



JOHN "JACK" R. WILLIAMS
1909-1998

Honored as a Historymaker 1993
Arizona Governor and Radio Broadcaster



The following is an oral history interview with John R. (Jack) Williams (**JW**) conducted by Janis A. Gordon (**JG**) for Historical League, Inc. on October 14, 1992 at Mr. Williams' Phoenix home.

Transcripts for website edited by members of Historical League, Inc.

Original tapes are in the collection of the Arizona Heritage Center Archives, an Historical Society Museum, Tempe, Arizona.

JG: Governor Williams, I'm delighted to be here with you this morning. Why don't you start our session by just giving us a brief background of your career in Phoenix and Arizona.

JW: Actually, I should have been born in Arizona, but there was no hospital in Ashfork so I was born in Los Angeles, California but returned immediately to Arizona. Frequently I'm tempted to put down born in Arizona Territory since the date was 1909. I spent the usual childhood. After a brief sojourn in Mexico, my father was Wells Fargo Superintendent for the West Coast, but Poncho Villa ran us out. My mother and I came out on a troop train and arrived in El Paso. My father was shipped out on a gun boat and he joined us in El Paso and the Wells Fargo gave them a job in Phoenix, Arizona as manager of their Phoenix office. We came back to Phoenix in 1913, having spent about a year, maybe less than that, out of the United States. From then on, I lived the usual childhood of Kindergarten and grammar school and Phoenix Union High School and then Phoenix Junior College. I might explain that while I was in junior college, I was working as a laborer at the depot, since my father died and I was fourteen and I supported my mother and took care of all of the affairs of the family. In effect, I became the man of the family and she got very confused over that. After the junior college episode which was only two years of college, I went to KOY for an audition and was hired as an announcer. I stayed with KOY with one brief exception when I was fired during the very depth of the depression. I stayed with them probably through almost 1960, gradually buying more stock and finally winding up as one of the owners of the station. During that time since I was very well known being the first radio announcer in Phoenix, it was easy for me to get elected to various offices. I was the continual president of the Phoenix Elementary School Board for about eight years because the woman on the board didn't think at that time, her name was Faith North, that a woman should be president of the board and she didn't like the other man that was on the board, so she'd nominate me and



I'd vote for myself and I'd be elected. Also, she is the one who voted to integrate the Phoenix Elementary School System long before the courts acted. She made the motion and I seconded it and cast the deciding vote to integrate the Phoenix School System. From there, I went to the City Council because Harry Rosensweig resigned, having moved out of the City of Phoenix by mistake. You can't be a city councilman if you're not in the City of Phoenix. I served for almost two years on the City Council. I was not very happy with the job. I am more of an executive than a legislator and the compromises simply drove me mad. As an example, we were, at least Alan Rosenberg and I, were in favor of buying the water companies adjacent to Phoenix and taking them over. In effect, we were simply buying customers. The rest of the council didn't want to make a fellow named Spence Stewart a millionaire so they voted no. We lost the battle and that was the final straw and I quit. About a couple years later, a delegation of citizens asked me to run for mayor and persuaded me to do so. I ran for mayor and the first thing we did was to buy the water companies at about \$250 a customer which is one of the great bargains of all time that no one now knows about. We bought all the water companies around Phoenix and then, of course, put in our own pipes and took over the customers. After serving as mayor for four years, I quit and went back to the radio station. By then, my associate had sort of become the top boss and he was just a little jealous of me coming back with all the popularity I had and it became rather unpleasant to go to work in the morning. I didn't know at the time that he was dying and he was very fretful and very argumentative. So when Senator Paul Fannin asked me to run for governor and Irving Jennings and many others asked me to run, I made the fateful decision to run for governor. I was elected in 1966 and took office in 1967. Then I served for eight years and could have served on. During the time I was serving as governor, the legislature changed the term from two year terms to four year terms. On my last four year term, I was pretty tired out. So I simply quit. I had had to sell the radio station since my partner died and I really didn't have a job. I have been unemployed except for writing some free lance columns now and then.

JG: Why don't you tell us about some of the major problems you encountered as governor.

JW: The major problems were getting the Central Arizona Project through Congress. That's number one I suppose. To put it into perspective, I was governor during a time of tumultuous upheaval amid the body politic there were. The flower children on the streets. There were great demonstrations against authority and I'm a conservative and was determined that there would be some order in the streets, that the flag would be kept up, for example, and we would not succumb to all the riots and all the threats. It was a weird period which is hard to understand now, but we were almost on the brink of revolution and it was necessary at times to call out the National Guard in order to prevent mobs from taking over the campus, the University of Arizona, for example.

JG: What happened there? Why were they?

JW: The students were going to take over the University and they didn't know what to do, but they were going to take over. We forget so soon that almost every great university had its president barricaded in his office and there was difficulty all around the country with student demonstrators. We had our own share of the problems. At the same time, there were pickets all over the place at the Capitol and not only students,



but we had adult picketers. I ran into a conflict with ... I went out of town and Caesar Chavez had asked for a meeting with me, but he was turned down by my secretary because I'd be in Washington. Later he revised the story to say I had refused to meet with him and he started the recall against me. By then, I was an ogre. I had signed the Farm Labor Bill which, in effect, gave the farmer some possibility of winning in the case of a strike. For example, laborers could not strike at harvest time. This, of course, was not liked by the labor unions and I became a very much hated figure. The Catholic Church preached sermons against me. Almost every church preached sermons against me and in order to keep from having difficulties when I went to church--by difficulties I mean having a whole group of officers go with me--I would select a different church every Sunday and then just one man would quietly go in with me and no one knew where I went because I was the only one who knew where I was going the next Sunday.

