

INTERVIEWEE: RAY E. LEE

INTERVIEWER: PAUL BOLTON

February 14, 1968

B: This is February 14, 1968. We are talking with Mr. Ray E. Lee in his home in Austin, Texas.

B: Mr. Lee, first of all, tell us something about your background.

L: Well, Mr. Bolton, I came to the University in 1921 and soon discovered that I had to make my way alone. Within a year I got into the newspaper work as a reporter, and went on through the University, then stayed with the Austin newspapers after graduating from the University in 1925.

B: You were at one time, just prior to your association with Mr. Johnson, the managing editor of the American or both papers?

L: I had served on both papers, but in 1936 I was managing editor of the American when I terminated my connection down there.

B: I understand that through a coincidence you are sort of responsible for Mr. Johnson's home county being in the 10th Congressional District. Is that right?

L: I wouldn't claim too much credit. This story is this: In 1935 the Texas State Senate was considering a redistricting bill for congressional districts, and the pattern for the 10th district was to extend it almost as far east as Houston. I went to the incumbent senator, Senator John Hornsby, and expressed my opposition to it, the newspaper's opposition to it, and said it would be a much better deal to have a compact district centering about Austin. Subsequently, whatever else influenced him, this was the way it worked out. Blanco County which had been in the 14th Congressional District for many, many years was transferred in that year to the 10th Congressional District, and Blanco County is Mr. Johnson's home county.

B: Blanco County is Johnson City . . . Blanco is the county seat, I guess, or is Johnson City the county seat?

L: I think Johnson City is now the county seat.

B: Yes. Now, Mr. Lee when did you first get to know Mr. Johnson?

L: I became acquainted with him in the fall of 1936 after I had left the newspaper. I was doing some part time work at the University and I was told that he was in need of a part time man to do press releases and to help out in his office; so I went to see him and within a short time I was working for him.

B: What was his office?

L: His office was director . . . state director of the National Youth Administration.

B: I thought at that time that you were still working for the paper when the campaign began. You were not working?

L: No, I terminated with the paper in September, 1936.

B: Something about those early NYA days. I understand that you worked long and hard when you worked for the NYA in those days.

L: Yes, I think that's right. I was only a part time employee, supposed to work 6 hours a day, but there were some times when I worked 10, and I do know Mr. Johnson and his deputy and other people on the staff were accustomed to come early and stay late.

B: What sort of a man did you find him? Have you ever made any attempt to characterize the man in those days? His ambition, his drive, what was it that made him different?

L: He had a characteristic, a drive, which exceeded anybody I knew. He wanted to try harder than anybody I knew. He was willing to keep pushing himself and to push others in order to accomplish a task. And when he set himself a task, well he just went all out for it.

- B: Now, along about this time Congressman Buchanan died and the office of Congressman became vacant. Did you have any part in any of the consultations that led Mr. Johnson to seek this congressional place?
- L: It was interesting to me that nobody seemed to know that Mr. Buchanan was seriously ill. He died on February 22nd, but the week before the Secretary of the Interior, Mr. Ickes, had come to Austin to make a dedicatory speech out at what is now called Marshall Ford Dam. Mr. Buchanan did not come. I think that it could be inferred that Mr. Buchanan simply was not well enough. Congressmen don't let Secretaries of the Interior or high-ranking officials go into their district without the Congressman being there. I think that the situation was that Mr. Buchanan must have been in seriously declining health throughout this whole time. I did not know anything about it and people whom I later heard speak about it didn't acknowledge knowing anything about his being ill. They tried to make out that his death was sudden and unexpected.
- B: And then to get back to my question about how Mr. Johnson decided to run for the office. Were you . . . do you know any of the details of what went on to lead him to reach this decision?
- L: Mr. Buchanan died early in the week, I think it was Tuesday, and his funeral down in Brenham was on Friday, and during that period of time Mr. Johnson must have talked to a lot of people about the possibility of running for Congress. I do know that on Saturday and Sunday when the NYA office was closed, I spent those days out at Mr. Johnson's apartment on West 34th Street, and there was continuous consultation with various visitors. Alvin Wirtz from Austin was one of those who came around. Sam Fore from Floresville was one who came around. That's in the 14th Congressional District. Denver Chestnut from Kenedy was there. There were various people from Austin who came in. Some of them federal employees and they were at some hazard in this situation.

B: On account of the Hatch Act?

L: On account of the Hatch Act, yet.

B: And, in any event he did decide to run and did he have a formal announcement or just how did he . . . ?

L: On Sunday the 28th of February the American Statesman printed a headline saying that Mrs. Buchanan was considering running. They also printed a front page editorial saying that the person selected from this District must be a supporter of President Roosevelt, and they described Buchanan as such a supporter. The nominee, said the editor, must support Roosevelt, which, for me, was a somewhat novel way to describe Mr. Buchanan's balky ways with the President.

During the day there were various consultations, and I thought after lunch they were nearing a decision for Johnson to run. At 4 p.m. I broke into a very private meeting and said, "Now look, men, if we are going to have an announcement in the Monday morning newspaper, we've got to have it ready by 6 o'clock. The papers have a very small staff on Sunday's and you just can't get an announcement in unless you get it down there early."

B: You mean on Sunday?

