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Oral History Interview

with

JENNIE JOHNSON

Blue Springs, Missouri
July 25, 1989

by Niel M. Johnson, Harry S. Truman Library

JOHNSON: Mrs. Johnson, will you tell us when and where you were born?

J. JOHNSON: I was born in Odessa, Missouri in 1908; February 20th.

JOHNSON: And what were your parents' names?

J. JOHNSON: Hugh and Etta Scott.

JOHNSON: Where did you grow up then?

J. JOHNSON: On a farm in Bates City, Missouri.

JOHNSON: So, you grew up on a farm. How about your schooling?

J. JOHNSON: I went to country school.

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JOHNSON: Went through country school.

J. JOHNSON: And I went to the college at Warrensburg and took my eighth grade, because I was the only girl going to country school, and my teacher thought that I should take that eighth grade down there. So I took it in ten weeks.

JOHNSON: Was it a summer school?

J. JOHNSON: Summer time. We didn't have school buses, so my mother rented a house in Oak Grove, and we lived there for two years. We had three sets of children that came in and stayed with us to go to school, because of the school buses.

JOHNSON: Oak Grove, the high school.

J. JOHNSON: High school. Then I went to Odessa and lived with my grandparents to finish the

last two years, and I graduated in 1926 from Odessa.

JOHNSON: From Odessa High School.

J. JOHNSON: Right. And it was the biggest class they had ever had; it was 60 kids.
Then I got a scholarship to go to Synodical College at Fulton and to be a librarian.

JOHNSON: At Fulton--Westminster?

J. JOHNSON: No, it's Synodical; it was a Presbyterian

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school. It's closed now. I got a \$50 scholarship. That was a lot of money in those days. My folks were out of money, so I entered nurses training at St. Luke's and I was there two years; then I got married.

JOHNSON: What was the year of your marriage?

J. JOHNSON: 1929.

JOHNSON: And you married whom?

J. JOHNSON: "Tiny" Clark Johnson.

JOHNSON: How big was he when you married him?

J. JOHNSON: Oh, he weighed 425 pounds, and I weighed 119. That was the first year that the Rabbits had control of the sheriff's office for a long, long, time.

JOHNSON: 1929?

J. JOHNSON: 1929.

JOHNSON: Now to go back with Tiny. Do you know when and where he was born?

J. JOHNSON: Yes, he was born in Odessa in 1898. He was an orphan; his grandparents raised him, and his grandfather was a state representative, Colonel Christie. They had money, so they put him through school and also put his brother through school.

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JOHNSON: So, he had one brother.

J. JOHNSON: One brother.

JOHNSON: That's the "Doc" Johnson we read about once in a while in the records?

J. JOHNSON: Yes. He was nine years older.

JOHNSON: His real name was Lee Johnson. Do you have any brothers or sisters?

J. JOHNSON: I have one brother, but he's not living here now.

JOHNSON: How did you meet Clark?

J. JOHNSON: My mother dressed chickens and sold them to him, when he had a restaurant at Lake Odessa. Then I came home on vacation from nurses training; he was at a picnic for the Johnson family, and he asked me for a date. That was in August, and we were married the next February.

JOHNSON: I see. So you were married in 1929. He had a high school education; Clark did?

J. JOHNSON: Yes, he had high school and college. He went to college in Tyler, Texas. I've forgot the name of that.

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JOHNSON: How many years did he finish down there?

J. JOHNSON: I think two years. Then he became a CPA and he worked for the packing houses. He never stayed put anywhere.

JOHNSON: So he was in accounting; he was an accounting major then.

J. JOHNSON: Yes. He had been married before, you see, before I married him. And his wife worked for Doc in the fire station. We were friends.

JOHNSON: Well, was Lee then a fireman?

J. JOHNSON: No, he was a veterinarian. He was a vet for the zoo, and also he had the contract for feeding hogs down on the river, the garbage. That's how he started his politics.

JOHNSON: Okay, that's Doc Johnson. That was what time, the early '20s?

J. JOHNSON: Yes, it must have been the early '20s.

JOHNSON: That's how he got acquainted with Pendergast?

J. JOHNSON: Yes, that's when he started his politics.

JOHNSON: So, he had that city contract.

J. JOHNSON: I think I've got that someplace. I could look

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it up.

JOHNSON: How about his practice as a veterinarian; he did practice?

J. JOHNSON: The zoo was about the only thing; and horses for the fire department.

JOHNSON: Oh, okay, the horses for the fire department. And these were all city contracts, that's why he had to be connected with . . .

J. JOHNSON: Yes, and he got affiliated with [Joseph] Shannon.

JOHNSON: Was it Shannon that helped him get the job then?

J. JOHNSON: Yes.

JOHNSON: I see.

J. JOHNSON: This Joe Shannon was a an awful nice old man. He never drove an automobile. So, Clark was his chauffeur--if we had to go to a funeral, or anyplace like that. If he had to go to a funeral, why, he knew we would take him, or we'd go with him to political rallies and things like that. Mr. Shannon liked to eat at Union Station. And those Fred Harvey waitresses, they just worshiped him almost. Of course, then Doc got acquainted with so many of them and I did too. I

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knew a lot of them.

JOHNSON: Well, you said that Clark went into the restaurant business after he was a CPA.

J. JOHNSON: Yes. At Lake Venita. It was owned by five cousins, the Johnsons. They built a resort out there on 40 Highway and he ran that.

JOHNSON: How long did he do that?

J. JOHNSON: Oh, about four years until the Democrats got the sheriff's office.

JOHNSON: Okay, until 1929. And this was after you got married?

J. JOHNSON: We got married in 1929, as soon as he got the sheriff's appointment.

JOHNSON: Okay, you got married at the same time that he got this job in the Sheriff's Department.

J. JOHNSON: He got it in January and we got married in February.

JOHNSON: Well, was he sheriff of the county?

J. JOHNSON: No, he was deputy.

JOHNSON: Deputy Sheriff of Jackson County.

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J. JOHNSON: Yes. And his badge was number 11.

JOHNSON: Okay, and this was through the influence of Joseph Shannon?

J. JOHNSON: Yes.

JOHNSON: So, he was a Rabbit.

J. JOHNSON: You talk about politics now, it was . . .

JOHNSON: We're talking about the '30s, the early '30s?

J. JOHNSON: The early '30s, yes.

JOHNSON: When did you first meet Harry Truman?

J. JOHNSON: When he was County Judge.

JOHNSON: Right after your husband became Deputy Sheriff?

J. JOHNSON: Yes.

JOHNSON: Where did you meet him?

J. JOHNSON: I imagine at the Court House, because I'd go to court with them you see.

JOHNSON: Well, did the Deputy Sheriff serve as bailiff for the County Court?

J. JOHNSON: Yes, he was bailiff, and he also transported mental patients. That was his job.

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JOHNSON: Transported mental patients to what places?

J. JOHNSON: St. Joe, Nevada, Fulton and Farmington.

JOHNSON: So, he was on the road quite a bit.

J. JOHNSON: Yes. We had around eight a week from Jackson County.

JOHNSON: And you accompanied him, is that right?

J. JOHNSON: Yes.

JOHNSON: And how many years did that go on?

