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Biographical Note

Droney, Middlesex County District Attorney, discusses his work in Cambridge, Massachusetts on John F. Kennedy's House and Senate campaigns, and memories of the Kennedy family, among other issues.

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Table of Contents

<u>Page</u>	<u>Topic</u>
1	Introduction to JFK in 1946
3, 12	1946 campaign for the U.S. House of Representatives in Cambridge, M.A.
11, 25	Anecdote about the Kennedy family
15	1956 campaign for the U.S. Senate in Cambridge, M.A.
23	JFK's health issues
23	JFK's stag party before his wedding
26	JFK's role in securing Droney the office of district attorney

Oral History Interview

With

John J. Droney

November 30, 1964
Cambridge, M.A.

By Ed Martin

For the John F. Kennedy Library

MARTIN: John, your memory of President Kennedy [John F. Kennedy] goes all the way back to 1946, I believe. Could you tell us your recollection of the first occasion you met the President and some of the circumstances surrounding that meeting?

DRONEY: Yes, Ed. Back about February of 1946 I met Tony Galluccio [Anthony Galluccio] who was a friend of the late President at Harvard and with whom I had played ball when we were younger. He told me that a friend of his was going to run for Congress. His name was Jack Kennedy, and he wanted some help in Cambridge which was an important part of his district. Tony had another year of law school, but I had passed the bar exam before the service so that I was freer than Tony, and he suggested me to John Kennedy. We made two or three appointments, but I didn't want to get involved because I wanted to start practicing law; however, I think I kept the fourth appointment

I met him one day at the Bellevue [Bellevue Hotel] at his grandfather's apartment. I went up the elevator and started to walk into the apartment, when I saw quite a few generals and captains and other brass. I got a little bit disgusted, so I walked out. I pressed the elevator button, the elevator came up, and as I was just about to go in, this fellow came out – tall, slim, in his shirt sleeves,

[-1 -]

and asked me if I was John Droney. I said, "Yes." And he said, "You're leaving before we had the appointment?" I said, "Yes." "What's the matter?" And I said, "Well, Tony Galluccio asked me to come over, and I came to please him because he's a good friend of mine. But I had enough of the brass during the war, and I thought it's time to drop it." He laughed and said, "John, I feel the same way, but Tony thinks that you can help me a great deal in Cambridge and I'd like to sit down and tell you my plans. I can take you in another room, and we won't be bothered." We went into one of the bedrooms, and we sat on the edge of the bed. He asked me if I liked politics, and I said, "No, I want to start practicing law. I'm married, I have a baby, and I'm starting late as it is." He said that he'd wanted to be a newspaperman but his brother was killed during the war and his father [Joseph P. Kennedy] felt that he was best fitted to replace Joe [Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr.]. He said, "You want to be a lawyer and practice law, and I want to be a newspaperman; but if we're going to do the things we like to do we have to do many things that we don't care about doing." Naturally, I was attracted to him right away. I guess anybody would be.

I asked him what he me wanted to do, because I didn't have any experience in politics—or little experience. And he said, "Well, I'd like you to get some fellows and girls together who have never been in public life before, who have

[-2 -]

participated in politics and don't worry about the pols because we'll get them later on." He suggested that I jot down the names of younger people I happened to meet as I went along the street, and when I had fifteen or twenty to have a meeting. The next day he called me on the telephone, and he asked me would I like to be treasurer, because, he said, we have to have a committee. I said, "Well, I'm not much of an accountant, I'm a lawyer," and he said, "Well, my dad has plenty of accountants, but I'd like you." I said, "Well, I noticed one of your cousins over there and I thought he might be offended." And he said, "No." "John, if you don't like to do it I'm not going to argue, I've picked you, but I have to clear it with my father." And I said, "Well, I'll do anything in the campaign that I can to help you." He asked if I would go over the next day to see his Dad. I met his father at the Ritz Carlton [Ritz Carlton Hotel] with Eddie Moore [Edward Moore], and we talked for a little while, had lunch, and then I left. Jack called me about half an hour after I got back to my office and said that his Dad approved me and that everything was fine. This was how we started.

The following day we asked the superintendent of our building if he had room for a headquarters, and he replied that he had the fifth floor. I told him that I was going to

[-3 -]

be with John Kennedy, and he said, "Well, if you are, you can have the fifth floor for your headquarters." I called Jack up at the Bellevue and he came over in about half an hour. He met Bill Mello, the superintendent, and Bill gave us the headquarters rent-free. We had it all during the campaign. This is how we got started, Eddie.

MARTIN: John, can you tell me what the political climate was in Cambridge at the time, just after the war, and who was planning to run against Jack Kennedy for Congress?

