INTERVIEW I

DATE: November 12, 1981

INTERVIEWEE: JOHN FRITZ KOENIGER

INTERVIEWER: MICHAEL L. GILLETTE

PLACE: Mr. Koeniger's residence, Austin, Texas

Tape 1 of 1

K: We were discussing on your last visit here the article in Atlantic Monthly by Robert Caro that indicated or suggested that Sam Johnson was sort of a despised person in his community of Johnson City. I'm sure that Caro, who is a brilliant writer, had that information possibly from some individual who didn't like Sam Johnson, but to the best of my knowledge there were very few people in the community that didn't like him. He was a respected man from an old and respected family; he was a civic-minded person and performed many services for the citizens in that community, such as looking up the data that was required to establish the basis for a [Texas] Ranger's pension. The State Legislature at one time had passed legislation which enabled men who had taken any part in defending the frontier communities against the Indians, if they established that, they could get a pension. And a number of men in the community who didn't even know they were eligible for these pensions got them because of Sam Johnson's interest.

I remember he came to my grandfather one time and asked him if he hadn't been a Texas Ranger and my grandfather said, yes, he had

been, so Sam Johnson told him, "Well, I believe, Mr. Mayes, that you're eligible for a pension." It developed, however, that my grandfather was a Texas Ranger after Texas had seceded from the Union; he was a Ranger in 1861 and the early part of 1862 and wasn't eligible. My grandfather wasn't applying for a pension as Sam Johnson came to him and suggested that he might be.

We were talking about his [Lyndon's] father, Sam Johnson--Sam Ealy Johnson. I think possibly that there's some misinformation about him. Some people may have got the impression from reading articles, material about Lyndon, that Sam Johnson was a tenant farmer. I think Lyndon himself may have emphasized that very brief period in Sam Johnson's life that he maybe was a tenant farmer, but if he was, it was for only a very brief period, and I doubt that he ever did much plowing or wore overalls or was a tenant farmer in the sense that we think of a tenant farmer. Pretty young in life, he was elected to the State Legislature, and he certainly made a living for his family, a good living most of the time, although he was a drinking man as we all know.

I thought of a story that might be interesting. Sam Johnson was in some sense, in some regards, a very impractical man. Some of his drinking buddies around Johnson City asked him one time to go fishing with them. They would go down to what they called "below the falls" of the Pedernales to fish for catfish. It was believed that yellow catfish didn't come above the falls, so you had to go below the falls to catch a yellow catfish, a big one anyway. So

Sam was interested; they took, of course, plenty of spirits along with them to refresh them from time to time, but when they arrived at the campsite where they planned [to stay] a day or two or maybe two or three days, Sam remembered that he didn't have any fishing tackle. He said, "I'm going to have to go back to town and buy some fishing tackle." So his companions assured him that that wasn't necessary; they had plenty of fishing tackle.

So on the first morning that they were there, someone brought him a reel and rod and at the end of his fishing line there wasn't a hook but what we called a Dowagiac or wooden minnow, which is used to cast for bass mostly. So the story was that Sam cast out and just left his hook there, sitting there all morning, and the other man came back [from] fishing, all of them with a string of fish. They inquired if he'd caught anything, and he said, "No, I haven't even had a bite." So that showed about how much he knew about fishing. He'd fished all morning with a wooden minnow.

G: Could you tell anything about his politics? Were you familiar with his political philosophy?

K: Well, no, I don't believe I can. I think that he possibly inclined to the liberal side, I believe he did. I don't remember enough, I wasn't old enough to know too much about that phase of his life. I really don't know too much about that. I think that maybe he introduced legislation of some sort about the time of World War I when there was considerable prejudice against the Germans. Of course, the Germans in Fredericksburg and Stonewall were very far

removed from the militaristic Germans of Germany, but anyway, there was a certain prejudice against them and some of them might have received some criticism from their neighbors or friends. I think that he introduced some sort of legislation, but I don't know enough about it to talk about that part of it.

G: What about the Ku Klux Klan? Have you ever heard stories of his opposition to it?

K: Yes, I've heard that. I think that most of my information in that respect, though, is just what I've read. I don't know firsthand. I know that he was opposed to it certainly.

G: Did he spend a lot of time around the courthouse in Johnson City, do you recall?

K: I don't remember him spending a great deal of time on the street. I'm sure he spent some, but not a great deal.

One of the things that most politicians like to do--I'm getting around more or less to Lyndon now--most politicians like to claim that they were born in a log cabin and all that sort of thing, to indicate how far they'd come up in life when they get to be elected to some high office. I don't think that Lyndon ever lived in the very humblest of surroundings. It just doesn't make sense. I don't remember anything like that, and I visited in the home with Lyndon when he was a boy and "stayed all night," as we say, and it was a normal family like most others. Now if they ever suffered any privation, it was only on a very temporary basis. Sam Johnson had good credit; everybody had to resort to credit at the stores

at times, especially the farmers because they didn't have the ready cash until they sold their crops. It's good politics for a politician to indicate how far he's come in life, and Lyndon, I think, himself might have spread the rumor that he was born in a log cabin and came up from the very lowest of surroundings, but it isn't actually true. I don't believe it is.

His father, as I say, dealt in real estate and served in the Texas State Legislature for a number of terms. The one thing that I remember about his father was he had the reputation of being the slowest driver in the whole country. He was known to drink and drive, but it was agreed that he was never in any danger because he drove so slowly. I remember on several occasions going with him myself, maybe going out on a real estate deal somewhere, and there were gates to be opened. He liked to come through town and motion to some boy to come and go with him and open the gates for him, for which he paid a reward, maybe fifty cents or something like that. I remember that he did drive at a snail's pace really, so he was never in any great danger of getting hurt or hurting anyone.

G: Was he a good speaker? Did you ever hear him make a speech?

K: He wasn't, no, he wasn't. I'm sure that he could make a speech, but he wasn't an orator or he wasn't that type, not really a public speaker as I recall.

G: How did he get along with his children? What sort of father was he?

K: Well, on the several times that I visited in the home with him, I never did see him scold the children. He was agreeable to everything.

G: Was he a raconteur? Did he tell political stories?

