

Lyndon B. Johnson



The Hill Country of Texas, home of the Johnson family for over a century, is an in-between place. To the east are softer, well-watered lands. To the west stretch high plains, plateaus, and deserts. The Hill Country bears the traits of both regions.



President Johnson speaking from the Texas White House.



The president lending a hand at the LBJ Ranch.

The Texas Hill Country is a borderland where gentle beauty blends with harsh reckonings. Ragged skylines of rock and cedar frame the region’s farms, ranches, and small towns. If spring rains are ample, bluebonnets, paintbrushes, and other wildflowers will lace valleys and roadsides. Summer storms batter the hills with thunder and hail. Cloudburst floods rip valleys. Punishing heat and drought can smite the land, wilting crops and drying creeks. In winter, winds sweep in from the plains, driving people and animals to shelter.

A Landscape Shapes a Leader Out of this place came a man who embodied the region’s contrasting seasons of great gentleness and violent energy. Often joyous and effusive, at home in a crowd, he sometimes withdrew into a lonely battle with his own blizzards and droughts. He was Lyndon Baines Johnson. From 1963 to 1969 he served as the 36th President of the United States.

President Johnson built a bridge between two Americas, one of small communities at isolated crossroads, and the other of globally connected cities. For 40 years—as teacher, public official, and elder statesman—he strived to make people neighbors again.

Johnson’s presidency straddled an era beset by the Vietnam War and social upheavals. Like others who wielded power in times of strife, he struggled against powerful currents. He denied the notion that problems cannot be solved. In the spirit of his frontier heritage, he optimistically believed that solutions would follow from his efforts. History as tragedy was foreign to his nature.

Johnson emerged from the arenas of an action-filled life as a man who strove mightily, who won great successes. And yet, despite his powerful will, he sustained great disappointments. Here, in the land of his birth and youth—the place he kept coming back to—are some reminders of this man, the places and things and people he loved, the home to which he always returned.

The myths and realities of Johnson’s frontier heritage helped shape both his life and what was written about him. History was a present force in the Johnson family. The forebears who had made that heritage tutored the child. He sat in the lap of a cattle-drover grandfather who

had “pointed them north” on the Chisholm Trail. He peered under the log cabin where his own grandmother and infant aunt had hidden from raiding Comanches. Heroes who had wrested homes from the wilderness reminisced on his front porch.

Hill Country Boyhood His boyhood home in Johnson City and the nearby settlement of his ancestors embody a part of the past America that nourished the child and molded a large part of the man. These places helped structure President Johnson’s view of how the world ought to be.

Lyndon was five when his father moved the family into the comfortable house on Elm Street in 1913. Growing up in Johnson City was a mixture of hard reality and childhood adventure. Besides the never-ending chores, he found time to do the things most kids did: breaking his leg falling out of the barn, playing first base and pitcher on sandlot and school teams, riding a borrowed donkey to the Pedernales River, and occasionally getting into trouble.

Lyndon’s mother and father each had a profound influence on the lanky youngster. His mother, Rebekah, a college-educated woman, took family and civic responsibilities seriously. She imparted to her children a belief in education and compassion for others. His father, Sam Johnson, a state legislator, taught his children the facts of political

life in the agrarian liberal tradition. By 1927, when Lyndon left for college, he had already begun to shape his ideas and values.

A Sense of Belonging The early years at Elm Street provided young Lyndon with a foundation for life. At the LBJ Ranch—the Texas White House—he exercised the energy and power that accrued to him as president, as entrepreneur, and as lord-of-the-manor rancher. He surrounded himself with family and friends and proclaimed through yarns and anecdotes the virtues of good upbringing and hard work. He regaled visitors with his sense of place, made real by green pastures, prize cattle, and an imposing ranch house.

Some guests, perhaps because of their host’s unstinting joy and hospitality, went away a bit envious of this man who so obviously belonged. But this homestead was much more than a showplace for power and pride. It was an operating ranch, where events could be controlled. Here a man who loved action could set a task, get it going, and get it done. It was a healing place far removed from the turbulence of Washington.

At the LBJ Ranch you can glimpse the child who chewed a blade of grass and wondered if it would rain and if the river would rise; and the man who strode onto the world stage, returned here to work the land, and finally joined his ancestors.

