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ARTHUR G. BROWN

Oral history interview concerning his friendship with Gerald Ford since 1927, especially the South High School football teams of the late 1920's and early 1930's and subsequent meetings of the 30-30 Club.

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Arthur G. Brown
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This interview is being conducted with Mr. Art Brown at his home in Grand Rapids, Michigan on January 26, 1980. The interviewer is Dr. Thomas Soapes. Present for the interview are Mr. Brown and Dr. Soapes.

SOAPES: Are you a native of Grand Rapids?

BROWN: No, I was born in Mount Pleasant, Michigan.

SOAPES: And then you moved here when?

BROWN: '26. My father owned an electrical company in Belding, Michigan and that's where I went to grade school. My father sold out his interest and we moved to Grand Rapids, and I started at South High, which was the only school in Grand Rapids I ever went to. I started in the eighth grade at South High.

SOAPES: And you would have run into Ford there?

BROWN: I met President Ford on the football practice field in 1927.

SOAPES: What position did you play?

BROWN: I was a tackle.

SOAPES: And he was playing center.

BROWN: He was a center, right.

SOAPES: Was this a full eleven man squad? It wasn't a seven man - -

BROWN: Yes, an eleven man squad. In those days there was no substitution, that is free substitution, you could not go back in in the half you came out. If the coach took you out of the game in the last half you might as well go take a shower because you were all done.

SOAPES: So you had to play both ways.

BROWN: Everybody played both ways, which, in some way, to me, was a much better deal than you got today, in this instance, that a man has to think for himself. Whereas today more people can play, that's very true, but he does one thing, that's all he does, and the coach tells him what to do before he ever goes in the game. He can be in there for one play, come out and go back, which especially in high school, it does not give the individual a chance to think for himself, which, as I say, is detrimental to the game but yet it lets more kids play - - they don't all have to sit on the bench all the time the way they did in our day. Because if we didn't get ahead by twenty points that poor sub never got in the game - - that's why you're considered a first and second team. Now you've got probably 33 players - - you've got the kick-off team; you've got the receiving team. When you had to block and tackle it was entirely different than you do today - - you've got one team that tackles; one team that blocks. Maybe they get a little more proficient at the job than we did, but we did pretty good, I think, in our day.

SOAPES: What kind of coaching did you have?

BROWN: We had a very good coach. He taught us a lot, not just how to carry a ball or score a touchdown. He taught us much more than that which has proved out. This is the only group that I know of, of a high school team that knows exactly where each and

every member of the 1930 team is -- he taught that togetherness. It didn't make any difference who made the touchdown, who made the tackle as long as we made it because if you didn't make it there was ten other guys who were right with you all the time. We played as a group not as an individual star. And that was true all the way through. Mr. [Cliff] Gettings was the coach, and he did a wonderful job. Some of these coaches today -- I've seen my son play high school ball -- and when a coach has to swear at players to get them to play is not my idea of a coach. Because if any coach had ever did that to me, I would have left right there. And I never heard our coach ever say one profanity word. The roughest he ever got was, "You look like a crappin can in distress." That's the strongest language I ever heard the man use. And he would get you to play and want to play, not necessarily to win but to play the game the way it should be played.

SOAPES: I was going to ask that next question -- Was this a Vince Lombardy type of winning "Winning is the only thing?"

BROWN: No way. You played by the rules, whether you won or lost you still stayed with the rules. There was no unnecessary roughness whatsoever.

SOAPES: Was there a heavy emphasis on winning?

BROWN: No. Sure, everybody wanted to win. If you ever lost a game you cried, which I never seen a kid do today much. Cheerleaders are the only ones that cry -- the kids playing, they

think well, ok, so we lost another one. No, there was no great emphasis on the winning, none whatsoever. It was play the game the way it was supposed to be played.

SOAPES: About how big a high school in terms of enrollment was South High at that time?

BROWN: Oh, there was -- I'm trying to think -- it included the lower grades which were in that building too, be around 3,000. There were 234 in President Ford's senior class. I'm just guessing; I can't recall the exact figure.

SOAPES: Did the football players tend to stay together as a social group as well?

BROWN: Very much so.