J. JOHNSON: Thirty-six years.

JOHNSON: He did that for thirty-six years; Deputy Sheriff and bailiff.

J. JOHNSON: Yes. The Sheriff would appoint me as a Special Deputy, and if he became ill--he had diabetes--I would go ahead and take the patients. I would get another helper, and if he wasn't at court, I'd open up court. A time or two.

JOHNSON: Was this a private car that you used, or a county car?

J. JOHNSON: At first it was, and then the county bought us a car.

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JOHNSON: What kind of a car was it?

J. JOHNSON: Oh, we had . . . Is the Franklin air-cooled? We had an old beat up one. So then the Court bought one. Bash owned a Dodge agency.

JOHNSON: Sheriff [Thomas B.] Bash.

J. JOHNSON: Yes. They bought us a Windsor, White Prince, seven-passenger. It came out of St. Louis. We could take more patients that way.

We'd hear the cases at court on Monday morning, and then maybe in the afternoon, if it was St. Joe we'd go there in the afternoon. Otherwise, we wouldn't go until the next morning.

JOHNSON: What other jobs did the bailiff have?

J. JOHNSON: That was all, open the court and transport.

JOHNSON: Would he maintain order in the court while it was in session?

J. JOHNSON: Yes.

JOHNSON: What was the ordinary procedure for the County Court? When would it hold sessions, and . . .

J. JOHNSON: They held one every Monday. One month it was in Independence, and then one month in Kansas City.

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JOHNSON: Every Monday; so it was just one day a week when they had the public meeting.

J. JOHNSON: Yes, unless it was something special. In 1929 we were down in the old Court House, down on Ninth Street I think it is, until they built the new one.

JOHNSON: But you alternated with Independence.

J. JOHNSON: Yes. See, we had two county seats-- Independence and Kansas City.

JOHNSON: How about the Eastern Judge? His offices were in the Court House in Independence, is that right?

J. JOHNSON: Yes.

JOHNSON: But how about the Western Judge then; where did he have his office.

J. JOHNSON: They had offices in both Court Houses.

JOHNSON: I see. When your husband became Deputy Sheriff, Truman was Presiding Judge. Was it [Howard] Vrooman and [Robert W.] Barr who were also on the Court at that time?

J. JOHNSON: Yes, they were the two, and that was when Truman was Presiding Judge.

JOHNSON: By this time Henry McElroy was the City Manager of

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Kansas City. Did you know McElroy?

J. JOHNSON: Oh, yes. In fact, his son used to ride horseback [at our place].

JOHNSON: Is that right? Of course, he's got kind of a checkered reputation.

J. JOHNSON: Very.

JOHNSON: What did you know about McElroy?

J. JOHNSON: Well, if you needed help, you got it. If a person needed a load of coal, if they needed help with their medical bills, they went to General Hospital; and it didn't cost them a thing.

JOHNSON: Now, this was through Pendergast. You'd go to the Pendergast organization and it would take care of these things?

J. JOHNSON: Yes. And Shannon, the two of them. And we had precinct captains.

JOHNSON: So you think that the Pendergast organization did provide for the welfare of a lot of people in Kansas City?

J. JOHNSON: Oh, definitely, yes. A lot more than they do now.

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JOHNSON: Where did Pendergast get his money to do that?

J. JOHNSON: Each precinct captain, after he had a job he had to donate some money.

JOHNSON: The precinct captains would donate part of their earnings.

J. JOHNSON: And the people that got a job.

JOHNSON: Patronage jobs, a certain percentage. How much?

J. JOHNSON: Not too awful much, depending on how much salary you got.

JOHNSON: But a certain percentage of your salary would go to the party organization?

J. JOHNSON: Yes. And you see, the fire department, those men only got \$5 a day.

JOHNSON: How much did your husband get?

J. JOHNSON: He got \$75 a month when he first started.

JOHNSON: When he first started in '29. Then you started getting a little bit?

J. JOHNSON: I got \$5 a day.

JOHNSON: Five dollars a day when you were helping transport patients?

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J. JOHNSON: Yes. And a meal.

JOHNSON: So you met Harry Truman in the Court House here during one of the sessions. Did he have to approve the hiring of the bailiff?

J. JOHNSON: No, the Sheriff did.

JOHNSON: The Sheriff was Bash?

J. JOHNSON: [Jefferson] Smedley was the first sheriff we worked under.

JOHNSON: Thomas Bash became Sheriff shortly afterward.

J. JOHNSON: See, Bash was an engineer from Sheridan County; he had a farm there, and worked for the Kansas City Power and Light Company.

JOHNSON: He was considered kind of a utilities man, a man who had the utilities interest in mind.

J. JOHNSON: And the Kansas City Power and Light Company put a lot of Democrats to work.

JOHNSON: They worked closely with Pendergast and Shannon?

J. JOHNSON: More with Shannon. Of course, they traded, see. One-third went to Shannon, and two-thirds went to Pendergast.

JOHNSON: Oh, okay, so they had that arrangement.

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J. JOHNSON: Yes. Let's see, the Sheriff's office was mostly Rabbits. The Treasurer's Office was Goats, and the tax office was Goats.

JOHNSON: The Treasurer's office, Goats, and the tax office, you think, were Goats?

J. JOHNSON: Yes. And I think the Probate Court was Rabbits.

JOHNSON: But no Republicans need apply, is that the idea?

J. JOHNSON: That's right. Yes. And, yet, if we had somebody who was Republican that we really wanted to get in, we'd all vote Republican in the Primary.

JOHNSON: When I talked to Rufus Burrus, he mentioned an incident in which a contractor, John Pryor, was trying to intimidate the judges, including Harry Truman, to get a claim paid. And the story is that Harry Truman signaled your husband, Tiny, to remove him from the room.

J. JOHNSON: And he did several times, different things.

JOHNSON: Do you remember that incident?

J. JOHNSON: No, I can't right now.

JOHNSON: Do you remember John Pryor? He was one of these

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contractors in gravel and rock.

J. JOHNSON: I'm trying to remember. I remember the name, but I don't recall the incident.

JOHNSON: How about incidents involving yourself or your husband and the County Court. Do you recall some of the incidents that happened while courts were in session, while there was business being done?

J. JOHNSON: Oh, yes, they would have disagreements and Clark would tell them to leave, and take them out.

JOHNSON: You mean people in the audience?

J. JOHNSON: Yes, in the audience.

JOHNSON: Would get into an argument with the judges?

J. JOHNSON: Yes. And Henry Chiles was another very active Democrat.

JOHNSON: Henry Chiles. Well, what was the ordinary procedure?

J. JOHNSON: Well, each Monday morning they'd have an agenda of things--bills to pay, and appointments to make and things like that.

JOHNSON: They'd have these warrants they had to sign for work done, or . . .

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J. JOHNSON: Yes.

JOHNSON: So your husband and you would unlock the Court House, so to speak, or you would be . . .

J. JOHNSON: It was usually open when we got there.

JOHNSON: Where would he station himself during the sessions?

J. JOHNSON: Oh, I've got that article, I think where they had to buy him a chair or something. I think it was \$300 for a chair.

JOHNSON: The chair collapsed.

J. JOHNSON: I think something like that.

JOHNSON: And they had to buy him a new, and very sturdy one. I see.

