

INTERVIEW WITH HARVEY PAYNE

PB: This is October 15, 1968. We are in the office of Mr. Harvey Payne, in Austin. Harvey, what is your official title?

HP: I'm the Director of Public Relations for the State Bar of Texas.

PB: Mr. Payne, Harvey Payne, how long have you known Mr. Johnson?

HP: Since school days, almost 40 years, 39 years, to be exact.

PB: You mean you were at the Southwest State College with him?

HP: Yes, I'm a little bit younger than he--but not much. He was a senior when I was a freshman. That's how I got acquainted with him.

PB: Did you go into the NYA where so many other Southwest Texas boys went?

HP: I went into the NYA, but not until after Mr. Johnson was elected to Congress.

PB: Oh, I see.

HP: When he decided to run for Congress he called a number of his friends of the old days and I was one of them. I was working in Burnet County then for the County Agent,

the Triple A, the agricultural program.

PB: Well, you were luckier than most young men of your generation in that you had a job then.

HP: I was. I was about the richest man in Burnet County. I was making about \$150 a month! And there weren't any deductions either.

PB: No income tax deductions.

HP: Not in those days, no.

PB: That was a hundred and fifty clear.

HP: Over \$1800 a year.

PB: Then after Mr. Johnson was elected to Congress by the way, did you have any part in that election campaign, the 1937 campaign?

HP: Yes.

PB: What did you do in that campaign?

HP: Well, my wife and I both were active. Mary and Lyndon's youngest sister, Lucia Alexander, who was living in Burnet then--beat the streets and carried the message. And the first vote my wife ever cast--and she's very proud of that--was for Lyndon Johnson for Congress. She was 21 in the early part of 1937, the year of his first campaign.

PB: Then what did you do, personally? Could you do much campaigning, as such, in your job?

HP: Not extensively, but I talked to everybody I knew in Burnet County, which was a considerable number because I worked with the farmers and ranchers up there. Although it's not a big county, I talked to as many as I could and did what I could without laying myself liable to the Hatch Act because I was working for the Federal Government.

PB: Was the Hatch Act in effect in those days?

HP: It was in fact.

PB: I didn't realize it went back that far.

HP: Yes. This was 1937.

PB: 1937, yes. Then after Mr. Johnson was elected to Congress, I understand that sometime after that period you went to work for the NYA.

HP: I did. He asked me if I'd like to have a little bit better job. And I'd worked for almost three years for the Triple A and the salary was about the same, and I told him I would be delighted to have a little bit better job.

PB: What did this NYA job pay?

HP: I was making \$1800 at Burnet; I came to Austin at \$2000.

PB: You got a magnificent raise from \$1800 to \$2000?

HP: From \$150 to \$166.66 a month.

PB: Something that I have emphasized in talking with other

people of our generation is that it's very difficult to explain to a person of this generation, this affluent society that we have today, what it meant to live and make a living in the days of the depression. Did you find it pretty tough in those days, too?

HP: That's right. I went to work before I went to Burnet County in my own county of Williamson. I went to work for the County Agent, Dor W. Brown, Sr., who became my father-in-law. I was making \$9.60 a week. That's where I met the girl that I married. She was making about that too. There wasn't very much money around.

PB: And there weren't very many jobs around.

HP: No, there weren't.

PB: What did you do for the NYA?

HP: I came down here in connection with its work program. I was district director for a while. I succeeded Sherman Birdwell, who went to Washington as Mr. Johnson's first secretary. And then later on I moved over to Taylor for a year as what they called the area supervisor. We had about four or five counties and we looked after work projects of young people under the program.

PB: What kind of work projects did you have that you recall now?

HP: Well, one of the things that we did was help build roadside parks. I give credit to the NYA for the State of

Texas having one of the best systems of roadside parks anywhere. That's one of the things we did, and we assisted school districts in work projects of various kinds, in building.

PB: On this roadside park project that started in NYA days, it might be of interest, I know it's of interest to me at least, to note how they have evolved over the years from what was just a place where you could get out of the car and stretch your legs and maybe sit down on a bench to a full-fledged rest stop that they have nowadays.

