

Interview with W. Sherman Birdwell. Done by Eric F. Goldman in Mr. Birdwell's home, 2103 Bowman Avenue, Austin, Texas, April, 1955

Goldman: Mr. Birdwell, what is the correct title of your present position?

Birdwell: Representative of Employers on the Texas Employment Commission.

Mr. Birdwell, when and how did you first meet the President?

A long time ago when we were both boys. He was living in Johnson City and I was living in Buda. Our parents hadn't been very close but we met and knew each other and as a result of this, our friendship continued on from then until the present.

Are there any good stories about him as a boy which you remember and would like history to know?

I don't think history ought to record those I know. (laughter)

You didn't go to college with him, did you?

No.

How did you come to be associated with him in the NYA project?

I had been in South America a few years and after returning I wanted to go back to South America. I had written him to ask his assistance with the State Department in the procedure I should take to make contact. At that time, he was Secretary to Mr. Richard Kleberg

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and he had written me about the particular department I should communicate with in Washington. I was in the process of doing this when he was appointed the state director of the National Youth Administration for Texas. He called me to meet him on a Sunday morning at the old Post Office Cafe in San Marcos at 6 o'clock. I met him and Jesse Kellam.

Pardon me, what were you doing in South America?

I had been an accountant for Guggenheim Brothers of New York at the old nitrate company in Marie Elena, Chile. And so I met Jesse Kellam at this cafe and just a few minutes later the President walked in and we had a cup of coffee. He said he wanted to tell Jesse and me a story about what he was going to do. We got in his car and we rode around and he talked about the opportunity that was being offered to young people for training and work experience and the opportunity to go to school.

Excuse me, but we like to get the details even though some of them may seem very minor. Do you remember what kind of a car it was he was driving in those days?

Yes, it was a Ford Phaeton, as they called them then.

Do you remember much of that conversation?

Yes, we talked, or rather he did most of the talking about the many young people who were out of school and out of jobs, and how

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through the program of the National Youth Administration they would be given an opportunity to earn enough money to either stay in school or go to school. Those who would not be able to go to school could earn a small amount of money and some wonderful work experience. He was telling us about the dream that many young people had and how he had been through the same road a few years previously and how something like this would offer such a chance for young people. We gathered that dream in ourselves and agreed to be a part of it and go to work.

When he talked in those days, Mr. Birdwell, did he talk quickly, emotionally?

Very quickly, very decisively, very pointedly and many times, very dangerously with both hands off the steering wheel.

Were you aware of his NYA appointment when you came to meet him that Sunday morning?

Yes, I had read it in the paper a few days before.

What is your impression as to how that appointment came about, Mr. Birdwell. Some of his old friends have a feeling that the President liked this NYA project so much that he went to his friends, like Mr. Garner and Mr. Rayburn, and said, I would like to do this. Others said it came about on the recommendation of people like Alvin Wirtz. Do you know how it came about?

I do not know.

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Then the office was down in the Littlefield Building. Would you please describe the physical set up?

Our offices were on the 6th floor and there were approximately three or four offices to start with. There were two particular phases of the program. One was the school aid program, in which we made allotments to the various schools and universities. The officials of the various schools and particular universities were given a direct grant and they selected the boys and girls, between 16 and 25 inclusive, who would be given these jobs. The other part of the program was the work experience program. Those were the two main divisions of NYA.

Mr. Deason didn't remember the offices too well but he did recall that the President had one office and you all were in the other office. Is that your recollection too?

Yes, Mr. Johnson had one office and then there was a general reception office and Mr. Kellam was in the other office. Most of his time was given to the school aid program. Mr. L. B. Griffith, a West Point graduate, was, I believe, in charge of the work projects program.

My first responsibility was head of the works project for the State of Texas. And our first big project was a project sponsored by the Texas Highway Department in which they furnished supervisors, trucks and material and we furnished the young men to build the beginning of the roadside park system in Texas.

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How did this idea come about? It is unusual.

Mr. Johnson felt that this would be a program which would be ideally suited for these young people to permit them to work and get some experience, some skills and training with their hands -- mixing concrete and laying bricks, building sidewalks, building arbors, building barbecue pits, benches and tables, building little driveways off the road to go into the park. He felt that this was very fundamental in teaching boys skill with their hands. It was his idea entirely. I went with him to the Texas Highway Department -- I forget who was the State Engineer at that time -- and we talked with them and Mr. Johnson sold the State Highway Engineer on the program and they agreed to accept it as a state-wide project. It was then broken down with each one of the District Engineers of the various districts of the Highway Department all over the State. They agreed with the idea and we worked then through their various local District Engineers.