I remember coming back from Prescott one Saturday and the next Sunday morning I went to church. The minister, not knowing I was in the congregation, or maybe he did not know I was in it, said let's all stand up and we'll say a prayer for Caesar Chavez. I was there.

JG: Is this why the students were demonstrating at ASU? Because of the farm workers?

JW: No, there was an era of rebellion among young people in those days. The streets were crowded with what we call "hippies." They had long hair and soiled jeans and they were the flower children of that era. I don't know what they were rebelling against really as much as parental authority. Let me put this into perspective. I used to give an inspirational talk to young people. It was an original elder type of talk--you can make it--do your best and you'll win. I was always received very warmly for many, many years and suddenly in the '60's, I made that talk and there was a sullen silence out from the crowd. I could just feel a wave of discontent and almost hatred emanating from the audience. I had spoken all my life so I can read an audience very quickly. Something happened during then and I don't know what it was. It's not here now, but it was a period when not everyone, but a great number of young people just took to the streets to demonstrate against anything. They would be in favor of free love. There were all sorts of strange programs. It almost got out of hand. In fact, in some places they did get out of hand. Kent State was one of the examples where they got -- unfortunately the National Guard there fired their guns and shot a girl who wasn't even a student. She was just one of the kids who were hanging around.

JG: I was just going to ask you about your use of the National Guard in Arizona. How many times and was there ever --

JW: I established a pretty good system of handling difficulties. We first used the local police who were pretty well known in the situation. If it swelled to beyond that, I would call in the sheriff's deputies. If it became even larger than that, we'd call in the State Highway Patrol. Each time, the announcement would be made that we were calling on this various police force and finally, we would make the announcement we were calling out the National Guard, but we would simply put them in the armories and we never called them actually on the scene so we never shot anybody. It was very effective. It always calmed them down after awhile. It took a little while to do it and some people got roughed up, but outside



of that, we never really had any real great difficulties. They were taking down the flags on the campuses. I remember at Arizona State University, students roared in to take down the flag and there were some workmen putting up a building there. They were steel workers and pretty tough guys. So these men formed a circle around that flagpole. They were burly, muscular and mean looking by then. So they told the students, come on now, try to take down the flag. We fought for this flag, we'd just like to see you try to take it down. And the students dispersed.

They were not really eager for a brutal conflict, they were just downstreeting. At the University of Arizona, the students insisted on the flag being taken down. They didn't want the flag flying and I phoned President Harville and said, I understand the flag has been taken down. He said, well yes, we always take it down at sundown. I said, I'm in Phoenix looking out my window and the sun isn't down up here in Phoenix. I want you to go out and put that flag back up and make sure that it stays up until sundown. So after some argument, he finally told me he went out and had the flag put up to the top of the mast and came back and reported to me that it was up there and that it would only come down at sundown. Those are the type of stupid things that occurred that required at least a firm hand or everybody might have been in a state of complete chaos.

JG: So things never really got out of hand in Arizona?

JW: No, at the University, they had quite a squabble at the gates of the University, but nothing really happened. You were always seeing groups of people with fists raised in the air and exhorting violence, but we kept it pretty well under control in Arizona as I recall.

JG: You mentioned a few minutes ago about the water problems and your feeling that this was a major area that you as a leader should explore. I'd like you to talk a little bit about the water problems back then and what was done and maybe give us your thoughts on what has happened since then. Also on the environment with mining and ranching and those kinds of things.

JW: Having lived all of my life, to all intensive purposes, in Arizona I could see that when they built the Salt River Project, putting water on the land made it not only bloom but made it a place where people could live. The Salt River Valley was not a very pleasant place in 1909, 1910, 1912, but when they built the Roosevelt Dam and the subsequent dams that the Salt River Project built, they created a whole new society and they made it very attractive for people to live here. With it came a flood of people. In fact, I think two million people live here now. At one time, we just had a scant handful, I think there were 12,000 people in Phoenix, 13,000 when I came. So you can imagine the change from 13,000 people in Phoenix and Hayden's Mill which is now Tempe and Mesa which had a beginnings of a Mormon Temple, it wasn't quite finished. I knew the effect of having a firm water supply. I also knew that in Tucson, which Tucson did not ever want to acknowledge, was growing on a vast aqua for water which had been deposited thousands of years ago under them. It was beautiful water, nice clean water. But they felt no need for any additional supply of water. In turn, they were doomed to run out of water. Essentially it was in the cards. When they kept on using water, when they finished the reservoir under them, they were through. That



made necessary looking for additional water. For a long time, Arizona had been looking at the Colorado River. There were many, many plans. One for a high line canal. A great number of people spent a lifetime working on it. I finally got the legislature, being governor, to start to prod our congressmen and we actually began to plan to get water out of the Colorado River. There were a lot of plans. There were dams that had never been built on the Colorado River. It's probably just as well if they weren't built, but each of these plans had its own supporters and lots of squabbling. But I knew that we could get water out of the Colorado River. We could take that water by canal to Tucson and we could help Pinal County. In those days, Governor McFarland and later Senator McFarland was a firm supporter because he had farms in Pinal County. Later when the thing was finally finished, he said rather sadly, agriculture built this thing and the city is going to take all the water. We finally got the measure passed and the canal has now reached Tucson and we're now fighting over who's going to get the water and we're also fighting over the fact that agriculture is in a great slump and it was planned for them to use the water until the cities needed it.