J. JOHNSON: And Truman wasn't very fond of colored people.

JOHNSON: You say he was, or wasn't?

J. JOHNSON: Wasn't.

JOHNSON: Harry Truman was not? Were there any incidents involving Blacks at the time?

J. JOHNSON: Well, I remember one story they told about this Black man who sent him a card through the mail that

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congratulated him or something like that, and he was real angry about it.

JOHNSON: Well, was Truman considered a fair person?

J. JOHNSON: Yes, very fair. Very.

JOHNSON: To everybody?

J. JOHNSON: To everybody.

We had a Black hospital, a general hospital. They were the nicest people at that hospital. They really took better care of them than the white people; these were the mental patients.

JOHNSON: The administrators took better care of them? They were subsidized by the County Court.

J. JOHNSON: County and city.

JOHNSON: And the city. Did Harry Truman always see that they got the money they needed?

J. JOHNSON: Yes, I think so. Also, our county hospital out here in Little Blue, that was political, very much so.

JOHNSON: That was built during Truman's administration as judge, wasn't it?

J. JOHNSON: Yes.

JOHNSON: That was one of the projects built by the bond

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issues.

J. JOHNSON: The women at the county hospital could not go down in the yard or things like that. They had to sit on that porch in those days. It was bad.

JOHNSON: Here are some names. I'm going to mention these names and if you have some recollections about them, we can put that on the record. Jim Aylward.

J. JOHNSON: Oh, yes. He was the Chairman of the County Committee.

JOHNSON: Yes.

J. JOHNSON: I was the Democratic Committeewoman for the 15th Ward under Aylward.

JOHNSON: You say you were under Aylward. What did you think of Jim Aylward?

J. JOHNSON: Pretty nice person.

JOHNSON: Robert Barr, Judge Barr.

J. JOHNSON: He was a nice person; kind of small and kind of quiet.

JOHNSON: Truman, I think, says that he thought Barr had a real inferiority complex. What is your view?

J. JOHNSON: He was; he was kind of shy, not outgoing.

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JOHNSON: How did he get into politics, being shy and apparently introverted?

J. JOHNSON: Well, he had a dairy farm; but I really don't remember how he got into politics.

JOHNSON: Howard Vrooman.

J. JOHNSON: I don't remember Vrooman at all.

JOHNSON: You don't remember Vrooman.

J. JOHNSON: I don't remember him particularly.

JOHNSON: Truman says that his two associates sometimes played craps while they were doing county business, and he, Truman, would apparently just ignore them and get some important work done. Do you recall anything about them playing craps?

J. JOHNSON: No. But Truman, of course, belonged to that group that played poker all the time.

JOHNSON: Did you ever see Barr or Vrooman or any of the judges not paying attention to business?

J. JOHNSON: No, I can't remember that particularly. Of course, that's been a long time ago.

JOHNSON: What about this poker group you're referring to?

J. JOHNSON: Oh, what do they call it?

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JOHNSON: Was that the one with Buck Purcell?

J. JOHNSON: Yes, the Harpie Club. And another thing they always had, they had wild mushrooms, and that was in the spring. That was one of the big deals, to have those morel mushrooms.

JOHNSON: Did they have a mushroom feast of some sort?

J. JOHNSON: Yes. And there was the Harpie Club.

JOHNSON: Where did they meet?

J. JOHNSON: I don't know where they met. They must have met at different homes and things like that. It wasn't too big, I remember.

JOHNSON: Did Purcell have a vacation home or a summer cabin?

J. JOHNSON: Yes.

JOHNSON: Where was that located?

J. JOHNSON: It was out in the eastern part of the county. He got married, you see, while he was judge, I believe. She was his secretary.

JOHNSON: Now, he's the one that was quoted as saying, "If you can't stand the heat, get out of the kitchen." I've heard that that really started during these poker [22] games. Did you ever hear anything about that saying being used during the poker games?

J. JOHNSON: No, but I remember the saying.
I remember there was a Judge Snyder, and a . . .

JOHNSON: Judge Snyder?

J. JOHNSON: Yes. And a [William O.] Beeman. Beeman was a Rabbit, and he owned meat markets. So he furnished meat to the County. And Fleming was another one of them.

JOHNSON: What was the first name?

J. JOHNSON: I didn't write that down; I just tried to think of a few of them a while ago.

JOHNSON: How about Fred Canfil; do you remember Fred Canfil?

J. JOHNSON: Oh, yes.

JOHNSON: What were your impressions of Fred Canfil?

J. JOHNSON: He was really a politician. He really pulled a lot of strings to get things done.

JOHNSON: He was chauffeur for Truman during that '34 campaign.

J. JOHNSON: Yes.

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JOHNSON: Did you know John Lazia at all?

J. JOHNSON: Just knew him.

JOHNSON: Did he have the reputation of being a mafia enforcer?

J. JOHNSON: Yes. Wasn't he the one that was shot down.

JOHNSON: In the '34 election.

J. JOHNSON: Yes.

JOHNSON: How about Mike, Charlie, or Willie Ross; do you remember the Rosses?

J. JOHNSON: Yes, they were with the Pendergasts.

JOHNSON: They were apparently some of his favorite contractors, and they were the ones that tried to talk Truman into giving them a contract on the road issue and he refused to unless they were low bidders.

J. JOHNSON: Well, see, you had to donate money to these organizations. We had a lot of Democratic clubs.

JOHNSON: Such as the Pendergast and Shannon organizations.

J. JOHNSON: Yes, and they used the money for this welfare, and things like that.

JOHNSON: What clubs did you belong to?

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J. JOHNSON: I belonged to the First Democratic Club; that was at 47th and Troost. Then I belonged to one at 41st and Troost. He was the county executive.

JOHNSON: Were they organized by neighborhoods.

J. JOHNSON: Yes, nearly each ward had a Democratic club. The Aylwards had their clubs. Shannon had . . .

JOHNSON: Was it the ward bosses then that organized these clubs? Were they the ones who dispensed the favors and received the fees, and so on?

J. JOHNSON: Yes. Yes, that's right. At one time the Democratic Committee people, if you had somebody in your township that needed a job, they had to come to you and get your okay. Bill Royster was another one I belonged to.

JOHNSON: Bill who?

J. JOHNSON: Bill Royster. He was a representative, and he had a big organization.

JOHNSON: Out where?

J. JOHNSON: Northeast part of Kansas City. When my husband died [in 1965], I got tired of running the liquor store that we had. So I called Mr. Royster and he said, "Can you come to some meetings?" I said, "Yes." I had

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never driven a car because we always had a County car and I didn't have any business driving it. So I took some lessons and got my driver's license. I went into the Hotel President and here was Sheriff [Arvid] Owsley and all those old-timers that I hadn't seen for a long time. Mr. Royster said, "Will you meet me down in my office?" I think it was Monday or something like that. I was the Committeewoman for Sni-a-Bar Township and we were having some fights. They had the meeting in Independence. Oh, it was one of those shouting things; it was really something. So, I was the acting secretary. Bill said, "Now, don't say anything, but meet me at the office next Monday." I went down and he took me down to the Board of Trade Building and gave me a job.