SOAPES: The people that Jerry Ford picked out as his close friends, is there a way that you could characterize the people that were closest to him?

BROWN: Actually President Ford was a very friendly man; he had the integrity, and his biggest standpoint to me was his honesty. It made no difference what locality or what wage group, you might say, of society that you come from, because he was as friendly with us, which come from a little poorer class I might say than he was, and he was friends with everybody and everybody liked him. You may know or not, I don't know, his father's financial standing was better than most of us. Most of us lived around Franklin and Division which was a lower income zone or bracket whichever you wish to call

it, and in those days it was almost Italian descent dominated. In fact, Al Capone was here for one of the prominent Italian's wedding at that time. Ford lived out a little farther in a little better district. And I worked in a drug store on the corner of Franklin and Division during non-football season because that was the only sport I did participate in due to the fact that I had to work. We all used to hang around down there anyway, and he would come down there quite often, and sometimes he would come down in his father's LaSalle. Now I don't know if you know what a LaSalle is or not, but that was a small Cadillac. But Ford worked too. He worked in the restaurant across the street from South High.

SOAPES: Right, that's the place where his father - -

BROWN: Right, father, not Mr. Ford. Mr. Ford was a wonderful person too, but his mother was a very nice lady, wonderful.

SOAPES: I was going to ask you for your impressions of them.

BROWN: Wonderful. His father was a politician, no question about that, and at times he may have made some sharp deals. But his mother, you couldn't ask for a more wonderful woman than she was, I don't think.

SOAPES: Did you get a sense that this was a strickly-disciplined household?

BROWN: Mr. Ford was rather humerous too - - he pulled some tricks on those kids and on his relations. But, as I recall, Jerry's stepbrother - - I don't refer to them as stepbrothers, they were his

brothers. You could eat all you wanted but you eat all you put on your plate, well that was true in most of our homes in those days too. We were getting into the depression and getting in there pretty fast, back in '27 and '28 and '30 was our last year there, that is as far as football was concerned.

SOAPES: You said that his father would occasionally pull some tricks on the boys. Do you remember any of those?

BROWN: Not exactly, but he would do things in the house. I know of one instance where he had - - like the dog had made some droppings only it was plastic and he left it in the living room floor. [Laughter] But I wouldn't say he was too strict, no. But Jerry admired him, there is no question about that. He viewed Jerry, I think, equally as his other three sons. In fact, as you know, Jerry didn't know he was adopted for quite some time. In fact, I knew he was adopted before he made the fact common knowledge.

SOAPES: How did you come to know that?

BROWN: Well, Mr. Ford worked for the Grand Rapids Varnish Company and the man that owned the Grand Rapids Varnish Company lived around very close to where I worked at the Fletcher Drug Store. And he'd come in there and was a little perturbed with Mr. Ford because Mr. Ford had left him to start his own Ford Paint Shop, or at least had left him. And he filled me in with all the details of Mrs. Ford and Mr. King, which at that time I figured it was nobody's business but my own - - I never repeated it to anybody

until right now. But that's how I come to know he was adopted. I never told anybody because I figured -- they were a wonderful family, why should I say anything. But Jerry did find it out before, he knew he was adopted. When Mr. Ford adopted him and used his name as Junior, I thought it was wonderful, very good.

SOAPES: The relationship between the brothers, was there a close relationship?

BROWN: That I don't know because they were a little younger, see, than we were. And I know how it is, being a younger brother myself, an older brother doesn't like to take the younger one along. I had that experience on my own. My brother was seven years older than I and he never wanted to take me, but as time went on I got to be bigger than he was. [Laughter] Therefore, I did not know very much about his brothers until recent years. They're all very nice as far as that's concerned. As you probably know, Dick and I are both on the Ford committee for the museum.

SOAPES: When you were playing football, how did Ford react to the results of a game, to winning?

BROWN: Well, he enjoyed winning and he hated to loose -- we all hated to loose.

SOAPES: Did he show this in any particular way?

BROWN: He shows a lot of emotions, but never in anger. I have never seen him loose his control in anger. He's lost control of himself in humility. When they unveiled the mural -- you've

seen it at the airport. Have you been out there?

