

## INTERVIEW I

DATE: April 3, 1965

INTERVIEWEE: O.B. Summy

INTERVIEWER: Eric F. Goldman

PLACE: President Johnson's Boyhood Home

G: Mr. Summy, I am going to ask you some questions about the trip to California. Do you remember the year and the month it started?

S: Well, it was on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day of July when we left here in 1925.

G: And the people who made the trip in addition to yourself?

S: Well, Lyndon, Otto and Tom Crider and Payne Rountree and myself. Five of us.

G: Whose automobile did you go in?

S: It was a car that the Crider brothers picked up here at the garage. They rebuilt a car, a little "whoopie" I called it. It had a back seat in it.

G: Was it a Model T Ford?

S: Yes, a Model T Ford.

G: And which Crider did it belong to?

S: The Crider boys in general. They were the ones who ran it after we go to California -- Otto or Tom, one of them, took charge of it then.

G: Whose idea was the trip?

S: The first I knew anything about it was the 2<sup>nd</sup> of July -- it was a short plan. I came to town and Tom Crider asked me how would I like to go to California. I said, "When are you going to start?" He said, "Maybe tomorrow if we can get everything going and get

enough boys together to go.” I said I’d go home and talk to my dad. We were on a farm, you know, and there was drought here. And we didn’t make anything on the farm. I went home and talked to him that night. He said, “Well you if you want to go, go ahead.” So the next day about 3:30 in the afternoon we left Johnson City.

G: Ben Crider told me that it was his impressions the reason you fellows went [was] that you were having hard times here.

S: That’s right.

G: And thought you would get good jobs out there.

S: That’s right. They put out a report here that money was on trees out there and you would only have to reach up and get it.

G: One account, Mr. Summy, says that Lyndon Johnson was the last one to join up, that he hadn’t thought of going and joined at the last moment. Do you remember about that?

S: No, when I came back to town, they said, “Well there are five of us going.” Lyndon was one of the five.

G: Was he the youngest.

S: Lyndon, I believe, was the youngest. I am 67 now and that was 40 years ago, last July.

G: Mr. Summy, one thing that is all mixed up in the accounts is the route you took to California. Can you remember it? First, how long did it take you to get there, how many days?

S: It was about five days, it seemed to me.

G: Now, the first night?

S: Well, the first night -- I’d say we left here around 3:30, a little late in the afternoon. We camped out between Kerrville and Junction.

G: There was a town named Kerrville and a town named Junction?

S: Yes. That was the first night. The second night, it was between Sheffield and Fort Stockton. We camped off the highway out in the sage brush -- we drove off the highway a little ways.

G: Off in the sage brush?

S: Yes. Then somewhere around El Paso, I believe.

G: Somewhere around El Paso? Not in El Paso?

S: It seems to me that for two nights we didn't camp -- we drove all night.

G: Now we are in El Paso. What is the next place on the route?

S: The next from El Paso? We went up to Lordsburg, New Mexico. Went across over to Globe.

G: Where's Globe -- in New Mexico?

S: Arizona. We crossed over the Hilo River and that was in Arizona. And it's Sapira -- that's in the edge of the mountains where you start to cross the mountains. No, that's not Sapira, I got that wrong. Oh, I can't think of that old place. Anyway, we came out of the mountains at Sapira, Arizona -- a mining camp.

G: How did you get into California?

S: We went to Blythe. It is right over the river there. It seems that we drove all that night.

G: Was the President the first one of you to leave the group?

S: Yes, that's right.

G: Where did he leave?

S: San Bernardino, I believe that's where it was.

G: Some of the accounts say that he had relatives there. Do you know who they were?

- S: Tom Martin, that was his cousin. That's where Lyndon stopped.
- G: One of the accounts, Mr. Summy, says that when you got to El Paso it was the first big city that any of you had been near, and all of you were scared to drive in it. Is that accurate?
- S: Well, I don't know. I had been in Austin and I believe that Austin is a little bigger than El Paso. I had been in Austin when I was a pretty small boy. But I had no experience in big cities.
- G: Otto Crider said you were all scared to go into El Paso, and that you drew lots to see who would drive. He didn't remember but thought that he and Lyndon Johnson lost and they had to drive in El Paso. Do you remember?
- S: Lyndon did drive, that's right.
- G: Did he drive in El Paso?
- S: He drove quite a ways out of El Paso.
- G: Do you remember what Tom Martin's occupation was?
- S: He had a law office.
- G: Is that the office that Lyndon Johnson worked in for a while?
- S: Yes.
- G: Sorry to keep asking you all these questions, but this is a very interesting story.
- S: That's okay. I will try to answer them the best I can. You know 40 years is a long time.
- G: I think you have a remarkable memory. Is it true you started out with \$15 apiece?
- S: I think that is just about right. I know I didn't have much -- it was something like that.
- G: What did you eat?

