

INTERVIEW I

DATE: May 4, 1979
INTERVIEWEE: L.T. (TEX) EASLEY
INTERVIEWER: MICHAEL L. GILLETTE
PLACE: Mr. Easley's residence, Alexandria, Virginia

Tape 1 of 1

G: Let's start briefly with your background. You're from Fort Worth, is that right?

E: Yes, I was born and reared in Fort Worth. I was christened my dad's initials, so really as I grew up I was called L.T. On passports and official documents and things, why, it's Louis Thomas Easley, but I was never called that in my life. I was just called L.T. until I went to the University of Missouri, and being from Texas back in 1928, why, not too many were from Texas. They hadn't heard of anybody's initials much, so it was a lot easier to call me Tex. So that's where I picked up that.

Then I worked on the Denver Post for five years and that was natural they called me Tex there. So then when I came to Washington with the Associated Press in March, 1937, why, again they called me Tex. Then in fact for about thirty years while I was with the AP I had this weekly column called "Texans in Washington." For a few years my by-line was L.T. Easley, and then it became L.T. (Tex) Easley and then just Tex Easley finally.

Then I retired from the Associated Press in 1967 and went with the House Committee on Agriculture as their public relations/

Easley -- I -- 2

press relations man. The House Ag. Committee then was chaired by Congressman Bob Poage of Waco. I retired last year.

G: What year did you come to Washington?

E: Reported to work for Associated Press on Monday morning, March 15, 1937.

G: Okay. Did you know Lyndon Johnson at all before you came to Washington?

E: I did not. Of course, I knew who Lyndon was. I had been working on the Dallas Times Herald when this vacancy occurred with the death of Congressman [James] Buchanan in Austin. I knew about Lyndon Johnson's role as NYA administrator and then being a candidate, and was very aware of the campaign, the election campaign, in which he was [involved], because I was on the Dallas Times Herald at that time.

When I came here to Washington I thought I was going into foreign service, because I had applied to the AP to go into foreign service. So to my surprise that very first morning they said, "You're going to be on what we call the regional staff. You come up from Texas, you'll be the Texas man. Your primary duty will be to cover the Texas congressional delegation and all other prominent Texans and Texas events that occur or anything that's going on in Washington that's of particular interest to Texas. Most of your stuff will be printed

Easley -- I -- 3

only in Texas Associated Press papers. If it's newsworthy elsewhere it will go over the other wires, some of it elsewhere in the United States and occasionally world-wide." Fortunately for me, Texans at that point already were so prominent that lots of the stuff that I wrote saw the light all over the nation and a lot of times world-wide.

G: Do you recall your first contact with LBJ?

E: I don't remember specifically. I know that I was assigned to cover him, as I did all of the Texas congressmen. I'd already met the other members because I'd been here about a month before he showed up on the scene, so obviously I met him right away, but I don't remember specifically the first time. But of course I remember lots of occasions, because my routine at that time was almost every day to contact every member of the Texas congressional delegation, including the two senators. I'd either see them in their office or see their staff or see them on the House or Senate floor. That was one of the main ways I had to see them--when they were on the floor and I could call them off and into the Speaker's lobby and talk to them.

G: Do you have any idea how he got appointed to the Naval Affairs Committee?

E: Well, I know that you've already researched this a lot so you can double check what I will say, because I'm simply going by recollection. That was a long time ago now. But I know that right away I began to learn of a lot of the behind-the-scenes

Easley -- I -- 4

battles that went on in Washington because of that committee assignment. Albert Thomas of Houston wanted on the Appropriations Committee, and he had the [seniority]--almost everything then and still largely, goes by seniority. Of course that's a powerful spot, on the Appropriations Committee. But Lyndon certainly had the backing of the White House. The White House didn't dictate to Congress but up to that point the White House had certainly been exceedingly influential in Congress. I say up to that point because that was about the point of the fight over the Supreme Court enlargement plan. That was when Congress really split up and from then on you had a great group, a faction in Congress which no longer followed Roosevelt's wishes. Up to that point we'd used the term "rubber-stamp Congress" a lot because in the first few years almost any bill the President sent up would be routinely approved.

Anyway, in this fight for this committee thing, Albert Thomas wanted it. Then there were people who would have liked Lyndon Johnson to get that vacancy. After all, his predecessor was chairman of that committee. That was a powerful spot just to be on, either Appropriations or Ways and Means. I can only recall back now that there was apparently an awful lot of behind-the-scenes pressure going on as to whether Lyndon Johnson would get it or whether Albert Thomas would get it. In the end Albert Thomas got it. Of course, Lyndon then went on what was still a very good committee, the Naval Affairs Committee.

Easley -- I -- 5

G: Do you recall who favored Albert Thomas and who favored LBJ?

E: No, I'm sorry, I don't.

G: Now Thomas didn't go on there in 1937, did he? Appropriations?
Wasn't that later?

E: Well, that may be so. I don't remember, because we're talking about forty-odd years plus ago, but it may not have happened with that vacancy. Because things don't always happen that way. A lot of times if a state gets in a quarrel among themselves, why, that gives another state which is trying to get a spot [a chance]. Now, I don't know whether that happened. Have you got the records there?

G: Well, let's see.

E: Anyway, way back there and sometime soon after that. . . . So it was certainly my impression from back there and recollection all the way through that there was no love lost between Albert Thomas and Lyndon Johnson, all the way through the years.