JOHNSON: You're talking about the 1960s?

J. JOHNSON: Sixties, yes. I worked there five years, and I get a \$72 a month pension from the state.

JOHNSON: Five years you worked where?

J. JOHNSON: For the Department of Agriculture.

JOHNSON: At its office in Kansas City?

J. JOHNSON: Yes. It was at the Board of Trade Building, 50th and Main.

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JOHNSON: How about your brother-in-law Doc [Lee C.] Johnson. You told us how he got started in politics with these contracts. Apparently he had some influence, politically. Do you recall what his influence was?

J. JOHNSON: Well, of course, he liked people and he had a big organization. On election day, you better get out there and work. In the '30s I think we had 300 in our precinct, and there'd be 600 that would vote.

JOHNSON: Is that right? More votes than voters.

J. JOHNSON: Yes. In your precinct you would find out who was going to be out of town, who was going to be sick. Your precinct captain would have those, and he would fit a person up to that, if it was a man or woman, or age, or whatnot. They would come in to vote, and they would vote and go back around and get to the end of the line, change coats and vote again.

JOHNSON: In other words, they were impostors to start with, and then they would come around and would vote again?

J. JOHNSON: Yes, three or four times.

JOHNSON: And Pendergast sanctioned that?

J. JOHNSON: Oh, yes, very much.

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JOHNSON: Why do you think he had to do that, or why do you think he felt it was necessary to do that?

J. JOHNSON: Well, I guess so he'd give all these people jobs.

JOHNSON: But wouldn't his Democrat organization have won without that tactic?

J. JOHNSON: No, it wouldn't have won.

JOHNSON: It would not have won?

J. JOHNSON: No. The Republicans were rather weak, but they were gaining here in Jackson County.

JOHNSON: So they might have won if there hadn't been corruption or graft or whatever?

J. JOHNSON: Yes. In my precinct at Tapawingo, I didn't have any fraud votes out there, but we'd have maybe 17 Republicans vote in the primary, and maybe there would be 200 Democrats. The Democrats would get out and vote.

JOHNSON: But that was an honest vote, you say?

J. JOHNSON: Yes.

JOHNSON: Where was most of this graft occurring?

J. JOHNSON: In Kansas City.

JOHNSON: In Kansas City.

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In any particular areas of Kansas City where this was flagrant?

J. JOHNSON: No, I think it was all over.

JOHNSON: All over Kansas City. I guess the newspaper, the Kansas City Star, tried to expose that, didn't it?

J. JOHNSON: That's when the Charter took over, about that time.

JOHNSON: Going back again into the '30s, we know what happened to Pendergast, of course; he went to jail.

J. JOHNSON: Income tax evasion.

JOHNSON: Did that kind of bring an end to this kind of graft and corruption.

J. JOHNSON: Yes. In fact, about the time that Pendergast got that sentence, I think there were over 50 in Kansas City that were arrested for fraud votes and things like that. That was about the time we came to the country.

JOHNSON: Of course, Truman was elected to the Senate in 1934. Do you think he might have been elected with fraudulent votes?

J. JOHNSON: I don't believe so, because he was elected throughout the state.

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JOHNSON: But, of course, there was a very heavy vote in Kansas City.

J. JOHNSON: Yes.

JOHNSON: The 1934 election became notorious. Lazia was murdered, and other people were being intimidated.

J. JOHNSON: All that, yes. And [Lee] Flacy was killed; he was a Deputy Sheriff.

JOHNSON: He was murdered in that [March 27] '34 primary election?

J. JOHNSON: Yes. I worked in the 8th precinct of the 15th Ward. That was out around 41st and Euclid to 41st and Michigan, or something like that. I don't know. I had that precinct, and they were having this political fight. These gangsters came out to my precinct first, looking for my husband. We had a "Dago" Louis that was Clark's driver, and they hit Dago over the head. I stepped up and slapped the guy. It's a wonder I hadn't got killed myself, and they went right on out and killed Flacy.

JOHNSON: These two gangsters?

J. JOHNSON: Yes.

JOHNSON: Whose orders were they following?

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J. JOHNSON: I gave all that stuff to Mr. [Gary] Thoms, I know, because I had all those

clippings and things.¹

JOHNSON: What were they trying to accomplish as far as you know?

J. JOHNSON: Well, it was just a political fight in the Primary.

JOHNSON: How about your husband; why were they looking for him?

J. JOHNSON: Because they were after the Shannon faction people.²

JOHNSON: They were?

J. JOHNSON: Yes.

JOHNSON: So what did your husband do about this?

J. JOHNSON: Well, he happened to be over at headquarters that day, at that time, or they would most likely have shot him.

JOHNSON: He was at Pendergast headquarters?

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J. JOHNSON: No, Rabbit.

JOHNSON: Where was that located?

J. JOHNSON: 47th and Troost.

JOHNSON: Oh, 47th and Troost was Shannon's headquarters. What about the Sheriff; what was he doing at this time? This was Bash, I suppose.

J. JOHNSON: Not much of anything. The deputies were active.

JOHNSON: But the Sheriff didn't try to track these people down?

¹ Mrs. Jennie Johnson's two scrapbooks, including articles on the 1934 election, have been copied by the Truman Library and are filed in Miscellaneous Historical Documents Collection, item No. 673.

² Articles in MHDC #673 indicate one Shannon faction, under City Clerk Peter Kelly, was in conflict with another Shannon faction linked to Clark Johnson's brother, Lee ("Doc").

J. JOHNSON: Oh, well, they tried to, I think. They had a hearing and things like that, but it didn't amount to much.

JOHNSON: How about the "massacre" at the Union Station [June 17, 1933]? Do you recall anything about that?

J. JOHNSON: Well, we were going to St. Joe that day, and we came by just as it happened.

JOHNSON: You were coming back into town?

J. JOHNSON: No, we were leaving town. We were headed out to General Hospital to pick up our patients. We lived at the Commonwealth Hotel for about four or five years,
[32]
and we were coming down Main Street, by the station, about the time it happened.

JOHNSON: So then what did your husband do?

J. JOHNSON: Well, we didn't do anything, because we didn't know what it was all about. See, we didn't have radios in cars those days like we have now.

JOHNSON: Right. But you saw a commotion going on over there, or what?

J. JOHNSON: Some, yes. But we just went on to pick up our patients, because we had appointments to pick them up. And then when we got back that afternoon, of course, we heard all about it.

JOHNSON: So you were living in the Commonwealth Hotel. Is that where you moved into after you got married?

J. JOHNSON: Yes.

JOHNSON: You lived there four or five years?

J. JOHNSON: Yes. He [Clark] was the house detective. All hotels in those days had house detectives, because there was so much prostitution, so much.

JOHNSON: Where was that located?

J. JOHNSON: Twelfth and Broadway.

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JOHNSON: Was Kansas City as wide open as its reputation implies?

J. JOHNSON: Yes. Very much. Yes, it was very wide open. If you went down to the North

end you better have a red ribbon tied to your steering wheel.

JOHNSON: Oh?

J. JOHNSON: It was dangerous.

JOHNSON: What would that do, the red ribbon? What would that do?

J. JOHNSON: [Seeing that], they knew that you were a friend.

JOHNSON: A Pendergast person, maybe?

