

ORAL HISTORY T-0018
INTERVIEW WITH: THOMAS KENNEDY
INTERVIEWED BY: MARGARET SULLIVAN
IMMIGRANT PROJECT (IRISH)
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SULLIVAN: This tape is part of the Immigration History Series of the Oral History Program at the University of Missouri-St. Louis. I'm Margaret Sullivan and I'm interviewing Mr. Tom Kennedy, who is the current president of the Irish Nationalists in St. Louis and we were talking about the Nationalists here. You were saying that the Nationalists were a secret organization.

KENNEDY: They are a very secret organization and it was forced underground because the of Ireland had a better hold of the United States government than we had and any action you take would be considered action against the United States government, too, and our prime purpose was to help Ireland get their freedom. •

SULLIVAN: The Nationalists in St. Louis is an old organization, aren't they? Do you know anything about the early history? I've never been able to track down a date for their founding.

KENNEDY: I don't think you could get me. In fact, I'm dubious about how they were founded in this country to begin with and I think it goes back to an organization that started in Ireland. I was looking at an old Irish history book I got here—not I but my father's book I should say—(interference from the tape recorder when the interview was taped)

SULLIVAN: You're saying that the Nationalists were founded out of the Fenian Movement, right?

KENNEDY: Still, you go into that secret stuff. We didn't even know, as members we didn't know what they did. They would send out dues to Headquarters in New York and that was done, too, in kind of a--what do they call?—a subway, underground, or something. What really kind of made us come to a halt in recent times is because the other fellows wanted to know more about it and we couldn't get any information and they said the heck with it. After all, those things are not necessary in this country any more. And we still haven't received a real, solid bit of information about the organization that I'd say I was privileged to join and to be a member of.

SULLIVAN: Was the national office in New York?

KENNEDY: In New York, and still are as far as I know. You can find... in San Francisco I understand they have a very strong, in fact they are, a political power in San Francisco. Nobody knows it, but they claim they are. What I do know about them, I never did get too much of it, all of it I heard from my father, he was a member of the Nationalists all his life

until they folded up and like everything else, one of the biggest faults we Irishmen have, we sometimes disagree with the leader and when we do we get mad and bingo, the whole thing goes to pot.

SULLIVAN: What was you father's first name?

KENNEDY: Thomas.

SULLIVAN: Thomas, too? I think I've run into him in some of the old records and the old newspaper accounts of the Nationalists.

KENNEDY: 'Course, we do have a burial plot out at Calvary. I don't know whether anybody told you about that. Even that was a source of disagreement at one time between the authorities who were on the committee and my father, Mike Manahan, and a fellow named, I think, McBride. I'm not sure of that name. They all got into a hassle over it one time. My father and Mike said to this guy to take the whole doggone works and run it yourself. He turned it over to his son and we haven't been able to get in contact with him to get that back in our control.

SULLIVAN: It's in somebody else's name, huh?

KENNEDY: So, we just formed a new group and my name is on it but I don't think we are half recognized by the cemetery authorities. We don't know for sure.

SULLIVAN: You don't know, really, the status of the plot out there at all?

KENNEDY: We know it's ours. It's there and it belongs to the Nationalists, there's no question about it but the privilege of having somebody buried there is just questionable as to just whether you have to have both groups or whether our one group now that was officially appointed some years back would have the right to say who could be buried there or not. I think they did try to burn somebody there and they found out there was another deed or something. About that time we got a little bit weak and nobody bothered to look into it.

SULLIVAN: This other group—is it still in existence?

KENNEDY: No, it's just one individual. Like I say, my father, Mike Manahan, and this—I think—McBride, but they were the three that was on this, I guess, burial committee and they got into a hassle over the thing and they...

SULLIVAN: Who did they get into a hassle with, do you remember?

KENNEDY: The three of them, just the three of them.

SULLIVAN: Oh, just the three of them together had the fight.

KENNEDY: Just the guys running the show on that end. Mike and my father, they just said, you take care of it, you run the thing to suit yourself and they pulled out. Then, he got pretty old and he turned it over to his son and I've never been able to catch up with him. Like I say, it could be something beside McBride but it's in that area or something like that.

