

The McCarthy Historical Project

By WERNER PETERS

McCarthy Historical Project

THE MCCARTHY Historical Project evolved from the unique and momentous campaign in 1968 of Sen. Eugene J. McCarthy. Never before has a systematic attempt been undertaken to collect and organize all retrievable material of a political campaign for the presidential nomination. The complete documentation of this episode in American political history, which will provide archival material for future historians and political scientists, is unequaled. The McCarthy Historical Project begins with the most hectic days of the campaign itself, when Abigail McCarthy urged people working in the national campaign headquarters to keep all files so that they could be collected and preserved at a central location. The voice of a historian drowned in the turbulence of political action, but shortly after the convention the idea of establishing a campaign archives gained momentum. At the end of 1968, the McCarthy Historical Project was officially established. An office was rented in an apartment building on Capitol Hill, and a staff, mainly former campaign workers, was recruited.

Already great amounts of campaign records had been collected; many files and documents from the national campaign headquarters had been salvaged at the end of the campaign and had been stored in a warehouse. Furthermore, the office of Senator McCarthy had sent our requests to the campaign centers in the various States asking them not to discard their files but to send them to his office. Even an oral history program had been initiated. Under Mrs. McCarthy's guidance, several dedicated former campaign workers had documented aspects of the women's effort during the campaign, specifically the "Women for McCarthy" organization. All this material was turned over to the project.

With these records as a basis, the project staff set out to establish as complete and thorough documentation as possible of all aspects of the McCarthy presidential campaign. Among the goals of the project were the reconstruction and documentation of the sequence of events of the campaign and the motivations of the campaign workers on all levels of the organization. It was also decided to recreate the structure of the national staff (including the rivalries within it) and to document the support that was generated by largely autonomous local organizations. Every component of the campaign organization was represented in the records. The candidate retained his important place in the collection, but the archives have not solely focused on him. Senator McCarthy's

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campaign was a mixture of many political forces, motivations, and symptoms extending far beyond his candidacy.

The scope of the project went beyond the timespan of the McCarthy campaign, as far as it seemed necessary for putting this event into its proper historical perspective. Indispensable for any research on the campaign was the history of the protest movement against the Viet Nam war, particularly the anti-Johnson activities within the Democratic Party. This and other events after the convention, such as the McCarthy write-in campaign and the Fourth Party movement, were included in the field of research. Also, the other candidates and important outside events such as the Tet Offensive were to a limited degree considered to be within the scope of the archives.

The methods employed for organizing the project were dictated by the special nature of this documentation. The project had to devise a master plan that would insure representation of all important aspects of the campaign and that would make apparent the documentation to be retrieved or even, by means of taped interviews, created. The final plan was the result of many attempts and many failures. There was no established scheme for the organization of documents about any campaign, and the unique nature of the McCarthy campaign, which to a significant degree was a more or less independent local effort, complicated this problem even more. It turned out that there was no single system broad and flexible enough in itself to encompass the many levels and wide scope of activities and events. The only possible solution was to develop a system patterned after the organization of the campaign itself.

The staff divided the collection into three separate complexes and organized their work accordingly: (1) the actions of the candidate himself; (2) the campaign in the States as it was organized by thousands of local workers; and (3) the events on the national level—mainly, but not exclusively, the organization of the national campaign staff. The areas, of course, overlap, but the important fact was that they could be organized independently and according to different systems.

THE CANDIDATE

With respect to the candidate's actions, the project's goal was to document all the official activities of Senator McCarthy—where he went, what he said, whom he met, how he was received—from the day of his announcement in November 1967 (and to a limited degree, in the months preceeding the campaign) to the end of the Democratic Convention in August 1968. The basis for this documentation was a complete and accurate schedule for the approximately 300 days of the campaign. This schedule in itself was a major work of research. There were schedules for most of the days the candidate traveled, but these schedules retrieved by the project were unreliable. Often scheduled events had been changed, canceled, and others added after the original schedules had been released, and rarely had these changes been noted on the

lists. Beginning with the original schedules, relying on personal memories of the people involved, and using extensively the clippings from the news coverage, the project staff tried to reconstruct the actual sequence of events and to compose the authentic schedule.

