INTERVIEW I

DATE: May 11, 1965

INTERVIEWEE: WELLY HOPKINS

INTERVIEWER: ERIC F. GOLDMAN

PLACE: Mr. Hopkins' office in the United Mine Workers Building, Washington, D.C.

Tape 1 of 1

EG: Mr. Hopkins, your letter describes your first meeting with the President but it isn't as complete as we would like to have it. Would you describe that as fully as you can?

WH: That time I recall in detail because I was running for Democratic nomination for a place in the Texas Senate. It was the 19th Senatorial District, composed of six counties, three of which were Comal, Blanco, and Hays. Blanco was the home of the President's family at that time. Hays, of course, had Southwest State Teachers College at which the President was then a student. I met Mr. Sam Johnson, the President's father, prior to that time and in my course of campaigning locally, I naturally sought out his friends. On this given occasion--would you like me to repeat?

EG: If you please.

WH: I remember it was an early summer or hot spring day and I had driven up there in the first automobile I ever owned. It was a little Chevrolet roadster, red, fire-engine red, with a jump seat in the back, and I paid all of $825.00 for it. I was campaigning

in it. I went to Henly, which was a beautiful community, somewhere on the Hays-Blanco line, I think, to a grove of live oak trees, where traditionally they held picnics on the ground all day, political picnics. I was there in behalf of my candidacy. There were probably two hundred or three hundred people in attendance from the countryside and it was a typical occasion, indigenous of the parts and of those times. They had a master of ceremonies. There was a speaking platform, consisting of just a country delivery wagon with the tailgate let down, if you know what I mean. The master of ceremonies was some local man presiding. He called on either the candidates or their representatives--everybody from constable to governor as a rule. And the time came in the afternoon when it was my chance to start to convince the voters as to why I thought I was qualified, to try to sell my message to them, as against my opponent Tom Grambrell, who was a county attorney at the time, down in Lockhart. I did my best and as I was let down from the wagon, walking back through the crowd, resuming my campaigning, soliciting votes, I heard the master of ceremonies, I'm not sure but I think he might have been a Casparis.

EG: I don't know what that means.

WH: That was a local name in those parts. It was Casparis who was a sheriff at that time. There was also a loyal Johnsonian named Vernon Gore, and it might have been Gore, I'm not sure. But one of the men whose face I remember very well was master of ceremonies.

In any event, I heard him call the name of Pat Neff and he called two or three times and nobody responded. Neff, as you may recall, was a former governor of Texas but at that time was on the State Railroad Commission, I think as its chairman.

EG: Wasn't it Neff who appointed the President's father to a railroad post, and if it was, do you know what that post was?

WH: Well, his father was an appointee of Governor Neff at the time the Governor was in office. I think in later years he may have received another, when Neff was acting in the role of chairman of the State Railway Commission.

EG: Do you know what the appointment was precisely?

WH: The later appointment that he had, I think, was a sort of traveling bus inspector in certain districts of the state where he went as a traveling representative of the commission to check on the operation of bus lines and truck lines. But I am under the impression that he had an appointment prior to the time when Neff was governor. On this particular instance, as a former governor, being a member of the commission, he was up for election, having served an unexpired portion of a term. And the master of ceremonies called on Pat Neff or somebody to speak for him. He was about to declare it by default and pass it on to the next one, when I remember very well, I saw coming through the crowd a young fellow, kind of waving his arms about, calling out, "By God--I think that's what he said--"By God, I'll make a speech for Pat Neff." Whereupon he climbed up on the tailgate and in the next

ten minutes or so, he made a stem-winding, arm-swinging speech in behalf of Neff, as a good governor, as well as a railroad commissioner, and gave all the reasons why he should be elected.

EG: How was the President speaking, did you say, stem-winding, lots of gestures, in an enthusiastic, excitable voice?

WH: Well, a fast-talking voice, and very articulate. It wasn't a rich oratorical style, but it was an enthusiastic, genuine style, if you want to call it that. He had a timbre in his voice that was pleasantly received by people.

EG: They didn't object to this young man's getting up there?

WH: Not at all. He had been introduced, as I recall, as: "This is Lyndon Johnson, Sam Johnson's son." Everybody in the countryside knew Sam Johnson.

EG: Now as he still in college then?

WH: Yes, he was.

EG: So he had just come over out of interest?

WH: I'm sure that he had. That was typical of the townspeople and the countryside. He was still in college. It was his last year in college actually.

EG: Did he talk in those days in a higher voice or lower voice than now?

WH: I should think a little higher voice.

EG: Much faster?

WH: I think it was, yes, much faster than his present public delivery. But it was so wrapped up in youthful enthusiasm and sincerity

of purpose, you might say, that his audience came along with him.

EG: And good applause?

WH: Yes, he got nice applause and when it was over, naturally being interested, I sought him out and made myself known as I usually did. In a short time, in a matter of less than an hour, around the grounds we kind of made common cause of each other. I liked the young fellow. I was some ten or fifteen years older and I guess perhaps I felt older than I was. As a sidelight, he might not recall it, but on the first instance having met him and introduced myself, he called me "Mister" and I called him Lyndon. He didn't stay on that "Mister" statement very long, because as a matter of fact, we were very attached to each other.

EG: I notice, Mr. Hopkins, that Alvin Wirtz had held this seat which you were running for. Now every place we have gone the name Alvin Wirtz comes up in the development of Mr. Johnson's career. When did he meet Wirtz, do you know? How did this friendship develop? By the time Mr. Johnson was on his way up the scale, they seem very close.

WH: I can't be precisely accurate, but I can give you some details. Alvin Wirtz, to begin with, was a magnificent character, a very strong man in his own right, a man who was very appreciative of the friendship of the people who were very close to him. And Sam Johnson, the President's father had been a supporter of Wirtz,

and he had supported him when Wirtz ran for the Senate seat I was seeking, Blanco county being in that senatorial district. And so, as I said, I met Lyndon that Thursday.

