

**Transcript of the audio taped oral history  
of National Press Club member  
Frank Holeman  
Conducted by Christy Wise of the  
NPC Oral History Committee  
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The original video tape recording of the interview is permanently deposited in the oral history collection of the National Press Club.

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CW: I think the best place to start is when you came to Washington, why you came to Washington, and what you were doing here.

FH: Okay, I was a copy boy for the *New York Daily News*. I was hired on March 22 of 1941. And the publisher had a policy of keeping one job open in the Washington bureau for a graduate from the copy desk. This was to keep people hopping when they hollered boy, which they don't do anymore. But the person who had the job was named Jack Purcell. He's still alive somewhere around here. He had gotten hired by NBC as one of the broadcasters for the war. They had a big news expansion and he left a vacancy open. They kept the senior copy boy, who had been a copy boy for 12 years, and put him in down here and it didn't work. So then they started looking around. They abandoned the seniority and said, Who do you think can survive down here and who won't be drafted? See I was 6 feet 8 at the time and weighed 150 so ... nobody thought I would ever be drafted so they sent me down here. I arrived on Memorial Day 1942, May 30.

CW: Did you want to go to Washington?

FH: Oh God, yeah. Even then it was the place to be. And I got promoted from copy boy to reporter. I worked for six months and then my Brooklyn draft board heard about all this and they came and transferred my papers down here. I had to go take another physical and the doctor says, Oh

son, things aren't that bad, we don't need you but we have to send you over to Fort Myer. So I went to Fort Myer to take the full Army physical. And I passed. When I came back George Dixon, a real senior writer for the *News* at that time, said, Well, I guess you've taken care of that. I said, Yeah, they drafted me. He said, Oh my God the Japs must have landed at Norfolk and they didn't tell anybody. He was going to get his own gun, but I was drafted, went away for three years in the Army, came back in January '46.

During that period when I worked here I was assigned to the War Navy Department which was down ... the Pentagon had not yet opened, and they were, the Army Navy had their offices down at Constitution Avenue in a temporary building around 21<sup>st</sup>, 22<sup>nd</sup>, 23<sup>rd</sup>, and I was given that job because of course I was single and didn't matter how late I stayed out at night. All the news from the Pacific came in late. You know, you get communiqués at 2 or 3 in the morning down there, so that's why I was given that job. As it happened, I was on the job, you know, a day and the Battle of Midway started. I began to get stories in the paper very quickly.

CW: Now I just want to back up for a minute. You went very quickly from being a copy boy to a reporter. This other person was there 12 years. So was it unusual to be promoted that fast?

FH: Well, yes. With war everything was unusual.

CW: I see.

FH: I was hired as a copy boy because one of the copy boys, one of the long-termers, had been drafted. His name was Danny Herr. He went off someplace and they hired me as a replacement. The fact of this business is that I got in much younger than most people did in those times. I worked with people who were much older than I was so that ...

CW: But if the war hadn't been on, would you have had to stay as a copy boy a lot longer?

FH: Oh, no. I wouldn't have been hired as a copy boy in New York. I would have been starving to death. I did starve for about eight months in New York. I graduated from the University of North Carolina in 1940. And I went to the dean of the journalism school and asked him if he had a job on a daily paper that I might apply for. He usually had five or six to take care of his pets, of which I was not one, unfortunately. So he looked at all of his stuff and said, Now where did you work last year, last summer? I said I worked down in Lumberton, North Carolina on a twice-a-week paper. He said, I got a letter from that man. He wants you to come back. You know, he wanted me to stay. I could have stayed down there, but I wanted to come back up here and get a job on a daily. He said, Son what you need is about three years in the county seat. So I went home and asked my mother if I

could go to New York, and she said, Why in the world do you want to go to New York? There's nobody up there but Yankees. But anyway, she finally gave me a hundred bucks and a typewriter, and off I went.

The highest building in my home town at that point was the Masonic Temple, which was eight stories high, and I popped out on Eighth Avenue outside of Penn Station and I almost fainted looking up there. You come out, you know, you go in a tunnel and you are right in the middle of the highest places I had ever seen in my life. I walked down the street a little ways and wanted to appear to be, you know, up-to-date and normal. So I saw a guy selling newspapers, and went over and bought a newspaper and put it under my arm, walked to the corner and opened it up. It was the *Jewish Daily Forward*, all in Hebrew, of which I couldn't read a word. That was my introduction to New York. I kept looking for work up there, couldn't find any, with the Depression still on. And I got a job as a copy boy, an office boy for a little advertising agency for about three weeks and got fired, and to this day I don't know why, but I did.

I lived with some people that I had gone to school with at Chapel Hill. They took me in and kept me, otherwise I would have starved to death. I would have had to go back home with my tail between my legs. But it worked out. The war came along — we got into the war, of course — and

then people began moving fast and they wanted to expand the staff down here. Purcell got hired away.

CW: Okay now, so let's jump ahead, the Battle of Midway ...

FH: That was when I first got ... Remember now, I'm not what you call a distinguished correspondent, I'm just giving you the framework here. My career was just about as ordinary as you could get. It was typical of the hardworking stupid bum that goes into this business, or did in those days. I enjoyed it, had a wonderful time, but most of it was luck, all the way through, so that's ... and being a kid of, course, I had no connection with the Club. Our office was at 1272 in the Press Building, and the bureau chief was John O'Donnell, who was a very good man to me but had an awful lot of enemies around town, including FDR.

CW: Oh, really.

FH: Who gave him the iron cross, remember that? Anyway, I was just barely starting out as a reporter, and you had to have two years experience before you could join the Press Club.

CW: Okay.

FH: So it looked like I was going to make it around here, and so in about September, Mr. O'Donnell said that he would see if he could get me

into the Club. You see, it was very convenient. We all lived in the damn place.

