INTERVIEW V

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INTERVIEWEE: WILLARD DEASON

INTERVIEWER: MICHAEL L. GILLETTE

PLACE: Mr. Deason's residence, Austin, Texas

Tape 1 of 1

G: Last time we were talking about the WPA and the NYA and some of the projects.

D: Yes.

(Interruption)

G: One of the first things I gather that they did was try to get three CCC camps established in Austin, College Station and Kingsville, so that some of the CCC people who wanted to go to the University [of Texas] or A & M could do that. That was in August.

D: Bear in mind that the CCC is no part, nor was no part of the NYA. So I'm not sure whether I know what you're talking about there.

G: I realize that, but evidently this was one of the first things that Mr. Johnson did when he got there. I guess this was just sort of an interim thing to provide jobs and lodging for students who were working their way through schools. You don't have any memory of that at all though?

D: CCC camps?

G: Yes.

D: No. No. I don't believe it happened. What's your authority for it?

G: The files at the time show that he was writing Aubrey Williams and proposing this, the letters that he wrote at the time to Aubrey Williams. It stated, of course, that this was not really NYA, but this was something he felt needed to be done.

D: Well, I just have no recollection of it. It never happened, did it? You don't have any indication that it ever happened?

G: No, no indication that it ever went into effect.

I guess really the critical thing right away was to get students jobs, wasn't it, so they could [continue their education]?

D: Yes. One of the things was to get a program set up. See, we only started in July, and universities were opening in September. [We had] to get the mechanics of the thing set up and working by the enrollment time at the schools so that the student could know whether or not it was going. If he could get an NYA job, why, he might have enough funds with what little help he could get from home to go to school. Sure, that was critical. There may have been an attempt to set up structures for them to live in, but it didn't work out that way and I have no recollection of it.

G: Did you have any problem getting the young people informed that this program existed?

D: Not really much in connection with the colleges and universities, because the institution would delegate some one or more people on the faculty. At the University of Texas I remember it was Dean Moore, dean of student life, [who] supervised the program. And through the communications, the Daily Texan and things like that, it was not difficult.

Also at that time, why, the Depression was the biggest news in the country. There was a lot of publicity. Some of it which we of course tried to generate.

(Interruption)

G: How about the problem of getting enough teachers? This seems to have been a difficulty early on.

D: Enough teachers?

G: Yes.

D: No. NYA didn't employ any teachers as such for the first year or two. We had project supervisors. The problem of assisting young folks was broken down into two main divisions. One was called student aid. I explained that by we worked through Dean Moore at the university. He had I'm sure a committee to help him, but they decided, under certain ground rules which NYA laid down, who was eligible to receive part-time jobs. University students, we'll use that as an example. The university provided work for them. Some of them worked in the library. Some of them worked in offices of the various administration offices around the university. Some worked for professors as their assistants. Whoever they were working for kept time sheets on the number of hours they worked, and they were paid by the hour and not permitted to make more, I believe, than fifteen dollars a month. Now that, at that time, helped considerably. It wouldn't today.

Say they worked in a professor's office, helping him grade papers and things like that. He would turn in a time sheet to Dean Moore's office with this student's name, the hours worked, the days worked and

so on. The Dean's office would compile a big payroll, twice a month I believe, which they would submit to us. Our finance people would check it and send it on to the Treasury Department. Treasury, division of disbursement, had an office in San Antonio. So the flow of the aid went from the Dean's office to our state office in the Littlefield Building to the Treasury dispersing office in San Antonio, and the checks were mailed back. I forget whether they were mailed to the institution for distribution or directly to the student. But that was the flow of it. Now that was the student aid program. High schools had a similar arrangement, but a high school student could earn only six dollars a month. That was not as big a program as the program in the colleges and universities. Now that was program number one.

Program number two was what we called the work project program for out of school youth between sixteen and twenty-one, or sixteen and twenty-four maybe it was. I've forgotten. I think it was sixteen and twenty-one. That's where we furnished part-time work, called a work project. We hired supervisors for those. Now two or three years later we developed work projects into training programs also, where in addition to working fifteen hours a pay period, something like that, they would spend certain hours in training classes. But that came several years later. It developed as the program went along. So at that time we did have a problem with getting teachers to teach welding and the crafts, carpentry and bricklaying and things like that, that they actually used in their work projects. But they'd have certain hours in which a skilled craftsman--

(Interruption)

Now tell me where we were. Yes, we would employ skilled craftsmen. Sometime maybe the same fellow who was supervising their work project would spend two hours a day, three evenings a week, something like that, in teaching. Of course they got no pay for those classes as such, but the supervisor got paid for his teaching job.

G: Let me ask you about the freshmen college centers that were established, or proposed, in October, 1935. Do you remember those? There were fifteen or twenty of them for students who couldn't afford to go off to college. They were programs set up in high schools, whereby freshmen credit could be given.

