

Interview with John Hyde,  
co-author of *American Dreamer, A Life of Henry A. Wallace*  
Interviewed by Chip Duncan, February 2, 2004

**Q:** Who was Henry Wallace?

**John Hyde:** He was one of the truly famous people of his generation. He was known around the world and, in a sense, slipped into obscurity. Introducing Henry Wallace to people now is kind of a task because he was a complex man. I see him as something of an explorer, as a pioneer, a person who wanted to explore the world around him and learn as much as he could about life and about the planet that he lived on. And, of course, the planet that he lived on was pretty well mapped out by the time he comes along. He pushes the boundaries constantly to try to learn more and more. He becomes a geneticist, an agronomist, a statistician and an economist. Spiritually, he's always looking at new ways to explore the inner self.

Along the way he becomes more and more involved in public policy and somehow he finds the time to head two cabinet departments. He was vice president of the United States, and he ran for president as a third party candidate. He's a kind of Renaissance man. He was a man who was constantly curious, constantly interested in everything that was going on around him and wanting to learn more and wanting to push that knowledge as far as he could.

**Q:** Why do you think Wallace, with all of his accomplishments and achievements, has been forgotten for such a long time?

**John Hyde:** Wallace, in part, was responsible for that himself. He wrote no memoirs after he left public life. He was enormously controversial at the time that he finally got out of politics and public affairs. No publishers really wanted to have a book about Henry Wallace because he was so controversial. He ordered his own diaries and his own oral history sealed for ten years after his death. And he lived a good decade and a half after he was done with politics and led a very productive life, but not in the public eye. And I think during that time he was slowly forgotten. When he died in 1965 it was a mere mention on the evening news and he was buried in a very simple grave in Des Moines.

**Q:** Why resurrect him? What makes him relevant today?

**John Hyde:** He made an enormous contribution to the world in terms of agriculture, in terms of the world being able to feed itself, probably more than any single human being in the 20th century. Wallace was responsible for the great agricultural revolution. Secondly, he tried to do some valuable things involving policy of our government, both foreign and domestic policy, in trying to make government more fair to the average guy, in trying to make our foreign policy more peaceful and make us a better citizen of the world. Those things are worth remembering from a historic standpoint. But his gigantic contribution to the world, his real mark was in helping to bring about this incredibly significant agricultural revolution.

**Q:** So, when you talk about this controversial man, what was the controversy?

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**John Hyde:** Well, Wallace was an unabashed liberal. He would have gladly accepted that label himself: progressive. His ideas were very much in tune with the New Deal, with Franklin Roosevelt - wanting government to be an activist institution. As with all political figures, the world changed somewhat around him. World War II came along. He was a very active proponent of American involvement in World War II. He believed in the cause. He believed that fascism had to be defeated. Public opinion started to shift to a more conservative way of thinking. Wallace never varied. Wallace kept on this path that he was on and did not give up.

After World War II we went through a period of hysteria, anti-Communist hysteria, fear of Russia, which affected both our domestic politics and also our position in the world. Wallace was caught up in that. He simply represented a different point of view. He was faced with enormous opposition to his ideas to the point where it almost seemed necessary to obliterate him, to totally destroy the viewpoint that he represented. It was as if a huge wave had fallen over him, and there was nothing that he could do to fight it other than to stand firm for his ideals.

**Q:** He seemed like a hard man to know. Who is this guy as a person?

**John Hyde:** Someone once said that Henry Wallace was an easy man to understand but a difficult man to know. I think that's true. Wallace was a person who had certain fundamental beliefs and those never really varied throughout his whole life. But he was a very complex man, an intellectual, a rather shy person, a person who would follow an idea to its logical conclusion. If it proved sound, fine; and if it didn't prove sound he'd drop it and move on.

He had an original mind. He was willing to confront new ideas, to test them, try them out. Wallace had no respect at all for conventional wisdom. It led him down some unusual paths. It led him to explore certain spiritual ideas, theosophy, astrology; he corresponded with a man who thought he was a reincarnated Indian. He was very interested in Native American rituals. He would follow these ideas as far as he thought it would take him, and if he found that they didn't merit anything he would move on. Well, sometimes that cost Wallace in terms of how people regarded him. Some people found him strange. He had a great deal of intellectual integrity. He was willing to test an idea, and if it didn't work he wasn't going to cling to it. That is one of the things that makes the charge that he was a dupe of some foreign government or a follower of the Commies -- that's laughable because he was a man who followed his own path his whole life. He didn't follow the path that somebody else set for him. He was not a subscriber to any particular ideology.

I think when you look at the Wallaces there are really three fundamental matters and this was true not only of Henry A. but of his father and his grandfather. There is family and agriculture and God. And these three things are interrelated. They are all part of a whole. The Wallaces felt that they were on Earth in order to serve God. And they believed that the way to serve God was to serve their fellow man, the social gospel. And the most fundamental part of mankind, the basic building block of all of mankind is agriculture.

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They saw the people who produced the food as being the basic people of civilization. They were what kept civilization strong and vital, the farmers. All of this is interrelated in their minds. And it all relates to God. God, as Wallace saw it, was the sort of life force that goes through the whole planet. God could be found in a blade of grass. What he did in terms of increasing the abundance of the world, in terms of giving the world an ability to feed itself, was not only important to the world but it was Wallace's way of relating to his God.

**Q:** Can you tell a little bit about the relationship with George Washington Carver?

**John Hyde:** It was an odd occurrence. George Washington Carver had arrived at Iowa State at a time when Henry Wallace's father was a professor at Iowa State. George Washington Carver was the school's only black student so it was a rare thing for anybody to have any contact with a black person in Iowa at that time. Henry Wallace, a four-year-old boy, who had just left the farm, was shy. George Washington Carver would periodically come to visit their house. Wallace's father was a professor and had befriended him and they would go on nature walks-- George Washington Carver, this big, tall, gangly young black man and Henry A. Wallace.

They would identify plants, identify the parts of plants. Wallace absorbed some of Carver's philosophy because Carver believed that God was in all living things and that you could relate to God through observing plants, trying to figure out what that plant is trying to do, how it contributes to nature, how it fits in with the whole universe.

**Q:** If you could, zip all the way forward to 1948. He's running for president and we're down in the deep South where segregation is commonplace. Yet he won't speak to segregated audiences. Is that in any way related to his early experiences with Carver and his family values and the acceptance that we're all equal?

**John Hyde:** I think he absorbed some of the family's feeling that equality was essential, equality of all human beings was really a fundamental value of Christianity. I think that goes all the way back two generations before Henry A. Wallace. Certainly his contact with George Washington Carver was an interesting and probably important part of his youth, but he was a very young boy at that point. They continued to be in contact even after Wallace became Secretary of Agriculture. He invited Carver to come back to the department and visit with people. Here was this prominent scientist, but he was black. And a lot of people in the department weren't too happy about that.

But I think his views on equality really grow more out of his religious values. He believed that looking down on other people because of their race was a sin. It was unchristian. He felt that this was a fundamental black mark on our democracy to have a system of segregation, to have Jim Crow laws in the South where people were treated unequally on the basis of their color. He saw that as a sin. He saw it as undemocratic. He often remarked that democracy is the true political form of Christianity because it treats, in theory, all people equally. Everybody has a chance to pursue their livelihood and their happiness in the best way they can and be equal before a law-- just as people in true Christianity are to be treated equally before God.

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**Q:** He's the editor of *Wallaces' Farmer* at the time. What was happening to farmers, especially in the Midwest, that led to some of his belief systems and eventually propelled him into the role of Secretary of Agriculture?

