

**Richard A. Baker**

**Senate Historian  
1975-2009**

Oral History Interviews

Senate Historical Office  
Washington, DC

May 27, 2010-September 22, 2010



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## Preface

by Katherine A. Scott

In the wake of the Vietnam War and the Watergate presidential scandal, many Americans demanded greater transparency from their national institutions. In the United States Senate, two historically minded members, Majority Leader Mike Mansfield of Montana and Minority Leader Hugh Scott of Pennsylvania, proposed creating a historian's office to "help senators, scholars, the news media and the general public" better understand "one of the most important institutions in this nation's political history." In 1975 the Senate appropriated funds for a small staff in the Legislative Appropriations Act of 1976 and the Senate Historical Office was born.

During the time that Dick Baker served as Senate Historian, from 1975-2009, the Historical Office grew from a small staff of three historians and a secretary in the attic of the Capitol Building to a nine-person office of historians, researchers, editors, and archivists with an office in the Hart Senate Office Building. As the collector and keeper of the institution's memory, the Senate Historical Office, under Baker's leadership, quickly earned a reputation for providing professional, non-partisan service. In 2005 Norm Ornstein, a Washington insider and close observer of Congress, credited Baker with building "one of the premier institutions of historical study and information in the nation." Members, staff, scholars, and the general public alike came to trust the office because, as one scholar observed, "When you get information from the Senate Historical Office, you have to consider it definitive. There is no better authority on the Senate."

Baker's interest in politics began at an early age. He took his first tour of Capitol Hill at 16 years old while on a high school field trip. After graduating from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, with a degree in history, he pursued graduate degrees, one in history from Michigan State University, and a second in Library Science from Columbia University. He later earned a Ph.D. in history from the University of Maryland, College Park. He returned to Washington, D.C., in 1968 to join the Legislative Reference Division (later the Congressional Research Service). Baker served briefly as acting Senate curator and then became director of research for the Government Research Corporation, publisher of the *National Journal*. In 1975, when the Senate established the Historical Office, he accepted the position of Senate Historian.

Senator Robert Byrd, who worked closely with Baker on his multivolume history of the U.S. Senate, recalled how Baker was always “ready to go above and beyond the call of duty in providing his assistance,” and “although he was responsible to 99 other senators, he was always there, eager to help.” Baker championed the history of the Senate whenever and wherever he could. During his tenure he published a number of works, including *Conservation Politics: the Senate Career of Clinton P. Anderson* (1985), *Senate of the United States: A Bicentennial History* (1988), *Thirty Minutes of Senate History* (1998), and *200 Notable Days: Senate Stories, 1787 to 2002* (2006).

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About the interviewer: Katherine A. Scott is assistant historian of the Senate Historical Office. A graduate of the University of Washington, she received a M.A. in history from the University of New Mexico and a Ph.D. in history from Temple University.

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## Charting a Course to Washington

### Interview #1

Thursday, May 27, 2010

**Scott:** So, I thought we could start with your childhood. You were born in Massachusetts, right? Maybe you can tell us a bit about growing up in Massachusetts.

**Baker:** I was born on March 18, 1940, in Stoneham, Massachusetts. That's where the hospital was located, but my parents lived in the next town over, the city of Melrose. I spent the first seventeen years of my life there until I went off to college. It was a Boston bedroom community, very Republican, and Victorian in its architecture, focus and orientation. All the schools seemed to be named after Republican presidents. It was an interesting perspective. My father worked for the United Shoe Machinery Corporation, which had headquarters in Boston. It was a big corporation for the first half of the twentieth century. My mother had known my father from childhood, and they both had the same surname. But we are sure that they were not cousins! My mother's parents knew the second wife of my father's father. My father's mother, my grandmother, was a really neat lady. At one point in her career, she decided after seventeen years of marriage that her husband wasn't the man of her life and so she left him. My father at the time was twelve years old. She left him and his older brother and went off with an artist, who had a day job as an editorial cartoonist for one of the Boston newspapers. Eventually, this was in the late 1920s, they moved to Paris. Everybody with an artistic inclination was going to Paris. We have at home a beautiful painting of her, very large portrait that he entered in the Paris Spring Salon of 1929. That marriage lasted for a few more years and then who knows whatever happened to him. I knew her very much as an old lady, you know, probably fifty, [laughs] but she seemed quite old to me as a child. She lived to be ninety-five.

**Scott:** She had come back to Boston?

**Baker:** She had come back and settled in Boston where she had lived previously, in a garret apartment near the Museum of Fine Arts. My grandfather remarried and his second wife was friendly with my maternal grandmother and her husband. They had one daughter, my mother, and my mother and my father were kind of childhood friends. Later on both ended up working for the United Shoe Machinery Corporation and one thing led to another and they got married in 1938. When I was born in 1940 two things happened. First my mother had quit

her job, you can't have pregnant women, let alone women with children, in the workplace. And secondly, my father received a deferment from serving in World War II. He served in something called the Massachusetts State Guard. But I kept him at home. I don't know if he ever fully repaid me for that. But it was a pretty good deal.

**Scott:** The deferment was based on---

**Baker:** On having one child.

**Scott:** What did your mother do?

**Baker:** She was a secretary. She had gone to the Katherine Gibbs School and then was a high speed typist. I have a brother who is three years younger, named Robert. They were very imaginative with names back then, Richard and Robert! Actually, I was named after my maternal grandfather, who worked as a butcher and later owned a small grocery store in Malden, Massachusetts. His wife, Agnes, was a major force in my early development. She was the ideal loving and generous grandmother. My mother had a talent for drawing. She is still going pretty strong at age ninety-five. But she had a talent for crafts and fine arts, so our house has a lot of those kinds of decorated trays and so forth. I thought she was very good at it, and so did her many students.

I went to the Melrose public schools. One of the biggest mistakes in my early life occurred as the result of an intense desire to start school at the age of five. There were no kindergartens, so I entered first grade at the age of five because my two best friends who were six were going that year. In order for me to go at that same time, I had to take a test. My earliest memories include waiting at the mailbox for the mailman to come to see if I passed the test to see if I could start a year early. And I did. So I started a year early and I always felt, throughout my elementary school days as if I was behind the eight ball a bit. I would have been better off to go to kindergarten and acquire a little more maturity before I started school. But it worked out OK. So, I went to the public schools, all the way through high school and graduated from high school in 1957 and went off to the University of Massachusetts in Amherst.

**Scott:** Why did you choose UMass, Amherst? Was it proximity? Was it a natural choice?

**Baker:** There was a dollar sign involved. The tuition was \$50 per semester. I also applied to Boston University and was accepted there, but the tuition was a lot more expensive. My parents were financially strapped. My maternal grandmother was able to help me with my tuition and I worked while I was in school as well. Plus, it was one hundred miles away from Boston, in Amherst, and a whole different experience. As is natural for seventeen-year-olds, I wanted to get out of the family home and have an independent experience. When I arrived at UMass, it was a campus of about 4,500 students and by the time I left there, four and a half years later, it was well over 10,000. For most of my time there, the campus was filled with mud and construction vehicles as they were building these very functional, artistically horrible buildings which everyone there has now come to regret and probably will for some time. Despite the mud and functional architecture, I enjoyed my life at the University of Massachusetts.

**Scott:** What did you study there?

**Baker:** I went to UMass as a business major, which meant the first two years in liberal arts. And then when my junior year rolled around and I started taking management courses, and accounting courses, and statistics courses I realized I had made a dreadful mistake. After one semester of that, I switched to my first love, which was history. And that cost me an extra semester at the end of it. But it was well worth it. I loved my history courses there. It took a while to kind of get into the frame of mind of trying to absorb huge numbers of dates and names and so forth. It's not quite the same as studying management or accounting, but I really enjoyed it very much.

**Scott:** You have spent a good part of your professional career studying politics. Were your parents active in politics? Did they talk about politics around the dinner table at home? How did you get to be so interested in politics?

**Baker:** They didn't, not a lot. I remember when I was twelve years old the presidential election of 1952. My mother was an Eisenhower Republican and my father was a Taft Republican. So it could get a little hot and heavy on that. But, generally, they were not that focused on politics. I was in Boy Scouts and I rose through the ranks to senior patrol leader. One of the advantages of that was that I got to represent my troop at the City of Melrose Board of Aldermen for one evening. There were seven wards in our city—I guess the boy scouts arranged to appoint seven boy scouts from all over the city and I got to be the one to represent my ward. I got up there and sat at the alderman's desk and it just opened a whole new world to me. I thought, this is a representative body and you have to get



elected to get here and you have to moderate your views to reflect those of your fairly diverse Republican, conservative constituency. That had a big impact on me. But then I also had the advantage of living just a Sunday afternoon's drive away from Lexington, Concord, and Boston, all good places to go for a ride. We would go by the site where Paul Revere was captured by the British and by the battle sites of Lexington and Concord. That made a very large impact on me and turned me in the direction of American history. My hometown had a number of homes that were built in the early 1700s. As elementary school children we would go over on class tours to explore those homes. That helped shape the mold a bit.

**Scott:** Didn't you also take a trip to Washington?

**Baker:** Yes, my junior year in high school. Again, my grandmother came through with the necessary cash because the trip was only for those who could afford it. It seemed like a lot of money at the time and I guess it was for a five-day trip in April of 1956. It was just mind-blowing. That really set the hook in terms of my wanting to come back to Washington and wanting to learn more about Congress and what goes on in that Capitol Building.

**Scott:** What did you see in Washington? Was it an organized tour?

**Baker:** We stayed in a place called the Manger Annapolis, down on 14<sup>th</sup> Street, and it was a pretty seedy hotel right next to a bus terminal. All night long the buses rolled in and out to the accompaniment of loud announcements. The tour was led by the social studies teachers. They had been doing it every year since Adam and Eve. They knew the places to go and they had friends in the Capitol Building who were able to get us a little extra special tour—or at least they would have us believe that. So that was very special.

**Scott:** Did you also visit the White House, the Library of Congress, or just here on the Hill?

**Baker:** It was a full-scale tour. We went to Arlington National Cemetery, Mount Vernon, everything that you'd expect to do if you came for three or four or five days today. We did it all. We stopped by the office of our two senators: John F. Kennedy and Leverett Saltonstall. We met with Saltonstall, I don't remember whether we saw Kennedy or not. We went into the Senate Chamber. This was the time when Lyndon Johnson was the majority leader of the Senate and it was quite an experience. I did meet with Senator Saltonstall a few years later. I worked on

his 1960 Senate reelection campaign as part of a political science course at UMass. I really enjoyed doing that.

**Scott:** When you graduated from UMass, you decided to go to graduate school?

**Baker:** I did, but the United States Army had plans for me. I was in ROTC [Army Reserved Officers' Training Corps]. My main motive for going in the ROTC was to collect \$70 per month of badly needed cash. It came as a huge shock to me that upon graduation they actually expected me to put on second lieutenant's bars and a uniform and march off to battle. I received my commission in March of 1962. This was when South Vietnam was beginning to heat up a bit. I went off to Fort Knox for my basic officer orientation training for eight weeks. I was assigned back in Massachusetts to Fort Devens, which was the closest military establishment to my home area, halfway between UMass and my parents' home. In 1963 I married my current wife, whom I had met at UMass. Pat and I moved into married officers' quarters, brand-new Capehart style homes, whose construction was funded under a program sponsored by U.S. Senator Homer Capehart of Indiana. So it was a great way to begin married life.

It wasn't terribly demanding in terms of dangerous work except riding around in 50-ton tanks. I was in the armored division of the army. At the beginning of my assignment there was some question as to whether I would be assigned to Fort Devens for six months or to Korea for eighteen months. Fortunately, they drew numbers and I was assigned to Fort Devens, but what I thought was going to be a six-month tour turned into a two-year tour and as it turned out a two-and-a-half year tour. I was not cut out to be a military officer. Most of my fellow lieutenants aspired to become colonels and generals. A good friend, John Tilelli, actually went to become a four-star general, but that was not exactly my career plan. I did my required service, as well as some reserve time after that, and happily returned to civilian life.

I really wanted to pursue history and I thought I wanted to be a high school history teacher. Michigan State University had what was then a pioneering Master of Arts in Teaching Program. It combined the subject matter, in my case history, and then a lot of education courses and you came out with an M.A.T. You are going to be ahead of people who otherwise just had regular old B.A.s or M.A.s, I believed, and so —following a pattern that was detectable earlier—I took one semester of education and history courses at Michigan State. It was a beautiful campus, I really loved being there. Pat hated it because she had to get a

job in a local high school teaching English and it was a very unhappy part of her early life—an attractive 22-year-old woman teaching 19-year-old boys. But I was having a great time just being a graduate student. Half-way through the course work, I applied for the full Masters in History program, getting out of what I by then decided, in terms of my evolving interests was a somewhat limiting M.A.T. program. That required waiting for a letter, like when I was five years old. I had to wait for them to decide whether I was qualified to be in the regular M.A. program. It was a happy day when they said I was.

I graduated in the middle of 1965 and had heard about a job opening in a small college near Middletown, Connecticut. So I went and had the interviews. It was a Catholic college and I'm not Catholic by religious preference, but it was a job. It was a college for the "delayed vocations." If a person wanted to become a priest, he needed to have a B.A. A number of people, past their teen years, apparently decided they wanted to become priests. They had four years of normal undergraduate courses and so I was the entire history department at Holy Apostles College: European history, American history, and a speech course or two. Forty-five hundred dollars a year to start and then I advanced to \$5000 the second year I was there. Before the second year began, I had decided that I needed to do something other than this for the rest of my life so I applied for the Ph.D. program in 18<sup>th</sup>-century French history at the University of Connecticut and was accepted to that program. I thought, if you are going to study history at the doctoral level what could be more fun than doing your research in Paris (perhaps echoing my paternal grandmother's experience), Versailles and the whole works.

**Scott:** You were thinking about those research trips.

**Baker:** That's right! Then I had to satisfy the language requirements. I studied the German and the French and I got those out of the way but by the time I did that, mostly in summer courses, I had decided that what I really wanted to do was to become a librarian because this would be a sure path toward my ultimate goal, which was to be the director of a major historical research library. I would combine service to others and deepening knowledge of history. So I applied to Columbia University, which at the time had one of the nation's top-ranked library schools. I was accepted there and we moved to New York. At that point we had one young son, Christopher. We found an apartment in New Rochelle, New York. I began classes in the summer of 1967 at Columbia. I enjoyed my time at Columbia. It was exactly what I had been hoping for. In the spring of 1968, however, the campus exploded over issues related to America's involvement in Vietnam. Everything changed very quickly. Being in a large urban university, we

didn't know our fellow students all that well up until the 1968 student strike. Then we got to be really good friends. I was elected the representative of the library school on the student strike committee. But I was twenty-eight years old, a good eight years older than the other people on the strike committee. I stayed on that committee for a while but the revolution went past me very quickly and I thought, no, this is not the best way to shut down a major university over an issue related to the war in Vietnam. So I left the revolution very quickly and I think one of the precipitating events was the day that some people tried to block me from going into Butler Library. I thought, wait a minute, I'm paying a huge tuition here, and you're interfering with my constitutional rights.

I went on and graduated. In my final semester I had heard about a Library of Congress special program for library school graduates. Every year they would take one library school graduate from each of the major library schools in the country, up to sixteen people. So I got to be the Columbia person. That was the time when I got the telegram from the Librarian of Congress saying that I had made it. I thought, Wow! I am really at a crossroads here. This is going to take me back to Washington, D.C. I can complete that circle that began in 1956 with my first trip there. This is big. We were quite excited, Pat and I. We moved to Washington with Christopher and settled here in the summer of 1968.

**Scott:** Washington was experiencing a very tumultuous period, following Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s assassination and then the city erupted after the assassination of Senator Kennedy. So I'm wondering, when you come to Washington, are you thinking about how different it was since your first trip in 1956. How did you feel about living here?

**Baker:** I was more focused on survival issues as opposed to newspaper issues. Sure, I realized that several weeks and months earlier that the city was on fire and that this was a very, very big deal. But the question was where could we possibly afford to live? My salary at the Library of Congress in 1968 was \$8,270 per year, and I thought boy, I'll really have a lot of money to throw around. But when I started looking for housing, we ended up in Suitland, Maryland, just over the D.C. line in southeastern Prince George's County. We got a nice garden apartment there. That was my main focus.

I began work at the Library of Congress in July. The program that I was a part of didn't begin until September, so I worked in the front office of what was then called the Legislative Reference Service. In 1970 it became the Congressional Research Service. My job was to be an inquiries recorder, a total

entry level position over there. My typing has never been very good, but doing it on an old manual typewriter was even more challenging. The inquiries came in. I remember we got a lot of inquiries on the subject of identifying a new public figure named Spiro Agnew who had been nominated to be vice president at that summer's Republican national convention. I did a little research on Spiro Agnew but it was basically a typist's job, so I was glad to head off to the "Special Recruit" program for six months.

It was a terrific experience. We spent about a week in each of the major divisions of the Library of Congress, both the reference divisions and the technical processing divisions. The program was really designed to build a cadre of middle managers for the library and maybe even senior managers down the road. At the end of six months I had to make a decision as to where I would like to work in the library. I didn't really want to work as a cataloguer and I thought, again focusing on my interest in Congress, that I'd like to work for what became the Congressional Research Service. So I was assigned to the Congressional Reference Division. Those people are not technical subject experts, but they are experts at efficiently answering challenging reference questions. As I had two master's degrees, one in American history and one in library science, they figured that would be a good match. And it was. For about a year and a half that's what I did. To have the Library of Congress at my disposal in terms of anything I wanted to find out, that was pretty terrific. Any book I wanted to get from the shelves, I could walk through the book stacks, I could take as much time as I wanted to answer these questions. It was a great job, but the novelty did wear off after a year or so.

In the summer of 1969 I received a call from the director's office of LRS saying that he had a call from the office of the secretary of the Senate. They were looking for a person to come over and serve temporarily as curator of the Senate. A few months earlier, the Senate had established the Commission on Art and Antiquities. This was in response to an event that had occurred during the signing of the Voting Rights Act several years earlier in 1965. Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield had a conversation with President Lyndon Johnson at the time that Johnson was signing that action at a historic desk in the Capitol's President's Room. The desk was an original Supreme Court chamber desk, harking back to the days when the Supreme Court met in the Capitol, until 1935. When LBJ had served as majority leader a decade earlier, that desk had found its way into his office, according to the story that I heard subsequently. He took one look at that desk and said to Majority Leader Mansfield, "I want that desk." That may not have been an exact quote, but he wanted it sent down to the White House so he

could continue to enjoy this historical treasure. Well, Mansfield, with his own love of history and his appreciation for the so-called antiquities, didn't react well to that at all. But he realized that this was not registered as a Senate treasure, it was just there. There may not have even been an inventory that showed it as separate from just all the other pieces of common office furniture. So Mike Mansfield was determined in 1965 to create a commission on art and antiquities for the whole Capitol Building.

Well, unfortunately, the House wasn't having anything to do with that. And that was principally because of a congressman from Iowa named Fred Schwengel. Three years earlier in 1962, with some help from House Speaker Sam Rayburn, Mr. Schwengel had established the U.S. Capitol Historical Society, a private group, a 501(c)(3) group that could raise money to spend on the purchase of artistic and historical objects for the Capitol's collection. Fred Schwengel was, how can I say this without sounding pejorative, he was in league with a principal staff member of the Architect of the Capitol's office. Her name was Florian Thayne. My relations with her were absolutely horrible. She and Fred Schwengel figured, first of all, the House of Representatives certainly doesn't need a curator in this proposed Capitol-wide commission on art and antiquities. And probably the Senate doesn't either because Mrs. Thayne was working as the reference specialist, even though she had no graduate training in what she was doing. She believed she had things very well under control, and Fred had things well under control because the Historical Society, as a private organization, would have more flexibility. You start bringing in these government-paid bureaucrats inside the House and Senate and who knows where that's going to go. Anyway the House leadership, considering Fred as the "art and history czar," said "no thanks" to Senator Mansfield's proposal.

That didn't slow down Senator Mansfield. In 1968 the Senate, by resolution, established the Senate Commission on Art and Antiquities with a curatorial staff. They hired a man named Joseph Dougherty. He was a Library of Congress employee who had worked for many years in the Capitol Station. Capitol Station was an outpost in the basement level on the east front of the Capitol. It was on the Capitol end of a pneumatic tube over from the Library of Congress. So, if you ordered books to be sent to the Capitol they came over on that tube and then the people in Capitol Station were responsible for distributing the materials, not only books but reports from the Congressional Research Service, throughout either the House or the Senate. Capitol Station was located in the middle of the Capitol Building equidistant from the House and the Senate.

Joe Dougherty knew everyone. He was a good Irish-American man just like Mike Mansfield and they got along well together. Mike Mansfield's major mission for Joe was to find out where the valuable furniture was being hidden. Where are the historical objects and where are the papers and the other so-called antiquities? If anybody would know that, Joe Dougherty would know it. He was just a hail-fellow-well-met and stopped off and talked to everybody all around the Capitol. Joe was hired to be the first curator of the Senate. Joe, for whatever reason, had some health problems and suffered a debilitating stroke after a very short time on the job. So that's when the call went over from the Secretary of the Senate's office to the Library of Congress: Can you find somebody that's got a history and a library background? And what they didn't say probably was somebody whom you can do without for the time being, someone who is highly dispensable. So there I was!

**Scott:** And at this point you had been with LRS for one year?

**Baker:** For about one year. So I came over strictly on loan to the Senate. I guess this was the summer of 1969. By November of 1969 I again needed the money and I thought, I'm going to cash in my retirement account at the Library of Congress. I'd been putting money into this retirement account for a year or so. The real motivation was that I decided I wanted to come work for the Senate. And yet, I'm not quite sure what was going through my mind, because I didn't want to be the curator of the Senate for the rest of my life, for sure. It was very clear that this was not where my training or my interests lay. At those times jobs were very easy to get. You know, you go and look at the list in the personnel office with no concern or insecurity about being able to find a good job with two master's degrees in Washington, D.C.

I signed on for the Senate in November of 1969 but then really began to run into lots of problems—access problems. Most of those access problems came from Florian Thayn who just wasn't going to be very helpful. There was another person named Dorothy McCarty who worked as the principal assistant to the sergeant at arms. The sergeant at arms was responsible for furniture storage and she wasn't about to help me one bit either. And I thought: what am I doing here? This is not a long-range career plan. In February or March of 1970 I wrote this long, soulful letter to Mike Mansfield explaining why the structure of the office wasn't terribly effective. You needed some clout to be able to get access to these materials and to have people pay attention to you. Secondly, I didn't think that my training was appropriate to the job and it was fine to be acting curator but I didn't really have any desires to become the full appointed curator.

About that time, James Ketchum, who had been the first appointed curator of the White House since 1962, was becoming increasingly disenchanted with the Nixon administration and was looking around. He had a friend in common with Mike Mansfield and one thing led to another and after I turned in my letter of resignation—I gave it directly to Mansfield’s office, I don’t know what I was thinking of, I should have given it to the secretary of the Senate. But you know, I was so filled with my direct relationship with Mike Mansfield! [Laughs] Shortly afterwards they appointed Jim Ketchum to become the curator of the Senate. And so Jim and I had an overlap before I left. I think Jim started on April first. Indeed, I did get another job. I found a position working for a brand new publication called *National Journal*. It had a parent company that had both a magazine division and then a private client research division. So I got a job in the library of that corporation which was called the Center for Political Research at the time. It later became the Government Research Corporation. Both equally meaningless and forgettable names but it sounded like everybody knew what they were doing there.

**Scott:** You were a natural fit with your background at the LRS?

**Baker:** Right. I worked as a chief reference librarian for a while and then the director of the library left and so I became the chief librarian. After about two years I became the director of research for the private client research department. We had a staff of about twenty-five. The magazine had a staff of maybe thirty and then some support staff, so the whole company was about eighty people.

**Scott:** Where was it located?

**Baker:** Down at 1730 M Street NW. National Journal was established basically to drive *Congressional Quarterly* into the ground. Some New York financiers saw a great way to make money by going farther than *Congressional Quarterly* which then was sort of facts and figures about Congress and tracking legislation. What *National Journal* was going to do differently was to focus on the major policy issues and not only at the congressional level but also at the executive branch level as well as the lobbying component. They would package all that together in a weekly magazine for subscribers but also a high-priced series of research services for corporations, particularly corporations that didn’t have Washington offices or even those that did. It was cheaper to hire us than it was to hire a staff member and pay all the health benefits. So it was a great idea and I got to meet so many interesting people, people I still have contact with. Particularly



journalists who had worked for CQ for a while, such as David Broder. I didn't meet him, but he started at CQ and then ended up at the *Washington Post*. A lot of people had started at the Congressional Quarterly and then, like Broder, moved to the *Washington Star* before reaching the *Post*. And some of them came through *National Journal* and then went on to greater glory.

So I stayed there for five years and by 1974 there were some major reorganizations of the company. The magazine was overpriced, it wasn't selling that well, it hadn't quite found its niche. They had used up the initial capital that they had to work with. The *Washington Post* bought a chunk of the corporation but it was floundering. By that time, my second son, David, had come along in 1969, and I had to begin to think a little more seriously about long-range planning. So I was ready to leave and one day I got a call from Jim Ketchum. He said that, within the secretary of the Senate's office, the curator's office was like two legs of a three-legged stool. They had the library and the curator's office but they needed a historical component. And they didn't have people who were trained as political historians. The other part of it was Watergate. There was an increasing sense of institutional pride among those who served in the Senate and both Mike Mansfield and the Republican leader Hugh Scott had training in history and had written history. It was an easy sell in 1974 to add to the appropriations bill a provision for a Senate history program. That became reality in mid-1975. So Jim Ketchum called and asked me if I'd be interested in applying for the job. I went up and had a couple of meals with him. He had a cabin up in Pennsylvania and he invited my wife and kids up and we spent a nice weekend there. I had known the secretary of the Senate, Francis Valeo, from my days as acting curator. They did advertise the job and there were other people who applied for it and were considered. But it wasn't a big national advertisement. They certainly didn't put it up before the various historical associations. I said I'd be interested and I applied for it. They said OK, you're the guy for the job. That's how it began.

**Scott:** Let's back up just a bit. I'd like to ask you a bit more about *National Journal*. What were the backgrounds of your staff there?

**Baker:** Mostly they were young researchers just out of college. The nucleus of it was the library. The library had researchers assigned to it who would help a reporter or track down information for a story. They were all bright college graduates and that was perfect for the job. As time went on, that group expanded but ultimately I went from the library to the research department administration and within the research department there were people with graduate degrees in a wide range of fields—health policy experts, etc. So it was a higher level. It was

challenging to be the director because at the time I was relatively young, in my early thirties, but they all seemed old. Many of them were in their late thirties and forties [Laughs]. It was not a settled career for anybody. The number of people who tracked in and out of the organization the five years I was there was substantial.

**Scott:** There was quite a bit of turn over?

**Baker:** Yes, plus the company reorganizations. There was a Valentine's Day massacre in 1974. The department heads were called down to Palm Beach, Florida, where the chairman of the company, a former chairman of the American Can Company named William Stolk, who was put in to kind of straighten the place out, and he's quite an elderly gentleman, or so it seemed to me at the time; he was actually only two years older than I am now! At one point he told me that my job was going to be eliminated as the director of the research department and that his idea was to replace all these seasoned researchers with "some girls," as he put it. The "girls" would be—and they might have been like the people that we hired as beginning researchers in the library—bright attractive, young women. The idea was that these young women would go around and become friendly with the reporters and extract the information from reporters which then could be repackaged. Remember, this guy worked for the American Can Company. As the brains behind the first pressurized can for tennis balls, he was all about packaging. He believed his reorganization plan would save a lot of money. It would save all the overhead.

**Scott:** He was serious about this?

**Baker:** He was very serious about it. Fortunately, we were down there for three days and I was able to argue, and I think others as well, and he brought in a management consultant, which I think only complicated things, but I was able to basically defend against his plan for reorganization of my department. However, we did lose some people, including my deputy director and a few others. .

**Scott:** Did you have people going from *National Journal* to CRS? Or vice versa?

**Baker:** No. The people at *National Journal* were mostly reporters. One of the guys who started about the same time I did was Dan Balz. Dan stayed there for quite a while and then went on to the *Washington Post*. They really had some

very good, bright, hard working reporters there. But the finances kept creating complications, as they always do for newly established corporate entities.

**Scott:** So the best journalists would find positions at the *Post* or with other reputable papers that had more money?

**Baker:** And more security. Exactly. Eventually *National Journal* got on its feet. It took a long while. I was very glad to have had a retirement party there in 1975 at the age of 35.

**Scott:** Your first retirement party.

**Baker:** That's right.

**Scott:** As you changed jobs in Washington, did your family relocate? When did you move from Suitland?

**Baker:** I moved from Suitland to Silver Spring, Maryland in 1971. I was at *National Journal* at that point. We bought a house for \$32,000 and it was going to take me thirty years to pay that off for sure, but it was very exciting to do that. The schools were good. We stayed in that house until 1979. Then once I had gotten my roots down in the Senate, we bought our current home near Kensington, Maryland.

**Scott:** What was Silver Spring like back then?

**Baker:** The nice thing about where we lived in Silver Spring was that the elementary school was a block away. There was a good size Giant food store three blocks away. A nice public library two blocks away. Silver Spring was relatively small by today's standards. There was a bus stop right near my house. It was all very convenient for that point in my career.

**Scott:** Was Silver Spring primarily a bedroom community for Washington in the 1970s?

**Baker:** I'd say so, yes. Montgomery County schools had strong reputations. Those were all considerations in moving there, but the main consideration was how much could we afford. My wife was spending full time raising our kids then. She went back to work after I'd come to work in the Senate,

in 1976-77. We were living on one income and that kind of narrows your range of opportunities for sure.

**Scott:** You started your position as historian in the Senate in September of 1975. You were creating everything from scratch. You were the first historian and you had to organize a new office.

**Baker:** We were located up in the attic of the Capitol Building. We were literally under one of those capped domes that you see from the outside on both sides of the central dome. We had a great skylight but no other windows. We were placed adjacent to the office of the curator and within the library. Slowly but surely the library was losing space, first to the curator, then to the historical office. Ours was really enough space for only three people to work in but then we also got space over in what was called the Immigration Building, which is now the police headquarters over next to the Monocle restaurant.

**Scott:** How much space did you have over there?

**Baker:** We had four rooms. It was great. It was a weather-beaten old building. It was space that nobody else really wanted. It was really annex space in the truest sense of the word. When we started, we had a small staff. There were three of us and later four: myself, the photo historian named Arthur Scott, a research assistant named Leslie Prosterman, and later in the year, close to December, we were able to hire a secretary because we needed somebody to handle the correspondence. In those days everything had to be typed by a secretary. That was a major day when she came to work, Christine Ross. We got off and running. Three of us fit nicely into a very small space up in the Capitol attic. The fourth person, the photo historian, who had equipment and storage needs, took up residence over in the Immigration Building.