With the present decrease in farming activity and the decrease in crops and income, agriculture simply isn't taking its amount of water and frankly we're having a great deal of difficulty in using up the water which belongs to Arizona. We had quite a battle with California to get our allocation of water. Unless we use it, I suppose it will finally go to California.

JG: Did you regard the water problem and the contention between farmers and city people as a major concentration of interest during your gubernatorialship or had it not reached that point yet?

JW: There's no conflict between agriculture and the urban areas over water. At the present time, agriculture isn't using its water at all. When the thing was first started, the cities weren't as big because we're talking now a span of twenty or forty years. So there's never really been any really fight between agriculture and the cities.

JG: Was water a major interest of the people back then? Were they aware of --

JW: No, most people never think about when they turn on a faucet where the water comes from. Only those who were in a leadership position in the legislature or in Congress have any concept of the importance of keeping a constant flow of water into an area. It's a strange situation--when it rains and there's a rainy season, nobody worries. When the six year drought, which we have just finished, then people begin to get concerned. We finished the six year drought and we have ample water and will have forever as long as the Central Arizona Project continues to operate which I hope it will, but it's got to be financed in some way better than it's being financed now.

JG: What about environmental concerns back then. They're headline grabbers today. Were they back then?

JW: Not to start with. The environment came on strong in the '80's and in the '70's and '60's it was not a major issue as I recall. I'm trying to remember anything that occurred during my watch that had any



great implications in regard to environment. The only thing that I know of are the copper mines and their smelters and the smoke that drifted into Phoenix, but that was always an argumentative thing. No one ever knew actually whether the smoke came from the Mexican smelters or from our own smelters. It wasn't a great issue, as I recall.

JG: What about the perennial issue of budget and taxes. What was going on while you were governor in that area?

JW: We were very fortunate. We have a law in the State of Arizona that the state cannot exceed its budget. All the while I was governor, we actually ran a surplus and we never had any problem at all, nor did we raise taxes. It's strange, when I was on the school board, I always prided myself that we never raised taxes. I didn't realize that all the while, the valuation of the property was going up, more and more people were moving in, we didn't have to raise taxes. We were getting more money just by the automatic increase in valuations and the automatic increase in population.

I was very naive in those days when I was on the school board. Later when I became governor, I realized that the same factor was working for the state and as long as we maintained a rather strict hold on the state employment, we could get by alright. The great problem that has occurred is that government is the largest growing business in the nation. There are more people employed now in government. I'll make this without looking it up, but I think it's an assertion that's true, there's probably more people employed in government than there is in industry in Arizona. As you look at those great buildings that have been built up and down Washington Street in Phoenix and the other state buildings throughout the state and realize that each of them is occupied by hundreds of people, then you look at the county, the county buildings, in them are swarming people, then the city and they're building a new 24-story city hall in Phoenix, you begin to realize that the public servant is becoming the master. At least it's becoming the majority.

JG: So your priority then was not in the financial fiscal area. That was sort of handling itself and holding its own at that time?

JW: My priorities were, but they were simple to handle because we simply kept a tight budget. We tried our best to keep departments from overwhelming us, but unfortunately, it's very difficult to do that. There is always a constant stream of people coming in with an idea for a new deal. In fact, let me put it this way. When I became governor, the state was run by boards and commissions and it had been so planned by our founding fathers. These boards and commissions had overlapping terms so no governor and no legislature ever had complete control over the state operation. I campaigned around the state asking for, I said give me a Republican legislature and we'll get the job done. I had planned if I was elected governor to deal with the problem as Governor Sidney P. Osborn did. He was probably our greatest governor outside of George W. P. Hunt. Osborn was at continual loggerheads with the legislature. They were his own people, Democrats. He would flay them with such terms as, I'll call you back again and again and again if you don't do this. He did call them back a lot.



Toward the end I became very close to him because he developed some muscular dystrophy. Anyway, he gradually became paralyzed from his limbs, then up through his chest and finally he couldn't talk and I delivered his speeches in the legislature. During that time, I got to know him very well. He led a very forceful government. So I was going to do the same thing with my legislature which I knew would be Democrat. To my chagrin, the day after I was elected, I found out I had a Republican legislature, the first one in the history of the state. That required regrouping and we would meet, at the beginning rather timidly, in various places around the area and the legislature leadership would say, governor, what do you want to get. I'd tell them and I'd say, what do you think they can pass, and they'd tell me what they could pass. So we worked together for about four years. There normally is an adversarial position between a governor and a legislature and that developed in the last four years which made it much more difficult. In that yet prior period when we first had our first Republican legislature, we debated what to do and there had been an earlier report given, named the Griffin Hagen Report, which recommended changes in our state government. These changes were to modernize it, get away from the commissions and boards and we took the Griffin Hagen Report down off the shelf and began to follow it. We created the big departments that they have today--the Department of Transportation, the Department of Public Health, the Department of Agriculture. We couldn't get that for a long time, they just got that recently. We changed the state government one thousand percent during the time I was governor. Bill after bill passed and I signed bill after bill to create these enormous departments which I have later concluded were all a mistake, created more problems than they solved. But that's part of government. Most everything you do is a mistake. You rush off with the best intentions and then somehow they don't work out the way you thought they were going to work out. We did wind up, in fact, the legislature was referred to in the newspapers as the gung ho legislature. They were very proud of that title and we did have some very great people.

