

## INTERVIEW I

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INTERVIEWEE: JAMES R. KETCHUM

INTERVIEWER: Michael L. Gillette

PLACE: Mr. Ketchum's office, Washington, D.C.

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G: Let's start with your background and how you got into this line of work.

K: Well, I came to Washington to go to graduate school at the end of the Eisenhower Administration. As a means to an end I signed on with the Park Service to work I knew not where, but I was assigned to what was then called the Custis-Lee Mansion, Arlington House. As a native of western New York State, to swear allegiance to the South so quickly in one's crossing the Mason-Dixon line was probably more than most of my conservative Republican family wanted to think about. I don't know, I guess I became a counterfeit Confederate fairly easily and had no problems swearing allegiance in another direction. I used to have problems with the Daughters of the Confederacy, who would come up to the Mansion and could never understand why the incised tablet on top of L'Enfant's tomb in front of Arlington House had purple stains on it. It turns out that it was what we used as our Saturday night bar about midnight when we would serve chianti or the cheapest red wine we could find to our dates, because it was just the most fantastic vista of the city.

All of those of us who worked for the Park Service had keys to the gates of Arlington Cemetery, because many times we would work overtime and work a nighttime

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shift. Being one of the few people who were with it and alive in the middle of Arlington Cemetery at three o'clock in the morning as you walked around punching these clocks that were on the outsides of buildings, with these keys on a clock that you carried, was not always the best place in the world to be because St. Elizabeth's patients from time to time would find their way over there, and we would have knifings and various attacks. So we had to carry a thirty-eight strapped to us.

To the Mansion came the call in 1961 from the usher's office at the White House that they were interviewing what would really have to be put in the category of curatorial assistants for a program that had started in the spring of 1961. In the fall of 1961 I went over to be interviewed--actually I went over in late summer, 1961--for a job which would be that of registrar. I was about as qualified as the man in the moon, and indeed I did not get that job. But about six weeks later I got another call for a curatorial assistant's position which was opening up. I went back and, yes, received that, went through clearance, and late in 1961 I started at the White House. I really was there, oh, I guess nearly two years by the time the Johnsons had come to the White House, and kind of like the man who came to dinner, I stayed on until the spring of 1970 when I came up here.

So I have not had the advantage of the five-year plans that a lot of my friends in Washington seem to have. That is, they change jobs with fair frequency and usually try to do all they can do in a certain area in four or five years and go on from there. I fear that you get into some of these worlds, and either you don't know enough to quit or say goodbye or it consumes you so very much so that you think you're the most important link in the chain of wherever it may lead. But continue.

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G: Did you have any contact with the Johnsons during those two years LBJ was vice president?

K: Not really. Very limited at best. I would see Mrs. Johnson or might see the girls at a few of the functions at the White House, but really, no. Not the kind of contact, for example, that you'd have with the Humphreys during the Johnson Administration. You just didn't have the number of occasions. Because I was very junior on the staff, I think, is certainly one of the biggest reasons, and also the types of occasions at the White House that brought the Johnsons and the Kennedys together for social occasions were relatively less than they would be, say, in the 1964 to 1969 period with the Johnsons.

G: Mrs. Johnson noted in her *Diary* that Mrs. Kennedy told her the two people she could always depend on were J. B. West and you.

K: That's very nice. Go ahead.

G: Right after the assassination, did Mrs. Johnson call on you right away?

K: Yes, almost within the first day of Mrs. Johnson moving into the White House. I remember receiving a phone call sometime during the day, I think it was early afternoon, saying that she wanted to get together, that boxes were being moved in and she had some questions about where she might put some of the furnishings that had been packed by hand at The Elms by a group of friends that had been helping out over there. I recall--it was about five in the evening--going upstairs, and she came out. We reintroduced ourselves in the west hall and went into a connecting corridor between her sitting room, bathroom and bedroom, off of which was a closet.

The reason I remember it is it is kind of a continuation of the introduction, so to

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speaking, how not to meet someone. But there was a switch on the jamb of a closet door--it was a large clothes closet--so that whenever the door was opened the light went on and when the door was closed the light went off. The boxes [contained] Doughty birds, porcelain birds which had been given to her from many different sources but mostly from Texas donors and purchased at Neiman's quite often. These were in boxes wrapped in tissue and some wrapped in newspaper. We got down on our hands and knees and started unpacking some of these in this closet. Suddenly a couple of the moving men--actually they were from the White House carpenter shop, but they were moving in furniture--moving a small settee, and I don't know whether it was going in or out of the sitting room, came along and closed the door. So here we are down on our hands and knees groping, trying to get up without hurting the birds or doing anything else, and just trying to make light of what, for me, was a comical situation later on, but at the time how to handle a situation, putting your best foot forward. It was not exactly the way you like to be introduced or to spend the first moment with the wife of the president of the United States.

I don't know, from that point on [we had a good relationship]. Not necessarily because of that, but just because of the feeling that Mrs. Johnson conveyed in terms of her way of turning to someone for either two cents worth of advice or whatever it might be, and also from the way she would seemingly feel quite comfortable having you come up and sit down at six in the evening while she put cold cream on and prepared new make-up for an evening engagement. I mean, just the circumstances under which you were dealing with Mrs. Johnson you immediately trusted her, because you felt that there

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was an obvious trust that she was conveying to you. I think only my mother had I ever seen [in cold cream] up until that point. My wife, I don't ever recall her using, at that stage of the game, great amounts of cold cream. But it was just a very relaxing, comfortable relationship from the beginning. So in thinking back on introductions, it just, like Topsy, was a feeling that continued to grow. It was hard for me, having listened to the accents of Newport and Hyannis, to get used to an accent that was totally removed. I think that affected me in the beginning, listening to someone speak from a part of the country that I was not particularly accustomed to listening [to].

G: Did she convey anything about her attitude toward her position on that first meeting?

K: No. I vaguely remember her talking about a desire to really get to know the house. I know she early on mentioned the fact that she wanted to break the Mansion down in terms of its history and furnishings and take on a chunk at a time. While she perhaps had had her overall tour to find out who slept where and why and had studied the photographs that J. B. West had furnished, she really wanted to get into the heart of the house and understand why certain rooms had been furnished the way they had been furnished and what acquisitions [we had made], what she soon called "walk and learns." When she would have ten minutes or forty-five minutes within that first month she would pick up the phone and say, "I've got some time. Do you have some time? Let's have a walk and learn."

She had a wonderfully spontaneous, almost child-like reaction no matter what the facts were. Like anyone who had been around this city as she had been, she soon realized that the truth was a much better story than fiction. When some of these furnishings and

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some of these strange objects that had been acquired, the story was known, she tucked it away and many times afterwards [remembered it], culminating in a film tour that she finally did for the Library in the last months of the administration. This same feeling I could see Luci picking up on quite quickly also. In fact, I remember Luci towards the end going around with a tape recorder with a self-contained mike, just going from room to room to room talking about her thoughts and memories and what had happened in various places.

But I think it was to her [Mrs. Johnson] kind of an archaeological study. She wanted to remove one strata at a time and really get down into what had made that house work for other families. She didn't see it as a house that Franklin Roosevelt had lived in or as a house that the Kennedys had lived in. But she really tried to see it through the eyes of the thirty-seven or so families that had lived there until then. I think really she was as interested in the effect the house would have on a family as she was the effect the family could have on the house.

I don't recall her being particularly humorous about a lot of these things. Mrs. Kennedy, on the other hand, had a very, almost a biting sense of humor, which saved her and I think saved a lot of the staff sometimes when the press would zero in on some of the programs that Mrs. Kennedy was involved in, especially the so-called restoration program, in which donors were being misrepresented. Maxine Cheshire of the *Washington Post*, for example, had done a particularly difficult to understand series in the summer of 1962, and just lots of humor seemed to be the way of deflating that. Mrs. Johnson, on the other hand, when there would be situations which the press seemed to be

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taking a wrong tack, would just kind of shrug her shoulders and say, "That's life," and go on from there.

I don't ever recall seeing her particularly upset except for the day after the Eartha Kitt situation. We were sitting up in the Lincoln Sitting Room. This was not the normal place, usually we were across the hall in a small sitting room off the Queen's Room. Bess [Abell] and Liz [Carpenter] were there. She kept wanting to hear from Liz what kind of reaction women who covered the White House in the East Wing, what kind of questions they were asking and so forth. That whole experience the day before seemed to be tremendously upsetting to her.

