

Statement Furnished to Dr. Joe B. Frantz  
By John H. Crooker

I came to Texas in 1893 as a boy nine years old. We lived north of Buffalo Bayou and north of the Southern Pacific Railroad tracks in what was known as the old Fifth Ward. I was born on a farm a few miles from Mobile, Alabama, the youngest of seven children. My father died shortly after I was born.

I attended school only through the seventh grade and read law while I was a switchman for the Southern Pacific Railroad. Later I left that job to become clerk to the Justice of the Peace on Preston Avenue in downtown Houston, across the street from where the present Civil Courthouse is. The man under whom I worked liked me very much and knew how hard I was struggling; and when he was ready to retire, he persuaded the Commissioners Court to appoint me in his place. I served as Justice of the Peace until 1914, when I ran for and was elected District Attorney; and I resigned as District Attorney in 1917 to go into the military service.

First, I was stationed at Camp Logan here in Houston as a private, and some of my friends recommended me for a commission in the Judge Advocate General's department; and after some months, my commission as a Major came through. I was ordered to report to duty at Camp Kearney near LaJolla, California.

After the Armistice, I remained in the service for some months to conclude some pending matters, and then returned to Houston

to practice law. I formed a partnership with R. C. Fulbright, who is now dead.

I first met Lyndon Johnson in about 1931, when he taught public speaking at Sam Houston High School, previously called Central High School, here in downtown Houston. At that time, my son, John, Jr., attended San Jacinto High School and was on its debate team. While my boy and his debate partner had won the City and District championship in debating the preceeding year, they were defeated in the finals in 1931 by the team coached by Lyndon Johnson.

I had no connections with Mr. Johnson in any way during the years from then until 1948 when he ran for the Senate. That year, W. Lee O'Daniel announced that he would not seek re-election, and several men ran, but Lyndon Johnson and Coke Stevenson were in the runoff, and ran "neck and neck" to the finish, with Johnson winning by a majority of only 87 votes.

After the State Democratic Executive Committee certified Mr. Johnson's name as the nominee, a legal contest developed and a suit was filed in Federal Court in Dallas and Judge Whitfield Davidson began proceedings there, although those of us who represented Mr. Johnson felt that there was no Federal question involved.

The Fifth Circuit Court was then sitting in Atlanta, as I recall, and I presented the matter to that Court and obtained a stay order.

While the matter was carried to a Justice of the Supreme Court who also granted a stay, I did not handle the matter in the Supreme Court.

As to my relationship with President Johnson after the 1948 campaign, of course I continued to know him during the years he served as Senator from Texas until he became Vice President and I knew him during the years he was Vice President until he entered the White House after the assassination of President Kennedy in November, 1963. While I always felt most friendly to him, I really didn't see President Johnson from the time of his campaign for re-election in 1964 until about February, 1968, when he named my son, John, Jr., to membership on the Civil Aeronautics Board, and designated him as Chairman of that Board. I have a picture on the wall of my office, showing the group in the East Room of the White House the day John, Jr. was sworn in.

I have observed President Johnson for what is now almost 40 years and I think politics, in the sense of a dedicated official rendering great service to the public, is a great science. Political activity is one of the most commendable things in the world; and by and large, I think Lyndon Johnson has remarkable aptitudes for many various achievements. Above all, he has always sought, as the book title says "To Heal and to Build". And I am sure this was never for selfish purposes, but for the public good of people in general. I think Lyndon Johnson is an outstanding statesman and I have certainly enjoyed my acquaintance with him over these almost 40 years.

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August 18, 1970

Dr. Joe B. Frantz  
Oral History Project  
University of Texas  
Austin, Texas 78712

Dear Dr. Frantz:

Receipt is acknowledged of your recent letter in which you again call my attention to a transcript of your interview with me several months ago. It seems to me that whatever you desire to use with respect to my replies to your questions should be embodied in a summary of the interview, as distinguished from a question and answer form.

Accordingly, I have transformed the substance of my replies to your various questions and am enclosing a typewritten draft of it together with an extra copy thereof. I feel certain that the summary which I am sending you covers virtually all of the substantial matters about which you interrogated me and I am quite certain that this summary is substantially correct.

With all good wishes to you and those concerned with your project, I am

Sincerely yours,

*John H. Crocker*

JHC:pw  
Enclosure