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*A Career Launched by a Photograph:
Recollections by Cal State Fullerton's Lincoln Scholar Ronald Rietveld
(1997)*

Shelfmark

California State University, Fullerton (CSUF).
The Lawrence de Graaf Center for Oral and Public History.
Project: Civil War Enthusiasts.
O.H. 2642.
Oral Interview with Ronald Rietveld, conducted by Brenda Maingot,
October 28, 1997, Fullerton, California.

Introduction

The oral history interview transcribed below belongs to a collection held in CSUF's Lawrence de Graaf Center for Oral and Public History (COPH), titled "Civil War Enthusiasts." The interview with Ronald Rietveld was conducted by Brenda Maingot on October 28, 1997, in Fullerton, California. The interview lasted 52 minutes and 12 seconds, and it is archived as a digital recording/audio file at COPH (see "Copyright Advisory" below). The verbatim transcript edited here was prepared in 2021 by Anthony Chavez, Moriah P. Esquivel Narang, and Osbaldo Jr. Rubalcava.

Ronald Rietveld was born in Pella, Iowa on September 22, 1937. In the interview edited here, he recalls his upbringing and early fascination with Abraham Lincoln. As a youngster, he corresponded with Civil War veterans and Lincoln scholars, which led to a meeting with Dr. Harry E. Pratt, the State Historian of Illinois. It was through this acquaintance that Rietveld found, at the age of fourteen, the only known photograph of Lincoln lying in state. Rietveld details how this discovery led to national media acclaim, an invitation to the Eisenhower Inauguration (1953), and senatorial and presidential campaign experience. Rietveld then relates the stages of his academic education, namely, his undergraduate work at Drake University and Wheaton College, and his graduate work at Bethel Theological Seminary and the University of Illinois (M.A. 1962; Ph.D. 1967). In 1969, after teaching at Wheaton College, Rietveld and his family relocated to southern California where he started his professorial career at (what is now) California State University, Fullerton (CSUF). Rietveld addresses his curricular portfolio, which includes courses in world history, Black history, and American history, and he shares details on his academic service, which includes serving as the CSUF History Department's undergraduate coordinator, advisor to the Tau Kappa Epsilon fraternity, and board member for the University Center. Rietveld closes his interview with comments on the relevance of the Civil War and how it has continued to affect the United States up to the present (1997).

Ronald Rietveld uses his life story to showcase how the shared interest in a historical topic can lay the groundwork for both personal and professional relationships with other individuals. These relationships presented him with the opportunity to make an unprecedented discovery which has influenced his entire life. Rietveld's perspective on the American Civil War, combined with the knowledge gained from conversations with veterans of the war, his relationship with numerous Lincoln scholars, and his extensive educational experience, offer a unique perspective on a well-known historical topic.

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Verbatim Transcript (O.H. 2642)

LAWRENCE DE GRAAF CENTER FOR ORAL AND PUBLIC HISTORY

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, FULLERTON

NARRATOR: Ronald Rietveld [RR]

INTERVIEWER: Brenda Maingot [BM]

DATE: October 28, 1997

LOCATION: Fullerton, California

PROJECT: Civil War Enthusiasts

TRANSCRIBERS: Anthony Chavez, Moriah P. Esquivel Narang, and Osbaldo Jr. Rubalcava

BM: —um Fullerton, California, and we're gonna be talking about the Civil War.¹ It is Tuesday, October twenty-eighth. To start off, Dr. Rietveld, can you just give me some background information on yourself?

¹ American Civil War (1861-1865); armed conflict between the Union and the Confederacy.

- RR: (squeaking noise)² I was born in a Dutch³ community called Pella,⁴ Iowa, on September twenty-second, 1937. Uh, the picture on the wall is a log cabin on a place called Lincoln⁵ Street, which is the home of my great-grandparents – grandparents, my mother lived there, and I grew up there. So, I grew up, part of my life, in a log cabin. Still –
- BM: (laughs)
- RR: – stands in my hometown. And, interestingly enough, if you – in the view of what I became later, in the Lincoln world, that house was on Lincoln Street. If that isn't a twist.
- BM: Yeah.
- RR: Uh, my family still live there. My father's family founded the community of Pella in 1847.⁶ My great-great-great-grandfather, John Rietveld, led a boat of a hundred and thirty-seven people. In addition, three other boats accompanied that came over to, uh, bring people for religious freedom. They fled Holland⁷ in 1847 because of the persecution under the Dutch government.⁸ And that's how Pella came about. Uh, so I am a, uh, I guess you could say a full-blooded Hollander, uh – (pause in recording)
- BM: Dr. Rietveld, can you just continue where you – you left off about, uh, being brought up on Lincoln Street.
- RR: Yeah. Uh, I began my interest in Lincoln, therefore, as a very young boy. I was already interested at the age of five. I have here in my library a couple of books, which are books that I purchased when I was five years old. So, my interest started about 1943, actually. I have an engraving of Lincoln that was given to me by my second-grade classroom teacher at Brooks School⁹ in Des Moines,¹⁰ Iowa. And I received it in about 1944 or '5. So, I started very, very early. Uh, as a boy – as a teenage boy, I corresponded with the last living Civil War veterans. There were still seven alive by 1950 – '51 and I wrote them, and one by one they passed away. They, so-called – there's some question about the last one being a Confederate,¹¹ but those (knocking) – (pause in recording) – yeah there's a rumor that the last soldier – rumor, depends on your viewpoint, if – if he was a viable

² This squeaking noise recurs throughout the interview, but is only noted here.

³ Denoting affiliation with the Netherlands, a country in northwestern Europe.

⁴ City in Marion County, Iowa.

⁵ Abraham Lincoln (1809-1865); 16th President of the United States (1861-1865).

⁶ According to the City of Pella's [website](#), "Prominent among the persecuted dissenters was Reverend Hendrik Pieter Scholte, or Dominie (meaning "Pastor") Scholte."

⁷ Informal name for the Netherlands, as well as the name of a province in the Netherlands.

⁸ Discrimination against dissenters from the state church.

⁹ Elementary school in Des Moines, Iowa, that is now permanently closed.

¹⁰ Capital city and county seat in Polk County, Iowa.

¹¹ Resident of the Confederate States of America.

- Confederate soldier, but supposedly one of the last of the Civil War soldiers was Confederate. He died in December of 1959 at the age of 117.¹²
- BM: Wow.
- RR: But, it – that’s debatable – a year or so before that, the last may have been a *federal* soldier.¹³ Nevertheless, I did – in my life – did touch the lives of Civil War soldiers. As a boy, in 1946, I remember we had a centennial parade in Des Moines, Iowa, for the centennial of the state of Iowa which was, uh, organized in 1846 from a territory to a state. And there were Civil War soldiers in that parade, in cars going down the streets. And I do remember seeing Civil War Soldiers in Iowa in 1946. Um – I began to write Lincoln scholars across the nation as a teenage boy. And I wrote a man by the name of Judge Bollinger¹⁴ – James Bollinger – James W. Bollinger, in Davenport,¹⁵ Iowa, probably Iowa’s oldest Lincoln enthusiast, and I was then a boy of thirteen – fourteen. So, the two of us corresponded for a while. He sent me an engraving of Lincoln as a gift. Then he died – but I found they were gonna dedicate his Lincoln collection at the University of Iowa¹⁶ in Iowa City.¹⁷ I wrote a letter, saying that I would love to attend the dedication because I had known Judge Bollinger personally. I didn’t receive an answer.
- BM: Hm.
- RR: Then I got a phone call. Clyde Walton,¹⁸ who was in charge of the Special Collections at the University of Iowa, called – and the essence of his question to me on the phone was, uh, “Are you for real?” I said, “Excuse me, what do you mean?” He says, “Why, are you only fourteen and did you write and know Judge Bollinger?” I said, “Well I knew him through writing.” And he says, “Well, we’d like to have you come to the dedication and be our guest.”
- BM: Mm.
- RR: So I was placed on a train, by myself – a steam train in those days – between Des Moines and Iowa City. I went to the dedication, November of 1951, at the University of Iowa. And there at the dedication, which was about a two-day affair, I met all the *living* Lincoln scholars – major scholars – in the United States, except for Carl Sandburg,¹⁹ who wasn’t there at the time. But the State Historian of Illinois, Dr. Harry E. Pratt,²⁰ took a liking to me and

¹² Walter Washington Williams (1842/1854-1959).