J. JOHNSON: Yes. See, they had a big Italian organization.

JOHNSON: Was that Lazia's?

J. JOHNSON: Well, let's see . . .

JOHNSON: [Charles] Gargotta?

J. JOHNSON: Gargotta, he was the one.

JOHNSON: They didn't take to outsiders?

J. JOHNSON: No.

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JOHNSON: Or strangers coming in?

J. JOHNSON: No.

JOHNSON: Was there prostitution in that area of town, in the North end?

J. JOHNSON: Oh, very much. Very much.

JOHNSON: In the Italian section?

J. JOHNSON: Very much. Everywhere.

JOHNSON: How about drugs?

J. JOHNSON: Didn't hear too much about drugs. We did out here in the county, in Blue Springs; we had lots of drug addicts. Older men.

JOHNSON: Oh, out here?

J. JOHNSON: Yes.

JOHNSON: Older men. What kind of drug was that?

J. JOHNSON: I imagine it was heroin or something like that. I don't know.

JOHNSON: Heroin? It wasn't just an addiction from medicines they were taking?

J. JOHNSON: No, they were just drug addicts. And you see, we had these taverns in eastern Jackson County. We had [35]
two or three down on old Highway 40, and there was one right there at the entrance of Fun Haven. They had lots of robberies and things like that.

JOHNSON: These are road houses?

J. JOHNSON: Road houses.

JOHNSON: You ran a restaurant or tavern at one time, did you not? Where was that located?

J. JOHNSON: Well, here's a picture of it. It was right there on 40 Highway. I think in that scrapbook there is something about that.

JOHNSON: What years was that?

J. JOHNSON: In 1933 about. Things were getting rough and they fired house detectives. We had saved up enough money, that we had, I think, \$500. Of course, you didn't have much money in those days. We bought 100 acres from Doc [Clark's brother]. He liked to buy farms. He had, I don't know, how many farms.

JOHNSON: Your brother-in-law had several farms. He was very well-to-do then.

J. JOHNSON: Yes, very much. He owned a farm there, and it did not have a good road to it. So the county built a road, with horses and mules, called Valley View Road.
[36]

We'd have these huge picnics--two, three, or five hundred people would come out there for Democratic picnics.

JOHNSON: On Valley View Road?

J. JOHNSON: Yes.

JOHNSON: Were liquor licenses necessary for selling beer?

J. JOHNSON: Yes. You had to have it okayed before you could even sell beer in your taverns.

JOHNSON: Was Pendergast in the beer business?

J. JOHNSON: Very much. The Pendergast organization controlled the distributorships. We bought beer from a distributor approved by Pendergast.

JOHNSON: And he was in the concrete business?

J. JOHNSON: Yes, very much.

JOHNSON: What other kind of business was he in?

J. JOHNSON: In just about everything.

JOHNSON: So he got a cut, from the beer sales?

J. JOHNSON: And Shannon got some too.

JOHNSON: And Shannon.

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J. JOHNSON: All of them did.

JOHNSON: Had their fingers into just about everything.

J. JOHNSON: Oh, yes. Everything. We had all these shows and things coming to Kansas City; we had all those show people.

JOHNSON: What kind of shows?

J. JOHNSON: The theaters.

JOHNSON: These were road shows coming in, like . . .

J. JOHNSON: Yes, like the Schubert, and the Gaiety, the Missouri, the Loewe, and Phantageous; they had a lot of them.

JOHNSON: Did they get a cut off of that?

J. JOHNSON: I imagine they did. I'm not sure. But the politicians entertained a lot of these show people.

JOHNSON: Do you remember any in particular?

J. JOHNSON: Like Guy Kibby. That was before your time though. I knew a lot of them.

JOHNSON: Well, your husband had at least two or three jobs.

J. JOHNSON: He was bailiff of the County Court and handled the transportation of mental patients.

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JOHNSON: And Deputy Sheriff.

J. JOHNSON: Yes. Deputy Sheriff.

JOHNSON: And a restaurant owner.

J. JOHNSON: Yes, we owned that.

JOHNSON: But did he operate it? Did he have much time to spend with that?

J. JOHNSON: Oh, yes.

JOHNSON: But how could he be running the restaurant, and doing all this other work?

J. JOHNSON: Well, we opened at 4:30 in the afternoon.

JOHNSON: And it was open until how late at night?

J. JOHNSON: 9:30.

JOHNSON: Just 4:30 until 9:30?

J. JOHNSON: And that way I could do the cooking. I would get home from these trips, and do the cooking. I was busy.

JOHNSON: At least you didn't have these late-night drunks.

J. JOHNSON: No.

JOHNSON: Where did you move to from the hotel?

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J. JOHNSON: We moved to this little old farm house. I think there's a picture up there.

JOHNSON: A farm house where?

J. JOHNSON: On Valley View Road.

JOHNSON: I see. You never had any children.

J. JOHNSON: No children.

JOHNSON: So one day a week you were at the Court House.

J. JOHNSON: Mondays.

JOHNSON: And then you would be transporting . . .

J. JOHNSON: Transporting [mental] patients.

JOHNSON: How many times a week would that be?

J. JOHNSON: It would depend. The average was eight patients a week.

JOHNSON: Eight a week. How many trips would that be?

J. JOHNSON: Well, it depended on where they were going. If they all went to St. Joe, we might take four at a time.

JOHNSON: Maybe two trips.

J. JOHNSON: And also, if we had more than that, the County would pay \$10 for a car, an extra car, and driver; \$5

[40]

for the driver and \$10 for the car. And we would take two cars maybe to St. Joe. To start out with, we took them on the interurban, in 1930.

JOHNSON: There was an interurban between Kansas City and St. Joseph?

J. JOHNSON: Yes. We picked them up in a taxi, and took them down to the interurban station. We went up to St. Joe, and had the cab meet us there. From there we took them out to the hospital.

JOHNSON: Now, when they were rebuilding the Court House in Independence, they had some sessions in the log court house.

J. JOHNSON: Yes, I think I've got something in there about it, too.

JOHNSON: Okay, so you and the bailiff were in that log court house.

J. JOHNSON: Oh, yes. That was all one summer, I think.

JOHNSON: Guarding the room, so to speak.

J. JOHNSON: Yes.

JOHNSON: That must have been kind of cramped.

J. JOHNSON: Well, they didn't have big crowds.

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JOHNSON: How long did these sessions go?

J. JOHNSON: Until noon, just about from 10 until about 12.

JOHNSON: Just two hours.

J. JOHNSON: Very short.

JOHNSON: On Mondays.

J. JOHNSON: Yes.

JOHNSON: They would transact the county business, and make the main decisions in those two hours?

J. JOHNSON: They had a county counsellor.

JOHNSON: That was Fred Boxley.

J. JOHNSON: Yes, Boxley.

JOHNSON: Did you know him very well?

J. JOHNSON: Yes, he was from Odessa originally.

JOHNSON: Was he an honest man?

J. JOHNSON: Just like the rest of them.

JOHNSON: He went along with what the organization wanted?

J. JOHNSON: Sure, they all did.

JOHNSON: Well, now, Rufus Burrus . . .

