

INTERVIEW II

DATE: November 17, 1981
INTERVIEWEE: JOHN FRITZ KOENIGER
INTERVIEWER: MICHAEL L. GILLETTE
PLACE: Mr. Koeniger's residence, Austin, Texas

Tape 1 of 2

G: During our last visit, you were discussing your experiences in San Bernardino, California with LBJ, and one anecdote that you did not talk about on tape was the introduction to Jack Dempsey. Do you recall the first time you met him?

K: Yes. You remember that Lottie Dexter Dempsey was a guest for at least three weeks or something like that in Tom Martin's home, and there was some matter that she wanted to talk to Jack about. I don't know whether it was in connection with the divorce or not, but she evidently made a telephone call to him. I think he was living in Los Angeles.

G: She was married to his father, is that correct?

K: Yes. She was a divorcee, had divorced his father, and I think that was possibly at Jack's insistence. I think Jack's mother was still living. His father and mother had separated and divorced and then his father had married this much younger woman, and I think that Jack was a little displeased with that. In fact she said one time that the ring she was wearing, which was supposed to have cost seventy-five hundred dollars--a diamond ring--had been given her by Jack Dempsey as a part of the divorce settlement.

Koeniger -- II -- 2

But anyway, she needed to talk to Jack, and she called him and in due time he came from Los Angeles, I'm sure, in his limousine with a chauffeur driving for him. She was watching for his arrival and she went out and sat in the car with him. They must have talked with each other for forty-five minutes or an hour maybe. She came in, and Lyndon and I, of course, were looking out the window, looking on at Jack and Lottie talking out there, and she asked us if we'd like to meet Jack. Of course we leaped at the chance, and she hailed Jack before he drove away and took us out and introduced us to him, and we shook hands with him and that was about it.

G: Anything else on San Bernardino that we didn't discuss last time?

K: Well, I can't think of anything at the moment.

G: Can you recall what San Bernardino, the town, was like in 1925?

K: Well, it seemed to be a very prosperous town. It was a railroad division point. I would guess that the population of the city then maybe wasn't more than thirty thousand--that could be checked on--it wasn't a large city. The newspaper was the San Bernardino Sun, I remember. And it's in the citrus area, a very nice town. Of course like all the towns around Los Angeles, it was more or less dwarfed by the big metropolitan area of Los Angeles. I think we already have on tape the Pickering Park [?] episode.

G: Now let me ask you, too, to simply describe what Lyndon Johnson was like in 1925, as best you can remember.

K: Well, that's rather hard to do. Lyndon was always a very, well, it seemed to me, an aggressive young fellow. When anything wasn't

Koeniger -- II -- 3

going as he liked it to go, he'd take steps to try to correct it. For example, as we were running a little bit short on money, he took this job as an elevator operator just as a temporary expedient so that we'd have plenty of grocery money. He was one that [was] always, well, aggressive. That's the outstanding impression that I have of Lyndon as I think about him. He was a lot of fun. He liked to tell jokes. He was easy to get along with. You never had any trouble with him, or I didn't, anyway.

G: Did he have any ambitions at that point that he shared with you?

K: Well, yes, I'm sure he did have. I'm trying to remember if he ever talked politics. I understand that later on that was his almost sole interest. He was interested then in politics, I'm sure. I don't remember him talking politics very much. I think that he was ambitious. He wanted to become a lawyer at that time; we both did. I think that maybe he went ahead and took some law courses at Georgetown [University] while he was working in Washington as Congressman Dick Kleberg's secretary. I think he did. I'm not sure. He didn't ever get a law degree.

G: Anything else on the California experience?

K: No, it seems to me that Ben Crider told me that he advanced Lyndon seventy-five dollars, maybe to come home. I'm not sure about that. Edith will be able to tell you about that.

G: This is Ben Crider's widow?

K: Ben Crider's widow, yes. She knows the story about that.

Koeniger -- II -- 4

I'm sure that other things happened; I can't think of anything at the moment.

G: Well, let me ask you, do you recall your next subsequent contact with LBJ?

K: Well, I came back to Texas on a few weeks' visit in 1928. These events that we're talking about in my contacts with Lyndon in California were in 1925. I am sure that I saw him in 1928. I think he was then in college maybe, wasn't he, or do you know?

G: Well, part of that year he was in Cotulla teaching and part of it he was in college.

K: San Marcos?

G: Yes.

K: I visited in San Marcos and I remember that Sam Houston--his younger brother--and some college girls and myself and one other college boy, I've forgotten what his name was now, and maybe three girls--this was in prohibition times--and we made a trip over to Seguin to get some home-brew. Sam Houston was driving, I remember that. I don't know why Lyndon wasn't with us. I have a faint recollection that he had other irons in the fire at the time and he didn't go with us, anyway. My memory isn't too good on seeing Lyndon then, but I'm almost sure that I did, and if so, he would have been in college at San Marcos.

G: Then did you see him again while he was working for Kleberg at all?

K: No, I don't believe I did.

G: Or NYA director?

Koeniger -- II -- 5

- K: No, I don't believe I ever saw him during that time. I was told some of the things that happened by Herb Henderson.
- G: Can you recall those?
- K: Well, not anything specific. I do remember Herb telling about all the people that Lyndon was meeting, and Herb attributed a lot of Lyndon's success and election to Congress, in fact, to the fact that he made so many friends while he was the NYA director. He worked, according to Herb, ungodly hours on this job, just worked day and night trying to help young people to get jobs and go to school and all that sort of thing, which the NYA director would do. He, I think, was considered one of the ablest NYA directors in the United States. He was very active and maybe that was the beginning of his political organization. He had people, he helped people throughout the state.
- G: Any other insights that Herbert Henderson had about the 1937 campaign?
- K: I think I've already told you about the mudslinging episode. No, I can't think of anything at the moment.
- G: Now, let's go back and talk about how you happened to go to work for him when he was a member of Congress.
- K: Well, during the Christmas holidays in 1937, I was going to college in Denton at that time, and during the Christmas holidays I came down to Johnson City to visit my mother, and he, Lyndon, was also there at the time. Well, Johnson City's a very small town and we naturally saw each other. I think maybe one of the things that

Koeniger -- II -- 6

could have been responsible for him asking me to go back to Washington with him--some very prominent person here in Austin had died. In fact, it was a member of the Pennybacker family. The Pennybackers were an old family here in Austin. Percy V. Pennybacker wrote a history of Texas which was a textbook which we had studied in school. So I happened to see the paper that morning--the Austin American-Statesman, I suppose--announcing the death of this member. It wasn't Percy V. Pennybacker, but some member of the family. So I called Lyndon's attention to that and I said, "Now you're in politics, and one of the things you should do, you should write a letter of condolence to the Pennybackers." He said, "That's a good idea," just like that. And I just had the feeling that maybe he considered, he thought that, "Koeniger here is a perceptive sort of fellow, so he'll be a good office employee for me in Washington," because right after that he began to talk to me about going back to Washington with him.

I didn't immediately accept his invitation because I was in college and wanted to finish my college work, and it was just nearing the end of a semester, and I couldn't go at that time. But I did tell him that I might be interested in going at the end of the semester after I'd completed my semester's work. So he had a visit to Austin scheduled at about the end of January. He was going to come back to Austin and make a radio speech in favor of the housing project, which he'd secured for Austin, one of the first in the nation. Did we go over this before?

