INTERVIEW I

DATE: January 13, 1984

INTERVIEWEE: JAMES M. ROWE

INTERVIEWER: Ted Gittinger

PLACE: Mr. Rowe's residence, Ingleside, Texas

Tape 1 of 1

G: Mr. Rowe, would you begin by giving us a little background? When did you become involved in covering the news in Duval County and Jim Wells County, that part of the country?

R: It was in November of 1947. I had a roving assignment covering much of South Texas, Laredo to Brownsville to Corpus Christi, and in the process I became more and more interested in Duval County. It's a peculiar place. It just seems to be going downhill, has been for the last thirty or forty years, losing population, people moving out. But the thing that fascinated me most about the place was the way George Parr could produce these overwhelming majority votes in the county.

He was an unusual person. I think of him sort of as I would a Jekyll-and-Hyde. He was a perfect host, and yet on the political side, one of his friends told me, he felt his political power--thought of it as you would think of a property right. He would spend everything he owned in order to assert and maintain that power. After I had been over there about a month I met George, and he was very cordial, but as the years passed, particularly after the August of 1948 run-off primary, he became my enemy. I don't know. They weren't accustomed to daily reporting of events in Duval County, and I was all alone.

Up until 1948 I had never heard of a reporter coming down from any of the big papers. After 1948 even the New York Times, Dallas Morning News, the Houston Chronicle, Houston Press, all sent their reporters down there to cover the story, and I suspect one of the main reasons for all this publicity beginning in 1948 was that Jesse Jones in Houston had fallen out with Lyndon Johnson over something. I don't remember now what it was, but in any event, he was very strongly a partisan of Coke Stevenson, and as my publisher, old man Houston Harte of San Angelo, told me one time, he would have been glad to have spent a hundred thousand dollars just to get Coke elected, but they suddenly realized--in the background in the past, they had gotten accustomed to these lopsided vote majorities in Duval County and no one paid much attention to it.

In fact, at the time of the 1948 run-off primary I didn't think there was anything particularly unusual about the thing, about the voting in Duval, but here was a case in which a small county was able--well, there were two--I don't remember the exact number, but something like 400 votes were added to the polls in Duval County. They were never able to check that out because of the fact that the ballots were burned, but on the night of the election, I got a report from the county chairman at nine-thirty at night.

G: Now, this was the Duval County chairman?

R: Yes, the Duval County Johnson man. There were 202 votes added in Jim Wells County in Box 13, 200 of them for Lyndon and 2 for Coke.

One of the peculiar things, Robert Caro asked me did I hear any reports of large sums of money being spent in this area for Lyndon Johnson. I said, "No, you don't need money down here. Oh, you need a little." I said, "All you need is friends. Friends like Manuel Raymond, the boss of Webb County, or George Parr of Duval County, and the Lloyds, Ed and Frank Lloyd, of Alice." They were pretty well in control of Jim Wells County. Then there were other alliances: the Guerras in Starr County, and I've forgotten some of the other leaders in other Valley counties. If you knew them and they were for you, you'd get the votes, because the most peculiar fact that I learned being around it was that most Latin Americans couldn't care less who was president of the United States or who was U.S. senator or governor. The only one they were interested in was the sheriff because he was the law. It was in connection with this--George didn't order his people to do anything, nor did the others. His leaders or his adherents throughout the country would come to him and say, "Who are we for?" And they would pass the word to the voters down there. They would even come into the polling place and ask them, "Who are we for?"

G: (Laughter) That's kind of embarrassing if you've got a poll watcher there, isn't it?

R: Well, they didn't have any poll watchers then. It was after the 1948 primary that they started putting poll watchers in. The peculiar thing, it was known as the patron system, and it was just as--in fact, the subtitle of my manuscript, "George Parr in Duval County Politics," was "The Mesquite Pendergast." He did as good a job as anyone could.

If you had a funeral, he would take care of the costs if you couldn't pay for it, or if you were in trouble and needed help, or you were sick, he'd see that the doctor saw you. It was a paternalistic sort of thing. Really no different from the way Bob Kleberg in the neighboring county, Kleberg County, [operated]. He did [it] in about the same manner.

So leading up to the 1948 primary, I didn't think much about the primary and really didn't think much about the whole business until I believe it was August 28, 1948 was the primary, and the following Friday they canvassed the returns. I went to the meeting of the Jim Wells County Democratic Executive Committee where they canvassed the returns, and they announced this total for Box 13, and mouths fell open. I suddenly realized that here had been 200 votes added. All the other people didn't know about it. They knew about it for the first time then, and one of the things that happened after the primary election was that the ballot boxes were taken to the jail, a number of them were, including Box 13, and they were kept by the Sheriff and not turned over to the County Clerk for several days. It's my belief that in that period is when the votes were added.

