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CLAUDIA "LADY BIRD" JOHNSON ORAL HISTORY, INTERVIEW XIV
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CLAUDIA TAYLOR JOHNSON

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Claudia Taylor Johnson 6/20/02

Claudia Taylor Johnson Date

by Patti Howell

Allison Fawcett 5-10-2011

~~Archivist of the United States~~ Date

Assistant Archivist
For Presidential Libraries

Appendix A

Attached to and forming part of the instrument of gift of oral history interviews, executed by Claudia Taylor Johnson, and accepted by the ~~Archivist of the United States~~ Assistant Archivist For Presidential Libraries on 5-10-2011.

Mrs. Johnson's Oral History Interviews:

May 26, 1975, with Merle Miller
June 25, 1976, with Merle Miller
June 29, 1976, with Merle Miller
January 30, 1977, with Merle Miller
February 14, 1977, with Merle Miller
August 12, 1977, with Michael Gillette
August 13, 1977, with Michael Gillette
August 14, 1977, with Michael Gillette
February 4, 1978, with Michael Gillette
April 1, 1978, with Michael Gillette
August 6, 1978, with Michael Gillette
October 9, 1978, with Michael Gillette
January 23, 1979, with Michael Gillette
January 24, 1979, with Michael Gillette
January 25-26, 1979, with Michael Gillette
February 27-28, 1979, with Michael Gillette
August 19, 1979, with Michael Gillette
September 2-3, 1979, with Michael Gillette
September 9, 1979, with Michael Gillette
November 13, 1979, with Anthony Champagne
January 4-5, 1980, with Michael Gillette
January 29-30, with Michael Gillette
September 20, 1980, with Michael Gillette
September 26-27, 1980, with Michael Gillette
February 6-7, 1981, with Michael Gillette
February 20-21, 1981, with Michael Gillette
August 10, 1981, with Michael Gillette
August 23, 1981, with Michael Gillette
September 5, 1981, with Michael Gillette
November 15, 1981, with Michael Gillette
January 2-3, 1982, with Michael Gillette
January 10, 1982, with Michael Gillette
January 30, 1982, with Michael Gillette
March 15, 1982, with Michael Gillette
March 19-20, 1982, with Michael Gillette
March 22, 1982, with Michael Gillette

March 29, 1982, with Michael Gillette
August 3-4, 1982, with Michael Gillette
September 4, 1983, with Michael Gillette
December 30, 1984, video and audio interview with Michael Gillette
January 4, 1985, video and audio interview with Michael Gillette
February 23, 1991, with Michael Gillette
March 4, 1991, with W. C. Trueheart
March 8, 1991, with Michael Gillette
August 1994, with Harry Middleton (six interviews)
November 5, 1994, with Harry Middleton
January 23, 1987, with Nancy Smith
August 18, 1987, with Lou Rudolph, Jim Henderson, and John and Sandy Brice
August 19, 1987, with Lou Rudolph, Jim Henderson, and John and Sandy Brice
August 20, 1987, with Lou Rudolph, and John and Sandy Brice
August 1994, with S. Douglass Cater
March 22, 1985, with Louis S. Gomolak
July 16, 1996, with Jan Jarboe Russell
July 17, 1996, with Jan Jarboe Russell

INTERVIEW XIV covering 1941

DATE: September 9, 1979

INTERVIEWEE: LADY BIRD JOHNSON

INTERVIEWER: MICHAEL L. GILLETTE

PLACE: LBJ Ranch, Stonewall, Texas

Tape 1 of 1

G: President Johnson flew to Texas to address the state legislature, and I believe he also met with W. Lee O'Daniel. [He] evidently received some assurance that O'Daniel would not run, and then, of course, later he did. Do you have any recollections of that?

J: Not a precise, clear-cut recollection. [I have] a vague remembrance that it was a blow when O'Daniel did announce and Lyndon hadn't really expected him to. We had a tremendous field against us: Gerald Mann, but I've already talked about him, I believe, and Martin Dies, and then when the incumbent Governor got in, that was a heavy field. Actually, I think there were twenty-eight people in that race. There are always some fringe candidates. I remember one man was sort of a vagabond who lived under a bridge, and that was more unusual then than it is now.

