INTERVIEW II

DATE: March 31, 1982

INTERVIEWEE: EMMETTE S. REDFORD

INTERVIEWER: MICHAEL L. GILLETTE

PLACE: Dr. Redford's office, Austin, Texas

Tape 1 of 1

G: Well, let's start with Johnson City, Dr. Redford. You mentioned just before we turned on the tape that you arrived in Johnson City before the age of the automobile.

R: I went to Johnson City with my mother and two younger brothers in the spring of 1912. My father had died, and my mother was going to Johnson City to become postmaster. The way we got to Johnson City at that time may be of interest. We took a train from San Antonio to San Marcos, spent the night in San Marcos, rode the next day from San Marcos to Blanco on a hack which was the term we used for an undecorated surrey--just a plain, two-seated buggy. We spent the night in Blanco, where we met our mother's brother and rode in his hack to Johnson City the next morning. I have driven this distance from San Antonio to Johnson City, which is about sixty miles directly, in an hour, but it took us parts of three days to get there. It was a rather isolated community.

The weekly newspaper--I believe it was then called the Record-Courier--was enblazoned on the front page across the top with some words like this, "Most Progressive County in the State without a

Railroad." The nearest railroads were at Fredericksburg, thirty miles to the west and a spur of the railroad which came down to Marble Falls twenty-seven miles northward. The community was a quite isolated community. At the time I first went there, merchandise came in usually by wagon from Austin, and the merchandise the farmers and ranchers had to sell moved by wagon from Johnson City to Austin. Some of the same kind of traffic went to Fredericksburg.

G: Was Johnson City on a path then to Fredericksburg or any points west?

R: It was on the only road you can get--direct road--from Austin to Fredericksburg. It was, as today, through Johnson City.

Mail came in from three places every day. At the post office in the morning we arranged the mail to go on a star route to Marble Falls and to Cain City, which was close to Fredericksburg. And the mailmen came back the same day.

G: How did they carry [the mail], on horseback or buggies?

R: Well, they all went in buggy in the beginning, until in my youth they went by automobile. And some merchandise moved that way. Light merchandise that could be carried in a buggy or a touring automobile would be carried for a charge by the mail carriers, as we called them. We had no direct mail service to Austin, but the Austin mail moved on the train to Lampasas or Burnet and from there on a spur down to Marble Falls and they we'd--but we got our mail six times a week, you see, as I recall, all three of these mail routes,

as we called them, went out from the post office and returned six days a week.

G: How was the mail delivered once it got to Johnson City?

R: Well, we had some rural routes that ran in--this was an area of farming and ranching and we had some rural routes that left the post office either three or six days of the week, I don't recall which. Seems to me we had two rural routes [that] went out, that carried the mail for delivery at mail boxes at farmers' gates. Of course, the townspeople got their mail either by having a mail box at the post office or by asking at the general delivery window for it. So we weren't so isolated as far as mail service was concerned.

G: Was the post office at all a gathering place for the townspeople?

R: No.

G: Was it combined with a store at all?

R: No. When we first went to Johnson City in 1912, the post office was on the street downtown where the stores were located. Most of the activity of the town was on that one block. And the post office was one of the buildings in the series of establishments down that side of the street.

G: Excuse me, was that the street that is west of the courthouse and faces the town square from the west? Where the Fawcetts' drugstore is?

R: Yes, the Fawcetts' drugstore and the Ross Furniture and Farm Implement Store, certain other stores were on the same side of the

block. Seems to me there were seven establishments on that side of the block and the post office was one of them.

When I was twelve years old, my mother was able to get the merchants and the other people in the city to sign a petition allowing the post office to be moved a block and a half away from this downtown street. This was some inconvenience to the little business community down there to have to walk a block and a half to the post office, but they realized that my mother was trying to rear three children in a combination post office and residential building on this street and that that wasn't a very satisfactory way of raising children. So they were willing to sign a petition, and my mother built a building a block and a half away from the business section which was a combination, rather neatly planned building which on one side was the post office and lobby and connected to it was the living quarters. So the post office was enough removed to [where] it couldn't have been a congregation center except as people would meet and visit with each other in the post office lobby.