G: Were they rivals in other ways?

E: I wouldn't say they were, and this same thing holds true, and it built up over the years between Lyndon Johnson and a number of other members of the Texas delegation who did not see eye to eye philosophically. But I really don't remember any really harsh words, but they certainly had differences and they certainly had a healthy respect of each other.

I might say that makes me think of the period when Lyndon had unsuccessfully run for the Senate first to fill a vacancy created by the death of Morris Sheppard. So W. Lee

Easley -- I -- 6

"Pappy" O'Daniel was governor and in the interim he appointed Andrew Jackson Houston who was the son of Sam Houston. Andrew Jackson Houston died, I think at age eighty-seven, after about a month in office. That was an interesting juncture, and of course I got to know him, too. Then Pappy ran, and of course to everybody's surprise [they were] in a real hot race at the end. As I recall now, the Austin paper put out one edition having Lyndon winning that special election. But in the end enough votes came in from the boondocks so that Pappy O'Daniel came here. So there was a sort of hostile relationship between those two.

I know at this juncture Lyndon, characteristic of what he did all the way through, appointed a really smart staff. They needed space for their work. I think his was the very first office then in what they used to call the attic, the fifth floor of what's now called the Cannon House Office Building. Up to that point there were just the four main floors, and what they called the attic floor--there were only one or two elevators to get up there. I think Lyndon was the first one that had offices up there. But by going up there he was able to have a lot more space, about double the space. He was really working, and even in those days he was building up an organization and supporters all over the state for another try for the Senate.

Anyway, I would go to his office and see either him or his staff. Then I would go over--later, not directly, but during

Easley -- I -- 7

the course of the day, I'd be over on the Senate side and I'd go in Pappy O'Daniel's office and see him. Of course, being with the Associated Press I really tried to be as objective and fair as I could be, but the other person doesn't think you are. So a lot of times Lyndon would say, "What do you and your friend Pappy O'Daniel have doing today?" or this or that. By the same token, sometimes Pappy would be asking me, "How are you and your buddy LBJ doing?"

G: He secured five million dollars to complete the Marshall Ford Dam project in the summer of 1937. Do you remember his work on the Colorado River, finishing those dams?

E: I only remember of his aggressively working for it. I, myself, now had never worked around a legislative body before, not even a state legislature, so I was learning a lot that was going on here and I know I was really impressed a lot. I first assumed that Lyndon did it all, and he sure did an awful lot, but obviously a good deal of the groundwork must have been laid with the authorization and all this by his predecessor, who obviously was a powerful man as chairman of the Appropriations Committee. But anyway, Lyndon Johnson did grab the ball immediately and started successfully pushing for appropriations, that initial one you're talking about and then others. Then not only on the Colorado River--that's where his

Easley -- I -- 8

fight and his interest primarily was in the early years, but later he was successfully pushing for appropriations for dams and projects all over the state.

G: How about his voting for minimum wage or anything of this nature? Do you remember that vote, his position there?

E: No, I don't.

G: On another occasion he and other southern congressmen met with FDR to attempt to secure a cotton subsidy. Do you remember that?

E: Well, no. I certainly do not, because after all, I was covering the waterfront for other subjects and all over the town, but primarily on the Hill with other people and subjects.

But certainly he was always in on things like that, particularly because, as I mentioned to you when we first met before you started recording here, it was obvious to me even as a newcomer that Lyndon Johnson certainly had the entree to the White House--in a remarkable manner and far more so than a lot of his colleagues from Texas who had been here for many, many years. I think--I'm certain, there was a degree of jealousy and resentment by some of the old-timers. Here this young fellow could just go down to the White House almost any time he wanted to, figuratively having a key to the back door.. So he did go down there a lot, because that's the way I'd get the news a lot on things happening. On the other hand, some of these other congressmen who had voted against Roosevelt on various issues--and

Easley -- I -- 9

that's just the way the ballgame is played in Washington to this day--why, they wouldn't be invited to the White House.

G: After his visits to the White House would he talk to you about them himself or would you hear it from other people?

E: Well, again, I certainly can't remember any specific details. But in the first place, Lyndon Johnson was a smart operator and he knew his press relations. I emphasize press relations at this point, because there were then no radio-television galleries. There was no television even in use at all; it had hardly been invented. There was no true radio network. So he and all these other congressmen depended almost entirely on their name being printed back in their home district, on the reporters for the newspapers. I might say the Associated Press had, by all odds, the widest coverage in Texas and there were both dailies and weekly AP papers all over the state. You didn't even have a separate gallery, of course, for radio and television. You now have galleries for periodicals and magazines.

So to answer your question, Lyndon was smart in his press and public relations from the very beginning. He would call me and the other Texas reporters, but particularly me at that point because so far as I know, there was no special correspondent at all for the Austin papers or any of the papers that circulated to any degree in his district. They were Associated Press members. So that was part of my job also, to call his office every day. So I

Easley -- I -- 10

would be seeing him or his secretary, those people, almost every day. If they had something they would call in to give it to me.

G: He had a reputation I think for getting news of projects that were approved ahead of other congressmen and even senators, didn't he?

E: Yes. Now that you have brought the subject up I'll certainly elaborate on it. It got to be a very touchy subject, and maybe you brought it up on purpose; maybe you knew this. But as Lyndon--I keep saying Lyndon because we're putting it in retrospect in the picture at that time. Of course, after he became president we called him Mr. President.

