

## INTERVIEW I

DATE: August 15, 1978  
INTERVIEWEE: LLEWELLYN B. GRIFFITH, SR.  
INTERVIEWER: MICHAEL L. GILLETTE  
PLACE: LBJ Library, Austin, Texas

MG: Let's get this on tape, the first time you met Lyndon Johnson.

LG: Yes. I was the chief engineer of the WPA for the Central Texas area with an office in the Littlefield Building in Austin. [Bob] Phinney, his office was right next to me. Phinney later became head of the IRS in Austin. Lyndon's Johnson's father came in to try to get a project through he'd had a lot of difficulty with, and I was glad to help him. A few days after he had been fixed up, so to speak, his son, Lyndon Johnson, came to see me and asked me to have a talk with him about this new agency that he was going to be the head of, the NYA. It seems that the NYA was in some way connected with the WPA financially in Washington. But after he had explained it to me, he said that he was totally inexperienced in engineering and projects and such as that, and had no acquaintances that were interested in that. Most of his friends and most of his background had been in educational fields. So he asked me if I would be his state director of NYA engineering projects. I told him no, I was very well satisfied being chief engineer of the WPA in the Austin area. But after I found out that it was a worthy program and that he was really in bad shape to find somebody to head up the Texas NYA projects division, I thought, well, yes, I will, provided that I choose my own people that I feel are qualified and that I be left more or less in

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charge of that particular phase of the business, which he readily agreed to. In fact, I had a separate office from the rest of the NYA.

MG: Where was your office?

LG: My office was on the same floor of the Littlefield Building but entirely separate.

But, anyhow, I brought with me Nat Turner, who was my assistant on the WPA, and Paul Dearmin. Nat Turner later became a very eminent consulting engineer in the Houston area. He was the head of the Turner, Freeze and Nichols office down there for many years and later he had his own engineering office there.

MG: Did this exodus cause any problems with WPA?

LG: That was just what I was going to mention. Of course, all this was to be cleared with Mr. [Harry] Drought in San Antonio, the director of the Texas WPA. He was to okay it. He was to be thoroughly satisfied because I didn't want to leave them in the lurch, so to speak. Anyway, that's more or less the way it got started as far as I'm concerned.

MG: Did Mr. Drought approve this right away?

LG: Oh, yes. Yes.

MG: I gather that Lyndon Johnson had had some problems with the WPA in terms of authority and chain of command and this sort of thing before.

LG: Well, it was very confused in an administrative way. I suppose you know all about how the NYA more or less got started. It was supposed to have been started by Eleanor Roosevelt. The WPA was started by her husband. The NYA had to be tagged onto the WPA in order to finance it and get it through Congress, in other words. It wasn't big enough to stand on its

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own, so they tied it onto the coattail of WPA, you might say.

Unfortunately, it was about that time [Franklin] Delano Roosevelt and [John Nance] Garner, who was a good friend of mine, didn't see eye to eye on everything. They had their differences. The WPA in Texas was beginning to get complicated, let's say.

MG: In some states the NYA seems to have been absolutely subordinate to the WPA setup with the state, but in Texas it looks like LBJ was able to achieve a good deal of independence. Is that the way it was?

LG: That's entirely the way it was. You see, we were organized--at least my department was organized--with the complete blessing of Drought, the Texas WPA administrator and also I was a very personal friend of Garner. I was one of the first people who came out publicly for him to run. I was city engineer at Corpus Christi at that time. Well, anyway, I had the closest relations with the WPA. The fact of the matter is there was no trouble whatsoever.

As I recall it--and I may be wrong, I see from this list here, this table here, that somebody worked up--I didn't operate at all as a supervisor of work projects. I was to be directly under the NYA state administrator. Lyndon Johnson was really administrator of the NYA and I was NYA state director of projects. In other words, none of the work projects could be approved without my signature. That was because they wanted an engineer in there for that particular purpose. But everything that had anything to do with educational matters was directed by J. C. Kellam, who went to school with Lyndon down in San Marcos. He was Lyndon's

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assistant. I don't remember what his title was. But I don't think this [list] was just exactly right at the start of Texas NYA.

MG: Do you recall approximately when you went on the payroll of the NYA?

LG: No, I don't remember the dates.

MG: Was it in 1935, do you think?

LG: It was before they opened up the office, I know that.

MG: Oh, really? That would have been 1935.

