Donald J. Detwiler
Senate Page, 1917-1918

Interview
A Page in the Wilson Era
(August 8, 1985)
Interviewed by Richard A. Baker

BAKER: I would like to begin by asking you where and when you were born. And perhaps you could tell me a bit about your early life.

DETWILER: I was born July 31, 1903 in Toronto, Canada. My father and mother lived in Iola, Kansas when they were first married. She married him in Toronto because that was her hometown. My father was practicing law in Iola. They lived in Iola first and then they moved to Kansas City later. I went to school in the first grade in Lowell School in Kansas City. The teacher was Mrs. Fraser. When I was promoted from the first grade to the second grade I burst out crying. I didn't like to lose Mrs. Fraser. When I graduated from Lowell School, I went to Central High School in Kansas City. In November of that year, before the first semester was over, I was appointed a page in the United States Senate.

BAKER: How did all that come about?

DETWILER: My father was a lawyer and knew Judge Thompson. William H. Thompson was a United States Senator from Kansas.

BAKER: Were they close friends?

DETWILER: I don't know. They were acquaintances at least.

BAKER: How did the subject first come up that you might be appointed a page? Did your father come home one day and tell you that was what was going to happen?

DETWILER: Yes. He thought it would be a nice experience for me to be in the Senate for one session of the Congress. He thought it would be more worthwhile than finishing that session of school. I only missed one semester of school.

BAKER: How did you feel about all of that?

DETWILER: I was quite excited about it. I was one hundred percent in favor of being a page in the Senate.

BAKER: Did you have any idea at that point about what being a page involved—before you left Kansas?

DETWILER: I thought it would be sort of an errand boy for the senator. When we came to Washington, we tried to report to the senator in the Senate office building. We found out later that we were supposed to go to the sergeant at arms, Colonel Charles P. Higgins in the Capitol.

BAKER: Did you come with both of your parents to Washington?

DETWILER: No, my father stayed in Kansas City. He put us on a train in Kansas City. Mother came with Archie, my younger brother—he's three years younger than I am. It was my first experience of traveling by train.

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Diary Entry
November 28-30, 1917

November 28—Withdrew my money from the bank—$5.80. Gave $4.00 to father. Spent 20cents—10 for watch fob, 10 for a pocket book for my money. Frederick came up about 3:00 p.m. and stayed until 3:30. We said goodbye to Mrs. Wherrel and went downtown to father's office while father wrote out a will on the typewriter for mother in case of an accident. When we came home Lillian and Eva and Mrs. Welch were over to say goodbye to mother. As soon as they left we ate supper and left the house at five minutes to five. We were very much afraid we would miss the train, but had good connections although the street cars were very slow. We arrived on board the train one minute before it left. We didn't wait for the baggage check but let father wait for it and he gave it to the conductor just as the train pulled out. I am in the berth now and am tired but will first copy some passages in the bible . . . .

November 29—Arrived in Chicago 8:30 a.m. Thanksgiving to get dinner and wait thirty minutes for the Manhattan Limited. We found

it was traveling in two sections. We had to wait only about four minutes for the second section which was ours. We rode in a Pullman (all the cars were Pullmans). Left Chicago at 10:00 a.m. On the train there was a library with observation platform on the end car. The day was cold and snow was on the ground in some places. We ate supper on the train. The trains average speed counting the time spent in the stations was 47 miles per hour.

November 30—This train has an easier ride and more comfortable cars than the Rock Island I think. We arrived at Washington about twenty minutes to 11:00 a.m. The

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train was almost three hours late. Mrs. Burris—419 Third Street, N.W. has two rooms for us.

We thought after that we wanted to go to the museum. It was raining slightly—after we got about half way there it began to rain hard. We certainly did get wet. After we got there we put our clothes on a radiator and then they got good and dry. The basement and the third floors of the museum are taken up with offices now on account of the war. We had a better time of it going home and did some shopping at the market. We had to sleep three in a bed tonight, the cot for Archie was not ready yet.

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BAKER: Was this also your first experience away from home?

DETWILER: Yes, that's true.

BAKER: How did you prepare yourself for this trip?

DETWILER: I didn't have to study for it. There was no examination to take. When we went up to the sergeant at arms office in the Capitol, he said that the pages had to wear knickerbockers and black stockings, white shirt and a black tie. He said, "You don't have to do that when you come back tomorrow, but before the session begins on December 3, 1917, you've got to be in that type of uniform.

BAKER: So, at that point your mother took you to purchase the appropriate clothing?

DETWILER: We went downtown. It was raining. We wanted to look at some of the museums and art galleries and things like that in Washington. We got wet, so when we got into the gallery we put our coats on the radiator and let them dry.