¹³ Albert Henry Woolson (1850-1956).

¹⁴ James Wills Bollinger (1867-1951).

¹⁵ City and county seat in Scott County, Iowa.

¹⁶ Public university in Iowa City, Iowa; established 1847.

¹⁷ City in Johnson County, Iowa.

¹⁸ Clyde C. Walton (1926-2000).

¹⁹ Carl August Sandburg (1878-1967); Pulitzer-Prize recipient (1919, 1940, 1951).

²⁰ Harry Edward Pratt (1901-1956).

asked me if I'd ever been to Springfield²¹ to see the Lincoln home,²² tomb,²³ and New Salem²⁴ where he grew up as a young man. I said, "No," I had never done that. He said he'd like to have me be his guest. He and Marion²⁵—his second wife, had just married in '51—would like to have me—I think it was '50—'50 sounds right. He'd like to have me visit them as their guest in Springfield the next summer (pauses) for a week. I said I would like that. So they—he said they'd let me know about when. So, he wrote me a postcard and said, "It's very hot right now, in the summer—

BM: (laughs)

RR: —but we'd love to have you come and be our guest." So, mother put me on the bus that—all by myself. I was a crazy kid. I traveled a lot alone after I was fourteen. I went on the bus from—Greyhound Bus²⁶—from Des Moines to Galesburg,²⁷ Illinois. Transferred by myself from Galesburg to Springfield. And after I arrived in Springfield, Dr. and Mrs. Pratt met me at the bus station and took me under their wing. They took me to the home, they took me to the tomb, took me out to New Salem to a production, uh, a Lincoln production, in the evening. And then on Sunday morning, we had missed getting up to go to the Methodist²⁸ Church which they attended. And Dr. Pratt said that he needed to go to the office and do a review on a book, and Marion said that she really needed to go to the Lincoln Home upstairs and do some work on the galley proofs of the *Collected Works* of Abraham Lincoln.²⁹ And, up there on my shelf, those blue and grey volumes are the *Collected Works* on which she was working. Upstairs—then the upstairs of the Lincoln Home had not been restored. Virginia Stuart Brown³⁰—who was a—a relative of Mrs. Lincoln³¹—lived upstairs. And so we took her to the home—Lincoln Home—and then we went off to the Centennial Building.³² And, um, Dr. Pratt took me to the file of the

²¹ Capital city and county seat in Sangamon County, Illinois.

²² 413 S 8th St, Springfield, Illinois.

²³ Oak Ridge Cemetery, Springfield, Illinois.

²⁴ Former village in Menard County, Illinois.

²⁵ Marion Dolores Pratt (1907-1963).

²⁶ Greyhound Lines, Inc.; bus company, established 1914.

²⁷ City in Knox County, Illinois.

²⁸ Protestant Christian denomination.

²⁹ Abraham Lincoln, *Collected Works*, The Abraham Lincoln Association, Springfield, Illinois, ed. Roy P. Basler, Marion Dolores Pratt, and Lloyd A. Dunlap, 8 vols. (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1953).

³⁰ (1892–1970); great-granddaughter of John Stuart, Lincoln's first law partner.

³¹ Mary Ann Todd Lincoln (1818-1882); wife of Abraham Lincoln.

³² Michael J. Howlett Building, Springfield, Illinois; commemorates the state's centennial.

Nicolay³³-Hay³⁴ Papers. Nicolay—John Hay and John Nicolay were Lincoln's private secretaries during the presidential years in the White House.³⁵ And this set of notes was given to the state of Illinois in 1943 by John Hay's daughter.³⁶ And so he opened up the file and said I was free to take anything out I liked, but that I needed to return the things to the very same place where I had taken them from, and I agreed to that. I would obtain what I needed from the file, walk across the hall area to the Lincoln-Horner Room,³⁷ and then I'd sit at a desk, look at it. Then I would walk the envelope *back* to the file so it was in the exact place. I'll never forget the file number was X:14. X colon 14. And the notes in that file were of a Lincoln visit. President *and* Mrs. Lincoln both visited City Point³⁸ in late March of 1865. There was a review of troops at the time. Mrs. Lincoln was very agitated because she and Mrs. Grant³⁹ got to the review late. They were, uh, riding on a corduroy road. That's where you take trees and halve them, and then the flat surface you ride over with a coach—very rough and very bouncy. She hit her head on the top of the carriage—she was not a happy camper—got there and found that General Ord's⁴⁰ wife⁴¹ was on horseback, sitting next to her husband reviewing the troops, became absolutely enraged. (pauses) She not only gave Mrs. Ord a tongue-lashing when she came over, but when her husband came over she equally gave him a tongue-lashing.

BM: Hm.

RR: One of those sad moments because it wasn't long after that President Lincoln was shot.⁴²

BM: Mm.

RR: I was going through those notes. In that same file was an envelope, written from John Nicolay. On the envelope it was addressed from—excuse me, *to* John Nicolay, Washington D.C., from Lewis H. Stanton.⁴³ Lewis Stanton was Lincoln's Secretary of War Edwin Stanton's⁴⁴ son. Son of the great Secretary of War, the war years. I pulled out two pieces of stationery. The

³³ John George Nicolay (1832-1901).

³⁴ John Milton Hay (1838-1905).

³⁵ Official residence of the President of the United States; Washington, D.C.

³⁶ Hay had two daughters: Helen (1875-1944) and Alice (1880-1960).

³⁷ Located in the Centennial Building, Springfield Illinois.

³⁸ Former town in Prince George County, Virginia.

³⁹ Julia Boggs Grant (1826-1902); wife of Ulysses S. Grant.

⁴⁰ Edward Otho Cresap Ord (1818-1883).

⁴¹ Mary Mercer Thompson Ord (1834-1894).

⁴² Lincoln was shot on April 14, 1865, inside Ford's Theatre by John Wilkes Booth.

⁴³ Lewis Hutchinson Stanton (1860-1938).

⁴⁴ Edwin McMasters Stanton (1814-1869).

inner stationery was folded in three and had something in it, I didn't pay any attention to the inner fold. I laid it aside, read the letter—I have a copy of the letter. And in essence it said, "I was going through my father's papers"—and that would've been Secretary of War Stanton's own papers after his death. And he says, "I found this photograph, and I thought perhaps it might be of some use to you." Of course, John Hay and Nicolay were writing that set of ten volumes on Lincoln⁴⁵—*Abraham Lincoln: A History*—in the 1880s. The letter was dated in July of 1887.

