

INTERVIEW X covering 1939

DATE: January 25-26, 1979

INTERVIEWEE: LADY BIRD JOHNSON

INTERVIEWER: MICHAEL L. GILLETTE

PLACE: Casa Leonor, Acapulco, Mexico

Tape 1 of 1

G: Mrs. Johnson, today let's talk about the year 1939 and the important events that stand out in that year in your mind.

J: We returned to live at 1910 Kalorama Road, where we had first lived when Lyndon and I were married back in 1934. A different apartment, a rather undistinguished apartment, and it doesn't live in my heart like a good many of the others.

 The activities of the year were revved up. It was a continuation of 1937 and 1938 but with a more assured Lyndon, I felt. One of the major things, of course, was getting the appropriation for the LCRA [Lower Colorado River Authority] loan to buy the TP & L [Texas Power & Light] properties for I don't know how many towns, fifteen or so. It had been a big fight and a continuing fight. I do not remember details; I just remember nights of elation and nights of discouragement. Then in the background there were always the mounting rumbles of the war across the ocean. We passed a big navy base bill and Lyndon became steadily more entrenched as a strong defense man.

 Our life became peopled in that year even more with some of the fascinating

Johnson -- X -- 2

characters of the New Deal: Secretary [Harold] Ickes; the new Justice Bill Douglas was early a friend of ours; Jerome Frank, who I think took his place as chairman of the SEC [Securities and Exchange Commission]; Leon Henderson, an economist; and by now our old friends, Tom Corcoran and Ben Cohen and John Carmody, with whom Lyndon had had so much to do in building the dams; Lowell Mellett, with whom he'd worked on the southern report. Virginia Durr and Cliff Durr, I'm not sure just when they entered our lives, but they were two of the most interesting people we knew. Trips out to their rambling, old country house on Seminary Lane out on the way to Alexandria were always something I loved. The talk would be good. You didn't bother much about the food, but the mental stimulation was first class.

I guess the biggest thing that happened to Lyndon that year was raising the height of the Marshall Ford Dam. I think the appropriation was five million dollars. I began to get acquainted with his way of touching all the bases, so to speak, a thorough preparation and in-depth homework. First, selling the idea to Secretary Ickes, and then getting the director of the budget--winning his approval. Always foremost with him was checking in with the President and getting his approval. Then every member of the Texas delegation he talked to about it, and as many as he could of his other colleagues. Then once having achieved it--and that was the heady wine of success--the next thing to do was to let the folks back home know just what it was going to do for them in terms of more jobs for more men. He made sure the newspapers got that word through his good friends Gordon Fulcher, Charlie Green, I guess Buck Hood probably, and Raymond Brooks. How many jobs there would be, how much the power bill would be reduced.

Johnson -- X -- 3

I remember there was a piece in the paper where, in describing what this would do for the area, he said it would turn the benefits of one of our great natural resources back to the people, instead of sending thousands upon thousands of dollars in profits from power consumption each year to the money centers of the North and East. Lot of congressmen in those days, and with a great deal of justification, looked upon our part of the country as a sort of a stepchild, and we were glad every time we could make a stride in bringing ourselves somewhat more even with the East. Wall Street bankers was a bad word that appeared in a lot of congressional speeches.

(Interruption)

So 1939 was a year of satisfactions and achievements. One of the biggest for Lyndon had to be the extension of REA [Rural Electric Association] lines for the Pedernales Electric Co-op out of Johnson City and the building of the co-op building itself. He got an architect whom he had known in NYA [National Youth Administration] days to design it and NYA labor participated in building it. He put together a whole lot of things of his life and his heart into that building. I think one of the happiest pictures I've ever seen of him in my life was in his shirt sleeves, standing in front of that newly completed building with the broadest grin and a lot of sweat under his arms showing in the picture. It is a very telling picture, sort of the height of his life in many [ways], at least up to that period.

On the plaque there was a more formal picture of Lyndon with his arm around Jesse Kellam, then head of NYA, who participated in building it, and Lee McWilliams, who I think was chairman of the local board of the farmers and ranchers who made up the

Johnson -- X -- 4

board. The plaque says, "Rural Electrification Administration Cooperative Project. To advance the position of agriculture, to enrich the life of the community, to free men and women from the heavy drudgery of the home and farm, this generating plant was erected in cooperation with the federal government by farmers and ranchers of the Hill Country, to whom it supplies the limitless service of electricity, Pedernales Electric Cooperative, Inc., Johnson City, Texas. This building was erected with the assistance of the National Youth Administration." That's really better than five drinks and a great vacation for Lyndon.

