

## INTERVIEW I

DATE: 28, 1965 April

INTERVIEWEE: Juanita Roberts

INTERVIEWER: Eric F. Goldman

PLACE: The Cabinet Room of the White House

G: Would you please tell about your talk with the President's mother?

R: It was with Dorothy [Territo]. This was primarily to be just an introduction. Mrs. Johnson wasn't feeling well and I didn't realize how ill she was.

G: This was in 1958?

R: 1958. I didn't realize how ill she was and I don't think any of the family realized either. If we had, of course, we would have made copious notes. We didn't do that. This was just a little call on her so that she could get acquainted with Dorothy.

In the afternoon visit she told us a good many things. And, you know, 1958 is a long time ago and I don't know how much I am going to be able to remember what she told me and what I've heard from other places. But she talked at some length about the early days and went over a good bit of the things that we know about in the scrapbook and some other things. It was in that session that I learned about Mrs. Looney, the starting to school, which is not in the scrapbook. Mrs. Johnson told us that afternoon that the reason that the President went to school at such an early age was because from their porch, when he would be out there playing, he could see the children at recess and he would run away from home. This is rattlesnake country --at least it was --and she was afraid that the little fellow toddling off through the field down to the

Roberts--I--2

school might run into a rattlesnake. She talked it over with the father, and Mr. Johnson called on Miss Kate --her name was Dietrich then --and asked if they would take him. This would be safer than his traveling back and forth. Miss Kate told him that she would have to take it up with the school board. She did and he started school. The best I could figure out, he was about four years old.

At that time he could already do a lot of spelling. He could not read according to my memory of what Mrs. Johnson said. But he could spell almost anything that he would hear. She was reading a lot to him. She would take him up into her lap and read not just children's things but general reading -- reading that interested her.

G: Juanita, did Mrs. Johnson mention any of the books that she read to the President when he was a boy?

R: No, I don't think so. I have heard it credited to her that she read only biographies. My memory of what she told me was that this was true of him. I don't recall that she talked about the things that she read but that after she had tried to get him to reading, he would say, "Momma, was it true?" He wasn't interested in reading things unless they were history or biography, but I don't remember her saying that about herself.

She told us that Miss Kate's habit with children was to have the children come to her desk. They would open the book, stand by her, and she would read from the open book. But at four he was too short. So Miss Kate opened the book on her lap. Well, he would turn farther and farther away from the book, looking over his right shoulder pushing harder and harder against her. She was puzzled for a while until she realized that this was his way of asking to be picked up. So she picked him up and held him in her lap for him to read his lessons. About the reading this is about the only thing I remember.

G: What about after the family moved over to Johnson City. Did she talk much about his schooling there?

Roberts--I--3

R: Not to my recollection. And things I've read don't quite agree with my memory of what she said about his going to college.

G: Could we have your knowledge of his going to college from Mrs. Johnson, Sr., and from any other source? He was working on the road gangs. Now what happens?

R: Yes. That afternoon she went deep into her philosophy --I will call it of man and work. She said that she had done all she could to impress upon all of her children that honest work makes an honorable person.

G: Is that a direct quote from her, as you remember it?

R: It is, in my words, what she said --that a man could be as honorable doing work with his hands as he could working with his head. Those were her expressions --working with hand and head, that a profession didn't make a man any better man or any more honorable. But she was ambitious for him to go to college. She felt he had the ability and, being a college woman, she wanted him to develop his every talent and every ability. I believe she said he came home from work and that he was tired and discouraged.

G: Did she mention, do you remember, Juanita, whether it was a Saturday night?

R: No, I don't remember. But that he came home from work and that he stretched out across the bed, lying on his stomach. After a while he said to her, "Momma, I've tried it with my hands, and if you will help me, I am ready to try it with my head." This was his way of telling her that he had reached his decision to go on to school.

G: As we have discussed before, there is a conflict in the accounts on the subject of how he got the money to go to college.

R: I don't recall that she even mentioned that.

G: Miss Shelton, in her Saturday Evening Post article, said that it was the mother who made the arrangements. Some of the President's old friends recall that it was he who made the arrangements.