G: Did you work in the post office when you were growing up?

R: Oh, yes.

G: Or deliver mail?

R: I worked in the post office. I must have started working in the post office at about twelve years of age. My younger brother took the oath to work in the post office when he was nine years old.

G: Is that right?

R: We helped put up the mail into the boxes, in fact, everything else.

I can remember when I was about fourteen or fifteen and [due to] a protracted illness of my mother I was to a considerable extent in charge of the post office. I left school early in the afternoon to come home to be there when the mail cars got back and help put up the mail and balance the books at the end of the day and make out the day's reports and so on.

You want me to go ahead with the story of what Johnson City was like?

G: Sure.

R: I think the census figure for Johnson City in 1910 was four hundred. I introduced Senator Johnson during the campaign of 1960 in a speech in New York City, and he said the town had over six hundred people, he wanted to correct me. It may have been that the town grew between 1910 and 1920, though I'm doubtful. My brothers at one time sat up in the bell tower of the school building and tried to count the number of people in all directions from there and they came up with about three hundred and thirty.

G: Really?

R: But the fact was that the town wasn't incorporated, so there's no precise way of determining the outer limits and how many people were in it.

G: What was the difference between the people who lived in the town and the people who lived out on the outskirts, out on ranches and

things? Was there any difference in the way they made their living? Did the townspeople have farm or ranches as well as--

R: Well, we had in the city the establishments that were common to a little town, and the people who ran those normally lived in the town. There were three grocery stores, two hardware and implement stores, a drugstore, for a time a clothing store--general merchandise store I guess you'd call it--a barber shop, a saloon, the blacksmith shop, the courthouse, the bank, and the post office. That was the nucleus of the inner community, surrounded somewhat by some little farms, then they got bigger as you went out further away from the town. There were a few lawyers, the doctor, and teachers, and preachers, and--well, that's about what the community looked like. [There were] some people who did day labor on the farms and ranches around or wherever else they could, and a few people who lived in town who had farms and ranches outside, perhaps in town because it was convenient for their children to attend school. It was a typical rural community, the usual community of people in the city.

G: Was there any cleavage between those who didn't live in the city and those who did?

R: Oh, no. Oh, no.

G: No social distinction?

R: Oh, no. There wasn't much social distinction. The invitation parties at which you were invited to come were very rare, and most parties, as we called them, that we went to in my youth were just--word spread

around that there'd be a party Saturday night at somebody's house and it might be two miles outside of the city or it might be in the city. But there wasn't much social distinction at these parties to which you were invited--maybe there'd been some kind of social distinction in the invitations, but there wasn't [otherwise]. It was a community so small that it wouldn't be accurate to talk about social distinctions, I think.

G: Who were the richest people in the community?

R: I don't know whether anybody was rich in modern terms or not. I thought, as a boy, that the John Kinney family, a ranch family who lived in town, was probably the richest people in town. But there were only limited number of people who had anything like the modern conveniences of life, and when it got time to have automobiles, why, there was some people in town like the Rosses that were able to have a Buick, the Fawcetts who could have a bigger automobile than most, and my uncle had a Saxon--a seven-passenger Saxon, the Charlie Klett family had a seven-passenger Buick. But I don't know whether those were the richest people in town.

G: How did they buy cars? Did they go to Austin or someplace and get them or was there a dealership in Johnson City?

R: Before I was grown, there was a Ford dealership in Johnson City. Of course, I grew up as the automobile age was coming in. At that time we registered automobiles by county. Number one was--I remember riding in number one--

G: Really?

R: --and some of the early numbers, you see.

G: Were the roads at all hard surface or what? First of all, the streets in the city--

R: We had no through highway. The roads were all county roads built or maintained by the county commissioners for their precincts. They were graded roads with gravel or sometimes just with adobe coverage. And the roads ran in all four directions.