K: Most of the Johnsons were. Yes, he liked to. He was interested in politics very much.

G: Yes. Was he stern?

K: Well, I don't think of him in that sense. He didn't seem that way to me. He may have been with the children. I told you that story on our previous visit here about when Lyndon ran away after wrecking the car.

G: Do you want to tell that from the beginning?

K: Yes. Now, this is secondhand, but I did hear this from Ben Crider who knew the details and was living there at the time. This is during the prohibition era, and we didn't have any local bootlegger right in Johnson City, but up around Stonewall and that area there were several of the enterprising farmers who brewed beer and made wine from the mustang grape. Mustang grapes grow in great profusion along the Pedernales River there, and Grape Creek. So the boys from Johnson City very early learned about this and would go up there. So Lyndon--he must have been just in his early teens possibly at this time--he borrowed his father's car and took several of his friends, including Payne Rountree, whom you stated that you knew. So they went up to Stonewall and had quite a few home-brews, or wine or both, and enjoyed themselves. On the way back--Lyndon was

driving, of course--it was described to me that Payne Rountree, who was seated in the backseat immediately behind Lyndon, the driver, placed both of his feet against Lyndon's shoulders and pinned him against the steering wheel. So Lyndon was screaming to "take your feet down," when about that time they went into a ditch and rather damaged the car quite a bit, the fenders anyway. Well, they were able to drive the car on to Johnson City, but Lyndon said, "I can't face Papa after this. I'm going to just leave home," which he did after the boys that were with him contributed what few nickels and dimes and quarters they had left.

So he left town, and apparently made his way down to Robstown. Well, I don't know how long a period went by, but Lyndon was gone for some time, and he had apparently got a job down there in one of the cotton gins in Robstown, which were powered by steam boilers at that time. So he evidently wanted to come back home and to find out first how his father felt about this wrecked car, so he wrote to Ben Crider and outlined what he was doing. I believe he told Ben in his letter that he had a job in a cotton gin down there, but he said, "It's very hard work and it's dangerous. You know how these old steam boilers blow up down here. There's two or three of them that have blown up in the last two or three years," and he said, "In fact, these ginners down here just wait for us boys from the Hill Country to come down here and work in these jobs, operate these boilers. The people that live down there are afraid to work in these gins."

So Walter Crider, Ben's older brother, joined a group in which Sam Johnson was in conversation and Walter, in the conversation, asked Johnson if he'd heard from Lyndon. So Sam Johnson is said to have declared, "Well, no, we haven't, Walter, and my wife is worried to death about him. Do you know anything about him?" Walter said, "Yes, my brother Ben has had a letter from Lyndon," and he then retailed what had been in the letter. So the story was that Sam Johnson in a few minutes got up and left the crowd that he was in and was seen walking up and down the street, and he came back and called Walter and said, "Walter, I want you to drive to Robstown just as fast as you can and get Lyndon. Here's ten dollars to buy the gasoline, and I want you to go get him." In that manner, Lyndon got to come home and all was forgiven.

I think that's a reasonably accurate account of what happened.

G: LBJ did have an uncle or someone or cousin in Robstown?

K: Yes, he had an uncle, Harvey Roper, who lived at Robstown. And in his letter he had said that he was staying with his Uncle Harvey.

G: Do you have any recollections of LBJ's mother?

K: Yes, I do. I remember one thing very well, that we were seated up in the gallery in the House of Representatives in Washington one time and I said to her, "Mrs. Johnson, you must be very proud of Lyndon." And she said, "Yes, I am, but I don't think any more of him than I do of any of my other children." She said, "He's done remarkably well to have come this far as fast as he has, but

still it doesn't matter to me," which I thought was the sort of thing that a mother would say.

She was a very aristocratic-appearing woman. Did you ever see her?

G: No. I never met her.

K: She had aristocratic manners and bearing and had been an elocution teacher, I believe, in her younger years. Her father, Baines--Judge Baines--was a successful lawyer in the country at that time. He bought a house in the town of Blanco that my father had built many, many years [ago] when Blanco was still the county seat of Blanco County. And Judge Baines had bought this house. My father, so the story is, was supposed to get married and he got jilted and didn't have any reason to keep the house after he'd had it built. It was a nice stone house--I've seen it several times--and there was a story about that and I don't know whether it was in an Austin paper or a Blanco paper or Johnson City paper--I don't remember now. I clipped the thing out and sent it to Lyndon. The clipping mentioned that his mother had lived for a time in this house when she was a girl, before moving to Fredericksburg, I believe.

G: Did she like Johnson City?

K: Well, I can't give any information on that. I'm not sure. I think her hometown was McKinney up near Dallas. I believe she was [born there].

G: Well, was she well-liked in the community?

K: As far as I know, she was. I never heard anyone criticize her in any way. There are always people, as you know, in a small town who are critical of people who are different. That may have accounted for the criticism that we heard about Sam Johnson. She was different, she was a sort of an aristocratic person. As I recall, she didn't mix too well with the other people, but I certainly never heard anything derogatory said about her.

That reminds me of another story that I can't vouch for, but I think it's sort of amusing in a way. The story is that on one Sunday morning Sam Johnson came home from, either from Austin or he had been on a trip somewhere, and he could have been drinking a little bit, but when he arrived home, the family was absent. He made inquiries as to where they were from the neighbors, and they said, "Well, I think Mrs. Johnson and the children are over at the Christian Church." That's the Disciples of Christ, Christian Church. There was what was referred to in those days as a protracted meeting going on over there. So he said, "Well, I'll just go over there and see about them."

So he went over to the church, and it happened that he arrived there after the service was practically over and they were raising money to pay the evangelist who had come there to hold the meeting. This was always interesting, because they would start off with, "Who will give one hundred dollars?" And there would be very few that would pledge for a hundred dollars, but then they would drop down after they had picked up the few who had pledged a hundred

dollars, and they would drop down to a lower figure on down to smaller sums. But the story is that Sam Johnson arrived at the church house and wandered down the aisle looking for the folks just at the moment that they were asking for pledges for one hundred dollars. So the man taking down the names looked up and saw Sam Johnson standing, and he said, "Oh, yes, Mr. Sam E. Johnson, one hundred dollars." So he began to scribble it down, and Sam saw what was happening and he said, "Oh, hell!" (Laughter) I don't know whether that's a true story, but it was--

G: You weren't there, it's just one that's been told around. I see. That's a good story.

