

INTERVIEW I

DATE: January 11, 1978
INTERVIEWEE: MILDRED PORTNER
INTERVIEWER: MICHAEL L. GILLETTE
PLACE: Mrs. Portner's home in St. Petersburg Beach,
Florida

Tape 1 of 2

G: Let's start with your background. You were born where?

P: I was born in Gratiot County, Michigan, and worked several years for the state of Michigan. I worked in special sessions of the legislature also and was involved in Governor Green's campaign in Michigan, working out of the Michigan Securities Commission because one of the commissioners ran his campaign. I had a breadth of experience in the highway department, State Administrative Board, Michigan Securities Commission, and later in the secretary of state's office. In that period I became a good friend of Frank Fitzgerald, who later became governor. I was secretary of the Young Republican Club at that time and became involved in a general [way]. [It] at least gave me a general knowledge of politics in Michigan, and I became very interested in that sort of thing.

Then of course we came into the Depression years and I worked in the early programs in Michigan, in Lansing, and then went to Detroit as the fourth person on the payroll for WPA. I had that experience for several years and finally became the business manager of the federal projects, which included art, theater, music, historical

records, writers, et cetera. In that capacity I got to know the gentlemen from Washington running the programs and dealt with them constantly, and one of those gentlemen was Luther [H.] Evans, who was head of the Historical Records Survey at the national level. I knew him from about the time he was thirty-four. I came to Washington during the war because of my husband's work. I had gone into retailing as just something to do while raising my son, and then he came down to the National Archives in war work. With that event I naturally was interested in going to the Library of Congress, and Dr. Evans was interested in having me because he was then Librarian of Congress. He had gone from HRS to head of what was then called the Legislative Reference Service, which is for Congress, within the Library, and then he became the Librarian.

He hired me as the secretary of the Library, and I always had a library-wide capacity in that job. One of the things that he wanted to develop very much was to give better service, of course, to Congress. He was constantly aiming toward that, and it evolved so that for many years, and especially to the period with which I became involved with the Johnson office, [I had] very broad authority in that capacity. I think I should state here that in that particular capacity in the Library, in my job description it stated that I might use a high degree of independence in exercising and conducting the varied aspects of all paperwork management functions within the Library, with the addition that I would use individual initiative diplomacy and experienced judgment in connection

with the advisory service provided to Library officials, members of Congress, and their staffs, wherein the incumbent was delegated full authority to speak and act for the Library of Congress in all matters pertaining to paperwork management. This authority carried with it the responsibility and necessity of producing an end result of the highest qualitative order. So that it was in that dual capacity that I worked for the offices on the Hill and met with the congressmen, senators, and started reviews and surveys of the flow of their paperwork and instituted the most current and advanced procedures related to paperwork management at any given time. This covered a span of about eighteen years.

The first contact that I had with the Johnson office was in early March, 1958, and that was through a telephone call from Mrs. Juanita Roberts, his personal aide and secretary. She asked that I make time if possible to come over and review their system and go deeply into their current records management, because they were having very serious problems and very great backlogs.

G: Did she indicate what the problems were?

P: The flow and mostly backlogs. No matter how much staff they had or [who] gave them odd people to work there, they still had it. She knew that there was something the matter with what was happening that didn't have to do necessarily with people, but perhaps the procedures. So I went over and had two sessions before March 18 with Walter Jenkins and Mrs. Roberts. The first one I spent probably two hours with Walter Jenkins, and he went into the safe and showed

Portner -- I -- 4

me background documentation on Johnson that he had just held there for historical purposes and showed me that he had an intelligence about this matter of maintaining a record. But he simply wanted to be relieved of the responsibility for the problems of the current work situation. Mrs. Roberts, of course, was helping and directing, but it took from her job also. They had a young man in there, but he was backlogging, and it was concerning even the form letters getting out to constituents. It was really--the place was falling apart. But they knew there was a problem and recognized it, so they asked us for the aid.

On March 18 I assigned a woman, Mrs. Dorothy Springer at that time, later to be known as Dorothy Territo, for a couple of weeks to work solely with the materials and to see what was happening. The purpose for her going in, because we didn't want to jar the place too much, was to look at informational materials and speeches and memoranda and press releases and get a feel for the office. Then we continued that and we thought that they had manpower problems, but as we got more deeply into it we found they had procedural problems and they were very grave.

G: Could you describe the problems?

P: Yes. The procedural problems--nothing was recorded. They would bring someone in new, and they didn't know a great deal about the office. There was no training, very little orientation. They just were sort of trying to swim against the current. But when it got so that mail didn't get out even though it might have been answered

Portner -- I -- 5

promptly, the separation of files and the maintenance of the current record was really in very bad state.

So we made a total survey. I sent another young man to work with Mrs. Springer. He charted, made a flow of the process, finding out what was happening at each desk and also what was happening in the maintenance of a record of the form letter, the speeches, et cetera, so there could be reference work back and forth. Then we instituted out card systems, and we found that their system of filing was not tied to a rigid, well-known classification system of any kind. We had to sample materials and start with subject headings and really reconstitute the whole process and put in a procedure where if there was a change made it was known to maybe twelve people instead of one in such a system, especially as they were dealing with the identification of files. Then we separated the congressional correspondence from the general run of the mill, and we went over the whole problem of case files, their referral and getting answers back. There was damage done at that time to his constituency because they didn't get references back on a veteran's problem or a compensation problem, because no one knew where the file had gone or what anybody had done with it. We made a totally new system.

We first concentrated on the things that would meet the constituency need, where there were hot spots and that sort of thing. Then as we did that, of course, and instituted a complete system, we were able to catch up with the idea of record copies of the speeches and identify by category the kind of thing that was going on in the

Portner -- I -- 6

Senate, his votes and all that sort of thing. There really wasn't a record. That took us at least--my first report to Senator Johnson on that was April 18, 1958. That meant that we had had a little more than thirty days to give some concept to a new system and what had been happening. Mrs. Springer classified current correspondence for six days with a member of my staff sent in to help. They worked thirty-five hours alphabetizing and filing masters because you couldn't find anything, and if the masters aren't filed daily then the system breaks apart completely.

Then we went into the problem of manpower and we found that Bruce Thomas, who was in charge of the current records and the mail, had so many other duties. There was a backlog of look-ups, and current mail was not being processed. In the meantime, we went into the manpower problem, and it was found that Mr. Thomas was unable to do his work due to the pressure of other work. He devoted less than half his time to records processing, and his aide, a Mr. Langford, engaged largely in the mail opening duties because Johnson's mail was always exceedingly heavy. Then they had less time than ever for look-ups, but they assigned an extra person to the operation and then they brought in additional aid on a temporary basis for processing of the outgoing mail. We decided that Mr. Langford had to get back to the current records because he was familiar with their system and had to learn the new system we were instituting.

This wasn't a cure-all in the maintenance and control of correspondence in that office, because it was found that correspondence

Portner -- I -- 7

inside the folders was not alphabetized. We found one to five misfiled pieces per folder and there were three hundred folders, meaning then that since no effort was made to alphabetize as far as finding anything was concerned, we were carrying three hundred to fifteen hundred lost cases in the current files. No amount of reference to peaches [?] could help this because they never got filed.