Koeniger -- II -- 7

G: No.

K: Well, anyway, he had written me a letter, probably, and told me to make arrangements, that he'd be there at such-and-such a time, or maybe he told me--I don't know which--to be in Dallas, and he wanted me to meet him. So when I got the telegram from him from Washington that he was on his way to Texas by train, to meet him in Dallas at the Katy Station, I talked to my professors. I believe I had five professors, taking five courses. At least two or three of them agreed that they would give me a passing grade without my taking a final exam, and maybe one or two others, possibly two, asked me to write some sort of paper which would be in lieu of taking the examination, which I did. Well, anyway, I met Lyndon in Dallas and we came on to Austin, and we stayed at the Driskill Hotel. We hadn't more than arrived in Austin till people, of course, wanted to see the Congressman and I went to work, really. He told me to talk with all these people and find out what we could do for them, and he was busy with the politicians such as Mayor Tom Miller and E. H. Perry and other friends of his and supporters.

G: Do you recall, in particular, what he said or did with regard to the Austin public housing project?

K: Well, there was considerable opposition to this housing project here, because some of the large real estate owners, I'm sure, thought that this was going to hurt their business.

G: He made a speech, I understand.

Koeniger -- II -- 8

K: Yes, he made a radio speech. As I recall, one of the things I remember in this speech, he said that it had been brought to his attention that there was quite a bit of opposition to this from certain interests in Austin. He said, "While that's understandable, we're not going to let that defeat the project." He said, "If I need to, I'm going to come back to Austin and I'm going to name names." He was going to disclose the names of these people. Well, it evidently never did become necessary.

But anyway, he indicated in his speech that he was determined that Austin get this project. So I think we were in Austin maybe a couple of days before we started back. And Senator [Alvin] Wirtz, who was a sponsor of Lyndon's--I believe [he was] one of the people that got him in touch with Congressman Kleberg [and was] instrumental in getting him a job; I think he had a hand in that. I didn't hear that from Lyndon, but I think I heard that, maybe, from one of the Hendersons. So Senator Wirtz and Lyndon and I took the train back to Washington. We rode in style, had a drawing room. Lyndon was busy most of the [time]; I didn't talk with him much on the trip back but I did talk quite a bit with Senator Wirtz. He was very proud of Lyndon.

G: What did he say about him, do you recall?

K: Well, he said that he had a brilliant future in politics if he played his cards right, or something to that effect, and that he was going to help him all he could. I think maybe Senator Wirtz was going to Washington, I'm not sure, but I think he was going up there to try

Koeniger -- II -- 9

to get some kind of appointment for himself. I believe he was.

Maybe Lyndon was going to help him.

G: Did he talk about that?

K: No, I don't remember what it was, or I'm not too sure. I think he had some motive for going, though. But he was only up there just a few days, I think.

G: Any impressions of Senator Wirtz that you had at the time?

K: Well, he was a very distinguished-looking man, and well-dressed, very well-dressed. He liked his drinks, as most politicians do. I believe I told you about when we got to St. Louis. Before we arrived in St. Louis, he said, "I'm just about out of Jack Daniels--" What label is it?

G: Black Label.

K: Black Label, yes. Jack Daniels Black Label. He said, "When we get to St. Louis, I want you to jump off the train--the train's going to be there ten or fifteen minutes; you'll have plenty of time--and go to a liquor store." He told me where it was with relation to the depot, real close by. "And get me a bottle of Jack Daniels and then get back on the train." So I did that. The problem was that this liquor store was pretty busy and I sort of had to wait my turn and lost several minutes there, so I did manage to finally purchase the bottle of Jack Daniels. I came back out of the liquor store, and the train was just beginning to move. So I sprinted as hard as I could and finally grabbed onto the handrail on the side of the car, and the conductor, I believe it was, brakeman or someone, assisted

Koeniger -- II -- 10

me to get on. Senator Wirtz was watching this I think from his seat in there, in the car, and he was a little apprehensive that I had missed the train. I don't know what would have happened if I had. (Laughter)

G: Was LBJ deferential toward Senator Wirtz?

K: Well, I'm sure he was, as a younger man would be to an older man. Senator Wirtz was considerably older than Lyndon. In fact, Lyndon wasn't even thirty years old at this time.

G: Do you remember anything about their relationship, how they interacted?

K: No, I don't. I don't remember. I have a recollection that Lyndon and Senator Wirtz actually didn't talk too much on this trip up there. Lyndon was busy with things that he'd picked up in Austin to do, possibly, and he was very busy with that, and we didn't have much conversation on the way back.

G: I was going to ask you about Edgar Perry and anything on this involvement in that public housing project. I know he was on the housing authority.

K: Well, I don't know the details of it. I never did learn anything about the details of the thing.

I do remember that on the trip from Dallas to Austin, coming down, Lyndon asked me to look over his speech that he was going to make. He'd already prepared his radio speech. And I may have given him two or three suggestions about how it could be corrected, which he did all right. He made the corrections I suggested. It

Koeniger -- II -- 11

could have been presumptuous on my part to tell him how to make a speech. The speech probably had been written by Herb Henderson.

G: Oh, really?

K: I suspect it had. Because Herb was his chief of staff on the speech-writing, anyway, and that was one of the reasons he'd wanted me to go to Washington, I'm sure. In fact, he told me that he wanted me to room with Herbert and ride herd on him and keep him from drinking if I could. I believe we've already discussed that.

G: But I don't believe it's on the tape.

K: I told him I'd be glad to do that, and he asked me if I liked to drink, and I said, "Well, I'm not a confirmed drinker, but I like to have a beer now and then." He said, "Don't even have a beer around Herb, because if he has one drink, he's off on a binge." So I told Lyndon, well, I can do that, so I never did even suggest to Herb that we have a drink together.

G: You mentioned, I think, something about Henderson going to New York?

K: Well, Lyndon told me what Herb was capable of. I don't remember how long before that had happened, but Herb had got on a binge and he'd gone off to New York and he'd been gone several weeks. He said, "We were missing him in the office terribly and he didn't get in touch with us and we were worried about him." He said, "So I put the FBI on the case and they finally located Herb in New York where he'd gone on relief, was on the relief rolls, and evidently having a big time. So the FBI brought him back to the office and Herb resumed his work in the office."

Koeniger -- II -- 12

G: What were your official assignments at the Washington office?

K: Well, the office at that time was headed, the office staff, by Sherman Birdwell. Sherman may--is he still living?

G: He died just recently.

K: Sherman was the office manager, I would say, and Charles and Herbert Henderson worked there. Mary Kay Henderson, Charles' wife, was an employee in the office, and frequently--no, not frequently, but from time to time, Lady Bird helped us some in the office. Sherman's wife worked in the office, I believe. I don't remember whether she worked full-time or part-time.

But I want to tell you one thing that I believe will be interesting to you. Along in the spring of 1938, I had got acquainted with a nice Jewish girl that worked in the office of Lawrence Connery, a congressman from Boston, or one of the suburbs of Boston. Connery's name became pretty well-known because he and Senator [Hugo] Black, later Supreme Court Justice Black, co-sponsored a piece of legislation called the Connery-Black Amendment. This was an amendment to the Wagner Act, the basic labor regulation of the time.