S: We just camped out. We had this campfire. We did our own cooking. We would lay on the sand at night, you know, out there in the sage brush.

G: Do you remember what food you ate?

S: Well, we had canned goods -- pork and beans and something like that.

G: Did you have \$15 apiece plus a lot of food along with you?

S: I think that's about all we had to start with.

G: Then you bought some food along the way?

S: I know I had taken all my bedding from home to camp with.

G: What about these mentions of flat tires? You say you had no flats at all?

S: It seems to me we had one flat and that was in the mountain country.

G: In California?

S: Between Globe and Sapira.

G: Did the car cause you any other trouble?

S: No trouble whatsoever.

G: What an ad for Model T Fords! Okay, you took turns driving and the rest of you would sit and talk?

S: I didn't drive. I guess I was the only one who didn't drive.

G: Did Lyndon Johnson do a lot of the driving?

S: Yes, he did.

G: What kind of driver was he?

S: He was a good driver.

G: Some of you slept sometimes or talked?

S: Yes, that's right.

G: Do you remember what you talked about?

S: Oh, I don't remember. Just talk.

G: Did the President talk about any of his ambitions, what he hoped to do in California and later?

S: No, I don't believe he did at the time.

G: Did he think of himself as a man who was going to be in politics...

S: No, he didn't mention that part of it. We didn't realize it -- none of us -- that he would ever be where he is now. You know he was just a young boy when he went to California. I think Rountree was the oldest. Then I was next, then the Crider boys.

G: Did anything happen along the way which frightened you?

S: We got into a bad whirlwind out there in Arizona -- it took our suitcases out of that little "whoopie" and there was a lot of gravel -- it was a pretty strong wind, that whirlwind?

G: A tornado?

S: A whirlwind, just a big old whirlwind, I call it.

G: Otto Crider tells that the President, who was the youngest of you, wanted to show you that he was a big fellow too and that he had a suitcase along with him which he would carry around as if it were a very heavy suitcase. And it blew open and there was nothing in it but a straw hat. Do you remember at all?

S: Lyndon, it seems to me, had two suitcases along.

G: With clothing in them?

S: Yes, I am pretty sure he did but I know that was a very strong wind and we just drove right into it on the highway. We learned better for if we saw another one coming, we would give it time to cross the road.

G: I don't know much about Model T's -- they were a little before my time. About how fast did you travel when you were going away?

S: I wouldn't think we were going over 20 to 25 miles with that little "whoopie."

G: Do you recall what the President did after he went to visit his cousin, Mr. Martin, in San Bernardino, or did you lose contact with him?

S: Yes, I went on to Waco, California from there.

G: Each of you went to a different place, didn't you?

S: The Crider boys went to Montia and I went to Wasco. We were in the same county though, Kern County -- the Crider boys and myself were all in the same county. But I was in a different place. I went to work for my brother out there he had been out there -- quite a few years and for the first job I picked up all the cotton he raised about -- 90 bales of cotton. The next job I got in California was hauling watermelons, putting them on a freight car. I had four mules -- big mules, you know. Seems like when you go out there they want Texans to handle mules. They thought I knew something about mules, being from Texas.

G: Do you remember, Mr. Summy, when the President first started out with you whether he intended to go to San Bernardino? Did he know where he was going?

S: Yes. That's where he wanted to go when he left there, I believe.

G: What about the family attitude toward his trip?

S: I don't really know about that part of it. Of course, Lyndon was young. I just imagine his mother did worry about him -- but I wouldn't know.

G: You don't know whether they approved of it or not, did you?

S: No, I sure don't.

G: Was it a gay trip -- did you all joke and sing?

S: Yes. It was a nice trip, something I will never forget and I am glad I made the trip.

G: Why did you come back?

S: I was farming here, you know. When I left, it was drought that year and I didn't have anything to keep me at home for the rest of the year. From the 3<sup>rd</sup> of July on is too late to farm in this country.

G: You intended to come back?

S: Yes.