G: Let me ask you about that meeting of the executive committee when they canvassed the votes. Did anyone express any surprise or dismay at the--?

R: They didn't express it, but you could see it in their faces. Nobody made a specific comment then. It was a peculiar thing. Where did this come from?

G: Did you talk to any of those people afterwards?

R: No, it was a day or two before we went into that, and that came about after Coke Stevenson and Frank Hamer and Kellis Dibrell--Dibrell was a former FBI agent--came down there to investigate.

G: Were you there when they came down?

R: Yes.

G: Did you see the transactions?

R: Well, what happened was that they came into the Texas State Bank. I believe Hamer was in front and Coke behind him and then some others, and I followed them on into the bank. They went to see Tom Donald, who was the secretary of the Jim Wells County Democratic Executive Committee. They asked to see the poll and tally lists of the election, so Donald produced them. Then Dibrell and others went down to the bottom of the list and began copying names, and Donald jerked it away from them then and said, "No, you can't do that." "Why can't we?" "Well, you'll have to talk to Homer Dean." Dean was then the county attorney. So they left unsatisfied. But Dibrell later testified that he had gotten the last twenty names off the list and that they appeared to be in alphabetical order, and in the course of time, they got affidavits from twenty people saying that their names were on the poll shown as voting but they had not voted.

G: I wonder if they had paid their poll tax.

R: Well, a peculiar part about it was when you checked into the names of these people that said they hadn't voted and were shown as having voted, at least two families weren't even listed as voters.

G: I wonder where the names came from.

R: I don't know. That's a peculiar thing. I never was quite satisfied. Dibrell also said that the last 200 names, 202 names, on the poll list were in a different colored ink. I don't know whether that's true or not. I didn't notice that particular aspect. I don't believe that anybody could have worked out the election, though.

What happened was that they had this federal hearing with a man named Bob Smith. He used to be the U.S. attorney for the Western District of Texas, and Judge T. Whitfield Davidson in Fort Worth had a hearing on the thing and appointed Bob Smith as master in chancery and sent him down to Jim Wells County to hold a hearing on the subject of the election. During the hearing, Luis Salas--Box 13 judge--testified that he had conducted the election and so forth, and that at the time he began reading newspaper reports that there was something funny about the election. So he went to see Tom Donald and borrowed his poll and tally lists. He took them with him to compare them, and he said everything was aboveboard. On his way home though, he said he stopped at a beer joint and he left the poll and tally lists in the glove compartment of his car. Those were two sets. The only remaining set is supposed to be in the ballot box; one to the secretary of the executive committee, one to the presiding election judge, and one is included in the votes in the ballot box. He said while he was gone, somebody took them, and he hasn't seen them since. But when they started opening the ballot boxes--Bob Smith, in fact, the master in chancery, used the bolt cutters to cut the locks off the boxes as

were going along. I've forgotten how many boxes now that they had opened before Justice Hugo Black halted the proceeding, and one of the boxes contained--full of ballots--was identified as one from Box 13. There were two from Box 13. One was opened, and Luis Salas identified it--he was on the witness stand--he identified his signature and identified that as one of the ballot boxes from Box 13. They didn't proceed any further after they got word from Justice Hugo Black, so they never did identify the second ballot box from Box 13, but I'm satisfied it was there if they'd proceeded.

One of the things that kept coming up was what happened to the ballots from Box 13? In Ronnie Duggers' book, The Politician, he has it, I've forgotten who it was saying, "They opened the box, and there was nothing there." Well, there were plenty of ballots in the box I looked at and was opened in court, and I don't know where that originated. That's one of the reasons I talked to Caro, because I wanted to straighten out that disappearing ballot box, and Luis Salas came to me several years later and said he knew where the missing ballots were. There were no missing ballots as far as I'm concerned.

G: When you say several years later, can you recall approximately when that might have been?

R: It was after the statute of limitations on perjury had expired. (Laughter)

G: It wasn't at the time that he surfaced in the 1970s and claimed to clear his conscience, was it?

R: This is somewhere--was at least after seven years, after the statute of limitation on perjury [had expired].

G: Do you know Luis Salas pretty well?

G: Not too well. I don't know, he was hungering, he wanted money, and they paid. I've forgotten the name of the writer [who] wrote some stories about it saying that he [Salas] was ordered by George Parr to open the ballot box and add 200 for Lyndon and 2 for Coke, and I don't know whether that's true or not. He certainly didn't testify to that in the federal hearing.

G: You covered that hearing?

R: Yes.

G: What do you recall of the atmosphere and the general ambience in that hearing?

R: It was pretty tense. There were these batteries of lawyers for Coke and for Lyndon Johnson, and I don't remember who was--I guess it was Thomas, a fellow named Thomas from an Austin law firm there.

G: Don Thomas?

R: Thomas?

G: Don Thomas.

R: Thomas. Yes.

G: Yes. Was Dudley Tarlton there, do you recall?