Lyndon Johnson impressed me from the very beginning when I first met him as being not only capable but as an ambitious young man who had his sights even then on the presidency. I remember John Connally, the John Connally who was later a Texas governor and so forth, was his secretary for a while. You'd go into the office, and John was sitting there at his desk, and there were one or two other secretaries--they didn't have big staffs like they do now, but John was his number one secretary. But he was really getting things organized, the Johnson office was. I can remember one occasion I went in there and John Connally picked up one of these little three-by-five index cards, you know. He said, "Just a minute," he wrote on this, "Tex Easley, AP." He said, "Just a minute," and so he went inside through the closed door and then of course promptly I was invited to come on in. But the point I'm making is that

Easley -- I -- 11

they really, from the very beginning, were keeping an index and file on everybody that came into that office as well as correspondence and so forth.

Then after Lyndon was defeated in the special election for the Senate, in my opinion and from my observation of all that went on there, he was really in earnest building up an organization for a Senate race. He had a good head start over most all the congressmen, no matter how long they'd been here, because of his close relationship with Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Roosevelt family. Elliot Roosevelt then was living in Fort Worth I believe, or had for a while. He'd married a Fort Worth doctor's daughter, I think.

So one of the ways he was able to build up a state-wide organization early on was through the Rural Electrification Administration. Lyndon was very aware of all this and all of the politics and the organization. Because, after all, he had not only worked as secretary to Dick Kleberg as congressman, but then as Texas NYA administrator. He was bound to have made a lot of state-wide contacts and knew how to do these things. Well, as time went on--and this is in the period before he ran and was elected to the Senate--he had such close relationships with the White House and specifically with the REA first, in my recollection, that he would get the advance word of a grant, of an REA project. There was nothing that meant more to the farmers and the people in a whole county or several counties than the fact they were going to get electricity where they'd had nothing but coal oil lamps before.

Easley -- I -- 12

So Lyndon got that. Of course as soon as he would get the news, the quickest way to get it to these papers was to call Associated Press, and then the United Press, now United Press International, but then UP. He would call the others, but they didn't have near the coverage that the AP had. They did not have in those days, as did the AP, a special west wire which went through Kansas City and branched on down to Dallas, then a relay all over the state.

So Lyndon or his office would call me right away on these things. Well, it wasn't long before when I would send this story out, that the congressman of the district involved would call me up, because I also wrote for his hometown paper, whatever it was: San Angelo or Pampa or Marshall, Longview. All those are Associated Press papers, were then, are now. Well, that congressman would get the news, but he might not get it first. Then he would call me. It put me in an embarrassing spot. He would naturally call because he was interested in his district newspapers. But if Lyndon got it first, and through me it got to those papers just in time to make an edition, which it did sometimes, Johnson would get the publicity. The fact that he was announcing a grant or loan--he wasn't giving the money, but he was announcing it--nevertheless that got his name printed in a favorable light. So it wasn't long before I was beginning to get squawks. These other congressmen would say, "What the hell do you mean giving Lyndon Johnson [credit],

Easley -- I -- 13

announcing this in my district?" I said, "Well, he called me with it, and I didn't feel I could in good honor call you up and say, 'Hey, do you know this is going on?'"

As you can well imagine, this didn't go on very many months until enough of the Texas congressmen had been almost alienated by this sort of a situation that they then got together and worked out an arrangement. So then Lyndon Johnson, because he knew it was smart to get along with people, worked out an agreement for a joint announcement between the senator and the congressman from the district involved.

G: Was this while he was senator or after he had lost that first race?

E: Well, I beg your pardon. This went on some after he was senator, but it went on some when he was building up this organization.

G: While he was still in Congress?

E: While he was still in the House, yes. That was what would really burn up a House member who then of course would take it up with the head of the REA or other federal related [agencies].

G: Can you recall a particular congressman who might have had this happen to him?

E: No, I really can't, but I'd say this happened with at least six or seven.

G: You can't recall the name of a specific one that called you, though, on that?

E: Not to the point of putting it on the record, no.

Easley -- I -- 14

E: Not to the point of putting it on the record, no.

G: Really? That's a good story though.

E: Oh, well, it's the truth.

G: Anything else on LBJ and his associations with the other members of the Texas delegation, Sam Rayburn for example?

E: Well, my impression is that they developed a lot over the years. I don't think they were very close in the beginning, because bear in mind that when Lyndon Johnson took his oath in the House, Rayburn was not the speaker. I believe he was majority leader at that point. I know he was not speaker. While he was a power and then later became speaker, I don't think that he had the closeness and relationship--I had this feeling at least--with Franklin D. Roosevelt that Lyndon Johnson did. I think Lyndon Johnson tended to emulate Franklin D. Roosevelt later. Franklin D. Roosevelt liked to have a lot of young smart people around him--at that time Tommy Corcoran and [Benjamin] Cohen and people like that, and Lyndon Johnson fell right into that category, a real smart young man.

Anyway, just from my observation, and of course I was quite naive on the Washington scene when I came here because I'd covered nothing bigger than a courthouse before, but I don't think they were so close. But as time went on, it seemed to me they got closer as they knew each other better. Of course, Mr. Rayburn knew Lyndon Johnson's father, so he had that advantage of a relationship. But anyway, as they got older, and

Easley -- I -- 15

then certainly as Lyndon went over to the Senate, why, they were put in a position of working together in their leadership roles. And then I think they certainly became much closer.

