

INTERVIEW I

DATE: September 4, 1979

INTERVIEWEE: VICTOR JAEGLI

INTERVIEWER: Michael L. Gillette

PLACE: Mr. Jaeggli's office, Abilene, Texas

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G: Let's start with your background. Where were you born?

J: I was born in Stamford, Texas. It's not very far from here, you know.

G: And did you grow up there?

J: No, we soon left. My father was employed by a wholesale grocery company. We moved to Dallas and then to Houston. Then I came to San Antonio during World War I. I was just a kid then, and I went to grammar school and high school in San Antonio, and I was a graduate of Brackenridge High School there. I played football at Brackenridge. Then I earned a scholarship to Schreiner Institute and I played football there.

Incidentally, I was a good friend of "Bull" Elkins, Wilson Elkins; in fact, I went to high school with him in San Antonio and then went to Schreiner with him and then went to the university with him, and I roomed with him. I am sure you are familiar somewhat with Bull Elkins' background. He became president of the University of Maryland and was retired just this past year. Wilson Elkins was a four-letter athlete for The University of Texas and he was quite a guy, Rhodes Scholar. He had a very interesting career.

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I majored in civil engineering, got my degree from The University of Texas in civil engineering, and then I coached. When I got out of school in the early 1930s, the depression was going strong. So I coached football and taught until Lyndon hired me.

G: How did you get on to the job?

J: Well, I heard about the NYA starting up, and Maury Maverick, who was a congressman in San Antonio, was, I think, a close friend of Lyndon's. Maury was quite a guy, and Maury told me to go on up to see Lyndon, so I did just that, to Austin. I think the NYA had just gotten under way, I think it was almost a year old then. Lyndon interviewed me and offered me a job as a district engineer for NYA in the Dallas office under C. P. Little. I went up there, and one of the first projects that I inspected--I was supposed to see that the job was being done properly, you know. I was a young engineer. I had coached a little football, but I hadn't done much engineering, but I had a good basic education and I had a lot of construction work.

This was probably one of the most interesting things that I'd hit, up in Sherman County I inspected a couple of highway roadside parks. Lyndon Johnson is the one that initiated that state highway park program with arrangements with the state highway department. We had a number of parks all over the state of Texas then under construction.

G: What did your inspections consist of?

J: Well, I wanted to see the kind of work they were doing, what plans they were using, how they were working, what sort of supervision they had, to see whether the young men were working. This was rather unusual. I got out to this county foreman for the highway department, and he had a group of boys out in the field out there. It looked like they were

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picking flowers. That disturbed me somewhat and I talked to him. I said, "What are these boys doing?" He said, "Oh, they're picking seed on wildflowers." And he said, "I have a program going up here. We plant these seeds along the right-of-way of the highway parks," and that's one of the reasons you see so many beautiful wildflowers along our highway right-of-ways in the state. I'm sure Lady Bird had a lot to do with this, too, because she was very interested in this very same thing.

G: She certainly became well identified with it later.

J: Yes, she surely did. I appreciated it very much. I not only like to see things well built but I like to see beauty in them, too, and Lyndon felt the same way.

G: Well, now, can you recall anything about that initial interview, any first impressions, I mean?

J: Yes, I can see him walk in and greet me at the door. He was a little taller than I am, and I was very much impressed with what a fine-looking man he was. He was well-dressed and immaculate, and I was very much impressed with his appearance and I was impressed with the manner in which he interviewed me. He asked me questions, and they were very pertinent to the job that I was supposed to take. It didn't take him long to make up his mind that I had the qualifications that he wanted in that engineer's job. Of course, the next time I saw Lyndon he had made a trip up to Dallas, and he was inspecting some of the work up there.

G: Was he pleased with it?

J: Yes, he was. He, of course, always saw some things that should be done better. He was very meticulous about what he was after.

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G: Can you recall any specifics here? I know it's a long time.

J: No, I'll get to a few more later on, but I didn't stay there very long. I was in Dallas less than a year, and I was brought into the state office. I was there a very short time, and I became the state director of Work Projects then; in other words, the state engineer.