Roberts--I--4

R: It seems to me reasonable that the mother made them because In my recollection he said to her, "If you will help me I am ready to try it with my head," meaning that there were things that he was not ready to do and I can understand that money might be part of them.

G: Juanita, did she discuss at all the President's chief interests when he was in high school? We know that he was interested in debating.

R: That's about all that I remember that she talked about. She was very, very proud of his knowing all of the poem, "Hiawatha." At age four he could recite it from beginning to end.

G: She had taught him that?

R: Yes.

G: Did she mention any other specific literary works?

R: Yes, in connection with herself --you know, Browning was her favorite.

G: How about Longfellow?

R: Well, she referred to Browning as her favorite.

G: Did she refer to Sir Walter Scott at all?

R: I don't recall that she did.

G: Some of the accounts mention that the room to the right in the Johnson City home was filled with books --

R: I can imagine this was true. She wrote. Her father was a lawyer and she read in his books -- I don't think with any ambition to become a lawyer but I think because she had a hungry Mind. And I believe that she would read anything that she had.

G: About Browning, do you remember "Let's Grow Old Together?"

R: Well, that afternoon she quoted it and she said, "This has always been my favorite. But I don't agree any longer." She said old age is not the best time. We talked a little bit about that. Looking back, I realized that it was because she was so ill and she did not like being in less than vigorous health.

Roberts--I--5

G: Was this conversation held in the Johnson City home or after she had moved to Austin?

R: It was here in Washington. She had come on a long automobile trip with her daughter, Lucia Alexander, and Lucia's husband and the daughter, Becky. They were visiting in the other son's home, Sam Houston Johnson. Sam Houston was married then to Mary Michelson Fish and the conversation took place in their apartment.

G: The reason I raised that question about what readings he might have done is because some of the President's old friends recall vaguely that he admired some of Woodrow Wilson's speeches. Others recall William Jennings Bryan's speeches.

R: No, I don't think so. More recently I have heard the President say that he can identify himself with Jack Kennedy and with President Eisenhower and Mr. Truman and Mr. Roosevelt and he identifies with Andrew Jackson, but he cannot identify with Woodrow Wilson. He has tried but he has no feeling of association. He has no identification with Mr. Wilson.

G: Did he, or his mother, or any of the people that you have known over the years ever talk about William Jennings Bryan and the President?

R: I haven't heard any of this and it would seem to me that, hearing him talk, and having known Mrs. Johnson and knowing her manner of speech, they would not have patterned --they may have listened -but I don't believe they would have chosen him as a person to pattern after.

G: I have heard the President years back say of Bob Considine, the commentator, "Now that is the way I would like to be able to speak."

R: I can imagine he would have admired President Woodrow Wilson as a young man, looking up to him as President. But I can't believe, from the environment he came from, that he would have found that this was somebody he wanted to follow and learn to be like. Nor do I think William Jennings Bryan would have excited him -- his methods or his manner or style.

G: Did Mrs. Johnson, Sr., talk at all, about the President's boyhood in the non-educational aspects? Did she have any good stories about his mischievousness?

Roberts--I--6

- R: I don't think we ever talked about that. I didn't have long periods with her. I had a wonderful and warm friendship with her over many, many years. But our times together were somewhat short.
- G: She's always described as a very graceful and gracious lady. How would you describe her appearance?
- R: When I first met her, she would have been in the late 50s. She was a tall woman of a large frame.
- G: You wouldn't call her slim?
- R: No, she wasn't slim, but she was not fat. She was a woman who gave every evidence of caring for her appearance and health. She gave -- in spite of this large frame -- she gave you the feeling of delicacy.
- G: Miss Shelton, in the Saturday Evening Post, refers to the fact that she was extremely well-dressed.
- R: She loved color and she loved pretty things. She had high standards. I wouldn't say that she was a woman with a great sense of style, in the sense of Mrs. Jacqueline Kennedy -- a sense of style that set her apart from other people. Mrs. Johnson, I do think, wanted to appear well-dressed but she would not be a slave to the current fashion. She would always be looking for the appropriate. But she also wanted to look pretty and she enjoyed a compliment.
- G: In terms of economics, Juanita: Mr. Johnson, the President's father, had his obvious ups and downs economically, but it is my impression that over the long pull, the family cannot be accurately described as "poor."
- R: No, and it was a cause of deep hurt with the mother when the President would refer to them as being tenant farmers and being poor. I don't believe this was false pride. I believe this must have been something that she felt very deeply that it could be taken as very critical of them for having failed the children. She didn't feel any sense of failure. Maybe they did have lean times, but that

they were never in the category of the poverty stricken. I don't think that she felt that the children ever suffered.

