

INTERVIEWEE: Mr. Sanford L. Fox

INTERVIEWER: Dorothy Pierce

November 27, 1968

P: This interview is with Sanford L. Fox, the Administrative Officer in the Social Entertainments Office at the White House. Today is Wednesday, November 27, 1968, and it is approximately 2 p.m. We are in the East Wing of the White House.

Mr. Fox, you have been permanently assigned to the White House staff since 1959. Have your responsibilities since 1959 been always within the Social Entertainments Office?

F: They have, yes.

P: Would you briefly give me your background in this end of the business?

F: Well, it begins as this. In 1945 at the end of the year the last inauguration of President Franklin D. Roosevelt was to take place on the south portico of the White House. Usually the inaugural ceremonies of all sorts are handled by the Inaugural Committee as opposed to people here at the White House handling it. And since the ceremonies were to be held here, it then became the responsibility of the Entertainments Office to assist with the obtaining of invitations, preparing them all, and then mailing them out. This was my first detail in '45.

P: Where did you come from -- being detailed?

F: I was then in the Air Transport Command, and I had returned from our tour of Africa. We toured the South Atlantic and the North Atlantic, and it was between that time of the Air Transport Command and the Naval Air Transport Service that I was transferred. I stopped in to see my predecessor, Mr. A. B. Tolley who was the third person to serve since 1881 in this particular office.

P: In the White House?

F: Yes. And as it is today, we are always looking for talent and people who are creative and naturally in the art of calligraphy. Of course, it's defined as "beautiful handwriting" but this really goes a little farther than this. We have illustrators as such and along with the illustrating there are times when the individuals have a strong talent of lettering and this of course ties into the art of lettering and design. Well, enough of this digressing here. Of course, the need was for all the people they could muster at

the time to assist in the invitations. So I was appointed to the Office of Protocol which was in the old Executive Office Building, and then detailed here for that time. At the end of the war, I was detailed back here from the Navy to the Office of the Naval Aide to the President who was then Commodore Vardeman, later Mr. Clark Clifford who is today our Secretary of Defense. I was detailed to his office and assigned to the Entertainments Office for duty. That of course was from '45 to '47, two years, under the Truman Administration.

In '47 I was discharged at the end of Navy service and I was then employed by the Central Intelligence Agency, from time to time I would come back and assist here. But the need would arise when -- the social season began in the fall, and there would be a break during Lenten season and the same standard receptions customarily held then are held today -- the congressional, the military -- these are not in their proper order -- however they are the main receptions -- the judicial and the diplomatic receptions. And many years ago they had a departmental reception until the government has grown so large you unfortunately would offend more people in not being able to accomodate all persons, therefore the departmental reception was dispensed with as the government grew.

P: Can you tell me what your duties were at the CIA?

F: Yes. Well, naturally, you would associate the work here with the graphic arts. And it would be, of course, of a classified nature, the things we worked on. But I would say that it would be related in a graphic art manner.

P: And so from '47 until actually '59 you were detailed only to the White House for various functions.

F: Yes. Perhaps a week or two at a time. Then in September of '59, it just happened as a coincidence, I came over to -- I forget now what it was -- to borrow something or other, and Mr. Tolley who was then head of the office, asked me at that time if I would consider coming over being his assistant, and this came right out of a blue sky in that at the time I didn't realize his assistant was retiring. He said he realized this was on the spur of the moment, for me to talk it over with my wife, and see if she and I together thought this was the best thing for my future, then fine. We did. As a result, I do feel we made the right decision and I've enjoyed the years here since. The variety of things we do are always interesting and fascinating because every day

is a new adventure. I think perhaps it's the fact of dealing with human beings and the very fact of dealing with new people, the challenges of creating something new and related to perhaps program the various requests from time to time from the First Family. In that way I feel that the office is very unique in its various challenges producing of invitations, programs, and various things in graphics in general. And then, of course, too, we are responsible for the protocol for the entertainment, and there were certain people who are not too concerned as to where they rank in line, and there are others that are very well aware of it and would know immediately if Mr. so and so was preceding them, this would be the case. A little quote around the office that was there for some time and it went, "Since the good God made us so that we can not all get through the same door at once, there must be precedence." This is attributed to an unknown British author.

P: Your occupation sort of exceeds political partisan politics, doesn't it?

F: I always explain it in this manner. The people who are in this particular service do not make policy. We carry out the wishes of the First Family whatever their request. It is our desire to do the very best we can for those people who are in the administration at the time. And this is also one of the things that was always impressed on me and I try to impress on others a need for dedication. I think if my predecessor said it once he said it a hundred times -- dedication always. And that I hope we always will carry.

P: You've mentioned several things that you are involved in. Could you describe what else your present assignment entails?

