

INTERVIEW I

INTERVIEWEE: NASH CASTRO

INTERVIEWER: JOE B. FRANTZ

25 February, 1969, Washington, D. C.  
(Tape 1 of 1)

F: This is an interview with Mr. Nash Castro in his office in Washington, D. C. on February 25, 1969. The interviewer is Joe B. Frantz.

I suppose, Nash, we might as well drop the formalities; since we've been first-name, it would be a little pretentious. Why don't you open this by telling us a little bit—where you're from and how you just happen to be in this office at this particular moment in history, how you got here.

C: Okay, Joe. The route wasn't very circuitous. First of all, I should say that I am a native of Arizona. I teamed up with the National Park Service in 1939 at Grand Canyon National Park and, except for four years I spent flying airplanes for the Navy, I have devoted all of my life's work to the conservation field, and more specifically to the National Park aspect of conservation.

F: Did you have training in forestry in some aspect, or did you come in as administrator? Had you --?

C: My academic background is in business administration, but I've always had a great love affair with the out-of-doors, having been born and raised in Arizona.

F: Where there's lots of out-of-doors—

C: Where there's lots of out-of-doors, or used to be. I am unfailingly appalled to go back and see what's happening in the way of population growth to my home State.

I came to Washington on my third tour of duty in 1961, as Assistant Superintendent of National Capital Parks. At that time we had a quite different organizational arrangement than we have today. And in the context of that job, Joe, one of my responsibilities was that of fielding the White House. My first visit to the White House occurred on August 12, 1961. As you know, the White House is a part of the National Park System of the United States. The public generally doesn't think of it in that sense, but the fact is that, as one of our national treasures, it is a member of our great National Park System.

F: So you have supervision of it in one sense?

C: We do in the sense that we do the budgeting for that portion of the White House appropriation called "Operating Expenses, Executive Mansion." We maintain their accounts in this office; we pay their bills and hire their employees—those concerned with the operation of the Mansion. We do all manner of things: we're concerned there with all of the special events that take place on the grounds, for example. We maintain the grounds, including the gardens; we maintain the guard booths, fences, roadways, walks,

and also the central part of the White House, meaning the sacred part of the White House—the Mansion itself. The East Wing, as you know, is first and last an office building, as is the West Wing. GSA bears the responsibility for maintaining the two wings. We cooperate closely with GSA, and they with us. The work we do there is coordinated by the Office of the Chief Usher.

But getting back to 1961. I was called there on August 12 by the Chief Usher, Mr. J. B. West, and generally acquainted with our responsibilities at the White House. One thing begat another as a result of this one visit.

Mr. West told me that Mrs. Kennedy was thinking about publishing and selling post cards on the White House at the White House, and he wondered if the Park Service had any kind of vehicle which might make this arrangement possible. I suggested at that time that we form a non-profit corporation, as we have in the case of other national parks. I wrote a memo that went to Mrs. Kennedy from the Associate Director of the Park Service proposing this. Mrs. Kennedy had also asked John Walker, the Director of the National Gallery of Art, to address himself to this problem, and I worked very closely with John on it, as I did with Mr. West, and ultimately with Mr. Clark Clifford, who was an advisor to President Kennedy at the time.

One thought generated another one. In short order, we decided that the sale of post cards in the White House would not be

dignified. Instead, we decided a guidebook would be more appropriate. We presented our ideas to Mrs. Kennedy, who immediately became quite enchanted with them.

We then formed a non-profit corporation in November of 1961 called "The White House Historical Association." At our first meeting in the fall of 1961, David Finley, who was then chairman of the Commission of Fine Arts, was elected chairman of the Association and so continues to this day. Other people included in this meeting who subsequently became members of our board included Leonard Carmichael, the Secretary of the Smithsonian; Connie Wirth, who was then Director of the National Park Service; John Walker, the Director of the Gallery, and others.

One of the most fruitful things that came out of our first meeting was a suggestion by Connie Wirth to the effect that we approach the National Geographic and enlist their help on the production of the guidebook.

The board passed a resolution in favor of Connie's idea and designated him to make the overtures to the Geographic. Parenthetically, I might say that it was helpful to us that Connie was—and is—a member of the board of trustees of the National Geographic. Anyway, Connie sounded out the trustees and I'm happy to say that they responded very enthusiastically.

In November of 1961, or perhaps early December, we met with Mrs. Kennedy in the Yellow Oval Room to review a dummy of the

proposed guidebook. This meeting included the members of the board of directors of the association, and Melville Bell Grosvenor and two of his colleagues, Franc Shor and Bob Breeden. Incidentally, I was not then a member of the board of directors. At the time, I was Administrator of the White House Historical Association but not a voting member of the board. And I might tell you, Joe, that before we had a non-profit corporation—while we were going about thinking and arranging for the incorporation of the association, we were without funds. I personally financed postage and related costs out of pocket, because we had no money at all.

F: You underwrote the White House?

C: Not really, but I did help in that respect.

In any event, we had a meeting with Mrs. Kennedy and showed her a dummy of the proposed guidebook. We chatted with her about two hours. She looked at the dummy in great, great detail and made some very worthwhile suggestions. Immediately thereafter we set out to produce the guidebook which we published on July 4, 1962. It became a best-seller overnight, one of the best-sellers of all time.

F: It also gave you some funds to work with, didn't it?

C: Exactly, You see, the White House has benefitted but little from Congressional appropriations for special things. For example, Congress has never concerned itself about providing important pictures—works of art—for the Mansion, especially pictures that have some historical connection with it. It never concerned itself, for example, with the replacement of rugs or the acquisition of objects of art that had a White House association. We filled that void through the earnings of the association.

We published the original guidebook on July 4, 1962. We printed a quarter of a million copies and, by October, we printed another 100,000 copies and in December, we printed another quarter of a million—just a—

F: And it has gone like that ever since.

C: Just a fantastic seller. Well, not quite that—

F: Yes, but I mean—

C: —well, it has gone very well. We've sold well over 2,000,000 copies by now, you see, and our earnings have almost reached \$1,000,000, of which we have donated about \$600,000 to the White House. I think the whole project is very well ordained in the sense that, with these earnings, we've been able to do things that probably never would have been done.

In 1964, I think in late March, we began approaching the sale

of the one millionth copy of the book. I called Liz Carpenter and suggested that, as a means of further stimulating sales of the book, it might be in order for her to consider asking Mrs. Johnson to present the one-millionth copy to whomever came through at that particular moment and bought it. Liz took to the idea very quickly and Mrs. Johnson did too, I'm happy to say.

On the appointed day, which we predicted, Mrs. Johnson appeared and presented the one-millionth copy to a young girl from the Midwest—from Indiana, as I recall.

F: Had the girl been alerted that she was going to be the millionth, or—

C: No, she had not been alerted. I stood by the sales table—

F: There must have been a considerable amount of surprise there.

C: There was, indeed, and the pictures that were taken at the time revealed the great, great alacrity and surprise she demonstrated at the time. We had Mrs. Johnson standing in the wings, so to speak, and when the time came I signalled and she came forward and presented the book to a rather surprised but delighted youngster. Thereafter, we went out in the then East Garden with the recipient, David Finley, and Bob Breeden and posed for pictures. This marked the first time that I had an opportunity to do more than just shake hands with Mrs. Johnson.

I recall the first time I met her. It was at the White House, in the East Room, at a State luncheon given by President and Mrs. Kennedy for a visiting dignitary from South America, the President of Ecuador. This was in July of 1962. Mrs. Kennedy wasn't there that day, and Mrs. Rose Kennedy served as the President's hostess. I recall going through the line with Bette, my bride, and shaking hands with the President and his mother, the visiting dignitary and his wife, and with then Vice President Johnson and Mrs. Johnson. I was charmed by Mrs. Johnson's seeming friendliness and warmth. She made one feel she was genuinely interested in meeting them. I shall never forget that.