G: It is your impression that the children always had adequate food and clothing; a little money for the movie, etc.?

R: I would think so.

G: Probably what we would call in the 1960's middle-class or perhaps lower-middle-class ?

R: I think that they must have been upper-middle-class in standards and perhaps, on the average, lower-middle-class in means. I think it could have been had they lived here then, because of the kind of people they were and the kind of standards they had, that they would have been in a much better economic bracket. Because they chose to live where they did, then their means were automatically limited. I believe, too -- now I don't know, I don't have any reason for thinking this, except that it is something that I have come to feel -- perhaps the father was not the best manager in the world and I think that he must have been a man of great generosity. Perhaps he was less prudent, having this great generosity, and I believe that maybe he also had what we call false pride. I don't know that this is true, but it is just something that I feel may be part of their problem of not having a steady amount of money available all of the time.

G: In terms of the father's occupation, Juanita, he obviously dabbled some in real estate. Is it your impression that he did much real estate?

R: That's a country where everybody's a trader. People pride themselves on their skill to trade and trading is an honorable profession. I feel that rather than saying that he dealt in real estate --I don't have anything to support this, but I feel that undoubtedly the father was a man who engaged in trading. And maybe his generosity got the best of him and maybe he didn't always make as good a trade as somebody else might have made.

G: How much actual farming did he do? Do you have any knowledge of that?

Roberts--I--8

R: No, I don't. Except that when they married he was fanning and he brought his bride to the home that is now called the birth place and they were farming.

G: He grew cotton principally, didn't he?

R: I don't know. In talking with the President's mother's sister, Miss Saunders, she talked of the farming but nothing about what they grew.

G: To shift to another matter: Would you please put on the tape that interesting story about the President's first connections with Mr. Rayburn? I gather this is something that you want checked.

R: I would. I would like very much to have this checked out. I don't remember where I first heard it. But I have for a long time lived with this information that when young Sam Rayburn was elected to the Texas Legislature he like so many other men of the time -- and some today used this as a means of going to Law School. When he arrived as a freshman, quite young, at the State House, he met Sam Ealy Johnson, the President's father, who was already a veteran. Sam Ealy Johnson took a liking to the young Sam Rayburn. He coached him and wanted to help him get the right committee assignments and there was then developed a good warm friendship. At the same time, the President used to go on to the floor with his father and sit and listen and observe. He liked to sit and hear these grownups talk. This is where he first came to know Sam Rayburn. So that in truth then, both the former Speaker and the President learned practical politics from the same old master.

G: Of course this is a different version from the one commonly accepted, which has the President as something of a protégé of Mr. Rayburn. Who do you think could best check this for us?

R: I doubt very much that there would be anything in the Rayburn Library that could support it. But I don't think it would be a bad idea to see what in the way of family records might be on deposit in that library and what access there may be to those old family records. Perhaps Congressman Wright Patman might help us to get on the road of verifying this and then there are all of the



Roberts--I--9

Sam Rayburn relatives that are living. Young Bob Bartlett may have heard at family gatherings something of this kind since Mr. Johnson has become President. I doubt very much that Mr. Rayburn had family living with him in Austin when he was going to school

G: In terms of this early period of the President in Washington, was John Garner in any particular way influential in his life?

R: I don't know that he was. He was the Vice President. I do believe President Johnson would have done whatever he could to become acquainted with him and to learn from him because this was his way -to know people and to learn from them. Perhaps Arthur Perry could tell us better. We do have an old picture of the Vice President with young Lyndon Johnson on the occasion of young Lyndon Johnson's being elected Speaker of the Little Congress.

