

Maureen and Mike

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**Oral History Number: 104-001**  
**Interviewee: Winfield Page**  
**Interviewer: Helen Bonner**  
**Date of Interview: July 9, 1980**  
**Project: Jeannette Rankin Oral History Project**

Winfield Page: A knit family once you take on one of the Rankins, you have to whip the whole bunch. [laughter]

And they are formidable. They are aggressive. They are ambitious, and they left no stones unturned.

Helen Bonner: The whole bunch?

WP: The whole bunch of them.

HB: Mommy and all?

WP: Well, Wellington and the sisters.

HB: Edna?

WP: No, there was one sister I didn't know too well. But Mrs. Sedman, who was the Dean of Women out here...

HB: That was Harriette, yeah.

WP: I knew her daughters very well. I lived in Sigma Chi across the street from where they lived down here. At that day it was at 340 University. And I went several times with one of the young Rankin girls. I told you last night when you asked me when I ran against Jeanette, and I gave you the wrong time.

HB: I knew that couldn't be.

WP: I ran against Wellington at that time. Jeanette was in 1940.

HB: Ok! I knew that couldn't be right and I was going to ask you about that. That was Wellington because it was in 1940 that she ran.

WP: It was in 1940 when I ran against Jeanette. Earlier in 1928, I was a kid out here at the University and they asked me to become the "Hoover Minute Man" —just talk on the radio in 1928 for President Hoover, who was running for the Presidency. And then the state office and among them was Wellington Rankin for governor of the state and Joe Dixon for United States

Winfield Page Interview, OH 104-001, Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana-Missoula.

Senator. Down in the basement I have a bunch of political things—the University wants a bunch of my files but I haven't had the time to get rid of them and get them lined up—but I do want to show you a few things in the scrap book down there to give you this background.

HB: I would love to see them.

WP: Because it is necessary to get this whole picture that I'm about ready to reveal to you. But, anyway, when Wellington was running, and I was over to the Sedman house across the street from the fraternity house, and I met Mr. Rankin. He was a very intense person. He stood at the mantle, and admired himself in the mirror.

HB: He did, huh!! I guess he was a handsome man.

WP: He was, and a very well-built man, a very aggressive person, and the problem was Wellington was defeated at that time too. I can't understand it because the Republicans were elected. Hoover was President. But Joe Dixon was defeated. Now Joe ran against B. K. Wheeler, and B. K. Wheeler is another power I am going to mention.

HB: I was wondering about Burton Wheeler because he was a very important man.

WP: He was a very important person, and he had a very strong part in the politics. Joe Dixon was in the tail end of his career.

HB: Is Burton Wheeler still alive?

WP: He died, oh, about a year or so ago.

HB: Oh, too bad!

WP: But, back to the Rankin Family. Whenever any of them run, all of them pitch in, and they really went to work. Then after that time—that I was in 1928—I took 10 years trying to get my name known and I was a Young Republican, I was State Chairman and National Committeeman, and then I was finally elected Regional Director of the Pacific Northwest States—Washington, Idaho, Montana and Oregon. That was in 1940 or 1941 — the early part of 1941, and Jeanette was in Congress, and we were back in my capacity as Regional Director. I was back in Washington, D. C. and Jeanette invited Alice and me to have lunch with her.

HB: Then you met her, too, and let her know what you thought, too. [To Mrs. Page]

WP: And Jeanette was on her toes! When we had this luncheon with her (laughter), she was "hi"-ing here and "hi"-ing there! And like this and that and the other thing, to everybody coming into the lunch room. It was a Congressional lunch room. I think it was where we were at the time. I also had a meeting with B. K. Wheeler and with Bob Taft. Bob Taft and B. K. Wheeler

were very much opposed to the trend that Roosevelt was taking us toward getting us into World War II.

HB: So, he was really with Jeanette at that time.

WP: Jeanette Rankin was opposed to it, and I was opposed to it. There's a case right there where I ran against her and we were just out to sell ourself, and I had to work on it.

HB: Did you have to deal with Anaconda Copper at that time?

WP: There is another thing. Another element in this thing. And I am going to bring you a little background of history here. Jerry O'Connell was the congressman from this district, and he and B. K. Wheeler didn't get along too well. And Jerry had been getting rather loud, and obstreperous in his ways in handling politics back there, and they wanted to dump him. But this was a strong Democrat district, so they broke the Republicans off... and I'm going back to 1938, that's the first time I ran for Congress. And I had taken ten years to build myself up without holding political office. But I got fairly well acquainted, and I thought the opportune time was now because Jerry O'Connell had broken his pick with B. K. Wheeler. And B. K. Wheeler, at that time, and Anaconda Company were working more or less close together, and they didn't want Jerry O'Connell in the picture, either. So, it was a golden opportunity to take on Jerry O'Connell. I figured that's a Republican nominee could win. Well, Montana's election laws are such that you can vote either way.

HB: I read that.

WP: You go through the precinct and they give you two ballots: A Democrat, and a Republican.