DRONEY: As you remember, Ed, we had an early primary that year. The primary was June 18, 1946. As I remember, the reason for the early primary was to give the

veterans who had been away an opportunity to vote a little quicker than they would ordinarily. So rather than in September, we had the primary in June. The congressional seat, of course, was held by a Democrat. Nomination was tantamount to election. So actually his fight was in June.

Mike Neville [Michael J. Neville] was mayor of Cambridge. He was formerly Speaker of the House of Representative in Massachusetts, and he was probably the most powerful fellow in public life. He was going to be an opponent, and he was the logical favorite. This was why we felt Cambridge was the key section—and that if John Kennedy could do well in Cambridge, he'd win the fight easily. We heard that Catherine Falvey [Catherine E. Falvey], who was a major in the Army [Women's Army

[-4-]

Corps], was going to run, and we thought there was a little danger in that, because she was a woman. We didn't know how the women would react. They may go for her. We had a strong opponent in John Cotter [John F. Cotter] from Charlestown. He had been secretary to a former congressman and knew the district well. We felt that if John Kennedy could do well in each of the districts—in other words, if he could split each section in half, then he would win without any trouble. And I think that was the plan.

It was difficult for him to move in at the time. It's incredible looking back. He was a veteran, he had a tremendous war record, he was slim and very attractive, very good looking, and yet it was difficult to get him in the Legion [American Legion] post because Mike Neville was so strong there. We had to fight everywhere we went to get him in the building and get him an opportunity to speak. Once he got in, it was all over.

MARTIN: Wasn't there a feeling that he might be a carpetbagger in this district?

DRONEY: I never heard that too much. I think that Curley [James Michael Curley], had been congressman in this district before him, and he didn't live in the district. The only reason that the pols were bitterly against him was because he had never run for public office before. A story in one

[-5-]

of the Boston newspapers related that one of the politicians in Boston said that John had a nerve to run for Congress when he never held a seat in the Boston City Council and somebody suggested that whether that was a qualification for a congressman was a moot

question. But that was the feeling at the time. He hadn't run for office, and, because he had the audacity to run against Mike Neville, the feeling was very bitter.

His great advantage was once he met people they went for him. During that campaign he revived the teas. I think the first one, and maybe the only one they had in that campaign, was at the Commander [Sheraton-Commander Hotel] on a warm summer night. And I remember that Ed Quinn [Edward W. Quinn], who was mayor for many years in Cambridge and one of the most popular Democrats we ever had, had a brother Jerry Quinn who saw the crowd at that tea and the caliber of the persons who attended. He said the next morning that John Kennedy would win easily because he hadn't seen anything like that since the early days of his brother when they had the rallies. The place was mobbed. They had the Cambridge Common wired. The people were out in the street, and it was just a fantastic thing. I think everybody knew then that he would be a winner.

MARTIN: Some people felt that during the campaign, John, in his first bid for political office, that he was a reluctant campaigner, that he was uneasy meeting people, that he

[-6-]

had difficulty moving into a crowd and shaking hands. Did you find this to be so?

DRONEY: No, that wasn't so at all. He loved to do it. He had tremendous courage. He surprised us all because we thought he was just a little rich boy that wanted to hold office when he first started, but he dispelled that illusion very quickly. He was the best campaigner I've ever seen. For example, if he heard that Mike Neville was in Charlestown and it was one o'clock in the morning, he'd immediately go to Charlestown. Most of the police and firemen in Cambridge were against John because they loved Mike Neville. Neville had done favors for them over the years. It wasn't anything they had against John Kennedy personally—it was only that he was out to destroy their hero. John was fully aware of their feelings, yet, he would walk in the police and fire station and when he left he'd have some of them. There's no question about that. He loved to campaign; he wasn't shy or sensitive at all.

I think the first time he ever made a speech in Cambridge was at the Kiwanis Club, one noon at the Commander; it was only about a week after I met him. I noticed that all the waitresses waited to get his autograph, and I had never seen that before up there. I felt then that this fellow has a great deal on the ball. But he spoke on his war experiences. He spoke for about forty minutes; you could hear a pin drop. They waited

[-7-]

after they were through work to see him and talk with him. And I think that that was the tip-off.

I remember also that the fellows who were supposed to be the racket and bookie men in Cambridge, bet five to one this fellow couldn't beat Mike Neville. I met one of them about two days after John's first speech, and I asked him what the price was, and he said, "Even

money.” This was in two days. And that’s about the size of it. The night he went into the Legion—we had a difficult time to get him in. Then one of the former commanders said, “Look, this fellow’s a Legionnaire, he’s a war veteran, he’s got a record, how can we keep him out of a Legion post?” And he hadn’t been half way up the aisle when everybody stood up and started clapping, and he had them then. And then, I think a couple of nights later I took him to the Bar Association meeting [Cambridge Bar Association], he had just come as a guest and sat down; but he took the place by storm.

