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

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This assignment is subject to the following terms and conditions:

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(3) I hereby assign to the United States Government all copyright I may have in the interview transcripts and tapes.

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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 XXIX covering 1951-1952

DATE: March 19-20, 1982

INTERVIEWEE: LADY BIRD JOHNSON

INTERVIEWER: MICHAEL L. GILLETTE

PLACE: LBJ Ranch, Stonewall, Texas

Tape 1 of 1

J: In February, I began the first of many trips to Texas to work on the house. I went somewhat reluctantly, because I had gotten our house in Washington tamed to the point where I was just enjoying it, and I hated to leave the children. But it had to be done. We had to get it ready to live in--the Ranch house--and hopefully by summertime, whenever Congress adjourned.

Max Brooks was the architect. We had chosen Marcus Burg, absolutely local contractor--Stonewall, not even Johnson City. I think our bid was twelve thousand dollars. Obviously we had not taken the advice of our good friends the [Wesley] Wests, and the others, to just bulldoze the house down, but we were making a big gamble to see if we could take this old place and turn it into a livable home for forever.

I went down in a grey, bleak February weather, stayed with Mrs. Johnson in Austin, would drive out every day taking my envelopes full of wallpaper samples and all sort of paint samples and Max Brooks' plans. Sometimes Max Brooks would go with me. We'd walk around all over the house with the carpenters and the workers here and there. Marcus Burg would be with us. It's a time that has a very vivid clearness in my mind. I

would sometimes have lunch in Johnson City at the old cafe there, right across from what's now the bank, and what was then, I believe, still the hotel, Casparis Cafe. Oh, they had the best pecan pie in the whole wide world, and their chili was pretty good, too. So was their chicken fried steak. Or else I would just go down to the foreman's house. We had chosen a foreman named [Julius] Matus. He had a very friendly nice wife and several small children, and they were established in what had been Aunt Frank's foreman's house. And she would have me down for lunch. We'd sit around their kitchen table. She always had a good and hearty lunch, and I remember the most marvelous jam made out of the local fox grapes that grew along the river and everywhere, along the fences.

G: What was your objective? Was it to oversee the renovation? Was it to decorate?

J: Well, you bet it was to just see that everything went like I wanted it. I would choose, hang up paint samples, which we did on pieces of plywood. I would hang up wallpaper samples, and I'd back off and look at them and get the judgment of various friends. I think both Liz Odom and Vola Mae Odom came out and passed on them. I loved having Mrs. Sam Johnson's approval, and she would come when she could, but it was pretty arduous.

G: Well there was no heat in the house then, was there?

J: No. It was cold and drafty, and all the old German carpenters were talking German and I couldn't understand them, and Marcus Burg would give them directions, and they would sort of look at him, uncertain, and then finally he would launch into German and they would say, "Ja! Ja!" and smile and nod their heads and go back to work.

We got an awfully lot of work done for a very moderate price. I remember for one of the upstairs room I selected a lovely geranium wallpaper in shades of bright red and pink and chartreuse green, and I called the room "the gay room," and it's held that name ever since, much to the laughter of my children as the years went by.

G: The connotation changed--

J: Absolutely. Perfectly good word in the English language and I declined to let it go.

There was a room called Aunt Georgia's room, because one elderly relative of the Martin family named Aunt Georgia would come to visit and she would stay--well I think she finally stayed about six or seven years until she died. So that room was later to become the secretary's room. And at that time, these three rooms were just in a row on the east wing, and you went from one to the next to the next. Apparently, privacy was not valued in the early days as much as it had come to be by us, so we cut off a little footage, and made a hall on the south side, and let a door into each of those three rooms, and we put one bath, thereby thinking we had three rooms very marvelously served.

The downstairs living room where the huge fireplace was, I'm so glad that we did not destroy, or in any way change, the huge fireplace with its wide hearth that was raised up about fifteen inches, or indeed did not take out the long pieces of hardware--whose name I can't call right now--from which pots had been suspended even by Aunt Frank, first by the earlier residents, and even by Aunt Frank in her time, for cooking. It was auxiliary cooking with Aunt Frank; she had a proper kitchen, but sometimes it would go out, or sometimes she said she just loved to cook a big pot of stew or beans over the coals.

We made many changes in the room however, because, in an effort to make it look like, I suppose, an English library they stained the beams a dark, sort of walnut color, and then the walls--there was a sort of a wainscoting and paneling and a lot of bookcases, but not very--well, at any rate, it made the room very dark, and to my feeling, dismal. So I ripped it all out and painted everything off white. However, bookcases later on once more lined the walls, but I felt it brightened it considerably. We took out a lot of the Victorian detailing. I'm very glad that Max Brooks made some before and after pictures. They've been interesting to have as a sort of record of the progress of this old house.

G: Did LBJ have an input in the decor?

J: Very little. He left all that to me, but I must say I sought earnestly to follow his needs, and his needs were not all that demanding. He wanted a darn good reading light above his bed and a darn good shaving light in his bathroom.