F: Well, here again, this would be in a personal way. People, of course, have different likes of various things, and I have found it extremely rewarding to me because I really admire and very much like Mrs. Johnson because she is a delightful lady. She is relaxed and when you are with her you feel at ease. I know there are times when we are trying to find the proper frame for a painting or it may be a particular photograph of them, I like to find things that are different than you would find ordinarily, and in this way it entailed designing something to be strictly individual -- something that a person would realize was made especially for them, and I've always maintained that anything coming from the President and the First Lady should always be of the

highest caliber, this is a tradition I hope will always be, because truly they are representative of this great country of ours, and there should be much thought in selecting things that they particularly like.

I've enjoyed very much the fact of coming up with new ideas for perhaps gifts and also trying to select things that I would imagine that she and the President would like, the creating of bookmarks, for instance, from deerskin that came from the ranch, and the technical things you run into on trying to stamp or emboss on the leather, and this beautiful leather is so pliable the Indians used to use it for clothing, and it's a type of leather that is not too readily used for stamping on, and the fact that it is pliable caused a need for a backing and then the stamping by trial and error we found that just plain stamping, or as we call it, plain embossing, with the heat used for the gold. This gave a branding effect which was very unique and different. And I know Mrs. Johnson expressed a liking of it very much.

P: Are you charged primarily with graphic arts responsibility?

F: Yes, this is a thing that I enjoy so much because it affords a wide range of things. It isn't only the designing and the procuring of invitations, there are things related to the invitations to dinners, luncheons, receptions, teas, whatever it may be. The office is responsible directly under the social secretary who in turn is the person who goes directly to the President and the First Lady regarding guests to be invited. When the list has been approved, the number and all, the invitations are then prepared, checked and mailed, and the responses which are enclosed would read, "Please send response to The Social Secretary, The White House at your earliest convenience." Those replies come into my office and from this point we are responsible for keeping the acceptances and the regrets, this gives a picture immediately of those people who are coming, those people who are regretting, and the reasons for regretting -- you know, illness, perhaps out of the country, or unforeseen times when -- we don't usually get 100 percent of those people invited. That aspect, of course, is the one part of the official entertainment.

Then along with this we have within my office, as I earlier stated, the responsibility for creating programs, preparing the art work for the menus to be printed. Also my people prepare and letter -- the place cards, then, close to the day of the event the

lists are put in order of precedence, the seating would be round tables. We use the ranking of dignitaries for host and hostess at round tables if it is a state visit of a foreign country the ranking guests are therefore intermingled with our ranking guests. For instance, if it was a King and Queen, the Queen would be on the right of the President and the King would be on the right of Mrs. Johnson. And the next ranking person would usually be the minister of foreign affairs and then the Secretary of State or at times the Vice President if he happened to be at the dinner would be the next ranking. And when you have foreign visitors, socially we try in the most pleasing way of making the guests feel comfortable, and that's the main thing in all protocol -- having your guests feel at ease. And you would then use the next ranking lady from the foreign party such that there would be a foreign person on either side of the President and First Lady. There are times when there are more gentlemen than ladies, so we come back to our next ranking lady in line.

P: Do you also become involved in the entertainment for the programs and events?

F: Yes, in this respect, you see here again the entertainment is discussed and suggestions are given to the First Family by the Social Secretary. When the arrangements regarding entertainers has been decided on and what the entertainment will be, the program will be submitted regarding the presentation that evening by the Artists who perform, there are times when material submitted is too long. We then condense the design to avoid having many, many pages consisting of designing, layout and typography. All these things would be the mechanical parts of getting the program together, and as far as contacting the people who would be performing, this would be for the Social Secretary.

P: And the selectivity of the type of entertainment?

F: Well, you see, as I say, the suggestions are made to the Social Secretary thereupon she would think of various people and entertainment that the President and Mrs. Johnson would be interested in seeing; and then here's another aspect of it, that it may be that one of your foreign visitors would have a particular likeness for a certain type of entertainment. I think King Hussain of Jordan was particularly fond of jazz, and we had the Dave Brubeck quartet entertain that evening. So in this case it isn't always what the First Family likes, but they try to think of their guests and those things they would enjoy.

P: And you've mentioned gifts, the selection of gifts.

F: The way I deal with this is rarely -- if there are gifts for foreign dignitaries, of course, this is the responsibility of the Office of Protocol, they have an individual there responsible for selecting gifts, this of course gets into research on the part of the desk officer of that area and in turn finding out things a President, Prime Minister and etc. particularly likes and then they work from there on the gift.

P: Are you speaking of a desk officer in the White House?