Yet, on the other hand, I remember the morning after President Johnson announced he wasn't going to run again we had a group that I was showing through the family quarters at her insistence. I remember, I think, either Endicott Peabody's wife with the group, so it could have been a Massachusetts group, but New Jersey also sticks in my mind. Mrs. Johnson came out to say hello. The point of what was being written and what was being said after the bombshell of the night before, and the relief or whatever else you want to describe the feeling, she was always very capable of handling a situation like that in a cool and with it manner. But the Eartha Kitt thing was a little different.

G: What else did she say during that discussion of the Eartha Kitt incident? Did she feel that she handled it [well]?

K: No, she didn't. She questioned the way she handled it. She certainly needed reassurance. Bess and Liz were obviously trying to be supportive.

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I didn't feel it was my place. I had not been at the luncheon. I was there for some other reason, to discuss something that must have been coming up. I recall having the feeling that she was very much in doubt if what she said had been the right thing. Had she been strong enough? She kept talking about Betty Hughes, I remember, and how grateful she was that Betty Hughes, who, Lord, I guess had nine or ten youngsters and two different families, was able to rise to the occasion.

I had personally taken Eartha Kitt and her daughter around one afternoon at the White House several months before. In the course of the Johnson Administration you got to meet and talk to and deal with every celebrity that ever came to town. In some instances they were family friends, people like Eva Gabor, who I think at that point was married to a man from Texas and was a fairly close friend of Becky Bobbitt's, to Jayne Mansfield, whoever. And they all were, once you took them out of the limelight, really quite decent and very nice individuals, except for Miss Kitt. Miss Kitt was really the most amazing, totally--I don't know what her problem was. She was very obnoxious and treated her daughter in such a way. I was fascinated by her because my wife used to do, many years ago--I think to dispel her convent background--an impersonation of Eartha Kitt singing "I Want to be Evil." So I was very much ready for Eartha Kitt, and I wanted to like her. It didn't work. So I'm afraid that when I listened to Mrs. Johnson question how one should treat Eartha Kitt my only response inside was [that] somebody should have reached out and hauled off and given her a good swift kick. But that's obviously anything but the way one will treat someone at a Women Doers Luncheon. What a strange name.



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Mrs. Johnson has always gone on record saying she didn't like beautification. She never, to my knowledge, went on record saying that she didn't like the name Women Doers Luncheon. But that's what they were called.

G: Was there any discussion of perhaps Eartha Kitt should not have been included in that to begin with?

K: I don't recall. I don't recall. I guess she had been in town from time to time, testifying on the Hill on behalf of urban programs. Whether and how easy it is to find somebody from that field who was a doer, I guess that was about the last time. I think they must have turned to safe people like Helen Hayes after that. But I don't recall. I don't recall.

G: Anything on the move into the White House other than you mentioned?

K: Really not, except it got me on the wrong tack as far as Dorothy Doughty and some of the other porcelain birds. I just assumed the way people had given them to Mrs. Johnson left and right that these were her favorite things. Because they were birds for a woman named Lady Bird, to me it just all was part of a fanciful picture. I dropped my lower plate in January 1969 when she took me aside and said, "Promise me one thing, that if anybody ever wants to give me a gift you will let them know in a discreet way that I have enough of these," pointing to the birds that were being packed. Then she went on to say in so many words, "Really, they are not my fondest possessions."

Damn it all, we were forever having to have those things repaired. There was one shop in particular in Washington that I think we must have kept in business. In fact, it precipitated a bad time with Marvin Watson. We were on the B classification as far as car--we, the curator's office. So you did have an automobile if you had to have a driver

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to go out on office business. But one day, in the great wisdom of Marvin and his budget cutting procedures, obviously practicing again for another casting of Scrooge and Dickens' *Christmas Carol*, we lost our B privileges. I don't think there was anything below a B at that point. You couldn't be demoted to a C category. We just had lost it. That same day, fortunately, Mrs. Johnson called and said that she had discovered another petal had broken off of a flower on the base of one of her Doughty birds and could we take care of it. I said, yes, I'd love to, but unfortunately I didn't have my automobile there that day. I normally drove to work. She said, "Don't worry, go ahead and use a White House car." I said, "Well, Mrs. Johnson, I'm afraid that we no longer have privileges in this office." And she said, "Well, I still have my privileges. Any time you want to, just call and ask for my car." So I said, "That's very fine." So we did exactly that.

Somehow the garage conveyed this to Marvin Watson's office, that Mrs. Johnson was now assigning her own car to offices that had been taken off the list. At which point--and I explained to her all about why we had lost our privileges--either the next day or that same evening I got a call from Marvin's office saying that our car privileges had been immediately restored, and we all lived happily ever after. She wasn't apparently going to take Marvin on, and felt that what he was doing was in his own way perhaps very good, but she was just going to somehow let it be known that there were other ways of skinning the proverbial cat and away we went.

I don't know how she handled disagreements with staff, but I do know that you were allowed to disagree and you were encouraged to disagree. It was with the East Wing that I dealt with principally, not that often with the West Wing. I remember one

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instance in particular with Bill Moyers. It had to do with Lyndon Johnson saying to Mrs. Kennedy at the time he was moving into the White House, "Little Lady, anything you see in your husband's office, you take. You are welcome to anything." One of the objects which Mrs. Kennedy was quite interested in was a desk which President Hayes had received from Queen Victoria made out of timbers of a ship, the *Resolute*. It was an English vessel that had foundered off of Newfoundland. The American forces had brought it back, re-outfitted it, sent it to England as a gesture after the Civil War in an attempt to put our differences aside and as a gesture of friendship. Later, when it was decommissioned, Victoria had some of the timbers removed, and the oak members served as the primary and secondary woods for this desk that was carved and sent over.

The plaque clearly said, "For President Hayes and his successors in office," and it was used by every president without exception. Mrs. Kennedy claimed she discovered it. Well, the claim I think was being made for her by the press office, and it really wasn't a valid claim because even Eisenhower had used it. But without exception every president in one way or another, either in his presidential office or in the Mansion proper someplace, had used it. In September of 1961 Congress had passed a law saying henceforth all furnishings in the White House are inalienable and cannot be removed. If they are to be removed they go to the Smithsonian--if a president says, "We don't want to use these furnishings, and we would rather have different objects on exhibit" and there was no appropriate place to put these. So it was not Lyndon Johnson's desk to give away in the first place, and secondly, Mrs. Kennedy should have known better. But the desk went, and it went to a traveling exhibit that the Kennedy Library mounted to raise money.

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I got the Kennedy Library people to sign a loan agreement on the desk so that it was still not considered an outright gift or whatever that had passed between Mrs. Kennedy and President Johnson.

In any event, the desk was to be returned within a period of perhaps six months. A year had now passed, and the desk was traveling around Europe. It came back to the United States in very sad condition, mainly because of the way the exhibit was handled and the shipping problems which they obviously encountered. So I found out about its being in Washington and I called Archives, where it was at the moment, and I said, "We're sending a truck from the White House over to pick up the desk. I have a cabinetmaker who is going to start working on its repairs." Never any aye, yes, or no.

Herman Kahn was then the head of the presidential library division. The first thing he did was he got hold of Bobby Kennedy. Bobby Kennedy then got hold of Bill Moyers. The calls were coming from Kennedy, and they were coming from Moyers. They were both incensed that such was going on. I explained to Bill that it was something which was part and parcel of the White House and could not be given away, and I traced as much of the story as I possibly could. I said, "The main thing I'm interested in right now is just putting the desk back in prime condition." Because the cabinetmaker who had once worked on this and formed for FDR a door in which he carved the presidential seal in the center--I'm never sure whether FDR requested this piece be added because he wanted to conceal braces or what the reason, I really do not quite understand, but it was the famous door that later Stan Tretick took shots of young John Kennedy coming in and out of the desk, peering out of it in a series that **Look** had

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been running in 1963--had just retired from the Park Service. He was available, and he also was dying of cancer. Nobody knew how long he was going to be around, but this would be the kind of project that would be the labor of love that he would like to return to. In fact, his wife today still is convinced, because he died a very short time after he completed the job, that somehow that desk had lengthened his life.

G: What did Bill Moyers say to you?

K: He just felt that the desk really belonged to [the Kennedys]. If President Johnson was giving it to the Kennedys, that it was a decision that should not be tampered with. I explained what the law was and that it was not. Maybe this comes from my relationship with the East Wing and with Mrs. Johnson, that if something was going on that would be embarrassing or something was going on that was [wrong]--oh, maybe it's Clyde, New York, *naïveté*--you point these things out and you try to go with the law or with what is part and parcel of what made this program possible in the first place, what made donations to the White House possible. He just simply said that, "In so many ways, you're really overstepping your bounds on this." Well, I turned to Mrs. Johnson, and she said, "Why don't you put it all down on paper for me and the President?" So that is exactly what I did.