LG: Just about the time the WPA opened up.

MG: Yes. Do you recall why the office was opened up in Austin rather than in San Antonio, where the WPA's state office was?

LG: I don't know, other than to get away from the close proximity of the WPA. (Laughter)

MG: Is that right?

LG: I presume so. Well, I think there were several reasons. All of Lyndon's friends were up here, and Lyndon was going to be up here. He was pretty wise about political matters and social matters. I think Lyndon felt that he would be much better off dealing through Washington direct than dealing through San Antonio, because he was a very wise, politically-minded young man at that time. He had formed connections up in Washington that helped him out a whole lot more than if he had to go through local WPA channels and then up.

MG: Who were his main connections in Washington that he could rely on at this time?

LG: Well, you see, he was for many years the secretary of Congressman Kleberg, whom I also knew very well. I believe that Kleberg was a playboy. He

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went up there for the fun of it. He was rich and didn't give a darn about the work that was involved. He just let Lyndon Johnson run the office. Well, when Lyndon Johnson ran that office, Lyndon Johnson met a whole lot of people. He had the know-how and knew his way around and so forth. That is why they began to know Lyndon. I think Lyndon came down here after Kleberg quit. I don't remember just how that happened, how they terminated their relationship, but he came down here with a lot of friends up in Washington. Well, I don't have to tell you that Lyndon Johnson was a master of political ability. I'm sure that he took a great fancy to Roosevelt and he let Roosevelt know it. He also let all Roosevelt's inside friends know it. He was beginning to get well known by Roosevelt himself. Lyndon knew how to do those things.

MG: Did you ever have any insight into how he got that NYA appointment to begin with? Who helped him get it?

LG: I think that one of Roosevelt's sons had a great deal to do with it. One son came down to Dallas or something like that and Lyndon, I believe, went up to see him. I believe that Deason was also very helpful to Lyndon at that time.

MG: Willard Deason.

LG: Willard Deason. Deason's status was a little bit different from anybody else in the whole NYA organization. Deason had evidently, down at San Marcos, been very, very close to Lyndon. If I would put my finger on anybody that was close to Lyndon, it was Deason. He ought to know a lot about it all. But Lyndon also leaned heavily on Kellam. I don't mean to say

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that he didn't. But he was never as intimate with Kellam as he was with Deason.

MG: One of the first things Lyndon did, I suppose, was establish a state NYA advisory committee that included Senator Alvin Wirtz.

LG: That, you see, was a political move. Wirtz was one of the few local people who became very interested in Lyndon. Senator Wirtz had national stature. By the way, Wirtz was the uncle of one of my classmates at West Point, Brigadier General Thomas D. Stamps. Anyhow, Wirtz was very, very helpful to Lyndon. I'm quite sure he established that committee for the sole purpose of getting Wirtz into it. Yes, into his fold, so to speak.

MG: Did you ever see Wirtz' input into the NYA? Did Wirtz ever advise the NYA or LBJ on any particular projects?

LG: I don't think so. I don't think he was anything but a name, so to speak. Whenever Lyndon needed him, I think it went in reverse. I think the committee was there, and I think they were there for the sole purpose of helping when Lyndon needed help, he would go to them, rather than they would come to him.

MG: Was he able to get larger appropriations from Washington than he was originally designated?

LG: That I know nothing about.

MG: I know he would go up there occasionally for advisory meetings and meetings of state directors. You don't remember any of these or what went on?

LG: Oh, no. I wasn't interested in any of that. I made a couple of trips to Washington with Lyndon, but they were on engineering matters.

MG: What did they relate to, do you remember?

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LG: When Lyndon Johnson liked somebody, he really liked them and he wanted to make them assistant president of the United States or something equally important. It didn't make any difference whether they were highly qualified or not. Well, anyhow, he got the idea that just about that time they were starting the big project at Passamaquoddy. This was a hydro-electric project. Electricity was to be generated by the incoming tides and then generated by the outgoing tides. Lyndon wanted Roosevelt to make me the head of it, because I had been the assistant district engineer of the Corps of Engineers of the United States Army at Cincinnati and had been in charge of building a dam up there. I was recognized as a good engineer for my age. So anyhow, Lyndon and I hopped a train and went up there to talk about it. All the way up there I told him, "I don't want this thing. I'm not going to take it." But he wanted me to go up there anyhow.