I think the secret of his campaign was that he seemed to, by luck or otherwise, hit a place at the proper time—like the Bar Association meeting, for example. He’d be such a tremendous success that somebody there would call Mike Neville and say, “You’d better get down. Jack Kennedy was here.” And by the time Mike arrived the damage was done. This is the way it was everywhere. Somebody asked him one day at the *Cambridge Chronicle*, “Jack, who’s your campaign manager? They say you have some mystery man that guides

[-8-]

you, and you always seem to come to the right place at the right time.” He thought and said, “Gee, I don’t have a campaign manager. We just—anybody that wants us to speak, I go there; and I guess we’ve been very lucky.” And that’s the way he left it, and that’s just about the way it was.

And then as we went along a little bit, Mark Dalton [Mark J. Dalton], Joe Healey [Joseph P. Healey], and a fellow from Somerville named Joe Thornton came in and helped. Jack liked Mark right away; Mark had a lot of ability. He didn’t stay too long in the Lodge [Henry Cabot Lodge] fight. I think it was a big state-wide thing. It may have been a little big. But he was tremendous in this one, and he started to learn to campaign in a more organized way.

MARTIN: Well, John, you mentioned Tony Galluccio over here in Cambridge. Besides him and yourself, in that 1946 fight, what other Cambridge people worked with Jack Kennedy?

DRONEY: Well, Joe “DeGug” [Joseph De Guglielmo] was the only one in public life. He was a councilor, and he and Neville never hit it off very well, do it was a natural that Joe would come with us. He did some work for us down in East Cambridge, and he was a good help to us. Al Vellucci [Alfred Vellucci], who is vice mayor of Cambridge now, wasn’t too friendly with Joe DeGug—they were sort of political enemies—but he was up and coming, and he did some good work for us. Frank Good [Francis J. Good], who’s now in the Superior Court, was a great worker. He came from a section where we needed help up around the independent

[-9-]

section, Wards 7 and 8; and he was well liked, had a big family, went out door-to-door for us, did anything we wanted him to do. He was a great help.

We had George Paris and another boy named Cuff, and they formed a Cuff-Paris Club, all veterans and their families, and they were very active workers. We had a girl there—she was not a girl—along in years—named Rose Reynolds, and she volunteered to work for nothing in the headquarters all during the campaign. She did a lot of—helped us a great deal. I remember the last time Lem Billings [Kirk LeMoyne Billings] was here, he asked how was Rose Reynolds and she had passed away and he felt badly. She was the one he remembered. She was a great worker. There weren't any that I remember in public life that actually helped us. They were all with Mike Neville—they almost had to be.

MARTIN: Well, were there any indications as you moved around in this first political fight that would lead you to believe that he would go far in political life? I mean, did you see any signs of great success?

DRONEY: I think it was obvious from the start, Ed, to everybody. People that met him were thinking in terms of president even then. Not senator but president. And I

think this was the normal reaction. The older ladies seemed to mother him; all of the young ones fell in love with him; the fellows liked him. There wasn't any group that didn't fall in love with him right away. He got some great help in East Cambridge from the

[-10-]

Portuguese people because they had moved from the West End [Boston] and the South End [Boston]; and wherever we'd meet them, the older ones would tell him how they worked for his grandfather, Fitzzy [John Francis "Honey Fitz" Fitzgerald]. That pleased him, and it helped a great deal. We moved in, and we did very well in East Cambridge.

MARTIN: How did he do in that fight in Cambridge?

DRONEY: As I remember, Ed, he won five out of the eleven wards. He just missed the sixth one. He almost won Ward 6, which was Mike Neville's home ward. We lost that by a very short margin. And I think he only lost Cambridge by a couple of thousand votes—maybe less than that—it was very close. But the minute we got the results from Cambridge, we knew the fight was over. He did very well in Brighton that year. I think he won about seven to one. And we didn't have television then, as you remember. His father came over with Eunice [Eunice Kennedy Shriver] and Bobby [Robert F. Kennedy] and Jean [Jean Kennedy Smith]. At about nine-thirty at night, we started to get some radio reports, and when we heard that he had won Ward 4, which was a key ward, and he was doing very well in 6, (we were getting reports from the wards)—his father said, "It looks like Jack's winning it easily," and they were very happy. I think Jean was about sixteen then, because we told Eunice, I think, that she looked like Jack, and Jean said, "Who do I look like?" And we said, "Bobby." She had a very bitter fight about

[-11-]

that, she didn't want to look like Bobby, she wanted to look like Jack. They said, "Where's Teddy [Edward Moore Kennedy]?" and they said, "Teddy's too young to be out that late at night." We had a great time that night.