Incidentally, I think I have told you about Aunt Frank's two bathrooms? Well, sometime, years before, I think very early twenties, she had put in two bathrooms--quite an elegant feature in Gillespie County in early l920s--and the tile reached to the ceiling. I'm very glad we did not take that out. Alas, we did take out the old tubs, which stood on very fancy legs, and even more unfortunately, the lavatories, which stood on pedestals and had very wide surfaces around the edge of them, would have come in so handy later for all one's toilet articles. We did put in a lot of closets, very much needed and very absent in houses built in those early days.

But, this was to be repeated often, these trips, from February to July.

G: How long would you generally stay?

J: A week, maybe a little longer, because life at home was beckoning, very much, back in Washington, where lots of visitors were coming. Ray Roberts and Cameron McElroy from Marshall came up and we had them out to the house.

Our house was a sort of a lodestone for all of our friends, and I loved for it to be. And Judge [Marvin] Jones' two nieces came to town, and there was a round of receptions and teas and luncheons and cocktail parties. Mrs. Tom Connally and Mrs. George Mahon and Mrs. [Fritz] Lanham--we went to all the familiar haunts to celebrate these happy events.

Secretary [Harold] Ickes died, and we, of course, went to the funeral. Another guest from home was the granddaughter-in-law of our dear friend, E. H. Perry, Lyndon's first convert from the business community in Austin and our dear friend, from the time we met him until his death.

Then we had some very special visitors. The [A. W.] Moursunds and he [Melvin] Winters came up from Johnson City. And we had them out to the house, and Lyndon gave a party for the men down at the Capitol, and a luncheon where he invited the Speaker [Sam Rayburn], and Vice President [Alben] Barkley, and Senator Connally, and Democratic Leader [Ernest] McFarland, and all of his--he really did his best for them. Then, we also went up to New York, and [I] have a delightful picture of all the six of us on the Empire State Building. In fact, that was our destination on a number of sight-seeing trips.

G: I was going to ask if his association with them--I know that his family had known A. W.

Moursund's family, well, since their mothers were young, but I was wondering if their association was increased after the Ranch was purchased?

J: Oh yes, indeed. Because he sought the advice of both of them on what kind of cattle to buy, where to buy them, who to get for a foreman--everything about running a ranch. And they were sort of our home base in this area, and in fact, I sometimes would stay with the Winters, rather than drive all the way back to Mrs. Johnson's.

There was one hilarious time when they had told me that they would be away when I got home that evening, but the key was in such and such a spot, and just come in and make myself at home. I got there, found the key, no problem, but I was not a bit good with making keys work. So I turned, and I turned, and I got to the point of just about cussing, and then, I saw the kitchen window. I could barely climb to it if I moved, I think maybe it was an old sawhorse in the yard or a box or something in the yard. [I] climbed up on that box, raised the kitchen window, started raising myself up to climb through, got part the way through, and got stuck. (Laughter) I was divided between laughter and near panic. Fortunately, I hadn't been there but a few minutes when up drove Melvin and Anita, and that remained one of our funny stories for years to come.

G: Did he have business associations with A. W. Moursund during this period?

J: I think in those days it was just a social and advice, and even more with Melvin in the beginning. Melvin was a very extraordinary man, one of the best men I've ever known, for his love of his community and his general willingness to shoulder any load for a friend or for a good purpose. He was a strong political friend and a strong personal friend.

G: And he was primarily a rancher, too?

J: No, no. He was primarily a contractor.

G: Oh, I see.

J: But he ranched on the side. And A. W., as you know, was primarily a lawyer, but he had inherited a good deal of land, and he lusted after other land.

G: I guess he got that from his mother. There were two other questions on the renovation of the Ranch. One, if you could have done it over, is there anything you would have done differently that you have thought about over the years?

J: I suppose within the framework of our means at that time, and we were always, I especially, wanting to live within our means and not above them, perhaps I went as far as I would have gone. It didn't take us long to find out, though, that we should have added more bathrooms and made things a little more plush.

G: Did you expand the kitchen then at that time?

J: Oh, goodness, yes. That was a primary aim. A must. And it has undergone several transformations since, but we certainly improved it.

G: What was your biggest dilemma throughout the whole thing? Was there any problem that just seemed insoluble or especially difficult?

J: Looking back on it, I'm still full of admiration for the skill of the local workmen, and the industry. I think we got an awful lot for our money. I learned a lot, and I'm glad we fell into the hands of Max Brooks. Not too long afterwards, he turned us over to one of his number-two men, Roy White, which began a lifelong friendship. I can't remember exactly when Roy came into the picture.

But back at home, oh, life was just full of interesting things going on. I'd go to the ballet and we went to dinner at Altavene Clark's. She was an old friend of Lyndon's that he had dated long before he'd known me.

G: Was this during the [Richard] Kleberg years?

J: Yes. And she had gone on to be a top assistant to a--I think she was most of the years with Judge Jones.

G: Marvin Jones?

J: Marvin Jones.