Then another time we went up to Washington on these roadside parks we were building in Texas. These roadside parks were a creation, more or less, of the NYA in Texas. Gibb Gilchrist, head of the highway department, was also a big help. The idea originated by necessity the mother of invention. In Texas we had a lot of kids in small counties, hither and yonder, all over Texas. There were at times only two or three of them in a county, and miles and miles away from anywhere. How could you give them any wages, no matter how much they needed it? There wasn't somebody to do the red tape. You had to pay somebody to make out the payroll and check them in and check them out and see that they weren't loafing on the job and all that sort of thing. Gibb Gilchrist, of course, had all these highway

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engineer and road supervisors and road crews in all the counties of Texas. They were entirely competent to do the red tape involved on NYA projects. I didn't want to hire somebody who would use five hundred dollars worth of NYA money just so we could pay several needy boys a few dollars doing some worthwhile work on roadside parks. That would be ridiculous.

So I went up to talk to Mr. Gilchrist about it. He said, "It's a good idea, all right, but I don't think my men will like it, and I don't want anything to be distasteful to them. I think that they would be very much incensed over the idea of having to play nursemaid to a bunch of kids, no matter how worthy the cause." I said, "Well, will you try it in some district? Just give it a fling for about two or three weeks and see what does happen. You don't know what their attitudes are going to be and I don't either. You don't know whether it will work and I don't either. Let's give it a try." Which he did. Much to his surprise and my surprise, his men told him that they were feeding these boys on the job out of their own lunch baskets and that they were entirely sold on the idea. A lot of those boys eventually became employees of the Highway Department, as a matter of fact. So the idea just worked out wonderfully both ways. In other words, we weren't putting out a lot of money for supervision and red tape. It was a simple matter for the regular highway department supervisors to make out the payrolls. We made it as simple as we could. The idea was so successful that we were able to promote many NYA roadside parks all over Texas at practically no overhead expenses.

MG: Was the first one south of Austin?



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LG: That was the one that Mrs. Roosevelt came down to see me on. She started the whole NYA program and she was delighted with this roadside park idea.

There's rather a funny little story in connection with that. She came down to Austin and stayed at the Pennebacker's home. The Pennebackers were friends of mine, church friends. Mrs. Roosevelt wanted to go see this NYA Onion [Creek] Park. [That] was the name of the park she wanted to see, because it was the first one, south of town here. So I was asked to go take her in my little old jalopy that I used for work. Here she came with a whole crowd of people out of the Pennebacker's home and I met them on the lawn. I thought she would rather ride in one of those twenty or thirty limousines and ride out in comfort. No, she was hellbent on riding in this jalopy, and she didn't want anybody to be in there with her. She didn't want any limousine. She just wanted to get in there with me, so I could tell all about the project.

MG: What did she think about it?

LG: Well, we haven't gotten to the story part yet. I was worried to death because I suspected that there wouldn't be anyone out there. Fortunately I called one of my sons, and I told him the desperate situation I was in, that I had Mrs. Roosevelt and she wanted to see Onion Creek Park. I knew there wouldn't be anybody there, I suggested that he get several kids and drive out to the park and play ball or something. When Mrs. Roosevelt and I got down there the kids were there. There was also a camper there, an old fellow sitting on the stoop of his camper whittling, and his wife was out there chopping wood to build a fire to cook their supper over. That

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evening my boys told me what happened. After Mrs. Roosevelt and I left, one of my boys asked this man, "Do you know who that was in that car? That was my daddy and Eleanor Roosevelt." The man dropped his knife and yelled to his wife, "Maggie, do you know who was in that car with that man? That was Eleanor Roosevelt." His wife dropped the axe and said, "Yes, and I'm Hedy Lamarr." So, when I got home they told that. The next day of course Mrs. Roosevelt wrote in her newspaper column, "My Day," an account of going out to the park. But she didn't have anything good or bad to say about it. She of course didn't mention the campers because we kept all that to ourselves.

MG: I've heard that when the roadside park idea was first discussed that Herbert Henderson was one of the biggest supporters of it. Do you recall the discussion at LBJ's home or wherever it took place?

LG: Don't remember the name at all. I believe there was a Henderson. It's beginning to come back into my mind.

MG: Do you remember how the idea was originated? This was the first NYA roadside park in the country, wasn't it?