We were really having to tear down an old system and complete a new one. During that transition, of course, morale went down. We could only pick up pieces for the moment in order to keep things going, so then we started concentrating on getting the masters in the file and then searching the files day by day, so many. They did much work between eight-thirty and nine-thirty in reconstruction, and then they had to go about the day's business, because again there was the influx of mail. We developed the outline, and we arranged two hundred and thirteen cubic feet of old records plus instituting the new system. And believe me, Mrs. Springer, later known as Mrs. Territo, did a magnificent job.

But we could never have done any of this without the full support of Walter Jenkins and Juanita Roberts. Juanita was making Walter Jenkins aware of these things. She wrote a full memo on December 20, 1958, telling him the real condition. And really, Bruce Thomas, who was in charge, was not at fault. He was as confused and frustrated as anyone. He simply finally realized that we were there to help him, but that took time with the total staff. Then we had to institute rules in the so-called satellite spots of the office where we

Portner -- I -- 8

had to set a proper flow from the executives into the office of the correspondence and to explain to them. We instituted additional carbons so that we wouldn't have to make master file pieces, that was a sheet of paper with designations on it, but we could use the carbon. And that took time. Asking people to make extra carbons and asking them to pull from letters and routine and set up a reading file and all of that took us probably the first three months.

After that we began to look around for the archival copies of speeches and the annotated speeches where they'd give Mr. Johnson the first draft and then it would be handed to several people. We didn't even have a record of the exact speech that he gave at any time, whether it was outside the Congress or whether it was in Congress. But we also tied this total thing together so that there were routines. In using the form letter to answer the constituent we found a roomful of envelopes full of mail, but never could we find the form letter that went out to the person. So when they wrote the second form letter on a piece of legislation explaining what was happening in the Senate, it was impossible to tell what Johnson's thoughts were about that. So we started the book about that piece of legislation. We then established an archival book of form letters, like twenty-five hundred letters, and they were separated pro and con. We made mail counts and built statistics, but when that mail was put away, until the legislative bill or whatever was happening on the floor with Senator Johnson was completed, we knew then what the next form letter would say because we had a record of it. From that time

Portner -- I -- 9

on, we had the first orderly process for recording the Senator in any fashion.

The speech classification started later and was done then by Bruce Thomas who was experienced. We began to build the basic record, and also could give service on files without being behind into the hundreds of look-ups, so the staff could operate. That was followed by constant training of members of staff and orienting them to the reasons for doing things in an orderly fashion, giving them some understanding that, really, the lifeblood of a senator's office or a congressman's office has to do with getting the correspondence answered, keeping a record, and being able to service the staff so that they could expedite mail, so they can expedite look-ups into facts that have come before in operation. It was December 17, 1958, that I reported once again that we believed we had developed an adequate system for the control of current records and that we had a system that gave us protection and signals as to backlogging and all that sort of thing. Then the staff began to understand and feel very good, because they could have service.

G: Did you meet much resistance from the staff at first?

P: Well, yes, but it wasn't the kind of resistance that could not be quickly overcome. It was the time that it took in order to make them understand this was an aid. When they have to go back and do back work and they are so far behind they want to stop right there and start with the current and forget about the back, but you can't do that when you have many inquiries and references to answer.

Portner -- I -- 10

Mail has to be answered in proper fashion, because if someone gets a second letter and they have not been satisfied with their first inquiry they are very unhappy. As soon as they saw something working, especially as we got our master file and the key to the system updated, they became happy. But it was a year of very great strain on Mrs. Springer Territo, because she, remember, was an outsider and nobody likes an efficiency expert. But you have to be strong enough to convey the fact that you're trying to institute efficient systems and yet help them along.

G: Did you keep an active hand in this yourself? Did Mrs. Springer report back to you weekly?

P: Mrs. Springer met with me at least twice a week, and I went there about three times a week. I tried to go every other day so that she wouldn't be chasing back and forth. There were times the telephoning was just not adequate, but we were in touch by phone constantly for the ten years. If I was in the Library I was available to her, and if she was over there in the building she was available to me for any question that might come up through Mr. Jenkins or Mrs. Roberts and later many, many more members of staff. So that it was a constant contact.

Then, of course, April and December--April's progress report was three pages; December's was two pages, written directly to the Senator for his information. In the meantime, Mrs. Roberts was getting into the record on the circumstances and conditions in detail that we found, so that it was complete cooperation.

Portner -- I -- 11

But the person that it was hardest for in that first year was Mrs. Springer Territo. She had to have tact but she had to get it done, and she couldn't sit and listen to long stories of why it wasn't done. That's where I came in, by going over and seeming to have a little more authority and perhaps a little more knowledge. In that way, by my meeting with the staff--I started in April meeting with three people or four people. I would go over there maybe every other day, and I would meet with them once a week to tell them how much they had accomplished and what we were going to do next, even though Mrs. Territo had told them and planned it, just to give her support and to give them an idea that we were coming out of the woods. That was the continuation, and everybody seemed to be very pleased by June, 1959, as to where we stood. That was my next report ending May 31, 1959. We spoke of training of the staff, and all cases were completed and final action had been recorded on them.

At that time, within that year in the next six months, the equipment that they worked with [wasn't adequate]. They were putting papers on chairs. The space was of course limited, so we built some functional furniture. I had a man on my staff who did this for me in many offices, and sometimes in the Library. We fixed up an "easy find" table, we called it, because we had pockets where if it wasn't in the file, it was there. It was about eight feet long, and it had a bin on it for the incoming mail and it had a bin so that as the mail would come in we could have it there and everything was laid out. So that if we didn't have it in the files there

Portner -- I -- 12

was some system. The functional furniture was installed in both the old and new offices and had relieved fatigue, improved morale, lent orderliness to the processing of correspondence daily.

Then there was a desk to be used by the classifier clerk that was designed so that if he had a pile of material and was going to work on it to classify it it was still available in the record center to people. He couldn't say, "I don't know what I've got." Because that was one of the problems. So that we brought the total count of the speeches classified within a year to a thousand one hundred and fifty items. The archive of famous names and the congressional correspondence grew considerably from the screening of the records maintained prior and without order.

Then we wanted to emphasize the fact that when all records had been screened, disposition made under approved record schedules, the nucleus of the records designated as archival must then be controlled by appropriate procedures as well.

G: Well, now, the disposition--

P: So we started the storage; we did not destruct. It was to remove the clutter and so forth. We set up schedules for breaking the record--we couldn't do that for a year--so that our files weren't so packed. Then we set up an orderly procedure for once a year, for storing a part of the back record in storage boxes and removing them. Because we didn't have space, by the time we got the materials that were out of file in file, for current records processing.

Portner -- I -- 13

That was the beginning of the identification and storage of Johnson's records in an orderly fashion.

G: Was there ever a decision to discard dead files or remove permanently some of the materials that were no longer active files?