SOAPES: No, I haven't.

BROWN: Well, President Ford was there when they opened the drape and his father and mother were pictured in the mural, and he just couldn't speak, the tears were rolling down his cheeks. He had never seen it until that point in time. That hit him. And I have often wished that his mother would have lived to see him be president; it would have been a wonderful thing. But when they unveiled that mural I don't think that he knew that his mother and father was in it. Of course, Betty and the children were there in the mural, too, and there was quite a big one of him. And that got him, right there - - those tears running down his cheeks. But he's been hurt, but he doesn't show it, and never in anger. He gave a speech at the University of Michigan, was on television, and he got booed quite a bit - - you could hear it. And I could see the look on his face - - it hurt him to think that here he is back at his own school and his own state and he's being booed. I called him later to apologize for it. He says, "Art, it wasn't that bad." And I said, "You don't kid me any because I could see the look on your face." "Well," he says, "there was a few but it wasn't quite as bad - -." But you could see the look in his face that he was hurt and I could understand why - - here he is, as I say, your own state, your own school, and they boo you.

SOAPES: A man of a great sensitivity who didn't quite show

it all, but when it did show it was very strong.

BROWN: Right, he just couldn't hold it back, right. But in anger, I never seen him loose control of his emotions in anger. He agrees to this too, I believe, that his mother was very strict on that, never loose control of your emotions in anger.

SOAPES: Was it a family that tended to show their emotions of togetherness?

BROWN: I believe so, yes, they were.

SOAPES: Were you around the parents enough to get a feel for the types of friendships that they developed?

BROWN: You mean with the people of their - -

SOAPES: Of their peers.

BROWN: No, no, not until later years because, as I say, I come from a lower income bracket and our social activity was nowhere compared to theirs.

SOAPES: The formation of the 30-30 Club, how did that come about?

BROWN: Well, Dick [Richard J.] Zylstra and I, Dick played fullback, we thought why don't we try to get this group, together for Thanksgiving breakfast, we've always been together - - this was in '31. We reserved a place at a hotel which was down by the old depot - - the depot is gone now - - and he and I went down. We didn't have much money; we didn't know if enough people were going to show up to pay for this project or not but they did and its gone

on ever since then. We did not call it the 30-30 Club. I started that because we were going to have our anniversary for the thirty years or whatever, twenty-five or something, but, anyway, I got tired of writing South High's 1930 Football Team. So I figured well it was 1930 and we had, at one time, thirty people in a squad, so I just made it 30-30 and it stuck, and I've used it ever since. That was the main reason for that.

SOAPES: Did Ford take an active part in the organization of it?

BROWN: Not at that time. See, he was away at school. And then he went on to Yale, of course, as you know, and then the war came along. He was back here for a little while in his law office, which I think you know.

SOAPES: With Phil Buchen.

BROWN: Right. We used to meet in the summer, now we only meet for this Thanksgiving thing. In fact, this year will be the big year because we have everybody, the wives. Otherwise, it's just members. But every five years we have the families -- wives, grandchildren, sons, daughters. Last time we had it, five years ago, we had 128 people. Just what will develop this year, I don't know.

SOAPES: Did you or any of the others from the South High group get involved in the political arena here in Grand Rapids?

BROWN: No.

SOAPES: You didn't work with the "Home Front?"

BROWN: No. In 1948, as I started to say, we used to meet in the summer - - June, I think - - I've got the records somewhere because I used to keep records of what we spent and what we did at these meetings. The meeting was at Gerald R. Ford's [Sr.] home - - that's when he announced that he was going to run for congressman from the fifth district of Michigan. At that time most of us didn't even realize we lived in the fifth district, but we did. I wasn't interested in politics at all. But, here, Ford naturally wanted us to get his petition signed, which we did. That was his first public announcement to run for the congressman from the fifth district.

SOAPES: So you didn't have any involvement with the "Home Front" organization.