As for me, my life continued with taking care of constituents and falling in love with the beautiful places of Washington. I went over and over to the Corcoran, to all of the historic sites within driving distance. The big time of the year was when the cherry blossoms would bloom and just as much the dogwood, and Rock Creek Park and picnics down there in the summertime. That was something I loved all of my Washington years. There was always an exciting event--to me exciting, because my tastes were still bounded by a limited life--an exciting event at the Congressional Club or the 75th Club to take constituents to.

One event of the spring was to go to the New York World's Fair on a special train with a whole lot of congressmen. Lyndon was not a bit good about going on those things, and yet he loved to do things to please me. But his natural bent, his natural determination, was work, work, work. At the last minute we did go. It was a big doings and I enjoyed it to the fullest.

But the thing that I remember best is not actually connected with the fair. We

Johnson -- X -- 5

decided, after quite a while of seeing the fair, we would slip away and see our old friend, Bill White, who had been transferred by the Associated Press to New York. [He] lived in one of those huge apartment houses way out at some spot we had no idea where. He gave us directions how to get there on the subway, because he said it would cost an awful lot to go on a taxi. Well, that is almost the only time in my life when I saw Lyndon *absolutely* unable to cope. We got on this fast-moving machine. It hurdled through the dark. There was nobody on there who spoke English. We kept on trying to ask for the station where we were supposed to get off. We couldn't find anybody who could talk anything that we could understand. I just became absolutely hysterical with laughter. The more questions Lyndon would ask, the more I would collapse in laughter. I don't think he appreciated me a bit. Finally he just grabbed me by the hand, picked me up, and as it stopped we just flung ourselves off of it. It happened to be close enough where we could then catch a taxi and find our way to the haven of Bill White's apartment, where we had a happy reunion.

He still saw a lot of the people that he had lived with at the Dodge Hotel: Bob Jackson, Kay and Arthur Perry. It was in this year that our own staff changed, but I believe that change took place in the fall when we returned. We knew that Sherman [Birdwell] was going to be leaving and we were looking around for someone else.

(Interruption)

G: [Do you want to] talk about the Texas delegation?

J: Yes. It was a very strong, cohesive delegation that Lyndon worked with. The Speaker [Sam Rayburn] was always the head man. I'm not sure; I think he was already speaker by

Johnson -- X -- 6

then, wasn't he?

G: I believe so.

J: Every Wednesday they would get together for lunch in the Speaker's dining room. They would talk about their problems. Sometimes they had a closed meeting; sometimes they brought guests. The Speaker was always the head man to us, a great influence in our lives, someone who Lyndon loved and who loved him.

But there were other giants there, too. From my own district there was Wright Patman, who interests me enormously, because he was a country man from a country region and never lost that touch. Yet he learned how to deal with the great big outside world. He was a low interest man. He became the scourge of bankers. He could stand face to face and do battle with some of the biggest people in the country. And yet when he'd get back home to Karnack and Jefferson, he would be the most simple of country people. I had a great admiration for him.

There was Lyndon's old boss, Bob Kleberg. There was Bob Poage. Agriculture was his love and his forte the whole way through. George Mahon, who early got on the Appropriations Committee and grew with the years, really a great figure. Lindley Beckworth was the youngster of the crowd. Cousin Nat Patman--pardon me, Cousin Nat Patton. It used to irritate Nat Patton quite a lot if there was any confusion about the names. But Cousin Nat called everybody in the whole wide world his cousin. He was from deep East Texas and sort of a professional East Texan. I remember when the King and Queen, King George and Queen Elizabeth of England, came. There was a big reception--I think it was in the Rotunda of the Capitol--and going down the line he called

Johnson -- X -- 7

them, "Cousin George and Cousin Elisabet," while some of us cringed.

There was our neighbor, Charlie South. We had a South and a West, both, in the delegation at that time: Milton West, from West Texas, and Albert Thomas of Houston, the most formidable opponent in debate anybody could ever have. Lyndon, one of the big fights of his life, which he lost, was to get on Appropriations. Albert won. Mighty hard to outdo that man. And Ewing Thomason was one of those sage, wise counselors to whom Lyndon always looked. Lyndon's father used to tell him, "Son, if you ever are uncertain about what to do, just notice what Ewing Thomason does, and just follow right along behind him. And he said the same about Judge Marvin Jones. Judge Jones had been replaced by that time by a young, handsome, affable congressman named Gene Worley. He and his wife Ann became some of our closest friends. Then there was Hatton Sumners from Dallas, quite a character, one of the most conservative humans I've ever known. A lot of stories clustered about him.