There was much in 1941 that was so similar to 1937. We opened in San Marcos; we closed at his boyhood home in Johnson City. The same factors were strong helpers, the people he had gone to school with at San Marcos, the people he had worked with in the NYA [National Youth Administration]. And this being a statewide campaign, there

was a very strong element of support from the old Fourteenth District, Mr. [Richard] Kleberg's district, where Lyndon had served as secretary for five years. There were caravans of cars that would set out across the state to accompany him as he was going to show up here and there and yonder. Once more as it had been in 1937, the people would talk to their counterparts. Mr. [Sam] Fore would talk to the newspapermen, and some rancher friends from the Fourteenth District would talk to other rancher friends, and businessmen to their fellow businessmen.

Lyndon, after a vast spurt of energy and exertion in the month of May, went to the hospital--I don't remember the exact dates--Scott and White, with his throat. He could just hardly whisper. All of his life he had trouble with his voice. If he had ever taken off and studied voice control consistently under an expert teacher I'm sure it would have served him well. There never seemed [to be] those gaps of time.

G: Gerald Mann's candidacy was perhaps the most harmful in the sense that they both had the same voters. Did he, to your knowledge, ever meet with Gerald Mann and attempt to dissuade him from running or make some sort of agreement so that only one of them would run?

J: I do not remember that he did, but you're right that they did draw from the same constituency. Particularly through Lyndon's mother's family he inherited a lot of the Baptist constituency and churchgoing folks. I don't remember that he did, but I remember that afterward they became friends. That was always one of the things that Lyndon attempted to do after a campaign was over was to conciliate and turn rivals and enemies into friends, if possible, or at least neutralize them.

This campaign was very heavily recorded by my little instrument, that camera that Lyndon had given me in the Christmas of 1940, I think it was. I used it myself lots, and when I couldn't, I'd turn it over to somebody like Juanita Roberts did some of them. We have pictures of W. Lee O'Daniel on the courthouse square in Marshall. It's fascinating to study the faces of the voters. They're all so intense and they're sizing you up. It's just like a stage play. You can just see them there sort of like a Greek chorus, just figuring you out. Pretty soon you think they're going to burst forth in their decision, whether it's pro or con. There was a good deal of blue shirts and overalls and Western hats with sweat on the hat band. There was usually in the crowd an old Confederate veteran, all aged and dried up, but in his uniform and full of medals. I remember at W. Lee O'Daniels's rally his pretty daughter, Molly, was going through the crowd with a little wooden barrel with a sign on it, "Drop in your quarters," or your dollars, because they made quite a thing out of their contributions really coming from the folks. We also have Gerald Mann standing on those same courthouse steps.

There was always--a courthouse square was the scene of confrontation. It was where the man came to present his case and where the folks came to hear him. There were certain days that were better. Saturday was the choice day. As I recall, one didn't campaign on Sunday, but that was the day when you really put your heads together with all the campaign people and decided schedules down the road, points to make in speeches, key people to telephone.

G: Did you travel any in that campaign?

J: I did. I traveled quite a lot. The funny thing, I must have worn the same beige gabardine

suit every day with a different blouse, thank heavens, and a great big beige hat and a big leather purse with a huge brass ornament, which, incidentally, Lynda still has, and [it] will last forever. This appears time after time in those movies. At any rate, if any of the folks were traveling with us they must have gotten the idea that we were a thrifty set.

There was a backdrop that followed us everywhere and it was the picture of Lyndon shaking hands with FDR [Franklin Delano Roosevelt] and he's being introduced by [James] Allred. In this particular instance Allred, right in the middle, had disappeared. Later on the following year the same picture was used with FDR and Allred, because Allred ran in 1942.