Of course, his father was well then, and he was really wonderful. The father was a great help in the campaign, because we were green as grass. Even though he stayed out of it, he wasn't out of it. He was very much in it. Anytime I ever had a problem, I'd call him and he'd help us. And Eddie Moore helped us a great deal. He took a very active part in it. He was also a loveable man, he and I became very friendly, and I enjoyed working with him.

MARTIN: Well, were there any unusual techniques in that campaign, John, that you can recall that were apart from the old-type political fight?

DRONEY: Well, he started the house parties. Now, we used house parties in the old days, but during this period they seemed to have died out. John thought it was a great idea, and we said, "Well, let's try it out in Cambridge. It's early, and we'll see how we do." His thought was to attract people who had never been in public life before and to meet people that ordinarily wouldn't become interested in a campaign. This was the secret of the campaign. There was a Kirby family up on Centre Street, Cambridge, that helped us quite a bit. They had a big family; they were a great help. They had the first house party, and I had the second one. And I have a picture of it over there. I'm

[-12-]

not in it because we were trying to get fellows in that he didn't know. They're all veterans. We made a great play for the veterans. In fact, I have a letter home that I wanted to give John once, and every time he came I'd forget to bring it. He heard about it, and he liked it. We sent letters to all the veterans in his name asking them to come to the headquarters to help in any way they can. A French man—at least he had a French name—who lived on Norfolk Street, wrote a letter back and said that the private to whom the letter was addressed was killed in action. But he said, "His father lives," and he said, "I know if my son were living he'd want me to help another veteran." So, he said, "Mr. Kennedy, anything that I can do for you I want to do, and I'm sure all the veterans and their families feel the same way." This was a great advantage. Mike Neville wasn't a veteran and Jack was, and it was a tremendous help because this was the time when the veterans were all returning.

So we worked with the veterans. They started the house parties, and they were an instant success. The only difficulty with them, we scheduled too many in one night, Ed, and it gave us ulcers, but they worked out because they were willing to wait for him. We'd try to have one every hour, and it was difficult to keep the schedule. We had a little entertainment that we sent before the candidate. We had some girl

[-13-]

that sang and some saw player they picked up over in the South End. He used to play a saw—not a sword. When they saw this blond singer and the saw player coming, they knew the candidate would be along in about an hour. But I think that the parties were the most

important part of the campaign, because we took the names and addresses of the people who attended, we wrote to them the next day, and they started drifting down to the headquarters, and we had a good organization.

I think the key to it was we were probably the first ones, the first group, that ever did any real registering of voters, and we had a tremendous registration drive. We went door to door. They say they do that in campaigns, and they seldom do it. But John did it in his campaign, because he had the people who were willing to do it for him. That was the secret. He had to have them because we had few of the pols—there's no question about that.

MARTIN: After his election, John, did he keep in touch with the people who helped him this first campaign? While he was down in Washington, from time to time did you get down to see some of these people?

DRONEY: Well, he kept in touch with them. After June 18 we closed the headquarters. There was no further need of it. The election was over then, and he was talking like an elected congressman, and he started to make plans. Then he suggested to have a cruise some night and we'll get everybody aboard and

[-14-]

have a good time. I vetoed that because I thought somebody would get drunk and fall overboard, and that's all we needed. So what we did—we had individual parties in the different cities, and he came to them. He kept in close contact. He used to come to Boston, and any Saturday that he was going to be there, if anybody wanted to see him, fine. But actually, Eddie, they never bothered him much because most of the people who worked for him liked him and weren't looking for anything. We didn't have too much trouble in the patronage end of it. We didn't have any pols working for us. We were all interested in doing our own work, so he had a good opportunity. Except that he had a tough district. He had a district where the people were poor—they were looking for jobs and work—and he handled it well. He learned very fast.

MARTIN: Well, he got himself reelected—was it twice?

DRONEY: Yes, and the next two fights he didn't have a contest really, except a nominal one. So he had three terms in Congress, and then in '52 he decided to run for the Senate.

MARTIN: Did you talk to him at all about that decision, John? Did you get in on any of the discussions involving whether he'd go for the Senate? There was some talk that he may have gone for governor at that time.

DRONEY: Yes, well, they had papers out for governor, too, but Dever [Paul A. Dever] was governor. Yes, I talked many times with him. Frank Morrissey [Francis

X.