HB: Were they still at large in those days?

Another voice: (Wife??) They're talking about the primaries.

WP: In the primary.

HB: Okay. Okay.

WP: And you vote one and you take it to the judge. This one you voted he puts into one box, and the one you didn't vote goes in the other box.

HB: Oh, I see, I see!

WP: So, it's been.

HB: Ted was asking me how Anaconda could control the votes like they did.

WP: Yes. Well, they got all the Republicans, well, I won't say all of them, but a great many of the Republicans to go over and vote the Democrat ticket to the electoral college. And I knew this was going to happen. There was a golden opportunity for a young guy like me. I didn't have the background: I came over from Billings and I didn't have a family or anything else. So, I tried my wings on this and ran against a fellow by the name of Thorkelson and a couple other Republicans. Well, I had built up quite a political support here in Missoula. Two days after the election—Thursday—and I have that in my scrapbook I want to show you, it's on the front page in the Montana Standard, "Thorkelson and Page are still running neck and neck." 345 votes I think it was separated us I came that close.

HB: Oh!

WP: Well, Thorkelson didn't do well. It was a known fact that here was another opening. By the way, the Democrats that the Republicans were always supporting and Wheeler and your Anaconda Company all together, they failed to lick Jerry O'Connell, but Thorkelson licked him. And I knew that this whole gang would be all behind the Republican nominee, so Thorkelson licked them. That was the first time we had a Republican elected to Congress for many, many years.

HB: I didn't understand that this used to be a Democratic district. I assumed it was Republican.

WP: Well, this western Montana is still Democratic.

HB: Still Democratic.

WP: In fact, the state of Montana is Democratic. Those that are Republicans are somewhat stupid like I was.

HB: (laughter)

WP: I had a firm belief in what they believed in, and I went all the way through up the ladder to the young Republicans...all the way through when Republicans were very scarce. There weren't very many of them around. Now earlier, when Jeanette was first elected and Joe Dixon was elected, the Republicans had a better stronghold because they had votes in the rural areas and the agricultural areas and the cattlemen and people like that. That qualified me to run in 1940. Well, Jeanette had left the state—hadn't been in the state for a long time.

HB: No, she was down in Georgia.

WP: She was back east. In fact, a lot of people wanted to question her authority to run.

HB: I understand she was really questioned.

WP: And I didn't bring it up, because I figured if I can't win on my own merit, well, I don't want to win. I want to win, but I don't want to resort to that kind of tactics.

HB: Yeah.

WP: So, we just bypassed that issue, and in fact, the only issue I had was I was qualified to hold the job and I just talked about myself.

HB: You did.

WP: And Jeanette Rankin...they were a very well-known family. Wellington Rankin on the telephone incessantly morning, day, and night...

HB: Is that right?

WP: ...calling up some of their old acquaintances, some of their old friends, (and they had many of them,) and every place I went the Rankin girls had been there.

HB: (laughter)

WP: Every bypass, every station, every place else. They were workers, and they really worked hard, and they deserved to win. It was a fair and square battle out and out.

HB: How much did she win by?

WP: I don't recall that at that particular time. Well, anyway, after that Alice and I were back in Washington, D. C. and I was still ambitious for the Congress, so I wanted to know if Jeanette was going to be here for re-election or not, so I asked her point blank. She said, "No, I promised the company [they were pushing Mike Mansfield] that I would step aside for Mike Mansfield." so...

HB: The Anaconda?

WP: Yes, when we say The Company, that's what it was.

HB: That's what it is!

WP: And they were strong for Mike Mansfield and Jeanette, I guess, had made a deal with them that she wouldn't run for re-election.

HB: Why would she do that? Why would she tell them something like that?

WP: Well, they were a powerful company. Now, the Rankins fought the company for many, many years.

HB: That's what I thought.

WP: But then they got in with the company.

HB: They did! When? After Wellington got...

WP: But she wanted to win at this particular time, and I don't know... Alice, did she give any other reason other than that?

ALICE: It's the only one I ever heard.

WP: That's the one she told both Alice and I that she'd promised the company that she wasn't going against Mike.

HB: So, Mike went in on her promises.

WP: He got in and he stayed in ever since. But that brings you through that election, and then she went back east again.

HB: Yeah.

WP: Well, the next time the Rankins appear in this. This is where I ought to bring in Wellington Rankin, because he was a tremendous influence with Jeanette. He had a tremendous influence in the state itself. We were elected Attorney General or he was appointed United States Attorney General? I don't know, but he had that office. He wanted to be governor in 1928. Well, then there was the contest that came up between Frank Hazelbaker, Sr., who was president pro-temp of the Senate. He wanted to be governor, and he beat Wellington Rankin for the nomination. Well, Rankin was so adamant about the situation, and they were going to elect the state chairman, and there was quite a battle between Rankin versus the company on who was going to be the state chairman and they finally came up with a compromise, and I was just a young Republican.

HB: The company was working in on that one I heard.