HP: That's right.

PB: Have you noticed those?

HP: I have. There's one between here and Georgetown that's almost an institution, it's so big and on either side of the highway. Rest rooms and barbecue pits and picnic tables and that sort of thing. You don't find them like that elsewhere. My wife and I just finished a 5,000 mile trip to the west coast and we saw nothing to compare with Texas in the way of highway rest areas. Sometime we'd have to drive down in the bar ditch to stop for a sandwich and a few minutes rest.

PB: The original roadside parks, however, were just
what did they consist of?

HP: Well, as I remember, they were mainly built of stone and the tables would have some kind of roof over them most of the time. They were just nice, neat, clean places for travelers to stop and relax and eat.

PB: During the years between Mr. Johnson's election to Congress and his election to the United States Senate, did you have contacts with Mr. Johnson during that period?

HP: Yes, we carried on a correspondence all during most of that time. I was in the service for a couple of years during that time. But we did carry on correspondence. I'd report to him little things I would hear about his welfare and that sort of thing.

PB: That brings up an interesting question an interesting facet, I would say, of Mr. Johnson's character, that I have observed from other vantage points. He liked to have his friends tell him what was going on back in Texas, didn't he?

HP: Absolutely.

PB: And could you tell us what sort of things you might write to him in a letter?

HP: Well, I might hear I was naturally still interested in the government's agricultural program. I'm from an agricultural county and I knew a lot of people. My

father-in-law was County Agent. And I attended a lot of those meetings and when I heard criticism I'd pass it on to the Congressman. And by the same token if I heard something in the way of praise, and more often it was praise than criticism, I would report that, too.

PB: For the agricultural program.

HP: Yes, for the program. The farmers always have had a pretty hard time making a living, most of them. I think it is borne out by the referendums they used to have, you know, where they would vote whether they wanted the government program or not and it always carried big. You'd have a minority just like in any group who'd be critical. But I think it was great, myself.

PB: You say you maintained a sort of sporadic correspondence with the Congressman during those years except for the period when you were in service, of course, and then after you came out of service what contact did you have with Mr. Johnson?

HP: Well, about the first thing I did when I came back from China in 1946 was get into the campaign. He had an opponent. It turned out not to be as difficult as it sounded but the Congressman's friends were concerned and I remember the first trip I made was with Jake Pickle.

We went over to Williamson County, as I remember, to a meeting and

PB: Jake Pickle is the present congressman from this district?

HP: Yes.

PB: What was that campaign? Was that the Hardy Hollers Campaign?

HP: That's correct.

PB: In other words, Hardy Hollers was trying to be the Democratic nominee for Congress from this district.

HP: That's right. One of his principal issues, I guess you could say, was the fact that Mr. Johnson had bought an apartment house out here on Dillman Street and I think he paid at that time it was an exorbitant amount it was about \$10,000. But it was a real nice place and Hollers claimed that Mr. Johnson retired his debt in about a week, as I remember--a week or two. That's as I remember it.

PB: Well now, to get the record entirely straight, the so-called apartment house on Dillman Street actually was a duplex, wasn't it?

HP: Actually, it was a tri-plex. It could house three families.

PB: And the Johnsons occupied a part of the house?

HP: Yes, sir, that's right.

PB: And rented out the other?

HP: Yes, sir.

PB: How did you fight this rumor?

HP: Well, we denied it.

PB: You don't recall the details?

HP: I don't recall the details of it, but Hollers harped on it in every speech he made.

PB: As I recall the campaigns in those days, Johnson was accused of owning practically every apartment house in Austin.

HP: Yes, that's correct. That's right.

PB: You were in the 1946 campaign; that was the campaign for Congress, and then we come to the 1948 campaign and that is the one that I really need your reminiscences about because it seems to me that that was a turning point in Mr. Johnson's career. Anyway, what was your capacity in this 1948 campaign?