Marshall Humphrey was an extremely astute politician and a great leader. We had Stan Turley who was another great leader and extremely astute individual. He was leader of the House and Humphrey was president of the Senate. So we had some great people, but I think we went pretty far pretty fast and I'm not sure whether I would do it again that way. I don't know what is the perfect government when you really come down to it. That's about the way it worked out for me. I signed the bills and the departments came into existence and so we wound up with what we have today.

JG: Did you have any problems with corruption or scandal at all in any of your terms?

JW: No we didn't. You had the usual problems with people getting off limits now and then. I remember some guy said he'd run against me if I didn't vote his way. He was one of the leaders, I think in the legislature probably. No, we had a very clean, I think clean administration. I don't know of any great scandal that I can recall. I remember we had appointed a fellow head of the National Guard and he was picked up for drunk driving. I told him one more time and you're out and he was out the next time.

JG: That was not a major perception of the voters at that time?

JW: No, you must remember we were a brand new, complete clean slate. Everybody was dedicated to



truth and sobriety the best in the world. I didn't stay there long enough for the little creeps to come in who finally began to worm their way in and build their own bailiwicks. I got out. I would say that we had an administration unmarked by scandal, but not unmarked by dissention. We had nothing but dissention during the whole while I was there.

JG: That usually follows when you're creating something new. Can you tell me anything about Indian relationships at that time between the government, between the citizens. Were there any problems? Were there any accomplishments?

JW: Actually I formed the first association with the Indians, an Indian development structure. I can't remember the name of it now, but we were very proud of it. However, Indians march to a different drum and we never accomplished very much. We tried our best and had sometimes frequent meetings. Indians are individual tribes. They have their own lore, they have their own history. They have their own way of doing things. The Hopi does not do things the way the Navajo does. The Apache does not do the things the Hopi and the Navajo do. In fact, the Apache are relatively newcomers to the whole area, although I don't think they'll admit it now. But they came in about the same time the Spaniards did. They were a nomadic, warlike tribe who finally settled on reservations after some squabbles which was before my time. The Indian problem, I don't think, will ever be solved as long as they're on reservations to anybody's satisfaction. They should have been assimilated as all other races were ultimately assimilated and they haven't been and are not being and they're just allowed to sit there. As sovereign nations, I notice where the Odotom are going to try to set up an embassy of their own in Mexico City. When they do that, they're a nation dealing with a nation.

JG: How would you depict citizen involvement, both in voting and in coming to meetings during your tenure?

JW: Not very good. Citizens have a way when things are going okay of not voting and of not paying much attention. They want to leave the work to somebody else. When something goes wrong, they're the first ones out to begin to decry it. During the time I was governor, most of my problems came from the young flower children and I had plenty of problems with them. I didn't need any more.

JG: Tell us what was going on in the area of people moving, transportation, during your administration.

JW: We had difficulty in building freeways because the Republic and Gazette editorialized against freeways for a long time. I believe it was finally, maybe during the time I was governor but I'd have to check the record, finally they abandoned their stand. We had a Papago Freeway we were going to build which was a high arch over the City of Phoenix. That was scoffed. I think it would have been very interesting to see it built, but we did start building our freeways and made just a slight dent. It takes a lot of money to build freeways. Get them built. I don't think we'll ever build them in anybody's lifetime unless we go to toll roads. Then when they're built, take the toll off. In fact, I'm in favor of toll roads.



JG: Was public transportation available to any great extent?

JW: It's never been very satisfactory in this area. We're so spread out. When I was mayor, we bought the bus system from somebody, I forget the fellow's name, and tried to get a little better transportation. But it never has been satisfactory and I don't think it ever will be because we're not a concentrated area. We're spread out over many square miles. There's no way you can do it except with the individual automobile as a transportation device, in my opinion.

JG: Was there concern back then about the percentage of the state tax dollar that was being allocated to the cities as opposed to the rural areas?

JW: No, we didn't have any problem then. During the time I was governor was the time when the federal government called all the governors in and said, we have the best tax collecting agency in the world. Now let's collect the money and we will give it back to you in federal grants for various purposes. Governor Reagan was then governor of California and he and I both looked at each other and said, well, here we go, because you're really in a problem. But that what started right then with vast federal grants for all sorts of purposes. Then you were besieged with people seeking these grants and they were large, they were millions. The federal government had the money at that time. Johnson was President and then later Nixon was President. We found ourselves really in debt to the government store. Now the good times have run out and the money has run out and everybody is complaining that the federal government is not giving enough grants for these various purposes. But it all started right then with Johnson who was so eager to take care of every problem and just shoveled the money out. He would have been probably one of the most generous presidents in all history if Viet Nam hadn't trapped him.

JG: Were the governors of the various states organized the way they are today?

JW: Yes, we had a National Governors Conference, a Western Governors Conference, and we had regular meetings and had our agendas.

JG: Did you feel you had any clout?

JW: In the Western Governors Conference pretty good, as much as any other governor did. It wasn't based on population, it was based on votes with a particular group. The Western Governors may not have had the clout in the National Governors' Conference, but we got along alright.

JG: Was there much crime back then? Was law enforcement and criminals and jails, were they issues?