SULLIVAN: When you joined the Nationalists in the late Thirties, around the middle or late Thirties, did they have any social affairs?

KENNEDY: Oh, yeah. We used to have a banquet every year.

SULLIVAN: St. Patrick's Day?

KENNEDY: It would be around the birthday of Robert Emmett.

SULLIVAN: Emmett. March 5. The beginning of March.

KENNEDY: Because we always had to get permission because we'd pick a Saturday—it was a fast day—in Lent and we always got permission to have meat on that day which was very graciously granted by the church.

SULLIVAN: Particularly, I imagine. Cardinal Glennon sympathized, particularly with your cause.

KENNEDY: The only quarrel we ever got with that was when we'd invite somebody to speak, he'd have to be of our faith, he'd say, "You should have told me so I could have eaten meat this morning" because the privilege goes for the whole day.

SULLIVAN: Did the Nationalists have frequent meetings? Did you meet often or meet once a month?

KENNEDY: Yes, we met once a month.

SULLIVAN: Where did you used to meet?

KENNEDY: Well, when I first belonged we met in a hall down on what used to be Pine Street. I forget the name of the hall. It was east of Grand, just about a block on the north side of the street. I forget what organization owned it. When they demolished all those places, we had to find a new hall.

SULLIVAN: Where did you meet then?

KENNEDY: Somebody found a hall over on...it was a Veteran's hall, over on... I think Caroline Street, around the medical school over there. I don't know for sure.

SULLIVAN: Around Grand somewhere. Yeah, I think there's a Caroline over there.

KENNEDY: It was down east, east of

SULLIVAN: You said your dues went to New York. Did they theoretically go to Ireland?

KENNEDY: Well, if anything, it was for the benefit of Ireland, either politically...! imagine if a shipment of arms was necessary, they'd take care of that, too. The Fenians at one time made a raid into Canada and they were financed by the Fenian organization here which I believe, in my opinion, if it wasn't the Irish Nationalists or the grandchildren of the...

SULLIVAN: Yeah, that's the opinion I get—that the Nationalists came from this period and from that movement, I think.

KENNEDY: The thing was going pretty well. The invasion would have been successful if the...I guess the English government got to President Grant and he put the...

SULLIVAN: They were waiting for him when he came back.

KENNEDY: A couple of the leaders were executed.

SULLIVAN: Did you ever belong to any other Irish organizations?

KENNEDY: No.

SULLIVAN: Just the Nationalists?

KENNEDY: Just the Nationalists.

SULLIVAN: The Nationalists—they just gave a banquet and then held monthly meetings? Did you have any other activities?

KENNEDY: Well, for a couple of years we also had picnics.

SULLIVAN: The Irish organizations are also very big on picnics.

KENNEDY: Yeah. In fact, we had several picnics over on the East Side. I think they call it Falling Springs. They were all social affairs and also they made a few dollars on some of them, which was good for the organization.

SULLIVAN: About how many members did you have?

KENNEDY: Oh...I'm not sure now, but I think at one time we had over a hundred.

SULLIVAN: I'm sure at your picnics and banquets you drew outsiders.

KENNEDY: Oh, outsiders, of course.

SULLIVAN: The banquets—were they just for the members or were outsiders invited?

KENNEDY: They were for everybody. You could invite all your friends and it was always a good time because the politicians were out looking for help and they showed up en masse with their crowds, so they did quite well with those.

SULLIVAN: Where did you usually hold the banquets?

KENNEDY: The Starlight Roof. The Chase Hotel had most of them.

SULLIVAN: I remember, I think it was...you remember Mr. Hayes of the Irish-American Club, Tommy Hayes who died recently?

KENNEDY: Yeah.

SULLIVAN: I talked to him a couple years ago and he made a remark about politicians. I remember him saying that if you gave a party in a rathskellar with five people. Mayor Kiel would show up and shake hands.

KENNEDY: Yeah, we're very prominent with the politicians.

SULLIVAN: They'd go any place just to get a few votes. Did you grow up in St. Louis?

KENNEDY: I was raised in St. Louis.