F: No, the State Department. You see, in the State Department, the desk officer is a very important person. He's very knowledgeable of the language, customs, and then, of course, working through our Embassies with respective countries the variety of things the visiting dignitary would like. We are having a dinner soon here for the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom who enjoys pipe smoking, so naturally when I noticed this in the list of things of the food and drink and the things that they enjoy, why I sort of figured that one of the gifts that would be obtained would certainly be a pipe or two, and it seems that one selection of pipes that was first brought along for the Prime Minister were maybe a little too grandiose and the feeling was that he would perhaps appreciate a couple of good pipes as opposed to seven or more pipes. Whereupon I was given the assignment of procuring pipes which I enjoy doing, do a little scouting in finding a couple of pipes or so for him.

But then my problem was the gifts should be made, of course, in this country, and today you have many imports of the Dunhills from England and the Danish pipes, the Standwell pipes, the various imports, all well made by fine craftsmen but the things in this matter of gifts should be made in this country, and the two pipes I found, but I couldn't find a piperack for them. So I designed one, and I had one of our carpenters make it from a block of walnut, and then I made the holder part with two small pieces of the deerskin. It was the suede part and the pipe fits in it fine. When I went back to Mrs. Dunaway who happens to be the person who does the selecting of many gifts for these visits, was having a little gold plaque engraved with the Prime Minister's title from Lyndon B. Johnson, President of the United States of America and the date.

These are things that are fascinating to me. I love challenges in finding something that is different. The gifts I was referring to here before the bookmarks, those were gifts around the Christmas season, and the other gifts, of course, would be occasionally, and of course this isn't one of my main functions but I'm here to assist and do anything

that I possibly can.

P: Well, now, you also mentioned something about designing picture frames.

F: The matting and framing are very important to all paintings and drawings. There were times when I would be asked to find something I thought Mrs. Johnson would like. In fact, she would show me the painting and we would discuss what she sort of had in mind then it was up to me to find something to fit this need. I would obtain various samples and also the matting. It would be material-covered matting, but something that would be harmonious to the painting and where she wished to hang it.

P: Are there any other areas where you give some assistance?

F: Well, some of these things are naturally done in a more personal way which of course again to me is a rewarding thing because I really enjoy trying to find something that is unique, different, and my theory is if you can't find it, then be able to make it, and so far I have been pretty fortunate in both really.

P: How often do you work with the First Family? And with whom do you work?

F: This again is like everyday life. There are times when you may go four or five days and never have a need for something that you might be able to obtain or do, and then there may be four or five days in a row when you may be called on to assist in obtaining an item or items in the way I feel the President and Mrs. Johnson would like in particular. Well, let's see, now, his secretary, Mrs. Roberts, would contact me and say, "This is what the President would like." And so it's up to me to come up with something that he would like and we discussed the things that he really would like and then go forth and create it or obtain it, whatever it would be, and submit for his reviewing and agreeing as to his likes. There would be times when Lynda Robb would call me for some assistance on photo albums or prints and the type of matting and the type of framing and how many she wanted, then I would give them to different people to work on. We have various specialists here. Some people excel in one area. I think one of my greatest challenges of all was the layout of the booklet, the style of typography, design, material, etc. for the weddings of Luci and Pat and Lynda and Chuck. I wanted this to be something outstanding that would be a true keepsake, a memento, it is a historic occasion and it should be something that is just a little above par. I've always tried to think of things that will make this particular thing a thing of beauty and outstanding and different.

One of the illustrators drew the national shrine and then we had the drawing reduced and a plate made of it, then gold embossed on a white velour paper which if you have seen it you are familiar with and the paper has the texture of velvet. This was the cover. The fly page was an oriental paper called 'fantasy'. It is very thin, very gossamer, you could read through the paper and it was sort of a production as you went on into the booklet the ceremonies were unfolding. In Lynda's case on the wedding booklet we wanted to do something on par and as I had said to Mrs. Johnson, I realize that being a father myself you never want to show more partiality to one child than the other, therefore they should be on equal basis and yet to come up with something again which was unusual. And I mentioned to Mrs. Abell, the Social Secretary, the possibility of making the cover out of a material like a silk or moire and of course right away she said, "Why that's great." So, then the next thing was to find a type of material that you could gold stamp or silver stamp in this case on without it burning the fabric. The research came out with a Bible manufacturer in New York City who actually gold embosses on a red cover moire. This is white material for these booklets. And of course they had a red material -- same thing and the experiment worked fine. So this was another one of those firsts for us to select.

P: With whom do you work more often in the First Family?