Now Wirtz also was very active and so was I in the election of Richard Kleberg to the Congress to succeed Harry Wurzbach, who died suddenly in the fall, I believe of 1931. After my campaign was over, the one that the President had managed for me, I maintained contact with him as I went to the Senate and so when the Kleberg campaign came along, Wirtz was active in Guadalupe County and Comal County. I, jointly with him, was trying to be active in all the counties including those in my senatorial district where I either had friends or relatives or good political supporters within the confines of the Ninth Congressional--not the Ninth, whatever congressional district, may be the fourteenth, that George Bush represents. You see, that congressional district is not the old tenth district that the President later represented himself. It was a shoestring district running all the way from Corpus Christi, on the Gulf, to Bexar County up to and including Comal County that was adjacent to Blanco. It went right on up the Balcones Fault Line. So Sam Johnson had friends in Comal County, Wirtz had friends and practiced law in Guadalupe County and I had friends in all the several counties. So we enlisted Sam Johnson's interest in helping to elect Dick Kleberg. Roy Miller, Dick's manager, set up headquarters down in San Antonio at the Gunter Hotel.

And I went up there the last week of the campaign to assist generally and to make some speechs for Dick in various parts of his district. We saw Sam Johnson several times in the campaign. I think he came in there, the San Antonio office, several times and so did Wirtz.

EG: You weren't really sure who suggested to Kleberg that he hire Lyndon Johnson?

WH: I think I am. Actually, I didn't do it directly, I said that in my letter. I made known during the campaign, during the last part of it, that I thought that Sam Johnson had a wonderful fine boy. After the campaign was over and Dick was nominated, I sent word to Kleberg that I thought Lyndon, as I called him then, would make a wonderful secretary. In order to accomplish it I deliberately went down to Houston where Lyndon was then teaching at Sam Houston High School and where Roy Miller had an office, and I talked to Roy about it and told him that I thought Lyndon would make the proper man and had the various qualifications. After that I talked to Lyndon and told him I had gone to Roy and had asked Roy to see if he couldn't have Kleberg see Lyndon for an interview, which Roy did. I recall that neither Roy nor Dick had ever met Lyndon at that time.

EG: When you mentioned this possibility to the President, was he excited at the possibility?

WH: Oh, unquestionably so. I don't recall the details but I know

he was delighted at the prospect because even in that day I think politics, if you want to call it that, was in his blood, just by inheritance and by training, and by general aptitude.

EG: On that point, Mr. Hopkins, we've talked to a number of his old friends in San Marcos and we have a somewhat confused picture of what his state of mind was in this period when he was finishing college. Some of them say that he felt committed by family tradition to be a teacher; felt that he ought to be a teacher. Others felt that he looked upon teaching as a stepping-stone to politics; that politics was in his blood, that he was thinking of it even in college. What was your impression of his state of mind?

WH: Certainly he did teach immediately following and I think he had committed himself to that when I first met him and for the first year I knew him. But it is my recollection that even in those days, he felt some day he might want to go into politics, or public life. Not in that particular year but long before he went into Congress he used to visit with me and my mother, who he felt very close to, and he talked very freely about how some day he was going to hold public office.

EG: You knew his father quite well?

WH: Well, I won't say intimately because he was older than I, but I knew him before I knew Lyndon and I knew him off and on.

EG: We have a lot of material on the father but I must say we don't know him very well. Even his appearance isn't very clear to us

for some reason; it's just not coming through.

WH: He was a tall, rangy sort of man. I can best describe him so far as his face goes--in fact the more I see the President the last several years the more I think he looks like his father. They have equal height, equal build. The contour of his head and arms and body and hands are very similar. As I remember, his father had more shrillness in his voice. His mother was a very quiet, soft-spoken person. The President's is not identical with his father's but some of the qualities of his father's voice I could identify. Mr. Johnson was not a fast speaker, I don't recall, to the extent that President Johnson was when I first met him.

EG: Now the father, his occupation was essentially politics, wasn't it? He dabbled in real estate; he would dabble in this, that and the other, but if you would have asked the father what his occupation was, he would have said politics, wouldn't he?

WH: Well, probably so. I don't know if I ever heard anybody ask him that question. He, of course, was older than I and he had his business activities in prior years. He had been a small landowner and I think he had been in the cow business in a small way through the years when his family was growing up. He had been in the legislature, as you know, but he was a man who always had an intense interest in anything political.

EG: Now in terms of the ideology of the father, the picture that has come through so far is that the father was a little bit of

a Populist in his attitude.

WH: In his legislative days, perhaps he was. I never heard him discourse on economics or abstract theories. I heard him talk many times, express his views on current candidates or on public officeholders, whether he liked them or didn't like them, and things of that sort but my recollection of him, and I can't say I was intimate with him on that, does not include other opinions. I don't think you would have called him a Populist, maybe as a younger man he may have leaned that way.

EG: Wasn't he something of a "peoples" man against the "interests"?

WH: I don't think you can doubt it because he was a man of the soil and a man who was in the rank and file of the common people. He loved people and he bred confidence in people.

EG: What was his style? Why should this back-country legislator be an author of a bill about stocks?

WH: I couldn't answer that because I assume that was before I knew Mr. Johnson.

EG: Perhaps he was against the interests so to speak?

WH: I should say that he probably could have espoused a cause like that for by nature because he really was for the common man, if you want to put it that way. He might have felt that some of the average rank and file of the people in that particular part of the state weren't getting their fair share of opportunities and their fair share of the world goods perhaps. But I don't think I would have called him a Populist.

EG: You wouldn't call him a southern Democrat type though?

WH: No, he wasn't. He was a homespun man in personal appearance and a rather clear-cut thinking fellow, but I won't speculate. I think he would resolve his political ideologies by applying them to local events and things in terms of the needs of people.