JW: I can't remember any type of violence like we have today. People, except for the fringe group I've mentioned earlier, were very go-along people and kids did not have guns. They didn't shoot each other. There were no drive-by shootings. We had the usual criminal element that robbed banks and got away with some violence, but nothing like we have today. This is a brand new experience in my lifetime. I don't



remember ever seeing an area where you couldn't walk downtown at night in complete safety. Now you can't. Now you can't drive on the freeway and really be very safe. You never know who's going to take a shot at you and you never know when a gun fight is going to break out. We didn't have the gangs then. I don't know what to attribute it to. I don't know whether the schools are breaking down or the families are breaking down, but something is broken down because we have almost a state of anarchy which we're not recognizing and if it gets much further beyond what we're going now, we're going to have to put down state enforcement of the law and probably bring the gendarmes in and march the streets as they did when I was in Spain one time.

JG: Were the policemen on the streets during your tenure as mayor for instance?

JW: We had a few walking patrols, but not too many, mostly in cars.

JG: Speaking of crime, I did want to talk with you for a few minutes about the Winnie Ruth Judd case which has, of course with this new book that's being read, sort of come back into the news. I know you were involved with it after she had escaped and was found in California. Can you tell us something about your reactions when you were living here and the original case was tried and then about your reactions when you found yourself in the middle of the issue again when you were governor.

JW: I was remotely involved with the Winnie Ruth Judd case for many years. In fact, I went with a girl who lived right across the street from the house in which the deed was perpetrated, but I didn't know what was going on at the time. My very first knowledge of it was when the trunk leaked and discovered she had cut up one of her chums. She was brought back for trial and at that time, KOY decided to dramatize the trial. It was a wild idea we were going to do it at midnight so that everybody could hear it across the United States. We had a pretty good signal in those days.

We hired a guy by the name of Jack Stewart who was really a sports writer who later became the general manager of Camelback Inn. Jack Stewart wrote a very good script and we dramatized the entire trial. A dear friend of mine was chairman of the jury. His name was Stuart Thompson. She finally wound up in the state hospital and began a series of escapes which continued while I was governor. Her last escape, they brought her back and I was faced with a difficulty of what to do about her. We had taken her into custody again and she was back in the state hospital. She'd escape time and time again. The story was that she had been working for a doctor and his wife in the Bay area and was behaving herself and had actually been rehabilitated and it would be a dreadful thing to keep her in confinement. In fact, I made a speech at the University of Arizona one night. In those days, it was difficult for the governor to go on a campus. The students were part of the youthful riot era and I was determined that they were not going to keep me away from making an appointed speech at the University auditorium. So I went to the University and the usual phalanx of patrolmen get me in and I walk out on the stage. I can feel from the audience this vast feeling of hatred just swelling up, just came like a blow against you. Then I looked down and in the front row, the students were unrolling a long scrim and when they finally finished it, it said "Free Winnie Ruth Judd." After that I made my talk and then I left. One time at the Arizona State University when I left, I was



pursued by a crowd of agitators who actually tried to chase my wife and myself and the patrolmen kept them back but it was a rather frightening and awesome experience to see these wild looking people who are out to do you harm, but I refused to run. I walked steadily and quietly out to my car. The patrolmen kept them back so nothing happened. At the University of Arizona, I did make my speech. I don't think anybody listened to it and I can't remember what I said, but I finished the speech and left. I debated what to do and I finally decided that I would make Winnie Ruth Judd pay one year for every two she had been escaped. At the end of that, I would release her and pardon her. So she did her time and I've been told later by people who met her that she remembers me very fondly so I guess I didn't make her too mad.

JG: I understand that you made a trip to San Francisco and talked with her lawyer, Melvin Belli, is that correct?

JW: No, I don't remember that. If I did it I just have no memory of it.

JG: The newspapers made some mention of it and there was speculation of whether that contributed to the final decision you made concerning --

JW: I don't remember going to San Francisco to meet with Belli, but the decision was mine and not influenced by him whatsoever. I would have remembered that.

JG: Let's kind of change the subject now. I'm kind of interested in the years that you spent as a columnist for the Phoenix Papers, then you had your own paper I believe called the Phoenix Sun

JW: Yes.

JG: I was able to find a very little information on that period and that part of your career so if you could elaborate a little for us.

JW: I did radio columns which were very popular for I don't know how many years, maybe from 1937 for sure and I was on the radio, 1929, but I know for sure from 1937 on into the '70's. The most popular columns I did on KOY were at 8:45 in the morning which I always closed off with "It's another beautiful day in Arizona. Leave us all enjoy it." That was a tag line that attracted a lot of attention and the reason I did that was because I used to mention on the program the weather and complain about it or something. One day a guy said, you know Jack, you shouldn't complain about the weather, it's always a beautiful day in Arizona. That really struck me so from then on I wound up the broadcast with "It's another beautiful day in Arizona. Leave us all enjoy it." But these were in effect columns and I have them all in boxes upstairs which I would write out about various things, some things they were very personal. One I have about my kids going through the measles and my little daughter finally getting them and her mother was so fearful that she'd rub her nose and she'd have a measles mark right on her nose and she'd wind up with a scar. That was a very cute column. A new editor came to the Phoenix Gazette named Mason Walsh. Mason approached me one day and suggested that I write five days a week a column, second section above the



fold which was a wonderful position. I wrote that column until I ran for governor. As soon as I announced for governor, I was wiped off the air and wiped out of the papers.