CW: But you weren't allowed in unless you were a member?

FH: That's right, or unless I was coming up for ... to get a member, I had some business up here. You couldn't get in.

CW: It was much stricter, I guess.

FH: Oh yeah. They counted all the time I had had when I had worked two summers down in North Carolina on weeklies, the *Red Spring Citizen* and then the *Lumberton Voice*, a year and a half as a copy boy in New York, so that they put it all together, and they got me in, let's put it that way. I joined the Club, was put up for membership, and got in I think October of 1942. So next year I'll be 50, I'll be a Golden Owl, 50 years. But then I covered the Navy, the Army, and all this and early war news, and finally in January they drafted me. But before I left, one of my last functions around the Press Club, I was now a member, was the inauguration of Felix Cotton.

You know, they used to have a little skit with every inauguration. Some big shot would come down, swear the guy in. Well, for Felix they had Sam Rayburn, the Texan, the Speaker, you know, and the skit was to unveil the statue of the new president on the courthouse lawn, and I was the little

girl in the fright wig who unveiled Felix Cotton just before Sam Rayburn made his speech dedicating this. Then I ...

CW: A tall little girl.

FH: Yeah ... in fright wig and all this. It was part of the fun that they always did. That was my first role in the Press Club, was that little girl. Then I was drafted and put in the medical corps, which I was not very happy with, and eventually I managed to get out of that, to wriggle out of that and was put in the counterintelligence corps and stayed in there for the duration. Went to the Pacific, 18 ... almost two years. I went to Australia, the Solomons at Bougainville and Luzerne and Japan. So I was in the original occupation troops in ... I got a letter toward the end of the war, you know — Do you want to come back to the Washington bureau or do you want to go back to New York? I didn't want to be a copy boy again. I said thank you very much, but I would like to come back to the Washington bureau which they ..

CW: So the New York job would have been a copy boy, not ...?

FH: Oh, no. I don't think so. Well, it could have been, but that's what you were guaranteed. Not guaranteed, but ... See, the *Daily News* was a little different paper. It belonged this guy Joe Patterson, who owned it, who started it with his cousin, Bernie McCormick. He ran it his own way. And,



as a matter of fact, a day or week after Pearl Harbor, he put up a notice in the city room, Mr. Patterson wants all members of the staff to know that he considers the defense of the United States even more important than the publication of the *Daily News*. The *Daily News* will not request a deferment for anyone, anyone — the managing editor, the cartoonist, the sports, anybody. So we'll do our best to have your job here when you come back. Most of the copy boys who were drafted eventually wound up on the staff of the UN, as reporters covering the United Nations, which was brand new then.

CW: Uh huh, Right.

FH: They used it as a hitching post until they got tired and went into other businesses, but I don't think any of them went back to being copy boys. But anyway, the thing was, did I want to come back to the Washington bureau? I said I would be delighted. So I came back and, hell, I didn't wait two weeks. I got out of the Army and I was up here. They put me out at Fort Bragg, closer to my home.

CW: Okay. And now, where were you living at that time?

FH: Well, I got to town and I spent my first night here in the Senate Hotel up on the Hill. It's gone now. And I finally found a room in a house at 1366 Spring Road, N.W., in the home of the mother of a newsreel producer.

His name was Phil Denton and his mother, of course, was Mr. and Mrs. Denton. They just rented out a room. Finding a place in Washington was very difficult and that is where I wound up. I rented a room in their house.

CW: That has not changed, has it?

FH: No, and in those days there was a trolley straight up 14<sup>th</sup> Street, so it was ideal for me. When I came back, though, I stayed with them maybe a couple of months. They had gotten older and more crotchety and I had other things I had wanted to do. They wanted me to come home at night just like a son, see, and that didn't ... I was as loose-footed as anybody else in those days, and I eventually wound up living over at 1704 Hobart Street, over in the Mt. Pleasant section, had a furnished room up there, where I could come and go as I pleased, and it was more to my liking. So I said thank you very much and left.

CW: So that's where you had been living before the war?

FH: Yeah, Spring Road, and after the war I lived in Mt. Pleasant on Hobart Street, which was on the end of the Mt. Pleasant trolley line. See I don't drive. Never did drive. I drove a jeep during the war and I get headaches all the time, and I said to hell with this. I left home to go to college ... My father died when I was seven. I went to Chapel Hill when I was 15, and didn't have any, then went to New York straight out of there,

never had to learn to drive. My mother sent the old Studebaker with the wooden wheels back to the dealer when my father died. She didn't drive either. And I don't drive to this day. I had to be on public transportation.

CW: Right, right. Okay so then what were you covering after the war?

FH: I got — and again single — the hours made no difference. It was mostly labor — strike, strike, strike, a long series of strikes. I had all of them. And the news rotated a little bit. They didn't want anybody to stay in the White House, because then you become sort of an assistant president, you know. So they would rotate us in and out, and if there was an over-water flight somewhere ... and the first good assignment I had, in 1946, I was put on a Navy carrier, the FDR, for a trip to the Mediterranean in the summer of '46. The Navy invited four reporters and my paper was one of them. The others were Arnold Dibble of the UPI, which was then the United Press, and Ray ... it will come to me ... from Hearst, and Turner Catledge of the *New York Times*. And we had a wonderful time. We had a month in the Mediterranean, stopping in every good port you could find.

CW: Right. Now, how did you get that assignment?

FH: Just that the Navy invited somebody from the *News*, and they assigned me because again I was single. Nobody cares whether he gets killed or not, send him on over there. Then in '47 ...

CW: Wait, I want to back up about the beat. When you said they would rotate people out the White House, would they change it every week, every day?