**John Hyde:** The Wallaces were editors of a very prominent farm publication, *Wallaces' Farmer*. Their cause was to make agriculture more successful, the lives of farmers more fulfilling, to try to bring forth a vibrant rural civilization where people would want to stay on the land. And they saw very early on that World War I was going to pose problems because we had geared up production. We were producing far more than we could sell at the end of World War I. As long as the war was going on and we had enormous needs overseas that was fine, but as soon as the war ended that system was not going to work because there was too much production.

Wallace's father became Secretary of Agriculture under Harding and Coolidge. At almost the same time a great crash began to happen in rural America. Prices fell through the bottom-- prices that farmer's received. Prices that they were paying for goods were going up as a result of protectionism for manufactured goods. Farmers were just totally squeezed. Wallace was wrestling with this problem throughout the '20s. The Depression really started around 1920, 1921 for farmers and continued up to 1929 when the rest of the country caught up with agriculture. Agriculture had been suffering for ten years. By the time he finally gets to be Secretary of Agriculture under Franklin Roosevelt, farmers had been suffering for twelve years. It was a dreadful time. People were not only having low prices, they had no way of controlling their production really. They had no way of responding to this in the same way that a manufacturing company or organized labor would respond. Manufacturers, if you're not selling as many widgets, you cut back on the number of widgets you're making. Labor, if it feels that it's not being properly compensated, can withhold its labor, can strike. What are farmers supposed to do? Every farmer is in competition not only with the manufacturer and labor; they're in competition with each other.

So, you've got to figure the guy next door to me is planting 100 acres of corn, and he's going to get so many bushels per acre. I better do that too. Well, pretty soon you end up with too much corn. And the problem throughout the '20s is they kept searching for a mechanism to control this and it didn't work. You couldn't do it voluntarily because everybody thought it was a great idea for farmers next door to cut back on their production, and then you'd go out and produce as much as you could. And you'd make more money.

Well, that's not going to work. They tried two or three different avenues through Congress to get relief for this problem. They were trying to address the problem in a public arena. Throughout the '20s Henry Wallace, who is essentially a rather shy man, a man who was very reluctant to be involved in public life himself, a man who had no political ambitions and who would have been just as happy experimenting with his corn and figuring out how to improve plant life, slowly Wallace is drawn into the public arena because of the desperate need to address this problem.

And I think it was only with reluctance that he did it. He wasn't a very effective public speaker when he started out. He was uncomfortable with the sort of demagoguery and the populism and so forth that is associated with a lot of rural protests, you know,

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pitchfork populism. That sort of thing made him uncomfortable. But there was a desperate need to address this problem, and he becomes more and more involved. It eventually forces him out of the Republican Party, which is the party of his youth, the party of his father who was in the Cabinet under Warren Harding and Calvin Coolidge. Wallace endorses Al Smith, a Democrat, for President in 1928 and finally goes with Roosevelt in 1932 and becomes really what one would call a farm leader at that point. He was one of many people who were very highly regarded as trying to address the problems of the farmers.

**Q:** He strikes me as more of an idealist. Is that true?

**John Hyde:** Wallace saw agriculture as a business. It had to be a viable, economic way to survive in order for farmers to remain on the land. Well, agriculture can't be a charity case. It can't be something that somebody is just doing because it's pretty and a romantic way of living. The Wallaces were very strong advocates of rural life, but they recognized that in order for people to stay on the farm and to want to enjoy the great outdoors and a healthy way of living that they had to make a living. Farmers were struggling. Many of them gave up and moved to the cities or their farms were foreclosed.

It's correct to say that Wallace was not a romantic about this. He recognized that there were economic realities. The Wallaces felt a strong kinship to the soil and to nature. They recognized the importance of soil and of protecting and conserving the land. And maybe you can see an element of romanticism in that. It certainly was a strong regard for nature and a strong desire to protect our natural resources. Wallace once said, "Soil is the mother of man. You can neglect it for as long as 100 years if you want, but eventually if you neglect the land, if you pay no attention to the soil, to rebuilding it, to keeping it strong, your civilization is going to die. It's that important."

When he goes to Roosevelt's administration, the New Deal obviously is a new way of thinking about all kinds of things, not just agriculture. But Wallace plays a key role.

**Q:** Can you talk about Wallace and the role he plays in the New Deal and why he is remembered as a significant contributor to that?

**John Hyde:** Can I say one more thing about his love of nature before we leave that?

This is a man who, when he is Secretary of Agriculture, goes on national radio and gives an address called "The Strength and Quietness of Grass." He loved the feel of grass. He liked to walk barefoot in it. He liked to lie down in it. He did have a certain regard for nature just as an aesthetic, as a thing to love for the beauty of it. And naturally he saw soil as the fundamental requirement for agriculture. Conserving soil was incredibly important to him, conserving our natural resources.

But he did have a love of nature, I think in a quiet sort of way.

He enjoyed being out of doors. He was a passionate gardener all of his life. He loved to garden. It sounds funny to say passionate gardener in a way because it's a solitary pursuit. He enjoyed that sort of solitude of being at one with nature, of having your hands in the dirt. And he enjoyed working with plants, with living things. I think there was a certain spiritual element of that in addition to the economics of it.

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Wallace once said that someone said economics is beneath everything. All the decisions that you make are essentially economic in nature when we get right down to it. And Wallace said, "I would agree with that. But under economics is religion. And your attitude about religion and your attitude about God affect how you're going to think about economics. Because it's going to affect how you think we should live on Earth, whether everybody is going to have a chance to pursue their own dream, whether everybody is going to have a chance to get enough to eat, to educate their kids. These are very fundamental things and I think he saw at base, at bottom, below everything was religion.

**Q:** Can you talk about him as a citizen of the world?

**John Hyde:** The Wallaces always were people who saw that we were increasingly a part of the world, that America couldn't be just alone in the world and go our own way and forget everybody else, that we were all a part of it, one human race. Wallace's grandfather certainly felt that strongly. Wallace himself was Chairman of the League of Nations Society during the '20s when they were promoting the idea of international cooperation, international justice. He saw throughout the '30s and '40s that we had to engage the rest of the world. We couldn't just seal off our borders. Airports should be international; travel should be easy between nations. It should be easy for all citizens - international trade was very important. This was at a time when we were still suffering the effects of protectionism.

Wallace saw international trade very much as Thorstein Veblen did, which is to say it's a vehicle for peace because you're unlikely to make war on somebody that you're trading with. Now, that's not to say that he would have been in favor of global exploitation or allowing corporations to come in and exploit the peoples of underdeveloped countries. He certainly believed that there were ways of addressing those issues. But at heart he believed that international commerce, international contact, and the exchange of ideas - that being a part of the world was really very important. And he was clearly, you know, he was a citizen of America. He loved his country, but he really saw these issues in global terms. He saw that we were all one people and that it wasn't right for us to try to exploit them, look down on them, discriminate against them because they were a different religion or a different color.

**Q:** Did he see us as privileged - that we should be giving back to the world?

**John Hyde:** Yes, he clearly did and we were. By the standards of the world at the end of World War II we were unrivaled in terms of our wealth, in terms of our military power. There was nothing like this. Europe was flat on its back. Russia had lost ten million or more people. It was economically destroyed. We had no real rivals. He saw it as our privilege, he would say. Another person would have said "duty" but Wallace said it is the privilege of those of us who have a great deal to teach and to help those who don't have a great deal to realize their full potential. The great debate at the end of World War II really was between Wallace on the one side saying this should be the century of the common man and Henry Luce on the other side saying this should be the American

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century, this is the century when America is going to get hers. We have the economic power and we have the military power to do anything we want.