Each of us is transformed over the course of a life, every stage revealing a different person—wide-eyed, idealistic, reflective. These images track Lyndon Johnson’s passage as the years and the demands of office leave their traces.



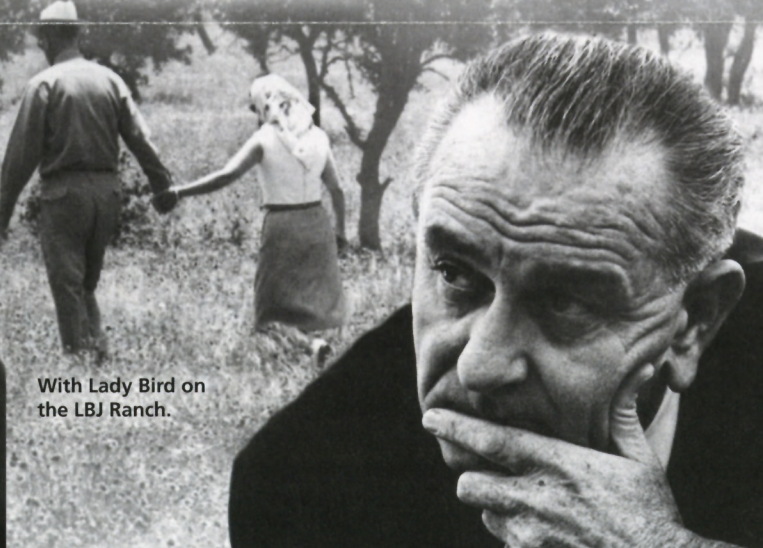
As a student (back row, fifth from left) at Johnson City High School.



As a young US Congressman with his wife Claudia “Lady Bird” Johnson.



With (left to right) Lynda, Luci, and Lady Bird during his presidency.



Pondering an issue as president.

Texas youngster to 36th President

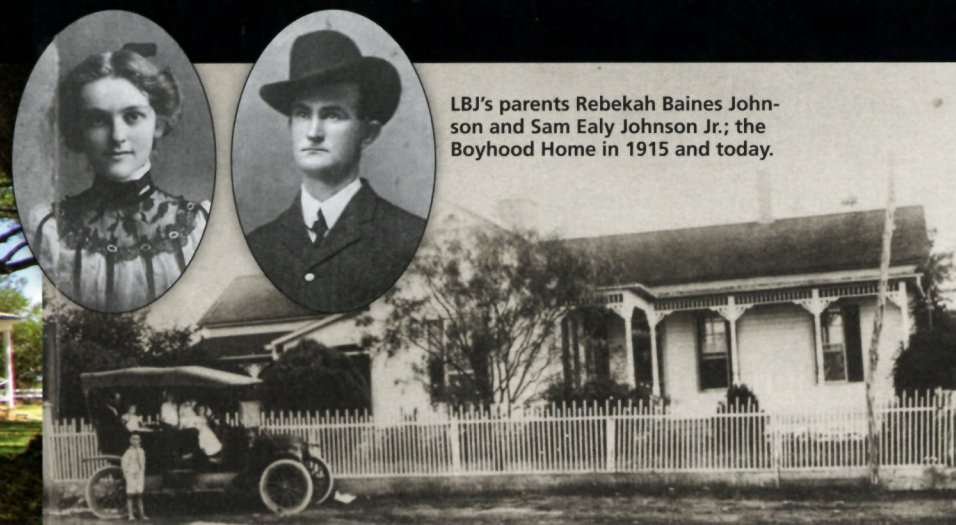
At age five.

LEFT TO RIGHT: ALL PHOTOS—LBJ LIBRARY. FAR RIGHT: JOHNSON FAMILY, PRESIDENT AND MRS. JOHNSON, AND PORTRAIT—LBJ LIBRARY /YOICHI OKAMOTO.

Visiting Lyndon Johnson's Texas



Texas White House, LBJ Ranch.



LBJ's parents Rebekah Baines Johnson and Sam Ealy Johnson Jr.; the Boyhood Home in 1915 and today.



NPS / ART MCRAE

“All the World is Welcome Here”

Lyndon B. Johnson National Historical Park includes many properties associated with President Johnson's life. The Johnson family's vision was to preserve these properties for visitors from around the world and for local communities.