So it was a delegation--that's not all, but that's most. Let's see, our two senators were for so many years Tom Connally, a towering figure, arrogant, aristocratic, enormously able man, very intelligent, and then gentle, sweet Senator Morris Sheppard, whose wife was a lovely woman.

(Interruption)

Always, every year, it was our custom for Aunt Effie to come and spend several months with me, perhaps two months at a time, sometimes three or four. Then I would go to Alabama to see her, or maybe she would be at Daddy's, or in Jefferson, for another couple of weeks in the course of the year. So we were together about, I would think,

Johnson -- X -- 8

probably a third of the time out of each year, always, from the time we married until her death. And oh, how she did love springtime in Washington! She and Mrs. [Rebekah] Johnson became great friends, which was a satisfaction to me.

A number of good things happened that year. Maury Maverick got elected mayor of San Antonio. That was cause for elation with all his old friends. He came up and Lyndon had a party for him. Parties were likely to be stag. Everett Looney, who was later to play a great role in our life, came up, and Lyndon had him to a marvelous stag party. They were not all stag. I was included in some--I remember, with Abe and Carol Fortas and Bill Douglas, and many times of good conversation. The New Deal, although battered in some respects and the clouds of war already gathering over us, they were a mighty vigorous, hopeful, determined, generally youthful bunch. We got invited out to lunch at Secretary [Harold] Ickes' home, or farm, in Olney. I think we went possibly two or three times. That was always something that I looked forward to very much.

Also the theater played a part in my life. There was a summer theater out at Olney. I would get some of the congressional wives or maybe a secretary, and we would drive out and have dinner at a beautiful, old country place which I think was probably named Olney Farms, and then go on to the theater. And [we would go] to the National, of course, and then on summer evenings to the Watergate, which has little relation with the Watergate that one hears about now. But it was a barge [which] would be docked on the Potomac at a place, a sort of curve in the river, and there was sort of an amphitheater built there. You would watch band concerts, or ballet, or excerpts from a musical. As I recall, it was free, and it was beautiful summer entertainment. Then on the steps of the

Johnson -- X -- 9

Capitol there would be band concerts on summer nights. All of that I loved participating in. I cannot remember for sure the dates at all, because the years do meld together, but it was approximately along the 1937-38-39-40 span of years, prior to the war.

Then in these years just before the war, the long pattern of Congress meeting in January and adjourning in about June or July got broken up by [having] either longer sessions or adjournment and then being called back for special sessions. I don't remember just how it was, how many or when special sessions were, but I know that they were broken-up years.

One of the high points in 1939 was that the public housing project in Austin, part of it got completed. I think it was the part where Mexicans were going to stay. Lyndon went down to see it and one of his favorite pictures and favorite achievements was to see the sort of housing it provided. He and E. H. Perry had their picture made right out in front of it with a Mexican family, and he's leaning over, playing with one of the children.

He would get to see the President an astonishing number of times, I expect, for a young congressman, usually on the subject of the dams along the Colorado and the REA. Always when he'd come home he would just be on high.

G: Do you recall President Johnson's relationship with Jesse Jones during this period?

J: As I remember, they were not close, intimate, in the way that he became with the Speaker, indeed, [with] some of the very big figures on the stage. But Lyndon respected him as a strong man in an important place who knew how to do what he was doing and was absolutely necessary to keep the economy sound. It was not that warm personal feeling, but it was one of deference and respect, as I remember. Lyndon was a big hand

Johnson -- X -- 10

all his life to try to refuse to be drawn into feuds. Some of his good friends on the one hand would be bitter enemies of other folks with whom he maintained a friendly stance.

G: Let me ask you about Tom Miller while we're on the subject of personalities.