G: How about Maury Maverick? Do you recall LBJ's relationship with Maury Maverick in the early years?

E: No, I don't. Maury Maverick, of course, was kind of the epitome of the New Deal at that time and was one of the leaders of it. But I don't remember their relationship. They must have gotten along amicably.

G: Anything on LBJ's support for public housing and slum clearance? You know that Austin Public Housing Project was a real pioneer effort there.

E: Well, his support would be in line with his philosophy on that. Generally speaking he supported all of the New Deal programs. I might say now in that regard, when I say he supported all New Deal programs, you remember when Lyndon first ran for the Senate he certainly had the great support of Franklin D. Roosevelt. There are some people that thought then when he lost, and Pappy O'Daniel won, that it might be that they just overplayed his closeness to Franklin D. Roosevelt. Of course, if he hadn't done that he wouldn't have been known state-wide, because O'Daniel was known state-wide as a governor, and Lyndon up to that point was not. So there's a neat question about how far he should go. Some people think he overplayed it.

Easley -- I -- 16

Well, anyway, you come then to the time that he ran and was elected to the Senate. There was a lot of opposition to him--he was running against Coke Stevenson, and Coke Stevenson of course represented and was a symbol of conservatism. It was a close fight as you know by the closeness of that famous vote. So Lyndon was put in the position at this time of trying to shed himself somewhat of this great reputation that he had among some people as an ultra-liberal. Liberals in that case had nobody else to vote for but him. So there was a period then in a lot of his press releases and statements and other things where a lot of people thought, and certainly it was my observation, that he was trying to do all he could to show himself in a conservative vein.

Jumping way ahead, after John Kennedy was assassinated and Lyndon went to the White House, if my memory serves me correctly, his first overnight guest was Houston Harte, publisher of the San Angelo Standard Times and other papers in Texas. I knew Mr. Harte quite well as one of my bosses, so to speak. He'd been a director of the Associated Press, owning a lot of AP papers, so forth. So I knew him quite well. Like most all publishers he was a pretty conservative businessman. Well, he wrote [an article]. I don't know whether you've read it but you might find it very

Easley -- I -- 17

interesting to read it again now. He wrote a long article which was sent on the Associated Press wires all over the country, giving his opinion of what kind of a president Lyndon Johnson would make.

Now I'll get to the point and why I bring this up, because at one point Lyndon was certainly known as an ultra, ultra-liberal and at other times he had tended to be getting a lot of conservative support. You take this article, this article published by Houston Harte all over the United States. As I recall that lengthy article, he forecast that now that Lyndon Johnson was in the White House, we will really find that he is basically, essentially, a very stable conservative businessman. He certainly was a pretty well-established businessman by that time because of his radio and television stations. The gist of Mr. Harte's article, as I recall it, was that we would see a lot more conservative, stable government, balanced-budget type government, if you please, now that Lyndon Johnson was in the White House. Of course, it wasn't too long after that that a lot of people then began to see that we had a lot of programs that harked of the New Deal period. Certainly in civil rights I don't think anybody since Abraham Lincoln deserves the praise of the black people more than Lyndon Johnson did for the rights that he brought them.

Easley -- I -- 18

G: How did you feel about him politically? Did you think he was conservative or liberal or middle of the road?

E: Well, all right, now you've asked me, I'll tell you I think just exactly in line with what I've said, almost every politician to a degree has to wave with the wind some. If they don't, some demagogue will jump in and take advantage of the situation and then they won't be in office long. So the trick is to try to vote your true convictions as much as you can or avoid getting in a jam, a squeeze. Some of them have done that very successfully, more so than others.

Of course, Lyndon, running like he did, faced first the problem of getting elected in Texas and with a political climate [that] changed from one time to another to where everybody was all for the New Deal and all these New Deal measures and they were very popular all over the United States and in Texas, and then you had a change of climate. Then as he ran state-wide he had to become more conscious of state-wide organizations and increasingly of labor. Now when Lyndon Johnson was first elected to the Congress, unions were a negligible factor in politics in Texas. They weren't very much of a factor until after World War II. But then, as Lyndon Johnson became a national figure running for president--you know he ran for president on his own first in the 1960 elections--he had to have a lot broader appeal than Texas. So, anticipating national campaigning, I know as Senate leader he certainly had begun then to liberalize his philosophy and his votes. He knew

Easley -- I -- 19

more and more that he had to have the support of labor unions and large organizations like that. So I think that he certainly shifted backwards and forth over the period. I wouldn't be overly critical of him for that because almost any guy, if he stays in office, has to do this to a degree or else he just doesn't last.

G: Let me ask you some more specifics about these early years. Did you ever observe his activities on the Naval Affairs Committee?

E: Well, I remember seeing him sitting in there in that old ornate Naval Affairs Committee room, which was in what's now called the Cannon Office Building. Now, of course, it's been merged with others and is the Armed Services Committee. I remember seeing him sitting in there and participating in discussions, but I don't remember anything specifically.

G: Did he ever talk about Carl Vinson, the chairman?

E: Well, I can't remember. I can't really remember that.