It was after the presentation of the one millionth copy of the guidebook that I progressively kept getting more and more involved at the White House, even beyond the extensive involvement I had during the Kennedy years. I got better acquainted with Liz and the staff, with Bess, of course, even more so with Bess in the beginning because she concerned herself with the special events that took place on the grounds, including concerts, art festivals, and other events. My real in-depth work with Mrs. Johnson began early in 1965, and more specifically in connection with her great beautification program. The first meeting of her committee took place on February 11, 1965; and on March 9, 1965, she went out publicly and made her first planting.

But going back just a bit—I've overlooked something. In



the fall of 1964, I think in October, President and Mrs. Johnson planted two oaks on the grounds near his oval office. One tree was planted in the area between the road and the holly hedge that forms the south boundary of the Rose Garden. The other went in south of the President's Office, a few feet west of the stone-paved walk that leads from the roadway to the colonnade immediately outside of the oval office. I recall that there were probably twenty of us there, including Irvin Williams, our horticulturist at the White House. One little incident occurred which I thought was funny: the President picked up the shovel and began pouring the dirt into the hole where the tree was planted, acting like he knew precisely what he was doing—and he did know!

F: It wasn't just symbolic—

C: It wasn't symbolic at all. He remarked that he had learned as a very young boy how to use a shovel, and I must say that he was very professional. That was a memorable occasion for I came away distinctly feeling that the President and Mrs. Johnson had a strong interest in those grounds and an appreciation for flora.

F: Do you recall, were they any particular oaks, any particular heritage, or region or—?

C: Yes, two oaks were planted. One was a willow oak, the other a Darlington oak. They exist to this day and will for many years to come.

Shortly after February 11, 1965, Liz asked me to come to her office and told me that Mrs. Johnson's Beautification Committee was on the verge of being activated. Liz wondered what possibilities there might be for the First Lady to go out and do a planting somewhere in town. Marcia Maddox, one of Liz's assistants, and I put our heads together and we went out and looked over the various possibilities. We went back and reported to Liz and, in turn, she checked in with Mrs. Johnson. One thing begat another and on March 9, 1965, the First Lady made her first official planting under her Beautification Program.

We left the White House in minibuses that we hired from the local transit company and drove to the Mall and more specifically to a site immediately south of the Natural History Building. Flanking both sides of the walk that leads to the Mall and then to the old Smithsonian Institution Building—the original one, the old red castle—we planted several thousand pansy plants. Mrs. Johnson got down on her knees and very enthusiastically and efficiently planted some pansies.

F: That wasn't the first flower she had ever planted either.

C: I'm sure of that. After I got acquainted with her, as I did over the years, I realized that this was one of many times that she had planted things, for she has had a life-long interest in natural beauty. She can get very lyrical and poetic about it all.

I recall about that particular day that she was bubbling with enthusiasm over this planting. And, as a matter of fact, Joe, the trowel she used on that occasion she used on three other occasions. After each time she used this particular trowel, I hung on to it and put it in my desk drawer here in this office. I kept thinking of the day when she might leave the White House so we might present it to her. And last December 17, when we held the last meeting of the First Lady's Committee in the Yellow Oval Room of the White House, I arranged for Secretary Udall to present the trowel to her. We had a plaque made up which listed the occasions on which she had used it; and on the opposite side of the trowel, we put a quotation from one of President Johnson's speeches alluding to beautification. The original ribbons that were on that trowel on March 9, 1965, were still on it on December 17, 1968, and I think the First Lady was quite pleased to have that memento of her beautification activities here in Washington.

Well, from the planting ceremony on the south side of the Natural History Building, we went to a little site at 3rd and Independence and Maryland Avenues, S. W. This used to be a decrepit, barren, wild-onion strewn triangle. At the time Marcia and I made our advance for this trip, we decided this would be a very good site for her to do another symbolic planting. So, working with the City of Norfolk and specifically with a gentleman by the name of Heutte—I've forgotten his first name, but I have

it in my records—we arranged for the city to donate one hundred azalea plants—

F: The City of Norfolk.

C: The City of Norfolk, and they donated these in honor of Mrs. Johnson's Beautification Program. Luci, by the way, was Azalea Festival Queen in Norfolk that year. We arranged for our Park Service gardeners to plant the azaleas; meanwhile, we had arranged for Kathy Simons, one of our landscape architects, to prepare a good landscape plan and I think it's one of the best that she did, because to this day that triangle just looks lovely. The landscape design included other plants, of course.

At the triangle at 3rd and Maryland and Independence Avenues, S. W., Mrs. Johnson planted two azaleas and a white flowering dogwood tree. That tree is still there, as are the azaleas. I might say that the triangle is a charming, delightful little park. I have always seen to it that our maintenance people give it prime and perfect attention because I know what great feeling Mrs. Johnson has since had for it. She drove by it many times during the years she was here, and always had something complimentary to say about the Park Service for looking after it so well.

I recall one time—I wasn't with her—that some people were lawn-bowling in that particular little park and she stopped and chatted with them. This attracted a lot of very favorable

attention on the part of the press. These plantings, in my mind, represent her very first public effort on the Beautification Program except that, as a part of that day, March 9, 1965, we also went into the Southwest part of the city to an area called Greenleaf Public Housing, where she also planted a dogwood tree. Walter Washington, who is now our mayor, was then the Director of the Public Housing Authority here and was with us on that occasion, along with other members of her committee and the usual press entourage. Mrs. Johnson attracted quite a crowd of residents and youngsters from the housing area. We had a Negro high school band that was very colorful and snappy and bright; and all in all, it was a glorious, memorable, wonderful day. From that beginning on that day, we went on to see the greater things that she did—the meaningful, wonderful, lasting things that she did.

F: Do you think she set out on a conscious program of beautification, or do you think that the idea just sort of germinated and grew?

C: No, I honestly think that she set out on a program that was begging to be generated. The great interest she showed for it, the tremendous personal attention she gave it, is what made it succeed as it did.

One thing has never been quite clear to me, and I must ask Mary Lasker about it one day. It is the origin of this program.

Mrs. Lasker, Mrs. Johnson and the President are very dear friends, and Mary is a very dear friend of mine. Mrs. Lasker has always had a love affair with flowers and trees, from the time she was a little girl in Wisconsin. This is an interest she inherited from her mother, because her mother was a great flower and park enthusiast. Mrs. Lasker, in the early 1940's, undertook a program of beautifying Park Avenue and she gave money and plants to the City of New York. To this day the beginnings she made are still in evidence. Park Avenue and other places in New York, as a result of her work, are still beautified every year.

As I said earlier, one of the things that has never been clear to me is whether it was Mrs. Lasker who advised Mrs. Johnson to venture into this program or whether it was Stewart Udall who did it, or both. My own impression is that Mary had as much to do with interesting Mrs. Johnson in doing this as anyone.

But to get back to the sequence of things: The next beautification episode we undertook was in April of 1965. The March 9 exercise went off very well and Liz now turned her attention to another aspect of beautification, highway beautification. The March 9 exercise had been attentive to the beautification of parks and public housing. Now Mrs. Johnson wanted to venture a little more broadly, and on this count Liz decided to go ahead and look into highway—

F: As historical clarification for people down the line, your district extends over into Virginia?

C: Yes, sir—

F: Your region—I should say.

C: My region. Actually the National Capital Region of the Park Service includes the District of Columbia and parts of Maryland and Virginia. We're the smallest region in the Service, one of six, but one of the most active.