J: Tom Miller was a marvelous man, portly, well dressed, quoted Shakespeare at the drop of a hat, in love with the city of Austin, marvelous storyteller, talked at great length on the telephone. If you got him on the phone late at night, your next day's work, you were liable to go to it pretty bleary-eyed. He had a great personal adoration of Roosevelt. You know, usually when the President would come through town there would be a meeting at the railroad station. Some pretty little girl would present him with a bouquet of roses. Well, Mayor Tom Miller presented him with a bouquet of roses himself! (Laughter)

He and Lyndon early became good friends. They would spend a lot of time together. They would go down to the newspaper together at night. They'd always stop on the way home and have a great big double dip of ice cream because they outdid each other in liking ice cream. The Mayor spoke of himself as a man of an evening nature, and indeed he was. He stayed up late at night. He was very well dressed. He was eccentric.

G: How so?

J: Well, it's hard to describe. He just didn't fit the mold of most people. He was intensely practical on the one hand in being a politician and knowing how to get the votes of different segments of the society. And he had touchy feelings; he was easily hurt. He was out of the ordinary. He was a great benefactor and boon for the city of Austin for which he was mayor off and on for about twenty years, as I remember.

Johnson -- X -- 11

Not that he and Lyndon didn't have their *deep* conflicts, one of which became the fact that Lyndon wanted that cheap power, and when Austin bought a piece of the REA, he wanted it to be known that the power was going to be cheaper. My recollection is that it didn't get cheaper, that since the city owned the plant, the Mayor somehow or another managed to divert the funds saved into other perfectly worthy, perfectly desirable city endeavors, such as parks, swimming pools, recreation, all things that everybody thought was good and Lyndon thought was good. But the Mayor said, well, the city wasn't going to vote any bonds to get those swimming pools and those parks, and he thought they ought to have them. They were going to pay for that power, and they wouldn't holler at the power being somewhat higher. But Lyndon wanted it to be known that you could get the power for less. So that was a lifelong philosophical battle between them which Lyndon lost.

He had great affection and respect for him, Lyndon did, in office and out of office, and toward the end of his life--but that's many years down the road. I'll describe that later.

G: There was some speculation that he might run for Congress against President Johnson.

J: Yes, there was. There was always this talk about so-and-so and so-and-so's going to run. I don't think the Mayor ever really would have run because the rough and tumble, the cruelties of it, he would not have relished. He had his own little fiefdom, sort of, as mayor of Austin. I never really thought that he would run, and it did not, to my belief, trouble the friendship between them.

(Interruption)

Johnson -- X -- 12

Some time during the summer I went home and spent a while with Daddy, as was my custom, and in the district. Then, I remember, in late August, while I was at my Daddy's, I got a call from Lyndon saying that he was going to the Greenbrier Hotel in White Sulphur Springs, West Virginia, with Alice and Charles Marsh, and for me to get right on the train and come right on up, because it was going to be such fun. I was filled with dismay, because I had gone home to see my daddy just taking only my tennis shoes and most country clothes. I knew I wasn't ready for anything as elegant as the Greenbrier. But Lyndon was very persuasive and just said, "Well, you can buy some more clothes."

I got on the train and went up there. I must say, I was a country mouse come to town. Alice was elegant. Everybody there was. Charles always--he knew all about clothes, although he didn't care greatly about them for himself. I think he must have taught Lyndon a good deal about them, at least the places to which we went together, and Lyndon was an apt learner and enjoyed them. I remember feeling very much forlorn and sort of left out. I did manage to go and buy a thing or two. But it's the most glorious part of the world, so green and beautiful. People have been going there for vacations ever since the days of the Revolutionary War, I think.

The talk was much about what was happening in Germany and in Poland and in all the surrounding countries, and what would England do, and what would France do. Charles made it all seem very vivid and very frightening and very close, and close was what we didn't want it to be. We, all the people of this country, it seemed to me, we just seemed to be pulling the curtains around us and trying to ignore it. I don't know why it

Johnson -- X -- 13

wasn't more of a blockbuster of a period to me, since it was so imminent, because I know it happened right soon thereafter, I mean the really beginning, the explosive beginning of the World War. I just remember it as an aura in a heavy cloud.

(Interruption)

G: That fall you had three new staff members: Dorothy Jackson, John Connally, and Walter Jenkins. Do you want to talk about their coming to the staff?

J: Yes, we made a complete change. Dorothy Jackson was the first one who came aboard, as I remember. She was a tall, thin, red-headed, freckle-faced, eager young girl from Cotulla, a place that had made a big impression on Lyndon's life. He knew a lot of her background and family. She was fast and bright.