BROWN: No, not until that time. Then everybody did everything they could for Ford because he wasn't too well-known. He had been an all-city center two years, and he had been an all-state center his last year. But other than that he wasn't too well-known in the city and, of course, out of our county in Kent where the fifth district which - - they are not now, it's Ionia - - but Ottawa County didn't know him. That's why he went out in the farm and stood with the old farmer and the old Hollander, you might say, because Ottawa County is practically all Hollander, you might say dominated - - Holland descent.

SOAPES: Was there much of that Dutch population here in Kent County?

BROWN: Still is, still is. It's getting away from it now, but it was mostly known as a Dutch town. They had blue laws -- nothing could be open on Sunday, you couldn't buy anything. But that's gradually faded away, no more of that, practically anything that wants to be open now is open.

SOAPES: Do you recall from that campaign of '48 what types of issues, what type of campaign he ran? I'm thinking in particular of the primary against Jonkman?

BROWN: He campaigned most that Jonkman had been in there too long and he didn't do anything -- he figured he had it won and he didn't do anything. And one thing that Ford did -- he would not promise anything he couldn't produce, and that was true from the first day that I met him -- that was one reason he lost out as President of the senior class. He would not promise anything he didn't think he could do, and he did the same thing in his presidential campaign. He never made a promise that he didn't think he could keep. Maybe some of them he couldn't keep, but he thought he could at the time. But old Barney Jonkman figured he had the thing sewed up -- no young whippersnapper was going to beat him. And Ford spent a lot of time in fact I think, you may know, he was late for his wedding and had manure on his shoes when he got there because he was out meeting people face to face. People couldn't figure out for one thing why he was single. Well he went with different girls as far as that is concerned. Now this Brown which is no relation of mine

that you know - -

SOAPES: Yes, Phyllis Brown.

BROWN: And he went with girls in high school, but I don't know, I can't say he was very aggressive but he was maybe more of a gentleman than the rest of us were when it came to the opposite sex. To help win the election isn't the only reason he married Betty there is no question about that - - but he figured if he was married he would stand a little better chance in the primaries. But don't misunderstand me that that was the only reason he got married, because it wasn't.

SOAPES: I understand that. I'm about the same age he was then, and I'm not married either.

BROWN: I was twenty-five before I was married.

SOAPES: Was that question raised at all in the campaign? Did Jonkman try to say anything?

BROWN: Not that I recall no, no.

SOAPES: You mentioned him loosing the race for President of the Senior class. Who was it that won?

BROWN: Bill [William] Schuiling. He's a banker in Washington now. I think he handled the fund for the pool at the White House. Remember when they got donations, subscriptions when they built the pool when Ford was President. I think he handled that end of it.

SOAPES: Once Ford was elected, did he maintain close ties back

here with his old friends and the people who had worked for him?

BROWN: Yes, he spent as much time back here as he possibly could, but he campaigned all the time for other people too. The night that he took over as President that Nixon was going to resign -- well, I had the house full of TV cameras and everything else but I got a call from a St. Louis paper -- I can't recall the name of the paper --

SOAPES: Post-Dispatch?

BROWN: Could well be.

SOAPES: Or the Globe-Democrat?

BROWN: Right. They didn't ask me anything about Jerry Ford. They wanted to know if I thought that Betty Ford could handle being the First Lady. I said, "My God, she raised four kids with no help from him because he was gone all the time and I think if she can handle that." She raised those kids. He was home when he could be, but he's a politician in a sense of an honest politician -- he's gone all over the country speaking for other people at that time when he was a congressman. Because I think it's, well in either his book or hers, that the children would have to redo their routine because he was going to come home -- they had to drop their dates because dad was going to be home for the weekend or a day or two, which was true.

SOAPES: Did you notice a trend in his personality in the early years of being much of the politician type?

BROWN: A leader.

SOAPES: A leader.

BROWN: More of a leader. Because if there was a situation he would move into it. You know when they say, he couldn't chew gum and walk at the same time was a lot of bunk, because if a decision had to be made, he'd make it.

SOAPES: Can you remember some examples of where you thought this really stood out in your personal relationship with him?

BROWN: Well, the only one that amounts to too much - - I don't know if you will recall, being your age - - there was always talk about a communistic element in this country. They wrote some stuff on the steps going into the gym at South High and just like that Ford had a bunch of us out there and made them scrub it off with a brick, what they wrote. The exact wording of what they wrote I will not go into, but we did. And he was basically behind it - - getting that out of there, getting it over and done with.