Everyone made an effort to have some kind of entertainment to entice the voters to come and listen, or to keep them interested until the candidate got there, and hopefully to collect a crowd. At the least you had a sound truck playing loud, cheerful music, lots of patriotic songs. It would go around and around the square and announce that you were going to speak at such a time and such a place and everybody come. When you really were trying and when you could manage it, you had a band, an entertainer, the familiar picture in the background of FDR and Lyndon, flags waving. You usually tried to have some of the outstanding people of the community on the platform with you, or to introduce you, or at least highly visible in front of the crowd. Our entertainer, I think I've mentioned her, was called the Kate Smith of the South. [She was] appropriately big and a great booming voice. "God Bless America" was what she always closed with.

G: How did you find her, do you know?

J: Through Harfield Weedin. I have mentioned that Harfield, who was highly capable, very

much a Hollywood type, made the show, put the show on the road and got it going. And always, somehow or other, in all that heat and dust [he] managed to look immaculate in a white suit and every hair in place.

G: As you think back, can you recall a day's event, not necessarily particular towns, but how many speeches in the morning and then maybe a break for lunch? What would be the typical day in terms of the number of speeches and where would he end up in the evening and that sort of thing? Did they generally try to make a circuit so that they would be back in Austin?

J: Oh, no. You would take a section of Texas. Sometimes he'd be gone from Austin three or four days, possibly even a week.

It was my job to keep in behind him with a suitcase full of clean clothes, to pick up those, to get them washed somehow. I was really the head of the clothes detail for one thing, and of the thank you detail.

Sometimes he would make as many as twenty speeches a day. But that would not mean major speeches. There would usually be a big rally at night and then maybe a meeting with a chamber of commerce group or a service club, a breakfast meeting, a lunch meeting, a lot of stops in between. The state is a big place. It was not nearly as simple as it had been in running in the Tenth District. You couldn't just stop like in Taylor and Georgetown and walk around up and down the two or three main streets and go in every store and speak to every merchant and every customer. You had hopefully enough friends to set up some sort of an organized gathering. It was up to your advance men, your best friends, to get the people to it. But I think twenty [speeches] would have

been an absolute maximum.

He traveled a good deal by tiny little planes. He traveled mostly by automobile. Carroll Keach was his driver to everywhere. I remember one time somebody looked at Carroll kind of commiseratingly and said, "Carroll, that sure must be a hard job." He said something like this: "Well, every one of us can do something for him." Just as though it was just his pleasure to do that. It was up to the fellow who was driving to remind him, "Now, Mr. Johnson, this next town you're going to meet Mr. John Jones and you remember John Jones used to be with you at so and so and so on." So then you could bounce out of the car with some assurance and some names and memories on the tip of your tongue.

Back in Austin we had headquarters, as I recall, at the Stephen F. Austin Hotel on the second floor, giving out onto that balcony, and there was a whole marvelous, wonderful coterie of young women typing away and lots and lots of volunteers. Somewhere in the vast recesses of the hotel, John Connally was holed up and working night and day. Everett Looney of Looney, Clark, Thomas, Winters and Shapiro and so forth and so on, was a confidante and planner and helper. Harold Young was, too, and we were always getting messages from Charles Marsh. Mayor [Tom] Miller would come in late at night with his advice.

Every county had a county man. My brother, T. J. Taylor, Jr., was his county man in Jefferson, from Marion County. Cameron McElroy was county man for Harrison [County] in East Texas. At the end of every election Lyndon always looked first for the votes of Blanco County, and I, for Harrison County. And then both of us intently for the

Tenth District. An odd thing about the Tenth District, I don't believe he ever changed much, either to win or lose, from 1937 on to the end of his career. Maybe the last election of 1964 he topped it. But almost all the time it would be around, between 64 and 67 per cent. That's plenty good.

Lyndon was chain-smoking in those days, always hot, always walking fast and going fast. I'd just trot along behind him when we were walking someplace.