D: Yes, but I don't remember too much of the details about that. I don't believe that lasted too long. But there were [some], particularly in smaller towns where there was not a college. The high school superintendent may have set up some freshmen college program. But I'm sorry, at this stage of the game I don't remember too much about that.

G: There's a note here in my files that says that that idea was proposed by President [Cecil] Evans of San Marcos.

D: I don't recall.

G: Presumably early on there was a meeting of Texas college officials, in September of 1935, right after you got started. Do you remember that, in Austin I think?

D: No.

G: Or San Marcos, one of those?

D: At that time I was concerning myself primarily with the administration of the program, getting it started and getting personnel and things like that. Jesse Kellam, who was the first assistant to LBJ, was concerned primarily with the educational phases of the program. He would have been handling that part of it. I do remember there was a program of freshmen college training, but I'm sorry, I don't remember much of the details of it.

G: Did you have much problem getting responses from Washington, from Aubrey Williams' office, or whatever?

D: No, no. No, they were always accessible. The only problems that we had that I recall was they were feeling their way and might send us one set of instructions this week, and next Friday they would rescind them and say do it another way. That was the only problem that we had, was trying to follow the regulations that came down. During the first few months of that, or the first year or two, I concocted the saying, which I've used many times since, that nobody ever unwrites a regulation. They just write another one, but they never unwrite a regulation.

G: That's true, I guess.

D: Yes.

G: Early on I understand that Mr. Johnson was able to get a larger appropriation for the NYA in Texas than he had originally been given. Do you recall his efforts to increase the [appropriation]?

D: Yes. Yes, that's right. That's right. He made a case showing that we were reaching the needy, had reached as many as we could with the funds that we had, and that we had a program going and that there were

many more here that needed the assistance. He was never bashful about asking for more money or more help. Oh, yes. Yes.

G: Who did he get the money from? Was it Aubrey Williams himself?

D: You know, I don't remember too much about that because that he handled himself. Now [on] these work projects and things like that he had assistance, but that end of the game he handled personally. I know we got it, but I don't remember the details of it because I wasn't involved in it.

G: I also have a note that in January, 1936, there was some possibility of moving the NYA office to San Antonio, and this was something that the WPA evidently wanted done but the NYA didn't want to do.

D: That's correct. Because at that time when we were setting up work projects they had to flow through the WPA's engineering staff for approval. They thought that it would just be better. I believe their finance division had to certify to our payroll, as I explained the college student payroll a minute ago, the work project payroll the same way. I believe their division of finance had to audit them or double check them or something on that. Mr. Drought and maybe some other folks felt like it would be better if we were all situated right there together. LBJ had strong feelings otherwise. He had gotten the program underway, and it could operate better and operate smoother, and he could get things done better standing aside from the WPA. Again, that was a battle he fought. If it was a battle--maybe that's not the correct word, but it was an administrative decision that was made in Washington. In many cities, as I understand it, a number of states, the state office of NYA

was sort of an adjunct to the state office of WPA. But that was not true in Texas, never was.

G: Do you know who made the decision in Washington, or how the President [Johnson] was able to win that point?

D: No, offhand I don't. You see, Aubrey Williams, who was administrator of NYA, was deputy administrator of WPA. He worked under Harry Hopkins. Harry was his boss, and President Roosevelt was Harry's boss. Where along the line the decision was made, I don't know. I don't know. But President Johnson I know was able to prevail on whoever had to make the decision.

G: Did you get an opportunity to see Lyndon Johnson and Aubrey Williams together or to gauge their relationship?

D: Not much, because Aubrey Williams was very busy. He came down here once or twice, but I don't recall seeing them together much. LBJ would go to Washington. He very seldom ever took me when he went up there, so I didn't see them together on a one-to-one basis, no.

G: Did he admire Aubrey Williams?

D: I think so. I never got any indication that he didn't. He was a great fellow for loyalty. If he hadn't admired him, why, I think there would have been a breaking off. I don't think he would have stayed and worked for a man that he couldn't be loyal to.

G: I may have mentioned this last time, but I gather he had a good friend in Washington with the WPA named Lawrence Westbrook. Do you recall?

D: Just vaguely, yes.

G: Did he ever enlist his support, I wonder?

D: I don't know. I don't know about that. You may have other sources of information that would reveal that, but I can't be helpful on that one.

G: I have one notation here that Mr. Johnson said in a letter that there was the problem of having to depend on agencies over which you had no control; of one, getting youth certified by a relief agency and assigned by the division of employment, and two, getting them registered with the National Re-employment Service.

D: That's right. Those were all problems. You see, when you have several agencies involved, as we did then, you had to go through each one of them. They had their own ways of doing things. LBJ was a man who could not abide mediocrity. I don't mean that these folks were mediocre, but they had their own pattern and their own speed for doing things. He had a speed which was usually an overdrive. He expected everybody else to operate that way, and they didn't. So we did have problems, numerous problems.

G: Was he able to streamline this process any?