FH: No, it wasn't on a timetable. It was roughly a couple of months, three months. Trips — you never got two trips in a row because they were considered real plums. I didn't go to Key West with Truman until 1950. My turn didn't come. But boy did I see Kansas City on Christmas and Thanksgiving. And then on the Hill there were all kinds of investigations going on, you know.

CW: Did they rotate the other beats in addition to the White House?

FH: The system was for a news editor, who was a wonderful guy named Ted Willis, to come in in the morning and look at the day book, the UPI ticker, the UP ticker, and figure out what stories were going to get good play the next day in the *Daily News*, and then we covered them. It was not a local thing to take care of your Congressman and all that, we covered national news in those days. Tried to write it very compactly, very tightly and with a little bit of zip to it, you know. But it was not phony, it was not

fake. We didn't gas it too much. We just didn't leave any octane in the tank. Writing for the *News* was not as easy as it sounds. You know, a 250-word story, that was a big one for us. Every now and then you'd sell them a Sunday story that was two pages, double-truck. Remember, this is a tabloid we're talking about. And that was 1,500, 1,700 words, depending on how many pictures there were ... And I would supplement my income by selling Sunday stories to the lady, the Sunday editor, whose name was Alma Barker. She was the Sunday editor of the paper from the end of the war right on to ...

CW: You could get paid extra for doing the Sunday story? It wasn't expected of you, then?

FH: No, that wasn't assigned to you. If you did of these double-page ... see, we even had a Sunday edition that was a pop, prior onto publication. It was one of these things that came out on Monday and all the railroad stations around the country with comics and the roto section and the news section. All the sex, crime, money, corruption stories from last week were rehashed with a couple specials from out around the country.

CW: And they came out Monday after the Sunday?

FH: They came out Monday before the Sunday. It was predated. They had a separate ... the circulation of it was up around a million, but the smart

management, you know how smart they are, they killed it eventually. They said this thing will never go, national papers won't work. This was way ahead of the *Enquirer*. So that's what happened to that. I used to write those stories. But basically immediately after the war was all the strikes, the John L. Lewis business, the trials, the investigation in Congress of scandals.

The best junket I ever had was paid for by — well, not the best, the second best — was paid for by Howard Hughes. He was being investigated for his war contracts. The Republican 80<sup>th</sup> Congress had him up, and the Republicans were investigating all the Democrats they could find and Howard Hughes was one of them. He had taken the veil, he hadn't gone crazy like he later did. But I interviewed him up here at the old WRC studios one night with another reporter. The announcer was Holly Wright, the moderator, and the staff announcer was Jackson Weaver, who's still over there. You know Hardin and Weaver? And Hughes was just an ordinary guy. He did wear tennis shoes for his appearances everywhere, but he wore sports clothes, sometimes no tie, but he was not a real kook and smart as hell.

CW: Right. He was sort of a playboy at that time.

FH: Oh yeah. This was the last stages of his playing days. And he had a high-priced public relations firm, Bob Beyer was handling him. A guy

named Bill Utley was in charge of that account, and they flew a planeload of us from Washington out to Santa Monica, put us on a bus to go down and look at the Spruce Goose, you know the plane, and we were there the day he flew it. Half of us had gone. I happened to be there that day. In those days you used file for all your friends so they wouldn't be, you know ... I filed three stories that day, and when I got back ...

CW: These were for people who weren't on the *Daily News*?

FH: That's right. Well, your friends would have done the same thing for you, and it was a good story and there would have been hell to pay if somebody said he wasn't there — so, you know, we always covered. It wasn't anything unusual. When I got back to the telegraph desk — our paper was organized the city desk — the telegraph desk, which handled everything outside the city, world news, national, he said, Well that wasn't bad but the other paper, you know, they had a hell of a good lead. It just said, "It Flies." That was mine for him, see. So I got hung on my own petard. It's happened before. Other people have done it for me.

CW: Now what was the Press Club like after the war?

FH: To understand the Press Club, it was an entirely different place from what it is now. The business was entirely different. When I got here, radio was just kind of considered a red-headed stepchild. The reporters, the

writing press were kings of the Hill and they always had been. The influence they had with Congressmen was due to the fact that a Congressman, to get any message back to his constituents, had to go through that reporter. There was no other way.

CW: They didn't have mailings?

FH: They didn't have the newsletter and all this stuff, but the way for them to get information back home was through that original reporter. And that's why the Press Club had so much political clout. I mean that's why we got this extra floor on this building. This is very important in understanding the history of the place. The press was really rampant, had a lot more influence with Congress than it does today. When we had a congressional night down here, everybody came.

CW: When you had a congressional night?

FH: It was a program where two Congressmen, a Democrat and a Republican, would debate or something . . .

CW: Okay so ...

FH: The print media was king. They had all kinds of influence up on the Hill, and at the White House and at the agencies. They just, you know, the press boys that were organized, they could get almost anything. That's how we got the building code amended for an exception to the building code



for this building. So we could put the 13<sup>th</sup> floor on top of whatever the allowed height was, then rent the rest of it and use this as a club.

CW: Well now, you said the regional reporters were the only ones, were the way that the members of Congress got the word back. Were there a lot of regional reporters?

FH: Oh yes. There were. The old building had all these little small cubbyholes, the offices were very small. It was designed for small bureaus, one- or two-man bureaus, and there were many of them. You know, this is long before the consolidation, the big chains, and all the rest of them, and many more papers existed. When I was in New York there were eight papers. When I first hit New York, there were eight papers — four in the morning and four in the afternoon and a lot of competition. When I got to Washington, they all worked together. Well, a little competition, too, but when it came to Club things, us against them, they were organized. And remember, the building was and still is at 14<sup>th</sup> and F. The *Washington Post* was down on E Street. The *Star* was on 12<sup>th</sup> and Pennsylvania. The newspapers that weren't in this building for one reason or another, many of them — the *New York Times*, the *Chicago Tribune*, *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, *Kansas City Star* — were in the Albee Building just a block away.