SULLIVAN: Your dad was from Ireland or your grandfather?

KENNEDY: My frandfather.

SULLIVAN: About what year did he come over. If I may ask you?

KENNEDY: Oh, my. I heard he was 19 when he came over and he was 98, at least that's the best age we could put 01 him, in '58 when he died.

SULLIVAN: He survived quite a long time.

KENNEDY: When he came to this country, he followed the building of the railroads on the western part of this country. That was the only place where immigrants could go.

SULLIVAN: Did he come over—no, he would have been after the potato famine.

KENNEDY: Yeah.

SULLIVAN: When did he come to St. Louis?

KENNEDY: When did he become a citizen?

SULLIVAN: I mean, when did he come to St. Louis?

KENNEDY: He came right to St. Louis when he came over. I had an aunt living in St. Louis and he came right direct to St. Louis. Well, no. I think he made one stop and visited an aunt of his, his mother's sister, in Cincinnati and then he came on into St. Louis. I don't know whether he went to work here first but there wasn't much work here and he wound up spending a great deal of time on the building railroads in the West.

SULLIVAN: Did your father marry here?

KENNEDY; Oh, yes. He married...my mother's name was Finnigan.

SULLIVAN: She was bom here?

KENNEDY: She was born in Ireland.

SULLIVAN: Do you mind me asking questions about your family like this?

KENNEDY: Not at all, not at all.

SULLIVAN: I mean, this would be good for oral history and that sort of thing.

KENNEDY: I'm very proud of my family.

SULLIVAN: What did your father do here after the railroads were finished?

KENNEDY: Well, after he came back, he went to work as a...but today they call them a plumber's helper but then they were just common laborers. And he spent some time working at the World's Fair. It must have been 1903 when they started it and he worked out there until it was ready to open. Then he followed the trade all the way through his life.

SULLIVAN: Did your father belong to a lot of organizations, to a lot of Irish organizations?

KENNEDY: He did belong to the Hibernians when they were very, very popular here when they had a...oh, if you didn't belong to the Hibernians, there was something wrong. And then he also belonged to the Nationalists.

SULLIVAN: Those were his two big organizations.

KENNEDY: In fact, they used to have joint meetings with the East Side and they'd come over here and our group would go over there, or his group rather, and they had quite a few of them.

SULLIVAN: What area of St. Louis did you grow up in?

KENNEDY: North St. Louis.

SULLIVAN: Which parish?

KENNEDY: The parish that I remember was Holy Rosary.

SULLIVAN: The reason I asked was...

KENNEDY: That was up around, you know. Fair Grounds Park.

SULLIVAN: Because the Irish, a lot of their social activities revolve around the church and the parish activities.

KENNEDY; Oh, yeah. 'Course, the founder of Holy Rosary came from Ireland.

SULLIVAN: You mentioned earlier that the East Side has better Irish organizations.

KENNEDY: Yes. I don't know why but they seem to be a lot more...

SULLIVAN; My next question was why.

KENNEDY: They seem to be a lot more...they lean a little more toward their groups. Maybe there was more of them over there.

SULLIVAN: That's what I was just wondering.

KENNEDY: I think that like all people, especially immigrants that come to this country, and you're kind of forced into what they now refer to as ghettos, and they you get a little bit better fixed and you move out—you move into a better neighborhood. Well, the first thing they want to do is to shed their national origin if they can. They don't want to be connected with that. Maybe they're a little bit rowdy, I don't know. Sometimes they say they were but they want to get away from it. They won't even belong to the different Irish organizations that exist.

SULLIVAN: You mean, the Irish in St. Louis tended to be a little bit more snobbish than they were...

KENNEDY: In fact, some of them with good Irish names when they moved, what we call West, I mean west from Kerry Patch or Seventeenth and Franklin or along those areas, they'd even drop part of the Irish manes, especially the "O" and if it could be pronounced a different way, it was pronounced a different way.

SULLIVAN: Yeah, I know. Jim Mullally mentioned that. He said when he came here he was surprised how the Irish in the city where some of them seemed to think they were so much better than the ones that prospered.