[00:10:00]

RR: Said he'd found this, uh, coffin photo. I thought it was rather interesting. I closed the letter up, I put it back in the envelope, and then I remembered, Uh-oh, I forgot the contents. So I opened up the other piece of stationery, and in the center was a—looked like a proof of a picture, which you get these brown proofs. And the closer I looked at it, the more I realized that it was a picture of President Lincoln, lying in state. You could see his face in the coffin, (pauses) (talking in background) taken in New York City. I knew *when* it was taken, April twenty-fourth. I knew *where* it was taken, in New York City. I knew that it shouldn't *exist* because there were *no* known photographs of the body, and I was in a state of shock. (pause in recording) Okay. Uh, Dr. Pratt asked me where I thought the photograph was taken, I told him New York City. He asked when I thought it might have been taken, I said "During the Lincoln funeral in the city," which turned out to be, I was right, April twenty-fourth '65. And then his next comment was, uh, could I keep my mouth shut? I had a lot of chutzpah,⁴⁶ as a boy of fourteen—I was technically fourteen, I didn't turn fifteen till September twenty-second, and this is July of '52. I suggested I would be glad to be still about it if he would promise me something and he said, "Sure, what?" And I said, "Will you promise to give me a copy of the photograph?"

BM: Mm.

RR: He agreed to that. In fact he kept his—his part of the bargain. And I kept my part, I remained still. Then on September 14, '52, AP⁴⁷ had released it across the United States that a fifteen-year-old boy—though I wasn't fifteen yet—had found the last photograph taken of Lincoln. And it was in the *Des Moines Register*⁴⁸ in the morning. My grandfather called around five o'clock in the morning to ask my mother what the deal was; my picture was in the paper. Mother hadn't seen it, so she awakened me at five in the morning

⁴⁵ John George Nicolay and John Milton Hay, *Abraham Lincoln: A History*, 10 vols. (New York: The Century Co., 1890).

⁴⁶ Yiddish term for strong self-confidence, nerve.

⁴⁷ Abbreviation for "Associated Press;" American non-profit news agency, founded 1846.

⁴⁸ Daily newspaper; founded 1849 as *The Iowa Star*.

- and said, “Your picture is in the paper, your grandfather said. He just called.” She says, “What have you done wrong?”
- BM: (laughs)
- RR: “Oh,” I said, “Mother, I haven’t done anything wrong.” I—I said, “It’s that photograph!” “What photograph?” Well, I was a good boy. Even if I had told her — and I can’t remember that I had — she didn’t remember it anyway. And I said, “Well, that Lincoln photograph I found last summer in Springfield.” And, after that, of course, the media picked it up. We had, uh, interviews by the press. Uh, I was on live television, WOI-TV⁴⁹ in Ames,⁵⁰ Iowa, in the day when they didn’t record — pre-record anything. I was on *live* —
- BM: Mm.
- RR: — in 1952, ‘53. And, uh, then *Life Magazine*⁵¹ picked up the story in September and October of 1952, and so the story was covered in *Life*. The initial story of it was written by Stefan Lorant,⁵² S-t-e-f-a-n L-o-r-a-n-t, from Massachusetts. But, Stefan mentioned at the end of it that a Lincoln *student* had found it, didn’t mention my name (pauses) which upset several Lincoln scholars that I knew, one in particular, Louis H. Warren⁵³ — Louis (pauses) Louis H. Warren? Shoot. Louis E. Warren I guess it is. (inaudible) I have to look — (cluttering) — real quick.
- BM: Mokay.
- RR: I think it’s Louis E. Warren. I don’t wanna get this wrong. (pause in recording) — Warren, who was (pauses) in Fort Wayne,⁵⁴ Indiana, in charge of the Lincoln National Life Foundation⁵⁵ and the Lincoln Museum⁵⁶ in Fort Wayne. He wrote and said, “You need to write *Life Magazine* and tell them that *you* were the one that took — that found the photo.” So, I wrote them. The next thing I found was that somebody was knocking on our door wanting to take a photograph of me, that *Life* had requested a photograph.
- BM: Hm.
- RR: So, in the early October issue — I think October 6, 1952 — of *Life Magazine* in the editor — letter to the editor section, you will find the letter I wrote them and my photograph —
- BM: Mm.
- RR: — at the age of fifteen, and I look very different than I do now.

⁴⁹ Television station; established 1950, now known as WOI-DT.

⁵⁰ City in Story County, Iowa.

⁵¹ American general-interest magazine; published 1883-2000.

⁵² Hungarian-American filmmaker, photojournalist, and author; 1901-1997.

⁵³ Louis A. Warren (1885-1983).

⁵⁴ City and county seat in Allen County, Indiana.

⁵⁵ Educational branch (founded 1928) of the Lincoln National Life Insurance Company.

⁵⁶ Collection of the Lincoln Financial Foundation’s Lincoln memorabilia; closed 2008.

BM: (laughs)

RR: But! It was a nice—it was a nice experience. Um, that following January, 1953, I was the youngest guest at the Eisenhower⁵⁷ Inauguration, again at fifteen. Invited by the, uh, Washington D.C., uh, Inaugural Committee,⁵⁸ and I stayed with Congressman Paul Cunningham⁵⁹ and Gayle, his wife, he is original co-author of the G.I. Bill of Rights.⁶⁰

BM: Hm.

RR: I stayed with Paul and Gayle (barking noise) at the, uh, Inaugural. There were then only two inaugural balls in Washington, and I was at the Georgetown Ball.⁶¹

BM: Hm.

RR: Uh, having been invited, that meant I had to have a tux. Well, in Des Moines, Iowa, they didn't have any tux to fit my fifteen-year-old body. So, they asked a, uh, department store in Chicago to mail in or fly in—I guess at this point mail in a—a tux, which they did. So, my tux was everything but the hat and the gloves.

BM: Mm.

RR: So, I was invited, then, to be present at the inaugural parade. I sat in Lafayette Square⁶² across from the White House Reviewing Stand,⁶³ and while there I saw Julie Nixon⁶⁴ meet David Eisenhower⁶⁵ for the first time.

BM: Ah.

RR: They were both children, and I actually saw them, for the first time, meet at the Inaugural Reviewing Stand. Um, before the parade was over, I had to escape. And I quickly did that. I don't know how I got a taxi. I still don't know how I got back to Capitol Hill,⁶⁶ but Paul put me in his office and said, "Now you can dress here." That morning I had taken my, uh, inaugural suit for the, uh, ball to the office, in the, uh, House Office Building.⁶⁷

BM: Mm.

RR: And he locked the door, I remember that very distinctly, and put me—and sat down. "Nobody will bother you, you can get dressed," and that was

⁵⁷ Dwight David "Ike" Eisenhower (1890-1969); 34th President of the United States (1953-1961).

⁵⁸ U.S. Joint Congressional Committee on Inaugural Ceremonies (JCCIC); established 1901.

⁵⁹ Paul Harvey Cunningham (1890-1961); U.S. Representative (1941-1959).

⁶⁰ Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944. Cunningham attended its Oval-Office signing.

⁶¹ Held at McDonough Gymnasium, Georgetown University.

⁶² Historic public park in Washington D.C.; located directly north of the White House.

⁶³ Specially built stand for the incoming President to view the inaugural parade.

⁶⁴ Born 1948; daughter of Richard M. Nixon and Thelma Catherine "Pat" Ryan Nixon.