But speaking about Lyndon's role, Lyndon was, as everybody says and was true, a behind-the-scenes type operator. He was really effective in the cloakrooms. I hardly remember a speech that he made in the House, where Texas had some great orators, like Fritz Lanham and Martin Dies. Incidentally one of the last survivors of the old-time school of oratory, though he seldom now orates in such manner, is the incumbent congressman of the old Lanham district. He is the current--Democratic--majority leader of the

Easley -- I -- 20

House, Representative Jim Wright of Fort Worth. He can really be eloquent when he wants to.

Anyway, Lyndon didn't develop his power in speaking on the floor or even in committees but in face-to-face contact with people. He had a very personal, intimate manner of talking to people. I'm sure you've heard this before. But he would talk to you, it would be a one-on-one operation. He would get right up against you and then take your lapel and look you in the eye. I'm one year older than Lyndon, I think he wore glasses for nearsightedness. Anyway, I wasn't wearing glasses but I was beginning to get farsighted and Lyndon would get me by the lapel and pull me up to him to convince me of something. I could hardly keep my eyes in focus. I'd almost have to push him away to get my eyes in focus. But anyway, that's the sort of a real personal contact that he would do. When they would talk about button-holing--well, he did it literally. That's the way he did with members when he would be talking to them. Of course, he had his facts. He always, as I say, had a smart staff and he would get this staff ahead of time to dig up convincing data and supporting facts. And then he would get a member back in the cloakroom or in the hallway or wherever he would see him, and he would corner him and he would talk to him.

G: There was in 1938 a good deal of competition among the airlines for routes into Texas, and I guess tied into airmail service and things

Easley -- I -- 21

like that, I guess a fight between Braniff and Eastern, and some congressmen would take one side and others the opposite. Do you recall that at all, the politics of that?

E: No. There was so much going on. Mind you, I was concerned--well, of course, basically all Texas but also to a degree the whole country, but Texas and the Southwest. When you take an airline fight, you're talking also about the other end of this route, and maybe the other end was Phoenix or Miami or New York or St. Louis. I covered an awful lot of those fights.

In fact, Eddie Rickenbacker, as you know, organized Eastern Airlines and he was a very smart, hard-driving, hard-nosed businessman, if there ever was one, as well as being a hero of both World War I and World War II. I don't know whether or not this got to be a fight getting into Austin between Braniff and Eastern or not. You suggested that there was. I don't know. I must have covered it if it was, but if there was I can just imagine that if Lyndon Johnson and Eddie Rickenbacker ran at odds at each other, boy, you'd really have two strong characters.

G: It had to do with Brownsville, more in that area.

President Roosevelt was being criticized for using PWA funds to put men to work in shipyards rebuilding the navy. LBJ on the Naval Affairs Committee appears to have supported increasing the size of the navy, and isolationist representatives, on the other hand, were opposing this. Do you recall this issue at all and any specifics of it?

Easley -- I -- 22

E: Well, I only recall that Lyndon was certainly close with the Brown brothers of Houston from early on and then during all the big ship-building days, and afterwards, too. I think, wasn't it George or Herman Brown, one of them, whose home I think Lyndon was at when he had his heart attack?

G: In Middleburg.

E: Middleburg, yes. But he certainly supported all that expansion of shipbuilding there. I don't remember specifically but I'm sure he must have [supported] to the same degree then installations such as the naval base at Corpus Christi. I don't know whether the Brown brothers got any of that contract or not. They probably did. They had an office here in Washington, I know.

G: That Corpus Christi Naval Air Station was not in his district and yet he worked on it.

E: No, no. Of course, that was built while he was still in the House. But he certainly, later as a senator, supported continuation to the extent that it lasted, but I don't know. I think there's some vestige of a station there yet, isn't there?

G: Yes.

E: Well, the Brown brothers, did they build it though?

G: Yes, they did.

E: That's what I thought. Anyway, he certainly was a very close friend and associate of them at that point.

Easley -- I -- 23

A lot of this I presume that I'm so vague about because after all, there's no reason why--I always marvel at these people who can get on witness stand and tell right where they were and what they did on a certain day. Well, I make no pretense at that, so I can talk in general terms. Then, of course, if anybody at the LBJ Library may read some of this later, well if they want to they can look up in reference and find--I think most everything I say is, generally speaking, accurate, but I don't remember many specific details.

G: I don't mean to confine you to these questions. Anything that triggers a memory, well, go ahead and tell it.

How about Alvin Wirtz' appointment as under secretary of the Interior? Do you remember Senator Wirtz?

E: I remember him and I was not surprised when he was [appointed] because I remember in the early days of Johnson's incumbency as a congressman that--we called him Senator Wirtz a lot then. I think he also became mayor, too, didn't he, at one point, of Austin? Anyway, A.J. Wirtz--Alvin J. Wirtz--he was here frequently and was certainly a very, very close friend and I'd say adviser of Lyndon Johnson in the early years. So I was certainly not surprised then later that he was appointed down to Interior.

G: Did you see them together much?

E: Oh, yes, a lot. Frequently that he was here they'd be together. My observation, looking back, was that Senator Wirtz was probably

Easley -- I -- 24

the closest person of all those public figures that I saw that came from Texas up here. I'd say Alvin J. Wirtz was the closest to Lyndon. He may not have been, but that's just as I look back on it.

G: Do you recall what they were like together?