K: It could have happened somewhat later.

G: Well, now, you were some years older than LBJ.

K: Yes, I'm nearly four years older than he was.

G: Did you go to high school in Johnson City?

K: Yes.

G: Would you describe the school?

K: Well, we went to school, all eleven grades of us, in five rooms. It was a stone building, a two-story stone building, which is not there anymore, but it was a very nice building. Having eleven grades in five rooms, though, meant that two or three grades [were] in a room as you can see, and I was in the same room with Lyndon. As I recall, I'm almost sure that I was. I don't remember too much about that; it's been so long ago. But I'm almost positive that we were in the same room together.

But I remember very well that Lyndon was very active in declamation, which is a contest that was held in the spring of each year, declamation, debating, and spelling. It was called the literary contest. He was always very active in that, and usually won, as I recall. Ben Crider and I were debate partners. I remember one time, one of the things that we were sort of amazed at. The auditorium between the two upstairs classrooms was sometimes used for practicing these things, but Lyndon said that to really practice this debate and declamation we ought to have even a more secluded place than that. So he went to, I suppose, the superintendent and obtained permission for us to leave the campus. So we went over to the Christian Church, which was just adjoining the school campus, and we went in this, and we practiced our declamation and debate over there. As far as I know, it was the only time that anyone every obtained permission to leave the school grounds for that purpose. But Lyndon swung the deal.

G: Did he have a favorite topic that he would speak on?

K: No, in a declamation contest you memorize a speech. It wasn't impromptu speaking. Lyndon could have done it, I'm sure, had we had that, but I don't believe that was an event at that time. But he, as I recall, did win several declamation contests. He liked public speaking.

G: Were there any memorable teachers that he would have had?

K: Yes, I think that anyone who went to the school at that time and was a student of hers will remember Miss Minnie Knispel, K-N-I-S-P-E-L,

who was from San Marcos. Most of our teachers at Johnson City were beginning teachers because our school paid the minimum salary scale, and while we had some real beauties as teachers, female teachers, most of them were not really intellectually qualified. Well, I shouldn't say that, but Miss Minnie Knispel, as I recall, had been a teacher in the San Marcos Baptist Academy, and she changed from that and came to public school teaching. And she was a very wonderful teacher. You said that you had talked with Dr. Emmette Redford. I think he would vouch for that, if you talk to him.

G: What subjects did she teach?

K: She taught English, history, social studies. I believe that she may have had some influence on Lyndon's career. I believe she did.

G: Really? Do you have anything specific to base that on?

K: I can't think of anything specific, no, but I'm sure that she did. She took an active interest in all her students, not in an aggressive way, but she was certainly [interested]. And she remained in touch with the school after she left the profession.

G: There was a Mr. Klett, is that right?

K: Klett. Scott Klett was the superintendent about that time. I don't recall Scott Klett teaching any classes. He might have. I didn't have any classes with him; I'm not sure that he did any teaching. He was a combination principal and superintendent, I believe.

G: I see. Any other teachers that you recall?

K: Well, I can think of the names of several of them, but I don't remember a great deal about their teaching skills, or maybe I wasn't

in a position to evaluate them too well at that time. I do recall Miss Carrie Yett [?], Y-E-T-T, Miss Leta Bradley, who was a real beauty, Miss Julia Howard [?]. I can't think of any others at the moment.

G: Did LBJ participate in athletics?

K: Not very much. He was not an athlete.

G: Why was this, do you know?

K: Well, I suppose he didn't have any real interest in athletics. I don't recall him ever winning anything. He might have participated to some extent, but very little that I recall. He was not an outstanding athlete anyway.

G: Others have remembered a town baseball team that he played on.

K: Yes, I believe that that might have been after I'd gone away from Johnson City. I don't remember ever seeing him play baseball. I might have at school, too, I can't remember all those things, and I don't remember him. I am almost certain, though, that he was not an outstanding athlete in any sense or he didn't talk about athletics--at least if he did, I don't remember it.

G: Was there a rivalry between Blanco and Johnson City?

K: Very much. Very intense.

G: Is there anything here that bears on Lyndon Johnson during the years in Johnson City?

K: Well, I can't think of anything except that Johnson City and Blanco were such rivals that we really put forth our best effort both in athletics and in the literary events. I have the feeling that

Johnson City won most of the literary contests, and Blanco won the athletic events. I'm not too sure that that's true. That's a memory I have of it. Blanco's a little larger school than ours, but they were our only rivals in the county almost.

G: What about Fredericksburg? Of course, it's in Gillespie County.

K: It's in another county, and we weren't in competition with them, so I couldn't tell you too much about that.

Let me tell you one story that you may like. In the spring, I believe, of 1922, Scott Klett, the superintendent, brought Delbert Ottmers, Ben Crider, Lyndon and myself to Austin. We came down to the state meet. Ben may have been in some athletic event, I'm not too sure. I wasn't in any event, because we had--or was I? Well, Ben and I had been eliminated as debaters in the district meet, I believe, at San Marcos, I think it was. We lost to San Antonio, I believe it was. Of course, we were just a little class B school at that time. But anyway, we did come down to this combination, this Interscholastic League meet in Austin.

The day that we came down was the day that a tornado struck Austin. It was in May, 1922, and the tornado had just passed before we got into town, and out around Oak Hill I remember we saw some chickens running around that had been practically defeathered. This tornado had hit with such force that the chickens had lost their feathers, some of them, and were addled and were walking around on the ground. We came on to Austin. Then we learned that the tornado had struck with great force in South Austin,

We didn't go out to see it, but it was described as having dipped down and destroyed a house, then lifted up and moved a little distance and then destroyed another house. And I think some people lost their lives in this tornado. In fact, I've seen some stories about it since.