JG: Were these mainly editorial type columns or did you actually cover news?

JW: I did everything. They were sort of like the thing that Paul Harvey does. I sometimes editorialized and sometimes just told stories and sometimes told jokes. I ran the whole gamut and the columns that I wrote I did not editorialize. I did such things as gave puzzles that I never could solve myself but Mason could always solve. The more puzzles I wrote about, the more that were sent in. They were fascinating to write about. There were commentaries on the daily events. For the most part, I stayed out of editorial writing in the Gazette columns, but in my daily columns I editorialized. For many years, there was so much dust in the Valley that was dreadful. I used to suggest that people take crank case oil. In those days they didn't have all the TC whatever it is in it that caused so much trouble. At least we didn't know about it. I suggested they would go out and dump the crank case oil in the dust when they rode in front of their homes and if enough did that, they would bring some relief to the dust because it was a dreadful affliction.

JG: Where was this dust coming from primarily?

JW: From the roads. All of the roads were unpaved. They were all unpaved in the early days, say 1937, '38, '39. There were more people living on unpaved roads than were living on paved roads.

JG: By the time you became mayor, had this problem been mostly alleviated?

JW: We worked on paving the roads in the city, but you couldn't pave the rural roads. That required county effort.

JG: Would you say that by the end of the time of your terms as mayor, most of the city streets were paved?

JW: I think they were all paved by that time. Of course, you still had the alleys and they created some dust. Dust has always been a plague. In fact, we have what are called dust storms that are part of the desert.

JG: You had dust back then, the roads weren't paved, and now we have pollution that the roads are paved and so many cars.

JW: That's right, we're never going to solve it. We have an inversion which keeps all pollutants sort of held down to the city.

JG: Speaking about news coverage, what would be your opinion of the kinds of coverage and the objectivity and impartiality of news coverage during the time you were involved with newspapers.

JW: When I was doing news?



JG: Yes. Then I'm going to ask you to move into when you were governor, how you felt about it.

JW: I think that there's always been a liberal slant to the news. I think it comes out of the journalism schools and out of the type of most people who aspire to be journalists. They're mostly crusaders and they have their own agenda. I feel that it has badly influenced all journalism. I have always been a conservative, I don't know why, except that I did have a rather strenuous youth and I believed that a person should take care of themselves and I always managed to do it. A conservative viewpoint, I don't know where it comes from, but versus a liberal viewpoint where the government or there's some big nanny that's going to protect you from all harm, I just reject that idea. I think person is an individual and is responsible for his own life and later has to account for it. I've always held that and as a result, I lived a very free and somewhat successful life that I can look back upon, a few things that I regret, but not too many.

JG: So you feel that news coverage in Phoenix and in Arizona was liberal coverage?

JW: Mostly always liberal coverage. Pulliam ran a pretty tight newspaper, but he couldn't get away from the fact that his reporters managed to present even then, although it was a conservative paper and heaven only knows when you put the Scottsdale Progress with which I continually feuded while I was governor, that was a very, very liberal paper. Of course, the Republic more or less supported me all the while I was governor because Pulliam more or less agreed with my philosophy.

JG: You decided to start your own newspaper or you bought out a newspaper, the Phoenix Sun after --

JW: We took over a shopping center paper.

JG: This was after you were governor?

JW: Yes, after I was governor. We did not make a success of it. I don't know what went wrong, but something went wrong, we did not get enough advertising. I poured about \$4,000 or \$5,000 into it and my one partner would not put up any money. I finally realized what he was doing to me. The other partner was okay, Bob Makin. I had more money that they did, but the one was -- It was just a chatty little paper that was geared to North Central Avenue. It came out of a paper that, I can't think of the name of the downtown shopping center. It's now slowly disintegrating, it's right on Central Avenue and Bookbinder used to own it. I'm sure you know the name of it, it's right on Central Avenue. It's a big shopping center and all the firms are moving out.

JG: You don't mean Park Square?

JW: Park Central, yes. This is the paper that Park Central was essentially interested in and Burtbocker let us take it over. Later on, the printing costs got out of hand and so the printer took it over which is the story



of most small papers.

JG: We touched earlier on the recall petition and the involvement of Caesar Chavez and the farm workers. Let's go to the point where signatures had been collected and I believe the Attorney General, his name was Gary Nelson, threw the petition out and there was a lawsuit and I don't know what all went on. Why don't you tell us about that.

JW: I don't know what went on either. I think the Secretary of State said there were insufficient signatures. The Secretary of State who would make that decision, insufficient signatures, I wish I'd now gone through the recall just because I would have won it, but I didn't. I was worn out by that time. Then there was a suit I presume. I'm very vague on that, I can't remember. I was tired and if there was a lawsuit, Gary Nelson would have handled the lawsuit. It did work out so that Caesar Chavez' recall did not take effect against me.

JG: The articles in the newspapers of that time refer to the fact that Attorney General Nelson disqualified signatures on the basis that they were taken under duress and I believe, according to the newspapers, the case was referred to U.S. District Judge Muecke, and that he said that that ruling deprived the petitioners of the constitutional rights to petition. At that time, there was a lawsuit involved and I have not been able to determine what the ultimate result of that was. Did the lawsuit get thrown out of court? Were there damages assessed? Did Chavez drop the lawsuit?