G: You replaced L. B. Griffith, I guess.

J: That's correct.

G: Well, did you work under him at all even though you were under C. P. Little?

J: A short time.

G: I was trying to understand the chain of command. You were under the district director, I guess.

J: Yes, C. P. Little was the district director.

G: But were you also subordinate to L. B. Griffith?

J: Yes, for a short time.

G: When you moved into the state office. I see.

J: Yes. I wasn't there very long. Just a couple of months. It was a very short time.

G: Was there anything on the project in Dallas while you were up there that was significant with regard to the NYA or the roadside parks?

J: Well, our construction program was primarily that. We started--I'm trying to think of any residence centers that--no, we didn't have any residence centers at that time. That was too early for that. It was in this period when I was in Dallas that Lyndon ran for Congress in Austin, see, and he was elected to Congress while I was in Dallas. That was in 1937. I came shortly thereafter and I don't know, I had an idea they were bringing me up to Austin

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specifically for the job that I took. I mean I was pretty well convinced of that. I don't know that I was promised anything like that, but I was very flattered. I was a young engineer; gosh, I was what? I was about twenty-six years old, twenty-five years old, and to be the state director of Work Projects, I thought, was doing pretty well. I was extremely interested in construction and so was Lyndon and so was Jesse Kellam.

G: Did you vary your role any from that that L. B. Griffith had had? Did you see a need to take a little bit different course at all?

J: No, I'm sure I had some ideas that may have been at variance with him. I respected L. B. Griffith. I liked him, and I think he had been in the army. He was an engineer in the army, in the Corps of Engineers.

G: West Point, I think.

J: Yes, he was a West Pointer, that's right.

G: Well, he seems to have been temperamentally very different from Lyndon Johnson.

J: Yes, he was.

G: I'm wondering if that was noticed?

J: Yes, I am sure it was. You know how I would hesitate to talk about an individual that I was replacing, but I felt that he was in trouble, so to speak, with--at this point in time, it was Jesse Kellam, but I think it was with Lyndon, too. I mean, Lyndon still was very much interested in NYA. His interest never did lag.

G: Do you think it was maybe a different pace, the fact that LBJ seemed to go at such a rapid pace all the time and maybe Griffith was more methodical?

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J: Yes, I think he was. Lyndon was so impatient about things, and Lyndon was a hard man to work for. His standards were so high. He got an idea at two o'clock in the morning, and he wanted that idea working, and you had better be doing something about it, too, when he checked with you again. He was very demanding upon his employees, and what was so great about Lyndon was that he worked harder than anybody that worked for him. He expected you to do something, but his own goals were so high. He had such a driving force in behind him that impressed me tremendously. He didn't let things stand in his way. He wanted you to get the job done, too, and I appreciated that, and this has stuck with me all my life. I'm much the same way. I am impatient about things, and I want to get them done, and I want to see them on their way. I think I picked this up from Lyndon.

G: Well, let me ask you about Texas Centennial projects. Did you work with that at all in Dallas?

J: No, and yet the Centennial project was under way, I remember. I remember having to take everybody that came to [the Centennial]; all my friends seemed to come to see me when I was in Dallas in 1936 in the Centennial year. I don't remember anything specifically concerning Lyndon related to the Centennial.

G: I know that at one point they wanted President Roosevelt to dedicate one of these roadside parks on the way to Dallas when he was going to the Centennial. Do you remember that? They were trying to get the park ready in time.

J: No. No, I don't. I remember a roadside park that was between--well, it wasn't very far from Dallas. It was hardly outside of the city limits of Dallas.

G: I believe this may be the one.

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J: But I don't remember Roosevelt coming to dedicate the park.

G: He didn't, but the NYA officials wanted him to and attempted to arrange it.

J: Well, I remember we had a program going very strong on that particular park, and it got finished. I mean, it was done in a hurry. We put fifty or a hundred more kids on it, and wham! It got done.

G: I think I read a memo to the effect that they had four hundred extra people on it from the highway department.