Then they made the decision that Clark Clifford should be consulted. I can remember here I needed a little bit of advice and counsel on my own hook, so I got J. B. West to go with me. I can recall going up to Clark Clifford's office, which then seemed to me about half a block long, and sitting down. Clark Clifford talked and talked and talked and talked. He talked for at least forty-five minutes. I didn't know whether he was saying, yes, the desk

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belonged to the White House, or, yes, the desk belonged to the Kennedys. I don't even know whether he said yes or no. I'm still to this day not sure what he was saying. But in the end the desk went [to the Smithsonian] after it was [restored]. The thing I was trying to buy obviously was time. In the end the desk went to the Smithsonian, where it was unveiled with a great ceremony and made one of the ornaments of the new Museum of History and Technology, which Lyndon Johnson had opened and dedicated early in 1964. This is now 1965-66-67 by the time it finally got over to the Smithsonian. But somehow, somebody gave in someplace along the line.

What I had been doing on November 22, 1963, was spending the morning in President Kennedy's Oval Office with people from the Smithsonian working out plans for a reproduction of the desk. Mrs. Kennedy had already started planning some of these things as far as the typical Oval Office re-creation was concerned, so that we again talked about having a copy made at the right time. The repairs to the desk, which were considerable, gave us enough of a back burner approach that by the time the desk went to the Smithsonian it seemed to me that everybody had agreed to the decision, I suppose the Kennedy Library hoping that when the Library was finally opened that they would then be able to borrow the desk from the Smithsonian perhaps. I guess what they didn't reckon with was Mr. Carter coming in and finding out about the desk and selecting it as his desk for the Oval Office. So it's right back where it was in 1963 when President Johnson turned it over to Mrs. Kennedy.

G: That's fascinating.

K: Well, the upshot also is that it was President Johnson who, not because of the desk

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situation, but in March of 1964 signed an executive order which finally gave teeth to what the Kennedys had started with the legislation in 1961, namely a permanent group, a permanent White House Committee. The office of the curator really never existed except as something which was set up by Mrs. Kennedy. But it never existed as a permanent White House office until President Johnson signed the legislation in 1964.

G: This was the Committee for the Preservation--?

K: It did two things: it established the Committee for the Preservation of the White House and established an office in the White House known as the Office of White House Curator.

G: Did you have anything to do with the selection of the committee at all?

K: No, not really. Mrs. Johnson went through a lot of names and wanted to know how effective and how helpful these people had been during the Kennedy Administration. But she, in the typical manner of how these decisions were made, was obviously getting advice from several quarters.

G: Did you have any influence at all on the legislation?

K: I worked with Nick Katzenbach in drafting. Clark Clifford was involved and Nick Katzenbach was involved in drafting the legislation, but only from the standpoint of their playing twenty questions on various things. Clifford had been involved in the very beginning, along with somebody in the Justice Department back in the Kennedy Administration, with deciding what kind of an existing vehicle the program that Mrs. Kennedy was trying to establish could be tied to. It was decided that the Fine Arts Commission for Washington, which grew out of the McMillian Commission of the

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Theodore Roosevelt Administration, would be logical because the Fine Arts Commission traditionally had been involved in some of the decisions at the White House. The chairman had always served as an adviser for the acceptance of furniture and furnishings.

There was nothing new about wanting to return pieces that had once been in the White House to the White House. Mrs. Benjamin Harrison had started gathering White House porcelain from previous administrations in the 1890s. Mrs. Theodore Roosevelt did a fair amount. The second Mrs. Woodrow Wilson was extremely active in this regard. The Coolidges went so far as to form a committee, which the Hoovers also used. It kind of fell between the cracks during [the] Franklin Roosevelt Administration, but when Harry Truman came along and found it was time to refurnish a house that had been totally rebuilt and he didn't have any money, except for B. Altman reproductions, he, too, wanted to encourage people to donate. And Mrs. Eisenhower picked up the popular project of china again and did a fair amount. Mrs. Eisenhower also acquired several pieces which had had some association with the Madison family, the Monroe family, and was very proud.

I can remember when she came back as the dowager empress during the Nixon Administration being so horrified at how things had been moved around the house and that Mrs. Kennedy had really ruined what she thought was a furnishing plan that would stay forever. I'm sure every woman who lives in that house must feel the same way about it. For a while Mrs. Eisenhower would make suggestions to Mrs. Nixon about how to replace certain things. Sometimes they would be done, and then when Mrs. Eisenhower would leave Mrs. Nixon would move them back the way they had been. I don't think



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Mrs. Johnson was ever presumptuous at all on that point. In fact, she was the most realistic about anything and everything that it must disturb her somewhat to see press reports that the Lady Bird Johnson fountain is no longer spraying forth down on the Potomac.

Did you see the piece the other day, the lengthy piece? I'll see if I can find a copy of it for you. The *Washington [Star]* did a big article on what has happened to an enormous floating fountain out in the Potomac that Mary Lasker had given which kept washing ashore and apparently spraying polluted water on pleasure boats that were going by and all these things. Once it came ashore the Park Service just lost it. They couldn't find it. So this enterprising reporter drove up and down along the Potomac a couple of weeks ago and finally located it. The problem was that these English centrifugal force pumps were never made to lean on their side the way that they had erected this thing. It was just one of those great, great stories.

Mrs. Johnson wrote a letter--and I must have a xerox; I left it in the White House where it rightfully belongs--about one of the last days, moments I guess, at the White House. She wrote me a note about her thoughts and especially about the White House, the Children's Garden which they had left as something of them. I don't really even hear about the Children's Garden any longer. I trust it is still being maintained and kept up. But this week the White House is undergoing a survey on the grounds to see how much it is sinking. They have discovered that the Washington Monument is sinking a half a foot every hundred years, which means that by the year whatever it will be, there will no longer be any Washington Monument. Well, they're doing the same thing with the White

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House this week. So, as they set their sextants and their sights on these great imponderables I trust someone will come across the Children's Garden and it's still living happily ever after.

But to get back to what I was talking about before. Mrs. Johnson, no matter how many changes she would make in the White House or how many changes she would contemplate from the very beginning as she moved in, she certainly realized that these were changes that would be again modified when they departed. No matter how affected she was by the staff and by the service and by all the perks, she always let you know that it was just a way station on a trip that would continue.

G: Did she make any changes?

K: She continued with the program that, if I were in her position, I would either totally have ignored or I would have abandoned. What Mrs. Kennedy had been identified with would, I feel, never exist today as a White House program had it not been for the second generation, so to speak, that Mrs. Johnson gave it, the kind of support. So she was making changes; she was making additions, really, if you want to say that the foundation was there for a collection of paintings, furnishing, examples of the decorative arts that were either associated with the White House or where prime examples of American cabinetmaking and American fine arts. She added. She studied gaps. She immediately, or almost immediately, realized that what the White House lacked, as far as paintings were concerned, was a solid representative group of painters that would represent really the chronology, coming well into this century, of the development of painting in the United States. Throughout those five years the pictures that she acquired, really, the

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artists, it's a who's who of American art. I'm thinking of [Thomas] Eakins and [John Singer] Sargent and Mary Cassat and Winslow Homer, William Glackens, Robert Henri, [John Singleton] Copley. It's doesn't stop, and very much was true with going into the pieces of American silver, as a case in point, or many of the examples of nineteenth century furniture.

She continued, at the same time blessed with an executive order and a very strong working committee. She got rid of the many committees that Mrs. Kennedy had had and developed a working committee made up of some of the people who had been involved during the Kennedy days and others who she brought on board like Alice Brown and Bruce Catton, people who had not been involved.

G: You mentioned that it was a program that you would have ignored?

K: If I were in her position. I just think it was too tough an act to try to follow. I think she could have easily done beautification when she finally decided what her project would have been and forgotten about the other. But she didn't. In not forgetting about it and really making people aware that it did count with her--it was obviously not something that was first, last and always, but it certainly counted. She brought those people together, and she brought them together continuously in small groups and the larger group was forever being convened.