HP: Well, let me make a few little comments here. In 1948 in my opinion he introduced a new dimension in state-wide political campaigns. And that was the use of a helicopter to cover this big state. And you just have to have something like that to do it. And with this new concept came the necessity for the use of advance men.

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This was not unlike the advance men the circuses used over 75 or 100 years where they'd go ahead of the circus and put up billboards and give out tickets and everything--we all remember when we were kids. And it was our responsibility--I think there were two or three others doing the same thing that I was doing because we had to go in different directions to stay ahead of the helicopter. The first thing I would do would be to select the site for the helicopter to land, and in this we had to make two judgments. We had to find a site that was safe for the aircraft to land and at the same time it would have to be accessible to the general public because he wasn't just out riding for health. He wanted to see as many people as possible and he did. And as soon as I would find a site and satisfy myself that it was the place, I would mark the site with streamers of yellow crepe paper here on a fence post or somewhere. Yellow is more visible from the air; that's why we used the yellow paper. And then the next thing we'd do, we'd go to the newspaper and we would place an ad in the paper giving the time and the date when Mr. Johnson would arrive in his helicopter, and we weren't satisfied with that; we would also try to get a poll list and send post-cards out giving this same information and most places we employed girls as telephone operators to just go down

and call everybody in the telephone book. And by the time the day came for the Congressman--or the candidate--to arrive, well nearly everybody knew about it and since it was such a new thing a lot of people may have come out to see his helicopter, but they also stayed to hear the candidate, and in those days we didn't have the same kind of rude demonstrators that we have nowadays.

PB: Mr. Payne, let me interrupt you just for a moment or two there. This concept of the advance man, I have heard said, by others and you, that so far as the political campaign was concerned it was a new concept for politics. Is that your impression?

HP: That's my impression; I'd never heard of it before. It was a brain-child of the candidate.

PB: But actually it's standard operating practice now.

HP: I think it is, yes, sir.

PB: All the candidates.

HP: It has to be if a candidate for state office is to be effective.

PB: No matter how they're traveling, there's somebody got to go in advance and get things set up for them.

HP: I'd like to make a note here, too, that I presume that as I recall most of the places, we didn't have very much money to operate on. We had to pay for that ourselves,

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I mean, there just wasn't funds for it and some places, I remember at Brady, Texas--that's the first time I ever met Earl Rudder; Earl was a friend of Mr. Johnson's --and took me in his car.

PB: Just a moment now. Mr. Rudder went on from there to become President of the Texas A & M College.

HP: Yes, sir. And he is now president of the system, I believe.

PB: A & M system.

HP: Yes. And he wouldn't let me pay for a thing. I offered, you know, to pay for these services such as newspaper ads and telephone operator but he said, "Just forget it. We'll take care of that here." Another place I went was just the opposite, and that was in Mason, Texas. I had cards with Mr. Johnson's picture and I wanted to go around the square and put them in the windows of the merchants and they wouldn't let me, and they said, "Well, you just forget it." His opponent at that time was former governor Coke Stevenson and they said, "This is Coke Stevenson country and we won't allow it!" So I recalled that my father-in-law used to be a county agent and pretty popular in Mason, and so I asked--the Commissioner's court was in session and I asked if I could have an audience with the Commissioners and County Judges. They

granted it. I walked in and introduced myself and told them my problem and they agreed, "Well, this is Coke Stevenson country." And then I told them that I was the son-in-law of Dor Brown. That just completely melted the opposition. Although they didn't say that they'd support my candidate, they asked, "How's ol' Dor?", and said, "You can be sure you can put your material up."

PB: You were just lucky in marrying the right girl.

HP: That's correct.

PB: Mr. Payne, you started out on a brand new enterprise. Did anything happen on your first day that you recall in particular?