But anyway, this Jewish girl was an employee, I believe the secretary maybe, to Lawrence Connery. I'd got acquainted with her, and I dropped in at the office once in a while and talked with her. So I was in there, sometime in the spring of 1938 one day, and she told me, "We are sending out letters to every high school graduate in our district." And she showed me the form letter. It

Koeniger -- II -- 13

was just one letter, one mimeographed letter, to all the high school graduates. She was working on this project at the time.

Well, either fortunately or unfortunately, when I got back to the office, I told Lyndon about this. I said, "There's something, now, that you ought to think about. There's going to be several thousand high school graduates in the Tenth District within a month or two." I said, "Over in Lawrence Connery's office, Congressman Connery's office, they're sending out a letter to every high school graduate." I think maybe I had a copy of this letter. He looked at it. I believe I brought a copy of this letter--and he said, "We'll go Lawrence Connery one better." He said, "We'll write an individual letter to every high school graduate in the district." That meant that we had to immediately get in touch with all the high schools in the Tenth District and get the names of all the graduates. If I remember correctly, Austin High School was the largest school in the district and maybe had as many as two hundred graduates, which meant that we had to write two hundred individual letters. Then for the other high schools throughout the district, say a high school had twenty graduates, we'd pick twenty letters out of this two hundred and duplicate those.

But this was a real big project and all hands had to go to work on this. We worked day and night almost on this thing because time was a factor, and we did wind up typing or composing at least I think it was about two hundred letters, and some of us were busy mostly composing letters, like Herb Henderson. I believe I worked

Koeniger -- II -- 14

on some of them. And we had everybody typing letters, so they didn't get a mimeographed letter, they got an individual letter, everybody in the district. I don't know whether he continued that in future years or not, but it's a big project.

G: I believe he did continue it.

Well, you worked as doorkeeper, didn't you?

K: Well, yes. When I went up there, he told me when I saw him at Christmas before when we talked about me going up there, he said that he didn't have enough seniority yet to have a patronage employee. These are called patronage appointments. But he said, "I think I can get one for you. It may have to be for doorkeeper or elevator operator. But if you have to start as elevator operator, you'll get to be doorkeeper right away. I'll see to that." Which he did. I'm not too sure, but I think that Congressman Kleberg had a patronage appointment that he wasn't using, and I think Lyndon secured that patronage appointment for me. And that's how I happened to go, and I did work, as I recall, maybe a week or two or three weeks as elevator operator and then I got to be appointed doorkeeper. [I] worked under the supervision of the famous "Fishbait" [William M.] Miller. I believe he was the man that was our official boss.

G: Do you recall the struggle over the executive reorganization bill?

K: Yes, I do. Before we go to that, I want to explain how the people in the office reacted to this writing all these letters.

G: Okay. Sure.

Koeniger -- II -- 15

K: They took it all good-naturedly, but gave me all kinds of hard looks and curses under their breath, you know, for getting involved in anything like this. They blamed it all on me, which may have been true. But that was all good-natured; they were accustomed to that sort of thing. In Lyndon's office you did a lot of work.

He had another rule, while we're on the matter of writing letters. He had a rule that all correspondence must be answered. I don't know whether it was within one day or maybe possibly a two-day limit, but every letter received had to be answered. He looked them over and signed the return letters. If it was something that was going to involve more time than one day or two days, whatever the limit was, to complete, they still got a letter of acknowledgement that the letter had been received and that the matter was being worked on.

Now what was it you wanted [to discuss]?

G: The Executive Reorganization [Bill].

K: Oh, yes. Well, one of the major pieces of legislation that took place during the second session of the Seventy-Fifth Congress, which was the time I was there, was the Reorganization Act of 1938. It was, of course, sponsored by the Democratic administration, I think by President Roosevelt himself. He was very eager to get this matter passed by the Congress. So there was a great deal of lobbying for and against the bill, mostly against the bill, as I recall. I do recall that the cry went up that Roosevelt was attempting to become a dictator. He was attempting to establish one-man rule in this

Koeniger -- II -- 16

country; the Reorganization Act supposedly would give him almost the powers of a dictator. I remember that we had patriotic societies coming down from New York and Boston and Philadelphia dressed in colonial costumes, parading around through the House Office Building and the Capitol, buttonholing congressmen and asking them to vote against this bill.

When the bill itself finally came up for a vote, it wasn't known which way it was going to go. It was suspected that the vote was going to be very close, so I think I remember that there was first a voice vote. Well, Speaker Bankhead took the floor in support of the bill, which is unusual. The speaker doesn't usually go to that length, but this was such a crucial vote that Speaker William B. Bankhead, father of the famous Tallulah, took the floor to speak in favor of the bill. The Majority Leader, Sam Rayburn, made a very impassioned speech in favor of the bill. I believe that actually the vote was on a recommittal. If the opponents of a bill don't want it to pass, they recommit it to committee which means that it's practically killed, and I think this was a vote for recommittal and against recommittal. I think that's what the vote was.

But anyway, I remember that Majority Leader Rayburn took the floor, and he made a very real impassioned speech. He said that if this bill were defeated, it meant that we're living in a leaderless land. I remember that phrase he used: "Do you want the word to go forth from Washington that this is a leaderless land?" Of

Koeniger -- II -- 17

course, you couldn't very well imagine this being a leaderless land with Franklin D. Roosevelt in the White House, but he at least used this phrase.

Well, I think there was a voice vote first called for. Frequently, legislation is passed by a voice vote when it's known that it's going to pass anyway, the yeas and nays. Well, they first had a voice vote and it couldn't be determined, because one side was just as loud as the other, but that wouldn't have settled it anyway. So I think that there was then a teller vote. A teller vote is where the members in favor of the legislation line up and pass by a teller and they're counted, bodily counted. Those for march in one line and those opposed in another line and they have a teller vote. Well, that was still so close that nobody was satisfied, so then [there was] a roll call vote, and that's getting down to the nitty-gritty of the thing. That's what finally determined it. I think that that took place on this measure, I'm not sure. The Congressional Record would indicate it, but I think it took place there. But anyway, the roll call vote was so close that it was just right down to almost the final few votes that determined it. And the final vote was, as I recall, two hundred and four votes for recommitting the bill--which was for the killing of the bill--and a hundred and ninety-six against.

Well, when the vote was announced, it takes some time for a vote to be tallied; it takes quite a while to call the roll of four hundred and thirty-five members. But anyway, when the final vote

Koeniger -- II -- 18

was announced, that two hundred and four to a hundred and ninety-six, I noticed Congressman Rayburn just fell over on his desk with his head in his arms. So I asked Lyndon later that day, that same evening, I guess, or that afternoon, what happened to Speaker Rayburn over there.

G: He had gone up to talk to Rayburn?