WP: Through Mr. Campbell, John Campbell, our senator here in Missoula. John Campbell and I were good friends, and I got to listen in and they had runners between the two camps, and they finally made the compromise. Well, then when he wanted to run for United States Senator, I supported Tom Davis, who is a lawyer in Butte, and Tom Davis was International President of the Rotary Club...a very high-class man, a man that would most certainly have made Montana a

wonderful senator. A Jim Murray was a Democrat and was running for re-election. Wellington Rankin was in this race. Well, I supported Tom Davis, and I was also running for my second or third term for the legislature. Let's see, I was a delegate to the Republican national nominating convention—Presidential nominating convention—in 1944. It must have been my third term. Well, anyway, I was supporting Tom and campaigning for him as well as running for myself, and I ran against the Rankins, but Wellington and I have always been friends...not close friends, but we were...

HB: Talked to each other?

WP: Yeah, we were on agreeable terms.

HB: Yeah.

WP: Ah, more about Wellington. I used to go up to his office. He had an old building there, and would get in that elevator, and it would sway back and forth. (laughter).

HB: Here in Missoula?

WP: No, they abandoned Missoula. Wellington was in Helena.

HB: Helena all the time?

WP: No, the Rankins hadn't lived here for years...

HB: Okay, okay.

WP: ...in Missoula. The old Rankin home is at the end of the Madison street bridge.

HB: Is it still there?

WP: No, I think he let it fall down. It caved in, and they finally tore it up, and the highway built—bought it out—to build over there.

ANOTHER VOICE: Where that little park is?

WP: It's right down on the North end.

Mrs. Page (?): No, it's across the river from the park.

ANOTHER VOICE: OH!

Mrs. Page: It's on the other side of the river.



WP: Their house was on the corner of Broadway and Madison—right where that gas station is. There's another street, Main Street, that runs into it, too. They had a big brick house.

HB: They had a ranch here.

WP: Yes, that was up Grant Creek. But they didn't have that then, as far as I know, they had sold that. The only member of the Rankin family was Mrs. Sedman, who was Dean of Women, and after she left that was the end of them.

HB: Did you know that Mrs. Sedman?

Mrs. Page: No, I didn't.

WP: I knew her very well.

HB: What kind of woman was she?

WP: She was a very fine person. She was an ideal woman to be Dean of Women out here at the University. In those days, you had very strict laws. It wasn't like the University's going's on now. You took a girl out during week time, you had to get her in by ten o'clock, and they had very rigid laws. She was a good Dean of Women. She did a good job. She had a nice family. I liked the Sedman girls: they were very nice girls. In fact, I have always gotten along quite well with the Rankin family—the whole family. But, anyway, Wellington, when he ran for the Senate, he just didn't get by. The company wasn't for him in those days, so you just didn't get by.

HB: Even with all his money and power, he couldn't do it?

WP: He practically owned three counties, and then I ran against him.

HB: How did he get all that property? I understand he was one of the biggest landholders in the United States at that time. How did he do that? I know his father already did all right. His father was one of the big builders in the town, right?

WP: Well, Wellington was quite a successful lawyer. He had two very competent law clerks that did all the actual bidding of law for him. John Acker, I think his first name was John, Acker was his last name, and then the girl that he married—Louise Ripfogel (??)—and she was brilliant. Wellington was the guy that could get up and speak before the jury, and he was quite successful. He was very aggressive in his land acquisitions. He got many, many pensioners from the penitentiary to get out and work for him.

HB: Cheap labor, huh?

WP: There's another story there. You go up to the Rankin office, and I've been there many times, and after you negotiate this wobbly old elevator, you get out... there was a fire down in one of the offices, and he just hammered boards across it and left it there... and then you finally got up there to his office on top. Right off the office there's a room with a bunch of chairs, and these fellows would sit in there waiting to be paid, and he wouldn't pay them. I don't know why he wouldn't pay them. He had all the money in the world, he just didn't pay them. He just let them hang there. Finally, I guess he would go ahead and pay them off. But they were crowded in there. He had a very fiery temper. One time he had a parking lot right across from his office, down on the ground floor, and he caught some guy [laughter] trying to get in his parking lot. He took an ink well and threw it at him, and swore, and told him to get out of there!

HB: [laughter]

WP: He was a character, a very interesting person, very energetic. But the whole family was energetic.

HB: Yes, it sounds like they all had tremendous energy.

WP: And they had a tremendous amount of, well, energy, drive, ambition.

HB: Would you compare them to the Kennedy family from the way they operate?

WP: In this way that when I was getting up to Wellington, when I ran against him, I had to run against those girls of his, too—those sisters of his—the whole darned family. Mrs. Sedman, I don't think she was out there; I don't think she did. But Jeanette and her sister and Wellington. Wherever I was, I had to clean out the whole bunch of them.

HB: I suppose in some ways it would be hard to campaign against women because you have to be so careful to not say...You had to be gallant, right?

WP: Well, when I was on this Hoover Minute man, one of the topics that I spoke on was the Republican party was a sponsor of the women's rights, and it kind of sounds funny on what's going on today.