HP: I don't recall the date that we began, but my first assignment was to go to Paris, Texas, up on the Red River, and Mr. Johnson left here, probably the next day, as I remember, with his pilot and a newspaper man who was a friend of his. I don't remember where all they went, but they just went from one community to the other, just sort of hedge-hopping up toward Northeast Texas, and that first night everything looked good; they were encouraged over the crowds they were getting. The helicopter caused quite a stir because it was something new and although you see them everyday now, at that time they were an exciting oddity. That evening

in the little town they decided to spend the night a number of newspaper men were around visiting with them and asking questions and he was talking to them. One of them said, "Mr. Johnson, could you sort of summarize your remarks in your speeches today?" And he turned to a newspaper man--we'll call him Henry--and he said, "Henry, you were out there with me all day. Would you give him this information?" In fairness to the newspaperman, he had a migraine headache and was taking aspirin by the handful. He replied: "Well, Congressman, I don't recall that you said anything very important today." I don't know exactly what reaction Mr. Johnson took, but he was more charitable than I would have been. I'd have made him walk back to Austin! But I want to tell you that he was assigned to another part of the campaign back in Austin.

PB: This newspaper man that you speak of was on the he was part of the campaign?

HP: He was part of the campaign. He wasn't representing the newspaper; he was on the staff, the campaign staff.

PB: He either wasn't listening very good or he didn't have very much diplomacy.

HP: He certainly didn't.

PB: Harvey, when you went into one of these towns to set it up in advance, how long did it take you? In other words,

suppose you found a vacant lot or a vacant space where this helicopter could set down. How did you go about getting

HP: I had to obtain permission from whoever owned it or from the city. Usually I'd go to the Mayor or whoever was the head man of the town to obtain permission. It would take--oh, I think the minimum as I recall, was two days, because sometimes you had to have handbills printed and it mostly took a little bit. You had to lay out an ad and--nothing fancy because I wasn't a professional advertising man--but at least we got the message when Johnson's helicopter was coming to town.

PB: Most of these small towns that you went into, they didn't have a daily newspaper. Would you go in well in advance so that

HP: We tried to go in far enough in advance that we could assure that the word got out. As you say, we were just lucky when we could get a weekly newspaper to come out a day or two ahead of his arrival. I had to get there as early as

PB: In other words, how far ahead of the candidate were you?

HP: Well, sometimes as much as a week. Then

PB: Then they would have to work it out so the helicopter would arrive at such and such a time in such and such a small town.

HP: Yes.

PB: How many stops did he make a day? Do you recall that?

HP: I would just guess as many as ten. I don't remember that, but he would make an awful lot of them.

PB: Well, getting back to this selection of sites for the helicopter to land in, did you ever run into any troubles finding a parking place?

HP: Well, I did by the candidate's standards! One time he called us all in and he was just at the point--he was exhausted, he was at the point of exasperation, and he said--this was about three or four of us--he says, "You know, I'm just no longer concerned about winning this campaign; my chief worry now is just coming out of it alive." He says, "Harvey, I believe you're trying to kill me!" Sometimes one of the problems we'd have would be trying to keep the helicopter away from high wires. I remember one time he landed at dusk between Sherman and Denison--that ballpark that used to have the Sherman and Denison Twins, you know?

PB: Yes.

HP: It was a pretty nice place, it had lights and everything. But there was a lot of wires in there. He landed there, but he didn't particularly relish it. The pilot shared his concern, too.

PB: Is that right?

HP: That's right. I wish I could remember the names of those two pilots. They were great! He started out with a big Sikorsky--a big helicopter, and that's what he was riding in when he landed on Market Square in Paris, Texas. I want to tell you, it looked to me like just thousands of people were lined up in that square. It was the most exciting thing I ever saw. That big aircraft just landed right in the middle of it. Lyndon got out and the people started yelling and applauding. He really had an audience! They heard him and stayed to watch the big chopper take off.

PB: He reacts to an audience.

HP: Yes, he does, very well!

PB: Harvey, I can appreciate that it was quite difficult to set up these helicopter landings in small towns and get him advertised, etc., and get a crowd out for the candidate, but when you went into a big town, your problems must have been compounded and confused, if I may say so. Can you recall any particular episodes of your troubles in a big town?