CW: Oh, okay. Why would they not be in this building?

FH: In the beginning, when the proposition of newspapers owning a building, putting up a building came up in the '20s, the publishers of the *Tribune*, the *Chicago Tribune* and the *New York Times* opposed it on ideological grounds. They didn't think reporters ought to own property of any kind and ought not to be in the real estate business. We didn't send you down there to run an office building, we sent you down there to report for us. So for religious reasons, in effect, they fought that, and some of the rest of them followed their lead. But there were many of them in this building. The 12<sup>th</sup> floor was the prime office space because you could walk upstairs right in that bar — the old bar, you know, it's where the library is now — and you didn't have to go all the way down to the other end. The entrance was right inside the Club. So on the 12<sup>th</sup> floor, there was us — we took over space that had been occupied by NBC when NBC moved out to a hotel to what was then the Wardman Park, I think. The *Daily News* had a suite down at 1272, a lot of room. And across the hall was the *New York Herald Tribune*, and up a little ways was the *Christian Science Monitor* on one side. Going along, there was the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, the Knight Bureau, and around the other side was the *Baltimore Sun*, the *Louisville Courier-Journal*. Most of them, many of them were here. It wasn't until 1944 that they took radio people in as active members.

CW: Wow, okay.

FH: When I came back ... and, of course, television was unheard of. And we were still using trains for campaigning. I went from the campaign train to the jets. My first campaign was on the train with Earl Warren running for vice president. And I covered some of the Alger Hiss business. I got to know Nixon at one point. So in '52, I was assigned to his campaign. And I was one of the hound's tooth club, the people, all the early guys who covered him as vice president.

CW: Why do you call it the "hound's tooth club"?

FH: Well, Ike said ... there was a big scandal in the middle of his campaign and it turned out the businessmen of southern California in his district had given him \$18,000 to use for campaign purposes — \$18,000 we were talking about then, but it was a big scandal at the time. It was called the Nixon Fund, the Checkers speech, remember that? So Ike said he had to be "clean as a hound's tooth." That's why the reporters ... reporters are very clubby you know, every campaign you find another group comes out of it. People who covered Truman in '48 became the "hard rock club." They all wore little picks, silver picks in their lapels because of something that happened during that campaign.

CW: Okay.

FH: I was with Truman in Kansas City on election night in '48.

CW: And you had taken the train out there?

FH: Yeah, and a funny thing happened. I picked him up — see, I was the chief out there, everybody knew they couldn't, they didn't bother with him, they had Dewey covered, they had the next president up in the Roosevelt Hotel. But somebody had to be with Truman, to make sure he didn't jump out the window. Or if he did, let him have it first. But anyway, I picked him up at the Brooklyn Academy of Music on Friday night. I mean, one guy moved from him to Dewey to prepare for the grand entrance of the new king, and we were on the train going across the last scheduled speech was in [RECORDING ENDS – REST OF TAPE IS BLANK]

## TAPE 2

CW: Okay.

FH: The custom was for the candidate — they all knew the Sunday papers closed early, and so they would give you a few excerpts. Most candidates just have one speech, you know, that they use on every goddamn place they go. Throw in a few new lines for reporters so they could put a new head on it. Well, that's what they did for us, but when he got up on that rostrum, Truman threw the prepared remarks away and lit into the Hearst-McCormick-Patterson axis and denounced all of our publishers. So we had

to start the whole speech all over again. In those days you wrote it right in your lap in the pit of the orchestra while he was talking and tore out a sheet and gave it to Western Union. That's how you filed.

CW: You had a typewriter then sitting on your lap?

FH: Yeah, a little you know a ...

CW: A portable?

FH: Yeah, a Smith-Corona. Still got it. As a matter of fact, I got it down in this office. Anyway, we all finally catch our breath, get back on the train, we're heading across Missouri going to Kansas City, and finally everybody is having a few drinks. Tony Vaccaro said, you know, we're denouncing Charlie Ross and all that bunch for not telling us what he was going to do, putting us through this ...

CW: He was the press aide?

FH: Press secretary. And Tony Vaccaro said, Goddamn, with a staff like this Robert E. Lee couldn't carry Virginia — which we thought was about as bad as you could get, but then on Tuesday it all happened. But to get back to the difference between then and now at the Press Club, because remember this was a center of, first of all, reporters, who were very important and bureau chiefs who were demigods — I mean, Arthur Krock

and Arthur Sears Henning, my guy ... the people hated him, but he was a big shot.

CW: Why did they hate him?

FH: Well, they considered him ... he had been a supporter of Roosevelt's and then he turned when his publisher turned after Lend Lease. Let's see, Patterson had the idea, Patterson the owner, had the idea that Franklin Roosevelt was trying to drag us into war, if you can believe that. So this all turned out to be true, but at the time everybody and all the Roosevelt fans were saying, Oh, how can anybody accuse our hero of this? But anyway, that's why they didn't like him. That's why he never got into the Gridiron Club, never got any of those things. But he was a very fine guy to me. As a boss he couldn't have been better.

CW: Really? Do you think he had good news judgment?

FH: Oh, yeah. They were all ... they wouldn't have been here if they didn't have good news judgment. I mean, it was highly competitive and it was pretty nearly centrally located. I mean, *Newsweek* was on that 12<sup>th</sup> floor. *Wall Street Journal* was down on the second floor. UPI was on the 7<sup>th</sup> floor.

CW: How come the *Journal* couldn't get higher space?

FH: Well, I have no idea. Maybe at the very beginning they didn't want one. They wanted to be close in case of fire. I have no idea. But you

know we almost lost the building in '31 and all that stuff? Somebody else will tell you that.

CW: Okay.