Morrissey] and

[-15-]

John and I sat down—oh, seven or eight times—on that particular phase of it, and I don't think he ever wanted to run for governor. I think he wanted to run for the Senate, but he knew and agreed that it was Dever's decision. After all, Dever was the governor. If he wanted to run for reelection, John didn't want to run against him in the primary even though he could have defeated him easily. So he left it up to Dever, but at that time Governor Dever wasn't feeling too well, and he was withholding any quick decision. One Sunday—John was speaking up in Springfield or Northampton, one of those areas—anyway, he came to the apartment late, and I was there with Frank Morrissey, and he had decided, I guess that morning, that he was going to run for the Senate, because he spoke to Governor Dever on the phone. Governor Dever said that he just had a complete physical examination, and the doctor said that he could go for governor. So he said, "Jack, I think I'll run for reelection." And Jack said, "Fine, I'll be a candidate against Lodge."

John came into the apartment—I think it was about four o'clock in the afternoon—and he said, "Hi, pal," to me, and he was laughing, and he was in great spirits, and he said, "Who got top billing in the *Record* [*Boston Record American*]?" First he asked, "It was in the paper?" And I said, "Yes, it's in the headline that you're going to run for the Senate, and

[-16-]

Dever is going to run for governor." And he wanted to know who got top billing, and he was laughing. Frank said, "You did, Jack. Who else?" And he got a kick out of it. He said, "What do you think of it?" And I said, "Well, I think we ought to get started." We called Joe DeGug in Cambridge, and DeGug said, "Well, let's get started right away." And Jack said, "Well, that's the kind of talk I like to hear. It's going to be a tough fight so we have to get started early." And we did. We had a meeting in Cambridge—I think it was—it was early, because I know it was a very warm night, but it was early in the campaign. I had a bet with Bobby Kennedy—he bet that we wouldn't have fifty people, and I bet that we'd have a hundred. And actually at that meeting at the Commander we had, according to the count, between four hundred fifty and five hundred people. John said to them, "With a group like this everywhere, we'll have the fight won before Lodge realizes that he is in a contest. So when he comes back from Europe late in the summer, this fight will be over. We want to get a good lead and stay out in front." And he said, "This is some indication of how we're going to win this campaign."

MARTIN: Well, how did he go about organizing on a statewide basis then? This was his first statewide contest, wasn't it?

DRONEY: Yes.

MARTIN: Who did he pick? Did he go after the political pros

[-17-]

around the state?

DRONEY: No. He had a secretary in every city and town. He had developed them over the years, speaking at Communion breakfasts and Holy Name [Holy Name Societies], so he was appealing to an idealistic fellow and a fellow who was interested in something good. He had a nice group at the outset. They were a ready-made group, and as he went through the state he kept their names and addresses. He always wrote to them and thanked them. He learned a little bit about their background, their wives' names, whether they had children, where they worked; and when he'd write to them, he'd mention some little item about them in the letter that made them feel he knew them well. And, of course, he had that great quality of having people feel that when they talked with him they were the most important person on earth. I think he felt that way about them. He seemed to like them, and they responded. So he had this ready-made group when he started. I think he spoke for six years at every parish and every church and every Holy Name group in the Commonwealth, so he had this group ready to take over and ready to start working for him. As I remember the secretaries, Ed, there weren't many that held public office or that were in public life at all. There were some, but the majority of them were fellows who had never been involved with any candidate before, and they were enthusiastic; they believed in him. This was a Kennedy organization; it wasn't

[-18-]

any other group. And I think that this is why he was so successful that year.

MARTIN: Well, did you work around the state for him or did you confine your interest principally to Cambridge?

DRONEY: No. I was chairman in Cambridge, but I was general chairman on the committee for this whole state and a Mr. Ford was treasurer. The campaign had bogged down early, and it wasn't going well at all. Nobody seemed to be the leader; we could get away with that in a congressional fight, but it was obvious to everyone that we couldn't go on like that if he was going to beat Lodge. And I think his father came here a few times and talked it over and knew something drastic had to be done. I think that this was the father's decision, and I think it was the turning point of the campaign. If they waited much longer it probably would have been too late. Bobby was drafted to be the campaign manager. He came up to Boston the following day, took charge, and from that moment on the thing started to jell.