HP: Yes, I sure can. The biggest town in Texas, as a matter of fact, it was Houston. And I don't know at what stage of the campaign that this was, but Mr. Johnson was to

come to Houston and speak at Hermann Park and I was there along with two other men and what we did was place newspaper ads and radio spot announcements and everything we could think of, not quite as detailed as in the smaller towns, because, for instance, it wouldn't have been very practical to try to get a telephone campaign out in Harris County. So we did the best we could and we really thought it was in fairly good shape by the date of Mr. Johnson's arrival. But he came to town and he took one look at it and said, "This just won't do."

PB: Where was this?

HP: This was at Hermann Park.

PB: Hermann Park. I don't believe I've ever been

HP: Well, it is, or was, a very prominent park in Houston.

PB: A ball park?

HP: No, it's just a

PB: General park?

HP: general park. And so he gave these assignments, and I don't recall who had them, but one of the main assignments was to get this place lighted.

PB: So the helicopter could land.

HP: That's right. And so they got the Houston Power and Light Company to come out with all their equipment and

their power post-hole diggers and I don't think it was over five hours they had to light that field, but they lit it. I mean they put up these tall, towering light poles and put lights on them and then somebody had borrowed for us a mobile beacon--search-light, I presume you'd call it, something like that. We had it out there to help mark the field, too. And the crowd started to gather. We had a respectable crowd for a big city like Houston, and particularly another drawing card, as I pointed out before, was the fact that he was going to land this night in that helicopter. So we were all excited, of course, and everybody looking skyward to see the first sight of the helicopter as it came down. And all at once the candidate walked on the stage and some untactful member of the troupe, as I recall he was some entertainer from Hollywood, said, "Senator, that was a mighty smooth landing." And that didn't get a big rise out of him. And it wasn't funny to me, either. What had happened--the helicopter developed engine trouble.

PB: And couldn't fly in?

HP: And couldn't fly in, so he had to come in an automobile.

PB: After all those arrangements that you had been making over how many days?

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HP: Well, it couldn't have been less than ten. Anyway, it turned out to be a very successful meeting and it was a very good turnout, he made a good speech. And that night, we took two of the Hollywood entertainers, and we drove to Dallas--I say we, I've forgotten who else was with me--and we went from Houston to Dallas to close the campaign in a couple of days.

PB: Harvey, what other anecdotes or incidents do you remember from that 1948 campaign?

HP: Well, at the time they weren't particularly funny for me and I don't imagine they were for Mr. Johnson, but I imagine that he could recall with some pleasure some of the things that absolutely exasperated him. About two days after the Houston rally we were in Dallas, and as I recall it was about the day before election day. Mr. Johnson wanted to cover every community in Dallas County if he could, not by helicopter, but by automobile. We were staying at the Adolphus Hotel and as prior arranged, I met Mr. Johnson at 5:30 in the morning in the lobby of the Adolphus Hotel. And he asked me where John Connally was. John--he was in our troupe and staff--and so I said, "Well, I'll try to find him," and so

PB: At 5:30 in the morning.

HP: Yes, at 5:30 in the morning. So I knew where some of our people were staying and I called them and woke them up and asked them if they knew where John was and they said no, and I just couldn't find him anywhere. I came back and told Mr. Johnson, "I'm sorry, but I just can't find him. I don't know where he is." I'll never forget what he said: "He is the goddam lose-iest boy I ever say!" And another incident in Dallas County, a companion of mine and a newspaper man, a man from the Dallas Times-Herald, and I met Mr. Johnson. We had Mrs. Johnson with us, too. We met him at a small airport on the edge of Dallas--I don't recall the name of the airport--we got in his car and we were headed for the Adolphus Hotel, and the driver, whom we'll call Fred, wasn't too familiar with Dallas, and he got on the wrong side of the street to let us out at the Adolphus Hotel. And Lyndon was just beside himself. He said, "Fred, I wish to hell you would find out where you're going before you start out!" Anyway, we circled a couple of blocks and we finally got to the entrance of the Adolphus Hotel. We started in stringing through the lobby. Someone handed Mrs. Johnson a big beautiful bouquet of roses and at the lead was Mary Rather, a long-time personal secretary of Mr. Johnson's when he was in

Congress and during his political career in Washington, really. Mary was leading us up to Mr. Johnson's room. It was on the third floor, as I recall. We went up there and Mary reached to open the door and she didn't have the key. And Lyndon said, "Mary, you of all people. I just don't understand it; I just believe everybody's trying to defeat me!"