We made the decision that we would move the office out to Johnson City. So we rented us a little apartment in the old Pedernales Hotel, a big old stone building that at one time was the "opera house," in quotes, and much later a hotel, which it was then, and has since become a bank, really a handsome old building. We got some of Mrs. Johnson's furniture. I remember we had one room fixed up with a pretty sofa that her mother had given her when she started housekeeping back in about 1907, and a couple of comfortable chairs. The rest of it was just the hotel furniture. Then Lyndon got himself an office fixed up in the new Pedernales Electric Co-op building that I described earlier. Dorothy Jackson came with us. There were periods of Lyndon going back to Washington for a [special session]. Perhaps it was the Lend-Lease? Was it Lend-Lease or was it something else that took place along back then?

G: I think it was the neutrality legislation.

Johnson -- X -- 14

J: John Connally entered our lives. I think he formally started working for us in mid-October, but at any rate, we were together in discussing it earlier than that. I would describe him as one of Mr. Sam Fore's boys. He was from Floresville. That's a mighty high recommendation to Lyndon. Senator Wirtz had already interviewed him and given him high marks. He had been president of the student body at the University of Texas. He was in law school at that time. It seemed to me he either graduated or just had maybe one course or something hanging over.

G: I get the impression from the correspondence that almost from the very beginning John Connally was regarded as someone who could take a lot of the burden off Mr. Johnson. That here was someone who could be trained, who could be responsible, who could really be a major assistant. Was that the intent?

J: Oh, yes. It was obvious from the beginning that he was top caliber and he was someone who could handle a big load and leave Lyndon more free to operate.

Then Walter Jenkins came with us a little bit later. Walter had been chief assistant to one of the deans at the University of Texas. But Herbert Henderson was still with us, writing speeches. So that was a foursome. They all roomed, I believe, at the Truman Fawcetts' house, and we were at the hotel.

G: Why did you decide to have the office in Johnson City, rather than, say, Austin?

J: I cannot imagine. Absolutely Lyndon's idea. I suppose [he wanted] a close affiliation with his home town. I really don't know why he decided.

This was a fall when I was not enjoying life to the fullest. I was really not very well. It wound up by me going to have an operation in Baltimore sometime in September

Johnson -- X -- 15

for several reasons: one, a major one, was that by this time we had been married almost five years and didn't have any children. I decided to take care of a physical problem by an operation, also to have my appendix out at the same time. I had gotten down to a hundred and thirteen pounds and wasn't feeling very well. The doctor had actually told me to drink all the milkshakes I wanted. I just have longed for that to happen under different circumstances ever since. In any case, it was one of the few times in my life when I was not physically very up to par.

G: I gather he would come to Baltimore to visit you and they pretty much had to keep him out because he was stirring things up too much or something. Do you remember that?

J: Lyndon in a hospital was a . . . ! (Laughter) There was always a good deal more noise and excitement when he was in a hospital as a patient or as a visitor than I expect the hospital staff would have liked.

G: Then I gather you went to Alabama to rest and recuperate after that, several weeks after the operation.

J: Yes. Always, in one way or another, I was with Aunt Effie for a good deal of each year. I can't say there was any bargain when we married, nothing like that, but there was just a very firm attachment and obligation on my side and a need and an attachment on hers. So I went both to visit my kinfolks and rest and to be with her for a while, as I remember it. But in the fall we were back touring the district once more, in Brenham for instance because there was always something going on in Brenham.

G: Do you remember that Armistice Day barbecue there in Brenham? Josefa was there and I think Mrs. Johnson came that year.

Johnson -- X -- 16

J: I can't precisely, but Lyndon was always a great one for having his family attend those things. Josefa was very pretty and warm and outgoing and would have been an asset in any kind of political gathering because she'd go around and talk to everybody.

I have a picture of all those new members and how young and vulnerable and just, "Oh, world, here we come," they looked. Herbert, of course, was no longer so young. He was one of the most memorable and colorful characters. We were fortunate to have had him. He had problems, but he also had great talent.

G: Now in November 1939 President Johnson unveiled a program for recreational parks on the lower Colorado [River]. Do you remember that?

J: Yes, and that is more interesting in retrospect than it was then, because the dams, as we all thought of them in those days, were for flood control and soil conservation and cheap power. Actually, recreation, which did have its genesis, its beginning, right then, on just a small amount of money, five thousand dollars I think it was, and it was going to be for park facilities around Inks Dam. Lyndon made high flown statements about, "Austin is destined to become the greatest recreational center in America." All of that might have happened much earlier if it hadn't been throttled by the war, because we were so soon propelled--

(Interruption)

--into concentration on war effort, both in all our available money, our thoughts, our concerns, our interests. So recreation along the series of lakes in the Colorado had to wait a while for its bloom.