J: (Laughter). That could well happen now. Well, I went out there; in fact, I had worked up some details on a few of the things in that park, such as picnic areas and barbecue pits and whatnot. I had gotten those things detailed out. The highway department didn't have a very strong planning program at that point in time. It was shortly thereafter that they put on architects who did the planning, but I remember working on that park right close to Dallas, and it was quite a--

G: Well, did you know then why they were accelerating the completion of that park?

J: No, I don't remember it. I may have, but I don't remember. Of course, I knew of Lyndon's closeness with our president at that time, and he was--

G: Did you ever get any indication of whose idea the roadside parks were, who originated the concept?

J: I thought it was Lyndon Johnson; [he] went to the highway commission. That was my impression of the whole thing. He got the program started and it picked up all over the United States because, you know, I subsequently became a national director of construction in Washington, and our program in Texas was set up as an example for everybody else in

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the United States. I think it was the driving success of Lyndon Johnson that brought about my being sent to Washington, at least I had that feeling, anyhow.

G: Now, I understand at one point that he was offered the job as manager or supervisor of the projects to harness the tides of Passamaquaddy Bay. Have you ever heard anything about that?

J: Oh, yes. That was a proposed NYA project. In fact, I went up to Passamaquaddy. It's in Maine, you know, and it never did develop. Incidentally, it was an interesting thing that came up this past year-and-a-half. The harnessing of the tides up there has been proposed, I think, by the Corps of Engineers at this point in time, and a group of environmental extremists using the Endangered Species Act, attempted to stop this project. This happened just a couple of years ago. The lousewort has been put on the endangered species list as one of the endangered species. I didn't know what it was when I heard this on the radio. I came back and looked in that dictionary right there to find out what a lousewort was and I found it was a flower that harbored lice that were very harmful to sheep. The farmers and ranchers were trying to get rid of the lousewort and they had just about succeeded in eradicating them. Then it became an endangered species, and there were a few of them growing in the reservoir area, in the conservation pool of the dam that was supposed to catch the high tide, and I don't know what has happened to that particular project. I haven't heard any more of it, but I know there was a protest as an endangered species; the lousewort was supposed to stop the project. Have you ever heard that story?

G: Yes. Do you remember when you went up there, was it while you were still in Texas or--?

J: No, I was in Washington.

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G: Well, do you know LBJ's connection with that?

J: No.

G: Do you recall his being offered that position?

J: No. That's rather strange. My memory is not that bad. I am sure I would have remembered it.

G: Anything on visits to Texas from the national NYA people like Aubrey Williams or Dick Brown?

J: Yes. I remember another Williams who was chief of construction up there at that time. He was an architect. His name wasn't Aubrey. Aubrey was a director, a national director. This was an architectural engineer. His name happened to be Williams, too, and he came down to Texas. I spent some time with him. That was shortly before I went up to Washington then, and I think I succeeded him. He was gone anyhow when I got up there. But then Mrs. [Mary McLeod] Bethune was one of them.

G: Did you see her when she came?

J: Oh, yes, I sure did. Let's see who else. Well, Mrs.--our President's wife--

G: Eleanor Roosevelt?

J: --Eleanor Roosevelt was there.

G: Was this for the dedication of that chapel in Denton or was this another thing?

J: No, I think I met Mrs. Roosevelt when Fenner Roth was taking her around San Antonio. She was quite a lady, a charming woman.

G: Do you recall what project she was interested in?

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J: No, I don't specifically. We had just started some of our girls' residence centers. Have you heard about this type of project?

G: Yes, but go ahead and elaborate on it for the purpose of the record.

J: These residence centers were set up for primarily rural girls in smaller towns and would bring in girls from the outlying smaller towns into a central location. They would normally have about thirty young ladies in one of the residence centers; it was a homemaking center was what it was. They would be employed in the various schools as clerks and assistant secretaries and in libraries. They would work half-time, about four or five hours a day, and then they would go to classes another four to five hours a day. Each one of these residence centers had their resident mother, who was a homemaking major, and the girls would make their own clothes. They usually would start out in an older residence that needed a whole lot of work on it, and the girls would first paint it, and they then would make drapes for it and get some old furniture and rework it, and by the time you had a group of girls there for six months, you had a beautiful place. It was really a wonderful thing, one of the greatest things that the NYA program did, and Mrs. [Effie?] Brooks--I am sure you've heard of Mrs. Brooks--she was in my office. She was working under me as state director of Work Projects. She did a wonderful job, and this was a tremendous thing for these young ladies. I say young ladies; they were most of them in their teens.