The bulk of the material in the "candidate file" consists of the speeches and press conferences Senator McCarthy gave on the campaign trail. Most of them have been preserved on sound tape and some on video tape but almost all have been transcribed fully or excerpted. The file also includes many drafts of speeches written by speechwriters, with the Senator's corrections. The most fascinating part of the speech file is the Senator's own speech notes, scribbled on hotel paper or the back of a speech that was written for him but quite obviously not used. Documents about other events on the candidate's schedule, such as meetings with delegates, conversations with party leaders, or campaign strategy sessions, were practically non-existent. The project fortunately has been able to fill in some of these gaps in the documentation through taped interviews.

Although all of Senator McCarthy's official papers from the beginning of his political career had been transferred to the Minnesota State Historical Society, he has turned over to the project all papers relating to the 1968 campaign effort. These include correspondence expressing support or offering help and contributions of money; the Senator's personal schedules, memoranda, speech notes; and not least, the drafts of his book on the campaign, *The Year of the People*.

STATE CAMPAIGNS

One of the most interesting aspects of the McCarthy campaign was the grassroots support of his candidacy that was instrumental in starting local campaign organizations all over the country, quite independently from the Senator and the Washington campaign headquarters. The project has tried to document these efforts, their successes and failures, as thoroughly as possible. Its system of retrieving and organizing material was according to States, since the campaign organizations were on that level and independent from each other. The project had attempted to document fully the activities of the State headquarters, but more importantly it has assembled materials of a representative cross section of the large and small communities throughout the State, which were mostly organized by local residents on their own.

The documents which have been collected (flyers, leaflets, invitations, minutes of meetings, press releases, news clippings, financial statements, correspondence, fundraising appeals, and similar items) reflect in their diversity a wide range of activities in these local campaigns. One invaluable source of information is narratives that have been contributed by a number of people describing the local campaigns and their individual roles. This is in addition to the hundreds of interviews accumulated by the project from people who were mainly active on this

level. Although there were campaign operations in all 50 States and even abroad, and the project has material from all of them, it concentrated on the primary States and on some of the important nonprimary States.

NATIONAL LEVEL

The third and most complex aspect of the project was the campaign on the national level, especially the structure and the activities of the national campaign staff. We also included here documents collected from several independent national support organizations, such as ADA and SANE and from national press sources, consisting chiefly of newspaper clippings but also including several radio and television broadcasts.

The constant changes that had taken place on the national level throughout the campaign complicated the project's restructuring task in this area. In the early days there was barely a national staff. During the primaries the staff developed into a complex organization. In summer 1968 the organization was modified as campaign requirements dictated. The convention in August necessitated additional staff changes. The campaign and accordingly the campaign staff never attained a stable organizational pattern. Areas of responsibilities and duties were often not clearly defined. The project's staff, therefore, had to choose a very careful approach. A rough outline of the main components of the national campaign staff showing its responsibilities and interrelations was made; from this, the staff refined it, changed it, and added to it as new facts became available.

We established full documentation of every important function of the national campaign staff, and we assembled impressive material. From the press office we retrieved a complete set of all press releases; from the research department, which provided information for the candidate's speeches and released statements on the candidate's position on particular issues, we obtained position papers and reference material, including Senator McCarthy's speeches, statements, and voting records from the beginning of his political career, as well as papers written by renown advisors who had volunteered their services to the campaign.

One of the major acquisitions of the project was the master set of most television commercials produced by the national campaign staff, plus a great number of dubs and other television material, which was either not used or served as raw material for television spots. The master set consists of 23 half-hour programs and close to 100 spots or 5-minute programs; and with few exceptions it is fully cataloged and transcribed. The project acquired a similar collection of radio commercials and national advertising in newspapers and magazines, but unfortunately it is not as complete and not as well cataloged as the television advertising set.

The collection includes the records of the financial operation: the fund-raising and allocation are well documented. Other major documents from national campaign headquarters are records from the advance and

sheduling staff, the farm desk, the "Women for McCarthy," the volunteer coordination office, the campaign literature production staff, and others.

The project obtained records from the campaign's "political desk," which provided "delegate intelligence." These records consist of surveys of the delegate situation in every State at several different stages of the campaign, reports from contacts in the field, biographical and political data on every delegate and alternate, and monthly, and later, weekly and daily polls and tallies. These records, besides detailing the story of the McCarthy defeat at the convention, will give researchers a firsthand knowledge of the strategy and techniques applied in the preparation of a presidential nominating convention.

The extensive file on the convention operations documents the continuous struggle of the McCarthy advance staff in Chicago with the Democratic National Committee in relation to hotel rooms, floor passes, telephones, transportation, and dozens of other technical essentials. The project collected documents illustrating the political planning for the three areas of challenges—credentials, rules, and the party platform.