EG: As you know, Mr. Hopkins, two of the things President Johnson has mentioned several times in speeches inthe last couple of years are the influence on him of two actions of his father. One was the defense of the German-Americans during World War I and the other was his opposition to the Klan. Now about the Germans, the President has mentioned that his father got up and made a particularly effective speech. We have been trying to find that speech and Harry Ransom at the University of Texas put researchers to work on it without success. Perhaps there is no recorded copy of that speech. Do you know anything about it?

WH: I don't know the speech except by reputation in later years. I don't know the place that it was delivered. I have heard people comment about Mr. Sam Johnson's defense of the German settlers.

EG: They did talk about it, is that right?

WH: As I recall it, it was evidenced in the fact that some of the strongest supporters I had in my district were German people and they very often referred to Mr. Johnson. Some of them supported me because I was his friend. I remember one time

in later years Lyndon asked me to go with him up to Cypress Mill, a little community not far out of Fredericksburg, on the edge of Gillespie and Blanco County, for the prime purpose of meeting a Mr. Wenmohs--I believe that was his name--and I have his name here somewhere. I thought I had a little book that I carried around with me in those days where I put the name of a good many people, but the point is that he had me go up there and meet the man and his wife and three or four other people. There weren't but a half a dozen of them there but I made them a little speech because Lyndon wanted me to do this because they were fine German people and he knew they were friendly to his father.

EG: Was this friendliness of the Germans to Mr. Sam Johnson because of this one speech or because they knew he was their friend in general?

WH: I think they knew he was a friend in general, but it may have stemmed originally from this speech.

EG: Did they talk about this speech?

WH: I can't say that I recall hearing them speak particularly about that speech, but in a general way I knew he had always been a friend to the German people when they needed it during the war. As a result of that, I was the beneficiary of some of this friendly relationship.

EG: What about Sam Ely Johnson and the Klan? Was he an outstanding opponent of them?

WH: I'm sure that he was. You see, the Klan had reached its height,

actually as I recall it, in Texas in the gubernatorial campaign prior to that time. 1924--that's right, when Jim Ferguson ran.

EG: The father and the Klan?

WH: I'm sure that the most vivid activity of Mr. Johnson's must have been prior to the time that I knew him. I assume it must have been in that very campaign that I speak of because I know that Mr. Johnson was always friendly to Jim Ferguson.

EG: About the Klan, in general in Texas and also in your district, when was it powerful?

WH: I can tell you when they first came to power because I was still in the University of Texas and I left there and took the bar examination in June, 1923 and was admitted to the bar the next month. They were at the height of their organizing activities at that time. They were very active in Austin.

EG: When did they first begin to become important?

WH: I would say the year before, in 1922, maybe, but this was in 1923 and I know I almost got involved in it myself when I was a youngster. I had enough sense to keep away and not get involved in it, but I almost did. It was the year I got involved in politics and that was in 1924 and I think that was when Mrs. Jim Ferguson ran for governor, wasn't it?

EG: Right.

WH: And it was a Klan and anti-Klan thing. It was family against family and brother against brother to the degree that they tarred and feathered one man and threw him out on the public square in

my town. I remember some of us--maybe we didn't talk about it publicly then but I can now--went together. A young Jewish boy, a friend of mine. and a few others, got about eight or ten yards of black crepe and we climbed up on the roof of an adjacent building and draped this fiery cross in black crepe the night after they had tarred and feathered that man. They woke up the next morning and found it on the cross and it took them half a day to decide what to do with it. They finally pulled it down and they had a little ceremony out in the square, close to the Confederate monument, and burned the crepe as if it were something dirty, a disgrace.

EG: Did the Klan in those days in Texas stand for what we generally associate with it? Anti-Jewish, anti-Catholic, anti-Negro, and extreme nationalism?

WH: Yes, that is certainly true. And they did run out of my town a damn good man, a saddle-maker, his name I don't recall, because he was alleged to have some improper relationship with some woman in town and there wasn't a damn bit of truth in it. But they made him suffer for it nonetheless.

And I know Mr. Johnson carried forward his activities and made well known his views on the Klan question after 1924. Of course, I didn't konw him then. I knew him only in 1930. But the Klan invaded our courthouse, elected some county officials, and thoroughly divided the families I knew, brother against brother, in one instance. It took a few years for it to wear

out but the election of "Ma" Ferguson was one fo the things that broke its back because Jim Ferguson was smart enough to know that somebody had to take up the challenge against the head of the Klan. I've forgotten who it was, I think his name was Felix Robertson and "Ma" Ferguson beat him and Jim Ferguson didn't throw any punches during the campaign to let them know where he was.

EG: Mr. Redford told us that at the height of the Klan in Texas it was notably weak around Johnson City and the President's area. Does that check with your impression?

WH: Yes, I would think so. I don't believe those people, as I knew them, were very quick to embrace such ideology and I'm quite sure that the Klan would not have had a stronghold there, for instance, that they had down in my area.

EG: There are a very few Catholics or Jews in that area?

WH: Even so, I doubt if they would have had the foothold they had in my county because those people were grounded in a way that reflected their neighborhood. They had taken care of each other in that rough country and Mr. Johnson's help for the German people who were settlers in there from another part of the world was typical. I would say Mr. Redford's recollections were probably right.

EG: You were telling us about Sam Ely Johnson in that period. Was Johnson one of the better known legislators in Texas?

WH: Dr. Goldman, I can't answer that precisely because you see he

served in the legislature for a number of years before my time. I recall he was a very forceful voting member of the House. But whether he was powerful in the sense of having a following in the voting pattern of the House, I cannot accurately say.

EG: Juanita Roberts, the President's secretary, has suggested that I try to run down among the President's old friends this matter: It is her opinion that the stories are all wrong which state that Sam Rayburn was a kind of political father to the President. The fact of the matter is that Sam Ely Johnson was a kind of father to both Sam Rayburn and his son, Lyndon.