But what I was going to tell you, we went out to the athletic meet and literary meet, and all the events were held out on the University [of Texas] campus. So about noon, we got together and we were hungry--Scott Klett wasn't with us, he was somewhere else--but Lyndon and myself and Ben and Delbert. Delbert Ottmers was in the pole vault. He was a pole vaulter. We were looking for some place to eat, so we inquired of some student, where could we find something to eat? And he pointed to a building and said, "Go right down there." So we went down and walked into the building and there were the tables and everything, and we could see people in the kitchen part of it evidently preparing for the noon meal. So we took a seat at a table, and I think we must have sat there for fifteen or twenty minutes, and we began to wonder what kind of a restaurant this was. Nobody came to wait on us, so we concluded that surely somebody would be out here in a little while, once they've seen us, so we just kept sitting there. Well, suddenly the door was flung open and a whole long file of students filed in. It was a cafeteria. We didn't know what a cafeteria was.

G: Really?

K: So we started to go join this line, but we had to go to the end of this line and were delayed another half hour getting up to where there was food to eat. Well, this made a great joke when we got back--I think Lyndon told the story--illustrating our ignorance of city ways. We'd gone into a cafeteria trying to get served.

G: That's funny. Anything else on that trip to Austin that you remember?

K: No, I can't think of anything else.

G: Did you do any other traveling with LBJ?

K: Lyndon could have been one of the contestants. I'm wondering why he was along if he wasn't a contestant. I think he could have been. I'm not too sure.

G: Well, now, you went to California in 1922, is that right?

K: Yes.

G: Let me ask you to recall, as best you can, the circumstances of LBJ's trip out to California. And I'm interested not only in what you remember firsthand, but what he told you about the trip out and what other people have told you.

K: Well, this is in 1925 when he came out; I had been there since 1922, so I was almost a Californian by that time. I was working, was employed at the time that he came out there, up at Tehachapi. The Monolith Portland Cement Company had a big plant there and I and Bill Crider, I believe, and maybe Ben, we were all working in the laboratory. I know Ben was there, but I'm not too sure--I believe he was working in the plant somewhere. But Bill and I were working

in the laboratory. I recall also that Otto [Crider], who had come to California with Lyndon, had got a job in the plant.

But anyway, one weekend Lyndon and Tom Martin, his cousin--Tom was an attorney, a practicing attorney at San Bernardino--came up to Tehachapi to visit with us. That same summer Arless Kent and I had visited Texas on my first trip back home in three years. We had come back to Johnson City on a visit, and Arless hadn't indicated to me that he was going to get married while we were back there, but he did. So he married the Baptist preacher's daughter, who was the prettiest girl in town, I think. I knew that he was writing to her, but he had withheld from me that he planned to get married, and I'm not sure that he did know at the time we came back together that he was going to get married. But anyway, he did get married while we were there, and I had gone back by myself. I didn't think it would be very satisfactory for me to accompany them back to California, so I just came on back by public transportation.

But I was describing to Lyndon and Tom one time the details relating to this incident and what a beautiful girl she [Iona] was, so Tom immediately became interested in us visiting them. He wanted to see this beauty. He said, "I may be able to get her in the movies." But anyway, to go back to our story at Tehachapi, we, as I say, took a picture of Otto Crider, Tom, Lyndon and I standing there, which appears in this film [The Journey of Lyndon Johnson] down

there. You'll have to watch closely or you'll miss it, but we are in the film.

But anyway, Tom and Lyndon suggested to me that I go back to San Bernardino with them, and I said, "Well, I have a job here. I can't very well just afford to quit my job." So they assured me that we'd get along all right. They said, "You have a little money." And I said, "Well, yes, I have a little." I'm not sure whether Tom or Lyndon, I think it possibly Lyndon, assured me that we had a good chance to become lawyers if we'd go and live at Tom's house and work in his office. He would support us with room and board with him and maybe be able to pay us a little, but he wasn't sure about that. But anyway, we had this opportunity, so I know that Tom did point out that it would be a remarkable opportunity for us. We wouldn't have to go to college, we could become lawyers without actually going to college. So I decided to go back with them, or I told them that I would come down there a little later, which I did. I think I waited until the end of the next pay period possibly. Then I went down. I didn't go back with them that day.

G: Excuse me. Before you get into the living in San Bernardino, let me ask you about this earlier trip you made to Texas. That was in the summer of 1925?

K: Yes.

G: This was before LBJ came to California, was it?

K: Yes.

G: Did you see him there? Did you talk to him about California?

K: I don't recall. Let me see . . . I just don't remember even seeing Lyndon.

G: And your friend got married in Johnson City, is that right?

K: Yes.

G: And who did he marry, do you remember?

K: My friend's name was Arless Kent. A-R-L-E-S-S Kent, K-E-N-T. So he married Iona Billings [?], the Baptist preacher's daughter. One weekend I was telling the story about it, and Tom found it a little amusing that I didn't want to accompany [them] on their honeymoon from Johnson City back to Los Angeles. But he said he'd like to meet this girl, so I said, "Well, let's just go over and visit them. I know where they live in Los Angeles, I know where Arless's apartment [is]." We called up and they invited us to come over and visit them. So we went over to visit with them, and I believe they had an extra bedroom, and we all made out and spent the night there.

Well, Tom, of course, much in the same manner as his father, liked his drinks, so we sent out and got the favorite tipple of the time, which was Gordon gin, as I recall from a bootlegger. Tom got to feeling pretty good on this gin, and the more he looked at this girl the more he was convinced that she was movie-star material. I think he may have already had some experiences in Hollywood, so he had Iona almost convinced that she was a potential movie star, and it wasn't too unreasonable because this was still in the

days of silent pictures. She wasn't an actress; she'd had no training as an actress. She did have the looks, of course. I was wondering all the time if Arless wasn't going to take umbrage at these passes Tom was making at his wife, but he didn't. He didn't seem to feel offended by it. Maybe he wanted her to become a star, I don't know.

But anyway, this must have been Labor Day, 1925, because Tom was scheduled to make a speech at Pickering Park [?] in San Bernardino. He was on the program for an address. He'd been invited largely because he was one of the few Democrats in the area. Most organized labor people were Democrats, and they were about the only Democrats. Well, that would be an exaggeration, but anyway, Tom was on the program to make some remarks out at Pickering Park. So Lyndon and I, who hadn't had quite as much gin as he did, kept urging him, "Tom, we'd better leave now. It's about fifty-five or sixty miles from Los Angeles to San Bernardino, and we're going to have to get that start pretty soon or we're going to be late." "Oh, we'll make it all right." He couldn't tear himself away, but finally, maybe an hour and a half before time for his address, something like that, we did prevail on him to leave.