K: Yes, Lyndon had immediately gone over there and consoled him, I suppose. And he said, "Well, I never have seen Congressman Rayburn so upset as he was about that. In fact he was almost in tears, or maybe he was in tears." And he said, "Congressman Rayburn said to me, 'Lyndon, I'm not so concerned that the bill was defeated. We'll pass that reorganization bill the next session of Congress anyway. But the thing that hurts me is that our own delegation voted against us on this.'" And I believe that the vote out of the Texas delegation, I think it was thirteen for recommitting the bill and only eight against recommitting it.

G: Any other reminiscences of the relationship between Johnson and Rayburn?

K: Well, I think that Lyndon attended the almost-daily sessions up in Congressman Rayburn's hideaway, which he called the Board of Education, where the administration stalwarts would meet each day. This was a secluded room in the House Office Building which they used for this purpose. They'd mix up their bourbon and branch water, as they called it.

G: Did you ever go to that?

Koeniger -- II -- 19

K: No, I never did. I wasn't quite high enough in the hierarchy to attend these.

G: Did LBJ do anything other than vote for the Executive Reorganization Bill? Did he support it actively?

K: Yes, I think he did. I don't know that he did. I don't remember that he made any special effort. I'm sure that there was an effort made to get the Texas delegation in line on that, in which they failed.

G: What were his relations with the White House like in 1938?

K: They were very good. I can think of one instance that might be of interest. There was a very important piece of legislation before the House at that time called the Ludlow Amendment. The Ludlow Amendment was named, of course, for its author, Louis Ludlow, a Democratic congressman from Indiana who conceived the idea that before the United States could declare war, there had to be a referendum of the people. The people had to have a vote on whether we declared war. Of course, the actual procedure, the president usually recommends to Congress that war be declared, and Congress passes the declaration of war.

But I remember one day Maury Maverick, who was a very close friend of Lyndon's--this is not the Maury Maverick that you probably know from San Antonio now, that's his son, but the old original, Maury, Sr. Maury, Sr. came storming into the office one day to see Lyndon.* He had a bunch of letters in his hand. He said, "Lyndon, what kind of mail are you receiving from your district on this

Koeniger -- II -- 19a

*My memory failed me here. The Ludlow Amendment was rejected in 1937 before I went to Washington.

Herbert Henderson, my roommate and constant associate, evidently described the events related to the matter so graphically that I thought I had actually been present when Maury Maverick came to LBJ's office.

I do remember Maury's coming to the office on other occasions.

Koeniger -- II -- 20

Ludlow Amendment? Every letter I get they're urging me to vote for this Ludlow Amendment." And Lyndon said, "Well, I think that our correspondence will show the same thing, especially from the women's clubs and organizations, women's organizations." Women, of course, are always against war and are possibly more so than men, or seem to be. And most of the women, I suppose, were convinced that they should have a vote on whether their sons go to war before we declared war. So Maury Maverick said, "Every damn letter I get from my district, they want me to vote for this amendment. I haven't any letters urging me to vote against it." He said, "I'm going to call up the President. Let's call up the President right now and see what he thinks about it." So Lyndon said, "Well, have at it. There's the telephone."

So Maury sat down at a desk and called the White House, and if I remember correctly, he told the operator, "Now I know the President's busy and you're probably going to tell me that I can't talk to him right now, but I need to talk to him." He said, "I'm here in Lyndon Johnson's office, and we both need to discuss the matter with him. I'd like to get through to him if I could." The White House operator evidently was persuaded, so she got the President on the line. So Maury told him the same story that he'd told us there, and he said, "What are we going to do about this? We're going to have to vote on this matter." And he reported that President Roosevelt told him, "Maury, I consider this one of the most dangerous pieces of legislation that's before Congress, now

Koeniger -- II -- 21

or has been while I've been president. I urge you to vote against it." So Maury said, "Well, that's good enough for me, Mr. Roosevelt, that's good enough for me. I assure you that Lyndon and I are both going to vote against it." And I don't remember now whether the amendment was actually voted on, but it wasn't adopted so it must have been defeated later. It wasn't voted on while I was there. I don't believe it was.

While we're talking about Maury, you may not be too interested in this, but I'll tell it anyway. Maury received an invitation from Lyndon to come up to the Colorado River, the dedication of one of the dams on the Colorado. I don't remember which one it was.

G: Probably Buchanan Dam, wasn't it?

K: It could have been Buchanan, possibly was.

I met Maury down at the newsstand one Sunday morning where he came down to get the Sunday paper real early before it was delivered, I guess. I happened to run into him there, so we went into a restaurant together, and he had some breakfast there, and we got in conversation. We talked, I guess, an hour--Maury and I. He was telling me about receiving this invitation to come up to the dedication of the dam. And he said, "Lyndon asked me to make some remarks at the dedication ceremonies, and I told him that I would, so on this day that the dedication ceremony was supposed to take place, I got up real early as I always do and I left the house without eating breakfast. I didn't want to wake Terrell up"-- Terrell was his wife--"and I didn't want to fix my own breakfast,

Koeniger -- II -- 22

so I drove on up to"--it was either Blanco or Johnson City, I don't know which it was--before he ate breakfast. He said, "I went into a restaurant there," and he said, "I noticed they had some Budweiser advertised, so I said, 'Let me have a bottle of that Budweiser'" while he's waiting on his breakfast; he'd ordered breakfast too. He said that he drank this and he had another one and maybe one or two more, and he said, "You know, that beer began to hit me about the time I got up to the dam dedication. In fact, he said, "I got so dizzy I couldn't have hit the ground with my hat and I was supposed to make a talk, so I had to beg off and tell Lyndon I was in no shape to make this speech at all." He said, "I was introduced and I stood up, but I didn't make any speech."

Well, Maury had high praise for Lyndon's ability. He said he's a congressman who gets things done, he does things. Lyndon had that general reputation. He was a doer.

G: Now, there was some indication that on that referendum before a declaration of war that Cordell Hull, the secretary of state, had talked to LBJ about it, also, and had encouraged him to oppose that. Do you recall?

K: Well, it seems to me that I do have a faint recollection of that, but I don't remember it.

G: There was an issue during this period to raise the minimum wage, or support a minimum wage bill, and Maury--or I believe that was in 1937, though, that would have been before you got there.

K: That was before my time.

Koeniger -- II -- 23

Let me mention one thing that I think illustrates another side of Lyndon, a cautious side. The poll tax was then used, I think, in five or six states. Only five or six remaining states in the Union, Texas being one of them, required a poll tax to vote. And I mentioned to Lyndon one day, in fact, I was telling him a story that I'd heard in Dallas from the famous Bill Kittrell--you've heard of Bill Kittrell probably. The poll tax was widely used in corrupt politics. I mean it was a cause of corruption in politics. If a man's poll tax was paid for by someone, the recipient of this gratuity usually would vote as he was asked to by the person who paid his poll tax, It was a very nominal sum, seems to me it was only a dollar and twenty-five cents or something like that, but it effectively precluded thousands of people from voting, in the lower economic orders, anyway.

But the story I was telling Lyndon about, it's kind of a racist story but I think you'll enjoy it. Bill Kittrell said that in Dallas he was always able to go over to Hall and Thomas Streets and visit a Negro friend of his over there, a sort of political boss, and find out how the Negroes were going to vote in local elections--county offices and city offices maybe. He said, "I could always learn how the Negroes were going to vote before the election. So I went over there to see my friend, this political boss, one time, and asked him how the Negroes were going to vote on a certain upcoming election." And his friend says, "Mr. Bill, I can't tell you right now how we's going to vote over here." And Bill said, "Well,

Koeniger -- II -- 24

you've always been able to tell me before. Why can't you tell me now?" He says, "Well, Mr. Bill, to tell you the truth, the reason I can't tell you how we's going to vote over here, I ain't been seen yet."