E: Well, I can't remember that.

G: Teacher-student or father-son?

E: I think there was a degree of that, or older brother--to say the least--relationship.

G: Charlie Marsh was another Texan who would come up here.

E: Yes.

G: Do you recall their association?

E: No, I didn't. I, somehow or other, was never [around him]. I, of course, knew who he was and saw him but I was never around him.

(Interruption)

I was just talking about Sam Houston Johnson. Sam Houston Johnson was a very able fellow in his own right. He was secretary to Dick Kleberg himself and a very able secretary. There have been some people who have thought maybe that he had just as much on the ball as his older brother, Lyndon Johnson. But anyway, when Lyndon became a leader in the Senate he put Sam Houston on the payroll, and he was over in one of these big rooms in the Old Senate Office Building, now called the Russell Senate Office Building.

Easley -- I -- 25

It's part of that whole picture of Lyndon Johnson. Every year as he went along he acquired more space and more rooms. You have to work here to realize what this means in prestige, because every senator or congressman loves to have more room so he can spread out and generally hire more staff. So anyway, Lyndon acquired over on the street level floor right opposite that ROA--Reserve Officers Association Building--diametrically, catercornered and across the street from it, acquired what had been a committee room in there. That room was filled largely with about three or four big tables just covered with newspapers and magazines, and about two or three personnel headed by Sam Houston Johnson. He was in there, best I can remember, for two or three years and then I don't know at what point operations were changed. So far as I know, Sam Houston's main job at that point was to scan through all these papers and cut out clippings. I don't know that they had or whether they subscribed, I'm sure they did, to clippings services also; if they had such services then, I know they would have. Anyway, they got all kinds of papers. So Sam Houston would scan through these not only to see stories that had Lyndon Johnson's name in it but to get ideas. That gets back to my idea that Sam Houston was a pretty smart boy himself. He would see things that gave him an idea for a story which could mean publicity for Lyndon Johnson. Which reminded me of the old adage of the old politician that says, "I want my name in the paper. I'd much rather it would be favorable, but for gosh sake put my name in the paper some way or another,

Easley -- I -- 26

because if you don't I'll be a forgotten man." Now that was before the days of television and radio of course. So that was their life blood, getting their name in the papers.

Anyway, Sam Houston would go through these papers and get up ideas for stories. Then he would call up various newspapermen of various political hues. I know a lot of times he had Holmes Alexander who would come in there and he would give him an idea. Sam Houston was continually calling me up or I'd see him, and he'd say, "Why don't you put my brother's name in the paper?" I'd say, "Well, tell me something!" Then he would give me something. It might be a good idea for a story or it might not.

G: Was LBJ's attitude toward the press unrealistic? Did he expect them to do more for him than the press was in a position to do?

E: I'd say it shouldn't have been because he certainly was with newspapermen enough, but I'd say it was really unrealistic. He was overly sensitive. As long as you'd print stuff that he liked to see about himself, gee, you were a great buddy to him, and he liked that. Of course, in the early years when I was the only one that wrote for his papers, why, I was pretty close to him and he gave me a lot of stuff. He later got in the Senate and he was doing other operations and I was still writing for the Associated Press and trying to write as objectively as I could, so perforce I at the time was writing stuff that he wasn't very happy maybe to see in the paper. So he didn't feel that I was as close to him--this was reciprocated I'm sure--as I had formerly been. Anyway, he just didn't like to see stuff that wasn't favorable about him.

Easley -- I -- 27

G: Did he ever call you in about articles that were critical of him?

E: Oh, a lot of times. He'd make some kind of caustic remark, but he was smart enough to know that really most of the time that you couldn't--that you had your job to do, you know. But oh, yes, he'd be aware, he'd let you know when there was something that he didn't like. Then by the same token he would certainly feed stories to people.

I can't help now but mentioning a guy you probably have interviewed. If you haven't, you certainly will want him interviewed, the newspaperman who was supposed to have been really closest to Lyndon of all people and was my predecessor as the Texas man on the Associated Press, this regional service Associated Press, this regional service in Washington where they brought men up from the state to specifically cover their state. That service started in 1933 and Bill White, who was from DeLeon, Texas originally, came up and was the original Texas man. So he had the start of knowing Lyndon then not as a congressman but knowing him as a secretary when he was a secretary to Kleberg. So he had this very close relationship which usually is built between the newsman and the staffer. Usually that's a closer relationship than it is between a newsman and the congressman or senator. So he was close with him as a friend and news source from the very beginning. Then later Bill White was of course with the New York Times many years, and then a syndicated columnist. As Lyndon and his aspirations grew beyond being a senator to being a

Easley -- I -- 28

president he certainly tried to develop and did develop news sources with media to get his name printed all over the United States. It's my impression that certainly his favorite of all those people was Bill White. I know they had a close working relationship as well as a personal friendship basis.

G: Was there a correlation between his value as a news source and what he expected in favorable publicity?

E: Well, do you mean whether he fed stories perhaps to--

G: Yes.

E: Yes, I think he did. I think he did, and I know sometimes he'd give me stuff, but I think it was simply because he wanted state-wide coverage in Texas or say originally in his district. But this was not an exclusive Johnson practice, of course. That's pretty predominant with politicians till today as far as that goes.

(Interruption)

G: Do you remember the third term issue, the movement to stop Roosevelt and the fact that the [John Nance] Garner forces were allied on one side?