So Lyndon said, "Tom, you don't mind if I drive?" "No, no, go ahead." So Lyndon took the wheel. We were in a Ford coupe, and we started out. And in those days, the highways were not broad like they are now. I think, as well as I recall, it could have been just two-lane part of the way. And on the way over--this is a thing I'll never forget--I've told several people

that have talked to me about Lyndon as an indication of his aggressiveness, his early aggressiveness. In this Model T, which at full speed wouldn't have made over fifty miles an hour, he was driving it just about as fast as it would go, trying to keep our appointment in San Bernardino. So this being Sunday, a lot of people were out driving, and driving in a casual manner, some of them with big limousines and chauffeurs. So Lyndon would get up behind one of these--it happened two or three times--and he couldn't get around them and the horn had been broken on our car and didn't sound. So his method of getting these people to move over so we could get around them, he'd reach outside with that long arm and he'd bang on the door, and it'd sound like a collision almost. It made a terrible sound as he banged on the door. So these chauffeur-driven limousines would swerve out, you know, and we'd go right on by. We passed everybody on the road, actually.

So we arrived at Pickering Park just at straight up--I believe it was--two o'clock that he was scheduled to speak. So we ran up the steps on the speaker's platform. As I recall, the master of ceremonies was announcing, "The Honorable Thomas J. Martin of San Bernardino is scheduled to address us at this time. He hasn't put in his appearance. If he's in the audience will he please come forward." And Tom about that time said, "Here I am," and we ran up the steps.

Well, Lyndon and I were very nervous about him making a speech, because we knew how much he'd been drinking. We'd observed one thing

about Tom, he didn't show that he was drunk in anything that he would say. He would speak with just as much coherence drunk as he did sober. But it would be in something that he did. Well, we were afraid that he was going to fall off of the platform or something like that, but much to our surprise he didn't; he had evidently sort of taken a nap or something on the way over there and had regained his senses by the time we got there.

But anyway, I remember Lyndon's asking, "Tom, have you prepared your speech?" And he said, "Well, I don't have any written text of it, no. I've thought about what I'm going to say." So that was a cause for further alarm for Lyndon and I, because we thought sure that he was going to disgrace all of us and himself and ruin his law practice and our chances to become lawyers. But anyway, when the master of ceremonies had introduced Thomas J. Martin and said a few words about him, that he's from Texas, that he was a member of the Texas State Legislature, and he has practiced law, and he became a first lieutenant in the First World War--of course, it wasn't referred to as the First World War then, it was just the Great War. But anyway, much to our surprise, Tom advanced to the speaker's podium and he made a speech that just had these people in the pretty large audience actually cheering and even almost throwing their hats in the air. He made a wonderful speech, even if I say so. It was a beautiful speech extolling the side of the laboring man in America primarily.

G: Was his practice of law at all related to labor or personal injury or anything that--

K: Maybe personal injuries. He might have had a few cases like that. And he could have--I don't recall whether he represented labor, if so, I didn't know about it. San Bernardino was a division point of the railroad, and [there were] a lot of men, quite a few railroad men there.

G: Why did LBJ go to California to begin with? Do you know?

K: That I don't know.

G: He never talked about it?

K: Not that I recall. Well, I'd have to assume that he was like many others. We thought there were opportunities there that we didn't have at home. In fact, there were almost no opportunities unless you were going to school. I think that he'd had an opportunity maybe even then to go, but--

G: Had he gone to San Marcos for a brief time before he came to California?

K: I'm not sure about that. I think maybe he had. I couldn't be sure about that. That's where practically all of us who were capable of enrolling in college did go, either to the University [of Texas] or to San Marcos.

G: I notice in that picture that you have of you two together that he's wearing a San Marcos belt buckle.

K: Well, that indicates that he might have been down to San Marcos or bought a belt with those, or that he intended to go there or something of the sort.

G: One of the stories I've heard about his experiences in San Bernardino is that he went to a Wilson Democratic Club meeting. Do you recall that?

K: I have a sort of faint recollection that he did, but I don't remember any of the details of it.

G: Another incident, evidently he went to the Santa Fe depot there in San Bernardino to hear Charles Dawes, then Republican vice president.

K: Yes, I think that I was with him at that.

G: Can you recall that?

K: Well, in those days, candidates for office traveled by train and spoke to the crowds from the back end of the train. And I'm almost certain that I was with Lyndon and we probably both of us went to see Dawes. I believe we did. I don't remember it too well, but I have a faint recollection of that.

G: Did he seem interested in politics at that point?

K: Yes, he did. He was always interested in politics. I'm sure he was, he couldn't have been otherwise. I don't recall him talking too much about that, but he almost certainly was. This was during the Ferguson era in Texas politics, and he, his family, and his Uncle Clarence Martin, as I told you earlier, had defended him in the impeachment trial. The Johnsons were Ferguson supporters, very strong. Politics in Texas at that time was very sharply divided between prohibitionists and anti-prohibitionists. Whoever it was that called Sam Johnson despicable may have been one of those very narrow-minded, straight-laced prohibitionists. He might have had

some arguments with someone on that, I don't know. I think that's possible, but Caro could have got his information, maybe not from the original person but from their children or something like that. I'm going to ask him if I ever see him again how he got this information.

G: What other things did you do in San Bernardino?

K: Well, as I told you on our previous visit, Lyndon and I practically ran the law office for a certain period of time.

G: Do you want to describe how that came about?

K: Well, as I told you, Tom Martin's wife, Olga was a beautiful woman even at this time, a number of years after she had been the beauty queen at the seventy-fifth anniversary of the founding of Fredericksburg, I believe. Olga Priess was her maiden name. Olga and her son Clarence, Jr., who was just a small boy then, four or five or six years old, came back to Texas on a visit. Came by train of course. Well, as I've indicated before, Tom had an interest in Hollywood, and it happened that just almost immediately after Olga left for her visit home to Fredericksburg where she intended to stay I think about a month or something like that, Tom got in the car and drove to Hollywood and was back possibly that same evening with his girlfriend in Hollywood who was named Lottie Dexter Dempsey.