Wallace's response to that was it should really be the century of the common man. This should be the century when people are free from the yolk of Communism and free from the yolk of fascism and free from religious tyranny or dictatorships or whatever kind of tyranny that they're living under and be allowed to develop, to survive economically, to educate their kids to live in peace and dignity. And those were the two real visions that Wallace and others were addressing at the end of World War II.

**Q:** Luce won?

**John Hyde:** Luce won. No question, the century of the common man was swallowed up, overwhelmed by the hysteria and in some cases the greed that followed World War II. Here is a guy who really wanted to do something for ordinary people and who really saw that we had this incredible opportunity because we were so technologically advanced. We were so far down the road economically. We had the natural resources and we had the ability at long last to really make the dream come true for ordinary people, not only in this country, but to start it going around the world. And this is a vision that a lot of people said, "Well, it's a nice idea. It's too idealistic. It will never work. He's being naive because there are always going to be evil people in the world." And maybe that's true. But we didn't really try it, did we?

**Q:** Can you talk about Wallace's role in the New Deal?

**John Hyde:** Wallace was one of the original cabinet members of the New Deal, sworn in on the same day that Franklin Roosevelt was, and as Secretary of Agriculture was a very important player in the New Deal. At that time, farmers constituted about 25% of the population. It was a very important part of the problem facing Roosevelt, the Depression. Corn was selling for ten cents a bushel at the time that Roosevelt took office. And farmers were burning corn rather than taking it to market because they couldn't get enough money to pay for the transportation to take it to market. It was a desperate situation. People were near revolution in rural areas.

Farmland was being lost at a horrific rate to foreclosure. Farmers were unable to control the situation at all. They sought a variety of desperate means but they had no real effective way of addressing it on an individual level or even small groups of people because it was a nationwide, in fact, international problem. And so Wallace comes in convinced that you had to do something and you had to do it quickly because this was a problem - people felt desperate and they had to have a solution. They had to at least have some hope that we were going to do something. And Wallace immediately starts to bring about action to force the agriculture department out of its sleepy ways and to find ways of helping the farmer to regain his footing.

Within less than 100 days he had pushed through Congress the first real change in agricultural policy, really ever, the first time that government was actively involved in helping farmers through income subsidies. He had devised ways of controlling production. He had devised ways of trying to conserve the land at the same time, and he

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had put in place a revolutionary system of supplementing farm income in exchange for cutting back on production.

These were breathtaking changes, and they came very quickly. And from that point on his department became the centerpiece of the New Deal. It was the place where all the action was. It was the place that attracted the young people like John Kenneth Galbraith and Adele Stevenson and all these bright young guys who were eager to be part of the New Deal and eager to do something. It was because Wallace was willing to experiment, was willing to give free reign to new ideas, to try it and to force action wherever possible. And from that beginning, the department really becomes this far ranging agency for not only change but for research, agricultural research for economic research, for just a wide variety of programs that were intended to improve the lot of a substantial portion of the population.

This goes on for a period of eight years under Wallace. He had enormously talented people around him to help guide the various projects. They were experts in their field. They loved working for Henry Wallace because here was a man who not only wanted them to do well, but was willing to consider any idea that looked like it was promising. He was a galvanizing force. He would cause people to think in new ways. He became a huge hero for those people who worked for him. Everybody understood at the time that here was the greatest Secretary of Agriculture that the country had ever seen. It was a very exciting time for these men and they wrote very movingly about Wallace in later years. It must have been an exciting place to work.

**Q:** How would you evaluate the policies that came out of it in terms of how they solve problems?

**John Hyde:** Well, the basic farm program, which was put in place in the very beginning of the New Deal survived for half a century. We're essentially drifting back in that direction now, because there didn't seem to be any viable alternative to this program that Wallace put in place, but also because it became kind of institutionalized and took on its own force. I think in terms of raising farm income he was fairly successful. Farm income went up about 70% during those years. It was a terrible problem because they started from such a low point, but things had clearly improved for average ordinary farmers. I think the conservation programs they put into effect were quite successful, the first real effort on soil conservation that the nation had seen.

In terms of maintaining the viability of rural life, the sustainability of being able to earn a living on the land, I think you'd have to say that it was not a success. People kept moving off the farm because they felt they could make a better living in the cities. And this effort of the Wallace family going back for three generations to try to find a way of making rural life economically sustainable and attractive, a place where you want to live and you want to stay and you want to raise your kids, they just weren't able to do it. We're down now too. It started with 80% of Americans, when his grandfather started editing the newspaper, were living on the farm. Then 50%, and then 25% by the time Henry A. becomes Secretary of Agriculture. Now we're down to less than 2%, around 1%.

**Q:** How did Wallace's business acumen and scientific acumen impact that? The flip side

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and the irony is he's creating a way for us to produce more with fewer farmers.

**John Hyde:** It was really the great irony of Wallace's life. He had such a profound impact on finding a way to improve the production of corn and subsequently to produce more with less labor. You have this continued mass migration off the land -- what has been called the largest mass migration in American history -- is the movement off of the land.

And Wallace played a part in that, there is no question. Hybrid corn was incredibly successful. It took over the farm belt. You could produce more corn with less labor with fewer farmers than ever before. It's a problem that Wallace was never really able to solve. He wrestled with it. Even on his deathbed he was exchanging letters with Lyndon Johnson hoping that agriculture could be included in the anti-poverty programs, hoping that industry could be decentralized so that you'd have industry in small rural towns, thus enabling farm families to maybe find work in a local industry in the off season. And hoping that farm wives, for instance, could help supplement the income in order to allow them to remain on the land if that is what they chose to do.

He wrestled with the problem a lot trying to figure out how to solve this movement off of the land. I think he would have been pleased by the number of people who are now returning to the land as small farmers, truck farmers, people who sell at farmers' markets, people who are able to earn a living off of ten, twenty, forty acres of land. It's not large scale commercial agriculture but for many people they find it satisfying and a very productive way of earning their living and an enjoyable one. He would have been pleased by that.

**Q:** You mentioned when he was on his deathbed that he was still writing to Johnson. When he got to the end of his life and he looked back and he saw the irony of his own life, how did he feel about himself? What was his self image like?

**John Hyde:** I don't think he had a lot of regrets about his own life. I think he felt that he had done the best he could. I think he felt that he had made a real contribution to humanity in some ways, and he had fought for his ideals and they were worth fighting for. So, I don't think he had regrets in that sense. I think he felt bad for the direction that his country was taking. I think he thought that the Vietnam War, for instance, which was going on at the time of his death in 1965, was an enormous mistake and was the logical progression of the Cold War policies that he tried to stop.

I think he regretted some things like that. But he was also something of a fatalist. He had a certain diffidence. He had an ability to accept things that happened without rancor. I do think the '48 campaign may be the one exception to that, because there were some frightening experiences in that campaign when he was in the South. He was threatened; eggs were thrown at him; people threatened the lives of people around him and of Wallace himself. And I think he saw a side of humanity and a side of America that really caused him a lot of distress.

**Q:** Picture for me his death. He's in Farvue. They've moved his body into the dining

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room?

**John Hyde:** They converted the dining room into a downstairs bedroom because, due to the effects of Lou Gehrig's disease, he slowly lost the ability to climb stairs. He had approached the disease very much in the same way that he approached all of life, very curious about its origin, about what caused it, about whether there was any solution, any cure. He sought both conventional treatments through the Mayo Clinic and other respected medical institutions. He also sought unconventional treatments with some doctors who were, for instance, practiced in Europe, who were not licensed in the United States. He took medicines which were not approved for use in America. He turned himself over to the national institutes of health for experimentation on his own body while he was still alive, hoping that more could be learned about Lou Gehrig's disease, ALS, while he was still alive.

