

This Is How the Tapes Play

in Peoria

By Richard E. Meyer

PEORIA, Ill. (AP)—It was early morning and raining and the man standing under the roof of the stockyards was Bill Friedman, weathered and old. He was talking about Richard Nixon.

"People figure he knew all about it all the time, and that'd be my opinion; and they figure, 'Why, some of those boys were guilty, and why didn't he get it out and over with a long time ago?'" Friedman leaned on his hog-sorting pole.

"Impeached? I'm not sure about that, but a hell of a lot of them think he should resign, and that's my feeling myself. Now some people think he didn't have anything to do with it. And some want to shoot him. But, in general, a lot of them want him to resign."

Hogs were selling for \$30 a hundred pounds, cattle \$43. Friedman, black hat pulled down over his short gray hair, leaned close, and out-bellowed the frightened, glassy-eyed animals.

He allowed he hadn't read all the President's transcripts of the Watergate tapes. But he said he was 77 and had been a livestock broker at the Peoria stockyards for 50 years, and he figured he knew how to read farmers.

"Before them transcripts came out, there were more farmers that was Republicans than Democrats. But now it's down to about 50-50."

"Will it play in Peoria?" John D. Ehrlichman used to ask when he was the President's top domestic affairs adviser and had Middle America in mind. Originally, the line was a vaudeville joke. Peoria along with Kokomo, Kalamazoo and Cucamonga, was synonymous with squaresville.

To Peorgians, their reputation is hardly a joke. Those who grope for the Middle American pulse have fingered Peoria's wrists periodically for years and ribbed Peorians in the bargain. So it was with tired patience that Bill Friedman and other Peorians in representative jobs and informed positions made it clear last week that, thanks to the Watergate transcripts, Richard Nixon isn't playing as well in Peoria as he once did.

Not that very many persons

agree with Goldie Brown, who long before the transcripts were published had established an "Impeach Nixon Committee" with headquarters in her small white house on Peoria's older southwest side. In an interview in February, a month after she opened, Mrs. Brown counted 12,000 signatures on her impeachment petitions.

Undaunted by the fraction that number represented of the more than 339,600 persons in Peoria and its environs, Mrs. Brown declared the President "a crook." She added: "He ought to be impeached."

Now, three months later and nearly three weeks after the transcripts, Mrs. Brown has gone to Washington. "She's staying at the Watergate Hotel," her husband said. He added that he doesn't involve himself very much in his wife's impeachment efforts. The signature count was unavailable.

Mayor Dick Carver, however, has sensed no impeachment groundswell. Settling

back in the black leather chair behind his desk at the Carver Lumber Co., founded by his father, he reported: "Among the people I talk to, I find the desire to see the provisions of Constitution utilized."

Carver said there was nothing to show that any overwhelming number of Peorians necessarily want to see Mr. Nixon resign or the House of Representatives vote for impeachment. They simply want, he said, to see proceedings stay within the due process of law.

"But the transcripts are disturbing as the daylights to me," Carver said. One of the nation's younger mayors at 36, he said that "I'm concerned about the level of statesmanship and morality reflected in the transcripts. I'm disappointed in the conduct of those people involved apparently at the highest level. I'm not

shocked by it, but I would have expected more—and that's not confined to the President, but it includes him, to a lesser extent."

Carver is a Republican.

"I find a desire among the people I talk to to support the President—but a sense of regret that Watergate was not handled in a more forthright manner. Support has wavered substantially. Mine has."

Carver is unabashedly proud of being mayor of Peoria.

"I have absolutely no reason to be ashamed to be mayor of a city that's representative of Middle America. Peoria is known as a do-it-yourself city."

There are many things here to be proud of.

Peoria is an urban skyline on the heights above the Illinois River in the heart of central Illinois farming country. Peoria is the home of the

Caterpillar Tractor Co., which employs nearly 30,000 area residents in its plants and offices. Peoria is the home of Hiram Walker & Sons, makers of whisky and employers of 1,600. And Peoria is the home of a Pabst brewery, which employs 1,000.

Peorians like to say they haven't felt any recession since 1958. And they like to say they're not afraid of a depression. Not that Peoria doesn't have its troubles. A former mayor is under an indictment charging bribery and official misconduct in liquor licensing. And its newspaper, the Journal Star, recently reported that Peoria is the home, as well, of 15 massage parlors.

But Peoria also has a symphony, a zoo, a nature center, a center for the arts and sciences, a theater company, a civic ballet, an opera company and a gourmet society. Peoria is an All-American

city. Its people remember visits by President Nixon in 1972 during the presidential campaign and, this year, to nearby Pekin, when the President sought surcease from the pressures of Watergate.

Pekin is the home of C. L. Dancey, editor of the Journal Star. He calls himself a "disillusioned Democrat" who has supported Mr. Nixon editorially and with remarkable consistency.

Dancey worries most that precisely correct measures won't be taken according to the Constitution during the impeachment process. "The best way to get through this is to go strictly by the Constitution."

While he said the Watergate transcripts are no more "cynical or ruthless" than conversations taped "in the press gallery during a campaign," Dancey conceded: "I think the transcripts do pro-

duce a very great disappointment in the people whose loyalty is to Nixon in the personal sense. A lot of people have been shocked to discover the President engaged in very earthy conversation, both as to words and subject matter.

On the other hand, the intensity of the resignation thing and some of the coverage has caused a great many people to direct their attention and feelings against his opponents."

State Sen. Hudson R. Sours, a Republican, whose office is on the top floor of the Lehmann Building across from the Peoria County Courthouse, opposes impeachment. Sours said flatly: "If the nation permits the Congress to play the role of the Long Parliament in the time of Charles I, then we had better look out for a Cromwell and the end of the Republic."