The park's two districts—one in Johnson City and another at the LBJ Ranch near Stonewall—document the origins, ancestry, and life of the 36th President of the United States.

LBJ Ranch Take a self-guiding driving tour of the LBJ Ranch, about 14 miles west of Johnson City. You will see sites that help tell Lyndon Johnson's life story. Obtain a driving permit and tour route map at the LBJ State Park and Historic Site Visitor Center on Highway 290 east of Stonewall. While there you may purchase an audio tour at the Western National Parks Association sales outlet: www.wnpa.org.

First visit the one-room Junction School that Lyndon attended at age four. A quarter of a mile away is the reconstructed LBJ Birthplace. The Johnson Family Cemetery lies across the road. Generations of Johnsons are buried here, including President and Lady Bird Johnson. Stop also at the home of LBJ's grandfather, Sam Ealy Johnson Sr. At the Show Barn visit with staff who manage the ranch and care for the registered Hereford cattle, descended from LBJ's original herd.

A trip to the ranch isn't complete without visiting the Texas White House, where the mat at the front door once read: “All the World is Welcome Here.” Access is by guided tour only (fee). Tour tickets are sold in the Airplane Hangar Visitor Center.

Adjacent to the hangar is a Lockheed Jet-Star, one of five JetStar aircraft used at the ranch. Owing to its small size, President Johnson jokingly referred to this type of jet as “Air Force One-Half.”

The Klein Shop served as the maintenance shop for the ranch. Inside are several of Johnson's favorite cars, including his 1962 Amphicar (amphibious automobile).

The Martin Barn served as the center for ranching operations until the Johnsons built the Show Barn in 1966.

The US Secret Service Command Post, in a small white cottage, housed the electronic surveillance equipment that helped protect the president and his family. Next door are three Communications Trailers used by the White House Communications Agency and by military aides. The trailer interiors and the Secret Service Command post are not open to the public at this time.

Johnson City Stop first at the park visitor center for information, exhibits, and two films: *LBJ the President* and *Lady Bird Johnson*. Then tour Johnson's Boyhood Home, where lessons learned by young Lyndon would shape his presidency.

For a glimpse of Hill Country history and Johnson's frontier heritage, walk to the Johnson Settlement to see restored structures from the 1800s. An exhibit center has photos and artifacts. Withers & Spauldings General Store, also within easy walking distance, has exhibits that reveal the town's influence on the budding politician. The Johnson City Chamber of Commerce staffs the building and provides maps and brochures about local businesses and attractions.

Safety For a pleasant and rewarding visit, please observe a few safety precautions.

- Do not touch, feed, or approach animals.
- Stay off fences.
- Children under 14 must be accompanied by a responsible adult in all buildings.
- Texas summers are hot; drink plenty of fluids.
- Fire ant stings are painful; stay on marked trails.
- For firearms regulations check the park website.

Accessibility We strive to make our facilities, services, and programs accessible to all; call or check our website.

More Information Lyndon B. Johnson National Historical Park is one of over 400 parks in the National Park System. To learn more about parks and National Park Service programs in America's communities, visit www.nps.gov.

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Related Sites

LBJ State Park and Historic Site

The state park, on the south side of the Pedernales River, is the gateway to the LBJ Ranch. It features the Sauer-Beckmann living history farm, a museum, amphitheater, walking trails, and a wildlife viewing area. For reservations and information call 830-644-2252 or visit www.tpwd.state.tx.us.

LBJ Presidential Library and Museum

The National Archives and Records Administration operates the LBJ Presidential Library at the University of Texas at Austin. It is both a center for scholarly research and a historical museum. Three floors of exhibits highlight President Johnson's long public career: www.lbjlibrary.org.

Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center

This special place in southeast Austin introduces visitors to the beauty and diversity of wildflowers and other native plants. The center brings Mrs. Johnson's vision to life with public gardens, woodlands, and sweeping meadows, and by hosting international research: www.wildflower.org.

LBJ Museum of San Marcos

President Johnson spent his college years, 1927 to 1930, at Southwest Texas State Teachers College—now Texas State University. The museum exhibits highlight the impact of those years on the legislation passed during his presidency: www.lbjmuseum.com.