F: But, for instance, the George Washington Parkway is part of your concern?

C: Yes, sir, it is indeed.

Well, we were so pleased with this first planting endeavor of the First Lady's that we started talking about giving it another dimension. And in this context, Liz said, "Well, let's consider highway beautification, because this is equally important."

Liz called Rex Whitten—Rex at the time was the Administrator of the Bureau of Public Roads. We talked with him and his lieutenants in Liz's office and he appeared to be quite enthusiastic about it. Great thinker and planner that she is, Liz wanted to go even beyond highlighting highway beautification; she said, "Why not visit Monticello as part of the trip?" As a matter of fact, she said, "Mrs. Johnson has an invitation to

the Abingdon Theater in Abingdon, Virginia, and we can tie the whole package together."

With the cooperation promised by Rex Whitten, and on Liz's instructions, I got in touch with Billy Britton, who was in charge of highway maintenance for the State of Virginia. Billy, a peach of a guy, liked the idea immediately and promised to help. We had him come to Liz's office from Richmond for a planning huddle. I remember Liz saying, "With Whitten and Britton, we can't fail."

Then on a Saturday in early March, Liz and Bess Abell and Barbara Keehn, who was Bess' assistant, a Secret Service agent, and I jumped in my car and drove down to look at sites where Mrs. Johnson might plant some flowers and trees along Interstate 95 between Washington and Fredericksburg. Billy Britton and his troops joined us for the on-site meeting. We selected two places for planting by the First Lady.

From there we drove to Monticello to look at the possibilities there. We had made arrangements to meet with the gentleman in charge of Monticello—I've forgotten his name now, but I made those arrangements. Bess thought a luncheon at Monticello would add a special touch to the trip. The Monticello people, as I recall, were concerned about holding a luncheon there because of the physical limitations of the site. Bess, who can charm the wings off a butterfly, charmed the man in charge of Monticello and it all worked out beautifully.



We returned to Washington rather late in the day, glowing over the possibilities of the trip.

In the next few days, Liz, Marcia Maddox, Barbara Keehn, and I flew to Abingdon, Virginia and did an advance on the theater there, working with Bob Waterfield, the Director of the theater. We arranged for Sam Weems, the Superintendent of the Blue Ridge Parkway, to meet us there. After we completed the advance in Abingdon, Sam drove us to Peaks of Otter, on the Blue Ridge Parkway, on an unforgettably fast and wild, wild ride. It's a long way from Abingdon to Roanoke, our destination for the night. The Blue Ridge Parkway is not designed for fast driving, as you know; it's designed in such a way that people simply cannot drive fast, so they can enjoy the lovely scenery. Liz, you know, is a very nervous flyer and equally as nervous a rider in an automobile. Sam Weems, who knows the road well, was charging along as fast as he could. We arrived at Peaks of Otter and were thoroughly enchanted with the place. We talked to the owner of the concession operations, a gentleman named Bryce Waggoner, a very good friend of mine. We asked him if he might be receptive to having the First Lady visit there. Of course he was.

Then we went on to Roanoke and spent the night; and the next day we flew back to Washington.

We needed a name for the trip, which finally came to be called "Landscapes and Landmarks." I had been searching my mind for a name and came up with "Landscapes and History"—as one suggestion; when Liz, one of the fastest thinkers on earth heard my suggestion, she said, "I've got it—we'll call it 'Landscapes and Landmarks'." And that's what it came to be called.

We reported back to the First Lady on the trip's possibilities and she approved. The planning proceeded and early in April of 1965 we made the "Landscapes and Landmarks" overnight trip, encompassing highway beautification, history, culture, and conservation. The President saw us off in our busses at the South Portico. We had quite a contingent, about 70 people, including the press. As I recall, we travelled in two Trailways busses. In the party were Secretary and Mrs. Stewart Udall; the Administrator of the Bureau of Public Roads, Rex Whitten, and his wife; Laurance Rockefeller and Mrs. Rockefeller; Bess and Liz; Mrs. Hubert Humphrey; Roger and Christine Stevens; Trudy Fowler and others.

We stopped first at a new rest and recreation area on I-95 near Woodbridge, Virginia, where the Governor of Virginia joined us. Mrs. Johnson did a planting here, to complete the landscaping of the area by Billy Britton and his people. In fact, Mrs. Johnson dedicated the area and unveiled a plaque on a big boulder there. Our next stop was at the site Liz and I picked near Fredericksburg

on I-95. Here the First Lady planted a dogwood tree in the median strip, and the State people had planted petunias and other very colorful flowers there, to demonstrate what might be done in the way of highway beautification. I am reminded that, before we left on the trip—a few days earlier—Mrs. Johnson, Rex Whitten, and I drove to both sites to look over the ground. I also remember that workmen were planting trees and shrubs and how delighted they were to shake hands with the First Lady.

From the I-95 site, we drove to Charlottesville. We had a lovely luncheon at Monticello, on the terrace—

F: It was a good season to be out, too.

C: Tremendous, magnificent. And from there we reboarded the busses and went to the Charlottesville airport, by way of the University of Virginia campus. I can remember one of the funny things that happened: The busses were brand new and sparkling, but one of them faltered and the First Lady had a schedule to meet at the University campus, and I decided that we couldn't wait. So I called on some of the local people who were at the luncheon to furnish transportation to supplement the people who couldn't be accommodated on the one operating bus. They responded very nicely and we met our schedule. Five minutes after we reached the campus our bus caught up with us. The First Lady made a tour of the University with its President, and it was all very warm and cordial. She had to great reception

on the part of the students and the faculty. The First Lady was especially interested in the garden surrounded by a brick serpentine wall.

From there we went to the airport. Mr. Laurance Rockefeller had brought his personal plane down, and because the contingent was so large we also used a chartered plane. Therefore, we boarded two planes and flew on to Abingdon. I was privileged to ride in Mr. Rockefeller's F-27 plane, which I thought was a delightful experience. I had never been in one before in my life.

We got down to Abingdon and the First Lady had a very nice reception at the airport and even a greater reception at the inn where she and the rest of the party stayed. That evening we had a wonderful dinner, which was preceded by a performance in the Abingdon Theater.

I've forgotten the name of the production, Joe; I'm sorry—I'd have to check my notes. But it was a very gala, festive, memorable evening. It was a dress-up affair, the ladies in long gowns and the men in black ties, of course. Following the production at the theater—and by the way, one of the interesting things I remember about this is that, in the old days—at the beginning of this Abingdon Theater enterprise, which was in the dark depression days of the 1930's—people couldn't afford to pay cash for their tickets. Instead, they were permitted to bring things in—

F: The barter theater—

C: The barter theater—that's right. They brought food and other items, and this supplanted the need for tickets. I recall that Mrs. Johnson bartered her way by presenting a seedling from the White House Grounds. This was in lieu of her admission fee.

After the theater production, we went to the inn and enjoyed a great supper. The next morning we flew to Roanoke and then bussed to the Peaks of Otter, a wonderful site along the Blue Ridge Parkway where we had an outdoor barbecue, done perfectly by Bryce Waggoner and his people. Later in the afternoon we flew back to Washington.

F: Waggoner, the State Senator?

C: No, sir, he's a private businessman—self-made man who—

F: I've spent a night at Peaks of Otter, but—

C: It's a lovely place. One of the bonuses of this trip for me was that I did the final advance on Peaks of Otter. I was able to take Bette and the children with me. We went early on a Saturday. I did the advance that day and the next. We spent Saturday night there and it was delightful.