Before we leave the subject of the physical appearance of the offices, Mr. Johnson's office was rather small, wasn't it?

Yes, it was a small office. I remember it very vividly. It seems that it was 601; 603 was the reception, and 605 was Mr. Kellam's office.

Was he frequently on the telephone?

Not as much then. He was on the telephone a great deal

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but he was usually out on those long legs all over the city, meeting people who would be helpful in forming the program.

What kind of a boss was he?

He was a very hard working boss. He was there earlier than any of us.

How early was that? What was a typical day?

A typical day was between 7:30 and 8, and I will say usually 9 to 12 o'clock at night -- day after day, week after week. Saturday was a work day and Sundays we were usually trying to catch up on some items of mail in the office. I remember very distinctly that the old Littlefield Building, where our first offices were, had its own electric plant. They had their own generators in the basement, so the light system was theirs, rather than the cities, and at 10:30 at night they cut off their electricity so that meant that we had to walk down six flights of stairs. But worse than that, it also cut off the lights. We still had to see. All the offices were equipped with old gas burners and we would turn on those jets, light them and work by gas light until we finished our mail or whatever it was.

Were there many personal mementoes of the President in his office?

Well, I don't remember his keeping so many things on his desk. He had some pictures, not a great number of them, on the wall.

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Probably his mother or Lady Bird?

I just don't remember.

What was his manner in those days?

Very strict, very decisive, very pointed, very business-like. We had a lot to do, and we did not have as much time for fun as people who were 25 should have had what with those long hours and the great amount of work and labor force.

Did Mrs. Johnson play much of a role in NYA or was she the homebody?

She was more the homebody. I don't remember her ever being in the offices other than maybe to drop by. They had moved into a home that belonged to Bob Montgomery at that time.

Do you remember the exact address of that home, by any chance?

I think that it is the 2800 block of St. Gabriel. It was a two-story house with a main room that had a step-up into the dining room and the kitchen and then from that step-up there were stairs that went to a second floor. There was a big porch -- seems like it was only off of the first deck hall. Quite a number of nights we had staff meetings out there in which we would read the act which created the National Youth Administration as well as the rules and regulations we received from Washington. There we would go over them, paragraph

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by paragraph, and page by page, to determine what was meant and what we should do. Lady Bird always had coffee and cake for us. This was usually pretty late at night.

Why did you go over those things so carefully? Was it that you wanted to make sure you were fulfilling the task exactly or were you trying to find out how much authority you really had?

We went over them because Mr. Johnson asked us to come out and go over them, and Mr. Johnson wanted to go over them because he wanted things to be absolutely correct. For instance, later in the program, after the first several months, we were having trouble in getting the Fort Worth WPA office to cooperate with us in the placement of these young people. They had a very valid reason for doing this in that they were running a WPA program. They felt it was much more important to get adults to work, with more income to the family, than youth who were making \$7 to \$12 a month. So being busy as we all were in those days, on a crash program of trying to get people to work and money in circulation, the WPA officials were giving first priority to their own placement of adults. Mr. Johnson asked me to go to Fort Worth and get some assignments of youths on projects there. It was the only major city in Texas where we didn't have any substantial numbers working. He asked me to go out there and I did and I got in everybody's hair and became very unpopular to the extent that the District

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Director of the WPA called Mr. Johnson and told him to get me out of there; that I was in their way. Mr. Johnson said that I had a job to do and he had sent me up there to do this job. It was to put young people to work and if he could get some cooperation out of them or help out of them, we'd be able to accomplish that objective. I've forgotten the name of the District Director in Fort Worth but he call Harry P. Drought who was the State Director of the WPA, with offices in San Antonio, the old Smith-Young Tower Building, and told Mr. Drought that he had to do something; he had to get me fired. Mr. Drought called Washington and told them to fire me off the NYA. Mr. Johnson had already talked to Washington and a decision was made at that time, for the first time and for the future, that no one hired or fired NYA supervisors except Mr. Johnson. So I stayed at Fort Worth and we got the job done.

At the height of the operation during Mr. Johnson's period, how many people were there, excluding secretaries? People like yourself.

In Austin?

Yes.