I remember we wound up the campaign, the last days of it, approaching Johnson City. I remember he stopped in, of all things, a blacksmith's shop. Can you believe that they were still running in 1941? But there was one in Blanco. He'd always make a point, too, of stopping by the barber shop, because that was a great place for men to congregate, talk politics, exchange ideas. The last rally was on the front porch of his boyhood home. Tom Martin was the master of ceremonies. When I look on those old pictures I can see Uncle Tom Johnson in the crowd and Cousin Oriole and Corky Cox as a little boy. I think that was where Dr. C. E. Evans and Ernest Thompson were on the front porch.

Somebody else that was always in the crowd, besides the old Confederate veteran, was the old trail driver. The farther west you went, the more you got, because naturally their habitat was where they had been trail drivers. From 1937 to 1941--I forget whether they were still around as late as 1948, because they were the genuine old first trail drivers, although the organization still persists, the descendants of them. They were always his friend and the organization was strongly his friend.

G: How about that wind-up campaign speech in Houston on Friday night before--let's see, the election was on Saturday, I think--just before he went to Johnson City. Do you

remember that? I guess Roy Hofheinz would have been involved.

J: Roy Hofheinz would have masterminded it. I remember how spectacularly young and handsome and buoyant Roy Hofheinz was, and just as energetic as Lyndon. They were a pair. I remember the flag waving. They must have had a fan behind it or some sort of a man-made breeze because the flag never stopped waving one second. And in those days, although I have said we were asleep as a nation, and that I'm afraid, in retrospect, is true, but believe me, we always responded to the patriotic theme. The biggest handclaps you'd get were when you would talk about liberty and freedom and national defense and the honor of our country. Actually I recall little of that last rally in Houston. Big towns always--I was not as much at home in them as in country towns.

But the signature of the campaign was always this incessant, fast hand-shaking at the end. That must have been an exhausting thing. It was a lot of exercise. You did your best to remember names, faces, an appropriate word, a pat on the back, a kiss for women that you were close to. And down the line they went. Sometimes I used to say to Lyndon, "Don't do it so fast. You're going to make a bad impression. You're going to make people think trying to get on with them," which he was, of course.

G: What did he say when you told him that?

J: I'm afraid he paid me no mind.

G: President Roosevelt, if not taking an active role in the campaign, tried to get some of the people in his administration to help President Johnson out in the 1941 race. One that he seemed to be having some trouble with was Jesse Jones, who seemed reluctant to make an endorsement. Do you recall anything about that or the relationship between a more

conservative Jesse Jones and a young New Deal congressman on the other hand running for the Senate?

J: No, I can't say that I do actually. I know that some of Lyndon's friends have assumed that there was a hostility between them. There wasn't on Lyndon's part, at least to the best of my belief, because he just had an inherent admiration for business, successful business especially, and almost a sort of an envy, like he would have liked to have had a try at that himself. And that grew with the years. So I don't think--he certainly was not close to Mr. Jones. Mr. Jones was a very important man and he was still pretty small potatoes. But I know he would have liked to have had his help and I don't think he ever got it.

G: There seems to have been a trend, particularly in this election later on, if there was a more conservative publisher, maybe he didn't get support on the editorial page, but he still won the support of the reporters. Do you remember anything like that?

J: Well, I know he sure did try to. This, I guess, was the high tide for us in our press relations, because they were always good, as I remember. There was very little that was bad for us from the press in that campaign of 1941. It was a beautiful campaign.

G: I gather weather-wise it was not all that favorable.

J: Well, it was hot and tiring and of course air conditioning was not a part of our lives then.

G: Did it rain a lot in that campaign?

J: I don't remember it, don't remember it. We would have welcomed it and used it if it had.

(Interruption)

G: Did you have any money problems in the 1941 campaign?

