

Harold Paulk (Hal) Henderson, Sr. Oral History Collection  
Series I: Ellis Arnall  
OH ARN 07  
Ivan Allen, Jr. Interviewed by Harold Paulk (Hal) Henderson  
Date: March 28, 1981  
CD: OH ARN 07, Tracks 1-3; 0:21:06 minutes  
Cassette: OH ARN 07, 0:23:41 minutes, Side One

[CD: Track 1]  
[Cassette: Side 1]

HENDERSON: First of all, Mr. Mayor, I appreciate you giving me the opportunity to interview [you].

ALLEN: Well, I'm delighted to talk to you.

HENDERSON: You were Governor [Ellis Gibbs] Arnall's executive secretary for about a year.

ALLEN: Yes, sir.

HENDERSON: How would you describe his style of governing?

ALLEN: I would say that Governor Arnall was a good executive himself. He had a great verve to do the job. He was what I would call--he was "wide open" in facing the public and the demands on his office. He had a great consistency to him and the ability to do the things that needed to be done right then. He had a first-class mind that made it possible for him to make decisions that other people would normally delay making. He liked to get things done.

He had great drive. And at that age, [he] was just a splendid, young executive in the governor's office that had the touch of the people and knew what he was doing.

HENDERSON: OK. Let me ask you specifically. When he dealt with the legislature, how would you describe his relationship with the legislature? Was he a dynamic, strong governor?

ALLEN: He was very much a strong governor in every respect. He had come through the legislature. He had held the top positions in the legislature. The legislature respected him and understood him, although there was a lot of the old reactionary group, of course, in the Georgia legislature at that time. He had come up through the legislature and was held in highest regard by them. And, I guess, a great companion in the beginning and then later on opposing him, probably very vigorously, was Mr. Roy [Vincent] Harris, who was quite a legend in Georgia himself at that time. But, Ellis could get along with people. And he certainly did that in handling the legislature which, you know, after all he had been part and parcel--he wasn't a new man coming through there.

HENDERSON: And looking back at this period of time, one is struck by the small size of state government back then. The state budget [was] sixty, seventy million dollars. I suppose it was much easier to govern or deal with the bureaucracy than it is today. But what was his relationship with the bureaucracy, the state bureaucracy?

ALLEN: I tend to think of it in terms of the time that I was there and by then Governor Arnall had made such an imprint on the state that not only the legislature but the bureaucracy itself of state government was responsive to his wishes. He had, of course, been friends with many of the members that were in the government itself and had appointed many of them. He had made his way in such a fine manner that he had a great sense of cooperation with the bureaucracy itself. He was a governor that by virtue of his own ability, the demonstration of it and the consistency of it, got things done from the entire group of people.

HENDERSON: OK. The governor had a reputation of being a reformer, but there was one area that he didn't want to reform. And I don't know if you were aware of some of his feelings, but I'm going to go ahead and ask you this question. He didn't want to reform the highway department. He said, "That's strictly politics." Now does that seem a little bit out of character from somebody who has a reputation for being a reformer?

ALLEN: That was so much a part and parcel of political life in those days that my reaction to the question then as it would be even now, would be that you had to take the highway department probably as it was. That was part and parcel of state government.

HENDERSON: That's exactly his argument. Let me ask you this: What do you think were his major accomplishments as governor?

ALLEN: Well, I think they would have fallen in two fields. One, he gave Georgia, and to some extent the South, a great boost up on the scale of the nation as a whole. When he had

the courage to go before the courts and got an adjustment of the freight rate issue, which had dogged the South for many years, and had made what was obviously the poorer section of the nation even poorer by what had been inflicted on us, that gave the nation a viewpoint of a governor from Georgia who was progressive and who wanted to do the things that needed to be done and was bold enough to be a leader and step ahead of those things. That was on a national basis. I think, when you look back on his career, probably the finest accomplishment he made was bringing the student educational system back into a form of accreditation. I don't think there can be any doubt [that] he knew what the problem was there. It had been handed down from the previous administration---the senior Talmadge [Eugene Talmadge] administration--and Ellis Arnall realized the great need of education in Georgia and that we couldn't stand the dabbling in political light in the educational system. And his resurrection of the accreditation and giving the dignity to education and, really, it was the first bold step forward to get Georgia off of the bottom of the list of education in the national picture as of that time.

HENDERSON: OK. Do you see him as having some major failures?

ALLEN: I think that the governor would probably have liked to have run again. [He] would liked to have had the opportunity to run again for the governorship. And I expect that was the prime thing that he didn't accomplish and that was the change in the constitution that would have made it possible for him to succeed himself at that time. I have no other feelings of failures on the part of the governor.

HENDERSON: Did he talk with you any about the steps to change the constitution? Was he very much behind this or are you saying you think—

ALLEN: I don't remember the exact details of it. My memory doesn't go back now. I think he lost the fight in the legislature towards the end of his term.

HENDERSON: Right.

ALLEN: I don't remember whether it required a constitutional amendment or not.