LG: Yes, the NYA roadside park originated right there in Gilchrist's office. Oh, no. Well, there were two phases. In other words, when the idea was accepted by the highway department it began to spread all over Texas. Lyndon and I made a trip to Washington NYA headquarters to report on the NYA roadside parks and other work projects in Texas. NYA administrators from other states wanted to know about them. Because of that meeting I believe that many NYA roadside parks resulted.

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MG: Do you recall discussion of whether or not to put rest-room facilities in those parks? I think that at the beginning there was some such idea but we could not use NYA funds unless we were assured that such facilities would be properly maintained.

LG: Well, no, I don't. I can say this much, knowing myself so well, I'd have turned thumbs down on the whole thing, because you couldn't have toilet facilities out there for somebody who might be out there once a week. It was not a popular thing, no. Those early NYA parks were like these parks you've seen. The park had benches, tables, barbecue pits, shade trees, et cetera. They were used by the motoring public to rest, eat and stretch one's legs so to speak.

MG: Well, I've heard that was LBJ's favorite project of all the NYA projects.

LG: Yes, we discussed this project on many occasions. He liked it. Immediately after the highway department grabbed onto it, he saw the magnitude of the thing. Well, I believe the idea of NYA parks spread in all of the states of the Union. It started right there in Gilchrist's office. As I have told you, it wasn't preordained by anybody. It just happened that those men out there on the job liked the boys and were willing to give them part of their lunch out of their own lunch bags, so to speak. It just went very well. Nobody knew that the idea would become so popular with the motoring public.

MG: Now, you mentioned that you went to Washington with LBJ in connection with these roadside parks. Do you remember who you talked to there and what the purpose of that trip was?

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LG: Oh, the purpose of that trip was that Lyndon had made quite a name for himself in the types of projects we had gotten down here in Texas, and that they were doing well and were successful. I, being the state director of the works program, was the reason why Lyndon took me along. We went to a national NYA conference in Washington and we answered questions and tried to help NYA leaders in other states.

MG: Were these other NYA directors?

LG: From other states. Yes, it was a national meeting.

Of course, I sound like I'm bragging--I didn't do this at all. These young district engineers, like [C. P.] Little and Ray Roberts and all those other chaps were all young men. I suppose that they looked upon me as grandpa. I had engineering training and experience and they grabbed hold of anything I wanted to do and did it enthusiastically. That's the only reason it was very successful.

MG: There is some indication that on one of these early projects, maybe a roadside park, that LBJ was going to get some publicity and had all the press come out there and everything, and no youth showed up for the first day. Do you recall that?

LG: I don't know. I do not recall this, but in the early days that could certainly happen.

MG: From then on he was very careful to make sure that the youth were on the job before [he publicized something].

LG: I really don't know. He did not go out with Eleanor Roosevelt. He instructed me to take her to the Onion Creek NYA roadside park. Lyndon was very pleased that my sons and friends were there.

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MG: Really?

LG: Yes, she was a remarkable lady.

MG: Did he talk about that? Did he try to go?

LG: No. I don't remember his being in town the day she went to the park. If he had been I feel sure he would personally have taken her.

MG: Let me ask you about that Passamaquoddy job. Who did you talk to after you got to Washington about that?

LG: I didn't. I thoroughly convinced Lyndon by the time we arrived up there that I just absolutely wouldn't take it. Because, first of all, I didn't feel qualified. In the second place, I didn't want to leave Texas. I didn't want to leave my family. I'd just built a home.

MG: Do you recall what year that was that you built that home?

LG: Oh, it was a little bit before all this NYA started. Let's see here, about a year before that. I knew Lyndon Johnson and Lady Bird shortly after they first came to Austin. In fact, we had them over to our house several times after I became NYA State Director of Projects for Texas.

MG: Was this while he was NYA director?

LG: Yes.

MG: Was this Passamaquoddy thing while he was NYA director?

LG: Oh, yes.

MG: It was?

LG: Oh, yes. I didn't know him until I had an interview with his father about his WPA job, which was located outside my WPA district.

MG: I was going to ask you what that meeting with his father pertained to. You said it was a project. Do you remember what [it was]?

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LG: His father lived in Johnson City. He was interested in getting a WPA project out there, which was really out of my territory. It was too far west.

MG: Was it a highway project or something?