G: Is that picture in Dorothy's Archives?

R: Yes.

G: If I may keep you just a bit longer, please. You've known the President so long and so well. In terms of the various stages of his life up to his election to Congress, are there any stories, anecdotes, facts that have not been reported in the many articles that have been written at one time or another which you feel we should put on tape.

R: I think there must be a great many that have never been recorded. You have lists of people who could help get some of the better ones and Gould Lincoln, who was already a skilled observer and an accurate reporter, already interviewing Presidents certainly his observations ought to be worth recording.

G: In terms of yourself. I didn't know him until he was in his first year of the Congress. I thought perhaps there were some stories of the earlier period that particularly stick in your mind.

R: Some of these young men whose names you have now, were working for him, like Congressman Roberts and C. P. Little, Bill Deason, and those fellows. Probably they have some wonderful and rich stories of that period of his life, observations and shared experiences.

Roberts--I--10

- G: Juanita, a number of his old friends have made the remark that they think that the NYA period was the turning point in his life in the development of his feeling about government, the processes of democracy, the needs of the modern world, etc. Has he ever said anything in your presence which would either tend to confirm that or undercut it?
- R: No. I can't recall that he did and I doubt that this could be supported. I think that as secretary to Congressman Kleberg this would have been the time. It is my understanding that in truth, Mr. Johnson in a very short time was running that office. If this were true, he would have felt very keenly the responsibility of it.
- G: Estelle Barben, whose name you do not have, was hired to come to Washington -- Miss Estelle Barben, of San Antonio -- Mr. Kleberg hired her and Mr. Johnson to come to Washington at the same time and she was to be the senior member. They came on the train together and I know that she must have an awful lot of wonderful things that she could tell about how he reacted to Washington and how he got started in the office and how he took it over. I think that would be a story worth hearing and recording because of things that I have heard her and Mr. Perry say.
- R: He was a very early riser and was at the office by 7:00 every morning. Even though the file clerk is considered the low man on the totem pole, he insisted on filing everything in that office because he wanted to know everything that went on in that office. And it was in no time at all until he was acquainted with the most important people in this town. Now how did he manage it? I think that is where he started of thinking in terms of bigger and better ways to serve and how to get there.
- F: During this early Washington period~ do you have any recollections from the President or from other people of his feelings about the policies of Mr. Hoover?
- R: No, I don't. I don't remember. He has made some statements in speeches that I would personally have been happier had they not been said. For example, I have never been happy to hear him or any other man use the expression, "Hoover Depression," because I don't believe any of them

Roberts--I--11

believe it. I realize that when you are whooping it up for fund raising or something like that --but I don't believe -- and I would like to put this question to him and ask him now, as President, how does he evaluate the Hoover years? He paid tribute to Mr. Hoover also. And I feel that this comes closer to being his real evaluation of Mr. Hoover rather than those other things that he said in the 1952 election 1956 election -- campaign time speeches.

G: Are there any recollections you have about his early attitude toward FDR? We know that he admired him greatly. Was it an admiration mostly for Roosevelt's daring and activity or was it about policy or was it both?

R: I think it was all things together. President Roosevelt was a master politician and he loved it. It was his life, apparently. It was the thing that gave him joy and pleasure --not only the things that he could do because he was a politician but the art and the science of getting these things done was of tremendous interest to him. It is to Mr. Johnson too, I believe. He considers politics in the same light. It is a science, it is an art, and it is a total life.

G: In terms of that, Juanita, the President's boyhood friend, Ben Crider, said that the President as early as the San Marcos days was constantly saying the greatest thing to be was "in public service." Of course it means a great deal to him today --it seems to be a constant theme in his life. That phrase can mean many things but apparently the President had his own special meaning coming perhaps from his mother or his father.

R: I think I heard him say that if he had not gone into politics, he would have chosen either teaching or preaching. I think public service to him means --serving the public, and these three are the ways that apparently appeal to him most as being ones in which you can serve best. I've never heard him bring in medical science. I've never heard him refer to being a doctor but of course there were teachers and preachers and politicians on both sides of the family --this was his heritage.