P: During the Senate days only, we found that there had been prior destruction in 1941 of his very early records of when he was national youth administrator. So we were very careful. We put records in an area which was called the attic in the Senate instead of destroying. I have here in the record that we finally set up some schedules about three years later to get the old answered and identifiable material that had a form letter that we could identify in the book that had been sent out. We got rid of some of that. But there were certain subjects we never touched. If it was a subject that would--well, say for instance, this is an example of something that seemed to me very important: we never destroyed the records and the collection behind the question of the poll vote because that was very important in the South, the voting rights thing. But things that were common to all offices, some of those back records of correspondence, went out. But you can't have foresight, but you can't have space either. So we did have the form letters that covered them and a covering notice to what it contained. If we thought that it was important, that Johnson's county man back in Texas could use that correspondence, we went over that with Mr. [Clifton] Carter at that time. Sometimes he took the constituent letters for reasons of that kind.

Portner -- I -- 14

But they also had a flow early in their life to the mailing list section. The mailing list was built by the constituent flow of mail, and when we got order they flowed regularly, so that we could build a mailing list from the constituent mail. Many times Mr. Carter would stop in and look at that. In that way we had a better feel for the constituency. Then we established statistics within the very early months on mail, specific subjects as we were getting into the subject outline, and our count pro and con. That continued for ten years as he was vice president and president.

G: I don't want to get ahead of your story, but can you recall your first meeting with Lyndon Johnson in this connection? You mentioned a meeting in which he sat in on the staff.

P: He came in the room and sat at the back of the room while I was talking. That was in February of 1959, but I don't have the date. He was going by, and I think he heard voices and he stopped in. Then he discovered what was happening. But Mrs. Roberts kept him constantly briefed of what was going on.

G: You mentioned before we turned on the tape that he had used the word museum in talking about his artifacts and things.

P: In August 14, 1958, he wrote his mother a letter, and in a carbon of that letter as it flowed across this struck us because he mentioned having a museum--he did not mention a library--in Johnson City. At that time he was thinking really of a museum, and some of the first thinking of Mrs. Johnson's, I'm sure, was frozen by that concept. Then it was later even, but it wasn't just because he

Portner -- I -- 15

became vice president, that he thought of the library. That came out very clearly as he realized what he had as record, and as we started with the photograph files he became oriented toward the archives idea. Because he thought of it as things firstly.

G: How early did you use the term "library"?

P: Always, as he continued as majority leader and we saw what kind of documentation we had, we used the term.

G: In 1959 did you use it?

P: No, we used records center at that time, because we were dealing with current records. But on the side we were bringing along in a line the archival type of record, like the documented speech file and classifying of speeches. As he saw some progress in this sort of thing and he saw the subjects involved with the speeches and all, he became oriented toward the record and away from things. It was before he left the Senate, I will probably find it here later in the records, that library was then the concept. But he also had to learn. He was a very busy man, as we all know, and he never sat down and thought about the Roosevelt Library and the Truman Library as such, as it applied to him. But when he started thinking about it he made broad application of the concept.

G: What was he like in that staff meeting? Have any first impressions?

P: He never asked a question. He smiled two or three times. As he went out he did remark that he wanted everybody to cooperate and do a good job. But that was all. It was very casual. It was Saturday morning. I'm sure he was headed other places. I had met him once

Portner -- I -- 16

before in Jenkins' office, but he did not talk to me that day. He did not disturb us. He just surprised us. But I think it was good for the staff that he was there a minute, because it gave them a feeling that they were part of something and that he bothered.

I thought this was interesting, and I made a note of it after I got off the phone. In April 18, 1958, of course I had sent my first monthly report over, and I was by that time in constant touch with Mrs. Roberts as I was with Mrs. Territo. So that in a conversation on that day she said that, "the Senator loves clean sweeps, changes, new methods, is a gadget lover, and wants immediate results. He grasps and accepts ideas with speed and may decide to make a change within a flash" and that I should be prepared for this. Which I thought was a very cute thing to tell me about, because I had been at that time almost six months in this deal with the office and Mrs. Springer and so forth. I thought that was worth noting, because it showed a [side] of the Senator that I could never have gleaned. But it also put me on my guard, and that's why I made that little note. I thought that was a very significant description. It's right from the telephone.

(Interruption)

G: [Would you like to] start on an explanation of the diary?

P: In my report to Senator Johnson on June 19, 1959, after speaking of the functional furniture and the classification of material and beginning the statistical record, there is an item that I would like to speak to. That is the last paragraph of that memo, 6-18-59. I said

Portner -- I -- 17

that I wanted to thank his staff for their cooperation and the support of Mrs. Springer's efforts to be of service to him, but in the next weeks that I would be available for discussion with Mrs. Roberts and "shall continue my service to Miss [Mary Margaret] Wiley," his secretary, "in connection with the establishment of a format for your most valuable item as concerns your archives: your diary." That was the beginning of the diary form. Mrs. Roberts and I had been working on it and Miss Wiley was very anxious to get a hold of it, but we wanted something we wouldn't have to change the format on several times. Of course, as he became vice president, president, we changed it slightly, but it was continuous.

G: Do you want to explain the concept of the diary?

P: In developing the diary form it took time and a great deal of thought. Of course, Juanita Roberts was the one with the imagination and the genius, because she was going to have to use it as she was going to have to ask others to use it. The first form had a face code on telephone from or to and time and entry, et cetera, but as we developed the final form Mrs. Roberts felt that we might be able to do two things. They had found at the end of the year always there was a tax problem about expenses, and whether he traveled on a commercial plane or what happened. We could never get a clear record. So the code had some things on it that were rarely used, but they were there. We had the expenditure code spelling out the automobile, cab, entertainment, special plane, commercial plane, restaurant tips, and train. Some of them were superfluous, but we put them in so they would be

Portner -- I -- 18

there just in case. Then we had the code for local and long distance, as well as to and from.

But the face had been working. The face of the form had been working beautifully, and it was a daily diary. Where he began his day was very important. We put that in as one of our first bright ideas because many times we couldn't find where he began his day. Then the entries were numbered, and if we wanted a cross reference to the files we could cross reference on a master sheet for the entry, which we did very many times. The travel activity was all on the back. You turned it over, and it was of course arranged so that it went easily into the typewriter. I know that we probably spent altogether, with the expertise and my forms control man, Mrs. Roberts' imagination and my sort of putting it all together and channeling their thoughts into a form, probably a hundred and fifty hours, because I make a note of how many hours we spent on some of these forms. I had to for my own staff.

G: Do you know if other senators had these daily diaries?

P: Mrs. Roberts gave the form to the then-Senator Humphrey, and his man came to me about it and I worked a little bit with his secretary on it. But I think they didn't really believe in the need. They had a format, but it was very simple. Then as Juanita met other people, and if we had a new Congress and she met certain members, she would tell them about the diary form.

G: I realize as far as she was concerned and as far as you were concerned the need was historical and archival and all this, but as far as he

Portner -- I -- 19

was concerned in his office and the institutionalization of this form and its adoption as regular procedure, was it primarily for tax purposes, as opposed to historical purposes?

P: The front was for historical and current records purposes. But I think it was really very interesting that Mrs. Roberts came up with the idea that we could further it on the travel activity, because you had a separate travel file and a very good historical record of the travel file. We had trouble with that file because we didn't want to take current things from it, but we didn't want to add too much to a travel file either. We had to work that out, which I have later here in my memos, how to set up his travel file as vice president and also president and senator.

