

California State Archives  
State Government Oral History Program

Oral History Interview

with

**HON. THOMAS M. ERWIN**

California State Assemblyman, 1943 - 1958

August 31, October 30, November 24, 1987  
Sacramento, California

By Gabrielle Morris  
Regional Oral History Office  
The Bancroft Library  
University of California, Berkeley

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None.

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## **PREFACE**

On September 25, 1985, Governor George Deukmejian signed into law A.B. 2104 (Chapter 965 of the Statutes of 1985). This legislation established, under the administration of the California State Archives, a State Government Oral History Program "to provide through the use of oral history a continuing documentation of state policy development as reflected in California's legislative and executive history."

The following interview is one of a series of oral histories undertaken for inclusion in the state program. These interviews offer insights into the actual workings of both the legislative and executive processes and policy mechanisms. They also offer an increased understanding of the men and women who create legislation and implement state policy. Further, they provide an overview of issue development in California state government and of how both the legislative and executive branches of government deal with issues and problems facing the state.

Interviewees are chosen primarily on the basis of their contributions to and influence on the policy process of the state of California. They include members of the legislative and executive branches of the state government as well as legislative staff, advocates, members of the media, and other people who played significant roles in specific issue areas of major and continuing importance to California.

By authorizing the California State Archives to work cooperatively with oral history units at California colleges and universities to conduct interviews, this program is structured to take advantage of the resources and expertise in oral history available through California's several institutionally based programs.

Participating as cooperating institutions in the State Government Oral History Program are:

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University of California, Los Angeles

The establishment of the California State Archives State Government Oral History Program marks one of the most significant commitments made by any state toward the preservation and documentation of its governmental history. It supplements the often fragmentary historical written record by adding an organized primary source, enriching the historical information available on given topics and allowing for more thorough historical analysis. As such, the program, through the preservation and publication of interviews such as the one which follows, will be of lasting value to current and future generations of scholars, citizens, and leaders.

John F. Burns  
State Archivist

July 27, 1988

This interview is printed on acid-free paper.

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## INTERVIEW HISTORY

Thomas Erwin was asked to participate in the State Government Oral History Program in order to preserve his recollections of legislative leadership and processes in the 1940s and early 1950s. Arrangements for the interviews were made with the assistance of Herb Alber, who also provided useful background information on his friend's career. Legislative handbooks for the relevant years and Regional Oral History Office reference files were consulted in preparing for the taping sessions.

Discussions were taped in Erwin's living room in Sacramento on the mornings of August 31, October 30, and November 24, 1987. The interviews were transcribed by Shumway Family History Services and lightly edited by the interviewer. Mr. Erwin received a copy of the edited transcript in early February 1988. He reviewed the manuscript, made a few brief additions to complete dangling sentences, and returned it to the interviewer by the end of the month.

The appendix contains a biographical narrative written by Erwin for the children of the Erwin School in Puente, which is built on land which he donated to the school. Papers relevant to his legislative career were destroyed without his knowledge before he moved from his southern California ranch.

Gabrielle Morris,  
Interviewer-Editor

April 1988  
Regional Oral History Office  
University of California, Berkeley

## BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY

Thomas M. Erwin, assemblyman for the 50th District from 1943 through 1958, was born in upstate New York in 1893. At the time of the following interviews, he was living quietly in a Sacramento penthouse, enjoying old friends and good food, often of his own cooking.

Erwin is listed in legislative handbooks of his tenure as "farmer." He was, in fact, a major milk producer and bottler in the Whittier area during the lean years of the 1930s. He was president of the California Milk Producers Association, Farm Credit Association, and Los Angeles Farm Bureau, in which role he was accustomed to appear before legislative committees. This experience, he notes, was useful when he became a legislator himself. He was also in the 1930s a member of the Los Angeles County Republican Central Committee.

As a member of the assembly, Erwin served on the committees on agriculture, fish and wildlife, livestock and dairies, revenue and taxation, rules, and ways and means. His oral history includes anecdotes about such issues of the times as raising the gas tax to improve the state's highways, subdividing agricultural land, developing agricultural colleges, and assignment of legislators' secretaries.

These accounts feature recollections from the 1940s and 1950s of such elected leaders as George Hatfield, Ben Hulse, up-and-coming young Jesse Unruh, and Caspar Weinberger, among others; and contrasting views of Governors Earl Warren and Goodwin Knight. Lobbyist Artie Samish and others whose behavior Erwin found dubious are also mentioned.

Upon retiring from the legislature, Erwin settled permanently in Sacramento. He also for a time owned rural property in Yuba County, where he pursued his lifelong interest in hunting and fishing.

GM

[Session 1, August 31, 1987]

[Begin Tape 1, Side A]

I PERSONAL BACKGROUND

Scottish Family

[Preliminary discussion of Mr. Erwin's Scots ancestry]

ERWIN: You've heard of the Tattoo?

MORRIS: Yes. In Edinburgh Castle.

ERWIN: Very famous. When my wife [Ruth] and I were there, I was talking Scotch with this--we would call him the maitre d', here, and he says, "Well, Mr. Erwin, how do you like our country?"

I said, "I just love it. My father and mother were born here, near Inverness. There's one thing I'd like to see, and I can't see it." "Aye," he says, "I know what it is. The Tattoo." And I said, "Aye." He said, "Well, it just happens that I've twa tickets."

And I said, "What'll it cost me?" And he said, "Spoken like a true Scotsman," he said. [Laughter] And he charged me only thirty dollars. And here were these Americans, offering several hundred dollars to try and get in, and they told me, "We can't get any tickets. The tickets were all sold out." So here my wife and I were going in, and they were standing outside and they said, "Are you going in?" I said, "Aye." And they said, "How did you get tickets?" I said, "Mon, it pays to know your way around." We went on in; they didn't get in.

MORRIS: That's wonderful.

ERWIN: Oh, it's gorgeous. Every clan comes out. And they dance the Highland fling, these boys; and flip their kilts up, and they don't have any underwear, and their tallywags are flopping back and forth, and the women would say, "Oooh, my!" It was quite a deal.

MORRIS: That certainly is. It's impressive with all the lights on at night up there at the top of the castle.

ERWIN: Yes. I wanted to shoot grouse, and I went back there. It just happened that this man in the Glenfiddich estate. . . . There was one gun, and I got it, \$3,500, and you hunt just one week. And I shot sixty-seven grouse. I had my own duck club out at Marysville for years, good duck hunting, and the ways that you have to do, shoot so far this side, so far that side, and if the birds flew over, then you have to bring your gun over and shoot that way.

MORRIS: While the birds are in flight.

ERWIN: They call them butts, and we call them blinds, that you walk into. And I said to old George, "George, what am I going to do with all of these birds I shot?" He said, "What birds?" I said, "I shot sixty-seven grouse." "Mon," he said, "all you get's ten." I said, "What do they do with the rest of them?" "The estate sells them."

MORRIS: Do they now?

ERWIN: Yes. The estate sells them. So, \$3,500 it cost me for just one week. Just the thrill, and it's just wonderful. We call it a bus and they call it a lorry, and they take you out in the morning. You get different butts to go into. You're rotated. In this group there were twelve of us, and the twelve butts were up the side of the mountain, among the heather. Now these birds are born in the heather, eat nothing but heather, and they die, are shot in the heather. I want to show you one. I have some.

I had a duck club on two hundred and fifty acres that I owned out of Marysville. When I sold all my things in the south

and moved north--after I went to the legislature--I was able to pick out District 10. They have one of the greatest flyways of wild ducks in the world. I've seen on my ranch up there at least 500,000 in the morning when you go out into the blind to shoot, and I could get a limit in about ten minutes. I wouldn't allow anybody to violate it. But if they want to shoot more, I said, "If you shoot one duck more, you'll never come back to shoot on my property," because there are too many violators; they'll never quit.

MORRIS: [Former Governor Edmund G., Sr.] Pat Brown used to like to shoot up there. Did he come shooting with you? Did [Former Governor] Earl Warren or Pat Brown come shooting with you?

ERWIN: Oh, yes. I was in with Earl Warren. I went into the legislature with Earl Warren, and if he gave you his word, it was good as gold. He was a very wonderful governor.

MORRIS: Could we go back a bit to when you and your family first came to California?

ERWIN: Yes, from New York State.

MORRIS: You already had aunts who were living in California, you said?

ERWIN: Oh, yes. I had three aunts that came with my father to New York state and worked for this man that apparently had made quite a lot of money. And that's where my father worked, too, for a while, until he got started on a ranch for himself. There was Aunt Mary, Aunt Jennie, and Aunt Susie, and that's my father's three sisters. Aunt Mary developed TB [tuberculosis], and in those days they didn't have a cure; they didn't have medicine like they have now, so their doctor said she will die if she don't go West, go to Colorado. And that's where they went. And then they got jobs as domestics, cooking.

MORRIS: So the three girls went off together to Colorado?

ERWIN: The three girls together. And that was in the early days, in the 1800s. And it was a wild place, Denver was, in those days,

but it was a gold mining town; it's the way it originated. The air in Denver, Colorado, was very healthful, I guess, because she got over her TB. Got married. Then Aunt Jennie and Aunt Susie came on to San Francisco, and they worked there for a while. Then Aunt Jennie went to Pasadena, and she worked for the [Robert] Cruikshanks on Orange Grove Avenue in Pasadena. I don't know whether you've ever been there or not. She met this old gardener, and they got married. Then Aunt Susie came down and took Aunt Jennie's place at the Cruikshanks.

This is laughable. Mrs. [ ? ] Gifford is mentioned in this write-up that Herb gave you.<sup>1</sup> She was the dowager of Pasadena. Her mother donated Brookside Park to Pasadena, 300 acres, and that's where the Rose Bowl is. And she donated the swimming pools. Mother Gifford was a very, very wealthy woman, and she married her husband, Robert.

Attending Occidental and Whittier Colleges: Friendships and Studies

ERWIN: I guess in the class of seventy [students]—I was at Occidental [College]—I was the only one who got "A." And Brooks, the son, was a freshman at Occidental when I was, and he would come down to my room and study. I guess he wanted to invite me home, so Papa came over to look me over, if I was going to be okay to . . .

MORRIS: . . . bring you home for the weekend.

ERWIN: So I could come home. I wondered, because he was walking around with the president of the college at that time, looking the

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1. "My Story," by Thomas M. Erwin, 1983. Prepared for students at the Erwin School, Puente, Los Angeles County. See Appendix.

buildings over, the dormitory. At this time I was living at Kappa Sigma fraternity house, and I guess he thought it was all right, because after we had gone around, he said, "Tom, I'd like you to come home with Brooks tonight and have dinner, stay overnight." I was going to the Bijou. Do you know where the Bijou is?

MORRIS: That was the moving picture theater.

ERWIN: Yes, a little hole in the wall, with black and white pictures. I thanked them very much, and I said that I was sorry, but I had another engagement.

MORRIS: With a young lady?

ERWIN: No. I was going with this friend from Arizona, an awfully nice chap. I could give you his history, too. So the next day Brooks said, "I want you to go home with me, because you don't have anything on tonight." So I had this little bit of a satchel, and I put my razor that you scrape. In those days there wasn't an electric razor, there were hand razors. I put my pajamas in. We were riding in Brooks' Stutz Bearcat, which was quite a car in those days.

MORRIS: Yes, indeed. Was it a bright yellow one?

ERWIN: And Mother Gifford had her town car and her own chauffeur. And Papa Gifford had a Cadillac. So we got into Pasadena, and Brooks said he wanted to pick up something for the chauffeur or something. So this kid we were riding with said, "Do you know what you're getting into?" I said, "No." He said, "These are the richest people in Pasadena." So we went down El Molino Avenue and up this circular driveway and around this great, huge home to a great, big garage that would accommodate four or five cars. Mother Gifford was out with her chauffeur on some social thing, and Brooks and I went up to the study on the second floor. We were studying Spanish or something when Mother Gifford came in. She came to the bottom of the stairs and said, "Are you up there, Brooks?" "Yes, Mother. Come on up and meet

Tom." So she came up. I stood up, and she came and shook hands, and went back and stood by the door. She looked me over and kept looking. I guess she liked what she saw, because she said, "Now, Tom, I want you to come home at least two or three times a week. You'll be very welcome. You'll be company for Brooks, and the two of you can study together." She was one of the sweetest ladies I have ever known, and she did so much for me.

And here my Aunt Susie was working for the Cruikshanks. They invited Mr. and Mrs. Gifford for dinner one night, and Brooks. I heard over the phone, "Brooks has his college chum. Is it all right to bring him?" "Oh, yes, it was fine." Here I sat, having dinner, and my aunt was cooking in the kitchen.

MORRIS: That's democracy in action.

ERWIN: It sure is. My aunt was a wonderful cook, just wonderful. We had lobster thermidor that night. Gorgeous dinner. And Mrs. Cruikshank kept looking at me, looking at me, as if she'd seen me some place. But she wouldn't dare open her mouth, because Mrs. Gifford was the dowager of Pasadena. She was worth about \$30 million, and the Cruikshanks were worth about five.

MORRIS: Really hard up. How had you decided to go to Occidental?

ERWIN: My sister was going to Pomona at the time, and some of the people I saw at Pomona, I didn't like. And I thought it would be better for me to go to Occidental, and that's where I took my younger sister. My younger sister was a very fine looking girl. I have the pictures in here. I'll get them and let you see them.

[Interruption]

MORRIS: Did your father find that farming was more successful here in California than it had been in New York state?

ERWIN: My father didn't have very much of an education, and he did the best he could. He died young. This is a country, whatever you

want to do, you can do it. That's been my theory. I'm a millionaire. That land that I sold in Marysville, state and federal [taxes] took almost a half of it. Here I sold this ranch up here for \$1 million. I had the sale pending, and I gave it to Occidental. Now Occidental has it; \$500,000 of it goes for scholarships. I've given away \$100,000 and I'm going to give them \$250,000. You know what the annual tuition and costs are at Occidental now? Eighty-seven hundred dollars a year.

MORRIS: I believe it.

ERWIN: And Whittier's \$8,000. Where in the world are the kids going to get the money to go to school?

My last year in college, I was a transfer and I couldn't play basketball. I transferred to Whittier and I couldn't play there, because they had school laws that you couldn't play basketball if you were a transfer. So I couldn't go back to Occidental. I was a transfer from Whittier, and I made my sophomore standing in half a year, went back as a junior. To graduate, I had to major in something, so I majored in Spanish.

MORRIS: Now that's interesting. That's unusual. Why did you pick Spanish?

ERWIN: Well, I had so many Mexicans working for me when I was raising celery. And they've always been friends of mine. I had originally all Mexican milkers, and we'd rattle off in Spanish. I had one family, they had this Pete [ ? ] Moreno, a little kid, and they went off and left him in the little house. Moved off, and he was all alone. I went down and he was crying, and I said, "Petey, what's wrong?" He said, "My tio [uncle] has gone off." They had moved and abandoned him. So I said, "Well, Petey, I'll take care of you. I want you to go to school." So he went, I think, one year in high school, and he said, "Padron, I want to work on your ranch." So I said, "Well, if

you don't want to go to school any more, you want work, why, okay." So he worked in the milk house, and he's alive today.

MORRIS: Were they good workers, by and large?

ERWIN: Oh, yes. They killed themselves to be good milkers and good workers for me.

MORRIS: Were these families that had lived in the Whittier area, or were they people coming in from Mexico?

ERWIN: They'd lived there. Some of them, when the war started with Japan, were drafted and they had to go. But I was just fortunate on my dairy that they weren't drafted there, because they needed milk so bad that the milkers were exempt.

MORRIS: In this biography, you say that you took some teasing when you graduated from college and said you were going into the dairy business, because they didn't think you needed a college education to go into dairying. Why did you decide to go into dairying rather than do something with a white collar and tie?

ERWIN: I had trouble with my growth, and I had my adenoids out, and my tonsils out. I was all the time getting colds, and I blamed it on that kind of a life that I'd had. I didn't think I could get any place. The last year I was there, I was so good at zoology that a college professor took me in as his assistant, and I got all of my tuition. It was terrific for me. I spent an awful lot of time mounting specimens; we had to draw them and everything. He said he wanted me to go on to Stanford and get a doctor's degree. That's where he graduated from. But he would have these carbuncles. You know what they are?

MORRIS: Yes.

ERWIN: On his neck. In those days they didn't have the medicine that they do now, and he said, "Mr. Erwin, one of those is going to break into my system, the protective tissue around it. It'll kill me." Three years later, it did. He'd had those all the time on his neck, just one after the other. I guess they're

awful painful. Poor guy. But he wanted me to go on to Stanford and be a college professor.