LG: I don't remember. But anyhow, he was all tied up in the red tape involved. I had a very efficient WPA engineering staff and we had no trouble fixing his WPA project for him. In about two or three hours he was fixed up and we got his project approved. He was very grateful for our help.

Lyndon's father was a fine man, by the way. His father, you know, was in politics for years and years, in the Texas state legislature.

MG: My impression is that on the weekends, all the regional directors and people would meet at LBJ's home.

LG: I don't know anything about that. I never went to any of those meetings.

MG: But I gather that your role was not nine to five, that you would work much later than that.

LG: As I said, I had a separate office and I was completely my own boss.

I'm one of the few people that can honestly say that during the years of experience I had with Lyndon Johnson, he never asked me to do anything unusual for him. He was one of the finest men I ever worked with contrary to rumors of his demands on many others. He treated me with the greatest of kindness and consideration. I was it; he said, "You run it." I knew damn well that if I didn't do a good job, he'd be on my neck in a hurry. I would have liked that. However, he was very considerate of me. I had nothing whatsoever to do with the main office, which was run under

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Kellam and Deason and Ray Roberts and this finance officer. They were in a different office, and I seldom if ever went in there.

MG: I guess they also built a chapel in Denton, at the Texas Women's College, the Chapel in the Woods.

LG: After I had left the NYA, they abolished my office as State Director of Work Projects and I believe they employed an engineer. I understand that they had a whole lot of NYA projects that I don't know anything about.

MG: You didn't work on that chapel in Denton?

LG: Never even heard of it. I went down to Prairie View or some such place on a number of occasions.

MG: They had a good program there I understand, very good.

LG: I did have charge of that, more or less.

MG: Did you?

LG: Yes, with the boy down there in Houston, whatever his name is.

MG: Alexander?

LG: The district NYA director who was in charge of Houston. Yes, Alexander. You got me confused. I was thinking of a young man in my office. Kay Alexander.

MG: Did you get any insight into Lyndon Johnson's attitude toward blacks and Mexican-Americans during this phase of his life?

LG: Yes, I know he was entirely tolerant. We had lots of Negroes on the NYA program right here in Austin, just lots of them. You know, back in those days Texas wasn't overflowed with Negroes at all. There were very few places where there were Negroes. However, Austin was one of the places where there were quite a few of them, and also Houston, too. But you

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could go all day long around Corpus Christi, and you couldn't find a Negro at all. So far as I know, I don't think any race issue ever came up in the Texas NYA. I was personally at Prairie View many times and that NYA project was entirely for Negroes.

MG: How about Mexican-American youths? Did these programs touch them?

LG: Why, certainly. I can't remember any racial problems or even racial discussions. Wherever the boys in the field felt that help was needed, we worked up a project for them regardless of race or color.

MG: One of the other projects was, I gather, highway beautification, planting trees along the highways.

LG: No, I didn't get into any of that.

MG: You didn't?

LG: No, I didn't.

MG: How about eliminating traffic hazards on roads and putting up railings on bridges and things like that?

LG: No, this park business was as far as I went. In other words, I just left it up to the highway department how they could best use these boys and make them earn their money. They would make barbecue pits and they would do anything possible that these men felt would make those parks more attractive and useful for the touring public, and that's all. My principal requirement was that the NYA youths be given jobs which would make them feel that their work was worthwhile. One of our chief aims was to build character and make them feel that any NYA pay they received was for useful work performed. I know that the State Highway Department work crews felt the same way. We were careful not to hurt their pride. And



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believe me, the reason I liked it was that these NYA youths felt proud of their work and didn't get out there and freeload. In other words, those highway crews were an inspiration to the NYA youths.

MG: Do you recall other work projects that you had under the NYA, in addition to the roadside parks?

LG: I can't remember. There were lots of them.

MG: How about building school gyms? Did you work on that?

LG: Well, there may have been a few of those, but I don't recall the hundreds and hundreds of projects that we had. There were any number of them. The highway parks, as a matter of fact, were a small proportion of the total number of projects. The need for various NYA projects came from the NYA district directors in the field, you understand, to me. It was up to me to approve or disapprove each project then to see that the money was well spent and to work the project up in a way that it wasn't a boondoggle job. That's where I [came in].

MG: Was your main concern whether or not it was feasible from an engineering standpoint or also from a management standpoint?