G: Did the President intend to come back?

S: I really don't know but he came back. He didn't start school that year, I don't believe.

G: But he may have intended to come back all along?

S: Well, Lyndon came back before any of us boys, I believe.

G: How did Lyndon get back?

S: I just don't know.

G: One account says he hitch-hiked back.

S: I don't think so.

G: You fellows just lost contact?

S: Yes, after we separated.

G: Were you close friends before, all of you?

S: Oh, yes, yes.

G: All the families knew each other?

S: Yes. He was the youngest one. And he sort of grabbed on to the opportunity.

G: Do you remember any of the songs you sang?



S: No, I sure don't.

G: Were you for the most part on paved roads or unpaved roads?

S: It seems to me like some of them were paved and some just grade roads.

G: Lots of beautiful scenery?

S: Oh, yes, you take from Glove Cross to Sapira -- that's in the Rockies you know. There are lots of deep canyons and high mountains through there.

G: Was your most exciting memory beautiful scenery?

S: Yes. I changed sides. I'd ride on the right and look off down there for a mile or two and saw where a car had gone over the grade. I changed sides when I was riding and got on the other side.

G: Did anything else happen on the way that particularly strikes your memory?

S: I want to tell you about these four ladies from St. Paul, Minnesota. They called me. At the time I couldn't recall ever seeing ladies out in the desert before. She called me one -- night it was getting pretty late in the night -- she asked me if I remembered the four school teachers from St. Paul, Minnesota.

G: You mean they were camping too?

S: They were stranded out there.

G: You were camping?

S: No, we were traveling. We stopped out there and they were stranded along the side of the road. We stopped and she said I recognize one of those boys as being President Johnson from some of the pictures she saw. She said 1924. I couldn't go along with her on that date. But we did see the four ladies out there stranded in that desert.

G: I am not sure I understand. This happened later, that she...?

- S: Yes. Way out in California.
- G: She recently telephoned you and said you fellows had helped them when they were stranded somewhere in California?
- S: We stopped there. I don't remember what all we did.
- G: To fix their tire?
- S: Or whatever it was. I can't recall but anyway she called me.
- G: Do you remember her name by any chance?
- S: No, Jennison or something like that.
- G: From St. Paul, you say?
- S: Yes. I tried to call back up there and they said 700 more people have the same name up there.
- G: When did she call you?
- S: Two or three months ago.
- G: You have been very helpful and I think that about covers it. There are only a few little clean-up questions. Did you go through any big cities except El Paso?
- S: Well, it seems like Pasadena, California. I don't remember. We also went through a little old place called Redlands. It was a pretty nice town.
- G: El Paso was about the only really big town you went to?
- S: Yes. We were out there near Los Angeles. We stayed out of that town because we didn't want to get into any traffic jam.
- G: Who figured out the route?
- S: We just took a map.

G: As you went along, you figured it out. You never got lost, you didn't have any trouble of that kind?

S: No, we didn't get lost.

G: And, now, if I may ask a few general questions. You know the President pretty well before you went, didn't you?

S: I knew Lyndon, I guess, since he was about 5 years old.

G: Are there any stories you particularly remember about him?

S: No, I sure don't. I know Lyndon as a kid as he grew up around here and on that trip.

G: A lively kid, curious?

S: I would say a smart boy -- a shrewd boy, Lyndon. Seems like everybody around here liked him as a kid when he was growing up. Old people, everybody liked him.

G: In connection with his family, do you remember when the Johnsons lived here, how many acres they had?

S: I would say about four acres, something like that.

G: Did they have cows or chickens here?

S: Seems to me like they did, both.

G: An orchard?

S: I don't remember any more.

G: A barn?

S: Yes, a barn or something out there.

G: Was there anything about the house that looked very different from the way it looks now?

S: No, I would say that it was about the same. Of course, you painted it and did a lot of improvement there.

G: Was the family very much engaged in the father's political life?

S: I don't think so.

G: Thank you very much, Mr. Summy. You have been extremely helpful.

GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION  
NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS SERVICE

Gift of Personal Statement

By O. B. SUMMY

to the

Lyndon Baines Johnson Library

In accordance with Section 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, O. B. Summy, 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 the 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

Accepted

Date

*O. B. Summy*  
*Edna Summy Bickett*  
Dec 29, 1975

*Henry J. Wadkin*  
Director, Lyndon Baines  
Johnson Library for Archivist  
of the United States

January 12, 1976