

MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

Wednesday, December 7, 1966

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// Wednesday, December 7th, that date that hur⁺gles out at you with salt in your eye and your memory whenever you see it on a date book or calendar. //

I was up early, but not in time for John Ben who rose at 6:00 and went for a walk along the river. About 9:00 he and Lyndon and Don Thomas and I rode around the proposed park carrying Udall's plans which calls for an administration building to house dioramas -- the geology and wild life, the history of the area, and nature trails, and field of the wild flowers of the area. And we are all groping for some way to show the wild life of the region -- white tail deer, the armadillo, the jack rabbits, the skunks, and wild turkey.

We talked to John Ben about our plans to leave the Ranch house and the guest houses -- the whole complex, including the cemetery and the birthplace house -- to the Government for a National Park when the last one of us dies. But until then, and within the next two years perhaps, our ~~park~~ problem is first to get over the hurdle of finishing acquiring the land across the river and then developing it in a way that shows the region most attractively and would interest more people.

John Ben Shepherd has become "Mr. Parks and Recreation" in the last few years, heading up John Connally's drive to get all the interesting, historical sites listed in the Texas County Historical Survey~~ing~~ Association, working with tourism and restorations and museums, and now the Head of the Texas Fine Arts Commission.

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Bringing this Park into being has proved to be a very thorny and time-consuming project for the Texas Parks and Wild Life Association -- Will Odom and Jimmy Dillinger and A. W. -- the hostile, suspicious press, and a complete lack of understanding that the Park will be a historical and economic asset to the State of Texas in time to come. And that the people who are contributing to it ^{are} simply believing in their State's future and preserving something for their children's children to enjoy.

The old LBJ Ranch house as a National Park after we are dead would be a sorry sight with a necklace of beer joints and curio shops strung up and down the river right across from it. And I believe those that come ^{will} after us both credit us with forethought and good planning in making this Park. But it has been a headache.

Lyndon thinks it would be a good idea for the Park board to request the Governor to appoint someone to handle the fund of completing land purchase and for development. John Ben would be a natural because of his work in the field. The Park board thinks well of the idea and so does the Governor. So that is what this visit is about -- to explain what we have here and what we hope to do with it, to discuss John Ben's taking over the job.

From the Park we went into Johnson City and drove past the Courthouse and Lynda Bird ^{1st} Street trees and the bank and Lyndon's boyhood home and the Fort. And I told about Mrs. Bybee's exploration of the Fort with me

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along with the University of Texas research man.

John Ben was very much intrigued. And then back to the main house. We showed him the Reagan and the Martin and the Danfz. And then I left them for awhile to ride around with Mr. ^{Carr}~~Carr~~. I talked to him about getting some clumps of sumac to plant along the runway, some fast-growing trees to screen that necessary evil -- our dump. He is replacing the lagustrom in the little Johnson City Park today. And I asked him to be sure and move the crepe myrtle, perhaps to the East entrance where the little cement dance area was put in.

It is quite sad on the runway to find a scattered two or three sumac and red bud and paradise bush that were planted last fall, out of the dozens planted. But then of course they had no care -- virtually none.

At 12:00 I helicoptered into Camp ^{Mabry}~~Mayberry~~ and stopped by Shanks and selected some delightful end tables for Luci's apartment. Jesse has been trying to give her a wedding present since August 6th. He wants it to be furniture.

The Secret Service had picked us up some fried chicken in a box. We arrived at Luci's apartment armed with four boxes of delicious chicken preceded by Helen who was lovingly donating a few hours of cleanup. And Mr. Klein, who was finishing hanging some pictures. Pat and Luci and Mr. Klein and I sat down to my favorite meal of ^{fried}~~fried~~ chicken. Pat firmly insisted on paying me back for it. A very nice manly feeling I thought, and I took his money with approval.

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Mr. Pike came out with the tables and pictures of others we could order. They fit well and look fine. So Jesse's wedding ^{present} ~~present~~ is decided on. And we moved other furniture around. He showed us pictures of two small day beds for her guest room. She will select the fabrics in her own good time.