R: No, I don't think so. I knew Dudley real well, but I don't recall him being there. And John Connally wasn't there.

But they were holding a similar hearing in Duval County, another master in chancery over there, and they couldn't do anything about it

because--you see, the critical point in the election is this: you can have all the ballots in the world you want to, but it's no good for the purpose of a contest of an election unless you have the poll list. In those days you picked up a ballot, it was a numbered ballot, and the polling clerk put your name beside that number as you took the ballot, so if you don't have a poll list, you can't identify a voter with his vote. That was the crucial thing. The disappearance of the poll list was crucial. If they'd ever found them, then they could have gone into the box and called witnesses and said, "Did you vote in this election?" "Yes." I don't know who--some clever person thought of that. What it amounted to, of course, we didn't have a secret ballot, because you could always identify the voter by the number of his vote.

G: What do you recall of the difficulty they had with serving witnesses with subpoenas at that hearing?

R: Well, the only witness they couldn't find--and he was in Monterrey, Mexico, I learned; a U.S. marshal finally discovered he was in Monterrey--was Tom Donald, who was secretary. It was a funny thing. They got Mrs. Donald on the stand and said, "Where is your husband?" She said, "I don't know." "Have you heard from him?" "Yes. He telephoned me last night." And it was common gossip around town that she was one of the most jealous of wives and kept track of her husband all the time. And [they] said, "Where did he call from?" "I don't know." "You don't know where he called from?" "No." And the day after the hearing was adjourned, Donald turned up and said, "I

understand someone was looking for me." (Laughter) He had come back from Monterrey.

G: Did you ever talk to Donald?

R: Oh, quite a few times. He was a pleasant enough fellow. He was the cashier of the Texas State Bank, George Parr's bank.

G: What was his version of all of these events, or did he ever give you his version?

R: He never gave it. No, he cultivated a deep silence. Of course, as long as you could keep people from blabbing, you were all right.

G: What about Clarence Martens? Did you talk to him?

R: Well, Clarence is a strange sort of fellow. I liked him, but I was persuaded that he would yield to George's persuasions, or especially Ed and Frank Lloyd, two lawyers there in Alice who were lawyers for George, they could persuade Clarence to do things. But I'm not at all sure that Clarence ever did anything illegal because he never had custody of the ballot boxes.

G: Now, you said that you talked to Luis Salas after the statute of limitations ran out. What was his version of the events, or did you talk to him?

R: Oh, no, he wanted money.

G: Oh, I see.

R: I wasn't interested in paying the money, and also I thought that he certainly had not been forthcoming as a witness at the federal master in chancery hearing in 1948, and I just didn't want to have anything further to do with him.

G: They'd had some trouble finding him to testify, too, I understand. They didn't find him until the wee hours of the morning or some such.

R: I don't recall that. I just recall he was there at the time of the hearing.

G: Well, I'd seen a transcript--

R: I guess they may have encouraged him to try to get off or go somewhere in Mexico.

G: According to the transcript, he was asked where he was the night before and he refused to say. He just simply said, "I'm not going to tell you." And I was a little surprised that they didn't put the pressure on him, but they didn't. Maybe they didn't think it was important. I'm not sure.

R: Yes, I guess the fact that he was there, after all, made it irrelevant.

G: Did you talk to the Lloyds about all this?

R: Yes. Frank Lloyd was the pleasantest of the two. Ed was a strange guy. I think he always wanted to find some way to get around the law rather than trying to follow it down to the letter, and he just did peculiar things. I remember he was a city commissioner of Alice when they canceled a guy's taxicab license. What a silly thing to do! So the taxicab owner took it to federal court, and they got an injunction and restored it. Such a silly thing to do, and so obviously illegal or unconstitutional.

G: Was this part of some political feud or other?

R: Oh, not in the Parr sense. He was an ornery--he won the case, and the jurors gave him one dollar in damages because he was such an obstreperous little fellow.

G: I wonder if that was the cab that picked Jake Floyd up at his house the night his son was killed?

R: Did what?

G: Well, you know, the Floyd murder.

R: Yes.

G: Didn't Jake Floyd take a cab to the meeting?

R: Yes. What happened there is that Nago Alaniz claimed that he had driven ninety miles an hour from Rio Grande City to Alice to talk to Jake. And Alaniz called Floyd from Jewel's Drive-in, which is on the east city limits of Alice, and he said, "I've got to talk to you." He said, "Well, come on over." "No," he said, "come out here." But he said, "Don't come in your car. Come in a taxicab." So Jake called a taxicab and went out to Jewel's Drive-In, and there Nago Alaniz told him that there was a man waiting inside his garage to kill him. That's why he had told him to come in a taxicab. So Jake had told his son, Jacob S. Floyd, Jr., that he was going to see a Parr man. So the boy, wanting to be with his father, ran out to get into the car to follow the taxicab out there. Alfredo Cervantes said that he was in the alley waiting when he heard the telephone ring. That was his signal, and he went out in front of the garage and waited. He said, "Then I looked out there and I could see under the street light that pilou [pelado?] had loused things up," apparently referring to Alaniz.