WH: I would subscribe to that. I think that the President's present characteristics were inherited from his father. Sam Johnson was a contemporary of Sam Rayburn and they knew each other. I would also bring up Wirtz. He had many fine qualities and had a tremendous influence upon Lyndon through the years. I spent many, many hours with him on different occasions and with the two of them together. I am not sure, but I think Lyndon knew Wirtz before he knew Rayburn.

EG: He died in 1950, didn't he?

WH: Yes, he died in 1950 of a heart attack.

EG: What did Wirtz look like? Could you give me a description?

WH: He was taller than me. I am 5 feet 8; he was 5 feet 10 or more. He was stockily built with a rather dark complexion. He had curly hair, more when he was young than when he was an old man. He had a kind of a sweet smile, and was a man of much magnetism,

not in a fanfare way but in a very wholesome way. And he also had characteristics which Lyndon's father had--appreciation of friends and remembering them and doing things for them. He was a very successful lawyer and he started his practice in Colorado County at Columbus, Texas, and he came to Seguin around, well, I first knew him about 1924, having met him during one of his campaigns when he was running for the state senate himself. I acted as his campaign manager in my county. That was probably in the campaigns of 1926 and '28. He always remembered his friends and I dare say that Lyndon looked up to him with respect and confidence and for guidance and in a sincere, deep-seated fashion before the same relationship grew up between Lyndon and the Speaker.

EG: In his attitude toward public policies, would you call him liberal?

WH: No. When he was in the state senate, he inspired some legislation which people would say was for the vested interests. Personally I never thought so. But for instance, he had an important role in the repeal of the Robertson Insurance Act which required all insurance companies doing business within Texas to keep certain amounts of deposits or investments within the state. He, for good practical business reasons, advocated the repeal of that. Insurance people in Texas and local Texas banks said that this was for the purpose of helping outside vested interests come in and things of that sort. He also became an authority on water power.

EG: Did he have a role in the big Colorado River development?

WH: Oh, yes, he was the father of it.

EG: I could go on for hours on that one. For it was in the earlier stages of the Colorado River Development that I got to really know Lyndon and that Lyndon got to know Wirtz. A few more years before that Wirtz had become interested in trying to develop the Colorado River and at a time when as a matter of fact, the Insull people, Sam and Martin as you may recall, had a great deal of money in it through one of their Mississippi Valley utility companies.

WH: Then the President did not know Wirtz until the President became secretary to Kleberg?

He may have met him, but I am quite sure that he did not actually know him. Wirtz became very enthusiastically interested in pursuing his efforts to try to do something with the Colorado River plan because it was about to go out of existence. The bubble had burst. It was part of the Insull empire, and Ralph Morrison and others in San Antonio were trying to get hold of it. Wirtz had a dream of building it up as a public power project and to do that he had to have both legislation and financing. The legislation I had something to do with, because I had it passed for him in the Texas Legislature as the first Colorado River Authority. But this was predicated on Wirtz's experience in Washington. He did the normal thing. He went to his Congressman Dick Kleberg for guidance as how to go about it

and he saw this young man Johnson had sense enough and ingenuity enough to get things done in Washington. Beginning in that era, he began to know Wirtz very actively and in fact the President had as much to do with the coming into being and the success of the Colorado River dams you know today as Wirtz himself.

EG: When did the legislation get passed? After this period, after the President had ceased to be secretary to Kleberg?

WH: Yes, during that time, but before, as well as after.

EG: The initial stages were to get federal funds into saving first the thing that was about to be lost and, second, to develop it. As the thing progressed a year or two, the rural electrification grew out of it. Wirtz became highly enthusiastic in its behalf and Lyndon as a congressman embraced it as a matter of bringing cheap electricity and power to the people in that area. But going back to Wirtz, in my judgment, the future of the Colorado River depended upon and actually got its real incentive from the time the first Colorado River Authority Act was enacted.

EG: Was the act actually passed while Johnson was secretary to Kleberg?

WH: That is right. There is no question about that because I was in the Texas Senate.

EG: But nothing happened in the Congress of the United States?

WH: Nothing, no legislation, was needed in the Congress at that time.

EG: But Johnson was working closely with you?

WH: Yes, but he was working primarily with Wirtz. I was the local sponsor for the legislation. For the Colorado River Authority afterwards there was first one name and then another and success breeds success. Unquestionably the present President of the United States brought that about. He talked to me about it before Wirtz became under secretary. Now at that time, as I recall, Lyndon was not only in the Congress, but his ability to make friends and know people and know how to use this, and his intuition about how to do things was developing rapidly. Without being able to say that I know it as a matter of fact, I am very certain in my own mind that Lyndon was also the one who brought about the appointment that was given to Wirtz.

EG: Mr. Hopkins, in regard to how the President's political philosophy developed--Wirtz was no particularly strong liberal influence except on water power?

WH: Yes, on water power and other things. And then I might say Wirtz embraced Roosevelt in theory. At the 1932 convention at Chicago that both of us attended, we were pledged to Garner but on the third ballot went to Roosevelt. Wirtz sincerely advocated the election of Roosevelt--worked for it--and in later years you may recall about the time that Lyndon was running for Congress the court-packing plan was up and Wirtz supported that for Lyndon and Lyndon supported it publicly.

EG: Was it Wirtz who suggested to the President this support?

WH: I can't say definitely because I was in Washington, although

I was trying to help long-range in the campaign. But I have every reason to think so.

EG: We have heard that Mr. Wirtz served as an advisor to the President not only when he was NYA director but during the congressional candidacy of 1937.

WH: No question about it.

Let's move back to the father. I understand that you and other people referred to the President's father as Mr. Sam. Was this particularly younger people who did this or was this general?

EG: Particularly younger people.