The children were consuming a happy part of my life. Lynda, alas, was fat. And I'm afraid I didn't do enough to cope with it. I didn't demand any dieting; I tried, but I certainly did not succeed. Luci was still slim and elfin and docile and pretty. They've later on told me that all those vegetables that I insisted that they eat, and that I put on their plate, and later I would notice that the plate was empty--they usually had their dinners at the kitchen table, served by Zephyr [Wright], because Lyndon would come home at such varied and uncertain and often late hours: nine o'clock one night, seven-thirty at the earliest, maybe sometimes, eight, maybe even sometimes as late as ten. And that's no routine for children. So I would give them their supper at the kitchen table. There was, on one side of it, a little drawer. When I was out of the room or Zephyr was not looking, they would simply empty their vegetables into that drawer. (Laughter) I hate to think what it must have been like when Zephyr some day opened it up, and I think maybe it's more a tale they tell than anything else.

G: When the President would come home for dinner, would he call first and let you know

when he was coming?

J: Yes. He was really quite nice about that. If he didn't, Mary would. Mary Rather. One of those marvelous gifts to life. A secretary that cared a lot, tried to keep up all of his relations with all of his friends, cared about me and about our children. Actually, she would stay with the children a lot when we were in Texas. She was just practically a member of our family.

Another member of our staff at that time was Sarah Wade who was one of those folks that worked for you eighteen hours a day during a campaign and just seems to--her candidate becomes her life, sort of, which is sad. It was a very distressing part of our times, and I don't remember whether it was in 1952 or a year or two later; at any rate, she developed cancer. Her husband, well, he dropped out of the picture as far as I can remember. I think he was working overseas, and then he really genuinely dropped out of the picture. We were with her during the declining years of cancer.

There were also all the usual social things: the 75th Club luncheon; Bess Porter would have a tea. Bess was a very good friend of mine. And the Congressional Club would go through its routine of a party for President and Mrs. Truman, and later on, a party for the Chief Justice and Mrs. [Fred] Vinson.

Luci was going to be all dressed up in a lovely ballet costume and model in a style show at the Congressional Club. I believe that was the year. I think she was four and coming on to being five, and alas, she came down with infected throat or ears, to which my children were repeatedly prone, and she couldn't model. I don't know that it bothered Luci much; it sure bothered Mary. She wrote me in full detail about it; I was in Texas at

that time.

Senators that we would see a good deal of were, of course, first and always, Senator Dick Russell and the Leader, Senator McFarland, and Senator Lister Hill of Alabama, and Senator [Earle] Clements of Kentucky.

G: Was he close to [Hubert] Humphrey by this time?

J: It was a sort of an interesting raillery backwards and forwards, and I think--I don't remember exactly when I began to like him so much, or exactly when Lyndon indeed began to. I do remember that he was one of the few people that ever invited us--he and Muriel--to come to his house and bring our children. We went over there--I think it was on a Sunday--and they had children about the same age, and they played and they had a sort of a big playroom with a slot machine in it. (Laughter)

A Republican that he saw a good deal of was Styles Bridges, who had a very handsome blonde wife. Styles was about as conservative as they come, but very able. He and Lyndon sort of recognized a similar strain, perhaps, in each other of, I don't know, I would like to call it leadership. They were friends. He visited us in Texas, not that first year, but early on after we got the Ranch established.

We lost Don Cook. He became chairman of the SEC [Securities Exchange Commission], and it wasn't long after that that he had to give up being counsel--for free, I think, and maybe it was part time--of Lyndon's committee. We depended on him so much, and it was a real loss. The committee, really, was the core of a lot of Lyndon's days then. There was slowdown in the target date for the full air force readiness, and he took in after that like a bulldog and said that they ought to be going ahead as far as they

could to bring the air force up to good fighting condition. He was always after little things and big things, anything that spelled mismanagement, inefficiency, graft or corruption.

This was the wind-down of tidelands, sort of a last-ditch retreat. He and Senator Connally were working together on some legislation to establish state ownership and state control in all the states that had tidelands, to get such a bill through Congress. With the knowledge, though, that it would be vetoed. I don't really remember--I don't think it ever made it through, and anyhow, Truman was quite clear and quite tart in his determination to veto it.

G: Why did he support it, then, if he knew that Truman was going to veto it? Just so that they would have established a record as [supporting it]?

J: I'm sure so, because he was a Texan, and because he was really mad about losing it, and because all of his constituents were seeing red about it. They just couldn't--it was, of course, one of the major reasons for Truman's growing unpopularity in Texas. And as the spring proceeded, [Estes] Kefauver defeated Truman in some of the early primaries--I think it was New Hampshire--and there were write-in votes in other ones of those states that vote early, for Kefauver or for other people. Senator [Robert] Taft was working toward getting the Republican nomination.

Lyndon's committee work was also taking him into trying to eliminate armchair corps, to get high officers, who were heavily concentrated in Washington, out to the field. And the Morocco Air Force Base was headlines in those days and all the chicanery and incompetence that was going on there. Frank Pace was the secretary of the army, and he

was very forthright and cooperative. He didn't get mad; he tried to be open and helpful and up with the committee. But I must say that Lyndon must have been about as welcome in most military circles as a skunk at a Sunday school picnic.

G: The Moroccan thing, I gather, was one where they spent way too much money and--

J: Yes.

G: Do you recall how LBJ got into this to begin with, how he discovered that it was a problem?

