

Lyndon B. Johnson

National Historical Park
National Park Service
U.S. Department of Interior

RECONSTRUCTED BIRTHPLACE

No one could ever understand Lyndon Johnson unless they understood the land and the people from which he came. His roots were deep...in the hill country.

—Rev. Billy Graham

Lyndon Johnson took great pride in his heritage and his roots here in the Hill County of Texas. In order to share that heritage with interested visitors, President Johnson hired architect J. Roy White of Austin, Texas in 1964 to reconstruct the birthplace home. President Johnson and Roy White relied on old photographs of the original birthplace house as well as family members' memories to guide the project. The house represents how Lyndon Johnson wanted us to see his birthplace.

RECONSTRUCTING A FARMHOUSE

While planning the reconstruction of the birthplace, they were careful to follow the same architectural style as the original house built in 1889 by the President's grandfather Sam Ealy Johnson, Sr. Although it is exactly where it was originally, what you see now is a much nicer rendition. The original house was torn down in the 1940s. You can get an idea of how it used to look by peering at a picture hanging on the front wall of the barn behind the house—it was taken in 1897, and some of the Johnson clan is standing in front of the home.



Pen-Ink Drawing/Cheryl Lengefeld, 1995

Lyndon Johnson's birthplace has the distinction of being the only presidential birthplace reconstructed, refurbished, and interpreted by an incumbent president.

Although most of the materials to reconstruct the birthplace were new, what they could salvage of the first structure they reused, such as pieces of the limestone fireplace and portions of the lumber. Mr. White didn't forget to include the open hallway, or "dog-trot," which was designed to provide ventilation in hot weather. He followed the original board and batten construction. A modern kitchen and bathroom, running water, and electricity were added, but the house has no central heat or air conditioning.

The house was used between 1964 and 1966 as a guest cottage for overflow company from the Texas White House.

President Johnson delighted in showing guests his version of the birthplace. He found great pleasure in escorting visitors from room to room while reminiscing about his early years growing up on the

Pedernales River. He told visitors that the kitchen had the only original piece of furniture—a rawhide bottom chair with a hole in the seat. Mrs. Johnson loaned the park her Roycrafter high chair in the kitchen. Etched on the back is "Lady Bird," the nickname given to Claudia Alta Taylor at age two. The other furnishings represent antiques donated by family and special friends of the Johnsons.

THE PRESIDENT'S PARENTS

It was to the old farm house that Sam Ealy Johnson Jr. brought his bride, Rebekah Baines, in 1907. To welcome his bride, Sam fixed up the original house by painting it bright yellow. On August 27, 1908, one year and one week after they were married, Lyndon Baines Johnson, the first of five children, was born. Rebekah and Josefa were also born in the house before the family moved to Johnson City in 1913, where Sam and Lucia were born.

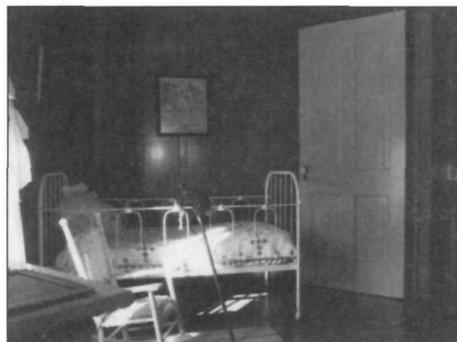


Farmhouse, 1897

When Lyndon Johnson was a child, the fashion was to have a “swept” or dirt yard, which is quite plain and unattractive by today’s standards. The landscape of the reconstructed birthplace conforms to the 1964 to 1973 period of how a front lawn should appear.

INTERIOR

Between 1908 and 1913, the three oldest children slept in the nursery/ shed room at the front of the house. The alphabet blocks are reminders of how the college-educated Rebekah tutored her children and taught two-year-old Lyndon his ABCs. The teddy bear, although not the original, is reminiscent of little Lyndon’s favorite toy. The china clown dish on the dresser was a Christmas gift that four-year-old Lyndon bought for his Aunt Lucie. He gave it to her three weeks early with the declaration, “it cost me a whole dime and it’s worth every penny!” The west bedroom/parlor also served as a birthing room. This small room reminds us of the spiritual and physical togetherness the Johnson



Reconstructed nursery



Old kitchen

family members shared. It is furnished with heirlooms, including the Victorian black walnut bed and the dresser that belonged to Rebekah Johnson. Six-month-old Lyndon’s first baby picture is on the mantel. His proud father had fifty postcards made from it and mailed one to each of his colleagues in the Texas House of Representatives.

Rebekah Baines Johnson was a well-educated and refined lady who loved poetry, literature, and books. When she became a farm wife in this rural area, she had to endure the loneliness of her husband’s many absences on business trips and sessions with the Texas legislature. She managed the farm and hired hands when Sam was away. She later said that the hard realities of that life—no electricity, cooking on the wood stove, pumping water from the pitcher pump at the cistern, and so on, made her first year of marriage “the worst year of my life.”

SAFETY, RESOURCE, AND ACCESSIBILITY MESSAGE

The home is restored for you and all future visitors to enjoy. Please help us protect and preserve it by not touching any furnishings or artifacts. Do not climb corral fences or approach the cattle. The Birthplace is wheelchair accessible, and the visitor center has available typed scripts and Braille scripts. Ask at the desk where you purchase your tour tokens.