MORRIS: Did you like that idea?

ERWIN: No.

Dairy Farming in the 1930s

MORRIS: So you decided to go back to farming and take up dairying rather than growing celery?

ERWIN: Yes. I bottled my milk and sold it wholesale. There were these eighty dairymen all around me had little dairies. If they'd just known the Depression was going to carry on until that war started, why. . . . Well, there was about ten years of it there. They would just flop, one after the other. It would just sicken me. It was just awful to see them come in. The banks in those days were very cold-blooded, and they just sheriffed them out like that.

MORRIS: So did you buy out some of those dairies that had hard times?

ERWIN: No, they were too small. Unlike those dairies I furnished the raw milk and guaranteed in bottles, and that's why I was able to withstand all the . . .

MORRIS: . . . hard times.

ERWIN: I got more money out of my milk. You could see one flopping. The banks would say, "Now, give me a chattel mortgage on the cows. Give me the feed bill. Give me a first trust deed on the property." And, boom! Out they went. Kicked them right out. Cold-blooded. They had nothing. They'd come and drive into my yard. They were local banks, not the chain banks nowadays.

[End Tape 1, Side A]

[Begin Tape 1, Side B]

MORRIS: It must have seemed like it was never going to end, there in 1935, 1936.

- ERWIN: Yes, that's right. And then the CIO [Congress of Industrial Organizations] originated under Harry Bridges. The last I heard of him, he was in San Francisco. I think the longshoremen [International Longshoremen's Union] or something, he's organizing those people.
- MORRIS: He'd been an organizer in the milk industry earlier?
- ERWIN: That's right. With the workers. He formed the CIO, and they got in all the dairies that were able to make it. He got them all controlled, and so then they tried to get me. I had 400 pickets all around my dairy. So I called Merritt Adamson at the Adohr Creamery and the Western Dairies, Arden Farms, and told them what was happening, and I said, "Let's all join the AFL [American Federation of Labor]. These are radicals, the CIO." And so we did. I joined the AFL.
- MORRIS: You joined, not your employees.
- ERWIN: I joined. All my employees had to go in. I had some CIO members in, and they kicked them out, and they were out of a job and out of everything.
- MORRIS: So it was what they call a "closed shop." In order to work for your dairy the fellows had to join the AFL?
- ERWIN: They had to belong to one of the organizations in those days. Roosevelt was the one that started them, Franklin Delanor [sic].
- MORRIS: Before we get past it, when you were showing me the pictures, one of them was of Miss [ ? ] Oaks. You said she had a great influence on your youth.
- ERWIN: Oh, yes. I was just a little kid at the time.
- MORRIS: Tell me about her.
- ERWIN: I was about nine years old at the time.
- MORRIS: This is still back in New York State?
- ERWIN: Yes.
- MORRIS: Did she encourage you to continue your education?

ERWIN: Yes. She was a very wonderful woman. I thought the world of her. In those days, you know, you didn't have a bathroom; you had an outdoor privy. We had to carry our water up from a well about a quarter of a mile away, if we used it in the house. I went through it all. It is very vivid in my mind today. But that's the nice thing about the country we live in. Democracy can't be beat. We don't know how fortunate we are. You know what I got for sweeping floors? Forty cents an hour. Today I pay Kiyoko [ ? ] twenty-nine dollars for four hours to clean the house.

MORRIS: Those forty cents probably bought more when you were a boy.

ERWIN: Oh, sure. It bought more because things were cheaper in those days. But that's all I had.

Leadership in Growers Associations; Los Angeles Farmers Market

MORRIS: It sounds like you were quite active with the other dairymen in the Los Angeles area.

ERWIN: Oh, yes. I was president of the California Milk Producers [Association], president of the Los Angeles County Farm Bureau, and president of Production Credit [Association], which loaned money. All in the same years.

MORRIS: Is Production Credit a nonprofit organization?

ERWIN: It was set up by the [United States] Farm Credit Administration, and it's like the Land Bank, headquartered in San Francisco.

MORRIS: They still have a big billboard on the highway between San Francisco and Sacramento. And they advance money for fertilizer and seed during the growing season, before you get your crop in?

ERWIN: Yes. And loans on dairy cows.

MORRIS: And that was set up during the Depression in order to help farmers keep from going broke? That must have been a big help.

ERWIN: Oh, it was.

- MORRIS: As a young fellow just getting started, could you go to the Production Credit people and get the capital to buy the cows and start your dairy?
- ERWIN: Oh, yes. Have you ever heard of the Farmers Market down on Wilshire Boulevard in Los Angeles?
- MORRIS: I have. It's supposed to be quite a sight to see.
- ERWIN: Well, I started it.
- MORRIS: Did you?
- ERWIN: When I was president of the Farm Bureau. The man said, "Now we want to start another one in Pasadena." I said, "Nothing doing. I've had enough of it." I got a hold of all those farmers and said, "Bring nothing but your best for sale." And they would bring in live chickens in those days, and the people would come and pick out one. They would kill it, and clean it, and get it all ready, and hand it out to them.
- MORRIS: Give you a fresh chicken.
- ERWIN: Their fruit was the very finest that they could. The walnuts and everything that they brought in, their English walnuts, everything that they brought in there had to be number one. That's why it got such a good reputation.
- MORRIS: I should say so.
- ERWIN: Well, I started it. I worked like a dog, as I said before. I had my own business to look after.
- MORRIS: At the same time, yes. Did they do enough business so that it helped some of the small farmers keep in business?
- ERWIN: Yes, and that's why it's still successful today.
- MORRIS: I think of the Farm Bureau as having a legislative agenda.
- ERWIN: Yes, they did.
- MORRIS: I wondered if you were active in that.
- ERWIN: I was president of the Farm Bureau for four or six years.
- MORRIS: That's a big task.
- ERWIN: In the Production Credit Association, I was president for about fifteen or twenty years.

MORRIS: Did you use to come up to Sacramento to represent them? What kind of issues were--?

ERWIN: I'd come on legislation before the legislature, would come and lobby for certain bills. So I knew where I was coming [when I was elected], and sixteen years is a long time.

## II CAMPAIGNING IN THE 50TH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

### Elected from Whittier, 1942

MORRIS: So what got you interested in going from being a lobbyist--presenting things to the legislature--to taking a seat yourself?

ERWIN: Well, I had no interest in it, but this delegation from Whittier came over because the man that. . . . Whittier had always sent a man to the legislature, and this one fellow-- [Assemblyman Gerald] Kepple was his name--was apparently defeated, and in a recount he won by sixty votes. Whittier said, "We can't send anybody [like that] from here to the legislature, because the Democrats will defeat him the next time." So a delegation came over to El Monte and talked with the editor of the paper there [the El Monte Herald], and the man that controlled politics.

MORRIS: Was that the same man?

ERWIN: Not the paper man, but the man that controlled the Republican Club, or whatever it was. They said, "We know the man that can win."

My sister was handling the office, and she said, "Tom, there's a delegation here coming down from Whittier and El Monte. They edit the paper, and they want to see you." I was in the lower dairy, so I drove up.

MORRIS: In your boots and your work clothes?

ERWIN: No, I was in my work clothes. Jennie had offices in our great, big home—about four bedrooms upstairs, a big breakfast room, and dining room, and a big living room, and then the big office. And she had gotten chairs. I went in and sat down, and I said, "Well, gentlemen, what can I do for you?" "We're going to run you for the legislature." I said, "What?" "Oh, we're going to run you for the legislature." I said, "Oh, I'm too busy. I just can't do it."

They said, "Oh, now, don't close the door. You think it over, and everything's set as far as the paper [Whittier News] in Whittier's concerned, and the Covina paper, the El Monte Herald," and some Temple City paper. This Democratic woman said, "Tom, I'll support you and I'll circulate under my signature five or ten thousand letters for you." So I paid her, and finally they talked me into it.

MORRIS: What was the name of this fellow who controlled politics in that part of town?

ERWIN: He was editor of the Whittier News. I forget.

MORRIS: And also a big man in the local Republican Club.

ERWIN: Oh, yes.

MORRIS: How about the woman supporter who sent out all those letters?

ERWIN: She was a dear, just a wonderful woman.

MORRIS: This sounds like a bipartisan campaign.

ERWIN: It was. When the smoke cleared away, I won where the Democrats had defeated Kepple. I won in every precinct. I won it by, I think, around 19,000. I couldn't believe it. But nobody would run against me, then, for a long time.

MORRIS: What made you decide to accept their plan to run you for the legislature?

ERWIN: Oh, they talked me into it. Then the Whittier editor said, "We've supported the candidate from here all the time. You'll have to get your support financially from over the other side

of the hill." So all my bureau of eighty men, they went out and put my campaign cards out, and they worked like everything.

MORRIS: This was the people who worked for you--?

ERWIN: Worked for me in my dairies. One woman ran against me one time and I defeated her in her own precinct.

MORRIS: Nowadays that part of California is considered pretty conservative, but you're saying that Whittier was heavily Democratic in registration.

ERWIN: When I quit, a Democrat won, and he was invited over by this group of businessmen in Whittier for lunch one day in order to get acquainted with him. So he ate their food, and after he got through they called on him. He got up and said, "I don't know why I'm here. I bet there isn't a damned one of you here that ever voted for me," and walked out.

MORRIS: Good heavens, that's not the way to encourage support.

ERWIN: He said, "When I get through with Whittier, you won't know it." They reapportioned it and they cut Whittier in three slices.

MORRIS: What was his name?

ERWIN: I forget his name now.<sup>1</sup> But he ran then for congress and was elected to congress after he served two terms up here in the legislature, and was elected to congress from that district. It had been reapportioned.

Congressmen Jerry Voorhis and Richard Nixon

MORRIS: When you ran for the assembly first, in 1942, you did have a Democratic congressman, didn't you? Wasn't Jerry Voorhis the congressman at that point?

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1. Ronald Brooks Cameron.

- ERWIN: Yes, a very fine man. Jerry and I would be on the platform together and I would give him a boost, and he always gave me a boost. Then, when [then Congressman Richard M.] Dick Nixon ran against him and defeated him, his father came and sat on my porch there in Puente and cried. He said, "Tom, we wanted you to go to congress after Jerry. Jerry wanted to go two or three more terms, then he was going to quit. We'd support you." I said, "I don't like the climate in Washington. I'll never go." I had all the votes in my fist when Dick Nixon quit to go to the Senate. I could have gone. But I didn't want it. The climate there didn't agree with me, and all my interests were in California. I was happy with what I had, and I didn't want to get involved with anything more.
- MORRIS: From knowing Mr. Voorhis over the years and knowing his family, did you see any evidence of the charges there were that he was working with communists?
- ERWIN: I felt awful bad about that. The poor old man sat and cried on my porch. But I'd given my word, and if your word's no good, what can you do? I'd given my word to Dick Nixon, and I supported him. I supported Dick and [Patricia] Pat [Nixon], and I bet you I had them in my home in Puente for pheasant dinners, and wild duck dinners, and trout dinners. Always when he'd get into difficulty, he'd come over. He liked a highball, too, Quaker or no Quaker.
- MORRIS: Did the Quakers tend to vote Democratic?
- ERWIN: There were some of them that did.
- MORRIS: I understand that Dick Nixon's committee--Frank Jorgenson and Roy Day and people like that--came over and got you to help campaign for him?
- ERWIN: Yes, they did. I'd liked Jerry Voorhis. I thought he was a very fine congressman. I was just caught between the devil and the deep sea. I wanted to come a couple more terms to the

legislature, and Whittier would have been mad as hell if I hadn't supported Dick.

MORRIS: That was what I was wondering. Did some of the people say, "If you don't help Nixon, we won't help you"?

ERWIN: Oh, yes.

MORRIS: That's tough.

ERWIN: "We helped you, and now we want you to help Dick." And it was just a heartbreak to see poor Old Man Voorhis. When I was in the legislature, Jerry had donated that Voorhis School to the state of California.

### III WAYS AND MEANS & REVENUE AND TAXATION COMMITTEES

#### Polytechnic College Financing

ERWIN: Then I got the Kellogg unit. That was about 5,000 acres, and if I hadn't gotten \$1 million to get that started, it would have reverted to the Kellogg Foundation. The assemblyman from there could get nothing through, and I got that bill through. [State Senator] George Hatfield carried it to the senate. [State Senator] Ben Hulse from Imperial [County] didn't want any money for the Kellogg; he wanted to have a Cal Poly [California State Polytechnic College] in Imperial Valley. So he had, through the committee on finance, set up about \$3 million for that unit in Imperial. So I carried the bill and got it over to the assembly for \$1 million to buy the Kellogg unit from Kellogg Ranch. I forget how many acres it was. But it's a big thing.

MORRIS: Now is that for the Cal Poly at Pomona?

ERWIN: That's right. Where it is today. So George Hatfield talked with Ben Hulse, and he said, "Tom'll carry your bill on your side. Let him get that through for the Cal Poly unit there, and we'll get one in Imperial Valley." On that basis, Ben Hulse let it out of his committee. He was chairman of Finance [Senate

Finance Committee] in the senate. There are 20,000 students there today. Did you know that?

MORRIS: I didn't. That's amazing. Ben never did get a campus in Imperial Valley, did he, because the other one's over there on the coast, in San Luis Obispo.

ERWIN: You know what I did? I was on Ways and Means [Assembly Ways and Means Committee]. Ben Hulse had quit, and two other senators had defeated the assemblyman who was running for the senate in Imperial [County]. So a Democratic senator and a Democratic assemblyman came up. I was sitting on Ways and Means one day, and I entertained a motion that this money that was set up for Cal Poly in Imperial revert to the General Fund. It went through like that. Alan Post, the legislative analyst, started to look at me, and I did this to him. [Gesturing "hush"]

Ben Hulse didn't know that I had done it, but they were so mad at those two--the senator and assemblyman--for not catching it. "They went up there," Ben says, "and they've done nothing and they've lost that. We won't have a school down here. Where are our students going to go?" So they kicked them both out. You know what they did in Imperial Valley? Two thousand of them went and changed their registration to Republican, and voted them out. [Laughter]

MORRIS: That's pretty swift retribution.

ERWIN: That's one way of getting rid of them.

MORRIS: Did you do something, then, to get the campus going over in San Luis Obispo?

ERWIN: Oh, yes. I worked for that. Then I found out that the head of the school was a drunk.

MORRIS: Mr. [Julian] McPhee?

ERWIN: I guess that was his name.

MORRIS: That's too bad. Was your concern that there be training for youngsters coming into farming so they'd be better farmers?

ERWIN: Yes, and get them a good education. They're doing an awful good job, Cal Poly is, and a lot of young farmers.

Recollections of Charlie Lyon and Artie Samish; Ethical Temptations

MORRIS: I was looking in the Legislative Handbook for 1943, the first year you went up to Sacramento, and it looked to me like there were a whole bunch of people elected with you, like twenty-five or thirty new people in the assembly. Do you remember?

ERWIN: I didn't know them, no. I was just a new man, too.

MORRIS: [Assemblyman Charles] Charlie Lyon was speaker when you came up, wasn't he?

ERWIN: Charlie Lyon was speaker.

MORRIS: Did he have any kind of orientation to help you newcomers get acquainted?

ERWIN: Did you ever hear of [Arthur H.] Artie Samish?

MORRIS: I've heard of Artie Samish, yes.

ERWIN: He was an Artie Samish man. But he was also a good friend of mine. But I never had anything to do with Artie Samish. He never contributed to my campaign until he felt that he maybe better, so he sent \$500 down. I never heard of so much money for a campaign. I'd usually get \$50 from [Southern California] Edison Company and \$50 from the big one up here. What was it?

MORRIS: PG&E [Pacific Gas and Electric Company]?

ERWIN: Yes. That was about it. So when I got the \$500, I got my campaign manager, and we went and registered and sent it back to him. I wouldn't touch it. But he had his own group that he fed every day.

MORRIS: Yes, I've heard that.

ERWIN: Oh, yes, he had a very elaborate suite at the Senator Hotel. I was invited half a dozen times, and I wouldn't go. I didn't want to be associated with him. I've got the book on the life of Artie Samish here.

MORRIS: That's pretty lively. The Secret Boss of California?<sup>1</sup>

ERWIN: Yes. Have you read it?

MORRIS: Yes, I have.

ERWIN: I'm mentioned in there, but he didn't take me on.

MORRIS: If I remember correctly, there were . . .

[End Tape 1, Side B]

[Begin Tape 2, Side A]

MORRIS: . . . rather than for campaign finance fiddling.