Later in the afternoon I went to the Federal building to Lyndon's large and handsome office which had been furnished completely without insight into his taste in a sort of modern, oriental manner. But it is a Goliath of a job to change it. And the suite is comfortable and the view beautiful. So I hope we will just give it some feeling of ourselves -- ^{with} ~~the~~ paintings and books and memorabilia. This was the first installment -- six paintings. Happily they fitted like a glove in hand. ^a George ^{Caleb} ~~Kahler~~ Bingham's county election in his office over the sofa; delicate Malaysian girls playing the exotic musical instruments in the dining room above the side board; the picture which the last astronauts had given us -- a great slice of the coastline including Texas and our own Ranch as a mere fly spec#. The picture had been taken from Lord knows how high up in space. We had it hung where everybody could see it. And every thing was just great, in the haphazard fashion that we acquire things. It is certainly happenstance that anything ever finds a spot where it's at home and needed. So I had that housewifely feeling that I was managing well.

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I left the Federal Building feeling very smug and satisfied, only to be completely frustrated in the next hour when I went to five electric stores looking for a simple item -- a pinup lamp, possibly bullet lamp -- to put above the beds in the trailer.

It has been a long time since I have followed my career of purchasing agent for the Ranch. I have mostly turned it over these last years first to Louise Kellam and then to Weeze Deathe. Now I have more respect for the difficulties they encountered in trying to get the simplest things. It is good to try to do the other fellow's job every now and then.

On the fifth try we ~~found~~^{found} a half-satisfying ~~was~~ version of what I was searching for. And I left in the sunset via helicopter for the Ranch, arriving at 6:00, hungry to see the country and Lyndon. There was only a glow left in the sky.

The talking machine told me that he was down at the cemetery riding with Senator Dorsey ~~Hardeman~~^{HARDMAN} and Lt. Governor Smith and Marvin and Jake. I joined them, and we rode around the Danz and the Martin, having a drink and talking with Dorsey Hardman about my trip to the Big Bend country, about Texas Parks in general. He is strong for them. About the one across the River in particular. Both he and Lt. Governor Smith approved of the idea of John Ben handling the fund and the development. We talked about all the characters in Texas politics, and John Garner to whose 98th birthday Dorsey had been. And Tom Connally on down to today.

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Dorsey is a rare character, an unabashed conservative, outspoken, tough as nails. Somehow, quite strangely, he has always liked us through ups and downs and in spite of frequent differences in our political philosophies. We are seldom around him and we owe him much. I could see Lyndon saying "thank you" without putting it into words for years of friendship. In fact this period here this fall has seen a good deal of that, to groups, to individuals, just as though he wanted to use his time well to express his love in case there wasn't all the time in the world. And to Mary and James and the Secret Service and any number of old friends -- to heap them with mementos, the "President's Country". Dorsey pleased me very much by calling it a collectors item with our autographs and the oak-tree picture and some other things.

Then we had dinner -- Luci and Pat and Marvin and Jake and Marie and Mary and Ashton. A very country dinner of liver and ham and cornbread and buttermilk and vegetables from the Ranch. We saw movies of our Australian trip, including Dorsey's good friend, Ambassador Edward Clark.

We said goodnight at a fairly early hour, and I bolted myself to a chair in the den and autographed all of the remaining books of the "Living White House" for Christmas presents, rising with the relieved feeling that my Christmas work was almost done -- at least for those people that came in groups. There were still a lot of special ones.

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LBJ Ranch

// The days are pleasant here. The country is in a picky mood, and the press quick to be ugly. They told of the news of Sunday that we had driven too fast going to church. And today there was a big story on the front page of the "Star" -- a very important headline: "He Was Always Bossy, Sister Says Of Johnson." And some columnist looked at Barry Goldwater as being El Morroco, looking ruddy and vigorous and chipper and happy. "He looks like he won the elections" somebody remarked. And the inevitable somebody else said, "The way things have been going for LBJ, maybe he did." A series of small pinpricks. One's job is to concentrate on the work at hand and not let energy be diminished by annoyance. //

*Doubt work
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