L: On Sunday for the Monday morning paper. There was some head nodding and so forth; so I said, "I'm going out here and draft an announcement." I sat down at a typewriter and pecked out a page and a half - - - I wouldn't claim I was proud of it, it was a way of getting the show on the road. I took it back into the meeting room and it was passed around from hand to hand and various suggestions and corrections and rewritings done, as is always the case in any political activity. Finally the paper was given back to me about 5:30. I went back outside and retyped it again in clean shape, and took it back into the meeting once more, and along about 6 o'clock they said, "Well, take it to the newspaper; here we go."

It was necessary for Mr. Johnson to submit his resignation as State NYA Director. A telegram was sent to Washington. My resignation was also submitted, not only to NYA, but also to the University of Texas where part-time I was teaching a first-year journalism course. My NYA resignation was accepted locally by Mr. J. C. Kellam, who was Assistant State Director of NYA. Mr. Kellam was soon made Acting Director, and one of his early acts was to warn the NYA staff to keep out of the campaign - - Hatch Act again.

B: Do you recall who was present at that particular meeting at which the announcement was prepared?

L: I think the people I've named were present. I don't know who else.

B: That would be Wirtz and . . .

L: Wirtz, and Fore, Sam Fore, maybe Denver Chestnut from Kenedy. There weren't any great number of people present.

B: Johnson was a very young man at that time, was he not? As I recall was his age around 27, 28?

L: Somewhere in there, 27, 28, 29. He was just old enough to be a member of the House of Representatives, for which the age requirement is 25.

B: That's right. Now, his was not the first . . . Was his the first announcement in this race?

L: Yes. The secret, which maybe somebody in the room knew, but I didn't know, was that a meeting had been going on in Brenham all day at which Mr. C. N. Avery, the long time Buchanan manager, had undertaken to assure Mrs. Buchanan that if she would run for the office, there would be no opposition. He had got on the telephone with various people; I can't call any names because I don't know to whom he talked, but he must have obviously talked with various Buchanan county leaders, and had attempted to commit them to his proposition. As I was told about it later, Mrs. Buchanan agreed to run for the unexpired

term, but insisted that the announcement be made in the home-town Brenham paper. Well, the Brenham paper was an afternoon paper and the first publication would be Monday afternoon. So here Mr. Avery was setting up all these agreements, but so far as I know, he ignored Mr. Johnson. So far as I know, he didn't call him and didn't put him in on the thing or try to commit him not to run. If he did I don't know about it. Mr. Avery's theory was that differences between Mr. Buchanan's friends could be settled more safely in Democratic Party primaries, than in a free for all election. He worried about a Townsendite or a Republican. His fear had a real basis -- only the nemesis was another Democrat -- LBJ.

When the announcement came out in the Monday morning paper, Mrs. Buchanan had difficulty making up her mind. But she wouldn't announce on Monday afternoon as had been scheduled, and finally, I think on Tuesday afternoon, her son put out a statement that she would not run.

B: Now, how many candidates finally ran in that race?

L: Ten people filed, and one withdrew, so nine people finally ran in the race.

B: You don't happen to recall the names of those people, do you?

L: Well, I can look up a list I happen to have handy that will tell us the names. When Mrs. Buchanan withdrew, Mr. C. N. Avery immediately announced. The next one to announce, so far as I know, was Mr. Merton Harris of Smithville.

B: He was the District Attorney? What was he?

L: He had been a district attorney for Lee County, Washington County, Bastrop County, and Austin County. In 1932 he had run against Mr. Buchanan and had scared the daylights out of him. He had come close. He didn't win, but it was really a rugged, tough race. From that campaign, and from his position as district attorney, he certainly had a well defined base of political strength. Mr. Houghton Brownlee was the next one to announce. He was, as

we mentioned a moment ago, state senator. He had his residence in Austin, but he had a ranch in Burnet County and he had a strong-hold there.

B: He had just defeated Senator . . . .

L: He had defeated Senator Hornsby the preceding year. Then Polk Shelton announced. Mr. Shelton was a young lawyer in Austin. I guess it is correct to say that criminal law was a large part of his practice. But he had connections out in a whole lot of the counties. He wanted to run.

B: He was a widely known young man.

L: That's right. Then Sam Stone in Williamson . . . the county judge of Williamson County announces, and that really undercut Mr. Avery, who had expected that Williamson County would be his bastion of strength. Mr. Avery's brother-in-law, Mr. Tom Nelson, was the banker at Round Rock, which is in the east end of Williamson County. Stone had great strength in the central part and the west end of Williamson County. Stone also had a sister who lived in Austin whose husband was employed by Herman Brown.

B: Herman Brown of Brown and Root?

L: Brown and Root. I don't know how they regarded that, but I would have regarded it as an asset to get . . . you get some support in Travis County. Then Mr. C. F. Richards announced down at Lockhart, who was a very fine attorney and a very respectable candidate, but he withdrew two days later and said he didn't want to run. I never did know why. Then we got some oddballs. Edwin Waller of San Marcos who had run in every election for 20 years.

B: Justice of the Peace?