Lottie was said to be a cowgirl from Idaho, and she had played some minor roles, I think, in western pictures, due to her ability to ride a horse and also her good looks. She was a beautiful girl. Well, she was a woman then, I would say, maybe twenty-five or

twenty-six years old. But once she and Tom got back from Los Angeles, the party started. Tom called up his private bootlegger who'd been arrested I don't know how many times for bootlegging but never sent to jail, or if he was sent to jail, it would be just for a very brief period and Tom would get him out. He owed Tom a law bill that you couldn't add up with an adding machine, so Tom, in lieu of cash, each time he needed a new case of Gordon gin, he'd call up the bootlegger and he would bring it out very cheerfully because he couldn't have possibly ever have paid all the money he owed. But anyway, we had a party going on almost every day.

Well, Lyndon and I attempted to carry on the law business with Tom's instructions. Tom, now, wasn't drunk all this time; I'm not suggesting that. He just liked to drink and maybe some of his other friends came in. But they had a party going on at Tom's house there almost all the time that Olga was gone. Tom said it was a rule of his to never talk to his clients while he had liquor on his breath, and that was so much of the time that he almost never went to the office. I think days would go by, several days, that he would never show up at the office at all, and Lyndon and I were attempting to carry on and did. We'd have to call up Tom about certain matters, but we knew the routine business about the office by this time well enough that we did keep the office open anyway.

I remember one time that Tom made the headlines in the San Bernardino newspaper. The greatest number of divorce cases ever filed in one day in San Bernardino history was made by Thomas J.

Martin when he filed nine divorce cases in one day. He'd saved them up for a number of days. He had a good divorce business, but anyway, this went on all this time.

I don't recall too much, but we were getting short of money. I had spent my meager earnings and Lyndon had exhausted his. We had to depend on Tom and he was spending all that he had, too, so we were getting down pretty low on living expenses. We established credit for groceries somewhere, I think. But anyway, during this time Lyndon and I talked quite a bit about our chances of becoming lawyers. This didn't seem too promising the way Tom was acting.

So in due time, he got a letter--I suppose a special delivery letter, I'm not too sure--but anyway, Olga was coming home and was going to be there just almost immediately from the time that we got the message. Probably a letter was what it was, and she probably left shortly after writing the letter. But anyway, we had very little time left. So in great alarm, Tom called Lyndon and I and said to come out to the house immediately. We might have had the car, I don't remember that. But anyway, Lyndon and Tom went to work to eradicate all traces of any woman being in the house there before Olga got home, and I was detailed to take Lottie back to Hollywood. So I drove her back to Hollywood.

G: Lottie was her name, is that right?

K: Yes, Lottie.

G: Mrs. Martin came back and did not detect--

K: She didn't detect what had been going on, or if she did, she didn't ever indicate it. She was the type that probably wouldn't have said anything had she known it. I'm sure she didn't ever know, really.

G: Well, how long did LBJ stay around after she returned?

K: I don't know, because I left almost immediately after and I'm not too sure. That was my only contact with him while he was there. I think that he possibly stayed out there a number of months after that, I'm not too sure about that.

G: When did you leave? Do you recall what month it was?

K: I think it could have been maybe in October, September or October, maybe, I'm not so sure.

G: Of 1926 or 1925?

K: 1925. I believe it was at least October, because I think that on the original of the picture I have of Lyndon and I that Olga took, I think that I have on the back of that, September 25, 1925, so it would have been possibly in October. Maybe as late as November, but I don't think so. I think it was October.

G: Well, you mentioned that you and LBJ were able to handle a lot of, some of the routine business of the office. What was that routine business? What sort of things would you do?

K: Well, for example, the divorce cases that he had on hand there. You have to file two or three papers in connection with that. It wasn't anything of any complicated nature that we had, the cases. I don't remember the exact nature of them. But he had a number of

clients there, maybe damage suits and the customary type of cases that an attorney will have, the general practice of law.

G: Did you all read any law books or study any at all?

K: Yes, we did. We did some at Tom's suggestion. He had, I'm sure, a pretty fairly complete law library. We had some time to read in these books, and he would suggest what we read.

G: Did you feel that LBJ was interested in the study of law at this point?

K: Yes, I think he was. I think he had plans at that time to become a lawyer. I believe he did. But he saw that his opportunities of becoming a lawyer there under Tom's supervision weren't too good.

G: The situation didn't improve after Tom returned to the office?

K: Well, yes, it did. That is, the drinking. Tom, in fact, I remember maybe immediately after his wife's return, he called Lyndon and I together--maybe we rode to town together--and he said, "Now, we're going to practice law. I've been playing long enough. We're going to really get down to business." I think this was his first day back in the office. So he called up a number of his clients, and at noon that day we went out to lunch and he took out a roll of bills that he'd collected this morning. If I remember correctly, he counted out about a hundred dollars that he'd collected, and that was a sizeable sum in those days. So it did look very promising from that point of view.

But I remember a remark Lyndon made one time after this speech that Tom had made at San Bernardino Pickering Park about the ability

of a man like that, how brilliant he was to get up and speak for at least a half hour without any sign of a note or anything. And I said, "That's a remarkable gift," and Lyndon said, "Yes, he has that. He has great ability, but his personal habits are not what they should be." Lyndon was sort of straight-laced, in a way.

I think I told you about during the campaign when he ran for Congress. This again now is secondhand. I had this from Herbert and Charlie Henderson. You know about them?

G: Yes, but I haven't heard the story.