I think it was very hard for Mrs. Johnson to come right out and ask somebody for a donation or for money. She would oftentimes gather pictures together, and someone would be there for tea and they would see them. You hoped that the spark jumped and that the patch was made, but not always. I know this was something which was always

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very difficult for me to say to someone: "We hope that you can give." Other people did it quite naturally. Jane Engelhard is a classic case in point. Not only did she want to give, but she immediately could tell you of ten other people whom she would call up and help give. Alice Brown was helpful in that regard as well. On the other hand, I can't ever remember getting a plug nickel out of Stanley Marcus, and he had been involved since the beginning of the Kennedy Administration, although he was not named to the Johnson committee that was established, the Committee for the Preservation.

G: Let's talk about the committee. If you will, going down the list of members and sort of homing in on what each person contributed in terms of expertise or special interest.

K: It was divided in half. You had members who served because of their *ex officio* positions, and then you had the public members named by the President. Well, to begin with a member who never came to a meeting, Mrs. Aristotle Onassis, Mrs. Kennedy, who was extremely helpful and continued--yes. She was helpful inasmuch as people would contact her about objects which they thought might belong to the White House, and she would immediately encourage them to give them and she would send them down. She never ever put a foot in the White House during all those days, but she was constantly invited and she did contribute. I have nothing but the best to say as far as her [contribution]. You would wish that after a period she would have appeared on scene, but obviously you could understand why she did not.

Bill Benton. It's kind of hard. We used to laugh at some of the outrageous things he would say at meetings. Most of those meetings were recorded, and there are transcripts which exist in the Library, at least the later meetings were. But I can't recall

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much that he did do. He'd get on the phone from time to time with publishing ideas, how the White House Historical Association could promote their books, especially the guidebook. Liz [Carpenter] soon came up with an idea that there should be a guide to the family, so to speak, of the White House, and it had the most awful name of *The Living White House*. I mean living as opposed to what I was never sure. But it was *National Geographic* again doing the photography.

I recall the book, when it was published. We had a great party in which all presidential descendants were invited. We wheeled in a little old lady who turned out to be Benjamin Harrison's granddaughter, who hadn't been in the White House since she--or kept talking about her measles, how she caused a quarantine of the White House with measles in the Harrison Administration. All kinds of people came out--an aged granddaughter of U. S. Grant, who had married a White Russian and lived happily ever after in Washington.

But the point is, we knocked ourselves out, and *Geographic* had knocked themselves out in this project. The next morning I got a call from *Geographic* that they were already working on the second edition and could they put a photographer in the middle of some meeting that Mrs. Johnson was having. I called up Liz, and Liz said, "Goddamn it! The woman has just been safely delivered of child! She's in the recovery room, and they want to screw around the table again!" I said, "What do you mean?" Well, I knew what she meant. I said, "Is this something that you want me to pass back to *Geographic*?" Because her response was no, she did not want to have a photographer in the middle of whatever this meeting was. She said yes in no uncertain terms, and I don't

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think I quite repeated it. *Geographic* is a fairly proper organization in the way they handle some of these things, and I don't think I quite repeated her message. But the fact is that *The Living White House* was launched.

Well, Bill Benton felt these books could sell and they could sell to a much wider audience, even though Mrs. Johnson handed out the one millionth, I don't know what, hundred thousand, two hundred thousand, I can't remember the figure. But she used to stand down in the east entrance, and as the figures would get close to a certain sale of the book the photographers would be invited in and a likely looking suspect who probably was the one millionth third and not the one millionth person to buy the book would be nabbed out of line and taken away and photographed and presented with it. He [Bill Benton] did contribute. He contributed a portrait of a young gypsy girl by Robert Henri, which was important because it helped get the collection into the twentieth century and start to take advantage of some of those in the Ash Can School, and encouraged others like Ira Glackens, William Glackens' son, who had been a contemporary and friend of Henri's, to give some of his father's works. But I don't remember his being all that helpful as such.

Alice Brown was very helpful. She was the type of person who gave aid and comfort. When no one else would give money for a donation or for an object she could be counted upon, and [she] also encouraged friends in Texas. She was a very lovely and very decent person. I can remember Mrs. Kennedy did not have guests at the White House that often, and we really welcomed the kind of relationship Mrs. Johnson had with many people who would come and stay. I guess when I talk about a proprietary interest

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in a place it's a very selfish way to treat that institution, but you really wanted to see it come alive as a house for a family more than you did as a museum for the public. So that when Mrs. Brown would be present and committee business would be discussed, it may not be a meeting of the committee itself but just for various things which were being considered at that point, she was extremely helpful.

Other people not on the committee but friends like Oveta Culp Hobby would come and spend the night and say, "What this room needs is a decent chandelier," and shortly thereafter a group of photographs of six different chandeliers would be in the mail. So it was kind of a contagion, kind of an ongoing program that these people participated in.

Bruce Catton was not particularly well during this period. He was helpful in considering objects which related to the previous tenants, but I don't ever remember his being responsible for acquiring one single thing. Mr. Henry duPont had been chairman of the Fine Arts Committee during the Kennedy Administration and up until his death continued to give of time and encouraged friends to give all the time. [I remember] a difficult meeting with Mr. duPont, who late in life--he must have been well into his eighties at this point--had given up enunciating. He mumbled and he mumbled. He was getting hard of hearing, and I recall one of the first times he came to the White House during the Johnson Administration sitting with Mrs. Johnson on one side and Mr. duPont on the other. Mr. duPont couldn't understand Mrs. Johnson. Mrs. Johnson couldn't understand Mr. duPont. I had been around him long enough that you feel like Annie Sullivan in search of a new Helen Keller in a situation like that. It was really a problem.

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But finally, wonderfully enough, he wrote long letters, and we always corresponded. But dealing with him otherwise. I can still remember Mrs. Johnson, who kept cocking her head trying to hang on to the last syllable that had been mumbled.

Jane Engelhard was not named to the committee in the beginning. Interesting point. I do not know why. She had been very active in the Kennedy Administration. It was an obvious mistake. But it never phased her in the least. She operated as a committee of one on her own.

G: She, by this time, was already very close to [Mrs. Johnson].

K: Oh, absolutely, and had been, had been for a long time. It was a definite oversight. It had to be. Because she would come. Every time there was a committee meeting which was open beyond the thirteen members Jane would be there. She was in an advisory capacity. I don't ever recall her advice not being sought by Mrs. Johnson and by the rest of us. But she wasn't named to the committee until Bruce Catton resigned, I think early in 1968. Jane, incidentally, is the only continuous link in that program from 1961 through present. Sometime somebody should do Jane as far as all those administrations are concerned, what she had done and continues to do.

She was talking last night about adding to the crèche that she had given. I know for a fact, in her way of trying to dismiss it and in my way of trying to give her the most difficult time ever, that she brought some priest into this country who had done some dastardly thing that we dug up [during security check]. Because she was parading him in. It was the time of the crèche. He had obviously known a fair amount about Neapolitan crèche figures. Mrs. Howard, who is *the* crèche collector in New York and used to have



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her crèche at the Metropolitan Museum each Christmas time, loaned many of her figures to the Kennedy Administration. She continued to loan her crèche to the Johnson Administration for one year, and then she had a great falling out, over what I do not know, as far as her perceptions of the Johnson Administration. Again, she was no one that we really were ever involved directly in except at Christmas time.

It was because of Mrs. Howard that Jane got into the crèche business. I think the first thing that somebody produced was a crèche made up of *papier mâché* figures. It almost became a cottage industry. You took cotton and gauze and, instead of newsprint, a type of sizing and wallpaper paste, and you sculpted these figures and spray painted them with gold. We had this very primitive crèche for a while. But starting in 1967, maybe even in 1966, Jane kept talking about the crèche that she was going to put together. She spent weeks in Italy visiting every shop in and around Naples acquiring these seventeenth and eighteenth century figures and had this priest advising her.

Anyway, it came time to have the grand opening and the dedication, and she decided she'd fly the priest in, coast to coast with the holy ghost type of thing. Except that we put the priest through clearance; it was Marvin's office. Somebody called up and said this guy had been guilty of every transgression in the world. There was a sex charge, and there was something else. I think he had either known Clara Petacci more intimately than Benito Mussolini. I don't know what it was all about. But anyway, it was a long, strange thing. But somehow, it must have been because it was the Christmas season, we ignored the regulations or waived them long enough to get the good priest into the house.

But she [Jane Engelhard] just was forever--if there was a project that needed to be

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handled and handled from beginning to end, she did it. I assume her anonymity continues to be preserved on some of these things, but the whole china story in itself is going to be something that will have to be told someday. It's told somewhat in the Smithsonian study of presidential china. But how she established and advised and gave birth to the collection of the Johnson presidential china is something that needs to be fleshed out in much greater detail.

