

THE NATIONAL SURVEY OF
HISTORIC SITES AND BUILDINGS

THE LYNDON B. JOHNSON BOYHOOD HOME

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INTRODUCTION

Blanco County, in the heart of the Hill Country of south-central Texas, is in many respects a Johnson preserve. In the mid 1850's the President's grandfather, Samuel Ealy Johnson, and his brother Tom, began raising cattle here. In due course they acquired considerable land holdings and, their cattle prospering, made the long drive north to Kansas markets.

The Hill Country--sometimes harsh with drought, hail, hot wind, and blizzard--is normally "a gentle land of little hills and verdant valleys, of limestone springs and forests of perennially green cedar and live oak."¹ Streams like the Pedernales and Blanco flow through it, and lakes and ponds occupy the hollows. The Johnson clan found this land much to their liking, and they increased upon it. Johnson City, established by early settlers along the Pedernales River in 1878, was named for the pioneering ancestors of the President.

This heritage of land and people is strong in the President's heart; it is to this place and to these people that he returns to relax and refresh his mind and body. It was here, in this Hill Country, that he was born and raised and schooled, and where he ran for his first public office.

1. Jack Maguire, ed., A President's Country (Austin, 1964), 6.

Residents of the area remember so many incidents from the President's early life that there is scarcely a building or plot of land in the vicinity but recalls some association with his boyhood or young manhood.

Today, the LBJ Ranch, bought some years ago from relatives, is the center of the President's activities in the Hill Country. Included in the ranch's 438 acres are the President's modern ranch home and a simple frame farm house where he was born to Samuel and Rebekah Johnson on August 27, 1908. Thirteen miles east, in Johnson City, is the boyhood home.

Of the three most important sites associated with the President in the Johnson City vicinity, the Boyhood Home stands out as the most significant historically.

Though in time to come the modern LBJ Ranch House will doubtless be re-evaluated in the light of historical perspective, its current official use as the "Texas White House," and the security restrictions that hedge it from public access, would appear to militate against its consideration at this time in the Presidential Landmark Program.

The Birthplace House, now being restored by the President, is similarly cut off from public access for security reasons. More important in terms of evaluation criteria, it is assumed that scenes of early childhood are less significant historically than those of the later formative years.

THE BOYHOOD HOME

According to residents of Johnson City, the Boyhood Home is a site particularly dear to the President's memory. Apparently, too, he has specifically chosen it as the place to commemorate his early life and the profound influence of his parents on his later destiny.

According to records at the Blanco County Courthouse, the Boyhood Home was built in 1886. Samuel and Rebekah Johnson moved here from their farm when the future President was six years old (sometime in 1914-15). He lived here until after graduation from nearby Johnson City High School.

This site is considered the place of evolution and development from childhood, through a boyhood marked by industry and quick assumption of responsibility, to the emergence of the young man whose meteoric career would culminate in the Presidency.

The home is a one-story farm house, painted white, and may be described as T-shaped. The two L porches are characteristic of this type of farm home commonly built during the last decades of the 19th century throughout the South and southwest.

OWNERSHIP AND PRESENT CONDITION

Formerly owned by the President, and restored by Mrs. Johnson and ^{is now} the President's sister, Mrs. Birge Alexander, the home ~~has been~~ owned by the Johnson City Foundation, which administers it as ~~dedicated to Blanco County. It is administered by the Lyndon B.~~ a historic house museum.

~~Johnson-Boyhood Home Foundation for Blanco County.~~ Early

photographs and the recollections of the President and his family were used in this preservation project; and according to local residents the house looks much as it did during the boyhood period.

Selected rooms have been remodeled for use as a historic house museum in which are exhibited memorabilia of the President, and his family.

Structurally sound and well maintained, the house and grounds (about 1 acre) appear to have a high degree of integrity.

The home is open to the public. It is already a noted Texas State Landmark (1965) and is frequently visited and photographed.

REFERENCES

Jack Maguire, ed., A President's Country (Austin, 1964); Houston Chronicle, "Profile of a President" (supplement, February 1964); Walter P. Webb, ed., The Handbook of Texas (Austin, 1962); local interviews and Johnson City Chamber of Commerce maps, pamphlets, news clippings, etc.

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