JW: As I recall, we won the lawsuit. I think that there were signatures were improper. It's very hard to get signatures. You've got to have the person a registered voter and elector and circulate petitions. Those were very carelessly handled petitions. That probably went on for a long time and I have no memory. I was exhausted and I finally quit the office. It probably continued after that, but I can't remember the details.

JG: During this recall petition, was this when the students demonstrated? Was this all involved in the same time frame?

JW: No. There was also two nuns who used to picket me in front of the capitol from the Catholic Church.

JG: For what reason?

JW: For this farm labor thing. I had another interesting situation. We had a Professor Starsky, I wish I could think of his first name, from ASU and he was preaching revolution to his students. He led a group of them against Barry Goldwater's home one day. I decided that we would get rid of him and not renew his contract. He was tremendously outraged. I remember very well the Board of Regents listened to the attorneys who told us--our attorneys were the Board of Regents, the governor meets with the Board of Regents, they did then anyway--said if you pursue this with this man, he will sue you and it will go from court to court and go on year after year. I could see the spines of the Regents begin to wilt a little bit and I said, as for me, I will not condone hiring any man who feels he is not bound by the terms of his contract



which Starsky had said he was sort of a free soul.

The spines all stiffened and we voted to let him go and to follow through. We were sued for year after year and I paid the costs of the suit for the other members of the board of regents. This went on for probably five years after Starsky vanished. We finally won, but it was a long and bitter experience.

JG: Were you reimbursed for your court costs?

JW: Oh no. I spent an awful lot of money in that job because in all my public life, while I was mayor I did not accept a salary. When I was City Councilman I did not accept a salary. Not because I was noble, but because I figured that if I used that salary, I wouldn't want to give the job up, I'd adjust my living to that particular situation. Then I was governor, I'd finally sold the radio station and I didn't have any salary, so I used the salary, but I paid all my own expenses and all the expenses of the office. For example, the office has what is called a flower fund. That takes care of coffee and donuts for the staff. We had staff of about twelve at the time I first became governor. Then it takes care of buying flowers for those who were deceased. I paid that and I maintained a booth at the Westward Ho where I met with people and legislative leaders. I paid all the expenses of the meals there for everybody. So I spent a lot of my own money while I was governor. It was a very expensive job.

JG: That's certainly an unusual approach to public office.

JW: It is an unusual approach. Very few people know that I did that.

JG: I certainly didn't know that.

JW: Ben Avery does. Ben Avery does. He's an old friend of mine. I was very careful and if I went on a trip, if I went to a Republican governor's office, I paid my way and my wife's way. I felt that the state should not reimburse me to go to a partisan conference. If I went to a National Governor's Conference, the state would pick up my ticket, but I would pay my wife's way and I would pay her costs of the hotel bill. If we went to Washington to meet with the President, I would always pay her way. The only concession I ever made was a patrolman would drive her car, but I would not let them send the special car for her. Then when I started out, I was not going to accept the official car. I was going to drive myself to work and go to functions in the official car and come back, get my own car and drive back home. After about three or four months of that, I was driving to work one morning and I hit the rear-end of a guy driving a station wagon. The car went out of control and I can see it to this day, it smashed into a palm tree and just disintegrated. The man was lying in the street and I stopped my car and got out. It did nothing to my car. I went over to him and he said, I want to get up. I said look, you're bleeding. He said, oh I fell on a wine bottle and I said just stay where you are. The police came and the ambulance came and took him off and then the police had the big problem of giving a ticket to the governor in the Capitol because the police have no authority on the Capitol. It got to be a really comical situation because the paper said the guy had fallen on a wine bottle. It so happened he was taking up a collection for the Boy Scouts for his son who was collecting wine bottles.



It was perfectly innocent, but I came out of that one in pretty good shape but the harness didn't fall on me. The guy had a wine bottle in his pocket. From then on, I decided I'd let the patrolman drive me, but I would not sit in back in grandeur, I'd sit in front. As it was, my right cheek just got riddled with skin cancers from sitting for eight years, being driven in the front seat. I should have sat in the back seat and stayed out of the sun. That's my story.

JG: If you looked back at your morality and at your terms as Governor, how would you judge what occurred? What things do you think were, in retrospect, very important?

JW: Very easy. Let me make two comments before that. The Mayor has a lot more power than a Governor. The Mayor's job is the best job of the two because a Governor is at an adversarial position with the Legislature and he is constantly being, as these notes I've indicated, he spends all of his day trying to fend off problems and he doesn't have a moment to himself. The Mayor, on the other hand, is the Chairman of his Legislature and if he wants to, he can, as I did, set the agenda and he puts the tough items at the end and they're so tired by then they don't want to argue and they vote on them very easily. So you're in complete control. Now that I've said that, your question was ...

JG: In retrospect, in looking at what has occurred ...