J: I don't suppose there ever was a campaign that didn't have money problems. We must have. My whole impression of 1941 is that it rolled smoothly. I can't remember whether this episode happened in 1941 or 1948. But at any rate, we were just about at a dead stop for lack of money. People from his office were telling him, "We can't get any more credit from the newspapers. We can't put in another page of ads. We can't buy any more radio time. They're even talking about discontinuing our telephones if we don't come up with the payment." And Lyndon, desperate, went to see a man that he thought could and would help him. I think maybe it was Mr. [E. S.] Fentress; I can't say for sure. He walked in, began giving him the best sales talk he was capable of, his qualifications, what he hoped to do with the job if he got it, why it would be in the interest of the state to have him. And the man kept on sort of nodding and looking very sympathetic and finally said, "Well, Lyndon, I wish I could help you. Would five do you any good?" I'm going to use this fictional figure, because whatever it was, five thousand or whatever, it was about five times as much as Lyndon had been hoping he would get. He wrote him out the check as though that was not nearly as much as he would wish he could give and as he was sure Lyndon was about to ask him for. All the time it was about five times as much. And Lyndon, with a great gasp of relief, took it, shook his hand, thanked him, and went racing out the door and back to the office. I wish I could be precise. Perhaps Walter [Jenkins] or Mary Rather could. They, in the background, were always keeping up with the bills and the mail, and his lifeline to the telephone and what people were saying.

So we rolled on around to the last day and voted, of course, in Johnson City after the speech from the front porch of his parents' home, necessarily a very sentimental

speech. Lyndon was naturally a very sentimental person. His home town and the height of his dreams and the end of this long and arduous campaign just put you on a sort of peak of emotion. We voted after the speech. Then we went to the hotel in Austin to wait out the returns. I think it must have been the Driskill. Do you know?

G: That sounds familiar.

J: It seems like we wound up--although his campaign headquarters were indeed in the Stephen F. Austin--well, in any case, in a hotel in Austin where we lived, literally lived, from Saturday night until the following, I believe, Wednesday. Saturday night, we had this setup with a great many phones, a blackboard. Walter Jenkins as sort of the chief manager of the telephone squad and the one who would write down, on the blackboard, the votes as they were announced by the Texas Election Bureau. We'd get constant calls from this county, that county, this part of the state, that district manager. Lyndon would be grabbing up first one receiver and then another. John [was] on one, Senator Wirtz in another room on another, calling in figures. Pandemonium and high hopes and drinks and food grabbed at odd hours and staying up all night. Those are the hallmarks of after an election.

I do not remember the time, but at any case the Texas Election Bureau announced that Lyndon was elected with a five thousand vote lead, at some point. So that the next day's paper, the *Dallas Morning News*, on Sunday morning--no, it must have taken it [longer]; it was the Monday morning's paper--had a whole half page of pictures of Lyndon from six months on up to as he was now as a member of Congress. A whole page about him and then a great big spread on the front page.

G: The process of the votes slipping away in the last final days, do you recall the events?

J: Sure. I suppose it would be impossible to erase from memory the feeling, if not the precision of the facts, as they marched one, two, three. We stayed in a hotel room having meals sent up. There were the constant telephone calls. At first there was this buoyant exhilaration, this five thousand lead over O'Daniel, and the paper saying only a miracle could keep FR's anointed out. Our lead was over W. Lee O'Daniel. Gerald Mann was entirely out of the race, but he was running third and Martin Dies was a poor fourth. But the votes were still trickling in. I think on Sunday we were getting swamped with congratulatory wires; I know we have somewhere in our files now stacks and stacks of those. I remember the figure three thousand--I can't say I counted them personally. Lyndon was talking about staff, making plans on who to put in what slot.

Then we began to get this [report]: the votes from the forks of the creek, so to speak, in deep East Texas began to come in with this very disquieting reversal in areas--Martin Dies' home district. There were several counties where the late votes coming in did not follow the trend set, which had been naturally [in favor of] Martin Dies, home town man [who] got large segments of the votes. O'Daniel and Lyndon pretty much divided the rest, Mann some. But Dies didn't get hardly [any]. In the last bit he dropped off mightily and O'Daniel picked up mightily. And Lyndon's fairly substantial little amount trickled to nothing. So this continued throughout Monday and Tuesday with Senator getting more and more worried and concerned. I have pictures of him on the phone and picture of John lying down spread out all over the sofa, Lyndon lying on the bed. Utter weariness in every line of them, but also this foreboding of impending disaster

written on their faces. Darling pictures of Mary Rather listening to the returns and then holding her nose and waving her hand in the air with distaste.