E: I certainly remember it distinctly but only in regard to the Garner role and really not Lyndon Johnson. Because that was part of my duty, Garner being a Texan, to stick around him a lot, and people who were with him, people like Gene [E.B.] Germany of Texas, who was one of the founders of the Lone Star Steel Company

Easley -- I -- 29

and so forth. He was one of the early gung-ho Garner men and against the third term. So as far as Lyndon Johnson is concerned, I'm sorry, I don't [remember].

G: That year LBJ helped Democratic congressmen get re-elected. He raised funds and wrote speeches and that sort of thing. Do you remember that 1940 congressional race?

E: Outside of Texas or in Texas?

G: No, nation-wide.

E: That's what I thought. That's the reason I asked that, because I don't remember him doing that particularly in Texas, but I do remember that he did some nation-wide, yes.

Incidentally, for some reason or another, I never know when you might ask the question, but talking about Lyndon in that early period and so forth, Lyndon was--and you may already know this and have it in your notes--if he was not the first he was certainly one of the very first guys to leave Congress and go in the service during the war. There were a lot of people, and the White House I think also, who really didn't want members of Congress to go into service, claiming they really could perform more for the country here as legislators than they could [as servicemen], and then they were actually all recalled. Before the war was over, they all did come back. And Lyndon was one of the first ones, if not the first, to go in. I remember seeing him right before he left. He turned the office over to Lady Bird. He was telling me, "You help Lady Bird run this." Then when he got out to San Diego, why, being

Easley -- I -- 30

shipped out there to the West Coast, he sent me a card from out there which I've got yet. I can't remember, I think he said something or another about, "I hope you're still helping Lady Bird hold down the office," or something like that.

G: My impression is he and Jesse Jones did not get along exceptionally well, that there was a difference in philosophies there?

E: I don't remember the relationship. I can well imagine that was the situation, but I don't recall.

G: Anything else on that Senate race, the first Senate race? LBJ announced at the White House.

E: Yes.

G: Were you there when he announced?

E: Well, no, I wasn't down at the White House. I thought you were alluding to the contest in which Coke Stevenson challenged him on the vote.

G: That was 1948.

E: Yes. I thought that was what you were about to ask. I was going to say this in that regard. That was contested, you know, all the way up here. It went into the courts and then it came up during recess of the Supreme Court. In a very, very rare occasion for a newspaperman, a justice invited about three of us reporters for Texas papers back into his private chambers for a hearing. It was Justice Hugo Black. Abe Fortas, who later then was on the Supreme Court himself, was representing Lyndon Johnson. This was on that issue, the contested vote with Coke Stevenson. That was very

Easley -- I -- 31

interesting. There in Judge Black's private chambers they argued. As I recall the decision, the Justice held that there was no violation of federal statute because it was a primary election. I think that was the finding in that case.

Apropos of that, I recall a conversation with Lyndon involving my personal opinion in regard to that election contest. If you remember, the Republicans had control of the Senate. I think I'm right on this; you may want to doublecheck some of my facts, but I'm sure I'm right. They were going to contest this before the Senate Rules Committee. But the Democrats won control of the Senate in that fall election and therefore the whole issue was thrown out. It was not even brought up again.

We were one night at a New Year's Eve party out at Walter Hornaday's apartment in Buckingham Apartments in Arlington, Virginia, where every New Year's Day and in the evening, we'd meet. It started out at first as a very informal thing with Congressman Tom Pickett, who was from East Texas where they eat blackeyed peas on New Year's Day, and his wife and my wife and I getting together. Tom Pickett at that time also lived in the Buckingham Apartments. We went over to Hornaday's apartment. Hornaday was the Dallas [Morning] News correspondent then. We had blackeyed peas and watched the New Year's Day football bowl game. There were only the six of us that first day, including Walter's wife, Ann.

Easley -- I -- 32

Hornaday saw that he had a good thing going and invited a lot of the congressmen the following New Year. Soon almost every member of the Texas delegation, they'd come up from home even two or three days ahead of time for the start of a new session in order to be at this apartment. It would be crowded. It was the first time many of the congressmen had seen their colleagues for maybe two or three months, and their wives. I was in on the beginning of the thing, and really I was about the only other newspaperman with the Hornadays in their apartment, and all the Texas delegation. This was one affair where they could--in one room they'd be talking and then having good Baptist or Methodist drinks going on. But this really was an occasion where all these members could really relax. They didn't have to worry about somebody misquoting them or quoting them off the record or things like that. It was really a friendship arrangement where they'd let their hair down.

On one of these occasions I remember that Lyndon Johnson and Lady Bird and myself and my wife, Bonita, were the last ones to put the party to bed about three or four o'clock in the morning. We'd all thoroughly enjoyed ourselves. Of course, you might imagine there was a little libation.

I might say as a part of all this incidentally, Mrs. Tom Connally was always there. She's a great pianist. As part of the fanfare around there she would play good old southern Baptist

Easley -- I -- 33

and southern Methodist songs and every one of us there had been raised on those. We'd crowd around the piano there and everybody knew them by heart, you know, and for an hour or two singing.