L: Anything that was open he ran for it and never won. Ayres K. Ross, an attorney in Austin who belonged to the Townsend association, a Townsendite. He had run against Mr. Buchanan, it must have been in 1936, when he polled more votes than a Townsendite would get; he polled all the anti-Buchanan

votes as well as the Townsend votes. That gave him some 5 or 6 thousand votes against Buchanan. Now the Townsendite Plan, if you may remember, was a deal where everybody age 60 or 65 was going to be paid . . . what? 75 dollars a month or a 100 dollars a month?

B: Automatically, I believe.

L: Automatically. Yes, everybody that age got that much money. One of Mr. Avery's arguments to Mrs. Buchanan about not having a contest was that this Ayers K. Ross might come in so strong, he'd nose them all out, with all the old folks' votes. Then a man named Stanley E. Smith, who was an accountant here in Austin, announced as a Republican. He didn't make a campaign effort and he got a total of 12 votes.

But in the final shakedown, Waller, Ayres K. Ross, and Stanley Smith didn't have much influence on the outcome of the election. But we had six pretty strong and pretty active candidates in the election.

B: Well, now, how did this campaign develop? What I'm trying to get at is what kind of campaign did Mr. Johnson develop here? As I recall, he was a very much pro-Roosevelt candidate.

L: When Mr. Buchanan died, and I think I said this a moment ago, the newspaper printed an editorial saying that the man selected to succeed must be a strong supporter of Mr. Roosevelt.

B: Now let's stop right there for a moment. A situation which possibly is of interest, that you are perhaps in a better position to explain than anybody else, and that is the construction of the dams on the Colorado River. Can you background us on that just a little bit?

L: The first dam on the Colorado River is the dam up in Burnet County which is known now as the Buchanan Dam. It was constructed originally as a flood control project. The Colorado River had always been a wildcat. It would



come down in flood times and would put water up in the streets of Austin and below Austin would do an enormous amount of damage to towns and farms. The State had established a Colorado River Authority which was representing the State in this construction. The U. S. Engineers had a big hand in it, and quite possibly the Department of Interior had a big hand in it.

B: If you'll excuse me for interrupting right there, this dam, as I recall, was it not started by the Insull interests and they went caput during the Depression, and then the State of Texas took over.

L: I'm unclear whether they were actually building a dam or whether they were just planning a dam, but the Insull people had come in here before the '29 financial collapse. They had pledged themselves to build this dam. It was taken over by the State interests and the Colorado River Authority and the Department of Interior.

Now the big issue that arose was over a proposal to build a power plant in connection with the dam. The power companies of Texas, shall I say the Texas Power and Light Company, because I think that's what it was, were very much opposed to using this water power to generate electricity. The issue got into Federal District Court in Washington, where in a consent situation it was agreed that power equipment would not be built until further legislation was adopted. In the meantime the builders would go ahead building the flood control apparatus.

This case as I understand it was never settled in court, because it was settled in Congress instead. Congress authorized power generation.

The second step was the dam was not known as Marshall Ford Dam, which is the one Secretary Ickes came down to make a speech about. The reason I think Mr. Buchanan should have been here is this: there was pending at that time an additional federal appropriation of 5-1/2 million dollars for

Marshall Ford Dam.

B: That's a federal appropriation.

L: Federal appropriation. They had enough money to build the dam so many feet high, but they didn't have enough money to build it to the height the engineers wanted, put the gates on it, and to build the power plant and Mr. Buchanan was committed to push during the session of 1937 for this 5-1/2 million dollar appropriation for the completion of Marshall Ford Dam. Well, his death, of course, left that appropriation very much in a vacuum. Wirtz knew about this because he was the attorney for the Colorado River Authority and had represented the Colorado River Authority in Federal Court and the court and legislative actions connected with the matter. And as a friend and advisor to Johnson, he was able to keep him completely informed on what was going on about the dams, the appropriations, the courts and so on.

B: There was also a matter there of carrying on the construction of the dams, which was made campaign issue, was it not?

L: Yes. They had X number of dollars and they had a contract with Brown and Root to build the Marshall Ford Dam according to a certain amount of plans. But Congress hadn't appropriated money for the whole project, because the project would be spread out over 4 or 5 years. Congress was going to slice up the appropriation in annual amounts. So that's where they were -- they had enough money to build so far, but they didn't have enough money to finish off the dam.

B: Okay. Well now I'm sorry that I interrupted you there, but I thought that was a good point to bring out. That was what the papers had somewhat in mind, don't you think?

L: I think the newspaper was very much concerned for the dams to be completed, because the editors visualized the opportunity for electric power, they

visualized flood control situations. It might be remembered that Raymond Brooks, who was a reporter and editorial writer for the paper, was also a member of the Colorado River Authority Board, and I expect that he felt pretty hot about the thing at that time. Charles Marsh was then publisher of the paper. He wanted the project carried through. And so, this editorial that I referred to said that we've got to have somebody, who like Buchanan, will get along with the President and win the Lower Colorado River Dam appropriations.

There's a little bit of background on this thing. You may remember that in January, 1937, President Roosevelt had put forward his plan for enlarging the Supreme Court to 15 members. Some people call it court packing, and the proposal irritated the Bar Associations all over Texas -- you just couldn't imagine -- and the Texas Senate, which is largely composed of lawyers, had up a resolution to condemn the President's proposal to pack the Supreme Court. Senator Brownlee made the motion to stop debate on the resolution and take the vote, and he voted to condemn the President's proposal. A few days later the Travis County Bar Association called a meeting on the same subject. They had a resolution, and Polk Shelton took the lead in condemning the President's proposal. The Travis County Bar Association passed it 65 to 8, or something like that. It was overwhelmingly passed. But it is interesting to me that two of the people who later came out as candidates in this campaign were quick in January and February to condemn the President's plan for changing the complexion of the Supreme Court.