BAKER: Where did you live while you were in Washington?

DETWILER: Four Nineteen Third Street, Northwest. Mrs. Burris had a three-story rooming house there and we rented two rooms on the second floor. One room for mother and one for Archie and me. There was a little kitchenette there. You had to carry the water from one of the bathrooms in a pail into the kitchen. Mother cooked on a gas hotplate. The first night we were there, the cot wasn't ready for Archie and we slept three in a double bed in her room.

BAKER: What did Archie plan to do in Washington?

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DETWILER: He went to school.

BAKER: Did he hope to be a page also?

DETWILER: After I completed the second session of the Sixty-fifth Congress, Archie took my place as page and he stayed for the next session of the Congress. I went to the Eastern High School at that point.

BAKER: It occurs to me that it must have been quite difficult to all of a sudden arrive from Kansas, to come to Washington, D.C., to be a page. You knew that you were going to be a messenger boy, but who gave you instructions? Was there a chief page? How did you learn the job of a page?

DETWILER: There was a very excellent instructor—Edwin Halsey. He was the boss of the Democratic pages. The Democrats were in the majority at this time. Senator [Thomas] Martin was the majority leader. Mr. [Henry M.] Rose was the assistant secretary of the Senate. And on the other side of the rostrum the Republican pages sat under Mr. [Joseph E.] O'Toole. Mr. O'Toole later ran for Congress, but he didn't make it. He picked the wrong year, I guess. Halsey became secretary of the Senate later [1933-44]. He was a very good master, a very good boss. All the pages brought lunches with them. There was a room assigned to pages across from the Senate

restaurant and also across from the Senate Stationery Room. At eleven o'clock all the "eleven o'clock boys" went to lunch. They divided us into two sections. When 11:20 came, the second section went to lunch in this room that was assigned for the pages. We could keep our overcoats in there in the wintertime. Our bicycles and anything like that we had we could keep in that room. It was on the first floor of the Senate wing of the Capitol. We usually went to the Senate Restaurant to buy a half-pint of milk to eat with our lunches. Sometimes some of the boys would buy a Coca Cola or even a cup of coffee at the restaurant. But they depended on lunches for their main survival.

BAKER: And you had only twenty minutes for lunch?

DETWILER: Twenty minutes. Yes. That was enough to eat a sandwich.

BAKER: Did you have a sense that there was some very strict discipline, some standards that you had to live up to as a page?

DETWILER: One of the jobs of the pages was to sit in a swivel chair by a committee door. If the Military Affairs Committee was meeting, they wanted a doorkeeper there. Sometimes they used an adult civilian doorkeeper and sometimes a page would sit there depending on the requirement or the availability of the man. Then if he sat at the committee door, he'd carry a newspaperman's card into

the senator that he was asking for and the senator would make a note on the card and the page would bring it back out and give it to the newspaperman. Sometimes the senator would come out and talk to the man. Sometimes he'd just send him the note back. Now, if we were sitting at one of those doors, sometimes the committee would be meeting for two or three hours. Sometimes it became a rather monotonous job. The page would generally have a notebook or a pocket story book to look at, or pictures of girls—something like that—to amuse themselves with. If Halsey caught one of us looking in a book or reading a newspaper while sitting on the committee door, he didn't like it. He'd take the book away from us. So there was a certain amount of discipline about the thing.

BAKER: So you learned pretty quickly who the boss was.

DETWILER: One of the doorkeepers for the Senate was named Pitou. The pages used to make fun of him. "Do you pee too?"

BAKER: He didn't like that.

DETWILER: He didn't understand it very much. He knew they were making fun of him. Another joke among pages was to remark, "you are not a page, not even a paragraph."

BAKER: How many pages were there when you were a page?

DETWILER: I think there must have been twelve or fifteen of us.

BAKER: Were the same pages there during your stay, or did they come and go?

DETWILER: We didn't lose any from sickness or desertion while I was there and none of them was promoted. Later on, Mark Trice stayed in the Senate after being a page, but the rest of us all scattered. I've lost track of them except Trice.

BAKER: How old were the pages? At the time you were fourteen?

DETWILER: Yes. I was the same age as most of them.

BAKER: Were there some as young as twelve or thirteen?

DETWILER: Two of them may have been twelve—Pee Wee and Boner. Ran and Young were older than me. None of them was going to school, or course. There was no school for pages at that time.

BAKER: What did you do about school? I know that after your term as a page ended in September you went to Eastern High School here in Washington. What did you do for education while you were a page?

DETWILER: Nothing. No school while I was a page.

BAKER: Did that bother you as a fourteen-year-old boy?