HB: With what's going on today, yeah!

WP: But I still stuck to the idea that I was the guy that to elect, that I had the qualifications of the person to elect. By that time, I had plenty of whiskers. I had 10 years in the legislature, two on a little Hoover commission, and then after I was defeated for the Congress, I went back to the legislature for two more terms or four more years. But that's what I tried to do and I sold them on this idea that the program—that platform—were some of the things that I had done and I just tried to sell that. But anyway, we took on the Rankin family again. Rankin had a lot of people that owed him favors and they had to pay off, and he was not a bit bashful on them to

pay off. But he did have a handicap there — he didn't pay a lot of his people, the people he owed money to, he didn't pay. And those people voluntarily came to me and wanted me to use it [the non-payment.]

HB: OH!

WP: I said, "Well, I can't use it. I appreciate your support, but I can't use it."

HB: So, a lot of it was just who could wield the most power in terms of favors.

WP: The fact that he had so much money, I don't understand why he didn't pay his bills... he didn't do it.

Mrs. Page: He wouldn't even pay his phone bills.

HB: Is that right!

WP: He yanked his phone out. They cut his phone, and he yanked it out by the roots, and threw it out the window.

HB: Is that right!

WP: He was a very emotional person.

HB: Yes, somebody said that he had won so many cases against the telephone company that they finally gave him a phone and quit charging him for it.

WP: I wouldn't doubt that! [laughter] Get rid of the nuisance.

HB: [laughter] Get rid of him, give him his phone. Evidently, he had a feeling that he shouldn't have to pay anything—that he was above having to pay anything. He was not chintzy, because what I read is Jeanette wanted to run for office or something, he would send her to the best dressmakers and say get good clothes, and he would pay for it.

WP: Well, Wellington also wanted to be National Committeeman. Now that's a job that requires a person with a great deal of financial means, because you have to pay your own expenses on all this. He wanted to do that when he and I were running against each other for Congress. And I said, "Well, now, just a minute! He can't have both fields." I said, "I am going to oppose him for this nomination for National Committeeman. If he wants to run for Congress, well, that's fine with me. " Well, I was told by the company I better not do it. That kind of antagonized me...well, I'm going to come out and do it, anyway. I got to thinking about it—I could use that in my campaign. Here's an overly ambitious person—he wants to be National Committeeman and he wants to be Congressman and he has no business doing both. And I did,

I used it.

HB: And you used it!

WP: Uh-huh! And I got votes back too, so I didn't oppose it, and he was nominated. So that's some of the Rankins. Ask me questions that maybe I might recall.

HB: Okay. Some of the things—like I read in some of my research...I think it was Jeanette said the reason that Wellington could not win national office and that she could was that he would not deal with the little person. He wouldn't go talk to the man on the street. He wouldn't go back and knock on people's doors and say, "I'm Wellington Rankin," like she would.

WP: That's true.

HB: And do you think that's part of it?

WP: That's part true. His conduct in everyday life was his biggest handicap. I had a lot of people volunteer support for me because of his conduct.

HB: Because he was a bit arrogant?

WP: Well, his natural everyday friction was coming against people.

HB: Was he pushy?

WP: Very, and he was aggressive. He was almost to the point you might say arrogant.

HB: Yeah.

WP: Now Jeanette, as I said, there wasn't any stone unturned throughout this whole district...and this is a big congressional district, you had to cover a lot of territory here...she's been there. She and her sisters and the Rankins have been everywhere that I went.

HB: How did the people, in Missoula especially, feel when Jeanette voted "No!" on World War II, when Pearl Harbor had been bombed.

WP: They were disgusted.

HB: Just disgusted!? Well, don't you think that would wipe her out politically even if Anaconda Copper...

WP: Well, she'd given up. She never did actually participate in politics for herself. However, she did come back to help Wellington.

HB: Yeah.

WP: When I ran against Wellington.

HB: After that vote, she sort of gave up participating.

WP: Well, she had already promised the company and Mike Mansfield was well entrenched in the office by then, and there wasn't any possibility of getting him out of there. And there wasn't anything open except the United States Senate, and Wellington wanted that.

HB: Do you think that the fact that she voted "no" on that war, and that was such an unpopular vote meant that she wouldn't have won anyway? So, she knew it, and that's why we could tell the company, "Okay, I won't run again."

WP: No. She did all of this before the vote.

HB: Oh.

WP: See, Alice and I were back there in July of 1941.

HB: Yeah.

WP: And that's when we met with B. K. Wheeler and Bob Taft, and we had lunch with Jeanette. That's when I asked Jeanette if she was going to run for re-election.

HB: And she said no?

WP: She said no.

HB: And this was before the war?

WP: This was before we got into this war. Now, B. K. Wheeler predicted—he told Alice and me—that Roosevelt was going to have the United States in this war before the year was out. It happened.

HB: It happened, and Jeanette said that, too. She saw it coming?