After April of 1965, I progressively kept getting more and more involved with Mrs. Johnson's work because of her great interest in beautification and the environment. I recall that, in April,

shortly after the "Landscapes and Landmarks" trip, she called me one morning here at the office and said, "Nash, I wonder if you could come over about noon and talk about beautification. We'll rustle up a hamburger or something." Those were her precise words. Of course, I said I would be delighted to join her.

So I went over to the White House to find Mary Lasker and my favorite press secretary, Liz, and the First Lady. Mrs. Johnson's niece, Diana MacArthur, was also there. At the time, Diana was with the Peace Corps, but she has always been very interested in youth. We all accompanied Mrs. Johnson to the family dining room on the first floor of the Mansion and had a delightful lunch. The rustled-up hamburger turned out to be filet mignon. But the—

F: Instead of hamburger.

C: Yes, the hamburger turned out to be filet mignon. The whole purpose of the luncheon, Joe, was to consider some kind of a youth conference on natural beauty. Diana had sparked the idea for it and, as a result of our conversations at the luncheon, Mrs. Johnson decided to go ahead and have Diana spearhead the youth conference on natural beauty, to take place in 1966. Liz did a great deal of her important behind-the-scenes work, of course. Diana had an entree with the Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts and other youth organizations. We advised her to go to the Coca Cola Company and Eastman Kodak and others and try to get some funds from them to underwrite

the costs of the conference. It was decided that we would have ten youngsters from each State and they could come either from the 4-H Clubs or the Girl Scouts or the Boy Scouts or the Campfire Girls or other youth groups. The result of it all is that, in June of 1966, we had the first White House Youth Conference on Natural Beauty. Diana did a tremendous job of organizing it, but with Mrs. Johnson and Liz as back-up, of course, she couldn't fail. I helped around the edges.

Liz told me that Mrs. Johnson wanted each youngster participating in the conference to have a memento of it. Liz suggested that we give them a living something, a living plant of some kind; and she said, "Well, what can we get out of the White House Grounds?" I said, "Liz, we don't have enough White House seedlings to give to all these kids plus the supporting people who will be here." I also said, "What would you think about my talking with Cecil Wall, the Director of Mount Vernon, and see if they might let us have some seedling boxwoods? I happen to know that they raise and sell them, and after all there is quite a connection between the White House and Mount Vernon."

Liz liked the idea, and I talked with Cecil Wall and Cecil very kindly said, "We'll be delighted to give them to you." So they gave us 500 little potted boxwoods, and we had a special metal plaque made identifying the boxwoods with Mount Vernon and the occasion with the White House. I must say that they went

very, very fast. As a matter of fact, I didn't get one. I did get one of the little plaques, I'm happy to say, and I still have it at home as one of my mementos of beautification.

F: Do you think by now that she had gotten the idea of extending this local program into a national program?

C: I think so. By this time the idea had grown and caught on. The press covered it almost daily. By now, I feel Mrs. Johnson had seen the possibilities the whole concept offered, and we certainly had seen those possibilities because at our committee meetings, we often talked about what dimension, what thrust this whole program had and could additionally be given.

In the fall of 1965, as a means of extending the breadth of the program, and as a member of a professional group then called the American Institute of Park Executives, today called the National Recreation and Park Association—as a fellow in that organization, I asked Liz one day—I did most of my business through Liz, as you well know. There were times when Liz wasn't handy and I did my business through Bess or Ashton Gonella, Mrs. Johnson's secretary. There were times when I called direct, but I always went through Ashton—

F: You're like me. Life always started with Liz and you went from there.



C: Yes, that's right. And Liz made it a lovely life, bless her.

In the summer of 1965, I had made plans to attend the American Institute of Park Executives annual convention in Milwaukee. It occurred to me that this might be a good time and a good place for Mrs. Johnson to expatiate on beautification before this highly professional group of park executives. So I talked with Liz about it and she said, "I think the possibilities are good. Give me a note." And I did. She talked with Mrs. Johnson and Mrs. Johnson immediately endorsed the idea. She thought this was something that might very well fit her own objectives.

So I arranged for the program chairman of the convention, a fellow named Bob Ruhe, to come to Washington and we met with Liz. One of the interesting things that came out of our meeting was that Bob had a conflict with speakers. Bob, therefore, suggested another date for Mrs. Johnson. You know, Liz could be very straightforward and she said, "Hell, Bob, Mrs. Johnson is doing this for Nash, and she can't change her date." Well, that was that. I felt very flattered that the First Lady would accommodate this group of executives for me.

We went out there that fall and Mrs. Johnson addressed the American Institute of Park Executives. She had a wonderful reception from them. They fell in love with her, if I can be as candid as all that—literally, they fell in love with her. The park group had a wonderful luncheon for her in one of the

big clubs in Milwaukee. That evening she stayed in a hotel, where we all stayed.

On the way out there on the plane, Mrs. Johnson asked me if I would arrange for her to get better acquainted with representative park executives from throughout the nation. Using my own judgment, I arranged for ten of them to come and meet with her for cocktails in her suite early that evening. We had a grand, delightful visit with her. In fact, one of those who was there is a guy you probably know, Elo—

F: Urbanovski?

C: Urbanovski, yes. We had a grand evening with Mrs. Johnson. Well, Joe—

F: I must say you have an advantage in something like that in that I think professionals recognize someone who has, you might say, legitimate and intelligent interest and they warm to them very quickly. I've seen this in other lines of work.

C: No doubt about it. The thing that Mrs. Johnson projected so clearly to this group was her deep, deep interest in enhancing the beauty of the country. And they believed her. I think they became a strong supporting group, not collectively, I might say—for I don't feel as an organization they undertook to do a whole lot, but individually these park people throughout the country got the message, and this was what we were really seeking.

Joe, I had so many occasions to talk with the First Lady. You know, we rode all over this town countless times. I met with her in the White House on countless occasions. I sent her notes. It's awfully hard to try and estimate the number of visits that I had with her on beautification, but I helped frame up the agenda for many of the meetings of her committee; I accompanied her on so many trips I've really lost track. You know, I'd have to go back into my records and—

F: Well, now, as I recall—I don't think it was at this youth meeting, but it seems to me there was in the summer of 1965 a White House conference on beauty.

C: Yes, this was the President's conference.

F: This was the President's?

C: On natural beauty, yes. And this conference was spear—

F: Were you involved in that?

C: No, sir, just nominally. Again in my varied role, I was involved in working with Liz and Bess on the arrangements.

F: You were then part of the whole—

C: Yes. For example, it had been arranged for the President and Mrs. Johnson to address this conference on the South Lawn.

Typically, when we have an event on the south lawn, the Park Service erects a stage with an acoustical shell and provides several thousand chairs in front of the stage. Usually the Marine Band provides music from an enclosure in front of the stage. The audience sits behind the enclosure, in front of the stage.

For this day we had arranged for about a thousand people who were taking part in the conference to come to the White House to hear the President and Mrs. Johnson. By golly, Joe, it started to rain just a few minutes before the program began at 5 o'clock, and people had to scurry into the Mansion. No one room in the Mansion will accommodate that large a crowd. The President and Mrs. Johnson spoke from the East Room. The Army Signal Corps had located audio equipment in the other rooms so that the speakers might be heard in other locations on the State floor. It was a hustly, bustly occasion because the crowd was just too big for that particular house on that particular day. But they did reach a lot of people. I thought the President's message on that occasion was very appropriate, as was the First Lady's. To this day I think that we're seeing the results of this conference. From that followed the formation of the President's Committee on Recreation and Natural Beauty, as you know, which Laurance Rockefeller heads up and which is made up of such a distinguished group of people.

Some of the recommendations they have made are being carried out progressively. And I think time will certainly show the great wisdom of convening this particular conference.