G: When did she start on that?

K: Well, the records are all there still in the White House, and copies are at the Library. It seems to me that that was started in 1966 or 1967 but never completed until well into the Nixon Administration. The bulk was there by spring of 1968.

G: What do you remember about that?

K: Oh, I remember a lot. I remember the thoroughness of Mrs. Johnson. No matter how detailed and how thorough she was and how much control we all thought we had over the project, it was a great success until we got to the dessert plates, which was absolutely the biggest disaster I've ever seen. They were plates that looked like they were adorned with decals from S. S. Kresge. How the former director of Pratt [Institute], the president of Tiffany and Company and all of the best design forces in the world could have dropped the ball, as well as what we were doing. The problem was that we had a time [factor]. The set was just not being produced as quickly, because of the handwork, as we had hoped, and so we didn't look at the final dessert service before the plates were fired.

In the very beginning Mrs. Johnson polled every one as to what the theme of the service might be, what devices would be incorporated. She studied the White House

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china collection, the pieces that are on exhibit at the White House, found a lovely eagle in a French porcelain service ordered by Monroe, hoped and indeed that was incorporated. She wanted to have it represent her interest, and so beautification was tapped. How do you tie in? Well, Liz called and she wanted to know--I don't know how, Liz got involved in it early on and then dropped out--if every state had a state tree because they were trying to figure out. Then the next question that came back from me was, yes, and I suppose you want to know if every state has a state dog. I tried, only in that way, to make her realize that perhaps state trees were not quite what the service needed.

From there we went to state flowers. Whether a state had a flower or not, by the time the Johnson service was finished it certainly did. Every state was contacted [for] the legislation which established X flower so that we could check the genus and species so we were not getting the wrong variety of dogwood or wood violet. We soon realized that for the three or four or five states that had one particular flower, some had not been very specific and others had been specific down to the last sub-phylum. That was going to be a bit of a problem, how do you handle and give each state its due? Finally they decided that they would be relegated really to the dessert service. We went on with the bulk of the design, and that would be wildflowers. So Mrs. Johnson started collecting many of the books that she had used through the years and some of the newer books that were coming to the fore, and the designers studied and she recommended and made selections. But it was continuous. Mary Lasker would be consulted. I think, really, Mary Lasker, as far as advice, gave the greatest advice design-wise in terms of the selection of the flora. In all it must have taken from start to finish--it seemed to me it was taking forever, but I

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guess it didn't take more than eighteen months to two years. But those dates can easily be checked on.

One of the unusual parts of the service were some lovely bowls, two sizes, which would be used for arrangements of fruit or flowers on the tables. I think [they were] one of the successful and the most innovative, as far as the designs were concerned, things [that] were done on the design front for the White House. Recently, within the past couple of years, I saw those bowls in a publication which was pointing out some of the finest designs of the third quarter of the twentieth century. I remember sending Bess Abell a copy, because Bess had gone through that first, last and always, with the rest of us. So they do stand on their own, but the dessert service, I guess, is considered a success today, but the dessert service had to be totally destroyed and they had to begin all over again.

Fortunately, the destruction of the dessert service, which came very late in the administration, it was probably the second to the last--it was the day of Lyndon Johnson's last State of the Union. So whatever day that was in January of 1969 we got together. There were, oh, J. B. West and Bess and Connie Carter, who was a researcher at the Library of Congress who helped on a lot of the flower research; one of Bess' assistants, and one of the carpenters, Bonner Arrington. We made wonderful caricatures of all of the various and sundry people in the West Wing who we felt had not always agreed when they were supposed to for five years and pasted them to a solid construction--it was masonry and brick I guess, anyway, a stone wall down in the sub-sub-basement--and stood at the other end of the room and heaved what must have been two hundred plates at

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these people.

The law, unfortunately, said that all china and plate that was not [to be kept] had to be destroyed. We were in a mixed bag here. We are talking about something which couldn't be returned to the company, which the company had ordered destroyed. But they couldn't do it, we had to do it. We had a legal ruling on this and all kinds of things. But anyway, that was the condition of the dessert service by the time the Johnsons left.

G: Was a sample kept just to see how bad it was?

K: Unfortunately not, which was a gross mistake. I think one plate, namely the District of Columbia's plate, may exist today in some form. Actually, samples should have been kept, fifty examples should have been kept. But we had a legal problem. I'm trying to think. It's a law that goes way back on only White House china. They used to throw it in the Potomac and silver as well. From time to time when the Potomac would be dredged, even as late as the 1950s and 1960s, pieces of plate would come back from late nineteenth century administrations. Yes, yes. But there it is.

We haven't talked about Ruth Field, who was helpful.

G: What did she do?

K: She played cards a lot. I don't remember. I think she kind of kept the New York establishment happy. I think she was someone who was good to have. I'm not quite sure. She'd done a bit during the Kennedy Administration, but not all that much. I think she one of the lesser lights of this committee, because for the life of me I only remember her because she had a very deep voice, talking at a couple of committee meetings, and that was the extent of it. I think she gave a rug at one point, but other than that I don't recall.

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Jim Fosburgh, who just died about two months ago, had been the chairman of a special paintings committee in the Kennedy Administration. He was married to one of Harvey Cushing's daughters. Again, I think it was a wise appointment. He was a one-man show in the Kennedy Administration, and he continued to be extremely supportive during the Johnson Administration and was very helpful in defining some of the areas as far as the acquisition of paintings that we should concentrate on. Mrs. Johnson very much listened to his advice and followed many of the leads that he presented.

I would say of the public members, and I'm including Jane as well in that, if you were giving some kind of a report card, I'd give Mrs. Kennedy a B to B+. I'd give Benton a C. I'd give Alice Brown an A-. I'd give Bruce Catton a C+. I'd give Mr. duPont an A. I'd give Jane Engelhard an A+. I'd give Jim Fosburgh an A. I'd give Ruth Field a C at best, maybe a C+. The other members were there because their positions were specified in the legislation, the secretary of the Smithsonian, the director of the National Gallery of Art, chairman of the Fine Arts Commission, chief usher, director of the Park Service. Of those the curator of the White House was also one of the six *ex officio* members.

Dillon Ripley was helpful. You could certainly always call on his institution to help. Things had improved considerably in terms of the relationship of the curator's office and the Smithsonian. Early in the Kennedy Administration the curator was an employee of the Smithsonian, but it meant that the Smithsonian staff would then come over and really make the curator go through them before consulting Mrs. Kennedy. It got to be a two-headed master and not a very workable situation. John Walker, who was

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director of the National Gallery, I always felt that if it was something which the Gallery absolutely didn't have any desire or any hope for, that he might recommend a donor giving a picture to the White House--the obvious jurisdictional problem here. The director of the Park Service was extremely supportive, very helpful. George Hartzog was the man during those days.

Bill Walton, chairman of the Commission of Fine Arts, was really kind of a royal pain in the ass. I don't know. He would make kind of cute and somewhat cutting remarks. You had the feeling that, I guess, [he] didn't think that things could be properly handled as far as this program was concerned because of the fact that it was a Johnson program. The mantle had been passed, but not appropriately so as far as he was concerned. Again, Mrs. Johnson, I think very much like President Johnson, they just knocked themselves out to include anyone from the Kennedy Administration who had been supportive of this effort. Too much so, I really think too much so.

G: What were the major policy decisions which were made, or the major recommendations? I assume that they did make recommendations to Mrs. Johnson and she made the decisions, is that right?

K: Well, she would make the decisions in consultation with. . . . If we were talking about the decorative arts, usually she consulted Mr. duPont or some of the other advisers who had been dealing with American furniture, for example. Every day you would receive from dealers as well as private citizens photographs, a provenance of a picture which someone felt would be appropriate in a White House collection. Our office was kind of the outer perimeter as far as the defense system was concerned. If it was something that

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was of interest, if it was something which was either related to the White House or one of the examples that I cited a little while ago as far as the so-called who's who of the collection, or the who was not who at that point, then it would be sent to her with a brief thought from me. At that point she would begin consulting.

On the other hand she would receive directly from people, either on trips or people would send directly to her. Alice Brown, for example, or others. C. R. Smith might be dropping by for a drink, and the discussion would come along. The next thing, C. R. would say, yes, he had a couple of pictures that he thought would be perfect for the collection and he would send them over. I can remember C. R. sending three or four over. Take your pick. The White House had a Remington but desperately wanted a Russell. Mike Mansfield cranked up Armand Hammer and sent him down. The next thing we knew we had a Charlie Russell.