We used to call the period before Bobby appeared "before the revolution" and anything that happened afterward was "after the revolution." And that's how they used to determine the time when anything happened. If there was a meeting and they were discussing it, they'd want to know was it before or

[-19-]

after the revolution? Bobby was a little green at the job. It was something new for him; but he had the drive, and he was one of the Kennedys. That made a big difference—nobody was jealous of Bobby. Things started to move. For example, in the headquarters in Boston, before Bobby came, they were a week trying to get a carpenter to divide the room into four or five smaller rooms. Nobody knew how they should be set up or how many rooms. It was just chaos. It's hard to describe it now, but it was going poorly. And then Bobby came, and things started to pick up from then on. Then after Bobby asked me to be campaign manager of Middlesex County. From then on that's what I did. We had meetings every night in some city or town in the county. And this was how they organized. They had meetings, follow up, make sure that the work was being done and the stickers were being given out and that we had house parties. We had a good organization in Middlesex County. We did a good job there.

MARTIN: And those tea parties then were just expanded over the state?

DRONEY: Over the state, yes. Well, of course, in '46 maybe they had one. In the '52 campaign they had them everywhere. They had a big one in Lowell. They had one up at the Commander in Cambridge where they had the first one—where 7500 people had a cup of tea or coffee—whatever they wanted—7500! The place only holds 400, but that hotel was set up so that you could walk in and out.

[-20-]

MARTIN: John, during the time he was deciding whether to go for governor or the United States Senate, was there any mention ever made, to your recollection, of running for some office other than these two?

DRONEY: Well, we discussed many times the statewide fight. He had had three terms as congressman, and wanted to move. And I think he was stymied. He more or less had to depend on what Governor Dever decided. And Governor Dever wasn't feeling too well at the time and he was waiting. So that John Kennedy felt he could win the governor's fight easily; to win the Senate fight against Lodge would be a tough fight, very difficult, and he knew what he was up against when he undertook that fight. At the hotel one day, Frank Morrissey and the congressman and I were together, and he asked me what I thought. I said, "I think you should run for the big office." And he said, "You mean the Senate?" And I said, "No. I mean the big office. I think you are the only one that could beat Eisenhower [Dwight D. Eisenhower]—the only Democrat. You're a veteran and he is; but you're young, and I think the people are looking for somebody new." And he said, "Well, it's a nice thought, but it's a little ahead of schedule." And we all laughed. He said, "I have to wait and see what Dever is going to do."

MARTIN: Well, John, after his election, in 1952, did you have much occasion to keep in touch with him through that first term as United States senator? I understood there was a period there when he was sick quite a while, after his election

[-21-]

and then, of course, his marriage. Did you attend the wedding?

DRONEY: Yes, my wife [Margaret “Peggy” Droney] and I attended the wedding. And I used to see him quite a lot during that period, Ed—in fact, I’d say every time he came to Boston. He’d call or write, and I’d go with him to a Communion breakfast or some place in the county where he was going to speak. Of course, Frank Morrissey and I had become good friends. I met him through the President back in 1946. John introduced me to Frank Morrissey, and Frank and I became pretty good friends. Frank was always with him, and I was with Frank a great deal; the three of us went together. And then Bob Morey [Robert F. Morey] was there a lot. Bob was very close, and he was very fond of John and drove him everywhere. So after John was elected senator I saw him a great deal.

I was sleeping the night after he defeated Lodge, and he called up around ten-thirty in the evening and said, “Where are you? We’re having a party.” And I said, “Well, we’re going to have a party in Cambridge in a week or so.” He said, “No. This is the victory party over at headquarters. Come on over.” And I said, “Oh, I’m dead. I just got out of bed.” And he said, “Well, come over because we’re going to have a good time. One more night isn’t going to hurt. Remember, I promised to sing ‘Sweet Adeline’ if I won, and I want some moral support.” So I got dressed and went over, and there was

[-22-]

a big crowd there, John got up on the platform; and it took him about an hour to even get started singing it, but he did sing. He sang it all. He sang it alone. Of course, he had a terrible voice—he had no tone—and then Bobby sang. I think Bobby was worse. We had a little party upstairs afterwards, and we had a great time that night. He was feeling well. He was in good spirits.

Sometime after that day they had a party for him at the Meadows for all the secretaries throughout the state. That was the first time that I had ever met his future wife. My wife and I were in line, and John looked pretty pale. We went up to him—we were the last two—and he said, “Peggy, you should never wait in line, you and John.” He then introduced us to Jacqueline [Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy], and she said, “Jack was just talking about you, John, on the way over here tonight, and he talked about you a lot.” She was very nice and, as I say, it was the first time I had ever seen her. Then John sort of put his arm on my shoulder and he said, “John, get me out of here. I’m awfully sick.” And that was the first time I ever in my life heard him say he was sick or not feeling well, even at times when he was in great pain. So I got Frank Morrissey, and they took him over to the hospital. I don’t think it was long after that that he had the operation. I know he was in real bad shape that night.