Well, with that situation, these two people in the race and the newspaper saying let's support the President; with Johnson having been appointed by the President to be NYA Administrator for Texas, it was logical and

reasonable that he said when he announced, "I am wholeheartedly, foresquare and fully behind the President. I support his platform and there's no if's and and's about it. I'm not going to quibble about this a'tall." Later on in the campaign he had some fun with the thing. One day he said, "Well, now, it does look like that everybody who's a candidate in this race wants to be for the President. Only a couple of them are not for him for the Supreme Court, and somebody else is not willing to say he's for him."

That was Merton Harris who had not been willing to say he would support the President. Mr. Avery made some equivocal statement at one time. Later he came out very stout and loud for the President.

Another thing that happened in the last two weeks of the campaign was this -- the newspaper ran a poll coupon in the paper on which the reader could check for the President's Supreme Court Proposition, or against it, and send the coupon to the newspaper. The reports were that a reasonable number of coupons were coming in each day -- well over 1000 before the poll was ended -- and that the votes ran 4 or 5 to 1 in support of the President -- strong support for following the President's recommendation.

B: That was in the face of the stand of the Bar Association and the Texas Senate?

L: That's right. One of the most significant things that happened in the campaign was a statement by General A. S. Burleson, who was Postmaster General when Woodrow Wilson was President.

B: Was he an Austin man?

L: A famous Austin man who lived down on West 7th Street. He made a statement saying that by all means this district should elect a young man who would support the President, and to elect an old man would be just to throw the Congressional vote away.

That was certainly an undercut at Mr. Avery who was then sixtyish and

Mr. Brownlee was pushing 60, and maybe some of the others. Johnson being obviously 27 or 28, he certainly fitted the description of a young man. And Polk Shelton, who was youngish, he was 35, but he wasn't supporting the President as strongly as Mr. Johnson was.

That was one of the little incidents in the campaign that was believed to be very important in the campaign.

B: Did you write speeches for the President? Or did he make his own speeches? How does he work in that respect?

L: He made his own speeches. Claude Wild is a man that I ought to have mentioned much earlier. Claude Wild came into the campaign during the second week, just quite soon after we had got started. I never did know exactly why. I've heard since that Sam Fore made some arrangement.

Claude and I have continued to be friends, not intimate, but we see each other and always chat about the Johnson campaign. He was, let me say, the tactition of the campaign. He helped Johnson plan his speeches. He helped plan the itinerary - - set out to go here, you know, and then got on the telephone and called up people in various towns and got them concerned about the fact that Johnson was coming there.

I looked after the central office and the publicity arrangements. We didn't have television in those days. It was strictly newspaper and some radio, and not many of us then knew enough about radio as a campaign media. We just didn't know enough to have confidence in it. But we did know how to get on the printed page.

Claude and I worked together. Some people call him campaign manager. I wouldn't argue about it. I just know that ultimately I signed a statutory report as campaign manager. He did his part and I did my part. There was no friction between us over the matter a'tall.

B: As this campaign developed, you had a great deal of trouble as I understand it in getting people to stand and listen to the candidates, is that right?

L: Yes, . . . there were several factors that enter into it. Not the least compelling was bad weather. You know that March is not the choicest month in Texas. It's not spring in March at all. And as I recollect March, 1937, was colder and wetter than usual.

B: Mr. Lee, we were talking about the difficulties of campaigning. It may be that some of those who listen to this tape will not be familiar with how a campaign was conducted back in the mid-'30's. Give us some highlights of some of the difficulties that you met in campaigning for public office.

L: The purpose of the candidate had to be to see as many people as he could and to shake their hands. That's still currently done. But lacking television and having very little radio experience -- it became much more important for the candidate to criss-cross the district -- to move so that he would appear one day in Elgin, the next day in Burnet, and the next day in Giddings. He didn't want to give an impression of being stationary.

Well, there were two, three, or four problems connected with that. The first problem in any campaign is always money, and Mr. Johnson had that problem. Mrs. Johnson had a sum of money. I don't know how much it was. I thought it was \$3,500.00. I've heard some other people say it was \$10,000. I know that she came forward and put her money into the campaign. Then, of course, there were some contributions which came in from a variety of sources. But we were always running on poverty row.

I wouldn't want to imply that Mr. Avery or Mr. Brownlee had any more money that we did, but I do know that with Mr. Avery's long experience as a business man and as Buchanan's representative, he must have known where the money sources were. He must have known how to raise it; and I think the same would be true of Mr. Brownlee in certain territories; and the

same would be true of the other candidates in their territories.

The most grievous problem was the problem of getting somebody to talk to. You'd set up a program. You were going to make three stops or four stops a day.

B: You're traveling by car?

L: Traveling by car. And you're going to make three or four stops. At each place some people would have been talked to by telephone, and were asked to pass the word around the community and get the people to gather to see the candidate and to listen to him for a few minutes. The listening was usually done on the courthouse steps, the city hall steps, or in front of somebody's store, or whatever might be a convenient place picked out.