F: Well, naturally my office coming directly under the Social Secretary and the First Lady, I would say truly Mrs. Johnson, and this would only tend to be logically true, and recently I think knowing too that the President knowing the type of work that we do, we are -- in fact we just finished the printing of the Thanksgiving proclamation. The President proclaimed the fifteenth of this month, I believe, is the date of it, and I'm right now creating a speech of his that he made in 1963 at Gettysburg, and he had mentioned to Mrs. Roberts that he would like to have this in the same lettering style that the quotation of Abraham Lincoln's was lettered in, and that was the Christmas gift of Mrs. Johnson to the President the first Christmas they were here. And this of course entailed much, much more type and two long columns, and so I finally, not being able to get this done at the office with the telephone and other things, I took it home and worked on it nights to get it completed.

P: It was all by hand?

F: All by hand, yes. It isn't completed yet but it is in the process anyhow, and I want this to be something a little different and outstanding for him because I know he

likes this sort of thing and with his many burdens and responsibilities anything that you can possibly do to make his day a little lighter or brighter or something, it is always so rewarding and worth it.

P: You were here also during the Kennedy Administration.

F: Yes, that's true.

P: Who did you work with most closely then?

F: Well, you see, when an administration first comes in, it's only understandable that they are beginning of course truly a new way of life in their living and things that are expected of them. And even though I'm certain there are times they would like to avoid doing so and so, this has become sort of a tradition that you just almost, well, you are just obligated to continue with because you have the various people saying you didn't do so and so for us that so and so did. It's not a thing you wish to -- every administration wishes to continue a particular type thing, but I'm speaking of the general things of entertaining, of your same receptions there, your manner, your way of doing it, your entertainment or where you may have it will always vary. And naturally this is wonderful. The reason we are going to this part is after -- I think the First Family realized the things that you could do that they would like then it becomes I think more of a thing of your becoming involved in doing the things they would like.

Now in the Kennedy Administration, naturally again the Social Secretary and then later off and on Mrs. Kennedy would call me personally like Mrs. Johnson and say, "Sandy, I have such and such. I wonder if you might see what you could do with this," whatever it may be. It could be the designing of a book or the crating of something which he might like. Well, again, anything of a picture or art form. And I would say that you couldn't really set a pattern, say, that she will call you every day. It's one of those things -- just as wishes come forth, they know what you can perhaps find for them. And that's the main way.

P: How would you compare working with two different families, first families?

F: Well, you know that different people have their different good qualities and so I would -- these are sort of personal likes and dislikes, and I think that's what makes the world wonderful and interesting. It would be very dull if everyone liked charcoal gray or if everyone liked a particular kind of painting. But I would more or less feel that it would be rather difficult to make a comparison in a general way.

P: Well, can you tell me if one say was more -- emphasized one aspect of your work more than the other or were you called upon more in one family than the other?

F: Well, actually I guess the variety of things -- they would be pretty equal in -- well, generally, on the selectiveness of the matting and framing because this is one of the things that is a natural thing to go with the First Family in the way of gifts of photographs or engravings or proclamations or whatever. And it would have to be in just a general way.

P: How would you compare the types and styles of entertainment of the two families?

F: Well --

P: Or programs that they put on.

F: There again I would say that these would have a tendency to be given in the way that would perhaps please their guests and if we would -- take for instance the President of Colombia is very fond of classic guitar for instance. Then I've seen in other chiefs of state -- a King would like jazz or the mood is a variety then there are times when it would be to the classical and serious side of music as opposed to the light side of perhaps a pop singer or say a violinist, Isaac Stern or a pianist, Van Cliburn.

P: I think what I'm aiming at is, doesn't a program or an event or a request or a gift somewhat reflect the personality of the person involved such as the two different First Ladies?

F: Yes.

P: Can you give me an idea of how that, to your mind, how did that become expressed between the two different First Ladies?

F: Well, I would have to say that my assumption would no doubt be the same as, say yours, in that we can look back on the different entertainments we had and I couldn't say that this was a definite like of one person or the other. Each administration has I suppose a like that they would prefer one type of entertainment and I'm certain there are times when they must be very bored.

P: Can you tell me just --

F: No. I'm assuming here, of course, naturally.

P: You must have some personal impressions of working with one and with the other. Their approaches make it distinctive to this family or to that family as it would any two individuals.

F: Well, let's see, the Eisenhowers I know did enjoy Fred Waring quite a bit. And Fred Waring and the Pennsylvanians were here on many occasions. Then I suppose, too, people have a tendency to pick up highlights in each administration. And I suppose for the Nobel Prize winners would be Pablo Casals, cellist. And then I'm trying to think of some of the members of the ballet, the Harkness Ballet. The musicals, of course, I think so many people really enjoy. I couldn't imagine people liking only one type of music and say they wouldn't care for musicals. Who could say, I don't care for "Hello, Dolly". Ridiculous. "The Man from LaMancha", "Hello, Dolly", let me think of one or two others, we've had some of the Broadway casts here which I think are always so light and entertaining and it does, I think, aid the First Family to relax even though you can never get away from the great, gravest responsibilities but for a little while you can sort of relax and enjoy.