KENNEDY: They wouldn't admit they were Irish.

SULLIVAN: The ones that had prospered, he said, very often were...

KENNEDY: In fact, there was a family that moved from the downtown area some years ago, they changed their name and claimed they were French but yet the parents talked with an Irish brogue that you couldn't cut with a knife. To try to convince anyone they were French, I mean, it's difficult.

SULLIVAN: That's kind of interesting though, in a way because I think most of the people I grew up with were Irish descent. Most of them tend to be rather proud of it.

KENNEDY: You take now, the generations now, they're very proud. 'Course, we've got something to be proud of. It's pitiful to think that even some of our people directly from the Old Side would want to get away from it.

SULLIVAN: That's what I say. Maybe one generation, some of them might want to get away, but the next generation come back.

KENNEDY: One generation away, they were the first ones to break away. They felt...they had a cross on their back because of these poor guys who come over. They're the first generation in this country. They assume a brand new image. But, then, their children started looking back over their shoulders to see grandma and grandpa and they decided they liked what they saw and they became pretty good supporters of the Irish groups and causes,

especially when they read their history.

SULLIVAN: Did the Irish tend...my impression is and maybe you could give me some information...the Irish tended to move out along Olive and Page and Natural Bridge. Were there certain parishes that were predominantly Irish?

KENNEDY: Yes, they did. They moved sometimes in groups. Quite a few of them scattered all over North St. Louis. Mostly North St. Louis. Very few of them went South. Where there was really a strong group of them was out in St. Edward's Parish, out there on Claire Avenue. In fact, at one time they referred to that as Little Terry Patch. Out in Parish and St. Mark's Parish, there were a great number of them out there.

SULLIVAN: I got the impression that you could kind of trace the, you know by the parishes. The old St. Patrick's Day Parade, the people march by parish. That's kind of like straight out St. Berge's out to Notre Dame in Wellston. There's a whole ring of...

KENNEDY: Yeah, but most of them went North and stayed North. Northwest, too.

SULLIVAN: Kind of out along Page and then North to Natural Bridge.

KENNEDY: Quite a few settled in University City, too. Of course, those were people...like today, these places...'course we never realized it, but places like St. Edward's Parish, certain areas in University City, would be like subdivisions, just filling lots. The people in the well-populated end of the city would want to move out, raise their families, have a home of their own, so they'd buy these lots and since a majority of them were working in the building trades, on their Saturday afternoon, if they get off at noon on Saturday, but especially on Sunday, a bunch of them would pitch in and they'd all go out and they'd build someone a house. Then, when they got that built, then another one would buy a lot, well, that way they'd all end up with a home of their own with what few dollars they could gather, their kindness of each other's labor. Quite a few of them got their homes that way.

SULLIVAN: It'd be more convenient if you were all working in the same area, too, you know.

KENNEDY: Oh, yeah.

SULLIVAN: As you grew up in St. Louis, were most of your friends Irish in the neighborhood you lived in? Were they predominantly Irish?

KENNEDY: Well, it was kind of a feeling when you went to school and you heard someone had an Irish name, automatically he was a friend of yours. Maybe he wasn't, but he was more acceptable.

SULLIVAN: He didn't know that right away.

KENNEDY: And we did have sort of a feeling of between the Germans and the Irish. But you find out when you go to high school that when you pick a pal in high school, nine times out of ten you'll see a fellow with an Irish name and a fellow with a German name would pal together. I don't know why, but it just worked out that way.

SULLIVAN: They mix more in high school than in grade school.

KENNEDY: But, in grade school you more or less...because that fellow with the foreign name, he was an invader. He didn't belong there. That's if you were in the majority. If you're in the minority you had a bad time in...I don't imagine an Irishman would ever go to St. Ambrose School back in those days.

SULLIVAN: You'd pick somewhere else to go. Are you in St. Ambrose Parish here?

KENNEDY: No.

SULLIVAN: Yeah, I wondered about that. What schools did you go to?

KENNEDY: Holy Rosary.

SULLIVAN: Holy Rosary. You grew up in Holy Rosary?