HENDERSON: Yes, sir. There were two separate efforts in the legislature, one in '45 [1945] and one in '46. And while the majority of the legislature, on both occasions, voted for it, they never could get the necessary two-thirds vote. Was he, to your knowledge, was he actively involved in trying to get this amendment changed or proposed?

ALLEN: I was not there at that time.

HENDERSON: OK.

ALLEN: I couldn't answer that.

HENDERSON: OK. You've already alluded to this in your introductory remarks. How would you describe his political philosophy?

[CD: Track 2]

ALLEN: I think that Governor Arnall was a, in my opinion, was very definitely a merciful Democrat, a great admirer of President [Franklin Delano] Roosevelt. He recognized the great poverty of the South and our very difficult condition [that] we were in at that time. And realized that the progressive reforms of the Roosevelt era were a greater advantage to the South than even any other section of the country. He was absolutely brilliant in forging ahead in those lines and restructuring the attitude of the state to bring it out of the depths of both depression and poverty that it had been in for so long.

HENDERSON: How would you contrast his philosophy of government with say, Eugene Talmadge or later on, Herman [Eugene] Talmadge's philosophy? Was there a big difference between the two?

ALLEN: Well, I think when I classify Governor Arnall as a Roosevelt Democrat that that pretty well draws the difference in the line between him and senior Talmadge. I expect with certain modifications, the latter Talmadge was far more progressive than his father, and came hold of certain political connotations involved. I would say that Governor Arnall's contrast was remarkably different from Mr. Eugene Talmadge. I wouldn't attempt to try to classify the different philosophies between him and Herman, Senator Talmadge.

HENDERSON: After the governor leaves the governorship does he consult with you or talk with you about ever making a political comeback in the state?

ALLEN: Well, yes, I was very closely associated when he ran again, and whatever help I could be I was with him the whole way when he ran again. What year did he run again?

HENDERSON: In 1966.

ALLEN: In 1966. Was that when he ran again?

HENDERSON: Yes, sir.

ALLEN: I was mayor at that time. I remember [that] I was at the big opening rally that when we kicked it off in Newnan [Georgia] that day. I never could understand why Governor Arnall wasn't reelected governor at that time. He was still young and vigorous and able to serve ably again. And I think the racial issue--not his failure in the racial issue, not his opposition either; he was progressive in his thinking along those lines--but I think the popularity of his opponents on the racial issue and the balance of the state probably precluded Governor Arnall from getting elected at that time, although that may not be a totally fair summary or résumé of it. Yes, I was extremely interested in him and did everything I could to be helpful at that time.

HENDERSON: OK. Why do you think--here's someone that goes out of office in '47, about twenty years later he cries his comeback--why did it take him so long to make the

effort? Was there something in state politics that held him back or was the climate just not receptive to him running? Or was the county unit system a hindrance?

ALLEN: Well, by '66 the county unit system was gone, wasn't it?

HENDERSON: Yes. I was just wondering—

ALLEN: Who all did he run against? Of course, I know [Howard Hollis (Bo)] Callaway was in it at the end, and Lester [Garfield] Maddox was finally elected governor.

HENDERSON: Right. This is the first time [James Earl] Jimmy Carter [Jr.] runs for the governorship.

ALLEN: Well, it was Arnall and Carter and Maddox—

HENDERSON: And Garland [Turk Byrd]—

ALLEN: Was this when Maddox was elected?

HENDERSON: Right, right.

ALLEN: Well, I guess it was the anti-feeling against blacks that I've always felt that race issue is what, of course, projected Governor Maddox into that position--a great tragedy for

Georgia and for the state. But, that was, I guess that Ellis Arnall couldn't cope with that. I mean, that was the way it was.

HENDERSON: If I remember correctly, I believe your father [Ivan Earnest Allen, Sr.] was very much involved in getting the constitution of 1945 approved by the voters.

ALLEN: I think Daddy mainly headed up the commission on government, and I'm not sure about that.

HENDERSON: Right.

ALLEN: I mean on the constitution--it may have been an earlier or later one. I'd have to go look up my father's records on that.

HENDERSON: I was wondering, was your father and Governor Arnall close political friends, and this helped you become his executive secretary. How did you become his executive secretary?

ALLEN: Well, Ellis and I had been close personal friends when we were in college; he and I knew each other. That friendship had continued. As he was making his way through the legislature, I was a young businessman here in Atlanta. We were friends, personal friends, and we were always good friends, I would say, through the years. His family and my family knew each other. Later on the former Mrs. Arnall--Mildred, Mildred [Delaney] Slemons--I

think, was her family name, she and my wife, Louise [Richardson Allen]--we were very fond of Mildred. We had many pleasant trips with Governor and Mrs. Arnall. And we were close personal friends all the way down the line. Daddy was very fond of Ellis, [unintelligible] was Ellis too. But, it was close friendship for many years--one of those good friendships that exist and has always been very close. We're still close friends.

HENDERSON: And you say you went to school together. Was this—

ALLEN: He was at the university [University of Georgia School of Law (Athens, Georgia)], I was at Tech [Georgia Institute of Technology (Atlanta, Georgia)]—

HENDERSON: I see.