WH: One or two personal things that I recall to give a bit of the characteristics of the man. I remember once or twice going by his home. I remember one time when they were living in San Marcos and maybe another time when they were living back up in Johnson City or close to it. I remember one time late in the evening going by, but I don't think Lyndon was with me and I stayed for supper with them at his invitation and his whole family was there suppering. I have never seen in my recollection a better manifestation of a right sort of feeling for a father and husband to his wife and his family than on that occasion. They were living in a very simple home, a rented home at the time in San Marcos. Mr. Johnson, or Mr. Sam as I called him, I am sure didn't have much of an income. But he would help Mrs. Johnson set a good substantial family table. As they gathered around that evening with a little visiting

before and after supper, as we called it, I can in retrospect see the many fine qualities of a gentleman that a man ought to have.

EG: Did the home in San Marcos have books around? She was a rather bookish lady.

WH: Yes, she was. I would doubt that there was a library as such. She had books in and around the house in profusion, but I can't recall a library. I'm quite sure that the books were around and Lyndon grew up with them because his mother would read to him and pointed this and that out.

EG: Did he ever talk about any books in particular?

WH: Lyndon, when I first knew him, wasn't much of a reader. For a number of years after that he lived such a hurried up sort of life and existence that he didn't think he had time to read. And I heard him remark upon that, in later years--I remember his commenting a few times, even when he was a grown man, that one of the books that impressed him the most was John Steinbeck's Grapes of Wrath. He used to comment on the story of the Oakies. The President kind of likened some of his earlier adventures on the West Coast, I think, to the role of an Oakie and that intrigued him.

EG: Mr. Hopkins, would you please go back now to the early Senate campaign. From that time to the appointment to Kleberg, did you have any contact with him?

WH: Yes, in this fashion. He had started to teach school, I think,

after he graduated down in Pearsall, I believe. Then he went down to Sam Houston High School.

EG: He went to Cotulla, Texas, for a while.

WH: He was at Cotulla before that, before he graduated.

EG: You did not know him during Cotulla?

WH: No, I did not.

EG: Now he is in Houston?

WH: That's right. And he immediately got into, enthusiastically as he would, putting his young students into the competitive debating field. Texas public schools at that time had a sort of intercollegiate contest of debating. And he very quickly got his youngsters into the district level and then into the inter-district level and he was taking them around the countryside. Very, very frequently he would stop by Gonzales at that time. Being just a country lawyer practicing by myself, my mother and I made our home together. Lyndon was over very often and had his youngsters with him. I remember two of them whose names, I think, are mentioned in that book--Gene Latimer and L. E. Jones.

EG: We know Jones.

WH: Did L. E. ever tell you about the time he was law clerk to Justice Butler?

EG: Yes. It is a very interesting story how he got it. Lyndon had gone back to Texas in the NYA job and he left L. E. up here. I knew at the time L. E. was having some difficulty

getting by financially. He worked in and around the Congress, in some congressional office, but always with the hope of completing his law degree here. He came to me several times in a very fine sort of way, and L. E. might not want me to tell this, but he was strapped. I helped him in a very small way but I know basically that whenever he got too short, he would call up "The Chief," as he called Lyndon even in those days, and the Chief would get him a little money even though "The Chief" didn't have much. I was with the Department of Justice running its trial section of the criminal division at the time. He came to me on a given day and said that he just thought that he would like to be a law clerk and he had learned that there was going to be a vacancy in Justice Butler's office and how could he go about becoming an applicant. He sat down and visited with me and we canvassed different possibilities. I didn't know the Justice except by reputation. I had seen before him once or twice and I knew he was a crusty sort of fellow and he appeared to have a sort of crusty humor, and I couldn't think of any way. So I finally said to L. E., "Well, why in the devil don't you just call up or go out there and become an applicant?" And bless your heart, he did exactly that. Well, within a matter of a day or two afterwards he came in my office one evening with the biggest grin on his face that you ever saw and he said, "I've got it." And I said, "How did you get it?" He said, "I went and called up the Justice and asked if I could see him." And, as I remember it, he went up to the

Justice's room or apartment, told him what he wanted, and became an applicant, and he got it.

EG: Did he have his law degree?

WH: Yes, I think he had his law degree at that time or was in the course of getting it. And he stayed there as I recall until the time he went back to Texas; he served up there a couple of years. That is the way he became secretary to Justice Butler. I have always thought of it as a tribute to him, to the courage that was in the man, and his ability to try to help himself when nobody else could.

EG: Then during the Houston period, you would see Mr. Johnson?

WH: Yes, and he became very fond of my mother and would stop by and see us and spend the night sometimes.

EG: Did you mother cook dinners for him?

WH: She sure did. The President was always hungry.

EG: Did he have any favorite foods?

WH: Brown gravy. That was kind of standard. Everytime folks in my part of the world in those days would have meat at night for supper, you'd have gravy with it. I can't say that I recall any specific dish as the President's favorite.

EG: Back in the Houston days, do you remember what you used to talk about?

WH: The President was always enthusiastic in trying to be successful in his job. We talked about his boys and what he was doing and he used to talk to me about the rivalries between some of the students.

EG: Did you talk about politics?

WH: A bit.

EG: Did he seem restless?

WH: I can't say per se. But he was certainly a boy on the move and I knew that as debating coach, he had matched some local contest. I have forgotten some of the details of it but in any event, the man on the other side was named John Crooker. He was a very successful lawyer of the then firm of Fulbright, Crooker, and Freeman. I think it is Fulbright, something, and Jaworski now and he sponsored the team opposing Lyndon.

EG: The Houston High School, these were the opposing team?