You got a variety of response. In some places a man called would say uh-huh, and do nothing about it. In other places he would think this was wonderful and he would get out and walk up and down the street for two hours, see everybody he could see, and tell them to be there at 11 o'clock to meet the new congressman. Sometimes they would have pretty good turnouts; sometimes they wouldn't. The real problem always was that you had the congressman scheduled to go to, let's say Elgin, Manor, Giddings, and Ledbetter, which is a circuit there that could be made in one day. A candidate would get to one of these places and there would be only four people there to greet him. Then he would get to another and there would be 20 people to greet him. Of course, he could turn it off by not making a speech, and walk up and down the main street, into every store, and shake hands with everybody, saying, "Come on up here to the corner, we want to talk a little bit."

Now another problem was that the weather was bad. March is never the best time for outdoor activity in this part of Texas. And as I recollect it this March, 1937, was particularly raw and windy and wet. You'd have times when you would get to a meeting place and have a reasonably good hall and lights and so on, and yet there it would be raining outside and you wouldn't have much of a turnout. I don't think it was exclusively Johnson's problem. I think it was a problem for every candidate in the race. They had a hard time getting together a crowd.

I remember when Mr. Johnson announced, he made his first speech at San Marcos. He used the college auditorium. He had very good resources and very good reason for opening in Hays County. He had been secretary to the President of the College. Sherman Birdwell's people lived at Buda. Kathleen Burnett Lee's people lived at Wimberly.

B: You are going to have to introduce these people as we go along. Sherman Birdwell was one of Mr. Johnson's assistants in the NYA?

L: Yes. Sherman was the district representative from Central Texas. Kathleen Burnett Lee is my wife, and she was the sister of Judge Will Burnett, who was county judge in Hays County, and Walter Burnett, who lived out past Wimberly. And with Blanco County just 20 miles away, it was considered that the opening there in the auditorium of the college was a natural.

It did work out very well. We had a relatively decent weather and had the auditorium comfortably filled with people.

B: How many hundred people would that be?

L: Oh, 12-1500 I guess. The room was full and that's when you feel comfortable - - when you get everybody to the room that there is a place for.

B: Let's digress just a moment. Twelve hundred people turning out to hear a political candidate below the office of President is a pretty good number these days.



L: Well, that's right. In 1937 you didn't have television, you didn't have radio coverage on the scale you have it today. People went to meetings in those days. In Austin, for example, we had Wooldridge Park down here by the Courthouse, which from the time you and I came to Austin was the political cockpit of Texas. Anyone who wanted to come to Austin to make a speech, made his speech in Wooldridge Park.

B: That's a beautiful phrase - - political cockpit. Is that yours?

L: No, it's not mine. Somebody else has used that before. I would credit Raymond Brooks.

B: Well, in any event, did you have a pretty good crowd here at Wooldridge Park?

L: No, we were unable to plan a meeting in Wooldridge Park on account of the weather. We were unable to find people who were going to give us an audience. We finally ended up in the last week of the campaign with a speaking in a district courtroom in the Courthouse, sponsored by former residents of Blanco County. This occurred on Monday night. I was surprised and you'd be surprised at the number of people who would identify themselves as having been born and raised in Blanco County but now then lived in Austin. We filled up the courtroom right comfortably. That was on Monday night. Of course, I would say that all the people who came were for him because they were from Blanco County and he was from Blanco County.

At that meeting it was planned that there would be another meeting in the same courtroom on the following Thursday night. The purpose then was to bring non-Blanco County people, Austin-people, to the meeting. We tried and we worked and we phoned - - I don't know who all did their share, but the turnout on this cold and wet Thursday night wasn't terribly impressive. It was just one of those meetings where you were just a little bit disappointed in the number of people.

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I remember the preceding week we had a meeting in Georgetown. Got the Georgetown School Gymnasium. Remember that Georgetown is Mr. Sam Stone's hometown. But there were people, of course, opposed to the county judge, willing to organize a meeting.

We got over there for the meeting and there must have been 100 people present. That was disappointing. It was good -- better than 12 -- but disappointing in terms of 500, or something like that.

I was looking in the papers the other day. I saw that Mr. Merton Harris claimed about two weeks before the election that had a big rally somewhere down in Austin County, had 1500 people present. A few days later Mr. Houghton Brownlee had a meeting up at Burnet and he claimed he had 1200 people present.

I don't know. We didn't cross-check at the time -- as far as I know we didn't -- but I would be surprised if they did have because we weren't getting 1200 people to meetings after our San Marcos opening. You had a hard problem there of trying to reach the electors and trying to convey to them the candidate's message.

Now one thing that happened that didn't hurt us was a poll conducted by Gordon Fulcher and Tom Whitehead, each of whom were senior editorial employees of the American=Statesman. This poll was published in the Sunday paper six days before the election on Saturday. It didn't represent itself to be a scientific poll, the Gallup poll or anything like that. But it was a sense of opinion in the communities visited. The paper said that Gordon Fulcher and Tom Whitehead had traveled over the whole district during the preceding week and had talked to various types of people to get their opinion.