PB: Harvey, I think we've pretty well covered the trials and tribulations of an advance man for Mr. Johnson or working for anybody else, for that matter. Have you had contacts with Mr. Johnson in recent years?

HP: Yes. About 1951 I was in 1950 I was in the Marine Corps Reserve, and was recalled to active duty along with many others during the Korean Conflict, and I was sent to the west coast and because of my age they told me, I wasn't sent overseas. And so I went down to the Marine Base at San Diego as a public relations officer down there, and Mr. Johnson requested the Marine Corps to transfer me to Washington and they granted his request and I went to Washington and was detailed from Headquarters, Marine Corps, over to the Capitol, and worked for the Senate Preparedness Subcommittee, of which he was chairman. It was a very happy experience, and I stayed there for about six months, I guess it was,

and I had my family with me. And I stayed there until about the time the mission I had gone over there to work on was completed and then I went back to the west coast. But during my stay in Washington I had many pleasant visits with him. He was always very considerate of me as a member of his staff. I remember one time he introduced me to the Vice President of the United States, Mr. Alben Barkley. We just met in the corridor. One other instance--it was years later than that--my wife and daughter and I were in Washington visiting and we had a call from Mrs. Johnson. She invited us to have lunch with her. She picked us up--I've forgotten now, I believe it was at Congressman (at that time) Homer Thornberry's office and took us over to the Senate dining room. It was right after the regular lunch period, and we sat down and ordered lunch. The place was practically vacated, and Senator Johnson came off the floor and visited with us quite a while. We talked about the folks at KTBC and all that sort of thing. About that time, in comes Senator Hubert Humphrey. Mr. Johnson motioned for him to come over and he introduced us to the Senator from Minnesota. We had a very pleasant hometown visit right there talking to Mr. Humphrey. The only other person--I'll never forget this as long as I live--

the only other person in the dining room was a young man with a shaggy hairdo. It was Senator John F. Kennedy. He was visibly amused. And that's an experience that I shall never forget. I wished I could record it for my grandchildren. It was a great experience for us.

PB: Did you have other contacts with the Johnson family?

HP: Yes, I worked with Lyndon's remarkable mother, Mrs. Sam Johnson, over a period of a year or more on pictures for a scrapbook. They were pictures made during the period from Lyndon's babyhood to his young boyhood. I had access to a photo laboratory and made copies of the pictures--from daguerreotypes, tintypes and faded photographs. The copies weren't particularly good. But I understand they recently were published in book form.

PB: I think that's right. Harvey, I believe we've fairly well covered your reminiscences and stories about Mr. Johnson. If you would care to, I would like to have from you a statement concerning your opinion of the man, his character, his contribution to this country, whatever you care to say.

HP: It would be a pleasure. I have known him, as I told you at the outset of this little visit, next year it will be forty years. He has been intensely interested in government and politics all of his life. Even when we were in school, we had a little group where we would try to--and

we were usually successful--have our boys elected officers of various classes--from freshman to senior classes. By the same token, we would promote our girls as class sweethearts--the college called them "gallardians". Sort of kid stuff, I suppose, but it was a training ground.

I've known Lyndon well and I was with him for many years, particularly when he was a representative. Consequently, it was a great, great thrill for my family and me when he was elected President of the United States. He fell heir to many problems with which no human being should have to be confronted. The war has been a major thing, of course. He felt that he had to prosecute it as I believe any loyal American feels. As for his critics, mostly partisan, I am confident that history will set the record straight as far as his domestic and foreign efforts are concerned.

He has been my friend for all these years. He has done much for me, personally. But more importantly, he's done a monumental job for this Nation. And his tracks for the common good of Texas will never be erased. Our state and our people will miss him.

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By HARVEY O. PAYNE

to the

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