That was the reason, that's what happens where the poll tax is in use. So I suggested to Lyndon, I said, "Why don't you lead a movement right now to repeal the poll tax in Texas?" I said, "Of course, I'm not sure that a United States congressman could do that statewide, but you might sponsor such legislation in Texas or use your influence." And Lyndon said, "Well, I'm against the poll tax. I'd like to see it outlawed, but the time isn't ripe for that. It isn't time."

G: What did he mean by that?

K: Well, I suppose he meant that it probably couldn't be done at that time and that it was going to have to wait a while.

G: Didn't have the votes, I guess.

K: I suppose so. Anyway, he was not going to be a crusader in a lost cause. He was afraid, I suppose, that that couldn't be done. Of course, that would have to be done in the Texas State Legislature and he probably was afraid he didn't have the power or the authority or the influence.

G: Do you recall anything about his friendship with President Roosevelt?

K: Yes, not too much. I remember on one occasion when all the girls in the office were very eager to go down to a White House reception. I don't remember, one or two or three of the girls in the office

Koeniger -- II -- 25

hadn't been to the White House yet, and there was going to be a reception, and they wanted to go to that and got time off to go down. It was strictly a women's affair, I think.

G: Did he talk about President Roosevelt?

K: No, I don't recall him talking about him. He was strictly a supporter of the New Deal at that time, which many of the Texas delegation were not.

G: Do you recall any of the details of his securing appropriations to develop the Lower Colorado River, to dam up the river, extend the height of the dam?

K: Well, I remember only one incident. Lyndon related to us in the office that a vote had come up in the House of Representatives on an appropriations bill which would add a million dollars for the purpose of adding height to one of the dams. He said that he was very apprehensive while this vote was being taken, because if there was a single objection to it [the appropriation would be killed]. As I recall, if one member of the committee--I guess this was the House itself; it had already been recommended by the committee. I think this was the vote of the full House. One objection would kill the appropriation. But there was no objection, so the million dollar appropriation came through. It was a part of a general bill of some sort. I remember him describing that.

G: Do you recall Senator Wirtz coming to Washington to help work on that one?

Koeniger -- II -- 26

K: Yes, I remember Senator coming up there once or twice while I was there. I didn't know the general purpose of his visit, though. I'm sure it was in connection with that. He worked very hard on that. In fact, one of the dams is named for him, the Wirtz Dam.

G: There was also an issue that year with regard to the establishment of air mail service between Houston and Brownsville and the rivalry among different airlines, Braniff versus Eastern. Do you recall LBJ supporting Braniff in this?

K: Well, this may have been the occasion. I was thinking the other day about the one time when I heard Lyndon give Sam Houston, his brother, a real dressing-down. This must have been concerning Memorial Day in 1938. Sam Houston was an employee in Lyndon's office, but he didn't keep very regular work hours. He frequently would arrive at work at ten-thirty or eleven o'clock in the morning and send out and get a bottle of Coca-Cola and a hamburger for breakfast and lunch. He wasn't a regular employee. But anyway, he disappeared for two or three days, and Lyndon missed him. He came into the office and wanted to know if any of us had seen Sam Houston. He said, "He hasn't been home in two or three days. Do you have any idea what happened to him?" So Sherman Birdwell, I guess it was, told him "Well, Lyndon, Sam Houston has gone to Indianapolis to the races, the Memorial Day races. He's taken his girl friend and gone to the races." Lyndon [said], "Well, where in the hell did he get the money to make a trip like that?" "Well, Eddie Rickenbacker, the president of Eastern Airlines gave him airplane tickets for

Koeniger -- II -- 27

two, for Sam Houston and his girl friend, and they've gone to the Memorial Day races."

Well, two or three days later when Sam Houston gets back, Lyndon is waiting for him in the office and knows he's going to come down, so when Sam Houston came in, he jumped on him about this. He said, "Now, Sam Houston, you know this matter that Eddie Rickenbacker is involved in is coming up for a vote, and you've compromised my position on the thing right now." He said, "Do you see what you've done?" Well, he gave Sam Houston a real dressing-down. I was thinking that it was on an extension of a franchise of some sort for Eastern Airlines. So that's possibly the answer that you referred to.

G: Maybe it was. I thought it had to do with air mail contracts.

K: Well, that could be. That could very well be. My memory, I just remember the--

G: Now he was a member of the Naval Affairs Committee. Do you recall his activities in that connection?

K: Well, I don't know the exact nature of them. I know that he was on the Naval Affairs Committee; [he'd] been personally selected for that committee by President Roosevelt, who had formed a good impression of Lyndon evidently on a visit down through Texas. He'd met Lyndon at that time. In fact, I think he decided at that time that he wanted Lyndon to be on the Naval Affairs Committee and so he became a member just about as soon as he was sworn in as a congressman, I think. I wasn't actually there at the time.

Koeniger -- II -- 28

- G: Anything about his relations with Carl Vinson, the chairman of that committee?
- K: Well, I know that they knew each other. I don't know what the exact nature of it was.
- G: LBJ did support a billion dollar naval expansion bill that year. Do you recall his support of that?
- K: Well, I just don't remember too much about it.
- G: Now, during this period also, he helped a number of Jewish immigrants leave Germany and escape the [Nazis].
- K: Yes, in that connection, let me relate an incident that might be of interest. One day this strange-looking person came into our office asking for Congressman Johnson and it was Erich Leinsdorf, the famous conductor of the New York Philharmonic. Erich Leinsdorf had been a refugee from Nazi Germany because he was a German Jew and had come to this country but he was here on a temporary visa, I suppose. He'd come to Washington for the purpose of trying to get his visa extended, and he had been directed to Lyndon Johnson's office as a congressman who gets things done. So Lyndon asked me personally to see what I could do to help him fill out the necessary papers, and I, of course, agreed to do that. It might have been because I have a German name and so did Erich, so Erich and I got pretty well acquainted and talked with each other. I asked him about the conditions in Germany and told him about my relatives in Germany whom I had never seen and haven't to this day; I have corresponded with some of them. So we filled out all the necessary

Koeniger -- II -- 29

forms and I remember Erich needed to give his address on the form. So he said, "Well, my permanent address in this country I suppose would be in care of the"--was it the New York Philharmonic? I believe it was.

G: I guess so.

K: New York. But he says, "My temporary address"--he was staying over in Virginia with someone, one of the suburbs of Washington. He said, "What should I put here?" So I thought a minute and I didn't know which was best. I said, "Well, I believe this is going to come before the Immigration and Naturalization Division, I think. I think they might be more impressed with a Virginia address than that of New York." So we gave his Virginia address rather than the New York address. It must have succeeded, because he's still in this country. I see his name from time to time.

G: Did Lyndon Johnson make any calls in his behalf, do you know?