But this helped her very much on the basis that she was responsible for pulling things together at the end of the year and giving him a package for tax purposes. Even if it didn't work perfectly by other staff members in using it, if she were away or if we hadn't given it to another desk or a second girl or something, it worked for her, and that was important because she was on the phones a great deal. And when she wasn't then the next person had the same group of forms and following day to day. But this helped her very much. We will say this, that if it wasn't filled out to the finite details by some member on the phone for him at the time, she was able to finish it on that day or ask a question. While if she'd had another scrap of paper it wouldn't have happened. So that that's why.

Portner -- I -- 20

I tried using it in the manual on the Hill. I only used a part of the front for general use with senators and congressmen. But they many times hadn't had a complete breakdown of the system and had a complete renovation and a complete orientation. We were along in 1959, remember, when this form was instituted, and along with that there were many other forms that were clarified, redesigned and made available.

G: I might add for the record that the practice of keeping the diary was continued on through the White House years. If anything, it was kept more copiously as years went on and he grew in importance. It's an extremely valuable record in the Library as far as we're concerned.

P: Well, that makes it worth the while. Because if you think, it was instituted in June of 1959, and as we went on none of us could have foreseen what happened. So that to me that was always a very comforting thing. I know that Mrs. Roberts spread the word because that had happened, and it seemed a very good idea.

(Interruption)

G: Photograph files?

P: The photograph files were of great importance, but they also had every kind of problem. We first had to agree to selected categories for the Johnson photograph file. Some of those headings could not be repeated in the subject file because they were such as animals, birds, bill and treaty signings. Then we went into children, church attendance, crowds, dancing, eating. We had to differentiate these and define them for ourselves, because there was an overlap. But

Portner -- I -- 21

when we got down to family portraits and farm groups there were some things we could identify. Then Mrs. Johnson became early involved in flowers before she became officially involved, and we had that category. Then of course funerals, handicapped, labor leaders and groups, trying to separate them and identify them. A mayor didn't want to be identified as a governor and vice versa, so we had that problem. And alphabetical by city. We had press conferences, and then we had to add walks, the President speaking at a podium or speaking informally. Using the telephone was a very large heading. Television viewing: for instance, he would have a group in the briefing room or something, it might be on the Middle East crisis, what have you. And domestic travel and then foreign travel.

G: This file was perhaps an active file, too, because you'd have to make the photographs available for publicity.

P: You're so right, constantly, and we had to see that not the last picture ever went out. We made enemies on that but they did get them from another source, and we knew they could. We always protected the photograph file, because if the last one got out we were sunk. Because the film was not in the order, ever, that the printouts were.

G: Were the negatives also kept, where you had negatives?

P: We had negatives for a while, but then they were taken back and stored properly under a climatic control and so forth. So that is part of the outline for photo files, and that was perhaps the final outline of November 1, 1967. Because this was a final photo file selected categories for the President, but we'd always had one that

Portner -- I -- 22

was behind it for the other times, when he was majority leader especially. There were some Senate photographs, of course, we could never identify, but we went back and we did many, many hours of work on that by just having someone assigned for a while that knew him well at that time. But again, I must say Mrs. Roberts and Mrs. Johnson were the most helpful ones on the photo file. Mrs. Roberts, having worked for him so very long and knowing the Texas people, saved us a great deal. She would have so many every night to help us with.

But from past photos, as we began to build and get order, we could identify other future photos. But we all had to agree on how to handle it. I went to our prints and photographs division and talked to Mr. [Edgar] Breitenbach who was then in charge. We had a mixed system, I found, at the Library, and I have a letter here where I wrote my good friend Philip [C.] Brooks out at the Truman Library. They only had thirty thousand pictures and they had put them in chronology but no subject identification, and he doubted if they ever would. He said that, as usual, they got into it late and identification was difficult. They, of course, had very limited staff and might not be able to do it. So we felt very proud of the fact that we got on this early, got on the diary early, and therefore, at the conclusion of his career in the presidency, we had a body of record and had backed the pieces up right from the beginning, both in speeches, the diary, and the photos.

Portner -- I -- 23

If we really wanted to talk about the total body of record, having gone back and gleaned old, old files, we would have a summer young man who was a law clerk or something come in and work just on that, as the awareness became positive. I just think we both played in luck by not having a change of the person close to him in his administrative processes, like Mrs. Roberts and Walter Jenkins had been with him for so many years. I started out with Walter Jenkins, so that was very important to me. I got a good base while Walter was there. He was so very sincere about this effort, and he saw it in the long term.

Then we got very wonderful cooperation from Mr. [George] Reedy. Of course, he was his press secretary when I first was working with him. He felt it was important that think pieces across the board get into the record, and there is a record here where that was used as an example of all the people that thought things out and gave him aid in briefing in that time. Mr. Reedy did a splendid job. I think as time goes on those records will be very important. We placed them in proper order and with proper subject headings, so that in the main body of record there is a quality to it that is personalized by putting this all together. And when someone left it was still carried out.

In that reference I want to speak of the task force records. One of the first task forces that we felt as we were thinking archivally and library-wise, still as majority leader, not as vice president We thought of task force, but we didn't dare hold

Portner -- I -- 24

them up. Materials were always in current use if you can think of a task force in operation. But when he lost somebody and the task force records were not gleaned rapidly, they would have changed the man [or] the counselor [or] whoever was working on it, then we would lose these records. The whole problem came up of what do we do about task force records.

So when Solis Horwitz, who left the Kennedy task force on civil rights and human rights, was moved to the Pentagon by President Kennedy I was called immediately to go over and have a session with him. Here in my papers I have an outline of some of the things that were in the file, but that was in the fall and the file had not had an entry in it since January, which meant the papers were out with the task force people. But that gave us the concept that we had to have task force records. I think we put in the alarm at the proper time because this was on civil rights. We eventually kept watching those and gathering them. Then Juanita really saw to it that we got task force records and got them in a body and they were protected.

But in connection with this idea of civil rights, she talked to me at some length and we both had a great feeling that this would be important. We felt that there should be a body of record in the Johnson Library that would reveal not only the term of legislation and so forth, but the whole body of record, the effort, should be portrayed. And wouldn't it be wonderful if it could be in the Johnson Library in the South? She wrote a very long memo on that, and from

Portner -- I -- 25

that time on he thought it was a splendid idea.

I want to say this, that I was invited to the seminar on civil rights in Austin, but I couldn't come because of illness. It was one thing that I missed. I would have preferred to be there for that than the opening, but I couldn't be there. As you recall, if you remember, Mr. Johnson was very ill that evening, but it was held and it happened. I hope that somebody will ask for a reference on that rather long memo that Mrs. Roberts wrote and that he accepted as a concept. In my heart of hearts I was very proud that this could happen in the Johnson Library and that he lived to have it happen. But [I] was terribly distraught at his being ill that night. I appreciated the invitation very much even though I couldn't be there.