FH: And the bankruptcy law was amended for the Press Club in 1931-32.

CW: Okay, we will get that.

FH: When I'm talking about influence, reporters really could do things in this town in those days because of the power, the ties they had and the life and death power they had over communications from the Hill to the hinterlands.

CW: But did reporters see any conflict of interest in that?

FH: Of course not. They took everything they could get. Like my junket out to see Howard Hughes' Spruce Goose. The Los Angeles water district gave us the best one I ever had. We went down to Palm Springs on Palm Sunday and inspected the aqueduct and all the water works ... that was a city-paid junket. You know, this ethics thing came along pretty late in life. It wasn't that these guys were corrupt. Nobody could corrupt them. They were irascible, you know. People got very sensitive much later. All these antennae you hear out there now — we won't do this, we won't do that — the purity crowd got us by the throat and we can't have any fun anymore.

CW: And neither can Congress.

FH: That's right. Anyway, the change in the thing was brought about by the growth of television, I mean of radio, during the war, when news became something, not just three minutes with ... and then the birth of television. Television was invented in the '30s but was held down, they prevented development because of the war, and they didn't go public until the early '50s. In fact, in 1956, I got the first color television set for this Club on loan from RCA. It was a permanent loan, but it was ... then the radio people ... when I came to town in 1942 and went in that bar in October and sat around just having supper, the people were really giants of journalism in there, in and out all day long and especially late in the afternoon. The dean of the crowd, or the guy they were most reverential to was the correspondent of Sunday *Times* Bill — oh, God, his name's getting away from me here — well, I heard him tell stories about covering the Gold Rush with Jack London and going to ... himself covering the Russo-Japanese war. He was knighted. You know, got those honors. While he was playing cards in the Club, somebody tore it off the ticker and went back and said, Bill, did you know this? So he was Sir Bill or Sir William from then on. His name is in this *True Blue*, has all these stories. H.K. Bauckhage was a radio man who was as famous as any of them as Dan Rather or anybody



else today. Had a program every day at noon, “Bauckhage Talking” from Washington on a lot of the networks. Richard Rendell was another one. These were very erudite people.

CW: Now, you saying when you came in in ‘42 ...

FH: They would be there. And, of course, you had to be ... there was a pecking order in the place. They sat at some tables and other people sat at others and, hell, I was lucky to get in the back.

CW: Sounds like people came and went all of the times of day and night. Was there a short-order cook who could cook anything up at any time?

FH; Yeah, the kitchen was open until 2:00 o’clock. And the bar was open until 2:00. There was an all-night restaurant down at the corner called Thompson’s. It was a cafeteria. It later figured in a Supreme Court decision on accommodations — you know, one of the early decisions about admitting blacks. Thompson’s Restaurant.

CW: So people would go there after 2:00?

FH: Yeah, and come back up here. The Club itself was open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. There was somebody at that front desk all the time.

CW: The Club never had rooms where people could stay?

FH: No, but they slept in the library. They had people who were designated ... Homer Joseph Dodge was one of them. His favorite place was ... we used to have little private dining rooms along the balcony overlooking the main lounge, and they would have a sofa in there and that was called "Lower 7," and he would go up to Lower 7. Other people had other places they would go. The library was full of overstuffed furniture, and there were always three or four in there. We always had a couple of people who lived here 24 hours a day.

CW: Wow, did they not have a place or ...?

FH: Well, not exactly. If they had a place, they didn't want to go to it. One of them was a famous old guy that I'm sure you've heard about. Now this is after the war, I'm talking about. His name was Judge Greis. He was a tax lawyer from Georgia, and he had a family arrangement that if he didn't go home, they would send him money. So he was a very ... very polite, but he was a really a drinker, and he passed out two or three times, collapsed a couple of times, they would call the rescue squad to come and get him. He's the guy in the famous story ... on the way out, asked the guys carrying the stretcher, Just a minute a boys, and pulls himself up on the bar and asks Jack Madden, the bartender, Jack, how about one for the road?

CW: Oh, no. Now was he a judge or was he a reporter?

FH: He was a lawyer. He was neither. He was an associate member. He was a source of news, a good companion.

CW: So what was the relationship between associate members and ...?

FH: They were the people who had money and worked for the railroads, worked for businesses, worked for big corporations. They were the public relations people of the time, or newsmakers. All Congressmen wanted to be associate members, the President was an associate member, all of them. They paid dues up until Eisenhower. And then Ike wouldn't subscribe, so they didn't want to let him get away without it so they went over and gave it to him. That's become the custom since.

CW: Right, but was it hard to get in as an associate member?

FH: Oh, yeah. There was a waiting list for a long time. They weren't as strict. If there was an opening, you could get your friend, your banker, your lawyer, your druggist ...

CW: Oh, so there was a limit to how many you could have?

FH: Yeah, no more than 80 percent of the actives. That was the cap

CW: Is that still true today?

FH: It's changed because when they merged with the different ... with the other club ... they jiggered the figures around a little bit. It's not 80

percent of the actives it's 45 percent of the total. So but it has the same effect and the idea is to just keep them where they belong. Now, of course, they're on the board. But anyway, the change is what I'm getting at, how the character of the whole place ... In the early '50s, television ... began to see it in the saloons, the first time I ever saw it was over across the street at the Willard, a wrestling show. I couldn't believe it. I thought it was a movie, you know.

CW: Well, what did you think of it?

