any campaign, this personalized approach. Personal letters would go out to, you could almost say, everybody in the state. So that they felt that the President was appealing directly to them.

MARTIN: And this was the campaign, too, where the famous "Coffee with the Kennedys" got under way?

DONELAN: Yes. And these proved very, very effective because the charm of the Kennedy girls was terrific. Which, incidentally, was one of words that was kind of a watchword of the campaign. Everything was "terrific." And to hear Bobby [Robert F. Kennedy] yell "terrific," you knew everything was fine.

MARTIN: Well, who handled the campaign from the headquarters at that time? Was there a campaign manager?

DONELAN: Yes, that would be Bobby. Bobby really ran that campaign. And when I say really ran it, he did. He was running hither and there in his shirtsleeves, in a million things at once.

MARTIN: Was he responsible for the decision-making?

DONELAN: I imagine so, although I wasn't involved in that. But upstairs there were the meetings where decisions were made and policies established and plans for the tours and so on, and all the other activities were formulated upstairs.

MARTIN: Well, I assume the candidate himself was busy elsewhere around the state? Did you get to see much of him?

[-4-]

DONELAN: He was constantly moving about the state, but he was in evidence of a great deal of the time at the headquarters. Of course, that was the big time when the volunteers could see him come charging in the door. Then we knew that a lot of activity was going on upstairs on the policy-making level.

MARTIN: Of course, the campaign got intense as you got into the fall. Did they increase activity at headquarters then?

DONELAN: Yes, you could feel the movement to the climax during the whole campaign. When I try to pick out specific instances, it's tough because we worked long hard hours, not because we were driven but because this is the way the campaign had to be done. So it was one long panorama of work and activity, with a lot of breaks. They had a great deal of fun, which is why most of the volunteers returned for the next campaign and also for Ted's [Edward M. Kennedy] campaign.

MARTIN: Well, Paul, the campaign reached its climax, of course, on election night, and it was quite a signal victory. Could you tell us about election night and the excitement that it surely generated?

DONELAN: It surely generated a great deal of excitement because that was the thing that we all worked for. Although there was this tremendous underlying feeling of confidence, it nevertheless broke loose that night. He came through the crowd, and when he would recognize a volunteer or familiar face, even with that milling mob pushing him in every direction, he'd stop and try to personally thank them for the job they had done. And, of course, when he finally got to the platform, he spoke for a little bit, thanking us for the tremendous job we had done and hoped that we had realized that he appreciated it and was thankful to us for what we had done. And if I'm not mistaken, he had went across, or down the street, where Lodge's headquarters were located, to talk to Mr. Lodge at that time, which I thought was a tremendous thing.

[-5-]

MARTIN: Well, it was a great victory and everybody...

DONELAN: In every way. I think everybody felt it was a vindication not only of him, but of the young, untried people which he brought together and organized so



thoroughly. And it certainly showed the old-timers what a young aggressive group could do. This was part of his way of doing things.

MARTIN: Well, Paul, after your work in this campaign, what did you do? Did you return to a regular job?

DONELAN: Yes, I got another job in my own field, and about a year later I went down to Plymouth where I worked for a printing firm.

MARTIN: And you sort of rested up there for another campaign that would be coming along involving a Kennedy?

DONELAN: For the next go-around. That's right.

MARTIN: So the next go-around came then in 1958.

DONELAN: That's correct. When the Senator came up for re-election.

MARTIN: Who was his opponent then?

DONELAN: Let's see. Not Sylvester [Howard J. Sylvester]. Vincent Celeste, that's it.

MARTIN: Vincent J. "Sonny" Celeste. There are few people today who can remember the name of the 1958 Republican senatorial candidate. Was that campaign for re election run along the same vigorous lines as the 1952, despite the fact that the opposition didn't have any apparent strength?

DONELAN: Yes, I would say it was. I think among the volunteers, we kind of laughed because we felt there would be no contest. But we were soon

[-6-]

straightened out on this fact that, regardless of his opponent, the then senator was going to run his campaign just as active and vigorously as he had done his first one. This he did, and this he proceeded to show the rest of us how to do again. And there was no letup at all. The campaign was run just as hard and vigorously as it possibly could.

MARTIN: Now the volunteers for this '58 campaign, were they the same ones who worked for the President in 1952?

DONELAN: The greater part of them were, I would say. There was, of course, the new young group that wanted to become involved with it. There was a constant...After six years, there would be another new college group who would be very active and who would very much like to be involved in the campaign. And this is the sort of people the President liked to have working for him because he knew they'd put their heart and soul into it.

MARTIN: Subsequently, you worked in the 1962 campaign of Edward M. Kennedy, the President's brother?

DONELAN: That's true.

MARTIN: Were volunteers for Edward M. Kennedy the same volunteers that had worked the previous two campaigns for the President?

DONELAN: I wouldn't say the same, but there were many familiar faces. There was like another get-together, a reunion of the older group. Again, it was another young group that moved in with a nucleus of the older group who had been in the previous two campaigns.

MARTIN: Now, at the completion of this latest, 1958, senatorial campaign, which, incidentally, gave the President a tremendous vote, I believe it was well over 800,000 plurality, Paul, you went back once again into private life?

[-7-]

DONELAN: That's correct. Yes.

MARTIN: And you remained and waited out for the next Kennedy fight.

DONELAN: Yes.

MARTIN: Did you think at that time the President would go on beyond the Senate into the White House?

DONELAN: Yes, and I think that was a fact that most of the people were aware of. They might have thought it was farther in the future than it actually was, but I think they realized he wouldn't stop there at the Senate.

MARTIN: What trait about the President did you like the most in your associations with him?

DONELAN: I suppose you would say sincerity was the biggest thing. When he talked to you, you knew he was talking to you and you knew he was listening to you. And he gave the feeling that he wanted and needed your help, and he wasn't being a politician when he asked you for it. Also, the fact that some people say he seemed to be driven by this desire to be the Senator or was driven by ambition. I didn't think that. I felt he had complete control and was not driven so much as actually riding because he knew exactly what he wanted to do, and as I said, he had complete control. There was no being driven forward as far as I was concerned.

MARTIN: You know, in all of the so-called Kennedy campaigns, there is great attention paid to detail. Part of your role then, in addition to illustrating brochures, was this job of decorating the campaign headquarters, the windows, the displays?

DONELAN: Yes, that was one of the big features of the headquarters, to make the windows attractive, not just by decorating them with crepe paper and fancy ornaments, but to give the people a running picture of what

[-8-]

was going on by use of photographs of the President in action, news stories about what was going on, where he had been, and what he was doing. This kept the people abreast of the entire campaign as it moved along. And I think this was, from my own knowledge, one of the new things that the President had inaugurated in his campaigning.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[-9-]

Paul G. Donelan Oral History Transcript  
Name List

**C**

Celeste, Vincent J., 6

**D**

Dalton, Mark, 3

**G**

Galvin, James, 3

**K**

Kennedy, Edward M., 5, 7

Kennedy, John F., 1-9

Kennedy, Robert F., 4

**L**

Lodge, Henry Cabot, 2, 5

**S**

Sylvester, Howard T., 6