DETWILER: No, I was interested in what was going on in the Senate. I listened to the debate. When Senator [James A.] Reed was

going to talk, for instance, the gallery would be crowded to hear him, because he was quite an orator. And some of the senators would quarrel in a very polite way and that was interesting for us to watch. I was interested in seeing people who visited the Senate and asking for autographs if the opportunity offered. General Leonard Wood, William Jennings Bryan, Douglas Fairbanks, etc.

BAKER: Did your teachers back in Kansas City have any concern that you were being pulled out of school?

DETWILER: Yes. I had just graduated from Lowell—named for the poet—School and the teacher had the class write to me. I got one of these big envelopes with twenty-five–thirty letters in it. But, I didn't try to write to each of them. I just wrote back to the class.

BAKER: And what did you tell them?

DETWILER: I thanked them for their letter and told them about the weather here and about the [First World] War.

BAKER: In reading your diary, I was impressed by what a well-educated young man you were at the age of fifteen. Your writing was very articulate. No spelling errors. You clearly had gotten a very good education before you went to Washington. Did someone come to you in Kansas City and say, "You're the person to go to Washington, because you are going to profit from this experience"?

DETWILER: I felt honored. I felt we were a little better than ordinary boys that weren't pages. We thought we were part of the United States Senate.

BAKER: How did you, as Senate pages, feel towards the House pages?

DETWILER: We thought we were a little above them. They were in the other wing of the Capitol. We didn't see them except when the president made an address. When President Wilson was going to talk to the Congress, he met the Congress in the House chamber because it was larger than the Senate chamber. And the senators walked across through the whole length of the Capitol to get over to the House chamber. The pages of the Senate weren't invited for these meetings, so we pretended to be House pages. We'd be flying around with papers pretending to be running errands and go into the House wing. Then when the crowd gathered around the president, we lost ourselves in the crowd. When the senators walked through, we ran through as if we had some message to deliver—something urgent. The House doorkeepers were fooled by that. In both times, during my stay, that the president addressed the Senate and the House, we were able to get into the House chamber.

The House pages were operating on a different basis than we were. They stayed at the back of the house chamber, behind a screen. When a congressman wanted a page, he pushed a button near his chair

and a little number came up on a board in the back of the room where the pages were sitting. If it was fifteen, the boss page would point to one of the boys and he'd see the fifteen. He'd go down to seat number fifteen and see what the congressman wanted. But the Senate pages sat on the rostrum in the front of the chamber right next to the vice president and when a senator wanted a page he'd snap his finger and if we didn't notice which senator it was, Halsey would tell us. He was very alert. He'd say, "Senator Borah!" or "Senator Martin!" Then the page at the front of the rostrum, nearest to the chamber, would take off and run up through the desks to see what the senator wanted. Maybe he wanted his hat.

BAKER: It must have been a very difficult job to learn all ninety-six senators' names. Did you succeed in doing that during your ten-month stay?

DETWILER: By the time I left I know which ones were which. It wasn't really necessary to know all their names to begin with because the coach, Halsey, would point to them. And of course, the senator who wanted the page would raise his hand when he was looking for one. So we never had any difficulty getting to the right one.

BAKER: You only responded to Democratic senators?

DETWILER: I don't think I ever sat on the Republican side. We didn't have people out sick, so it wasn't necessary for us to

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transfer from one side to the other. When pages were meeting one another or other people in the Senate, one of the first things they asked was, "Who is your senator?" Everybody in the Senate was a "victim" of patronage.

BAKER: Did pages who were under the patronage of a senior senator feel more superior to those of a junior senator?

DETWILER: No. I don't think so. I thought my senator William H. Thompson wasn't particularly distinguished, but I never admitted that to anybody and none ever kidded me about it.

BAKER: Thompson was a first term senator.

DETWILER: A one and only term senator! (laughing)

BAKER: Very early in your diary, it becomes apparent that you spent more of your time assisting Senator Thomas P. Gore of Oklahoma than your senator from Kansas. How did that come about?

DETWILER: I was one of the tallest pages. I was almost as tall as a man. The other reason was that Senator Gore liked me.

BAKER: Why was it important to have been tall?

DETWILER: I wasn't exclusively his page. Other pages did take a'hold of him from time to time, but he had me even take him out of the building and down to the second hand bookstore on Pennsylvania

Avenue. We walked down through the Capitol grounds. He showed me his watch. He was blind. He couldn't see at all. When he pushed a button on his watch, it would strike the hour and then the minute. The minute striking was rather complicated because it struck for the five-minute groups and then for the one-minute. It wasn't an electric watch. He had to wind it up every day.