FH: Well I thought it was a movie, and then when I went to South America with Truman in 1947 for the signing of the OAS treaty, creating the OAS, NBC did not have a full-time cameraman on that trip. They hired a freelancer from Miami named Harry Walsh, and he had a hand-held camera, you know ... he made film, and as we were coming back from ... way up in the mountains where this thing was signed, Truman, in one of these sharp mountain turns, his car almost skidded off the mountainside, and there was a ravine there a mile deep, and the whole motorcade stopped, and Harry was in an early Packard front car. He went up there with his camera — of course, the Secret Service had demanded that it stop, you know — and he was ahead of the still photographers and so no still photographer had a picture, and they immediately demanded that damn movie camera be confiscated and

destroyed. Just open it up, that's all you need to do to expose the film. But the Secret Service guy was smart enough not to do that, but what he did was hold the camera. And the NBC ready eye news correspondent on that trip was Bjorn Bjornson. He was a radio man and he was agreeing with the establishment — let's destroy it and forget it. But I wanted that picture in the worst way and Harry wanted somebody to get that picture, so we took it to a developer in a movie studio in Rio and they developed the film that he had that was left and we picked out a frame, blew it up, took it over to IT&T, radioed it to New York. So then when the still photographers found out that was going on, Oh goddamn it something's got to be done. Here's the President's car hanging over a mountain and nobody has got it except the *Daily News*, which is exactly what I was happy with. But the point of it all is that's how television started — with a camera part-time, no sound ...

CW: Did you have a sense of where television was going to go?

FH: No, nobody did. Some of the congressional hearings, the people who were the real lords of the press up there were the newsreel camera men, highest paid of anybody on earth.

CW: Even then?

FH: They were all members of a union, very tight. They really made money, and they saw what was happening or what was going to happen. So

they wouldn't let the guy on the stand ... in a congressional hearing like the McCarthy stuff in the minority hearing, and before McCarthy, like the Howard Hughes business, they wouldn't let him anywhere near ... he had to walk around like this and put a sound reporter up against a speaker at the press table.

CW: He being the television ...?

FH: The television.

CW: Were the newsreel people independent from Congress, or were they part of Congress?

FH: No they were independent from Congress. They belonged to Hearst Metrotone News, Fox, Pathway ... They made a 10-minute movie that was shown between the features.

CW: In the theaters. So they had a sense ...

FH: They knew what was coming. And so they saw it a lot better than we did. But television comes along and the TV people never really made this place their headquarters, never. You see Cronkite, Cronkite's pictures ... but not because he was working for UP ... came up to lunch.

CW: Well, I could see where if they weren't allowed into the Club ...

FH: They didn't want it.

CW: For a while, then they maybe they just decided okay we don't need the Club.

FH: That's right. They made some — I don't think it was concerted, but individually they just decided — and then the studios all moved up town, different places way out ...

CW: Was that because the space was cheaper?

FH: I have no idea. I would think so, but for their own reasons maybe they had to get some place closer to the transmitter. I don't know why they went, but you know they are all up on the same ...

CW: Oh yeah, they're up on that big hill. Yeah, sure.

FH: And then they began to make a lot more money — the ones that were speaking or on the tube began to make a lot more money than the rest of the workings stiff, and so they never did become a working part of this place. The only one you see around here now is Pat McGrath. Although Frances Hardin is on the board, you seldom, you know ... She doesn't use it every day like some. I mean Pat's in here a couple times a week. And when we lost ... now, of course, old Red Eye runs to the Hill. He'll do anything for the guy.

And in 1950, at the very beginning of the Korean War, we thought that it was all going to be over in a couple of weeks. It looked like the North

Koreans were going to have South Korea, and I was assigned to do a story on the reaction to the red conquest of Korea. I supposed to go out and travel all around the Far East and come back and write a big series. I went out with Homer Bigger. He and I flew out on the same plane — he was a great guy, by the way — but still no real cameramen. NBC hired the Jones boys, Charlie and Eugene Jones, two identical twins from Washington, who used to ride around in their car with a speed graphic, chasing fires and selling pictures freelance to the *Washington Post* and the *Times Herald*, and they offered, they sold themselves to NBC — we'll go out there. Again, they were not members of any union, they just hired them ...

CW: Now, did you take a still photographer out with you to Asia?

FH: No, we used ... belonged to the AP, UP, used the wire photos, you know the radio photos, the ones that came back all black and nothing but eyeballs and feet. Stan Tretick was ... you know Stan?

CW: I know the name.

FH: He was a good guy. He was out there with us. It was a wonderful bunch, frankly.

CW: Now was that a plum assignment? I mean had you worked your way up in the bureau a little bit by then?



FH: Well, maybe. I don't know, but we had a wonderful bureau, we had six, eight, nine good people.

CW: Six to eight people in your bureau?

FH: Well at least, that is, correspondents, writing reporters who went out for a story, came back and wrote it. Then you had your support people.

CW: So, the '50s, then ... the Club was ... what was happening in the '50s?

FH: Well, we had ... in the Club itself we were still rolling along on the momentum from the war, had money that had been saved here. Immediately before World War II, in I think '39, before it broke out in Europe, the board of governors, somebody persuaded them to buy a boatload of Hankey Bannister's scotch, and they brought that in, and they had Smith Bowman, who made Virginia Gentleman, as a member here, so they had scotch good as — it's still a working man's scotch — out here. The bar scotch now I think is still Hankey Bannister, and Virginia Gentleman or Gentlemen of the Press or whatever they call it is still bar bourbon. It was one of the few places in Washington you could get honest bourbon and scotch throughout the war at a reasonable price. So they came out of the war with \$40,000 in profits, and it was all salted away in Treasury bonds at the Riggs Bank. We used to go over there once a year and look at them, and

when they matured, replace them. So we had none of the financial problems that we are struggling with now. We were living fat, dumb and happy. It was rolling just on its own.

CW: What were dues? I mean ...

FH: About \$25 a year.

CW: Is that all? And would the paper pick that up?

FH: Yes.

CW: The paper would.

FH: Most publishers would. It saved overtime. We were all in the building here or across the street or next door, and you could always find them. You could always root them out of the old card room or the bar, or up there. If anything happened you knew you could round them up, and then they didn't have to pay them overtime.