I saw him, of course, at the stag party we had for him—I believe it was at the Parker House [Boston]. All the chairmen had a stag party for him, and they gave me the honor

[-23-]

of making the speech and presenting the gift to him. I remember I was seated next to him on his right, and he was kind of shy. He asked if I thought he was doing the right thing and what will the women think. I said, "Oh, you are doing the right thing, because I have a little girl and you'll get a lot of pleasure in this thing. You get older just campaigning, and if you're not married, you have very little to show for all the work you've done." I thought marriage was a great thing, and I said I didn't think it would have any effect on the voters at all. "People expect you to get married. You'll have children some day and spend a little time with them. As I look back, the best times I ever had were with my little girl." He said that was good—he felt good—and then he got a telegram from Walter Power from Hartford [Connecticut] signed "Senator Power," giving him all kinds of instructions for the marriage. He got a kick out of that. Walter Power was a fellow that helped him around Charlestown and Brighton in the old days, and Jack nicknamed him Tyrone. He signed the telegram "Senator Walter Power from Connecticut," and everyone there except the ones that knew Power thought he was the Senator. But he felt good that night. He was in great spirits, and he was very happy about getting married.

I saw him after the operation when he first started to get better. I went with his father and Judge Morrissey and a couple of others and my wife to see Teddy play his last game

[-24-]

at Yale [Yale University]. Jack and I fought a lot, and this was one of the periods when we had had a little argument—over nothing—over little things, but he'd usually call up; and he had called this time and said that he'd like Peg and me to come to the game; I'm sure his father had him do it. We did go and we met him there. We sat with him during the game, and we ate, and we had a good time. The father had three or four cars to take the various people to the game. He had them play the sirens all the way from the train to the game—not because he wanted to get there quicker, but he said it would embarrass Jack. He said, "Look behind and Jack will have his head down on the floor." We did and saw that nobody could see him. The father said, "I don't know what's wrong with him. Now, if I were a senator and I was going to a game, I'd have them using those sirens, and I'd let the people see me. Jack hates anything like that. So that was the big joke of the day. That was also the day, of course, that Teddy scored the only touchdown against Yale. And I remember the father saying, "I'd like Teddy to play well, and I'd like Harvard to win, but I'm more interested in seeing him get out of this game without getting a serious injury. He has a bad knee now. Too many of them have been hurt."

MARTIN: Now, John, of course, he ran for reelection against Vincent Celeste [Vincent J. Celeste], but there wasn't too much of a campaign that year. Well, shortly after his reelection

[-25-]

as senator, a vacancy occurred here as a Middlesex County district attorney. Can you tell us more about the circumstances surrounding that and the role that Senator Kennedy played?

DRONEY: Yes, Ed, I came down to this office in 1956. Jim O’Dea [James L. O’Dea, Jr.], was elected district attorney. I understand he was the second one in fifty years who belonged to the Democratic party, he was our chairman in Lowell [Lowell, Massachusetts], and Jim ran that tea in Lowell. I met him actually through John Kennedy. I also met him trying cases, and we became quite fond of each other. When Jim was elected to fill a vacancy, he asked me a few days before he was sworn in if I’d come down as an assistant district attorney and stay for a few months until he got started, and I agreed. Then the three months went on, and there was a vacancy for the first assistant and he asked me to be first assistant. I remained with him then, and he left in 1959, around August or September. The morning he left, I called Washington, and I talked to Evelyn Lincoln [Evelyn N. Lincoln]. John Kennedy had just come in then, and I told Evelyn what it was about and she put him on the line. He said that Chub Peabody [Endicott Peabody] and John Zamparelli [John F. Zamparelli] and two or three others were down. They had been down for the last two months asking his support, and he had told them that if I was interested he would do his best to get it for me. I pointed out that Peabody was still interested. I said, “I know from talks that you’re

[-26-]

going to run for the presidency. Peabody is close with ex-President Truman [Harry S. Truman] and Adlai Stevenson [Adlai E. Stevenson], and you’ll be looking for their support. I wouldn’t want you to get into it if it’s going to hurt you in any way. It’s not that important to me.” And he said, “The hell with that stuff. Do you want this, John?” And I said, “Yes, I do, John. I’d be very interested if I could get it.” And he said, “Why don’t you hang up, and I’ll call you back in a few minutes.” He called back in ten or fifteen minutes from Washington and said that he had talked to Governor Furcolo [John Foster Furcolo] and Eddie McCormack [Edward J. McCormack, Jr.]. He said that Governor Furcolo wasn’t sure whether or not a commitment he had made some time ago was binding on him, but he would talk to me and he would do whatever he could. So John said, “I don’t know, John, whether he’s going to give it to you or not. I have a feeling he will. I haven’t asked him for anything before.” And he said, “I’m going to keep on him, and you keep in touch with me.”