K: Whether he made any telephone calls or not, I'm not sure. I helped him fill out the forms, which was a pretty long form as I recall, and we told him, we assured him, that we would do whatever was necessary to keep him here.

G: Had he met Lyndon Johnson personally by this time? Or had he just been referred to him?

K: I just think he'd been referred to Lyndon's office, and Lyndon met him--I know that--while he was there. I believe that Lyndon might have asked me; I don't know whether it was Lyndon or Sherman who gave me the job of helping Erich.

Koeniger -- II -- 30

G: Do you recall anything about LBJ's relationship, friendship, with Charles Marsh, the publisher?

K: No, I surely don't. I don't know anything about that. He was the editor of the Austin American.

G: No, publisher.

K: Publisher, yes. No, I never heard Lyndon make any remarks about that.

G: How about LBJ's friendship with George Brown? Did you ever see them together?

K: I didn't know anything about the Brown-Root connection at that time.

G: Well, mainly, I'm asking about their friendship, the fact that--

K: If they were friends, I didn't know about it.

G: Anything on his activities with regard to the Rural Electrification Administration in promoting co-ops in Central Texas?

K: Well, I know that Lyndon worked on that, worked on it hard. He had all kinds of projects going and working on them. He was undoubtedly one of the hardest-working congressmen in the whole Congress.

While I think of it, I want to tell you one thing that you might be interested in. Lyndon was quite an admirer of Huey Long. Huey Long, of course, had been assassinated before Lyndon actually became a congressman. I think Huey was assassinated in 1935 or 1936.

G: September, 1935.

K: Was it? September, 1935. Lyndon was an admirer of Huey's, and of course he'd been on the Washington scene during that time, possibly as the secretary to Kleberg. But he said that he never missed an

Koeniger -- II -- 31

opportunity to hear Huey make a speech, and he remembered some of the humorous incidents of these speeches and would tell us about what Huey did. And he told us, I remember one time--I don't know whether he was telling all of us in the office or just me, I don't remember that part of it--but he said that at the time Huey organized this Share-the-Wealth, Every-Man-a-King-movement, which Huey did originate while he was a senator, he had just more mail than any other senator, or any other half-dozen senators probably, coming in, and from all over the country, nationwide correspondence. Pretty soon Huey's Senate office was crammed with desks so you couldn't walk around through it, so Huey called up the superintendent of the building and told him he had to have some additional desks. So the superintendent of buildings came up and surveyed the situation and said, "Senator, where are you going to put these desks?" So Huey said, "Well, I'll find a place for them, you just send them up here. I've got to have them. And more office help, too." So the upshot of it was that Huey put a bunch of desks out in the Senate hallways of the Senate Office Building, and I think that he kept them there and told all parties concerned that "I'm going to have space and office personnel to answer my mail, I don't give a damn what anybody says. Roosevelt himself can't order me not to answer my mail and take care of my business."

So one of the jokes, though, that he told us about Huey, he said that this was a joke that was told about Huey. When he came to Washington, constituents of his back in Louisiana would write

Koeniger -- II -- 32

a letter: "Senator Huey Long, Washington, D.C.," and then the Washington post office of the U.S. government offices in the Capitol would write "S.O.B. 42 or 45," or whatever Huey's office number was. So the first batch of mail that Huey got [with] "S.O.B. 45" on it, he rushed out into the hallway and collared someone and said, "What in the hell does this mean? This 'S.O.B.' here on my correspondence?" So the passer-by [said], "Why, Senator, don't get excited. That's simply the abbreviation of Senate Office Building." So Huey breathes a sign of relief and says, "Well, I'm glad to hear that. I was afraid that wasn't what my constituents meant." (Laughter) I remember Lyndon telling that story about Huey.

G: Any other anecdotes about Huey Long?

K: No. I can't think of any, except Lyndon's statement that Huey Long was the most persuasive speaker that he ever listened to. He had really a lot of humor, and he was evidently a very colorful character.

G: Maury Maverick, another colorful character--

K: Oh, he was.

G: --who we've already discussed, was defeated in the Democratic primary that year. Do you recall this race and anything that LBJ may have done to help Maverick, his reaction to Maury Maverick's defeat?

K: I know that he was disappointed, but I don't know what active part he took in it. If he did, I don't know whether he did or not. The congressmen, as I recall it was just a general feeling that every congressman sort of stood on his own and they didn't mix up in each other's affairs too much. I doubt that he took any active part in

Koeniger -- II -- 33

it. If he had, you see, the congressman that succeeded Maury Maverick, Sr. would have come to Washington with an antipathy towards Lyndon. Lyndon didn't actually get out and invite trouble.

G: Did he feel, do you think, that Maverick had not been pragmatic enough in the way he voted and the things he supported?

K: Well, that could have been. I never did hear Lyndon express himself on that. I think that they voted more or less alike. I know that they did confer with each other from time to time. We knew the employees in Maury Maverick's office pretty well.

G: Malcolm Bardwell and people like that.

K: Yes, we knew those people pretty well. And they knew us and there was some rapport between the two offices.

G: What were his relations like with Congressman Kleberg, with whom he had worked before?

K: Well, they I think were good, as far as I know. I don't remember. I do recall that Lyndon told a story one time--this might not have been Lyndon telling the story, it might have been Herb Henderson--that Lyndon was a little disappointed, that someone down in Kleberg's district, in the Corpus Christi district, had run up quite a bill, one of Kleberg's ranch employees had run up quite a large bill at a service station. He would go in and have gasoline, fill up his car, maybe his truck and several cars. The bill got to be pretty large, and I think it possibly had been paid several times. The ranch would pay it in due time, but they didn't pay on a monthly

Koeniger -- II -- 34

basis or something like that. This employee had run up a rather large bill and the service station told him that they couldn't extend any more credit because the bill was getting too large. So this employee suggested that he call the ranch about it, so the service station operator called the ranch and related the details of how large this bill was. So, on the orders of either Congressman Kleberg or his brother Bob--I don't know which it was--they said, "Well, we'd like to give you this business, but if you're not prepared to extend credit for over a considerable period, we'll just have to order our employees to take their business elsewhere," which they did. So Lyndon did make a remark about that. He said, "That is a pretty callous way to treat this service station operator," who was trying to make an honest living and needed this money, and the Klebergs were well able to pay it every week, if it was necessary, but they wouldn't do it because it was an inconvenience to them.

That's about the only thing I can think of that--as I say, I think my job was given to Lyndon, this patronage appointment, by [Congressman Kleberg].

G: LBJ also that year worked on a report on the economic conditions in the South with Lowell Mellett and others. Do you recall that report, focusing on such things as farm tenancy.

K: I don't remember anything about that.

G: What do you recall about Mrs. Johnson during this period?

Koeniger -- II -- 35

K: Well, she would drop in at the office. She wasn't working in the office, but I believe that I have mentioned earlier that she did come down and help us on this project of mailing out the letters to the high school graduates. She worked on that. She wasn't a regular employee, though. And I don't know why she wasn't, because this was before the children were born. Lyndon at this time, remember now, is not quite as wealthy as he later became.

G: Were the staff members invited over to the Johnson home, or I guess it was an apartment then?