SOAPES: This was while you were still students.

BROWN: Right. It was back in '28 or '29, it wouldn't have been '30.

SOAPES: That's interesting, I hadn't heard that story before.

BROWN: But he was the same as we were. He and I were athletes. They had an elevator at South High - - it was three floors - - the elevator was for the teachers and handicapped students. One day Ford and I come down the hall and decided we'd ride to the

third floor in the elevator. We got off on the third floor we ran right into Mr. Buikema, who was a teacher at that time and later was superintendent of schools in the city. And we got reprimanded right there, that if we were athletes we should be able to climb the stairs. But as far as getting into any -- what can you call it -- hell raising -- there was very little of that. We had a feud going between South High and Creston High School at one time. Creston High School sits back quite away from Plainfield Avenue, and I've seen that thing packed with kids -- somebody hitting somebody else for no reason and nobody knew why they were there to start with.

SOAPES: But Ford wasn't the type of person who might be found in a brawl situation.

BROWN: No. Not unless he got pushed right in the middle of it. Otherwise, to look for it, no.

SOAPES: Was he known as academically talented in high school?

BROWN: Yes. I sat with him in one American history class and it comes in very good because, as you know, he writes left handed, and I sat on his right side and it was very easy to read what he put down, because, as you know, he was an honor student. His grades were good. He was an Eagle Scout. How he had time to do all this -- football was the only sport I participated in -- he was in football, basketball and track. Of course somebody will tell you he was on the wrestling team too, but there was no

wrestling and there was no baseball at South High at that time either. When we, the 30-30 Club, were going to go to Washington there was one guy called me, said he was the captain of the wrestling team in 1930 with Ford and he thought he ought to go - - no way. He's well liked. There's very few people who don't like him. Politicians, as you know, he has as many friends that are Democrats as he does otherwise.

SOAPES: I get an impression that he was the type of person as a high school student who was always active physically, always doing something.

BROWN: Right, and still keeping up with his studies. As I say he worked. In the summer he worked out at Reed's Lake, which was an amusement park at that time. Have you done any tape with Mr. Delamar who he worked for?

SOAPES: No.

BROWN: The man that he worked for at one time.

SOAPES: I haven't. When he was a congressman, you said he was around a lot, was his name in the paper frequently - - headlines of Ford does this, Ford does that?

BROWN: Not too much as I recall, no. But he spent an awful lot of time in Grand Rapids when he could. He used to come out to the house because he knew Mrs. Brown - - her name was Betty the same as Betty Ford - - he would be here to some Republican gathering or some speech or something - - it would be ten or eleven o'clock at

night or a little earlier maybe -- he would come out to the house. He said if I go down to the hotel, Art, I'd either have to sit in my room or if I set in the bar somebody wants something. He'd come out and sit on the davenport and we'd talk about our kids -- I only have one son so he'd have more to talk about than I would. As I say in a bar, Ford would drink same as you or I, not to any excess, never. But now I see he's cut it out for pecan ice cream because there's so many calories in it, in the cocktail. I've seen some of the letters he used to get when he was a congressman. He did a lot for the little people we'll say. He's got some letters that somebody's son came home from the Army, only had one shoe. Now that's just like going back to the teacher and saying my kid lost his mittens at school, but he'd do it. I don't believe anybody ever wrote him that wanted help that didn't get it. I run into people yet today that tell me what Ford did for them when he was congressman.

SOAPES: So he kept his fences mended by responding to the requests of the people.