He said, "I was getting ready to go and I stumbled on the step"--it was an asphalt driveway with a little concrete lip on it--"I stumbled over that, and here came this boy charging out of the house," and he said, "I thought he was coming at me, so I got up and shot him."

G: Who did he say this to? Where is this from?

R: This was developed in a peculiar way. Jake Floyd learned that Cervantes was in Guadalajara, so he got one of Cervantes' friends to go down there and see Cervantes. They got drunk together and in the process Cervantes told this story to Jake's informant.

G: And the informant came back and told Jake Floyd. Is that the way it went?

R: Yes. Plus the fact that he claimed he'd never gotten his money--Cervantes. There was a strange sequel to that. Eventually they tried Cervantes in Mexico City for the murder of Jacob S. Floyd, Jr. in Alice, Texas, and gave him thirty years. You sure couldn't do it in the United States.

G: No. I wonder what became of Cervantes?

R: Last I--I don't know. He may be dead by now. But that thirty years in Mexico means thirty years, and that's the maximum sentence they give. There's no parole or anything like that.

G: I wonder where they got their evidence. Who testified there?

R: They had fingerprints. When he used the gun, he threw it into a trash barrel, and they found the fingerprints, lifted them from the pistol--I think it was a .38 detective special--and asked Mexican authorities--

he had been in quite a bit of trouble in Mexico--and they were able to identify him with his fingerprints on the barrel.

G: I see.

R: And also he was seen. [In] testimony, he was seen parked--with a view of the Floyd garage and everything--he was seen parked with Mario Sapet, a real pistolero from San Antonio, and they were apparently casing the joint. Cervantes drove Sapet's Packard getting away, parked in Nuevo Laredo and took off. They made quite a bit of circumstantial evidence.

G: Let me ask you a few more things about 1948 and the sequel of 1948. Did you ever talk to anybody in the Johnson camp--by the Johnson camp I mean Connally or someone on that order--about what had transpired in Jim Wells County?

R: I didn't personally. Of course, my editor, Bob Jackson, they had been roommates together in Washington when Bob was administrative assistant to [Ewing] Thomason, a U.S. representative from El Paso, and Lyndon was administrative assistant for Dick Kleberg of the King Ranch, and so they kept pretty close contact there.

A peculiar thing--I'm trying to think of this historian, they call him--what's the school at Canyon? West Texas [State University]?

G: Is it Sul Ross?

R: No. I'm not sure. J. Evetts Haley.

G: Oh, yes.

R: J. Evetts Haley wrote a book about Box 13--A Texan Looks at Lyndon--and about Lyndon Johnson, and I found some terrible errors in there.

was going to write a book review listing all his grievous errors, and he said, "Wait a minute. Let me talk to Lyndon about it." So he called Lyndon, and Lyndon urged him not to do anything because he said he would just cause more publicity for the book itself, and so I never did write the review.

G: I'll be darned. What were some of the errors that you wanted to [list]?

R: Oh, ballot boxes were empty. I don't remember now, but I counted thirteen.

G: That's a good coincidence.

R: Yes, thirteen, a good one on--less than a round number. But I was continually plagued by the fact that so many errors were perpetuated and looked like they were going to become history, triumphing over fact.

G: Was one of them the allegation that they'd voted dead people?

R: I've heard that, and I never was able to substantiate it, but I don't doubt it.

But I'll tell you one thing. I covered an election contest suit once in Rio Grande City. The fact of the matter was there was a candidate won in the primary, and the defeated candidate ran a write-in campaign in the general election and got elected.

G: That's kind of unusual.

R: Yes. So I covered this contest. It was three weeks in Rio Grande City. During the course of that trial, they had a bunch of surplus ballots left over from the election. Thirty witnesses of a hundred

and seventy-five, I believe it was, testified that they could neither read nor write English or Spanish and couldn't sign their own name, yet they wrote in J. M. Longoria. "Well, would you mind showing us how you did that?" Yes, they'd give him a ballot, and he'd start counting up there, up the lines, and write in J. M. Longoria, and he couldn't even sign his own name. Thirty of them testified. What an election school they must have held. (Laughter) But that's how crazy South Texas politics has been. They've done it like none other. I don't think I would have been happy if I hadn't been in the midst of it.

G: Did you cover LBJ's campaign swing through South Texas that summer of 1948 when he flew the helicopter?

R: Yes, I went to the rally in Corpus Christi and then later that day went up to Sinton and saw him, but I didn't know him well enough. I know one time he said, "Oh, I know you," but he didn't remember me. You know the bane of all politicians is someone who comes up to you and says, "I bet you don't remember me."