WH: Right. Lyndon used to go all out to see if he could beat John Crooker, not in the physical sense but in the competitive sense. I forgot how it grew up, but he always had a competitive disposition and was out to win. Sometimes when he was visiting me and I knew he repeated it to my mother, he said any number of times--I don't know his exact words, but I do know he said to my mother several times, "Mrs. Hopkins, I am going to be President some day." I didn't know it at the time but in later years when he was in the Senate and before I lost my mother in '56, she used to reminisce with me. She told me of some of her conversations with Lyndon to which I was not privy at the time. But I can't say he ever made that direct remark to me. But we did talk prospectively. He wanted me to run for attorney general some day. He wanted me to run for governor some day. And he almost persuaded me to run for attorney general.

EG: Was he looking for political openings for himself too?

WH: I can't say that he was. I would doubt it because he was just out of school. He wasn't in his native habitat, like his local district where he could run for county attorney or what-not. But I think in the back of his mind was the desire to be elected, because you may recall, he had been in Washington with Kleberg less than a year when he was elected speaker of the Little Congress. He got it because he was a popular fellow and he got out and ran for it.

EG: Now during the Houston period, you remained here in Texas?

WH: Yes, I came here Washington in '36. And Kleberg was still in the Congress when I came.

EG: You were more or less in constant contact with him?

WH: For one reason or another--that's right.

EG: In the Kleberg period, our picture is he takes over the office, he drives hard to get Kleberg to act in agricultural matters and veterans matters and the Colorado River Authority. Is there something else important, i.e., not only as secretary to Kleberg but in actually running the office?

WH: He surely ran the office, I can say that. Those are the three areas in which he was expressing interest at the time. I don't know of any other thing that I could isolate by name as a distinct activity. You may remember that before he became NYA director that President Roosevelt offered him the place as manager at Passamaquody, the tidal power project in Maine. He would have

none of that. My recollection is it was offered to him before he ran for Congress. I recall a long conversation we had about it in which I advised him not to accept the offer.

EG: This comes from his interest in the Colorado work?

WH: I would think so and the fact that Roosevelt knew him first and foremost because of Lyndon's attempt to help promote local Colorado River Authority. I think that the President may have met Lyndon as a congressional secretary through some of those activities.

EG: FDR knew Johnson before Johnson ran for Congress because Claude Wild told us that when he entered the campaign they assumed Roosevelt support, indirectly or directly. Actually no one seems to remember just how. Do you remember? Wasn't there a telegram from either Jimmy or Elliot Roosevelt?

WH: I can't say. There was a terrible lot that figured in that. You see, I was in Washington at the time. That was in '38 when he ran for the Congress. I don't know whether it was from Elliot or Jimmy Roosevelt. But there was a telegram that I'm sure wasn't from the President, but it carried the Presidential imprimatur so to speak.

EG: While he was working in Kleberg's office, are there any anecdotes or stories which particularly illustrate what he was like during that period?

WH: I remember one occasion when he lived in a one-room basement room in the old Dodge Hotel with two of the boys he had working in the office with him just to save money.

EG: Arthur Perry and Bob Jackson?

WH: That's right. At that time, Arthur Perry was secretary to [Senator Tom] Connally, I believe.

EG: There were no particular anecdotes that stick in your mind before he went to Texas to become NYA Director?

WH: Not at the moment, I don't recall any incidents or anecdotes worth repeating.

EG: The NYA appointment, do you know how to he got that NYA appointment?

WH: I can't be clear, but I have a very distinct impression that it had its genesis in Wirtz's mind. Wirtz certainly approved it and encouraged him to do it. Just where the first offer came from, I don't know. But Lyndon in those days had made quite a friend of A. Williams. He knew him at that time as congressional secretary. Of course, he knew him in later years too. Whether it was because Williams was in a position to recommend it to Harry Hopkins or other channels that put his name in motion, I can't say.

EG: Did Wirtz look upon young Lyndon Johnson as a young man with a brilliant political future?

WH: I don't have any doubt about it.

EG: Do you think Wirtz thought he might be President.

WH: Well, Wirtz may not have thought of that in the early days but I think Wirtz dreamed dreams for him, just as I did.

EG: What did you men, who had such experience in politics, see in him exactly?

WH: Ability, personality, intelligence, a wonderful memory. He

had the ability to be a good campaigner, if you want to put it that way, long before he got into politics. He knew how to approach people. You might well say, he might well have read Dale Carnegie's How to Make Friends [How to Win Friends and Influence People]. He had that kind of a quality. He had a tremendous drive, not only in accomplishing things but in demonstrating to people that he knew how to do things.

EG: Mr. Hopkins, sometimes men who have tremendous drive and work night and day and drive everybody around them make enemies. He seems to have made friends by doing it.

WH: No question about it. I've known two or three individuals who have been in and around his office and worked for him when he was in the Congress who, after a year or two, had to take sabbatical leave. But they always came back. He had an ability to imbue those around him with a sense of loyalty and friendliness. He always found some way, no matter how hard he was driving, to evidence his appreciation.

EG: Do you have any incidents in your own relationships of this way of evidencing his friendship?

WH: Yes. You'd have to let me think. I might but I can't say right off the top. Since knowing what the world was all about, how to get around in the world, and engaging people, that you probably wouldn't notice in a man quite of his early years.

Speaking of appreciation, I don't konw whether this answers it or not. Lyndon married before I did. I wasn't at his wedding.

When I was married in '36, Lyndon and I wrote back and forth to each other in correspondence and I had been up here a few times as a country lawyer on business. But he went out of his way to fly down the night before I was married. Lyndon flew down purposely for that, and I recall very, very well that the night before the wedding he came by and had a visit with my mother at the hotel, by himself. At that time my mother was upset and a little excited, regretful at losing a son maybe she thought, and he's the one who went to see her and asked her if he couldn't take her over to the little banquet they gave for Alice, my wife, and I after the wedding the next day.

EG: This tenderness and consideration for older people, I gather, was also the trait of the father.