Now, to get some expansion on the task force files, there is a memo available that went out to the agencies, as will be certainly gleaned from the record, where the agencies should send in materials on several subjects and what they had done for the Vice President or President or for his office on these things. That all took place in routine, but the really bird dogging of the task force papers was a very critical problem because you had men of very high level working on these task forces. We knew that in their briefcases and carrying back and forth and going into meetings that they had to have these records. I would say the loss was marginal, but there was a very great attempt to get them. I am not sure, but I believe that that is not so in the Roosevelt Library and I know it isn't true in the Truman Library, because I have been both places very generally. But

Portner -- I -- 26

I am very proud of that, and it happened just through this one call Juanita made to me when this counsel was leaving and I had the talk with him and recorded what he had in his file. There was so much wrong. I thought that I was going to get really good documentation, but he presented it in such a way that immediately we gleaned the problem. But then we arranged for repairing that situation, and I think that's been very great. That's one point I want to make.

In July of 1965 it was decided that we were losing documentation through the separation of members of staff. It was very important that we set up a safeguard concerning this action. There was really no other way of handling it but by having the President issue an instruction. Any instruction from central files or from the archival group would have had very little meaning. It was pointed out that we were concerned about the lack of safeguards for his records and that we knew that nobody wanted to set up a briefcase search or an office search or that sort of thing. We wanted something put in the record that would plead the integrity of the President's papers and put the responsibility where it belonged, on the staff member, while he was working there currently or as he was separating.

We suggested that we thought it was of critical importance and that it should be a presidential action. We attached a draft of an instruction to go out, and it would be tied to files created or accumulated in their offices which reflected the work they had performed in carrying out presidential assignments and other White House business. It was stated in such a way that it was the President's belief

Portner -- I -- 27

that the files of a presidential assistant engaged in White House business was an extension of the President's own files and should be treated as such. Compliance with the instruction would have required that each member of the White House staff who kept personal or private papers in his office should maintain them separately from the files relating to his White House work, which is almost asking the impossible. But it was an attempt at that.

To this day it's not solved what are presidential papers, and we know that it may not be solved for many years hence. But it was an attempt to at least maintain a basic record through the staff assistants. We just felt that we should point out to the level of staff that surrounds a president that papers in the first place which were purely personal for them should not be there and maintained if they are there in a separate way. We had excellent cooperation from many members of staff, but in a couple of instances in the two years that had elapsed since Mr. Johnson became president we had some difficulty, and in the transition period it would be only certain to happen. So Mr. Johnson issued a brief memo to staff pointing up. Then we left it to the integrity of the staff, and I think on the whole after transition it was rather a successful effort. It is a very tough thing to put into words, because of lack of definition first of all, and secondly, the fact that busy men can't separate their personal files from their so-called business files.

May 19, 1965, something came up that made everybody have a wary feeling, apparently, that was handling the President's papers. There

Portner -- I -- 28

was some expressed feeling that various memoranda and other documents, including ones bearing the President's handwriting, should be destroyed. We don't know where this idea came from. Dorothy pointed out that she'd had long experience and heartbreak over missing documentation in the chronology of the President's activities, labors and achievements, primarily due to the actions of individuals who took it upon themselves to destroy papers and files, thinking they were acting in the best interests of Lyndon Johnson. But time had proven that operationally, historically, the policy [that we were to adopt] was great. No such action should be taken. I had set up a rule that from the vice president on in our time there would be no disposition, no schedules of disposition, and I had much archival precedent to base that on. There was thorough agreement with the Archivist on this. She pointed out that disposition is a very dangerous and irrevocable act and that she didn't feel that any member of staff could foresee the future and therefore should not take it upon themselves. The Archivist of the United States supported us in that judgment, et cetera. She completely agreed that documents and files might have a restriction and be protected, but there must not be destruction.

That had started from the day he became vice president, as far as I was concerned in my orders, but we felt that we had to get this in the record because we didn't know if something was happening to some of the records. We did it to guarantee that there was awareness that this could happen in any arrangement, but must not happen. As

Portner -- I -- 29

of this date in 1965 we put this in the record, hoping that before storage of anything, if an individual had handled it, they would not separate the files and remove materials. This is always such a danger that Mrs. Roberts passed this on to the President, and he assured her that he had given no such order. I presume this happens with a staff of that many, in so many places. But we hoped that this concept that everybody agreed upon was carried out further as the records were stored and shipped to Texas.

In relation to the Majority Leader's records as Lyndon Johnson became vice president, a member of my staff who was in my paperwork management deeply and had worked with making the furniture for the West Wing in the White House and Mrs. Johnson's so-called offices with Bess Abell--he had fashioned furniture that would simultaneously arrange procedures and work flow--was able to go over and see that the records of the Majority Leader of the Senate were closed and an inventory made. Then again, he acted in the same stead when it came to the Vice President's records as Johnson became president. There is a very good drawer-by-drawer inventory and identification of the closing of the Majority Leader's records and the Vice President's records.

However, I was not on the scene when they left for Texas. My last association directly with the White House was in October of that year. But I am assured that it was done in an orderly fashion, because they had previously been stored in the Archives and were waiting movement. We had, as I repeated earlier, established a flow

Portner -- I -- 30

to storage and to the Archives, not put [them] in odd places from the very beginning of the program. They were held on the premises during his majority leadership, but they were moved periodically as he was vice president and president into storage at the Archives.

G: When and how did the National Archives get into the picture? Am I jumping ahead of your story?

P: No. It's in 1965, I think, that--well, after and during the time the legislation was being prepared for the Johnson Library, then the Archives were fully in the policy-making and upper level thing. But the routines of the paperwork went on, never disrupted or consulted with the Archives.

G: Did you do any liaison work with the National Archives?

P: Not as concerns the Johnson Library.

G: When did you first learn that there would be some sort of presidential library, or perhaps even before that, that there was a movement afoot to create a library for his papers?

P: In July, 1961, the Library of Congress wrote for the privilege of depositing Mr. Johnson's papers with the other public papers in the Library. We of course had a depository before the Archives, because the Archives came into being much, much after the Library. The Librarian of Congress served for several years as the archivist before there was established an archivist in Archives. That was in his authority. We had a residue of presidential papers and some important ones. We have the Lincoln papers and so forth. So on July 10, 1961, Mr. [L. Quincy] Mumford wrote for Mr. Johnson's papers, when

Portner -- I -- 31

he was vice president, and he replied that he had made no decision and that he felt flattered to be asked to have his papers taken into the collections of the Library of Congress but he couldn't at that time make a commitment concerning the outlook for disposition.

Confidentially, I knew that the University of Texas had been interested at least a year and that it might possibly be a library.

G: Even before he was president?

P: I think it came to a head after he became president, but there had been some discussion. Well, he was a very important majority leader, let us say, and had a marvelous record as majority leader. I think there was an interest in his papers.

G: Right, but his papers as part of the state or the University of Texas archives, as distinguished from a separate library to house his papers?

P: They didn't talk of the separate building, but they talked of having a separate room, as they do in some places.

G: Oh, they did? I see.

P: There was nothing culminating at that time, but it was important, you see, as he became vice president that there might be an early decision. This is what brought the library's request to him on July 10, 1961. Mrs. Roberts asked me to draft the reply because I knew that there were other interests involved. I drafted the reply to Mumford for her signed by Lyndon Johnson.