LG: Mostly from--well, primarily that it wasn't a boondoggle outfit, that the money was well spent, that it wasn't taxpayer's money thrown down the gutter for somebody's crazy ideas. That was the first thing. Then the second thing was to casually look [it] over. They never got so involved that [there were] a lot of engineering problems which had to be solved. I would look each project over to see that it was feasible and worthwhile.

MG: Anything on the resident training centers, where they would teach kids welding and things like that, that you [remember]?

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LG: No, I didn't get intimately acquainted with any of that. That more or less came from NYA district directors and local technicians. They would ask for a project, and if it looked feasible, why, I'd okay it.

MG: Did you have a problem getting Washington to approve these projects?

LG: No. They never disapproved anything I ever approved. In fact, they sent some people down from Washington on several occasions to talk to us and get the ideas useful in other states.

MG: Who did they send down? Do you remember?

LG: I forget whether [Aubrey] Williams came down or not. I think he did. I have some photographs at home which they gave me.

MG: Do you?

LG: Yes.

MG: I understand on one occasion LBJ wanted the President to stop and dedicate a park on the way to Dallas.

LG: I don't know anything about it, never heard of it. [He] might have. I only know about the inspection of a NYA roadside park made by Mrs. Roosevelt.

MG: As you're thinking back over this day-to-day working relationship with Lyndon Johnson, do you recall influencing him on certain projects where he might have wanted to do it one way?

LG: No, he left me absolutely alone. The only time I ever saw him was to say hello and tell him what we were doing. I of course saw a great deal of Lyndon on our several trips together to Washington NYA meetings.

MG: Is that right?

LG: That's right.

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MG: Well, you must have had some input though. I mean, he must have needed to seek your advice in planning these things somewhere.

LG: I honestly say that he just seemed to like me and that was all. It was just "Hello, how's everything?" And that's quite contradictory to what you hear from everybody else who ever worked with Lyndon Johnson. No, he didn't. I don't know why. I think I must be the exception to all rules. But of course I caught him when he was just a young man. He had just gotten married. Maybe he was a little impressed by my being a little older than he was.

MG: Anything else on this period that we've left out?

LG: I don't know of anything. I think you have covered it all.

MG: Any anecdotes about him at this time, or memories that you have of him?

LG: Well, lots of memories of him. Strange to say, they were all good. I mean, I never saw him do anything that was highly objectionable to my nature. He was a man who was scrupulously honest. Perhaps it was because a number of politicians were out gunning for him. Those people realized that Lyndon was a young politician with great ability and a political future. They were all throwing roadblocks in his way, politically.

MG: Why, because he was young?

LG: Well, because they knew that he was a brilliant man. They knew that he was going places if they didn't stop him. They knew that he was an admirer of Roosevelt, who was a liberal, and Texas was not a liberal state. Most of the senators like Tom Connally and outstanding politicians in this area, at that time, were very conservative people. They didn't like this "upstart," who was close to President Roosevelt, so they were throwing

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roadblocks in his way. So Lyndon Johnson, in my mind, was overly scrupulous and was careful to give anyone something that might be used against him. I felt the same way and that's why he liked me. One reason why he liked me was that I was scrupulous, too. I didn't want to see money thrown down the drain for somebody to point the finger at me and say, "Oh, that boondoggle guy." Neither of us wanted to get caught approving any of that kind of stuff.

MG: Did you ever hear Harry Drought's assessment of Lyndon Johnson?

LG: I never talked to Harry about Lyndon Johnson although Harry and I were good friends. His brother was also a very good friend of mine. They were glad to help me all they could. Drought was not that type of man. All he wanted to do was to see that these projects which his name was in any way connected with were all operated on a business-like manner. In other words, that the WPA and NYA money was being well spent. Drought was a close friend of Garner, and Garner didn't like boondoggling.

MG: Now, with the size and distances that were involved in such a project in Texas, it must have been difficult to administer all of this efficiently. It was so far-flung. Did you have to take special measures to prevent any waste or inefficiency or mismanagement?

LG: No. One of the most important things a lot of people don't recognize is the character of the man at the top of a program even if he never issues an order at all. Lyndon Johnson's policies and way of looking at things dominated the NYA program in Texas. If you were in here working with a big organization and Lyndon was at the top of it, somehow or other his policies would leak down like little drops of rain to where subordinates

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would operate on that same basis, more or less. And it's just fortunate that everybody in the Lyndon Johnson organization was against boondoggling. I think Lyndon was himself, although he was a great admirer of Delano Roosevelt, who was considered by many Democrats in Texas as being too liberal.