He kept extensive records of the progress of the disease, his heart rate, his ability to walk, other measurements of its progress. He thought about it and read about it a great deal. And he compiled all this in a little diary, which was never really published called "Reflections of an ALS-er." He combined all of his notes and had them typed up. And in the end he's reflecting on the war that is going on in the world. He could see the great cruelty, the violence that was taking place in Southeast Asia and other parts of the world and found that very disturbing that we were still resorting to war.

He said that he was profoundly moved by the experience of the kindness that other people had shown to him during this period of his illness and that he saw enormous goodness in the people around him. He was quite moved by that. He wrote this because he was unable to speak at that point and died not long after, about a week after he wrote those words. Those were his final words.

**Q:** Let's go back to FDR, 1940. So, he's been the Secretary of Ag for two terms. Why Wallace?

**John Hyde:** It's a complicated question really because first of all nobody had ever sought a third term. And Roosevelt went to great lengths to make it appear that he wasn't seeking a third term even though he had obviously at some point decided, "I'm going to have to serve a third term." And at that point you have not only rivals within the party who were opposed to a third term, maybe on philosophical grounds or maybe wanted to be President themselves, but you also had a very complicated international situation that Roosevelt was trying to address. You had a war going on in Europe. It was a war that Roosevelt believed eventually we were going to have to enter. So he was looking for someone who not only would be supportive of the idea of him being in office for a third term, but also a person who was philosophically compatible with the ideals of the New Deal. He was looking for an internationalist, someone who would be supportive of the military preparedness that Roosevelt was beginning to undertake and would be agreeable to the internationalist philosophy that he was pursuing.

A good many of the alternatives in the Democratic Party, the Midwestern Progressives, people like La Follette, are Progressive-- are liberal on domestic issues but were essentially isolationists in their international outlook. Roosevelt obviously couldn't have

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that kind of disagreement with his own vice president. He had to have somebody who was supportive of this. Wallace fits both categories. He fits the category of someone who is liberal on domestic issues but also an internationalist in his foreign policy views. He was also on the right side, on Roosevelt's side on the fight with the Supreme Court. This was really a huge matter during Roosevelt's second term. During Roosevelt's second term was his effort to increase the size of the Supreme Court in order to get around the conservative views of the nine old men who were on there. And this was vehemently opposed both, not only with Republicans but with many Democrats. It was certainly Roosevelt's major defeat. And Wallace was very supportive of Roosevelt during that fight and felt that it was the right way to go and gave Roosevelt a good deal of not only rhetorical support but intellectual support. He wrote a book on constitutional theory, in fact, called *Whose Constitution: An Inquiry in the General Welfare*. His point being that at some point, the people of the United States, if it's a democracy, have a right to take action that is going to benefit the citizens of the Republic. We didn't have to just do what nine guys who were intent on supporting the big business and corporations said. Well, Roosevelt lost that fight, but Roosevelt had a very good memory as to who was on his side and who wasn't.

And Roosevelt, I think, admired Wallace also as a person of a lively intellect. He enjoyed the company of talking to Wallace about issues, not only agriculture but a vast number of other things in which Wallace was an expert-- economics, statistics. Wallace was not a politician. He didn't know anything about politics. He couldn't tell Roosevelt anything that Roosevelt didn't know about politics. Roosevelt did enjoy this side of Wallace. Wallace always said, he thought he brought out some of Roosevelt's better angles because there was a liveliness to Wallace's intellect that Roosevelt responded to and that he enjoyed that exchange and that company.

And Roosevelt was also a person who was willing to tolerate a few eccentric ideas. He had some himself. The fact that Wallace was regarded as something of an eccentric by many politicians in Washington, the fact that he would go out on the mall and throw boomerangs or walk into the department barefoot because he'd been out traipsing around on the mall, Roosevelt thought, "Ah, nothing wrong with that." But many of the conventional politicians in the Democratic Party were not at all happy with that choice. They felt that he was essentially a Republican. Wallace didn't bother to change his party registration until 1936. They felt that he was not political. He didn't have the interest of the Democratic Party at heart.

And they were absolutely right about that-- he didn't. He cared about his ideas. He cared about the New Deal. He cared about doing what he could for ordinary people. He could have cared less about the political fortunes of the mayor of Chicago.

**Q:** In what way, though, could they have considered him a Republican?

**John Hyde:** He was a registered Republican until 1936.

**Q:** I mean ideologically.

**John Hyde:** He clearly would have been on the far-left fringe of the Republican Party, I

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guess. He just came from that tradition. He came from a Midwestern Republican tradition. His father was a member of a Republican administration. There was just a feeling that there were a lot of people who had come up in the Democratic Party who had earned their way to public office or who had earned some position in the party through years of loyal work to the Democratic Party and that they deserved to be rewarded for their efforts. And here is Wallace who is this guy who has no interest in politics, no personal ambition, who could have cared less about the fortunes of the Democratic Party other than as a vehicle for the ideas that he believed in.

They couldn't believe that here is this guy who is going to be vice president of the United States who essentially they didn't think of as a Democrat. There was enormous opposition to him at that convention. His name was booed. His nomination was greeted with boos. There were ten or twenty guys who all of a sudden decided they wanted to be vice president. Some of them had themselves actually nominated at the convention. The thing was pretty much out of control. And it only got back into control when Roosevelt sent his wife to try to get things calmed down.

I take that back. Roosevelt did not send her, but she was invited to come. Roosevelt himself was prepared to not run if he didn't get Wallace. He listened to the convention on the radio and heard things getting out of control. Roosevelt was furious, grabbed a notepad and said, "This party can't be half of one thing and half of another. It has to be either completely liberal or completely conservative. And by not running, I give you a chance to decide. I so do," he wrote. And he never sent the letter because it got turned around before he was forced to. But he was prepared to drop off the ticket if he didn't get Wallace.

**Q:** So, Wallace is kind of a pivotal player in three elections: 1940, '44 and '48. Had Roosevelt dropped off the ticket it would have been a very different world than what we have in all likelihood. And the same thing happens in '44. Had Wallace made it on the ticket, it would have been a very different world. Maybe you can help characterize that a little bit.

**John Hyde:** You know, it's hard to imagine 1940 and 1941 without Roosevelt. It's just hard to imagine. From the standpoint of history, from where we sit today it's hard to think of America not being in World War II. Eventually we would have, I suppose, but it's hard to imagine without Roosevelt at the helm. I don't have any idea who would have been nominated if Roosevelt had actually not run. Pretty clearly it would not have been Wallace.

**Q:** But then when you fast forward to '44...

**John Hyde:** Then you get to '44 and the situation in the convention hall had completely changed. All of a sudden Roosevelt is off fighting the war. He's not paying attention. He's not going to insist on Wallace's nomination. The bosses are very opposed to Wallace but Wallace is enormously popular. A huge demonstration breaks out when they mention Wallace's name. They almost end up nominating him in spite of the opposition of the bosses, because he had a good deal of support within the rank and file of the party.

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He had been the great spokesman for democracy during the war. He had been the champion of the common man. He had been the champion of liberalism and of the New Deal and of Roosevelt.