November 23, 1964, I had the privilege of going to the Ranch and working on items in the Boyhood Home, such as the mother's glass,

Portner -- I -- 32

identification of it in the Ruth Webly [?] book and then seeing the furnishings and later giving complete identification of those of the Eastlake [?] period to Mrs. Johnson. I had a view of the Birthplace and was asked to do a memo on the furnishings that were to be completed on the Birthplace, which I did later for Mrs. Johnson. In the afternoon, I went directly to Johnson City to work in the Boyhood Home.

Dorothy Territo and archivist [Wayne C.] Grover traveled around the countryside with Mrs. Johnson looking at sites for the library. There were tentative agreements that the University of Texas had a great deal of meaning in these arrangements, and we had all agreed after this afternoon that this meant that Johnson City would probably be passed over as a site for the presidential library. But there really hadn't been a definite decision.

G: Was there some school of thought that the library should be located in Johnson City or near the Ranch?

P: At the time Mr. Johnson stressed museum and library, and especially in the early, early days, museum, he had wanted it in Johnson City. But when it came to the conclusive presentation from the University of Texas he was interested, particularly because it would give him a public affairs institute. He was very interested in that part of the concept as it began to look as though it might bear fruit. He believed as a teacher in teaching. He wanted the opportunity for scholars to come there, and of course this could not and would not have been worthy of Johnson City. This was the only way that it

Portner -- I -- 33

could have taken place. He became vitally interested in the public affairs institute as it was said to be in the offer. I think this was the coloration and also the locale, because of students staying and traveling and what have you. And if they were going to enlarge on this concept, it must be near a university.

G: Describe that weekend down at the Ranch. Was he down there then?

P: Yes, he was down there.

G: Did you talk to him about the library or his papers, or a library?

P: I came down, and when I came through in the morning he was in his office part of the house, where the switchboard and the girls were. He was reading the newspapers. We said "Good morning," "Good morning, Mr. President." He asked me how the library was coming. He off-handedly said, "It better be the best damn library." And I said, "It's going to be. There's just no question." But even though he was informal in that atmosphere, he was not interested in details. He never was. He just wanted a reply that everything was on track. He had then arriving--[Richard] Goodwin was down there at that time, came in in the middle of the morning. Also with him in discussion was Senator Russell, and [Harold Barefoot] Sanders was there, but I can't think what he was then. He had much discussion in the home that day. He went out to a cattle auction about one o'clock, and he came along by us on the road and asked if we wouldn't come. Mrs. Johnson said, no, we were much too busy. And he said, well, we'd have a lot more fun. But we went about our chores, and I went to the Boyhood Home.

Portner -- I -- 34

G: Did you talk with Mrs. Johnson more about the Boyhood Home than about the library? Was this primarily setting up [the Boyhood Home]?

P: This was primarily to get the Boyhood Home finished, get the mother's glass identified, to get a record of things.

G: Do you want to talk about your role in setting up the Boyhood Home exhibits now that we're [on the subject]?

P: I think I noted here on the tape someplace that I spent about three weeks working on the family papers. In that I found report cards and the memorabilia of a little boy in the letters to and from the mother. I found many suitable things, but I thought that since Lady Bird was so involved that probably the best letter of interest and character was the letter that was written by Mrs. Sam Johnson to her son and daughter-in-law on their honeymoon. That was placed in the bedroom on the little Victorian desk. Anybody reading it could glean much from the mother's relationship to the son and what she hoped the future relationship to the son and daughter-in-law would be. That has been partially published in papers, but it's a very interesting letter.

As we arranged things and talked about the furniture, I think Mrs. Johnson spent an hour and a half or so there with me, and then she went on to pick up Grover and to do some errands. Her sense of humor was very, very wonderful. We had the round table and the chairs and the old telephone and the glass and the cabinets, and the little French clock with trim on the mantle. It didn't look lived in. It looked too antiseptic. And she said, "You know, what

Portner -- I -- 35

we really need to complete this are some chipped cups and saucers on the table." I thought that was a very cute thing, because we all in our time had lived that way. It was very interesting that she would make that comment.

Again, I don't know if I put this on the tape or not, but the point of that morning [was] the piece of furniture that had been made out of the armoire in her house was very important to her. And she was very interested in getting the Birthplace finished. It was finished on the outside but it had only a few pieces of furniture, a bed and a brass crib, et cetera, and the armoire. Other furniture needed to be added. I followed that trip with a recommendation on the type that I thought was of that period. Because there was no original furniture left for his birthplace.

On that day we also went over, in Johnson City, to a house that his grandparents had lived in. And the story, as is known, [is that] the grandmother hid from the Indians in the underground sort of cellar, dugout. The shots were still there and so forth. That was looked at as perhaps a place that might be rehabilitated. Then there was some interest by a sister for eventually buying that and redoing it after it was decided to use the Birthplace and have it reconstructed and the Boyhood Home renovated. So that was fascinating--also, seeing the little school where he first went to school and would run away at four to go in and bother the teacher, right near the Ranch and up the hill.

Portner -- I -- 36

When he was still there at the noon hour, and we went out to the cars with the FBI agent following us, Mrs. Johnson took us over to the stones of the grandparents and the father and mother. [She] showed us the exact position where Mr. and Mrs. Johnson's stone would be, and the graves would be there by the Pedernales with the big trees and all. Even though I couldn't be at the funeral I had great imagery as to where he would be and the color of the stones and the color of the trees and so forth. It was a very moving experience.

G: Anything else about that trip that you remember? I think you mentioned a comment on the plane back.

P: Oh, in riding back--did I not put this in the record?--the Archivist, Mr. Grover, and Dorothy and I agreed that this would set the time that we could see that the library would not be in Johnson City, nor would there be any edifice there but the Boyhood Home, as such. Because there was no question that the University people had made their offer on very good terms.

G: Did you go along with that decision?

P: Concept?

G: Yes.

P: Oh, I knew of the President's interest in the institute. No matter what he was politically or otherwise in his interests and his drive, I think that President Johnson was decidedly of a teacher mentality that knew that teaching and learning went into infinity. I presume there were times he would have been more comfortable as a great professor than a great president, and vice versa. Because he always

Portner -- I -- 37

had an interest in consuming and absorbing ideas and thoughts and premises. He might not agree with you, but he never had any appearance of having a closed mind on items and ideas and thoughts.

(Interruption)

[December] 4, 1963. That was so close to the tragedy, and we were working on things that related to Mr. Johnson becoming president and turning over from the vice presidency the records and so forth. We had to provide Mr. Jenkins with a memo telling the details of the search in the records of Johnson for the past week; this was on Monday, December 2. I was in the Vice President's office on December 2, in the Senate, where Mr. Johnson had maintained his office there. I was asked to help empty his desk for removal to the White House and to put in order his diary for sealing and storage, because everything was left right out. Everything stopped. Also, there was some question about some pictures that Mr. [Booth] Mooney wanted identifying Mr. Johnson and his family for a brochure that had to be gotten out posthaste.