**Scott:** What was Scott's role?

**Baker:** Arthur Scott had been a long-time Washington photographer for Hearst's International News Photos. In 1955, he became the official Republican Senate photographer. Each Senate party had its own photo studio and photo operation. He had been doing that for a long while and he knew all the Republican senators. He had developed a huge collection of mug shots that he had taken of Republican senators standing next to foreign dignitaries, or zoo animals, or what have you. He was a good photographer and to me he seemed very old at the time, but he was only in his late fifties. He thought he was going to be the Senate photo

historian, that there wouldn't be anybody else, like a Senate historian. He was close to Hugh Scott.

**Scott:** No relation between the two?

**Baker:** No. But Hugh Scott thought the world of him, I guess. Either that or he wanted to get him out of the Republican dark room. I'm not quite sure which. Scotty, as he was known to everyone, had great plans to become the Senate historical photographer. Using his own personal collection of mug shots, he wanted to build on that. His plan was to run the entire historical program, to get the parking space out in the Capitol plaza that was assigned to the office, and have a dark room. All of a sudden, I show up! He couldn't figure out what it was that I was supposed to do. Then he knew it was serious when I got the parking space. [Laughs]

**Scott:** No one had sat you two down and explained how things would work?

**Baker:** No. When I reported for duty on September 2, 1975, I was told to go in and see the assistant secretary of the Senate, a gentleman named Darrell St. Claire, a wonderful guy who is still alive at well over the age of 100. Not the kind of guy that you'd have a quick and comfortable conversation with. If you were a senator and you were off on a parliamentary delegation somewhere, Darrell would know how to take care of you. He had all the political skills. But not necessarily for somebody who is really nothing more than a bump on a log—that's what I felt like. I came in and sat down on the couch. He didn't have an office. He had a desk in room 221, which is now part of the Democratic leader's suite, but then it was the secretary of the Senate's suite before it was taken away in 1987. He motioned to his couch. "Sit down." So I sat there and he's busy writing something, or whatever. His personal demeanor is such that, you know, you catch on pretty quickly that you only speak when spoken to. So I sat there for what seemed like a very long time. He wanted to know about my background because the decision had already been made to hire me. He took me in to see Frank Valeo. I had known Darrell a little bit when I was called over from the Library of Congress six years earlier. Now that I think of it, that's actually when I sat down on that couch for a very long time and was taken in to meet the secretary of the Senate. But our 1975 meeting had elements of a rerun of that experience.

**Scott:** Did he recognize you?

**Baker:** He did. At one point in 1970 I thought I wanted to go back to the University of Massachusetts to a job in their library, figuring I might take over the library there someday. He had written a letter of recommendation so when I showed up in 1975 he said, "I thought you went off to Massachusetts." But his demeanor was such that you still waited. He said: "All right, what I want you to do is keep a record of everything that you do around here every day. Then come down and we'll talk about what's going on. I want to see what progress you're making. But you are the historian and this is the historical office and I expect you, we expect you, to do whatever it is that historians do. Whatever government historians do and just do it better than everybody else."

That was my guidance. I was back to see him within a day or two. At that point he had mentioned something about Scotty. I kept hearing Scotty. "Now you're going to have to talk to Scotty." Scotty was not around a lot in his office over in the Immigration Building. But he and I eventually did sit down pretty early in the process. It was clear that he didn't like me and he didn't like the arrangement one bit. He intended to move on his own separate way. He particularly wanted a dark room. Oh, did he want a dark room! There was no money anywhere for a dark room. I was trying to fight for money to get books for a separate historical office library and also for staff. I just kept hearing "dark room." So over the next three or four months we had a lot of extended and very heated meetings. It just wasn't the way he wanted to play it. Sadly, he ended up developing cancer and retired in the summer of 1976. He died later that year. It was not an auspicious start in terms of getting the office up and running. But then we hired our research assistant who really gave the office some legs in terms of being able to get over to the Library of Congress and begin to start some of our projects. And then a secretary and that was it.

**Scott:** When Darrell St. Claire sat you down and said "Do what government historians do," you didn't necessarily have any point of reference for what government historians did, did you?

**Baker:** Not a big sense. I certainly knew a lot about the community because I had worked at the Library of Congress for those years. I had a sense of where to go for help. I did keep detailed notes for the first couple of months on the job.

**Scott:** I saw those, they were great.

**Baker:** It shows, slowly but surely, the awakening of me.

**Scott:** I remember particularly the notation: “Scotty thinks he’s running the office.”

**Baker:** Right, exactly. I went over and made a point of getting to meet the executive director of the American Historical Association. I signed up for a number of history conventions including the Oral History Association meeting, the American Historical Association, the Southern Historical Association, any meeting that I could get funding for. Leslie Prosterman and I really launched a two person P.R. campaign. The newspaper *Roll Call*, which was virtually a “mom and pop” operation in those days, published on its front page the press release that I wrote. You know, “Senate establishes historical office.” Very soon I began to get visits from people around the Hill who wanted a job in the historical office, or who were just curious about it. I remember one day Roger Mudd walked in. He had heard about it. He was a good friend of Richard Hupman, who had been the Senate Librarian during my time as acting curator. Again, I knew pretty well the lay of the land in terms of how the secretary of the Senate’s office was organized. Anyway, Roger Mudd came in and wanted to know, “what are you guys doing up here?” I was only a half a step ahead of him in giving him the answer.

I discovered very quickly that there were a large number of governmental historical programs. I guess I knew that coming in. The State Department had one of the best and one of the largest. The Defense Department had all kinds of history programs. But the timing was spectacular. These things just couldn’t have happened at almost any other period of time. It came in the aftermath of Watergate. As I mentioned earlier, the Senate was feeling its institutional pride. Congress established the National Commission on the Records and Documents of Federal Officials because here is [President] Richard Nixon trying to destroy what he considered his personal property.

**Scott:** And what had been considered personal property of the presidents up until that point.

**Baker:** That’s right. And even after that. It took this commission several years of deliberation before they recommended the legislation that became the Presidential Records Act of 1978. But note, it was only “presidential records.” The mandate was to look at the records of all government officials, all three branches of the government. In 1976 ... I’m mentioning these in terms of the timing and the environment. We’re operating this office for a very short period of time when we were asked to run a full day hearing or a full day conference on

congressional papers. We had a lot of support from the Library of Congress in getting this organized and we brought in lots of experts who testified and their testimony became part of the final report of the public documents commission chaired by former U.S. attorney general Herbert Brownell. It put a very intense spotlight on the importance of the records of public officials. That spotlight brightened even a bit more when it came to congressional papers.

As a result of our day-long conference and op-ed pieces and everything else, it became clear that members of Congress, many of them, couldn't have cared less about their papers. Committee records were indifferently maintained. So right off the bat there is a huge chunk of activity. [Historian] Arthur Schlesinger wrote a very nice letter to Mike Mansfield encouraging Mansfield to set up an historical program. This is 1974. He wrote, if the Senate's going to complain about executive branch agencies being not forthcoming, then they ought to do a better job with their own records. All of these events created a favorable environment for our work. Plus, the 1976 bicentennial of the American Revolution was being planned. There was a joint congressional committee on bicentennial arrangements that Congress created in 1975. Very quickly we were drawn into that organization in terms of planning. What is Congress going to do that will be special? That joint congressional committee on bicentennial arrangements did have a staff director by the name of Wallace Green. He was appointed by [Congresswoman Corinne Claiborne] Lindy Boggs, who was chair of the joint committee. He was well-qualified, I'm sure, but when the task was over he left because it was a temporary committee. So that experience reinforced the idea that you don't want to see your expertise walk out the door when you have these special commemorations and then they are over and people leave. Plus, you can't always get people who are at the top of their game to do these things when they know they are only going to be around for a matter of months. All of that was happening in 1974, 1975, and 1976 which was the perfect climate for us to put down some roots.

**Scott:** In those early months or years, how did you set the priorities for the office? How did you decide what the office would focus on?

**Baker:** From today's vantage point, it seems like it just kind of fell into place. One of our earliest fans was Columbia University historian William Leuchtenburg who later moved to the University of North Carolina. I had many conversations with him about how great it would be to have a catalog of locations of former senators' papers. Because he would have to spend very expensive research time going through the *National Union Catalog of Manuscript*



*Collections* and other sources to piece it all together. Where were the New Deal era senators' papers located? He said, "If you do nothing else, do that." So we got a lot of input at these history conferences.

Plus, my background as a librarian told me that we needed a bibliography very quickly of significant books and articles about the Senate as an institution and some of its more notable members. One of our first publications was a list of 1000 separate books and articles about the Senate. It was probably less than 100 pages and it was designed to be distributed far and wide as sort of a calling card for the office, a business card for the office. So we spent a lot of time on that. The locations of papers, the bibliography, and then the Senate Foreign Relations Committee had a major project to publish its closed-door executive session transcripts for the period beginning in 1947 when they were taking a look at post-war recovery in Europe.

There was a graduate student at the University of Texas named Robert Blum and he made arrangements with the committee staff to get into these closed records for his doctoral dissertation. I think he was particularly interested in U.S.-China relations after World War II. The tradeoff was that he would come to work as a temporary committee employee giving him security clearance and would begin to organize these papers for publication. The committee had decided independently that this material needed to be available for research. That project started in 1973 and clearly Mr. Blum saw this project as a way to get full-time employment once he got his Ph.D. He may have been responsible for the Arthur Schlesinger letter, I'm not entirely sure about that. So again, all this coming together in 1974 pushed the creation of the office over the goal line. I remember my first conversation with Robert Blum after I took over. He was quite surprised because he thought he was going to get the job. I don't know if he knew it was available at the time. So then he wanted to be the associate historian. That didn't work out.

That became one of our first projects, to continue with that. The plan was to not only assist the Foreign Relations Committee, but the Armed Services Committee had comparable records, the same thing, executive session transcripts, buried in a storeroom of the Russell Senate Office Building. I'll never forget the first meeting with the chief clerk of the Armed Services Committee, a gentleman named Jack Ticer. Somehow I got down into that storeroom. I don't know if he took me down there or not, but when he figured out what it was that I wanted to do with those records, to publish them, he didn't think that was a very good idea at all.

One of the advantages of a historical office is that you are here, through thick and through thin, through good times and bad, but you're still here. Eventually, if you have a project that you want to do, you wait it out. Eventually you develop a consensus that it's important to do it and in the process you refine your original idea. Finally, as a result of the elections of 1980, when the Democrats lost control of the Senate and the Republicans took over, John T. Ticer was taking an unanticipated retirement because his job had been transferred to the Republicans. Shortly afterwards we were able to get those valuable records out of harm's way, from basements that were susceptible to flooding and down to the National Archives. A terrific collection that went back as far as the Spanish American war in terms of what was there. That's one where we waited them out.

Some of those early projects we were able to start on fairly quickly. Frank Valeo, as secretary of the Senate, had this idea that he wanted a Senate history room. This is about the time that plans were underway for constructing the Madison Building at the Library of Congress. The Senate was not averse to doing what the House of Representatives tried to do which is to grab some of that space in this soon-to-be-opened Library of Congress building. The House was a little more brazen about it because they were right next door, you know, just a tunnel away. I'm not quite sure whether the history room idea came from a senator or whether this was Frank's own desire. It would be a joint project of the curator's office and the historical office, but being the history room the historical office would take a major push in that direction. To back up a bit, the earlier discussions about creating a historical office included an idea to create it as a unit within a new office of Senate Information. That would include the curator, the historical office, and the library.

**Scott:** As well as a public relations officer.

**Baker:** That's right. I think Jim Ketchum was particularly enamored of that scheme. He drew a very elaborate organization chart. But that didn't fly. That didn't get off the ground at all, because, as you point out, it sounds too much like information control. The Directorate of Information. It was very clear right at the very beginning that the library, the historical office, and the curator's office were the supports of a good, solid, three-legged stool.

**Scott:** It sounds like one of your greatest challenges was outreach. Letting senators know that you were here and explaining to them the value of their papers. Did you go around to the Senate offices, how did you get the word out?

**Baker:** We developed a brochure. This was the thinking of the 1970s, maybe the 1950s. But we thought it was pretty high tech and modern in the 1970s to do a brochure that the Government Printing Office designed. It had six panels, with all of the services of the historical office described. Unfortunately, someone selected, and I must have agreed to, this horrible sickly green color. Just terrible.

**Scott:** I've seen it.

**Baker:** It was terrible. Nonetheless, we ran with what we had and we distributed that to members' offices and the word began to get out. Very quickly we realized that our bread and butter in this office, above all else, was going to be its archival programs. Everything else was important, but at election time, particularly when members are defeated and wondering, "What am I going to do with my papers?" or some member's thinking, "I'm retiring and what am I going to do with my papers?" So we get drawn into that very early.

We began to meet people who had been doing it as private contractors or just personal consultants to individual members. There was a man named Eugene Jenkins who worked for a number of senators including Roman Hruska and Carl Curtis both of Nebraska. He stopped by the office a lot. I'd go down and see where he was working and he had issues that he figured he needed help with here. In a way he was sort of an advance agent of our agenda-setting for what are the typical Senate-related archival problems, what are the goals and challenges. He was out there in the field, he was doing this. Even though I had some archival experience in library school, these were the issues that were immediately important. I began to run into a number of people like that. Before I knew it, I was not only the Senate historian but I was also the Senate archivist. I was going around and doing briefings to members' offices and realizing pretty quickly that I was in a little bit over my head and that we really needed a professional archivist. That was still down the road.

**Scott:** What role did the academic community play in the first years of the Senate Historical Office? I know that you had an advisory board. Did they help you in any way?

**Baker:** They did. The first advisory board was chaired by Forrest Pogue, a distinguished biographer of George Marshall, who had an office down in the Smithsonian Museum of American history. He was a wise old guy. He added so much gravitas to what it was that we were trying to do. I would bring him up and

he would sit down with the secretary of the Senate. He reinforced the need for our services in the eyes of the Senate secretary.

Later on, in 1981, when party control changed and we felt we were on shaky territory because we were set up by the Democrats and all of a sudden our friendly secretaries of the Senate were long gone and we were dealing with new leaders, one of the first things we did was to establish an advisory committee on bicentennial arrangements to plan for the Senate's two-hundredth anniversary in 1989. I think it was called the Study Group on the Senate Bicentenary. Somehow we picked up the British usage of that word. [Laughs] We put together a very good advisory committee including the head of the manuscript division at the Library of Congress, key officials from the National Archives, William Leuchtenburg, historian Harold Hyman from Rice University who had written a wonderful essay called, "Lincoln and Congress, why not Congress and Lincoln?" which argued that we are not giving enough attention to the congressional side of political history. It all just kind of slowly came together.

One event that represented that building consensus and also moved us ahead a great bit was our 1978 conference on the research use and disposition of senators' papers. I mentioned the 1976 conference that we did more like a hearing for the public documents commission, but the 1978 event was a day and a half conference held over in the caucus room in the Russell Building. We had about 250 attendees. We published the proceedings and formal papers. Senator [Robert] Byrd and Senator Howard Baker as the two party leaders kicked it off, which gave us high visibility. We had a wonderful turnout from three constituencies. We had Senate staff, we had historians from around the country who were writing political history, and we had archivists from major research institutions. For a day and a half these people came together and some of them had known each other, but this really seemed to cement an alliance or at least built a platform, I guess I should say, for a growing alliance. We published those proceedings and those also served, like our historical bibliography, as office business cards. We managed to get those widely distributed. Even today, as I think Karen Paul will tell you, this was the foundational document for what came afterwards. I guess the questions we were trying to answer were: who cares about Senators' papers; and what kinds of problems do they create for the repositories that all of a sudden find themselves as the unwitting recipients? Do scholars use them? It was interesting for the Senate staffers to hear some distinguished historian stand up and talk about the biography that she had just written about a senator and how these papers were absolutely invaluable.

**Scott:** So it was a venue where you could convince some of these Senate staffers that these papers have value and by having the scholars there they could really contest to that.

**Baker:** Everybody was really vetting the process. It was being vetted by the fact that it was in the majestic Senate caucus room, that it was kicked off by the two floor leaders of the Senate and that all these knowledgeable people from within the Senate and around the country thought it was important enough to come to. So that was a big milestone.

**Scott:** I think this is a good place to end.

*[Photo on the following page: Richard Baker in the newly renovated Old Senate Chamber in 1976.]*



## The Watershed Election of 1980

### Interview #2

Thursday, June 3, 2010

**Scott:** Thank you for being here for our second interview. I found this *New York Times* article that was published just one month after you started here at the Senate Historical Office, with the title of “Senate office to publish declassified documents.” Can you say something about the story behind this article?

**Baker:** When I opened the *New York Times* on Sunday, October 19, 1975, I nearly had heart failure. First of all, I did do an interview with somebody who purported to be a reporter for the *New York Times*. I think she was a stringer. But it didn't matter. Her questions weren't terribly sharp, and my answers certainly weren't terribly sharp because, as you say, I had just started on the job. We were kind of groping along together. We spoke on the phone for maybe 45 minutes and then she came up and interviewed me in our little office up in the attic of the Capitol. We had an agreement when she left that I would dig up some more information and she would sharpen her questions a bit more and we'd have a second interview. That was probably two days before this article appeared in the *Sunday Times*. It's clear that either they had space to fill or she's being paid by the word and not by the quality of these words. So there it was.

The first thing I did was to go hat-in-hand to the office of Majority Leader Mike Mansfield. I went in there to apologize because he was very instrumental in setting the office up and what did he know? They hired me and he opens the *New York Times* and there is this bit of fiction in there about what the office is going to be doing. So, I went in and explained what I just mentioned to you and he and his staff couldn't have been nicer. “No problem, these things happen. Welcome to Capitol Hill.” But then, several days later, I received a phone call from the National Archives and they thought it would be really great if I could come down there and meet with some of their staff to talk about the work of our office, which they were very “excited” about. We set up an appointment and that occurred maybe mid-November.

**Scott:** And that was prompted by this article?

**Baker:** Very definitely. I sort of walked into the conference room and I looked around the table and there are all the senior division chiefs of the National Archives, including the deputy archivist of the United States. What I saw was a

very somber group of senior managers—the second tier down from the archivist of the United States. They basically wanted to know, and I haven't looked at this article recently, but there were some reflections in the article about the National Archives maybe not doing its job entirely and that's why the Senate had decided to set up this office to make sure it did.

**Scott:** Right, related to declassifying documents.

**Baker:** That's right.

**Scott:** So, it lit a fire under the National Archives. They felt they needed to respond.

**Baker:** They did. They seemed ready to light a fire under me. And they wanted to find out who this new character is, who's giving all these interviews as if he knew what he was talking about.

That really began a long and ultimately happy relationship with the National Archives. At the time that this article was published, the Senate curator, Jim Ketchum, had a very good friend named Al Leisinger, who had worked for the Archives for many years. I think he had just retired. And he was a bit, I think, disaffected with management at the Archives. That's in the blood stream of the Archives, to have senior responsible people who are disaffected. You know, it's that kind of a complex institution. So, Jim Ketchum was getting a lot of back-channel information from Al Leisinger about the problems of the Archives. We realized that the Archives was going to be a major component of any projects we did here at the Senate Historical Office. It was a heck of a way to begin the relationship. We parted from that meeting with an understanding that we would be in touch.

As I looked around at the structure of the National Archives, knowing that the records of the Senate and the House go down there for permanent preservation and access, I wondered where were these records being housed? There was no separate legislative division. Chronically, over the next fifteen years, the records were sort of orphan records. They were being moved from one division for the administrative convenience of the Archives. That became very clear to me that the driving force behind the meeting was that these issues could be explosive in terms of political misunderstandings with the Senate. So the Archives' folks apparently thought, "We need to keep a lid on as much as possible. But on the other hand, we don't want to spend a whole lot of resources that we don't have to make them



more prominent.” So when this character from the Senate Historical Office says we are going to start publishing all these classified documents, they want to know: who’s going to declassify these documents? So that was a real interesting beginning for sure.

**Scott:** What was the nature of the meeting? Were they trying to explain to you what their role was? Were they trying to understand what you were planning to do?

**Baker:** A little of both, but without setting up a major new declassification program. Of course, all of this is coming in the context of the Watergate committee and the public documents commission which existed to open up and determine questions of ownership. So they were sensitized, for sure, to the problem. That’s how it started.

**Scott:** In the wake of Watergate, Congress is seriously studying this question of ownership of papers, congressional, judicial, presidential. You mentioned last time the National Study Commission on the Records and Documents of Federal Officials which was created by Congress in 1974 to explore this issue. What were senators doing with their papers when you opened the office in 1975?

**Baker:** Not much. It’s like any other group of fifty people, or one hundred, if you are looking at all the incumbents. Most of the one hundred senators in 1975 had no plans whatsoever for their papers. That’s akin to making arrangements for your burial. If word got out that you had selected a repository for your papers, of course, the logical next step was, when are you retiring? Why are you leaving Congress now? We tried to come back with the response that this is only prudent management practice. This is all in the interest of public access. If you plan for it over a long period of time, as opposed to dumping everything on the hapless repository as you are walking out the door, the result would be a richer record, a better organized record, and it will be less expensive for the repository to manage and make it available to the public. Most senators in 1975 had given little thought to their papers.

One of the first staff members I met here was Eugene Jenkins who worked for Senator Roman Hruska. Jenkins’ job was to take care of Hruska’s papers and those of Carl Curtis, the other senator from Nebraska. I think he had had some association with Everett Dirksen a few years earlier, but he was sort of the go-to guy around the Senate if a member was contemplating leaving, another member

would say, “Go talk to Gene Jenkins or have your staff talk to him.” He had an enormous body of received wisdom about what to do and what not to do. I also met John Sobotka, who worked for Senator James Eastland. Poor John Sobotka! The Eastland papers were then housed up in the attic of the Russell Building. Unfortunately, there was a lot of storage space in the Russell Building attic. It’s where people sent their stuff that they didn’t know what to do with. Poor John Sobotka laboring up there. He was a staff member of the law school at the University of Mississippi. He was designated to respond and be helpful to Senator Eastland in organizing his papers. John was a real long-suffering, hardworking guy, who gave 200 percent for every job. He would drive up here in the summertime when the law school was not in session and help organize Senator Eastland’s papers. So, there he was, working up in the attic of the Russell Building in the broiling summer heat. The ceiling was not insulated, it was stifling. At one point he had to cut a hole in a wall just to get the circulation of air up there. So it was combat archiving for sure.

**Scott:** Archive boot camp.

**Baker:** Right. Slowly but surely, there was a small group of people who responded to a natural need to do something to get these papers boxed and organized and out of here. A few years earlier, when Senator Richard Russell of Georgia died in 1971, his papers going back to 1933 were dumped literally, just dumped in the big tubs. The staff would go through, pull out the file cabinet drawers and dump everything into a tub. No organization, no order whatsoever. And off they went to the University of Georgia where it took them more than a decade to begin to figure out. And it was only because of a very dedicated staff member named Barboura Raesly, who went with the papers back to Georgia. Without her, without knowing what the various names of staff members and internal office administrative quirks, that collection would have been impossible to reorganize. She was there to help interpret that. Otherwise they would have been in big trouble.

**Scott:** She was able to help them understand what was important versus the records that were less important.

**Baker:** I recall that there was some discussion of the “blue file.” The blue file was basically crank obscene letters to the senator. They didn’t want them in the regular files. But they stuck them in the blue file. Who would know what the blue file is? In those pre-automated days there were all kinds of little gimmicks to

make the files work and make them understandable. It really took the maximum of human intervention to do that. It placed a premium on human ingenuity.

**Scott:** Did you find that some senators were more historically minded than others? That some senators took less convincing, for example, to understand the value of their papers and archiving them with some institution after their retirement?

**Baker:** Absolutely! That continues right down to today and it will apply one hundred years from now, as well. It's sort of a basic part of human nature. It is so maddening to run across senators, particularly now in the electronic age, it's so easy to destroy the data with the push of a button or with the discard of a tape or disc whereas back then you had to do something with these mountains of boxes. One of the panaceas introduced at the time was microfilm and the Senate had a micrographics division under the sergeant at arms and they were good at bulk processing. You could literally put these papers on a conveyor belt and just photograph them and then that way you can throw away all the papers and then you have microfilm. Nice and tidy and efficient!

**Scott:** They did that in-house?

**Baker:** Yes, both for committee records and members' papers. In more recent times, we in the historical office have confronted the question of what happened to the secretary of the Senate's records from the 1970s. We remember there was a microfilming project, and of course, the papers, many of them were long gone because they had been filmed. They were mostly administrative, financial papers. Finally, Diane Boyle, our archival assistant, discovered these films and most of them were quite unstable after thirty, thirty-five years. She managed to get them copied back onto paper. So the irony is that you go from paper to film to paper. [Laughs] I guess that's somebody's idea of progress.

**Scott:** Where did she find them?

**Baker:** She really knew the nooks and crannies of the Senate campus very well. She knew many of the custodians. I don't know where she found them, but she unearthed them in a storeroom. In the 1970s there were some high-salaried people whose job it was to figure out how to microfilm better and faster. Then you come back a generation or two later and that "efficiency" turned out to be a sure step toward oblivion in terms of the integrity and the existence of the record.

**Scott:** When you first opened the office in 1975, not much of the institution's history was available to scholars. Even the Conference minutes of the Democratic and Republican caucuses weren't available to scholars but available for members only. How did you eventually convince the leadership of both parties to allow you access to those records and to edit them and make them part of the public record?

**Baker:** One of the best arguments was that, in earlier times, the access to those minutes was not evenhanded. Indeed, some favored individuals were able to take a peek, or even more than a peek at the records. But other people were not allowed that opportunity. Our argument was that—fairness. The other was control, because if you publish these you'll know what you're publishing. If there is anything in there that might embarrass a current or former senator, the time to deal with that is in the publication process. You know, get it cleared and if it's necessary, using the model of the Foreign Relations Committee's executive session transcripts, we either take it out with some footnotes that indicate material has been deleted, with the possibility of release at some future date, or perhaps never. But that was the price we had to pay and it was a small price because, when you get right down to it, the fears of the custodians of these records, the Republican and Democratic Party secretaries tended to be understandably a little exaggerated. They don't need these to be published, it's not going to help them at all. It took us a very long time to convince both parties to do this.

The bicentennial of the Senate, in 1989, was a wonderful target to plan against. The Senate did establish a planning committee, maybe we can go into that later. So when you have a planning committee saying, this frames the enterprise as a good idea, it's not just a bunch of historians sitting around the historical office looking for something to do. But it took us longer to convince the Republicans. It wasn't going to happen, as it turned out looking back on it, until the Republicans took control of the Senate. And all of a sudden, the secretary of the Senate—my boss—is a Republican. And one day he and I went in to meet with Conference Chairman Senator Thad Cochran. Clearly the skids had been greased ahead of time. It was a lovely meeting. "Of course we want to do this in the interest of history" and so that was it. We said, you know, the Democrats are going to do it. And so, maybe you ought to be at the table as well. So that was it. But it took a long while to get the door opened to such a meeting and it underscores, I think, one of the most valuable things about a government history office. That is, you don't have to get it done tomorrow. It may take five years, ten years, or even longer. But you have the collective memory of the project and you

sense, within the institution, when is the time to move. When is the time to get it done?

**Scott:** And you just remained persistent.

**Baker:** And we realized that around here, persistence can backfire. So we kept our persistence covert. You know, I wouldn't badger the secretary of the Senate. In recent times, we had an excellent administrative arrangement where the assistant secretary of the Senate would sit down with all the department heads on a monthly basis to find out what's going on in the respective offices. That really didn't develop until the later 1990s. But it was a great way to keep the secretary involved and it was a great therapy device for the department heads because first of all, somebody with authority is listening to what you think the problems are and also has the opportunity to help solve those problems. I learned very quickly that there are times when you might as well just put it in a box and set the box on the shelf and forget about it for a while because they don't want to hear about it for whatever reason.

**Scott:** Did this have something to do with the political cycle?

**Baker:** I think so. Also, it's the difference between the first and second session of a two-year Congress. First sessions are always more forward looking, the second sessions are kind of wrapping things up. It also has to do with having worked for twelve secretaries of the Senate. Every one of them was, as far as I'm concerned, a good person to work for. But they all had different agendas and were a good mix, half Republicans, half Democrats. You could kind of eventually get to it. Having some bicentennial anniversaries in there also helped.

**Scott:** I'd like to talk about Frank Valeo because he's the first secretary of the Senate that you worked for. You worked with him for two years, he left in 1977 when Majority Leader Mike Mansfield left. I'd like to know how you worked together, how he supported the office. He was a very historically minded person.

**Baker:** Very much so. He correctly thought of himself as a scholar and a writer. He had previously worked in the foreign affairs division at the Congressional Research Service, the old Legislative Reference Service at the Library of Congress. I think people saw him that way. I had worked for him a little bit when I was acting curator of the Senate in 1969-1970. I think our relationship was a bit distant. He was sort of the grey eminence. You would be

ushered into his presence. I must say, Jim Ketchum, when he was curator of the Senate, one of his great talents was to be able to break through that. Before you knew it, Jim was inviting Frank to his house for barbeques and picnics, you know, he knew Frank's son very well. That's not my strength. Frank was a little bit distant but very supportive.

Then, sadly, when he died in 2006, there was no one to do a eulogy at his funeral. It was a memorial service at a church in Chevy Chase. Don Ritchie had done his oral history interview and that had built a type of therapeutic relationship. Don did a magnificent eulogy for Frank Valeo. In Frank's later years, he would call me occasionally and, at his request, I had given a very careful—and perhaps overly critical—reading of his book manuscript on Mike Mansfield. His son had died at a very early age and he was very emotional on the phone. But I didn't think it was appropriate for me to be doing the eulogy at his service. I mention that only to give you the sense of the distance of my relationship with him. But he was there to support us, but as you point out, it was only two years. He was, for better or worse, tagged as Mike Mansfield's agent, and so when it came time for him to stand for reelection as secretary in 1976 with Mike Mansfield leaving, he lost to Stan Kimmitt.

**Scott:** What about your relationship with Mike Mansfield? Did you speak with him regularly?

**Baker:** Not regularly. But with him being the majority leader and being very busy, that was understandable for me. I did go in and speak with him several times. When I retired the first time from my job as acting curator he invited me in and we had a nice chat. When I came back, I had a couple of occasions to speak with him. He was also somewhat of a remote individual who you don't make small talk with, for sure. He thought what we were doing was terrific and I think he was proud of having inspired it. Years later, he came back to the Senate and we had our picture taken together in the Mansfield room and the thing I remember about that picture was that I was so interested in talking with him, you know you had the grip for the hand shake, and I'm talking to him and he commands, "Look at the camera!" [Laughs] So, I learned a lot from him right down through the end of it. He was a towering figure in the Senate's history and in the history of this office. This office would not exist in its current form, it might be some other form, but not without his active interest and intervention.

**Scott:** Some scholars and close observers have criticized Mansfield when they compare him with his predecessor Lyndon Johnson. They've said that

Mansfield wasn't as political, he didn't require the members to toe the party line. He let them be a little more independent. What do you think about that assessment as a historian? Do you think that's an accurate, or fair, critique?