I'm trying to recall what occurred next. All during the rest of 1965 we did many plantings, beautifying as we went along. One thing in which Mrs. Johnson was vitally interested was the beautification of schools, feeling that children would learn from it. She spent a great deal of time on this. I recall an occasion in 1966 when we went to the Jefferson School in S. W. Washington, not far from this building. The First Lady dedicated some plantings at this school. The curious thing about this is that Liz and I had gotten the S. Klein Company interested in beautification—they're the department store people, you know. They had a young man with them at the time by the name of Robert Ench, who was in charge of their nursery operations. We got acquainted with Bob and I asked him one day if they might consider underwriting the beautification of this particular school and he said, "Sure!"

Bob came down here and, using students from the school and rolling up his own sleeves, he directed the work and they did a tremendous job. Mrs. Johnson was immensely pleased with it.

F: They beautified their own school?

C: That's right, using their own labor, but with the S. Klein Company furnishing the plant materials and the know-how and the supervision.

This is one of nine schools that Mrs. Johnson sponsored beautification-wise. I'm sorry to report that this is the only school where it took hold. The others just didn't seem to respond. She made visits to quite a number of schools. For example, the Walker Jones School, the Terrell School—these adjoin in the city here. We spent a lot of time getting donors to give plant materials, and Mrs. Johnson spent a lot of time going out there and addressing the students, visiting with the teachers, actually doing plantings. I can remember driving with her several times around the city, looking at school plantings. I sensed her disappointment over the fact that the schools had not been attentive to maintaining the plantings.

This is true of every school we planted, except for the Jefferson School, which, I think did a quite good job of maintaining the plantings, even to this day. In the case of the other schools, we had our disappointments.

Lynda wrote an article for Look magazine in 1966, for which she received an honorarium of \$1,500. She told her mother that she would like to do a beautification project with her earnings, and we selected a school in Washington, the Cook School at First and P, N. W. I arranged for Kathy Simons, our landscape architect, to do a plan, which was very nice and practical. Working with school officials and the children, we beautified the school and it turned out beautifully. In six weeks, they had vandalized the

project. Of course, Lynda was very disappointed about it; she called me and I went to the school and talked to the principal and some of the teachers. They said that, if we would restore the plantings, they would guarantee that this would not happen again because they would prevail upon the students to take care of them. With these assurances, I went ahead and raised some more private money and we restored the plantings and made some modifications, but this, too, was a great big flop.

I have to confess that the beautification of schools has not been nearly the success that we had hoped for. I think the problem is in the fact that we have not undertaken to do a really meaningful job of conservation education, and I think that until we do this—

F: You've got a basic education problem there?

C: I think so. And this applies not only to the youngsters, but equally to adults. I think—

F: Why do you think Jefferson held on?

C: I think it's still holding up quite well. Why did it hold on?

F: Yes.

C: I think because the kids did it themselves, because they had teachers who have an appreciation for the uplift that the school got and they were determined to see it continue.

I had one thought I was going to inject in here, hopefully in sequence, that I have overlooked.

F: You made some fairly extended trips with Mrs. Johnson, right?

C: Oh, quite a few of them, Joe. All of them memorable.

F: Where did you go? Can you pick them apart?

C: I think so. I recall making a trip to New York with her one time to dedicate the Jacob Riis Plaza Playground. This is a project Mrs. Vincent Astor undertook to do through her foundation, which donated \$800,000 for it. My involvement in this came about as the result of a phone call from Liz early one morning, asking me if I could go to New York and advance Mrs. Johnson's visit.

The call came early on the day that Mrs. Johnson was to make her trip there.

F: I see. You had a lot of advance, didn't you?

C: I didn't have much time for an advance, so I rushed to my office, got my book of T.R.'s, dashed over to National and took the first shuttle I could get. I had to make a few phone calls before I left. I dashed up there and met a gentleman from the Public Housing Authority, because this project is in a public housing area.

I went ahead with the advance and it was well that I got there ahead of Mrs. Johnson because this particular group of people had



not been through a First Lady's visit; they had not made the proper arrangements for welcoming her, for the route she was to take, the things she was to see, that kind of thing. Happily, they were very cooperative.

F: Probably looked on you as a little bit of a Messiah.

C: Well, I think they were happy to see me there because they were really floundering. By this time, you see, I had done several advances and had learned a great, great deal about trips.

Anyway, Mrs. Johnson dedicated this wonderful amenity. She walked and walked through the playground, meeting with many people and greeting them. Mrs. Astor and Mrs. Lasker and Mayor Lindsay all took part in the dedication. As a result of this project Mrs. Johnson saw there, Joe, and because of the great interest she demonstrated, Mrs. Astor was moved and stimulated into doing a like project here in Washington, not an \$800,000 project like she did in New York, but a \$400,000 project. This is the lovely recreation area we now have at Buchanan School in S. W. Washington.

I recall the day that Mrs. Johnson, Mrs. Astor, Mary Lasker, Liz, Walter Washington and I and a Secret Service agent jumped in a White House station wagon and did a bit of touring about the city. We came to the Buchanan School site and Mrs. Astor looked at it, and Mrs. Johnson looked at it—Mrs. Johnson had seen it before, of course, many times—and Mrs. Astor said, "I

think I would like to do this one." It was just begging for attention; it was in terribly bad shape. Mrs. Astor's foundation retained Simon Breines, a New York architect, to design it.

One of the things I recall so vividly about Buchanan School is that cardboard for the most part substituted for glass in their window structures. This is a school in a rather economically marginal part of town, and the kids broke just about every window in that school.

We learned that the beautification of schools tended to minimize on window damage quite substantially. I can't tell you whether it obtains today, but it certainly did at the time.

Getting back to the New York trip: we flew on a regularly scheduled airline flight, on an Electra. That night, President and Mrs. Johnson were having a salute to the Congress in the State Department Building. This was the day that the Congress was debating the Highway Beautification Bill. I had worked closely with Bess in making the arrangements for the salute to the Congress; I had also worked with Nat Greenblatt who, by the way, has recently married Bob Hope's daughter. He was the producer of the show, and we had Fredric March, Anita Bryant, Hugh O'Brian, and other luminaries of the stage and screen. We flew back from New York under very stormy conditions, and the flight was miserable. Liz always said the airplane was the devil's finest invention. She hated flying and climbed the walls every time she couldn't see the ground.

On this flight, I recall plying her with two stiff drinks, but they didn't do any good. She sat next to me and took my hand and just about broke it—she was that apprehensive and nervous on the flight.

Ashton Gonella, Mrs. Johnson's private secretary and a dear of a lady, was also with us. I learned that she, too, was quite nervous in that airplane. We had been in bumpy, bumpy clouds all the way and, as we approached National, the pilot started letting down and we began seeing lights through the heavy rain. Suddenly the pilot gunned the engines and we were obliged to go around again. Unfortunately, the pilot made the mistake of saying over the public address system, "I'm sorry, but we were too close behind the plane ahead of us and have to make another approach." At that point Liz would have given her kingdom for terra firma. Anyway, we got down.

My wife, Bette, and I were invited to the White House for a buffet supper before the salute to the Congress at the State Department auditorium that evening. I had planned to go home and freshen and change but, because we were so late getting in from New York, I had called Bette and asked her to meet me in the White House—in the Usher's Office—with a fresh shirt. She did this, and I freshened up there, even going so far as to borrow an electric razor.

From the airport, I rode to the White House with Mrs. Johnson and Ashton, and for the first time I realized that Mrs. Johnson didn't especially care for flying either. I recall her saying, "Oh, I'm so glad to be on the ground." I had no idea she ever got nervous, for she never showed it.

F: She masks it fairly well.