Sometime in my youth they began to build a highway from Austin to Fredericksburg, I would guess sometime in the second decade of the century, but I don't know precisely when.

G: You mentioned that you attended the first meeting in which that highway was discussed. Can you recall that meeting?

R: We had a meeting at the courthouse, and I was somewhere between ten and fourteen years of age. It was the first public meeting other than at the churches, I guess, or school events that I ever went to. The people had voted a forty thousand dollar bond issue for the thirty miles of road between Fredericksburg and Austin that were in Blanco County. The forty thousand dollars was exhausted with the grading work for six miles of road, and they had to vote more money. This must have been after 1916, because that's when the Highway Act was passed in Washington.

I remember that the chief excitement of the meeting was the farmers and ranchers who were disturbed because the surveyor was laying out plans to alter the road, and one or two farmers were going to have it cut off a corner of some field. These farmers

objected to altering the roadway which might have had ninety-degree turns in it, you see. So there was lots of protest from these farmers.

G: Just because they didn't want it to cut through portions of their land?

R: That's right, that's right. I remember also there was some discussion about hiring an engineer to complete the surveying or do the surveying and they didn't want any--when in the Federal Convention of 1787 somebody suggested in a moment of debate that they stop for prayer, Alexander Hamilton said that they didn't need any foreign aid. Well, the people in Johnson City didn't want any foreign aid. They couldn't think of anybody at first from the county who they could employ to do this surveying until somebody remembered that there was a young man who had graduated from Cypress Mills High School and who had gone on and graduated from [Texas] A&M and was a civil engineer, so I remember at that meeting the feeling was that if they could get him, it'd be all right to have foreign aid. It wasn't quite foreign aid.

G: They did use that term, foreign aid.

R: No, that's my term.

G: Oh, I see.

(Laughter)

R: They didn't want anybody, an outsider, you see. I'm picking up Alexander Hamilton's term, you see.

The road was built and by that time, trucks had come in, and this made Johnson City accessible, changed life in many respects.

G: How so? How did it change it?

R: Well, I don't say changed it quickly, but it removed some of that isolation that you had. It was still no easy trip to Austin. When I was a student in the University [of Texas], first year I was in the University, it still took us about two hours to go from Johnson City to Austin. And by the time I graduated from the University, we had that highway completed and you could go more quickly, you see.

G: Would you go to Austin by Marble Falls before that? Is that how you would do it?

R: No, there was a road from Austin, wagons and other things.

You asked how it changed it, it put you closer to other things. Johnson City and Blanco were closer together. We could have more ball games, we could have more commercial interchange, and same thing with Fredericksburg. By the time of my early years in college, boys that had automobiles might take their dates to Fredericksburg for a movie. Lyndon had that kind of advantage, being able to go to the parties and dances in all the surrounding area, you see.

G: One more question about that highway meeting. Do you recall Sam Ealy Johnson being there or playing a role in it?

R: No, no. Nearly everybody in the community was there, so he probably was.

G: Was there a rivalry between Blanco and Johnson City, and if so--

R: Yes, the rivalry I suppose centered mainly about the location of the courthouse. The courthouse had at one time been in Blanco, and in

my youth there were two courthouses--one used as a bank in Blanco and the other was in Johnson City. I remember an election about 1915 or 1916 to consider whether to build a new courthouse in Johnson City. This resurrected the old rivalry about where it would be, those in the southern end of the county around Blanco voting against the bond issue and those in the northern end of the county from Johnson City northward voting to build a new courthouse. The Johnson City group won, and a new courthouse was built about 1916.

G: Did the rivalry spill over to other areas like sports?

R: Well, it extended to everything. Of course, after the Interscholastic League was developed, the only two high schools in the county were Johnson City and Blanco. So the Interscholastic League--well, that's not quite true. If we had an Interscholastic League contest, declamation contest, there might be three people participating--some other school entering besides Blanco and Johnson City. But to a considerable extent, it was a contest between the two every year in sports and in literary events between the two cities. And the rivalry was intense. Summer baseball games between the two towns would often end with a dispute before the game was finished.