[42]

J. JOHNSON: Well, now, I think Rufus would be as honest as any person ever was. He was a grand person.

JOHNSON: He was not much of an organization man?

J. JOHNSON: No. He had a big family, a lot of votes.

JOHNSON: Well, do you remember the issue about the farm, the mortgage on the Grandview farm, the Truman farm? Do you remember questions about that mortgage on the Truman farm?

J. JOHNSON: Not especially.

JOHNSON: When they weren't having sessions on Monday, was Truman usually in his office there?

J. JOHNSON: In his office, yes. See, the Eastern Judge had an office right beside the old Court Room.

JOHNSON: Yes, where they have it fixed up now. Does it look now like it did then?

J. JOHNSON: I haven't been in for about a year, so I don't know what they've done to it.

JOHNSON: I mean when you were last there, did it and the Court room, look like they did in the old days?

J. JOHNSON: I think so.

JOHNSON: I looks very much like it did in those days?

[43]

J. JOHNSON: In those days, yes.

JOHNSON: How many people from the public would show up for these sessions?

J. JOHNSON: Not very many unless they had something to talk to the court about. If they had something about a road or they had something about zoning, or something else.

JOHNSON: Well, it wouldn't hold more than 30 or 40 would it, those benches; or 50 maybe.

J. JOHNSON: I expect 100.

JOHNSON: A hundred could get in there, but usually there would be no more than how many?

J. JOHNSON: Oh, a dozen or so.

JOHNSON: Do you remember any arguments between the judges and those in audience?

J. JOHNSON: No, because they usually were pretty quiet.

JOHNSON: But there was a time when your husband threw out John Pryor for instance. Were there other times when he had to remove somebody from the room?

J. JOHNSON: Oh, yes, every once in a while. I can't think of anything special right now.

JOHNSON: They probably were somewhat intimidated by his

[44]
size.

J. JOHNSON: That was it; and these mental patients were, too, because he was so big.

JOHNSON: But some of them could be violent, I suppose.

J. JOHNSON: Oh, very much. Yes. And we didn't have the drugs in those days. The only thing we had was something that smelled to high heaven.

JOHNSON: Ether, you mean?

J. JOHNSON: No, it wasn't ether, it was something else.

I remember one patient especially that we took to Nevada. Of course we had leather handcuffs, and the "stick" to put on them, so they wouldn't hurt themselves. We put them on the ankles and then from here up to here, and I would sit in the back seat, usually. But this one, she was real, real violent. We called ahead and told them she was bad. They had a wet sheet, and they'd put her on this cot, wrap her in those sheets and that would cool them or something and calm them. That was about the only treatment they had.

JOHNSON: Was it family members that would refer these to the court?

J. JOHNSON: Yes, usually, or a doctor.

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JOHNSON: Or a doctor. Where were they put in custody?

J. JOHNSON: Some of them were at General Hospital. Some of them were at their homes.

JOHNSON: Were any of them in the jail?

J. JOHNSON: No, not very often.

JOHNSON: You'd either get them out of the home or out of the hospital to take them to the mental hospitals.

J. JOHNSON: Yes. I remember one we took from St. Mary's Hospital; she had been brought over here from Russia, I believe it was, as a maid and she couldn't cope with it. She was a lovely little person. We took her down to Nevada, and she was so thrilled to see cattle and things like that. I often wonder what happened to her.

JOHNSON: Do you remember anything about the justices of the peace?

J. JOHNSON: Yes.

JOHNSON: They were supposed to have been abolished, these JPs, these so-called "Jack Rabbit Courts," in 1930.

J. JOHNSON: Yes, and they were Jack Rabbit courts, too.

JOHNSON: Truman went and reinstated two of these JPs, Marion Waltner and Vernon Green. Were you acquainted

[46]
with either one of those?

J. JOHNSON: I knew them.

JOHNSON: Okay. And that became quite an issue.

J. JOHNSON: Oh, that magistrate business--they'd follow you out here on 40 Highway and arrest you for nothing.

JOHNSON: Just to get the fees?

J. JOHNSON: Yes, just to get the fees.

JOHNSON: They finally, like I say, abolished it by law. They were really abusing their authority?

J. JOHNSON: Very much. Very much.

JOHNSON: Well, that sure didn't create popularity for the Pendergast organization. Why would he put up with that?

J. JOHNSON: There wasn't much he could do about it.

JOHNSON: What did you and your husband think of Pendergast? I know that you were for Shannon. I guess you were friends of Shannon, but what did you think of Pendergast?

J. JOHNSON: Sure, but we were friends of Pendergast too, because they traded jobs. Maybe Pendergast would have a job that a Shannon man could fill, or Shannon had one
[47]
that a Pendergast man could fill.

JOHNSON: So, you stayed on good terms with both of them.

J. JOHNSON: Yes.

JOHNSON: Then there was Jim, who was a nephew of Tom. Did you know him very well?

J. JOHNSON: I just knew them.

JOHNSON: Was he a good man?

J. JOHNSON: I think so, yes.

JOHNSON: He was a friend of Truman.

J. JOHNSON: Yes.

JOHNSON: Truman refers to Doc Johnson in one of his memos to himself. Of course, you've already said that there was a close political relationship between Doc and Joe Shannon, and Shannon apparently is the person that Truman refers to as the "Little Democratic Boss."

J. JOHNSON: He was.

JOHNSON: Is that how they referred to him, as the little Democratic Boss?

J. JOHNSON: He was easy going. I don't think he ever took a drink or anything like that.

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JOHNSON: Shannon?

J. JOHNSON: Shannon, yes.

JOHNSON: Is that right? He was very sober?

J. JOHNSON: Most of the time, yes. He loved to eat at Fred Harvey's.

JOHNSON: But I think Truman felt that Shannon was against him. Do you recall Shannon ever commenting about Harry Truman, or what his feelings were toward Harry Truman?

J. JOHNSON: Not especially.

JOHNSON: Did you ever hear him say anything good or bad about Harry Truman?

J. JOHNSON: Nothing I can remember. I know we had to get along, that was for sure.

JOHNSON: There's an implication in one of Truman's essays that Doc helped get Vrooman kicked out of office.

J. JOHNSON: I can't remember Vrooman. You see, that was back when I was just getting started.

JOHNSON: I see.

You mention your husband starting out at \$75 a month. Do you recall what happened to the pay scales there after the Depression started in '30, '31? Did he

[49]

have to take a cut in pay?

J. JOHNSON: I don't believe so. In fact, for using the car, I think they gave us a \$50 a month expense account, for gasoline.

JOHNSON: Do you remember ever getting a raise in pay during the '30s?

J. JOHNSON: Oh, yes. Well, evidently we did get some raises in pay.

JOHNSON: After what, around the mid-thirties?

J. JOHNSON: Because I think we were getting about \$425 when . . .

JOHNSON: Well, was that in the '60s?

J. JOHNSON: Yes. It wasn't very much.

JOHNSON: But still \$425 a month.

J. JOHNSON: We didn't get too much.

JOHNSON: No, they weren't that well paid.

J. JOHNSON: Now, see, [J.A.] Purdome was one of the Sheriffs that had a lot of these taverns and things.

JOHNSON: He had a lot of taverns?