J: No, I don't. I suppose there's always some civil employee, maybe even some army personnel, who are willing to write and reveal such things, and sometimes it's just personal anger or nitpicking, and sometimes it's real, and you have to bore in and get witnesses from all sides and evaluate.

G: Was the situation corrected to his satisfaction, do you recall?

J: He was not easily satisfied and not often satisfied. I think he thought he was getting a lot done. I don't think he was ever [satisfied]. I think he was frustrated by his ability to do more and faster and also, the committee was studying Russian air power and the general state of Russian readiness with all sorts of military, and not being very reassured by what they found. And Lyndon was always a "it's later than you think" man and a strong preparedness man. It was a theme that ran through his whole years.

Meanwhile, back home in Texas, [Allan] Shivers was, his friends were opening a strategy to have an uninstructed delegation go to the Democratic National Committee. And [Joseph] McCarthy, that show was still going on. He was suing Senator [William] Benton for libel, and Senator Benton was proposing his ouster from the Senate.

All of this brought us to an important date toward the end of March--the Jefferson-Jackson Day Dinner at the Armory. My brother, Tony, and Matiana were our house guests and went with us to the dinner, and Lyndon and I sat at the head table. Truman, at the end of his speech, got up, to *my* complete surprise at any rate, and said that he was not going to be a candidate for re-election. And that was a blockbuster. It opened up the Democratic field to all sorts of possibilities while the Republican field, the arena pretty much belonged to Taft and Eisenhower.

G: Do you recall LBJ's reaction to this, to the Truman announcement?

J: No. I think he liked Truman, and he liked him better in perspective as the years went on, as so many people did, but he was very much aware of his unpopularity in Texas and how hard it would be to elect him. His stand on tidelands had made it difficult for a lot of Texans to rally enthusiasm for him. No, I don't remember what he said or did that night, except that it stopped a lot of us in our tracks.

G: Is this something that stayed with him over the years, do you think?

J: Oh, you bet it did. He always sort of set that as the point at which one would have to make up their mind whether they were going to run or not.

G: His own announcement was such a blockbuster that I'm just wondering if he ever made the parallel or--

J: Yes. Oh, indeed, oh, indeed. Many years later he asked me to look up that date, and to get the speech, and. . . .

Meanwhile, a lot of things were going on on the social and personal scene. Warren Woodward, our good staff man since 1948, got married to Mary Ellen--I don't

remember her [maiden] name. We went to the wedding, and there was a luncheon at the Wardman Park. And Gene Latimer left Lyndon's staff to go back to Texas and go with Civil Defense, which was a sort of a goodbye to a period that had lasted from Lyndon's school teaching days in Houston, back before I knew him.

Tony Buford would come to dinner every now and then, and we'd go out with him and the Speaker or we'd have them both to the house.

Lynda's birthday party that year--the makeup was just about the same whether it was a Valentine party or a party for the Speaker--except always with the Speaker's there would be his own relatives included. At this one [there was] a little boy who lived close behind us, Hunter Mennox [?]--he was a regular--and Lloyd and Lan, the sons of the Bentsens, and several members of Walter's family, Beth, and young Walter, and Patty Nichols, and Rodney was still in town--Josefa's son--and Molly and David Thornberry, and little Lera Thomas. I forget what year the Thornberrys, with Lyndon's great nudging, bought that old house down on--I think it was Devonshire Place. Anyhow, it was within three or four blocks of us. Perhaps that comes later, anyhow, Lyndon was always planning and perhaps more than he should, about the lives of his staff and his close associates. (Laughter) But I don't know where that story belongs, really.

The two members of Truman's cabinet, the two wives of members who were present at every gathering of the Democratic Party and all sorts of social things were Mrs. [Charles] Brannon of Agriculture and Mrs. [Oscar] Chapman of Interior. I liked them both. I saw more of them than anybody. Certainly the cabinet member that aroused the most hostility among Texans was [Dean] Acheson.

(Interruption)

We did not, I forget when we really began to know them well and personally--just exactly what year it was, and I think it probably took place through our friendship with the Bill Whites. I know we were at their house several times when the Achesons were guests.

Our canasta parties still continued. We'd have a casserole and some salad, and we'd all gather at the Thornberrys or the Jenkins or the Johnsons. We did it about once a week, rotating where we would go, and it was kind of our night to just be utterly relaxed. I loved them.

The Chief Justice, a marvelous character, and his equally interesting wife, Roberta Vinson, were members of our circle. It's really something to reflect on, how soon we came to know the biggest people in town, what good friends they were of ours, because Lyndon was doing an important job in the Democratic Party, but he was not yet majority leader.

I think I've told you the story of how Truman appointed Mr. Vinson chief justice. In any case, I forget exactly how it took place, but Truman appointed him chief justice, and the word got on the radio sooner than Mr. Vinson wanted it to, because he was rushing home to tell his wife who did not want him to go on the Court, because never, never, never could you make any money on the Court. As great and powerful as that job was, she wanted after *many* years of public service to finally land in some job where you would make a good living, and store up something for your old age, or illness and death. Well, Truman appointed him, he accepted, it got on the radio, alas, too quick. She heard it going home from the beauty parlor. She went home and got in bed and began to cry,

and at some point, the Chief Justice phoned the Speaker and Lyndon and said, "Y'all have got to come and help me." They went over there, and I think they asked me to join them later. At any rate, they all tried to console her, and reassure her, and it was going to be all right. But, oh, it was a very difficult time.