I asked him how he came to be blind. He said that he was playing when he was a boy and that another boy shot an arrow into his head, like the English king that was killed at Hastings. And he lost an eye. Then, he said, two or three years later he had an accident and lost his second eye. He had a nice-looking daughter that I saw several times. I forget what her name was now. He was very much interested in getting the farmers of Oklahoma a better price for their wheat. They were paid so little for wheat that they were using it for fuel.

BAKER: He was chairman of the Senate Agriculture Committee then.

DETWILER: I think that's what his job was. He was certainly a leader for agricultural price controls.

BAKER: Did you have the feeling that he was a very important member of the Senate at that time?

DETWILER: Yes. I think he was important.

BAKER: I'd like to ask you something about some of the personalities that you met in the Senate, starting with some of the staff members. Do you recall anything about Col. Charles Higgins, the sergeant at arms?

DETWILER: Yes. He was a very dignified chap. A very fine gentleman.

BAKER: Did you have any day to day dealings with him? Did he actively supervise the pages?

DETWILER: I suppose that he would be the one that would discipline us if we had been bad. But I never got to him that way. W. D. Meng was his assistant. Meng was a more friendly man than Higgins and probably wasn't as busy as Higgins was. When the Senate came into session, Meng had the privilege of sitting on the rostrum on the second level, at the same level we were sitting on. One morning when the Senate met, just after the padre said the prayer, Meng sat on his chair and it broke. He was a heavy man, a big stalwart person and his chair crumbled under him. The pages picked him up and helped him out into the lobby between the Senate chamber and the Marble Room. He wasn't hurt at all, fortunately, but the chair was a complete wreck. (laughter)

BAKER: I am wondering about your relationship with another Senate official named Thomas Keller, [assistant doorkeeper] whom you described in your diary as "the grouch of the Senate."

DETWILER: I don't remember him.

BAKER: In your diary you noted that he was displeased with you because you had taken Senator Gore on a tour around the Capitol. For your transgression, he apparently assigned you a position in front of the Military Affairs Committee room for the whole day.

In thinking about some of the senators of that time, whom among them did you consider the most pleasant, not necessarily in terms of their politics or legislative accomplishments, as people, as personalities?

DETWILER: Ashurst! Henry Fountain Ashurst of Arizona. He was the first senator from Arizona. He was a very pleasant, very friendly type.

BAKER: Were there others?

DETWILER: Thomas R. Marshall. Vice president and presiding officer of the Senate. I used to think that maybe he had a wooden leg. He had a strange walk, a different way of throwing his legs when he walked. I don't know whether he was injured or not. He was very nice chap. Very good to the pages.

BAKER: Did you attend his famous Christmas dinners?

DETWILER: He had a dinner for the pages every Christmas. The dinner was given in the Capitol building, in the Senate dining room, in the private room next to the big dining room. The pages all came to the dinner and Senator [James D.] Phelan of California bought us each a book. I thought that the vice president's dinner was a nice custom. We all looked forward to it. That was a big deal with us.

BAKER: At the 1917 dinner, you had just arrived in Washington. You had been here scarcely a month.

WILL SCHELTENA (Mr. Detwiler's grandson and a Washington journalist): Didn't you try to convince John Graves that they ought to do that again? Back in the Sixties?

DETWILER: I suggested that, but the vice president didn't see it that way. (laughing)

BAKER: Any other senators who come to mind in this connection?

DETWILER: Senator John Hamilton Lewis of Illinois with the pink whiskers. He was a very classy dresser, too. He would usually have a loud pair of pants on and maybe a red coat. When he wanted to put a stamp on an envelope, he would lick the envelope and then put the stamp on it. He was an eccentric person, but a very capable senator.

Senator Boies Penrose of Pennsylvania was a tall man. He looked like a Prussian guardsman. He had a peaked head. And, for his car, he had a special body built so that he could get into it without knocking his hat off. His wife was a big woman too.

SCHELTENA: Was he big or just tall?

DETWILER: He wasn't fat, he was just tall. I think he must have weighed 280 or 300 pounds. He stood about six-foot-two, or at least it seemed that way to me.

BAKER: How about some of the worst senators—those who were difficult for you to deal with?

DETWILER: [Robert] La Follette, [Sr.] of Wisconsin. We expected to see horns on his head, because we had been reading about his opposing the war and that sort of thing. But, he was a very capable senator. He had his hair cut short and it stood straight up.

BAKER: Were there some great hatreds or fierce antagonisms between particular members that you were aware of in the Senate of 1918?

DETWILER: Sometimes a senator would try to delay action on a bill by a filibuster. And another senator would try to oppose that. One of the senators was Senator [James K.] Vardaman of Mississippi. He used to spend his time in the cloakroom stretched out on the sofa

with a pillow on his stomach and take a nap there. I thought that was a very interesting way for a senator to carry on. (laughter) Of course his constituents up in the gallery didn't know that he was asleep. He wore his hair long, down to his shoulders. He was a racist, a white supremacist.