WP: Well, Jeanette was opposed to it, and she voted against it. She'd be consistent. We realized that Roosevelt provoked this situation, but people asked me if I'd been elected what I would have done. I said I would have voted to go to war, because Japan created the act of war, and we couldn't do anything else but [go to war]. But I said I was opposed to Roosevelt getting us into this thing, because B. K. Wheeler told us time after time that Roosevelt would deliberately do this.

HB: Well, why didn't B. K. Wheeler vote no on it with her? Why didn't B. K. Wheeler vote no?

WP: Well, he's just practical like all the rest of us. Once we were...

HB: Once you were there...

WP: Once we were devastated like they hit us at Pearl Harbor he had no alternative. The fact of it is, it's like one person provokes the fight, and the other guy hauls off and does the swinging. Who's guilty? The guy that does the provoking or the guy that does the swinging? We were just as guilty at getting that war started as any because we provoked it.

HB: Jeanette wrote a fine article (it's in the Congressional Record) a year after Pearl Harbor giving all the evidence towards exactly what you said. It was pretty persuasive. I understand a lot of historians are backing it up now.

WP: Oh, yes. Mary was the wife's name, and I have forgotten what the man's first name was. They have a book out—I don't remember—about 1947-48, and cited time after time where this war was deliberately provoked. It's almost a historical fact. People like B. K. Wheeler, now they went out and licked B. K. Wheeler.

HB: What was Wheeler like as a person?

WP: B. K. Wheeler had a very spectacular life. We had some very interesting men in politics in Montana. B. K. Wheeler came to Montana—he was just a struggling young attorney. That's when they had the Copper Kings in Montana, the Anaconda Company and the Heines and all these others, and he was espoused to radical causes. In fact, they had what they called the IWW in Montana, and those were the [Industrial] Workers of the World. Well, B. K. Wheeler. And then they had the Non-Partisan League. Now, that was a farm organization that had gained quite a bit of political clout back in 1916, I guess. It was very effective here in Montana. Well, B. K. Wheeler was one of those you might call "left wing boys" at that time.

HB: Considered a radical.

WP: Yes, and there he encourages the radicals against the Company.

HB: About what time would that be? About what year?

WP: Well, I couldn't be accurate—I have information in the basement to look it up.

HB: Well, that's all right, just about, so I can get a feeling?

WP: I would estimate about 1916.

[Side two]

WP: B. K. Wheeler was one of those boys that was espousing the cause of the common man, and the Non-Partisan League and all these things were very disruptive to the two political parties. The political parties in those days were—the Republican party was stronger than in later times. That upset the balance of power quite a bit, and therefore B. K. antagonized the Democrats and the Republicans as well. He went down to Dillon and they rode him out of town on a rail.

HB: They really did this?

WP: They really did this stuff. He had a rough go of it.

HB: What kind of a man was he? Was he a Native American? Was he an Irishman?

WP: He came from New England. And he came here and started up here in Montana in the law profession. He was a very confident person, and he was a hard worker. Now, you would see him out in the sticks, in the byways and so forth, getting his political fences.

HB: Didn't he and Jeanette work side by side on a lot of these causes?

WP: More Wellington at that time. I was just a small child when all this happened. When Jeanette was first elected to Congress, we only had one Congress person at that time. Well, I think this must have happened—now, I'm just surmising this—after the census, and Montana had two Congressmen, and they chopped it off, and gave her the tough part—Butte and Anaconda. It was just impossible for a Republican. They just don't have a chance. Butte and Anaconda were a large part of our district at that time. Now, whether that was the finishing touches in that or not, I don't know, but Jeanette only served one term. And that was the end of her, and she left the state—she and her sister, I think. Mrs. Sedman was here and Wellington Rankin was over at Helena. Well anyway, back to B. K. He ran for governor against Joe Dixon. Of course, everybody—the company, and everybody—got out to help Joe Dixon lick this awful guy—B. K. Wheeler. Joe Dixon got elected, and the very first thing Joe Dixon did was to slap a metal mine tax on the Anaconda Company.

HB: No kidding!

WP: Right! Joe Dixon—there's another character. I have two books on Joe Dixon...

HB: He used them and then turned around and straightened them out.

WP: Well, he didn't use them: they used him.

HB: They used him, or tried to.

WP: ...as a weapon. They didn't love Joe Dixon. They had no love for Joe Dixon.

HB: Between the devil and the deep blue sea!

WP: Right! They licked B. K. But that was the best thing that ever happened to B. K. Wheeler because B. K. Wheeler took time. Then, I think, he had the appointment as United States Attorney General or something. But, anyway, he got himself built up so he ran for the United States Senate and he was elected. He and Tom Walt were the instigators of Teapot Dome.

HB: I'll be darned! That's wonderful!