G: Did Eleanor Roosevelt express an interest in this sort of a program?

J: Oh, I'm sure she would. I didn't notice specifically--she would be tremendously interested in this because it really had a wonderful effect upon the young people. I've forgotten about the boys, but I also had a lot of fun with this, too.

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G: Well, anything else about her visits? Was LBJ there when she came down, or was this later?

J: No, I don't think so. I think it was later because I just remember her. I am pulling this out of my mind from 1937 or 1938, about that period, 1937.

G: Anything else on Mary McLeod Bethune's visit? What was she interested in?

J: Well, she was interested in these girls' projects, too. She was very much interested in them because we had some colored girls; some of these residence centers were for colored girls.

G: Do you recall her impression of the NYA projects?

J: Yes, I thought she was much sold on it. In fact, there were very few people that came to Texas and looked over our projects and saw what we were doing that wasn't very much impressed with them. We had a superior program, and I'm comparing it now to what I saw after I got to Washington and traveled over the other states.

G: What do you think made Texas special here? Why was it superior?

J: Well, a couple of real good reasons. Lyndon had picked some pretty good people to get this thing going, and Jesse Kellam was one of them. Jesse had a lot of drive to him, too. He worked just about as hard as Lyndon did, and he drove us about like Lyndon did. You know he was a coach himself; he was a coach at Lufkin, Fenner Roth's coach. Have you talked to Fenner yet?

G: Yes.

J: He's a great guy, isn't he?

G: So then you feel that the main ingredient was the hard work.

J: Oh, definitely.

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G: I noticed in looking at the statistics that Texas didn't get that much more money than other states; in fact, some states got quite a bit more than Texas. What about the programs? What was unique or outstanding about the nature of the programs in addition to the hard work that was put into them?

J: There was a lot of good planning done. I mean this was sound planning. Being a construction person, a construction man, [I know] you can't do decent construction without having good plans, and that's something--I don't want to brag on it, but I insisted on plans, proper plans. I set up a division and got good architects and engineers into my office in Austin. I was encouraged by Jesse Kellam to do this, and my shot to everybody was "We can't build anything unless we've got some sound plans. We're not just up there putting bricks on top of bricks." We concentrated first on community centers, which were very popular. They were much needed in our towns, smaller towns. We built many of them all over the state. This was one of the things, I think, that made our construction program stand out. Griffith was, of course, interested in that and drew good plans. He was a good engineer. But I was a stickler on it. I'm not bragging about the thing; I just wanted good plans. Some of the work that was done--I think La Villita was one of them. A great deal of La Villita was planned in my office.

G: Oh, really?

J: I had several architects there. Johnson was one of them, George Johnson. Johnson did a great deal of work in the restoration work down there along with O'Neil Ford. You recall, of course, that O'Neil Ford when he first started working, the first big job he did, I

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guess--and it was a wonderful job, it was one of the outstanding things that NYA ever built--and that's the Little Chapel in the Woods in Denton. Have you seen it?

G: I have seen pictures of it. I haven't seen it.

J: Pretty, isn't it?

G: Yes, beautiful.

J: Everything in that thing was made in NYA shops, all the pews, altars, everything.

G: Now, whose idea was La Villita, the restoration of it?

J: Well, it was the dream of Maury Maverick, the mayor. Maury Maverick wanted to see it done. He also was much interested in the river development along San Antonio, and I'm sure you have seen the development of the San Antonio River. We had a horrible flood there in the 1920s that just devastated the town; there were a hundred and some odd people drowned in that flood. And there was some much needed work that had to be done on the river, and it was important that it be done in such a manner that we could improve its flow characteristics and also improve its beauty. Maury was our mayor at that time and he had a driving force behind him, too.

Maury got into a little difficulty in San Antonio. He allowed the communists to have a meeting in the--have you heard this story?