CW: Because they considered you still sort of on the premises?

FH: Well, close enough. All you had to do was call over here, and if it wasn't a woman they would answer the phone. If it was a woman, they figured it was somebody's wife, they wouldn't peach on him — say no, he's not here. They could get a crew together for any day any time over here.

CW: Now, they would have had to pay overtime if you were home in your room and they called you back, is that it?

FH: That's part of it. The other thing is the papers were making money too, and my paper was the richest financially — I mean the best financial success in publishing up to that time. There was a deep tub of butter, and everyone was ... there was an excess profits tax so the publishers were just as happy to maintain the operation the way it is — don't rock the boat, we're doing fine. They left their Washington bureaus alone.

CW: Yeah, sure. Now this whole thing about overtime makes me think, or want to ask, was it strict hourly accounting?

FH: On my paper ... We were a guild paper. Most or many of these regional correspondents were not. The idea was to keep them happy back home and they would stay there forever. And they did and they got older and older and older.

CW: You mean the regional ... oh, I see. Their idea was to keep the home paper happy.

FH: And in '41, and when I got back here in '46, the *Star* was still the premier paper in town, and they had a red-stripe edition, their 5:00 o'clock edition. It had a red streak across the top to differentiate it from all the others, and every afternoon at 5:00 o'clock there would be at least a half dozen of these regional correspondents standing on the corner 14<sup>th</sup> & F waiting for that *Star* truck, and they'd kick it off — the guy would stop —

and they had people selling the paper on each corner. And the man from some town, I'll say Sioux City, would take the *Star*, find the hearing on the farm bill — they covered everything — cut it out or tear it out, scratch out the *Star* reporter's name, put his on it and walk right around to the Western Union office and send it.

CW: No.

FH: Oh, sure. That was the way life was. They didn't get the *Washington Star* out in Sioux City so ... it was first rate coverage, too.

CW: No plagiarism or anything

FH: No.

CW: Like the *Star* was a news service.

FH: It was a news service for a lot of people, and some big names too got in there. But television came in and the *Post* moved, I think '49 or '50, up to their present building, and the AP moved from the *Star* building up to 20<sup>th</sup> Street. *Newsweek* and the *L.A. Times* and some others moved up to 1750 Pennsylvania. But they scattered, the community scattered. The ones that had all been centered in here used to come in for lunch, and you would hear them talking — the most erudite conversation you ever heard, you could be educated about anything. They knew a lot. Those guys, they dropped off, they died or ...

CW: So, would you say the '50s, if you had to generalize about the 50s, that that was the time when things started to disperse?

FH: I would say the '60s. They started to disperse, and it became a stampede in the '60s. I think Kennedy, when Kennedy started holding those press conferences and all of that sort of stuff, television got a franchise on the White House, and they didn't move a muscle without consulting the TV people. And the reporters all got the back seat, and a reporter who was on television is still a big shot, but if you're not on that tube, boy, you can forget it.

CW: Now, before Kennedy, would the President come here to have a press conference?

FH: No. The President had a press conference, the first one I ever went to as a back-bencher, standing up in the back, was the Roosevelt one. I went to about three of them.

CW: And he had them in the White House?

FH: He had them in the Oval Office. People just stood up in front of him. And there were maybe 50 to 70 people jam-packed in there on a good day. The visitors were all let in last. You had to wait in what was called a "fish room." There's still a fish room, I think. It's outside the Cabinet room

over there. It's called a fish room because of a big aquarium. You sat and waited until ...

CW: Now where did Truman have his?

FH: Well, he started out in the Oval Office, but then it was too ... I guess he stayed in the Oval Office. but Eisenhower moved over to the Indian Treaty room in the Old Executive Office Building.

CW: Really.

FH: And they began to film Eisenhower's. You couldn't use the film live, and it had to be submitted to Haggerty, but he never censored anything. But the understanding was it wasn't to be transmitted simultaneously with the event.

CW: But they had the capability to do it? Okay.

FH: Kennedy is the one who put in on live.

CW: Okay.

FH: And he moved it ... it was such a big mob that he moved it over to the State Department auditorium, 21<sup>st</sup> Street, 23<sup>rd</sup> Street, I guess.

CW: So, this is before they built that room where they are now, and that's at the White House?

FH: Yeah. So, then when print media lost all of its clout and when a rival media took it over and became the dominant factor in the news

coverage around here, and those people didn't elect for some reason, whatever — they still to this day don't come here. But you can give a prize for someone and Diane Sawyer will speak in the auditorium, but she's not over here having a drink at lunch, which is what they were all doing before. That's why I recommend that you sometime take a look at that old Dave Garroway show downtown — the news business in Washington 1958, which was two years after my time. It was still print to a large extent, so that is why I think the landfall was ... the firebrand was Kennedy, when he began to televise presidential conferences live.

CW: Well now, when the various news organizations started to move out of this building, did they also let their memberships lapse?

FH: Yeah, and started to tell the reporters, We're not going to pay your dues any more. So, for example, the *Daily News* moved out, my old paper. They moved out sometime in the '60s, I believe, and went up to K Street, and they stopped paying dues.

CW: And so then reporters were left likely to pick it up, right?

FH: Yeah, and at the same time, dues went up, see, and it became more expensive. But you've got to remember also concurrent with this was a change in the personality in the kind of people we got. When I first came to town there were some very erudite ones, and some people who had just

learned things from experience — had worked around, started off as Western Union messenger boys and wound up as correspondents. Just, you know, the people who had worked their way up from the bottom and the people who had gone to the Heidelberg University and all the rest of it, and ... God, I wish I could think of Sir Bill's name ... but anyway, the people who could recite Beowulf and people who knew exactly which horse was running at the fifth race at Hialeah and what his chances were. That was the mix. The college-educated specialists with the beat and all that kind of stuff didn't come in until later, and the change has been great for the reporter. The wages are much better, working conditions are better, you know. They're married now, they've got a mortgage, they've got hospitalization, and when they die, you don't have to pass the hat. That was one of my first experiences here, was somebody came in to see Mr. O'Donnell, going to bury a former president of the Press Club. That told me what the Press Club amounted to.