In this poll, they said Johnson and Harris were leading in the campaign and looked like they were coming in neck and neck, and Avery was third. A few days before that a man by the name of Alonzo Wasson, who worked up at the Capitol Press room, and you'll have to tell me who he was . . .

B: He was a correspondent for the Dallas News, and editorial type correspondent.

L: He had put out a poll in which he said Avery was just a shoo-in. There was some to-do about the American-Statesman poll, of course, for everybody relegated to third or fourth place, was dissatisfied. Those who were put up in second and third place were happy that they were there, but disgruntled because they weren't in first place. There was quite a to-do about how the poll was conducted and so on.

On that same Sunday, I think it was, the newspaper printed another editorial, saying again that we've got to have a supporter of Roosevelt; that these two candidates who are against Roosevelt won't do; you can't have them -- let's mark them off the list. So far as the newspaper was concerned, that was getting the running field down to four people.

B: Right along in there someplace, near the end of the campaign, I believe that Mr. Johnson came down with an attack of appendicitis. Do you remember that?

L: Yes. That was a phenomenal thing. I told you a moment ago that the Blanco people on Monday night arranged a meeting at the Courthouse on Thursday night. So Thursday afternoon Mr. Johnson was drooping about his apartment in Austin, saying he didn't feel good. We didn't attach enough importance to it. He was tired and withdrawn. So we urged him to rest awhile and go to sleep if possible. He demanded to know who was going to take him to the speaking that night and called the roll. This one had something to do, somebody else had a job, so I said, "I'll come and get you and take you down there. I'll be glad to."

I got back to his house about a quarter to 7 and he was in the bathroom. He said that he was in pain and that he had taken purgatives but he couldn't get any relief. I was so inexperienced that I didn't realize that I was hearing the symptoms of appendicitis. I just had never dealt with an appendicitis case.

After a few minutes we got in the car and went down to the Courthouse. He shook hands all around the room there with friends and people, and got up in front to speak. He was going along doing pretty good, but all of a sudden he sort of folded over in the middle and pulled his arms up in his belly. Then he sat down. Some people who were there who were much more experienced came up and asked him how he was and so on and expressed the fear that he must have appendicitis. No doctor was in the audience, so he sat there for 5 minutes, then he was able to straighten up and say to the people, "Well, I'm real sorry, I've had this bad pain. You'll excuse me if I don't complete my speech, but I want to shake hands with all of you and thank you for coming, and urge you to be sure to vote Saturday and to get some other people to vote for me too."

He shook hands around. I got him out to the car and took him home, he was having more pain. He telephoned his cousin, Dr. Claude Martin, and said, "I'm sick." And Claude said, "I'll be right over."

Dr. Martin came and I left because I had to go to the newspaper. I was uncertain whether to say he had faked up at the speaking or not. I just didn't know exactly how to treat the thing. I talked with Fulcher, who was the night editor. He asked me to write a couple of paragraphs and he improved on it. I got back to the apartment about 10 o'clock and found that Johnson had gone to Seton Hospital. I hustled over there and I found that they had called in Dr. Joe Thorne Gilbert, who is still an eminent surgeon here in Austin, and Dr. A. F. Beverly, who was an obstetrician, who

is no longer with us, and that the three of them, Dr. Martin, and Joe and Beverly had examined Lyndon and said, "Yes, he's got appendicitis, and there is no time to delay. Let's get this operation underway right away." So he was being operated on by Dr. Martin by the time I got back to the hospital.

They took out his appendix, I think it was not ruptured, but it was kinda close. He was in pretty bad shape.

There was a problem. I thought I ought to get Alvin Wirtz on the phone, Claude Wild on the phone, and ask advice. I believe Claude came to the hospital. We held a little council and agreed the best thing to do is to get the best news publicity we could on the true facts.

I got back down to the newspaper and found that they were closing their midnight Central Texas Edition. This is the edition that would go to Georgetown, and Lockhart, San Marcos, Johnson City, and all the towns in the district. So I told Mr. Fulcher what had happened and he said, "Oh, gee whiz." He couldn't get in that Central Texas edition, but he remade the front page for the Home edition and put a top line over the Austin American masthead -- the top line over that -- saying that Johnson has midnight appendix operation, apparently doing well.

The news was well circulated in Austin and of course it was telephoned by various people around the various counties. I remember that a doctor down at Lockhart, who must have been supporting somebody else, called up Doctor Beverly and wanted to know if this was really on the level that Lyndon had appendicitis. Doctor Beverly, being a man of great conscience and distinction, chewed out the doctor over the phone and said, "You know damn well it was or I wouldn't have said so."

That was the way he told the story to me.

B: Let me get the time of that. That was on the Thursday before the election?

L: The election was on Saturday and the operation was on Thursday before midnight.

Johnson had one more speaking engagement, an important speaking engagement in Luling for Friday night. The speech had been written and he asked Claude Wild to go down there and read it. And Claude did. There was also a radio broadcast from Luling on that particular Friday night.

B: That was over WOAI?

L: Over KNOW, I guess.

B: Local station.

L: Austin station, yes. I don't think it was over WOAI. WOAI covered so much more territory than we could pay for.

B: Oh, yes, I see. The reason I asked was that I had talked at one time with Mr. Wild and he'd said something about using WOAI.