I talked to Barney Solomon [Bernard Solomon], who was one of the aides for Governor Furcolo then, and he said that John called every day—sometimes two or three times a day—and he said, “He’s really putting in on him on a personal basis.” He said, “I think he’s going to give it to you.” This went on for six or seven weeks, and then when the Governor finally decided to submit my name, we found out that the council [Executive Council] had had a meeting and that they weren’t going to confirm me, that

[-27-]

they were going to refuse to confirm anyone unless it was John Zamparelli who had served in the legislature. John said, “You’d better call and tell them not to put that name in for a couple

of weeks—or put your name in for two weeks—and I’ll talk to the councilors.” He asked some of the councilors individually to be with me, pointing out that I was first assistant, I’d been in the office, I was his treasurer and campaign manager, and that this was a personal thing with him. We ended up through his efforts getting the council, and I was confirmed. So naturally I was very, very grateful to him, and he certainly took a good many risks in asking for the job; but he never hesitated, and he did things that I wouldn’t expect that he’d do.

I think that probably the greatest thrill that I have ever gotten in public life was when this job was pending, the president of the fireman’s union sent him a telegram, and he said that his interest in me was not appreciated by the members of the Fire Fighters Union [International Association of Fire Fighters]. John wrote him back a letter which was later published in the *Boston American* [*Boston Record American*]. He said, “Your letter telling me that my interest in John Droney is not appreciated by you is not appreciated by me.” He said, “I’m a citizen of the United States, I’m a citizen of Massachusetts, and I’m a public office holder, and I can sponsor anyone I wish.” He said that I was his close personal

[-28-]

friend for many years, that I had been first assistant district attorney, that my abilities and integrity had never been questioned, and that he was going to do anything possible to see that I was appointed district attorney of Middlesex County. I remember the night I read that in the paper, I didn’t care after that whether I got the DA’s job or not—I got such a kick out of the way he went on the firing line for me. It was a tremendous thing because I don’t think if I had a brother and he was running for the presidency that he would have ever taken part or participated in a fight for this office, when you think of all the ones who were looking for it. He didn’t count the cost, and he didn’t ask whether it was going to hurt him. As a matter of fact, he said that that didn’t make the slightest bit of difference. And you don’t find many like that in life.

MARTIN: This interview has been with Middlesex County District Attorney John J. Droney. The interview took place at his Cambridge office. The date
November 30, 1964. The interviewer Ed Martin of Senator Kennedy’s staff.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[-29-]

John J. Droney Oral History Transcript
Name List

B

Billings, Kirk LeMoyne, 10

C

Celeste, Vincent J., 25
Cotter, John F., 5
Cuff, 10
Curley, James Michael, 5

D

Dalton, Mark J., 9
De Guglielmo, Joseph, 9, 17
Dever, Paul A., 15, 16, 17, 21
Droney, Margaret "Peggy", 22, 23, 24, 25

E

Eisenhower, Dwight D., 21

F

Falvey, Catherine E., 4
Fitzgerald, John Francis "Honey Fitz", 11
Ford, Mr., 19
Furcolo, John Foster, 27

G

Galluccio, Anthony, 1, 2, 9
Good, Francis J., 9

H

Healey, Joseph P., 9

K

Kennedy, Edward Moore, 12, 24, 25
Kennedy, Jacqueline Bouvier, 23
Kennedy, John F., 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 12, 13, 14, 16,
17, 18, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28
Kennedy, Joseph P., 2, 3, 11, 12, 19, 24, 25
Kennedy, Joseph P., Jr., 2
Kennedy, Robert F., 11, 12, 17, 19, 20, 23
Kirby, 12

L

Lincoln, Evelyn N., 26
Lodge, Henry Cabot, 9, 16, 17, 19, 21, 22

M

McCormack, Edward J., Jr., 27
Mello, Bill, 4
Moore, Edward, 3, 12
Morey, Robert F., 22
Morrissety, Francis X., 15, 16, 17, 21, 22, 23, 24

N

Neville, Michael J., 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13

O

O'Dea, James L., Jr., 26

P

Paris, George, 10
Peabody, Endicott, 26, 27
Power, Walter, 24

Q

Quinn, Edward W., 6
Quinn, Jerry, 6

R

Reynolds, Rose, 10

S

Shriver, Eunice Kennedy, 11
Smith, Jean Kennedy, 11
Solomon, Bernard, 27
Stevenson, Adlai E., 27

T

Thornton, Joe, 9
Truman, Harry S., 27

V

Vellucci, Alfred, 9

Z

Zamparelli, John F., 26, 28