G: Go ahead.

J: --allowed the communists to hold a meeting in the municipal auditorium right in the center of our city, and there was a great protest to it. The protesters had to be settled down with fire hoses. The communists got to hold their meeting there, but this killed Maury Maverick politically in San Antonio, and he shortly thereafter went to Washington.

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We were getting ready for the war; the war hadn't started yet. This was in 1940; this was 1940, yes. He was head of the War Production Board there and one of the principal individuals. He gave me some help there. I was in Washington then, and we were putting up some two hundred large shop buildings all over the state, prefabricated buildings, and we needed priorities on them from the War Production Board. The Director of Procurement of NYA in Washington said, "Oh, it will take you three or four weeks or a month to get priorities on this." I said, "I bet I get back to you today." "Ah," he said, "you're crazy!" I took it by Maury's earlier that morning when he first got to the office and said, "Maury, I need some help." I'd been working with him in San Antonio, you know, on La Villita. Maury said, "What do you want?" I told him, and he gave me a couple of men and said, "These men will take you through." I got thirteen signatures on the thing that day, and about a quarter of five I had the priority. It was a typical thing that Maury did and that Lyndon did. Those shops were put over the United States, scattered all over. We have a number of them in Texas.

G: Anything else on La Villita that you feel is important?

J: (Laughter). I guess I can tell you a little profanity here. I have never forgotten the time I was down there. I went to San Antonio quite often. It was just seventy-five miles from Austin, you know, and I was interested in this project, too, since a good deal of the planning was being done in my office. I had gotten through looking over the project to see what they were doing. At that particular time we were casting tile that was made by the young men that were working for us, and we had imported a Mexican tile maker from Monterrey to come up to supervise this work. I'd gotten through looking at the project and I was just

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getting ready to go back, walking across the street there to the north of La Villita, and I heard somebody screaming at me, and I turned and it was Maury Maverick. "Hey, stop, you son of a bitch!" he said. He was the mayor of the town then. You could have heard him for three blocks. (Laughter) This was an unusual thing. Of course, I stopped. He wanted to see me about something else that he'd thought up.

Old Fenner was down there. He was a district director at that time. Fenner and I are very close friends, extremely close right now. Incidentally, the library building there--I don't know whether you've noticed this--it was designed in my office in Austin, and plans sent down.

G: Didn't know that.

J: There were a number of projects throughout the state that were designed in the state office of NYA.

G: How did the process here work? Did you generally get a state engineer or an architect, rather, who was in private practice or an architect who was employed by the state to design it?

J: No, none of them were employed by the state. Sometimes they would be, yes. Sometimes they were city or maybe a school district for the various types of construction projects. Then we had our own staff. Then O'Neil Ford grew up. I never will forget the first time of meeting O'Neil Ford. You've heard of him.

G: Oh, yes.

J: I remember I went to Denton with Jesse, I guess, Jesse Kellam wanted me to interview him. I know it was Jesse because I was state director of Work Projects then. I went to his office,

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and he had his [Ford's] office and his bedroom all in the same place. He had his couch over next to his drafting board, and he was working on the Little Chapel of the Woods. He was proud of that one, too, because it is a beautiful thing. I guess you've seen that picture many places. I wish I could get a copy of that.

G: The Little Chapel?

J: Yes.

G: I'll send you one.

J: I just would love to have one. It's one thing I don't have and I think I'm as proud of that as anything we have got.

G: Do you want an exterior or interior view of it?

J: Both. I'll put it up in my office right here if you can get them for me.

G: When you were working in Dallas did you ever come back for meetings at the state office or the Driskill Hotel on the weekends to participate in any of these weekend skull sessions?

J: I am trying to think. I participated in some when Lyndon was in Congress. There'd be a few skull sessions there. He would come back and talk to us. He would gather a few of us around him and--

G: Which project was he particularly interested in after he went to Congress?

J: No, he was interested in the one at Inks Dam. It was one of the largest residence centers we had, and it was operated directly out of the state office. It wasn't operated by any district directors.

G: Why was that?

J: Well, it was a big thing, and all the plans for all of it came out of my office in Austin.