G: Sure enough, he won't.

R: I always try to remove that embarrassment by immediately introducing myself. It's a little bit unfair.

(Interruption)

G: All right, sir, go ahead.

R: I'd written a manuscript on George Parr and South Texas politics, and part of it, of course, was devoted to Box 13 at Alice. So the Unitarian Fellowship asked me to give them a talk on Parr and South

Texas politics. I went to this home. There weren't more than about twenty people there, and in the question-and-answer period, one of the people in the audience asked me, "Did Lyndon Johnson stuff the ballots in Box 13?" And I said, "Oh, it would be unfair to blame Lyndon for that, but his friends damn sure did stuff them." And about three months later, a man named Blake Gillen, G-I-L-L-E-N, he worked with Edgar Linkenhoger in this Transport Company of Texas--

G: What was that last name?

R: Gillen?

G: No, the fellow that you mentioned after him. He worked with him--

R: Edgar Linkenhoger, L-I-N-K-E-N-H-O-G-E-R, who ran the Transport Company of Texas. Incidentally, the Transport Company of Texas got a contract for support work on Kwajalein, about a ten million dollar contract, and Fortune magazine--I was the stringer for Time, Life and Fortune for about twenty years--and I helped prepare this story. It was called, "How Not to Award a Government Contract." And this involved both--I think mainly Sam Houston Johnson. Linkenhoger worked with him and got this contract, and Blake Gillen was one of his assistants. And during 1960 Blake Gillen went all over the United States collecting money for Johnson for the campaign for the presidency. Well, the last I heard he was on the board of the Trinity River Authority in Dallas. At any rate, about three months after my little speech to the Unitarian Fellowship, Blake Gillen came to me and he said, "I want you to know that the Senator appreciates what you said about him."

G: My goodness!

R: I said, "What did I say about him?" "Oh, you said it would be unfair to blame Lyndon for stuffing the ballots in Box 13 in Alice." I said, "How did you know about it?" He said, "Oh, we have certain ways of finding out about it." He was then Senate majority leader. I thought, "Wow! What an intelligence network."

G: His intelligence was almost as good as yours.

R: Better.

G: Who were some of your good sources on the 1948 business?

R: Well, Harry Lee Adams, who was the incoming chairman of the Jim Wells County Democratic Executive Committee. And then Jake Floyd; I worked very closely with Jake Floyd. And Clarence Holmgreen.

G: Oh, yes.

R: He was county clerk at Alice. I had been covering Duval County for less than a year and I had about given up on it because it looked to me like the people in Duval County were satisfied with what they had and there wasn't any point in rocking the boat. If that's what they wanted, they could have it. And then after 1948, they began organizing the Freedom Party, and then it became possible to get some real stories out of Duval County. Before then, you couldn't get anything. Nobody wanted to talk to you.

G: Did you talk to C. W. Price? Do you remember him?

R: Yes. Dinky Price?

G: Dinky Price.

R: I talked to Dinky quite a bit. That's when I first knew him, I guess, was when he became involved. And then there was that guy named Ike Poole, who was also working for Coke Stevenson.

G: You don't happen to know where Ike Poole might be, do you?

R: Last I heard of him he was in Houston, but I don't know.

G: I'm having trouble tracking him down.

R: He had some sort of oil field supply company in Alice. I think he left after the drilling and so forth got a little thin on the ground back in the fifties.

G: It sounds like your best sources, in fact, I think it's fair to say that all the people you've named were opposition people, people who were on the other side of the Lloyds and George Parr.

R: Yes. Well, that was the principal thing because I would try to--I developed a pretty good working relationship with Frank Lloyd, the lawyer, Ed Lloyd's partner, and Frank told me quite a few things. One comment in particular that I remember that I perhaps mentioned earlier, that is that George Parr considered his political power as you would a property right and that he would spend every cent he owned just to preserve and keep that power, which he eventually did when he went into bankruptcy because of the--I think it was more protective bankruptcy, though, than anything else.

G: Yes. Do you have a version of what happened to Box 13? Have you constructed in your own mind a sequence of events that accounts for the discrepancy?

R: Well, this is my version. The boxes were delivered to the county jail, which is right across from the courthouse. They were then in the custody of Hubert Sain, S-A-I-N, who was the sheriff. My feeling is that while the boxes were in the county jail, the votes were added to Box 13 in Alice. Then, of course, when they couldn't locate the poll list and tally list and couldn't identify a voter with his vote, well, it seemed irrelevant whether the ballots were actually there or not. Of course, we identified one ballot box from 13.

G: So you think Hubert Sain had to have been a party to what happened?

R: Hubert Sain was a Parr man. At that time Parr was pretty strongly entrenched in Jim Wells County.

G: Who else do you think was implicated? Who else would have had to be involved?