Mrs. Roberts then asked how long they could have the books that we had provided immediately that weekend for the President's office, because the shelves had been emptied and we were concerned if there were photographs of the new President in the Oval Office the [empty] shelves would be there. Naturally, President Kennedy's people had taken his belongings and had put them away, as they must, and left us with just a quick glance to see what we must do to fill in. So the assistant librarian at the Library of Congress came down,

Portner -- I -- 38

and they chose books and they delivered them to the library. I saw that his desk got over there and that his safe was emptied and that his diaries were sealed and put away, ending the vice presidency. It was really a very thrilling time, but a very sad time.

Strangely enough, because we had been working so close to his records for so long, it would have been foolhardy not to have recalled occasionally that not through tragedy, but even natural causes, Mr. Johnson could have become president. In the back of our minds, I think, we were always in a race for this, and we don't know why. I don't know why. I think that maybe we just wanted to always keep up to date, but I don't really think that was the thing that motivated us. I think perhaps we were motivated by fear of being not prepared. This is a case where we never said preparedness, but we always thought it. And it certainly wasn't any introspection, it was just a matter of our acting. But we were able to seal things off comfortably and cut them off comfortably.

We must speak of crises besides the tragic loss of Kennedy and the crisis of his becoming president. There are times in the life of all public men that crises happen. Because of my long relationship to the Johnson records and their completeness, what existed, there was a period that I spent some time during the Bobby Baker affair that I checked out the record. Because the President wanted to be absolutely sure that the public record and his records were clear on his relationship with Baker and that he did not have or know of things that were being claimed. I spent many days, probably

Portner -- I -- 39

a part of the time of three weeks, going through the Johnson records as I knew them from March 18, 1954, to date. There was no way of discovering even an item in the record that would have revealed anything but the facts as given when asked by Mr. Johnson. There was absolutely nothing in the record that could have in any way related to matters of policy or business. There was an occasional greeting card; that was all. And I was responsible for verifying that.

But it does take some strain in doing those things, and you want to be sure you've remembered to look every place. This happens from time to time in this kind of work. You feel a grave responsibility, as I did during the period of the Kennedy death. We were responsible for getting new quarters, not knowing what arrangement there would be for the people working with us. We didn't want to discontinue the process even for a day, so we stayed up very late writing a memo to Mrs. Roberts, and back through to whomever Mr. Johnson designated to act, as to our position. We were revising on December 4 the diary form once again, and we returned the second draft of the diary form to Mrs. Roberts at the White House. Everything was turned upside down in just a few minutes.

I would like to say that on that day that the President was shot I had had an opportunity that morning to be in the Vice President's office, with Mrs. Roberts, listening to a tape with a Belgian artist. Mr. Johnson had had an interview with him in Brussels, and he had bought some small paintings from him. I thought there was an expression on that tape that was very revealing of his

Portner -- I -- 40

feelings and the feelings for the young and humanity. I remember so distinctly as I was listening to it--

(Interruption)

Tape 2 of 2

G: Okay, we're on again.

P: What was I saying?

G: You were talking about the Belgian painter.

P: This is a repeat perhaps. I was listening to the tape where Mr. Johnson was being interviewed or speaking with this Belgian artist about art. He was recalling that he was at least six or seven years old before he had really been introduced to any real art. There was not a museum in existence in Johnson City. Even though his mother was a teacher and a speaker and everything there, there was not that opportunity for the youth in that neighborhood. And [he felt] that he was going to see that there would be a museum or something similar in Johnson City. But remember, this was in November of 1963.

I really think, as I see this December 4 memo of 1963, that this is the first time that we have decided to make an effort to make Mrs. Territo, now, the liaison with National Archives in arranging for the storage of exhibit materials and other items already wrapped and numbered in a register. Because as he became president quarters changed, and we couldn't run over into storage. We had the vice presidential material all in order, ready to go to the Archives. It was in a memo to Jenkins that I presented this idea: three parts to our future programming in the president's office.

Portner -- I -- 41

One of them was to get the vice president materials that were beautifully identified closed out by the first of the year and get them to the National Archives, and we made arrangements for that. That was the first need of space and the use of the National Archives. You asked me at what date that might have been; it's right here. So that was where we entered into a different kind [of operation]. It didn't change my relationship, as you can note from the letters exchanged by the President with the Librarian, but it changed our needs.

Of course, from then on the presidential library idea became stronger and stronger and stronger and stronger, and it just evolved. That's why we have these memos on acquisitions following that in 1965 and 1966. There's one here where I had met with Grover and Juanita and Dorothy, before we presented our first draft. There came a time a year later where Grover took the opportunity to compliment Johnson on having Dorothy and [said] that she was a fine archivist. Dorothy had sent Grover an autographed picture that he'd wanted from Johnson. There came to be identity in an entirely different way in 1966; this was no longer just a records management problem, even though we had tied everything archival up. It was a matter that ultimately, at a date, these would be moved and moved to Texas, and we had to plan in that relationship with the National Archives.

Then Grover and Mrs. Johnson began to come together with their ideas. Many times we had gone over them first, which I have the

Portner -- I -- 42

evidence here. This is in preparation for acquisitions, and it is a considerably large meeting we are preparing for. The date of the meeting was to be February 14, 1966, between four and seven. It was with Dr. [Harry] Ransom, Mr. [Gordon] Bunshaft, Mr. [Max] Brooks, et cetera. But background for this discussion was a memorandum prepared by Dr. Grover, Mrs. Roberts, Mrs. Territo, Mrs. Portner, and circulated to those present outlining preliminary considerations, scope, and timing of the acquisition program. At the end of that memo [there] was also a suggestion of Dr. Grover's that we recommend that it was important that they start thinking about a head of the library and what type of person and so forth, and that Mrs. Johnson should begin to think about that.

G: Now that we're on that subject, do you have any insight as to why Chester Newland was chosen?

P: No, I really don't. He was recommended by the people involved with Mrs. Johnson. It was a trial and error sort of thing, but I think at the time of his appointment it was thoroughly agreed by her that it was all right. We had no reason to think about it because he came out of the clear as far as we were concerned, other than we knew that they were interviewing for it. But if I were perfectly honest in my feeling on this thing, it would be that it was effected through a search by the University and Mrs. Johnson that was agreed to. It is always the improbability of who will be the first librarian in a library like that. I think that, frankly, we were very fortunate to have Dr. [Herman] Kahn and later another fine woman,

Portner -- I -- 43

Elizabeth Drewry from the Archives, at the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Library. But Dr. Kahn being there first made a great deal of difference. We always had Philip Brooks to depend on at the Truman Library. I met, but never got to know, the gentleman with the Eisenhower Library. I met him at the last luncheon in October at the White House when Mrs. Johnson had a little over forty of us from the museum and library world in. He was there that day. But it's very important. And yet if things go wrong, because the record is there it can always be picked up. So that it isn't a grave situation. I don't recall how long the first librarian [director] was there, do you?

G: No.

P: I found his appointment in my papers this morning, but--

So then we switched over to the relationship with the Archives, and Dorothy was the editor of the President's public papers; that was a heavy and new experience for her and took a great deal of time. But she had so separated and set up the record as he was vice president that it wasn't much of a mechanical thing other than to determine with Mr. [William J.] Hopkins, the head of central files in the White House, that he understood what we were about and what we had done and what we were going to continue in the presidential documentation and records. That took some doing, because some presidents wanted everything to go to central files, and then they would either move them in toto or in parts. Others wanted to hold back for their own use or even some historian's use they knew were going to write

Portner -- I -- 44

about them. Everybody had done it a little differently. But all we did was to talk long with Mr. Hopkins from time to time, and the flow of records to the central files was very routine correspondence.