Because we had districts later on. We started out originally with three of us -- Deason, myself and Mr. Johnson. Mr. Kellam was on loan to us from the State Department of Education and we four formed

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a supervisor's staff. The first girl on the payroll was a girl named Marie Lyndell. She was a very young girl and a fine secretary. From there we enlarged our number. I was the first Work's Representative, we'd call it. And then when Mr. Griffith came over to take over that -- he was an engineer graduate of West Point -- I became State Finance Officer and we gradually grew. At first we had four districts in Texas; four men in the field. We gradually expanded. The largest number we had was 12 districts, which was just prior to Mr. Johnson's going to Washington in '37 as Congressman. At that time, I would say that there were approximately 15 to 20 on the supervisory staff.

In Austin?

In Austin.

And roughly how many around the State?

Roughly, another 20.

You mentioned the roadside parks as one of the NYA projects. Would you describe several other important projects that he was particularly proud of. The roadside project was the number one in his view, wasn't it?

Yes. That is right. That was the first big project and one of our largest overall projects. The second group I would say in co-operation with the various recreational departments of the cities in Texas, in which we cleaned and enlarged swimming pools, built platforms, diving platforms, and picnic areas, and even some small bath houses.

The building of parks in the various cities was another very large project because the supervision was already established in the various cities. In addition to that, they had some of the materials that were necessary, such as lumber, cement, sand and so forth. They also had tools for these boys to use. So the second biggest project was the general sponsorship by the various cities, through their Recreation Departments.

Originally many of our projects were in conjunction with the WPA. Whatever type of work that they were doing in various communities many times we tied in directly with. We did the things that unskilled and younger people could do in connection with the same type of work project being carried on with the WPA. I don't remember whether Mr. Johnson was still NYA Director when we started -- I think he was -- what we called sewing room projects, in which girls were taught sewing.

His big drive in general was to train young people in a trade or skill so that they could get a job? Is that what the point was?

That is correct.

Mr. Birdwell, Harry Ransom, of the University of Texas, who was a newspaper reporter then, has said that it was his impression that the NYA period was an important one in developing the President's thinking -- that it first gave him a clear picture that the Federal

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Government could do a number of important things which the states could not manage themselves, that it gave him the first real sense of the use of government to satisfy human needs, and so forth. Is this your impression too?

I would say so, yes, because this was his first job after teaching school other than the approximate four years he was Secretary to Mr. Dick Kleberg. While secretary to Mr. Dick Kleberg, I am sure that he got a broad prospective of government functions and various departments and how they apply their own particular spheres of influence to people's lives. But that was an overall picture and since this was his first assignment, I am sure that it tied in as a school teacher with the needs of young people. I would say that this probably jelled in his mind to a very great extent -- the opportunity for the Federal Government to take steps in doing something very constructive that either the states could not or would not accept.

Do you recall in the many conversations you had with him, the staff meetings and so forth, of his ever saying things along this line? I should think it would have come up. I'm sure you were criticized by hostile elements in the state who called the NYA a boon-doggle.

There was very little criticism of the National Youth Administration in Texas for two reasons. In the first place, it was filling

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a very urgent need that was easily recognized. All parents could readily see that their boy or girl was able to go to school when they could not go otherwise. They also saw this boy or girl earning dollars and doing constructive work and so you had a ground support from all the people. There was very little criticism in the early days of the National Youth Administration. In the later days, there was criticism.

This is after Mr. Johnson left?

This is after he left. And it wasn't in particular because he had gone. It was only because we began to approach fuller employment during the years leading immediately into the war. The criticism was principally from two sources. One was that there were enough jobs so we didn't need the WPA and the NYA, which was true, as such. The second criticism was from school people, of the high echelon, that we were trying to direct the funds being channelled into the schools. They felt that this should be done through the State Department of Education.

Now to go on with his methods of operation and philosophy.

Mr. Johnson was a person who believed very much in staff meetings. He would outline a problem or situation and he would ask each one of us in turn to give our personal reaction and suggestions. After going from each one of us in turn, he would usually sum it up by

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saying, "Thank you." Then before we left, or soon thereafter, he would make his announcement as to his own decision. He was a very decisive person. He would ask advice but he didn't always take it.

During this period would you call him an all-out New Dealer or an enthusiastic New Dealer or some such adjective as that?

I would say that he was an all-out New Dealer.

Admiration for the President personally and for his policies?