P: What comes to your mind as some of the more unusual gifts or requests of the various administrations that you have served?

F: Well, let's see, unusual. Gee, right off the bat -- I would have to look back at the record of some of the things that were obtained. It's rather difficult just right off hand to --

P: Well, I meant only in your mind, it might not have necessarily been the most unique in terms of creativity but maybe it was the most -- the one that created the most difficulty, that you had to work on the hardest. For instance, you just told me a little while back about Mr. Johnson's speech that you are recreating in the same handwriting.

F: I think the most difficult thing we ever created was one evening I was called at home by Mr. Watson and he said that the President wanted some pens framed that went with respective bills that he has passed through Congress. The thing was he wanted them the next morning. And, there, let's see, now, I'm trying to think, it was something like -- some astronomical amount for each one and each one was supposed to have a plaque and these were put on a green velvet background with the Seal at the top, then in a frame. And there was, let's say, only ten hours from the time we started to have them finished. And there were something like a dozen, and I was calling every direction I could to find an engraver, someone who could run a pantograph machine to engrave these little plaques with the bill and the date it was signed.

And then of course I had to get enough people who after laying out one as a

pattern to follow all the rest of them, and we had these charts all over this huge room over in the General Services in their carpentry shop. And of course the difficulties keeping dust off and keeping these things clean all over the room, this was a gigantic, monstrous production. And believe it or not, we completed all except four and they were on their way to completion, and we started working all night -- well, we worked all night and pretty soon I just became numb to it and it just moved through and we got the cars and brought them back up here to the office here the next morning. I was in kind of a daze.

P: On what occasion was this? Do you recall around the date? Or what the bill was?

F: No, it was the occasion when the President wanted to give each of the people like the Speaker and the Vice President and the Senate and the House leaders, these particular gifts. And it was just the time element in trying to muster up enough people to create these, we had quite a few different machines going all around town, and you see, when Washington closes in the evening, people go home; it's not like some large cities, say, New York City, where things even there naturally some firms, like engravers and all, they do have day hours. And here it is a thing that is closed and I was trying to find people throughout the city that you could get who knew the machines and would do the engraving.

P: Has this happened very often where as some occasions demanded it you just -- to get things completed --

*F: I think the closest we ever came to the brink was our last one. Mrs. Abell called me from the hairdressers and said, "Sandy, I've got a tremendous rush job here," and I just had to laugh because I was working at that moment between my administrative duties and trying to talk on the telephone and take this down and do this speech of the Presidents, and I said, "Fine." And she came over and she said, "Here, It's a program for tonight." I said, "Tonight!" Well, it was one of those days. The program had to be laid out and it was quite a bit of copy on it and taken in to the Government Printing Office and fortunately they have a staff that goes day and night. There is one section there that I understand can proof-read *Gone With the Wind* in twenty minutes. And so you know the size of that staff. And fortunately they did come through, but one other time --*

P: *What program was this?*

F: *I'll think of it in a minute.*

P: *Was it very long ago:*

F: *Just the last one--I'll think of it. Oh, it was a chorus, a group from Howard University. And one other time was at the salute to Congress and we had the cover at the last minute it was one of those things it was all of us standing there, "Please may I have it." When it came, the ink was still a little damp, and the green ink was coming off on the white gloves. That is the closest. And always somehow we seem to always get them in. But it's very touchy when we do things in that sort of rush because if there was really ^{time} we try to proofread and change and all that. And there are times when this is done in this manner so hurriedly. You look at it, and say, "Oh, this would have been so much better if this had been lowered here and moved over here." Of course, this is your aesthetically judging it in its overall design. But very few people realize when they see something how long we spent on it. It either stands or it falls. And they never look at things--well, this took so long to create--they did this in an hour or they did this in a week. That never comes up. They are looking at the overall. It's up to you to get it all right.*

P: *Now you mentioned a word I'd like to pursue there. You said it either stands or it falls. Could you recall such an occasion?*

F: *Well, you know, I say that because -- really I'm not boasting at all -- but we have fortunately been able to make the deadlines even -- you will look at something and say, "It is impossible," but still somehow you can get enough people in the moving spirits -- of course, "you are doing just great, oh, that's marvelous. I don't know how you do it." And just that little bit -- that's all.*

P: *Then in all your time here there have been no failures in either -- not just in getting the thing completed but, you know, it arrived too bad or not well enough done?*

F: *It's strange, but I can't think of any.*

P: *That's very good.*

F: *Perhaps I might think of something a little later. One time we had the program finished and Mrs. Abell called me and she said, "Sandy, Gregory Peck isn't on the program." And I said, "I didn't even know he was on the program, it wasn't on the*

layout.” “Well, he isn’t and if he can’t be on the program I don’t want it.” I said, “Oh, let me see what I can do.” And I called and they said, “What?” They were already printed and bound together. They took those programs, opened them up, and they found that they came so close to the color of the ink, we put his name in -- yes we found a place on the frontispiece of the program -- and it was put on, and I thought we were a goner there, but we made it again.