KENNEDY: I spent a year at McBride High and for some unknown reason I went to work. Then somebody got the bright idea that I'd make a good prospect for the seminary and I spent about four years or so at the St. Louis Preparatory Seminary wasting their time and mine.

SULLIVAN: You decided against that, then?

KENNEDY: Finally, I went to work.

SULLIVAN: Where did you work?

KENNEDY: Missouri-Pacific.

SULLIVAN: Missouri-Pacific?

KENNEDY: Well, I had a few jobs in between there, but I mean, I spent 41 years with them and retired in '70.

SULLIVAN: So, now, you're enjoying your retirement.

KENNEDY: Oh:

SULLIVAN: I know when I talked to Jim Mullally he seemed to be doing more now than he did before he...

KENNEDY: I never do anything. I've been the laziest person on earth. If you weren't here I'd probably still be in bed.

SULLIVAN: We're the same type I think. I'd probably do that if I could, too. The Irish in St. Louis—you mentioned a lot of them were in the building trades. What were some of the more common occupations?

KENNEDY: Well, bricklayers; carpenters to some degree; plumbers, quite a few of them

were plumbers, that is in the building trade; and plasterers, a good number of them were plasterers. 'Course, I would say in my time, as a kid, most of the laboreres of all the building trades were predominantly Irish, especially on the North Side. Now, I don't know anything about the South Side, whether they had other nationalities or not. On the North Side it was difficult to get a job as a hod carrier unless you were Irish. It was hard work, or course, but they had to fill it up.

SULLIVAN: Of course, the Irish were very active in the building trades unions, too.

KENNEDY: Oh, yeah. They eventually became some of the big leaders of the building trades unions. 'Course, you're gifted with a brain, if you'll just develop it.

SULLIVAN: The...also, most of the police when you were growing up, the police department were heavily...

KENNEDY: Well, that would come about I imagine...a great deal of that to their very strong interest in politics. They've very good politicians and they generally take over whenever they go after a job they take over and they became the power. Naturally, they had to help those who helped get them in power, which were their own people.

SULLIVAN: Patronage is always a good thing. I noticed, looking at the... you mentioned the Germans and the Irish sticking together in school and things. I noticed that the Democratic party, if you look about 1900, if you look at the city committee, it's all Irish. If you look at the Republican city committee, all the names look German. Was there ever any rivalry between the Germans and the Irish?

KENNEDY: No, no. We just kind of...I don't know...in fact, they get along wonderful except there was kind of a..."That's an Irishman " and that's enough to kind of put you on your side of the street but there was never any quarrels or any disagreements. In fact, like I say, when they moved... when we got to high school, it was just kind of common thing that you automatically would pick out some fellow with a German name and a German guy would pick up some fellow with an Irish name and then from then on the melting pot took place. You became friends, very good friends.

SULLIVAN: You know, everything is kind of lined up in politics. I know in the church here, there was an Irish Pastors' Association and a German Pastors' Association and I keep asking people and everybody keeps saying everything was friendly so I guess it was.

KENNEDY: In the early days, they used to never put a priest with a German name in what was called an Irish parish. See, there is no such thing as a German or Irish parish in the country after people knew it. There are parishes where the majority of a certain race or nationality go there and then it gets the name. All the parishes in this country are called English-speaking parishes. Like I say, the majority of the persons of a certain nationality, and it automatically becomes that nationality of church.

SULLIVAN: It depends more on groupings of people in neighborhoods, really.

KENNEDY: But, there's no animosity or disagreement among the people. It's just...like I say..."He's a German," and that's it. If it had any faults that was the reason he had them. The

Germans say the same thing. If there's something wrong with him, he's Irish so what can you expect? That was the end of it. We never had any quarrels about anything at all.

SULLIVAN: I know, there's a saying in my mother's family that if they don't like something, it's "Dutchie". I guess that's kind of the same thing. Did you have a large family? Did you have many brothers and sisters here?

KENNEDY: I had one sister and three brothers.

SULLIVAN; Are they all still alive.

KENNEDY: My sister is still alive—that's all. She's out in Sacramento and has seven children. She kept the faith. She married a guy named Lynch.