ERWIN: That's where he stuck all that money that he collected from these big interests, you know. . . . He said he controlled the legislature. In his book he said that. He controlled the speaker. He controlled Charlie Lyon, [Assemblyman] Sam Collins, both of them. Charlie Lyon was in six years and Sam Collins was in six years; that was twelve years.<sup>2</sup>

MORRIS: As a newcomer to the assembly, could you tell that the speaker was under the influence of a nonlegislative man?

ERWIN: They were very nice to me in the legislature, because I was a large landowner. Charlie Lyon said, "We ought to treat him nice," and they did. They gave me the committees I asked for. I was on Ways and Means every year, I think, I was there. Sixteen years.

MORRIS: What was it that you liked about Ways and Means?

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1. Arthur H. Samish and Bob Thomas, Crown Publishers, New York, 1971.
2. Lyon was speaker from 1943 to 1947, Collins from 1947 to 1952.

ERWIN: Well, it controls all the finances of the legislature, and all the important legislation. You visit all the prisons; you visit all the mental institutions.

That's one thing that I never liked to go to was the mental institutions. Formaldehyde, the smell. You have lunch there. They use it on the floors and God knows what all. There's one in Stockton. We were going there one time, and they'd taken us in. Here they were lined up as we went in. Two or three of them said, "They're all Nazis; they're all Nazis. I can tell to look at them, they're all Nazis."

MORRIS: This is the patients saying it of the visiting legislators?

ERWIN: Yes. We were all Nazis.

MORRIS: They thought you were a Nazi.

ERWIN: The whole bunch of us. They were taking us in to lunch.

MORRIS: That must have been a shock.

ERWIN: Then I had one place, this woman came up to me and said, "Oh, Mr. Lindbergh, get me out of here. I don't belong here. I want to go home. Get me out of here."

MORRIS: That is very sad.

ERWIN: Yes. You run onto some strange things in your life.

But you couldn't pin anything on me, I'll tell you that. The truckers wanted to get a bill out of the finance committee when I was chairman of it. They'd asked this one guy—and I didn't like him too well. . . . He said he'd like to see me outside the chamber for a few minutes.

I said, "What's on your mind?" He said, "Now this bill, you can bring it up. You're the big shot on Revenue and Tax [Assembly Revenue and Taxation Committee], and you're the chairman of the committee, and you can bring it up. I can get you \$3,500 if you'll just let it out of the committee."

I said, "Are you trying to bribe me? If you are, I'm going to go in and take you up on the floor." He said, "I'll deny

it." I said, "Don't ever bother me again about it."  
Temptation's thrown in your way all the time.

MORRIS: Was it usual for lobbyists to offer money in return for getting a bill they wanted?

ERWIN: They did it. I know they did. But I'd never take any of it. No, it'll backfire on you. I went through that legislature sixteen years and I never took a bribe and I never did a thing that I shouldn't have done. There were an awful lot of crooks.

Look at that [Charles H.] Charlie Wilson. When he got into congress, he was called up and censored before the whole House back in Washington. And we knew he was a crook here, because he'd bring his wife and four kids up, and then he'd take the bill and take them to one of the lobbyists and say, "If you want my vote, pay for this."

MORRIS: You wonder why some people think that that's okay to do.

ERWIN: I don't know. In my book it's crooked, and I don't want any part of it. When my wife and I came to the legislature, we got the big sum of \$100 a month, and it cost me \$600 for board and room at the Senator Hotel.

#### Family Arrangements

MORRIS: Did your wife come up with you every legislative session?

ERWIN: Oh, yes. She came up for three sessions, and then she moved her mother from Long Beach up to my home. She lived at my place for six years, till she died.

MORRIS: That really makes a change in your household arrangements.

ERWIN: Oh, yes. I don't why I let her do it. But her brother and his wife wouldn't have her there a week or anything to help out. But I think being mean will hit you back someday, because he's busted now, her brother, and his wife is an alcoholic.

MORRIS: Your wife was a Long Beach girl?

ERWIN: No. They came from Saskatchewan. Originally they were in Nebraska. Then the old man moved into Saskatchewan, Canada, when it was young; that's years and years ago. He made quite a lot of money. He went into the lumber business up there, and when he came down from Canada, he had, I think, \$60,000, which was a fortune in those days. He bought about 600 acres in the Antelope Valley and put it into alfalfa. I bought alfalfa from them. That's where I met Ruth. She never told me until the day before we were getting married that she had been married before, and I should have kicked her out right there.

Earl Warren as Governor

MORRIS: That's too bad. Looking in the Legislative Handbook again, I see that [Assemblyman Thomas W.] Tom Caldecott was the chairman of Ways and Means when you were a freshman. Is that right?

ERWIN: No. It was a man from San Francisco, the chairman of Ways and Means.

MORRIS: I'm going to look it up. I've got my books backwards.

ERWIN: I'm trying to think of his name.

MORRIS: [Assemblyman Albert C.] Wollenberg.

ERWIN: That's it. He was a very smart individual, too, a very nice man. I liked him very much.

MORRIS: He was very close to Earl Warren, I understand, they both being from San Francisco.

ERWIN: Yes. Earl Warren, you see, had the privilege of appointing the chairman of Ways and Means and the chairman of another committee.

MORRIS: Senate Finance?

ERWIN: No, another committee. Chairman of Revenue and Tax. Those two he appointed, more or less.

MORRIS: Could you explain to me the difference between Ways and Means Committee and the Revenue and Taxation Committee? To me they sound like they ought to be the same.

- ERWIN: All tax bills go to Finance or Revenue and Tax, Finance in the senate, Revenue and Tax in the assembly. Ways and Means has control over all the institutions in the state. Prisons. I saw a man executed, and that's the worst thing I ever looked at. The warden said, "I have to witness every one of these." He didn't believe in it, he says. "I want you to witness it." We were down there at the time; the execution was going to be that morning. And that was a man that was out with these two women. He'd gotten drunk and he shot the driver, so they executed him. I'll never witness another one; it was just awful to witness, just terrible.
- MORRIS: In those years was there any thought of maybe doing away with execution as a way of dealing with crime?
- ERWIN: They've talked of it. But a lot of these prisoners said that if they did away with executions, "there'd be no end to what we can do. We can just murder right and left, and get away with it, and not be executed."
- MORRIS: Mr. Warren had some ideas about improving how the prisons worked.
- ERWIN: He was one of the finest governors the state of California ever had, I can say that.
- MORRIS: Did he come and campaign in your area when he was running for reelection?
- ERWIN: No, but he kept his eye on it so that he knew what was going on in the districts. He said my district was always safe as far as I was concerned. Whittier is a very moral town, and they wanted somebody that was at least honest to represent them. The newspaperman—I forget his name—ran Whittier pretty much. It's a Quaker town, you know, very moral.
- MORRIS: Was the newspaper editor also a Quaker?
- ERWIN: No, I don't think he was. But the people that worked for him were all Quakers.
- MORRIS: Did you ever disagree with how he thought things ought to go?

ERWIN: No. When he elected you, he kept his eye on you. If you voted right; you hadn't better vote crooked or be caught in a scandal. They would have defeated you right away.

MORRIS: Did they give you good newspaper coverage?

ERWIN: Oh, yes. Always.

MORRIS: So if Warren didn't come and campaign in your district, would you be the one to say, "Everyone should vote for me, and also for Earl Warren"? Or did you need to do that in those days?

ERWIN: No, I didn't need to do that. Earl Warren had no opposition and no trouble.

MORRIS: Is it time we took a break?

ERWIN: No. We're going to go for lunch now.

[End Tape 2, Side A]

[Session 2, October 30, 1987]

[Begin Tape 3, Side A]

#### IV AGRICULTURE AND RULES COMMITTEES

##### Farm Bureau, Production Credit Association, and Milk Producers Association Experiences

MORRIS: In our last conversation, you mentioned something about you knew what you were getting into when you became assemblyman, since you had been active representing various organizations before the legislature.

ERWIN: Yes.

MORRIS: I wonder, how was it different to actually be a member of the assembly on the other side of the process?

ERWIN: Well, I was president of the Los Angeles County Farm Bureau, and president of Production Credit--that is an organization that finances the farmers in California, based in Berkeley--and I was president of the California Milk Producers, all in one year. The Farm Bureau is a very interesting group to belong to, because it deals with farm problems throughout the state of California. Not only that, but four or five western states. And they had a convention that I attended when I was president, in Reno, and Key Pittman and his wife were there. Key Pittman was the senator from Nevada, a very prominent senator; was a great friend of Franklin Delano Roosevelt. And [Patrick A.] Pat McCarran was another senator; they were two powerful senators in the [U. S.] Senate.

MORRIS: I remember Pat McCarran, yes.

ERWIN: They were both at this Farm Bureau convention. Key Pittman's wife was a very striking woman. She was absolutely beautiful, wonderfully dressed that night she attended, and there was friction between Key Pittman and Pat McCarran; their wives apparently didn't get along together. But Key Pittman met his wife in the Yukon Territory. He was very much interested in gold, and that's where he made the money he had. When he was back in the mountains, she was prospecting for gold, and he met her coming around some bend.

MORRIS: That's amazing. I didn't realize there were any women prospectors.

ERWIN: That was her background, and he married her, and she was a very striking, wonderful looking woman.

MORRIS: Was the Farm Bureau at that convention interested in some California legislative issues?

ERWIN: Oh, yes. Yes, they were. California's farming is very diversified, and very specialized. If you're in the orange business, you have just oranges. And if you're in the dairy business, you have cows. And if you're in the cotton industry, you just have cotton. That's in the San Joaquin Valley.

MORRIS: Does that cause problems before the Agriculture Committee? Say, the cotton farmers don't necessarily agree with the citrus growers?

ERWIN: No. They're just interested in their specialty crop. If you're in the chicken business, you're interested in chickens. Or, if you're in the turkey business--there are great, great farms of turkeys here in California. And the Farm Bureau has all these diversified crops that they kind of help manage and give advice to the farmers. When I was president of Farm Bureau. . . .

I don't know if you've ever heard of the Farmers Market on Wilshire Boulevard. I started it.

MORRIS: Great idea.

ERWIN: Oh, I worked my head off on that, and then they wanted to start one in Pasadena, and I said, "Nothing doing." I worked my head off on that one. And the farmers brought their chickens, and brought their turkeys in, and they were butchered. You picked your bird out that you wanted, and it was butchered, eviscerated, and cleaned for you, and given to you. It became very popular and very well known throughout California; everybody wanted to go to the Farmers Market. They've copied it somewhat throughout the state. They've one, I understand, here. Somebody was telling me—I think it was Dr. [ ? ] Collins—that he and his wife had been at this one, but I've never been there.

MORRIS: So in the Agriculture Committee in the assembly, you were a member of that for many years?

ERWIN: Yes.

MORRIS: How did you as a committee keep the peace between the cotton growers, say, and the citrus growers?

ERWIN: Oh, there was no friction between them.

MORRIS: None?

ERWIN: None whatever. They just were interested in their crops, and they were advised by the Farm Bureau to the best of the Farm Bureau's ability. If they had any disease or anything like that, they would assist the farmers in that line to take care of the disease.

MORRIS: Would the legislative committee by and large take the recommendation of the Farm Bureau or the Milk Producers Association?

ERWIN: Oh, yes. The Farm Bureau would appear before the committee and the legislature quite often. That is, in legislation that they wanted. They would come and lobby for it. And the Farm Bureau was considered one of the finest and most honest groups that would appear before the legislature, and their recommendations were most often taken.

MORRIS: At that time, did you have any staff to the Agriculture Committee, any consultants or any people working for the legislature?

ERWIN: They have their own lobbyists that come up to the legislature and look after the farm legislation.

MORRIS: That's the Farm Bureau [which] had the lobbyists?

ERWIN: Yes.

MORRIS: I was wondering if, in the legislature, the committee had some staff that helped on these things when you were first there.

ERWIN: There's the county Farm Bureau and the state Farm Bureau. And when I was in the legislature, it wasn't like it is today; they're practically all attorneys today. It's drifted away from businessmen and farmers. And some of the attorneys that have strong or large farmers in their district would contact their assemblyman or their senator, and he carried their legislation.

MORRIS: So when you were there, being in the milk business yourself, you could make your own judgment as to the quality of the legislation, things like that.

ERWIN: Yes.

MORRIS: How about the Department of Agriculture? Did they have a lot to say to the legislative committee?

ERWIN: Oh, yes. They had a great deal of influence as far as the legislature and farm legislation were concerned.

MORRIS: There was a Mr. [Anson Alvin] Brock who was director for many years. Do you remember him?

ERWIN: Yes.

MORRIS: Was he helpful?

#### Fish and Game Concerns

ERWIN: Yes, he was. He was a very fine individual. Like Fish and Game. [Nathan] Nate Milner was one of the. . . . You see, when I came in, it wasn't a department.

MORRIS: It was still a division in the Department of Natural Resources.

ERWIN: I carried the bill that made it a department.

MORRIS: What led the committee to decide you should do a study and think about making it a department? We've been having some trouble with the Fish and Game Department now in 1987, I understand. There've been some questions that maybe the department wasn't being run for the public interest so much as for special interests. Was there any problem like that when you were on the committee?

ERWIN: I understand that it's having its difficulties; I've heard it.

MORRIS: I couldn't find Mr. Milner in the state handbook. What position did he have?

ERWIN: Under [Governor Culbert L.] Olson, he was one of the directors of the Fish and Game Commission before it became a department. When I carried the legislation that made it the Department of Fish and Game, they were elected for a term, so many years.<sup>1</sup>

MORRIS: The governor would appoint them to the commission.

ERWIN: Yes. They were appointed for so many years. Well, Olson had appointed Nate Milner, and of course Nate Milner gave Olson money when he'd go running against Earl Warren, and it made Earl Warren mad as the dickens. So we tried to get him to reappoint Nate Milner, and a group of us went down from the assembly and the senate, and asked him to reappoint Nate Milner to Fish and Game. He looked at us and he said, "Gentlemen, the answer is no." That did it. All of us walked out.

MORRIS: Was Ed Carty appointed to replace Mr. Milner? Do you remember Ed Carty?

ERWIN: Yes. He was from Ventura. Yes. Earl Warren appointed him, and then he appointed. . . . The one that took Nate Milner's place was from the Central Valley—Modesto, I think.

MORRIS: The names that I came across were Lee Payne, Harvey Hastain, William Silva.

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1. S.B. 223, 1951 Reg. Sess., Cal. Stat., ch. 715.

ERWIN: Hastain's from Imperial.

MORRIS: Okay, that's further south.

ERWIN: Yes. Imperial Valley.

MORRIS: Paul Denney? Does that sound right?

ERWIN: Yes. He was from the north.

MORRIS: I know Mr. Carty was interested in commercial fishing, the sardine problem. Did each member of the commission sort of have their own special interest?

ERWIN: Yes. They were appointed because they knew that industry well, and that was the reason they were appointed. Nate Milner was trout. But this man from Modesto took his place. Earl Warren wouldn't reappoint him.

MORRIS: Did that cause any problems between you and Mr. Warren?

ERWIN: No. I always got along very well with Earl Warren. In fact, he asked my opinion of two of the commissioners he had appointed. He called my office one Saturday, and Hatfield was in his office on the other side of the capitol.

The governor said to me, "Tom, let's go for a walk in the park." So we did, and Hatfield was looking out the window. He said, "I saw you walking with His Nibs." I said, "Yes." You know what he wanted? He'd heard whispers that Paul Denney in the north and Hastain of Imperial were taking strange women to the Fish and Game Commission meetings. Paul Denney's wife was a very fine lady, and so was Hastain of Imperial's wife. I knew both of them; they were very fine women.

We were walking along, and the governor said, "How's Fish and Game going?" I said, "Governor, I know exactly what you're after. And if you don't do something about it, it's going to develop into an awful scandal, because it's getting around every place that these two commissioners leave their wives at home and they bring a strange woman to these commission meetings." He said, "Yes, Tom, I've heard of it, and I'm going to take care of it." When their term was up, he reappointed

somebody else. It made Ben Hulse, a very powerful senator in Imperial, sore that he hadn't reappointed Hastain.

MORRIS: Would Ben Hulse have known about this problem on the Fish and Game Commission?

ERWIN: No, he hadn't. Oh, Ben was furious. He called me over to his office and he said, "Tom, I'm mad as hell that he didn't reappoint Hastain to the Fish and Game." I said, "Ben, do you know why? Now I don't want to be quoted; I don't want to get into this deal. But every time that they have a Fish and Game Committee meeting, he brings a strange woman. You know his wife."