JW: When I was Mayor, I was elected Mayor and I didn't know what to do, so I went to all the leaders in the community. At that time, it was a smaller community and you could touch base with them all. Walter Bimson was head of the Valley Bank and Walter Lucking was head of the Arizona Public Service Company and I just went around and touched base with these people who the future of Phoenix really affected the job they were in. I said, what do we need to do as a city. They said, annex, don't let little small communities as happened in St. Louis, spring up inside your city limits. Don't let there become a Maryvale incorporated town. Don't let there become a South Phoenix incorporated town. Don't let there become a North Phoenix, whatever it's called out there, Sunnyslope, because these communities will organize and incorporate and you'll have them inside the greater Phoenix area. So for four years, I started out meeting with, and we had these people all living outside the City of Phoenix. Our boundaries were rather small and I would go and meet with a group and the fists would be shaken at me and people didn't want to come in the City of Phoenix. Funny, I had a film made which showed the services of a big city--garbage pickup and police pickup and fire protection and all of this. Then, people became more amenable to signing up. I signed up Maryvale, for example. Before I did that, I had to placate industry. Industry didn't want to come into the city. I said, what's wrong with your coming into the city? I had to meet with the Snell group and the Jennings group. The Snell group said, well, your coats don't fit. We have the Reynolds Plant and every time they have to move their big equipment everyday from one point to another, we'd have to have a plumbing inspector come out and make inspections twice a day, every time we do that. I said, okay, we'll change that. So we changed the codes. Erv Jennings on the other hand had some problems. He wanted to form fire districts and take care of his own problems. I said Erv, the Phoenix Fire Department would be much more satisfactory and he finally looked at me and said, okay Jack, we'll come in. I had to bring in these very, very antagonistic groups of industrialists. At the same time, I was working with the citizens of



Phoenix, of outside Phoenix. To make a long story short, we had about 150,000 in the City of Phoenix when I went in as Mayor. When I finished, we had 500,000. We did it simply by annexing which the city has continued to do and by buying the water companies, we can provide the water. By building the bigger sewer system which we did while I was Mayor, we could take care of the sewage not only of Phoenix, but of Tempe and Glendale and I guess Mesa. I think we still have a massive city sewage system which takes care of all the sewage which we started at that time because Glendale threatened to run their own sewer line down to the river. By then, they would wipe off all annexation. So it was a heavy time and what I accomplished while I was mayor was to increase the City of Phoenix to 500,000 people and make it a rather major city. When I was governor, we changed it entirely from a system of commissions and boards to a modern state government of departments, department heads and all that went on in that particular area.

JG: Were you able when you were elected Governor to go out to business leaders and Mayors to find out what they wanted? Did you do that kind of thing when you were Governor?

JW: I didn't do that while I was Governor, no, there are too many people coming at you when you're Governor. You spend the day meeting with people who have problems over which you have no control, only a legislature has the control and you simply try to quiet them down and see if you can get some legislation that will help. Toward the end, I had a very strong man by the name of Burt Barr who ran the legislature and for the most part, he and I did not agree lots of times, but we had to compromise many a time. I remember one time while I was away, I took one major trip, I didn't take the usual Governors' junkets, there are lots of them. You're invited to go everywhere, but I did not take the junkets. I did take one trip to Japan in my last. While I was gone, the legislature decided they would set the salaries of the heads of the departments. When they took that power away from the Governor, they took the power of running the departments away from the Governor. So Burt came in. He heard that I was very much upset about that bill and he said Governor, you going to veto that bill? I lost my temper and said Burt, I'm going to veto that g.d. bill and every single bill you pass the rest of your session and you'll be here 'til July as far as I'm concerned trying to pass bills that were my veto. He said okay Governor. Got up, killed the bill and it never came to vote. So I won that one.

JG: Before we end this marvelous, informative and frank interview, do you have any experiences that you'd like to relate for the record or any thoughts that we haven't covered during the interview.

JW: I would say no, we've about covered everything.

You've gone through my Caesar Chavez problem and gone through my hippie difficulties and the school problems of maintaining order. I was always concerned that I would have to face the execution of a man at the State Prison and I believe in capital punishment, but I'm not sure whether I could face it if that decision came. I waited in dread for eight years and we kept piling people on Death Row and it went on for year after year and finally, I think just last year which would be many years after I left the Governor's office, finally we executed someone. That's one that I didn't have to face.



JG: Do you have any comments on the directions that city government and also state government are headed today? How do you feel about what's going on?

JW: I just think they're getting too big and too powerful.

I would like to see them all scale back. In fact, one time while I served as Governor, we had one of these so called recessionary periods like we have today and we sent out an order that every department would cut back ten percent. Of course, there were screams of protest, we just can't do it, but we said you have to do it. You're not going to get your budget until you do it and they all cut back ten percent. We told the universities and everybody else that when there is a meeting somewhere, there will be just one man who will go, one man, one trip. There will no longer be a large group of professors going to this meeting and a large group going to that meeting and you'll go coach class to these meetings. Since at that time the Governor's office controlled all travel vouchers, we made that stick and there was a scream of protest from the universities because they did not like not sending the usual coterie of professors off to the various meetings. We really cut back and we wound up with another surplus that year. I think it was thirty-five million.

JG: How long did that surplus last after you left office? Do you recall?

JW: I don't know, not very long. There's always people that are ready to use it up and a lot of people watch the budget and they come in and tell you, you've got this money here, we can spend it for this purpose. In fact, there was some fund out at the fairgrounds, I can't remember what it was, but it was for a particular purpose but it could be spent for other purposes. I've had more people beat me over the head to get that money so they could use it for their purpose, but I always said no. I think one of the best words that a Governor in America uses is no. Most of the things proposed are bad.

JG: There are a lot of people who would agree with you and particularly now. I want to thank you, Governor Williams, for taking the time to do this interview with the Historical Society. We're very proud to have you be a History Maker and the interview was marvelous. I have enjoyed it so much and I'm sure that anyone who listens to it tomorrow, next year or two hundred years from now will enjoy it. Thank you so much.

