

FOREWORD

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Library Oral History Program

Oral History Interview

with

JONATHAN B. BINGHAM

October 21, 1965
Washington, D.C.

By Charles T. Morrissey

For the John F. Kennedy Library

MORRISSEY: Let me ask you when you first met John Kennedy.

BINGHAM: My first meeting with John Kennedy, as far as I can recall, was at a luncheon in Chicago at a hotel during the 1956 Convention. My wife [Mrs. Jonathan Bingham] and I were there, and Mrs. [John F.] Kennedy, and, I believe, the Stewart Alsops. I don't have any very clear impression of that luncheon.

of these at the US Mission to the UN. These appointments were made at Stevenson's recommendation. Kennedy told me later that he had called Charles Buckley to find out if the latter had any objection to my appointment. Apparently Buckley did not raise any objection.

I do not know whether Kennedy considered me seriously for any other position, although various people close to him, such as Galbraith and Bowles, talked to me about possible other positions, including Director of the Peace Corps or an Ambassadorship. The UN job was what I wanted and I conveyed this information.

President Kennedy regularly invited the General Assembly delegation to the White House to be sworn in.

This happened on three occasions and he would have a casual word for each of the delegates, in addition to making some general comments about the importance of the UN and of the Assembly session. I would see him, occasionally, in New York, but these were not very meaningful or lengthy contacts.

At times I communicated indirectly to the President on UN matters. One such communication was a letter I drafted for Ambassador Stevenson's signature, arguing strenuously that any new atmospheric nuclear explosions not be conducted in the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands (a recommendation which the President followed, in spite of the fact that some preparations had already been made for tests within

the Trust Territory.) On several occasions I also talked with Arthur Schlesinger, jr. on colonial and African questions arising at the UN. On one occasion, I heard that the President had seen, and was upset about, a cable from Ambassador Elbrick in Lisbon, saying that the Portuguese were up in arms about a statement I had allegedly made on TV which was insulting to the Portuguese in connection with the Angola question. I got hold of the transcript of the TV show to prove that I had been severely misquoted. This incident demonstrated the degree to which the President followed day to day events in the foreign field.

In January of 1962, I seriously considered running for Congress against Congressman Charles Buckley in the