D: It improved as time went on, yes. It didn't improve immediately though. There was some backbiting and infighting between the different agencies involved. You see, first the youth's family had to be certified as eligible for relief--and during the Depression days a lot of folks were--by the Texas Relief Agency, which later became, I believe, the Re-employment Agency. Then they had to flow through the WPA assignment offices. Way on down the road, several years later, that would change, but for a long time it wasn't. And that's where a lot of the problems came, just breaking through this step by step by step procedures that had been set up.

G: Where was this assignment office?

D: The assignment offices were in districts. WPA had districts all over the state. It was too big to try to operate from a state office. The state office was an administrative thing, but they had district and county offices and sub-offices.

G: How did this backbiting affect this?

D: Well, our NYA district director would go to the people and say, "Look, I've got a project approved here. The youngsters are there ready to go to work if we can get them certified and assigned." Sometimes they'd just say, "All right, we'll get to it as soon as we can. We're busy with other things." Or, "Well, now look, we're trying to get their daddies to work. We've got the same problems you have. It's more important to get the head of the family to work than it is to get a son or daughter. So just stand by and take it easy. We'll get around to it. We're working as hard as we can." But our mission wasn't to get the daddy to work. We had another mission. We felt like ours should be fulfilled as quickly as the other side of the picture. It was just a question of who does what first and how much overtime do you work, how fast do you work, and things like that. So naturally there was a lot of friction.

G: Was he able to win these people over, do you know?

D: To a large extent. It took quite a while. When you say win them over, it wasn't just one way one day and suddenly another way the next day. The thing was just a gradual change. Any new program, I've learned since those days, is pretty hard to implement. Because everybody has

their own ideas about how it should be done or how it shouldn't be done, and it just takes a while to establish par. We were just going through a shaking down period, with LBJ just shaking a little harder than anybody else is what it amounted to.

He had a great saying all of his life. He had no use for can't-do people. He was a can-do man. He used that frequently. He sometimes got exasperated and felt like some of these folks that said, "Well, wait, we got to get the papa certified first," were can't-do folks. He would push and shove our district men to push and shove the people out there to move a little faster.

G: Was the WPA coordinating committee in Washington that had to approve certain projects a trouble spot, too?

D: I think so. I don't remember the details on that. Because as I say, he handled most of the Washington problems, and I had very little connection with it.

G: I suppose that Texas' physical size and the distances made it very difficult to administer just because of its geographic proportions?

D: Well, of course it did, and there was a lot of travel involved. These young district men we had out there would maybe be setting up a project in one county seat today and trying to get another one started a hundred miles away the same day. He might work until eleven-thirty in the morning at one and just jump in his car and get to the other one by one or two in the afternoon and try to work there. Now, after the programs got under way, we had local supervisors which you could get on the phone and talk to. But you're dealing now with the first

few months of the first year, which was the most hectic part of all of it. After a few years the wrinkles were ironed out and it ran rather smoothly.

G: Let me ask you a little about this advisory committee that he established, and I assume he selected the people himself. You've looked at that list before. Do you remember his contacting these people? [It was] really a blue ribbon [committee].

D: Yes. It's some of the real leaders of the state. No, again, that's a thing that he handled. I met them because they would come in. He'd call them. It wasn't just an advisory committee in name only. They would come and sit down maybe once a month for the first few months and spend all day going over the problems and things, problems that we had, also ideas which he wanted to project. He was a great idea man. Before he went to the public with any idea, why, he would sound it out with these folks and get their reactions and their help and their advice. Frequently they'd say, "Well, now wait. Have you thought about this?" And maybe he hadn't.

G: Can you recall any particular instance where they gave him some guidance in that way?

D: No. I wish I could, but at this stage I can't.

G: Do you recall his ever tapping their influence to get something done or get a program approved? These men must have had a lot of connections and influence?

D: I don't recall, but I'm sure that he did. For example, Beauford Jester was at that time or had been chairman of the board of regents at the

University of Texas and was a leading ex-student and a prominent attorney. Of course [he] later became governor. But he could be very helpful all over the state. Lutcher Stark was a capitalist and philanthropist from Orange, I believe, a very influential man in the southeast part of the state. Matter of fact, every man on there was very influential and very helpful to him. He used their advice and I imagine used their influence where he needed it, because he was not immodest to ask for help if he needed it.

G: Senator [Alvin] Wirtz I imagine was the most available since he was right in the same building, wasn't he, just up on the next floor?

D: Yes, he was. He was. Senator Wirtz, in many respects, was his senior adviser on many, many things, many, many things, including the NYA advisory board. I suspect that Wirtz helped set this up. He was the unofficial adviser before he was ever named to the advisory board.

G: Do you recall anything of their association during the NYA years, any particulars that show Senator Wirtz' influence?