Oftentimes the object was not as important as you would like it to be, but the donor was, not oftentimes but sometimes, and the obvious problem. But our guidelines were such that I can't ever remember--I can remember in the Kennedy Administration when certain individuals were about to be indicted by the Justice Department, that we quickly had to have a Dominican Republican divorce as far as any interest in pursuing their donations were concerned. But I can't remember that happening in the Johnson Administration.

Some people were collectors in their own right who were just old friends of the family who would call up. Mrs. Oscar Cox. I think her husband may have been solicitor general at one point, but her friendship with Mrs. Johnson, I guess, goes way back, went



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way back in Washington. She and her husband collected fantastic pieces of American silver, Paul Revere and others. After Mrs. Johnson and Mrs. Cox were together one day, Mrs. Cox suggested that someone be sent over to her house to look over the collection and pick out whatever pieces would be appropriate. I mean these just open sesame gestures that were made.

But the guidelines really were those that had been established during the Kennedy program, and they were continued. A gift either had to relate to the White House itself in some form, to its either having been there or had been something which had association value with a previous occupant, or it had to represent one of the fine efforts of a particular period of fine arts or decorative arts. So that if we were talking about Winslow Homer, and it was not a Winslow Homer sketch of Rutherford Hayes, for example, then it had to have been--and that was true with people like Eakins, who had come to the White House to paint the President and sat in a room on the second floor about where Luci Johnson's bedroom was located and made some lovely sketches of Lafayette Park at the same time. Well, those would have all been very appropriate, but we couldn't find anything like that of Eakins. So what we ended up accepting was a portrait of a young girl of Philadelphia. But we were pleased to be able to share an Eakins with the public and with the family. So it was a two-pronged policy, it really was.

G: Did any of the offers have strings attached?

K: If they did they weren't accepted.

G: Do you recall any in particular that had to be refused on that basis?

K: I don't. I think the White House has that advantage of being able to accept something and

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the donor is as pleased to know that he can go out and say, "The White House has it" and let it go at that. We never would accept loans from dealers. Dealers were always trying to loan objects, obviously with the hope of taking them back and selling them at a higher price. Unfortunately that practice did start during the Nixon Administration, and I think it's one of the most disgusting practices in the world. It's done with good intention, because fine pieces do come along and you can't find donors immediately. But to take seven or eight or nine pieces and put them in the White House on public view and parade potential donors by them is a bad practice when the owner, the dealer, asks for them back and then sells them. And sells them with--and this has happened, yes--the White House association. I often regret not taking every piece of furniture in our own house and at some point or other moving it into the White House and just photographing it in place and putting it right back at 209 11th Street, S. E., so that forty years from now our youngsters can come along with the photographs and show them to people, saying, "Yes, this was in the White House."

No, [in] that whole business I think we bent over backwards, no matter what we were dealing with, trying to make sure it was not the White House that was for sale or that the string in any way went out to any pre-agreed or any conditions that were binding. The law of September, 1961, very specifically said that it wouldn't be removed from the White House. It said that if it was, it would be still White House property but on indefinite loan to the Smithsonian and subject to the recall of the White House. So this seemed to satisfy most donors, that it was inalienable and it was there to remain.

G: Were there any offers that you didn't accept that in retrospect you think that you should

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have?

K: I don't think so. I think really we accepted more than we should have.

G: I gather one of the innovations was accepting the works of more modern artists.

K: Yes, getting into the twentieth century. Right. We had never done that. We had almost too long a test of time. I think it's reasonable for an institution like the White House to be extremely cautious and very careful and have, say, a fifty-year cutoff date. Because no one, even today, can competently judge what of the contemporary works from the sixties, for example, is going to be of lasting value. None of us can do it. It's an absurdity to say you can. While careers are made by people who attempt to play this game, they soon give up any ghost. But I think we had been really too conservative, and to get us up to the First World War period was a very important departure. There were all kinds of ways for the White House to pay attention to contemporary works, and they can do this easily in the West Wing. They can do this in the East Wing. We had to stay away from having one-man shows and honoring living painters. Some, of course, got into the act obviously because of portraits, presidential portraits, which would be commissioned. That will lead up to the Elizabeth Shoumatoff's. I hope someone has talked to her. I don't know what condition she is in today or anything else. If not they certainly should. Do you know?

G: I think we do have an interview with her.

K: Good. Good. Because I've never seen a more disturbed or distraught woman, and she had obviously had the pins knocked out from under her in April of 1945 when FDR collapsed in front of her. But I think she almost collapsed one day when Lyndon Johnson came up to her and pointed to some sketches I guess she had been making of her first

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effort and said that he wanted five just like that with five different jackets on or something. I don't know what the number was. I went upstairs to talk to her shortly afterwards, and in her thick Russian accent she said, "A xerox machine! He thinks that I am a xerox machine!" The woman was totally undone, after she had put her life blood into creating this first [sketch]. She's a competent painter, but I don't think her portraits of President and Mrs. Johnson are--there's a certain thirties quality, especially about Mrs. Johnson's. There a very, almost two-dimensional [quality]. I have not seen the [Aaron] Shikler. I look forward to seeing it. I am terribly prejudiced though on his behalf so I should not even attempt to judge that. But White House portraits are forever going to be a bone of contention, and never was there a bigger bone to pick than the Peter Hurd bone. That whole experience was--

G: He was only one of three, I think, recommended. I'm wondering how he was chosen, if the President himself chose Peter Hurd?

K: Well, I think he liked the thought that it would be a western painter. I can't think who the other painters were. Was Tom Lea one of them?

G: I thought Shikler was.

K: Shikler was recommended, but was he really being considered at the very end? Shikler was being recommended to paint Mrs. Johnson and Lynda and Luci. I can remember that. A whole series of 35mm transparencies of Shikler's works were there, and I remember Mrs. Johnson looking at them. Somehow, I think President Johnson had a Peter Hurd over in the [West Wing] that had been borrowed from some source. I think Pete himself had sent some pictures up from New Mexico to hang over in the West Wing.

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But you can't meet Peter Hurd and not immediately fall in love with that guy. He is truly an extremely engaging and a nice, nice person. Yes, absolutely. I'm still wondering if that picture had been shown to him under better circumstances at the Ranch. . . .

G: Do you recall Johnson's reaction? I mean, his quotation is famous, but the mood he was in?

K: I remember. I was certainly not there, but I remember asking somebody who was there at the time. It was either Ashton Gonella or maybe one of President Johnson's secretaries who I talked about. He was in a hurry to see it. I remember asking under what light and what the--the way it was described was not a good situation. It really wasn't. It was just kind of half out of the packing crate, just a kind of viewing that you would have of something up in an attic looking through the prism of cobwebs.

G: How about Mrs. Johnson's reaction to it?

K: I think she was uncertain. It hung in our office in the White House for months, and she would bring any number of people in to look at it. I remember her bringing Clark Clifford in. I didn't understand why Hurd felt that he had to put a book in Johnson's hand, the history of the United States. That made no sense to me at all. And why he would copy completely a *National Geographic* photograph of the skyline of Washington, that I could never understand. But his handling of the figure of Johnson I thought was tremendous. I thought it had power. It had a certain raw vitality. It's a hard medium to work in, the medium that he works in, egg tempera. It's a fairly perishable medium. This portrait I think could easily stand on its own two feet against any number of those in the White House. Shikler's portrait of John Kennedy, for example, not only is it a little--it's

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too romantic for my blood, but it's a certain sympathy card of condolence, something that Hallmark might put out. I don't know. I do like his portrait of Mrs. Kennedy very much.

But the Peter Hurd, he struggled. He was uncertain. He had never painted, to the best of my knowledge, a president before. I do not recall. He would come to town, and he would study and he would observe Johnson in social situations, stay over at the Carlton Hotel. He would call his brother-in-law up at Chadds Ford, he'd call him up on the phone. I would be dispatched to go down to Union Station and meet the train with Andrew Wyeth. Wyeth would get off and he'd be wearing--I remember the first time he had this great black cape with a chesterfield collar. He came out kind of like Dracula. There was a lot of almost Halloween effect to the thing, and down we went to the White House. A most modest guy, very modest, when he's sober, yes, very much so. Hurd would say, "Andy, what do you think?" And he'd say, "Well, you know. . ." and they'd go on and on and on and back and forth. You wished that you could have records these two giants in their field in their uncertainty with it.