We saw a lot of the [George] Smathers and the [Mike] Monroneys, something of the [Burnet] Maybanks of South Carolina, and always of the members of Lyndon's subcommittee.

G: What was Maybank like?

J: Maybank was a delightful and charming man who amused Lyndon very much, and he liked him very much, but he never could understand his South Carolina accent. They would just go through a whole conversation, which Lyndon didn't understand, or so he said. Maybank was a member of an aristocratic, old South Carolina family, as I recall, and he was one of the men that you looked up to in the Senate.

By all odds, one of the most glamorous things that ever happened to me was to go to Mrs. Joseph Davies' for a luncheon or a *garden* party--that was the best of all. I think I've told you about the small luncheon where she spoke about her father and Henry Ford.

Well, I think we better close for now, and I think this brings us through March, I think, and to April.

March 20, 1982

J: The spring of 1952 I remember chiefly divided into three strains: trips to Texas working on the Ranch house, a political donnybrook building up in Texas, and, indeed, in the nation, and Lyndon's work on the subcommittee. Those were the threads that wove

through the months of spring.

In April, the Belden Poll showed that [Price] Daniel was leading heavily over Senator Tom Connally. "Senator Tawm," as he was called, went to Texas, listened to some of his friends, phoned Mrs. Connally, and then announced that he was not going to run, after thirty-six years in public service and approaching his seventy-fifth birthday. I remember a sad little conversation I had with Mrs. Connally in which she expressed great relief, but she said, "There's always something more you want to do and that you think you can do better than the other fellow, or maybe only you can do it."

One of the things this meant was that Lyndon was going to emerge as the senior senator from Texas with therefore somewhat more clout. Actually, he'd always been mighty proud of that title that he sat in the Sam Houston seat.

We began to emerge on the national news scene. *U.S. News and World Report* had a lengthy interview with Lyndon on the arms program. The major thrust always of what Lyndon talked about was rooting out waste, inefficiency, mismanagement, graft--evaluating our program in the whole arms field in relation to Russian strength. He was just adamant on the subject of we must be a strong, well-defended world figure. His picture was on the front cover of *U.S. News and World Report*. I think actually we were in a much more sort of cozy family way in the *Saturday Evening Post*, too. I believe I remember I have some picture of him on the Capitol steps and two little girls dressed up in alike dresses--that was something one did in those days. If you had two, or even three daughters, you dressed them alike on special occasions. I hope they liked it.

G: Did these cover stories bring him more recognition, in terms of people being able to

identify him in public or identify you? Can you recall?

J: Oh, yes. Your friends would always say, "Well, I saw you on the front page," and your friends would be sort of gratified that they had chosen you long ago, when you were a small figure.

G: But, as he became a national figure, really a national leader, was there a point at which he became a recognizable figure to the public as a whole, not just the name, but the face, and they would identify him in a crowd?

J: I certainly don't remember any particular date or watershed. He just sort of emerged, and I believe it was the subcommittee that was a large part in propelling him to a position of prominence.

G: Did he enjoy this publicity, say the *U.S. News* interview and things like that? Do you recall his--

J: Well, he used to laugh and say, "I've had them for me and against me, and it sure is easier when they're for you." I don't know that he enjoyed it, but I expect he relished the good parts of it.

He was considerably exercised by President Truman's seizing the steel mills, because he thought that had a foreboding. That kind of use of presidential power might mean that someday, somebody--I don't think he ever thought of President Truman doing it--might seize newspapers or universities, or gosh knows what all.

In Texas, this big fight was building up between the loyal Democrats, among whom you would count as a leader John Cofer, Walter Hall, Lillian Collier of Mumford, Stuart Long the newspaper columnist, rather surprisingly, Fagan Dickson. There was talk

of backing Lyndon as favorite son. Every time that word was mentioned, he repeated that the only job he wanted was the one he had. Because this was a walking-on-eggs season, it was natural and inevitable that there would be a swell of support for our mentor and dear friend, the Speaker. And the Texas delegation did start a movement for him. And Dick Russell, of Georgia--the great senator, in Lyndon's estimation--was also a very likely candidate.

G: Was he torn between these two, whether to--

J: Oh, I'm sure that he would have been. It was--

G: He seems to have stated a preference for Russell over Rayburn at this point.

J: Well, I think that was at a time when Russell had expressed a real willingness, even an ambition, for it. And that the Speaker, somewhat like Lyndon, was just not talking.

G: You don't think he, Sam Rayburn, really wanted to be president in 1952, or do you--

J: I can't really say. I don't much think he did. I think to him, the most important post in the world, and the one that he admired and relished with all his heart, was speaker of the House of Representatives. He looked down on the Senate. It was part pose and part real, I think, and he and Lyndon used to have a good-natured raillery about it.

G: The Russell candidacy, which--

J: I think that was for real. I think the Senator thought, "It's now or never." I think he really epitomized the soul of a large segment of the conservative Democratic Party, particularly of the thirteen southern states. And I think he really had a deep doubt that the nation would ever accept a southerner, somebody as conservative as he was. But I believe he really wanted to make that try. It was something of a heartbreaker.