BAKER: Henry Cabot Lodge? Did you have much contact with him?

DETWILER: Oh yes. He was a fine-looking chap. He had a goatee and a moustache. Everything was well manicured. He was on the Republican side, of course. We didn't do much for him, because we were supposed to take care of our own half of the Senate.

BAKER: I would be interested in knowing what a "typical" day was like. You told me earlier that you would have lunch at eleven o'clock or 11:30. The Senate would normally go into session at twelve o'clock. How would you prepare the Senate chamber? What were your duties before the Senate went into session?

DETWILER: We had to take the Senate calendars off the senators' desks. We would put them all in a row on a long table. Then we opened the calendars, they were loose-leaf binders, and took out the bills that had been passed and put in the new ones that were supposed to be considered. The way that was done was to have the pages all in a row. I'd have the first bill, and you'd have the second bill and

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he'd have the third bill. I'd put mine on and you'd come over and put yours on and then he'd put his on. That way we didn't get them mixed up. The last man came along and would clamp the books shut tight. Then we had to take the books and put them back on the senators' desks on our side. The Republican pages were doing the same thing over on their side under O'Toole. Sometimes there were five or six bills to be changed. Other times there was only one to be taken out. Halsey would tell us what to do about it.

BAKER: Were those just the bills that were going to be considered on that day alone?

DETWILER: I'm not sure.

BAKER: Were there a large number of bills in the calendar?

DETWILER: Yes. It was a fat book.

BAKER: So it included all bills cleared for floor action?

DETWILER: That's right.

BAKER: They no longer do it that way, with all of the bills actually on the calendar physically present on a senator's desk. I don't know when that practice changed.

DETWILER: They had a special ventilating system in the Senate chamber when I was a page. Each senator's desk had holes in the

bottom. The foot of the desk was wide. It had a brass plate on it with many holes in it and the air came in right by his feet at each senator's place.

BAKER: Was the air cooled in the summer?

DETWILER: No. I don't think so. Just circulated air. It was cool because it came from the basement under the Capitol. I guess that's the reason why they did that so it would be naturally cool.

BAKER: Was the chamber a comfortable place to be?

DETWILER: Very. All the light came from above through a glass ceiling.

BAKER: Was it difficult to hear people speaking in the chamber?

DETWILER: The acoustics were good there. In those days, when the Senate was considering important bills, we often had a crowd of people in the galleries, because a certain senator was going to talk. They liked Senator [James A.] Reed of Missouri very

much. He would get very excited when he was talking, or pretend to be excited. His face would get red, but he talked very clearly and very ably. [Thomas] Martin of Virginia was the Democratic leader on the floor. He didn't make as many speeches as Reed did.

BAKER: It must have been an awfully exciting time to be in the Senate. With the war going on . . .

DETWILER: President Wilson came and asked them to declare war on Austria-Hungary. He thought we were at war with Germany and Austria-Hungary was the ally of Germany. We ought to be at war with both countries and we ought to be able to cut off all trade with Austria-Hungary. On the western front in France the Germans were making an important drive there at one time. It looked like they were folding up our army. The Senate was in quite a dither about it. We weren't always winning the war at that time. It was something like the Battle of the Bulge in the Second World War. It was the last big effort that the Germans made. They had come forward a good many miles at the time and broke the Allied line.

BAKER: You were a Democratic page and there was a Democratic president in the White House. Did you feel proud of your president?

DETWILER: I felt very proud of Wilson, yes.

BAKER: Did you sense any difference between the Democratic leadership and members, on one hand, and the president?

DETWILER: I didn't sense any. I thought they were following him. Later on when he was ill, there was a feeling that Mrs. Wilson was taking on too much. But, I'm not sure how I came to that conclusion. It may have been something that [my brother] Archie heard

[as a page]. They couldn't get to him. He wouldn't receive them. He was lying on his bed, sick. Some people thought the vice president should take over, if the president wasn't strong enough.

But, when I saw the president he was tall. He stood bigger than the other men around him. That seemed very fitting to me for Wilson. I was able to touch him, I got so close. When I was a page, I was quite an admirer of President Wilson.

BAKER: Did you have the sense that he was very well protected with bodyguards as he moved into the chamber?

DETWILER: No. I didn't see any sign of protection. There might have been, but I didn't know. Of course, the security people were in plain clothes, but they didn't make any display of their weapons.

BAKER: We were talking about the Senate chamber and the duties there of the Senate pages. You mentioned something about the galleries. I have always wondered about seating in the galleries. Were there certain groups that sat in certain sections of the galleries?