SULLIVAN: Did your brother stay in St. Louis?

KENNEDY: Yeah. My younger brother died when he was about a year old.

SULLIVAN: The rest of them all stayed in around the city?

KENNEDY: They all stayed and died. Oh, I guess, Ed said about 12 or 15 years and then lived, say, maybe two years longer.

SULLIVAN: To get back to East St. Louis for just a minute. What were some of the big organizations besides the Hibernians? Do they have the Nationalists over in East St. Louis?

KENNEDY: The Nationalists weren't what you'd call a big organization because of their underground methods and everybody wasn't accepting the Nationalists either. They'd run you through the mill before they'd take you in.

SULLIVAN: Could they give you some kind of examination?

KENNEDY: They put your history down. They find out who your grandparents were and if there was anything kinky about it, you weren't taken in. 'Course, they have made a mistake a couple times picking on people who turn out not to be Nationalists—pocket-liners. Because of that, they slowly went downhill because everybody doesn't want to be screened just in order to belong to something, especially those born in this country don't go for it any more. What the heck? I don't care. My grandfather could have been a horse thief but that ain't my fault. Why did they let him steal the horse in the first place?

SULLIVAN: If he'd stolen an English horse, it would have been OK. What were some of the organizations on the East Side besides the Hibernians?

KENNEDY: I really don't know, but the Hibernians was really one of the outstanding. In fact, at one time the chief of the police department or the chief of the fire department would be a member of the Hibernians. Every Irishman on the police force or every fireman would belong to the Hibernians.

SULLIVAN: Hey, that's a thought.

KENNEDY: In those days, if politics changed, both chiefs were out. The new group would come in and they'd pick somebody else. If they didn't appoint another Irishman, why all the policemen and firemen would quit the Hibernians. The only reason they did that was because they wanted to stay in favor with the chief.

SULLIVAN: That would be interesting to kind of look at the police chief and the fire chief and then look at the memberships and see if they really fluctuate.

KENNEDY: Yeah, it really used to fluctuate. My dad told me that when he was a member of the Hibernians for years.

SULLIVAN: The Hibernians died out here for a while too, didn't they?

KENNEDY: They did. They slipped a little bit but now they're getting back and they're doing pretty well. I don't think they'll ever be numerically as big as they were before. They were up in the thousands.

SULLIVAN: I know they have some huge picnics and things.

KENNEDY: Yeah, they'd have a parade. I never saw one but my father was one of the uniformed members of the outfit. I still remember a cap he had and I don't know what happened to it anymore. I guess my kids used it to play with. It had the regiment number on it in gold letters on the cap. It was kind of an odd-looking cap but it...you see a lot of them now. It looks like they're coming back, especially those caps that stand up, something like the French police wear.

SULLIVAN: I was wondering about the Hibernians dying out here. I was wondering if they kind of burned out at the same time as the Nationalists.

KENNEDY: No, no, I think they didn't die all together but they kind of got a little bit behind in their doings.

SULLIVAN: Another question I ask people which I can't find any answer to but maybe your dad might have mentioned this to you...they used to have these huge, big St. Patrick's Day parades here about 1907.

KENNEDY: Oh, yeah. That was a must here.

SULLIVAN; And then all of a sudden they stopped and the newspapers never said why. I got a lot of this out of the...I don't know if you remember the old Western Watchman, but they insinuated that...they hinted sort of that some of the Irish pastors had a fight among themselves.

KENNEDY: That could be.

SULLIVAN: I just wondered if hi ever mentioned anything to you.

KENNEDY: One of the things the Irish had to cope with, especially in this country, now I'm not real sure but I think at Trinity College where all the priests are trained in Ireland, or were

at one time...now Trinity College is a fine institution, educational institution. There's no question about the men coming out of their being well-educated. But it's my understanding it's English financed and an English institution would naturally brainwash their people in that school along their lines. In fact, if you have noticed during the founding of the Fenians, some bishop denounced them, severely denounced them as a bad outfit and at one time when the Fenians organization was going real good, some English clergyman got to Rome and had the Pope excommunicate anyone who was a Fenian. Irishmen take their religion very seriously. Excommunication was a pretty serious thing. However, some of the better minds did get to Rome and got the Roman group straightened out on it and that ban was lifted.

