

INTERVIEW I

DATE: September 7, 1984

INTERVIEWEE: B. F. "TOM" DONALD

INTERVIEWER: Michael Gillette

D: My father, B. F. Donald, wanted to name me after Tom Campbell, the nominee for governor [Thomas M. Campbell, governor of Texas 1907-1911], but my mother put "B. F. Donald, Jr." on the birth certificate. I graduated from high school in Fort Worth, then went to Texas A&M. My brother lived here in Alice, and I came to visit him and decided to stay. I got a job as teller at the Texas State Bank. I was secretary of the Jim Wells County Democratic Party for four or five years.

After elections, the precinct election judges bring the tally sheets in to the county secretary, who takes them before the executive committee to have them certified. The tally sheets showed how many votes there were for each candidate. The election judges would take three copies of the poll tax list, three copies of the voting list. The county secretary would present his copy to the executive committee to certify.

The election [the 1948 Democratic senatorial primary] was held on a Saturday. Various officials brought in poll lists. They all came in but [Box] 13, the Nayer [Elementary] School voting place. It was tardy for two or three days. The county executive committee had gotten some word from poll leaders that so many votes had been cast, then the total was later about 200 votes more. Luis Salas [the Jim Wells County election judge] brought the returns in to me. I just certified them. I just mailed them in. [?] Holmgreen had the ballots. We had the tally sheets.

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The county executive committee met in the tax collector's office in the courthouse or in the grand jury room. E. M. Brownlee was there. The county chairman called the meeting to order. The procedure was to read the returns: so many votes for LBJ; so many votes for Stevenson. Brownlee saw the voting list for 13 and said wait on this. "We're not going to vote on this." But [?] Martens called for a vote to certify the returns and his motion carried. Brownlee voted against it. Brownlee was religious. When he thought something was wrong, he didn't want to have anything to do with it. Brownlee kicked up a stink and told me there was going to be a federal investigation.

Coke Stevenson and company came into the bank to see the voting records. They entered the bank in an intimidating manner. Frank Hamer, the Ranger with him, was packing two or three pistols. Kellis Dibrell was there. They said that Kellis Dibrell was with the FBI, but when I asked him for identification, Dibrell said that he was no longer with the FBI. Coke introduced himself and said he wanted to see the list. They wanted to take a picture of the list. The county attorney had said no pictures. The county attorney told me that the public was entitled to see the records but not to copy them. They looked at the voting list.

Harry Adams looked at the list and wrote down three or four names. When he started copying names, I took the list away. The scuttlebutt was that Adams had come over at the request of Jake Floyd. Floyd was very close to Stevenson.

G: Describe the voting list.

D: It was a poll list that you go in and sign. The last 200 names were in the same handwriting. For some reason the last 200 names were either written by the same person

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or the similarity was so close that it would take an expert to tell the difference. The last 200 names were all in the same color ink, whereas the earlier voters' names were written in different colors. The last 200 were written in good hand by a person who wrote well. Luis Salas was a telegraph operator; he wrote well.

G: Who told Salas to add the votes?

D: I think that word came down from LBJ's headquarters to maybe someone in Lloyd's organization to add votes. We had a pretty good organization here in Jim Wells County. Ed Lloyd would have known about the added votes; he was the Parr leader in Alice. [George] Parr would have known.

G: Did LBJ come down to South Texas after the election?

D: No, I didn't see him. I think I would have known if he had.

G: Did LBJ talk to Parr in the aftermath of the election?

D: I think some of his people did. John Connally came down to Jim Wells County prior to the election. LBJ came once to Alice in a helicopter during the campaign.

The trial came as a surprise. I went to Monterrey, Mexico, on the advice of my attorney, Ed Lloyd. I talked to my attorney. He asked, "Aren't you building a house?" I said yes. I had to go to Mexico for four or five days during this ruckus to get some tile for the house. My wife didn't know where I was.

G: Did you get any tiles?

D: Yeah, I got them in San Antonio.

I think that I stayed on as secretary until the next election. I left the voting records in the bank vault filed under "real estate." I had the only copy. I forgot about the

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records and left them there when I retired. I learned later that all of the old files were thrown into the incinerator.

Epefano Betancourt and Marcellino Aguayo were the janitors who burned the ballots in Duval County. They mistakenly burned the run-off ballots instead of the ones for the first primary. They needed more empty ballot boxes for the November election.

Coke had promised to appoint L. E. Jones to district judge; Coke told Parr yes but appointed someone else. Jack Pope had been elevated. The scuttlebutt was that Shivers had engineered the other appointment.

George Parr told me LBJ never saw or spoke to Johnson in twenty years after the 1948 election.

G: Did LBJ help Parr in getting a pardon?

D: John Nance Garner arranged for Parr's pardon.

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B. F. DONALD

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This assignment is subject to the following terms and conditions:

- (1) The transcript shall be available for use by researchers as soon as it has been deposited in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.
- (2) The tape recording shall be available to those researchers who have access to the transcript.
- (3) I hereby assign to the United States Government all copyright I may have in the interview transcript and tape.
- (4) Copies of the transcript and the tape recording may be provided by the Library to researchers upon request.
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<u>Thomas P. Donald</u>	<u>May 17, 2006</u>
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