⁶⁵ Dwight David Eisenhower II, born 1948; grandson of President Eisenhower.

⁶⁶ Location of the U.S. Capitol Building; meeting place of the U.S. Congress.

⁶⁷ In 1953, either the Cannon Building (1908) or the Longworth Building (1933).

fine. I got part of it on, and suddenly I stop. I was kind of, uh, whistling or singing or whatever you do at that point—very happy camper getting ready for the ball—and I stopped. Paul rapped on the door and said, “Are you okay? Is everything fine?” I said, “Paul, everything is wrong. Absolutely everything is wrong.” “What’s the matter?” he said. “I have forgotten the most important part of my suit for the inaugural ball. I forgot my pants.”

BM: Oh, no.

RR: They lived at Rhode Island Northeast⁶⁸ in Washington. He said, “I’ll tell you what I’m gonna do.” He said, “I’m gonna go back and get your pants.” And then he said, “We’ll put you in a taxi to Georgetown.” “But,” he said, “When we start campaigning next time, you need to tell these people in Iowa what a great guy I am—

BM: (laughs)

RR: —that I would go *all the way out* to Rhode Island—Rhode Island Northeast—to get your pants.” Boy, he kept his word.

BM: (laughs)

RR: When we campaigned in 1954 together, in an audience of hundreds of people, he told them that I was present, and I could *verify*, what a great guy he was because I went—he went “*all the way out*” he—

BM: Whoo-hoo!

RR: —said, to get my pants—

BM: (laughs)

RR: —so I could go to the inaugural ball. And I was one of the most *embarrassed* teenagers—

BM: (laughs)

RR: —you can imagine, but he was right.

BM: Um-hm.

RR: That was 1953. That summer, (pauses) I traveled (pauses) to the National Hobby Convention⁶⁹ in Roanoke,⁷⁰ Virginia, with a man named Rev—the Reverend Oliver B. Rancifer,⁷¹ from Wisconsin, who was a Lincoln collector, who knew Robert Lincoln,⁷² Lincoln’s son, personally. And, um, we traveled for a month. Another fella in Chicago by the name of Kitt Boaz⁷³—both of us were young teenagers—and Rancifer, who was a man in his sixties. And we drove his, uh, car, poor car, for a whole month, uh, doing all the major historic sites in Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, went into

⁶⁸ Diagonal avenue in the northern part of Washington, D.C.

⁶⁹ All States Hobby Convention; in 1953, held at the Lord Baltimore Hotel, Roanoke, Virginia.

⁷⁰ Independent city in the U.S. commonwealth of Virginia.

⁷¹ Unidentified individual.

⁷² Robert Todd Lincoln (1843-1926).

⁷³ Unidentified individual.

- Tennessee, northern Georgia, and then to Virginia, and then all the way up the New England states to, uh, Massachusetts, and then across New York to Niagara Falls, then back to the Chicago area. Um, I'm still using the experiences on that trip, teaching.
- BM: Wow.
- RR: That summer, we visited the homes and graves of sixteen American presidents.
- BM: Wow.
- RR: At, uh, the Grant Tomb⁷⁴ in New York City, I met General Grant's granddaughter, —
- BM: (gasps)
- RR: — great-granddaughter, and great-great-grandchildren.
- BM: Hm.
- RR: Uh, Julia—Princess Julia Grant Cantacuzène⁷⁵ was her name, the granddaughter of President Grant, and she was there at the tomb, had a nice visit with her. And then when we visited the home of Andrew Johnson⁷⁶ in Greeneville,⁷⁷ Tennessee, we met the great-granddaughter of Andrew Johnson at that point, and it was quite a nice experience to meet Margaret Patterson,⁷⁸ uh, Glover was her name. And, uh, so I can say I've met the descendants of at least two presidents of the United —
- BM: Uh-hm.
- RR: — States. More than that actually because I have met other descendants, too. That was '53. Nineteen fifty-four, I was, uh, active in the Republican campaign in Iowa,
- [00:20:00]
- RR: and I was in charge of the mail division for a senatorial candidate, Thomas Martin.⁷⁹ And, uh, Thomas Martin was successful, went to the United States Senate. So, I had experience in 1952 working the county level, in 1954 working the state level, and then, in 1956, I was invited to travel with the Eisenhower-Nixon⁸⁰ Bandwagon —
- BM: Wow.

⁷⁴ Tomb of Ulysses S. Grant (1822-1885); 18th President of the United States (1869-1877).

⁷⁵ Julia Dent Grant Cantacuzène Speransky (1876-1975).

⁷⁶ (1808-1875); 17th President of the United States (1865-1869).

⁷⁷ Town and county seat in Greene County, Tennessee.

⁷⁸ Margaret Johnson Patterson Bartlett (1903-1992).

⁷⁹ Thomas Ellsworth Martin (1893-1971); U.S. Senator (1955-1961).

⁸⁰ Richard Milhous Nixon (1913-1994); 37th President of the United States (1969-1974).

RR: – in Iowa. So, I campaigned with President, Mrs. Eisenhower⁸¹ personally, Vice President, Mrs. Nixon⁸²—I had met the Nixons for the first time in 1954. I campaigned with them in '56, and, uh, was present and met President Eisenhower at the runway, uh, in Des Moines, before he left. There were a hundred-thousand people plus in Des Moines for that presidential parade, and I was there. My role was Uncle Sam.⁸³ They had dressed me up in an —

BM: (laughs)

RR: – Uncle-Sam uniform, which is quite an experience for a boy. My grandmother attached the—the hair to the hat, because the hat was too big for my—my very small head. I think I'm, what, six and seven-eighths.⁸⁴ And, um, I had a real problem because the TV cameras were on—running and I didn't know what to do. Everybody was taking their hats off for the President of the United States—

BM: (laughs)

RR: – and Paul had yelled at me, “Here comes the President!” I didn't even think I could meet the President, but what I didn't know is three weeks before they had already given me security clearance—

BM: (gasps)

RR: – to meet him, and I didn't know that. Everybody who worked at the county headquarters were cleared to meet the President. I had no idea that I was in line to meet him until it happened, but, uh, Paul says, “Get in line!” I get in line, and here comes the President, here he comes, and I thought, “What am I gonna do?” If I take off my hat, I lose my hair.

BM: (laughs)

RR: That would be very embarrassing on national television to see Uncle Sam *lose* part of his head. So, I decided I'd play the role. President of the United States was going to meet Uncle Sam. I was Uncle Sam. I didn't take off my hat. I kept my head and had a nice little visit with, uh, President Eisenhower.

BM: Wow.

RR: The amazing thing for me, personally, is that he was a lot shorter than I thought.

BM: Hm.

RR: He was five-nine and I'm six-one, but it's so—one of the warmest, fleshiest handshakes I've ever experienced. Soft hand, but Ike didn't do much hard work with his hands his whole life through. (smacks lips) He didn't know how to drive a car till after he was President of the United States. He was

⁸¹ Mary Geneva “Mamie” Eisenhower (1896-1979).

⁸² Thelma Catherine “Pat” Ryan Nixon (1912-1993).

⁸³ Personification of the United States or its government; first used around the War of 1812.

⁸⁴ Within the range of the hat size “small.”

chauffeured everywhere, his valet picked out his clothing for him, and, so, he didn't have to do any manual labor in his whole life. And you could tell with him – his hand –

BM: Hm.