L: I don't know. Maybe somebody bought WOAI time.

B: Did the other candidates claim this was sort of a fake or something?

L: Publicly they didn't. I don't know whether some of them called Dr. Gilbert or not. Certainly one doctor called Dr. Beverly, to my knowledge. They certainly must have questioned the thing.

Of course, Martin being a cousin of the candidate, that made it a little bit touchy and it was very important that he got these other doctors to pass judgment.

Johnson was unable to make use of some things that had been set up. For example, on Friday we got a telegram from Elliott Roosevelt, who was running a radio system at Fort Worth at the time, in which he wished him all good luck and so on, that Johnson was authorized to use the Roosevelt name and read this telegram or make use of it. We turned it over to the newspaper, but because of all the news we did not get much out of it.

Then Saturday morning Elliott Roosevelt showed up in Austin and came to the office. Apparently he did not know that Mr. Johnson was in the hospital.

B: You mean that wasn't important enough news item at that time to put on the press wires?

L: I don't know. We were so beat down from the events that had happened, we didn't push it hard enough. But certainly if our candidate had been on his feet, it would have been a time to appear with a Roosevelt's arm around his neck.

B: Now, the election was on Saturday. You spoke a while ago about a survey conducted by Mr. Fulcher and Mr. Whitehead, I believe. How did their survey compare with the results?

L: Almost on the nose. They had two discrepancies: when they said Harris was running Johnson a close race, it wasn't quite true. Johnson had Harris by 3000 votes. And they put Avery in third place and he came up in fifth, but not very far out. The final vote -- I took this out of the newspaper filed the other day -- the final vote was a total of 29,943 ballots cast. And out of the 30,000 Mr. Johnson got 8280 votes. That's a little better than 27 percent. Mr. Harris got 5111, which is a little better than 15 percent. Mr. Shelton came third -- a surprise so far as this poll was concerned -- with 4400 votes. Mr. Sam Stone was next with 4000 and Mr. Avery was next with 3900. So you see, Mr. Avery, Stone, Shelton -- third place was pretty well contested. Mr. Brownlee got 3000 and Mr. Ross, the Townsendite man got 1000. As I said a while ago, Mr. Smith, the Republican got 12; Mr. Waller, the loser in San Marcos, got 18.

B: Oh, he did quite well.

L: But the poll was not badly off. The poll picked the first two places even though they thought they were going to be closer. Events in that last week may have pushed Mr. Johnson farther ahead of Mr. Harris. I can't believe

Mr. Johnson lost sympathy because of an appendicitis attack.

One of the things, the real telling test, is the quest-on of who led which counties. Johnson was high -- there were ten counties, you know -- and Johnson was high man in six of the ten counties. Travis -- the largest, Burnet, Blanco, Caldwell, Hays and Washington. Washington is the third largest, next to Williamson. Johnson was high man in these six counties.

Merton Harris was high man in two counties, Burleson and Bastrop, Bastrop being his home county and Burleson being part of his distinct attorney district. Mr. Harris got only 1500 votes in Travis County.

Polk Shelton was high man in Lee County, which is Giddings, but he got about 20 percent of the vote in Travis County. Of the 12,000 votes cast in Travis County, he got a big block.

Sam Stone was high man in Williamson County -- far and away high man -- and he got 900 votes in Travis County. But he didn't score well in the other counties, and ended up with 4048 total.

B: Mr. Lee, tell me this, where were you on the night of the election? Do you recall? Were you in Johnson's . . . was he still in the hospital?

L: He was still in the hospital. I wasn't in his hospital room. I guess I was at the newspaper office.

B: Gathering the returns?

L: That would be the logical place for me to be, to be gathering the returns and cross-checking with the editors and phoning various people. I'm not sure that I remember. But I wasn't at the hospital.

You see, Mr. Johnson went to the hospital on Thursday. By Saturday people began flooding in there to see him -- sympathy and so on. The doctors had to put up a no visitors sign. Johnson developed a bad appendix situation and had to stay in the hospital about two or three weeks. The



doctors plugged off the visitors, particularly after it was known that he had been elected. By Monday it was just impossible for him to see the people who wanted to see him. He just didn't have the strength or the energy to receive these people. The doctors had to set up a guard there saying you can't go in. Mrs. Johnson was outside there, and was taking messages. Various other people who had been on the staff were taking messages.

B: What happened after the election? What did you do? What did all of you do?

L: After the election, Mr. Johnson was in the hospital and the problem was to get him well enough to get him to Washington to get on the payroll. Of course he couldn't be sworn in until about a week later when the votes were canvassed -- the election was on the 10th, and the canvass -- I don't seem to have a date on this. But he couldn't go until the vote was canvassed anyway and the certificate filed that he had been elected. Meantime, it was necessary, according to the statutes of Texas, for somebody acting as manager to file a financial report with the Secretary of State. So I consulted lawyers to find out what we had to do, and made a financial report to the best of my knowledge and belief to the Secretary of State in due time. We certainly didn't want to have a situation come up where the candidate was going to be disqualified for failing to report.

B: Do you recall what it cost to run in an election in those days?