He said, "Tom, that clears the air as far as I'm concerned. I won't bring your name into it." But you just can't do those kinds of things in public. This Paul Denney was. . . . Well, I never thought he was too sharp. But his wife, Susie, was a very nice lady, and I don't know why he would do a thing like that to his wife. But some of these old guys are philanderers, believe me. [Laughter]

#### High Jinks in the Typing Pool

MORRIS: Were there problems like that with any of the other commissions that were supposed to advise the governor and the legislature?

ERWIN: Well, the committees that I was very interested in. . . . I was chairman of Fish and Game [Assembly Fish and Game Committee], chairman of Revenue and Tax, chairman of Livestock and Dairies [Assembly Livestock and Dairies Committee], and chairman of Rules [Assembly Rules Committee], which was the one that handled all the business of the assembly.

MORRIS: Did the Rules Committee make the committee assignments?

ERWIN: All the secretaries are hired by the Rules Committee, and if any complaints come in, why. . . . It was laughable that two men from the assembly that were chairmen of the Rules Committee always wanted to look the stenographers over.

MORRIS: They wanted pretty ones?

in—she was the head stenographer—and I said, "Now, Juanita, I want you to hire and fire all of the pool employees"—and there were about 100 or more of these secretaries. I said, "If there's any complaint comes from the assemblymen to me, why, then I'll call you in and we'll talk it over." She said, "Mr. Erwin, I never had this happen before. I'll do my best." And she did. She was just a wonderful woman. She did a wonderful job. But temptation was always right on your doorstep.

MORRIS: Some of the assemblymen would have particular people they wanted to be hired as secretaries? Was that the problem?

ERWIN: Yes. You take one man. One of the very strong creameries down in Fresno had this girl working down there, and she was philandering with practically all the help. And the wives came down and were going to tear the building down if they didn't fire her. So they fired her. The next thing, she came up here and she was hired in the stenographic pool.

MORRIS: For the assembly.

ERWIN: Yes. And one of the assemblymen, he was. . . . Oh, she was a very striking, wonderful looking woman. He was living over at the El Rancho [Hotel] with her, and they were dancing at night together. In those days they had glass-heeled shoes.

MORRIS: Cinderella shoes.

ERWIN: I guess so. He was buying her those, and buying her dresses, and he'd tell me, "Oh, Tom, it's marvelous. When she lays her head on my shoulder, we're waltzing together, oh, I feel out of this world!" I said, "Your wife will find out about it, and you'll get in trouble." "Oh, no. She's dumb. All she wants to do is run the store down in San Diego." That's where he came up from.

She suspected something, and she put a detective on him. So the detective reported to her everything that was going on, that he bought her these dresses and bought her the shoes. And he'd go down and hit the cash register. Because in those days,

all we got was \$100 a month. He would go down and hit the cash register.

MORRIS: In the back of the family store? I'm not clear where the cash register was.

ERWIN: They had a store.

MORRIS: So he'd go get some money from the store's cash register.

ERWIN: And he would go down and hit the cash register at the store and take it out, and he'd tell his wife it costs so much to live up in Sacramento. So he went home this weekend to get some more money, and she met him when he got off the plane. She said, "I want you to sign this paper, and this paper, and this paper." He said, "What are they?" She said, "This gives me the store. This paper gives me the home. And this paper gives me"--oh, something else. He said, "I won't sign them." "Oh, yes, you will," she said. "I've had a detective on you for the last four months." She enumerated everything he'd been doing.

So I said, "Well, I told you." He was telling me about it. I said, "Now. . . ." He said, "I've nothing now. I'll have to get the lobbyists to give me some money, because I'll be needing it." He had, I think, two terms after that. I said, "Now you'll have to marry the girl and make her respectable." "Oh, no, I won't," he said. "I'll run off to Mexico." He married her.

MORRIS: Did he? Did the lobbyists come through with enough money for his election campaign?

ERWIN: I guess so. I don't know anything about his finances from then on.

#### Speakers in the 1950s; Regulating Lobbyists

MORRIS: When you're chairman of the Rules Committee, that usually means you're pretty close to the assembly speaker, doesn't it?

ERWIN: Oh, yes.

MORRIS: Who was speaker when you were chairman of Rules?

ERWIN: I nominated him on the floor. Wait a minute. He was from down around San Francisco way.

MORRIS: Was that Luther Lincoln?

ERWIN: Yes, Lincoln.<sup>1</sup>

MORRIS: They called him "Abe."

ERWIN: Abe Lincoln, yes. He's dead now.

MORRIS: Yes, I'd heard he died. We talked to him five or six years ago. He was one of the Young Turks, wasn't he? He wanted to do different things in the assembly?

ERWIN: Before that, I nominated [Assemblyman James W.] Silliman.<sup>1</sup> I nominated him on the floor after Sam Collins. He followed Sam Collins.

MORRIS: Sam Collins had had some problems, hadn't he, too?

ERWIN: Yes. He served as speaker, I think, three terms. Six years. I nominated Lincoln on the floor, and he won by two votes.

MORRIS: That was close.

ERWIN: It was a very close race.

MORRIS: Were you counting the votes and keeping track of who was on  
. . .

ERWIN: No.

[End Tape 3, Side A]

[Begin Tape 3, Side B]

ERWIN: I convinced the assemblymen from Orange County to vote for Abe Lincoln, because the south pretty well controlled the speakership, you know, previous to that.

MORRIS: How was that?

ERWIN: They had more legislators from down there, more assemblymen. The assembly wasn't reapportioned. They reapportioned the

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1. Lincoln was speaker from 1955 through 1958, following Silliman, who was speaker in 1953-1954.

senate, but at that time the senators represented counties. And the north had more senators than the south did, and then they reapportioned it according to population. That's why they have so many senators in the south now, quite a lot more than they do here in the north.

MORRIS: In that case, how come you became interested in supporting Mr. Lincoln for speaker?

ERWIN: Well, I didn't like the man that was running against him.

MORRIS: Who was that?

ERWIN: I forget who it was. He was one of these characters that was pretty much controlled by old Artie Samish at that time. I didn't have to [be] because I had my own money. You'd have them eating in old Samish's room. He had about eighteen assemblymen that he had that solid vote, and he fed them practically every day, lunch and dinner. He had this room, and he would pass through and he'd say, "Have a nice luncheon, boys." I never would go in, because I didn't want to be. . . .

I represented Whittier, which was a very strait-laced community. The big Republican vote was in Whittier, and I was able to carry the whole district. The man that I succeeded—he came from Whittier, Kepple—he was supposed to be defeated, and on a recount he won by fifteen votes. So the Whittier group came across the hill, and I was quite prominent in these different groups, Farm Bureau, and Production Credit, and they came down. I was down at the dairy, and my sister Jennie said, "Tom, there's a delegation coming down, and they want to see you." So I got in my car and drove up to the home place where I had the office. My sister Jennie had put about seven or eight folding chairs in the office, and I went in. Here they were all sitting.

I said, "Well, gentlemen, what can I do for you?" They said, "We're going to run you for the legislature." I said, "What?" "We're going to run you for the legislature." I said,

"Oh, no, I'm too busy. I have too many irons in the fire now, and I just. . . ." "Now don't close the door on us. You're the only man that can win on the Republican ticket, so you'd better think it over." So I did and told them I would run. I won by about 5,000 votes, and the last time I ran I won by 16,000 in that district.

MORRIS: You also introduced a bill to regulate lobbying in the legislature [1950].

ERWIN: Yes.

MORRIS: Did that come out of the Rules Committee, too?

ERWIN: Yes.

MORRIS: You smile. Tell me about that. Had Governor Warren asked the legislature to do . . .

ERWIN: He asked me to do it.

MORRIS: Had you had an interim committee looking into lobbying or something?

ERWIN: It was aimed at old Art Samish. He made a terrible mistake. He went to jail, you know. He went to Leavenworth.

MORRIS: Didn't he go to the place in Los Angeles, Terminal Island or something like that, for income tax evasion?

ERWIN: No, he went someplace in the north. I forget where it was [State of Washington].

MORRIS: That bill also said that legislators could not hold outside jobs and things like that.

ERWIN: Yes, but it was watered down. Earl Warren thought it was aimed at him.

MORRIS: At the governor?

ERWIN: Yes. He lobbied all the time, too, you know.

MORRIS: As the governor, yes. The governor comes to the legislature and says, "These are the bills we need for California."

ERWIN: Yes, and some of them, it affects their district and they won't go along with it. But he thought that I was helping the

lobbyists too much, Earl Warren did, and he raised hell with me. When I introduced that bill, he asked me to introduce that bill. I did, and the lobbyists got sore as hell, so I was between the devil and the deep blue sea. Gee, it upset me something terrible. The bill that I put through to regulate the lobbyists—he called me up and said that he wanted to discuss it with me. So I came up to Sacramento and they said, "The governor's ready to discuss this bill with you." I said, "Well, if he's going to take me in there and cuss me up one side and down the other, I'm not going in. He can do anything he wants with it." He sent word out, "Oh, no, Tom, you come on in." And so he went over it and okayed the bill and signed it.

Comparing Warren and Goodwin Knight as Governors

- MORRIS: Would that be [William T.] Bill Sweigert who would come and talk to the legislators in Warren's office?
- ERWIN: Yes. He had his lobbyists.
- MORRIS: You remember Mr. Sweigert?
- ERWIN: Yes.
- MORRIS: Did he generally see things the way the legislature did, or was he more likely to see it the way Warren did?
- ERWIN: No, he was quite neutral. He had to be, or the legislature would have kicked him out. But he was very honest and very thorough, and he would explain to you the governor's thinking on a certain piece of legislation.

When I was chairman of Revenue and Tax under [Governor Goodwin] Goodie Knight, he would call my office and get me on the phone. He'd say, "Don't let that bill out of your committee. I don't want it on my desk."

Earl Warren, if he gave you his word, it's as good as gold; he was a very honest man. But Goodie Knight, you couldn't believe a word he told you. When his first wife [Arrella] died and he married this other woman [Virginia, in 1954], he was out

on the yacht of the man that started the Home Building and Loan—I forget his name right now.

MORRIS: [Howard] Ahmanson?<sup>1</sup>

ERWIN: Yes, I think that's it. Today it's a tremendous deal. But, you see, Ahmanson was supporting. . . .

MORRIS: Was he supporting Goodie [in 1958], or was he supporting [U.S. Senator William] Bill Knowland, or Nixon?

ERWIN: He was supporting Goodie Knight, because Goodie Knight handled all his stuff that he wanted. He got away with a bunch of things that weren't kept on the up and up, like the Platte Ranch in the San Fernando Valley. I forget how many thousand acres it was. He bought it to subdivide it. All the roads put through, he wanted the county to pay for them, the County of Los Angeles. And he got away with it.

More Agricultural Concerns: Subdividing Farm Land, Smog, Industry Interests

MORRIS: My goodness. Did the Agriculture Committee have any concerns about converting agricultural land to subdivisions?

ERWIN: Not too much, because practically all of the ranches. . . . Like, I had about 200 and some acres in southern California, and the taxes are what did away with those farms. Taxes were so high, and they offered so much money for these ranches to subdivide them, that everything that I had was subdivided.

MORRIS: They made you an offer you couldn't refuse?

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 1. Virginia Knight recalled in a 1977 oral history that the yacht belonged to Frank Muller, and that the wedding trip was interrupted by controversy over whether Ahmanson, Knight's choice for vice chairman of the Republican State Central Committee, would be accepted by then Vice President Richard Nixon. See California's First Lady 1954-1958, Regional Oral History Office, University of California, Berkeley, 1987.

- ERWIN: No. They raised the taxes so high, no use of hanging on to it. And then they offered you a big price at that time for the land, so I just sold all mine.
- MORRIS: The private developers would offer so much money you couldn't afford not to take it?
- ERWIN: That's right.
- MORRIS: Wasn't there a piece of legislation to keep the taxes lower on land if it did remain agricultural, something called the Williamson Act?<sup>1</sup>
- ERWIN: That didn't apply to southern California. It applied to the San Joaquin Valley and the north.
- MORRIS: Didn't you farm fellows from the south ask for it to apply to you, too?
- ERWIN: We couldn't do a thing about it.
- MORRIS: How come?
- ERWIN: Because they moved right in beside us and the land was all subdivided.
- MORRIS: Your farmland had already been subdivided?
- ERWIN: Yes. I was down to twelve acres. No, fourteen acres—the two acres where my home was. And the Erwin School is built on the eighteen acres that I sold to Bodger Seed [Company]. I got, I think it was, \$2,500 an acre, and he sold it to the school for \$10,000 an acre, and that's where the Erwin School is built. Land values went so high (they are right now), and there's nothing. . . . You couldn't farm it and come out of it; the taxes were outrageous. They wanted it all subdivided into homes, and the people were moving into southern California so fast, the smog was down there and everything.
- MORRIS: Wasn't smog in Goodwin Knight's 1954 campaign?
- ERWIN: Yes, I think so.

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1. A.B. 2695, 1965 Reg. Sess., Cal. Stat., ch. 2020.

MORRIS: And you were having the problem also out on your ranch?

ERWIN: Oh, yes, we were having problems. You'd put in spinach, and if there would come a little shower of rain, it would bring all that stuff down. Lead would fall on the leaves of the spinach and burn holes in them, and you couldn't sell it. I had twenty acres that I had to plow under, the smog was so bad.

MORRIS: This would be hard to put a date on, but do you remember when you started having trouble with your crops because of smog?

ERWIN: When the people began moving in so fast; that's what brought it on. Too many subdivisions. You know, one of the smartest women in the world was Mae West. "Come up and see me some time." She put all her money in land between Los Angeles and the ocean, and I bet you she was worth, when she died, \$500 million.

MORRIS: Mae West?

ERWIN: Mae West.

MORRIS: I never think of her as being a California lady. I think of her as being sort of show-business international.

ERWIN: [Laughter] She sure was. And one of her favorite places to eat was on Wilshire Boulevard there. I forget the name of it [Brown Derby], but she would be there with two of her guards practically every night for dinner. She had two or three guards.

MORRIS: It sounds like you spent a lot of time in Los Angeles City proper.

ERWIN: Oh, yes, I did. I had to, because I'd drive in to. . . . One day I would have to go to the Farm Bureau, and another day I'd have to go to the Production Credit, and then another day to the California Milk Producers. When you're a director or a president of them. . . . I was president of Production, president of the Farm Bureau, and president of the California Milk Producers.

MORRIS: Did you keep on being a member of those boards after you were elected to the assembly?

- ERWIN: Yes. For years they kept me on. No, I was only president of the Farm Bureau for two years.
- MORRIS: But did you stay on the board while you were in the legislature?
- ERWIN: Oh, yes. But the presidency was rotated [after] two years, and one of the finest men, I think, that was one of the attorneys for the Farm Bureau. . . . He was a man in San Francisco. I forget his name right now, but his daughter was drowned in that Dead Man's Cove. She was up on a big rock and went to sleep, and a big wave came in and took her out.
- MORRIS: There are bad tides and currents in San Francisco Bay. Did the Farm Bureau attorney fellow help make suggestions for legislation?
- ERWIN: Yes.
- MORRIS: There were a couple of important bills at that point. There was one about milk pricing and quality standards. Was that something that your experience was helpful in? You don't remember that.
- ERWIN: I didn't get that.
- MORRIS: There was a bill called the Milk Control Act.<sup>1</sup> Why was that needed?
- ERWIN: Well, it was passed by the legislature. I forget whether I carried it or not.
- MORRIS: Did you sometimes abstain on a bill related to the milk industry since you were in the milk business yourself?
- ERWIN: Oh, yes. I knew all about it, because on farm legislation pertaining to milk they referred to me, because I was one of the largest producers in the state of California at that time, milking 1,200 cows.

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1. S.B. 344, 1947 Reg. Sess., Cal. Stat., ch. 939.

- MORRIS: Was it all right for you to go ahead and vote on a piece of legislation regarding milk?
- ERWIN: Oh, you had to. If you introduced it, you had to carry it and you voted for it, too.
- MORRIS: That's interesting, because nowadays sometimes people say, "I have a conflict of interest. I'm in the cattle business, and I shouldn't vote on a piece of cattle legislation." That wasn't a concern, then?
- ERWIN: No, not in those days.