People liked that, and he had really become quite popular. So, the party bosses, the urban bosses, the mayors of the big democratic cities and the southern power brokers, the segregationists, had to do everything they could to keep Wallace off the ticket. Because given its own, left to its own devices, the delegates would have nominated Wallace. And then, yes, it would have been a different world. We'll never know exactly how it would have turned out but had Wallace been nominated he undoubtedly would have been elected with Roosevelt in '44. He would have become President in April of 1945 and he undoubtedly would have pursued the ideals that he believed in. He would have pursued the "century of the common man." He would have pursued an accommodation with the Soviet Union. He would have not adopted a militaristic foreign policy.

**Q:** Would he have dropped the bomb?

**John Hyde:** Yes, I think he would have. Wallace was very involved in the decision to build the bomb. Roosevelt had turned to him because he was the only scientist in the cabinet. Roosevelt had turned to him for advice as a sort of personal liaison to these scientists who were suggesting that an atomic bomb might be possible and were also suggesting that Germany was on the verge of starting a program to build an atomic bomb. And Wallace was very involved. He was the head of a super secret committee called the "top policy committee," which consisted of several scientists who were knowledgeable about this. And this committee then recommended to Roosevelt that they proceed with what was a costly, totally secret, very risky effort. Nobody knew exactly how this was going to come out, whether it was even possible or whether we would be able to do it before Germany did.

And he kept abreast of the developments from time to time during the war, although he deliberately did not involve himself in any of the effort to build the bomb. But he was periodically briefed on the progress that was being made. When at the time the bomb was dropped, when we were still at war, a war that Wallace had been very supportive of, I think he would have seen it as a way of shortening the war and saving American lives, which we'll never know. We can argue about it a long time. I think it is to Wallace's credit that he never criticized Truman. He never really said exactly what he was thinking. He was very critical down the road of Truman's willingness to use nuclear diplomacy as a tool of American foreign policy. He was very critical of the way that the bomb was handled. He felt that the scientific information about nuclear power, nuclear energy should have been internationalized and placed under some international body like the United Nations. So, he had disagreements with all of that, but I think he would have dropped the bomb, yes.

**Q:** So, the first chance he really gets to pursue his ideals with the idea of being President is '48. I mean, he didn't get the shot in the '44 convention. So, what happens? How does the Progressive Party start up? Why is Wallace willing to pursue that election?

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**John Hyde:** I think you have to see what happened to the liberal cause with the death of Roosevelt. Truman comes in and Truman is essentially not a New Dealer. He's a politician. He's a party man, clearly not as liberal as Roosevelt on domestic issues, and is something of a blank slate on foreign policy. It's not quite known what his thinking on these matters was or would be. I mean, he had not spoken a lot about foreign policy except to say that the war effort was good and that he was for allied victory. So you had a struggle for Truman's heart and soul on matters of foreign policy and to a certain extent on domestic policy. And Wallace remains in the Cabinet for sixteen months. Then, after Truman becomes president Wallace is Secretary of Commerce. He's clearly the leader of the liberal faction of the Democratic Party. I mean, it's very clear at that point that he is regarded as the most significant liberal in the party.

And more and more he's looked to by the liberal factions as their voice. He does a certain amount of that on the domestic side without too much controversy. But on foreign policy he finds himself increasingly at odds with other members of the Truman administration and more and more uncomfortable with Truman's hard line policy toward the Soviet Union, his get tough with Russia policy. Wallace saw the opportunity to establish some kind of international force that is greater than the force of any single nation and the opportunity to come to some kind of accommodation with the Soviet Union, which after all, was our wartime ally.

That was slipping away. He keeps going back to Truman and trying to persuade him of his views, trying to persuade him of how the bomb should be handled, trying to persuade him of what our foreign policy should be with respect to the Soviet Union and to the European countries. Truman tends to agree with everything. But then Truman tended to agree with other people who would come in and express the opposing views. But the general movement of the Truman administration was clearly against the liberal cause and against Wallace's views.

So, you have Wallace getting fired and a disagreement over his foreign policy views in 1946. From there on the liberals become more and more disenchanted with Truman on a whole variety of issues-- on moving from a wartime economy to a peacetime economy, on labor relations. This is the era of the Taft-Hartley law, this is on policy toward the Soviet Union, on any number of things. You have a lot of discontent with liberals and they are looking for somebody to speak to that.

During this period between '46 and '48 you have increasing discontent among liberals in the party, among trade unionists, liberal intellectuals, celebrities, you have a lot of discontent over civil rights issues. I mean, a sizeable portion of the party is embarrassed by the fact that here is the Democratic Party in bed with segregationists in the South. And they're looking for a voice and Wallace is increasingly that voice. He takes over as editor of the *New Republic* and goes on some speaking tours-- one big speaking tour in the United States where people actually come and hear the guy speak. Huge crowds turn out.

And he went on an international tour where he was regarded as practically a conquering hero among leftists in Europe but absolutely enraged conservatives in this country. People wanted to revoke his passport and all sorts of things. Wallace was finally persuaded that in order to give voice to these views, that there had to be a new party to

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express these positions. And he agreed to be the vehicle to do that.

**Q:** So, paint a picture for me of this 1948 convention. What was going on? How crazy was it?

**John Hyde:** It's interesting because a lot of people assumed that it was. It was treated by the national press as being sort of a captive of the Communists or of these dark forces and they manipulated every move that was made at the convention. In fact, the reverse was true. It was freewheeling. There were a lot of young people there. There were a lot of people who had never been involved in politics. Everybody got a vote. Everybody debated every last comment in the platform. There were all kinds of amendments. There was no control over anything. There was a lot of music and a lot of idealistic talk about how we were going to change the world. And a lot of songs were written for Henry Wallace, "Marching on with Henry Wallace."

It was a kind of fresh, vibrant atmosphere that wasn't really controlled by anybody. Certainly it was less controlled than the Democratic and Republican conventions were by their respective bosses. You had people who were idealistic, who thought the world could be a better place and this was what they thought would bring it about. It was uncontrolled to the point that the party actually adopted some positions that it turned out Wallace didn't agree with. He could easily have insisted, "It's my party; it's my candidacy, I don't want this in the platform." And he thought, "Well, you know, these people have come here; they've debated this; this is what they want to stand for; this is the expression that they want to make. Fine."

**Q:** Why was there the idea that Communists were some way involved in this?

**John Hyde:** They were. The Communists were involved. Somebody said it was the worst kept secret of the 1948 campaign. In fact, because of Wallace's belief that if you were going to oppose the Cold War, and if you were going to say that Communists had a right to participate in democracy as long as they weren't doing anything illegal, and if you were going to oppose the first cousin of the Cold War-- which is McCarthyism, the Red Scare --intellectually you had to say, "Well, if Communists want to support me, and I'm a God fearing capitalist, and if they want to vote for me, God bless them."

They did participate in the party. The Communist party endorsed Wallace instead of endorsing its own candidate as it had done in previous elections. This was, of course, fatal. Reporters could barely concentrate on anything other than the fact that Communists were involved in the party. The atmosphere in the country is such that you couldn't tolerate that. It was the one thing that Roosevelt always insisted on. He would not tolerate Communist participation in his campaigns. He didn't want their support. He rejected their efforts to be friendly. Going back to 1924 when LaFollette ran for President as the third party candidate, the one thing he said was that "there will be no Communists in this campaign." You can't do it; it's deadly. Wallace certainly knew that it was costing him votes but he just wouldn't budge on the issue. He felt that as a point of principle, he had to allow it.

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**Q:** Did that eventually taint the careers of some of the people who supported them like Terkel, like Pete Seeger?