L: Well, the report doesn't reflect what it cost to run in an election, because the law specifically exempted certain types of expenditures. I can't recollect the exemptions now. But under the law at that time you had to report only certain types of expenditures. So I scratched around to the best of my knowledge and I summarized all of those expenditures. Seems to me if you bought time on radio, you didn't have to report that; or bought an ad in the newspapers, you didn't have to report that.

B: What in the world did they ask you to report?

L: You were required to report transportation costs, telephone costs, postage -- I'm just fishing back in my memory now. I may have it backwards. It may have been the other way. The report did not purport to be the total cost of the campaign. But it was a report of the things that the law required to be reported.

B: Now, Mr. Lee, I understand that as soon as Mr. Johnson . . . some time after Mr. Johnson recovered from his operation there was a meeting set up with the President. Do you know about that meeting?

L: Yes sir, I know a little bit about it. President Roosevelt was taking a fishing trip vacation in the Gulf of Mexico. He was out there something like 10 days. Then he came in to Houston where he mounted a special train. Governor Allred was host to the President on the special train and Governor Allred invited Congressman Johnson to ride with him.

Mr. Johnson had been out of the hospital a short time. He was very lean, very thin, quite gaunt, in fact. Maybe you've seen the picture of him with the President.

On the train the Governor got permission to bring the Congressman out to the back end of the train to meet the President. This was the man who had carried the President's flag in the Congressional district election down here in the campaign. So the President was glad to receive him, greet him and pose for pictures. That was possibly Mr. Johnson's first acquaintance with the President, a situation which developed into a much closer connection in later years.

B: Did you have contacts with Mr. Johnson subsequent to the campaign? Any personal contacts with him.

L: I saw him frequently. I didn't go to the hospital to beseige him there. He had too many people already. But he knew where I was and I knew where he was, and we saw each other from time to time. There was a big rush of people to get on the bandwagon. People who had supported Mr. Avery and supported Mr. Brownlee out of personal obligation, were perfectly willing to switch their allegiance to Mr. Johnson now that he was elected.

B: As I understand, Mr. Johnson -- from what I've talked with other people -- he was quite willing to accept such overtures, too, was he not?

L: Well, he had only 30 percent of the vote and he had to run for reelection in about 18 months, so he needed to get all the friends he could get.

B: One of those people, as I recall, having talked with someone about it, was Mayor Miller. Which candidate did he support in the . . .

L: I do not know. I believed at the time that he was supporting Mr. Avery. He had a personal obligation to Mr. Avery for Avery's support to him extending over a period of years.

B: I think that is correct. It is true, is it not, that Mayor Miller, who was a considerable force in Texas politics -- you will attest to that won't you?

L: Yes sir, he was.

B: And they did become very close . . .

L: He moved into Mr. Johnson's bedroom just as fast as he could. Mr. H. A. Wroe was Democratic Finance Chairman in Texas at that time. He was Chairman of the Board of the American National Bank in Austin . . . and for years had been finance chairman of the Democratic Party in Texas.

During the campaign there was an arrangement made for Jim Farley to visit in Texas and to visit in Austin. He dedicated a building in Waco and he did something about a building in San Antonio; he spoke to the Legislature in Austin. Mr. Nalle, who was then Postmaster in Austin, and Mr. Avery went to Waco to join Mr. Jim Farley's party and drive back into Austin. When Mr. Jim Farley drove up Congress Avenue in an open car, Mr. Avery and Mr. Nalle were in the front and back seats of the car with Mr. Farley.

I massed half a dozen pretty girls on the balcony of the Stephen F. Austin Hotel, behind a Johnson Headquarters sign. They set up a whoop and Mr. Farley turned around and gave a great big wave to us anyway. That was the most we could get out of him.

B: Well, you got a little bit more out of Mr. Farley, though, I believe. I should explain at this point, perhaps, that Mr. Lee served eight years as Postmaster in Austin while Mr. Johnson was in Congress.

What else can we add to this record?

L: Well, we rambled on a lot here. I'm not sure there are things we'll think of later that ought to be put in.

This campaign was peculiar in this respect. Each of the candidates had a strong point somewhere. I think I touched on this, but it's a revealing thing.

Johnson was the only one who was able to develop wide-spread strength over the district. Where Mr. Avery was real strong in the east end of Williamson County and Austin; where Mr. Stone was very strong in Williamson County; where Brownlee was strong in Burnet County; where Mr. Harris was strong in Austin County and Bastrop County; where Mr. Shelton was strong in Lee County. None of the others could develop a uniform picture -- a picture that gave them support everywhere. That, I think, was the secret

of the outcome of the Johnson campaign.

B: How would you sum up Mr. Johnson as a man during that period?

L: Mr. Johnson was always, in my experience, a very energetic, earnest man.

A man with high ideals; a man who wanted to do the best job that could be done. He was always concerned about the underdog; about the Mexican boys and girls, and the Negro boys and girls who were not getting enough education, who were having a hard time getting jobs. He was always concerned that people who were associated with him should do the very best they could.

I remember hearing him say something like this -- Never, never should anybody connected with Lyndon Johnson be known as a loafer, or be known as a careless person, or a person who didn't do his very best. He wanted people around him who made the maximum effort, people who cared. If he got some people sometimes who didn't quite measure up, that, of course, was just human error. He was always striving for the ideal, that people should do their very, very best for their fellow man.

B: Thank you, Mr. Ray Lee. You have been very helpful.

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