#### V COMMITTEE CHAIRMANSHIPS

Revenue and Taxation, 1953-1954: Thoughts on Liquor Licensing, Caspar Weinberger, Water Resources

- MORRIS: How did you get to be chairman of Revenue and Tax? That's a pretty important spot.
- ERWIN: Yes, it was. I was voted chairman in 1953.
- MORRIS: You get elected to chairman of Revenue and Tax?
- ERWIN: The speaker appoints the chairman. The chairman of Revenue and Tax [Assemblyman Jonathan Hollibaugh] ran against Lincoln, and he was defeated.<sup>1</sup> I nominated Lincoln on the floor. He wanted me to take the chairmanship of the committee. He wanted to hit old Joe Hollibaugh over the head. That was one way of doing it.
- MORRIS: Hollibaugh had been elected the same year you were, wasn't he? He was also elected in '43.
- ERWIN: Yes, the same year.
- MORRIS: So he decided that he should be speaker.
- ERWIN: Yes. He ran for the speakership, and was defeated by Abe Lincoln.

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 1. For Lincoln, read James Silliman. See Erwin's correction on next page.

MORRIS: Did Hollibaugh have any qualifications for the job?

ERWIN: I didn't think he did, but he thought he did. And Mary Ann, his wife, thought he did.

MORRIS: Was she helping run him for speaker?

ERWIN: Oh, she was doing everything she could to help him out.

MORRIS: Really? What did that involve, having people over for dinner and things like that?

ERWIN: No. He didn't spend any money. He was on the payroll of somebody else. Let's see; I forget the name of the guy. But old Joe was. . . . I got the chairmanship of the committee on Revenue and Tax. Lincoln wanted me and kicked him out. No, it wasn't Lincoln. It was the man that I nominated from. . . . Oh, I forget his name. He represented Monterey County in the legislature. I forget his name.

MORRIS: There was a Silliman.

ERWIN: Silliman, that's the one. I nominated Silliman on the floor, too. He served one term.

MORRIS: Silliman I've heard referred to as sort of a new breed with a new idea of cleaning up the assembly.

ERWIN: Yes. He's dead now, too. When he got to be speaker, instead of running again for the legislature, he ran for the senate and was defeated.

MORRIS: There was a reapportionment in there.

ERWIN: No.

MORRIS: Fifty-two?

ERWIN: No. I think it was later that that came. But he ran for the senate and was defeated.

MORRIS: When Mr. Silliman was speaker, isn't that when you had a big to-do about liquor licensing?

ERWIN: Yes. That's what hit old Samish over the head. But instead of keeping his big mouth shut, he bragged to the newspapers and different ones that he controlled the legislature. Then they pinned a lot of crooked stuff onto him, and he went to prison.

- MORRIS: It wasn't just Samish. There were a very small number of liquor licenses that were being sold for huge prices. Wasn't that what it was about?
- ERWIN: Yes. And he dealt in them, too. And he had a lot of stock in the Greyhound Bus Company.
- MORRIS: I don't know that I'd heard that. Did Greyhound Bus have some interests in the legislature, too?
- ERWIN: No. They had their lobbyist; I think Samish was the lobbyist for them. He had eighteen solid votes. He threw money into their campaign; he never put a penny in mine.
- MORRIS: Did he offer you?
- ERWIN: Oh, yes. I sent it back.
- MORRIS: There was a young fellow there in the assembly by the time that Silliman was there named Caspar Weinberger.
- ERWIN: Oh, yes. He was a very fine man.
- MORRIS: How come you stuck him with investigation of the liquor licensing? That must have been a dreadful job.
- ERWIN: I don't know. I didn't know if he had very much to do with it. But he was one of the smartest men that the legislature ever had.
- MORRIS: Really?
- ERWIN: Yes. The president of the United States now has him. When the president was governor of this state, Caspar was chairman of . . . . He handled the state finances [director of the state Department of Finance].
- MORRIS: But I understand that there was some question about that, that some of the people who had supported Mr. Reagan for governor thought Mr. Weinberger was too liberal in his thinking. They didn't want him to be in the governor's cabinet. Remember that?
- ERWIN: Yes, but he kept him, and they were great friends. They've been friends ever since. They're talking something about replacing him in Washington, and the president said nothing doing. Caspar was, I thought, a very honest, very intelligent man.

MORRIS: He had some ideas on how the departments ought to be organized and things like that.

ERWIN: Yes. He was a very bright fellow.

[End Tape 3, Side B]

[Begin Tape 4, Side A]

MORRIS: We were beginning to get into concern about water resources then. Remember, Mr. Weinberger helped organize the Department of Water Resources. Remember that?

ERWIN: Oh, yes.

MORRIS: And the Revenue and Tax Committee must have been involved in the plans to figure out how much it was going to cost to build more dams and get water to the new subdivisions. Did you agree with Goodwin Knight's plans and his idea about how much it was going to cost?

ERWIN: I forget that.

MORRIS: Goodwin Knight wanted, I think it was, \$57 million to start work on the Feather River Project.

ERWIN: Yes. He didn't get it, though.

MORRIS: Did Revenue and Tax think that was too much money?

ERWIN: The last two years, he was very discredited.

MORRIS: How so?

ERWIN: The legislature didn't like him. He would call me in and say, "Don't let that bill out of the Committee on Rules. I don't want it on my desk."

MORRIS: That would be hard to deal with.

ERWIN: Yes, it was.

MORRIS: Did you think that the state didn't need to spend that kind of money for water development?

ERWIN: I don't know what was involved, but the north didn't want all that water going south, because they were afraid it would be detrimental to the north here. Of course, you can see what they're doing now in the High Sierras. Even that Mono Lake has

gone way down, and the fish and wildlife, they're dying from it. It's getting very, very low. You see, the fresh water end took care of the seagulls and everything that nested up there in Mono Lake. Now it's getting so dry that the Indians, they go and gather the eggs. They can walk right out onto the island there where the seagulls nest, and they take the eggs and take them home and eat them.

MORRIS: That's a shame. There were some concerns about water quality, also, in the forties. I remember hearing that [Assemblyman] Randal Dickey was active in that legislation. Was he there in your time?

ERWIN: Oh, yes. I knew Randy very, very well. He had a girl for every corner of the legislature. He was chairman of Rules before me, and every girl had to pass his muster, or he wouldn't hire them.

MORRIS: Do I understand that beauty was more important than spelling? Is that the idea?

ERWIN: I guess so.

MORRIS: [Laughter] Just checking.

#### Rules Committee Housekeeping Chores, 1955-1956

ERWIN: When I got to be chairman of Rules, he took all the minutes and everything of the meetings before him and took them off to some ranch he had in the wilderness and burned them.

MORRIS: My goodness! So you didn't have any records of the previous

. . .

ERWIN: So we couldn't go back and look up what he was doing.

MORRIS: You didn't know what the rules were.

ERWIN: When that new [capitol annex] building was built with those offices, there was quite a scandal over it for quite a while.

MORRIS: Why was that?

ERWIN: Well, they said that they got money from contractors for this and money for that. There's no record of it, so it's just

hearsay. But hearsay went in the legislature really quite a ways, so don't poke me. [Laughter]

MORRIS: This is the office building that was built in the forties.

ERWIN: Yes. That new office building.

MORRIS: Before then, you must have been pretty crowded in the original capitol building.

ERWIN: Oh, yes, it was terrible. We had a couple or three stenographers that handled practically everything for us. The legislature was smaller when I went there for a few years, until the new building was built, and then everybody wanted their own stenographer.

This one man, he had a wife that had drooping eyelids, and she would put them up like that. She kept tab on him, boy. And he had this great, big, heavy-set woman; she wore big shoes, you know. But she was a wonderful stenographer.

So when I was chairman of Rules, this guy came to me one day on the floor of the house and he said, "What are you discriminating against me for?" I said, "I don't know what you're talking about." "Well," he said, "you gave me that big tub of a stenographer." I said, "Is she inefficient and not doing a good job?" But his wife was the one that made him take her, and she was just a number-one stenographer. I said, "Is she not doing the work right?" "She's making fun of me. She's such a big, fat tub. I want another one." "Well," I said, "you just prefer charges against her. I'll call Juanita Depondina up—she's handling it—and we'll go over it. If you want her fired, why, I'll let Juanita take care of it." "Oh, no, no, no. She'd sue me." "Well, then," I said, "Don't bother me." [Laughter] His wife wouldn't let him do it. She would lay those eyelids like this.

MORRIS: Did she have them sewn up or use Scotch tape?

ERWIN: I don't know what she had, but her eyelids dropped down. When she wanted to see good, she would lift them like that.

[Gestures]

MORRIS: Lift them up to keep an eye on things.

ERWIN: She kept her eye on the old guy, and he thought I was discriminating against him. I said, "I've nothing to do with it. Juanita handles the stenographers. I delegated that authority to her and she's doing a wonderful job. Now if you want to prefer charges against that girl, I'll call Juanita up and you can explain it to her." "Oh, no, no, she'd sue me." "Well, then," I said, "don't bother me."

MORRIS: Did the Rules Committee in general . . .

ERWIN: They handled all the hiring and firing.

MORRIS: Did they also kind of review the bills in front of the legislature and decide what ought to pass and what ought not?

ERWIN: No.

MORRIS: Was there a party caucus that did that?

ERWIN: In a way, there was. But it was referred to a committee, and if the committee passed on it, why, it pretty often would get through and become law.

MORRIS: The whole house would vote on it.

ERWIN: But if there was a lot of opposition to it, then we couldn't get it out of the committee.

#### Republican Party Activities; Minorities in Government

MORRIS: But did the Republicans in the assembly get together?

ERWIN: They were in control all the time I was there.

MORRIS: Did you meet together and decide what you liked and what you didn't like?

ERWIN: No. They would have their caucuses like the Democrats would have theirs, and neither the Republicans nor Democrats knew--we didn't know what was going on with the Democrats.

MORRIS: Did you stay in touch with what the Republican party, the state central committee was doing, and take an interest in the statewide political races?

ERWIN: Yes, I did. And [Thomas H.] Tom Kuchel, you know, was the [U.S.] Senator from California. I was invited to this big dinner over at El Macero Country Club, and this woman sitting beside me said, "We're going to defeat that Kuchel." And I said, "Well, what are you going to defeat him for?" "Well, he's too liberal and we don't like him." I said, "Well, you know what's going to happen? You're going to get a Democrat, and he's going to be worse than Tom Kuchel. Tom is a very fine man in my book," and I turned my back on her. I said, "Elect a left-wing Democrat. Is that what you want?" "We'll defeat him, too." Have they defeated . . .

MORRIS: Alan Cranston. Are you thinking of Alan Cranston?

ERWIN: Alan Cranston won, and he's still there.

MORRIS: Right. That got kind of crossed up, didn't it, in 1958, when we had two Republican senators at that point, and then Bill Knowland ran for governor and convinced Goodie that he should run for the U. S. Senate. Did you folks in the legislature offer any suggestions on that or have any opinions on it?

ERWIN: Nixon and. . . . Who else? They were for Knowland, Nixon and somebody else. And Bill Knowland was defeated.

MORRIS: Badly.

ERWIN: Yes, badly defeated.

MORRIS: I was thinking of a few years earlier, when [former Assemblyman Thomas] Tom Werdel, who was also elected the same year you were, made a try for the nomination for governor. You remember that, in '52?

ERWIN: Yes.

MORRIS: Was there something special that he disagreed with Warren on?

ERWIN: No.

MORRIS: Did he look to you like he had the capability to be governor?

- ERWIN: He ran against Earl Warren, didn't he?
- MORRIS: He ran for the nomination against Warren. He lost in the primary. It looked like there was beginning to be opposition to Warren.
- ERWIN: I was for Earl Warren all the time. I came in with Earl Warren. He came in as governor, and I came in as a legislator.
- MORRIS: Did he come over and campaign for you in 1942?
- ERWIN: No, but I met him and I knew him.
- MORRIS: You met him during the campaign?
- ERWIN: Yes. He was down in Los Angeles, and I was at this meeting. He was there and shook hands. At that time I didn't drink, and he had a drink and he says, "Don't you want a drink?" I said, "No, I don't. Thank you, Governor, thank you." But he was a good governor, I'll say that for Earl Warren. He was a fine man. He gave you his word, as good as gold.
- MORRIS: Did the people around Whittier in your district think he was too liberal?
- ERWIN: No, they didn't.
- MORRIS: They didn't object to some of his social welfare ideas, and mental health, and public health?
- ERWIN: No. He was very strong for the coloreds, the colored people.
- MORRIS: Was he?
- ERWIN: Yes.
- MORRIS: Why was that, do you suppose?
- ERWIN: I don't know. I didn't ask him why he was. But he did something and had—wasn't he for somebody that was from the Virgin Islands?
- MORRIS: Walter Gordon, who was later governor of the Virgin Islands.<sup>1</sup> He'd played football with Walter Gordon at UC Berkeley [University of California, Berkeley].

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1. See interview with Walter Gordon, Regional Oral History Office, University of California, Berkeley, 1979.

ERWIN: Oh, he did?

MORRIS: Yes, Walt Gordon. There were maybe five black students at Cal in 1913, and they played football together. While Warren was governor, he appointed Mr. Gordon to the Adult Authority, the sentencing body. Was that a very surprising thing in those days?

ERWIN: No.

MORRIS: Did you meet Mr. Gordon, have anything to do with him?

ERWIN: I knew him, but I didn't have anything to do with him. But I understand he was a very fine individual.

MORRIS: You had a couple of colored people in the legislature. [Augustus F.] Gus Hawkins was in the assembly.

ERWIN: Yes, but Hawkins was one of these guys—you couldn't tell that he was colored. He looked like a white man.

MORRIS: Light skinned?

ERWIN: He didn't look as if he were a colored man. But Gus was quite a character.

MORRIS: Was he? How come?

ERWIN: He was a smart colored boy. He had his colored girlfriends; he was noted for that.

MORRIS: Would they come to Sacramento and visit?

ERWIN: Oh, yes.

MORRIS: Did you and he sit on any of the same committees?

ERWIN: I don't think so. He didn't have very important committees when I was there.

MORRIS: Did he get along generally well with the other fellows in the legislature?

ERWIN: Oh, yes. He and [Assemblyman Vincent] Vince Thomas were—Vince Thomas was from San Pedro. Vince was on several committees; he was on Fish and Game with me. We were down in Imperial [County] one time checking on something. They had us for a big fish fry dinner that night, and they picked us up in boats with outboard motors and took us across the Rio Grande and into one of these

bays. The Imperial boys had a cabin back in there, and one of them said to me, "Come on, Tom, let's go out and catch some catfish." So we went out. They had—we went out fishing—catfish that big, and they were in a wooden crate with boards on top so they couldn't get out, and they were put down in the water. They were all alive. So when they took them in, Vince Thomas said, "Are you going to eat that?" I said, "Hell, yes, sure I am. It's good." So he tasted it and he says, "Well, I thought this was only nigger food, but it sure is good."  
[Laughter] Oh, you run onto some awfully strange things.

- MORRIS: Mr. Thomas was there for a long, long time, wasn't he?
- ERWIN: Yes. He was a very good legislator, too. Vince did a good job for his district. He was on Fish and Game, too, you know.
- MORRIS: I thought his primary interest was the tidelands oil that was off the coast outside of San Pedro.
- ERWIN: That was part of it. But he was very interested in Fish and Game because they netted sardines at that time, a great, great amount of sardines. I went out one time during the war. At night, when these sardines are swimming, it's like you look down and see light down there in the water.
- MORRIS: Their bodies are phosphorescent.
- ERWIN: And the boats with a net would run around this great thing, and bring them in, and dump the—well, just millions of sardines. They needed them during the war for food, and they were ground up and sold to dairies.
- MORRIS: Fish meal for feed.
- ERWIN: A lot of by-products from the sardines.
- MORRIS: Did Vince Thomas have any idea as to why the sardines sort of disappeared by the end of the war?
- ERWIN: They were fished out. You see, during the war the boats worked overtime. They were out practically every night getting sardines. And they just fished them out. And then they came

north to San Francisco and fished that out; so the sardine industry was just ruined.

MORRIS: Did the fact that it was wartime have anything to do with it?

ERWIN: Yes.

MORRIS: You couldn't go further out and catch other kinds of fish?

ERWIN: Well, they wouldn't go further out; they were afraid of the Japanese. The Japanese did come in, you know.<sup>1</sup> On San Simeon, two or three volleys were fired there, and it scared old [newspaper publisher William Randolph] Hearst out. He and Marion Davies went a-way up into the mountains. He bought a bunch of land up in Shasta County, I think.

MORRIS: Right. Big place up there. Would it have been Mr. Hearst who made a big fuss and said we have to get all the Japanese out of the cities in California?

ERWIN: I don't know. But he fled into the mountains, I know that. Well, we're getting. . . .

MORRIS: Okay, is it about time to stop, do you think?