**Baker:** I think he was the antithesis of Lyndon Johnson. There could not have been another Lyndon Johnson-style leader. The Democratic caucus would not have stood for it. Mansfield was the deputy leader when Johnson was in office and so he was the logical successor but he was the deputy leader with good reason. They wanted somebody who had a more "small d" democratic view of how the Senate should be run. There is a wonderful story about a speech that Mike Mansfield prepared, with some help from Frank Valeo, in November 1963 in response to the pushback that he was getting from some Democratic senators like Thomas Dodd who said "you should be more like Lyndon Johnson." Mansfield in this great speech said, "I am who I am and you have to take me or leave me. I'm fully prepared to step aside." That speech he planned to give on Friday afternoon November 22, 1963. News of Kennedy's shooting reached the Senate Chamber so he dropped it in the *Record* and he never actually spoke it on the floor. So then in 1998 when the then-Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott set up a program, a so-called leader's lecture series, to bring back former leaders, he was the kick-off speaker. He called me one day, out of the blue. He said, "I'm not sure what I should be saying to this group. You're close to the planning, what do you think?" The last thing I wanted to do was write a speech for him. I said, "Well, the one thing we do know about is that undelivered speech of yours from November 1963. We would be happy to go through it and take out a lot of the references that no one would focus on today that were just for that moment and turn it into a speech for you." He said, "That sounds like a great idea." And so we did and he did. He gave it and it really kicked off that series very, very well. It also became sort of a foundational document, or at least a major document in trying to understand the limits of the majority leadership in the United States Senate.

**Scott:** It's striking when you think about how much Mike Mansfield was able to accomplish while he was leader that perhaps he was persuasive by not using the "treatment" like Lyndon Johnson did. He was actually able to be more effective as a leader in terms of getting his policies through the Senate.

**Baker:** Sixteen years as leader is a lot of time to do a lot. But also, having it coincide with the Great Society, for which he deserves credit. And Watergate, he was instrumental in making sure that Sam Ervin was the chairman of the committee and not Edward Kennedy. Of course, we now have Don Oberdorfer's

and Frank Valeo's books about Mike Mansfield and Don Ritchie's oral history with Frank Valeo is a rich source of information about Mansfield.

**Scott:** I wonder about your impressions of Senator Byrd, who becomes leader following Mike Mansfield's departure. This is the first transition where you, having worked under one majority leader, are now working under another. Did anything change in the office? Senator Byrd is himself very historically minded. Did you meet with him?

**Baker:** No, I really didn't. Not in 1977 when he became leader. Whom I did meet with was the new secretary of the Senate, one Joseph Stanley Kimmitt who had been the Democratic Party secretary previously. So, Stan Kimmitt was my closest connection to Robert Byrd. We were able to get Senator Byrd along with Senator Baker to open the 1978 conference on senators' papers. I gave a speech at the 1977 meeting of the Organization of American Historians, and Senator Byrd put that in the *Congressional Record*, called the "Senate Historical Office: Why, What and for Whom?" So, that was nice. But I had no personal contact with him until March of 1980.

**Scott:** When you got together with him to discuss the creation of the United States Senate Bicentenary Study Group?

**Baker:** Even there, not very much. That was pretty much handled through staff. My introduction to Senator Byrd came courtesy of former Senate Parliamentarian Floyd Riddick, who one day in March 1980 called me up and said, "I want you to come over. The time has come—you've been here for five years—for you to meet Senator Byrd." So, I wasn't quite sure what was up. I met Doc Riddick, as he was known, over in Senator Byrd's majority leader office in the Capitol and I was so nervous. I barely knew what my name was at that point. I was sweating. Oh, it was terrible. But once we walked in and sat down and had the introductions and so forth, Senator Byrd is a natural politician. He knows how to put people at their ease. Clearly what he wanted was some help from us. Only years later did I learn from Bob Dove, who later became Senate parliamentarian, that Senator Byrd was moving toward a series of historical speeches about the internal operation of the Senate, starting with the sergeant at arms' office. And Bob Dove, and Floyd Riddick his former boss, were certainly wise enough to realize that was going to mean a lot of work for them and why should they be writing historical speeches when there's a historical office. So, summon the historian, center stage.



**Scott:** Here you just thought it was a pleasant meeting.

**Baker:** That's right. I should have known better. Majority leaders don't have time for casual chit-chat. This followed an event on March 21, 1980, when Senator Byrd's granddaughter and her fifth grade class came to visit the Senate Chamber and, as it was a quiet Friday afternoon with no pressing business before the Senate, he gave a history speech. And then his other granddaughter came the following week with the same teacher and he wanted it to be different. But also, at that time, he had in mind a question about the role and authority of the majority leader to arrest senators to force them to come to vote to provide cloture and to move ahead. By 1980, he didn't realize it at the time but he was finishing up his first four years as majority leader. Floor people who have been interviewed about Senator Byrd say that was his prime, those four years, that he really was the master of the floor. Well, the one thing he wanted to know was the history of arresting senators. How many times had it been done, what were the circumstances? So, could we help him? The sergeant at arms' office had put together a few pages, but it wasn't satisfactory. He wanted the real history. So that was my first assignment, to go and see if I could put together a speech for him on the history of arresting senators, and more broadly, the role of the sergeant at arms in enforcing discipline in the Senate.

**Scott:** So that's how it starts, with that one essay?

**Baker:** Right, exactly.

**Scott:** Little did you know that it would become such a huge project.

**Baker:** Then it became sort of a "while you're at it" syndrome. "What about the rest of the Senate's history?"

**Scott:** So this is March of 1980. Nineteen-eighty is important for several reasons in the history of the historical office, but Majority Leader Byrd and Minority Leader Howard Baker establish a study group on the Commemoration of the United States Senate Bicentenary in 1980. What was your role in that process?

**Baker:** I would like to say that it was a very active role. We saw that, as we were discussing earlier about getting the caucus minutes published, we knew we needed some sort of hands-on from higher-ups, whether they be senior senators or distinguished historians and others from around the country. So our motive was to get that going. And keep in mind that not only the bicentennial in

1976, but the opening of the Capitol's restored Old Supreme Court Chamber in 1975. And the Old Senate Chamber in 1976. All of the sudden there it is, this magnificent room beautifully restored. Not without its problems in terms of restoration and understanding what the room really looked like in the 1850s, but that room opened in 1976.

In 1975 the Senate was going through a whole process of institutional self-examination. It set up a Commission on the Operation of the Senate to figure out how the Senate could be managed more efficiently. Senator Byrd realized that quite likely he was going to be the majority leader in 1977. The Senate also created the Select Committee to Study the Senate Committee System. These were two fundamental investigative bodies with very tight deadlines to report and to have any recommended changes in place in January 1977. And when the Senate convened in 1977 they delayed organizing the committees for several months until they could resolve sensitive issues associated with realigning Senate committee jurisdictions, multiple jurisdictions, who handles the foreign economic finance, for instance.

But this whole sense of tradition pervaded discussions of change. If we are going to make changes we want to make sure that they are consistent with what's been done in the past. And the creation of the historical office in 1975 certainly was a part of that wave. As we moved from 1975 on up through 1980, it was a matter of all of that beginning to bear fruit. By 1980, I think we had the stature in our office to be able to recommend to the majority leader and the minority leader, "This is what you should do." If there was to be such a study group, here's what they might consider. So it's not a matter of just going in and sitting around a table and saying, "Has anybody got any ideas?" But again, they had as recent examples of format and substance these two study committees that existed in 1975 and 1976.

**Scott:** As models.

**Baker:** As models.

**Scott:** The study group on the Commemoration of the United States Senate Bicentenary issues its report in 1982. In those two years, how often does the study group meet and how do things work?

**Baker:** They didn't meet that often. There's a transcript, or summary of maybe three meetings, four meetings. And of course, we did prepare a final report

based on those meetings. But it involved bringing people from around the country to Washington. This raised a few headaches, how are you going to pay for this? Fortunately, we were able to find some funds to do that. That also established legitimacy of this operation. If the Senate is willing to spend good money to bring people here, then it must be a serious purpose. The main unanticipated development was the change in party control as a result of the 1980 election. And so the chairman of this committee, by the time it got organized, was a Republican, former floor leader Hugh Scott. And Howard Baker was the majority leader at that time and Howard Baker has a real strong sense of the institution. After all, his father-in-law, Everett Dirksen, had been a senator and he'd been in the Senate for a while. Again, all the planets aligned and it was a wonderful opportunity.

The change in party control absolutely helped things. The one thing we recognized from the Republicans was that they wanted to start clean. They wanted to not run the Senate the way the Democrats had done for the past 26 years. But on the other hand the Senate is such a profoundly traditional body that you can't do that. You don't have that license to institute stark change. So you have to go back and pick and choose from the historical models. Well, who better than the staff of a historical office to help you determine what those models were. But it was, in many respects, a clean slate. Certainly it was in terms of the people that we dealt with. No more obstreperous committee clerks who wouldn't let us look at their records. You know, all of a sudden those people were replaced by Republican committee clerks. Some of them may have been just as obstreperous by nature as their predecessors, but at least they were new and we now were the old people on the block. We had been around for five whole years!

**Scott:** One more thing before we move to this watershed moment with the 1980 election. I wanted to ask you about the office's role in creating Resolution 474. Senator Byrd proposes Resolution 474 which would establish new rules to govern the accessibility of Senate committee papers. The Senate had never had such a rule. What was going on behind the scenes? How did the office help him create that resolution? Did you draft it?

**Baker:** We drafted it. We had some good help from Michael Davidson who was the brand-new Senate legal counsel. That resolution was passed in 19...

**Scott:** It passed in 1980, but it goes into effect in March of 1981. It passed while Senator Byrd was majority leader.

**Baker:** Right. The Senate established an office of legal counsel, as opposed to legislative counsel, in 1979 and Michael Davidson was the first director of it. Prior to that time the Senate used private law firms to help with any legal issues. That approach proved to be kind of self defeating and very expensive.

**Scott:** And Watergate had made it such an issue.

**Baker:** That's right. So I got to work with Mike Davidson, a terrific fellow who also was fundamentally interested in historical records. But it also grew out of our developing relationship with the National Archives. The Archives would say to a researcher, and did say famously on one occasion when Merrill Peterson called the Archives and wanted to look at some Senate Finance Committee records from the 1850s. The first thing the custodians did there was to call the Senate Finance Committee and say, "Some scholar is trying to get into your records. Do you want that to happen?" So we realized that we needed to come up with a number. The Archives was sort of operating on a fifty-year rule basis. Everything is closed for fifty years if it hadn't been opened at the time it was created. Well, that was absurd. And again, with the public documents commission focusing on these issues, these were hot issues. There was a little one-upmanship because the House had a fifty-year rule. Our feeling was, the Senate ought to be able to do better than the House. We just came up with twenty years. That seemed reasonable. That's the definition of a generation, twenty to twenty-five years. If we had to negotiate to thirty we would have done it. But let's start with twenty. The records had to be at the National Archives in order to come under this twenty-year opening policy. So if a committee decided not to send records, like the Intelligence Committee, then it was moot. So, with some really good legal draftsmanship by Mike Davidson, we got this resolution put together and it was something that really appealed to Stan Kimmitt and he cleared it with [Robert Byrd] and we got it adopted. And it was a very happy day in the office for sure.

**Scott:** I can imagine. That is a huge coup!

**Baker:** It is! It really is. And of course it only applies to the official records of the Senate at the National Archives. Years later when Karen Paul succeeded in getting a comparable resolution adopted, an advisory resolution, saying that members should take care of their personal papers and send them to repositories, the day that it was adopted finally—it was a House and Senate

concurrent resolution—Karen and I did a major dance down the hall. When you see Karen Paul and me dancing—

**Scott:** It's a special occasion.

**Baker:** It is a special occasion, yes.

**Scott:** That brings us up to the November election of 1980 which is a watershed moment in American political history, particularly in the Senate where twelve incumbents were defeated and six senators retired. So you have a huge turnover. Twelve of those individuals didn't realize that they wouldn't be coming back. So it seems to me that this could be a real moment of crisis for the office. How are we going to get in touch with these folks? What did you do?

**Baker:** There weren't a lot of us here to go meet with those senators. We didn't have any archivists on the staff at the time. [Associate Historian] Don [Ritchie] and I were pretending to be archivists. I remember that he went and had a famous meeting with George McGovern, who had been defeated, to convince him that his papers ought to go back to South Dakota. Needless to say, the worst possible time to talk with any senator about sending papers back to their home state is when that home state has just defeated a reelection bid. So he went off to Princeton and only years later did he come to appreciate that South Dakota was the place and made amends in that direction. We were very busy going and talking not only to senators but mostly to their senior staff. It is the great truism of the 1980 election that "no one saw it coming." No one saw the Republican victory coming at all. Those who were defeated, some may have had a sense that they were in trouble. The Panama Canal treaty debates two years earlier certainly softened the ground for defeat in some cases. We tried to put together guidelines that we could hand out and we had the printed copies of our 1978 conference proceedings. The least receptive audience for something like that is going to be someone who is wondering where the packing boxes are coming from. "How do we pay to ship them without wiping out our office expense account, which we'd like to convert to pay supplements for departing staff?" Or, "How can we incinerate all our records?" That is when the seed was planted in 1980 to get a professional archivist on staff.

**Scott:** Because it just overwhelmed the office.

**Baker:** Absolutely! First of all, we needed more people. We started off with four, and then five, and we were under some limitations in terms of space

and money to expand much beyond that. But 1980 was the definitive argument for having strong archival support staff. Ever since then, you know, I've said to anyone who'll listen that the archival services of our office are the bread and butter work of the office. This is something that if our office ceased to exist, it would have to happen. It would grow up again in some other form, but it's absolutely fundamental to members. That's a story for another time.

**Scott:** How long did you wait after the election returns came in before you contacted them? What did you say? It must have been a very sensitive time.

**Baker:** And it always is. First of all, the day following the election nobody is answering the telephones. A week or so later, staff begin to slowly come back to the office, coming to grips with what they have to face. So, we would try to put something in writing because it was very difficult to track down the defeated senator. There were cases like Paula Hawkins, of Florida. She was a product of that 1980 election. When she was defeated six years later, she just didn't show up at the office anymore. She simply abandoned the office, walked away from it, as I've heard the story from her staff, and I think that's close to being accurate.

**Scott:** Did you rely on contacts that you had established within the office of some of these senators if they had people who were more historically minded?

**Baker:** The impression I'd like to leave with you about all this was that we were not at all in control of that situation. It was sort of like fighting a conflagration with a garden hose. We felt every once in a while we were doing something good. We summoned up people like Gene Jenkins and John Sobotka and a couple of others who had emerged by that time as people who really had the street "cred," who were knowledgeable. But the potential audience, the actual audience was just not receptive. They wanted to throw things in boxes. Undoubtedly a lot of records were destroyed. The perennial question about constituent correspondence, you know, which had a lot of social security numbers back in those days. Should that be saved? And a lot of it by nature was tossed at that point. It was a chaotic time.

**Scott:** How did the historical office manage the transition from Democratic leadership under which it had been created to Republican leadership? Was there a moment when the returns were coming in on that November day when you worried about the office and whether it would survive the transition?

**Baker:** I remember that day as if it were yesterday. I remember going out for a run in the morning thinking, “this is interesting, another election,” and so forth. And then sitting at home at night watching the results come in and realizing that we had to start all over again in terms of our political connections with the Senate. Because there was no guarantee. We, like anyone else on Capitol Hill who doesn’t hold an election certificate, are so-called employees at will. It might be the will of the incoming Republicans who had not tasted power in the Senate since 1954. Nineteen-fifty-four. We didn’t really want to be a victim of that. We wanted to say, “No, you need history more than ever to have this continuity.”

The big question mark was the new Secretary of the Senate William Hildenbrand, a close aide to Howard Baker and former aide to Delaware senator J. Caleb Boggs. Bill was a very shrewd Republican Party secretary. I remember watching him from the gallery of the Senate Chamber. It was really interesting to see his balletic movements around the floor and what he was doing. So I had a lot of respect for him as a political operator. Again, I was very much intimidated by him. You know, I didn’t have anything in common with him other than that we both worked for the Senate. We knew he, at least, was going to continue working for the Senate. [Laughs]

Then there is the story about the *Washington Evening Star* newspaper right after the election coming out with a banner headline. I think there is a copy in our files. “Help Wanted.” They did a two-part issue where they listed the names of senior staff and their salaries, pulled out of the records that the Senate publishes. There are all these great jobs: “Do you want to be the Librarian of the Senate? The Historian of the Senate? The Financial Clerk? Here you go, here’s what these people make!”

And there was Bill Hildenbrand putting up a sign on the door of the secretary of the Senate’s office saying, “Open under New Management.” He covers this very nicely in his oral history interview. Fortunately, Howard Baker was going to be the new majority leader and had a real balanced view of the institution. He said to Hildenbrand, “If people are doing their jobs effectively, they should be allowed to stay in those jobs.” Which was a monumental—in terms of the institution—a monumental turning point, because it was the first test since the 1950s of continuity in the face of party change. In 1953 when the Republicans took over, and in 1955 when the Democrats took over again, a number of the offices under the secretary of the Senate switched their supervisors. So the librarian would become the assistant librarian. And the assistant librarian would become the librarian. Or they’d bring in somebody altogether different.

The Senate, I think, in terms of moving away from a patronage-based administrative, legislative, and financial staff owes an awful lot to Howard Baker and to Bill Hildenbrand.

About 25 years later, I gave a talk at the University of Tennessee Summer Institute for Teachers—it was sponsored by the Howard Baker Center—about the difference between the Senate and the House. And I said, “Well, here’s a classic example: in 1995 when the House changed control the first thing they did was fire the historian. In 1981 when control changed in the Senate, Senator Howard Baker said, ‘If they are doing a good job, let them stay.’” And he just beamed. He was sitting there in the aisle.

**Scott:** Oh, he was there?

**Baker:** He was there. He beamed, he loved that. It was like closure. I just wanted to thank him, not only from the perspective of our office, but for what he did to support the institutional continuity of the Senate.

**Scott:** Had you made one of the priorities of the office to be nonpartisan?

**Baker:** Absolutely. We didn’t have a moment’s thought about anything other than a nonpartisan office, which is the beauty of the office being under the secretary of the Senate. I think that all the time Frank Valeo was secretary, from 1966 through 1977, he prided himself in following the Congressional Research Service model of nonpartisanship and fair and balanced service. That’s what he brought from the Library of Congress. Even though he was the Democratic Party secretary for several years, when he became the secretary of the whole Senate, he realized he had one hundred bosses and everyone was equal in terms of what they deserved. He instilled in his department heads, for sure, that attitude. The quickest way to lose your job is to show any partisan preference in the administering of your services to the Senate community.

**Scott:** And making it through this transition must have been evidence that you made it, that you were a nonpartisan office.

**Baker:** That’s right, it really did. That’s a very shrewd observation, I think. It put the seal of approval. And again, in an institution where staff turns over quite rapidly, and particularly in the late seventies—the Senate reached its peak in terms of the number of staff in 1979 and it has sort of gone down a little bit since then. Anybody that had been around for six years, you know, really was



an old timer. The office had been around for six years. So, yes, the years of preparation were pretty much over. Phase one was over. And starting in 1981 we moved into phase two.

**Scott:** I'd like to close with one last question. I'd like your impressions of the institution after this watershed election. When the Congress convened in 1981 under new leadership, after having been under Democratic leadership for twenty-six years, did you observe any changes? Did things feel different? What was it like to be in the Senate under Mike Mansfield in 1975 versus the Senate of Howard Baker in 1981?

**Baker:** The word "openness" comes to mind, very much so. Not that the Democrats were closed, but the Democrats had been doing what they had been doing for several decades. All of a sudden it's, "Let's look for new ways to proceed." "Let's invite more people to sit at the table." That didn't last too long. That's typical of any new relationship and so forth. Then you get comfortable and you get into the second session of that Congress and all of a sudden the same old problems appear. But 1981 brought lots of hope and optimism. It was tempered, however, by the incoming class of freshman senators who were—

**Scott:** A big class.

**Baker:** They were a big class. And frankly, there were a lot of people in that class who were elected not so much because of who they were, but because the voters were angry at the incumbent senator. The test of that came six years later when many of them lost their seat.

**Scott:** Are there members in particular who you feel fit in that category?

**Baker:** Well, I mentioned Paula Hawkins earlier. I'd have to look at the list of the senators. It is astounding, and this is a fact above all other facts to shed some light on the Senate of that transitional period. The previous three elections, 1976, 1978, and 1980 brought in fifty-five new senators. Now some of them were short termers, but it fundamentally lowered the experience level, the seniority level of senators. And sure, the Senate always has its senior members who have been around a long time and then you'll always have one-termers who just kind of get here because they weren't the incumbent, but the average level of experience went down. The attitude was, "Well, that's not so bad. We need to be thinking in fresh new ways."

**Scott:** There was an anti-incumbent sentiment in 1980, much as I think there is today, that helped usher in that sea change.

**Baker:** The one big change was Senator Byrd who was absolutely devastated by this. First of all, he had lost his job as majority leader.

**Scott:** After only four years.

**Baker:** That's right. And then about that time in late 1981, his sixteen-year-old grandson, Jon Michael Moore, was killed in an automobile accident. He fell asleep one morning driving back from his paper route and died in the accident. That really devastated him and certainly that was a monumental blow. It didn't help to have the change in the Senate also. And that's when the Democrats began to think about meeting on a regular basis for party caucuses, to have what might be termed group therapy sessions. They didn't have to do that when they were flying high.

**Scott:** One last question: What were your impressions of Howard Baker as majority leader? As Senator? As politician? Did you meet with him as you had with the other majority leaders?

**Baker:** You know, as a department head under the Secretary of the Senate there is a structural problem there about meeting with the party leaders. The person who is supposed to meet with the party leaders is the secretary. And then you meet with the secretary. So there's a clear chain of command. However, the reason I mention this is that there seems to be some license given to historians. So, any contacts always took place with full knowledge of the secretary. Howard Baker, I had always had enormous respect for Howard Baker. I liked him then as a human being. I liked his sense of humor; he didn't take himself too seriously. That characteristic made him a very effective party leader and, later, chief of staff to President Ronald Reagan.

Some of us remember the famous day in late 1980 after the election when he walked into the Disbursing Office on the second floor of the Capitol, right next door to the Republican leader's suite and looked around. The disbursing staffers were really impressed that the new soon-to-be majority leader cared about their operations and so-forth. Of course, what he was doing was surveying the space, which was right next door to his office. The office his father-in-law had had. Within a day the word came that this nice, avuncular new majority leader wanted them all cleared out and they moved downstairs—this was in 1981—to the floor

below which had been a barber shop. Then as soon as the Hart Building opened in 1982, they moved over here. So, he was capable of making, you know, tough decisions, for sure, but he came packaged in a very nice manner.

He cared a lot about the institution's history. When I asked for help from his office, for various things, he never turned me down. You know, I was careful what I asked for, but it was a very good relationship. At that point, I had developed a relationship with the Everett McKinley Dirksen Research Center out in Pekin, Illinois. I had first been associated with them in 1976 when they opened. They had a big opening ceremony and the archivist of the United States was going to give the keynote address. Well, the archivist, James Rhodes' plane was delayed in Washington National Airport so he was late arriving for the ceremony. So they looked around in desperation for someone, anyone, from Washington [Laughs]. So I ended up giving an impromptu speech. Subsequently, Senator Roman Hruska, who was a pal of Dirksen's, inserted it into the *Congressional Record*. This speech basically was about what it is we are trying to do in 1976 to get the Senate Historical Office going. From that point on I worked with the Dirksen Center and then eventually spent twelve years on its board of directors back in the days when Senate staff were allowed to serve on boards of directors. Senator Baker knew that I was helpful to the Dirksen Center. And that relationship with the Dirksen Center continues, even in my post-Senate life today.

**Scott:** Thank you.

**Baker:** You're very welcome.

**Bicentennials and Books**  
**Interview #3**  
**Wednesday, July 21, 2010**

**Scott:** Welcome. Senator Robert Byrd passed away on June 28. At that time he was the Senate's longest serving member. I'd like to start with your reflections about Senator Byrd's contribution to the Senate as an institution and, more specifically, to the Historical Office.

**Baker:** I always counted it as my enormous good fortune that my time here coincided with his best years here. As historians of the Senate we all think, "What era would we have liked to live in?" You get that question a lot. And sure, you want to live in the Golden Age of the Senate in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. What it would have been like to know Thomas Hart Benton or Daniel Webster? Without being trite about it, there were a lot of these people and others in the persona of Senator Byrd. It has risen to the status of a cliché to say that Senator Byrd would have been comfortable in any Senate of the United States in any era, 18th century right on up through the 21st century. That is a way, I think, of getting at his formality as a human being. It's hard to think of him with his coat off, walking around in a sport shirt. But also, he was custodian of the Senate's constitutional role and the traditions and the interior culture of the Senate.

It came home to me once when a senator told me privately that she liked to use her BlackBerry in the Senate Chamber, but she knew that Senator Byrd didn't approve of using electronic devices in the Senate Chamber. There was a bit of an uproar about that when laptops were first developed and some wanted to use laptops. So whenever Senator Byrd entered the chamber, they put their BlackBerries away. He was in many ways the guardian of the Senate's traditions and culture.

The development of the Senate Historical Office was greatly aided by the coincidence of a series of major historical anniversaries, including the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Senate. And then to have supporting us in the planning Senator Robert Byrd and his long-time associate and assistant, Joe Stewart, as Secretary of the Senate, you talk about the planets being aligned! It was very fortunate. So on that personal level, it was a wonderful experience to work with him. Senator Byrd's interest in the institutional history of the Senate kind of radiated out through the operations of the Senate more broadly. No one had really thought about putting into writing an institutional history of the Senate. Why would you want to have that? Well, you can answer that very quickly if you only think about

the brand new members who come in who may have had the worst possible preparation for being U.S. senators, namely, a stint in the House of Representatives. You really need to retool and regroup and rethink. A written history certainly was one tool toward that. Orientation programs with the leaders actively involved was another way to transmit that culture, but throughout all of that, Senator Byrd was the spark plug.

I can't think of another contemporary senator who is anywhere close to being in his circle of the firmament. So the obvious question that we hear all the time is: Who's going to be the new Senator Byrd? And my answer to that usually is, we'll have to wait and see. It takes a while. We use the term "father of the Senate," and sometimes the press refers to such people as the "dean." The father of the Senate was a 19<sup>th</sup>-century term. (In Great Britain, the longest-serving member of the House of Commons has the formal title of "Father of the House." He advises on matters related to the body's history.) There have been, over the years, a number of senior senators who people just looked to for their wisdom, for their counsel, for their calming sense of deep knowledge. Certainly, he was it. He would have said that Richard Russell was his idea of a father of the Senate. I think very deliberately he took Richard Russell as a guide as he learned about the institution.

**Scott:** He had been here for decades before he reached the stature of the "dean of the Senate."

**Baker:** Indeed. It's easy to read history backwards and to identify when all of a sudden the early Robert Byrd gave way to the modern Robert Byrd. Some would say 1967 when he had been here for eight years. Prior to that time I suspect he was interested in holding some sort of Senate party office as a low rung on the ladder to something better. This is a man who literally climbed the ladder out of poverty, a ladder out of a poor education into a much better education. When he became Democratic Conference Secretary in 1967, that was the first rung, and then he eventually became assistant leader, the whip, in 1971, and then finally the leader in 1977. By the time 1977 rolled around I think he was a very different man in terms of his political beliefs and he shed a lot of his earlier home-based kind of attitudes and had by necessity learned to be a moderating force. Nobody is going to have any leadership role in the Senate if they are not viewed as a person of the middle. He did that very well.

**Scott:** Someone who is capable of making compromises, striking deals?

**Baker:** And of just bringing together, if not all the members of your party, or all the members of the Senate, at least a large majority of them. Bringing them into the same tent and looking for ways to keep them in the conversation. There have always been some who are just outliers who will be unreachable. The leaders are not going to spend a lot of time with them as long as he or she has the votes they need to get the programs going. There are stories that are told of Senator Byrd literally lobbying for legislation that meant very much to him or to his state and the care with which he just worked it in an old fashioned way. He wasn't interested in wholesale vote-getting. He was interested in retail selling, one at a time, case by case. It generally worked for him. I think other senators, first of all, respected the energy and more than the energy, the persistence. That's the big word for Senator Byrd: persistence. Most senators as you well know are just too busy, their attention spans are fragmented, shattered beyond belief. He had this laser like . . . again it's kind of a cliché and I apologize for using it, but he really would zoom in on an objective and it was like a dog with a bone. He wouldn't let go of it until he achieved it.

We found, in working with him on the four-volume history of the Senate project, that we had certain ideas as historians that we thought we'd like to see in each of these volumes. And we generally had good meetings of the minds on that, but I remember one time sitting down with him to propose a volume three that would be a sort of fact book about the Senate. And his response was, "Well Dr. Baker, that could be your book, but that's not my book." [Laughs] So I can just translate that experience into a much larger field of negotiation for major legislation. He didn't back off easily but he also wasn't a Johnny one-note who was just going to fight, bleed, and die to get everything that he thought he could get. You know, compromise, of course, is the big word.

**Scott:** In terms of mentoring other senators, and maybe the way that he grew into this title of "dean of the Senate," it seems to have something to do with leading these orientation meetings for new members. Did he initiate those orientation meetings or did they predate his leadership?

**Baker:** It's probably both. As far as I can determine, the first formal orientation program for new senators was 1976. But that may be because the historical office was created in 1975. [Laughs] So there is that possibility. But many people were interested because there was a fairly good size class of senators elected in 1976. As people looked around for precedents, there really were none. Nobody could remember having done that. Before, the new senator would sit down with the incumbent senator from his or her state, or if they were political

rivals, then they would look around for somebody from a nearby state who might be helpful. Or, they might go to the secretary of the Senate if it happened to be a long-serving secretary of the Senate. You couldn't avoid in 1976 doing something formal because the new members demanded it. Here's Senator Byrd in 1976, about to become the majority leader, and he expected that he would be the majority leader. He realized that he had to continue the kind of hands-on approach that he took as the assistant majority leader, the whip. All of a sudden, Mike Mansfield, this somewhat detached god-like oracle, is off the scene and in comes Senator Byrd with a whole new style of management. Senator Byrd couldn't change his persona, that's who he was. I think that's what the times demanded.

Also, 1976 was a time of a lot of institutional self-evaluation, as we've discussed already. And Senator Byrd was right in the middle of all that. Just as a few years later he was involved in the recodification of the Senate rules, for the first time since 1884. Nobody else would have thought of doing something like that, but it's sort of tidying the place up. But the rules are important, or some of them are, while some of them are dead letters. As far as I can tell, he was not the engine pulling the orientation programs. But he was certainly the person who blessed the enterprise. He came and did what the secretaries of the Senate and sergeants at arms, and party secretaries, asked him to do.