G: Was LBJ in on the genesis of that candidacy, do you know? Did Russell talk to him about it before he announced, or did he help persuade Russell to run, or advise him in any way? Do you have any idea?

J: I don't know. I know it was his lifelong effort, and it becomes very hard sometimes to stay out of primaries, to wait until the candidate is chosen and then fight as hard as you can. There's no doubt that he admired and loved Russell. I do not know whether they ever met and talked it over or not. At least if it happened, I wasn't in on it.

Meanwhile, down in Texas, [Ralph] Yarborough was announcing for governor against Shivers, and Lyndon got a very tart letter from Jane Y. McCallum, one of those courageous staunch women in politics, a suffragette from way back, very much a lady, but very able and tough. She was angry at Lyndon for going out to the airport to meet Shrivers and for extending courtesies on the Hill to him, for arranging for him to meet some senators for conversations about the tidelands bill. She was a staunch Yarborough supporter. She had been, and I think became again, our staunch supporter. At least I'd certainly want to be put in the column of one of those who admired her.

G: There's some indication that people like Sam Rayburn and Lyndon Johnson were trying to get from Shivers a promise that he would support the party nominee, whoever it may be. Do you recall their efforts to do so?

J: I think that that is a fact. I can't say why I think so, because Lyndon was always on the side of avoiding a fight, a rift in the party, chaos in it. He, once it was inevitable, would sign up and go with whatever side he thought was right. He tried to mediate them. Texans were getting all excited about whether they would support Rayburn or Dick

Russell. Paul Bolton said that down the line, [Lloyd] Bentsen may be the rising star.

We, in Lyndon's committee, General [Carl A.] Spaatz, a colorful, hot-blooded war figure testified, talked about Russian stockpiling, atomic and hydrogen bombs, and time is running out, and our scheduled slow down and the build-up of air power is an inexcusable risk.

We also had another interesting witness before the committee, Bernard Baruch, who appeared and testified on our dismal lack of strength. Lyndon made a speech on the Senate floor about where did the defense dollars go. You know, as I look at that now and think of Truman doing the same thing, in the forties, and Lyndon in the fifties, I wonder where is the man doing that now. And I do not see him.

The death struggle of tidelands was taking place with Senator [Spessard L.] Holland of California introducing a bill, which Lyndon--

G: Or Florida.

J: Oh, of Florida, of course! Lyndon preferred the Connally-Johnson bill, but he thought that the Holland bill had a better chance of overriding a veto, and it did do a good many of the essential things that our side wanted done, so he announced that he was going to vote for it and asked people to join him in voting for it.

We had a large quota of visitors from home that year. The Hugh McGees, whom I'd campaigned with in my small efforts in East Texas, came up, and I pulled out all the stops and took Mrs. McGee to the breakfast for Mrs. Truman, and both of them to lunch and sightseeing. The Senate Dining Room was my beat in those days, and I'm sure that I have mentioned how lovely the ceilings were with [Constantino] Brumidi paintings

before some misbegotten idea came up years later that we had to enlarge it, and we chopped it up and covered over a lot of the ceiling. They came out to dinner at the house, and I think I took Mrs. McGee to the breakfast for Mrs. Truman.

There was a certain poignancy that year, of course, on many scenes. The departure of the giant, Senator Tom Connally of the red face and the white mane, and the rapier tongue, and the impending departure of the little man that was very unpopular then, but has had a deep place in the hearts of his countrymen and has emerged to have an even stronger one--President Truman. Anyhow, when you went to the congressional breakfast for Mrs. Truman or the Senate Ladies lunch, or her return engagement for us at the White House, you were aware that this was the last time. It had been five times, I think--no, no, no, no, eight times. They came in in 1945, didn't they? In April of 1945. So, there'd been, possibly, close to eight.

Other visitors were our old contingent from the *Dallas Times Herald*, good friends through the years, Albert Jackson--growing more hunched over with arthritis as time went on, but with that cheerful able manner, and Clyde Rembert who handled their TV branch of the business. They both worked for Mr. Tom Gooch, who was a legendary figure in Texas journalism, and who had given sizeable segments of his paper, the stock in his paper, to the men who did the work, among whom are Albert Jackson and Clyde Rembert and Mr. [Allen] Merriam, were three of the top ones.

Another visitor that came was somebody who was to enter my life later. I forget exactly how I met him, but Mr. [Charles] Palmer of Atlanta, who had been a big Democratic leader in Roosevelt's day. We came to know him, not well; it was much later

that he came back to see me and proposed that Madame Shoumatoff do the portrait of me and of Lyndon for the White House.

The Russell Laschingers of Gilmer came up, and we went through the whole routine for them. And then, the last of the visitors that I particularly recall, sometime in early June, were Max and Marietta [Brooks], and once more we pulled out all the stops and had a party at our house with as many of the Texas delegation as we could get.