DETWILER: Yes. The press had a gallery right above the vice president's seat on the rostrum. Behind their seats they had, in an adjoining room, their tables and desks and typewriters. At that time all debates were taken down in shorthand by two stenographers. One

stenographer would work along for about an hour and then another would come down and relieve him and they would overlap for a few minutes. Then the first one would go upstairs and transcribe his notes.

BAKER: And they worked for as long an as hour?

DETWILER: I think so. They used Pittman shorthand.

BAKER: Were the sessions generally well attended by the press?

DETWILER: Generally there were three or four men up there. If there was going to be a particularly important debate you might see all the places taken.

BAKER: That raises the question of the wire service reporters. I have read that at one time, early in this century, the Senate permitted wire service representatives onto the floor during the time that Senate was in session.

DETWILER: I didn't know that they had the privilege of the floor. Members of the House and the cabinet and the president did.

I have here a seal of the president cut out from the middle of the envelope containing a presidential message. The doorkeeper comes down the aisle carrying this and says, "A message from the president of the United States!" And everybody stops talking, and the vice

president recognizes him and tells him to bring it forward. So he walks up forward with it and hands it to the clerk and the clerk hands it to the vice president.

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BAKER: Then they would just throw away the presidential envelope?

DETWILER: The envelope became a prize for pages and various hangers on.

BAKER: What about some of the other galleries? Was there one reserved for women?

DETWILER: Yes. And there was a gallery for senators' families, or at least there were chairs reserved for them.

BAKER: Was there a separate gallery for blacks?

DETWILER: No. At the time I was a page in the Senate blacks didn't eat in the same restaurant with the rest. In fact, they didn't eat in the Capitol at all.

BAKER: But, would they allow them into the galleries of the Senate?

DETWILER: I never saw one up there. I don't know of anyone being turned away.

There was another thing that the pages used to do. They used to carry cards into the chamber. For instance, William Jennings Bryan visited the Senate. He came into the Marble Room and gave me his card. He wanted me to give it to Senator Martin. So I gave the card to Senator Martin and Senator Martin scribbled something on it and gave it back to me. He couldn't leave the floor of the Senate at that time. I guess he told Bryan to wait. I didn't read the scribbling. I brought it back to Bryan and I said, "Mr. Bryan, I have an autograph book and I would like to have your autograph because you were secretary of State." And he said, "Well sure, I'd be glad to do that." And he got up and walked over to the desk there in the Marble Room and sat down and took my book and gave me his autograph. Then he took a piece of stationery off the tablet that was on the table there and wrote his signature five or six times on it and handed it to me. He said, "If you are collecting signatures, here are some more for you." So, I folded it and put it in my pocket, and lost it! (laughter)

BAKER: I'd like to know a little bit more about the autograph books. You have a very nice one. You seem to have most of the members of the Senate of the time in your book . . . .

DETWILER: Mr. Halsey thought we over did it, you know. He tried to discourage us sometimes.

BAKER: Why was that?

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DETWILER: I think it detracted from our usefulness a little.

BAKER: Did pages ever sell autographs or autograph books to the public?

DETWILER: Not that I know of. Some of the pages would get the autograph of President Wilson when he came to the President's Room in the Capitol to sign bills there. The pages would have three or four autograph books on the table there and while the president was waiting for somebody, he'd take the books and sign all of the books that were available to him.

BAKER: That was generally for the pages' personal use?

DETWILER: If they sold any, I don't know of it. We weren't thinking of that at the time. At least I wasn't.

BAKER: Apparently, in earlier years, around the turn of the century, pages were known to do that.

MRS. DETWILER: If you are familiar with the Congressional Cemetery, you may know that there is a page buried there among the senators.

BAKER: I was not aware of that.

DETWILER: One of the pages was smaller than the rest of us. We called him "Peewee." I remember one time we were playing in the

lobby between the Marble Room and the Senate chamber. And I made a pass at him as if I was going to jump on him. He put his foot against my chest and turned me over his head. (laughter) I came down pretty hard!

BAKER: As I recall from reading your diary, you had some injuries while you were in the Senate.