BROWN: Right. He was always here on a holiday when there was a parade. As you know, he was up at Cedar Springs in this red flannel deal; he was out here at Comstock Park -- he always had a parade. As I say, he was on the road whenever there was the opportunity to, as you say, mend his fences. He kept in contact with the people, let's put it that way. He did not loose contact at any time, and he was a wonderful memory. I wish I had the

memory he's got. He calls these older farmers by their first name, yet. When he came back here as Vice-President, first time he come back, we were out here at the airport, the 30-30 Club was there, we were out at the plane and of course they were lined on both sides, the county representatives. He got off that plane - - here it is dark - - he's calling them by their first name. His memory is wonderful, sharp, very sharp. How he can remember it all, I do not know. When they say he stumbles and this and that, as you may know, he has trouble with his one knee - - he was operated on the knee in Ann Arbor. He pretty near fell down at Nixon's inauguration; he stumbled on those steps and he caught himself just in time. That stumbling has nothing to do with this up here, not at all. It is that knee gives out on him, that's the whole thing. It's too bad that they had to blow up that part of it when he fell getting off the plane - -

SOAPES: The airplane in Vienna.

BROWN: Right.

SOAPES: Do you remember any time during his service as congressman when he was involved in controversial matters that generated some sort of criticism here at home for him? Where either the press or some of the political people back here would be highly critical of what he was doing.

BROWN: He got into a little controversy when he backed Mrs. [George] Romney to run for the senate against [Philip] Hart. That

kicked up a little, but not as much as the charge that he had received money for his campaign which was not legal. At one time there was quite a deal about that - -

SOAPES: The Seafarers Union, I think it was.

BROWN: Right, that somebody had given him money. It did not develop into a big bubble, but it started - - it could have. In no way was he involved in what they said. The money was turned over to the Republican party; he did not keep the money. I think they tried to blow that up quite a bit but he proved that it wasn't. In fact, he's something like I am: he's a keeper of everything that might be some day of use. When he was investigated before he was made Vice-President, he had receipts and everything else for everything that he had ever bought that was related to the job. He's rather a pack rat, you might say, same as I am. I've got stuff way back - - used to be Brown's junk, now it's Ford's memorabilia - - changed right away. [Laughter] But as I say, as far as anything scandalous there was something about when he tried to get [Justice William O.] Douglas impeached. There was criticism of bringing in a Playboy magazine or some magazine of that type where Douglas had made a statement I believe. But this money deal I think was the biggest thing, that they tried to say that he had received personal contributions to himself, which, as it turned out, was not true at all, that he had to show that it was turned over to the Republican party, not to him.

SOAPES: In reading some of the newspaper clippings from the 1950s that he kept in his scrapbooks that are over at the library, I noticed a number of references to local politicians wanting to get him to run for governor or senator in the '50s. Did that get very wide public discussion?

BROWN: Do you mean for or against?

SOAPES: Either way.

BROWN: No. As you recall, or maybe you don't know this, Senator [Arthur] Vandenberg took Ford under his wing in Washington when he first came. Of course, Vandenberg was a senator and well liked, a Hollander from this town. Well, when he died, there was talk of making Ford fill out his unexpired - -

SOAPES: Being appointed by the governor.

BROWN: Right. But they didn't think his personal finances would be apt for the job. I thought that stunk, myself. Here's a man that could do the job - - I don't know if he actually wanted it as far as that's concerned - - but the talk was that his own finances wouldn't be high enough to handle that job.

SOAPES: What about the other rumors involving running for governor then in the mid '50s?

BROWN: There wasn't too much excitement about it I didn't think, and no way did he want it.

SOAPES: He indicated to you he wasn't interested at all.

BROWN; The only thing that he wanted, he wanted it badly,

was speaker of the house, that was his one political ambition. But there never was enough Republicans in there at the time he was there to get him in that seat. I personally think he would have rather had that than vice-president or president, but he never planned on that. In fact he would have retired that last year; 1976 he would have been all done.

SOAPES: Can you recall the first time he mentioned to you that his ambition was to be speaker of the house?

BROWN: Well, I think right from the start. He thought that was the most wonderful job in the world - - no specific incident, no. But he always had that longing, dream or whatever that some day he could sit in that seat. That was his one ambition, and he never had any yearning or any thought of running for president or vice-president. They wanted him to run for vice-president at one time as you recall - - I have that newspaper here somewhere - - and he didn't particularly care about that.

SOAPES: There was a boom for him in '60 and again in '64.

BROWN: Right, Gerald Ford for vice-president.

SOAPES: What do you recall of the reaction here in town to his nomination to be vice-president in 1973?