R: Well, in Mangen's story, the Associated Press man Mangen--I've forgotten his first name--he says others were there, but I don't have any independent recollection or theory.

G: Did you know Richard Barton of Duval?

R: Oh, yes. He was one of the original members of the Freedom Party. They were pretty brave people. I used to go over there and attend their rallies at night, and almost the moment I crossed into Duval County from Jim Wells County, ten miles from Alice to San Diego, a deputy sheriff's car would tail me, follow me, and then follow me on out of town.

G: Did you ever feel endangered?

R: (Laughter) Well, one time the FBI, the Border Patrol, the Texas Rangers, the two sheriffs, and a private eye all told me my life was in danger, and I never did really feel that it was.

G: Well, did they tell you why or who was threatening?

R: They weren't clear. They thought it was something I knew that I might tell to a grand jury. But I didn't know--couldn't imagine what it was about unless they thought that I had information about the murder of Jacob S. Floyd, Jr. After that, I got a .45 automatic and I put it in the glove compartment of my car, and, of course, I usually left the car open so you've got to lock the glove compartment with that .45 in there. So I could visualize the situation. Somebody comes up to me beside the car, and he says, "You James Rowe?" And I said, "Yes, but just a second. I want to unlock my glove compartment."

(Laughter)

G: That's not very good reaction time.

Did you know Bob Mullen?

R: Oh, yes. The old man and the son. The old man was quite a character. Young Bob was a little bit weak, and I think he didn't have the real fire in him that his old man had.

G: Well, what about the sequel to 1948? Of course, it occurs to everybody, you could say that Box 13 made Lyndon Johnson president in a pretty direct line.

R: Yes, in fact in this manuscript of mine I wrote, I said, "There would be no Senator Lyndon Johnson, no Senate Majority Leader Johnson, no

Vice President Johnson, and no President Johnson if it hadn't been for Box 13."

There was a peculiar thing in the aftermath of the run-off primary. During the week or so that the returns seesawed back and forth, the lead seesawed, Coke Stevenson charged that Johnson had telephoned his people in South Texas, "Do your duty!" And I never could find that anywhere. Just as I'm absolutely positive that Lyndon Johnson never did come down to San Diego after the election to talk with Parr.

G: Now, that's what Luis Salas alleged in his later story.

R: Yes, I'm absolutely positive, because he had too many other lines of communication. Johnson was a very sensitive politician. His antennae were acute. He would never have put himself in that position for fear that it would get out.

Now, the only evidence I ever saw of any assistance to George Parr on the part of Lyndon Johnson was--I've forgotten what the year was, but George Parr had been convicted of mail fraud in connection with Benavides Independent School District finances, and he was tried in Houston and convicted and sentenced to ten years in prison. Well, some time later my publisher, Ed Harte, was in Washington, and he visited the law firm of Arnold, Fortas and Porter, and Abe Fortas took him down--they had a sort of a hospitality room in the basement of the law office--and asked Ed Harte, "Ed, do you know a fellow named George Parr down in South Texas?" Ed [said], "I sure do." "Well," he says, "I've been asked to represent him." I believe it was James Sharpe was the name, a lawyer from Brownsville, had prepared a three-hundred-page

page brief for the Supreme Court in this particular case in support of George Parr's appeal. Fortas took one look at it and said, "If you file that, I'm jumping right out of this case." And he substituted a three-page brief, and it was one of the craziest opinions I have ever seen. The Supreme Court of the United States virtually convicted George of stealing money from the Benavides Independent School District, but it wasn't mail fraud.

G: Which was what he was convicted of.

R: Yes. (Laughter) And reversed it. But I'm reasonably sure that Lyndon asked Abe to take it. I have no proof.

G: It's been alleged that Johnson went out of his way to avoid the Lloyds and George Parr in the fifties.

R: Well, I'm sure he did, but Robert Caro believes that the one who served as liaison between Lyndon and George Parr was Johnny Young, U.S. representative from the Fourteenth District. He was from Corpus Christi, a former county judge. I think that's likely, and I also think Johnny Young might have been over there when they had that meeting to--"We need some more votes, boys."

G: Is he still around?

R: Yes, he's a lobbyist in Washington for Coastal States Oil Company [Coastal Gas Producing Company], Oscar Wyatt.

G: Yes. Sounds like he might be worth talking to.

R: I've never talked to him. I never did know about the link until Caro had it in his first volume on Lyndon, and it seems reasonable, but I don't think Caro had any proof of it, and certainly I don't.

G: What do you think of Caro's version in general of the election?