P: I probably should have asked you about close calls and not failures. I’m sure your staff is too good.

F: That’s the other thing. You see, people certainly expect and they should have their names spelled correctly, and when it’s coming from the President and First Lady and you receive an invitation and your name is misspelled, well, this can be a very touchy thing. I mean, example -- they invited me, but this isn’t the way my name is spelled. So we have to be so careful because you will find many people with the same name and you have the checking, researching, and finally that this person, because perhaps someone said, well, invite so and so. They are connected with such and such. Many names appear, but we had one that had been sitting here one time, I forget the name, the person invited was of the same name but the wrong person was invited and we had to explain why this invitation came and it takes quite a bit of diplomacy.

P: Was this a social occasion?

F: Yes. And the person as I recall said that they were delighted to have the invitation but they sort of thought that it was meant for another person and they would be delighted to return it.

P: Does that happen very often?

F: No. I must say -- you see, again, it’s a human error. You must always go forth thinking that this will happen sometimes, but try, try never to let it happen. You can check, and check, and doublecheck, and check.

P: Could you tell me a little bit about the mechanics and the protocol involved regarding White House entertainment -- the preparations and the procedures involved in these various functions in the social occasions?

F: Yes. When the lists are made, regarding those people to be invited, the clerical people in my office make the copies for the people to use as their working list as such

and the invitations are lettered and the envelopes are hand addressed from these lists. Now, at the beginning we will start off generally with putting them in order of precedence and then before the final list is made for the press releases, then it is thoroughly checked because occasionally you will find that one person will be out of line here and there. But that is the time when we really put them in order.

P: Does the Presidential requests for, say, a seating arrangement or something -- would that preempt protocol?

F: Well, you see, here, people realize that protocol is ranking people by their positions, and there again it is always the President's wishes. However, if some little thing may be commented on by someone, the responsible person, of course, is the Chief of Protocol, and it is his responsibility to avoid them and make it understanding to the person that this is the case.

P: Have you come across any problems with this ranking of people?

F: Well, no. You see, generally, the line of proceedings we use here would be pretty generally held to, in each administration. However, there has been slight changes in the listings and this of course would come about by the creating of different positions and all. And so in each administration you will find some very vague changes. But there again it is very unlikely that you have -- you never would have, I don't believe, all those people who -- unless it would be something very unusual because, first of all, we couldn't accommodate all of them, but the ranking order is pretty established.

P: Do you recall any times when say the individual concerned either was terribly concerned, as you mentioned about it, like they are sensitive about it say as people are about the spelling of their names where they didn't agree with your ranking of them.

F: Oh, no. You see, generally, people wouldn't know where their ranking would be.

P: Well, it's indicated when you sit down.

F: I've had -- I won't mention the names -- but I've had an individual have his secretary call me to find out why so and so outranked him, and I used the term of the categories that they are in, like your Cabinet and your Supreme Court, the Senate and the House, and the Under Secretaries and so forth. So when it came down to it, he was in say category 16 or 17, maybe 15, and when I explained that there were thirty-four categories, that sort of appeased him. And he wanted a copy but again this has to be

held confidential for the use of the State Department and the White House and those people who really have a need to be aware of it. I remember telling Mrs. Johnson when they first came, that President Roosevelt once said that hospitality takes precedence over protocol. And she said that she liked that. Now say it again, and I repeated it, that he had stated one time that hospitality takes precedence over protocol, meaning that regardless of how some people may think of where they rank, not to offend them. But once in a while if you have a special visiting guest and all, why there again in a very diplomatic way, things can always be smoothed over to make people feel comfortable.

P: President Johnson is known for his liking of things being initialed and monogrammed^m. Has this increased your work in this area?

F: Well, no. You see, this again, as I say, I just get touches of gifts and so forth occasionally and these are just really assisting with them. No, most of all I've been called to try to find an engraver for maybe engraving a couple thousand tie clips with LBJ on it. As I recall, the last time it was very very small but getting the clips and all was quite an ordeal. One person says they are on a plane and expects them to be here and they don't show up. And after you have told someone that they will be there, it is rather embarrassing to have to say, "Well, they were supposed to have come in." Again, it's a timing thing. But as to his changes from time to time, no.

P: I mean, there hasn't been more work in this area than say in other administrations? With Mr. Johnson and his affinity for wanting things initialed and monogrammed?