**Scott:** And you were part of these orientation meetings, starting in 1976. What kind of role did you play?

**Baker:** It was a really big deal for us because all of a sudden the leadership of the Senate and the people we all worked for realized that a good teaching model to use for these new students, incoming senators, is a historical model. Follow the history, take it one step at a time. How did we get from there to here? So, naturally you need somebody to come in and do that in one hundred words or less, or maybe a little bit longer. And throughout the various orientation programs, there was always a historical component. Generally, it was at the beginning. In those earlier days, it may have been a little farther into the schedule. But now, into the 21st century, the programs begin with a talk in the Old Senate Chamber by the Senate Historian, for maybe half an hour, and this is around 5 o'clock on a Sunday afternoon, and then a big dinner for all the senators-elect hosted by the president pro tempore and the majority leader and the minority leader, so that's their official welcome. But they get warmed up a little bit for it, by being in the Old Senate Chamber and hearing about the history of the Senate from the perspective of the old chamber. It's easier to talk to them about the

Golden Age of the Senate. It doesn't get as complicated as it does when you get down to more recent times.

**Scott:** How did you approach these history lessons? What did you focus on?

**Baker:** Well, I gave it a lot of thought over the years. You are never satisfied with each presentation, there is always something that you can do better. But I realized pretty quickly that this room is a magnificent prop. All you have to do is point and every part of the room has symbolic value. You point to the galleries, and the fact that they built galleries only some years after they first moved in there. Why all of a sudden do they need galleries? Eighteen twenty-eight, well, what was going on? And you can go from there. Then there is a press gallery and that leads to stories about the relationship between the media and the Senate and individual senators. Sometimes I would try to do a fact-and-figure brief routine because every senator wants to know where he or she fits into the big picture, what number they are; where do they place on the long chain of senators going back to 1789. I'd mention some firsts and whatnot, but just a bit of that.

In the 1982 orientation program, the whole program was done in the current Senate Chamber. I was given 45 minutes and I knew going into it that that was much too much time. But the people who scheduled us, there was sort of a window and they needed to fill it, so I was the victim. [Laughs] Sure enough, about 25 minutes into it, I remember Secretary of the Senate Bill Hildenbrand sort of tugging on my sleeve and saying that's enough. Twenty-five minutes. And that's right, that's about enough. Once in the year 2000 I had a chance to speak to the entire membership of the United Nations Security Council meeting in the Old Senate Chamber. I deliberately kept it to about 25 minutes, maybe even 20 minutes. Later, I thought, I seem to have an attentive audience. Probably I could have stretched it and gone on a little more but, you know, we all give history lectures and we like to believe that our audience is just hanging on our every word. Around here you just know that there are tiers of the audience. The top tier is with you every step of the way and the bottom tier is checking their BlackBerries to figure out where their next meeting is. So you try to hit that balance and that's what we'd try to do in the orientation program.

I would add that the substance of the program was determined by the number of new senators. There are a couple of years when there were only three or four new senators and so we didn't really have a formal program those years. It was all done in the old fashioned way of having the leaders sit down two-on-two,



or four-on-two, with the new members. But any more than say, six, in a class, then you are in business. There was also the challenge of Senate races that were decided after the general election date, or senators resigning to move into cabinet positions, or to become president. Sort of an echo effect as the second group of senators arrives. You find yourself sitting down, as I did with Don Ritchie one day in the Old Senate Chamber, for Al Franken and his wife. We had a delightful time. About 45 minutes. It was quite an experience.

Certainly there were stars--the celebrities who came into the Senate. Like Hillary Clinton in 2000. I enjoyed speaking with her one-on-one after the formal session in the Old Senate Chamber. That applies to many other senators-elect, including Barack Obama in 2004. He and Mrs. Obama were the first ones to approach me at the lectern after the presentation to ask specific questions. They were very intense kind of questions. I remember suggesting to him that he might want to do a second book—one about his experiences as a freshman senator. [Laughs] And he looked at me and smiled and said, “The contract’s already signed.” [Laughs]

**Scott:** I noticed in what I think is a post orientation memo that you had hand-written in the margins, “This was a tough audience.” I wonder how receptive were the new members to, let’s say, your history lessons or to any part of the orientation meeting? I’m not sure that you were there throughout the orientation meeting or if it was just for your presentation. They must feel overwhelmed—there is a lot of information coming at them—and I wonder how attentive are they?

**Baker:** You put your finger on the 25-minute rule. I suspect the “tough audience” note came as a result of something more than 25 minutes. I just think that’s too much to expect because of everything that’s going through their minds. They are thinking about hiring staff and getting decent office space. Basic survival issues and all of a sudden some historian is up there, going on about something in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. So it’s really important to judge your audience. I don’t know what year that was, but there was a lot of pain involved in writing “This was a tough audience.” [Laughs]

**Scott:** In the case of the one-on-one sessions, would you sit down one-on-one with them and give them the same presentation that you would have offered to the larger audience?

**Baker:** Yes, in a more relaxed informal way, but not always. In some cases we'd be told to stand by or come down and meet senator so-and-so in the Old Senate Chamber or the secretary's office. And then we'd get word at the last minute that the senator-elect or new senator had somebody coming in from the home state or had to meet with someone in the Disbursing Office. That was pretty much the end of that.

I remember there were certain senators who had a natural interest in trying to learn about the institution through its history. And I remember Senator Jeff Bingaman of New Mexico, I think in late 1982, we did a program in the Senate Chamber. He was sitting up there in the front row. I had been writing a book on a New Mexico senator and he grabbed on to that and we became good friends. His interests were pretty active about the role of previous New Mexico senators and about the history of Senate committees with jurisdiction over energy and environmental matters. He was also responsible for boosting the sales of the resulting book.

Senator Sherrod Brown of Ohio is a deeply committed student of Senate history. He gave his brother a birthday present—the present was lunch in the Senators' Dining Room with me! [Laughs] His brother, whose name is Charlie Brown, is a history lover and has an encyclopedic memory for U.S. political history. I have found that there is always a little bit of testing going on in these exchanges to see who knows more. Senator Byrd would ask very innocent and straightforward questions but as some of his staff observed recently, he didn't ask a question if he didn't know the answer to the question. And if you didn't know the answer to the question, then you better go find out the answer. So, there's always testing going on. These senatorial "students" are not always the docile students that you think they might be. They wouldn't be here, in most cases, if they didn't have a whole lot to offer.

**Scott:** What kind of person was Senator Byrd?

**Baker:** I want to say that he was a somewhat insecure person. But I don't know if I'm qualified to make that kind of judgment. But he seemed to have the demeanor of an insecure person. In dealing with his insecurities, his lack of formal education, he didn't know his mother, who died within a year of his birth. His parents handed him off to relatives to raise. I don't know about him, but most people who grow up in that kind of a situation can have a tough time. I think of the term autodidact. He was a self-taught man, in every sense of the word. I've never met a person who better exemplifies the fiery passion to learn as much as he

could, ranging over a vast canvas of interests. At his funeral, one of the ministers referred to Senator Byrd as living life as if every day was going to be his last, but learning as if he were going to live forever. I have the image of his driver loading up Senator Byrd's Senate automobile with books to take home so that he could read over the weekend for whatever project he happened to be working on.

He was such a complex man. People paint him in simple colors sometimes but they are really mistaken to do that. I had the pleasure of his company for 30 years and I'm still stumbling trying to answer your very appropriate straightforward question. I can't evaluate him. I can't judge him in terms of his role as a legislative leader or as a colleague among senators. I can only evaluate him as somebody who helped me to learn a lot of history. In 2006, my wife and I went to his wife's funeral. He said to my wife, referring to me, "Here's my mentor." And I said, "Au contraire." This is the man who has taught me a great deal about the Senate. I think of my doctoral dissertation advisor. He was an important person in my life, as I'm sure yours was, but Senator Byrd was my permanent dissertation advisor. He was the person with whom you always wanted to make sure that you knew what you were talking about. You always wanted to be out a little bit ahead. When you come into this job and you know very little about the Senate as an institution, you figure it's going to take three lifetimes to become competent. So you try to read and learn as fast as you can and as much as you can. And certainly working with Senator Byrd on his history of the Senate project was an ideal opportunity. Not only did you learn it and then write it down once, but then you had to read it probably 28 times in terms of galley proofs and page proofs so it really sunk in. It was a wonderful learning experience. I, and certainly others in the Historical Office, saw him as a remarkable unique human being. How will he be viewed 30 years down the road? We historians all try to avoid those kinds of questions. [Laughs]

**Scott:** We ended our last session discussing how the Historical Office survived this watershed election in 1980 and the change in party leadership. Before we move into phase two I thought we should talk about your partner in crime through this transition, Donald Ritchie. How did you come to hire him as associate historian? When did he come on? How did you divide up the work in the office?

**Baker:** Probably in the second paragraph of my first interview with you I should have brought Don into the conversation. That's how important he is to the development of this office. Somehow we managed to get along without him from September of 1975 until March of 1976. We did stumble along. [Laughs] But that

just made the difference that much more noticeable once he came on board on March 8, 1976. That's a date, like my wedding anniversary, that I remember.

The community of Washington-based historians was much larger in the mid-'70s than it is now. There were lots of social events, semi-annual luncheons at the Faculty Club at George Washington University, where you'd have 100 or more academic and government historians coming together. It didn't take me too long to hear the two words "Donald" and "Ritchie" put together.

I went to the annual meeting of the American Historical Association in December of 1975 in Atlanta. By that time, word of the office's creation had spread. This was thanks to the *New York Times* and articles in historical organization publications. The profession in general received the news in a very serious and upbeat way. I'm not sure today, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century . . . political history is still respected but it's not as respected in the academic world as it was in the mid-'70s. It was also a tight job market in the mid-'70s. I walked into the hotel in Atlanta and all of a sudden I felt like a rock star. All of these people are approaching me who figured out that's what I was up to. One woman, Connie Schultz, no relation to the identically named wife of Senator Sherrod Brown, but a professor at the University of South Carolina now, had been a history graduate student at the University of Maryland. I remember running into her in the exhibition hall. She gives me this big pitch. And I thought she was pitching for the job for herself. Turns out that she's saying, "You really have got to meet Don Ritchie." She had known Don as a fellow graduate student. Don had been the editor of the history journal there and had been there a long time because he had done both a masters degree and a PhD there.

**Scott:** And spent some time in the service.

**Baker:** That's right. He had time off for good behavior, coming back after being toughened up in the Marines. So he was part of the fiber of the University of Maryland history department. Once he got his degree he held, like a lot of other people did, several part-time teaching jobs simultaneously, and he also worked for the American Historical Association. So his name was very well known. It didn't take me long to hear about him from many sources, but I'll always remember Connie Schultz with great clarity and passion saying, "You've got to talk to Don." And Don didn't set her up to it. Of that I'm sure.

I met Don at the Atlanta convention and encouraged him to apply. The letters of recommendation began to come in and I remember getting one from

Professor Wayne Cole at the University of Maryland. Professor Cole was not Don's dissertation advisor but he was and is a distinguished historian of American foreign relations. He wrote the best letter of recommendation I have ever seen written about anybody, including letters that he also wrote to me about some of his own doctoral students. But the one about Don was just off the charts. It expressed so much genuine feeling in a page and a half of text. And of course, I had put Don pretty much near the top of the pile for the interviews. I remember our interview very well and there were a couple of other impressive candidates. In hindsight, I realized at the time I didn't know the names of most of the people who I interviewed. But after the fact, it turns out that a lot of them stayed around Washington and they did get jobs in the history field. I had forgotten that I'd interviewed them and I have never been sure whether there is a certain distance in our relationship because they didn't get the Senate job. There were one or two other very strong contenders, but I had no doubts whatsoever that Don was the right guy.

For the next 34 years I didn't for one second ever doubt that conclusion. We had a wonderful relationship. We never had any difficult words. I've used the word "mentor" with regard to Senator Byrd. My other mentor at the time was Don. I had the title of Senate Historian; he had the PhD. I realized I had better get my own PhD in a big hurry. Don has about him a style of being able to teach you what you really need to know but in an unthreatening, very helpful way. As a result, Don has a very wide network of people throughout this country and abroad, historians and others, who see him as a very important person in the development of their own professional careers. That's my view about Don in my own career.

I don't want to understate my affection and enthusiasm for Don. But I couldn't overstate it.

**Scott:** When Don came on board, there was a lot of work to be done. How did you set about assigning tasks?

**Baker:** It came at us very quickly and we realized that there were three major areas that demanded our attention. First came the archival issues: members' papers, which we've discussed earlier in these interviews, and committee records. I went off to conferences of archival associations to learn what I didn't know and I always came back from those kind of chastened about how much there was to know.

Another was developing a catalog of where former senators' papers are located and what has been written about those senators. There was no comprehensive bibliography of works by and about senators or of books about the institution. It's in that second category that Don grabbed on very quickly and put together a 1,000-title bibliography of the Senate. It had a heavily illustrated paperback format that we could use as an office "business card" in the historical and the Capitol Hill communities. Also Don identified some of the most significant former senators of all times and we had a section in there of biographies about them. So it was a mixture of both institutional histories and personal biographies. It was very well received and you open it up and you say, "Something is going on in that office." I've always felt a little guilty. My name is on the title page as the author, but Don was the guiding genius who put it together.

The third area was oral history. I realized that oral history was a big component and that I'd better learn something about it. The national Oral History Association had its upcoming conference in Asheville, North Carolina. So I went down to the Grove Park Inn and spent three delightful days. It wasn't like going to the American Historical Association where there are thousands of historians. These were several hundred friendly people who were, by nature and profession, good at asking questions. I really took an instant liking to those people and thought that we needed to get up to speed pretty quickly on interviewing former senators. There was one major oral history project underway at the time sponsored by the Association of Former Members of Congress. And they had a National Endowment for the Humanities grant—a pretty sizable grant—to go around interviewing former members. I have read some of those interviews. I've talked to some of the members who were interviewed and, of course, it was better than not having interviews, but not by much. There was a certain cookie-cutter nature to the questioning. One former senator told me that he was interviewed and then did not hear again from the person who interviewed him for about two years. Didn't see a transcript in a timely manner and then eventually did see a transcript by which time he had forgotten what he had in mind when he was making some of these responses. I think by any measure it was not a successful project. We thought, "Well, do we really want to be in the business of interviewing a lot of former senators?" Maybe not. Maybe that is important, but it's not as important as interviewing people who are really close to the machinery of the Senate, who know how to oil the gears when something breaks down to get it fixed. So that's when we decided we would talk to people like the assistant secretary of the Senate, Darrell St. Claire, one of the first people interviewed; Floyd Riddick, the long-time parliamentarian of the Senate; various secretaries of the Senate and

official reporters of debates because that helped us in our education. We really wanted to know how the Senate worked, doing the homework for those interviews. But the best possible option was to have people who had devoted 30, 40 or more years to their lives to that kind of work. So it was the beginning of creating a very strong resource. I was going to go to the next annual meeting of the Oral History Association and my father became ill. So at the last minute I had to cancel. I gave Don my airline tickets and he likes to tell the story about how he was able to use my airline tickets with my name on them, to fly out to San Diego for a conference there. From that point, Don owned the Senate Oral History Project. He has developed one of the best programs that I've seen.

**Scott:** How did you decide who would be on the list of people to approach for an interview? Did you have any trouble getting interviews in that early stage before the Oral History Project developed such a great reputation?

**Baker:** We decided who would be on the list basically by people we became interested in, whether through personal contact or by reputation. We'd get a lot of suggestions from various Senate old-timers. "You ought to go out and find so-and-so." Mark Trice, former secretary of the Senate, 1953-1955. We haven't spoken about Mark Trice in these interviews? I think he began his Senate career as a page in 1917. And, with a few breaks, he then spent most of that time as a very knowledgeable Senate insider. Don and I tried every trick in the book to get Mark Trice to participate in an oral history interview and he simply wouldn't do it. And he'd look at me and growl, "Baker! I know what you're up to! I'm not telling you anything! This is a sacred trust," and so forth. But then he would say, "But I have these photographs that you might like to see." I remember going over to his home in Bethesda and spending an afternoon going through these pictures. Of course, as you're looking at each picture he is telling these wonderful stories about what was going on in the picture. So I tried to write down as much as I could but that's not the same as a formal interview. He just wouldn't do it.

Years later, for the secretary of the Senate's newsletter, *UNUM*, there were a series of profiles on former secretaries of the Senate and I wrote one on Mark Trice. Then it went up on the Internet as part of the Senate Website, and his grandson, who was teaching history in a school in Missouri and had gone on to get a PhD in history at the University of Virginia, saw this article about his grandfather. So he called me up. Eventually he transferred to us the papers of Mark Trice which he had, as the history student in the family, fallen heir to. We then transferred those down to the National Archives. They formed a reasonably rich collection, but not a substitute for sitting down and asking him a series of

questions. They would have complimented each other very nicely to have both of these resources. There were others as well, who by dint of their personalities or their sense of duty, just didn't talk to us.

Then at the other end of that spectrum are the people who work here for a couple of years, like aides to Senate leaders or whatever and then go out and write a book about it. I remember a former aide to Majority Leader Howard Baker writing such a book. That produced a good deal of heartburn within Baker's camp. "Wait a minute, who is this guy? He doesn't know what he doesn't know." There's a whole culture, that's very much frowned upon around here, of people who use their experience to profit personally, either in terms of an ego boost, as some people might say the oral history route would be and therefore they weren't going to do it because they are going to keep these confidences, or a financial boost, and trying to do a book. It's that kind of thinking that causes people to say, I'm not going to participate. Just as the obverse of that is, people say, it was a great honor in my life--and this is certainly how I feel-- to be able to come to work at the Senate for an extended period of time and I'd like to offer whatever insights I can muster and people can take from it what they will. I came to the conclusion that if people didn't want to do oral history interviews, we probably didn't want them as subjects. Perhaps that made me feel better about not getting them, but we wanted people who were wholeheartedly interested in trying to add a small piece to this huge puzzle.

**Scott:** Did the focus of the oral history project change over time? We've already talked about how you chose not to focus on former members. What the interviews show really well is the behind the scenes institutional development of the Senate. Was that something that you envisioned from the beginning? Or did it sort of develop on its own?

**Baker:** It developed on its own. We were just going after the individual pieces of a mosaic. And all of a sudden you stand back and you see this brilliant picture emerging and it's out there for researchers and the general public and eventually this is going to be a very large program. Thanks to the Internet it's now widely available. I'm very proud of it. I'm very proud of Don Ritchie's leadership in getting that off the ground, for sure.

**Scott:** It's a tremendous project. People talk to me about it all the time even if they have no other connection with the Historical Office.



Moving a little bit into phase two, we also talked about the realization that you and Don had when those 12 senators left rather unexpectedly after the election of 1980, the realization that there was this huge archival component that you probably didn't have the staff or the knowledge to really spend as much time with it as you would like to. I'd like to talk about the decision to hire an archivist and how that came about.

**Baker:** Well, archival work is all about preservation. The decision to hire an archivist was purely self preservation [Laughs]. There I am up there speaking to many credulous audiences, you know, you are the historian, you are supposed to know about all this. But I was one lesson ahead of the class in terms of the kind of reading that I could do. Surely, as the early years went by we gained a lot of experience just by talking to people in the offices who had archival responsibilities. But then our involvement with the Public Documents Commission and our involvement with the National Archives made us realize that we have a tiger by the tail and this is goal that has been affirmed repeatedly by the highest authorities. You must do everything within your powers to ensure that the historical record of the Senate survives intact. In Arthur Schlesinger's 1974 letter, one of the things he pointed out was the Senate, if it expects the State Department and other executive branch agencies to open their documentary resources to the public in a timely way, also ought to be open. Just our mere existence as an office stimulated a lot of interest in us as a vehicle for getting access to records. We had calls from a few very prominent individuals who had some personal interest in getting into a particular body of papers that were Senate-related. It's hard to say no to those people if you don't have a good reason to say no. Or if you don't know what you are doing.

So we figured we better learn pretty quickly what we were doing. In 1982—this is the blow back from the 1980 election—as we were coming up on the next cycle of elections we turned to the National Archives for help. The Archives was having some financial problems at that point. In order to save money they were not promoting people. So we heard that there were a couple of very capable people who were in that situation. One of them was Karen Paul, who had been an archivist at the University of Virginia, who had really good credentials. I remember meeting her in the cafeteria of the National Gallery of Art for a luncheon-get-to-know-you kind of interview. We weren't talking about hiring her, we were talking about getting the National Archives to loan her to us. So it wasn't as if I had to make a long-term commitment, but I wanted somebody who could get started quickly. I was very impressed with Karen right from the very first day. I can't remember what happened in terms of her salary situation,

but I think the Senate did transfer funds to the National Archives to help them out so that we could have her services for one year. At the end of that year we renewed it for a second year. At the end of the second year, we decided to bring Karen onto the staff. We had a very sympathetic person in the office of the secretary of the Senate named Marilyn Courtot. Marilyn was by training a librarian and was very active in the field of micrographics. She really identified with this particular problem. Marilyn then went on to become assistant secretary of the Senate. She was very helpful in getting us that additional slot for an archivist.

Everybody from 1984 on has felt very good about the fact that, a) we have an archivist, and b) that the archivist is Karen Paul. Karen went on to do all kinds of pioneering studies. We kept hearing from offices, “We need an archival manual,” or, “We need to know what we’re supposed to do,” and “What kind of forms do we fill out?” One of Karen’s first responsibilities was to develop a manual. That manual has now gone through several editions. Not only has she done a manual for members’ papers, but also for committee records. Those are the bibles of the trade. The nice thing about them is that they are updated every few years to reflect the impact of on-the-ground experience and, also, electronic records. We realized very quickly that the archival side of the office was “the bread and butter” of our existence. It didn’t take two seconds for a senator to understand what it was that you were up to if you began with a reference to an archival program. So I was very supportive of that right from the beginning.

**Scott:** Did the members make use of her services right away? Or did it take a little bit of work?

**Baker:** The members that I was referring to are the people who have oversight of our office in terms of budget, funding, continued existence—members of the Committee on Rules and Administration and the Legislative Branch Appropriations Subcommittee. They thought it was great. Other senators, you know, 100 people and you get some who are passionately in favor of doing the “right thing” exactly the way we tell them to do it, and then you get the other end of the scale: “Don’t bother me, I’m too busy.”

**Scott:** Throughout phase one and into phase two, you are not only the historian of the United States Senate, but you are also a PhD student at the University of Maryland.

**Baker:** You used a great title, “Historian of the United States Senate.” Others might say, “Wow, that sounds great. That is a wonderful job, I’d love to have it.” When the office began, there was a question as to what we were going to call the office—“the Senate History Office,” “the Historical Office,” “the Office of the Senate Historian,”—and what would be the title of the people who work here. “Historian in the office of the Secretary of the Senate.” I could be “the historian in the office of the secretary of the Senate.” Well, first of all, that assumes some understanding of what the heck the secretary of the Senate is all about. I just brazenly barged ahead with “historian of the U.S. Senate.” There is a librarian of the U.S. Senate and a curator of the U.S. Senate. So it wasn’t a huge departure, but it was important, I think, to make it clear that we are historians not just for the secretary of the Senate’s office where we work, but for the whole Senate. Right now that may not seem like a big point, but earlier I thought it was a big point.

**Scott:** It took some discussion.

**Baker:** Well nobody really questioned me on it, but I was the one who was submitting the order to have the office stationery printed.

**Scott:** The other titles that follow in the office, the decision to use academic titles, associate historian and assistant historian, how did that come about?

**Baker:** I think we did use an academic model. Today, the Office of the Historian in the House of Representatives uses the title “deputy historian” instead of “associate historian.” I don’t think it ever occurred to us to use “deputy,” it sounded too bureaucratic, it sounded like some government agency—heaven forbid! And we were trying to reach out to an academic community and academics could understand them. That’s pretty much it.

**Scott:** Back to your decision to get a PhD after you start in the office. You have two master’s degrees but not the PhD. Was it something you jumped into, or did you think about it a bit? Working full-time and getting the PhD on top of that is not easy to get into.

**Baker:** And having two children around the ages of six and eight. There were a lot of opportunities to do other things. I think it was my nature as a person to want to get the highest degree I could within the field I was in. I saw my father held back by the lack of a post-high-school education. Earlier in my career, I was

in the PhD program at the University of Connecticut. I kind of shifted around and thought, well, it makes sense. When I went off to begin the PhD program at the University of Maryland, one professor there said, "You don't need a PhD in history. Take some courses, but you've got the job! Don't worry about it! You've got the job and you've got the title and that's fine." And then Walter Rundell, who was chairman of the department at the time, urged me right at the very beginning to get it. He said, "People are going to expect you to have it." And so I applied for the program. They had a very good program in governmental history. So, I didn't really give it too much thought. I just thought this is something I needed to do.

**Scott:** I think this speaks a little bit to the changes that were taking place among the staff in the 1970s as well. There would have been a period in the past when someone who had a title or worked as the Senate historian may not have needed to have that degree. But it seems that in the 1960s and 1970s there is a real professionalization of staff occurring in the Senate. Did you have a sense for that at the time? Or did it just seem natural that you would get the PhD as the historian?

**Baker:** Personally, it seemed natural that I would do it. I didn't want to spend a whole career explaining why I didn't have one. I will never forget speaking at the new senators' orientation program in 1980. The organizers prepared a paper name card for my place at the table. The card identified me, prematurely, as "Dr. Richard Baker." Before the session began, Marilyn Courtot walked up and matter-of-factly tore off the "Dr." I spent the next few years working to make sure that would not happen again.

Your question is a good one in that it suggests that there were a lot of patronage jobs around the pre-1980s Senate. Until then, no Senate librarian had bothered to attend library school. Roger Haley, whose father had been chief clerk for the Joint Committee on Printing, was the first librarian to have a library degree. He got that on the job, an MLS. So, I thought in terms of job security. History on Capitol Hill in 1975, if you mentioned history and said, "I'm working in a historical office," people would say, "Oh, you work for Fred Schwengel at the Capitol Historical Society." "No, no we don't. That's a private organization, we're part of the Senate." But the Capitol Historical Society in that day and age was the sum and substance of Fred Schwengel who was an incumbent congressman from Iowa. He lost one term but then he came back. So he was the face of history on the Hill. He was a tall and imposing fellow who always had a good story to tell you about Harry Truman or Sam Rayburn. He would pull out of

his interior coat pocket a huge sheaf of papers all enclosed in plastic to protect it against the rain in case he was doing this outside. He would read off these facts and figures and that conveyed an impression about institutional history that didn't really suggest that you needed to have advanced graduate degrees to be a purveyor of that kind of history.

I had run into this when I was the acting curator earlier in terms of discussions about establishing a sound and light show for the exterior of the Capitol. I wasn't involved in that because they didn't have the money for it in the late '60s, but that was an ongoing project as far as Fred Schwengel was concerned. The Capitol Historical Society and the Office of the Architect of the Capitol were more than ready to handle the whole project, "thank you very much." And they would bring in some PhD consultants and I think they may have done that. There wasn't any high premium put on having a graduate degree. By the mid-'70s, however, with the Commission on the Operation of the Senate, there was a sense of, "Wait a minute now, we've just ended a 16-year period where one group has been in control. Now we're going into a new era and it's time to put a premium on educational preparation." I don't know if I've answered your question fully.

**Scott:** I'd like to talk a bit more about the U.S. Capitol Historical Society as an alternate model to the House and Senate historical offices. I read that former Secretary of the Senate Kelly Johnston called the CHS a "failed effort at privatization." You've mentioned in a previous interview that it was an alternate model to Senate or House historical offices. Why has the relationship between the U.S. Capitol Historical Society and the offices in the House and Senate been a historically troubled one?

**Baker:** I think the answer to that is Fred Schwengel. Fred didn't need any help from the House and the Senate other than the help he asked for—and the purchase from his Society by Congress each year of tens of thousands of calendars for distribution by members to constituents. That appropriation formed the Society's financial backbone for years. He was not a person who was a good listener. And he didn't want to hear contrary opinion. He was long in years at that point. He had been a member of Congress, he didn't want staff telling him how he was making mistakes or what he really should be doing. He was the guiding genius behind the creation of that organization, he had sold it to House Speaker Sam Rayburn in 1962. On the Senate side, they said, "Well that's fine, go ahead and set it up. Do whatever it is you need to do."

Back to the sound and light show. Fred had been to Versailles and Mount Vernon also had a *son et lumière* program, which was very popular on summer evenings. He wanted to do that for the Capitol Building where you'd be out on the east front plaza and hear the voices of Thomas Jefferson and Abraham Lincoln coming down from the Statue of Freedom. It was hokey in the extreme. But Fred, because he was Fred, had a lot of supporters who, just to keep Fred happy without ever going into the substance of the matter, would say, "Sure Fred, sign me up. I'm happy to do it." And that was dangerous. When I was the acting curator, and then when Jim Ketchum came in as the Senate curator, one of the big issues was how to fight the Capitol Historical Society on sound and light. Eventually Jim, working through Mike Mansfield with a lot of help from Secretary of the Senate Frank Valeo, was able to kill it. But that project created a lot of ill will against the Society within the secretary's office and throughout the Senate, and perhaps on the House side too, about the kinds of things that could be done.

Then the Capitol Historical Society developed a program of lectures associated with the American Revolution bicentennial. Thirteen lectures, arranged chronologically, bringing in the best scholars in the country, paying them very generous honoraria, paying a historian named Ron Hoffman, from the University of Maryland, who was recommended to the Historical Society by his mentor Walter Rundell. Walter Rundell was on the board of the Capitol Historical Society, and so Ron Hoffman had the responsibility for 13 years to organize these annual conferences held on Capitol Hill about a particular phase of the American Revolution, including women in the revolution. It was broadly and thoughtfully conceived, but had nothing whatsoever to do with the history of Congress. And they were paying a fortune to all concerned to do this. They had a contract with the University of Virginia Press to do annual conference volumes. But the volumes were notoriously tardy, sometimes five, six years after the conference. And generally scholars would come and some of them would put in creative new work, but then they would publish it somewhere else and so six years down the road it was not exactly cutting edge.

I began to lobby pretty early to get them to think about conferences related to the institution of Congress. And Fred wouldn't hear of it. But the string ran out on that American Revolution series. The Society eventually developed a series of two annual programs on Congress, one focusing on the institutional history and one focusing on the art and architecture of the Capitol. Now if they had done that earlier, and if they had chosen to work with us, I think that the relations would have melded together nicely. Instead, the Historical Society became a happy hunting ground for staff. They had hired staff, some of them were particularly

good and we'd find out about them. We hired Beth Bolling Hahn to be our historical editor, for example. Carol Beebe now works for the Capitol Visitor Center and Matt Wasniewski is now chief historian in the House Office of History and Preservation. So we owe them a lot in terms of staff. But the nature of the relationship in terms of working together, it was always that they would let us know when they needed our help. And they would make a major issue of the fact that they were donating lots of art and artistic objects to the Capitol, to the curatorial collections. And when they were called on that, to prove it, they had great difficulties doing that. Particularly on the Senate side, it was always this sense of these bicameral organizations, you always think that they are in bed with the people on the other side. So it probably works both ways, but the attitude in the Senate was that it was a House organization—run by current or former House members. And I think that in the beginning, or maybe throughout, that's what it was.