R: I was very much impressed by it. I had read Ronnie Dugger's book first, and then Caro's, and I thought Caro's was so far superior because of the depth of his research. He had really gone up there and lived. Somebody told me that he had moved into Johnson City and spent six months there talking to whoever would talk to him about Lyndon Johnson. And he captured that pioneering and the poverty of life in the Hill Country and the hard work. He captured that, I thought, very well. But he was so surprised by what I told him about you didn't need money down in South Texas, all you needed is friends. Get to a place like San Antonio and I'm sure you'd have to spend quite a bit of money, Dallas, Houston, but not down here in this closed political system of the patrons.

G: What did 1948 do to that system? Was there a lasting effect?

R: It eventually ruined it because the legislature passed reform legislation. For instance, now you have a stub ballot box and a main ballot box, so it made it somewhat harder to steal an election, although it is still possible if there aren't any poll watchers around and you've got all your right people in the polling place. And, of course, voting machines, too, ruined the system that George thrived on, and that again destroyed the election-contest-suit history of Texas. It used to be you'd have at least two or three stories; one was the election, the results of the election, and the election contest suit. I've seen that time and time again in South Texas particularly. Now you get voting machines, and you can't identify a voter with his vote,

and there goes your story. And, of course, there's a question of whether--suppose you have a poll list, say a hundred names, and you fill in the voters who voted there, and then you go up to the machine and ring up a hundred votes. If there's no poll watchers, you can easily steal an election that way, but it is a little more difficult than it used to be. I guess we still don't have a secret ballot though.

G: I guess not.

R: Because your name is signed on the back of the stub. I remember the lengths to which people would go. There was an old one-armed editor of the Kingsville Record named Ed Errard. Ed was the mayor of Kingsville back during the Ku Klux days in the early twenties, and the Ku Klux had put up a candidate against Ed and Ed lost, so he went to the ballot boxes and got the names of all those who voted against him on the city payroll and fired them. (Laughter)

G: That's pretty drastic, but it's an example of what you can do if you don't have a secret ballot.

R: Well, at the same time, Ed Errard, as mayor, the Ku Klux Klan asked him for a permit for a parade, and he turned them down. Then he got to thinking about it, so he called up old Judge Walter Timon, a Catholic, whose district ran from Corpus Christi to Laredo, and he said, "Judge, Ku Klux say they're going to parade tomorrow, and I say they ain't. There might be some shooting before it's over. What do you think I ought to do?" The Judge said, "Well, wait a minute, boy. Let me think. . . . I tell you what. If you have to get in a shooting

scrape, you hightail it over to Laredo." He said, "I'm going to be over in court there tomorrow, and then we'll see what we can do." (Laughter) That's the justice of the frontier.

G: Pretty rough and ready.

R: Because old Timon was, oh, militantly anti-Ku Klux; he was a Catholic. (Interruption)

Lyndon was coming back from the 1960 convention where he had accepted the vice presidential nomination, and he stopped in Corpus Christi and Bob Jackson met him out at the airport, and Bob began upbraiding him. He said, "My goodness, Lyndon, why did you accept the vice presidency? You would be much more valuable to Texas as Senate majority leader than vice president." And Lyndon said, "Well, six of them didn't have to get elected." Which sounds ominous in retrospect, but I'm sure perfectly innocent at the time.

G: Yes. Yes. Did you ever talk to him about that, about the 1960 convention?

R: No, not to Johnson.

G: Did you ever interview LBJ for any purpose?

R: No. I've shaken hands with him. That's about the extent.

I remember a peculiar incident. Johnson was in Corpus Christi in 1957. I've forgotten what the occasion was, but it was just after Sputnik had been launched. So Cecil Burney had introduced me to Lyndon in the receiving line there. Someone mentioned Sputnik, and Lyndon immediately said, "Well"--in effect--"we're going to do

something about that right away," indicating that we were going to catch up with them.

But in the meantime, they were serving coffee, and I got off to one side, and I was talking to Lady Bird and Johnny Lyle. Lyle was the congressman from the Fourteenth District at the time, and I was never so embarrassed in my life. Johnny Lyle got to talking. He said, "You know, I came down the Capitol steps one day and ran into Lyndon, and he said, 'What's your blood type?' And I gave it to him, and he said, 'Here, get in here.' He got me in the car and took me to the hospital, and they took a pint of blood from me. He said, 'Lady Bird needs some blood.'" And he [Lyle] said, "Maybe some of that Lyle blood helped you, Lady Bird." Something along that line. And I was so embarrassed. My God, why did the guy go onto something like that?

G: You said you talked to Caro about his research.

R: Yes. Incidentally, that's where the manuscript is. He's still got it.

G: Oh, he does?

R: Yes.

G: Is that the only copy?

R: Yes.

G: Oh, dear.

R: If you'd be interested when I get it back, I can send it on to you.

G: Oh, I'd love to.

R: If you want to reproduce it--

G: I'd love to. I certainly would.

R: All right. Only thing I have--I'm afraid it's not--

(Interruption)

You know, he was quite a character, Lyndon Johnson. I don't know whether most people appreciated how complex a person he really was.