D: No, but I want to tell you a story about Senator Wirtz as to how he advised people. After LBJ went to Congress and Jesse Kellam became state director of NYA, he also leaned on Wirtz a lot. He said to me one time, "When you have a problem and you go and ask Senator Wirtz about it, he doesn't tell you what to do. But after you talk with him a while, you know what to do." And I thought, "Isn't that a great thought? He doesn't tell you what to do, but you know after talking with him. You know what to do." I think that typifies Wirtz. He was a wise man, one of the wisest men it's been my privilege to know.

G: He was also quite fond of Lyndon Johnson.

D: Oh, yes, yes, yes, yes, very fond of him. As long as Wirtz lived there was a very close, personal friendship between them, and still now between Mrs. Wirtz and her daughter, Ida May, and Lady Bird.

G: What was Senator Wirtz like? How would you describe him to someone who never met him?

D: I would say he was a little larger than an average-size man, but he seemed larger because of his personality. He was not a domineering personality. He was a very friendly and ingratiating fellow. But he is a man that you instantly respected and soon learned to love after you got acquainted with him, a very personable and outgoing fellow, easy to talk to. He always had the knack of talking, when he was talking to you, about you. I think that's maybe one reason for his great popularity. He never talked about Wirtz. If you visited with him, he talked about you.

G: Was he a good raconteur?

D: Oh, yes, yes, yes, he was. Yes, yes, very personable, very likeable. When he came into the room he was the kind of a fellow that everybody rushed over to shake hands with. He had time to visit with every one of them before he shook hands with the next one. He never missed anybody. To that extent he was a good politician, though he was not primarily known as a politician. He had been in the state senate early in life. But he was known for his wisdom and for his friendship and helpfulness to many people.

G: He was an expert on riparian rights, I guess, water rights. Did he conceive any NYA related projects that tied into some of his interests in the development of [water projects]?

D: I don't know. But let me tell you a story I doubt has ever been documented. You know, Wirtz later on became under secretary of interior. He told me this story one time. We were traveling across country together in his automobile. He said shortly after he went to Washington as under secretary of the interior, why, he said to one of the young lawyers in his office, "Bring me the file on--" some water project out in the West. The young lawyer had been there when Wirtz came, and these were Wirtz' words, "I guess he assumed I was just a political appointee, there for political reasons. He brought me the file, and then he started to explain to me about the project that the file concerned, and what the law was on it, and so on and so on. I let him go for a little while, and I said, 'Young man, sit down.' For the next hour and half I gave him a lesson in water rights. I never had any trouble with him trying to advise me after that."

G: (Laughter) That's a good story.

D: Yes, it is. It's a good one. And a true one.

G: Do you remember which project it was?

D: No, no, no, no, no. I don't think he told me. We drove from Washington to Austin together and spent two or three days [together], so I got other stories like that I don't recall. That just reminded me of it when you said riparian rights.

G: Did you ever hear the story of his defense of Maury Maverick in that corrupt practices indictment in San Antonio?

D: If I did I've forgotten it.

G: On the one hand he seems to have been a real populist, and he advocated rural electrification, a lot of these things, and on the other hand he represented a lot of wealthy, conservative clients. What were his politics? Could you get a measure of what he believed in?

D: Well, I think you've pretty well analyzed Wirtz. As far as human rights were concerned he was very liberal; from an economic standpoint he was more conservative. I think he realized that in promoting water projects and things like that he was assisting both of his philosophies, because to create new water projects was certainly an aid to the human rights things in which he believed. But it also added to the overall economy, would be a good thing from the standpoint of the economy of the country. Of course the private power companies were dead set against some of the things he did in creating public power and things like that. But Wirtz was a fellow that could sit down and talk on a level with the president of any power company in the United States and know what he was talking about, and whether they liked what he was doing or not, they had a great respect for him.

G: I'm wondering why he didn't continue in politics himself.

D: I don't know. I don't know the answer to that one. Have you heard the story about the time that LBJ said, "Tell the folks to go to hell"? That was a power company that they were having a struggle with over I guess it was some rural electrification program. One of the private power companies was fighting what they were trying to do. It had been going on for a year or two, and Wirtz finally was trying to work it out, working between the two. LBJ was congressman at that time, and he got

exasperated with the private power company's position and said, "Well, just tell them to go to hell." Wirtz said, "All right. I'm having a meeting with them tomorrow. I'll make a deal with you. I'll tell them to go to hell if you'll make them go."

G: Anything else on Senator Wirtz that you recall?

D: Not at the moment. I'm sure after we finish I'll think of some more. Maybe we can pick that up at some later date.

G: Those are marvelous stories.

Let's talk about the roadside parks.

D: All right. The roadside parks were one of the early developments in connection with work projects for out of school youth, those between sixteen and twenty-one who were unemployed and in need of employment, in need of money to sustain themselves. That's where I talked a few moments ago about getting the WPA and the re-employment people to make the certification and the assignments. Just the mechanics of getting there was a problem.