J. JOHNSON: Yes. He didn't own them, but I mean . . .

[50]

JOHNSON: He played favorites then with them?

J. JOHNSON: Yes, very much. Some of these deputies, oh, they were so crooked it wasn't even funny. They would go in and these taverns had to pay off.

JOHNSON: Now, you're talking about the county Sheriff's Department?

J. JOHNSON: Oh, yes.

JOHNSON: Now, your husband, of course, was a Deputy Sheriff.

J. JOHNSON: Yes, but see, he wasn't assigned to any of that. See, he was assigned only as bailiff of the court and for transportation of mental patients.

JOHNSON: Was he ever called on to do anything he didn't feel was right to do, your husband?

J. JOHNSON: Well, he wouldn't do it. One funny thing--Tapawingo had a Sportsman's Club, and back in the '30s there was a lot of what they called "mouse games." You know, you would bet on these mice, and things like that. Tapawingo was having one of these, and this one old lady called the Sheriff's office and, of course, we didn't go because we didn't want to cause any trouble.

JOHNSON: These were raceways for mice?

[51]

J. JOHNSON: Yes. You've seen them haven't you?

JOHNSON: Was that legal in those days?

J. JOHNSON: Oh, yes.

JOHNSON: It was legal. But betting on horse races?

J. JOHNSON: Oh, yes, very much.

JOHNSON: Was legal?

J. JOHNSON: Well, it wasn't legal, but they did it.

JOHNSON: Okay, it wasn't legal but it was done.

J. JOHNSON: We had the race track out at Parkville, you see.

JOHNSON: Where was that?

J. JOHNSON: Parkville. Out there at Red-X.

JOHNSON: Do you know if Pendergast lost--did he bet on races out there?

J. JOHNSON: I imagine so, yes.

JOHNSON: He lost a lot of money on horse races. Were you aware at the time that he was betting on horse races and losing money?

J. JOHNSON: No, I wasn't that close.

[52]

JOHNSON: That was kind of a secret in the '30s?

J. JOHNSON: I wasn't close to him in that way.

JOHNSON: Your husband stayed on as bailiff for how long?

J. JOHNSON: From 1929 to 1965.

JOHNSON: He died with his boots on, so to speak.

J. JOHNSON: Yes. In fact his health was bad, but the Sheriff kept him on anyway.

JOHNSON: Did the Shannon organization remain on after the Pendergast organization began to crumble?

J. JOHNSON: Oh, yes.

JOHNSON: So it outlasted the Pendergast?

J. JOHNSON: Oh, yes.

JOHNSON: Was it still, then, Shannon's influence that kept your husband on as bailiff, through the succeeding administrations?

J. JOHNSON: The Sheriff did it, really.

JOHNSON: Let's see there was Bash during the '30s.

J. JOHNSON: Before him, there was [Jefferson] Smedley. Then Bash, and then Purdome I think. And then [James L.] Williams. Williams was impeached.

[53]

JOHNSON: Was that in the '40s or when?

J. JOHNSON: It must have been about the last of the '30s or early '40s. He was followed by [Granville] Richart. And then Owsley, and one that's down in Texas now [William K. Carnes], and [Robert J.] Renneau. Renneau is an awfully nice person.

JOHNSON: Isn't he the one that's in there now?

J. JOHNSON: He's there now.

JOHNSON: Sheriff Owsley was in office when your husband died in 1965?

J. JOHNSON: Yes.

By the way, the Rabbits had the jobs in Swope Park.

JOHNSON: So, all of the personnel out there were Rabbits.

J. JOHNSON: Most of them were Shannon people.

JOHNSON: But when did that end? When did that system come to an end?

J. JOHNSON: I think when the County Legislature took over.³

³ In the early 1970s the three-person County Court was replaced by a County Executive and a County Legislature.

[54]

JOHNSON: Earlier I mentioned McElroy, and he got a reputation as very corrupt.

J. JOHNSON: Yes. And then Bryce Smith was the mayor, [of Kansas City, Missouri] and he . . .

JOHNSON: Was he an honest man?

J. JOHNSON: Yes; and he was a Rabbit.

See, the General Hospital and all of those people, they were all political appointments.

JOHNSON: Yes, but whose were they, Shannon's or Pendergast's.

J. JOHNSON: Well, two Pendergast, and one Shannon.

JOHNSON: They kept that proportion pretty steady?

J. JOHNSON: Yes, steady.

JOHNSON: Didn't that end after Pendergast went to jail?

J. JOHNSON: Not until the County Legislature took over.

JOHNSON: So it even continued on after Pendergast went to jail. And after he died.

J. JOHNSON: Yes.

JOHNSON: Anything else you can think of, any incidents or any quotes that we might want to put on the record

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here, involving county politics?

J. JOHNSON: County politics--well, as I say, they really took care of the needy people.

JOHNSON: But they certainly had some slums and very poor people.

J. JOHNSON: Sure they had slums, but they . . .

JOHNSON: You say they took care of them by doing what?

J. JOHNSON: Giving food, giving them fuel, housing,
and . . .

JOHNSON: They'd help pay their rent? To avoid evictions?

J. JOHNSON: Yes, lots of them did.

JOHNSON: Were there any evictions? They always had Thanksgiving turkeys, I guess, too.

J. JOHNSON: Yes, and always had a big Christmas; that was the big thing. So was Thanksgiving.

JOHNSON: Well, now, Christmas, did the precinct captains go out?

J. JOHNSON: Yes.

JOHNSON: Did you go out with gifts and food?

J. JOHNSON: Yes. Oh, yes.

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JOHNSON: So you went out distributing some of these things that people needed, then?

J. JOHNSON: Very much.

JOHNSON: You mentioned being a committeewoman or precinct captain for the Democrats.

J. JOHNSON: I was committeewoman out here at Sni-a-Bar Township, I don't know for how many years.⁴ I'm not right now, but I was.

JOHNSON: You were committeewoman for Sni-a-Bar.

J. JOHNSON: And if you wanted a job--well, I heard this the other night; a fellow came in where I was working and he said, "There's the gal that put me to work." And I hadn't remembered that I signed the "okay" for him.

JOHNSON: Well, when did you first become a committeewoman?

J. JOHNSON: Oh, about 1932, '33.

⁴ According to an interview in 1978, Jennie Johnson was elected committeewoman for the 15th Ward of Kansas City in 1932. In 1934 she and her husband moved to a small farm at Lake Tapawingo, and there she organized voters into a new precinct, the 7th Precinct. She later was elected several times as committeewoman of Sni-a-Bar township, serving into the 1970s. See interview by John B. Billings in Mrs. Clark Johnson Scrapbook, MHDC #673.

JOHNSON: You mentioned meeting Truman in the Court. Did you ever visit him in the home?

[57]

J. JOHNSON: No, I never did.

JOHNSON: Did you know Bess? Did you meet Bess and Margaret?

J. JOHNSON: Oh, yes. They all rode horseback.

JOHNSON: Oh, they did.

J. JOHNSON: You see, that was when we lived on the farm, down on Valley View Road.

JOHNSON: What years are we talking about?

J. JOHNSON: That was about 1934.

JOHNSON: You lived there about how many years?

J. JOHNSON: Oh, 40 years or more I guess.

JOHNSON: And in the 1930s the Trumans came out and rode?