BROWN: Wonderful, wonderful. The FBI is the one that did the investigation - - the town was full of them -- and evidently everybody give a good word because he passed, let's put it that way. But they were pretty clever: they asked me things that they already

knew the answer. This money deal which I couldn't recall a while back, they brought that up. And after I said -- they said, "That's right." But, as I say, he was the most thoroughly investigated president we ever had, and I don't believe there's ever been any scandal about him. And his favorite past president, the same as mine is Harry Truman, and poor old Harry, he might have used some strong language but he never went out of line in his role as president of the United States or any other office, I don't believe -- the same with Ford.

SOAPES: Was there a feeling in the town that the local boy has made good?

BROWN: Right, right everybody -- Democrats or Republicans alike, they all liked him.

SOAPES: You were telling me you organized then, after he was President, the trip to Washington.

BROWN: Right.

SOAPES: That took you, what, six months you said?

BROWN: Oh, easily. It started when he was vice-president. I wrote and I said "Jerry, if you can find a hotel where we can stay and is agreeable to your security" -- because as you know the Secret Service has got him covered like a blanket -- "and meet us there for the breakfast." Then he become president, and then he wrote and said, "Betty and I think it is a wonderful idea and we will have it in the White House," and put me in touch with Nancy

Howe, one of Mrs. Ford's aides. And from then on I went back and forth with her on the phone. We tried to get South High's school song - - the Marine band played for the breakfast, you know, smaller part of an orchestra, whatever they got. We had a heck of a time finding anybody who had the music. [Laughter] And people who hadn't attended any of our meetings on Thanksgiving showed up; they all got an invitation from the White House. There was only one person that didn't go because he didn't agree with Ford's pardon of Nixon. There were others in the group that didn't agree with him - - I don't agree with him - - but that had nothing to do with it, I didn't think. Anybody that was that simple that because of his political move wouldn't go with the group - -.

That night at the White House he and I were down in the Oval office - - Mrs. Brown and Mrs. Ford were still up in the living quarters - - and talked down there and I wanted to see Liberty, you know, the dog, so we went outside. And, of course, we had no more than stepped out the door than the Secret Service were ahead and behind us. That's when I said to him, "Jerry, what in the H did you pardon this guy for?" He said, "Art," - - he told me practically the same thing that's been published - - "I was spending most of my time on this Watergate thing, and the best advisers and everybody told me the best thing I could do is pardon him. I [Ford] personally thought it was the right thing to do," but he said, "if I hadn't of and they would have started a trial

against President Nixon there was nothing I could do. It would have dragged on for five, ten years through the courts." And he said, "I didn't think it was the right thing for this country to have to suffer. I thought, if I pardon him, this is my own thoughts, [Ford's] if I pardon him we'd get this out of the way and maybe I could get the country back so it believes in government again and get it going." He said, "If I had to do it over again, I'd do it. I knew that there was going to be some reaction and repercussions against it, but I didn't think they would be quite as bad as they were. But if I had it to do over again I'd do it, because," he said, "the prime reason was to get the country back, if I could, that they believed in government and get us out of this mess," which it was.

Personally, my own - - I can't see what any fool would do this. What did he go in there for, Watergate, Nixon? He had the election won. There was no reason for it that I can see. And anybody who was foolish to keep tapes against himself is foolisher yet.

SOAPES: You were telling me earlier about the time you first called him "Mr. President," that he took some umbrage or didn't particularly care for that.

BROWN: He said "Art, you know me better than that."

SOAPES: But did you continue to call him Mr. President or was it Jerry?

BROWN: Not to his face, no. Usually when I talk about him to other people I don't refer to him as Jerry, no. Some people that know him as well as I do, yes. And on that same point, see I talked to him on the phone after he become president, but when we got to the White House, the day before Thanksgiving, he had a schedule lined up for us. We went back to the capitol and they took us all through this and that. We had not seen him, Mrs. Brown nor I, personally since he had become President. Well we were back in our room at the White House - - Susan was right across the hall from us, she was in and out of our room like we belonged there - - in fact she had been in our home, too. Anyway, as I say, we had not met him face to face as president. So we're going down to dinner, and he wasn't at the White House when we arrived, we hadn't seen him as yet. We were going down to dinner, and Mrs. Brown says to me, "Well, what do we do. After all he is the president of our country." She said, "Are we going to shake hands or do we bow or what?" And I said, "God, I don't know. Just play it by ear, I guess." So when we get down there he's sitting on the davenport with his feet up, because that leg bothers him, reading the paper and he jumped up and hugged and kissed her which he has done before, and that took care of the protocol right there. It was just the same as always. He's never been any different to us than he ever was at any time. But as I say after all he was the president of the United States, which I have a lot of respect for. Although