But I went to Texas repeatedly. The time in February I've talked about, and that was the pattern of all the times. And I think we were there twice in April, and then I was there toward the end of May, and then I'm sure I was there in June getting ready for all the, what we hoped would be, the soon moving-in as soon as Congress was over. And Lyndon was writing me with his usual, "Hurry, hurry, hurry, we want to move in as soon as we adjourn." And he was down in Texas several times too, briefly during the spring. We were down there together around Easter time.

I think it was in June that there were a series of events that took place, that brought him back for a few days, and that was the death of Tom Gooch. He, I believe, attended the funeral. He had sort of an old-fashioned regard for paying your last respects to the people who had been important in your life.

Then there was another event, and that was Margie Neal Day in Carthage. She was Texas' first woman senator and an able woman, although I don't think she transgressed too many of the mores of the day, and she was certainly not the liberal leader that Jane Y. McCallum was. Lyndon went over there. He had a lot of respect for her, and usually she was his friend, not always. The big event for him was to participate

in the dedication in mid-June of the Alvin Wirtz Dam. He made a major speech into which he could pour his heart and love. Homer Thornberry also spoke, and of course, Tom Miller and Allan Shivers. A lot of things brought a lot of people face-to-face in those days, whose political directions were diverging.

G: Did you go to that, to the Wirtz [dedication]?

J: No, and I'll always be mad because I didn't. I cannot imagine how--because I loved all the family. The whole family came down and sat on the front row. Stephanie, the oldest granddaughter, unveiled the granite marker.

The Supreme Court knocked down Truman's seizure of the steel mills, declaring it unconstitutional, and Lyndon issued a statement in support. An interesting thing that came out about that time was the Paley Report. President Truman had appointed a number of highly-qualified businessmen to do a deep study on the natural resources and the future needs of the nation, and give us some sense of direction. George Brown was on there, I am proud to say, and I think it was one of the big things he's done and highly useful. Bill Paley of CBS was chairman. This was the first warning that I can remember that our oil supply was limited, that in a few decades it would either be gone or else it would be so hard to recover that it might not be feasible.

G: Was LBJ alarmed by the report, or did he--

J: I remember that George Brown used to come out to the house a lot and go into these lengthy and exciting speeches about how he, Lyndon, had better be alarmed, and had better take notice of it. I think Lyndon heard him and heeded him and did not get as alarmed as George would have liked. He came out, made a statement in praise of their

report, but said he didn't agree with everything.

G: Coke Stevenson was making a lot of noise to the effect that he was planning to run against LBJ in 1954.

J: Yes, he was. I think Lyndon assumed that when it came right down to it, Coke Stevenson would develop bad health and decide not to do it. Because his life had been marked with--he'd been striking for easy goals, and this would not be easy. It would be another knock-down, drag-out, and Lyndon felt that his position had grown steadily stronger in the four years that he had been there. He had some exchange of letters with folks like Jimmie Allred and just various political friends at home about it. I don't think he ever took it seriously. There was some little incident about a sheriff that said he had found the ballot box.

G: [Sam] Smithwick, I think.

J: Smithwick. Unfortunately--my gosh, I think he was speaking from the penitentiary where he had been put for murdering a newsman. So I don't think he got the credence that he aimed for. It got some publicity.

G: The *Dallas News* used this to embarrass LBJ.

J: Yes.

G: Do you recall his reaction to this?

J: It was just that the *Dallas News* was frequently harassing us.

There were in those days, I'm sure there still are, all sorts of organizations that would come to town. The Maid of Cotton, the Queen of Wool. (Laughter) National organizations would elect some pretty young woman to carry their banner to get

publicity, to have her picture made with whoever she could: the speaker, the president, the majority leader. And we were present at a number of such occasions. There was one real funny one, sponsoring specialties, food specialties of areas, and this was one from Louisiana. And among the food specialties was baked muskrat or something like that, and there was a horrible picture Speaker Rayburn made when he was biting into his piece of it, which was a source of teasing.

(Laughter)

G: In one of the letters he wrote this spring, he indicated that he was having to really be the floor leader while McFarland was off campaigning for re-election.

J: Yes.

G: Do you remember his doing so, and what he thought about this view of the majority leadership? It really gave him a chance to observe his next job in the Senate.

J: No, I must honestly say I don't. You know, looking back, you just wish you had been more alive, and more prescient, and also an antenna had been more keenly tuned to what was important and what was unimportant in the day. I know that the Senate excited him, and he respected it, and he loved learning its ways. And I do remember that that was an awfully busy spring, for many reasons.

Meanwhile, there were still some of the glamorous things going on that I liked. I went to the Australian Embassy to a reception, and went to the Ambassador of the Netherlands hosted a party for Queen Juliana and his Royal Highness Prince Bernhard. And I admittedly liked the glamour of those things, and a number of them you could go to, if they were daytime events, without your husband and with a number of other Senate

wives who were in the same position without feeling conspicuous. On the more intimate scene, Scooter and Dale Miller had one of their big cocktail parties. Administrations came and went, and figures surfaced in Washington and rose to prominence and then declined, but Dale and Scooter went on and on, and still are, in fact.

I got to going to delightful parties at Minnie Lee Wire's, who had a spacious, lovely home. Her father had been a member of the Texas House years before, and she was one of those many people who lived on in Washington, married and remained in the social scene.