I'm a great admirer of Lyndon Johnson. I was surprised and pleased when he became President.

MG: When you were down in Corpus, did you have any contact with Roy Miller or get to see him?

LG: Oh, yes, I knew Roy Miller. I knew him well and we attended the same church.

MG: LBJ was an admirer of Roy Miller, I understand.

LG: Yes, Roy Miller was a very brilliant man. He was a man who was the daddy of the intracoastal canal. Yes, he was a very able man.

MG: Anything on the relationship between Roy Miller and Lyndon Johnson that you remember?

LG: Not that I know of. I didn't even know that they were close friends.

MG: Were you still with the NYA when LBJ decided to run for Congress after Congressman Buchanan died? That was in 1937.

LG: Yes, I was with him when he decided to run for Congress.

MG: Really? Did you help out in the campaign at all?

LG: No. That is to say I was for him but I never was a campaigner. That was the only time I ever felt that he was displeased with me. I said, "Lyndon, listen. All my life I have felt that my support of a candidate was a personal matter and I have never campaigned for anyone. I'm just

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not a politician. I went to West Point where we recognize that our leaders are those elected by the voters. Our commander-in-chief is the president elected by the voters and not the one that I elect." You know what I mean. We have to take them all as they come. He didn't like that worth a damn. He thought I ought to just get out there and go around and see all my friends and campaign for him.

However, he got over it because in later years, right here in this building, I came down here once with a big crowd of people. He was signing autographs and when he saw me he jumped clear out of his chair and grabbed my hand with both hands. I could see that he was genuinely glad to see me again. In other words, I think we always remained good friends. Over the years I saw Lyndon on a number of occasions at his home, at parties, and at the White House. When he was President but on this occasion just mentioned I felt more than ever before that we were friends.

MG: Did you see him at the White House?

LG: Yes, I saw Lyndon several times at the White House. My wife and I were invited. I married a daughter of Bess Beeman. Bess Beeman you may never have heard of, but she was a very close friend of Lyndon for many years. I never met anyone more loyal to Lyndon than she was.

MG: I sure have [heard of her].

LG: When Bess Beeman died Lyndon flew down to Austin, Texas to her funeral. All I'm saying is, I married Bess Beeman's daughter, and Bess Beeman used to stay in my house when she came to Washington. On occasions when she was invited to the White House or to parties my wife and I were also invited. So that gives you some idea of my tie to Lyndon Johnson and Lady

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Bird. I think that in his early life Lyndon liked me and then later on when I married Bess Beeman's daughter, I think that broadened our friendship.

MG: How do you feel about the NYA in retrospect? Do you think it was a good program?

LG: I think that something like the NYA had to be done. The reason I was personally sold on it was really a very unusual experience in 1933. I was driving back and forth from Austin to Corpus Christi on weekends because I was making plans to move my family to Austin. Anyhow, one night, about one o'clock in the morning, I was driving through Bastrop when I saw a whole pack of kids on the road. I was driving by myself. I couldn't figure out why in the world all these kids were out there. Little kids on up to some about eighteen years old. I couldn't figure out why on earth they were out there at that time of the morning. I stopped and talked to them, but they wouldn't tell me. Finally I got interested and I stopped for coffee somewhere up the line. I was told that recently this happened quite often. Times were hard and the children's families were so poor they didn't have enough food in the family to go around. So some felt that they had to leave home so the smaller children could eat. They formed gangs, not to pillage anything, not to vandalize, but just to look for work and food and shelter.

So that's why I became very interested. I knew something had to be done because that was a hell of a situation, to have boys, little kids, and there may have been a few girls, too. I don't know, but boys are all I can remember. It was a terrible situation. It was very bad. I felt

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that anything that could be done to help the situation would be a good thing so they could get work and food and shelter. However, I felt it would be bad to give them a handout without making them feel that they were doing some useful work to earn it. These kids didn't want charity-- they wanted work.

The idea today seems to be that they are entitled to food and money when they need it without giving them the opportunity to work. Lyndon Johnson when he was a boy also saw hard times but I believe that Lyndon had the idea that he should work if possible without feeling that he was entitled to have his needs given to him without being willing to work.

MG: Well, I certainly do thank you.

LG: I am glad to have met you.

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview I]



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