My problem that I've got to reconstruct at some point is when did all of this take place in relationship to "the ugliest thing I've ever seen" tale. Because I can't recall whether Hurd was still coming and looking at the portrait. Whether we had it in the office for a while in its--

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K: The decision was finally made to return the portrait directly to Hurd. Some time though in that period enough people, including Dillon Ripley, realized that an awfully good thing was going to be let go of. I think Hurd may have even donated it to the National Portrait

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Gallery. But they were just then getting ready to move into their first and only home that they have had, a building that Lyndon Johnson dedicated in 1968, I believe, as a matter of fact. It was never unveiled, I believe, there until perhaps 1969, maybe even 1970. But I'm awfully glad it's still here in the city. I do go down and see it from time to time, and I do think about what had to be biggest misunderstanding as far as the world of painters and paintings, almost as big a misunderstanding I suppose as the Festival for the Arts in 1965, which Eric Goldman tells a great deal about in his book on the Johnson years.

G: Anything else on the Hurd incident?

K: No, I don't think so. All painters are sensitive, too sensitive, and all presidents are a bit too sensitive. But I don't think that Peter Hurd is the kind of individual who would do anything but laugh about it today. In the White House files is correspondence on the subject, but I don't think there is much, if anything, after the fact. I think it all precedes. I remember having to run out whenever he would be in town and buy him paints, for example, because he would be invited ostensibly for a state dinner, and then somehow the next day he would be able to arrange some time for sittings. Or he may just have wanted to back and work in his hotel room with fresh conceptions and with photographs that he had had. I'm not totally certain. I'm sure the National Portrait Gallery has a good bit of this all down now in terms of how he worked.

G: What were Johnson's objections to it?

K: He just didn't like the way he looked. I don't think it was the book, the history of the United States, that bothered him, and I don't think it was the city of Washington with the southwestern sunset. I think he just wasn't as pretty as [hoped]. I'm sure it has to be

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based on the same reasons that none of us like many of the images that are committed to paper or canvas or whatever of us. We just don't.

G: He never elaborated on specifics though?

K: No, I had never heard him. I never, never, never heard him. All I know is that portrait was always an unsure commodity in everybody's mind. There was always something about it that you could be critical of, and yet there was something about it that you really liked. To that was its salvation, because there are too many pictures floating around that you can be critical of everything. It obviously was a mixed bag and was going to engender a type of controversy. But it became a great--the whole joke of the thing, and you had to deflate everybody's balloon.

I guess the culmination for me was a portrait by a Texas painter named Douglas Chandor--or who had settled in Texas, he was English by birth--of Mrs. [Franklin] Roosevelt that was acquired in which the artist left several sketches of her hands in the portrait. We were having an unveiling in the East Room and Bess Abell, who always wanted to test everything to make sure it was in working order--I don't think she ever went on the honeymoons with Lynda and Luci, but she did take everything through to completion--said, "Let's make sure that when the President and Mrs. Johnson pull the veil everything will be fine." Well, *Life* magazine had the good sense of photographing the Hurd and doing just a full-page blowup. It was not nearly as large as the surface of the portrait of Mrs. Roosevelt, so what I simply did was mount a piece of cardboard behind the Hurd and I put this thing there. Then we got up, and we had our practice in the East Room. What I didn't realize as Bess is pulling--and Bess doesn't know what's happening,



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she doesn't realize that the portrait [by Hurd is there]--is that Mrs. Johnson at that point was just coming around the corner. I do an impersonation of Eleanor Roosevelt on top of everything else, talking to Harry Hopkins, and I used to hide in the East Room and play all kinds of good games with myself and others. I don't think to this day that Mrs. Johnson ever saw the Peter Hurd actually on the easel, or she may have and didn't let on. But Bess certainly dropped her lower plate, because it was about twenty or twenty-five minutes before the people were to come and do the camera set ups before the thing.

So, what else can you say about something like that? It was a wild statement. It was a statement that had great value as far as the wires were concerned, and it never has stopped. It will be forever identified with Lyndon Johnson. Peter Hurd will be forever remembered, not as the son-in-law of N. C. Wyeth and the brother-in-law of Andy, but he'll be remembered as having painted the ugliest thing Lyndon Johnson ever saw.

G: How about the White House Festival on the Arts? Were you involved in that?

K: We were involved only from a registrarial standpoint of helping Smithsonian people. The story is well told by Goldman I believe. It really is. Liz tells it I think from a slightly different vantage point, obviously. Goldman, [I have] tremendous admiration for him, one of the nicest [people]. Schlesinger always made me feel that I was so much dirt underneath somebody's fingernail. I don't think Arthur Schlesinger really had anything to do, and Mrs. Kennedy felt sorry for him. He was over in the East Wing where there were military aides and social office, and he was working on long-range projects perhaps and taking notes. But she would seek his counsel when certain manuscript materials would come up at Parke-Bernet, for example, at auction, or Charles Hamilton or some of the

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other places. We'd go down and you would talk to him. He always acted as if something did not quite smell right. I'm not sure if I'm putting too much into this.

Goldman, on the other hand, was just the greatest person to go and talk to. You could spend hours. He had ideas. He would pick up the phone. Goldman in the East Wing and Horace Busby, Buzz, in the West Wing, as far as I'm concerned, if I had to be on a desert island and select a couple of people that I would like to preserve there forever, they would be certainly two of my choices as far as the male of the species is concerned. I don't know what women of the White House. I would certainly want Bess and Liz, for entirely different reasons, except I wouldn't want one without the other. Because they taught me, Liz especially, that you have to disagree to get along. Not at all what Sam Rayburn used to be teaching everyone, that to get along, you went along.

Going back to Goldman, he did in a matter of weeks what any museum would say is impossible. He gathered in the White House pictures like Wyeth's "Christina's World," pictures from all over the country, sculpture from all over the country. You should see the catalog of both events and objects which were brought up. I don't think the White House ever has had a finer hour, and I think it's forgotten. I think I totally got lost in the craziness of what Robert Lowell and Dwight MacDonald were up to. It's pathetic. If that whole enterprise had somehow been built with enough of a tie--you were dealing with an arts community whose lead time is six to nine months, as far as publications are concerned--and if somehow maybe it would have been remembered more than it is, but it's again remembered for the wrong reasons. I don't know how many examples in each administration are remembered for the wrong reasons, how many Peter Hurd portraits or

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how many White House festivals. I'm not sure, an awful lot obviously. But for some of these things, I was a bird or a mouse in the corner.

It was a beautiful time to see these works gathered and to see the sculpture on the lawn, the David Smith pieces for example, and some of the other pieces. Institutions all over the country didn't have a penny to get them here. They had to pay their own way. Many of them were then hanging in major exhibitions which had to be dismantled or holes created. The performing arts as they were represented, again, it ran wide in a complete gamut. Mrs. Johnson participated, attended most of the sessions, I remember. I remember Phyllis McGinley walking around with her arm in a sling--I don't know whether she had had an accident--preparing to read her poetry, I assume. Hollywood was represented. But whatever it was, and how many facets you can't point to on this jewel, I don't think most people ever knew that it even took place today.

G: It's overshadowed by [the other incidents]. Do you recall the genesis of that art festival? Was it Goldman's idea?

K: I'm pretty sure it was Goldman's idea, yes. It seems to me that he, in his capacity of being resident thinker, had submitted it to somebody in the West Wing. Was Harry McPherson in the West Wing at that point in 1965? I don't think he was, was he? But he submitted it to someone. It was approved by the President. He may have consulted with Mrs. Johnson. But I do think that the start was from the President's side of the family, and then from there it went on. But our office was really considered just support troop. We didn't get involved in the selection process.

Goldman consulted museum directors. People like Tom Hess and *Art News* in

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New York, I'm sure, had quite a direct impact. Goldman at that time was very much involved with a young woman named Barbaralee Diamonstein, who was his assistant in many ways, a fantastic and capable person, amazing person in many ways. She was able with her energy, I think, to harness a lot of the advice, and it was good advice. Gosh, it was good advice. But the National Collection of Fine Arts of the Smithsonian aided and abetted the registrarial effort, and that's where we were involved.

Because this whole thing suddenly had to go up overnight. It was not a case of these pictures being moved in two weeks ahead of time. Everything had to be done on paper. I think it was first talked about, a date had been set finally, maybe five weeks before it actually took place. The dates were firmed up. My memory especially of the South Lawn of the White House the evening before--it must have opened up on a Monday morning, and this would have been a Sunday evening as things were in place; I remember we worked around the clock that weekend--of the sun setting, or the evening sky, and some of those forms playing off against the natural forms, such as the Jefferson Mounds, and the music coming from a rehearsal on the shell on the South Lawn [is] tremendous, really just great. For every bad memory you have of the South Lawn, and the worst I have is of the helicopters landing, bringing people in and taking off for more, coming in from Andrews on the Friday night of November 22, you get a good memory a la [the Festival].