We continued the same type of subjects that we had had as vice president and we pulled that material in, so when we went to have the record it was much in line with the Vice President's records. Because even though he was president--there was an addition of subjects and minutiae and everything, but there was a core of the same. It was not a difficult process other than getting the gift officer and the head of central files and the Archives to understand, by what we could present, what we had done and what we were doing. That was an effort, and it took some months. But Dorothy Territo was completely on top of the job, and Juanita, even with the new responsibilities, never left the realm of planning this and hanging tight to it and making the same procedures work. We had a lot of the same people. So it was very, very [similar]. I think perhaps the relationship to the program from majority leader to vice president was much tougher than from vice president to president, even though you wouldn't think that. They were long-trained people. They were oriented. And we only took on a small core of new people as sort of a liaison public relations thing. It wasn't a hard core "we must do it this way" type of operation; we weren't thought to be efficiency experts or anything. So that it was a much softer transition, records-wise.

Portner -- I -- 45

I found that in watching the development of Mrs. Springer Territo since I had hired her into the Library in the late forties her growth had been fantastic. Her aptitudes had grown and her diplomacy had become greater. She had ten years of maturity, but some people do nothing with it. She did a great deal with it. She had fine capacity. You can see that spelled out in the compliment Mr. Johnson pays her at the time that he thought of her in Texas and recognized she was standing there, you know, which takes a while sometimes. This was good fortune. And the fact that Mrs. Roberts would come to us [and] we could go to her [helped]. No matter what was happening in her world, which was a very important world next to the President, never once was she too busy to be bothered with anything we had to ask or say about the library. But maybe we were careful, too, to make it important. We tried. So that it was a three way street right to the end.

It should be noted that in the very early days of my review of the Johnson records, as requested by Mrs. Roberts, one of the things that I was conscious of [was] oral history. Because of the use by the National Archives over the years, any of us who were in paperwork management and belonged to the various groups were aware of oral history. This was brought to mind very rapidly because Mrs. Sam Johnson was ill, and I wanted desperately that we get a record of her. She couldn't walk much or move around, but she could speak. So Mrs. Roberts went to Mr. [Jesse] Kellam to see if we could get a tape recorder and tapes. We had no money for any such thing. We couldn't

Portner -- I -- 46

even justify it. After some time we finally got a machine and a tape, and Dorothy [Mrs. Territo] went out to see her. It wouldn't work. I think Mrs. Johnson was heartily disappointed also--Mrs. Sam Johnson, the mother. We weren't able to tape her, and she died two weeks later.

But we did continue this process, and we did get some tapes and a machine. Mr. [Eric] Goldman did some interviews. I can't remember who interviewed Professor [H. M.] Greene; but he was elderly, and we were so frightened that something would happen. We put down a list of about twelve names of urgent nature, and those were accomplished. We could not control the conditions or the condition of the tape, if it had been in heat or what have you, a place where it should not be and was not under climatic control. In this connection I fought bitterly upon Mr. Barrow [?], who was a great man in paper and climatizing and so forth down in Virginia, to get more than climatizing the Johnson Library. I wanted a room with cold depth for certain records into posterity and certain tapes into posterity, but I really didn't win. I fought about that a long time.

But I did accomplish this, we instituted this before he was vice president: we had inks tested at GPO. We gave Mr. Johnson at one time 75 per cent rag, but paper was going up and up and we had to compromise when he was vice president with 25 per cent rag. Then a cute thing happened, and this always happens in the course of events. We had instituted the inks and the pens. He loved the gadget pens, felt ones, bamboo, and we had to take them away from him. In relation to these pens, I should make a statement. Mr.

Portner -- I -- 47

Jake Pickle, his great friend and congressman, called me over and asked me to see what could be done with a beautiful photograph of Johnson that he wanted to keep but the ink had acid eaten completely out. I pointed out at that time the problem, and I was more positive then that I was going to get these pens and things away from him. And we did. We were successful. He was most cooperative when he understood, because his signature and the doodles and everything else [were valuable]. That was a failure in the Lincoln papers; the acid just drove the paper away as though it had had worms in Lincoln's time.

Anyway, Dick Nelson, who was working with Eric Goldman, as an economic gesture got him wood pulp paper, cut down the expenses of the office, the whole thing, in the middle of stream. And we learned about it. So we went right back through, and there were things that Mr. Johnson wasn't even aware of. He didn't recognize that on the new order the paper was different. When we finally got to Mr. Nelson on this, he immediately corrected the situation. As I said, we couldn't go back to 75 per cent rag, but we went back to 25 per cent. We took into consideration all the recommendations out of this gentlemen who was testing everything for the U.S. Government as well as for institutions. Mr. Nelson wrote a brief memo to Mrs. Territo on toilet paper saying to read this quickly and destroy or it would evaporate, because he had been upset with us because we insisted that he change back to the things we had instituted and educated for.

Portner -- I -- 48

After being at the Boyhood Home, we went to lunch at the White House with Mrs. Johnson. There were fourteen of us. It was sort of a thank you for all we'd done. Dr. Grover was there, the Archivist, and we happened to be standing together when she took us down from the family living room to the Lincoln Room to show us what had happened the night before. She had up on a standard, on a piece of bond paper, all the signatures of the first astronauts and their families. They had had them as guests the night before. The wives and children were still there, but the astronauts had flown over to Paris for the big air fair. When we looked at it, I think that Dr. Grover and I spoke in one breath. The signatures had been made with one of the cheap pens and the poor ink. We should have had more tact, but we were so upset by it that we just quickly said to Mrs. Johnson, "Oh, how could it have happened?" She was very disturbed that it had happened and she said she should have thought of it, but of course it can happen any time.

She wanted to know what to do, and I said, "Well, we'll just pray this piece of paper and the ink last, because you'll never get the same group together in the same way anyway." They weren't returning, of course, to the White House. But it was really a very valuable piece of paper, because it was the first group of astronauts and their families, and this happened. She thought she was doing something wonderful for us, and we were so unkind as to dispel it, which was not tactful of us. But this shows how everything has to be watched.

Portner -- I -- 49

G: Different degrees of consciousness, I suppose.

P: That's right.

G: Is there anything else that you think we need to add to this record of achievement here?

[End of Tape 2 of 2 and Interview I]

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

Legal Agreement pertaining to the Oral History Interview of Mildred Portner

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, Stuart Portner of St. Petersburg Beach, Florida, 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 a personal interview conducted with Mildred Portner on January 11, 1978 at St. Petersburg Beach, Florida, and prepared for deposit in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

This assignment is subject to the following terms and conditions:

(1) The transcript shall be available for use by researchers as soon as it has been deposited in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

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

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

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

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

Stuart Portner

Donor

7 Feb 1980

Date

acting

James E. C. Heile
Archivist of the United States

Feb. 21, 1980

Date