But the roadside parks was a project conceived, and there's been various persons given credit for it. I really don't know. My first acquaintance with it was when LBJ went to the state highway department and talked to the highway engineer and came back and had a staff meeting and told us what had been discussed. They were talking about it and thinking about it, and we kicked it around. LBJ had just hired an engineer of some ability named L. B. Griffith, Llewellyn Griffith. He got Griffith's idea on it, and between he and Griffith and Jesse Kellam, going back several sessions with the state highway department and maybe

with the Governor probably, came up with the idea that we would build roadside parks up and down the highway with labor to be furnished by NYA, the youth workers, under the supervision of the highway department. It was a federal project sponsored by a state highway department. They would furnish all technical supervision and the land upon which to make the parks, something I'm sure they had in the back of their mind. Maybe they'd done some of it already, I don't know.

But between the highway engineer then, who I believe was Gib Gilcrest [?], and LBJ and the staffs of those people, the thing was conceived. As I recall we built them in practically every part of the state, roadside parks where people could stop and rest, and built picnic tables and turnouts. Since then the state highway department has kept it up and enlarged it, and [they] now have rest centers all over the state. But back in the thirties the only rest center we had usually, sometimes it would be to make a step over the fence where people could go into the woods beside the road. But the thing gained its popularity in the thirties under the leadership of Lyndon Johnson and the highway department, who I believe was Gib Gilcrest.

G: That's the name I have here. Did he have to persuade Mr. Gilcrest?

D: I don't know. That's another one of those meetings I didn't sit in on. I would not think so, when he got the picture of what they could do, because Gib Gilcrest was a fine man and a fine engineer and a fine road builder. We had very little administrative problems with it because the highway department had the engineers. They knew what to do and how to do it, and we had the labor. It was largely labor.

Sometimes there was a little money spent on building picnic tables, but a lot of those were built out of rock and cement, so that was a material that could be near at hand. Strong young backs could pick the rocks up and put them together.

G: The first one I understand was just south of Austin, is that right? Do you remember that?

D: Seemed like it was, but I've forgotten now. See, the highway's changed since then, and I don't know just where it was. But it was probably a pilot project. I'm sure we didn't wait for it to be completed. It may have been completed first, but they were working all over the state.

G: I've read the story, and it may be apocryphal, and I'm not sure it pertained to a roadside park, but that one of the early projects was planned, and the President [Johnson] decided he'd have the news media there and get some publicity out of it. They got all the equipment and the materials and the site, and no youth showed up. Do you recall that? From then on he made sure that all the youth were there.

D: No, I don't. I don't recall that. It could have happened. I have no recollection of it.

G: I gather that in large measure his attitude on publicity was rather conservative, that he never talked about things that they planned to do but just what had been done and what they were actively engaged in at the time. Was this an active directive that he [followed]?

D: I think it was a philosophy that he pretty well followed all of his life, that it's much better to talk about something you've done than to talk about something you're going to do, hope to do.

G: Do you recall Herbert Henderson's role in helping plan the roadside park idea? Did he have any input at all that you're aware of?

D: I don't know. Herbert had input into a lot of things. He was a very brilliant man, newspaperman as a background and a writer and an amazing fellow. He may have had. I'm sure from the standpoint of publicizing it, when it came time to publicize it, that Herbert had a lot to do with it. But I don't recall in those early days his [input]. But he sat in all the staff meetings and made contributions, so he would have been a part of it.

G: A related project seems to have been highway beautification, planting trees along the highways. Do you remember that?

D: Yes, that was a natural follow-up to the parks.

G: Whose idea was that?

D: I don't know. In those days we were young men involved in doing, and whose idea it was, you know, didn't make a lot of difference. I just don't remember about whose idea things like that were, because ideas grow sometimes. You don't know where they spring from. Suddenly they're there, and you implement them. Somebody was originating them, but I was concerned primarily with implementation.

G: How about the elimination of traffic hazards, protruding mailboxes and things like that, putting railings along bridges? This seems to have been an active program also.

D: I don't have any recollection of that. I would think that that would be the highway department, because they had safety engineers and folks like that. I don't think that NYA ever took any significant part, at

least certainly not in originating ideas like that. There may have been places later on in which we had a project to do it, just where the highway department didn't have enough funds or enough labor or something and they wanted to put in safety railings and things like that. [There] well could have been projects, because it was the type of thing which lent itself to work, to unskilled and semi-skilled youngsters working under supervision of a highway engineer.

G: I have a note here that says that LBJ wanted to make motion pictures of his pocket-size parks, I guess to use for publicity value. Do you remember the pocket-size parks?

D: Well, the pocket-size parks were the same thing as the roadside parks, as far as I know. Yes, later on there were some motion pictures made I think, again, primarily to take to Washington and show the folks what we were doing and what we could do, justification for the money we were spending and that which we hoped to spend. Maybe we needed some more. Maybe we had projects awaiting funding. As I say, he was never bashful about asking for what he needed. So I think the movies, that if they were made that it was primarily for that purpose. I don't remember ever showing them publicly locally, so I'm sure they were shown to the people in Washington who were concerned with allocating money where it would be most usefully used.