**John Hyde:** Sure and Wallace himself. Support of Wallace, participation in the Progressive Party, that was a part of your FBI file from there on out. This was considered to be just short of treason by the FBI and by conservatives in this country. Participation in the Progressive Party campaign became a part of your record, and it became a part of questioning your loyalty to the country. So, you have people like Pete Seeger threatened with jail or loss of their reputation. Not to mention Wallace himself who ends up being dragged before the House Un-American Activities Committee. Wallace had never refused a request to testify in front of any congressional committee ever, and he was perfectly willing to do it. But it was felt that it was necessary to subpoena the former vice president of the United States because they wanted to just make a point. It took a lot of courage I would think for people like Katharine Hepburn and Paul Robson and Pete Seeger as celebrities to lend their names to this. I think it took courage for the celebrities to do it, but at least they had a name. There were a lot of ordinary people who participated in that campaign, who gave money to it or who had signed public statements of support for Wallace who lost their jobs, who lost their homes. People were thrown in jail. One man was killed and as much courage as it took the celebrities to do that, they at least had the celebrity. Wallace at least had an international reputation, and he had been a vice president of the United States. So, it took enormous courage for Wallace, but I think the little people suffered a lot because they had no resources to fight this.

**Q:** Is that why you think, despite his incredible popularity just four years earlier, is that why the party did so poorly in the election, a million votes?

**John Hyde:** Yes. It was a deliberate strategy on the part of Truman and his political advisors. Clark Clifford wrote a famous memo saying, "You don't need to prove that Wallace is a Communist, but you have to get liberals to go out and reject the Progressive Party. It allows Truman then to adopt a kind of centrist position in that election, which going into it seemed hopeless. You've got Strom Thurmond on the right with the segregationists, and you've got Henry Wallace on the left with his radicals and the left wingers. It seemed like the Democratic Party was breaking apart into thirds. What it actually did was make Truman appear to be a centrist moderate and allowed him to win.

**Q:** So, tell me about the campaign, especially as far as it relates to the South. What made the platform unique?

**John Hyde:** The campaign was well financed. They had a lot of support. They got a huge chunk of money from Anita McCormick Blaine, the daughter of the inventor, McCormick. They raised a lot of other money from ordinary people. They were pretty good at it. So, they had the financing. They had an energetic candidate in Henry Wallace. They had people who were well known. Pete Seeger, Woody Guthrie and Paul Robson would entertain crowds. They had huge rallies. But everything gets swallowed up in the

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Communist issue and in the portrayal of Wallace as being beyond the mainstream of American thought, as being someone who would be in league with the Soviet Union after he was elected.

And it just continues to go downhill. Someone once said the whole history of the Progressive Party was of people leaving. They started to campaign with an idea that they might win ten million votes, and it just dwindles down to practically nothing. They won a million votes. They won no electoral votes. They won, I think, 33 precincts in the whole United States. It was a disaster for the left.

**Q:** What about their platform? It sounds incredibly visionary by today's standard.

**John Hyde:** The platform was really the lasting monument to the Progressive Party because even after the Progressive Party went away in another five or six years, the platform remained a kind of road map for the next half century in American politics. It called for all kinds of measures that we now regard as part of American society or at least they're still being debated, like health care. But it called for a Medicare type program. It called for the eighteen year old vote. It called for equal rights for women. It called for the end of Jim Crow laws, the end of segregation. It was a whole blueprint for forward thinking measures that have since become part of law or are still very much in play. It was a remarkable document. Many would argue that's been the role the third parties have played throughout American history. The Progressives were able to envision a lot of things, to call for a lot of things that have been a part of American politics ever since.

**Q:** Can you talk about some of the things that made their campaigning unique?

**John Hyde:** You had a lot of music, and you had big rallies that people actually paid to attend. Even his nomination speech, they charged money to go hear him accept his nomination, remarkable as that seems now. They had a lot of radio programs that they purchased time for, you know, fifteen minute speeches or whatever. They had a lot of artists and writers and intellectuals who contributed works of art. Ben Shawn did some very nice posters for the Progressives. They had writers who took up their cause and wrote eloquently. It was an interesting campaign and somewhat unusual. Wallace himself campaigned vigorously to the end.

But, of course, the most unusual was the trip to the South, because never before in American history had an American politician, someone running for president, refused to campaign before segregated audiences. He refused to sleep in segregated hotels; he refused to eat in segregated restaurants. It was met with just vicious opposition in the South. His rallies were disrupted; mobs greeted him in various cities. It was a very difficult tour. Any Democratic presidential candidate thereafter really had to follow Wallace's steps because it was clear that he had pointed to the great injustice in American democracy. He had a little taste of American fascism in the South, and it made it impossible for future Democratic presidential candidates to play that game.

**Q:** His vice presidential candidate gets thrown in jail?

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**John Hyde:** His vice presidential candidate was an interesting guy. He was an itinerant country musician in Idaho who liked to run for office, and he ended up getting elected to the U.S. Senate. It's the best job he ever had, and Glenn Taylor knew that he was destroying his political career by agreeing to run with Henry Wallace. He had been elected to the Senate as a Democrat, and he knew that he could no longer be accepted in the Democratic Party if he ran with Wallace. He did it anyway because he was an idealistic guy, and he really believed that he wanted peace in the world.

He went South in his campaign, went to Birmingham and was told that he couldn't go into a public building through an entrance that was marked "colored only." He had to go around and go in through the white only entrance. And he said, "Well, to hell with that. I'm a U.S. Senator. I'll go in wherever I want to. He was thrown to the ground by the Birmingham police. Bull Conner was the police chief. His clothes were ripped. He was roughed up. He was driven around town for a while in a kind of menacing way, and then they threw him in the drunk tank for the evening. He was there with all of the guys who were the drunks and the petty criminals.

One guy came up to him and said, "They got me for spitting on the sidewalk; what did they get you for?" And he said, "Well, I'm a U.S. Senator. They got me in here for going into a building through the colored only entrance. And Glenn Taylor later wrote, "Clearly that guy thought I was the craziest son of a bitch in here."

**Q:** Can you move forward now and talk about House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC)? Why was Wallace brought before the committee?

**John Hyde:** He appeared before HUAC several times, but it mainly was an effort through innuendo to question his loyalty to the country. That is mainly to score points for the anti-Communist cause.

**Q:** What was going on? What was HUAC? Who was McCarthy?

**John Hyde:** The House Un-American Activities Committee was created during the war supposedly to question any activity and to consider any legislation against any activity that was considered un-American. During the war there was a period of time when the committee did actually consider the activities of Nazis in the United States as well as Communists. But after the war HUAC becomes completely a vehicle for expressing anti-Communist views and for questioning the loyalty of anybody that essentially they disagreed with. For instance, at one point Wallace is brought before a committee and asked about his role in the licensing of uranium to the Soviet Union.

Well, in fact, he had no role in that. It was under the Lend-Lease program, and he wasn't in charge of that program. He just simply had no role. But he's forced to deny it. The innuendo, of course, is that he had helped the Soviet Union build a bomb. And it was that sort of thing. There were a lot of people who had worked under Wallace who were prime targets of HUAC who were accused of being spies for the Communists, either in government or out. The best known of whom is Alger Hiss. Alger Hiss had worked at the U.S. Department of Agriculture as a very young man at the beginning of the New Deal. He didn't really know Wallace. Wallace may have met him once but there was

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really no connection.

But then HUAC is running around trying to portray Alger Hiss as a Communist spy. Alger Hiss at one point worked for the Department of Agriculture, and Henry Wallace was the Secretary of Agriculture. So, you have a lot of people like that who end up getting dragged in before these Red hunting committees.