WP: And that gave him a tremendous build up. Then this B. K. Wheeler—I am going to give you a Republican point of view of a Democrat. We've got two kinds of Democrats today: we've got the Jeffersonian Democrats who believe in paying our bills, keeping a balanced budget, and living within our means, and having a stable dollar; and then we've got the Social Welfare Democrats that believe doing all these things for mankind and so forth, regardless of what we're doing to the value of our money or anything else. Well, B. K. Wheeler was the conservative branch of the Democratic party. Now, that sounds funny inasmuch as he's responsive to these other causes the Non-Partisan League and the IWW and so forth.

HB: But the element—that doesn't sound funny to me.

WP: Anyway, when he got elected, he became more and more conservative. He fought and licked Franklin D. Roosevelt in packing in the Supreme Court. Roosevelt was mad because he couldn't get of all his Social Welfare put over and the Supreme Court threw it out as unconstitutional. So, what was he going to do, but dump more judges on the Supreme Court to vote his way and wipe these guys out. Well, it took a guy like B. K. Wheeler to do it. Well, that broke B. K. Wheeler's pick with Franklin Roosevelt. Well, Franklin Roosevelt favored Senator Murray, the other senator of Montana. All his patronage and all his other stuff went that way, so that left B. K. Wheeler to espouse the causes of and brought him closer and closer in alignment with the Company.

HB: Oh, good gosh. A radical gradually gets moved through the political system over to the other side.

WP: The [unintelligible] thing gets switched. In fact, if you want to be elected to any office in the national you had to get B. K. Wheeler's approval and go through the Company in order to get clear sailing.

HB: I'll be darned! Isn't that something.



WP: Well, anyway, B. K. Wheeler was a rugged individualist. He voted his own mind. He had the courage to stand up to the President of the United States on packing the Supreme Court, but there's bad blood that exist between Roosevelt and Wheeler. And Wheeler was strong against this strong centralizing strength of the Federal government. Now, there's a complete reversal there. You take the history of the Republican party and the Whig party: they were for strong centralized governments as against the state rights [position] of the Democrats. The Civil War broke out and then the Democrats were strong states righters. That existed until Roosevelt got in. Well, when he got in, he wanted the centralized power in the Presidency, and took on the strong centralization of government. That threw us Republicans in our reverse to come out for the States rights. So, this leaves B. K. Wheeler out here with the state's righters on the wrong party: he was playing footsy footsy with the Republicans and the conservative elements in the state of Montana and that was a strong political force. Well, that's how Jeanette Rankin finally got into this thing, because she had their approval, and Wellington Rankin later had their approval. So, you see there was a lot of funny switching going on.

HB: A lot of switching, almost like everybody was always trying to choose between the devil and the deep blue sea all the time.

WP: That's it. Joe Dixon, of course, he lost out when he came out with this metal mine tax. The Anaconda Company came out and ran Judge Erickson from Kalispell against him. They licked Joe Dixon, but Joe Dixon got appointed as Assistant Secretary of Interior under Hoover, and Joe Dixon was a strong character. Now, he came out against the Republican party when Taft ran against Roosevelt. He was Teddy Roosevelt's Bull Moose campaign manager, Joe Dixon was. It might pay you to look into his life, too.

HB: Okay, I will. Naturally, since this is a screen play, what I need are conflicts and opponents. Who would be a colorful opponent for her in terms of just character and personality?

WP: Opponent of Jeanette?

HB: Yes.

WP: Well, she ran against—in the Democratic ticket—she ran against Jerry O'Connell.

HB: Was he a colorful person?

WP: He was a colorful person, but he had dissipated his strength so terrible, that even a young guy like I without any political background or anything else could have...(interrupted)

HB: He was an older guy by that time.

WP: No, no, he, Jerry O'Connell, I think he is right about my age. He was a young person.

HB: Yes. He wasn't Irish! He sounds Irish—was he Irish?

WP: Yes, and from Butte.

HB: And from Butte. There's a lot of Irish people up there.

WP: Yes, and in those days that was a strong minority. Now, I did run and I finally did get the Republican nomination for Congress and I ran against Lee Metcalf who was running for his second term, and it was very difficult. But I had to write Butte and Anaconda off. A Republican just doesn't have a chance.

HB: That's right.

WP: You have to pick up your strength. I figured out how to pick up my strength in Missoula, Helena, Bozeman, and in Kalispell to offset—and to come out ahead—to offset what I was going to lose in Butte and Anaconda. That's not true now, because Butte and Anaconda has lost so much population that they don't have that position that they had at one time.

HB: Are there any local stories or local legends that people tell about either Jeanette or Wellington that would give me a feeling about how people felt about them? Personal kinds of things?

WP: Well, I'll tell you the Rankins—people were either very strong for the Rankins or very strong against them.

HB: Why? Usually for personal reasons instead of political reasons then, huh?

WP: Yes, personal.

HB: There were personal reasons, too.

WP: Oh, yes! If I could summarize Jeanette and Wellington—they're both alike in this way—they were both exceptionally ambitious. They were very self-centered people. They were takers, not givers. And that might have turned people against them. I was surprised at the voluntary help that I had when I ran against Wellington.

HB: They were out to get Wellington?