C: She masked it beautifully, and the only other time I can recall where she was a little apprehensive about being in the air was on the last trip I made with her, the Redwoods trip. Liz was sitting with me, holding—breaking—my hand as usual. Mrs. Johnson was sitting right behind us. She was by herself and asked if I might join her for a few minutes, which I did. At this point Liz dashed across the aisle and joined Erv Duggan—and broke his hand. Mrs. Johnson was a little bit nervous, too, but she did not say so. She is as brave a lady as she is great.

One of the great trips, Joe, was the float trip down the Rio Grande River. I think that's the occasion on which I first met you.

F: It could be.

C: In fact, I'm sure it is. Liz started talking about it early in March of 1966. She asked me about the Rio Grande country and Big Bend National Park. She asked "What is out there?" And I

said, "Liz, I don't know. I've never been there." I had been through Alpine but not in the park. So she said, "Well, what do you think about getting out the literature and maps and taking a look?" I did just that and we took a look and got mighty enthused.

Then on a Sunday in early March, she and Charlie Boatner and Scott, her son, and I flew out to the Big Bend country. Perry Brown, a very dear friend of mine—in fact he was my best man when Bette and I were married—was the superintendent of the park. We got out to Big Bend and floated down the Rio Grande on the advance, just the four of us and Perry Brown and one or two rangers. We were delighted with the whole experience; it was unforgettable.

F: You picked Mariscal Canyon because it was a one-day journey over the other two canyons.

C: Oh, yes, precisely for that reason.

F: You never made any other consideration?

C: No, because we knew that allotting more than one day for the float trip would be logistically impossible, and it was for that reason that we arranged it just that way.

After the advance, we came back to Washington. One of the things I'll never forget about that trip is that Charlie Boatner and I shared a room and Liz and Scott, her son, shared the room

right next to us. The little motel was not insulated for noise, so that noises from one room to the other were quite discernible. Well, I learned very quickly that Charlie Boatner is one of the loudest snorers of all time. Scott gave him some pretty strong competition. Needless to say, I had a totally sleepless night with these guys, one with me and one next door—

F: It was worse than sleeping in a streetcar barn?

C: It was terrible, and I told Charlie that I was in the market for a new roommate. There were other times when I was almost obliged to room with Charlie and the thought terrified me. Sharing a room with Charlie again was out of the question.

We came back to Washington and Liz reported to Mrs. Johnson on the trip's possibilities. Mrs. Johnson was immediately enthusiastic about it and asked we go ahead with the planning. As a part of this trip, it was decided also to visit San Antonio to dedicate a project on the river.

I went out several days ahead of the First Lady, which I usually did to make arrangements. In this case we were scheduled to land the airplane at a World War II airport at Presidio, Texas. It was no longer a regularly operating airport. They didn't even have radio communications. The hangars were run down and shabby. But it was the only airport close to the Big Bend headquarters. At that, it was a hundred miles away.

This is where I learned that cars can operate as fast as one hundred miles an hour, for Charlie Boatner proved it, much to my consternation. I know now why Texans drive so fast. Spaces are wide, the traffic is light, and the temptation is great.

F: Not much to do except get there.

C: That's right. As a part of this whole exercise, Joe, we also decided that this would be an appropriate time for Mrs. Johnson to dedicate the Fort Davis National Historic Site. This involved driving a car from Alpine to Fort Davis to Big Bend headquarters, and everything is a hundred miles from any place out there, as you know. I spent a lot of time behind the wheel of a car.

The trip was outstanding, not excluding the Grand Teton trip and others. First of all, we were blessed by magnificent weather, by an exceedingly warm welcome as only Texans can give.

F: One thing I wonder and have always wondered on that trip, I flew in with the party. There was a mob at that old airfield, which I would suspect exceeded the combined population of Marfa and Alpine, and I wondered if a real attempt were made to whip them out or did they just come because this was something they wanted to do?

C: No, I think this is something they wanted to do. On these advances, one could usually tell by talking to a few key people whether you would have to exert much effort to get anybody out. In most cases

we did not have to exert much effort to get anybody out. In this case, we exerted no effort at all. We merely announced that the First Lady was coming, and people came from everywhere. The whole State of Texas was there, it seemed to me.

We had a very happy and gay and colorful arrival ceremony, as you know, and went on down to park headquarters where Mrs. Johnson spent some time looking at a relief map of the park at park headquarters. We had a wonderful and sparkling Mexican band play during the luncheon on the plaza of the park headquarters building. After lunch we took a hike. Mrs. Johnson loved to walk, by the way. Any excuse to walk in lieu of riding she always found reason to do. We took a wonderful hike that afternoon. We had a large group, including sixty or seventy press people, with us. The hike was about two miles each way—perhaps a little less—to a superb overlook with magnificent vistas. You probably know the name of—

F: The Lost Mine Trail.

C: The Lost Mine Trail, that's right.

The hike was wonderful and that evening we had an outdoor barbecue. You were there, and you know how gay and colorful it was around the campfire. I remember Brownie from Alpine State Teachers' College, Brownie—

F: Brownie McNeill.



C: Brownie McNeill spinning yarns. As a matter of fact, I remember that you told some tall tales that night. The next morning after breakfast and an outdoor church service, we were bussed to the takeoff point on the Rio Grande for the raft trip. We had a flotilla of rubber rafts that numbered about forty-six, if I'm not mistaken. It was quite an armada, you remember?

F: Yes.

C: And it was a glorious day.

F: It was like an invasion.

C: Exactly. I'm sorry that the water in the river wasn't more plentiful that day, because so often we had to get out in our tennis shoes or bare feet and help pull the rafts to deeper water.

The trip as a whole went very well, Joe. I recall our stop for lunch on a sandbar along the banks of the river. One of the interesting things about the sandbar that Liz, Charlie and I selected for lunch is that it turned out to be in Mexico, but we didn't know this. Just about the time we were getting ready to leave, or after I got out there, one of the park rangers said to me, "By the way, do you know that you're going to be having lunch in Mexico?" And I said, "No, I didn't know that. Is this likely to be a sensitive matter?" And he said, "I don't know,

but it could be." Liz and I then decided to check it out with the Mexican desk in Washington.

I called the State Department and they advised that we select a sandbar on the American side, which we did.

One of our problems was comfort station facilities. There aren't any along the Rio Grande.

F: And no trees to get behind.

C: And no trees to get behind, exactly—at least in some places. We bought some chemical toilets from Sears and Roebuck, and located them at an appropriate place. They worked very well.

I have no doubt that, of all the trips the First Lady made, this turned out to be one of the most exciting ones for her. After we landed at Boquillas—

F: Yes.

C: On the American side of the river, we all freshened up at the campground and had a wonderful evening of margaritas and songs and delightful food provided by, oh gosh, I—

F: The Odessa Chuckwagon.

C: The Odessa Chuckwagon. What a great outfit that is! That reminds me that, on the morning of the float trip, we had breakfast behind the new concession building, then under construction. We had an

outdoor church service that morning since it was a Sunday. I remember so well the wonderful flapjacks and bacon prepared by the Odessa gang. They were glorious—the flapjacks I mean.

I recall, too, on this occasion that Mrs. Johnson planted a little evergreen tree by the new concession building, a local tree. I have pictures of her planting that tree.

We left the next day by way of Fort Davis where she dedicated the Fort Davis National Historic Site. This was on a Monday. Mrs. Johnson flew back to the Ranch from Presidio Airport and took the press with her. At this point Liz wanted the press to go to Salado, her—

F: Her ancestral home.

C: Her ancestral home. I'm trying to recall whether this was the occasion on which Lynda planted some trees in honor of her grandparents at Johnson City.

F: She did. There was some kind of planting out at Johnson City.