RR: – shake, but a very, very warm person. I met Mamie, Mrs. Doud,⁸⁵ her mother, was there at that time. It was a very nice experience. Nineteen fifty-seven, I left Drake University⁸⁶ where I had begun my freshman year in '55 for a place called Wheaton College⁸⁷ in Illinois. I graduated from Wheaton College in 1959, and three days later was married to Ruth Eleanor Davis, now Rietveld, and we've been married since 1959.

BM: Wow!

RR: And, uh, I graduated (pauses) June ninth, married June twelfth of '59. Moved up to Saint Paul-Minneapolis,⁸⁸ where I was enrolled at Bethel Theological Seminary⁸⁹ –

BM: Mm-hm.

RR: – at Saint Paul. I pushed four years of seminary into three and graduated *magna cum laude*⁹⁰ in 1962. On June fourth, 1962, I was ordained to the Christian ministry at Union Park Baptist Church in Des Moines, which is where I had attended, and Bethel is a Conference *Baptist* Seminary, and I, at that point, was Conference Baptist.⁹¹ Ruth's family, uh, background was also Conference Baptist on her mother's side. Her father is an ordained Baptist minister, so she was a PK.⁹² I first met her when she was seven, and I was eleven.

BM: Aww.

RR: We didn't date till she was sixteen, and then seriously dated again seventeen, she was engaged to me at eighteen, and I married her at nineteen, and I was twenty-one.

BM: Aww.

RR: So, after we left ordination in June, I became Protestant chaplain⁹³ in Zion National Park,⁹⁴ in Utah, and I served as the Protestant chaplain in the national park. Having three services, a morning service, early sunrise, a regular morning service around ten, and an evening vesper service at six. It

⁸⁵ Elivera Mathilda Carlson Doud (1878–1960).

⁸⁶ Private university in Des Moines, Iowa; established 1881.

⁸⁷ Private Christian college in Wheaton, Illinois; established 1860.

⁸⁸ Metropolitan area in Minnesota.

⁸⁹ Private seminary in Arden Hills, Minnesota; established 1871.

⁹⁰ Latin for “with great praise;” academic honors.

⁹¹ Protestant Christian denomination.

⁹² Abbreviation for “Pastor's Kid.”

⁹³ Clergyman.

⁹⁴ Nature preserve in southwestern Utah; established 1919.

- was an interesting experience for me because I—I labored and worked among about a 90 percent LDS⁹⁵ environment.
- BM: Mm-hm.
- RR: Most of the people in the park are LDS or Latter-Day Saints or Mormons. And it was interesting to be a minority, uh, in—in my religious background and where the—we got along very, very well. We stayed with the, uh, the person of Christ, and we didn't wander around too much until the last week, they wanted to know about my thinking about Joseph Smith,⁹⁶ too. Yes. (pause in recording) (clank sound)—62.
- BM: So, you're working with the, um, LDS?
- RR: Yes. Uh, that summer, (pauses) after '62, I—I went to seminary at Bethel—make sure I got my sequence right. And I graduated in—from Bethel—nineteen—boy, the years go by quickly. I graduated from Bethel '62. That's right. And then I went to the University of Illinois⁹⁷ that fall, that's the way it is. I completed my work at Zion. I was admitted to the M.A. program, University of Illinois, and I started in the fall of '62. I finished my Master's in '64. At that point, we had our first child in 1963. John was born in our fifth year of marriage.
- BM: Hm.
- RR: And Ruth was a bank teller. She had worked when I was in seminary at Bethel as a switchboard receptionist for Doctor Billy Graham's⁹⁸ office in Minneapolis. So, she worked—
- BM: (gasps)
- RR: —uh, on the grand staff—
- BM: Wow!
- RR: —for— for— for three years. And,—
- BM: Oh.
- RR: —uh, then she became a bank teller 'cause she counted a lot of money at BGEA,⁹⁹ when they had the Crusade fund,¹⁰⁰ she helped do that. After she left being switchboard receptionist, she moved into the—the financial part of the department, counting all the proceeds coming out of the, uh, out of the various evangelistic—
- BM: Mm-hm.
- RR: —services. So, she had money experience. So, she became a teller at a bank in Champaign.¹⁰¹ When John was born, that's the last work she did as a

⁹⁵ Abbreviation for "Latter-Day Saints" (a.k.a. Mormons).

⁹⁶ Joseph Smith Jr. (1805-1844); founder of the Latter-Day Saints movement/Mormonism.

⁹⁷ Public university in Urbana-Champaign, Illinois; established 1867.

⁹⁸ William Franklin Graham Jr. (1918-2018); Christian evangelist.

⁹⁹ Billy Graham Evangelistic Association; non-profit organization, founded 1950.

¹⁰⁰ Money allotted for evangelistic campaigns (a.k.a. "Billy Graham Crusades").

¹⁰¹ City in Champaign County, Illinois.

- teller. Um, that was '63. We lived in a one-bedroom apartment, on Church Street –
- BM: (laughs)
- RR: – nine – and 913 was the number. Church Street in Champaign.¹⁰² Went out of my mind, no air conditioning, one bedroom, kid is in the same room, and the final straw was when he would stand up in his bed and yell at us, “Up! Up!” And then, in those days, you had glass bottles. And he proceeded to throw a glass bottle and hit me in the head –
- BM: (laughs)
- RR: – which was not a very fun experience. And I thought, you know, I just can't live this way, and go on for any additional work. I wasn't sure I could go on beyond a Master's, not in a one-bedroom apartment with no air conditioning in Illinois. But the Dean of Students at the University of Illinois, Robert Sutton,¹⁰³ (pauses) was a very, very good Christian friend. They had encouraged us to su – had, we had gotten to know them in the, uh, Student Baptist Church at the University of Illinois, which we were attending. And they offered, if I would go on for my Ph.D., they offered Ruth and I the opportunity to live in their home, in Urbana¹⁰⁴ –
- BM: Wow!
- RR: – uh, and their kids would even mow the lawn, at \$125 a month. A full house, upstairs, basement. Now we can have room for John. In that spring of '65, Ruth was expecting our second child. I had to go to a conference meeting in Springfield, the last – the Civil War Centennial Conference¹⁰⁵ meetings in Springfield. While there, uh, our close friends were George¹⁰⁶ and, uh, Dorothy Cashman,¹⁰⁷ curators of the Lincoln Tomb. Uh, Ruth and I spent a lot of my vacation from school, uh, at the cemetery living in the house with the curator. We had our own room upstairs. So, my vacations were often spent – Easters, other vacations – at the tomb in the cemetery. So anyway, it –
- BM: (laughs)
- RR: – was kind of our home away from home.
- BM: (laughs)
- RR: But Ruth, or somebody, called and said that she was in trouble with the pregnancy. So I raced home, it was a couple-hour drive, and found that we'd have to put her in the hospital and try and save the baby. It didn't work.

¹⁰² As of this edition (2022), the 1950s apartment building at 913 Church Street still exists.

¹⁰³ Robert Mize Sutton (1915-2005).

¹⁰⁴ City and county seat in Champaign County, Illinois.

¹⁰⁵ Event commemoration the 100th anniversary of the end of the American Civil War.

¹⁰⁶ George Leslie Cashman (1897-1983).

¹⁰⁷ Dorothy Moline Cashman (d. 1974).

BM: Mm.

RR: After several days, uh, she miscarried. And the doctors, uh, always assured us, though, that—that if it wasn't right, it would be better to have a miscarriage than—

BM: Mm-hm.