F: Well, now, I wouldn't be able to say as to the amounts and all and change. My office now is doing for the President many photographs to inscribe the person's name and the greeting and then returned for his signature. And also we've come up with a new, a different, and which I think is a very nice little memento where people are always requesting autographed pictures, or would you please autograph your book to me. And to spare the President these extra burdens, rather than opening the books and his writing in the book, we have a gift book plate, it's like a book plate but it's a card printed on parchment-type stock with the Presidential coat of arms going across, and it says, "To" and a blank, "And with my best wishes" and then the "President of the United States of America" very small. He signs it and we put the name of the recipient or the group it might be going to. And it's a dual thing. It's a nice little gift, a book

plate, and it also has a signature and the person's name.

P: With all of the things that are requested from the President and are signed by him, are there members of your staff who are trained to reproduce the President's signature?

F: No. It isn't saying that this isn't possible to do, but we do not do it. The fact is that in any case where this would be done by request and this just hasn't been ever. In fact, we have never been requested to reproduce his signature. Now, in printing, we would take his signature, have it photographed -- this would be called a facsimile -- and then printed in various sizes depending on the work itself and how the signature would fit.

P: He can't do it all.

F: I know. That's quite a burden.

P: Mrs. Johnson is particularly known for her hospitality and her graciousness in social events and occasions. She is so good at remembering people and sending letters and notes. How has this affected -- what impact has her social awareness and efforts had on your staff?

F: Well, doing many of these things, I'm sure we are delighted to do anything that she would want. I'm certain that she has made many, many thousands of people very, very happy and being as charming and warm and hospitable as she is, it is very easy to see why people would treasure those mementos.

P: Has it increased the volume of your work in this area?

F: Many different things have increased -- you know, little things. You can't specifically take one item. But overall, with the engravings and photographs and some albums as such, these of course naturally take on a little more meaning, and many times if it is a special album we took pages out and letter^{ed} captions under the photographs and then put them back in the binders. This, of course, is in the interesting variety of things.

P: I'd kind of just like to sum up a few here where we have touched on so many different things. In all the various first families that you have worked with, could you give me what you consider to be several highlights, and it could be in any of the areas. I don't mean just necessarily entertainment or receptions, but even in gifts or requests. Do you recall any -- go back to '59 or even earlier and then bring it through.

F: Highlights --

P: Of your working here. I want your highlights -- what have been highlights to you in your working here at the White House?

F: Well, gee, this is going to be in so many --

P: Well, we could start with the present and go back. You've already mentioned two weddings which you thought were so -- . And then you did mention another one to me before we started recording.

F: One of the greatest highlights personally and to my wife and myself was being the guests at dinner for the Prime Minister of Japan, and I know so well how these things evolve, the background and all and the many things that are connected with the dinners especially that it was really delightful, rewarding and enlightening to me especially and I know to my dear wife to be guests that evening. And we so much enjoyed the conversations and all with the other guests. And I know especially -- that evening we had Mr. & Mrs. Howard Duff -- Ida Lupino -- and the entertainment was Tony Bennett, and these people were really as fascinated with the procedures and the socializing, the formalities of the evening that I found it extremely interesting also to view it from the guests' standpoint. And the entire evening -- the dinner itself, the guests at the table, the conversation and all were just delightful.

P: In your official capacity, do you often stay through the event that you have worked on?

F: No, not necessarily. We've had some last minute shuffling of seats and all. When you see that a dinner guest isn't seated and their escort envelope therefore gives them a table number and if, for instance, at the last minute someone may become ill or there is a problem with the weather and a plane isn't in on schedule then we have to move people from one table to another and I've been staying until all the guests are seated. But there have been times also that we, in the haste in leaving, really a little before my usual time and have one of my assistants there to rush out into the country and change to a black tie and my wife and I come back to the entertainment. And that of course is another very interesting, very relaxing and fun time.

P: What determined what room of the White House things are going to be in?

F: Well, first of all, the numbers of people, and of course the East Room is the large room that is certainly ideal for the guests to be announced and can socialize before the visiting dignitaries are announced. You see, the visiting party many times --

Of course, the state dining room is set up for the dinner. If we have a larger group such as 190 for dinner, as opposed to 140, we have to use the Blue Room, and we use five tables in the Blue Room --

P: But it is predominantly size. It's not necessarily occasion?

F: The occasion, yes, there may be times when you are being limited to the numbers we can accommodate. If it is a very special occasion, then they would certainly want to be able to get as many people as they possibly could. That's what governs the large number and of course in using the two rooms it would have to be, say, the head of state with his wife, for instance, because Mrs. Johnson would be in the Blue Room and the President would be in the dining room and in that respect you would therefore need to have a counterpart with Mrs. Johnson, a king with Mrs. Johnson and a queen with the President. So the rooms, yes, say the Red Room, the Blue Room, the Green Room normally would be used for after dinner demitasse and so forth before the entertainment begins back in the East Room where there is a stage set up depending on the program, you see.