**Scott:** Given Schwengel's leadership, that makes sense.

**Baker:** They did stock the board of directors with former senators and former Senate staff. But in terms of a creative genius, that was Fred. I might add that the Society has been much more open to cooperation in recent years. I should also add, in the interest of full disclosure, that I was honored to accept their annual Freedom Award on the occasion of my retirement last year and that I too have become one of those former staffers who sit on the Society's board.

I have a 12 o'clock luncheon.

**Scott:** Let's stop there.

**Baker:** Ok.

## Celebrations and Commemorations

### Interview #4

Wednesday, August 11, 2010

**Scott:** Welcome.

**Baker:** Thank you.

**Scott:** The final report of the Study Group on the Commemoration of the Senate's Bicentenary recommended participating in several ceremonies, one of which was associated with the signing and ratification of the Constitution. I wanted to ask you about your role and the role of the historical office in working on the commemorative meeting of Congress in Philadelphia on July 16, 1987.

**Baker:** That was a major project for a limited period of time, from early 1986 until July of 1987. The original plan was to have an actual meeting of Congress in Philadelphia. This would have been the first meeting of Congress in 187 years in Philadelphia. Needless to say, the city fathers and mothers of Philadelphia didn't miss the opportunity to realize the commercial possibilities of all of that. "And who knows, once they come up here maybe they'd like it and be happy to stay." That guiding assumption lasted until well into 1986, probably near the end of 1986 and then everyone involved realized the security costs of having the whole Congress up there. All of a sudden we began to hear from the various House and Senate officers, "We'd have to replicate everything that's in the House and Senate Chambers up there: the reporters of debate, the voting system, and so forth." I think some of these people didn't want to do it. So they were piling on all the potential problems. The idea of a real session fell pretty quickly as the time approached and they realized the cost of it. But again security was also a major issue. This ended up being a so-called ceremonial session.

So this was a commemoration of the Great Compromise, not the ultimate signing of the Constitution in September of '87, but the Great Compromise on July 16 of '87. This was going to be Congress's special day, the heck with the executive and judicial branches. "This is our part of the Constitution!"

We were involved in planning a trial run exactly one year to the day before the actual 1987 event. They had police up on the roof of Independence Hall and Congress Hall. They wanted to know exactly where the sun was going to cast its shadows on that particular day. Again, I think it was an opportunity for the



security to not only do their job but perhaps get a little extra funding and perhaps go a little bit over the top on that one.

We had a dinner on the site one year in advance and it brought together a lot of people from the House and the Senate, and from Philadelphia, as you would expect. It was nice to get to know the people from Philadelphia. It was also nice to get to know the people from the House, which can be as remote as Philadelphia! [Laughs] So that worked well. We got to know Hobart Cawood, who was the Superintendent of Independence National Historical Park. And they really knocked themselves out to make it a very friendly and great occasion. We had a number of planning meetings and got to know some good Philadelphia restaurants along the way.

Finally, on the day of July 16, 1987, the entourage assembled at Washington's Union Station. Some of us had gone up a day earlier, but most of the members of Congress—there were about 200 all together who participated—had a special car on a special train out of Union Station to Philadelphia. They had Navy Seabees along the bridges over the Susquehanna River to make sure nobody would try to blow up a large number of congresspeople. But it was an absolutely beautiful, glorious day. Just could not have been better. Not a cloud in the sky. The temperature and humidity were perfect and the day went beautifully well. Our main concern was that leaders of Congress and others members who were participating in the program would all get up and say the same thing. So we tried to give them talking points so that they would hit a different part of the story. And it really worked very, very, well. In the morning there was a joint meeting in Independence Hall in the very room in which the Constitution was drafted and signed. Then it moved over to Congress Hall next door and the Senate went upstairs to its chamber and the House downstairs to its chamber and had a very nice ceremony in each of those rooms. And then there was a luncheon and everybody really felt very good about it. And then they went back home, contented that they had celebrated the Constitution from the perspective of how did it make Congress unique. The Great Compromise that established the basis of representation in the House and in the Senate. From that compromise evolved two profoundly different institutions. It was a significant day and a good event.

**Scott:** I found a memo that you wrote to [Secretary of the Senate] Joe Stewart and you recommended that the House and Senate hold a joint session but that they also hold individual sessions. Why did you think that was important?

**Baker:** We needed to do something that symbolized Congress as a whole. This Great Compromise was principally about the whole Congress. But it was also about how you establish representation in the House and the Senate. So it seemed logical to start with a joint meeting. Each state, I believe, was represented by its most senior member, whether senator or representative, in the Independence Hall event. And then it was up to the House and the Senate to set up the separate programs the way they wanted. And we arranged to have a program printed and again worked on helping members with talking points in so far as they wanted them. Some of them handled it very nicely with their own staffs. Others came to us for help. Senator John Stennis, as the president pro tempore, was presiding. Strom Thurmond, as the senior member of the Republican Party, was there but we didn't put in any role for him. Senator Stennis was enough of a politician and a good colleague to say to Senator Thurmond that when he finished speaking, perhaps Senator Thurmond would like to say a few words. And we all thought, "Oh boy, there goes the program." [Laughs] Senator Thurmond got up there and we had official reporters of debates from the Senate up there so they took it all down so it looked like a regular session. Senator Thurmond made some nice remarks. Then we followed the script and other senators made their remarks and they all gathered for a group photo of about 25 senators.

Years later, senators who had attended would come up to me and say "That was a real special event. It really was nice. I remember the time we all went up to Philadelphia."

**Scott:** I noticed in the *Congressional Record* that throughout 1987 Senate Minority Leader Bob Dole delivered a series of bicentennial minutes on the Senate floor. These minutes seem to be in the mold of Senator Byrd's minutes.

**Baker:** Interesting you should pick that up. [Laughs]

**Scott:** I wonder if the Historical Office was involved in crafting these minutes.

**Baker:** From the period of the American Revolution Bicentennial, ten years earlier, a number of media outlets came up with their own historical minutes. They called them American Revolution Bicentennial moments, or minutes. So it was in the air. People are willing to sit still for something that they think is just going to last a minute. They can get their little dose of history—

**Scott:** As long as it's short.

**Baker:** That's right. Of course, Senator Byrd's speeches beginning in 1980 were quite long. Senator Dole was attracted by the idea of doing something. He was a supporter and an appreciator of the Senate's history and a student of it, to some extent. And so he asked me if we could help him prepare some minutes. First, you know, it's: "Can you give me some talking points?" But you really know that it would be most helpful to them to have the actual polished minutes, the text ready to go. For two years we wrote these minutes, most of them about 200 to 250 words. And he would read them ahead of time. Every once in a while we would get a question. Or, "The leader doesn't really want to talk about this." But that was a rare exception. He would read these minutes at the opening of each daily session of the Senate. That was special. And then at the end of the Congress in 1988 he called me up and said he would like to invite the entire Historical Office, and also people at the Government Printing Office, to lunch. We had decided that what we would do out of the Bicentennial Commission recommendations was publish the minutes in something called the Senate Historical Almanac. GPO provided three different cover and design samples for him. He chose the one that I personally liked the least. It looked like an American Express calendar and appointment book, sort of bound the same color and ribbon and all the rest of it. He liked it, and that was fine. He dedicated the book to the memory of his parents, which shows you how much it meant to him. So he invited our whole staff and some of the GPO people who worked on that book to lunch in his leader's suite in the Capitol. It was a great event. There is a picture in the Historical Office of that event. A good time was had by all. It was sort of his ultimate way of saying "Thank you for all your help." At one point he said to me, "If I can ever help you in any way, if I can ever help you get more space ..." It wasn't more money for staff. The real currency was space. I appreciated that very much.

**Scott:** That's great. That's one of the publications to come out of the Senate Bicentennial Commission recommendations.

**Baker:** It was politically nicely balanced to have a bicentennial publication for the Republican leader that reflected his particular interests and one for the Democratic leader that reflected his interests.

**Scott:** The Bicentennial Commission also recommended support for several other publications, including Senator Byrd's History of the Senate volumes, as well as later providing financial support for transcribing and publishing the short hand journals of Captain Montgomery Meigs. I'd like the talk

about the Historical Office's role in writing and producing those volumes. If we can start with Senator Byrd's History of the Senate volumes, what was the Historical Office's role in writing those first two volumes?

**Baker:** I think we spoke earlier in the interview about my meeting with him in early 1980 when he wanted to learn more about the role of the sergeant at arms, and particularly arresting senators. It was clear that he wanted that for his own tactical purposes if not strategic purposes. He really loved the idea of standing on the floor and teaching his colleagues, most of whom were not up to speed at all on the institutional history of the Senate. Nor was he, really, at that point. So, at one point he said, after we prepared two speeches on the sergeant at arms, he said, "We should really do something on the secretary of the Senate." And then, "What about the chaplain?" "What about the Republican and Democratic Party conferences and policy committees?" He was really getting into the inner fiber of the Senate. You couldn't go into any book store and find anything that remotely touched those subjects. And the momentum built on that. He was very interested and knowledgeable about the Constitutional Convention and the creation of the Senate. He had done quite a bit of reading on that. Well, once you get going on the creation of the Senate then you want to know how it turned out.

At George Washington University there is a documentary history project that edits and publishes the papers of the first federal Congress. My complaint about that project, it's a brilliant project for the first federal Congress but it totally ignores all the ones that come after. So if I had been shaping that project I would have made it at least 1789-1800. How Congress got off the ground. It was logical to then do speeches on the second Congress but we didn't want to get into the trap of doing it Congress by Congress. More than one hundred speeches! But some two-year Congresses accomplish more than others. Don and I worked out a table of contents, not thinking at all that this would ever be a book, but this was just a list of topics for floor speeches. Many of them were chronological topics. But every once and a while we would work in "the history of the Senate pages" or the "history of the Senate chaplaincy." Senators and staff began to tear out of the daily *Congressional Record* these speeches and keep copies in loose leaf binders—

**Scott:** For their own reference?

**Baker:** For their own reference. Of course they weren't indexed and after you collected ten of these, all of a sudden they were useless. So before very long

Senator Byrd started getting suggestions from members to turn this into a book. At the same time, the Senate Bicentenary Study Group was surveying possible projects. About 1982 they thought a book of Senator Byrd's speeches would really be great. So we worked throughout the 1980s on that.

He took particularly strong interest in the topical speeches. And perhaps the one that he displayed the greatest interest in was the chapter on impeachment. This was coming along at the same time that the Senate was dusting off its constitutional role for holding impeachment trials. It hadn't been done for 50 years, and many believed it had become a dead letter of the Constitution. All of a sudden these federal judges in trouble come along, three of them between 1986 and 1989. So Senator Byrd went back and he was particularly interested in the British House of Commons and the House of Lords, and in their procedures with regard to the trial of Warren Hastings in 1787. Just to see how American constitution writers were trying to figure out how to put together a constitution that allowed for the removal of public officials. So the Hastings trial really had a big impact on the way that the framers drafted the impeachment provisions of the U.S. Constitution. There is a book by a husband and wife team, Peter Hoffer and Natalie Hull, *Impeachment in America, 1635-1805*. He devoured that book. He really liked it. I think he wanted to interview the authors. He may have, I'm not sure. That was one chapter that he wrote entirely by himself. We ultimately transferred to his archives his yellow note pads with his beautiful handwriting. Then we went to work on the post-1789 impeachment history, which was good for the office because we certainly learned a lot about the process. There was a lot to read and scholars were stimulated by the 1986 impeachment trial. I remember books beginning to appear written by law professors and others. He really was interested in that particular chapter.

He also did a speech that we weren't involved in. There were several of them for this series called God and American History. He had a speechwriter, who was also an ordained minister, named Hampton Rector. Jerry Rector. Jerry cranked out a speech for him on God and American history. There was another one on West Virginia becomes a state. We worked very hard to keep God and American history out of this book because it didn't flow. There wasn't any good place for it. And we wanted this book to be as balanced and objective and have a broad public audience. There is nothing wrong with God in American history but it seemed like this wasn't the place to put it. So we managed to keep that out. West Virginia becomes a state did end up in the book.

**Scott:** How much editorial input did he exercise? Did it depend on the particular chapter or topic?

**Baker:** He exercised significant control at a number of levels. First of all, on the conception of the project, he knew what he wanted and what he didn't want in that project. On the individual speeches, as you suggest, some were pretty much boilerplate American history. He read those with great interest, but he didn't make a lot of changes in the drafts that we sent. I might add that basically we were turning out drafts at the rate of one speech per week. One 30-page speech per week. Then we had the opportunity to do some revising. That is, when a senator gets up and makes his speech from the floor, reporters and people all over the country, after television came to the Senate, are listening. Every once in a while we'd hear from people who had some quibble about some fact in the speech. So we did have the opportunity to kind of vet the speeches before they ended up in permanent form in the final published volumes.

He had a major role in reviewing the photographs that we selected for the final four chapters of volume two. He had some of his own that he offered and we used. The day-to-day kind of drafting, just as any speech that a senator would give on the floor of the Senate, had heavy staff input. But bottom line is that when a senator comes and takes a look at that text, he or she decides whether they want to use it or they don't. Throughout the individual speeches he would interject his own experience. We did a speech on the history of the Senate whips, the assistant majority leaders. And, as a former whip, he knew a great deal about it and he wanted to put in the whip notice that that office sends around to all of their party's senators. Don Ritchie wrote a wonderful chapter on the Senate in literature and film: *Mr. Smith goes to Washington* and *Advise and Consent*. Senator Byrd went over the film presentations and he said he would take the novelist to task for floor procedure. He said, "You would never do it that way" and so forth. The little gems in those chapters that he interjected were great fun.

**Scott:** I'm trying to imagine how anyone could put together a researched 30-page chapter in one week. That must have put a significant strain on your resources in the office. How many historians did you have at that point? Were there three of you?

**Baker:** There were three historians working on the project. And these were heavily documented and carefully footnoted. So it was one of our major projects. We had a lot of other things going on at the same time but we worked very hard on that. Ultimately, it came at just the right time in the evolution of the

office and our evolution as historians here because we had to cover the whole waterfront. I think as I mentioned earlier, not only did we draft the original text for many of the speeches but we also then had to read it repeatedly in galley proof and page proof prior to the time it was published.

These speeches got a lot of favorable attention, not only from the general public. Probably 10 or 15 senators really loved them and went out of their way to tell Senator Byrd not only just to flatter him but genuinely that they liked them. Probably another 20-30 senators sort of were glad that they were there, just for future use. They had their grandchildren read them so they could say grandmom or granddad was in the Senate and they should know about the Senate. Also they got good reviews from scholars around the country. He got a lot of correspondence, back in the days when people sent letters, from experts who said, "You've got it exactly right and I'm very glad to see you quoted my book." [Laughs]

And the ultimate was that the book won two major awards. The Society for History in the Federal Government gave it an award for the best book of government history published that particular year. He attended the luncheon award ceremony and got up and made some brief remarks. It was a very nice feeling. And then the American Library Association designated it one of the notable government publications of that year. As a matter of fact, there was a third award within the printing industry. The Government Printing Office won an award for the printing and graphics of the book and how they put it all together. So it was a very positive situation.

He had a book party for it in his Democratic leader's suite for volume one. And then for volume two another book party over at the Library of Congress hosted by Jim Billington, the Librarian of Congress. People on the House of Representatives side kind of looked with a bit of envy that the Senate would do something like this, particularly after he sent each of them a copy. They raised the obvious question: "Why don't we have something like this over here?" They did have a book that was quite dated by that time, by Neil MacNeil of *Time* magazine, a congressional correspondent, called the *Forge of Democracy*. A nice one-volume light popular history of the House. But then a new member of the House named John Larson from Connecticut said, "Freshmen senators receive a copy of Senator Byrd's history of the Senate. What do we have over here on the House side?" That kind of initiative and institutional concern eventually earned Mr. Larson a House leadership post.

So that stimulated efforts that ultimately led to the hiring of a distinguished American historian named Robert Remini. Before they actually hired him as historian of the House, there was a period when he was a Kluge Fellow at the Library of Congress, a richly endowed chair. There were a number of Kluge fellows in different disciplines. His job was basically to write a history of the House of Representatives and he had about four years and some support staff to get it done. A real challenge to do that. A real challenge. There are strengths and weaknesses to any kind of enterprise where you try to put into one volume all of the nuances and personalities, particularly in a body as huge as the House of Representatives with more than 11,000 members over the years.

With Senator Byrd's project, we knew we couldn't do it in one volume. So we ended up with two volumes and then two appendix volumes. One was a book of statistics, which immediately went out of date. A lot of this occurred well before the Internet. What the office does now, as you know, is to have these statistics available up to date online. They are heavily used and regularly updated. He also wanted to have, as the fourth volume, a collection of notable Senate speeches. That in itself was a huge research task. We contacted scholars of speech, including Bernard Duffy at California Polytechnic State University and Halford Ryan at Washington and Lee University, and asked, "How you go about such a project. What makes a notable speech? What are the judging criteria?" Some are obvious. Daniel Webster's reply to Robert Hayne in January of 1830, Webster's Compromise of 1850 speech, and the 7<sup>th</sup> of March speech of 1850. We ended up with 46 speeches and we deliberately, probably yielding to the inevitable, included four speeches from Senator Byrd. Here was a flesh-and-blood live senator who had been around the institution long enough to know what made an effective speech. He had delivered a number, in particular, as Senate leader, of effective speeches. So it wasn't too difficult to come up with four, with some help from him and his office, that he considered models of effective Senate oratory. So those are the last four. Of course, afterwards we got a number of comments, the usual comments, "Well, it's just a puff piece for Senator Byrd putting him in the same league with [Henry] Clay, Webster, and [John] Calhoun for great speeches."

The National Communication Association loved it. Word got out in their newsletters and they basically bought a lot of copies of volume four. It had a very good introductory essay and a lot of it was enriched with the cooperation of the experts on rhetoric whom we consulted. It gets forgotten about as an appendix volume but I think it will have a lasting value. I'll bet it's on the bookshelves of a number of specialists in the history of American speech.



**Scott:** What about the Meigs volume? This is a huge project that the office undertakes. It takes some ten years to produce. Can you tell us a little bit about how you came to embrace the Meigs' project?

**Baker:** I loved that project. It was one of the most enjoyable things that we did. We learned about the existence of the shorthand journals of Montgomery Meigs, who was an army captain in the Quartermaster Corps. In 1853 he was assigned to help construct an aqueduct for the city of Washington to bring water from the Potomac River because there had been some disastrous fires including a fire at the Library of Congress portion of the Capitol Building that had resulted in major destruction.

While he was at it, they gave him additional duty to plan for the construction of the House and Senate wings and eventually the Capitol dome. It had previously been managed by the Interior Department and there was a bit of graft and corruption and inefficiency there. What they were building was out of alignment with the existing building; they needed professional engineers and people who were subject to military discipline. Montgomery Meigs was the guy for the job. He decided to keep daily journals in shorthand. As he said, "I love shorthand. I can write six times faster with it than I can with long hand." He was using what is today an obscure form of shorthand, Pitman shorthand. He kept these journals throughout the whole process of building the House and Senate wings and it wasn't just about "how many bricks did we order today," or labor strikes, or "we can't get enough workers," or "these Irish workers coming in, the immigrants are harder to deal with." It was also "I had lunch with President Pierce." The immediate politics of getting congressional funding for this project, particularly the difficulties on the House side. I appreciated his laser-like focus on principal congressional figures, as well as on the life and culture of living in Washington D.C. at the time, what his family life was like and all of his concerns.

We hired a former official reporter of Senate debates named William Mohr who had just retired and happened to know this archaic form of Pitman shorthand. So he went to work. The journals were in the Manuscript Division at the Library of Congress and they had been microfilmed. We were able to purchase microfilm copies of all of the journals. A huge amount of text! Then Mr. Mohr transcribed from those photocopies, transcribed from Pitman shorthand to the modern version of Gregg shorthand. So he had to do several translations and then translate it into English. Once the project got going, for over a period of about four years we would receive thirty-page transcriptions of another month in the life of Montgomery Meigs in Washington, D.C., in the U.S. Capitol. It was

literally like getting a letter from the 1850s. You couldn't wait for the letter to arrive. It just grew.

In 1859 Meigs had a falling out with the superintendent of the Capitol construction, named William Franklin. He was ultimately transferred down to the Dry Tortugas in Florida. He built forts down there. He returned a short while later. During the Civil War, he was appointed quartermaster general of the Union army. It was his plan to turn the Robert E. Lee estate in Arlington into a cemetery as a sort of revenge against Robert E. Lee for leaving the Union. One of the things that we learned from these shorthand notes was that he was trying to get his son, John, into West Point. He had been a West Point graduate and wanted John to go. He had great difficulty doing it, but eventually he won and John graduated. John Rogers Meigs became an officer in the army and in 1864 was gunned down by Confederate soldiers. It wasn't just that he was a casualty of war. It looked like he'd been singled out, he and a couple of others. He was assassinated. That inspired Meigs to think about having his son reburied in what had become Arlington National Cemetery.

We heard about this project because a historian-archivist at the National Archives named Mary Giunta was working on an extended article about John Rogers Meigs and had run across some shorthand notes from the period during the Civil War. She also knew about this larger body of material and figured that we too might want to know about it. Even though it was not too far away, just over at the Library of Congress, we had not heard about it, nobody at the library had told us about it. It was Mary Giunta who opened our eyes to this marvelous project. We published the book in 900 pages and that amounted to about 40 percent of the entire bulk of what we had had transcribed. It really was tough for me and for the historical editor to cut it down to 40 percent but we figured that if we wanted it, there would be a lot of people who could be potentially interested in this, certainly architectural historians, historians of the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century.

Today we would have done it differently. Today we would have had a Website and we would have had most of it there; we would have produced a 150-page book. I have often thought that a good retirement project would be to take that 900-page book and boil it down to a highly illustrated volume of about 150 pages that might appeal to visitors at the Capitol Visitors Center about the building of the Capitol. Unfortunately that is a deceptively big project and there are other things going on. The other sad thing is that this book was published just at the time of September 11, 2001. So any efforts to publicize it really got lost in all of the tragedy of 9/11. We did, however, arrange to distribute copies to an

association of architectural and engineering historians. They were very happy to have surplus copies that we had available. It was very well received.

**Scott:** How did you secure funding for this big project?

**Baker:** We basically used funding from the Senate Bicentennial Commission and they had access to ample funds. The main funding was to pay Mr. Mohr for his time and effort. The book was published through the Congressional Printing and Binding Fund at the Government Printing Office.

This book was edited by Wendy Wolff who spent a huge amount of time. The success of the book is almost entirely due to Wendy Wolff's hard dedicated work. As a payback for that, the Society for History in the Federal Government named it the best book of the year, the best documentary edition, and awarded the prize not the Senate Historical Office, but to Wendy Wolff, which I thought was very appropriate.

**Scott:** In 2006 the Senate Historical Office published *200 Notable Days*. It's a collection of the historical minutes that you had been delivering to the Democratic caucus. I'd like to know the back story, how did you come to be invited to this caucus and to offer these minutes at the weekly meetings?

**Baker:** Early in 1997 I was one of about four people who were in briefing Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle about some archival matter, historical matter. As part of that meeting, perhaps before it started or near the end of it, I was chatting with him a bit about the history of his office, the history of the Senate Democratic Conference and the Senate Democratic leader. He just asked me this string of questions. Fortunately I was able to answer most of them. He said, "Would you be interested in coming in to our weekly caucus luncheons of the Democrats and talking about other such stories that you know about related to Senate history in general? Non partisan." I said "Sure, I'd be delighted." So he said, "We'll just do it on a trial basis for a couple of weeks." And so he introduced me, it was February of 1997. I didn't know how long these should be, I think they were probably about the same length as the Bob Dole Bicentennial minutes for a while.

But I realized that 200 words isn't enough to engage an audience. It's the toughest audience anybody could ever face. Certainly the toughest audience I've ever faced. Senators sitting there, they are ready to start, they've just had lunch and they are ready to talk about the boiling issues of the day. All of a sudden

some historian comes along and starts talking about the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. It had better be good, it better have a good punch line. It took me a while to work that through. Also I realized that there had to be a little mission creep here, that I had to go from 200 words to over 500 words. And then I got the stage hook from the Democratic Party Secretary Marty Paone who said that they were too long and we have to cut them down a little bit. So I cut them back. Eventually, we settled on about 450 words. That was enough to set the background, give some detail and then to come through with the crunching final statement. The three-week trial period ended up being a 12-year run until I retired.

When Senator Daschle left the Senate at the end of 2004 and Senator Harry Reid became the leader, the first word I heard was that he's going to run these meetings differently: "Thank you, we don't need your minutes anymore." For about six months I found other things to do with my time on Tuesdays. Then the word came that Senator Reid would like to revive the historical minutes. Of course I would like to think that that was the result of enormous grumbling on the part of Democratic senators. I would run into senators who had been late to the luncheon and they would say, "Oh, we didn't get our fix this week." "We're really sorry to miss you." So he restarted them. The structure of the meetings was different. When I did it under Senator Daschle the room was filled with people, not only senators sitting at the six or seven round lunch tables in the Lyndon Johnson room of the Capitol, but also staff. Every senator would have one or two staff members there in case some issue came up that they needed help with. So I was giving these speeches to a large audience, probably a hundred people in there. Senator Reid changed the format to senators only. Of course I didn't really know that until I showed up to give my first speech under him. I started out doing it every week, and then it changed to every other week.

At one point I was talking to a reporter and I had said I was still doing the speeches. The reporter said, "I thought you had stopped giving these speeches, why did you start again?" I said "Senator Reid asked me to start." And she said, "What were they doing on the alternate weeks?" I gave her a one-sentence explanation of what they were doing in the alternate weeks even though I wasn't there. I was told only to come back every other week because the other weeks were covered with events. What I should not have done was given her some hint as to what was going on in place of me in the alternate weeks. That created a fair amount of heartburn on the part of the leadership. These meetings, which had been open to large numbers of authorized staff all of a sudden were senators-only events. I had been gone for the first six months and I didn't know the ground rules, but I still had been around here long enough to know that I shouldn't have

mentioned to a reporter what might have been going on behind closed doors when I wasn't in the room.

**Scott:** Did you hear from Senator Reid's office?

**Baker:** I did hear from Senator Reid, on December 6, 2006, in a rather dramatic way. That was that and everything worked fine after that. And so we continued on. I must say, when I look back on the time I spent in the Senate Historical Office, one of my proudest memories is at the time I retired, Senator Mitch McConnell called me into the Republican leader's office and said he was really sorry that he hadn't taken me up on earlier offers to do these minutes for the Republicans. It was an obvious question: why are you doing them just for the Democrats? We would have been very happy to provide a historian to do that. At the time I retired, he decided he was going to change that and have the associate historian, since Don Ritchie who was going to be doing the Democrats, in my place--Betty Koed, the Associate Historian, would be speaking to the Republicans. From everything I've heard it's a tremendous success. The Republicans love Betty and the Democrats love Don and I can go off into the sunset feeling very, very good about that. All that really began out of the Bob Dole historical minutes. It's amazing how members remember some of them, particularly if they are related to their states or something that they had some involvement in related to history. So they were very well received.

**Scott:** This was a weekly minute, which again seems like it would require quite a bit of work on your part to come up with something new each time.

**Baker:** The idea of doing it in alternating weeks died pretty quickly. What they had planned to do in the other weeks didn't work out as they had expected. You're right. It became a weekly event. A lot of work, a sort of preoccupying concern. Particularly that punch line. You want to walk out of there with everybody smiling or gasping or what have you. We decided to put these up on the Internet because there was so much work involved, rather than doing it for this one closed audience. Very quickly the editor of the *Hill* newspaper, a man named Al Eisele, asked me if I'd be willing to give them the minutes as a column and do a column each week after I'd done them for the Democratic caucus. Nobody had any objection to that. From about 1997 or maybe early in 1998 until Senator Daschle left in 2004, I did it as a weekly newspaper column which meant that I had another deadline. It also meant that even during some recess periods they still wanted material for the newspaper even though I hadn't given a minute that week. So it was another burden and I received some pretty good response from readers

of that newspaper. But I was glad when that ended. I was sorry though and one of my feelings about leaving here was that I really enjoyed doing that every week. It was a great way to get to know all the Democratic senators. Don has continued it beautifully. Think of it, two historians in the historical office get to speak to every senator once a week about something related to Senate history. That's the bottom line and I think that's just terrific.

**Scott:** How did you feel that first time when you stood up to give your minute? Were you nervous?

**Baker:** Not as nervous as I was when I went in to see Senator Byrd for the first time in 1980. By that time I had a fair amount of experience speaking to groups and senators. I was more concerned about the format. Some of them just didn't work. The trouble was that the arrangement of the room--in the LBJ room, you walk in from the rear of the room across the room up to where the lectern was placed and then give the speech and then walk back out. It's a very long walk particularly if the talk wasn't stellar. People scratching their heads, "What the hell did he say?" [Laughs] Near the end of it, Senator Edward Kennedy would often sit in the back of the room. Sometimes I didn't notice him there as I had tunnel vision trying to get out of the room. But all of a sudden I'd see this big bright grin, and he'd say, "You nailed it this time!" He was a great cheerleader. In his memoir he mentions the fact that his daughter Kara gave him, as a Christmas present, a copy of the *200 Notable Days* and he had some nice things to say. That was great.

**Scott:** What was the process like for crafting these minutes? How did you find the stories that you were going to tell?

**Baker:** It took me a while to realize this, but, some of the stories were right there in the Dole historical minutes. I tried to be very careful because I did not want this to be an expanded version of the Dole almanac. There was a period of time when I purposely did not look at the Dole almanac. But just working on Senator Byrd's history, we found lots of stories. There are large databases of newspaper files and particularly now with electronic searching and you can put in some key words. Over the years we built some very good files of Senate history-related material. Rich biographical files and some crazy stories that occurred related to some senators. So it was all there. It was really a matter of organizing and trying to second guess the audience. What would this audience be interested in? And also to try to keep it topical. The original idea was to tie into something that happened that week "x" number of years ago. That was the theme of the bicentennial minutes. We were somewhat limited because there are some times of

the year when nothing much happens related to Congress, particularly in August when they are not here. It took a bit of planning. As I was retiring, I said to both Don and Betty that I estimated sometimes it took me as many as 15-20 hours to write one of these. Well, in a 40-hour week, that's half the week. Needless to say I spent a lot of time at home and over the weekends until I really picked up some rhythm. I didn't really know that I had done a credible job until I'd given it to our historical editors, Wendy Wolff and then Beth Hahn, and she would come and say, "That's a good one," or, "I don't understand the ending," or whatever. Sometimes I'd show them to my wife. She's my toughest critic and she didn't hesitate to say, "Why would you say this? Why would you give this kind of a talk?" Anyway, it was a burden but it was a burden that I was delighted to bear, for sure.