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G: Did that involve a lot of help from Washington?

J: No, it possibly did. I don't remember our getting any special appropriations. I'm sure they didn't cut it for that project. It was such a big project. We had so many different types of skills. We needed to train our workers in our factories: welders and foundrymen, machinists, airplane mechanics, radio mechanics--radio construction, and also, we trained a lot of men in Morse code and whatnot. I had a very interesting thing in Austin. I had a radio behind my desk that I could get thirty-three different stations, NYA stations, in Texas. My phone bill wasn't very high then because I used radio a whole lot to talk to the district directors, and we had a good station in Austin, and we then branched out to all of them.

But I can get on Inks Dam. That was quite a project. See, when Inks Dam was set up, the war was going on in Europe and going strong, and it looked like we were going to get into it, and there was really a scarcity of skilled factory workers, skilled men. We made all kind of things in those shops, things for the navy, for instance, ship ladders and welded ship ladders. All told at Inks, we had a foundry there; we had a machine shop; we had a welding shop; of course, we had a woodworking shop. We did a whole lot of woodworking there. We made so many things for our schools. We made filing cabinets, like you see out here, in our sheet metal shops. We provided a great number of things while we were training these youngsters, provided things for--we were still pretty much in a depression at that time, you know, in the early 1940s.

G: I gather that a number of Washington agencies were tied into this. The Interior Department and--didn't you get help from a number of different ones on that Inks Dam project?

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J: No. Well, they had some personnel out of Washington that came down, but I, of course, felt as if the head of our machine shops was a skilled man in training, and I was very proud of him, and he set up a bunch of shops and helped select the personnel for them. We had some very fine district directors. Fenner Roth was one of them. Another one was A. W. Brisbin. I'm sure you've talked to A. W., haven't you? Have you gotten to interview him yet?

G: Yes.

J: He had a very fine residence center in Waco. It also had quite a few shops. In fact, those buildings were designed in my office in Austin.

G: What about the PEC building? Was LBJ interested in that? The Pedernales Electric Co-op building.

J: Oh, yes. That was one of the first buildings we had. He had us build that Pedernales Electric Cooperative. He was very much interested in this, and I think that was the first one in the United States, if I'm not mistaken. I think he had a whole lot to do with passing that legislation for--I know he was sure after that one, and we went after it, too.

G: Did he spend a lot of time coordinating on that?

J: Well, we would hear from him. He was always wanting to know the next day whether it was finished. It wasn't the next day, but it was a few weeks after that.

G: Was that one done out of the district office or the state office?

J: No, we had the plans. I don't know where the plans came from there. I approved the plans, but we didn't have that set up at that point in time.

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G: Do you think it's fair to say that even though he had been elected to Congress he was in many ways still state director of NYA?

J: He had an abiding interest in the thing, I'll tell you that. Lyndon was the most unusual man I've ever known. He was the hardest man to work for I've ever worked for, yet I enjoyed working for him. He taught me a whole lot. He taught me a whole lot of the drive that I presently have, and he really worked on us. I don't know whether to tell you any of these personal things I used--on this thing--

G: Sure.

J: When Lyndon was in Congress, we'd go out to his house from time to time and play poker out there, and Lyndon didn't play much. He would play a hand or two, and then he was up and gone. He was up at the phone in the hallway over there near the stairs. It was a two-story house he had out there near the lake. He was on the phone calling somebody. It might be one o'clock in the morning when he was doing it, but he'd get an idea and plop! He'd play a couple of hands, and then he was off on something else. He was a fine host. I didn't mean that he ignored us, but he'd let us go ahead with our game, and old--what's his name? Williams, in Washington?

G: Aubrey Williams?

J: Aubrey. He liked to play poker, too, and he had lots of drive but it was quite different than Lyndon's.

I am trying to remember some of the other things Lyndon did. Oh, later on, when he was president, Lyndon appointed me to the board of the Kansas, Oklahoma, Arkansas River Commission. This is the river commission that supervises the contract between the

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state of Oklahoma and the state of Kansas on the waters of the Arkansas River, and again, Lyndon was interested in water resource development, but that was--I don't remember him for that particular thing.