G: What do you think of the portrait that Caro has painted as compared with the one that Dugger has painted?

R: I think it's probably a little more balanced than Ronnie Dugger. I saw a television--it was on public television, I believe it was a [William F.] Buckley show--interview with Ronnie Dugger on one side and Jack Valenti on the other, debating the merits of Ronnie's book.

G: Do you remember in Dugger's book there is a picture of five men around an automobile, and on the hood of the automobile is what purports to be a ballot box with 13 painted on the bottom. Do you know anything about that picture, what it is?

R: It was just one of these put-up things, a joke. They were interested in making a joke of it rather than a serious matter.

G: Dugger didn't think it was a joke though, did he?

R: Oh, hell, no. I don't know. I remember seeing the picture, and I have the book in there somewhere, but as I recall it, that's all it was, was a joke, perpetuating that same theme, there was nothing in the ballot boxes. I can't get over that.

G: Let me ask you one thing I don't think we have talked about. What was the reaction of the onlookers, the witnesses, the attorneys at that hearing in Alice when the order came down to close the proceedings?

R: Oh, there was real despair in the Stevenson camp, and I could see that Bob Smith, the master in chancery, was disappointed. He wanted to finish that examination.

G: Smith had no love for George Parr, as I seem to recall.

R: No. You know why? He was the U.S. attorney for the Western District of Texas who prosecuted George Parr for income tax evasion in I believe 1932 and convicted him. There was a curious sidelight to that. Old Smith said one day he got a telephone call after the indictment of Parr for income tax evasion, "Smith, this is Cummings"--Attorney General--I've forgotten what his first name was [Homer S. Cummings]. He said, "Yes, sir, General." He said, "Have you got an indictment down there on a fellow named George Parr?" He said, "Yes, sir." He said, "Is it a good indictment?" "Yes, sir, it's airtight." "Well, go ahead," he said, "but I just got a call from John Nance Garner saying that they were persecuting one of his friends down there named George Parr." (Laughter)

G: Did you have any connection in any way with the FBI's activities in connection with the 1948 business? Didn't they try to conduct an investigation?

R: I'm not sure whether it was a real investigation or not. What happened was there was a guy, I believe his name was Smith, was with the Senate Committee on Privileges and Elections and had been sent down to check into this. He had been gone that day, and I was waiting for him in the Alice Hotel lobby when he came in. I walked up to him and introduced myself, and he said, "How in the world did you find me?" I

said, "Well, I just got word that you were here." And I said, "What can you tell me about your investigation?" He had been over in Duval County. He said, "I can't tell you a thing. You have to get it out of Washington." And I said, "You can't tell me anything?" "No," but he says, "I think it would be worth your while to go over and see the chairman of the Duval County Democratic Executive Committee." His name was Campbell King. So I hightailed it over to San Diego and found King at his home, and I said, "Did that investigator for the Senate committee impound the Duval County ballots?" And he said, "No." He didn't volunteer anything else.

Well, I went on back and wrote a story that they hadn't impounded those ballots. The next day the United Press, a fellow in the Valley, had a story that the ballot boxes had been burned. What happened was that Jim Wells County was holding an election shortly after the run-off primary. It was some county, local, election, and all of their ballot boxes were impounded from the run-off election. So they asked Duval County to loan them some ballot boxes to hold this election, and so somebody--they never did establish who--instructed the janitor to burn the ballots so they could loan the ballot boxes to Jim Wells County for their election. (Laughter) If he had just volunteered just a smidgen of anything--

G: You got scooped.

R: I sure got scooped.

G: Well, didn't Truman Phelps assist in some way in that?

R: What?

G: Truman Phelps--did you know him?--from Laredo.

R: Truman Phelps?

G: Yes.

R: No, I don't think so. The only one I knew fairly well over there was Manuel Raymond and Chic Kazen.

G: Did the FBI ever come talk to you about any of this?

R: No. That's why I suspect that the FBI didn't really carry on much of an investigation in Box 13.

G: What haven't we covered about 1948 and the sequel that you think you would like to get into the record? What haven't I thought to ask you?

R: I'm sorry. I didn't get your theme.

G: No, I'm trying to think of what we haven't talked about that we ought to talk about concerning 1948.

R: Of course, it has such a strange history. It's been broken I think, of course, by election reform and by economic improvement and so forth, but it was like President Roosevelt broke the boss system with social security and welfare programs. No longer--the boss didn't give them a scuttle of coal or some money on election day and things of that sort.

G: That theme has been explored in a book that I read some years ago. I'm trying to think of what--was it The Last Hurrah?

R: Well, that was by Edwin O'Connor. That's a fine book. Did you ever read The Inside Story of the Pendergast Machine by--I've forgotten his

name now. He was--Maurice Milligan--U.S. attorney for the Western District of Missouri.

End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview I

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