G: Is that right?

R: So it was a very intense rivalry.

G: Did this affect LBJ at all, do you recall?

R: Oh, I wouldn't think so. It was disappearing, probably, by the time he graduated from high school.

G: What about his father? Had he been at all a part of this rivalry?

R: I wouldn't think so, anymore than everybody else who voted in the election. But the rivalry was very intense, but tends to break down when roads are built. And it was moderated considerably by the fact that a considerable number of people in Johnson City had grown up in Blanco and vice versa, you see. Several of the leading families, like Mr. Ross, had grown up in Blanco. Lyndon's mother. We heard of bigots in the other city, and I'm sure they talked about bigots in our city.

G: Let me ask you about the Ku Klux Klan. Do you recall being aware of the Ku Klux Klan in that area?

R: I don't know anything about it in Johnson City, as such. At the crest of the klan movement in Texas, I was a country teacher in the public schools at Hunt, thirteen miles above Kerrville. This was a two-teacher school of which I was superintendent. To the best of my knowledge, and I was repeatedly told that there were only two men in the community that weren't members of the Ku Klux Klan and that I was one of them. And they put me on their mailing list, they importuned me constinuously to join the Ku Klux Klan. I mention this to show that I think this was about the crest of this thing that early centered around the election of 1922 when Robertson had Ku Klux Klan endorsement in his running against Mrs. [Miriam] Ferguson--or I guess it was 1924. But I'm sure that--I was not living in Johnson City--there must have been

a Ku Klux Klan there, though I'm very doubtful that it ever had any strong influence in the Johnson City community.

G: Why do you say that?

R: Because I don't--the Ku Klux Klan, in some sections at least, tended to develop its strength around the Protestant religious community. And I'm just certain that the people that I knew in Johnson City who were the leaders of the Protestant religious community were not Ku Klux members. I never heard my relatives or friends talk about the Ku Klux Klan in Johnson City, but I mention the incident concerning me because it is an indication that it did have strength in some parts of that general area.

G: How did they react to your refusal or reluctance to join the Klan?

R: Well, nobody importuned me except the man in whose home I had a room, and he just couldn't understand why a respectable, church-going person like I was--Protestant, non-Catholic and white--would not be a member of the Ku Klux Klan. But I said they importuned me continuously--I guess they stopped it after a time because I made it clear that I didn't have any sympathy with it.

G: Were there Catholics in Johnson City?

R: I don't believe there was a single Catholic family in the city. There were three churches--Baptist, Methodist, and Christian, Methodist being the strongest. And I think you had to get toward Fredericksburg some distance before you began to get Lutherans and Catholics.

G: How about Mexican-Americans? Were there any?

R: There were no Mexican-Americans in the town, except for a brief time. While we still lived down on the main street, there was a Mexican-American who set up a restaurant next door to our house, and after a time, the boys or young men in town rocked him out of town one night.

G: Do you mean stoned him?

R: Well, they threw rocks into his restaurant and damaged the place enough that he left. I remember it well, because my little brother was about seven years old. He used to go over there and sit up at the counter and the man would give him free chili, so he cried about this incident.

There were also no blacks in the community. There were no blacks in the county, I guess, except at a little segment some eight or nine miles from Blanco at a post office called Board House, which was a black community. All the farmers and ranchers in that Board House post office community were black. But they shopped in Blanco, I suppose, instead of Johnson City.

G: Someone had told the story that when the highway was built, that there were blacks working on the highway crew.

R: Well, there were certainly blacks working on some road construction crew at the time, and I guess it was when they were building the highway. This would have been in Lyndon's youth, because Lyndon was the person that told me about what happened. And he told me in that period. There was a protest, as Lyndon tells it, by the town drunk to the construction supervisor that the whites would

quit if he didn't fire the black or blacks. The contractor said he wasn't going to fire the black or blacks. A fight occurred. And when Lyndon told me the story, he said, "I was cheering for the contractor."