ALLEN: But we knew each other—

HENDERSON: Right.

ALLEN: I was the president of the student body at Tech, and he had some equivalent. Although he was in the law school. Now, I think he went somewhere else before he went to the university, didn't he?

HENDERSON: Yes, sir.

ALLEN: Didn't he go to Sewanee [University of the South (Sewanee, Tennessee)]?

HENDERSON: Yes, Sewanee.

ALLEN: Sewanee, and then got his law degree at the University of Georgia.

HENDERSON: Right.

ALLEN: Yes, sir, he was a wonderful man.

HENDERSON: But do you think that, obviously, you do, the state suffered from [Ellis?] not being sent back into the governor's office?

ALLEN: Well, I think a continuation of what Governor Arnall.... What are you talking about? When Talmadge took over?

HENDERSON: Well, in either situation, whether in '47, or in '66, or if he'd run again.

ALLEN: Well, go back and trace things. That was the aberration of the governor's office in '47. In my estimation, [it] was a tragedy the way it gave another black mark to the state of Georgia in the political manner in which it was handled. But, then, of course, the courts straightened that out, and [there has] been a lot said about that. But [Melvin Ernest] M.E. Thompson actually succeeded Ellis Arnall, and Ellis made him governor. As you remember,

the courts said [that] Ellis Arnall should succeed himself until the successor was duly elected, I think. So, for the next couple of years, Thompson carried on pretty much in the manner in which--he didn't have the influence to carry on at the same pace that.... He was good man, but he hadn't come in under public support that Arnall had. So, I don't think you can put much change in the few years after Ellis went out. And when he ran the second time, I've always felt that Maddox's election was one of the black marks in the state. If Ellis Arnall had been there, we would have been better off, of course. It was a tragedy that Maddox was elected on, I guess, a minority. He didn't have the majority of the vote as I remember.

HENDERSON: Well, in the runoff he did. That's when the Republicans allegedly came over.

ALLEN: Wasn't Maddox elected by the state--by the legislature?

HENDERSON: Let's see. He got the Democratic nomination, that's when he got the majority.

ALLEN: Yes.

HENDERSON: You're right, Bo Callaway got a majority of the vote...no, a plurality of the vote.

ALLEN: A plurality of the vote.

HENDERSON: Right, because the write-in campaign--

ALLEN: That's right.

HENDERSON: That's right, you're right.

ALLEN: He was not elected. Maddox was not elected.

HENDERSON: That's right. Elected by the legislature.

ALLEN: Elected by the legislature.

[CD: Track 3]

HENDERSON: Did you play any role in the '48 campaign? This is when Thompson runs against Herman Talmadge. Or were you back in business then?

ALLEN: Well, I was back in business but...well, let's see, I'm getting my years mixed up.

M.E. went into the governor's office--he was elected lieutenant governor in what year?

HENDERSON: All right. He was elected in '46.

ALLEN: All right.

HENDERSON: All right.

ALLEN: I had a lot-- [ALLEN and HENDERSON chuckle] --this has nothing to do with Ellis. I had come to know M.E Thompson very closely through my association with Governor Arnall. I succeeded M.E. as the executive secretary, and M.E. went on up to, let's see, revenue commission, if I'm not mistaken.

HENDERSON: Yes.

ALLEN: And, when M.E. ran for lieutenant governor, it was the first time they'd ever had that office.

HENDERSON: That's right.

ALLEN: He and I were great friends, and I tried to help him, I mean I'd be a hundred percent right, but I've always said he didn't have much money to run for lieutenant governor on. I think he ran against [Samuel] Marvin Griffin [Sr.] at that time. Marvin and M.E. and I were all old friends. Under the [Eurith Dickinson (Ed)] Rivers' administration we'd been good friends. But I supported M.E. and I remember—and money was pretty scarce in those days—but I contributed a thousand dollars. [HENDERSON laughs] I think that was as large a gift as he had to run for lieutenant governor on, and I've often said I'm only the only man

that ever elected a governor with a thousand dollar contribution. [ALLEN and HENDERSON laugh] That's nothing to do with this tale. What was the question you asked me?

HENDERSON: I've forgotten the question. [ALLEN and HENDERSON laugh] [It was] such an interesting story.

ALLEN: Right. You've take me back into some of the wonderful experiences that I've had and all came about as my association and friendship with Governor Arnall, many of them did.

HENDERSON: Yes. Great. Did he ever urge you to run for public office?

ALLEN: Well, that I couldn't answer that. I know [that] I always had Ellis's support in every possible way, and we had a great and lasting friendship.

HENDERSON: Well, Mr. Mayor, I've gone through my questions.

ALLEN: Well, you ought to have an enjoyable time writing about Ellis Arnall.

HENDERSON: I have a—

ALLEN: He has one of the fine records that any man could have in this state.

HENDERSON: Well, I think so.

ALLEN: He's just a wonderful person.

[End of Interview]

*Richard D. Arnold*  
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