By Wednesday morning, W. Lee O' Daniel was declared winner by the thin margin of 1311. So we had a meeting on what to do next. There was a lot of talk about, "Shall we contest?" Lyndon was not for it. He just couldn't remember having heard of any contest where, in the end, one either won or won with a feeling of satisfaction. They were just messy things. So he said, "There will be another ball game," and he called this one quits. I'll never forget the picture of him leaving, which has to remain only in my mind's eye now because, although I took it with that little camera, somehow or another the film is gone. He was wearing a rumpled seersucker suit and he was marching out to get on the plane. He looked so jaunty, and I knew that he had had to pull that up from the very depths of his resources and spirit to appear jaunty for me and for all of his campaign workers. He turned around and he waved at us and he got on that plane and off he flew, still the congressman from the Tenth District but defeated for the race for the Senate. But I felt so proud of him, and never more so than when he said goodbye.

G: How did you take that defeat yourself? Was that hard for you?

J: Oh, no, no, no, I really and truly couldn't--I didn't ever regard it as a defeat, but as sort of a learning experience. It happened early in our years. Let's see, in 1941 Lyndon was not--how old was he? He was born in 1908. He was thirty-two or -three, wasn't he? And still in a job with a great place of usefulness. Having gone into a race with three strong men with statewide friends, acceptance, power, for a very small David to take on all those Goliaths and come out as well as he did was a mighty good show.

As a matter of fact, within a month, at least not much more than a month, there was something so poignant and so--I almost felt eerie about it. Lyndon as congressman went back to resume his duties on the floor. Speaker Rayburn asked him to be one of his lieutenants in trying to get Roosevelt's extension of the draft passed. Here we were, in August, four or five months away from Pearl Harbor, and we were about to run out of the draft. And there wasn't enough support for it to be at all sure you were going to get it passed. Speaker Rayburn was just trying with Herculean efforts to get everybody to vote for it and to make sure that anybody who was going to vote for it didn't get sick or have an important appointment someplace else, or that they showed up on the floor if they could barely walk. Lyndon was a chief lieutenant. It passed by one vote. Always since it's almost made my hair stand on end to think how close that was for us all.

There was an interesting and also rather poignant and very personal feeling that six months later or thereabouts, when former Governor Jim Ferguson's daughter, Ouida Ferguson Nalle, came to see me and brought me a beautiful piece of needlepoint that she herself had done, and said something about like this, "You know, our family had always been your husband's friend and his father's friend. We thought he made a good congressman and he probably would have made a good senator. We just want you to know we think of ourselves as still your friends." To explain this, to backtrack a few minutes, a lot of speculation had gone on in those days between Saturday night and Wednesday, when the vote began to change and when the vote from the forks of the creek came in, that it was the old-time Ferguson vote, and that it was the master hand of Pa Ferguson that was being felt over there in an area where he had always been

particularly strong. I have no knowledge but that was a feeling among a lot of old timers. Somehow or another I've always particularly cherished that piece of needlework.

And I'm glad to say that Lyndon walked out of it, to the best of my belief, without bitterness and with a lot of learning.

G: Do you recall Senator Wirtz' advice on whether or not to contest the election?

J: Senator Wirtz was not one of those who considered seriously contesting it, as I remember it. I think it was a younger [group], and I can't say quite who, but the young ones, most disappointed, perhaps less versed in the long, long ways of the world, considered contesting it.

G: Was there after that election, before President Johnson went back to Washington, was there any sort of party or get-together that you recall?

J: No. There was no sort of a [party]. I know that Lyndon made an effort to thank everybody, and so did I, and I stayed behind to do more of that while they were dismantling the headquarters. But as far as having a party, there wasn't one.

G: He left right away, I gather.

J: He left very soon after the Governor, W. Lee O'Daniel, was declared elected.

End of Tape 1 of 1 and Interview XIV