G: You know, we were talking about the co-op, Rural Electrification Administration. I gather he was very distressed with the development of the LCRA [Lower Colorado River Authority] later on after he was in Congress, a project that he'd helped put through in the legislation, and I think he felt was charging higher rates than it should have and was not working closely enough with the rural electric co-ops. Do you remember anything about that? Did he ever talk to you about that one?

J: No, he never did. See, we had a cooperative program with LCRA, I say cooperative program. We built an administration building at Lake--at Buchanan, right downstream from Buchanan, from the dam there.

G: Still in use.

J: Oh, yes, it is. We quarried that rock.

G: Beautiful stone.

J: We cut it. We cut it with a drive saw that we made in our shops. This was a big old saw blade that was about five feet in diameter. We used up a number of them. Had diamond teeth on it, tips of diamonds. We cut that limestone from Burnet, you know, where it's natural. There's plenty of it up there, and the boys built--and again, that was designed in my office.

G: You were mentioning earlier a party that you had for LBJ at Ray Roberts' house.

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J: Well, this was when I was in Washington. The war had come along, and Pearl Harbor hit. This must have been in February of 1942, and I tried to get Ray to tell me everybody that was there. He couldn't even remember the party. You know Lyndon had promised in his campaign--I guess it was for the Senate then--that the day that he voted for a declaration of war he would join the service, and he did join the service. I think he was a commander--he became a commander--and Ray Roberts, the speaker's secretary--and I was living in Washington then. I lived about a mile and a half from Ray on Glebe Road in Virginia. There was a party that night, and as I recall it--Ray can't recall it--but both Ray and Lyndon were in uniforms. He says he didn't know whether Lyndon went in that early. I thought he did. I know that there were at least three individuals there, and I know that Lyndon Johnson was there, and Ray was going into the service--he went into the service in February of 1942. I went into the service in March of 1942, shortly thereafter.

G: Can you recall any more of the specifics of that get-together, who else was there or anything?

J: No, it was one of--Ray and Lyndon and I were the only ones--I don't think Sherman [Birdwell] was. Sherman went into the navy later on, and of course, Jesse Kellam did later on, but it wasn't Jesse, I know.

G: Well, LBJ ran for Congress in 1937. He resigned the last day of February. Did the people who had worked with him at NYA help him in that campaign, do you recall?

J: Oh, well, sure we did. Of course, we couldn't contribute money toward his campaign, but we did everything within the law that we could possibly do (laughter), and maybe we stepped beyond the law some. What the hell was that statute at that time?

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G: Hatch Act.

J: Hatch Act, yes, where you were not allowed to campaign, but there wasn't any reason we couldn't support him.

G: How about in 1941? When he ran for the Senate against W. Lee O'Daniel, do you recall anything on that race? Did you help him with that?

J: I didn't help him financially, but I was on the way to Washington when that happened, I think. Let me stop and remember now. No, it must have been the year before that because I went to Washington towards the end of 1940. When did he run for--?

G: 1941, for the first time.

J: 1941.

G: For the Senate. 1937, he ran for Congress.

J: Yes, but then he was defeated.

G: 1941.

J: Yes.

G: Then he won in 1948.

J: Yes.

G: Anything on the relationship between the NYA and the WPA that you feel is important? Harry Drought?

J: Well, we thought that we were doing a much better job than WPA was. WPA did a lot of good work. They had to do some of our work. They had to do some of the casework for us and whatnot, and I would get awfully impatient with it. It was a little--it was quite a different thing than WPA. Well, WPA had some worthwhile work, and they had a lot of

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jobs that were worthwhile. In fact, one of the dams that washed out up here last August was built by the WPA, up here at Albany. There were a number of projects that were of great worth that WPA did, but we were separate and apart from them. There was a lot of competition there. I got impatient with the procurement of WPA. They did our procurement for us, and, of course, being impatient, why--well, WPA generally had a good program--I use a word of boondoggling, which was one of Maury Maverick's favorite expressions, there was some boondoggling there, but there always is in that type of program.