CW: You mean because he was so poor he hadn't left an estate?

FH: That was not unusual in those days. We're talking about '42 now. Social Security was for people who had regular jobs. These guys used to work for one paper one week and another paper the next week, and they moved around the country. There was a time, in my time in 1940, just like I



wanted to go to New York, everybody wanted to go New York. That's where the big wire services, the big newspapers and magazines and the ad agencies, public relations, everything was in New York. Nowadays, a guy born out in Denver and you say ... do like Gene Fowler, go to New York. Hey, wait a minute. I've got a house out on Colorado Boulevard and my wife, we've got children in school and she's employed. I don't think I want to go. You don't get the same ne'er-to-wells down in here that we used to get, and it's good for the people but it's terrible for the Club. Here we are sitting in card room, and in the old days there would be two games going on right now, some of them left over from last night.

CW: Did you have a ticker or something?

FH: Sure, the tickers were, every office had tickers, and then there were those two tickers, the AP, UP tickers somewhere in the Club.

CW: Yeah, but I mean, you would have to, if you were here when you should be working in your office.

FH: Well, the office knew where you were. There was always somebody down here, get that sonofabitch back down here. And you were playing with bankers. I have played with the president of National Savings and Trust, Bruce Baird. Russ Wiggins, you know, their managing editor, he used to play in that old Club. And I guess maybe that's the reason, maybe

television was affected this way first. Maybe that's where they got the high-class talent, and maybe that's why they never became habitués of the place. But that's what we miss. If this was still the media place, where everybody, including the number-one media, were, we wouldn't have to be worrying about a lot, struggling to get people in. Why don't we have more active members? Well, the dues are up and people say, what the hell, I can come over here and watch any news ... and I don't play cards and I don't drink. The bartenders used to complain when the first white wine was asked for ... what the hell is happening to this place?

CW: But, you know also it's a little different in that it sounds like there was a lot of trust and sort of just unwritten understandings between the bureau chief and the reporters. I mean, if you ... I've worked for people who wouldn't let me take off in the middle of the day and be playing cards.

FH: I'll tell you, there was a guy down here named Joe Fox, who was a White House correspondent for the *Washington Star*, who was a great guy. And he had a wife and three beautiful daughters, and they kept him on as short a line as you could imagine when he was in Washington. The minute he hit that plane, that press plane going out with Truman, he was into it, and by the time we landed he was gone. So somebody had to file for Joe all the time. It was so bad down in Key West once, we were playing cards at the

Marine barracks, BOQ, and the phone range, it was a guard out at the gate and said we have a man out here who identifies himself as Mr. Fox of the *Washington Star*. He's inebriated, you know, what do we do with him? And the Marine officer of the day said, Wait one, and he calls his other boss and he finally picks up the phone and says, If he's in keep him in, if he's out keep him out. But Joe, one time, he got a congratulations on a story that had been filed for him and, of course, they knew back here what the story was. They said, your story sounded very much like Bill Lawrence, and then I said we congratulate you on this, it sounds very much like William H. Lawrence of the *Times*. Joe sent back a message saying well he did get a little help from Lawrence, and then another message back ... the last time we heard, Lawrence was in Bulgaria, where are you? Those things wouldn't happen today, I don't think. We had the same ... I believe the business appeals to the same type individual, you know — very intelligent, highly idealistic, a little cynical, very industrious, will do anything for a story, and it's us, it's the Japanese, it's the Russians, it's anybody, the French, anybody you meet, you will find they are all the same kind of cats. So that I think it's psychologically the same people, but they are much better off physically and financially than they were.

CW: But they're also expected to be seen around the bureau a little more.

FH: Well, that's right, and everybody partition looks like a bank, you know, a small loan office. And the technology has changed. They got rid of all the printers. You are now the printer with the computer, so ...

CW: It's also ... it's competitive. I mean, you don't find people filing for each other, so I think there might be this fear that if I'm not in the office or I'm not at the press conference or around, I'm going to miss it, the competition's going to get it, my editor's going to call and say, Hey how come ...?

FH: That could be, and there used to be intense competition of that kind between the wire services, but even they would help each other in a pinch.

CW: When do you think that changed?

FH: After my time. I left the *News*, I left Washington in '65. I got invited, promoted to glory, I got invited to New York to be an assistant to the executive editor to the paper. And a couple of years later, he got a brain tumor and died, and I knew that the publisher had another candidate for sure and I'd better get out of there before I was pushed, so I looked around for another newspaper job and I couldn't find anything. I wasn't making a hell

of a lot of money, but I was making more money than I had been as a reporter, so I was trying to keep up in that same ... so I finally wound up in a job as a public relations guy for a little outfit called Railway Progress Institute, which was a trade association of the railway equipment manufacturers, engines and box cars and stuff like that, a very nice outfit and I worked for them for 18 months, and then the *Press Club Record* carried a little ad that a basic industry is looking for someone to open a Washington news bureau, and I applied for that and got it. I got my last job through the *Press Club Record*. And it was as the rubber manufacturers, the tire manufacturers wanted somebody to work the other side of the street from Ralph Nader. So if it hadn't been for Ralph, I wouldn't have a job.

CW: I'm wondering if we shouldn't take a break here, what time do you have?

FH: Eleven o'clock.

CW: And what I'd like to do [RECORDING ENDS – REST OF TAPE IS BLANK]