SULLIVAN: I noticed in St. Louis, anyway, a lot of the leaders in the Nationalists and the Friends of Irish Freedom around the time of the First World War were priests, like Father O'Rourke, particularly. Father O'Rourke...and if you look at the membership of these organizations there were a lot of priests in them. My impression is that the Irish American priests are a lot... than the Irish priests.

KENNEDY: They generally got it from their parents. When you get something from your father and mother, you know, seldom to they give you bad information. When you get to looking at it and read up a little on it, he's not such a dunce after all.

SULLIVAN: After you get past that stage. Yeah, I know what you mean.

KENNEDY: He knows what he's talking about. SULLIVAN: I was just wondering if maybe you had hear anything about these old parades. I got the impression that there was a big fight. The Watchman made some sort of comment about it.

KENNEDY: Back in my day, Monsignor Dempsey was generally the, they call him the Grand Marshall or something.

SULLIVAN: The Grand Marshall, yeah.

KENNEDY: He'd be the head guy. He was quite a wonderful man. A good Irishman. Even though he might have been brainwashed by the Trinity College, he did a lot of changing. He stayed with the people.

SULLIVAN: I was looking at some research on the Irish Nationalists back before the First World War and in Ireland, most of the Irish, there was a wave of constitutionalism. John Redman was going to free Ireland through the permission of Parliament. But I noticed in St. Louis, the Nationalists really hung on and the Nationalists seem to be much more deeply rooted in St. Louis than the Constitutionalists or the Redmans organization.

KENNEDY: Well, their reason for that...there were several lads who came to St. Louis who had to leave Ireland in a hurry and they brought with them their desire to free Ireland. They passed it on to their constituents. Of course, I wouldn't be free to give you some of their names because I don't know how their families feel about that. In fact, whenever you meet them, they never talk about it. They never mention it.

SULLIVAN: They never mention they had to leave in a hurry, huh?

KENNEDY: I think they think their ancestor was somewhat of a criminal just because they might throw a bomb at a lodge full of English soldiers or something like that. They can't accept that. It's quite a family.

SULLIVAN: There has been recently a kind of revival of Irish things in St. Louis. I know the parades are back, the Hibernians seem to be reviving.

KENNEDY: A group of Irish lads, of Irish descent anyway, just out of the clear blue sky started this St. Patrick's Day thing and I think it came from St. Ann's where they used to have a St. Patrick's Day parade out there in St. Ann's Village and I think those lads just kind of mushroomed up and got a little support from the city of St. Louis. I think it's... there's a judge here in town who's quite active—Cochran. Is that his name?

SULLIVAN: I think so.

KENNEDY: He's quite active now in the parade, quite interested in it. Not from a political point but simply from reviving the old St. Patrick's Day parade just for the fun of it.

SULLIVAN: It's a tradition and the remembering...

KENNEDY: It was in the old days when they would have the parade because the older ones would speak about it.

SULLIVAN: What do you think prompted most people to join organizations like the Hibernians and the Nationalists? Do you think it was mostly just the sociability of getting together with other people?

KENNEDY: You would meet some very fine people and especially the Hibernians are the social organization but they do a lot of good work. I think they have a...without being sure, not being a Hibernian, but I think they have some kind of a charitable thing they take care of whenever they have a few dollars ahead which, I mean, in itself is worthy of membership. They do have a good time when they get together and they do have a dance once a year. I did years ago attend them when I was much younger and I always had a wonderful time. They had a hall then on just west of Grand, had it in an old church. I guess you don't remember that.

SULLIVAN: No.

KENNEDY: Right up from the Rock Church. That was a hibernian hall I at that time.

SULLIVAN: These organizations, like the Hibernians I think provided a lot of entertainment, really, for young Irishmen.

KENNEDY: They keep up the tradition of Ireland and I think they only have one...I think they have to be a Catholic to belong...I'm not sure about that now.

SULLIVAN: I don't think you do.