All the aspects of the campaign described thus far were also documented through taped interviews. Wherever written material was insufficient or nonexistent, the project staff interviewed people who had been personally involved. The project consistently tried to interview the important participants in the major departments of the campaign organization. But clarification and supplementation of written material were not the only purposes of the interviews. The project also attempted to document the personal motivations of the campaign worker; why he participated in the campaign, why he supported McCarthy, his political background, his views on the candidate, his afterthoughts about his participation in the campaign, the value of it, and his judgment of the campaign's success or failure. It is fair to say that the success of the McCarthy campaign depended to a large degree on the new type of political activists it was able to attract (students, middle-class housewives, party members who were opposed to Viet Nam policy). These interviews constitute an invaluable background for the understanding of the special features and impact of the McCarthy campaign.

The project accumulated over 600 interviews with people involved in every aspect of the campaign, from every important State. Most of the people interviewed were campaign workers and supporters, but there were quite a few who had been active on behalf of other candidates, and a number of independent observers, especially newsmen. Only very few people have imposed restrictions on their interviews. A third of the interviews have been transcribed.

The entire McCarthy Historical Project collection consists of about 350 cubic feet of material, of which 50 cu. ft. might eventually be weeded out as being duplicates or peripheral material. The diversity of the material is striking. Written documents in all forms—handwritten, type-

written, photocopied, mimeographed, and printed material—constitute the main part of the collection. But very important and valuable is the audiovisual material described above. The collection also contains so-called campaign memorabilia; posters, bumper-stickers, flags, even McCarthy dresses, and other campaign paraphernalia.

The project staff sent questionnaires to approximately 3,000 campaign workers throughout the country, of which one-third have been returned. The results have not yet been tabulated, but this material will certainly provide invaluable information for future researchers. This questionnaire was designed to retrieve from the grassroots worker in the McCarthy campaign data such as social background, party affiliation, political orientation and involvement, attitudes towards the candidate, and reflections on the significance of the campaign.

The master plan that was devised for the collection of the materials was later used as a guideline for organizing the documents. The documents relating to the candidate's activities such as speeches and schedules were filed chronologically; the records from the States were arranged geographically and, wherever appropriate, were subdivided according to major activities such as fundraising, public relations, and canvassing; the national campaign staff records were organized according to the major functions of the staff, as described above. The staff did not, however, impose this system categorically on all materials, but maintained certain series of records as they had been received by the project, where it seemed more historically accurate to do so. This will pose problems for the researcher in that additional material pertinent to his research may be found in other parts of the collection. Thus it would be a necessity for the final depository to develop a comprehensive cross index. The project designed a set of about 45 subject headings which, together with geographic areas and names of persons, constitutes the "key" to our inventory of the collection.

Although the project was quite successful in carrying out its ambitious program all available material could not be collected within its short tenure. It is hoped that the recipient library will followup the leads already developed by the project but not pursued because of lack of time, money, personnel, or because of the reluctance of some people to participate in this documentary effort.

The project staff, under the supervision of a coordinator, consisted of four research assistants, three of whom were responsible for a major area of the project discussed above, and the fourth for directing the oral history program. In addition the project engaged secretarial and clerical help. Experts from the National Archives and the Library of Congress have, from time to time, been asked for advice. The project was operated financially and organizationally independent of Senator McCarthy's office, although the Senator's office gave a great deal of assistance in obtaining information and documents.

The project attracted the interest of many people writing about the

campaign or certain aspects of it. Unfortunately, because of limited space and the disorganized state of the material in the early months of its existence, the Historical Project was not able to accommodate demands of large-scale research but tried to satisfy limited and specific requests for use of the material. The project's cooperation with authors writing about the campaign proved most beneficial, as many authors were persuaded to deposit their research material with the project upon completion or publication of their work. Two such collections of particular value are Arthur Herzog's records, especially his interviews with many top-level campaign personalities for his book, *McCarthy for President*, and film producer Emile de Antonio's extensive background material on the campaign and the Viet Nam war.

It is hoped that all of the material will be made available to researchers as soon as possible. Relatively few restrictions have been imposed on access to the material. Understandable exceptions are some of the interviews, the delegate intelligence reports, some of the financial records, and a few confidential memoranda.

This collection documents more than the lost fight of one man for the presidential nomination of his party; it illustrates the coming together of powerful historical forces, which already have had a definite impact on politics in the United States and will certainly be significant for years to come.

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