He greatly admired President Roosevelt. He was strongly in favor of all his policies because he believed in them. He could see that this was one of many things that President Roosevelt was doing at that time that was helpful and constructive and needed. He was a very enthusiastic supporter of President Roosevelt.

Did Mr. Johnson ever deliver any speeches as the NYA Director?

Very few. While he was NYA Director, I cannot remember a great number of public appearances.

Was that a matter of policy or was he just too busy?

I would say off-hand that our objectives that were sent down from Washington were already outlined and set up. It was a matter of our following them. So he had no particular need to make public addresses to get public support for us. His need was to get the boys and girls to work and that took a great deal of time. He conferred

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with lots of outside individuals in terms of suggestions and thoughts -- such as Alvin Wirtz -- who, if I remember was on the seventh floor, the floor above us, and I know he was often up in Mr. Wirtz's office talking with him about our program.

Mr. Wirtz as important throughout this period? He was a member of the Advisory Council, was he not?

Yes. He was a member of the State Advisory Council.

And his law office was on the seventh floor?

It was in the Littlefield Building and if I remember correctly it was on the seventh floor.

Which members of the Advisory Council were particularly important to the President?

General H. Miller Ainsworth, of Luling, was an important member of his State Advisory Council.

Had the President picked his Advisory Council himself -- I don't mean technically -- but were these people that he wanted on there?

Yes.

Was Alvin Wirtz the older person that he most turned to during this period?

I would say yes.

Could you tell us a little about Wirtz? What he was like --

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his ideas and his physical appearance too.

Mr. Wirtz was an ex-State Senator. He had a law office, a very fine firm and Senator Wirtz himself was a slow-moving, slow-talking, soft-spoken individual. He was about 5 feet 9 and weighed about 170 pounds, smoked a cigar almost continuously, and really did not ever have too much to say.

Very cagey -- shrewd?

I wouldn't use the terms cagey and shrewd as much as I would say deep-thinking, a careful analyst of what people said and then a very careful analysis of how he replied and what his statements were.

Was he an enthusiastic New Dealer too? He later served as Under Secretary of Interior.

Yes, I would say so. His enthusiasm was a personal thing. By that I mean it directed his thinking and his activities a great deal. But you didn't hear Senator Wirtz propounding the New Deal a lot. Within his circle of friends and his influence of people, which was tremendous, his feeling was well known and very influential.

On this point of Mr. Ransom's, that it was during this period that the President first saw the real possibilities of government in the service of ordinary people, did you get the impression that that was actually happening in the sense that he more and more felt this as

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he went through his NYA work?

Yes. But he didn't talk much in those general philosophic terms. It was always a specific job to be done. Most of our work was in reference to a specific application of the rules and regulations that we had to operate under. They were directed more to specific questions within the administration of them -- the National Youth Administration Act itself.

Did you file NYA reports from Austin to Washington?

Yes, we filed reports in terms of how many young people we had working, usually by sex. That is, how many girls we had working, how many boys we had working, how many man hours were put in by these people, the percentage of supervisory personnel, with particular reference -- the President was always very conscious about this -- to our operating expenses. In other words, how much it cost us to put a boy or girl to work.

He wanted to keep that expense ratio low.

Very low. I was very much in that line as State Finance Officer. I finally got the reputation that before I'd issue anyone even a new pencil they had to turn the stub back in.

A typical story that may be of interest was about a boy in San Antonio who was named Hersey Johnson, no relative, and Hersey kept asking me for a pencil sharpener. Since Hersey's office was inside the WPA office, I felt that there wasn't any reason why he couldn't

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use theirs. So I just didn't send him one. He kept on pestering me for a pencil sharpener. Finally he asked Mr. Johnson if there was any way that he could get a pencil sharpener. He just couldn't get it out of me. So Mr. Johnson asked me if I couldn't find somewhere in the budget \$1.35 to buy a pencil sharpener for Hersey Johnson. This had become quite a point with me. I have been saving over many years an old box of used razor blades. So I fixed this box up, put a pretty red ribbon around it with a bow on it, and sent it to Hersey Johnson. I sent a letter in which I said under separate cover I am sending you the pencil sharpener that you wanted. I haven't heard the last of those razor blades yet.

Mr. Birdwell, did the NYA work of the President make him well enough known in Texas so that the average citizen knew the name Lyndon Johnson?