It was some time in this fall of 1939 that the Corpus Christi Naval Base began to

Johnson -- X -- 17

come into being. The House Naval Affairs Committee made a visit to Corpus. There was the mounting interest in the war, the necessity for preparation. All of that was leading up to training more naval pilots some place; Lyndon worked on making *that* place Corpus Christi. It combined his old love for the Fourteenth District and his new conviction that we had to have stronger national defense and the all-time compelling need for more jobs. So it was something that he threw himself into with a lot of enthusiasm and it became a strong thread that wound through our lives for many years to come, although it was just beginning then.

G: Do you know what his role was on that? Was it working through the Naval Affairs Committee?

J: I'm sure that must have been it. As a member of the Naval Affairs Committee he could dig up all the facts, speak for it with vigor and passion, and just push, push, push at the right places.

G: I was going to ask you about the Maury Maverick corrupt practices indictment.

J: Oh, that was a near tragic, but really funny, episode in our lives. Maury Maverick, running for mayor, had . . . Well, he had earned the enmity of a good number of people who got him indicted for buying poll taxes and for, you know, passing them out to people, and people would go and vote for him. For once, Maury was scared. He called Lyndon and said, "Lyndon, you've got to get Alvin Wirtz to represent me on this." Now he did have some other lawyers, too, but he had more confidence in Senator Wirtz, and he was just determined to get him. Lyndon called Senator Wirtz, and he was just on the verge of leaving the country to take his wife on a long-looked-forward-to vacation trip. I

Johnson -- X -- 18

forget where they were going but somewhere on a cruise. Oh, the Senator just hated to go and face his wife, and yet in the end he just couldn't say no to Lyndon and Maury. So he undertook the case.

As he delved into it, it began to look darker and darker. Because it appeared that some labor unions, or at least the accusation was, that some labor unions had sent a good deal of money down to Texas to help in this campaign, and that Maury, so the accusation went, had gone to the bank and got the money turned into silver dollars and placed it in a basket in some spot where there was a meeting of a lot of people, many of them Latin Americans. Poll tax in those days cost--I forget whether it was two and a half or a dollar and a half. So they were just invited to participate and vote, so the accusation went.

Well, the Senator must have sort of looked at the evidence with a certain amount of dismay and fading heart, but the course he took was just really hilarious. He decided that all that was left open to him was the following: he got a very well-chosen jury and then he got up and said, "For years those easterners, those northerners, had been coming down to the South and taking our money and going back up to the North with it. Here comes somebody who goes up there and gets some money up there and brings it down here to be used by people who certainly needed it." He won it on that basis, sort of a hilarious basis, and they almost laughed it out of court. It was a close call, a very frightening thing. But there was a lot of relief among some of us when Maury was acquitted of it.

G: Do you remember the picnic that was held for the postmasters of the Tenth District at Buchanan Dam?

Johnson -- X -- 19

J: Oh, I sure do. That was at the administration building at Buchanan Dam, which was among many other things built, at least in part, by the NYA, I think, that administration building. It was on a high eminence overlooking the waters of the lake that was backed up by Buchanan Dam. All the postmasters came. It was a middle-of-the-day affair. Lyndon talked over the state of the district, and I daresay it spread out a good deal to the state of the nation, too, because Senator Tom Connally was there and also Senator Wirtz. As I've mentioned, the postmasters were kind of the bellwethers of the district. They kept their fingers on the pulse of the community, and they knew what people approved of and what they disapproved of and what their needs were. There were a good many postmistresses as well as postmasters, too. They were, I suppose, until the Hatch Act put an end to it, one of the foremost appointments available to a congressman.

Yes, it's a picture with a lot of familiar faces on it: Ray Lee and Mr. [John] Bruner and then a lot of Lyndon's staff was there, as his staff always was there, a very young John Connally and a very young Walter Jenkins. And of course I was there. I really got to get in on ever so many of those things. But as I look back on them, I'm sorry about all those I missed.