ERWIN: Yes.

[End Tape 4, Side A]

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1. For a further discussion of this incident, see Conversations with Earl Warren on California Government, Regional Oral History Office, University of California, Berkeley, 1982, pp. 1-2.

[Session 3: November 23, 1987]

[Begin Tape 5, Side A]

Voting Procedures; Newspaper Influence; Highway Bill Maneuvers

MORRIS: I wanted to go back to a couple of questions like, do you recall where you sat in the assembly chamber when you were first elected?

ERWIN: What?

MORRIS: What seat you had in the assembly.

ERWIN: Yes. I was in the middle section, second seat back. It was on the aisle, from the front.

MORRIS: And who was your . . .

ERWIN: Well, let's see if I can think of him. George Butters, I got him. He was from Imperial. I got him as my seatmate because, having the seniority, you could choose your seatmate if you wanted to. This man chose me to go and be his seatmate. After he died, then I took the center aisle seat. Then I could choose my seatmate. George Butters, and then there was a man from Riverside that took his place when he was killed.<sup>1</sup>

MORRIS: In those days, if you were not on the floor, would your seatmate vote for you sometimes?

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1. Butters was succeeded by Edwin Bulen, San Diego.

ERWIN: Well, I didn't like to have people vote for me, and I would lock it so they couldn't push the button.

MORRIS: Good for you.

ERWIN: Yes. I didn't like to have my seatmate vote, because I might not have wanted to vote myself the way he would vote. So whenever I was called out or had to go someplace, why, I would lock it. You could lock your voting machine so they couldn't vote.

MORRIS: Did a lot of the men in the assembly have their partners vote for them?

ERWIN: Yes, a lot of them did. They caught one voting on a tight vote. This fellow was sick and wasn't there. And to prevent that kind of a thing from happening was the reason I would lock mine when I was gone.

MORRIS: Were there times when that could make a difference?

ERWIN: Oh, yes.

MORRIS: Do you remember any particular cases where it did?

ERWIN: With the vote on the highway bill, you had to watch everybody, because a lot of the oil companies were opposed to the highway bill going through.<sup>1</sup> So they could sell more oil and gasoline. Look at the freeways we have now. I voted for the freeway bill and did everything I could to see that it went through. The oil people controlled the man on Revenue and Tax. He wouldn't let the bill out of the committee. So we found out from the legislative counsel [that] if we'd send a skeleton bill over to the senate, the senate would put all the revenue into the bill; and then, when it came back for concurrence, instead of sixty votes, all we'd have to have is forty-two votes.

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1. A.B. 46, 1947 First Ex. Sess., Cal. Stat., ch. 11.

MORRIS: A simple majority.

ERWIN: A simple majority.

MORRIS: That was pretty clever.

ERWIN: And they went wild when they saw what was happening.

MORRIS: This is what you did on that highway bill?

ERWIN: Yes. I voted for it. There was one man from Los Angeles. His brother was on the city council of Los Angeles. They apparently were opposed to the highway bill. And the brother in Los Angeles on the city council told his brother to vote against the highway bill. One of the newspapermen came to me and he said that the word came in from this fellow on the city council for his brother to vote against concurrence.

I went to him and said, "What's your brother doing asking you to vote against it?" He said, "How did you find out?" The Los Angeles Times was for the highway bill, and the Whittier News was for it. The Whittier News was in my district, and a very fine paper at that time. The Los Angeles Independent, came to me and told me about the brother of the man that was representing them in Sacramento. The one up here representing in the legislature, he couldn't imagine how I found out. He said, "How in the world did you find out so quick?"

I said, "I have ways of finding out. You'd better vote for this because if you don't, you'll probably not be supported the next time you run for the legislature." So he voted for it. We needed every single vote we could get. This man that just retired in Washington, Weinberger, he voted for the highway bill, too. Of course, his wife was ill and he quit.

MORRIS: Right, from the president's cabinet. He was one of the bright young fellows that came into the assembly after you did.

ERWIN: Yes, he is. He's very smart. He served, I think, maybe six years while I was there.

MORRIS: Wasn't he assigned to a special committee to look into . . .

- ERWIN: He took [Assemblyman Albert] Wollenberg's place.<sup>1</sup> Wollenberg represented that district in San Francisco.
- MORRIS: Wollenberg was supposed to be really close to Earl Warren.
- ERWIN: Wollenberg was chairman of Ways and Means when I first went to the legislature. He was a great friend of Earl Warren's.
- MORRIS: But in those days, didn't the governor get to suggest who he'd like as chairman of Ways and Means?
- ERWIN: Yes. He carried the governor's program.
- MORRIS: Right. But would Mr. Wollenberg disagree with Earl Warren sometimes?
- ERWIN: It never came up. If he disagreed with him, he went down and they talked it out.
- MORRIS: Down to the governor's office?
- ERWIN: Yes.
- MORRIS: And the Republican members of the assembly would meet together and decide what they . . .
- ERWIN: Yes. They were in the majority at the time that I was in the legislature, all the years I was there.
- MORRIS: And all of you Republicans in the assembly, did you get together once a week or something like that to decide what you did or didn't like about the governor's bill?
- ERWIN: Yes, we had our meetings, and the Democrats had theirs. And a lot of the Democrats went along with us, because they. . . . You see, this Independent newspaper was Democratic, and the Times was always Republican.
- MORRIS: Would [Times editor] Kyle Palmer talk to you and other people in the legislature about what the Times had in mind?
- ERWIN: Yes.

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1. Arthur H. Connolly, Jr. represented the 21st Assembly District 1947-1952, after Wollenberg's appointment to the bench and before Weinberger was elected.

MORRIS: Did people tend to think that if the Times thought something . . .

ERWIN: But they were very fine lobbyists. They never asked you to do anything unless it was for the good of the state. I'll say that for them.

MORRIS: What kinds of things did they think were needed in the state?

ERWIN: Well, they were for the highway bill, and so was the Independent paper in Los Angeles. Both of them were for it, and worked their heads off to get the bill through. We found out from the legislative counsel--and we kept it very quiet--we'd get a skeleton bill out, and the chairman of Revenue and Tax laughed his head off. He said, "Well, you've got your skeleton bill out." My God, when they found out that the senate had amended all the revenue into it, they just went crazy.

MORRIS: That was the increase in . . .

ERWIN: They were the oil people.

MORRIS: Really? That was the increase in the gas tax, wasn't it? What was the big problem?

ERWIN: Yes. Before they had the freeways, you would drive to a stop and use more gas. And the oil people, they wanted to sell more gas. Where would we have been today if we hadn't had the highway bill? The freeways now, you can travel and not have a stop every few feet.

MORRIS: How did [state Senator] Randolph Collier get to be the "Father of the Freeway System"? Most of the building was going on in southern California.

ERWIN: Yes, I know. But Hatfield was the man that really put that bill through, got that skeleton bill with all the amendments in it to raise the revenue for the highways. That was the biggest fight that I think the legislature ever had, because the oil people were. . . . They even went to the Whittier News and wanted them to. . . . You see, Whittier had more Republicans by far than any city in my district. They went in to the editor of

the paper and said, "We want you to get some young man to run against Erwin. We want to defeat him next time he runs."

The editor of the paper said, "Well, who do you represent?" They represented, I think, the Union Oil or some oil company. The owner of the paper was in favor of the highway bill, and so he asked him who he represented, and he told him. He said, "Now, I'll tell you one thing. Erwin's our man. You get the hell out of my office. I'm going to get on the phone right as soon as you get out of here and tell Erwin that you're here and what you're trying to do. I'll contact every paper in the district. When we want to get rid of Erwin, we'll let him know. But we're all in favor of him. Get the hell out of the office and stay out."

MORRIS: That's wonderful.

ERWIN: That ended that one, because he called me right away. And here it was the independent oil people. They were the ones who were terribly opposed to that. So they went around to every place they could stick their nose in and defeat somebody, they did it.

MORRIS: That's a pretty devious way of getting . . .

ERWIN: Well, that's the way they worked in that day, and I think they do the same today.

MORRIS: It seems possible.

## VI ADDITIONAL LEGISLATIVE AND PERSONAL EXPERIENCES

### More on Subdivisions in the San Fernando Valley

MORRIS: You were elected the same year that Earl Warren was elected to the governorship.

ERWIN: Yes, I was.

MORRIS: When you and he got to Sacramento, did he make much of an effort to get to know people in the legislature?

- ERWIN: No. Earl was a very honest, very decent governor. If he gave you his word, it was as good as gold. And the worst governor, as I told you before, I think was Goodie Knight; you couldn't believe a word that man told you.
- MORRIS: Why was that?
- ERWIN: I don't know. He was controlled by Howard Ahmanson. Do you know who Howard Ahmanson is?
- MORRIS: He used to be big in the insurance business, didn't he?
- ERWIN: Well, he owns Home Savings and Loan; he owned that.
- MORRIS: Did Mr. Ahmanson have a particular interest in legislation coming before the Banking Committee?
- ERWIN: Well, I knew George Black very, very well. He owned the Los Angeles Creamery and had a lot of cows. He had a ranch in Los Angeles, and he sold it for a big bunch of money for subdivisions. And he went out into the San Fernando Valley and bought this big ranch. Howard Ahmanson wanted to subdivide it, and so he got the state to pay for the roads. There's an awful lot of money involved.
- MORRIS: I could believe it.
- ERWIN: The man that was representing him, finally when he was elected supervisor, he became the majority on the board of supervisors who were in favor of that, and they were all controlled by Ahmanson. He put all this money into their campaigns to elect them.
- MORRIS: They are the people who subdivided what had been George Black's ranch? Do I have that right?
- ERWIN: Yes, Howard Ahmanson subdivided that big ranch in the San Fernando Valley of George Black's. Of course, all those roads and streets were paved by taxpayers' money. Ahmanson didn't pay for it. He got the supervisors to vote for the county to pay it.

Other Open Space Concerns: Lumbering, Prison Siting, Sacramento Airport, Erwin Ranch

- MORRIS: Was the legislature concerned about all the subdividing that was going on? It wasn't just in Los Angeles; it was up in around Alameda County and . . .
- ERWIN: No, they weren't too much involved in that, as I recall, because if they had, I'd have known of it.
- MORRIS: Were there those of you in the legislature who thought maybe too much good farm land was being converted to housing?
- ERWIN: Oh, yes. Sure. I was one of the ones that felt it, and someday you're going to feel it. But now I think people are going into the mountains. Why, that's becoming almost cities up there. Have you been up in the mountains between here and Lake Tahoe?
- MORRIS: Right.
- ERWIN: We stayed at one of those bed and breakfast places last weekend. It's owned by these two women. They've got a very, very nice home; they're both schoolteachers. One of them sprained her ankle; it was very painful. She was on crutches. But I'm glad to see that the mountains. . . . Grass Valley up there, look at that, how it's subdividing. That's in the mountains.
- MORRIS: They're getting some small industrial plants up there, too.
- ERWIN: Yes, they are. But where are you going to get your lumber some of these days, with the forest fires and everything?
- MORRIS: Right. There was a big Forest Practices Act that was going through the legislature when you were in the assembly.<sup>1</sup> Was that something that you'd be interested in?
- ERWIN: Oh, yes.
- MORRIS: That was [state Senator Edwin J.] Ed Regan.

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1. Z'berg-Nejedly Forest Practice Act, 1973 Reg. Sess., Cal. Stat., ch. 880.

ERWIN: The Weyerhausers, you know, they owned it. Norman Clapp, who went to Occidental, where I graduated. Norman Clapp. He's a fine looking man. Do you know what he's worth today? Occidental asked me if I could get somebody to help them raise funds. That's probably about four years ago, and I said, "Did you ever contact Norman Clapp?" They said, "Who's he?" And I said, "He's president of Weyerhauser." They researched him; he's worth \$330 million.

MORRIS: That's a lot of board feet of lumber.

[Laughter]

ERWIN: It sure is. I think he gave the college \$700,000.

MORRIS: That's a good piece of change.

ERWIN: Yes, it is. By next year, I'll have given them over \$1 million.

MORRIS: That's really a fine thing to do.

ERWIN: It'll educate a lot of kids and it's something that'll carry on forever.

MORRIS: Did Mr. Clapp come talk to you about some of the problems in the lumber business?

ERWIN: Well, this friend of mine from Marysville that I've given \$100,000 to—when I die, he gets it—I told him one time, "Why don't you buy lumber from this Weyerhauser?" "Well," he said, "I can't get in." I said, "Get a hold of this man that's a great friend of Norman Clapp's down in southern California." I forget his name; he's dead now. "Get a hold of him and maybe he can get you in," and he did, and he got him in.

MORRIS: There was a problem buying lumber from Weyerhauser?

ERWIN: He couldn't get in with them.

MORRIS: He couldn't get acquainted with Mr. Clapp. They were choosy about who they sold their wood . . .

ERWIN: But when he was recommended to Clapp, why—he was president of Weyerhauser at the time—he was selling their lumber and he's been selling it ever since. That's where [Arthur] Art Seaman gets most of his lumber.

MORRIS: And he runs lumberyards that sell retail, is that what it is?

ERWIN: Yes.

MORRIS: I see. That makes a difference. Some of the other things that were going on during the Warren administration was, there was a lot of work about improving the civil service. Was that something you were interested in?

ERWIN: No, I don't think so.

MORRIS: Mr. Warren was also big on bringing in new methods in Corrections, running the prisons and the [California] Youth Authority?

ERWIN: Yes, he was.

MORRIS: Was that something you were interested in?

ERWIN: Yes, I was. I helped them get that prison at Chino.

MORRIS: That was a new idea, though, wasn't it?

ERWIN: Yes, it was.

MORRIS: How did people in the neighborhood feel about that?

ERWIN: Well, Chino was very sparsely inhabited at that time, and they had to get these prisons in an area that wasn't too heavily inhabited. You hadn't a lot of opposition as you have now, even to the airplane fields. I remember when this one was built here, it was moved from West Sacramento over to where it's located now.

MORRIS: Up north of the city.

ERWIN: And they're building around it, my goodness. It's an awful big establishment now.

MORRIS: There's going to be a big industrial park around the airport now.

ERWIN: Yes. People will move in and then they raise hell on account of the noise, but how are the planes going to fly if they don't make noise?

MORRIS: Did it take much doing to convince the people in the Chino area that. . . .

ERWIN: No, because there weren't too many around. It was very sparsely settled. Now one of the biggest growers out in that

Chino-Riverside area is the Mormon church. They've got about 30,000 acres in orange groves that they've built.

MORRIS: Run by the church or different Mormon families?

ERWIN: All run by the church. That's one of the richest denominations in the world today, the Mormon church, because you have to tithe, to be a good Mormon, so much of your income to the church.

MORRIS: I understand that. And is there a problem having the Chino facility near these big orange groves now? Do the Mormons not like that?

ERWIN: No, there are no problems at all. Up the river beyond the ranch that I sold--the Mormon church was interested in buying it. The man that bought it sold his ranch in Chino to the church and then bought my ranch here for nearly \$1 million. In fact, I got more than \$1 million out of it because I had the largest piece of river frontage between Mount Shasta and the ocean. I had thirty acres fronting on the river, and the County of Yolo, they wanted it for a park. The man that contacted me on it said there was going to . . .

[End Tape 5, Side A]

[Begin Tape 5, Side B]

ERWIN: . . . and sit in at the supervisors' meeting tonight, so I went and sat. They got down to discussing that. They said, "That old man that owns that ranch, he's from southern California, and land prices are inflated down there. And he doesn't know that we can condemn and take, and that's exactly what we're going to do. He's not going to get the price that we are going to offer; we're only going to give him \$2,000 an acre for the thirty acres fronting on the river." So after they finished talking, they said, "Is there anybody here that's got anything they'd like to say?"

I said, "Yes, I'd like to say something." "Well, who are you?" I said, "I'm that old man you've been giving hell to all night from southern California." [Laughter] I said, "Now you gentlemen know that that land is priceless. There isn't a piece of land—and I've researched it—between Mount Shasta and the ocean as large as that. I know you can condemn it and take it, but I'm not going to let you take it for the \$2,000 an acre that you're offering me. I'll get an attorney and fight it."

So I got an attorney. And you know what they did? All they had to do was just write two letters, and they raised it \$1,000 an acre. And instead of waiting. . . . They told me afterwards they would have paid another \$1,000 an acre to get it, because they knew the value of it. Anyway, the attorney advised me to take it, and they took 40 percent of it.

#### Improving Agricultural Education; Sisters in Education

MORRIS: Did you stay in touch with the Milk Producers and the Farm Bureau while you were in the legislature?