G: Do you remember the junior placement service in Fort Worth, job placement service?

D: Yes, but I don't remember too much about it. If you talk to Tony Ziegler--have you talked to him? Tony was the district man in Fort Worth

who could give you more on that. Or C. P. Little. C. P. was concerned with that a lot. Have you talked to C. P. Little?

G: Yes. He's a good source.

D: He lives in Virginia now. Winchester, Virginia.

G: Placing jobs with private industry in general, did you do much of that?

D: Well, what we could. At that day and time there just wasn't a lot of private industry to place folks into like there is now. We encouraged the youth to apply any time he had got any sort of a skill. For example, if he'd learned enough on these roadside parks to be a bricklayer or a stonemason or an assistant to a stonemason, then we would encourage them to register with the employment service as a stonemason's helper. So in that way he might get a full-time job rather than just a part-time. Bear in mind, these were only part-time jobs. The papa might work forty hours a week, but not the youth. I think [he could work] fifteen, maybe. I've forgotten. It was limited to something like that; it was part-time work.

G: There was a project called Glenrose Camp for unemployed women. Do you remember that one?

D: Yes, I certainly do. Then there were several all over the state. Yes. After the program was under way it appeared that in the work projects there was very little for girls, and they were just as needy as the boys. ERA is no new thing. People were advocating it back in the thirties and pointing out the fact to us that the girls were being neglected. A number of very well trained and useful women were brought in as supervisors and then these projects set up. Glenrose, I don't remember too

much about the details of it. It was one of the earliest ones, though, for training of girls. I don't remember various things, where they could get employment. If they were unskilled, unemployed, they were just more or less hopeless.

G: This one was apparently closed down because of bad weather. It had been a very good camp and had good supervisors. Do you recall the problem there?

D: Because of bad weather? No. No, no, no, no. I don't.

G: How about La Villita?

D: La Villita is a gem and a jewel which still shines today, some forty or fifty years after it was conceived. I guess we would have to say it was conceived by Maury Maverick, pushed by Maury Maverick, built with NYA labor and supervision. I don't know, I could talk for hours about La Villita, but it's so well-known I think I'll just let--if you have any particular questions that you want to ask me.

G: Can you recall the development of that project? Was this something that Maury Maverick and LBJ worked on together, or was he still director when that was conceived?

D: I don't remember when it was first conceived. The implementation of it came over a period of several years, after LBJ had gone to Congress. I don't think it was under way before he went to Congress. But La Villita, as you know, means little village. It was early San Antonio which had fallen into decay. People had overlooked it. The city had grown around it. It was just a little blighted area down in the middle of San Antonio, and Maury conceived the idea of reconstructing it and sold everybody on

it, Jesse Kellam and the folks in Washington. I'm sure LBJ, as a congressman, did a lot of helping on selling Aubrey Williams and the other folks, of making a sizeable expenditure of money over a period of several years. San Antonio was full of unemployed youth, largely the Latinos. Now sometime they call themselves Chicanos. They are, by nature, craftsmen and artisans. So they were used, along with of course the Anglos who were certified, in the building of La Villita, or the reconstruction of the little city, the little village, which is there today. [It has] thousands of visitors every year.

G: Anything else on La Villita? Did Maury Maverick have any opposition that had to be overcome?

D: I suppose that any opposition he had would have been from folks who say, "Well, why spend money rebuilding those old buildings," or something like that. But I don't recall that he really had any.

G: In September, 1935, LBJ addressed the American Legion convention in Dallas. Do you remember that occasion?

D: Not specifically, no.

G: These are just designed to trigger memories.

D: All right, all right, all right.

G: Then in November there was an ex-students' meeting in San Marcos, and he spoke to that. Did you go to that?

D: I don't remember. I've been to many ex-student meetings there, but I don't specifically remember that one. I don't think I did. I don't think I went. I'd remember it.

G: He later spoke at Baylor University, to the faculty and students, about NYA. Do you remember that?

D: No. I didn't go on many of those trips. We had other things to do, and he was well able at handling those by himself.

G: How about his association with President Roosevelt during this period? I think that the President came down to dedicate that Texas Centennial Exhibition in Dallas and stopped along the way to dedicate an NYA park or something. Do you remember that? June, 1936.

D: June of 1936. Well, I didn't attend it, so I just don't have any definite recollection of it at this stage.

G: I'm wondering [about] the planning of it or getting him down there?

D: I do recall a couple of visits that Mrs. Roosevelt made down here.

G: Do you?

D: Oh, yes.

G: Can you talk about those?

D: Certainly. At Denton, Texas, they had at that time. . . .

G: The chapel there?