WP: That's right. There was more people that voted for me than voted—they were more against Wellington than voting for me.

HB: Was he a flashy person? Did he like to drive big cars?

WP: No. He's too darned tight for that.

HB: I'll be darned—so was Jeanette!

WP: He flat didn't spend money. It killed him to spend. He bought that Placer Hotel over there in Helena, and that was THE place where everybody met throughout the state, and when the Legislature was in session, we all stayed there. He bought that hotel, and took and didn't put anything back. Alice and my last term that we spent in Helena, that rug was so beaten and dirty that I hated to put my feet on that rug there! [laughter]

Mrs. Page! Well, it would get cold in the middle of the room...

WP: And the switches were out, and they just put tape over. You pinched them on and off. Now, his wife...

HB: Good! Those are the kind of things I need. That's terrific! How did his wife Louise—wasn't she beautiful in those days.

WP: And she was, and she tried to do something for that hotel, but it had been bled white.

Mrs. Page: She was always trying to get him to do something and he wouldn't do it.

WP: Yes, he was very strong willed.

HB: Do you remember in some of the family business—I've got to have some human things in here—was Wellington already married when he met Louise?

WP: I don't know! I heard—this is just hearsay and you can't put anything to it— I heard that he had gotten married and his wife just walked off and left him. Now, I don't know. I always thought of him as being more or less of a bachelor. He was attracted to women. It wasn't that he didn't like women, but when Louise worked for him why he finally got married.

HB: She worked for him for a long time before they got married, so it wasn't one of those passionate relationships. Sounds pretty...

WP: I can't say anything about that. There's all kinds of rumors that I wouldn't even want to comment on. I'll let you dig that out someplace else.

HB: Okay, [laughter].

WP: But anyway, she was a very competent person—Louise was. I guess Wellington did give her somewhat of a hand in trying to bring back their hotel. They painted it up a little bit, but by that time it had gotten so that Babcock came in and built this big motel over there—the Colonial—

and that was the final death blow. But, even then, I started in the Legislature in 1943, and my last term was 1961—wasn't it? And that was the last of the Placer Hotel. By that time the people had started living in motels, and then Babcock came along and built this Colonial. Have you been in Helena?

HB: No, we're going there tomorrow.

WP: Oh yes. You'll find that a very interesting place. But the Colonial Motel put the final finishing touches to the Placer.

HB: That's a good touch—that's a good character touch. All this money, and he won't have the light switches fixed!

WP: He practically owned three counties.

HB: That's what I read. He had some ranches with cattle, but he never actually worked those ranches? He just owned them?

WP: No, but he kept a darn close watch on them. He hired all the help—everybody that ever worked on them—he didn't rely on a foreman to do that; he did that himself.

HB: He sounds like a dominating man.

WP: Very dominating. A very forceful person, a very strong orator, he had a terrific ability to get up, make speeches, and so forth.

Mrs. Page: What was it that he used when he campaigned? He used a picture that had been taken of himself about 25-30 years before. Finally, the newspapers refused to print it!  
[laughter]

HB: [laughter] No wonder.

Mrs. Page: Do you remember that?

WP: Yes. But I don't like to mention those things. If I couldn't whip him on my own, I didn't want to whip him.

HB: Yes.

WP: I didn't want them to say that was dirty.

Mrs. Page: That showed his vanity.

HB: He was a vain man, huh?

Young man's voice: These kinds of stories that we were just talking about kind of help us to see what the person's like. I know it has nothing to do with politics. It lets us know the person better.

WP: I liked to sell myself. Another interesting thing—you talk about Wellington's vanity—he had false teeth—and they were killing him, and he had them in his handkerchief. [laughter] Well, then somebody'd came—why, put them in. [laughter] He and I got to be such close friends that he didn't pay any attention to me, but when somebody else came around—I seen him do that!

HB: That's good. I like those touches. That makes him very human, doesn't it?

WP: Yes.

HB: Because we have all these little things we do.

WP: But he was a very interesting person. Oh, yes, there's another thing he held an important part in—he did a lot of lobbying with the legislature. This is just hearsay—but people told me that they would come to him and want him to kill a bill or to promote a bill. I didn't realize at that time that he had all that influence in the Legislature, but evidently, he must have had it.

HB: As a lobbyist, I guess when you have that much money...

WP: And he had it. And that's the thing I depended upon when I ran against him 'cause I didn't have the money. I was just a punk kid that started out and I didn't have too much money to put into it, and I realized that I was going to run against a man with tremendous wealth. But I also knew that he was so darned tight with his money [laughter] he wasn't going to spend it.

HB: [laughter] Were there ever any sort of rumors or talk that Jeanette might marry someone ever?

WP: I never heard of that. You see, Jeanette was absent from the state of Montana during the time I started building my political career. In fact, I was totally surprised when I heard in 1940 that she was going to run because I had already had my cap set for it in 1938. I came so close to that nomination when Jerry O'Connell was still a Congressman. I figured that I would really take it this time. And Thorkelson had burned himself out so quickly, the Republican Congressman, I figured that he wasn't going to be a factor.