No, it did not. That goes back to the fact you asked me concerning making a large number of speeches. He just was not popularly known, using the term "popular" in its full sense -- not a matter of popularity, but in terms of being well-known. As a matter of fact, I'm informed, and I have no reason to doubt it, that when he chose to run for Congress that he had to be introduced to the Mayor of Austin, which was the largest city in the 10th Congressional District.

About L. B. Griffith, does he live in Austin now?

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He now lives just outside of Washington, in Maryland, and has his own engineering firm, engineering consultant work. When the President was inaugurated in January there was a quickly gotten together meeting of the National Youth Administration people. There was a little cocktail hour and Mr. Griffith was there. This was the first time I had seen him since about 1938 or '39.

And the other name you mentioned as the first secretary, Marie Lyndall -- where is she now?

She's still in Austin, so far as I know.

Is she married?

I think she's married.

Do you know how to reach her?

We can try.

Now to move on to his last days of NYA and the Congressional campaign. Mr. Birdwell, would you tell us what you know about the President's decision to run for Congress -- who influenced him in that direction, how it came about?

I feel that in the background of Mr. Johnson's mind had always been further public service and when Mr. Buchanan died, his decision was made to enter the political field and seek elective office. That was precipitated, I would say, very largely by Alvin Wirtz.

When he made the decision, which he made quickly I gather, did he call you young fellows together?

Yes, I remember that the Johnson's had moved to a place of residence then known as No. 4, Happy Hollow Lane. The building belonged to ex-Senator Brownlee of Austin. It was a two-story duplex and the Johnson's had one side of it and I'm almost sure this was a Sunday. I received a call out at Buda where I was living at this time.

This was on a Sunday afternoon, close to dark, and either Mr. Johnson or someone in the house, it may have been Lady Bird, called me to come up to the house, that Lyndon wanted to talk to me. When I got to the house, Senator Wirtz was there in the kitchen and Jesse Kellam was there and I believe Willard Deason.

Yes, he recalls being there.

And Senator Wirtz said that Lyndon has decided to run for Congress and we've got to do all we can to help him. There was a matter of finances and there was a matter of some advice as to the people he should see. We started planning immediately at that time who each of us could contact.

Did you think he was going to win at that time? Mr. Claude Wild, the campaign manager, said he didn't think he was going to win at the beginning. He got convinced in the middle of the

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campaign. Were you young enthusiasts sure from the beginning?

No, we were not.

It looked bad, didn't it?

Well, there was a large deal, number one, and there was one person that many people felt had the inside track. He was General Avery, or Colonel Avery as we called him, who had been a very close associate of Mr. Buchanan. It looked like Colonel Avery had an inside track but since in those days it was high man who won, it was a question of who got the one extra vote, and Mr. Johnson campaigned all on the New Deal, on his adherence and belief in it. And as he said, he could get up earlier and meet more people and stay up later than anybody else and as a result of it he felt like he could win.

The tenth congressional district was then considered quite a conservative district, was it not?

Yes, it was conservative.

And yet he ran on a New Deal ticket and won.

That is true and I think that the reasons that Lyndon Johnson won, the big reasons, were (1) the popularity of Roosevelt at the time -- there was more personal popularity rather than a complete acceptance of all of his New Deal philosophy and (2) Mr. Johnson just saw more people and in his very warm and personal

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expressions to them, made them feel like he was a person who would represent each individual.

Did you see him campaign?

Yes.

Give us a description of his campaign manner. Do you remember a specific speech on some street corner or at a little gathering?

Well, specifically, I took him out to South Austin to the end of what we call Main Street, Congress Avenue, which was almost the southern limit of Austin at that time. Another person took our car back toward town five or six blocks, and we would just go in every store, every fire station, every place of business and he would personally meet every person in there all the way to the back door to where the janitor was sitting. He would give them his card and look them in the eye and give them a big hearty handclasp and say, "I'm Lyndon Johnson, I want to be your Congressman."

Did he have a card? What did the card say?

I don't remember.

He had a little white card?

Just a white card, the usual kind carried by candidates.

It said Lyndon B. Johnson. I may have some of these cards.

Did he give many speeches on corners or in buildings?

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No, he limited his to small groups. In his first campaign, he never spoke to any large meetings. He made quite a few at fairs, at public meetings that were being called, and many times where a community would invite all of the candidates to come and appear, he would go and appear.

When he spoke, did he use stories or was he very serious?