J. JOHNSON: Yes. Anyway, I always loved horses.

JOHNSON: You had a stable there?

J. JOHNSON: Yes. Doc had money, and he came down one evening. My nickname was "Scotty" and he said, "Scotty, I put you in business. I bought you a riding academy." I had never ridden in a riding academy; I didn't know what a flat saddle was. Well, there's that place right up there [pointing to a photograph].

[58]

JOHNSON: Is that the Tapawingo Cafe?

J. JOHNSON: You see, he built that for a tavern when prohibition was repealed. But first he bought this riding academy. He said, "The horses will be there in the morning." Sure enough, the next morning there were nine head of horses. And I didn't know what I was going to do with them; we didn't have any place to put them. And he said, "Well, I'll build you a barn." So that fall he built this barn, and we built it up from nine to 60 head of horses. When they repealed the liquor law, he said, "You might as well take the place over," so we traded the farm for the place up there.

JOHNSON: This restaurant, tavern.

J. JOHNSON: Yes. And we lived upstairs. We served 3.2[%] beer, and as I say, we served meals from 4:30 until 9:30.

JOHNSON: Well, were you running the stable before prohibition was ended?

J. JOHNSON: No, afterwards, when it ended.

JOHNSON: The stable and the restaurant were operated together?

J. JOHNSON: Yes.

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JOHNSON: You ran them together.

J. JOHNSON: Yes.

JOHNSON: Well, how did the Trumans figure into this?

J. JOHNSON: Well, they knew Clark at the County Court, you see, and so they all came out to ride horseback.

JOHNSON: So, all the Trumans, that is Margaret, Bess and Harry, all came out and rode?

J. JOHNSON: And her sisters, the Wallaces. In the summertime they'd all come out and ride.

JOHNSON: They did some horseback riding.

J. JOHNSON: And the judges, after Court sessions, would have to go out in the county someplace to investigate a road or something. On the way back they'd stop at our place and have coffee or tea or a sandwich or something.

JOHNSON: You got acquainted with them that way.

J. JOHNSON: Yes. And they were lovely people.

JOHNSON: This would have been before he went to Washington?

J. JOHNSON: Yes. Well, then after he went to Washington, when he was Senator, he came out for horseback riding.

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JOHNSON: Of course, he had ridden a horse during the war.

J. JOHNSON: Oh, yes.

JOHNSON: But was that new to them, to Bess or Margaret?

J. JOHNSON: Well, it was to Margaret, of course, because she was only ten or eleven years old.

JOHNSON: But she enjoyed that.

J. JOHNSON: Yes. I remember when she got her driver's license. She was very unhappy because she said she had to take all the family and drive them, and things like that.

JOHNSON: Be a chauffeur.

J. JOHNSON: A chauffeur, yes. But they were nice people.

JOHNSON: So that was one of their leisure-time activities, riding horses.

J. JOHNSON: Every week. And the Burruses did too.

JOHNSON: And the Burruses too.

J. JOHNSON: Yes, they rode horseback.

JOHNSON: And that was on Valley View Road, off of Highway 40?

J. JOHNSON: No, this was on 40 Highway. It's where the

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school buses are now, on 40 Highway. I sold my land to the school district for school buses. It's right at the entrance to Lake Tapawingo.

JOHNSON: Okay, at the entrance there. Is that building still there?

J. JOHNSON: No. When the school bought it they tore it down. See, Bash and [Mitchel] Henderson, he was a judge; and [John L.] Heffner was a Deputy Sheriff; Clark [Johnson] was a Deputy Sheriff, and they all had land out there. We had 1500 acres of land to ride horseback on. We did not go on any highways.

JOHNSON: Oh, so it was all connected there. Your husband didn't want to retire, apparently.

J. JOHNSON: No. The Sheriffs were really good to him.

JOHNSON: Did you ever meet with the Trumans after they came back from Washington?

J. JOHNSON: No, I didn't.

JOHNSON: I see.

J. JOHNSON: I was too busy.

JOHNSON: What was your husband's opinion of Harry Truman?

J. JOHNSON: Oh, he liked him very much. Very much. He was

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a nice person.

JOHNSON: He always got along with him?

J. JOHNSON: Oh, yes, he got along with all of them.

JOHNSON: Anything else now that we may have forgotten to mention before we close up here?

J. JOHNSON: I was trying to see if there was anything here [in the clippings] . . .

JOHNSON: You say the Rabbits would always have an annual picnic?

J. JOHNSON: Oh, yes. That was one of the big occasions.

JOHNSON: And whereabouts?

J. JOHNSON: Well, that depended. [Some were out there] before Lake Jacomo was built, of course. Out at Sugar Creek they have a rabbit dinner there every year; I haven't missed one of those in 40 years, I guess.

JOHNSON: So there still are rabbits around.

J. JOHNSON: Yes, they go out and hunt rabbits; the firemen do it.

JOHNSON: Would Pendergast people never take part in that?

J. JOHNSON: They had their own.

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JOHNSON: You never got together as one group?

J. JOHNSON: Oh, yes, one time we did.

JOHNSON: You would get together as a group?

J. JOHNSON: Oh yes. And on general election we really worked together. It was the primary where there was fighting.

JOHNSON: How long did Shannon remain head of that organization?

J. JOHNSON: Well, Doc took it over.

JOHNSON: Oh, Doc Johnson did.⁵ I suppose he is deceased.

J. JOHNSON: He died about ten years before Clark did.

JOHNSON: The organization kind of faded out?

J. JOHNSON: Yes. Now I belong to the Bill Baker "gang" in Independence, the Eastern Jackson County Democratic Club.

JOHNSON: So you're a part of that.

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J. JOHNSON: Yes.

JOHNSON: Neither you nor your husband latched on to any "graft," so to speak.

J. JOHNSON: Oh, no.

JOHNSON: But did most of these appointees do that?

J. JOHNSON: Lots of them did; a lot of these Deputy Sheriffs did. They made a lot of money, because they'd go into these taverns and they'd say do this or do that, and that was it. But my husband [and I], we just weren't that kind of people, you see.

JOHNSON: Yes. So there were exceptions to this generalization about dishonest people in the "machine" organizations.

⁵ Joseph Shannon died in 1943. According to an obituary of Lee C. Johnson, in the *Kansas City Star*, Johnson was removed as director of the Kansas City fire department in 1940 by a reform government, and during World War II he and partner, J. G. Hoover, owned and operated a 600-acre farm near Camp Crowder at Neosho, Missouri. Johnson also won the contract to dispose of the camp's garbage.

J. JOHNSON: Oh, yes, very much. Oh, there was a lot of good people.

JOHNSON: Of course, Truman is considered one who remained honest.

J. JOHNSON: That's right, and this Bill Royster, his organization was really honest.

JOHNSON: That was the north . . .

J. JOHNSON: Northeast.

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JOHNSON: In the northeast section, the Italian section.

J. JOHNSON: Oh yes. And they really took care of their people out there.

JOHNSON: But he was honest.

J. JOHNSON: Really honest. Still you never knew from day to the next what was going to happen next.

JOHNSON: Yes, that's the reputation local politics has had.
Well, thanks very much for your time.

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