But it was largely a community with Anglo-Saxon background, north European. Almost no Germans in the community itself--you had to get about four or five miles from Johnson City towards Fredericksburg before you moved into the German community.

I started to say the background of the population was north European, predominately Protestant. I recall in my youth there were seven Confederate veterans and one Union soldier.

G: Oh, really? Who was the Union soldier?

R: I don't remember his name right now.

G: Was he treated with any degree of disdain?

R: No, everybody liked him. He was treated with the same respect everybody else was.

It was a homogeneous community, in other words.

G: Let me ask you about the prohibition issue there.

R: I remember the first election in which I had any interest was the election of 1916 [1914?], in which the candidates for governor were [Thomas H.] Ball and [James E.] Ferguson, and the issue was the prohibition issue. And the community was pretty well split between the Ball and the Ferguson people. And then about that time, a little later, I guess, but before national prohibition had come, we had a local option election, in which the citizens

of Johnson City by a vote of seventy-eight to seventy-six voted for prohibition and closed the saloon. It was the most intense political division that I knew of in my youth in my community.

G: Who had owned the saloon? Do you recall?

R: Yes. King Casparis.

G: Did this mean that people would make bootleg whiskey after that?

R: Your guess is as good as mine.

(Laughter)

G: The Redfords didn't make any?

R: The Redfords didn't make any.

G: Well, did the issue of prohibition create any sharp divisions within the community?

R: Well, we all knew who was on each side, and I don't know whether anybody had any animosity about it or not. If they did, it didn't have any lasting effect.

G: Well, sure. Sam Ealy Johnson was known as a drinking man. Did that mean that he spent most of his time with anti-prohibitionists rather than prohibitionists?

R: Well, I don't suppose so. He was an outgoing kind of fellow who was friendly to everybody he met on the streets. Oh, I don't think that that made any difference to him or to anybody else. He wasn't a churchgoer, and therefore he didn't meet the church people on Sunday. The Johnson family were Christadelphians, and they only went to church at the summer camp meeting--that is Mr. Sam Johnson and his brother Tom in the community. They would go every year to the camp

and take their families to the Christadelphian get-together in Fredericksburg. But the fact that Mr. Johnson didn't come to church on Sundays narrowed his association some perhaps, but not at any other time.

G: Mrs. Johnson, I understand, was a Baptist. Is that correct?

R: That's right.

G: Do you recall the extent to which she participated in church services?

R: I never knew, because that wasn't my church. And so I never knew. Everybody thought of her as a religious woman.

Lyndon joined the Christian church.

G: Have you ever heard the stories of why he joined the Christian Church?

R: I've always had an assumption as to why he did. At the time he joined, each of these three churches had a summer revival meeting, and he joined in the summer revival meeting. And quite a number of his age group with whom he was regularly associated joined. Ava and Margaret Johnson, his cousins, joined at that time--their mother was a member of the Christian church--they joined at that time, and I think one of my brothers. And I just have always assumed that Lyndon joined because the other kids that he was with all the time were joining the Christian church and going to Sunday school over there. There was a dearth of people his age over at the Baptist church. But there was seven or eight of them, as I recall, that joined at the same time.

G: What was the summer camp meeting like?

R: Oh, you brought in a preacher from the outside who usually began on Friday night and ran through to the second Sunday afterwards. Night services--maybe morning services, too--each night [were held], which were evangelistic meetings--old-time evangelistic meetings, exhorting meetings.

G: Were they social occasions as well?

R: No, I don't think so.

G: They didn't have picnics and things of this [nature]?

R: Oh, it was customary to have dinner at the town pavilion on the last Sunday and that was quite a social occasion. After church on Sunday you'd have your dinner at this--used to say on the grounds and then we got a town pavilion and they had them there. Those were important social occasions for the kids because everybody brought out their best cooking in unlimited quantities.

You haven't asked me about the school.

G: That's a big topic.

[End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview II]

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