RR —to have a situation that wasn't right. Uh, but we wanted a second child. Jim was born—our second, there's three years difference between John in '63—Jim was born November twentieth of 1966. And, uh, he really was a gift from the Lord.

[00:30:00]

RR: Both children were very clearly prayed for, and, uh, we're glad to have them both. Um (smacks lips) then, I graduated my Ph.D. in the—the summer of 1967, and Wheaton College, my *alma mater*,¹⁰⁸ asked me back to be a professor. I would be assistant professor at Wheaton. So, eight years after I graduated, I returned to Wheaton—

BM: Mm.

RR: —as a professor. But, unknown to me, their Americanist whom they were replacing me with at this point decided to remain and, unknown to me without communicating to me, I was going to be their European historian.

BM: Oh!

RR: So when I got to Wheaton it was a great shock to me to find I wouldn't be teaching the American courses, I'd be teaching European. So I began my career as a European historian.

BM: Hm.

RR: I have more coursework in European history than I do in American, but I did my Master's and my Ph.D. dissertation on nineteenth-century American history, so I'm qualified to do that as well. As a result of all of this, I ended up with a six-language background. Uh, which qualifies me to be a Europeanist as well. So that's why today I'm teaching world history, because I have the background to do that. Uh, at Wheaton, I developed seven new courses in two years—

BM: Mm!

RR: —for the student body, 75 percent of which are high school valedictorians.

BM: Wow.

RR: Wheaton is a very, uh, very *excellent* academic clientele. We had a hundred and twenty-five faculty while I was there. We had one thousand seven hundred students, and, today, one of my students in my European history course is a professor at Notre Dame¹⁰⁹—

BM: Wow!

¹⁰⁸ Latin for “nourishing mother;” allegorical phrase denoting an institution one has attended.

¹⁰⁹ Private Catholic university in Notre Dame, Indiana; founded 1842.

RR: – teaching American colonial history, of all things. I stayed at Wheaton, uh, for summers teaching in '65, '66, became full-time on staff '67, '68. In 1969, I decided that I would opt for a meeting – uh. Back up. December of '68, I went to an American Historical Association¹¹⁰ convention in New York City, where I was interviewed for a job as an American professor at a place called California State College at Fullerton.¹¹¹ I never heard of the place. Ruth wanted to come to California badly, and, unknown to me, she had prayed to come to California for twelve years.

BM: (laughs)

RR: So she prayed me right out of the Midwest –

BM: (laughs)

RR: – to California. I came here and pioneered Black history at Cal State,¹¹² I was partially brought here to do that. Before there was Afro (pauses) Ethnics or African American history, or whatever. I taught Black history courses on campus.

BM: Mm.

RR: As well as – I began to teach “Jeffersonian¹¹³ Themes in American Society,” which I had built from scratch. I taught a course initially, in those early years, called “Democracy on Trial,” which I hope to offer again soon, 1845 to '77, pre-war, Civil War, Reconstruction.¹¹⁴ And then I continued to build courses in my career here. I am currently offering off-and-on about ten different courses in –

BM: Mm-hm.

RR: – this department. So I came in the summer of 1969 as an assistant professor. My salary, however, increased dramatically. At Wheaton, I was making seven thousand dollars a year, with Ph.D. in hand. When I came here, my income went up to thirteen thousand, which I thought was wonderful, until President Reagan,¹¹⁵ who was then governor, decided that it was the faculty's responsibility to control their students, and we'd had a student riot¹¹⁶ here, in March of 1970, and, uh, we didn't get a raise for three years.

BM: Mm.

¹¹⁰ Professional organization for historians; founded 1884.

¹¹¹ Now known as California State University, Fullerton (CSUF); founded 1957.

¹¹² California State (College, later University) in Fullerton, Orange County, California.

¹¹³ Political, social, and cultural beliefs advocated by Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826).

¹¹⁴ Period in U.S. History (1865-1877) after the Civil War.

¹¹⁵ Ronald Wilson Reagan (1911-2004); 33rd Governor of California (1967-1975), 40th President of the United States (1981-1989).

¹¹⁶ Student protests against campus officials, Reagan, the Vietnam War, and the Kent State and Jackson State Massacres.

RR: So I lost my shirt, financially, in the move. And what I thought was gonna be such a great up, was not financially the up that we thought it would be. But, nevertheless, I was at Cal State. Wheaton asked me to return, two different times, and, in each case, offered to put my children through college at no expense.

BM: Wow.

RR: They were little then, and I didn't think that was quite such a big deal, so I didn't return to Wheaton and stayed on. Now I think, maybe that wasn't such a bad –

BM: (laughs)

RR: –offer. It's very expensive, and my *alma mater's* over twenty thousand dollars, I think, a year now, –

BM: Mm!

RR: – which is not cheap. Um, but I stayed on. In these years at Cal State, I have served as undergraduate coordinator¹¹⁷ as a total – at a total of twelve years. I was the first undergraduate coordinator in this department, and I just resigned the position this year after the last of a second six-year span. Um, in all these years, I remain very active with the student clientele. Since 1975, I've been advisor to Tau Kappa Epsilon¹¹⁸ fraternity here, a social fraternity. Um, I've been active, off-and-on, as an officer in Phi Kappa Phi,¹¹⁹ the national honor society, this year now I'm president of the honor society at Cal State. Uh, I was on the board of the University Center¹²⁰ when we, uh, added all the new addition to it. And I'm the one that's responsible for having named those names Gabrielino,¹²¹ Hetebrink.¹²² Uh, the pavilion which is the, uh, named after the Spanish explorer –

BM: Mm-hm.

RR: – Portolá,¹²³ because we're gonna be putting up, before long, a display on the walls explaining why those names are over there. All the original landowners of Cal State have a name of a room now, from the Indians, through the Spanish, through the Mexican period, through the American period as well. Um, I don't know, that's kind of a run-through of where I am up till now. Now, you can ask questions.

BM: Okay! Now, going way back, when you said that you got interested – you became interested in Lincoln at age five.

RR: Mm-hm.

¹¹⁷ Advisor who explains course requirements to students based on their major (e.g., History).

¹¹⁸ Founded 1899.

¹¹⁹ Founded 1897.

¹²⁰ As of this edition (2022), known as the TSU (“Titan Student Union”).

¹²¹ Gabrielino-Tongva (“San Gabriel Band of Mission Indians”), California Indigenous people.

¹²² Family with ties to Fullerton, California, since 1874.

¹²³ Gaspar de Portolá (1716-1786); Spanish explorer who led expeditions into California.