ERWIN: Oh, yes. I was a great friend of theirs. I was still in the dairy business when I was elected to the legislature, still milking 1,200 cows a day.

MORRIS: Did the Milk Producers and the Farm Bureau have legislation they wanted introduced?

ERWIN: Oh, yes. They had their own lobbyist, too.

MORRIS: Who was that?

ERWIN: I forget who it was. You'd have to look it up at that time.

MORRIS: Would they come to you for suggestions on . . .

ERWIN: Yes. They'd come and ask for my help. If legislation got out of the committee, why, there's a good chance that the legislature would vote for it, because it was very well researched legislation. And the legislature in that day was very sympathetic to the agricultural department, because a lot of them were landowners, you know. The senate was practically all

rich farmers. Ben Hulse from Imperial was worth about \$20 million, and George Hatfield from Merced, he and his wife owned 30,000 acres. So most all of them were landowners at that time.

MORRIS: So would the Agriculture Committee and the Livestock Committee generally pass the bills?

ERWIN: The Committee on Livestock and Dairies was one committee, and the Committee on Agriculture was another committee.

MORRIS: And would those two committees generally pass the bills that . . .

ERWIN: Oh, yes. They consulted each other and would recommend the legislation, if it was good. It would always go over, because everybody at that time was sympathetic to farming and legislation that involved farming. You know, [University of California at] Davis, when I came to the legislature, was just a nothing. It was just a little one-horse deal that nobody gave a damn for as an agricultural college, and the walnut growers, and orange growers, and almond growers, they had to send their sons back to Ames [University, Iowa] or back to Cornell [University, New York] or that one in the Midwest, agricultural college.

The board of directors of the California Milk Producers, and California Orange Growers, and California Walnut Growers, they called me into a meeting one day down there and they said, "Why don't you raise Cain and get an agricultural college here in California? We have to send our kids back East to get an education in farming and agriculture." So I went to Hatfield and I said, "George, let's call the lobbyist for the University of California in and raise Cain and tell him he isn't going to get any money for the university unless they do something about the agricultural college at Davis, which is nothing."

MORRIS: Was this [University of California President] Robert Gordon Sproul?

ERWIN: Yes, that's the man.

MORRIS: You dealt with him face to face.

ERWIN: Yes. So George and I got back of it and called the lobbyist in and said, "Now, you're not going to get what you ask unless you do something for Davis. We want an agricultural college. There's more co-ops here, and we're far ahead of the rest of the states in agriculture, and if you don't do something, we're going to cut your budget."

And he laughed and laughed and laughed, and he said, "I wondered when you people were going to do something about that." Then we built first that medical college there [at UC Davis], the first building. And, my God, it's gone on now  
. . . .

They have a Russian there from the Dnieper River that's head of the sturgeon—raising sturgeon. I see in the Mississippi they caught a 1,200-pound sturgeon.

MORRIS: Now, this doctor from Russia . . .

ERWIN: This doctor from Russia worked at Davis, and he was one of the men that headed up the sturgeon coming up out of the Black Sea, up the Dnieper River in Russia. He knew just exactly how it was handled.

MORRIS: Fish farming.

ERWIN: That's where we used to get the caviar from, but now it's almost impossible to get.

MORRIS: So we're now growing caviar in California?

ERWIN: No, we're growing sturgeon. They have to be a certain size before you liberate them into the river. You could catch a sturgeon now, and they say they're very good eating. The Russians, when they milk them to raise their caviar, they eat the sturgeon.

MORRIS: After they take the roe out.

ERWIN: Yes.

MORRIS: Fascinating. Why did you want to add the agriculture school-- have it under the University of California rather than the state colleges?

ERWIN: We had one you get an agricultural diploma from, and that's Cal Poly.

MORRIS: So you wanted to share the wealth?

ERWIN: That's where a terrible battle began. The Kellogg Unit.

MORRIS: I think you told me about that.

ERWIN: It was going to revert back to the Kellogg Foundation if we hadn't gotten the bill through. It wasn't in my district, but the man who represented that district was [Assemblyman Ernest R.] Geddes, and he couldn't get anything through. I got the bill through for \$1 million to buy the first building before it reverted, about 10,000 acres.

MORRIS: Did you have anything to do with getting the Los Angeles campus strengthened? Wasn't that a citrus experimental station at what's now UCLA [University of California at Los Angeles]?

ERWIN: I don't know what it originally was. I always did everything I could to help out as far as education's concerned, because both my sisters were schoolteachers. That's one nice thing about my family, we never fought. I can't understand a family fighting among themselves.

MORRIS: Did your sisters go to Occidental as you did for their training?

ERWIN: No, one of them did. My younger sister. My older sister graduated from Pomona College.

MORRIS: And her name?

ERWIN: Sue Erwin.

MORRIS: That's a nice name.

ERWIN: And Jennie was the other one.

MORRIS: Jennie's the one that went to. . . .

ERWIN: Occidental.

MORRIS: Did they teach there in the Whittier area?

ERWIN: Sue taught in the Whittier area, but Jennie taught in the El Monte area.

MORRIS: Not too far away.

ERWIN: No. Then Jennie quit. When I was going to have to hire a book-keeper, why, she said, "Tom, let's keep it in the family. I'll quit teaching." I paid her as much as she'd get every month in teaching.

New Wing on the Capitol

MORRIS: While you were in the assembly, there was a new wing built on the capitol, wasn't there?

ERWIN: Yes.

MORRIS: Did that change how things went at all?

ERWIN: Well, then, most all of the members that were chairmen of a committee had their own rooms. In some places, there were two assemblymen in the room.

MORRIS: Back when there was just the one building.

ERWIN: Yes. Before they built the annex, nobody had an office. You just had some stenographers that would come and type or get shorthand. They'd take a letter if you wanted to send a letter out, and then they would type it and bring it to you for your signature.

MORRIS: You shared an office with [Assemblyman] Chester Gannon in the early days, didn't you?

ERWIN: Yes.

MORRIS: How did you and he get along?

ERWIN: We were great friends. And a movie actor from Hollywood that came up; I forget his name [Assemblyman Charles Conrad]. But I see him once in a while; he's quite old looking now. He takes part in some of the movies.

MORRIS: Really? He was in the legislature with you?

ERWIN: Oh, yes.

MORRIS: Then there's the other one, the movie actor from Hollywood who went all the way to Washington.

ERWIN: Yes. He's different.

MORRIS: Yes. I'm sorry. That was my little joke. I didn't know about the other one.

ERWIN: My first seatmate was [Assemblyman C. Donald] Don Field.

MORRIS: Was there a big scramble for the best offices when the new wing was finished?

ERWIN: No. The chairmen of the committees got their pick of an office.

MORRIS: And did you get your choice?

ERWIN: Yes, I did. It was very nice.

MORRIS: What was your choice? Which office did you have your eye on?

ERWIN: I had one that I could look out to the Senator Hotel and to walks where the people would be coming up and going down.

We're going to have to go pretty soon.

## VII ASSEMBLY SPEAKERS AND OTHER NOTABLES

### Samish Influence Again

MORRIS: Okay. I've got a couple of questions about the speakership, if we could talk a little bit about that.

ERWIN: Oh, yes.

MORRIS: Sam Collins replaced Charlie Lyon, is that right?

ERWIN: Yes, Sam Collins followed Charlie Lyon.

MORRIS: Was Collins pretty close to Lyon?

ERWIN: Yes.

MORRIS: So it was sort of taken for granted . . .

ERWIN: They were both Artie Samish's men.

MORRIS: Were there any people who thought of challenging Sam Collins for the speakership?

ERWIN: No. They had it pretty well sewed up, because they'd come around and ask you. We were in session for about three months of the year, that's all, and they'd come around and ask you if

you'd vote for them. So they had the votes pretty well counted before they went in, before the session started. And then when you voted them in, they were in for two years.

MORRIS: Then there was a Mr. Silliman who was speaker.

ERWIN: Yes. I nominated him from floor.

MORRIS: You did.

ERWIN: Yes. And I nominated Lincoln from the floor.

Howard Ahmanson; Byron Rumford; Frank Lanterman

MORRIS: At some point, there was talk that you might be going to try for the speakership.

ERWIN: No. I wasn't interested in that; I was in the supervisor race down south. But Howard Ahmanson was for the other one, because he promised to vote for the building of the roads through that huge subdivision. It meant millions to Howard Ahmanson. And he beat me.

MORRIS: On that one.

ERWIN: Yes, because the Los Angeles Times was for him, and the Democratic paper was for him, and he was a Democrat.

MORRIS: What you're saying is that you were spending a lot of time on trying to stop that vote in the Los Angeles Board of Supervisors?

ERWIN: Yes. Why should the taxpayers pay for building roads in somebody's subdivision? It meant millions for Howard Ahmanson and the Home Savings and Loan when he bought that huge Black ranch. Sure as the devil, when Bonelli went in, he voted for it and broke the votes. They needed three votes, the majority.

MORRIS: That's William Bonelli?

ERWIN: No, not William Bonelli. It's . . .

MORRIS: Frank?<sup>1</sup>

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1. Frank G. Bonelli served in the assembly 1953-1958.

- ERWIN: I forget his name. William Bonelli was the one that was supervisor down there for years. And then he had to run off and hide in Mexico.
- MORRIS: Wasn't he also on the Board of Equalization or something like that at the state level?
- ERWIN: Yes, he was. That's how I knew him.
- MORRIS: As a member of the Board of Equalization?
- ERWIN: Yes. I knew him, knew him well.
- MORRIS: What did you think about the problems that he was faced with? Was it a put-up job or had he been mixed up in something that was questionable?
- ERWIN: I don't know. He was involved some way, because he moved to Arizona, and they were going to extradite him and make him come and testify, and he fled into Mexico and spent the rest of his days down there.
- MORRIS: That was the period also when there was a big flap about liquor licenses.
- ERWIN: Yes.
- MORRIS: And was this something that the legislature had a hard time doing something about?
- ERWIN: Yes. I wasn't for liquor licenses in those days and I never voted for them. That was one of Artie Samish's favorite things, and I never was very much in favor of the things that he was for.
- MORRIS: The problem was, to buy a liquor license costs a tremendous amount of money.
- ERWIN: Yes, it did. And it had to pretty much go through old Artie Samish's hands, it and the cigarettes.
- MORRIS: How come Caspar Weinberger got put in charge of the special committee to do something about liquor licensing? Remember that?
- ERWIN: I forgot how he worked on that committee. I didn't pay much attention to that committee.

MORRIS: It must have been sort of a hot potato.

ERWIN: Yes, it was.

MORRIS: Better not to have anything to do with it?

ERWIN: You know, Whittier was a dry town, and you couldn't get drunk on the job like the district attorney that was drunk in San Francisco, you know, from here [Sacramento]. He belonged to the Sutter Club, this guy. I just can't think of the name right now [Herb Jackson]. But he's very much in favor of [Anthony] Kennedy; he was Kennedy's law partner.

MORRIS: This Mr. Kennedy who's going to be nominated to the [U.S.] Supreme Court?

ERWIN: Yes. And he's a very fine man.

MORRIS: He certainly seems to be, from all the newspaper accounts.

ERWIN: His brother drowned in Hawaii.

MORRIS: Kennedy's brother?

ERWIN: Yes.

MORRIS: That's too bad.

ERWIN: They're a very strong Catholic family, and his brother had four children. His wife divorced him, which in the Catholics are not very much in favor, as I understand. I'm not a Catholic myself, but I'm very tolerant of anybody's religion. I feel it's their own personal business, and I'm not going to be like some of these ministers and stick my nose in it, because we're all striving for the same place and hoping we get there.

MORRIS: I think you're right, yes.

There were a couple of other really noticeable people that came in the legislature after you. I was thinking of [Assemblyman Harold K.] Levering, who was elected in '49. How did he get involved in this loyalty oath legislation? Remember that? And there was a big flap about whether the University of California would have a separate loyalty oath.

ERWIN: I forget now.

MORRIS: How about [Assemblyman] Byron Rumford? He was elected in '49.

- ERWIN: Yes, I know him well. He was a very fine individual as far as I knew.
- MORRIS: Did you think it was time for the legislature to consider equal opportunity legislation to encourage people to hire more Negroes and open housing to them?
- ERWIN: When I was there after we got the annex built and we had our rooms, why, practically everybody that was chairman of a committee, at least, had their own stenographer. My stenographer was [Norris] Norrie Poulson's daughter, the mayor of Los Angeles. She was my stenographer for, I think, about six years. She was a divorcee.
- MORRIS: [Assemblyman] Frank Lanterman came from not too far away from you.
- ERWIN: Pasadena.
- MORRIS: Was he somebody you worked together on issues with?
- ERWIN: Oh, yes. He was a very honest individual, a bachelor. He'd never ride a plane because he was. . . . His home was up on the side of a hill and he saw an airplane fall one night, and that was enough for him. So he wasn't about to get into one. He'd never fly in an airplane, always took a train up to the legislature or rode with somebody in a car.
- MORRIS: He spent a lot of time on the Ways and Means Committee. Did you see about getting him appointed to Ways and Means?
- ERWIN: No. He was appointed after I left the legislature. The first year, I was on Livestock and Dairies, and Agriculture, and I forget what the other one was—Fish and Game.

#### Jesse Unruh as a Freshman

- MORRIS: Probably the one that's gotten to be best known is [Assemblyman] Jesse Unruh. He was a freshman in 1955.
- ERWIN: Yes. He came in about four years before I quit. But he was a nobody in those days. Nobody. But to take a sharecropper. . . . He's quite a boy.

- MORRIS: Did you kind of look over the freshman crop when they came in each year?
- ERWIN: No. When you came in, you told the speaker the committees you wanted. If there was a vacancy or a possibility of getting on it, why, you most always got on.
- MORRIS: By the time you left in '58, was Unruh beginning to be better known around?
- ERWIN: No. But he got appointed to some committee. I was chairman of the subcommittee on Ways and Means, and we went up to investigate the building of the funicular from Palm Springs to the top of the mountain. This woman, she ran a riding academy up in Idyllwild. I told you about it, didn't I?
- MORRIS: I think so, but I don't think we got it on tape.
- ERWIN: So here we all got on horses, and rode across the mountains to the other side of . . .

[End Tape 5, Side B]

[Begin Tape 6, Side A]

- ERWIN: I had ridden all my life, and I had my riding boots. So old Jesse—at that time he was just a big, heavy guy, over 300 pounds—had gotten on that horse and couldn't get his legs down around; they stuck out like that. Oh, my God, that woman was stopping us all the time and telling us about this, and scenery, and "Look at the lake there," and "Look at the scenery here." It finally came lunch time, and there was a little place where campers could build a fireplace. She got a pan out from one of the packhorses and heated up the hot dogs. They had a sandwich a piece for lunch and some soft drink of some kind. I kept urging them and urging them. She said, "Not much farther." She wanted to show us the scenery.

Finally, at two o'clock we got over where the darned place, the lift was going to be built, and she wanted to

explain it. I said, "Well, we're going to get on our horses and we're going to go back now. It's a long ways back. I don't want you to stop and show us any more scenery. They've seen enough." We all got on our horses. Along about six or seven o'clock it began to get dark, and I yelled back at the guys behind me, "Give the horse its head and it'll bring you into camp." We didn't know where in the devil. . . . You couldn't see; there were no lights or anything. I said, "Just hang onto the pommel of the saddle." So they did, and we finally landed down.

They all wanted a drink, because it was a terrible day. And poor old Jesse was raw from his knees clear up to his rear end. He was lying in a tub of water, and when I got in. . . . Idyllwild was a dry town, and I happened to know that this Howard Warren was the director of the California Milk Producers when I was president of it. I called him. I knew he used to drink a lot, and I said, "Have you got any whiskey? I've got four dead guys here, and they've been clear across that mountain." He said, "No. The doctor made me quit drinking, Tom, but I'll go down. I know a place about six miles down, and I'll go down and get a pint for you." So he did, and I divided it four ways with some water. It was a lifesaver for them. Poor old Jesse, when we went down, he was in the cabin with (the subcommittee was two Republicans, two Democrats) another Democrat—and we were in another cabin, the two of us. Howard brought it back and wanted us to go to the Lions Club.

Well, I'm a Lion, but I said, "No. They're dead. They've been clear across the mountains. They cannot, under any circumstance, do anything." So we didn't have anything to eat. I divided the pint of whiskey four ways and we had a drink. Old Jesse was lying in this tub of lukewarm water. Oh, if he wasn't a mess. My God!