**Scott:** What made you decide to publish them as a volume? Was that at someone's suggestion?

**Baker:** There was so much work that had gone into them. Even though they appeared in *The Hill* newspaper, they get thrown away every day. I think the secretary of the Senate at the time, Emily Reynolds, really liked them. She was a Republican appointee and observed that the Republicans didn't have access to them. We were looking for a special publication to do for a number of audiences. The timing was right. The Government Printing Office had been doing some really interesting work in designing congressional publications for a large audience so that they looked like commercially produced works. Beth Hahn selected 200, at that point there were probably well over 300. Two hundred is a big number around this office as we've celebrated so many bicentennials. And there was some heartburn also about not having the last minute be about Senator Byrd becoming the longest serving senator in history. People in his office were not pleased that we did not include him as the very last one. My feeling was that he's an incumbent senator and this is not about incumbent senators.

Former senators, including the living ones got their hands on it--I remember getting a phone call from former New York senator Al [Alfonse] D'Amato. He said, "My God! Somebody called this to my attention and my wife said that's the best picture of you I've ever seen!" It was about a filibuster that he waged in 1988. People read the book and took it seriously. It came out just before the Christmas buying season. One senator purchased 300 copies and gave them to all of his staff and campaign contributors and others. There were other large bulk purchases on the part of senators. I think the government got its money back on that book.

**Scott:** I think that's a good place to stop.

**Baker:** Good.

*[Photo on the following page: Senators Ted Stevens, Chris Dodd, and Bill Frist listen to Richard Baker's remarks at the unveiling of a portrait honoring Roger Sherman and Oliver Ellsworth in the Senate Reception Room in 2006.]*





**The Capitol Visitor Center**  
**Interview #5**  
**Wednesday, September 1, 2010**

**Scott:** Welcome back. Thank you for being here.

**Baker:** Thank you. I'm very glad to be back.

**Scott:** I thought today we'd talk about the origins of the Capitol Visitor Center, the CVC. I wanted to start in 1995 when Secretary of the Senate Kelly Johnston submitted a report to the Senate Rules Committee which recommended establishing a visitor's center in order to enhance and improve the visitor experience. Can you tell us a little bit about what a typical visitor experience was like before the opening of the CVC in 2008?

**Baker:** In a word: awful, just awful, particularly during the periods of high visitation in the summer and leading up to the summer. Even the basic facilities, such as dining areas and restrooms, were not available. It was basically a 19<sup>th</sup>-century building, the Capitol Building, constructed at a time when it was very difficult for people to get to Washington and not that many did come. That of course had changed by the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, if not earlier. So the building was long overdue for some very serious rethinking about how to accommodate visitors.

We learned in 1995, and even before, that people were paving a detour around the Capitol down to the Smithsonian or over to the Library of Congress and especially down to the Air and Space Museum and the Museum of American History. The Capitol Building was something to look at from a distance. The long lines were very discouraging for many visitors. As early as the mid 1980s we conducted some informal surveys with the Senate Curator's office. We obtained from the Smithsonian template surveys for the quality of the visitor's experience. It was very unscientific in terms of the way we administered those surveys but we got a quick sense of what we already knew: that it was not a pleasant experience.

In the mid 1980s, the upcoming bicentennial of Congress, and then in the early 1990s the bicentennial of the Capitol Building provided tremendous impetus, at least we thought it did, to get some movement. Nineteen-ninety-three was the Bicentennial of the laying of the Capitol cornerstone. The year 2000 was the Bicentennial of the opening of the building. If you can't focus congressional and public attention during that time, you never will. We did, and it worked out. It

took a long, long time from the Kelly Johnston survey of 1995. As you might expect, there are just so many people involved, so many definitions of what it is that you want to take away from a visit to the Capitol.

**Scott:** How did this movement to build a Capitol visitor's center start? Did it start in the Historical offices and the Curators' offices, or were there also senators who were particularly concerned because their constituents were talking to them about their experience?

**Baker:** That's an interesting question. We found that there was more concern on the part of House members, maybe because they represent smaller groups of constituents. They have more time to focus on quality of visitation issues than senators who simply are distracted by a million different things coming in their direction.

The idea for a visitor's center was a fairly old one that had just never come to fruition. The east front of the Capitol was extended between 1958 to 1962. That begged the question about extending the west front of the Capitol because they had picked up 90 rooms on the east front extension. So the idea was to do the same for the west front. There was a lot of dissatisfaction about the way that the east front extension of 32.5 feet looked. If you stand in front of the Capitol on a sunny day you realize that the façade of the Capitol was constructed at different times. The central portion, the east front extension, is much whiter than the yellow, almost orange, tone of the House and the Senate wings constructed in the 1850s. This is a Georgia marble and it just didn't fit. A lot of architectural critics pointed that out very quickly. There were cost overruns and a lot of members inconvenienced by the construction. It turned out that they decided, after a very long period of consideration, not to do a west front extension. The House basically was in favor of a west front extension. The Senate generally was not. It turns out that the House leaders, most of them were on the west side of the building to begin with and they would benefit by getting more space. Senators weren't quite as concerned. It was a very complicated issue.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s there was a desire on the part of the Senate to restore and renovate the Old Senate Chamber and the Supreme Court Chamber below it. The House wasn't going to have anything to do with that. "Why should we spend taxpayers' money for the glorification of the Senate?" So the Senate would pass legislation for the funding and the House would just ignore it. Finally, Lady Bird Johnson in 1972 called the chairman of the House Appropriations Committee, who was a fellow Texan, George Mahon, and asked

him if he would relent on the appropriations. She was given assurances that if he did, the leadership of the Senate would relent in its opposition to funding for the west front extension. There was a trade-off there. So the funds did come and work began on the restoration of the old chambers in about 1972. A lot of other political issues intervened in terms of the west front extension. It didn't happen.

The reason that I go into some detail about this is that included in the west front plan was the visitor's center. At one point the plan was to build a bus ramp that would allow these buses to come up and disgorge their passengers in a little tunnel on the west front of the Capitol and then drive away. This was actively discussed during the 1960s and by the early 1970s the funding wasn't available and that was the end of that. Then came the bicentennial of the American Revolution and again a lot of focus on the Capitol Building, which then looked really grimy. I recall how atrocious the Rotunda looked in 1975, perhaps from cigar smoke. The paintings, the murals, the frieze, and the canopy, were in a state that would not have pleased their creators. Using the forthcoming bicentennial of independence, particularly given the fact that four of the eight murals in the Capitol Rotunda were about the American Revolution, it was time to tidy it up. In the mid 1970s there was a sense that we've got to make this a more attractive and educational destination for visitors. Our office was established in 1975 as part of that same spirit. It didn't take us too long to make common cause with the Senate Curator to see what could be done.

Meanwhile, the Capitol Historical Society that we've discussed earlier had in its 1962 congressional charter a provision to provide educational information to the public for free. They thought they were doing that. So once again, there was a line of demarcation between the internal Senate operations for history and art and what the Capitol Historical Society was doing. They thought everything was fine; they didn't need any help. It was difficult to unite. If we could have united with them and had gotten them to say, "Yes, a visitor's center would be great," it would have moved it along a bit faster. But they said, "No, we are already doing it. We provide educational material. Everything is just fine." They had a kiosk down in the so-called crypt area right underneath the central Rotunda. That slowed down progress on a visitor's center considerably.

**Scott:** Were they really providing educational materials? What were they doing?

**Baker:** Maybe at the beginning they were, a little bit. But then they realized they needed to make money. Then they began to sell educational

materials. Very early on they produced a guidebook called *We the People* in conjunction with National Geographic Society. That operation was pretty much driven by National Geographic as far as I can tell. The National Geographic and the Historical Society made a great deal of money. They did foreign language editions of the *We the People* book. They had some ancillary publications on art and history as well. It led them to say, "We don't need any help from any newly established curatorial or historical programs. We're doing it well." The real guiding force of the publication really did come from the National Geographic. National Geographic did most of the writing and provided the illustrations. Again, we're just kind of standing on the outside looking in.

**Scott:** There's a movement among some people to create a visitor's center. And then upcoming commemorative ceremonies make people think about the Capitol Buildings being in the national spotlight. These issues are now in the national consciousness and part of a national conversation. How do we get from Johnston's report in 1995 to a commitment by the House and Senate to fund the construction of the CVC?

**Baker:** One word with a capital "S": Security. In 1998 two Capitol policemen were shot and killed by a crazy man trying to race into the House side of the east front of the Capitol. That focused attention enormously on extending the security perimeter of the Capitol and rethinking visitor access to the Capitol. Having the Kelly Johnston report, and having people around like Senator Robert Byrd, former Congresswoman Lindy Boggs, and a number of others who took this very much to heart---it wasn't going to be totally security, but it was driven by security. How can we make it a better experience for visitors?

That's when, as part of reconstruction planning, the idea of the visitor's center really got underway. The architectural firm RTKL did a very thorough design. One of the major decisions was where to put this thing. There really seemed to be no choice other than underground on the east side of the Capitol. The slope of the hill worked against anything on the west side. A plan was put together right after the 1998 shooting. But then it languished again. It moved slowly. There was a groundbreaking ceremony. The Pew Charitable Trusts in Philadelphia got involved in it and they provided some seed money. A woman named Rebecca Rimel was and still is their president and chief executive officer. She got very interested. So there was a grand ceremony turning that first spade of earth in 2000. Then things languished a bit until 9/11/2001. And then again it became an issue of, "How do we protect the members of Congress? How can we get them into an underground bunker?" And this is the underground bunker. This

is the visitor's center where you can have all kinds of air handling equipment if there's a chemical attack. There was a lot of concern about chemical attacks. How you can scrub the air inside and have the facilities to literally wash everybody off? Give everybody a shower in place to decontaminate them.

**Scott:** This couldn't be done in the old 19<sup>th</sup>-century building.

**Baker:** No. There was no space. And the infrastructure was not there. After 9/11 it got going in earnest and the U.S.A. Patriot Act authorized an appropriation of \$40 million available for this kind of Capitol protection out of which a lot of money came for the visitor's center. Earlier, in the mid 1990s, the idea was that they would raise money through private subscription and that went on for a while. They approached Bill Gates and I think Bill Gates provided \$5 million. Well, they needed \$100 million. If that's all he's going to give—

**Scott:** One of the wealthiest people in the world.

**Baker:** Exactly. Earlier, at the time of the congressional bicentennial in 1989, Congress passed legislation to have the U.S. Mint strike coins, \$5 gold coins, and so forth. The surcharge from those coins would provide funding for a Capitol visitor's center. That ended up raising initially about \$17 million, which was good, but it wasn't \$100 million. That went in the bank, over to the Library of Congress—they have a trust fund and they managed it, everything was handled very properly. But it just wasn't enough. That was the state of the matter at the time of 9/11. After 9/11, the big decision was made that Congress will fund the construction of the visitor's center as opposed to having it done privately. I've never thought it made any sense to do it privately. But this was in the era of George W. Bush Republicanism where we need to turn to the private sector to share some of these public burdens. It was worth trying, but it just didn't work.

**Scott:** It's a political issue, why should Congress appropriate this money for themselves? It's always hard to sell to constituents.

If we could back up a minute. I laughed as you described the proposal to have a bus ramp where people could be let loose on the Capitol. I laugh because security around here has increased so greatly since that time. I wonder if you can talk about what kind of security measures were in place in the mid-90s when Johnston submits this report. Clearly there weren't the same security concerns that there would be later. Did that early vision for a visitor's center include increased security in the mid-90s, or did that come much later?

**Baker:** No, it was there. The issue was there. It really began with a bombing in the Capitol in 1971 in a first-floor barber shop on the Senate side. All of a sudden, people woke up to the fact that we're living in a different world. That was during the middle of the Vietnam War and there was a lot of domestic unrest and unhappiness with that war.

**Scott:** It was a faction of the Weathermen who planted the bomb?

**Baker:** Yes, that's right. And then fast forward to 1983 when there was another bombing right outside the Senate Chamber in the corridor just across from the Democratic leader's office. It happened about 11 o'clock at night. If it had happened earlier, or if there were plans for the Senate to stay in session that night . . . It blew out the windows in the Republican cloakroom. It was a horrible situation. It did maybe \$250,000 worth of damage. It was just a mess. I walked into that area the next morning and it would just break your heart. Rubble everywhere. You think, "Wait a minute, this is a whole new world." The earlier 1970s bombing led to the installation of television cameras above doorways and in the ceilings and a more comprehensive system of identification cards. But 1983 really expanded the security. There were areas closed off in the Capitol so it was no longer possible for visitors to walk and stand in front of the Senate Chamber. Lobbyists were very upset because they were treated like tourists. Well, tourists are lobbyists and lobbyists are tourists. [Laughs]

**Scott:** All members of the public. [Laughs]

**Baker:** Exactly. There were a lot of hurt feelings during that time. So by 1995 security was a major issue but not to the extent that people ever believed that someone would try to fly an airplane into the Capitol Building. With that realization after 9/11/2001, it's off to the races in terms of all kinds of overreaction, as far as I'm concerned. It's hard to sit there and say to some security person, "You're nuts. You're going way too far." And they are saying, "Well, how are you going to prevent the next airplane from trying to fly into the Capitol?" That's another story.

**Scott:** So the CVC is created with a dual purpose: an inviting area to enhance the experience of the visitor, but also a safe haven for elected officials and their staff in the event of another national attack.

**Baker:** Exactly. When they drafted brochures about the visitor's center, they would put that in there. I kept editing it out, the fact that they had security as the first reason. I kept putting in public education, and then security. And it kept coming back with security and then public information. It's clear that without 9/11 we'd still be worrying about when they were going to build the visitor's center.

**Scott:** They decide to build the visitor's center and you become part of an advisory team to the Capitol Preservation Commission which oversees the construction and development of the educational components that will be a part of the CVC. Is that right?

**Baker:** You mention that commission. It's also another sad chapter in the history of the Capitol Historical Society. The Historical Society was in a position to be the Capitol Preservation Commission. They had the organizational structure. But their founding spirit, Fred Schwengel, refused to go along with the idea that on the 15-member board, 8 members would be congressional appointees and 7 would be private, he adamantly opposed that. Joe Stewart, who was Secretary of the Senate at the time, had the clout to make it happen if Schwengel had agreed. As a result, in the legislation, they paved a very large highway around the Capitol Historical Society and created the Capitol Preservation Commission, which was basically an 18-member body of House and Senate leaders and people who could elevate the debate and short circuit some of the delays and get it done. That was the idea.

**Scott:** From what I can tell, the commission does not do much from its creation in 1988 up until the early 1990s. Is this a body that is doing work around the Capitol?

**Baker:** I had forgotten that the Capitol Preservation Commission was created as early as the 1980s.

**Scott:** From what I can see, there are periods of time—years—when it didn't even meet.

**Baker:** No, it really didn't become active until just prior to that groundbreaking ceremony, or maybe the time that those two police officers were murdered. Then it became particularly active. It became clear that they were going to move ahead and that this was going to be real. Once a week, a representative of every one of the 18 members of the Capitol Preservation



Commission, a high level representative, met in a shirt-sleeves working kind of meeting to make decisions. That went on for years. That was really where the work got done and the major decisions were made.

**Scott:** Were you in on those meetings?

**Baker:** No, but the secretary of the Senate was an ex-officio member, an active member and I believe the assistant secretary of the Senate was as well. The group included the staff director of the Senate Rules Committee and the ranking minority member of the Rules Committee staff and their counterparts on the House side. These people, from what I can determine, really got to know each other over the years. There was a huge amount of turnover because party control was changing back and forth during that time, leaders were changing, but the nucleus was there. It was kind of a travelling road show. That's what got it done, basically.

**Scott:** Were they making decisions about the design of the CVC, the way that the public would be educated? Or did that come later when the group of curatorial advisors came on board?

**Baker:** Simultaneously. They turned to us and said, "All right, what is the narrative? What is the story we should be telling, what is the script? You do a script." So we worked with our counterparts in the Office of the Architect of the Capitol and in the various historical offices over on the House side to put together a script. It worked really well. I think it worked well particularly from our perspective because we had been around a lot longer than the folks on the House side. I think, very immodestly, I can say that we had more to offer since we'd been accumulating information about the history and culture of the Capitol and of the Senate. Having assisted Senator Byrd in writing his *The Senate, 1789-1989*, we really had worked out the narrative during the 1980s in terms of Senate development. Then you have to focus on Capitol Building development and all that. I think we were a force for stability and for some enlightenment as part of that process. On the House side, the people from the historical office kept changing, although they had some really good people over there who made some excellent contributions.

**Scott:** Then the House created the Office of the Historian. So in some periods you were dealing with two offices?

**Baker:** We were, which was a little strange at times. But, you know, the more the merrier!

Robert Remini came in as House Historian in 2005. I think he attended only one meeting. In fairness to him, he really needed to get up to speed on the subject. A number of people around that table had been dealing with the proposed visitor center for five or more years. So he made his contributions, but he wasn't terribly active. But his deputy, Fred Beuttler, was active. And then people from the Office of History and Preservation were very active, including Ken Kato who had been the director of a predecessor to that office, and his successors, Matt Wasniewski and Farar Elliott, and of course Senate curator Diane Skvarla, from the Architect's of the Capitol's office, architectural historian Bill Allen and curator Barbara Wolanin.

We really had a team spirit. There were really no fundamental differences around that table even though we represented profoundly different institutions. We all tried to stay on our own turf. Nobody in the House told us how to interpret the Senate. I can't think of any major issues of conflict between the working people on the Curatorial Advisory Committee.

We also had really important help from the Library of Congress Manuscript Division. Particularly, Barbara Bair and Jim Hutson, head of the Manuscript Division, and of course the National Archives' Center for Legislative Archives director Mike Gillette and his successor Richard Hunt. All of a sudden there was an embarrassment of riches. Not everybody was at the same meeting at the same time. Sometimes there were collateral meetings. There was a separate group of the art curators who would have their meetings about where do you place the statues and what kind of artwork is going to be commissioned. That was way beyond our area of expertise. It fit together very nicely primarily because of the coordinator, Martha Sewell. She was absolutely the right person at the right time. There were some tense moments, often spurred by not the personal differences around the table so much as concerns about the people we all work for and trying to get them on board as well. And Marty Sewell was always unflappable. She just kept the ship moving very, very smoothly.

**Scott:** Was she at the AOC?

**Baker:** Yes, she was.

**Scott:** And she was the coordinator for the whole project.

**Baker:** For the exhibition gallery and related areas, she was.

**Scott:** One of the greatest contributions that this office made was helping to author the text for the CVC educational program. It seems like a great challenge but also an opportunity because you'll be able to teach these millions of people who come through the Capitol something they don't already know. But how do you condense all of that information into 50-word paragraphs? Or 200-word paragraphs? Maybe you can talk about how you worked in this office to produce the narrative and the text that we can now see in the CVC.

**Baker:** I think one of our major impacts was the basic structure of the exhibition gallery. It didn't have to be arranged chronologically. But as historians, we have a certain appreciation for chronology. It could have been done topically—here's the advice and consent gallery, here's the treaty gallery, or whatever. So we decided pretty early about using a chronological format for the main part of the exhibition. We worked with a top-notch design firm, Ralph Appelbaum Associates. They have a long list of distinguished projects that had been accomplished at that time. So the designers came down from New York and would sit around the table. It was interesting to try to educate them as well. "What do you mean by this? Why do you think we should do that?" But we all worked together pretty well. The one thing we heard from them over and over again was, "You can't put a book on the wall." If you want to see the reason why they said that, take a visit to the Constitution Museum in Philadelphia. Although that was their project and that was done almost concurrently with the visitor's center, the planning was a little bit ahead of the visitor's center. But, unfortunately, the Philadelphia museum is nothing if not a book on the wall, too many books on the wall. It's overwhelming.

You were mentioning earlier 50 words or 500 words. Basically we identified major events in each chronological period. The periodization was a big problem and one we probably didn't handle as successfully as we might have. You start with 1789 and you come up with your periods. You are limited by the configuration of the space to six periods. Well, you sort of back into that last period. The last period begins in 1946, and runs to the present. And when you consider the average visitor, 1946 might as well have been the Civil War! [Laughs] So we probably would have been smarter to start at the end and kind of work back in the periodization. Maybe we should have had that last section begin in 1975 or maybe even, heaven forbid, a little bit later than that. But I think you could have made a good case for 1975. But then it didn't fit with working

backwards. That was a bit of a challenge. We very much needed space for a seventh period.

We decided that this is going to be about stories. So we had to come up with a certain number of House stories from each time period, a certain number of Senate stories, and a certain number of Capitol stories, and the stories can only be a very limited number of words. Back in the office Don and Betty and I would put our heads together. What are the Senate stories we want to tell? We came up with a list and it was a longer list than we had space for. We chopped a few off and then we would add some and drop some, you know, a typical kind of working by collaboration with your respective colleagues. That worked out pretty well.

The one event that I will never forget is with regard to the number of words. There are six galleries of national aspirations: freedom, unity, common defense, knowledge, exploration, and general welfare. The original plan was to come up with a 400-word statement that would be incised in marble about what is the meaning of “freedom” in the context of all of this. Or unity. Let’s use unity as an example. You start off with a topical sentence and then maybe in the middle you’d have an example or a couple of colorful quotations and then a conclusion. It didn’t take long to add up to 400 words. After we did that, we patted ourselves on the back about how brilliant it was, for all six of these topics. But, alas, we heard back from the designers: “It’s putting a book on the wall.” Too many words, let’s cut it in half to 200. So out went the middle section, basically. This left the topic sentence and the conclusion. That wasn’t too wonderful, but we worked on it. There are various stages of this story, but it came down to “We just need about 25 words.” From 400 words to 25. My attitude was, “Forget it. We’re historians.” [Laughs] But Don Ritchie, to his everlasting credit, said “Let me take one final whack at it for all six of them.” These we had to get by the House side as well. The Clerk of the House, Jeff Trandahl, was a very sharp guy, very hands on. He had his ideas of what should be in those statements as well. Everybody was sort of at their wits-end. Finally Don produced a draft that sailed through the committee review. Everyone involved eventually signed off on it.

For the unity section, unfortunately, it began “As our nation’s motto, *E pluribus unum* says, Out of many, one.” And you know, a lot of people, perhaps several dozen, looked at this. Unfortunately, *E pluribus unum* hasn’t been our nation’s motto since 1956! [Laughs] So this was rather embarrassing. But it was more than embarrassing because there was, by that time, a group of fundamentalist Christians who had zeroed in on the text of the visitor’s center. The text literally had been put together in a book, maybe a 100-page book,

including the whole text with illustrations, all the panels from start to finish. It had gone out to all the members of all the Capitol Preservation Commission including Tom DeLay [House Majority Leader]. Tom DeLay from Texas had a friend named David Barton who was the deputy chairman of the Texas Republican Party. Beyond that, he apparently was a self-taught historian and a guardian of the telling of the story of the nation's origins through an organization called Wallbuilders. And the story he wanted to tell was that the United States was a divinely inspired nation. God was at work at the Constitutional Convention. The drafters of the Declaration of Independence and those who signed off on it realized and saw the hand of God at work even though they didn't go into a lot of detail about that. David Barton and some of his allies took a very good look at that script and saw almost no references to God. But then, when they saw that the unity section had as our nation's motto *E pluribus unum*, they felt we had deliberately left out "In God We Trust." That was the final straw.

So they put together their counter document. They got a lot of press in their world on the subject. They were able to use this single mistake—my mistake—as the key argument that there is a bunch of basically leftist liberal intellectuals who are trying to hijack this project. Believe me, that couldn't have been farther from the truth in terms of who was sitting around that table. They attached all these other perceived slights throughout the rest of the script. If it hadn't been for that one slip, their case might not have seemed quite as dramatic.

Meanwhile, this had already been cut in marble in the visitor's center. Shortly after, all of this hit the press, I went down to the visitor's center and somebody from the Architect's Office had taken Plaster of Paris and filled in "as our nation's motto." And it worked! The text then began, "*e pluribus unum*: Out of many, one." So it happened to work. Eventually they ended up removing the whole panel. It's one thing when you make a mistake in a book manuscript. [Laughs] But when you do it in marble!

It energized David Barton who had been around here for a while. He had developed a relationship with the Senate majority leader, Bill Frist. At one point Senator Frist organized a senators-only tour of the Capitol, a religious history tour of the Capitol, given by David Barton. Nobody accepted the invitation. Bill Frist was the only one who ended up going on this tour of the Capitol with David Barton standing up on the benches out in the Rotunda and pointing to the religious figures in the various murals and so forth. It was another manifestation of what we are seeing today. Some very conservative people see a conspiracy afoot. They

say that if we get away from our founding principles, if we misinterpret our founding principles, we are in trouble. Of course, the whole purpose of the exhibition gallery was to highlight those founding principles.

I think David Barton was his own worst enemy. His reading of history didn't stand up to any standard interpretation of American history, whether by liberals or by conservatives. He was way over the mark. Eventually it ended with sound and fury, but no substantive action.

**Scott:** He also lost his support when DeLay resigned in 2006 as this was starting to blow up. Some of the members who had supported his interpretations also happened to be leaving.

**Baker:** It died down a little bit, but it did not end. Countless hours were spent behind the scenes going through that text finding every possible hint of a reference to a religious event or personage. We put together a list of all of these to calm down some of the members of the Capitol Preservation Commission. There were a few changes made. There are virtual House and Senate displays and the motto "In God We Trust" was added over the House theatre. A reasonable person on any side of the issue could say, "All right, they heard us and they added these changes." The visitor's center very much reflects Congress, which is an institution designed to stimulate and embody compromise. It only works when compromise is in place. When people are unwilling to compromise, it doesn't work, it falls apart.

**Scott:** The CVC opened in December of 2008. What do you think of the final result? Were you satisfied with the way things turned out? Are you very proud of your contributions there and the contributions of the office?

**Baker:** I'm not focusing on me. I'm proud of the Senate Historical Office and what the office did and what this team of more than 40 historians did. That team didn't exist 25 or 30 years before. There were no slots and no salaries for these people. They brought a lot of cumulative expertise. If you had to go out and hire independent contractors to do what these in-house historians and curators and architectural specialists did, you couldn't have done it. You wouldn't have been able to do it to the degree of effectiveness.

That's also true in terms of working with the producer of the CVC orientation film, Donna Lawrence. She came and she told us what she needed. We provided what we thought we had. It was a high level dialog right from the very

beginning. It was a very expensive project. I'm sure she lost her shirt in terms of what it cost her to produce that film, but she was willing to do that for a variety of altruistic reasons, I'm sure.

**Scott:** What was her background? How did she come to the project?

**Baker:** She is based in Louisville, Kentucky. She did the film for the Constitution Center, among others. But that was the one that I think people around here looked at. A number of us were in on the preliminary review of probably five or more filmmakers who wanted that commission. We boiled it down to three and put her name at the top of the list, principally because of the Constitution film. I mentioned Marty Sewell being easy-going, but with a lot of steel behind that velvet, and the same was true with Donna. She really knew what she was doing. When she had to sit down and explain to members of the Senate and the House of Representatives, who weren't necessarily willing to be totally reasonable on some of these questions, she was just the master at addressing their concerns in a highly intelligent and effective way. That was very important.

I think that the Exhibition Gallery is a knockout, it really is, once you get into it. The problem, as you have undoubtedly experienced, is that it can be easily missed. It's an RTKL problem, or a fundamental limitation in the terrain they had to work with. Right from the very beginning when they designed it, it was sort of the last thing that they placed when they were developing the major elements of the visitor's center. I can see on paper logically placing it in the back up against the east front of the existing Capitol. But it's not in the best traffic patterns. It certainly is possible to go into the visitor's center and not even know that the gallery is there. CVC administrators have gone out of their way, at least at the very beginning, to have aides pointing it out as people walk in the front door. "If you have time before your ticketed performance of the orientation film, by all means go into the exhibition gallery." I haven't been there lately, but I did make a point of observing on a number of occasions and there just are not that many people in the gallery compared to the number who are out in the atrium a few yards away and who are moving around by the gift shops. That is a fundamental structural problem and I don't know what you do about it. You can put all the signage that you want out there but people don't read signs.

**Scott:** One of the other problems is that it's not necessarily, from my own perspective, an inviting space because when you see it from a distance it looks dark. It's a dimly lit area because of the documents. So you aren't drawn to it in the same way that you might be drawn to another space.

**Baker:** One of the governing principles in all this was that this exhibition gallery would be the one place that visitors could come and see original documents. They don't want to see facsimiles. If you can say "We're going to have an exhibit with the original document from the Constitutional Convention or the First Congress" that will attract a certain sector of the population that comes to visit. Unfortunately, the lighting and the placement of those documents for preservation reasons, undoubtedly, is almost completely counterproductive. You have to take it on faith that you are looking at the document that is described in the accompanying text. [Laughs]

**Scott:** You're absolutely right and it's such a shame because the documents are so wonderful.

**Baker:** And it can be done, they do it at the National Archives, you can see original documents. They do it at the Library of Congress. That one they may need to work on a bit. Again, there may be some structural problems working against a happy solution. But I hope they don't give up trying.

**Scott:** When the CVC opened in 2008 there was a little bit of controversy about the center itself because of cost overruns and because of a delayed opening. Why were there cost overruns and why did it open later than anticipated?

**Baker:** The Madison Building at the Library of Congress, for instance, or the Hart Building, the very building that we're sitting in today, both opened behind schedule and had huge cost overruns. The Hart Building was built during a period of inflation so the original estimates totally were out the window. As a result they cut back on a lot of the fundamentals of the building.

The same was true with the visitor center except that by calling it a visitor center it kind of skews the argument a little bit. It is a visitor center, but it's much more than that. By the time that the construction was completed, by the time that they finished with all the add-ons, maybe two-thirds of it was the visitor center and one-third of it was additional workspace for the leadership of the House and Senate, and security and administrative space. The Office of Senate Security moved from a little warren up in the attic of the Capitol to wonderful accommodations. No visitor to the center is ever going to see those accommodations. They have all of those kinds of appropriate and necessary secure briefing rooms and so forth. But that is high tech and it costs so much money. All of a sudden, the estimates went from the \$250 million range to about



\$600 million. A lot of that was added on for security, though I'm in no position to know how much. But certainly without that extra meeting space and so forth it wouldn't have been anywhere near what it actually was. But that doesn't translate very well in terms of a stand-up television report where the reporter has a minute at the most to talk about it all.

**Scott:** In spite of those early criticisms it has, I think, exceeded people's expectations. It's very well attended. They have had an increase in visitors as a consequence of having the CVC.

**Baker:** I think visitation has nearly tripled. There used to be something like one million a year and now it's well over three million.

It had a personal impact on my life in that I was trying to decide when to retire. I thought that I didn't want to leave here until the CVC was completed, just from a proprietary sense of wanting to make sure it all worked out the way that we hoped it would. It opened in December of '08 and nine months later I retired. Now it's into a whole new phase of operations and there will always be issues in terms of how do you make it work effectively. But that's a whole new ball game.