Roberts--I--12

These people, his forebears, didn't dodge responsibility in community building, trail blazing, and that kind of thing. They were soldiers grand and town builders. The preacher father rode a horse, you know, with a gun across the saddle and a Bible in his hand. And wherever he went he; tried to build. Not only the President but all the members of his family apparently had cut their teeth on the same spoon and they wanted to do something where they worked with people or left something behind them that helped.

G: Could I go back for one question on the President and his mother. She was such a powerful influence on him. Some of his old friends feel that there was an especially close relationship between the two --that he was sort of a favorite with the mother. Others feel that she was the kind of woman who would have been rigid in not wanting to have a favorite. Do you have any impression about that?

R: Yes, I can see her now smile and say. Well, he was my first born. However, she loved her baby, Lucia and she got special attention because she was the baby. And each one in his own way got special attention from her. I don't believe she showed favoritism to the point of hurting and denying the other children. But he was her first born.

G: Were there perhaps some things about him that had special appeal to her?

R: Sam Houston has told me in the past that because the President was a lot like his father sometimes there was a little conflict and the President turned to his mother for resolving the conflict. Some people said that he was mama's boy because of this. But I don't know.

G: Are there any other things that we should put on the tape and check out --things have bothered you in the way these stories have been written?

R: One detail we have to check out is how much money the President had in his pocket when he went to California.

G: That's right, and I don't know who got him the money to start and how he got into the school. You know there's a tape on the President by the man who interviewed him on entry.

Roberts--I--13

R: I'd like to mention this too. When the mother wrote -- and I don't know if she did it to any of her other children -- she always wrote across the seal of the letter, after she would put in the envelope and seal it, she wrote across that flap "Mezpah." This is old Bible. "The one Lord Watch Between Thee and Me while we are away from the other." I never saw a letter come from her that did not have "Mezpah" written across that seal.

G: Mrs. Johnson was quite religious?

R: In thinking and in feeling but I don't know of her being a great church woman.

G: The father had no particular interest in religion?

R: You know about the Philadelphians. I think because of the strong religious influence that was in his family perhaps he was a Christian without strong feelings. I don't know really. Apparently he was not a church man.

G: Juanita, this has been tremendously helpful. Thank you very much.

R: Let me think of other things.

G: Of course. And if I may, let's do another tape another day.

[End of Interview I]

GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION  
NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS SERVICE

Gift of Personal Statement

By MRS. JUANITA DUGGAN ROBERTS

to the

Lyndon Baines Johnson Library

In accordance with Sec. 507 of the Federal Property and Administrative Services Act of 1949, as amended (44 U.S.C. 397) and regulations issued thereunder (41 CFR 101-10), I, Mrs. Juanita Duggan Roberts, hereinafter referred to as the donor, hereby give, donate, and convey to the United States of America for deposit in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, and for administration therein by the authorities thereof, a tape and a transcript of a personal statement approved by me and prepared for the purpose of deposit in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library. The gift of this material is made subject to the following terms and conditions:

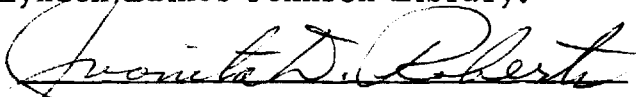
1. Title to the material transferred hereunder, and all literary property rights, will pass to the United States as of the date of delivery of this material into the physical custody of the Archivist of the United States.

2. It is the donor's wish to make the material donated to the United States of America by terms of this instrument available for research as soon as it has been deposited in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

3. A revision of this stipulation governing access to the material for research may be entered into between the donor and the Archivist of the United States, or his designee, if it appears desirable.

4. The material donated to the United States pursuant to the foregoing shall be kept intact permanently in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library.

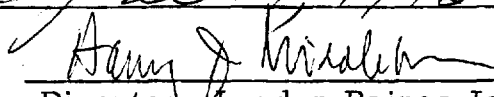
Signed



Date

April 17, 1975

Accepted



Director, Lyndon Baines Johnson  
Library for Archivist of the United States

Date

May 5, 1975