D: Well, the chapel, but I'm trying to think what the institution was called. It's now Texas Woman's University, before that [it] was College of Industrial Arts or something like that. Anyhow, it was a woman's college. Dr. [Louis Herman] Hubbard was president of it. Somebody comceived the idea that on the campus of the woman's college, where they had a thousand or two or three thousand women students, that there ought to be a chapel where they could go and meditate and worship if they didn't want to go to the church of their choice. Some of them

didn't go to church. So that was an NYA work project. Out-of-work, out-of-school, unemployed youth built the little chapel in a beautiful setting, in a clump of trees on the campus. It was used later--a lot of girls got married in it, you know, and things like that. But Mrs. Roosevelt came down for the dedication of that. She spoke at the dedication there. We had a very nice service. Again, as I say, the ERA was operating in those days. That was a project for the girls at the college. It was a beautiful thing, simple, and I assume still standing there, unless in their overall planning they put something else there. It was the last time I heard anything about it. It was called the Little Chapel in the Woods, I believe.

G: It's very handsome architecturally.

D: Yes, yes. Yes.

G: Anything more on Mrs. Roosevelt's visits?

D: Yes, she came, I believe, at Gonzales' Warm Springs Foundation, which now has seven, eight or ten buildings, you know, for treating paralytic children and things like that. In those days it was just getting started, and it's my recollection that NYA built the first or maybe the second building there. I don't want to say the first; I think it was the second. But again, that was a work project under the supervision of skilled builders. The unskilled labor was furnished by NYA. The building is still there. I saw it a year ago. Mrs. Roosevelt came down for the dedication of that. Of course, that was something that was very close to the heart of President Roosevelt because of his affliction. This was the Warm Springs Foundation in

Texas, where many children were treated and still are today. She came for the dedication of that building. I was there for that. I was there at the chapel, but I was not at the earlier one which you mentioned, when President Roosevelt came to Texas.

G: Then I guess there was another occasion where President Johnson was at the White House with other NYA state directors and saw President Roosevelt then. Do you remember anything about that?

D: No, I don't. I have no recollection of that.

G: Did he ever talk about President Roosevelt in those days? Do you recall his feelings for President Roosevelt while he was NYA director?

D: Oh, yes, he was very much a Roosevelt fan. He was devoted to Roosevelt, and he was all of his life.

G: What did he say?

D: He just thought he was a great man and a man of great vision. As to specifically what he said, I don't remember, but I know what his attitude was. He had a great admiration, respect, and almost love for the man. And so did I, and so did most of the young folks he had around him. I used to say that I felt like when I started to heaven I'd have to go by Roosevelt and get my ticket validated.

G: He of course met him in Galveston after his election to Congress and rode [his train].

D: That's right, but that was after his NYA days, you see. He'd finished his NYA program when he met him there. That's correct. That story's well known.

G: Did he ever talk to you about that occasion, the details of it, what they talked about?

D: Oh, I don't remember that he did. I remember it all happened, but I don't remember him relating the incident or anything like that.

G: You were still here with the NYA in San Antonio then?

D: Oh, yes. I had moved from San Antonio back here about that time.

G: You had the opportunity to get to know his Uncle George very well over the years.

D: Yes, I did. I did. I remember Uncle George with great fondness and admiration. I met George Johnson, who was his paternal uncle, oh, shortly after 1930, when Lyndon went to Houston to teach school and I was teaching in San Antonio. I'd go to Houston to visit him, and he was living with his Uncle George and Mr. [John] Bright, another uncle. I met him there, and I'd see him every month or two or three for the next eight or ten years, as long as he lived.

George was a man that was very knowledgeable but very modest. He lived a rather frugal and modest life and never married. However, living with Uncle George, Uncle George had his widowed sister, Jessie Hatcher, and her child Ruth, and he was taking care of them. I believe LBJ lived in the house with them when he was teaching school down there. So when I went to visit him I visited Uncle George, Aunt Jessie and Ruth.

George, I'm sure, had a profound influence on Lyndon. Lyndon was twenty or twenty-one years old when he went down there. George at that time was probably in his late forties, but they associated daily. George had a car, Lyndon had none. They were both teaching at Sam

Houston High School. George taught history and government. Lyndon was teaching debate, public speaking. They drove to school together and back together, and so they just lived together for the year and half or two years that Lyndon was there. Of course, they saw one another frequently as long as George lived. But after Lyndon went to Washington, why, George stayed there and taught until he died in his early fifties, with a heart attack I believe.

But he was a scholarly man, a very gentlemanly fellow, and a very modest sort of fellow, which was not a particular trait of the Johnson family. They were all rather aggressive folks, outspoken. George would speak out if you engaged him in conversation, but he didn't take the floor immediately. He had to sort of be pulled into a situation to where he would [speak]. He was the most knowledgeable man on American history I was ever associated with. He could just tell you dates and situations of everybody from the landing at Jamestown on down to the present day. He was a fountain of knowledge and took great pride in it, and I'm sure was a great history teacher. I've often wished I could have had classes under him, but I never did.