- BM: How were you exposed? Was it during kindergarten class or?
- RR: No. I, I don't think so. I think we had some neighbors who—who loved to study about the American presidents. And I became interested, I think, partly through that. Although there is an indirect connection through my own family. The founder of ma—my hometown is Reverend Henry Peter Scholte.¹²⁴ My grandfather led one of the boats, and Scholte's family came over on a separate boat also. Uh, but together they picked the home site. My grandfather and four other men picked the site where Pella's located. Scholte became a good friend of Lincoln's. And, as a young boy, I was aware that Reverend Scholte had, uh, been a guest at the Inauguration 1861. Uh, family tradition says that Lincoln offered him position of Ambassador to Austria in 1864. Scholte had his first heart attack when he received word that Lincoln had been assassinated. And—and I have, uh, even, uh, touched or put around my shoulders the Scholte shawl,¹²⁵ which he wore to meet Lincoln. Which turned out to be the very same kind of shawl that Lincoln had! They compared notes—
- BM: Hm!
- RR: —on their shawl. I had the very early connection, when I was a young boy. So, indirectly, my grandfather knew a man who knew Mr. Lincoln very well. That was there in the family. But I, I think my neighbors—who especially enjoyed studying presidents—turned me toward Lincoln and Washington.¹²⁶
- BM: Now, why is that?
- RR: Because I think we just admired Lincoln as—as a human being, and as president during the Civil War years. Uh, I read some—some of the earliest books on Lincoln, which are now *child's* books, that are still available. And I began to read about Washington *and* Lincoln and soon I focused just on Lincoln.
- BM: Uh, but you don't know *why*?
- RR: I don't know exactly why. I get—really can't say. Already, by the time I was in first grade, I was focusing on Lincoln.
- BM: Hm.
- RR: Certainly by the second grade, clearly.
- BM: So you don't really know what's kept your interest going all these years?
- RR: Oh that's a difficult question. I think it's because I have grown in my appreciation of—of not only *who* Lincoln is, but the *importance* of him to the nation. He is a—a fascinating character, not an easy person to know at all. Therefore you're never sure you've got your hand around the man's story. There's always something new to learn about him. Um, even his law

¹²⁴ Hendrik Pieter Scholte (1806-1868); see above, note 6.

¹²⁵ A piece of clothing worn to protect against chill or damp weather.

¹²⁶ George Washington (1732-1799); 1st President of the United States (1789-1797).

partner said that he was a very difficult man to know, and to know well would be very hard. But, as President of the United States—I have grown in my appreciation (pauses) to accept the fact that by own mind, that we have a nation today, partly because the will of one man. Lincoln was not willing to see the nation divide into two separate nations. And if any one person can *make* a difference, I would suggest he probably is one of those—in our history—who made a *great* difference. One person. One person's will. Never giving up. And—and—paid a real price, eventually gave his life for it. But I think my admiration started out interested in him as a young man, because I was young. And then I have grown up with Lincoln, so to speak, all these years. Now I am four years older than he was when he was assassinated. Hard for me to think that he accomplished all that he did accomplish by the time he was fifty-six, when, now, I'm sixty. I have never lost admiration for him. I know he's mortal.

[00:40:00]

RR: I see moments when his anger was very paramount. He had a very strong will. He could control his will—which some people cannot do—and he could do that. But—he was a man with a difficult life. And spiritually, I think, he grew very much during the war years. So, I admire him on many counts. Political. His importance for the nation. I admire him as an individual. I especially admire his spiritual qualities as a person.

BM: Mm-hm.

RR: And, uh, that has only, I suppose, enhanced what—as a boy—I thought was a very admirable person. That's a roundabout way of saying: I was attracted early, but I can't say why, and I still am attracted and I'm not sure I still can say why.

BM: So are you more attracted to Abraham Lincoln rather than the Civil War as a whole.

RR: I started out being attracted to Lincoln first.

BM: Mm-hm.

RR: Then my interest spread to the war. You cannot understand the war without the man, and you can't understand the man without the war. (tap)

BM: Mm-hm.

RR: And so my interest, you see, already by the time I'm a teenager, I'm writing Civil War veterans. So my interest had already grown by the time I was twelve—thirteen to encompass the war years, so.

BM: Now, wh—somebody with not that type of background that you had such exposure to Lincoln. Why is it that so many people in 1997 are so fascinated with the Civil War? Not having exposure like you had?

RR: (takes breath)

BM: What is it?

RR: Well, I would say—if you wanna be pragmatic about it—I’d say the Ken Burns¹²⁷ series, which was on television, uh, on the Civil War,¹²⁸ really brought back to the consciousness of the nation the importance of the war in the life of the country. It’s a watershed in American history. Uh, the nation is different coming out of the war than went into the war, as often wars do. You can never predict going into war what will come out of it, and we found that through the Civil War. It’s the bloodiest war in the nation’s history.

BM: Hm.

RR: Uh, many Americans have forgotten that it was the bloodiest war, and we killed each other in this country. Uh, but it had an impact on the world! Not only did it keep the United States together so it might become a major world power, it also, in the military sense, set the tone for modern warfare, and the means and technology of modern warfare. Uh, the next war that came out after the Civil War in Europe was the, uh, war between, um, Germany and France, the Franco-Prussian War.¹²⁹ Well some of the observers, who were French, some of the observers, who were German, of the Civil War were active in—in fighting each other in Europe! And the Civil War had a direct impact on the French and the Germans. And then, of course, you can see it in the Spanish-American War¹³⁰ right on up and through to the twentieth century. Um, but it’s the watershed event in the nation. I think it still is, and the Ken Burns series made that clear. And then the movie *Gettysburg*¹³¹ just reinforced that. The movie *Glory*¹³² reinforced the importance of Black Americans in the Civil War event as well.

BM: Cause there’s, um—there’s quite a few different organizations—are you in any organizations, um, on the Civil War?

RR: Yes. I’m a member of the Long Beach Civil War Roundtable.¹³³ In fact, I was their first lifetime honorary member.

BM: And what do you do in those organizations?

RR: What we do is we meet once a month and, uh, we have different speakers or sometimes discussions on personalities, or military events, or some aspect of the war itself. And, uh, usually have a— a pretty fair number there. I’m not only a member of that, but I am a member of other organizations

¹²⁷ Kenneth Lauren Burns (born 1953); American filmmaker.

¹²⁸ *The Civil War*, directed by Ken Burns, 9 episodes (1990).

¹²⁹ Armed conflict between the Second French Empire and the Kingdom of Prussia; 1870-1871.

¹³⁰ Armed conflict between the United States and Spain; 1898.

¹³¹ *Gettysburg*, directed by Ronald F. Maxwell (1993).

¹³² *Glory*, directed by Edward Zwick (1989); about the 54th Massachusetts Infantry Regiment.

¹³³ Meeting of enthusiasts to discuss aspects of the Civil War; Long Beach is a city in Los Angeles County, California.

- across the nation, too, uh, the Abraham Lincoln Association¹³⁴ in Springfield. I'm a member of the Lincoln Fellowship of Wisconsin.¹³⁵ I'm a member of the Surratt Society¹³⁶ in Maryland, uh, um, I guess my memberships are multiple, certainly my publications coming in are legion. I have difficulty keeping up with all the information coming in, but I belong to multiple organizations around the war itself.
- BM: And, uh, what is the goal of the organizations? What's their purpose?
- RR: Basically to inform and to educate. Um. (pauses) It's important to keep the impact of this war alive in the nation's consciousness because it's the old story, if we don't know our history, we may be forced to make some of the same errors or mistakes. However, after all these years of teaching, I know one thing we have learned from history, and I can tell you what that one thing is.
- BM: Now, what is that?
- RR: We *don't* learn from history.
- BM: So then why are we continuing—
- RR: Because—
- BM: —doing—
- RR: —we don't, we don't know. And you keep hoping that the next generation will be smart enough to correct the faults of the previous generations. But, unfortunately, they think they know it, and they don't need any other input, so you make the same mistakes from generation to generation.
- BM: Do you think there'll be another Civil War where the tr—the South try to succeed again.
- RR: No, I don't think the South will ever secede again because—as a nation—we are so tied together and—and even more now as a part of the world economy. We can't survive, unless we're a part of the world economy. And the South is as much of that now as the North.
- BM: What—what do you feel was the South's major, um, (smacks lips) points of defeat?
- RR: They're debating that one. They still are debating it. And I—I suppose I have reevaluated that many, many times over. I think, ultimately, you have probably two answers, and they're—they're fussing about both of them. I think, in the *final* word, the North, economically (pauses) and in unity, somewhat politically, were so united, that their overwhelming resources meant, I think, that the Confederacy would not *be* successful. But there are many examples in the world, of a small nation—to say, for example—like the United States withstanding the greatest empire in the world, which is Great Britain, who had all the resources on *their* side. And, yet, they were

¹³⁴ Advances studies and disseminates scholarship about Lincoln; founded 1908.