C: It was that occasion. You see, I had this problem: I had to get back to Washington because Mary Lasker and the Society for a More Beautiful Capital, Inc., which I shall tell you about later on in this interview, were having a beautification luncheon two days later—Wednesday—for 200 people in the Franklin Room of the State Department. We chartered five busses, which Bess decorated very

gaily, to take this contingent of people, including the Beautification Committee and other people interested in beautification, on a tour of Mrs. Johnson's projects. Bess made the arrangements for the luncheon and I helped her, along with Rex Scouten.

I had to get back here to help Bess with the luncheon and therefore missed the one opportunity to visit the LBJ Ranch, I'm sorry to say. The luncheon was on Wednesday and this was already Monday and I had to be here to help Bess.

This luncheon was one of three—1966, 1967 and 1968—one of three that Mary Lasker gave. The whole idea behind this was to show Mrs. Johnson's committee the things that had been done, to show donors the things that had been done with their money, and to show potential donors the things that might be done if they participated in the program.

F: Have you ever tallied up how much money was inspired—how much private money was inspired to be given?

C: Yes. About \$3,000,000.

F: That's remarkable.

C: I think it's quite remarkable. It is not generally known, but I think for this particular record it ought to be known that Mary Lasker is the beautification program's most substantial contributor.

F: She was rather quiet through it though.

C: She likes to be anonymous about her gifts. Her nature is one of modesty, which is only one of her extraordinary qualities. Next to Mrs. Johnson, Mary Lasker did more for the beautification program than anyone. She not only gave generously of her money but was the committee's best, most effective fund raiser. Even more importantly, she came up with the best ideas for beautification projects—she and Liz. Mary was tireless on behalf of beautification. She still is. If you will look out my window here, you will see some cherry trees on both sides of the road along the river. Mary Lasker generated the idea of planting flowering cherry trees on both sides of the road that encircles Hains Point. Hains Point is a peninsula, a man-made park dredged out of the Potomac in the 1890's, 327 acres in size, and that road goes all the way around it. Mary's idea was to plant the trees on both sides of the road so that, in time, they will arch across the roadway and form a beautiful canopy of cherry blossoms for people to drive under. So, in the spring of 1966, she gave us \$70,000. She inspired Mr. Andre Meyer—this has never come out publicly—a New York investment banker and a long-time friend of hers, to match her gift. With this money, in the spring of 1966, we made the first planting of the cherry trees. Over the next two years, we finished the planting, numbering 1,846 Yoshino cherry trees around the perimeter of Hains Point. To complement them, we also planted quite a number of evergreens to

set off the cherry blossoms. "This planting," Mary said, "is in honor of President and Mrs. Johnson." We plan to install a plaque this spring to commemorate the planting.

But this is only one of the many, many projects that Mary stimulated—and paid for. She got us interested in an azalea propagation program—another great idea of hers. Her first project was an azalea planting project. For this, she donated 10,305 azalea plants, which cost over \$30,000, that we planted on Pennsylvania Avenue between Pershing Square and the Grant Statue at the foot of Capitol Hill. Now, several years later, they have grown quite a bit; and in the spring of the year they are a riot of color.

I recall one time, on July 4, 1965—we planted the azaleas along Pennsylvania Avenue in the spring of 1965. We had so little time to plant the azaleas because we wanted them in bloom by spring.

F: You mean almost instant blooming, didn't you?

C: Right. On July 4, 1965, Tom Stevenson published an article in the Washington Post to the effect that the azaleas on Pennsylvania Avenue were a total flop, that they were dying because they had not been watered. I became quite alarmed and concerned, especially because I had been keeping an eye on them. Knowing that Mary Lasker and Mrs. Johnson would probably read the same article, I decided to go and take a look. After church, I drove downtown and rounded up our Park Police photographer and his Polaroid

color camera. We walked the length of Pennsylvania Avenue and looked at every plant. Out of the 10,305 azaleas we had planted, I found we had lost 362, which is a very acceptable loss figure for that quantity of plants. I phoned Mary the next day and urged her to discount the Post article, and I sent some pictures to prove her azaleas were in good shape.

This was Mrs. Lasker's first project. She has done so many things, Joe, that I simply can't cover them all, but I will tell you about some of the more significant ones. One of these was the planting of daffodils along the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway. This was strictly her idea. After we drove along the parkway and considered the possibilities, she offered to donate 200,000 daffodil bulbs if we agreed to plant them. Of course, I was delighted to accept her offer.

This is one of the most glorious displays in Washington in the spring of the year. It has precipitated no end of praise. She became even more enthused—if that's possible—about daffodils and one day told us she would like to buy an additional million bulbs for planting on Columbia Island and West Potomac Park. I was overwhelmed, needless to say. So I said, "Mary, that's a big project—and expensive—for the bulbs will cost you at least \$60,000." And she said, "But think of the pleasure this planting will give to people." Thinking of others: this is the greatness of Mary Lasker.

Mary and I then talked with Mrs. Johnson and the First Lady was delighted with the prospect, for she well knew about the beauty of the daffodils along the Rock Creek and Potomac Parkway. We decided to retain Ed Stone, Jr., one of our country's most distinguished landscape architects, to design the planting beds. To consult with Ed, we retained a gentleman by the name of Charles Lewis, the Director of Horticulture at Sterling Forest Gardens in New York State. By the way, Mary Lasker paid him his fee. Ed designed the superb plantings on Columbia Island, with Charles Lewis' help. The daffodil plantings in West Potomac Park were designed by our own landscape architect, Darwina Neal. When aggregated, Joe, they cover an area of almost thirty acres of solid daffodils.

F: I haven't seen that yet.

C: You have a real treat in store this spring. As I recall, we have something like ninety beds of daffodils. We used 29 varieties, including some early bloomers, some mid-season bloomers, and some late season bloomers, so that we have a beautiful panorama of daffodil blossoms over quite an extended period of time in the spring—about six weeks.

We planted these in the fall of 1967, and the idea occurred to me that, if we could get local garden clubs to help us, the plantings would attract a lot more attention and cost us less



money. I talked with Mrs. Lasker about this and then we talked with Mrs. Johnson, who thought it was a fine idea.

Working through one of the members of Mrs. Johnson's Beautification Committee, Mrs. Clyde Romig, we arranged for the local garden clubs to provide us some help, mostly ladies—there were some men—and on a lovely fall day in 1967 we all met out on Columbia Island, as it was then called, and turned the ladies loose, along with our own gardeners; and before the fall was over, we had planted the bulbs; I must say that—

F: Just in mere units, that's staggering.

C: It is and I must say that I consider this to be one of the more successful plantings. To my knowledge there is no larger single planting of daffodils anywhere in the United States, a decorative planting, I mean. By the way, Mrs. Johnson joined the garden club ladies at Columbia Island for the planting. Along with the rest of us, she got down on her hands and knees and went to it. We have some great pictures of this event.

Mary also generated the notion of planting dogwoods on Columbia Island—2,720 of them. Again, Ed Stone, Jr., designed the plantings. I told Mary that dogwoods would fit in very well. She felt that a 50-50 combination of pink and white dogwoods would be especially lovely. I advised her to stick with white flowering trees, for the pink dogwood is not a part of the natural scene. My colleagues felt as I did—only more so.

Well, Mary stood fast. She said, "Nash we must also have pink. Think of the effect." You know, she's so descriptive and lyrical and so gifted with talent, color-wise and every other way. I had a terrible time convincing our landscape architects about it but we finally compromised. We have some pink dogwoods and I am glad we do, for they provide a wonderful variety. Mary was right.

We estimated that it would cost us \$400,000 to plant the quantity of dogwood trees Ed Stone projected in his plans. Mary offered to give one-half if we would match it.