A figure that Lyndon had admired, was never intimate with, but had a lot of respect for [was] Senator [James W., Jr.] Wadsworth of New York, who had been in both the Senate--I mean he had been a senator for New York; he was defeated. He ran for the House, returned to the House and stayed a while. He was the father of Evie Symington. We attended his funeral in the National Cathedral where his sons were ushers--the first time I think I had seen that--but members of the family assisted you in. Since then I have seen members of the family speak, and I think it is appropriate.

The annual children's party took place at the Congressional Club. They were always, to my memory, rather grim affairs to which the children were not exactly thrilled and delighted to go, and the little girls had to wear white gloves and learn to curtsy, and they danced, and you practically had to rope the little boys into going. But I'm afraid we didn't inject much just sheer, romping pleasure into them.

On the Republican side in Texas, there was a battle royal coming up between the Taft forces, which were in charge of the political machinery, and the Eisenhower forces,

which really had the folks behind them. I guess that's the first time I can remember glamour, charisma, that becoming a big part of being in politics.

G: Do you think it was partially television that--

J: Well, it was war record, and big smile, and desire for return to--well, people had a lot of confidence in Eisenhower. And they had a lot of dissatisfaction and frustration with those who were in. They wanted to put the ins out and start over.

Anyhow, it looked like they were going to have a rival delegation--sending one for Taft and one for Eisenhower--and they might have a big effect on what happened nationally in the Republican Party.

Meanwhile, Daniel, I guess, was in a pretty comfortable position with Connally having withdrawn. I don't know whether Daniel had an opponent--if so, it was not one of any particular strength. But Yarborough was fighting vigorously, although pretty much ineffectively, against Shrivers. And the Rayburn for President Club, which looked like it might develop into a real draft, was getting going. And Lister Hill and John Sparkman came out supporting Russell

Lyndon did some unpopular things; he supported foreign aid against a strong tide to cut it, and also, he was for appropriations for NATO and U.S. forces in Europe. There was considerable buildup of desire, or so our mail and the papers we read indicated, desire to just withdraw from all foreign entanglements.

One of the things Lyndon did that he got satisfaction from was getting Joe Sheehy as federal judge for the East Texas district.

Shivers came out for Russell for president, but mainly he was demanding an

uninstructed national delegation, and the loyalists were planning to bolt the convention.

Finally in May, sometime in late May, was the *coup de grâce* for tidelands, when Truman vetoed the tidelands bill. He did kind of tip his hat in the direction of Texas by recognizing their unique claim, but he said that the Supreme Court had disposed of the legal question, so that was the end of that.

And Eisenhower, who was above it all, sort of, actually did finally get a little acid against Taft in saying that they'd overridden majority rule in Texas and that Taft--it was a machine instead of the real voice of the people.

So that, as I remember, was the picture of our life in the spring of 1952, unless you can think of any things that you want to ask me.

G: Why did LBJ discourage his supporters from putting his name forward as a favorite son?

J: Oh, because I just think it would be natural because of the Speaker. That there should be a chance for that to build up, if it was capable of building up. He really and truly liked the job he had. He wanted there to be peace in the Democratic Party and the Democratic convention. He didn't want to be in the middle of a brouhaha.

G: He seems to have been very discouraged this spring by the political developments.

J: Oh, he was! Because we were going to waste our strength in fighting each other, and the tide was against the Democrats. The tide, and it was a very conservative tide running. The amazing fact is that Lyndon survived in Texas politics for as long as he did. Not only survived, but took a lot of people with him, and finally went as far as you could go. Because there were times when he was running against a large part of the Texas feeling.

I forget where we spent Easter that spring. I know we were in Texas and had

hoped to get home to be with Luci at Easter. I'm not sure whether we did or not. I do remember one darling Easter when Billie Marcus came up to see us in the early spring and brought two exquisite white dresses, once more made alike, but all ruffles and lace, feminine, for our two little girls.

That brings us to the end of June of 1952, I think.

(Interruption)

Our Christmas of 1951 was spent in Texas, at Dillman Street, with the traditional visit to Mrs. Sam Johnson's house on Christmas Eve, where she always had a tree and all of the grandchildren and served delicious desserts and coffee after the tree--never any liquor, not even wine. And then, at 1901 Dillman, we had everybody over for a dinner, Lyndon's sisters, Lucia and Rebekah and Josefa, and the children of the family, our two little girls, Lynda and Luci, and then Rebekah's son, Phillip, who was very handsome even at that tender age and dressed like he was in a style show all the time--I don't think I ever saw Phillip dirty. Little Becky Alexander, the daughter of Lucia and Birge Alexander, and Rodney, who was a sort of a russet-haired, bright-eyed little clown, Josefa's adopted child. It was always aimed, it was sort of an unvoiced feeling of all of us I think: "Let's try to make this as nice as we can for Mrs. Johnson," because getting the family together was written in capital letters on her heart, and she always wanted us--all of her children and their spouses and their descendants--to be together, to share things, to love each other.

That small house at Dillman was blessed with the services of Gene Williams by that time, and Helen Williams. The backyard was the best thing about Dillman. And of

course, the best thing of all was being young.

End of Tape 1 of 1, Interview XXIX