DETWILER: I was riding to the Senate on a Ranger bicycle and was going down an avenue that had a park in the middle. Traffic going on each side of it. In the middle was a street car line and little trees and grass on each side of it. I was driving on the middle part where the streetcars went. And when I came to a cross street, I ran into a wagon that was meant to haul coal, but it was running empty. Me and the bicycle went under the wagon. And then the driver stopped the wagon, but it ran right over my leg. My leg was flat on the paving. It didn't break anything, but it bruised me a little. So the policeman picked me up and put me back on my feet. The bicycle wasn't hurt either. It went in between the front and back wheels of the wagon. So, I got on the bicycle and wanted to go on back to the Senate where I was headed for. But the policeman had a

ticket for me. So he gave me the ticket and I put it in my pocket. I was supposed to appear in court the next morning. When I got to the Senate, I showed the ticket to Mr. Halsey. He said, "Well we'll see what we can do about that." And he went over to the telephone in

the secretary of the Senate's office, and I went with him. He said, "This young man is a page in the Senate and the Senate is going to meet tomorrow at eleven o'clock and we want him to be there. We would like to have you tear up the ticket." Sounded like an inconsequential thing anyway. Then he told me to tear the thing up. He had had the thing quashed. It seems that you weren't supposed to use that center section for a highway. It was reserved for streetcars. So, I had broken a law. (laughing)

We had an experience sometimes in the catacombs under the terrace of the Capitol. They have a tunnel from the Capitol to the Senate Office Building and one to the House Office Building. And they have another tunnel that goes over to the Smithsonian Institution. And one from the federal heating plant. Steam has to come in from underground pipes. If you want to walk through those tunnels, you push a button that turns on lights for a hundred or two hundred feet ahead of you and when you get to the next button you push it and that takes care of another section. And as you push the button for the next section you see the rats running ahead of you. (laughter)

BAKER: Was that a favorite place for the pages to go?

DETWILER: The pages used to play tag down through there. Also in case of really bad weather you could walk to the Smithsonian without having to get your feet wet.

BAKER: This raises the question of pranks. Pages, being young boys get into a lot of mischief. Were there any favorite pranks that you know of?

DETWILER: They had a contest to see who could make the best paper airplanes. The Senate chamber is a wonderful place to sail them when there's no Senate in session. Sometimes if you were careful enough you could get it clear up into the gallery. Another game they played was with pennies and nickels or dimes trying to see who could put the penny closest to the line. There would be a line on the rug where the rugs were sewn together and we would all stand at one line and throw our pennies. The one who was closest to the line picked up all of the other pennies.

BAKER: Were you pretty successful at that?

DETWILER: Yes, I made a few. (laughter)

BAKER: In your diary, you mentioned being allowed to use Senator Gore's private Capitol office.

DETWILER: He had an office in the Senate Office Building, but he also had a little hangout in the basement of the Capitol in the terrace area. He didn't use it for anything in particular, but once in a while he went down there with me and he gave me the key to it so that I could take things down to the office or take them out of the office. And I thought it was a nice thing for the pages to have a

little room like that that wasn't too well known. So, I told some of the other pages about it and we used to go down there and play checkers sometimes. The trouble was, though, sometimes the Senate was in session and there would be two or three of us down there and Mr. Halsey would kind of notice that he'd send us on an errand here or there and nobody comes back. So, he got on us about it and the senator wanted his key back again.

BAKER: So that was the end of that. How long did this go on?

DETWILER: Just a few days. I had the key longer than that, but the other pages were mixed up in it for just a short time. That was my big mistake—inviting the other pages. I was only supposed to do errands for the senator in that office, instead of having meetings there. We had a secret meeting place and it kind of busted up Halsey's plans because he lost too many of his pages.

BAKER: Who was your real boss?

DETWILER: Halsey.

BAKER: What was the worst thing he could do to you by way of discipline?

DETWILER: Fire me, I guess. I don't know. Maybe he couldn't. He didn't fire anybody while I was there. But we didn't have any

discipline problems. Sometimes a page would meet another page, passing in the halls, and he would say, "Where are you going?" And the other one would say, "I'm loafing." He had finished his errand and he was fooling around. But aside from that, the habit of pages of sometimes delaying their return to the rostrum, I don't think the pages were involved in anything very heinous.

BAKER: Were there clearly defined categories of jobs for pages? Were there "riding pages" and "telegraph pages" and so forth?

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DETWILER: No. Any one of us might be put on the door of a committee room, any one might take care of Senator Gore. We all worked on the calendars. We couldn't say that we specialized on any one thing to the exclusion of other things.

BAKER: Would you be asked to take messages down to the White House, or over to the House of Representatives?

DETWILER: No, we weren't sent on errands like that.

BAKER: Do you know who did those kinds of errands?

DETWILER: The sergeant at arms must have sent one of his men on that. He possibly could have sent a page, but he never sent me to the White House and I don't know of any page that was ever sent to the White House.

BAKER: You probably would have known about it.

DETWILER: Yes.

BAKER: What was the worst job that they would give a page to do? What did you hate to do more than anything else?

DETWILER: Sitting on a door. Sitting in the chair there. Not supposed to read. Not supposed to go into the committee room. Nothing there to interest you, because the door's closed. Visitors going past think you are a part of the furniture.