He was very serious and what he was talking about mainly was that he wanted to help Roosevelt do this job. He talked particularly about the completing of the Buchanan Dam. This was the large dam that was started by Samuel Insull. And he emphasized the bringing of power to the rural people. He used this very effectively in the rural areas, about reducing the drudgery of the woman on the farm, bringing her electricity and lights, bringing milking machines to the farmer and washing machines to the wife.

When he was talking before city groups do you recall any of his themes?

One of the big things he used was the industrialization of Texas in terms of the power that would be generated and how much that would influence the growth of cities. Another thing that I remember, he hit hard at the differential in the freight rates between the North and South. There should be more equitable charges by the freight companies.

Do you remember any other things he particularly stressed

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in the rural or urban areas?

No.

The campaign was about five or six weeks, wasn't it?

It was about six weeks. It seems that Buchanan died in February and we had the rest of February, all of March and up until April 10th. I remember that on the night of April 3, he had a rally called to speak in the District Courthouse in Austin. After the speech was over, I went up to where he was and he was covered with perspiration. It wasn't a particularly hot night although it was crowded and there was no air-conditioning. He was covered with perspiration and he was constantly wiping his brow and he turned to me and said: "I'm sick. Stand here beside me." I was standing there beside him trying to help get people to shake hands and pass on by so he could meet each one personally. Immediately after most all the people had left, he asked me to go somewhere and do something for him. I forget what it was. But he left there and went to the hospital.

Was that the Seton, the Catholic Hospital?

Yes, that's where he was taken to Seton Hospital. And he was operated on somewhere after midnight that night.

And that was appendicitis?

And that was appendicitis.

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Can I come back to the very beginning of the campaign.

How and where did Mr. Johnson announce his candidacy?

He announced his candidacy formally, at Wooldridge Park in Austin with a large reception -- by reception I mean a large group. He had a great number on the platform. His mother was there and sister Luci was there and he had a large political rally.

And did he announce his theme of his campaign? Was there a specific slogan that Lyndon Johnson identified himself with?

No, I don't remember any slogan except the general slogan that Lyndon Johnson is a person who can get the job done.

I've heard that he made early speeches in San Marcos.

I know he made speeches in San Marcos. As a matter of fact, trying to recall that far back, it kind of seems like his first announcement was at San Marcos, at the State Teachers' College. I believe he made his announcement in the Assembly Hall.

To the student group?

Yes, I believe that was his first speech and I think the one I had reference to was the first speech in Austin.

Mr. Birdwell, did the President think he was going to win from the beginning? Do you have any impression of that?

I have no impression. I only know that as the campaign

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was drawing to its final days, Mr. Johnson received a telegram from James Roosevelt. The exact wording I forget, but the impression that it was meant to convey, and that Mr. Johnson used it to convey, as well as all of his workers, was that the President was behind him without President Roosevelt's saying so. We quoted the telegram from James Roosevelt.

Mr. Birdwell, about the victory and the trip with Franklin Roosevelt, let's take these up one by one. The President is over in Seton Hospital and the campaign headquarters were Claude Wild's office downtown. Now there was a sort of a party in both of them, was there not? Were you at Wild's headquarters?

No, I was not. I was working that day.

You mean at your regular NYA work?

Well, even in those days we were under the Hatch Act, and so I was just working.

Since Mr. Johnson had had such a serious operation, there was not too much celebration in his room as such. It was limited. There were some people there. But it was limited, because of the size of the room and because the doctor wouldn't permit it. But I wasn't at either place.

In terms of the trip with FDR which comes soon, several of the President's old friends have said that it is their impression

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that Governor Jimmy Allred got in touch with Roosevelt and said you ought to take a look at this young man. He's really something.

When Roosevelt came down to the gulf for some fishing, he called Lyndon Johnson over, talked with him, and took him back on the Presidential train. Do you know anything about that?

I can tell you more impression than actual fact. And that is that Jimmy Allred was Governor and was a friend of Lyndon, and Governor Allred was the one who arranged the meeting. There was a very well-known picture taken of all three with white suits on -- President Roosevelt, Governor Allred and Mr. Johnson. The President asked Mr. Johnson to accompany him on the train. And to the best of my memory, Mr. Johnson went as far as East Texas and got off the train somewhere up there. I do not believe he went all the way to Washington with the President.

Did you ever talk to President Johnson at a later time as to what happened in those meetings?

No.

Do you know anything about them? Did you hear any stories?

No.