She and I talked with Mrs. Johnson about it, and the First Lady was delighted. Then I talked with my principals in our Washington Office, and George Hartzog agreed to match her gift.

Very fortuitously, as it turned out, the low bidder submitted a bid of \$156,000; and the reason he was able to do this was that he bought a nursery that was going out of business, and instead of spending \$400,000 on this project, we jointly spent \$156,000.

F: Real nice.

C: And she paid her share, which I think is pretty tremendous.

F: —out of her budget even.

C: That's right. Joe, under this project we are planting over 2,700

dogwood trees on what was then called Columbia Island. This was strictly a Mary Lasker idea, endorsed by the First Lady, and executed by the National Park Service. We started the plantings last fall and will finish them this spring. In fact, most of the trees are in now.

F: What's the reasonable life of a dogwood?

C: I'm not sure, I know.

F: But it's a long-lived tree, so—

C: Well, reasonably long-lived, Joe, I would say probably in the fifty-year range.

F: So for any generation now while you—

C: Oh, absolutely.

I recall when we first started talking about beautification, Mary got David Lloyd Kreeger and Mrs. Kreeger, of Washington, interested in the beautification program. They wanted to do a fountain or a sculpture, for they are very art-oriented. We didn't immediately come to terms on the form of project they should do, but we sustained their interest. Mary talked with them many times, as I did. They retained Philip Johnson, a very renowned architect who designed their new house, to design a fountain for them at a site at the end of Constitution Avenue,

right along the river, where Constitution ends. We checked Philip's design out with the Commission on Fine Arts and the National Capital Planning Commission. Very briefly, Philip proposed a brick cylinder-like structure over which water would cascade around a 360-degree arc. We felt his concept was different and exciting and interesting. Mrs. Johnson liked it, but the Fine Arts people and the National Capital Planning Commission people did not. Libby Rowe, then Chairman of the Planning Commission, suggested that the Kreegers do a project in the ghetto. So we wrote off the Philip Johnson design and decided to try something else. Right after the terrible April riots of last year, we proposed to the Kreegers that they consider doing a couple of vest-pocket parks in a depressed part of the city. We prepared some designs and they liked them and subsequently donated \$35,000. With their gift, we went ahead and developed the parks. Mrs. Johnson dedicated them last year, and I was privileged to be Master of Ceremonies on this occasion.

But to get back to Mary Lasker: she has not only contributed a great deal of money herself, but has been very instrumental in getting others to do the same. For example, let me tell you how that great Reader's Digest article on beautification came about last year. The annual beautification luncheon at the White House took place in April 1968. We exhibited a number of renderings of our proposed projects and, as a part of our exhibits that day, we

took a collection of some 80 color slides of beautification projects and put them in an automatic slide projector with a screen and cranked the thing up in the northeast corner of the State Dining Room. Two of the guests at this luncheon were Mr. and Mrs. DeWitt Wallace of the Reader's Digest. Mary Lasker was standing with them as they were looking at the slides and as I happened by, Mary took my arm and said, "Nash, come over and tell the Wallaces about your slides," which I did.

Joe, before the afternoon was over Mary had almost convinced them that they should do an article on beautification in the Reader's Digest. Within two or three days, I had a telephone call from one of Mr. Wallace's associates from Pleasantville, New York, asking if he could come and see my slides. Of course, I would be delighted to see him. He came to Washington and looked at our hundreds of slides and made a selection. Last year, in the fall, the Digest published a wonderful eight-page article on beautification. I took one of the pictures in the article. I'm not a photographer—by no means am I a photographer—but last spring Mary Lasker and Deeda Blair, who is a very dear friend of hers, and I were out admiring Mary's 200,000 daffodils in West Potomac Park. I had my camera and took a picture of Mary in a daffodil bed with the Jefferson Memorial in the background. It turned out sufficiently good to inspire the Digest to use it.

F: You lost your amateur status.

C: I did that day, the only time in my life. The beautification stamps that were issued by the Post Office Department last January were also Mary's idea. The first beautification stamp, the one of the cherry blossoms and the Jefferson Memorial that was printed in 1966, was also Mary's idea. She has done many things, beyond donating money, as you can see. She has been a powerhouse of enthusiasm and inspiration for this program.

The notion for the jet at the tip of Hains Point stemmed from her, too. She lives in New York City, in a lovely townhouse, and she also has a country home at Amenia, New York, some ninety miles north of New York City. On her grounds at her country place, she has an artificial lake, about two-thirds of an acre in size. In this lake she built a jet of water that rises about forty feet in the air. The jet is lighted for night effect and is magnificent. From her experience with her jet and the Geneva fountain, she got the idea of building a jet here in Washington.

She and I began talking about this, 'way back in 1966. Mary retained a local artist by the name of Harry Dierken to prepare a rendering to demonstrate how such a jet might look. She and Mrs. Johnson and I talked with Bill Walton, the Chairman of the Commission on Fine Arts, and Libby Rowe to be sure they approved of the concept in principle, because we didn't want to run into problems with these important Commissions later on. Happily,

they approved the principle. We located a hydraulic engineer by the name of A. J. Hamel in Los Angeles and had him come to Washington and consult with us. We told him roughly what we had in mind and shortly thereafter he gave us an estimate of \$160,000. I gave the figures to Mary and she asked that he come up with a design. To make a short story of it, we activated the jet in December 1968. It is a superb addition to the Washington scene. The jet is a column of water that rises 250 feet in the air, or 25 stories; it's lighted at night so it represents quite a—

F: Do you light it every night?

C: We don't right now. Let me tell you what happened. The ice formation in the river about Christmas-time caused the structure to drift. We sent a diver in to examine the anchoring system, and he found that the anchors were not strong enough to hold it in place with the heavy ice pressures. We have removed it, and are now reconstructing the anchoring system on the tip of Hains Point. We plan to put it back in the water in March and indeed it should be working then for all time. This is a project that Mary paid for—\$160,000. The overruns on it were \$17,000, and she also paid for them, for a total of \$177,000.

Right now we have ahead of us a project to do a lovely pool and fountain on the south side of the Jefferson Memorial. Another beautification project in the offing is a sculpture garden, some-

thing Mrs. Johnson and Mary Lasker have been very instrumental in working toward. Without Mrs. Johnson's endorsement and Mrs. Johnson's interest, Mary would not have had nearly the enthusiasm and the inspiration for the things that she has done.

F: They've sort of worked on each other too.

C: They have indeed. They complement each other very well, because one inspires the other.

F: It looks like to me you've got yourself two good lady assistants.

C: Oh, Lord, never in my life do I expect to work with two people who have such a feeling and such a dedication for anything as these lovely ladies. They have been magnificent, marvelous.

F: I want to come back later. I want to go over some of these other trips that you've made. We're about to come to the end of the tape now, and of course we've got all the management of the region itself.

C: Okay.

F: And I suspect I've cut enough into your morning this morning. I've ruined it.

C: Not at all, but I just remembered that I have a lunch date at 12 and it's 12 o'clock now.



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In accordance with the provisions of Chapter 21 of Title 44, United States Code, and subject to the terms and conditions hereinafter set forth, I, Nash Castro of Palisades, New York, do hereby give, donate and convey to the United States of America all my rights, title and interest in the tape recordings and transcripts of the personal interviews conducted on February 25, March 4, March 20, April 25 and May 1, 1969 in Washington, D.C., and prepared for deposit in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

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Interview IV, in its entirety  
Interview V, in its entirety

(2) The tape recordings shall be available to those researchers who have access to the transcripts in accordance with the above stipulations.

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Nash Castro  
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Date

Robert M. Vance  
Archivist of the United States

October 11, 1983  
Date