G: Is there anything else on your association with NYA or Lyndon Johnson that we've left out?
Any other anecdotes or stories?

J: As I recall, when Lyndon was first elected to Congress, Sherman Birdwell was his first secretary. You've talked to Sherman, haven't you? Sherman was sort of roly-poly. He was a little thick around the middle when he went up there. When he came back in about three months, his shirt size, his collar, was about three sizes too big for him. He just looked like he had been run through a washing machine, you know, just bedraggled. He says, "I can work twenty hours a day, but I can't work twenty-four hours a day."

(Laughter)

Really Lyndon was a driver if there ever was one. I'm sure everybody has told you the same thing, precisely the same thing. There is not much variance in that. He was impatient as hell.

G: He could get away with it because he worked along with them, you think?

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J: Well, you knew that he wasn't just driving you. You knew that he was driving himself. You would try to keep pace with him, which was impossible, and Lyndon would--I won't say that he was unscrupulous. That's not the right word, but he felt that the end justified the means, and there's not a man in this world that loved his country more than Lyndon Johnson did. He was an arm-twister. Of course, you know this better than I do, but a lot of arms needed twisting.

G: How about any other stories or episodes that you can think of?

J: I know I've forgotten a whole lot, and I can just try to catch back into--

G: How about when he came out to Abilene in 1953 to speak? Anything about his visit then that is significant?

J: No.

G: Or was this in Corpus?

J: That was in Corpus Christi. Well, for one thing he was late. (Laughter) I was a little embarrassed because I was the program chairman for the Rotary Club. I was the program chairman that year, and I'd gotten Lyndon to come, to stop off in Corpus Christi, and he kept us waiting a little while, but it was worth waiting for. Lyndon had so much to say to people, to talk to people, that he generally ran late on many of his appointments. I suppose you have hit that pretty [often], you have heard that same criticism of him. I am pretty anxious about appointments I make. I never like to be late, and I hate to have people be late for me and especially if there is any possible way that you can help on it.

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Lady Bird was one of my favorites, too. You know, she had a whole lot to do with the beautification of our highways in the state. I am sure she had quite a bit of influence on Lyndon on those very things. I think Lady Bird is a great lady.

G: Is there anything else that we have left out?

J: Oh, I guess you have gotten the story of Coke Stevenson a half a dozen different times and I guess you'll hit it from many angles. Of course, you know the basic thing that happened with Coke Stevenson. The Duke of Duval County wasn't trying to get Lyndon elected. He was trying to get Coke Stevenson defeated. I don't think he hardly knew Lyndon. That's hard to say when anybody--but that wasn't his purpose. He had a couple of things he wanted to get even with.

G: Did it have to do with an appointment that Coke had made?

J: Yes.

G: Or failed to make? Do you recall the specifics?

J: It was, let me see, a judicial appointment was what it was. Coke had failed to make it when he had been requested by the Duke of Duval County, and of course I don't know this to be exactly true, but this is what I was told by the people that know about it. Old George Parr just, to get even with Coke for not having appointed this district judge, it was a district judge was who it was. A lot of people think that Lyndon stole this election. It was George Parr that put him in. I think George is the one that wanted it done. A lot of people disagree with that. I happen to know George Parr.

G: Did he ever talk about that race, the 1948 race?

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J: Not to me. His wife--oh, it was his next-to-last wife--lived just around the corner from us in Corpus Christi. Incidentally, I did go to Corpus Christi, and I built a dam down there. That was when Lyndon appointed me to this water job. This is the dam I built, and incidentally, it has got a flood in it that was caused by one of the most massive hurricanes that has ever hit this state. Hurricane Beulah had just come by just two days before this picture was taken. I had built this dam and had just gotten finished with it when that four-hundred-year flood hit it, and I operated the thing when that picture was taken.

G: Is that right?

J: I am glad I did operate it. It was [one of] the few things that went wrong that got right.

G: Well, I certainly do thank you for your time.

J: I wish that I could tell you a little bit more about Lyndon. I will probably think of a half a dozen other things after you get out of here.

G: Well, if you do, we can just add them to the transcript. I sure appreciate it.

End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview I

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