KENNEDY: The difference between them and the Nationalists, you had to be of Irish descent

to be a Nationalist, your religion didn't mean a thing.

SULLIVAN: As long as you were Irish.

KENNEDY: As long as you were Irish.

SULLIVAN: Why did the Nationalists die out lately? You said they were kind of wane.

KENNEDY: I don't know. It was a lack of interest and it was difficult to get members. They didn't seem to have any interest. It just kind of slowly went down. Well, we still have a few lads that are interested in it. They get together once in a while, maybe at a wake or something, and talk things over or call each other up but...

SULLIVAN: About how many members do you have now?

KENNEDY: I'd say, without too much trouble, you could gather up about twenty.

SULLIVAN: Mostly older men?

KENNEDY: No. I think about the only old one, unless Marty McVey is still alive I think he is—is a fellow called Conway...

SULLIVAN: Richard Conway?

KENNEDY: Rick Conway.

SULLIVAN: Did you find that most of the people who belong to the Nationalists also belong to the Hibernians?

KENNEDY: The majority did. The majority belong to both organizations. Some of them belonged to Irish-American...

SULLIVAN: Were most of the members of the Nationalists born in this country or were they born in Ireland?

KENNEDY: When I first joined, I would say the majority of them were born in Ireland.

SULLIVAN: Maybe this explains the dropping off...

KENNEDY: Well, as I say, because of this secret set-up they had, which they had a very good reason for which we probably don't understand, the young lads born in this country, they wanted to know...especially when you send your dues to New York. Who gets it? Who do you send it to? And why? That's the American way, you know. You say, "Where are you going?" You don't care where he's going. It's just a way of conversation.

SULLIVAN: They wanted their receipt from New York.

KENNEDY: If they would give you some kind of a...even a sick explanation people would accept it. But they leave you standing there. Right now, they cut you off just like that and you ain't going to go for that. Then you wonder, where does this money go, who gets it, what do

they do with it? And why? What's the purpose? We know what the purpose is but then you still want to know who gets it.

SULLIVAN: When were you elected president of the Nationalists?

KENNEDY: Oh, boy. Gee, I don't remember. We haven't had a meeting for so long.

SULLIVAN: Can't remember. It's been years and years, huh?

KENNEDY: Let's see. I guess it's 15 years ago.

SULLIVAN: Who was the president before you? Do you remember any other people that were officers?

KENNEDY: Well, there was Jack Drew was president...Jim Hogan...Charlie Cullen—Charlie Cullen lived on the East Side. Those were just some I remember.

SULLIVAN: Did many of your members come from the East Side?

KENNEDY: Yes, quite a few came over. We used to have a good delegation from the East Side.

SULLIVAN: About ten percent, fifty percent? Any idea?

KENNEDY: About twenty percent. If not, more. Connell Sullivan and his dancers he was a member.

SULLIVAN: He's from the East Side, right? You mentioned—what's his name?—McDunham? Jack McDunham?

KENNEDY: Yes, McDunham.

SULLIVAN: He was the last secretary?

KENNEDY: Yes, to my knowledge he was the last secretary we had.

SULLIVAN: Have any idea where he might live?

KENNEDY: No.

SULLIVAN: I'd like to give him a call. I guess I could call Stone Center. KENNEDY: Yeah. They could probably connect you. He might have some records. I don't know.

SULLIVAN: If we could find these records...it would be a shame to have them get lost if they're still around.

KENNEDY: One bad habit we have though, we Irish...if we get mad at somebody, we get mad at the whole organization. Each individual member comes in for our rap, too. It's just a sad thing because as a united people it'd be great because some of this stuff that we still exercise today is the cause of this miserable set-up we have up there in It's all based on the

same thing—if I can't pitch, I'm not going to play.

SULLIVAN: Everybody wants to be a chief, huh?

KENNEDY: Yeah, everybody wants to be a chief. It's emphasized in some of the stories in that book. Like I say, if you have one at home, you can find it throughout the pages.

SULLIVAN: Well, I'm going to give Mr. McDunham a call, then.

KENNEDY: Yeah. He might actually have some worthwhile information.

SULLIVAN: Well, thank you Mr. Kennedy.