G: He did some studying at the University of Colorado, didn't he?

D: Yes, yes. I remember now that he was up there one summer at least, maybe two or three summers, maybe working on a master's degree. But he was up there. Matter of fact, he and I made two or three vacation trips together.

G: Did you?

D: Yes, when I was working, after about the second or third year in NYA we had got to the point where we could take a vacation. First year we couldn't. He and I made a trip together to the West Coast, went out through and saw the Carlsbad Cavern, Grand Canyon, and West Coast, Yosemite, and back through Boulder, Colorado. We spent a day or two there. He was visiting some of his old friends that he had when he was [there earlier]. I think maybe the previous summer he had been there. In those days teachers would teach nine months out of the year and then go to school during the summertime, and George went maybe two or three summers to the University of Colorado. I have forgotten, but I know we did go by. We spent a night or two nights there, and he visited some of his friends.

G: Did LBJ ever go to the University of Colorado or take courses there?

D: I don't think so. I don't have any recollection of it.

G: I wonder if he ever took any by correspondence or anything?

D: I don't think so. The only school that he ever took that I know of after he got his degree at San Marcos was when he went to Washington to work for Mr. Kleberg. He went to night law school some there. But he got so busy he had to drop out, and he never finished it. But as far as taking correspondence toward an advanced degree, if he did I have no recollection of it.

G: How was George Johnson different from Sam Ealy Johnson?

D: Sam Ealy Johnson, Lyndon's father? Well, I would say in the matter of aggressiveness. Basically that was about the difference. Mr. Sam Johnson was a fellow who was--when I say aggressive, he was conversationally

aggressive. He would speak out rather freely on many subjects and was a rather wise man. He was well versed in many things. The Johnsons all had very keen minds and remembered everything that they ever heard, that they ever read. George was just not quite as quick to tell you about it as, let's say, Sam Ealy or some of the rest of them were. That's basically the difference. George was a little bit timid almost, modest maybe is the way to describe him. But other than that, why, I don't know how I'd distinguish him from Sam Ealy Johnson.

G: Did Uncle George talk about LBJ's teaching or his youth?

D: Well, yes, of course. He was very fond of him, very proud when he won all of the debate contests that he did, and looked on him sort of as his boy. Ruth was his girl. Though he had other nieces and nephews, they maybe weren't as close to him as having him there living with him, driving to school and back every day. I'm sure he counseled him a lot and was helpful to Lyndon in his early weeks of teaching.

G: Anything else? You know, he's someone that we never got a chance to interview, of course--

D: No, it's too bad, too bad.

G: --and you probably could shed some light. You probably spent as much time with him as anyone.

D: Well, Yes. I went on another vacation trip. He and I went to Mexico City together, probably the summer after we went to the West Coast. I spent those two vacation times with him. When I go to the cemetery now and see his grave I just weep that he couldn't have lived longer.

G: Anything else on his relationship with Lyndon Johnson.

D: Not that I know of. I'd say it was almost a father-son. Certainly he

was a very fond Uncle that was helpful to him and advised him, and admonished him at times. I'm sure that the admonitions were remembered, if not heeded as of the moment. I think he had a profound influence on him at an impressionable stage of his life.

G: He was very thrifty, I understand.

D: Yes, yes, he was, very thrifty. And on a schoolteacher's salary he was able to take care of Aunt Jessie and Ruth. He may have helped Lyndon some, I don't know.

G: The story goes that LBJ was there in Houston and got a call from Kleberg's office, or Congressman Kleberg, asking him to go to work for him, and that he counseled with Uncle George. Do you remember the details of that story?

D: I don't remember the details of his counseling with Uncle George. I'm sure that George advised him to go.

G: How about teaching?

D: Yes.

G: Why would he have done that?

D: Because he was thinking that his future would be broadened by going into service like this, which subsequent events proved it was. I might say--I think I've never told this little story before, but after the decision was made that Lyndon should go to Washington, why, he'd just been like the rest of us. He never had a dollar ahead on anything. To make a good impression when he arrived in Washington to go to work for Mr. Kleberg, he wanted to appear properly dressed. So he borrowed Uncle George's overcoat--it was wintertime--and my suitcase. That's about all I had. I did have a pretty nice leather suitcase I had bought out

of a pawnshop. So with my suitcase and Uncle George's overcoat, he made a trip to Washington. A couple of weeks later I got the suitcase back--through parcel post I guess--with Uncle George's overcoat in it, said, "Please take this coat back to Uncle George." (Laughter)

G: He was, in many ways, like a father to him.

D: Yes, he was in many ways like a father, many ways like a father.

G: And yet I guess they were very different because, as you say, he was quiet.

D: Yes, the modesty and timidity of Uncle George never came through on LBJ. He was outgoing and aggressive, as everybody knows.

G: Well, that's an interesting portrait. I appreciate all the details on that.

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview V]

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