And when did Mr. Johnson go to Washington to assume his Congressional duties? We're now in about mid-April, or early

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May of 1937.

Those dates are all kind of foggy to me. I only know that when he asked me to go up as his secretary, I got as far as the train with my ticket bought on one occasion and he sent someone to get me off the train. I started again and that was cancelled. Finally, it was decided that a young person by the name of Carroll Keach, who had worked for Mr. Johnson when he was secretary to Mr. Kleberg, and I would drive Mr. Johnson's car to Washington. Mr. Johnson had gone to Washington and had taken the oath of office, it seemed like on a Thursday or Friday, and Carroll Keach and I drove in the following day.

Could that have been the May 13th date?

It could have.

Yes, I think so.

You were what we call today his Administrative Aide?

Yes, Administrative Assistant I believe they refer to it as now. In those days, each congressman had a secretary and I was his secretary.

In those first days, he takes the oath and he jumped right into his work -- what was the tone in the office?

As I say, Mr. Johnson had arrived in Washington about a day or two before Carroll Keach and I arrived. We arrived either

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on a Friday or Saturday, I forget. It was late in the afternoon and we were driving over to the House Office Building. We had not even gone to try to find a place to stay. As we arrived, we saw Mr. Johnson walking by the side of the Old House Office Building. We stopped and spoke and he said, I've got an office, and he gave us the number. If my memory serves me right it was 118. I remember it was on the first floor. We went to the office and there were 13 bags of mail waiting to be opened. After his election on April, the 10th, no one had been there for some 5 or 6 weeks and Mr. Johnson had delayed his actual going to Washington until the opportunity to meet President Roosevelt was formulated and he got to make his train trip with him. And so besides his illness, the fact that he was waiting on President Roosevelt delayed his going to Washington for several weeks after his election. All the mail asking for the jobs from the Postmaster General down to the janitor of the Federal Building in Austin were there waiting for us -- 13 bags of mail, and Carroll Keach and I started on them when we got there that night, opening them up and sorting them, till way after midnight.

Your very first night there, you didn't find a place to stay and you were already at work?

That's right.

Where did you spend that night?

I think in the office.

Where did he stay? Was Lady Bird with him?

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No, Lady Bird and Mrs. Birdwell came up when school was out.

Do you know where he spent the first night?

No, I imagine it was at the Dodge House.

Do you remember what he said when he heard about the mail?

I just remember he said, Let's go up to the office. I think we have a lot of mail. Yes, he had already moved in or moved in soon thereafter to the Kennedy-Warren Apartments in Washington. I think they were on Connecticut Avenue. Bob Montgomery had leased the apartment in Washington. It seems that Bob Montgomery was on some kind of special assignment and the apartment was vacant. It was a furnished apartment and I know that we lived out there together in the Kennedy-Warren Apartments. When Mrs. Birdwell and Mrs. Johnson came to Washington about three or four weeks later, we all lived together in the Kennedy-Warren apartment with his brother, Sam Houston Johnson. We lived in the apartment until Mrs. Birdwell and I were able to get one.

Do you recall his first act as a Congressman?

No, I never got from the House Office Building to the Capitol for five weeks. After I had been there five weeks, he had an urgent telephone call from Austin and I went over and called him

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off the floor. I never even had time to go over to the Capitol for the first seven weeks I was there. We were still working on those 13 sacks of mail.

How long did it take?

Oh, about five weeks to get everything caught up. But all those letters were answered within the first ten days. If we didn't have an answer, we acknowledged the receipt of them.

Mr. Birdwell, I have taxed your patience. I think that covers the questions that I had in mind. Is there anything else that you would like to add about the whole period?

Just the impression that I have from my years of association with the President -- that he so particularly wanted to do the best job on anything that he tackled. He wanted to do it correctly, he wanted to do it efficiently, and he wanted to do it economically. All of his efforts were directed toward that main objective. His pleasures were in working. Whereas many of the rest of us would think about golf or a card game, his was in talking about politics or about the program. And he was a very effective and a very tireless worker.

With respect to leisure, were there any books that you recall as having influenced the President during this period?

I don't remember the President's reading a great deal

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other than the volumes of regulations and bulletins that we got from the national office of the NYA, and they were numerous. He was busy just reading those and keeping up with things that had to be done. He read those assiduously and very carefully so that he knew exactly what he was talking about.

Thank you very much Mr. Birdwell. You have been enormously helpful.

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