P: Are there any special arrangements that have to be made in the East Room for programs in there?

F: Yes. Those programs, when they are returned to us after printing, are given to one of the secretaries in the Office of the Social Secretary, and also the social aides, and they take them over and put them on the chairs for the guests.

P: What about staging? Is there a special type of stage?

F: Yes, there is a new stage that was initiated, and we now have at the White House a really very finely created stage. The Columns are duplicated to correspond to the columns in the room.

P: Is there any problem of exit and entry like in a regular stage production?

F: No, it's in the north end of the room and the guests are seated in say the center and south parts facing north, and the players or whoever is entertaining can come in and

out the two doors at the top of the stairway.

P: Is there a lot of this already sort of written down as to how you are to do it -- carried over, tradition is the same?

F: People vary slightly. Knowing how things usually progress in the evening depending on the length of time the guests would be spending with the First Family upstairs in the living area before they come down, exchanging of gifts, and time will vary. You can't depend on just a certain time, each has to just go along. So it has to be flexible. Dinner is at eight, and it could vary; the guests have to go into the receiving line and go into the dining room. The time can vary as much as forty-five minutes to almost an hour.

P: Has there been any innovations made in White House social entertainment and in graphic arts approach?

F: No.

P: Well, we've covered a lot of different subjects. Is there anything else regarding your responsibilities and assignments?

F: One thing is the designing of the china, the Johnson china. There was a time when the dessert plate came back and the design wasn't just exactly as thought. So we improvised and made the changes and all to have this particular plate redesigned but still with the same border and all as such.

P: Were you all responsible for the design that the First Family chose for their china?

F: No, no. You see, this was actually one of the aiding things of working for the Social Secretary. They've got a curator and also the wishes of the First Family, and I'm certain there were others who were offering suggestions which are always very helpful. I know there are times when you may present four or five things, alternatives you could use, and I know Mrs. Johnson would say, "Well, I'm really kind of thinking here. Let me see this and this and this." And then she could pretty well tell. Because it is rather difficult at times when you are looking for some certain specific thing, and this would only be natural that it would be kind of confusing.

P: Are there any other areas you think we should mention or bring up?

F: Gee, I can't think of any right off hand.

P: That's all of my questions. Well, let me ask you one final question. How do you

think the social entertainment of the Lyndon Johnson Administration in the White House will be recorded in history?

F: Oh, I think it will be very well accepted and very -- in a cross section and variety I think it should certainly be ranked among all of the highlighted parts of entertainment.

P: Do you think the Viet Nam conflict has perhaps lessened the social events?

F: Well, yes, to a degree. I would feel that this no doubt would have a tendency to naturally -- I can't think of any particular instance, but naturally I don't think it would be too visibly noticeable, you know.

P: Some administrations in history through the years have been known particularly for the glamour and elegance of their entertainment. Do you think that these adjectives apply to this administration?

F: Oh, yes. You've heard many things recorded as to people's opinions and the whys and wherefores, and there are many things I read and I look at what this person said and what that person said, and there are times the facts weren't just exactly true always, but you get comments, opinionated comments from people. So I think over the broad scale of the evaluation of historians I think this administration has really much to leave the American people.

P: That's all the questions I have, Mr. Fox. And I want to thank you very much.

F: Thank you. I hope this will be of some interest and I thank you.

August 17, 2004

MEMO FOR THE RECORD

In reviewing the cassette recording of Dorothy Pierce's oral history interview with Sanford L. Fox, a discrepancy was found between his transcript and the cassette. Upon reviewing Mr. Fox's edits to the transcript, it was found that Mr. Fox had made the changes to the transcript. The researcher should be advised that Mr. Fox made these changes.

Mr. Fox stated on the tape, "We are having a dinner soon for the Prime Minister of Iran." He made a correction to page 6 of the transcript changing Iran to the United Kingdom.

Laura M. Harmon
Archives Specialist

GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION
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Gift of Personal Statement

By Sanford L. Fox

to the

Lyndon Baines Johnson Library

In accordance with Sec. 507 of the Federal Property and Administrative Services Act of 1949, as amended (44 U.S.C. 397) and regulations issued thereunder (41 CFR 101-10), I, SANFORD L. FOX, hereinafter referred to as the donor, hereby give, donate, and convey to the United States of America for eventual deposit in the proposed Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, and for administration therein by the authorities thereof, a tape and transcript of a personal statement approved by me and prepared for the purpose of deposit in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library. The gift of this material is made subject to the following terms and conditions:

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