The Johnsons really knew how to use the South Lawn of the White House: the county fairs in which we would all be pressed into service with skimmers and red and white candy-striped jackets, taking tokens from congressional kids. Then they'd be sent

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off and a new gang of kids would be brought in the next day. Very shortly Lyndon Johnson made sure your own kids or your own grandchildren were involved. I'm sure he couldn't see anything being set up and used only once. As quickly as he could share it with his extended family [he did]. That has to be one of the greatest secrets of his success, his whole concept of family. I'm dying to sit down and read Jane Howard's new book on families of the 1970s and how they have changed. I hope sometime when presidential families are being discussed that people will never leave out the four and a half thousand additional members that Lyndon and Lady Bird always included in theirs.

That whole feeling seemed to continue even after they left the White House. You were expected to stop and drop in. Anybody who knew them well enough would never do it. Unfortunately there were plenty of people who perhaps did not appreciate, or were not sensitive enough to this, who probably do try to stop in. Down at the Ranch, watching Mrs. Johnson kind of waving to the tour buses from the front porch, it disturbed me to no end that this dove-tailing continues to go on. But it's her decision. God love her for it. I don't know. It's not my type of sanity, it really isn't. But on the other hand, if there is an ingredient X to the art of the possible, that has to be it for them. It really has to be.

G: Let me ask you one thing about something we were talking about earlier, the acquisition of furniture and paintings. Did Lyndon Johnson get involved personally in any of these?

K: He would kind of walk in as pictures were gathered around the West Sitting Hall and after giving Mrs. Johnson a smack say, "That's a mighty pretty picture" and walk along. I can remember once he called me up. He was having lunch. He had a bronze with I think

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John McCormack had sent down--it must be down at the Library right now--of a lone rider, maybe on a bucking bronco, perhaps. But this was something that McCormack for some reasons had decided to give him and to send down. He said, "What do you think of it?" I told him.

G: What did you say?

K: You know, "a fine piece" type of thing, or, "It looks to be fine." Then I remember doing what I guess we always do with Remington or Russell, with any of the bronzes, reminding him of the fact that there were an awful lot that were being copied, especially coming in from Japan, that were counterfeited. I don't think I came right out quite that directly, but in a way I guess what I was leading up to was, "Let's check the thing out." Indeed we did with a man named Rudy Wunderlich in New York, who would probably be considered the leading authority on bronzes. Although today, with some of the material that the Amon Carter Museum has as far as checking [they may be the leading authority]. They have a new type of micrometer which can take it down to the nth degree. C. R. Smith some day should tell you if the Library has an extensive enough collection of western art. C. R. would be--I know the University has many of his pictures--a good one to talk to about what has happened in the last fifteen or twenty years *vis-a-vis* the Japanese and many of the copies have been bootlegged in this country.

But I think he just wanted somebody to look at it more than anything else. He liked it. But I think if it had been something that had been a forgery, I don't know whether he would have liked it any less. I don't think he would have. It was not necessarily the initial act of creation of the artist that he could suffer through and

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sympathize with, but rather the representation of the form and the figure that he wanted to see. That was a pretty thing to him, or that was an active moment that had been captured, not an ugly thing.

G: I suppose in the Oval Office he did assert himself there on what should be where.

K: Not particularly. The room that he really wanted to get everything together in was the little room off the Oval Office where he had the autographed photographs of various presidents going back to FDR. He quickly got that room set up within days of moving into the Oval Office, yes.

No, Mrs. Johnson made suggestions for the President's office. Mrs. Brown, a decorator from McMillen in New York, made some suggestions. But I don't recall the President really changing or effecting that many changes in the Oval Office. He certainly used the room a great deal more than, say, Carter or Nixon used it. We would put pieces in the office, some of which are still there today, pieces which would range from American empire consoles, very French in influence, [to] primitives of the White House painted from the south around the area of where Tiber Creek had been located. He was interested in the portraits that were in the Cabinet Room. We would change those from time to time. He wanted a portrait of Truman to hang over there. He was very interested in borrowing a portrait of FDR.

G: Didn't they make a ceremony when they unveiled that?

K: When they finally got the portrait.

G: Were you there?

K: Yes.

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G: What was his attitude then? Did he identify with FDR?

K: I think he certainly identified with FDR. I think that was the success of Madame Shoumatoff in many ways, that "I am being painted by. . . ." I've never been able to figure out any other association, other than his strong feelings for FDR. And like the rest of the country, or to many in the country, FDR had been given the same sense of canonization in his mind.

G: Did Johnson say anything in particular on that occasion that reflected his devotion to Roosevelt?

K: I am sure he did, but I do not recall. I don't recall. I just don't. I'm trying to think of the number of portraits of presidents or presidents' wives that were acquired during [the Johnson Administration]. With the portrait of Mrs. Roosevelt I recall--unfortunately the Peter Hurd memory is strongest of all. When Mrs. Truman's portrait was unveiled I remember he invited Dean Acheson to come and make the remarks. They were lovely, they really were some of the nicest. That ceremony stands out in my mind as being one of the best blends of the object, the memory, and the people gathering for her. Her grandchildren just seemed to hang on every word that Acheson was saying about their grandmother and how protective Truman was of her. Apparently there was some international flap with the diplomatic community. Mrs. Truman had been either snubbed in some way and Acheson got called in by HST on it. This is all in the remarks that would be in the Library.

This business of bringing the objects and the people or the administrations that they represent together was handled many times very successfully. Mrs. Johnson, really,



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was the one who was putting her *Good Housekeeping* seal of approval on these things. The so-called evenings at the White House that he would have for--well, he began with members of the House and then went to the Senate, and then he went to the governors and then the mayors. I think we thought he would have county executives next. But what he was doing every Tuesday and Thursday night for an awfully long time were briefings in the Blue Room or sometimes in the East Room. The war was certainly heating up in a big way, McNamara and his charts. But what to do with the wives? So we would show them a film or two in the theater. Mrs. Johnson had just helped us with the completion of a film called "Paintings in the White House" that was started during the Kennedy Administration. She did the introduction to the film, and a lovely film it is. If you've never seen it, I wish you would take a moment to screen it at the Library. It's a beautiful film, and it won, and deservedly so, many awards.

After the films I would get up with a hundred and fifty anecdotes. Liz would sit in the back row, and she would get word from the usher's office as to whether or not they thought the President was winding down in the East Room or up in the Blue Room. You would just keep telling these things. Sometimes you could tell them, oh, for only five minutes, other times you would go for an hour. Well, after Mrs. Johnson laughed at the same stories four hundred and twenty-two times, we finally decided we should try something else. So we thought of a tour of the family quarters. Then after the tour was over we would take all of the furniture out of the Queen's Room, and we would gather in there for some kind of a discussion. One evening it was congressional wives talking about some of the problems that they had to all the other congressional wives, except I

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think Patsy Mink's husband used to come.

Another evening though it was a panel made up of Charles Taft, Margaret Truman, Barbara Eisenhower, Lynda Robb, talking about the White House from 1910 through 1965 or 1966. When you started with Charles Taft on holiday from the Taft School telling the male operator that he could go out for lunch, and Charles Taft becoming the switchboard and the central communications person at the White House during his father's administration for a two-hour period, as opposed to what we all knew went on today with Signal Corps and so forth, you had a better understanding of the kind of growth and development of the institution. This, fortunately, again is preserved on tape at the Library. They're great stories, wonderful stories that these people told. They went on for probably an hour and a half to God knows what. But it was great because they had a chance ahead of time to see many of the furnishings in the house that brought back some memories. Then they could sit down, and while they had had some material prepared, they were able to--we always made certain that enough of the staff who had been there since the year one were on scene to see them and to renew that association.

They've just finished casting the principals in "My Thirty Years Backstairs at the White House," which actually begins with the Taft Administration. If you have a chance, check today's *Washington Post* and you will see all of the people who are going to be [in it]. They have half of Hollywood depicting presidential families from the Tafts through the Eisenhowers for this. It's NBC's answer [to "Roots."] It will really be retitled "White House Roots." I'm sure because it's going to be something else again. Where are we, sir?

G: Shall we take a break?

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K:     Why don't we? Why don't we? Yes, I think we should. I definitely would be in favor of  
that.

End of Tape 2 of 2 and Interview I

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