WH: I'm quite sure it was because kindness radiated from Mr. Sam, even though he might have had a rough outward appearance in some respects. Kindness was in his disposition and you knew it.

EG: To older people especially?

WH: I'm sure it was and I'm sure he exhibited it to the old people of his area.

EG: Was this a characteristic of a Texas community that you had great respect for older people?

WH: Yes, there was always a show of respect from younger people to older people, a middle aged person to an older person. In fact when I grew up, when I was in my teens, people in later years that I knew well I called by their first names. But my mother

taught me to say "Mr. Ross"--his name was Ross Boone, his first name Ross. She would say, "You call him Mr. Ross." There was a feeling of respect for people.

EG: But especially strong was this kindness to older people? And this kindness to older people was especially strong in the President's father and the President?

WH: No question about it.

EG: The mothers of his friends all loved him. They all refer to his wonderful manner with them. Could you describe that manner for us? When he met your mother, what did he actually do?

WH: Well, in a very refreshing and forthright sort of way, the young fellow would talk to Mother in a way that not only warmed the cockles of her heart but made her want to embrace him as her son. He would talk about what he had done that day and enthusiastically so. Sometimes he would ask Mother questions like, "What would you do?" She would reply to him and then he would relate the things that had happened to him down at school.

EG: He might hug her?

WH: Oh, unquestionably, he would embrace my mother just like I would. He had little endearing terms that he would use. It's a very trite thing to say "honey" for instance, but I think if it is used in the right way and the right modulation of voice and the right approach, it is received in the way it's meant.

EG: It is amazing how many of the mothers of his old friends, like yourself, had special affection for Mr. Johnson.

WH: My mother did until her dying day. They knew Mrs. Johnson and I'm sure loved her the same way because she had a lot of qualities that would attract young men to her. I always felt that my mother had some of it. The President himself in those days was such a sweetly disposed person, even though he was on the move, a boy in a hurry, going places. He still always had time to go out of his way, if it was only for fifteen minutes and people never forgot that.

EG: To go on to the NYA period.

WH: Yes, and he comes down to Austin.

EG: You were not up here in Washington?

WH: I was here. I visited down there a few times when he was NYA director1

EG: Can you give us your impression of him as NYA director when you visited him?

WH: I remember he had an office in one of the earlier office buildings in Austin where the American National Bank is now located and was then. It's been refurbished in later years. It wasn't a very commodious place and he was busy, as you can well anticipate, from early morning 'til late at night.

EG: Did he have a couple of telephones or did he have one?

WH: I remember he more than that. He had two but it seems he also had an office in town, another little office that was adjacent to it, if I remember correctly. And there may have been one in the waiting room.

He was a telephone man then, too. There is a little bit of something that comes to my mind and I've told it to my friends a few times. It's a good story and it actually happened. The President will understand my repeating it, I reckon. On one afternoon I was down there, I had been in Texas for some reason or other, I went by his office just for general visiting and a young colored boy, couldn't have been more than in his twenties somewhere or other, black as the ace of spades, came in and the substance of conversation ran something like this. He said, "Mr. Johnson, I wants to borrow five dollars." And Lyndon as usual wanted to have a little fun out of everything. He was going to let him have it, I reckon, but he had to draw him out and he said, "Well, boy"--he called him by name or boy, I've forgotten which--"What do you want with five dollars here late in the afternoon?" And he said, "Mr. Johnson, I wants to get married." That gave Lyndon the cue. He asked him a few more questions, trying to draw him out and he said, "Now tell me, boy, why is it you want to get married." And he said, "Well, Mr. Johnson, I just got to get married." Lyndon said, "Now come on and tell me the truth. You just love her. That's the reason you want to get married, you just love her a lot." And he said, "Yes, sir, that and a few other little things."

He quickly realized, I think, the possibilities in that NYA position. He picked out key people and interested them in the NYA. For instance, I remember Edgar Perry, for whom the hotel is named

down there now. He was very wealthy, a much older man than Lyndon and he had been reputed to be one of the rather conservative group around Austin. I knew his son; I went to school with him. It didn't take Lyndon long. He intrigued Perry to help him as director to do such and such a thing. It set in motion a group of influential people that he was able to call on and get enthusiastic help when he decided to run for Congress, which was less than eighteen months after that. He did the same thing with Charles Marsh, that is, C. E. Marsh, who used to own the Austin American and a string of newspapers. The President knew Marsh very well. But he did Marsh the same way, and actually he got Marsh's support to run for Congress by long distance telephone, a call I made to Marsh or to some of Marsh's intimate friends.

EG: In the campaign itself, did you actually participate?

WH: By remote control, I helped.

EG: Did you ever attend a meeting in a summer camp?

WH: No, I was in Washington.

EG: Do you remember attending the meeting where he made the decision?

WH: No, as a matter of fact I was in Florida handling some cases--in Tampa prosecuting some bankers. But I remember the occasion because I was informed of it. He telephoned, telling me that he was going to do it.

EG: Did he ask you if you felt whether he could win or not?

WH: Yes, he asked me specifically if I could get him the full support of Charlie Marsh, which I did by long distance, and Marsh had never

met the man.

EG: What did you say about him?

WH: I merely told Marsh of my interest in him. I had know Marsh intimately for a long time. Marsh and I had mutual friends, and Marsh had observed Lyndon as a NYA director in Austin, he being joing owner of the paper there. I don't know whether he had met Lyndon during those days, he may have but Lyndon did not know him well enough, I know, to ask for his support. Marsh did support Lyndon with his paper, and the first one of the political polls I ever heard being run, Marsh set up. It was early but it was a pretty authentic poll nevertheless.

EG: Mr. Hopkins, Claude Wild was the pro. He wasn't emotionally involved, and he said at the beginning of the campaign that he did not think that there was much of a chance at all. Did it look like a very long shot to you then?

WH: Oh, yes, at long range.

EG: Could you tell us a bit more about Avery, the wealthy building contractor.