Mrs. Page: Wasn't it Wellington that licked the Corps of Engineers up there at Flathead Lake when they wanted to dam the lake?

WP: Oh, yes! That was quite a fight there!

HB: What was that all about?

WP: The Army Engineers were going to—have you been up at Flathead Lake? It's a beautiful place—summer homes on it!

HB: Oh, we loved it!

WP: What the Army Engineers were going to do, they were going to raise the current dam and flood the north end of Flathead Valley. Well, they were going to flood up into Kalispell from Poison. I am talking about from Poison's Kerr Dam. They were going to run back up the Flathead River and clear up into that Flathead Valley—beautiful agriculture area in there. And that would wipe out all these beautiful summer homes that were around the lake. And then when they wanted the water for Bonneville Dam, pull the plug, and make a sink hole out of that beautiful lake. Well, the citizens of Montana were irate about that. That's one time when all we politicians of all stripes of view—Governor Bonner, Wellington Rankin, myself, and others of us all went up to Kalispell and those Army Engineers up there—the y started telling us what we were going to do and what we weren't going to do. Old Wellington rose with all of his mighty vigor and sign banging, he started after those guys and put the chase on them and they get pretty sassy, and the crowds started booing the officers and telling to get out of town! They practically had a riot! We put the run on those guys!

HB: [laughter] Oh, that's wonderful!

WP: And the Flathead Lake is still there—untouched!

HB: Do you happen to remember if he had a sense of humor?

WP: Very serious person.

HB: Very serious.

WP: Very serious. He could have, but Louise Rankin will have to be the one to tell you that.

HB: I am going to see her.

WP: Mrs. Gait, now.

HB: Mrs. Gait.

WP: I admire her very much. She belonged to the Young Republican Club with me when I was a state chairman.

HB: Oh, you really knew her well!

WP: Yes, I knew her very well.

HB: I hear she is a brilliant woman.

WP: She is.

Mrs. Page: Wasn't she the first woman congresswoman [legislator] in the state of Montana?

WP: I think so.

Mrs. Page: I know it was right around your time.

HB: I know she's still practicing.

WP: Yes, well, she was the legal brains behind the Rankin law offices—she and John Acker. I think that's his first name—John. Both of them—they did all the legal work, and gave it to Wellington Rankin, who's oratorical ability is whiz like. He took the fruit of their legal knowledge. She was competent, a good-looking woman, and a very nice person.

HB: That's what I hear. I'm looking forward to meeting her.

WP: I always liked her very much.

HB: Right now, she is out at the Republican convention. But she'll be back in a couple of weeks.

WP: Her husband was elected as a delegate to the convention. That's an experience. I had that in 1944. We were in Chicago, and that really was a wonderful experience.

HB: How did you feel personally like when both of you had lunch with Jeanette. How would you respond to her personally—as a person? How did you feel about her?

WP: Jeanette?

HB: Yes.

WP: Well, she was always very friendly. She was very courteous to us, and invited us to have lunch and so forth. [laughter] I don't think she paid too much attention to us. She had other fish to fry around.

HB: She had all these people.

WP: But that's typical of the Rankin family.

HB: They've got so many things going on, and so many friends, and so much power.

WP: She wanted to honor us. She wanted to show us that she recognized the fact that we were there. And, of course, the Republican senators all did the same thing for us too, and then B. K. Wheeler, a Democrat. I thought as though we were talking the same language at that time. We were opposed to this drifting into war the way we were, and we didn't like the way things were being run. B. K. Wheeler years later, when they drafted the young men into the service and they were buying their homes around through here and they couldn't make their payments on their homes and they had to sell them at a terrific sacrifice—so I introduced a—what am I trying to think of—what so they called it in the Legislature?

HB: Resolution?

WP: Well, that's what it amounts to—to send back to the United States Congress, that, when we were in war and we drafted young people into the Army, that there would be a moratorium put on the payment of the homes, that the interest be paid by the federal government, and the wife and children would have a roof over their heads, and then when they were released from the Army, then they assumed their responsibility back. Well, B. K. Wheeler took it, and introduced it to Congress. I was quite honored by that maybe I can find it down in my scrapbook. Before you go, I will have to show you some of those things.

HB: I would like to see it.

WP: I'll show you where he introduced this.

HB: That will also give me a picture of him so that I can have some feeling for what he did do.

WP: I think I have a picture of B. K. Wheeler down there.

Mrs. Page: She means a mental image, don't you?

HB: Well, I would like to see B. K. Wheeler's picture.

WP: While we were over to the dedication of B. K. Wheeler in Helena and—somewhere in my files that I haven't had time to sort it out (I have piles of—reams and reams of material ) and somewhere in there, Alice, there is a picture of B. K. Wheeler in this little folder about like that one I have there.

HB: Do you have a picture of Wellington?



WP: Yes, I think I've got a picture of Wellington in there.

[End tape]