I don't like this guy that's in there, I still respect Carter as the president, in that way. But I didn't know exactly what we were going to do to tell you the truth - - how he would be after he become president [Ford], but it was no different, no change whatsoever. And Betty was the same way.

SOAPES: Did you detect any change in the attitude of the town of the local press here towards him when he went from congressman to vice-president to president?

BROWN: He had good publicity here I think because Maury DeJonge, who was a reporter at the Grand Rapids Press - - he is no longer there, he's now a county clerk - - was very favorable to him. In fact, he went to Washington when we went, the 30-30 Club. He was in the driveway with a photographer when Mrs. Brown and I arrived at the White House. They covered that well here, not only that but the TV stations as well. We got a lot of mileage, you might say on the TV.

[INTERRUPTION]

BROWN: TV coverage and news coverage here, in fact the whole country had very good coverage on it. For the 30-30 Club I subscribed to one of these news deals that covers all United States papers that send you the clippings.

SOAPES: A clipping service.

BROWN: Yes, I have that. I have pretty near every paper in the country.

SOAPES: Have you had much contact since he's been out of the White House?

BROWN: Yes.

SOAPES: Again, is it still the same?

BROWN: Still the same, same man. [Pointing to a picture] These were taken at the ground breaking, in fact that one there is the coach standing behind him, Mrs. Brown and I. And those are all members of the 30-30 Club, their wives. They were all invited to the ground breaking of the museum. But he's still the same.

SOAPES: Was there much feeling of resentment or unhappiness here when he decided not to move back to Grand Rapids?

BROWN: Some, yes, there's been criticism. But you know Betty's health does not go along with this atmosphere. One criticism though, there may be some basis for it, I can't say right or wrong, for his skiing, that he does not come back to Michigan to ski. Now there is criticism against that, because there is good skiing here, maybe not this year but it's getting that way. I think he would have created a little better feeling if he would have come back here, maybe once - I don't say he had to build here, no. But he built in Vail or bought the apartment or whichever to ski. Well, the north land of Michigan is quite critical of that, that he didn't come here at all. It was a point. But, in my own, I figured, what the heck, he can live where he wants to, that's his business. If I want to move I can move. I moved out of the city of Grand Rapids

when I retired and moved out here. People said, "You going to go to Wyoming" - - they figured the state of Wyoming, not the city.

SOAPES: So, the relationships he's been able to maintain back here are still there; he still has the ties back here.

BROWN: Now he will be here for the Lincoln day dinner, which is March, I don't know, 24th twenty something, he'll be back here. He's been in and out of here with this Ford Museum Committee. As I say, maybe I personally have had more contact with him than anyone else, that is going back over fifty years or so, being that I - - run, that's not the word I want - - over-seeing this 30-30 Club because it's been left up to me, mostly. If a decision is made, I make it. And being on that museum committee, I don't agree - - that's another place that Ford and I disagreed - - I didn't want the museum there. I still don't like it, but it's going to be a beautiful building, good. But the reason it's made in a triangle is the very thing I said, "What about the noise off the expressway?" You know where it is. Here's the expressway. Well, you get seven or eight diesel trucks going by there - - I wanted it down on Jefferson Avenue between the Grand Rapids Museum and St. Mary's Hospital, but there was too much political and financial backing that this other side had and I couldn't swing that. It's going to be a beautiful building, but it's a lot more work than we ever thought. We thought we'd get the building and then the National Archives would take over. Well, that's not true.

We've got to put the exhibits in there too -- I didn't know that.

And, as you know, the cost due to inflation is going up and up and up and up.