K: They were living in an apartment, I believe. No, I don't recall that we were. When I first went to Washington, I stayed at Lyndon's apartment with him and Lady Bird for several days, two or three days. Then I moved to the Dodge Hotel, I believe it was the Dodge. Was it the Dodge or the Hodge?

G: The Dodge.

K: The Dodge. The hotel. That's where Herb and I roomed together. That was where Lyndon himself had stayed when he first went to Washington, I believe.

G: What was the name of the lady that ran that hotel?

K: I don't remember. That was a man, I think, when we were there, that was the manager. I don't remember.

(Interruption)

K: While I was working in Lyndon's office, the congressman from the Brownsville district whose name was Milton West somehow managed to have a carload of fine grapefruit, Rio Grande Valley grapefruit,

Koeniger -- II -- 36

shipped to Washington, and he gave maybe a full crate or half a crate or something to every member of Congress. We, I know, got some of these grapefruit and most of us in the office were given some of them. So Lyndon learned about this and he fretted for quite some time. He said, "I would like to do something like that myself, and I think maybe I will." He thought that was good public relations, but he finally gave it up because he couldn't decide on what product the Tenth District, what he could send that would be representative of this district as grapefruit was of Milton West's district. But anyway, he finally gave up that project, as far as I know, and also it would have been pretty expensive, too, unless he could get someone to sponsor it.

We had a lot of fun in the office laughing about that, "Maybe Lyndon can go out in the ranching sections and send a calf to all the other members of Congress." [We] said, "We'll make them a present of a bull calf or a sheep or a goat from Blanco County and the western part of the district." But we didn't tell Lyndon that that was our speculation what he might send. We never could agree on what would be representative of the district, though. Maybe he could go down to Taylor and send them a bale of cotton, we thought that up [?], but that wouldn't be a very appropriate gift.

G: Was he alarmed about the situation in Europe during this period?

K: Well, I think everybody was to a certain extent. I remember during that period every time we saw anyone of Oriental ancestry we immediately concluded they were a Japanese spy. While I was working

Koeniger -- II -- 37

in the Capitol there as doorkeeper, I remember on one occasion there were two young Japanese who came in. I don't know whether they came to our office, possibly didn't, but somehow either Charlie Henderson and I, or Herb and I, were in conversation with these Japanese students. They spoke good English. Their story was that they were attending engineering school in Germany and that they had completed two years of their work, I believe, and they were on their way back to Japan for a vacation before going back to Germany and completing their engineering courses. And their itinerary was-- they'd already, I believe, visited Boston and New York and now they were in Washington and they were going to visit Philadelphia and Chicago and maybe on to San Francisco and sail from there to Japan. I think each of them had a camera slung over his shoulder in an expensive-looking case--a camera and a magnifying glass or spy glass, really. And one of them that had the telescopic glasses, I guess it was, he was demonstrating how powerful they were, and we were looking out of the window of the Capitol at the National Cathedral which is about four miles away and you could see the mortar between the stones on that thing. I've never seen a pair [that powerful]. It was a German-made lens, I think. So they didn't ask us any questions that would have been of any value to a spy, I don't think. But immediately after they left--if I remember if it was Herb and I or Charlie, whichever it was--we both discussed these [men]. "These are Japanese spies." We said it jokingly, but within a year after that, World War II breaks out. Pearl Harbor.

Koeniger -- II -- 38

Well, no, it's a little longer than that. This is 1938. The European War broke out in 1939 and Japan bombed Pearl Harbor in 1941.

G: Did you ever make any trips with LBJ during this period?

K: No. No. I don't believe I did.

G: Did you have weekends off, or did you have to work in the office on weekends?

K: We had Sundays off. Herb Henderson and I became very good friends rooming together, and Herb knew a lot about Washington and we visited all the places of historic interest in Washington. We visited the house where Abraham Lincoln was assassinated, we visited Arlington Cemetery. I remember we were walking through this and quite accidentally, I guess, we stumbled upon the grave of William Howard Taft, one of the former presidents who was buried there. And on the way back to Texas after the session ended, Herb and I visited the battlefield of Bull Run, Manassas. He knew a lot of history--a brilliant man--a pity that his personal habits were what they were. So was Charles. I'm sorry to hear that he's dead.

G: Well, I don't know for sure that he is but I've heard that he is.

K: I wish I could find the letter--I've probably lost it--that I received from him. He talked about Lyndon at length, didn't say anything disparagingly against him.

G: Anything else about your experiences in Washington?

K: Well, I'm sure I had a lot of others. I can't think of any right now. Let me look through here a minute.

Koeniger -- II -- 39

Did I tell you about the first check given out under the Agricultural Adjustment Act? Lyndon was instrumental in getting the first check to be delivered in accordance with the terms of the Agricultural Adjustment Act. A farmer from down I think near Corpus Christi was called. It must have been some farmer that Lyndon got acquainted with when he was Kleberg's secretary because that was in Kleberg's district. It wouldn't have been in the Tenth District. But anyway, this farmer came to Washington and they had quite a ceremony at the White House while Franklin D. handed the check over to this farmer. FDR evidently talked with the farmer at some length, and I remember Lyndon describing the affair when he came back to the office. He asked the farmer, he said, "What was your impression of the President?" And the farmer said, "Well, he's the kind of man I'd like to have as a neighbor." That was the impression FDR made on him.

Oh, there's one other thing that I need to tell you now that you'll appreciate, I think. While I was there, we got a letter from Miss Bessie Scofield [?] in Johnson City who told us that her nephew, Teemer Furr was going to be in Washington. He was riding a horse from Johnson City to Washington. He was carrying a letter from Mayor Tom Miller of Austin to the Mayor of New York City. He was going to deliver it in person. Teemer was a boy who came out to Johnson City when he was twelve or thirteen or fourteen years old. We, Lyndon and I, both knew him and sort of grew up with him actually, and he turned cowboy. He came from Alabama, but he got to Texas

Koeniger -- II -- 40

and he immediately became more Texan than the Texans themselves. He strutted around in boots and was crazy about horses and riding and all that sort of thing, so he did have a fine saddle horse and a fine saddle. So Lyndon had written back to Bessie Scofield, our friend in Johnson City, and told her that we would certainly try to look out after Teemer when he got to Washington anyway we could.

So in due time, Teemer rides into Washington on his horse or maybe stabled his horse at the city limits or somewhere. He had a car along with him to carry the horse feed. But he came to the office and I don't know, I think maybe Lyndon might have taken him out to his apartment to spend the night the day that he arrived there, but they came down to the office together the next morning. So Lyndon said, "Now, Teemer, what can we do to entertain you? Is there anything we can do while you're here?" So Teemer said, "Yes, I'd like to meet the President." Well, that was a very modest demand, of course. (Laughter) So Lyndon said, "Well, I don't know whether it can be arranged or not, but we'll try it." So he called the White House and he learned that the President was out on the Mayflower cruising on Chesapeake Bay. This was on a weekend, and he's not available. Maybe when he gets back Monday or something like that we could see him, but we can't get an appointment right now.