**Scott:** We've talked about the educational component of the CVC with the exhibition hall and the film. But there's another educational component to this in that the CVC trains the "red coats," that is, the tour guides. Additionally, House and Senate staff attend one- or two-day training sessions where they have an opportunity to tour the CVC and to create their own narrative stories about the history of the House and Senate that they can use on tours with constituents. I wonder how that became a component of the CVC? That they would also train the people in House and Senate offices to improve that visitor's experience because they would be telling more accurate and more complete stories.

**Baker:** That has always been a problem. One of the major purposes of the CVC was to control crowd flow in the Capitol. Not only to enrich the quality of the time while people are here, but also to keep visitors flowing in a time-efficient and predictable manner. There is a security element to that, as well. You begin to think of it almost as a manufacturing process, to move "x" number of cans through the assembly line, get them in and get them out at a precisely determined time so that the total time that anybody is in the Capitol proper outside of the visitors' center can be measured in very few minutes. So that means a more structured touring experience.

There was a time in the 1970s when Majority Leader Mike Mansfield killed a plan that some other senators had come up with, in response to constituent requests, for self-guided tours of the Capitol. We worked on a brochure that was available at the door. People could come in and wander around the Capitol and go stand around outside the Senate Chamber and that's when the building's legislative purpose slammed smack up against the museum function. Mike Mansfield said, "We have to get rid of those self-guided tours, we can't do it." Still, it was in the spirit that you could come in and wander around and see what you wanted to see.

As more and more people came to Washington, as security became more of a consideration after the 1998 shootings of Officers John Gibson and Jacob Chestnut, the idea of having organized tours became more popular. Meet the people out front, march them through and then deposit them back into the visitors' center, where they can go look at the exhibition gallery or whatever. We found that a lot of members do not want to turn over 300 crossing guards from their state or district to Capitol tour guides either because of a logistical problem or because there is not much space. Instead what they want is their own personal tour. There is nothing more memorable than having a member of Congress taking you on a tour of the Capitol, regardless of how inaccurate the information. Then that devolved from the member leading the tour to staff leading the tour. Very quickly that meant that interns would start leading the tours in the summertime. It would break your heart to hear some of the stories that the interns would tell. Never let the facts get in the way of a good story! [Laughs]

Now, with the more structured arrangements of the Capitol Visitor Center and the need to move people through in a predictable amount of time, if the tours aren't going to be led by a Capitol tour guide, they've got to be led by "trained" staff members. That led to a real nightmare: How do you credential these staff members, particularly if they are interns and they are only here for three months? The host office wants to get rid of them. They aren't going to be drafting legislation. That got to be a real headache. We developed a script and Betty Koed, in particular, took that on as a major responsibility. "Here are the take-away points about the Senate." I know that Betty is long-suffering and a very helpful person, but I think that even her good nature was sorely tested in her dealings with people from the CVC. That's an ongoing challenge, I suspect. In the summertime, the last figure I saw, in terms of the number of summer interns who descend upon the Senate, is about 2,000. That may be ridiculously understated. That puts a huge burden on members' offices and these people end up as tour givers.

**Scott:** I recall giving a couple of CHIP talks this summer during the one-day training sessions. The audience was huge, 200 interns, and some would be taking the “training” at the end of their internship—

**Baker:** Good timing!

**Scott:** There they’d be in the training session. How many stories had they told over the summer that were inaccurate, or just a good story, but not factual?

I’d like to end today talking about the relocation of the Senate Historical Office from the Capitol Building to 201 Hart Senate Office Building, where we are meeting today. We’ve joked several times in our interviews that the currency of the Senate is always office space. How can you get more office space? How to keep the office space that you have? I wonder if you can tell us the circumstances that led to the move to 201 Hart? We’re in a great office and you’ve managed to keep it since you moved here in the early ‘80s. What’s the story behind that?

**Baker:** It was a once in a lifetime opportunity. We had heard similar stories when the Dirksen Building opened in 1958, all of a sudden you have this big building and a lot of space and not everybody has fought over every inch of that space. But as time goes on, all of a sudden, instead of fighting over blocks of space, you start fighting over square-inches of space because it gets so crowded. We had the opportunity to come in and select office space, because from 1975 to 1983 we were in two offices. That basically meant that we had two staffs. People from the Immigration Building staff would come over and chat with the people in the Capitol, but it was inefficient and polarizing to some extent. The idea that we would all be together as a historical office in one space was great.

We looked at a number of Hart Building locations, including one up on the 8<sup>th</sup> floor. I knew that wasn’t going to work because each time I’d go back to show somebody else where our possible space was, I couldn’t find it! It was really remote. And then there was an opportunity down on the first floor. I thought, no, we don’t want to be there because everybody looking for a telephone (in days before cell phones) or directions is going to stop by the office. We need to be a little more removed, though not too far removed. So the second floor of the Hart Building seemed perfect. What I particularly liked about this suite was that you couldn’t punch a hole in the wall to allow the people in the suite next door to take over our space. It was self contained and it was too small for a senator’s office, too small at 1,500 square feet for any function like a senator’s office, so that worked out well.

There was a room down the hall and around the corner, Room 204 that was given to us to use. When Joe Stewart became Secretary of the Senate in 1987 he had a number of friends who had worked for the Senate whom he believed would be suitable interviewees for our oral history program. Don conducted really good oral histories because these were long-standing Senate staff. We needed a place for them to work. Joe also occasionally provided us with additional staff during the Bicentennial. We needed annex space for them. So we had this room down the hall and we used it.

The then-Senate Chaplain, Richard Halverson, whose office was located right next door, had a fair amount of clout around here and he decided that he wanted that whole suite. He didn't want his partitioned half suite, he wanted the whole suite. He did research to learn that it was just a matter of knocking out the wall, there were no permanent load-bearing walls there. We didn't want him to do that. So there was a battle that went along and we won with lots of help from Joe Stewart. I remember running into him in the men's room one time. Chaplain Halverson would always greet me in the restroom with a "God bless you brother." One day, referring to the space issue, he said, "I think I've finally brought myself to the point where I can forgive you. But my secretary hasn't." [Laughs].

We were always worried about losing that space in 204, though never about the prime space here in 201. That was ours and as secure as anything on Capitol Hill can be. But this adjunct space was not. Finally, in 2001, there was an evenly divided 50/50 Senate. The committees needed to expand their space. The Finance Committee, which is right across the hall, had been coveting that space for years. It finally won. It was a decision at the leadership level and we didn't stand a chance against that. So we lost that space.

Then we ended up getting space down in the basement. When a crop of new senators arrives, those members have temporary space there until the permanent office suites are made ready for them. After the first three to four months of a two-year congressional cycle, when the new members are settled in permanent quarters, we were able to use that for our archival processing facility. Diane Boyle, the archival assistant, was down there. But we got booted out eventually. Finally we got space, temporary space, back on the 8<sup>th</sup> floor, 801. It was just a tiny telephone booth kind of office. Slowly but surely, again, thanks to Diane Boyle, we worked with the Rules Committee to get the next-door office, one that nobody ever seemed to be using. Gradually, we turned it into working space and that's now where the photo historian has her office. In terms of office

space you never can say that you're secure with what you have, except for SH-201. Although even with this suite, there was a move some years ago to convince us to move down to the Postal Square annex.

**Scott:** Talk about being off campus!

**Baker:** They were looking for these odd entities. You know, does it matter where the historian is? Well, we have an archival component and the archivists need to be very close to the committee staffs and so forth. So we did defuse that effort. They said, "We'll give you twice as much space as you have here." And we said, "Thank you very much but we're happy." There really hasn't been a serious move on this space. But you never can let down your guard!

**Scott:** You never know!

Ok, I think that's a good place for us to stop. Thank you very much.

**Baker:** You're very welcome.

**New Audiences, New Opportunities**  
**Interview #6**  
**Wednesday, September 22, 2010**

**Scott:** Welcome.

**Baker:** Thank you.

**Scott:** Thank you for being here. I thought we could start with a discussion of the presidential impeachment trial of 1999. I'd like to know what role the Historical Office played in helping the Senate to prepare for that trial.

**Baker:** The one thing to remember about the role of the Historical Office in preparing for that trial is that a lot of it was conducted in a semi-secret fashion. We really began in late November of 1998 when it was very clear what the House was going to do, but they hadn't formally impeached President Clinton. We met quietly. There was a team of maybe 20 people, heavily populated with lawyers from various parts of the Senate. But also the historical component was important because, as you know, around here, if an action has the blessing of tradition, of precedent, then it's a lot easier to accomplish that action than if you are doing something from scratch. Just a very trivial example: the gallery admission cards for visitors—do you issue one card as a permanent card or do you issue a new one every day? How do you manage that? A lot of that was dealt with by the curator's office. Once we determined that the Andrew Johnson impeachment trial had a policy of daily admissions as opposed to permanent admissions, then all of a sudden it didn't deserve any more thought. That was it. There's a reason for doing it. So even though some of the precedents were a century-plus old, once we established the existence of those precedents, we could move on. That was partly the role of the Historical Office, just to talk about the tenor of the Andrew Johnson impeachment trial. The Senate in 1998 knew a lot about impeachment practice because of all of the preparations starting in 1974 when they thought there would be a presidential impeachment trial for Richard Nixon and then the three judicial trials in the 1980s. It was really a matter of fine-tuning it for how do you deal with a trial of a sitting president?

**Scott:** That's interesting. Did that consume a lot of the office's resources for a short period of time? Were you really busy on the project?

**Baker:** It certainly was an intensive involvement for a short period of time. Yes, I'd say that it did consume quite a bit of the office's resources. Betty

Koed became the expert on impeachment trials. Of course, new books were coming out at a great rate, maybe three or four because of the potential market for those books. Someone had to read, digest, and understand and figure out how those might add to the sum total of knowledge. Plus, just lots of articles and old reports, old Library of Congress Congressional Research Service reports. Somebody in the office needed to be on top of that. Betty beautifully performed that function. And then of course she translated all of that information into an Internet-friendly format. We were getting calls about precedents and it was great to be able to direct people to the Internet, to our website. A lot of people never called us because they had already gone to the website which is typical of any breaking controversy, whether it's a contested judicial nomination, or a treaty fight, or an impeachment. If you get it up there on the Senate website, you make a lot of people happy. They understand that what they are getting is balanced, nonpartisan information. It keeps us from getting telephone elbow in terms of all those phone calls.

**Scott:** Betty Koed was a relatively new hire at that point? She got thrown right into it.

**Baker:** She was. She started in 1998, right at the very beginning, but she picked up on it. It's typical of Betty to move right on in a positive way and she did a great job.

**Scott:** Maybe we can talk a little bit about the role that technology has played in the Historical Office over time. Clearly when you started in the 1970s it was a very different operation getting material and information out to the public, or to Senate offices, or scholars. It was a very different process than it is now. As you mentioned, our website is, in some cases, the first place that people go. If they can't find it, then they call us. Maybe you can talk about how technology has changed the mission of the office, or the way that you have distributed information over time.

**Baker:** I think the Senate of 1975 had much more in common with the Senate of 1935 than it does with today's Senate. Just take two major instruments of communication: the telephone and the typewriter. We had telephones, but they didn't have long-distance capability. If you wanted a long-distance telephone you had to go over to the secretary of the Senate's office where they had one long-distance phone, at least one, that was for use for the offices under the secretary. As far as typewriters were concerned, I think we did have electric typewriters but that was it, certainly not memory typewriters. That was a huge deal when they

trundled into the office up in the Capitol a “mag” card typewriter. The data was captured on a magnetic card that looked almost like a strip of microfilm. The secretary would type in everything to that card and save it. The data was stored in a large electronic box placed near the typewriter. That’s the other major change. The secretary ruled the office, the office secretary, not the secretary of the Senate. If that secretary was having not a good day or was irritated with, say, the historian, the production might slow down a little bit. All roads led to that staff member. Over the years, just as in other office situations, the role of a traditional secretary has basically ceased to exist. Now we have office managers, which is a higher grade in terms of quality of experience and background. It took us a long while over the years to get that right. We ended up finally with Stephen Tull and that was a great mark of success. I knew I could retire when Stephen was well established in that job. His predecessors, with the notable exception of Liz Strannigan in the early 1990s, in fairness to the office, I would not have walked out of the office and left them with that problem. That’s another story.

**Scott:** Nordy Hoffman talks about introducing computers into members’ offices in the late 1970s. When did you guys get your first computer?

**Baker:** A bit later. When the Republicans took over in 1981 Senator Mark Hatfield became chairman of the Appropriations Committee. He was very proud of what his office was doing as a model, as a showcase for the “all automated” office, even using the expression “paperless” office. Being in the support portion of the Senate, we’re not the first to get the cutting edge technology. It comes along. As a way of communicating to what we thought was our constituency, we developed a newsletter. If you have a newsletter, you have to have a mailing list. Someone has to maintain the mailing list. You have to keep it up to date. That became a huge project. The newsletter itself, we perhaps sent to 1,000 people. I like to think that the *UNUM* newsletter, the secretary of the Senate’s current newsletter, is really a direct descendent of our newsletter. Ours had the catchy title of “Senate History.” It was a bold undertaking and lasted for a few years. It served a very good purpose for us within the historical community because it reminded historians around the country, as well as people around the Senate, that we existed. It was a good communications vehicle. It eventually became obsolete thanks to the Internet.

**Scott:** The office really started using the Internet in the late 1990s, when you started to populate the Senate website with information about Senate history.



**Baker:** That was the beginning. Today, we hear about these two milestone dates, somewhere between 1994 and 1996, when all of a sudden more and more people have access to it. I'd say that's about right. That was not long ago.

**Scott:** No it wasn't.

**Baker:** But it had an enormous impact on how the office communicates with the world and how we communicate with each other. It is now customary to send an e-mail to a colleague sitting just fifteen feet away. Who would have conceived of something like that prior to the mid-1990s? And we were able to automate all of our paper files and to have those scanned and available. That would have been unthinkable in 1975 or 1985 or even 1995. Now we have it.

**Scott:** Do you think it's been a time saver?

**Baker:** The automation of the files?

**Scott:** The digital system of having everything available on individual computers at individual workstations rather than maintaining files in a central location where people have to dig through them.

**Baker:** That's a tough question. My instinctive response would be, not much of a time saver. It certainly is if the building has to be closed. If there is another anthrax attack or some other reason they have to shut down the building. Now that you can operate from home and reach into those files, it's wonderful. It's really more of a security benefit. In terms of my own way of gathering information, I'd much rather pull out that file and leaf through it.

**Scott:** That's a perfect segue to talking about how you and your office handled the evacuation on September 11, 2001. How did you respond to what was going on?

**Baker:** Well, we all stood around in my office on that gloriously beautiful but indescribably awful morning. At the time we had one television set. We all watched the TV and couldn't believe what was happening, just as everyone else couldn't believe it. Eventually we decided we probably should leave for the day. It wasn't as if the buildings were evacuated or anything else, despite a plane flying into the nearby Pentagon. We went home. And then came back the next day and began to deal with the horror of it all. From the perspective of our workplace, memories of that day are somewhat clouded by what happened here a few weeks

later when an envelope containing anthrax was discovered in Senator Tom Daschle's Hart Building mailroom. No one ordered an evacuation of the building. That would make sense only in hindsight. Senate staff all came back into work the next day. I think it was the third day that the sergeant at arms and leadership decided to close the Hart Building and also the Russell and Dirksen Buildings. Those other two buildings were opened within days or weeks of that closure. But the Hart Building stayed closed for three months. We didn't know along the way what the duration of that closure would be. Any forward motion in the work of the office took place from a desk in the Senate Library because the library was located in the Russell Building and that opened up fairly quickly. We would have telephone communications with all of our colleagues, but it was a pretty rustic kind of situation and not very efficient communication. It was a very long three months. We didn't get a whole lot of work done. Today, because of that event, the idea of telecommuting, although I don't personally think it's a great idea in our specific situation, it is feasible. You literally can do your job from home. In 2001 that would not have been an option.

**Scott:** For those three months, did you have any access to the documents that you have here in the office?

**Baker:** No. The office was sealed, the building was sealed. Mike DiSilvestro, who was the director of the office of Senate Security, was really in his element. He's a terrific guy. He is perfectly cast for his job. He was happy to put on a moon suit and come in to retrieve work. To retrieve financial information from the Disbursing Office so they could move ahead with the payroll off site. But otherwise the building was sealed to anyone who wasn't wearing protective gear because they didn't quite know what to expect. Three months later, on January 22, 2002, the day was announced and we all walked into the office with Gail Chaddock, a reporter from *Christian Science Monitor*. She wanted to do a story on what it was the historians found when they came back. We found Don Ritchie's plant, indestructible! [Both laugh] We were all concerned about the physical quality of the files. The incident response team said that they did spray some chemicals. It was also not clear whether they sprayed in our office or other places in the Hart Building. That was the moment of truth when we opened the first file drawer on January 22 and everything looked okay. The office looked the way it did three months earlier. There weren't sandwiches on the desks, but basically, it was as if people had just stepped out for a few minutes and had come back after a 95-day lunch hour.

**Scott:** During the time that you worked, you had a desk in the library. I would imagine that journalists would have been very interested in what the Senate was doing and what was going on in the Hart Building. Were they calling your desk there in the library?

**Baker:** We did get quite a few calls. But it was a time of great confusion and chaos. There were many other information outlets. Around here every senator's office is an outlet. It was a good home-state story, how are our senators coping with the fact that one or both of them are out of their offices in the Hart Building. Senators had to double up with other senators in Dirksen Building offices and Russell Building offices. It was a time of enormous inconvenience for sure. Coming in the wake of 9/11 people really didn't know what was going to happen next. Is this the beginning of a chain of horrors? I got a number of phone calls at home, Don did, Betty did. So we did the best we could. I remember doing a lot of business from my cell phone. One day in particular, I remember sitting in my car parked outside the Capitol. I was here to do my shift in the Senate Library and trying to field very detailed questions from reporters—about Senate history, about questions specific to the event. I thought, boy, this is really working out of your vest pocket. It was not a preferred way to do it, but we did the best we could. Of course, with three Capitol Hill newspapers, another major change from 1975, they have to feed the beast. They have columns to fill up so we did what we could.

When we returned to the Hart Building on January 22, Don, Betty, and I needed no prompting to recognize this as a unique (let it be hoped) event. We also recognized that interviewing key staff in the Secretary's Office about what they do on a day-to-day basis might be less than thrilling, but getting them to describe how they struggled, during the anthrax crisis, to get back to normal would be a good story—and it surely was. Don and Betty took the lead in developing standardized questions to help give the project a degree of coherence. They did the interviewing. I believe those transcripts will only grow in value in the years ahead. (Imagine having something like that for the displacement that followed the 1814 burning of the Capitol.)

**Scott:** How has the institution changed since the attack of 9/11 and then the anthrax attack after? What are the biggest changes that you have seen after that period?

**Baker:** These would be security related changes. Obviously the level of security increased. We witnessed it from 1971, 1983, and then 2001. You can

only ratchet it up so far, however. During each of those times there was discussion about building a fence around the Capitol Building. There were cooler heads who said you cannot wall off a representative assembly's quarters, although, in effect, after 9/11 that's what happened in the Capitol. The perimeter has been tightened and sealed. Looking out from a third floor window of the Senate wing onto the east front and looking down and seeing behind one of those big marble columns a Capitol policeman with submachine gun and extra ammunition attached to his or her belt, it is so chilling and so sad. I think, speaking as a person who likes to think of himself more on the content side and less on the security side, it's extremely unfortunate and it's a great overreaction.

From my perspective, the classic example was the sergeant at arms decreeing that the Senate Chamber galleries would be closed when the Senate was not in session. That's understandable in the immediate aftermath of these incidents when people are trying to develop a revised security plan for the whole campus. The sergeant at arms and the leadership are responsible for the well being of 7,000 staff members plus countless visitors. Caution is definitely the watchword. Unfortunately, from my perspective, after a reasonable period of caution passed these restrictions remained in place with no indication that they were ever going to change, that the galleries would be open so that people could just go in and look down in the Senate Chamber. It took basically more than eight years and a lot of hair pulling and ranting and raving to finally get the Senate to change that policy.

**Scott:** Can you talk a little bit about the day that it was announced that the policy would change?

**Baker:** It was at my retirement party. Senator Mitch McConnell, the Republican Leader, said as a going away present they were going to open up the galleries. Both he and Senate majority leader Harry Reid very kindly offered that as an added farewell gift. But then there was some confusion because it wasn't clear whether they were going to open the galleries for the rest of the recess in August 2009 or forever. Anyway, we got that confusion resolved—it's forever. That was really wonderful.

**Scott:** Why do you think it took them so long to get to that point?

**Baker:** It was an oversight on the part of the leadership. It was the sergeant at arms running the security program as he interpreted guidelines from the elected leadership. If you do it the way the security folks want to do it, you'd

never have anybody in the building. Their job is to protect the members. The easiest way to do that is to keep the outsiders out. I think it simply hadn't come to the attention of the leadership. Over the years I talked to a number of senators, starting with Senator Byrd, who had other things on his mind. It was really Senator Tom Harkin of Iowa, who I have seen socially on a couple of occasions, and I have a nice relationship with him. He got outraged. He said, "I can't believe it! I cannot believe it! You must be kidding. Explain that to me one more time." I think that's the reason. Senators did not know that the galleries were closed when the Senate was not in session because they leave the campus.

**Scott:** They are off doing other things.

**Baker:** They are gone. With all the other things they have to focus on, this is a housekeeping matter. You leave that up to the sergeant at arms. At one point, some of us lobbied a bit, without that official's knowledge, to have the secretary of the Senate added to the Capitol Police Board or to another policymaking body that the sergeant at arms was on but the secretary of the Senate was not on. The secretary, and the clerk of the House, the counterpart over on the House side, represent program as opposed to security. There is this constant battle between those two forces. The people with the guns, the police, usually win. There's been a chronically touchy relationship between the secretary of the Senate and the sergeant at arms going back to Year One. If you have to run an institution administratively, you need to have one administrator, not two. In 1975 the Commission on the Operation of the Senate recommended that there be a chief administrator of the Senate. The same thing was recommended over on the House side and indeed there is a chief administrator of the House, but they also have the sergeant at arms and the clerk of the House. So all it did on the House side was add a job and they all appear to have their independent fiefdoms. Whereas, I think in the Senate, the recommendation was an administrator of the Senate would set policy and it's just not going to happen. So we have the secretary and the sergeant at arms. In some cases those two individuals have gotten along very well. Al[fonso] Lenhardt was the sergeant at arms during 9/11 and Jeri Thomson was the secretary of the Senate. Jeri was responsible for recruiting Lenhardt, so they had a naturally strong relationship. Other relationships have not been so close.

**Scott:** Do you think a good balance has been struck here between program and security after 9/11?

**Baker:** I don't know. It's not an easy question to answer. In some areas it has, and other areas it hasn't. That's not a very constructive answer. I think the

opening of the Capitol Visitor Center has solved a lot of those problems. It's probably brought additional problems in its own wake. But at least it has rationalized the security problem. As I said in the earlier interview, it's the primary reason that the Capitol Visitor Center exists, for security. The educational function is secondary. There it is.

**Scott:** One thing we haven't talked about and a big change in the Senate since you've been here is the introduction of televised floor proceedings which started in 1986. I wonder if you would like to comment on that. How you've perceived a change over time since C-SPAN started to televise the Senate floor proceedings.

**Baker:** You can use the tired old cliché of Pandora's Box. At the time that they were debating whether to allow gavel to gavel television coverage, really beginning in the late 1970s on up through 1986, that reference was made on more than a couple of occasions. "You let those cameras in here and no one can predict what the consequences are going to be." I personally think that they had no choice but to do that. Eventually they would have done it. The House did it in 1979. The Senate, being the slower, more conservative body, waited another seven years. If it hadn't happened in '86 it would have happened a couple years later.

From the perspective of the Senate Historical Office, and the mission of the office, it was a very good thing. People, who wouldn't otherwise have any connections with the operations of the Senate, could for the first time see, day by day, every minute that the Senate is in session. The Senate literally extended its gallery coast to coast, and worldwide. That's good. Prior to 1986 I think that anybody who stopped to think about Senate operations might be tempted to think about a Hollywood version of that.

A few years later came the development of websites and the expansion of the Internet. This gave us the welcomed opportunity to populate the websites with explanatory information. Why is the Senate doing this or that?

I thought we had a major breakthrough in 1989 when I asked Senator Byrd if he didn't think it was unfortunate that people who came to the Senate after seeing it on television on C-SPAN didn't have any piece of paper they could take away that explained what was going on in the chamber other than just a one-page seating chart. He thought that was pretty bad. I was then able to say, "Senator Byrd really thinks it's unfortunate that we don't have something to hand to visitors." That was the beginning of the booklet that was issued every Congress

with the seating chart in the middle and a lot of the historical and room-related and site-related information. In more recent times they have separated the seating chart from the book, which is a great idea because a number of years, they would print large numbers of copies of those books and my experience was that the doorkeepers were not enthusiastic about giving them out. For whatever reason, there was a surplus of these Congress-by-Congress brochures. They would have to be pulped, huge numbers of them. It's a real good thing that they have developed an evergreen version that people can take with them. I suspect that many of those pamphlets will show up in family archives 20, 30, 40 years later—when Grandma went to Washington for the first time.

**Scott:** You mentioned something really interesting which is that with C-SPAN coverage, the office had a role to play in educating the public about what they were seeing. So that created, not more work, but it meant that you had more information to get out there. Is that because people were calling and asking you how things were going? Or you just felt from your own standpoint that we better explain to them what it is that they're watching?

**Baker:** A little of both. It came from both directions. I was very happy to be invited to be on C-SPAN that first day that they did live gavel-to-gavel coverage, along with the Senate parliamentarian, Bob Dove. What is the significance of this big day in Senate history? Nobody knew what the significance was because it was new. Even today, all of these years later, you can still get a good debate going about the impact of televising Senate proceedings. Certainly it has made keeping up with the floor proceedings a lot easier for members, for staff, for lobbyists, for the American public. That's huge. But in terms of trying to help explain what was going on there, we had to really think in different ways about how you are going to communicate. It wasn't something that we arrived at quickly. Having within the next eight years the availability of the Internet and e-mail really began to jump-start that project into a higher gear.

**Scott:** Television and the Internet have vastly expanded the audience of the Historical Office, is that accurate?

**Baker:** They have, at a time, as you would well appreciate, when the field of American political history has really shrunk. The people who are doing really good writing in American political history tend to be journalists who are good writers and know how to tell a good story. American political historians are retiring from academic institutions across the nation and being replaced by people in other fields of historical study. That is sad. In the earlier days we really did try

in a very aggressive way to communicate with our colleagues among other American political historians. We went to the annual meetings of two, three, sometimes four associations and had high visibility. In more recent times, that audience has almost disappeared. But instead we have access to the whole wide American public and the international public, judging by the kinds of calls that we get from BBC and German television and Japanese television and so forth. I don't think we would have ever expected to be able to pick up the phone and have somebody calling from London who sounds like they are speaking from the next room. That's a far cry from the days when we had to go over to the secretary of the Senate's office to get a long-distance line. [Both laugh] That wasn't that long ago.

**Scott:** I've been answering a lot of those e-mails that come in through the historians' e-mail account, where anybody can find us on the Internet and e-mail us a question. We've had e-mails from people all over the world. It's just remarkable the audience that we can now appeal to, because of these technologies. As you say, 35 years ago that wasn't possible at all.

**Baker:** That's right. Not even 25 years ago.

**Scott:** One question that we do need to cover and haven't is, what's been the biggest change in the institution in the last 35 years?

**Baker:** You can get a lot of answers to that question, but certainly the breakdown in comity among members is one answer. That is huge. To see what we see now, almost every day the Senate is in session, a solid phalanx of the minority party saying, "You're not going to move on this. We're not going anywhere." That would have been inconceivable 25, even 20 years ago. Prior to the 1980 election, that was sort of a turning point when all of a sudden you begin to get a harder-line group of members in here. Of course, they're not selected as in the case of a private club's members. Aside from age, residency, and citizenship requirements, the Senate must welcome anyone who shows up at its door bearing valid credentials. They are sent here and they are a very good reflection of public attitudes. That hard-line intransigence is very sad. Since the basic premise of the Senate is as a forum for compromise, for educating one another about what is happening in different parts of the country, all of a sudden compromise is out the window. Willing to be informed by your colleagues about their particular region's problems or state's problems is also, I think, of less importance, now that everyone has 24/7 access to the Internet. You can find out yourself what is going on in Colorado. If there is a difficult political situation



there, you're going to see it in a blog very quickly. So the interconnection among members has weakened enormously.

**Scott:** Why do you think that is?

**Baker:** Well, I think you trace it back to the economy and to the United States government running a very large deficit. Fighting wars without limit. You see pictures taken of the Mine-Resistant-Ambush-Protected (MRAP) vehicles being used in Iraq and you wonder what each of them, and countless other modern vehicles and weapons systems, must cost. It's a staggering amount of money. Nothing is more important than the safety of our troops, but it is impossible entering these kinds of military actions to even begin to know the financial consequences of such decisions. Then we look at the country and we see school systems are in crisis. There are a higher number of people living in poverty today, one out of every seven Americans. What is happening to the country? We are bleeding to death. We are bleeding to death because of these limitless wars. We have got to refocus our views. We've got to think back more to the idea of collective security. Hopefully there will never again be a day when a Congress will supinely allow a president to raise the banner and say we're going to have a preemptive strike on some sovereign nation no matter how much we like or dislike that nation. Now we are paying the price. We are in open-ended conflicts. Who is going to stand up and say, "I'm going to vote against an appropriation to provide more MRAPs or more body armor for the extra 100,000 troops that we're sending off to the Middle East." So, from a legislative perspective, it's truly out of control.

This reflects the enormous swing of power to the executive branch. The president in times of crisis has always been the preeminent official of the executive branch. The Senate and House come out very badly in that kind of a competition. Again and again we see the president appointing senior officials to his personal staff because he knows that he can't get them past the confirmation process for the job he actually wants them to function in. That's bad for the Senate and it is bad for the president, but most of all it's bad for the process. The framers of the Constitution didn't anticipate, in their wildest dreams, that that would happen. And it is happening and it's happening more and more. The question we hear all the time, with greater volume and with greater intensity is: "Is the Senate irrelevant? Is the Senate dysfunctional?"

**Scott:** "Is it broken?"

**Baker:** Right. And parts of it are indeed in need of repair, but the Senate, just as it doesn't control who comes in as members, has to deal with the situations it faces. I think it's done a pretty good job over the last 220-plus years of doing that. But it's tougher and more challenging now than it's ever been. There have been times of enormous challenge in the past: the Civil War, the Spanish American War, the two World Wars, any war-related era. But it's hard to think of a time when the polarization has been greater, the public distrust of their elected officials higher, and that's a huge breakdown.