¹³⁵ Aims to unite Lincoln enthusiasts through a common organization; founded 1940.

¹³⁶ Dedicated to the history of the Surratt House Museum; founded 1975.

- not successful in stopping the Americans' (knocking) revolt! (pause in recording)
- BM: Okay. So you're just saying, uh, it was the South—it was the North being more united than the South. Do you think the blockade of the Southern ports¹³⁷—
- RR: Well—
- BM: —played to be—
- RR: —that was a slow thing. It— (longer pause in recording)
- RR: —point I want to make, probably. I mentioned the overwhelming resources and the organization of the nation's military structure under Lincoln. He was the first to organize what we call the modern command system. And that's what my course "Lincoln and His Generals" is all about in January. But I would say the other factor is the loss of will in the South. And I *know* Gary Gallagher¹³⁸ has a new book¹³⁹ out on that, which he of course opts for—my first point is that the Northern resources were just so overwhelming. That the South, of course, still continued their will to fight, and you can see that in the Army of Northern Virginia under Robert E. Lee,¹⁴⁰ they would not—at least, a certain number of them would not—*leave*. But, on the other hand, look at the number of people that went AWOL!¹⁴¹ As the war was lost in the South—in the western part first—and the forces dwindled *away*, uh, in the western part of the—of the South. And then a large number were abandoning the cause in Virginia in those last weeks of the war. And so I *still* think, there was a loss of will!
- BM: Mm-hm.
- RR: And part of that is because when your wife and your kids are exposed to starvation and to danger, you're concerned about the *home*. And you *leave* and go home, a lot of them did that and came back and fought. Eventually, frankly, they couldn't leave anymore.
- BM: Mm-hm.
- RR: I think the South's will (pauses) failed in the end.
- BM: Hm.
- RR: And thus, it was better to give up and live and survive than to fight and starve. Jefferson Davis,¹⁴² however, was the one clear un-Reconstructed rebel.¹⁴³ He wanted to *continue* the war, he wanted to take the war into a

¹³⁷ The U.S. government preventing the free passage of Confederate supply ships (1861-1865).

¹³⁸ Gary William Gallagher (born 1950); American historian specializing in the Civil War.

¹³⁹ Gary W. Gallagher, *The Confederate War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997).

¹⁴⁰ Robert Edward Lee (1807-1870); Confederate Army General.

¹⁴¹ Abbreviation for "Absent Without Leave."

¹⁴² Jefferson Finis Davis (1808-1889); President of the Confederacy (1861-1865).

¹⁴³ Former Confederate, opposed to Reconstruction.

- form of *guerilla warfare*¹⁴⁴ into the mountains of Appalachia,¹⁴⁵ and Robert E. Lee *opposed* that.
- BM: Mm-hm.
- RR: But when Robert E. Lee died, he had at least applied for United States citizenship. One of the clerks *took* his application as a souvenir for the signature, it was never acted on. Therefore, Lee did not regain citizenship when he died in 1870. But Jefferson Davis is a different story. Jefferson Davis *refused* to apply for citizenship in the United States his *whole* life, and died *not* a citizen of the United States.
- BM: So the men that fought on the Confederacy side, they lost their right as United States citizens? I—I never heard of that.
- RR: The leadership did.
- BM: The leadership.
- RR: Yeah.
- BM: I never —
- RR: They had to be reinstated by — by an oath of allegiance! And Davis *refused* to take the oath of allegiance. Lee was *willing to*, but his application was never acted on. So, technically, Lee died not a citizen, and Jefferson Davis was not. Therefore, I have a real problem when President Jimmy Carter¹⁴⁶ *gave back* Jefferson Davis his citizenship¹⁴⁷ — which he never wanted, never asked for.
- BM: Mm-hm.
- RR: I highly object to that.
- BM: Now what role do you think *California* played during the —
- RR: Very —
- BM: — Civil War.
- RR: — important role. Lincoln said in 1863 before the Congress, that California's role was very important, partly because of the amount of gold and silver coming out of the Comstock Lode.¹⁴⁸ There were ships off the coast here of San Francisco,

[00:50:00]

- RR: uh, that were called treasure ships. And California's gold and silver helped *pay* the Northern part of the Civil War.
- BM: Well, how did the — 'cause the gold and silver were not, they were privately owned.

¹⁴⁴ Fast moving, small-scale military action by irregular forces against traditional forces.

¹⁴⁵ Mountainous region in the eastern U.S. (from southern New York to northern Mississippi).

¹⁴⁶ James Earl Carter Jr. (born 1924); 39th President of the United States (1977-1981).

¹⁴⁷ Jefferson's citizenship was restored by Senate Joint Resolution 16 (Public Law 95-466), approved October 17, 1978, which President Carter signed.

¹⁴⁸ 1859 discovery of silver ore in the state of Nevada.

- RR: Yes, but they – but, nevertheless, the government, you know, has a certain amount of say in the middle of *war*.
- BM: That’s true. Mm-hm.
- RR: That was taken around the horn.
- BM: And (inaudible) –
- RR: Oh no, Lincoln – in his last day of his life, Lincoln talked of coming out to California and *personally thanking* the *miners* of California for their contribution in the war.
- BM: Wow.
- RR: He even talked of *moving* to California, maybe. (pauses) Most people don’t know that either.
- BM: Mm. Okay, in closing, do you have – do you have anything you would like to *add* about the fascination of the Civil War? The reenactments,¹⁴⁹ have you been to any re –
- RR: Oh, yes.
- BM: – reenactments?
- RR: Oh, you bet I have. Um, I’m happy right now in the state of the Lincoln and Civil War fields. We have a younger generation coming in, like Jared (inaudible)¹⁵⁰ and others, uh, who are very responsible scholars. *Much* of what’s coming off the press is from young scholarship. Very good. *Very* academically strong. I’m very pleased at that. Reenactments, I’m *happy* as long as they realize, in the reenactment, that they can never, *ever*, ever, ever, ever, ever, ever, ever, –
- BM: (laughs)
- RR: – you can count all those, fully bring back the smell of death, and blood, and war. You can have all the reenactments in the world. But, like Carl Sandburg said walking with Walter Cronkite¹⁵¹ on the battlefield of Gettysburg in 1963,¹⁵² he hoped that in maybe one of those guns in the reenactment they would just put one *real* bullet. It might make a great difference to see an *actual* person shot, and bleed. But the war was more, and more of that. And we have lost the smell of death, and the trauma of war. You can have all the reenactments, all the reality that you would like to think is there. It will *never* cross that moment of real death.

[00:52:12]

END OF INTERVIEW

¹⁴⁹ Restaging and acting out of a past event.

¹⁵⁰ Last name not intelligible.

¹⁵¹ Walter Leland Cronkite Jr. (1916-2009); American broadcast journalist.

¹⁵² Gettysburg, Pennsylvania; major Civil War battle site (July 1-3, 1863).