WH: I can't say in detail what the setup in Austin was. I know that Avery was in the opposition group, of course, and was one of the big stumbling blocks that he had to get around. Wild should have known some of that.

EG: He says Avery was the big obstacle and that the way Avery was disposed of, insofar as he was disposed of, was to make Avery the rich fellow and Johnson this young country boy, and why

not support "the people?"

Now at the end of the campaign. The President wins and then he goes on a trip with FDR. Do you remember anything about that trip?

WH: Only from hearing about it sometime later. As I remember, FDR had gone down there on a little vacation to a summer resort off the Gulf Coast. And as I recall it, it was Wirtz who found some way to make known to FDR that this young fellow was embracing his court packing plan and was a very enthusiastic endorser of all of the policies in his campaign. I think Wirtz arranged for him to get on that train.

EG: Did President Johnson ever talk to you about what they said and what happened.

WH: Not much. When he was elected and came to Washington to be sworn in, he came by himself. Lady Bird wasn't with him, and he spent the night at my house.

EG: Did you meet him at the train?

WH: No. He came to my house.

EG: Where did you live then?

WH: In Foxhall Village, on Volta Place, in the 4900 block. A little row house; it's still out there.

EG: You had a guest room:

WH: Yes, we had a tiny guest room.

EG: I just want to get all the details.

WH: Yes. There was a tiny guest room with a little roll-away bed.

EG: And was your wife with you?

WH: No, just the two of us.

EG: Do you remember how he was dressed? One man has called it "countrified."

WH: Well, he wasn't fashionably dressed but he was well dressed. Lyndon always has been.

EG: He wouldn't have been noticeably "countrified"?

WH: Oh, no, if you want to say that he was noticeably countrified in the sense that people would turn and say, "Hey, Seedy," no, not at all, not at all.

EG: Was he bubbling over?

WH: Oh, enthusiastic to the point that we sat and talked late that night.

EG: All night?

WH: Yes, all night. I offered to go up with him the next morning to be sworn in, and as I recall, he said he preferred to go by himself and he did. He had breakfast at our house and went up there.

EG: Did he go by streetcar, automobile, taxi?

WH: I don't know but I suspect he went by streetcar because we were modestly situated and he was just a block and a half from the Cabin John streetcar. I know, I used to take that. I'd walk from my house down to the Cabin Street Car Station. I don't think he had to transfer. I think it took you somewhere up close to the Capitol, in my recollection. He may have transferred into a cab after he got downtown.

EG: About how long a streetcar ride was it?

WH: Probably twenty minutes because Foxhall Village is, as you may know, out beyond Georgetown University. It's some considerable distance. He may have taken a transfer, I don't recall.

EG: Why did he go by himself? Do you think that he didn't want to bother you or was it some sort of emotional feeling?

WH: An emotional feeling, in my judgment.

EG: Of standing up there by himself?

WH: I think so.

EG: You don't remember the conversation of the night before, do you?

WH: It was a typical reminiscence of what had happened in bygone days between us. I think he spoke somewhat of his days when he was with Kleberg. He referred to the fact that he didn't know that when he was speaker of the Little Congress that he would be a member of the Congress.

EG: Did he say anything especially about what he wanted to do in Congress?

WH: I'm sure he did. I can't say that he mentioned any one specific thing, although he may have expressed something about wanting to go on Naval Affairs Committee. And I think he did.

EG: Why that committee?

WH: It may have been something that had gotten into his mind in the way of a suggestion from somebody about what a good committeeman a good, young Texas congressman might make. He had political know-how and a lot of moxie even at that time because of his being around the Congress and he knew what congressional appointments were and how they were obtained. He may have thought it

out himself, but I think he mentioned it.

EG: In those next few days, did you stay in contact with him?

WH: He came by as a I remember and spent another night or so with me. I have forgotten the sequence of events. Lady Bird joined him later, but I think there was some gap of time before she came up here.

WG: He stayed with you till then?

WH: I can't say certainly until she arrived. He may have gone apartment hunting. I think he might have. His wife might have gone with him, I don't know.

EG: Did he talk about his first days in Congress?

WH: I can't recall any details, except that I know he was a mighty happy man when he came home for supper that night. He had been serving in his own right as a member of the House.

EG: Would you characterize that previous conversation? I know you can't recall the details but could you generally characterize this nostalgic conversation. Was it basically a kind of gratitude and pride in what he had accomplished in finally being elected to Congress in his own right?

WH: Yes, that is a way of describing it, perhaps. We talked about little personal adventures we had together and he and Alice and I laughed about them because we had not been around together for some time in years gone by. We talked about Bird and when she was coming up. We might have remembered some things we had done jointly when he was still with Kleberg. I know on one

occasion, I don't know if we mentioned it on that night, but the four of us, Bird, Lyndon, Alice and myself had been out for dinner somewhere, down on the waterfront, over across the Anacostia Bridge maybe. And we were coming back and they were working on a stretch of street and there was a red lantern out. We being young and adventuresome, I said something like, "Lyndon, you drive and I'll pick up that damn red lantern and we'll take it home with us." He did but when he slowed down I picked it up, but that damned thing had a piece of concrete in the bottom of it. I had a hard time holding on to it. I don't think he talked about that, but I'm trying to reach back in my memory. We did a lot of things together and we talked about them that night.

On other occasions the four of us, on a Sunday afternoon, just for an outing, got into the car and rode around the countryside. We'd ride up towards Harper's Ferry and across the valley into the Shenandoah Valley. And kid-like, although we were growing up, just for entertainment, we'd count grey horses and stamp them, you know, and see who'd get ten first. If so, we might win this little bit or an extra drink or something.

EG: Mr. Hopkins, we have taken more of your time than we should. You have tremendously helpful. Thank you very much.

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview II]

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By WELLY K. HOPKINS

to the

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