**Q:** What is the story related to HUAC about the letter from Wallace's daughter?

**John Hyde:** He at one point tried to appeal to reason. There was a Senator from Michigan that he had known on a kind of personal level. And he wrote out a letter just saying, "You know, it's really a humiliating experience to have been a vice president of the United States and to have served your country in two cabinet positions and to have been a patriotic American and to have tried to be a person of integrity, a person of loyalty to his country, to be dragged before this committee. Imagine how that would make you feel."

And he said, "Think what it means to my family, to my children to have my reputation being dragged through the mud." And Jean Douglas, I believe, took it personally over to the Senator's apartment and gave it to him. Wallace never received a reply.

**Q:** What happened next?

**John Hyde:** After 1948 he lingers in the Progressive Party for a while, increasingly uncomfortable about the control of the party by really hard leftists. I think he was really looking for a reason to get out. But he did participate. He gave some speeches, did a couple of tours. And when the Korean War was sanctioned by the United Nations, Wallace broke with his own party over that issue. He felt that if a war was going to be sanctioned by the United Nations-- and he was a very strong proponent of the United Nations-- that if his own country was involved that he should under those circumstances be supportive.

Wallace wrote a letter and said that he was leaving the party on those grounds and made a public statement to that effect. He thereafter probably didn't join any party. He did vote for Adlai Stevenson in 1952. Stevenson had worked for him at the USDA, and I think he had high regard for Stevenson as a liberal. But he also was quite friendly with Dwight Eisenhower. He came to feel that if you were going to really control the military industrial complex-- a phrase, by the way, Wallace used before Eisenhower used it in his famous address-- that if you were going to get control of the military in this country that it had to be a person like Eisenhower to do it.

He felt that Eisenhower had the credentials, and he had the will to stop the complete militarization of this country. And he supported publicly Eisenhower in 1956. In 1960 he had a secret meeting with Nixon, gave him some advice on foreign policy from his viewpoint. It's interesting that Nixon, having come to prominence as an anti-Communist, would have sought Wallace's advice and listened to it respectfully.

He did not support any candidate in 1960, but he did express some opposition to John Kennedy's farm policy during the campaign. This was interpreted as a backhanded endorsement of Nixon. Thereafter Kennedy was very gracious, invited Wallace to attend

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the inauguration. It was the first time Wallace had been back to attend an inauguration since he left office and was treated very well by Kennedy. He became very friendly with Orville Freeman, the new Secretary of Agriculture, and ended up sort of returning to the Democratic Party and supporting Johnson in 1964.

**Q:** Did his spiritual life help him through, what to many people, would be a very agonizing end of his career?

**John Hyde:** After he becomes Secretary of Agriculture, he has this flirtation with the guru, Nicholas Roerich. He writes some letters back and forth, which eventually find their way into public view. He is quite embarrassed by it. That was sort of his final fling with these sorts of fringe characters in a spiritual sense. At some point he joins the Episcopalian church and that is more or less where he stayed for the rest of his life. He always attended the service without a sermon. He didn't like to be preached to, but he found some enjoyment-- some spiritual satisfaction-- in participation in the liturgy. He referred to it as "recharging your spiritual batteries."

**Q:** Tell me about Ilo and the kids.

**John Hyde:** Ilo was from a small Iowa town. It was a very conventional marriage. She saw her role as being a wife and mother. She was not one to participate in politics. As far as I know Wallace never even talked to her very much about politics. It was a very happy, compatible marriage. She was a very attractive and rather outgoing lady. She was much prized in Washington during the New Deal as being a gracious hostess and an enjoyable person at parties. Roosevelt himself often requested that Ilo be seated next to him because he enjoyed her company.

She's kind of the flip side of Henry because Henry is reticent. He doesn't like small talk. He doesn't like socializing very much. He's not comfortable around political gatherings. It's just not his cup of tea. He'd rather be home doing some math problems.

They had three children. Henry B. Wallace was the eldest, who for a time was very involved with chicken breeding, which Wallace had a big interest in. And Robert, the middle child, was also very interested in chickens. He was in charge of the hatchery that Pioneer Hybrid started. Jean Douglas, his youngest child, was in many ways the closest to her father, I think, in terms of his agricultural interests. And she very much enjoyed that aspect of working with her father on agricultural matters. Jean also has a lot of her mother in her too and is a very nice lady.

**Q:** Late in life when he's back in Farvue, Ed Murrow shows up for an interview. What was that all about?

**John Hyde:** I think Murrow admired Wallace. Wallace would still have been a fairly controversial figure. But remember, Murrow made a lot of his reputation standing up to McCarthy and in forcing CBS to actually have some backbone, which took a good deal of courage. And I think he admired Wallace's courage and probably felt that Wallace had been maligned.

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And periodically during all of the 1950s, you have reporters who will show up. They'd show up every now and again and say, "Well, what about Henry Wallace? What is he doing these days?" And what he was doing was going back to his roots. He was going back to farming, to experimental agriculture. He developed new varieties of strawberries, gladioli, corn and chickens. His chickens practically overtook the world. Half the chickens in the world were related to Henry Wallace's chickens. He found ways of making chickens lay more eggs with less feed, thereby being more economically productive. And he was an incredibly successful agriculturist. He had what ordinary gardeners call a green thumb.

**Q:** Why Farvue instead of Iowa if he was so tied to Iowa?

**John Hyde:** A lot of Iowans wondered that. I think it was because he bought the farm in '46 shortly before he left the cabinet. He, I think, wanted to remain close to the United Nations, to the East Coast. He was interested still in public policy and recognized that he'd have a better chance of having his voice heard if he was on the East Coast. He took this job as editor of *The New Republic*. And I think he decided that it would be better for him to remain in the East. Also, going back to when Roosevelt was alive-- Roosevelt had a sort of fantasy that he and Henry Morgenthau, his Secretary of Treasury, and Henry Wallace would all someday retire from public life and they'd all have farms in the Hudson Valley area and would be able to be country gentlemen farmers and enjoy their old age together. And he talked to Wallace about that several times, tried to convince him to buy some property in New York State. So, that may have been some of the reason why he looked at New York State.

**Q:** Tell me a little bit about Henry as a scientist and the development of Pioneer.

**John Hyde:** From the time that he was in college he had a huge interest in corn. Corn was king. Corn was the backbone of the Midwest, and the Midwest was the backbone of American civilization. And as far as he was concerned, improving corn was one of the most important things you could do for the country. He begins to start experimenting with corn. He graduates from Iowa State and for the next 20 years he is just intently involved in trying to find ways of improving corn yields, improving its sturdiness, improving the health of the corn plant.

He said, at one point, there was a time at which he knew corn almost as well as he knew people and "I had for it as much affection." And he, at a crucial moment, figures out how to use hybrid corn, hybrid seed, how to develop it, to control it, manipulate it in a way that you can predict reliably what corn is going to do and then improve it, constantly improve it. Once he's figured that out, then the question is: "How do you spread this information to farmers as a whole so that it means anything, " because nobody knew anything about hybrid corn or how you go on developing it or breed it or use it. And he kept looking for various vehicles-- maybe some kind of cooperative thing. Maybe he could put it under the care of a university, which would figure out how to spread this among farmers. Finally he decided that the only practical way to do it was to make it commercial and to start a company whose job it would be to sell this stuff to

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farmers, teach them how to use it, and convince them that it was good. And that was the founding of Pioneer. He did it mainly with his own money, a little inheritance from his wife, Ilo, and a few others of his friends who invested in it. They couldn't get a bank to invest in it because banks figured, "Why would anybody buy the stuff? It's going to be expensive." And it took a few years to catch on. But once it caught on, it took over farming. The company was started in 1926.