BAKER: Was it your job to keep people out?

DETWILER: Yes. If a man came by and wanted to go in, I'd take his card. But he couldn't go in unless he was invited to by one of the people in the room.

BAKER: So it would have been very unusual to invite the public into the committee room to watch what was going on?

DETWILER: At that time, the committees met without the public being there. If they were going to have a public meeting, they would meet in the Caucus Room in the Senate Office Building. There would be seats for the spectators there.

BAKER: Where did the senators meet when they wanted to have a party caucus?

DETWILER: In the Caucus Room.

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BAKER: In the Senate chamber, some senators throughout the years have been known to have candy in their desks or comic books, or whiskey bottles. Were you ever aware of that? Was there a "candy desk" to which members and pages could go to refresh themselves?

DETWILER: In the Senate cloakroom there was a great vat full of ice and sparkling water and Poland water and White Rock ginger ale, but the senators kept their liquor in their lockers. Each senator had a mahogany locker with his name on it in the cloakroom. But, I don't think they had it in their desks. They could go into the cloakroom and take a glass off the shelf there and put some of the Poland Water into the glass and pour some of the whiskey in and make themselves a drink. But, I didn't see anything going on on the floor of the Senate. The pages weren't supposed to use that water, but I remember that once in a while, Mr. Halsey would open a bottle and divide it with me.

BAKER: When the Senate went out of session after a day's business, were you free to leave, or did you have special chores?

DETWILER: We had to be dismissed. We had to straighten up the senators' desks, but there wasn't much to do after they adjourned. The real work was before they went into session.

BAKER: I want to ask you about those marble bathtubs down in the Capitol basement. Did you ever have any dealings with them?

DETWILER: They were big—big enough for Boies Penrose. They were beautiful tubs.

BAKER: Did pages ever want to use them?

DETWILER: We never took a bath in them.

BAKER: Could you if you had wanted to?

DETWILER: No. I don't think so. I never asked permission to.

BAKER: As you look back over your Senate experiences, are there any unusual incidents or special recollections that you would like to mention?

DETWILER: One of the Liberty Loan drives. There was big excitement on Capitol Hill, because the British sent a big tank over here. They called it the "Britannia." The tanks in those days were different than they are nowadays. The tread went around the whole tank. They were much larger than the present day tank. This thing came rattling along in front of the Capitol Building and parked there. Mary Pickford and Douglas

Fairbanks and four or five other movie stars got on the steps of the Capitol and made a speech to the crowd.

The same day or the next day, they had a Liberty Loan parade. An English bomber flew over the Capitol and dropped a lot of printed circulars: "Buy U.S. Bonds!" The papers were all over the place like

scattered leaves. At that time they didn't have regulations about flying close to the Capitol. They practically dropped the papers on the front steps of the Capitol. The senators and congressmen then joined in a parade. They walked from the Capitol to the White House in support of the Liberty Loan. The pages had a little sign that said "United States Senate." We carried the sign ahead of the senators. The senators walked two and two. About half of the members participated, I guess. Behind them was a delegation of House pages with a sign: "House of Representatives." And the congressmen walked along. And the Supreme Court went in carriages. (laughter) Before we got to the White House, some of the senators straggled off into various cafes and restaurants and places, but we still made a fairly good showing.

BAKER: As you look back, was there an event that was a particularly happy occasion for you?

DETWILER: The vice president's dinner. (laughing) That was the big occasion for us. There wasn't any other special occasion for a page. Of course there was payday. Every two weeks we got about forty dollars.

BAKER: Did you get a regular salary?

DETWILER: Two dollars and seventy-five cents per diem. It depended on how many days there were in that pay period. For a thirty-one-day month we got a little more. February you got a little less.

BAKER: Were there any ways you could make additional money while you were a Senate page?

DETWILER: Nobody ever tipped me. I used to wonder about that because the Western Union boys would take a message in and come out with a quarter or dime. We would deliver cards for these people wanting to see the senators, for the newspapermen, and they never paid us.

BAKER: If you went over to do a special project—at one point in your diary you noted that Senator Gore needed help sealing envelopes—were you just expected to do that as part of your normal duties as page?

DETWILER: I don't think I got paid for it. [Senate records indicate that pages occasionally received "extra compensation" amounting to about 10 percent of their regular salary.]

BAKER: This has been a very interesting session for me. In wrapping it up, are there any particular thoughts that you have about your service as a Senate page that we might not have covered in our conversation?

DETWILER: I'll probably think of it after you leave.

BAKER: I will send you a preliminary transcript in a few weeks and you can make notes on it for the final version.

DETWILER: I think that is a good idea.

[End of Interview]