G: About this time John Nance Garner was announcing for president. It was part of an effort to stop Roosevelt, to prevent the third term, and LBJ, of course, was supporting FDR. Do you remember the episodes here? Maybe we can start with John L. Lewis'--

J: Diatribe against him. Yes, I do. That was an ugly thing in which, in my opinion, Lyndon took no pleasure, the things that John L. Lewis said about John Nance Garner being a labor-baiting, poker-playing, whiskey-drinking, evil, old man. At the same time, when

Johnson -- X -- 20

the Texas delegation was called together by Rayburn to pass a resolution supporting Garner, Lyndon did not sign it because he looked upon it as a prelude to an endorsement of Garner in the stop-Roosevelt campaign. This was mid-summer, or something like that, of 1939. He thought by the next year it would be swelling up into a strength for Garner and he didn't want to be any part of that, not out of dislike of Garner, but out of a very great conviction that FDR was the best man for us. And it was hard to do, because he had to put himself, a pretty young David, against some very sizable Goliaths, including the Speaker himself.

G: This didn't create any tension between him and Sam Rayburn?

J: I'm sure it did, but nothing that didn't evaporate.

G: You know, I get the impression that over the years he had several run-ins with Garner, from the time he was assistant to Kleberg. He wasn't at all afraid of Garner, was he?

J: Well, he always had a sizable respect and deference for old people, powerful people, and it was so with Garner. But he was not in the same philosophical mold as Garner and there was no closeness between them. And Garner could ride roughshod over younger and less powerful individuals.

G: Is there anything else about 1939 that you want to talk about?

J: Oh, at the very end of 1939 Senator Wirtz was appointed undersecretary of the interior, which was good for us, because it meant he would be close at hand for counsel and companionship. Also all of the dams along the river, he knew more about them, had done more about them over possibly a couple of decades, than Lyndon could ever learn. So it was marvelous for Lyndon to have him there, and he brought with him Mary Rather,

Johnson -- X -- 21

his secretary, who soon became a very close friend, and is to this day.

G: I gather L. E. Jones went to work for him, too. Is that right? Do you remember?

J: Well, it seemed like L. E. Jones was in and out, in and out of our office, as was Gene Latimer, so much of the time, from the first moment I knew Lyndon. I do not precisely know whether he was with us at this time or not. But if not, it would have been in some place where Lyndon would have gotten him a job probably. L. E. would [be] perfectly capable of getting the job, but Lyndon would have done everything he could to help him get it. Our same old staff remained close to us all through the years.

Oh, yes. There was one more thing in 1939. My Uncle Claud in Alabama, my mother's brother, had been managing land for me that had come to me through my mother for many years. After I got married, he told me to think about when I would like to take charge of it myself. Sometime in 1939 I got a letter from him saying that he had just sold a pretty nice tract of timber, and he had twenty-five hundred dollars, and wouldn't I like to take at least that much and invest it in something in the town where we lived. At about the same time Charles Marsh had offered to sell us some land along the river on Scenic Drive. I forget just how much it was, because later on we did buy some more from him. But that first tract right along Scenic Drive was not very large, several acres though. And we bought it, as I recall, for twenty-five hundred dollars for the whole thing, the twenty-five hundred dollars. He sold an adjoining piece to Gordon Fulcher, who worked for him at the newspaper. He sold a piece, I think, or at least somehow or another, the Mayor, Tom Miller, acquired a piece which I think maybe he gave to one of his children.

Johnson -- X -- 22

At any rate, we had this really lovely piece of land along the river. We talked about building on it and we didn't. I think we actually got as far as drawing some plans. There were several times when, rather like a timid fish, we approached the bait and never really took it, about buying a house. I can't quite account for it. I must have been a pretty timorous young woman in those years, because I always wanted a home. Lyndon was quite happy just living in first one rented place and then another, at least then. We drove by it innumerable times. We walked over it. We looked at the handsome, big, oak trees. We even cleared out some of the underbrush. I remember one set of plans that we had, we had an estimate of six thousand dollars on the house, and I, frankly, was not very thrilled with a house that modest. I did want something more of a lifetime house than that. The gist of it was that the rush of the years, the many things that we did, kept us from applying ourselves to it with determination, and we did not do anything with it that year or for some time.

C: Did you ultimately sell it?

J: That portion we did. I think we sold it to a dentist named Cherico [?] for what we thought was a very fine price. Too bad we couldn't have foreseen what a fine price would be about ten or fifteen years later.

G: Was that the first piece of property you ever bought?