So Lyndon broke the sad news to Teemer. He said, "Is there anybody else that you can think of?" He said, "Well, if I can't meet the President, could I meet the Vice President?" This could

Koeniger -- II -- 41

have been on Monday, because I don't believe Garner would have been in his office otherwise, so Lyndon said, "Well, I think we can arrange that." So he called up Congressman Garner's office. Garner had the reputation of being the earliest riser in the city of Washington. In fact, they had to put on an extra elevator operator to be there to take him to his office before the regular hours, and he did come to his office real early. Mrs. Garner was his secretary, his head secretary anyway. So I suppose that we talked to--whoever made the call--to Mrs. Garner, and she said, "Why, sure, we'd like to meet this Texas cowboy." It was explained that we had a Texas cowboy there that wanted to meet the Vice President. "Why, sure, come right on over." So Lyndon had said, "Let's go," and he and Teemer and I, we all knew each other--

Tape 2 of 2

K: Anyway, we received this invitation to come right on over to the Vice President's office, which was in the Senate Office Building, or was it? Yes, it was, I believe, in the Senate Office Building, which is quite some distance. It was far enough that we got in the car and drove over there, Lyndon and Teemer and I. Mrs. Garner greeted us and asked us to have a cup of coffee and she said, "I'll tell Mr. Garner that you're here, and I'm sure he'll see you in a few minutes. But anyway, we'll have a cup of coffee first." So we sat down and had the cup of coffee and about the time we completed, she went to the door of the Vice President's office and said, "Come on in, boys, the Vice President will see you now."

Koeniger -- II -- 42

So we went in. Vice President Garner was seated at his desk and he had on a white Stetson hat. He'd put this hat on for the benefit of the cowboy, I suppose, to show that he was a cowboy, too. He was sitting there at his desk, and he never did ask us to sit down, but he did talk with us for some little time there. After we'd shaken hands with him, he questioned the cowboy about how long he'd been on the road from Johnson City. I guess we explained to him that Teemer was carrying a letter from Mayor Tom Miller of Austin to the Mayor of New York City. So he wanted to know the details about how long he'd been on the road and how many miles a day he averaged, so we arrived at that figure, whatever it was. Then Garner said, "Well, I rode ninety miles one time in two days. But I was so damn sore at the end of this trip, I had to take my breakfast standing up for several days. And, I never did make any such rides as that again." And so as we departed, Vice President Garner said, "Well, Teemer, when you get up there in New York, if you have any trouble now, if those Yankees give you any trouble up there, you let us know and we'll come up there and get you out of it if we can." (Laughter)

Teemer's idea, as we understood from him, was to sell this horse and saddle in New York for a lot of money. I think we learned later that maybe he did sell the horse and saddle for maybe a thousand dollars or something like that. He didn't ride back, but he did make the entire trip. And they had some pictures

Koeniger -- II -- 43

of him delivering this letter to the Mayor of New York. That could have been [Fiorello] La Guardia at that time, I'm not sure.

G: I believe it was.

K: I'm not sure whether it was or not. I believe La Guardia actually was in Congress at the same time Lyndon was.

G: Anything else on LBJ as a congressman?

K: Well, I remember I was somewhat disappointed at the few appearances he made as a speaker in Congress. I know that he could have performed there, but I didn't ever hear him make a speech. I believe I did hear him make one or two motions of some sort that I actually observed, but he wasn't an important figure at that time. He was a freshman congressman, and he was probably better known than most of them. He did have a reputation among other congressmen, the other members of the Texas delegation. They all referred to him as the Boy Wonder, the boy who gets things done. He was very youthful looking. I remember one time I was walking maybe between the Senate Office Building and the House Office Building with an old, old congressman from Chicago, Adolph J. Sabath, S-A-B-A-T-H, who was the dean of Congress at that time. We talked quite some time, and he asked me where I worked and I told him, so he said, "Oh, yes." I said, "You possibly know Congressman Johnson." "Oh, yes, I know him. We all know Lyndon." And he said, "I admire him. He really gets things done." So Lyndon had that reputation in his first term.

Koeniger -- II -- 44

G: Did he have good contacts in the executive [branch]? How was he able to get things done?

K: Well, I suppose he went right to the top. He had the ear of the President, there's no question about that. He could get things done that others couldn't. In fact, we had some business from other congressmen [who] would come in and turn over their work to Lyndon: "Lyndon, you can do this. I can't. You know how to do this." Some of the older, more experienced congressmen.

G: Can you recall a specific example here?

K: I can't remember any specific things, except I do remember Congressman [Ewing] Thomason from El Paso coming in one time to get Lyndon to do something. I don't remember what it was now. I don't know if I knew then.

G: Well, did he have extensive contacts in the executive, in the departments and the agencies?

K: I think he did. I think he did largely because as secretary to Congressman Kleberg he'd made all these contacts. He knew the Washington scene real well when he became a congressman. He had all kinds of contacts. He got things done, there's no question about that.

G: He was unopposed that year for re-election, I believe.

K: Yes, I remember that. He was very apprehensive up until the deadline on the filing date, and he was really happy when no one opposed him.

G: Was there someone who was planning to file who was talked out of it that you recall? Or discouraged?

Koeniger -- II -- 45

K: If so, I didn't know about it. I might have known at the time. If I did, I forgot it.

G: Who were his friends while you were up there? Who did he spend his time with?

K: Well, he was pretty close with Maury Maverick, with Ewing Thomason from El Paso, with Marvin Jones from the Panhandle district, Amarillo, I think. I'm sure that he was friendly with all the members. The state delegations caucused from time to time; they all knew Lyndon.

G: Did he have friends among the press as well?

K: Yes, we had some member of the press, whose name I don't remember, who relied on Lyndon a great deal for news who came frequently to the office to get inside information if he could from Lyndon. I can't remember who it was now, I can't remember his name. But it seems to me that he was a Texas newspaperman originally.

G: Was it Bill White?

K: No, no, it wasn't.

G: George Stimpson?

K: No. I just can't remember who it was now.

G: Tex Easley, perhaps?

K: Tex Easley. That strikes a chord. I believe it was Tex Easley. I think it was, yes. That's who it was, I'm almost certain.

G: Anything else about this experience you recall?

K: Well, I can't think of anything at the moment.

G: Well, I surely thank you.

[End of Tape 2 of 2 and Interview II]

GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION
NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS SERVICE
LYNDON BAINES JOHNSON LIBRARY

Legal Agreement pertaining to the Oral History Interviews of John Fritz Koeniger

In accordance with the provisions of Chapter 21 of Title 44, United States Code, and subject to the terms and conditions hereinafter set forth, I, John Fritz Koeniger of Austin, Texas do hereby give, donate and convey to the United States of America all my rights, title and interest in the tape recording and transcript of the personal interviews conducted on November 12 and November 17, 1981 at Austin, Texas, and prepared for deposit in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

This assignment is subject to the following terms and conditions:

(1) The transcripts shall be available for use by researchers as soon as they have been deposited in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

(2) The tape recordings shall be available to those researchers who have access to the transcripts.

(3) I hereby assign to the United States Government all copyright I may have in the interview transcripts and tapes.

(4) Copies of the transcripts and the tape recordings may be provided by the Library to researchers upon request.

(5) Copies of the transcripts and tape recordings may be deposited in or loaned to institutions other than the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

John F. Koeniger
Donor
Sept. 12, 1982
Date

Rowland Wong
Archivist of the United States
October 7, 1982
Date