By the end of the 1930s virtually all the farm belt is planted in hybrid seed and from then the hybrid revolution spreads outward to wheat, to rice, to soybeans, to virtually all crops now. And it has had an enormous impact on the world. It has enabled the world to feed itself for the last 75 years.

**Q:** What was Wallace's tragic flaw?

**John Hyde:** Well, politically his great flaw was admitting Communists to participate in that campaign. Given who Wallace was and given his principles and given what he was trying to do in that campaign, he probably couldn't have done anything else but it sure did cost him. On a personal level, I don't know that he had a tragic flaw. I think he said in his oral history that "I tried to do certain things in terms of education, in terms of advancing certain ideals that my grandfather also did." He did it through the means of preaching, teaching and writing, and consequently he was universally beloved. "I did it, I tried to advance those ideals in the political arena with results that my grandfather would have expected." But I don't think he regretted it. I don't think he saw it as some massive failure on his part or a tragic flaw.

**Q:** Tell me about failure. Did he consider himself failed? I mean, allowing the Communists in 1948 wasn't the greatest decision.

**John Hyde:** I don't think he saw himself as a failure. I think he saw himself as a person who tried to do the right thing as he saw it and who failed.

**Q:** Can you talk a little bit about the Dust Bowl and the need for soil conservation in the '30s?

**John Hyde:** We had gone through this period where the idea of American agriculture was that you work a farm until you wear it out. You wear out the soil and then you move on; you move west. And consequently we hadn't really done a lot of conservation work in this country. And eventually you run out of land, and so you have to start figuring out how you're going to conserve the soil. We also had bad luck in terms of weather for a couple of years. But we were not at all prepared to meet that. We had very hot, dry summers a couple of years. And we had these enormous dust storms, which would just blot out the sun. It was terrible, and we were losing enormous amounts of soil. And Wallace's Department of Agriculture worked very hard to try to put groundcover on some of that stuff-- put it in grass, plant shelter belts – trees - to start preserving some of that land.

Interview with John Hyde,  
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Interviewed by Chip Duncan, February 2, 2004

**Q:** The Wallace family and Hoover had a tumultuous relationship. Can you talk a little bit about Hoover?

**John Hyde:** The feud with Hoover goes back to World War I when Hoover was the food tsar and was encouraging farmers to grow more crops, to produce more hogs, in order to help feed Europe and feed our troops. He turned to the Wallaces as consultants to help in this process. And the Wallaces did their part and tried to come up with a program to help encourage farmers to do that. They wrote about it and felt that Hoover betrayed their trust by not giving farmers their fair due. And thereafter it just escalated to the point where it was bad blood between Henry Wallace's father, H.C., and Hoover. They were both members of the Harding cabinet. It continues to the point when Henry Wallace's father died unexpectedly in 1925. Wallace felt that the pressure that his father was under in this fight with Hoover was in large part responsible.

**Q:** What do you think?

**John Hyde:** I think Wallace felt that way out of bitterness. I think eventually he calmed down. I think he took a more moderated view of Hoover so that he wasn't really blaming him for his death. But he had no love for Hoover. If you go to Farvue today, which is still owned by the Wallace family, the walls of Farvue have autographed pictures of every President since Theodore Roosevelt autographed to one or another of the Henry Wallaces, every president from Theodore Roosevelt except one-- Herbert Hoover. There is no Herbert Hoover.

**Q:** Could you address the 1946 speech?

**John Hyde:** He gave a speech in 1946 which addressed foreign policy. What was taking place at the same time was the American delegation was in Europe at the European peace talks deciding how Europe was going to be treated. Wallace gave a speech to a real left wing crowd in Madison Square Garden in which he said, "I'm neither pro-British nor anti-British. I'm neither pro-Russian nor anti-Russian. I'm an American. I feel we can work with everybody. I think we should get along." And this eventually led to his firing because the Secretary of State, James Burns, felt that this was contrary to American policy as it was being played out in Europe in the peace talks. It eventually forced Truman to dismiss him from the cabinet.

Interestingly enough, parts of the speech were booed by the left wingers in Madison Square Garden because they felt it wasn't sufficiently pro-Soviet Union. And then others felt that it was too favorable to the Soviets. So, he ended up getting caught both ways. He did show the speech to Truman and they read it together, page by page and Truman said, "Yes, that is exactly what I believe." And Wallace said, "Can I quote you on that?" And Truman said, "Absolutely." So, right in the speech that he delivers in Madison Square Garden, he says, "And just two days ago I showed this speech to Harry Truman and he said, "This is exactly what I believe." And then that falls apart.

**Q:** As the author of the book, what do you think about Henry Wallace now?

**John Hyde:** I think he's an absolutely fascinating man. He had so many interests. He had such a rich, supple mind. He comes at ideas in ways that are just totally new and totally fascinating. And just when you think you know everything about Henry Wallace, you'll find out that he was interested in some area that you never even suspected. He'll be interested in monetary policy during the 1920s and all of a sudden he's writing a letter to some guy to tell him how to prevent dogs from taking your chicken eggs. Or he'll be writing a letter to Henry Ford telling him how to improve a certain model of tractor. Or he'll be starting a little group to listen to Spanish folk songs, and then he goes off to NBC and convinces them to start a program of Spanish folk music-- which played for a while. He's always surprising. There is always something fresh and exciting about the way his mind works and the different avenues that he goes down. I think some of it gets him in trouble. Some of his spiritual adventures, the letters to Nicholas Roerich ended up getting him in some political trouble. A very fascinating guy.

**Q:** What do you think his legacy should be?

**John Hyde:** I think he was one of the great figures of the 20th century. But his real mark is in agriculture. I think you have to say the real lasting impact that he had was the introduction of hybrid seed and figuring out how to make that commercially viable and how to set in motion a process that resulted in completely changing agriculture. There are maybe a few pockets of agriculture around the world that have not been touched by this, but they are very few. And billions of people, literally billions of people have been touched by what Wallace started in a very fundamental way. But even in the 1920s before he was nationally known, it was very clear to a lot of people that he was a very idealistic man who was very thoughtful about a lot of things and would follow his ideals wherever they took him. He was a serious man in that respect. And someone once said, "Henry would cut off his right hand for an idea-- and yours too for that matter." That was Henry Wallace. He was willing to follow what he thought was right to its logical conclusion. And if it ends up you're an army of one, then so be it. There is a quote that I would like to read. This was in 1933 when he had been Secretary of Agriculture for less than a year. He comes back to Iowa to give a speech. It was sort of his homecoming. He gave a big speech in a large auditorium in Des Moines and talked about the New Deal and talked about agriculture and what they were trying to do. At the end of it he realized he had a few more seconds of airtime because it was being broadcast and he hadn't filled it. But he decided he would use it. He said, "only the merest quarter turn of the heart separates us from a material abundance beyond the fondest dream of anyone present. Selfishness has ceased to be the mainspring of progress. There is something more. We must learn to live with abundance." I like that. He also said, with respect to greed, sooner or later the question, "What is there in it for me" will have to be translated into, "What is there in it for all of us." In his oral history when he was summing up his experiences, he reflects about his life and his public life. He says, "If I were to draw conclusions from my life so far, I would say that the purpose of existence here on Earth is to improve the quality and increase the

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abundance of joyous living. Jesus took on himself the highest of all missions when he said he came to give a more abundant life to humanity. The improved quality and increased abundance of life is a progressive matter and has to do not only with human life but with all plants and animals as well."