K: Well, Charlie Henderson and Herbert were from the state of Ohio, and they came down and they met Lyndon while he was the NYA director. This is before he became a member of Congress. Lyndon had secured appointment as the state administrator of the National Youth Administration, and Herbert and Charlie worked for him here in Austin. Well, when Lyndon made his announcement to run for Congress upon the death of [James P.] Buchanan, they helped him. Herbert was his speechwriter, actually. He was a very excellent writer, a good speech writer. He said that Lyndon's campaign wasn't really getting off the ground. He had a number of opponents. I think the leading opponent they considered the leading man was the man who had been the secretary to Congressman Buchanan, a man named C. N. Avery, I believe it was. Well, Lyndon's [campaign manager], Claude Wild--incidentally [he was] a prominent lawyer in Austin at that time, and I think maybe his son is still a practicing attorney here, Claude Wild, Jr. Isn't there a lawyer by that name here?

G: I guess he's still here.

K: Well, Claude Wild, he was a campaign manager for Lyndon. He'd managed political campaigns as a part of his law business. Well, he called a strategy session and he told Lyndon, "Your campaign is not really getting off the ground. It's just running like a dry creek. We're going to have to devise a different strategy." Lyndon was just making the customary, well, I'd say the New Deal-type of speeches around the district here. He was a strong supporter of Franklin D. Roosevelt. So Lyndon said, "Well, how are we going to do this?" So Claude Wild is reputed to have told him, "Well, Lyndon, you're going to have to sling a little mud." And Lyndon said, "Oh, no, if I've got to do anything like that, I just don't want to do anything like that. I respect all these opponents that I have in this race, and I don't like to do that."

Well, the campaign went on then for a while, and still it wasn't catching fire like Claude Wild thought it should, so Wild called another strategy meeting, and he again warned Lyndon, "You're going to lose this race. Avery's going to win it if you don't really create some excitement, stir up a little excitement here in the district. The people are entitled to that. It happens in every campaign, and you're going to have to do that just like all the other successful politicians." So Lyndon was finally convinced that he had to do that, so he said, "Well, mix up the mud, Claude, and I'll start slinging it."

So about the next speech that he made, which could have been at Burnet or Marble Falls or Taylor--I don't know where it was now, I don't recall--but anyway, Lyndon began the mudslinging by telling the assembled audience that if any of them ever had any business in Washington, and assuming that C. N. Avery had defeated him for the post of congressman, he said, "If you go to Washington, and start to look for C. N. Avery, don't go to his office in the House Office Building because he won't be in his office. Don't go over to the floor of the Capitol, the House of Representatives, because he won't be there either. But if you want to find C. N. Avery when you go to Washington, you'll have to go down to the cocktail room at the Mayflower Hotel, the cocktail bar." Well, that was the dirt that he started slinging. That's all that I remember of it, anyway. But anyway, that's the sort of thing that people like to hear, and Lyndon was the type that knew how to sling the mud, not really offensive, but--

G: Well, let me ask you some more about San Bernardino. Where did you live when you were there?

K: We lived at Tom's house.

G: Did you? And did he live in the city itself?

K: Yes, right in San Bernardino. This picture here is made right across the street from his house.

G: I see the palm trees.

K: Yes, there was a vacant lot across. That's right in front of his house there.

G: Can you describe the house?

K: Well, it was a reasonably nice frame house, six or seven-room house, nothing outstanding about it.

G: Did you all share a room, is that [correct]?

K: I believe Lyndon and I did. I think we had shared a room.

G: Then how would you get to work?

K: We would use the car. We had a car.

G: The Model T coupe?

K: Yes. We were not over, I don't believe we were more than half a mile or three-quarters of a mile from downtown. San Bernardino wasn't a large town then.

G: And you worked at the Platt Building, is that correct?

K: Yes, yes.

G: That's where the office was?

K: Yes.

During this time that we were there when we began to sort of run short on funds, Lyndon went to the building superintendent and asked him if he could get a job operating an elevator, and he hired out as an elevator operator, increasing our income a little bit. We weren't completely without funds, but they were getting very low.

G: Did Lyndon get any money from home during this period?

K: Not that I recall. He could have. I'm not too sure. I don't believe he did.

G: Did you have to pay room and board to Tom Martin?

K: No, no. No, that was a part of the deal.

G: Well, how would you earn any money at all?

K: Well, we didn't have any means of earning any money. We did have our board and room, though.

G: The Platt Building must have been brand-new in 1925. Do you recall?

K: I don't recall too much about it. I think it could have been about a four-story building--four, maybe five. It was an office building.

There was a lawyer next door to us named Donald Rothrock [?]. Donald Rothrock was from back East somewhere and he practiced law. He and Tom, while not partners or close associates or anything, Tom relied on Rothrock to some extent. He knew more about [California law]. He'd practiced law in California for quite some time. I remember Tom talking with him from time to time about some point of California law. Rothrock knew the law real well. Rothrock told a story about Tom one time that was rather interesting to me. This was while Tom was absent from his office. He came in several times asking about Tom, and we told him, "Well, Tom is staying home right now." We didn't tell him all the details, but he suspected it. He told me a story about something that happened over in Los Angeles in the courtroom one time.

Tom was trying a case in Los Angeles and Rothrock might have been in the case, too. I don't remember what kind of a case it was. But anyway, they were defending someone, as I recall, and the prosecuting attorney, I believe, made some remark about Tom, suspected that Tom didn't know California law too well, so he dwelt on several errors that Tom had made in his argument before

the judge there. Then he referred to Tom as "You Honor, this jack-legged lawyer from Texas is trying to do such-and-such" and at that moment Tom leaped completely over a table, according to Rothrock, and hit this attorney right under the jaw with his fist and practically knocked him cold. (Laughter) He wouldn't allow the prosecuting attorney refer to him as a jack-leg.

G: Why did Tom Martin go out to California to practice law?

K: Well, that's a long story. I'll tell you very briefly, though. At age twenty-eight, I believe it was, Tom was elected chief of police of San Antonio--the youngest chief of police in the United States at that time of that age. And he had in fact his police uniform which was a very gaudy affair. He put it on once or twice while Lottie was there and paraded around to show us how he looked when he was chief of police of San Antonio. (Laughter)

Well, San Antonio's always been a politics-ridden town. There'd be two factions, as there are in many towns. Well, Tom's faction was in power when he got to be chief of police. This, of course, was during prohibition times, and the story was that everything went along real well. Well, first let me tell you one of the incidents that happened while he was chief of police. This, of course, is hearsay, but I'm pretty sure it happened. They would arrest some of the girls down in the sin portion of town and have them in jail. So Tom had some of his buddies from up around Stonewall--the Shipp [?] brothers, at least one or two of the Shipp brothers--and he called them down and put them on the police force, and they liked

to go partying together. These were boyhood chums of his. So they would have these girls in town, and Tom and at least one of the Shipp brothers would go down to the city jail and order a couple of these best-looking girls released and they would go on trips with them to Mexico or down to the border or somewhere else. This is one of the things that came out in the indictment. It seems that there was also an agreement whereby on certain days or certain weeks that bootleggers had free rein in San Antonio, and if arrested, would be fined a nominal sum. I think some of these things could have been true.