J: I'm pretty sure it was. We did later, however, buy a larger piece from Charles Marsh which was adjoined to that which was on the steep hillsides behind it. I used to jokingly tell Lyndon that the only way you could get to it was by helicopter, and at that time helicopters were just practically, you know, just like a ship to the moon. Little did I

Johnson -- X -- 23

know that they would be such a part of our lives a few years later. And charcoal burners still lived on it. I mean, they didn't own it or anything, they just moved in, cutting the cedar and burning the charcoal. "Squatters" is the word [for them]. But it was scenic and beautiful.

End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview X

NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS ADMINISTRATION

LYNDON BAINES JOHNSON LIBRARY

Legal Agreement Pertaining to the Oral History Interviews of

CLAUDIA TAYLOR JOHNSON

In accordance with the provisions of Chapter 21 of Title 44, United States Code, I, Claudia Taylor Johnson of Austin, Texas, 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 with me and prepared for deposit in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library. A list of the interviews is attached.

This assignment is subject to the following terms and conditions:

- (1) The transcripts shall be available to all researchers.
- (2) The tape recordings shall be available to all researchers.
- (3) I hereby assign to the United States Government all copyright I may have in the interview transcripts and tapes.
- (4) Copies of the transcripts and tape recordings may be provided by the library to researchers upon request.
- (5) Copies of the transcripts and tape recordings may be deposited in or loaned to other institutions.

Claudia Taylor Johnson 6/20/02
Claudia Taylor Johnson Date

Sharon Everett 5-10-2011
Archivist of the United States Date

Assistant Archivist
For Presidential Libraries

Appendix A

Attached to and forming part of the instrument of gift of oral history interviews, executed by Claudia Taylor Johnson, and accepted by the ~~Archivist of the United States~~ on 5-10-2011.

Mrs. Johnson's Oral History Interviews:

**Assistant Archivist
For Presidential Libraries**

May 26, 1975, with Merle Miller
June 25, 1976, with Merle Miller
June 29, 1976, with Merle Miller
January 30, 1977, with Merle Miller
February 14, 1977, with Merle Miller
August 12, 1977, with Michael Gillette
August 13, 1977, with Michael Gillette
August 14, 1977, with Michael Gillette
February 4, 1978, with Michael Gillette
April 1, 1978, with Michael Gillette
August 6, 1978, with Michael Gillette
October 9, 1978, with Michael Gillette
January 23, 1979, with Michael Gillette
January 24, 1979, with Michael Gillette
January 25-26, 1979, with Michael Gillette
February 27-28, 1979, with Michael Gillette
August 19, 1979, with Michael Gillette
September 2-3, 1979, with Michael Gillette
September 9, 1979, with Michael Gillette
November 13, 1979, with Anthony Champagne
January 4-5, 1980, with Michael Gillette
January 29-30, with Michael Gillette
September 20, 1980, with Michael Gillette
September 26-27, 1980, with Michael Gillette
February 6-7, 1981, with Michael Gillette
February 20-21, 1981, with Michael Gillette
August 10, 1981, with Michael Gillette
August 23, 1981, with Michael Gillette
September 5, 1981, with Michael Gillette
November 15, 1981, with Michael Gillette
January 2-3, 1982, with Michael Gillette
January 10, 1982, with Michael Gillette
January 30, 1982, with Michael Gillette
March 15, 1982, with Michael Gillette
March 19-20, 1982, with Michael Gillette
March 22, 1982, with Michael Gillette

CTJ Appendix A -- 2

March 29, 1982, with Michael Gillette
August 3-4, 1982, with Michael Gillette
September 4, 1983, with Michael Gillette
December 30, 1984, video and audio interview with Michael Gillette
January 4, 1985, video and audio interview with Michael Gillette
February 23, 1991, with Michael Gillette
March 4, 1991, with W. C. Trueheart
March 8, 1991, with Michael Gillette
August 1994, with Harry Middleton (six interviews)
November 5, 1994, with Harry Middleton
January 23, 1987, with Nancy Smith
August 18, 1987, with Lou Rudolph, Jim Henderson, and John and Sandy Brice
August 19, 1987, with Lou Rudolph, Jim Henderson, and John and Sandy Brice
August 20, 1987, with Lou Rudolph, and John and Sandy Brice
August 1994, with S. Douglass Cater
March 22, 1985, with Louis S. Gomolak
July 16, 1996, with Jan Jarboe Russell
July 17, 1996, with Jan Jarboe Russell