The next morning we left. We had a state car and drove on down. It's down the other side of the mountains to Palm

Springs. They met us and, oh, my God, they took us to--what's the name of that club? [Racquet Club]--for a gorgeous meal. We had highballs and just a gorgeous lunch.

MORRIS: Did you indulge by that time in an occasional whiskey?

ERWIN: Oh, yes. So we all went out and looked at the site where it was going to be built. When we were back the whole bunch of us recommended 100 percent to build the tramway, so we all voted for it. [Laughter] That girl with her horses just killed it. It was miserable.

MORRIS: Did you get to know Unruh well enough on that trip to think he might have some potential for legislative leadership?

ERWIN: Oh, he was always talking on the floor. He had something that he wanted to talk about. I'll hand it to him: he was nobody's fool. I certainly wouldn't have done some of the things he did, but I guess we all have our different likes and dislikes.

[Interruption]

#### VIII SUBDIVISION, REAPPORTIONMENT IN THE 50TH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

MORRIS: I was wondering what had happened in your district, in the 50th district.

ERWIN: The last time I ran, I won by the biggest majority I ever had.

MORRIS: Right, and in 1954 the vote total was 63,000. Then, two years later, in '56, the vote total was 102,000. What was going on?

ERWIN: Subdivisions.

MORRIS: But you won by almost 20,000 votes.

ERWIN: Yes.

MORRIS: How come you decided not to hang in there?

ERWIN: I'd been in long enough, and I had so much business at home to look after. My sister just could not handle it down there alone, so I decided that the best thing for me to do was just quit. I wanted to retire anyway. But things certainly changed.

- MORRIS: Pretty much the farming has disappeared in that neighborhood?
- ERWIN: In my district it has. I sold 120 acres of it. He subdivided it right away, sold it for subdivisions. Twenty acres of it's where my home was on, there in Puente. The Erwin School was built just a little ways from it, oh, probably about 150 feet from my home. And a big shopping center went in across the street from me. So the noise and the racket and so forth--I decided the best thing to do was just to sell and move north. My wife didn't want to come up here. So I said, "Then I'll move you to Santa Barbara and I'll look after my ranch interests and live at the Sutter Club." That's what I did. I had the ranch in Marysville and the ranch up the river to look after.
- MORRIS: This is while you were still in the assembly?
- ERWIN: Yes. So we moved her to Santa Barbara, and I would drive down. She had her mother living with her, and her mother died at my home there.
- MORRIS: Your base in Whittier kind of disappeared, then.
- ERWIN: Oh, yes. And the man that came in was a Democrat.
- MORRIS: I wondered about that. What was this guy Richard DuBois who ran against you in '54 and '56?
- ERWIN: Who?
- MORRIS: A man named Richard Dubois was the Democratic candidate.
- ERWIN: Oh, yes. Well, he got no place.
- MORRIS: Did you endorse Earl Riley, the Republican candidate after you?
- ERWIN: No. He was defeated by the Democrats by about 3,000 votes.
- MORRIS: He ran a pretty good race, but this guy [Assemblyman] Ronald [Brooks] Cameron got 67,000 votes, about the same number you had two years before.
- ERWIN: Yes.
- MORRIS: He's a very different kind of a man.
- ERWIN: Yes. None of the businessmen supported him, you know. He was invited to a meeting that they had once a year for the newly elected representative of the district. He ate a big lunch and

then was called on to say something. He got up, and he looked around, and he said, "I don't know why I'm here. I know damned well that there isn't a one of you here that voted for me. When I get through with this district, you won't know it," and walked out.

MORRIS: What did he have in mind for the district?

ERWIN: Reapportionment. Reapportionment came up, and Whittier was divided into three districts, split right up. And they never elected an assemblyman from that district again.

MORRIS: They split all those Republicans in Whittier?

ERWIN: They split them up into three Democratic districts. Cameron did it.

MORRIS: That was about the time that [Assemblyman Philip A.] Phil Burton was coming in.

ERWIN: Yes.

MORRIS: He was supposed to be the great expert on reapportionment. Remember him?

ERWIN: Yes.

MORRIS: What did he do about reapportionment that was different from how it was done in 1950?

ERWIN: They drew the lines of where your district was.

MORRIS: The Democrats rather than the Republicans.

ERWIN: Where they could, they divided up the Republican districts and were able to elect Democrats in place of Republicans.

MORRIS: That's kind of the way the Republicans do when they're in the majority, don't they?

ERWIN: I guess they did.

MORRIS: Did anybody consult you about reapportionment in the 1952 one?

ERWIN: No. My district was very happy with me in there. If I'd wanted to run again, I guess I could have been elected.

MORRIS: Did it look like the registration was beginning to change?

ERWIN: No. The Democrats voted for me. I had a very prominent Democratic woman, and she supported me and sent out thousands

of cards asking the Democrats to vote for me. One of the women that lived in this Mountain View district where the Mountain View Grammar School was, I beat her in her own district, her own voting precinct.

MORRIS: Would you care to wind up with any suggestions from your long experience about what you think is important in state government and political campaigns?

ERWIN: I'll think about that and then I'll. . . . Give me some time on it, and Herb will write it down and send it to you. Is that okay?

MORRIS: Right. It's really very exciting to talk to somebody like yourself from the background in agriculture, because you're quite right: there are very few people in the legislature anymore with that background.

ERWIN: That's right. You see, there's too many attorneys.

MORRIS: You think so.

ERWIN: I sure do. They're pretty much running the show.

MORRIS: There were some attorneys in the assembly when you were there.

ERWIN: Yes.

MORRIS: Did they look at things differently than you did?

ERWIN: Well, no. They were interested. . . . Well, Charlie Lyon was an attorney; Sam Collins was an attorney.

MORRIS: Caspar Weinberger.

ERWIN: Yes, but he wasn't the speaker. But a lot of attorneys came in after reapportionment.

MORRIS: Was [Assemblyman] Ralph Brown elected speaker during your time?

ERWIN: No.

MORRIS: Maybe just after.

ERWIN: Not while I was there.

MORRIS: He may have been elected speaker in '59, after you left.

ERWIN: He could have been.

## IX SCOTTISH STORIES

MORRIS: Are there any family stories about how the Erwins came to leave Scotland, going back to where we started? You smile.

ERWIN: I was going north. This headmaster of a boys' school in Bedford, he was driving. We got to this town right on the border between Scotland and England, and that's where the battle was fought. He said the MacGregor clan ran away, and the other Scottish people were killed by the Bavarian butcher that was imported from Bavaria. Tony [ ? ] laughed like the dickens, and he said, "I wondered what was wrong with you." And I said, "Well, we lived to fight another day, didn't we?"

But traveling through Scotland, he showed one of the places in the Highlands where the Bavarian butcher defeated the Scotch clans, and beheaded the leaders, and went down to this little stream and washed the heads. They were all sent to the king of England at that time. His brother was in the Holy Land.

MORRIS: Richard?

ERWIN: King Richard, yes. Richard's brother, John.

MORRIS: We're talking back in the 1600s, aren't we?

ERWIN: Yes, that's when it was. That's when this happened. You know, the graves where the bodies were buried there in the hillside, there isn't a bit of heather that will grow. Those graves, they don't take anything out, and the heather's all around the five or six graves.

MORRIS: Was that the period when they declared wearing kilts was illegal?

ERWIN: I don't know.

MORRIS: Who was the Bavarian butcher?

ERWIN: He was knighted by this king of England, and had a castle named after him. That's what the Scotchmen will tell you.

MORRIS: So the Erwins were part of the MacGregor clan.

ERWIN: Yes. And my mother was a Stuart. My father's mother was a MacGregor.

MORRIS: Mother was a Stuart and Father a MacGregor?

ERWIN: Yes.

MORRIS: So the survivors all left together?

ERWIN: Well, they called them—in the First or Second World War, when they went to war for England—the "ladies from hell."

[Laughter]

MORRIS: Some of the Scots who lost those battles went to Ireland, and then came to the States.

ERWIN: Yes.

MORRIS: Did your family come straight to the States?

ERWIN: No. They came down out of the Highlands of Scotland.

MORRIS: And then went to Ireland?

ERWIN: You see, my mother had a . . . Her mother's sister—Aunt Jane's what she called her. We'd go to church. Then every mother would leave us for Sunday school, and she would go over and have a cup of tea and visit with Aunt Jane every Sunday.

MORRIS: This is once you got to New York.

ERWIN: Yes.

MORRIS: That must have been a pleasant day.

Okay, why don't we stop there, and then you can take a look at the transcript and see what you'd like to add, if anything. I think it's a wonderful story you've told us. It covered lots of exciting events.

[End Tape 6, Side A]

## APPENDIX

## MY STORY

By Thomas M. Erwin

My parents came over from Scotland in 1848 so Mother could be with an Aunt in a small town called Mt. Morris, New York. This aunt lived in a log cabin she bought from "Red Jacket", an Iroquois Chief, for a string of beads.

My parents were very, very poor. I was born near Geneseo, New York in 1893 on a small rented farm. Last April 6, I turned 90 years old, but my memories of early childhood and school are as fresh as ever.

## I. Childhood and School

The school I went to was very different than the nice school they named after me. It was a one room school where one teacher taught grades 1 through 7 with about 50 children altogether. For a rest room, the school had only an outside privy. Inside was a room with a pump for drinking water. It may be hard for boys and girls today to imagine how things were at the beginning of this century. There were no radios, cars, movies or television. Back then newspapers were the only source for news.

Miss Oaks was a very wonderful teacher in the small school. She inspired me to continue my education. I wasn't always the best behaved student either since I used to sometimes get into fights with other boys. But thanks to Miss Oaks, I went on in my education.

My first year of high school was in Geneseo, New York. It was a large school. In that town they had a Normal College which trained teachers; many did their practice teaching at the high school.

The farm in New York State where I grew up had 300 acres. It was rented from Austin Wadsworth who was very rich and who was a friend of Theodore Roosevelt and his daughter, Alice Roosevelt. I remember seeing President Roosevelt, his wife and Alice. They had come to visit Mr. Wadsworth at a horse show on his estate. That was in about 1908.

My family moved to California in 1912. The only difference between us and the "Oakies" of the 1930's was that we came west on the train instead of in jalopies. We settled first in El Monte. Father went into the dairy business and had 23 cows. But he went into debt for the feed bill and it looked like we would lose everything. So he sold all the cows and ended up with \$1000 clear.

My older sister (I had two sisters and an older brother) and I went to El Monte High School. There I played on the tennis team and was captain of the basketball team. At that time, the school didn't have a football team. Later I was elected president of the student body.

My older sister wanted to be a teacher. We needed money to pay for her education. So we rented 10 acres and grew celery and then rented 5 acres more. The celery did very well. We cleared \$2500 on the celery; this allowed my sister to go on to school.

The next year we rented 20 acres and grew more celery. We made \$10,000 and bought 20 acres and then 10 more acres with a 13 room redwood house. My Mother lived there the rest of her life. It has the first real home she ever owned and she was very happy there.

## II. College Days

While my sister was at Pomona College studying to become a teacher, I started my first year of college at Occidental College. Then for three years, I had to leave college to work to support my Mother and two sisters.

At Occidental College I majored in Spanish. I did well at it since I had learned to speak Spanish from meeting Mexican-Americans who helped work in the celery fields. Out of 72 students in my Spanish class, I was the only one who received an "A".

It is wonderful to be able to speak more than one language. But people sometimes make fun of those who can't speak English or who have a different accent. As I said before my parents came from near Edinburgh, Scotland. Scots people have a heavy accent or "brogue" all their own. When I was a small child, that is all I learned to speak. When I first

went to school the other children laughed at me and called me a foreigner. I quickly learned that a Scottish brogue and English don't mix. So I learned to speak good English. To this day I can speak the Scottish brogue if I want; when I visited Scotland a few years ago and spoke their dialect, the people loved it. And I still can speak Spanish too. This was very helpful when I travelled to South America and Mexico about 5 years ago.

It is wonderful when children learn another language in the home or at school as long as they learn good English too !

As mentioned before, I started college at Occidental College. There I was captain of the freshman basketball team. Before I could start my second year, my father died of a heart attack. I had to leave school and work to support the family, but I wanted to continue my education very badly. I went a half a year at Whittier College and made up my second year.

Returning to Occidental College, I worked in the Book Store, swept halls, waited on table in the large dining hall to earn money so my Sister wouldn't have to work and could keep on with school. After she graduated she was a teacher for many years.

My good friend at college was Brooks Gifford who I met when I joined the Kappa Sig fraternity. His mother was a wonderful person. Her parents donated the land to Pasadena where the Rose Bowl stands today. She lived in a beautiful home where I visited Brooks many times.

In high school and college I acted in several plays. The director of our college play helped many people get into the movies. He wanted me to try out for the movies, but my sisters convinced me not to do it. Who knows, maybe I might have become a movie star!

### III. Starting My Dairy Business

On graduation day all the fraternity members were talking about what they would do after leaving school. I told them I was going to enter the dairy business. They laughed at that since back in 1923, when I graduated, most people did not believe a college education was needed to run a dairy.

But I went home and started with six cows on 13 acres south of El Monte. Business was very good. Eventually we had 300 cows on the same ranch. I also used to ride horseback and had several dogs.

All my milkers and friends were Mexican-Americans and I was very fond of them and liked them very much. Later I bought 20 more acres: it was another dairy south of the first one with a home on it. In a few years I had 1200 cows and 87 helpers.

In the 1930's the depression came and there were very hard times. Many people lost their jobs and many farmers lost their ranches. Fortunately I had been very careful to save money during the good years so I was able to make it through the depression years.

In Puente I bought another 100 acres. During this time a man named Mr. Wilson had 20 acres with a beautiful house and barbecue pit. He wanted to sell me the house and 20 acres and we finally came to an agreement. Many of his friends were in the movie business and used to visit the house. One of them was Hal Roach who ran a movie studio. It was at his studio that the early Laurel and Hardy comedies were filmed.

The 20 acres I bought is where the Erwin School is today. The house is still nearby. Mrs. Findlay knows where it is. On the 20 acres I grew tomatoes and alfalfa.

#### IV. Entering The California Legislature

By 1942 I was a very successful dairyman. I was also head of a bank that made loans to farmers. Years before that I had started the Farmer's market in Los Angeles. Now it is mostly shops but originally it was where farmers came to sell their produce. Through all these activities, I came to know a lot of people throughout California.

A group of business and city leaders from Whittier wanted me to run for the California Assembly. At first I wasn't sure I should, but the newspaper editor talked me into it.

In my first race, I ran against an ex- Superior Court Judge. but all the newspapers supported me. I ran as a Republican in a District with 14,000 more Democrats than Republicans.

That was the 50th District then. But I won anyway. During my 16 years in the Assembly both Democrats and Republicans were my friends. The last time I ran in 1956, I won by over 19,800 votes.

I greatly admired Earl Warren who was Governor from 1943 to 1953 when President Eisenhower appointed him Chief Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court. I was a delegate from California to the Republican Convention in 1956 when President Eisenhower was nominated for a second term.

During my years in the Assembly, I worked hard to pass laws which help all Californians. These included the following:

- Providing funds to build the highway and freeway system after World War II.
- Fish and game laws. I helped set up the Fish and Game Commission which is now the Department of Fish and Game. In fact I named the official California fish (the golden trout) and bird (the valley quail). One measure I got through was setting up places where children could catch fish. I also promoted fish hatcheries to restock the streams and lakes with more fish.

At Governor Warren's request, I introduced a law stopping the use of fishing nets in the Sacramento River. The nets were taking out all the fish. To this day people can still fish in the River because of that law.

- Laws to help education and schools. For example, I helped set up Cal Poly in Pomona and San Luis Obispo. As Chairman of Finance, I approved all their projects.

#### V. The Erwin School

The reason the Erwin School was named for me was because of my support for funding education and schools when I was in the Legislature. Many teachers and officials in the Department of Education were friends of mine.

When I sold 100 acres to the Bodger Seed Company, they subdivided it into residential lots with the understanding they would provide land to build an elementary school. The greatest honor of my life was when they decided to name the new school after me.

Mrs. Findlay was there when the Erwin School was dedicated in 1958. She retired in 1982. Over the years she has written to me and sent stories and pictures done by children at the school. I've enjoyed these very much.

Today where my farm used to be, is now a residential neighborhood including Erwin School. Many of the milkers who had worked in my dairy bought house lots and some children at the school today are their descendents.

Over the last 25 years many children have attended the Erwin School. I hope the school and teachers have meant as much to those children and to the children there today as the little country school and Teacher meant to me those many years ago.

THOMAS M. ERWIN

Sacramento, California  
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