But anyway, suddenly after Tom had been in office I don't remember how long, but after he'd been in office a certain time, about nineteen indictments, or counts, were brought against him, any one of which was sufficient to get him in trouble or at least force him to resign rather than face a hearing on it. So Tom resigned, resigned his position as chief of police, and I suppose that the news of that traveled over to this area to such an extent that he didn't think it advisable to practice law here, so he moved to California.

I remember one of the things when Tom first went to California he told me about--and I remember this. Cornelius Vanderbilt, Jr. of the great millionaire family of the Northeast had come to Los Angeles just before Tom went there--that's where he went first before he came to San Bernardino--and he had founded a newspaper, the Los Angeles Illustrated Daily News, I believe it was

called. It was a tabloid-type paper--didn't fold out like most newspapers--and it sold for either one cent or two cents a copy. The method of distribution was to put these papers on certain corners and depend on the public to leave the money for them. Newsboys didn't peddle them, the public just picked up the newspaper and left their pennies. They cited as an illustration of the basic honesty of people that more money would be found each day at most of the stations where they left the papers, more than enough to cover the cost of the papers. What would happen, people would come along and see the headline of the paper and they didn't have the penny, so they'd drop a nickel or a dime. That's what happened.

But anyway, he worked during a certain period I think as sort of a public relations man for Cornelius Vanderbilt, Jr.

G: That's fascinating.

K: Then, he being a lawyer, he got into the practice of law. As to how long he stayed in Los Angeles, I don't remember.

G: He did ultimately come back to Texas, is that right?

K: Oh, yes.

G: Why did he return to Texas, do you know?

K: I'm not sure. I didn't keep in touch with him as I should have. It's my feeling that he had a very serious automobile accident and maybe lost the use of an arm and--

G: This was out in California?

K: Yes, while he was out there. Then the Martin Ranch, which is now the LBJ Ranch up on the river, that was owned by his father, of

course. He was the sole heir to this, too. And he may have come back because his mother, Frankie Martin, prevailed on him to come back as they were growing old. Whether he came back before Judge Martin died, I don't know. She outlived Clarence Martin, her husband, by many years. In fact, he died I think when he was in his early sixties.

G: She outlived Tom, too, didn't she?

K: I think she did. I believe she did.

G: When did he die, do you know? [Was it] the late forties?

K: No, I don't know what year he died [1948]. I think that she did outlive him because I just went by to see her up there one time at the Ranch, talked with her a while, and she was alone then, and Cousin Oriole Martin--you probably know about her--

G: Yes, I did know her.

K: --visited with her. I knew her. And I think that an arrangement [was made and] Lyndon acquired that. He bought the Ranch from his Aunt Frankie because she wasn't able to take care of it any longer and possibly Tom was gone, too, and he gave her the home in Johnson City, which is now the Boyhood Home. She moved down there and he probably moved to the Ranch. I'm not too familiar with all those details.

G: Did Tom Martin influence Lyndon Johnson?

K: I think he did. I don't think there's any question about it. Lyndon may not have wanted to admit that, but I think both his Uncle Clarence

and his Cousin Tom influenced him a great deal. I'm sure they did. Maybe subconsciously, is that what we call it?

G: What leads you to believe this? What indication do you have?

K: Well, they were both lawyers, excellent lawyers, good speakers, as I've indicated, and interested in politics, too. Both were in politics. I'm sure that Lyndon grew up up there on the river, his earliest years around his Uncle Clarence. He never speaks too much about that--I don't think he does. I haven't read all of Lyndon's books on the thing, but I don't think he mentions them nearly as much as he mentions the Johnson side of the family. But I think that the Martins, to whom he was related only by marriage, I think that they did influence him. Of course, Tom was his first cousin. Lyndon's father and Tom Martin's mother were brother and sister.

G: Well, LBJ seems to have lacked an aggressiveness before he went to California.

K: As far as getting on with his career or with his education?

G: Yes.

K: Yes, that seems to be the general belief.

G: Did you notice a change in him?

K: Well, I was only with him that brief period out there in California.

G: Had he changed, did he seem different from the way you'd remembered him in Johnson City?

K: Well, I can't think of anything. Of course, he was growing up, he had a great interest in the ladies. I remember we double dated a

number of times out there with--we had a nice-looking secretary who worked in Tom's office with us. That also helped us in our holding down the office while Tom was absent. I think it was about a month, as I recall.

G: Do you recall her name?

K: No, I can't. I don't remember her name.

G: Did he have a steady girlfriend in San Bernardino?

K: No, no, I don't think he did. I said double dated--I don't remember us doing very much dating; we didn't have the money to do too much dating. But I remember that we did. She called up a friend--our secretary--for me, and we double dated and went out partying, dancing and local entertainment.

G: Well, are there any other characteristics that LBJ may have picked up from Tom Martin?

K: Well, Tom was a good storyteller, a marvelous storyteller, and Lyndon was. I suspect he could tell a story as well as any president we've had since Abraham Lincoln. And that was a characteristic of Judge Clarence Martin and also of Tom. Tom had some marvelous stories, and I think Lyndon may have picked those up. Well, story-telling was an accomplishment that quite a few people in the Hill Country in those days had. It was one of the few means we had of entertainment. There was no other entertainment there, so I think people naturally liked to entertain each other, and we had some wonderful storytellers. People change from generation to generation. Now we're entertained by something else; then we had to entertain

ourselves. But I think that we'd have to say that Lyndon's ambitions in politics came from both sides of his family, the Johnson side and the Martin's.

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview I]

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