That night Lyndon and I mostly were still yakking and putting this party to bed. I told him something about how lucky he was that the Republicans didn't have control of the Senate, because knowing politics like I did, in the Rules Committee and with the closeness of that vote they would have certainly have rehashed all this, everything that was ever printed and maybe more, too, because that's just the way the game's played. They would have stirred this up to the point that he possibly might not have been seated. Well, anyway, he didn't like it. He was angry that I'd even rehashed that.

G: What did he say, do you recall?

E: Gosh, I don't remember, but anyway, he was very unhappy. He didn't like it that I even recalled those contested election circumstances. But he was lucky that that issue never came up in the Senate. I don't know, looking back on it now with all the years subsequent experience, I don't know whether they would have denied him a Senate seat, but they certainly would have gone into it. Remember, he didn't have the national prestige then that he later was to acquire. So you had just the question of a relatively minor man elected to the Senate, I'm talking about nation-wide, from a national viewpoint. So the Republicans, if they could have,

Easley -- I -- 34

would certainly have done anything to keep him out and to have either maybe gotten a Republican or at least to have had a very conservative man like Coke Stevenson in.

G: Anything else on LBJ and his ties with the New Dealers, with Tommy Corcoran or Ben Cohen, Jim Rowe?

E: Well, I just know that they were all very close to him and a lot closer to him than to almost any other member of the Texas delegation because of their relationship with the White House. And they were about the same age, whereas a lot of your Texas congressmen, of course, were old enough to have been Lyndon Johnson's father at that time.

G: LBJ played a crucial role in the extension of the Selective Service Act before Pearl Harbor. Do you remember that? He worked with it on the floor.

E: Yes, as I recall I think Sam Rayburn voted the deciding ballot to pass it, the extension of the Selective Service Act. I think it was a tie and came up to Rayburn as speaker and presiding officer. I believe he did cast the deciding vote. Either that or he went down in the well, which seldom Mr. Rayburn would do, which the speaker can do, where influence is really needed. I think he did.

But as for Lyndon Johnson's role in it, no, I don't [remember], but as I say, he seldom spoke on the floor in the House and not often in the Senate until he got to be floor leader. Then of course he had to. And his type of speaking was more like a logician, reasoning. It was not eloquent oratory.

Easley -- I -- 35

G: Anything else on LBJ as a congressman that you recall?

E: No. When you say as a congressman, you are referring to a member of the House?

G: Yes. Did you see much of him socially then?

E: Oh, quite a bit in those days because the Texas delegation in those days was a pretty close-knit organization. Generally speaking, they were philosophically split into about three groups. About a third were pretty liberal and voted with Roosevelt on almost everything that was New Deal-like. By this time now of course the New Deal had been on for several years and you had your reaction setting in with the Supreme Court enlargement fight. Long about that period was when you began to have an influx of several new congressmen, men like Bob Poage from Waco, and [George] Mahon two years before, and Clark Fisher a couple of years or so later. So anyway, by the late thirties and early forties, mid-forties, your Texas delegation was basically split about three ways and they weren't real extremes, but about a third were more or less liberals and about a third were really middle-of-the-roaders and about a third were quite conservative people like Hatton Sumners and other people of that category. As I recall there was really no bitterness, and as I say they were a lot closer socially than they are now.

Also, you've got to keep in mind nowadays a guy jumps in an airplane and in a couple of hours he's back down home, and he does go home frequently. In those days it was two days and nights

Easley -- I -- 36

by train so that a man came up here for a session I think he was only allowed just one round-trip fare. There was very little going back and forth. Usually they were here several months and the government was not nearly as big then as it is now, so Texans generally who worked for the government were a lot closer because they were kind of isolated up here, or exiled in a manner of speaking. So the delegation itself frequently were at occasions, social functions, both strictly social functions and functions which would be sponsored by a quasi-lobby group, for instance like the Rural Electrification Association people who would meet here from all over the United States.

Each state group would have a dinner for the congressmen from their particular state. These were usually pretty nice affairs with a powerful group like the REA group is politically. They're not the only ones but that's an example. The congressman and his wife get invited to a nice dinner at one of the hotels, well, I think most of them went because they enjoyed going and certainly in the old days when it wasn't quite the high pressured round of things that there is now. So these affairs that they would give--and a sort of lobbying they didn't mind. It was kind of like being for God, home and country, being for electricity on the farms. So anyway, they would sponsor a nice dinner. Of course I in my role of reporter for Texas papers, and my wife, would also be there.

Easley -- I -- 37

So continually throughout the year there would be these social functions both in homes and in the hotels, and then the Texas State Society would have one or two affairs a year which were big occasions and all of the congressmen would come.

G: Well, I certainly do thank you.

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview I]

GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION
NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS SERVICE
LYNDON BAINES JOHNSON LIBRARY

Legal Agreement pertaining to the Oral History Interview of L. T. (Tex) Easley

In accordance with the provisions of Chapter 21 of Title 44, United States Code, and subject to the terms and conditions hereinafter set forth, I, L. T. (Tex) Easley of Alexandria, Virginia do hereby give, donate and convey to the United States of America all my rights, title and interest in the tape recording and transcript of the personal interview conducted on May 4, 1979 at Alexandria, Virginia, and prepared for deposit in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

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.

(5) Copies of the transcript and tape recording may be deposited in or loaned to institutions other than the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

L. T. (TEX) Easley
Donor

OCT. 13, 1982
Date

Robert M. Stone
Archivist of the United States

November 15, 1982
Date