**Scott:** It's very interesting that as people announce greater distrust of Congress in poll after poll, they also are electing officials who run on a platform of, "I will not compromise. I will stand firm to my convictions." In effect they are putting people in Congress who won't cross the aisle and won't work to find that hard compromise that can make progress possible. I think your comment about the officials being a reflection of the greater body politic is an important one.

**Baker:** If you really want to run for Congress on a platform of "I will not compromise," you ought to run for some other job. [Both laugh] Go into the military. But that's not what this is about—I don't know what the role of the Senate or the House of Representatives is, if it is not about compromise. It is about shifting, altering your views within broad parameters of principle, for the common good.

**Scott:** And particularly in the Senate where individuals have so much power to slow debate and to deliberate on particularly contentious issues.

**Baker:** Exactly. Other people will say that a turning point was 1975 when they shifted the margin required for cloture from a two-thirds vote to a three-fifths vote, making it easier to get, but also more feasible to use that as a weapon to delay proceedings. Under two-thirds vote a filibuster was very, very hard to break. Under 60 votes, it's possible to break so it's a whole different dynamic. There's a new book called *Filibustering* by Gregory Koger and that's one of his theories, that the change to 60 votes has really had an enormous impact on the operation of the Senate. I think as historians we'll let a little more time go by.

**Scott:** It's striking, too, how many people, when you read the oral history interviews for example, who have worked in the institution defend to the end the filibuster and say that it is a very vital component of the Senate. They often criticize academics who work outside of the institution and who haven't really

been grounded here for suggesting that it needs to be changed and that it's undemocratic. It's an ongoing debate.

**Baker:** A good example of your point is that the Brookings Institution held a conference this past May 17 and they had two panels. One panel included Bob Dove, the former parliamentarian, Marty Paone, the former Democratic Party secretary, and me. We all said just what you said and offered a qualified defense of the filibuster. Otherwise you just have a smaller version of the House of Representatives and the Senate becomes a majoritarian body. At the Brookings conference, Norm Ornstein, Thomas Mann, Sarah Binder, Steven Smith, and a couple of other political scientists argued that this is a huge crisis. It is, but their solution to the crisis is to go to majority cloture. The Senate is anything but a majority based institution. Half the nation's population lives in the ten largest states, which are represented by only 20 senators.

**Scott:** Can you say something about the nuclear option? That's been a recent, pretty heated debate in the Senate. Maybe you can say something about that in terms of your historical perspective and the perspective of the Historical Office. What did you think about that debate? Were you contacted in any way, were you involved in thinking about the historic precedent for that?

**Baker:** We did not play a significant role because it was such a highly political, present and future-oriented battle. Consistently, over the years, when the political people are making their cases, they realize that we are in a nonpartisan stature and that if our advice or guidance is going to mean anything, it is only if it's taken in a nonpartisan way. The idea that the then-Senate majority leader, Bill Frist, was actively considering getting a ruling from the presiding officer that with regard to judicial nominations you could have a simple majority vote to close debate to take up those nominations, that move being the nuclear option, was to those who have been around the Senate a while and who have respect for its proceedings, anathema. It was a highly unusual kind of situation in which Bill Frist found himself one morning as the Senate majority leader through an unprecedented series of events. He didn't come up through the ranks the normal way that a leader would. If you look back on any of the other leaders previously or since, those are people who would probably not pull the trigger on the nuclear option. We can only hope that future leaders will demonstrate restraint comparable to that which Senator Frist ultimately exercised.

**Scott:** One thing I would like to follow up on from an earlier conversation we had. You mentioned before that there were more federal historians when you

came to the Senate in the 1970s, more historians working within the federal government. And also that the community here of federal government historians worked very closely with people in the academic world. You had annual meetings and luncheons. And you said that it has changed. How do you account for that change? What has happened that has led to a less collegial community here in Washington?

**Baker:** I think it all begins with the availability of teaching jobs, or government history jobs. The supply of jobs has shrunk while the supply of competent, well-trained historians has increased. People coming up through the profession are giving up on the possibility of working as government historians. Earlier, the government history field was, from my vantage point, populated by people who realized there was no hope getting an academic job. Or the opportunities were greatly constricted. They began to look around at this emerging field of federal government history, of public history, and you can get pretty excited about what you can do in these fields. You have large potential audiences to reach, but, sadly, even that reached a saturation point.

Particularly during the bicentennial of the government's establishment in 1989, there was hope that you'd get every government agency to have a formal historical office. That was a pretty modest goal, or so one might think! The military agencies had such a program. The State Department did. For a while the Environmental Protection Agency did. And then it began to taper off. I think a lot of it was due to availability of funds and priorities and changes in presidential administrations. For years we tried to get established a White House historical office. We had an agreement that we would have a meeting with President George H.W. Bush to talk about actually doing that. And then he was defeated for reelection. So that was the end of that. There have been a few other times like that. I had long conversations with Charles Ruff who was the White House chief counsel and defended President Clinton in his impeachment trial. He said, "There's no way we are going to let historians into the White House. That will be like a magnet for subpoena servers. Historians will have documents and people will subpoena those documents, they will have inside information about how the White House operates." So it's the glass half full or half empty kind of situation. The strength of having a historical program in his interpretation is also the weakness of having such a program.

The Society for History of the Federal Government was created in 1979 and at its apogee had well over 400 members and today its membership is probably half of that. It's another indication of what you are mentioning. And

let's hope that we're talking about cyclical trends here. We're heading on the up cycle again.

**Scott:** It strikes me, too, that now there isn't a lot of interaction, and I'm new here, but there isn't a strong bond between academic historians in Washington (because those would be the easiest folks for us to meet with) and historians who work within government agencies. That seems to have changed. Don has talked to me a number of times about the luncheons that you all attended and what great opportunities they were to keep contact with people working within academia and also to keep those historiographical conversations going. That bond is no longer as strong as it was.

**Baker:** The University of Maryland is a good example of a history department that had some very good historians. That department went out of its way to have collaborative programs with federal history agencies. But those very historians at Maryland are either dead or have retired and they have been replaced, if at all, by someone in an entirely different field, so there is really nobody to reach out to anymore. I couldn't name three people in the University of Maryland history department. Whereas 20, 30 years ago, of course I did my Ph.D. there so I knew quite a few of them, but even so, they were reaching out to us. I don't think that's happening.

But it gets to a fundamental question: What's the audience for the Senate Historical Office? I think we were created under the assumption that we would help historians around the country gain access to rich documentation of Senate legislative activities. That was what Arthur Schlesinger had in mind in 1974 when he wrote that letter to Mike Mansfield. It's shifted to, I think, a much more useful purpose of helping the nation at large, now that it has unimpeded access to the proceedings of the Senate, to the proceedings of Senate committees, everything right down to the personal conversations, with the exception of personal conversations between two members meeting behind a door trying to strike a deal. It's a much more open institution and I think our service is to help respond to the barrage of questions the Senate's greater public visibility now stimulates throughout the land.

**Scott:** That's interesting. I hadn't thought about it that way. Is there anything that we've missed here that you'd like to mention?

**Baker:** Our relationship with the Center for Legislative Archives is a very important one. Just in a nutshell, when their office began, there were just two

people at the National Archives who had any responsibility for taking care of the Senate's official records. That has evolved, particularly since the early 1990s, into the Center for Legislative Archives, with a staff of about 20 people, very good professionals. It's very gratifying to see that. I don't know whether maybe you want to add as an appendix to this interview, a paper I did for the Capitol Historical Society Freedom Award about the role of this office and the National Archives in making the archival records of the Senate more accessible.

**Scott:** I will do that. If there is anything else you would like to add to an appendix, please let me know.

**Baker:** In Karen Paul's *An American Political Archives Reader*, the first article is sort of an overview that I did. Entitled, "Reflections on the Modern History of Congressional History," it might be useful. You are welcome to be the judge of that.

**Scott:** I can't thank you enough for spending so much time with us and for being so patient with me as I work my way through this first interview. I've really enjoyed it and we've added so much information to the record about the history of the institution and the historical office.

**Baker:** It's given me an opportunity to interact with you for six sessions and to get to know you a little better. That is something I'm really glad happened.

**Scott:** I am too.

**Baker:** I hope we will continue a good friendly collegial relationship in the years to come.

**Scott:** I do too. Thank you so much!

# An American Political Archives Reader

Edited by  
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THE SCARECROW PRESS, INC.  
*Lanham, Maryland • Toronto • Plymouth, UK*  
2009

of the Congressional Papers Roundtable was part of this effort to reach beyond the Beltway by creating a national forum for archivists to discuss congressional papers issues. In addition, award-winning guides to the research collections of the House and Senate were produced by the Center for Legislative Archives.

A major turning point occurred in 1990 when P.L. 101-509 established the Advisory Committee on the Records of Congress and simultaneously improved the status of the Center for Legislative Archives at the National Archives. This committee broadened regular discussions about the records of Congress still further by including the clerk of the House, the secretary of the Senate, appointees of House and Senate leadership, and the archivist of the United States. Its accomplishments can be traced through the four *Reports* that are reproduced on the Center for Legislative Archives Web site. Many of the specific projects described in these reports were first articulated in *The Documentation of Congress*, published in 1992 (S. Pub. 102-20). This report was the product of the Congressional Papers Roundtable and its Documentation Task Force headed by the Senate archivist.

Another important building block was the establishment of the Association of Centers for the Study of Congress (ACSC) in 2003, testimony to the fact that research institutions were beginning to focus energies on building better documentation of the Congress. Through its 501(c) (3) status and its annual meetings, it has again broadened the discussion by including historians and political scientists to further illuminate what to preserve and how best to make it available. The ACSC is exploring various options to make congressional sources available through the Internet.

While much progress has been made in the over 30 years since the initiation of efforts to better manage these invaluable historical resources, there remains much to do. Preserving and making available the records of Congress and the political process is an enormous undertaking, requiring enormous resources that are efficiently managed. It requires continued coordination among numerous individuals and groups, including those who create, collect, preserve, use, and finance the preservation of congressional collections. This volume is designed to inspire those who are interested in participating in this fascinating endeavor. It also sheds light on where we started and where we have come. Together, we may create even more effective ways to manage this important segment of the historical record. Like the history of Congress itself, progress happens when many come together for a common goal. In this case, it is the documentation of our political process.

# 1

## Reflections on the Modern History of Congressional History

*Richard A. Baker*  
U.S. Senate Historian

### HOUSE RESOLUTION 307

On March 5, 2008, within minutes of accepting an invitation to prepare an address on "the modern history of congressional history" to the annual meeting of the Association of Centers for the Study of Congress (ACSC), I received an urgent message. "Turn on C-SPAN to watch what's happening on the floor of the House of Representatives!" As the image flickered onto my computer monitor, I heard Representative Robert Brady (D-PA), chair of the Committee on House Administration, say, "[This legislation] reminds members of the importance of maintaining and archiving their papers so that future leaders and citizens may learn and understand the decisions that we have made." The camera then shifted to Brady's Republican counterpart, Vernon Ehlers of Michigan. "As members of Congress," said Ehlers, "we are routinely faced with an abundance of notes, letters, and other papers that cross our desk each day. For each of us, there is the temptation to rid ourselves of today's notes and papers and begin each day anew, free of the scourge of clutter." He continued, "It would be easiest to discard these items along with the rest of the day's castoffs, but, as history has shown us, it is often those mundane items that have painted the most accurate and detailed picture of our nation's history. These papers and their contents separately may tell us very little about the place and time in which they were created, but they are threads that, when woven together, create the fabric of our democracy."<sup>1</sup> The House then proceeded to adopt a resolution "expressing the sense of Congress that Members' Congressional papers should be properly

<sup>1</sup> Presented at the Association of Centers for the Study of Congress, May 2008.



maintained and encouraging Members to take all necessary measures to manage and preserve their papers." Several months later, on June 20, the Senate unanimously joined the House in awarding its approval.<sup>2</sup>

Senate Archivist Karen Paul and I do not usually do a lot of dancing in the office. But, on any list of euphoric days in the modern history of congressional history, the morning of March 5, 2008, would surely be near the top. In 33 years as Senate historian, I have come to appreciate the potency of three simple words when strung together in a paragraph: "Congress," "democracy," and "history."

## HISTORICAL FRAMEWORKS FOR STUDY OF CONGRESS

As the existence of the recently established Association of Centers for the Study of Congress affirms, history-based programs and agencies designed to explore the role of Congress in our democratic republic exist in an abundance unimaginable just a generation ago. Today, Congress employs close to 40 historians, archivists, and curators. This strong cadre is enhanced by 15 professionals at the National Archives Center for Legislative Archives. Staff at the center preserve and interpret House and Senate holdings amounting to 180,000 cubic feet of bills, resolutions, memoranda, and correspondence. The recent explosive growth of electronic records has added a new unit of measure to the center's holdings, which now include between five and six terabytes of data. Prior to 1975, with the exception of small curatorial programs, none of these staff positions existed.

How do we account for this remarkable burst of institutional support for the organized study of congressional history?

To frame an answer to that question, we must look at "The Scandal," "The Celebrations," and "The Dividend."

## THE SCANDAL

### Nixon

At the center of the scandal is President Richard M. Nixon. In response to revelations of the break-in at the Watergate headquarters of the Democratic National Committee, the Senate in 1973 created its Select Committee on Presidential Campaign Activities. That panel held 47 days of hearings and set in motion the process that led to Nixon's resignation. Nixon's efforts to withhold and destroy presidential records raised a long-deferred question: "Who owns the papers of federal officials, including those of U.S. senators and representatives?" The congressionally mandated National Study Commission on Records and Documents of Federal Officials—known as the

Public Documents Commission—concluded in 1977 that presidential and congressional papers, then considered the private property of those who possessed them, should be defined by statute as public property.<sup>3</sup> Congress considered that recommendation but chose only to deal with the papers of the nation's future chief executives by passing the 1978 Presidential Records Act. The prevailing sentiments among legislators regarding the remainder of the Public Documents Commission's proposal seemed to be "Who would want our papers?" and "Think how much they would cost to archive!"<sup>4</sup>

The Public Documents Commission had based its recommendations, in part, on testimony at a forum on congressional papers in December 1976. University of Michigan historian Robert Warner had commented, "In a sense, the problem of the papers of members of Congress is very great, indeed perhaps more considerable than either the Supreme Court or the presidency." He continued, "We have [had] 37 presidents and 102 Supreme Court Justices, but we have had almost 11,000 members of Congress."<sup>5</sup> Warner underscored complex issues of ownership, inadvertent loss, and the huge volume associated with these papers. Several years later, as archivist of the United States, he used that position to support major improvements in the preservation of congressional archival materials.

The aftershocks of the Watergate affair rumbled across the political landscape of the 1974 congressional election campaigns. Newly elected members, dubbed "Watergate Babies," arrived in Washington committed to inaugurating a more transparent government. In 1975, this spirit moved the Senate to create two reform-oriented, temporary panels: the Commission on the Operation of the Senate and the Select Committee to Study the Senate Committee System. The latter panel recommended that the Senate institute arrangements for timely and equitable access to its records.<sup>6</sup> The Senate responded and in 1980 mandated that most of its confidential records be opened 20 years after their creation.<sup>7</sup>

In this post-Watergate reform climate, and on the eve of the bicentennial celebration of the American Revolution, historian Arthur Schlesinger reminded Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield (D-MT) that most executive branch departments have historical offices. "Why should not the Senate have one? I need not add that Congress would be in a much stronger position when it complains about executive secrecy if it at least kept pace with the executive in opening up its own files."<sup>8</sup> Senator Mansfield and Minority Leader Hugh Scott (R-PA) successfully sponsored legislation establishing the Senate Historical Office, which opened in September 1975.<sup>9</sup>

### New Harmony

The major historical and archival professional groups took note of these Watergate-inspired developments. In October 1976, they invited to a strat-

egy session 41 historians and archivists concerned with the recent papers of still-active public figures. This gathering at the restored historic Indiana village of New Harmony proved to be anything but harmonious. The historians emphasized timely access, while the archivists counseled patience to ensure that the "chilling effect" of premature disclosure would not impel the creators of public papers to withhold, destroy, or place excessive restrictions on them.<sup>10</sup> Despite the conclave's contentiousness, the acquaintances forged there helped to shape the discussion for years to come.

### Dirksen Center

The mid-1970s also witnessed the earliest moves toward the creation of congressional research centers. In 1976, President Gerald Ford traveled to the hamlet of Pekin, Illinois, to dedicate the Everett Dirksen Congressional Center. He made this trip out of affection for his one-time partner in the Capitol Hill Republican leaders' news conferences dubbed the "Ev and Jerry Show." An unfortunate side effect of that visit occurred when a zealous squad of Secret Service agents ripped open sealed boxes of unprocessed records in a futile search for explosive materials. Perhaps they were looking for evidence of a Dirksen plot to make the marigold the national flower. Only Dirksen Center Director Frank Mackaman would know if there are still any bombshells hidden among the Dirksen papers.

Later that spring, the Dirksen Center conducted an inaugural symposium that attracted 60 historians, archivists, and librarians curious about this new facility and concerned about mounting problems of conserving congressional papers. Dirksen Center Board Chair James Unland noted the late senator's dream "to humanize the history of the legislative process." Unland prophetically noted, "This [conference] is the beginning of his dream."<sup>11</sup> In his keynote address, Archivist of the United States James B. Rhoads—a member of the Public Documents Commission—observed that in the aftermath of the Watergate affair, "we see a growing interest in the Congress as a countervailing force to the executive branch." He warned, however, of the great costs of preservation, the expense to researchers of traveling to such widely dispersed resources, and the privacy concerns raised by opening relatively recent materials.<sup>12</sup> Weeks later, Senator Roman Hruska of Nebraska, a Dirksen protégé, inserted the conference proceedings in the *Congressional Record* so that, as he put it, "Senators who are considering disposition of their own papers may have some understanding of the considerations involved."<sup>13</sup>

### Funding

The challenges expressed by archivist Rhoads signaled the need for significant funding. A pioneering federal grant to a congressional papers

repository came in 1974—\$1 million to process the papers of former House Speaker Sam Rayburn.<sup>14</sup> In 1978, following the death of former Vice President and Senator Hubert Humphrey, Congress appropriated \$5 million to the Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs at the University of Minnesota. In an emerging tradition of balancing such grants between Democratic and Republican honorees at the same time, Senate Republican Leader Howard Baker of Tennessee inserted another \$2.5 million for the Dirksen Center.<sup>15</sup> He honored his father-in-law and predecessor as Senate GOP leader, joking that Republicans could do the job for half of what the Democrats required for Humphrey. Sixteen years later, in 1994, the Dirksen Center made up that discrepancy by obtaining a further federal grant of \$2 million to process the papers of former House Republican Leader Robert Michel. This second Dirksen grant came as part of a package that awarded \$2 million to Boston College to manage the records of former Democratic House Speaker Thomas O'Neill. Other such bicameral and bipartisan pairings would follow.<sup>16</sup>

### 1978 Conference on Senators' Papers

In September 1978, Watergate, the New Harmony Conference, and expanding precedents for providing federal funds to process the papers of former members inspired the Senate to conduct a symposium on "The Research Use and Disposition of Senators' Papers." Senate leaders Robert Byrd (D-WV) and Howard Baker, both displaying increasing interest in management of the historical record, welcomed the 250 historians, archivists, and congressional staffers to the historic Senate Caucus Room. Throughout the two-day gathering, participants struggled to identify common ground. Historians who preferred to save everything, and archivists who insisted on having the final say about what to discard, had their eyes opened by Senate staff members who cited mail deliveries to member offices as high as 10,000 letters per week. This staggering volume in those pre-terabyte days created pressures for quick disposal of seemingly less significant items. "The scourge of clutter!" Participants noted that senators in 1978 would accumulate more paper in a single year than their predecessors of 30 years earlier would have amassed in an entire career on Capitol Hill. The 180-page conference proceedings included the first checklist of "Steps Toward Establishing a Records Disposition Program [for members of Congress]."<sup>17</sup>

### Professional Endorsement

This fertile environment of the late 1970s produced two significant new historical membership associations: the Society for History in the Federal Government and the National Council on Public History. Working with

established historical and archival organizations, both created committees on government records. Simultaneously, an informal organization of Washington-area historians, dormant for a quarter-century, resurfaced. Soon, the "D.C. Historians' Group" was attracting more than 120 academic and federal historians, archivists, and librarians to its semiannual luncheons at the George Washington University faculty club. A by-product of the Nixon scandal, a splendid network was now in place!

## THE CELEBRATIONS

### Bicentennial Fever

On Capitol Hill in 1977, Robert Byrd became majority leader of the Senate. A longtime believer in historical knowledge as the firmest pillar for a representative democracy, Senator Byrd, together with Howard Baker and other congressional leaders, contracted "Bicentennial Fever." From a legislative branch perspective, there was a great deal to celebrate. Congress recently had been instrumental in bringing down an "imperial president." It had also overridden a presidential veto to enact legislation reasserting its constitutional war-making powers and had strengthened its role in the nation's budgeting process.

The 1976 American Revolution Bicentennial commemoration provided the motivation for the Senate to complete a grand restoration to their 1850s splendor of the Capitol's former Senate and Supreme Court chambers. Used for events associated with the Senate's institutional history, the Old Senate Chamber reminded audiences of the "Golden Age" of the "World's Greatest Deliberative Body."<sup>18</sup> Yet, the 1976 bicentennial disappointed those who had hoped it would spur creation of projects and programs with an enduring impact. Congressional leaders vowed not to miss the next opportunity: the forthcoming bicentennial of the Constitution and the resulting federal government.

In 1981, the Senate, under Republican leadership for the first time in 26 years, began some serious long-range planning. Previously, "long-range planning" for history-related events on Capitol Hill usually amounted to a short-range "quick fix" of hastily arranged ceremonies. American University historian Anna Nelson called this "history without historians." Howard Baker, the new majority leader, established the Senate Bicentennial Study Group. Senator Baker selected as chair his predecessor, the former Senate Republican leader Hugh Scott—a cofounder of the Senate Historical Office. The Study Group included eight current and former senators, the librarian of Congress, the archivist of the United States, and noted constitutional scholars. It met three times over the following two years. The panel's five-

year game plan included revival of the long-out-of-print *Biographical Directory of the American Congress* and compilation of a guide to the papers of all former senators. Numbered among other projects were the first comprehensive finding aid for the historical records of the Senate at the National Archives, narrative histories of the Senate and its committees, a documentary film, and commemorative postage stamps.<sup>19</sup>

### House Historical Office

These recommendations begged a large question. "Who would undertake companion projects for the House of Representatives?" Although the House had taken the initiative in the mid-1970s to create a joint congressional committee on the American Revolution Bicentennial, that panel's staff had long since departed. As the Senate Bicentennial Study Group was preparing its final report, key House members began to pay attention. Most notable among them were House Speaker Thomas P. "Tip" O'Neill (D-MA) and Rules Committee Chair Richard Bolling (D-MO). Representative Bolling, one of the institutionally oriented "wise men" of the House, sponsored legislation to create a House Historical Office, and Speaker O'Neill appointed a national panel of distinguished scholars to guide that office.

Then, without warning, on September 24, 1982, a small band of fiscally conservative House members struck. Interpreting this initiative as merely a gimmick to improve the public image of the House, they offered as their best argument against such an office the fact that the Senate had one. To the acute embarrassment of Speaker O'Neill, who was out of town, they mustered the votes on a quiet Friday morning to kill the plan. This prompted Representative Newt Gingrich, a Ph.D. in history, to lament,

- if my colleagues think the organization of ideas, the organization of our history as an institution is irrelevant;
- if my colleagues think the people's house deserves less than the White House mess or the limousine cost for the State Department;
- if my colleagues think it does not matter that young historians and political scientists are going to learn early in their careers it is pointless to study the institution of the House because you can not find the papers; you can not get the documents and you might as well go down to the White House because that is where the action is, that is what you can write about easily;
- if my colleagues want to vote for self-contempt and for ignorance, they have a chance. Walk in and vote 'no.'<sup>20</sup>

Ultimately, the House took the advice of Gingrich, who would become its speaker in the following decade. In place of a permanent historical office, members created a temporary House Bicentennial Office. Speaker O'Neill organized a national talent search and appointed as head of that

new office University of Maryland historian Raymond Smock. The new director wisely organized a bipartisan steering committee of House members, with Representative Lindy Boggs (D-LA) as chair.<sup>21</sup>

### Congress Returns to Philadelphia

Within months, Smock had assembled a staff and set to work—along with the Senate Historical Office—on a full bicentennial agenda. The highlight of that agenda was a ceremonial meeting of Congress in Philadelphia on July 6, 1987, to commemorate the 200th anniversary of the Constitutional Convention's Great Compromise. That agreement provided for states to be represented equally in the Senate and in proportion to their respective populations in the House. With a joint congressional meeting at Independence Hall and separate sessions in the Senate and House chambers of Congress Hall, the event drew more than 200 members of Congress. A picture-perfect day and thousands of spectators inspired members to enjoy the occasion and to anticipate similar programs over the coming two years, culminating in a 1989 celebration of the bicentennial of Congress.

### Harpers Ferry Conference

Creation of the House Bicentennial Office spurred efforts—initiated at the Senate's 1978 conference—to provide members of Congress and legislative committees with a full range of archival services. In 1984, the Senate hired Karen Paul to be its first professional archivist. Previously archivist at the University of Virginia and a National Archives staffer on loan for two years to the Senate Historical Office, Karen, with her House counterparts, helped to organize the Congressional Papers Roundtable within the Society of American Archivists (SAA). Karen and her colleagues also worked with Frank Mackaman of the Dirksen Center and the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC) to organize a three-day conference in 1985 at Harpers Ferry, West Virginia. In its report to Congress, the conference highlighted "the often severe problems of space, money, and staffing encountered by libraries and historical agencies that acquire, arrange, and describe these important historical materials." Noting the approach of the congressional bicentennial, the report emphasized "the need for improved records management techniques in congressional offices" and called for establishment of minimum standards for the collections themselves and for the archival repositories that accept them.<sup>22</sup>

### 1989 Bicentennial Events

The 1989 congressional bicentennial year featured what came to be seen as a never-ending round of ceremonial activities. Early one bright spring

morning, trucks from the U.S. Mint lumbered into the Capitol Building's east front plaza bearing mammoth coin striking machines. On June 14, House and Senate leaders, members, and favored staff lined up for the opportunity to strike commemorative five-dollar gold pieces. Congress had authorized a three-coin bicentennial set, the sales of which ultimately contributed \$30 million to underwrite costs of the Capitol Visitor Center.

In separate ceremonies, the Senate and House unveiled bicentennial first-class postage stamps. Planning for that event sparked a search for an object to serve as an iconic representation of each body. The Senate selected the golden eagle and shield that surmounted the presiding officer's dais in the Old Senate Chamber. From the former House Chamber, now Statuary Hall, the House chose sculptor Carlo Franzoni's magnificent *Car of History*. This work in marble depicts Clio, the muse of history, riding in a chariot, looking over her shoulder to record in a ledger events of the past. The chariot's visible wheel houses an ornate clock.

In a March 4, 1989, appearance before a joint meeting of Congress, historian David McCullough used Franzoni's masterwork as a stage-setter. In remarks entitled, "Time and History on the Hill," he began and ended with a vignette about early nineteenth-century clockmaker Simon Willard. McCullough lamented the popularity of the modern digital clock. He termed it "a perfect symbol for much that is out of balance in our day. It tells only what time it is now, at this instant, as if that were all that anyone would wish to know, or needs to know." Franzoni's clock, however, "with two hands and an old-fashioned face . . . tells us what time it is now, what time it used to be, and what time it will become."

At work on the biography of Harry Truman that would earn him a Pulitzer Prize, McCullough enumerated the outstanding members of past Congresses for whom no adequate life accounts existed. His list included House Speakers Joseph Cannon and Thomas Reed, and Senators Carl Hayden, Joseph T. Robinson, and George Aiken. "[C]ompared to what has been published about presidents and the presidency," he said, "we have hardly begun. The field [of congressional biography] is wide open. The opportunity for a new generation of outstanding congressional scholars couldn't be greater. . . . We are all of us so accustomed to seeing our history measured by the presidency that we forget the extent to which the real story of the country can be found here [on Capitol Hill]. . . . Above all, we need to know more about Congress because we are Americans. We believe in governing ourselves."<sup>23</sup>

### Ken Burns's Film

The 1989 bicentennial production that reached the largest audience was Ken Burns's 90-minute Public Broadcasting Service film *The Congress: The*

*History and Promise of Representative Government*. Narrated by David McCullough, this work premiered on March 13, 1989, at Washington's National Theater before an audience of several hundred members of Congress. Produced concurrently with Burns's *Civil War* series, and using the same fiddle music and some of the talking heads, *The Congress* was quickly overshadowed by its more heart-wrenching co-creation. Its greatest impact was most likely felt in schools throughout the Midwest, thanks to free distribution by a regional phone company, but it continues to be seen on television and DVD. This film represented the first comprehensive effort to assemble visual material to support a major documentary on Congress.<sup>24</sup>

### Capitol Bicentennial

The congressional bicentennial of 1987 to 1991 merged smoothly into the U.S. Capitol bicentennial of 1993 to 2000. In 1992, the Office of the Architect of the Capitol and the private U.S. Capitol Historical Society announced plans to commemorate the 200th anniversary of the 1793 placement of the Capitol's first cornerstone. A highlight of the Capitol bicentennial was the May 9, 1993, helicopter removal of the Statue of Freedom from its perch atop the dome to the Capitol's east front plaza. Workers labored for nearly six months to reverse the effects of 130 years of acid rain and lightning strikes. On a spectacularly beautiful October 23 morning, congressional leaders welcomed President Bill Clinton at the west front to deliver remarks on the history of Congress and the Capitol. Then the intrepid chopper hoisted the gleaming statue back to its accustomed platform.<sup>25</sup>

Over the next seven years, the Capitol bicentennial fostered projects of enduring value. The Office of the Architect of the Capitol produced a richly illustrated, 500-page history of the construction of the Capitol, by its architectural historian William Allen.<sup>26</sup> That office also published a collection of essays by Capitol Curator Barbara Wolanin and other scholars on the Italian fresco artist Constantino Brumidi—the "Michelangelo of the Capitol."<sup>27</sup> The Capitol Historical Society sponsored an annual symposium featuring experts on the building's art, architecture, and political history, with proceedings published by the Ohio University Press.<sup>28</sup>

The Senate Historical Office obtained the long-observed shorthand journals of the U.S. Army engineer Montgomery C. Meigs, who from 1853 to 1861 directed construction of the Capitol's House and Senate extensions and dome. The Historical Office arranged for the translation of that obsolete system of shorthand and produced a 900-page, award-winning volume entitled *Capitol Builder*. Meigs offered a daily accounting that extended beyond construction issues to include detailed accounts of daily life in pre-Civil War Washington.<sup>29</sup>

The Capitol bicentennial culminated in the year 2000 with a groundbreaking ceremony for a long-needed Capitol Visitor Center.

## THE DIVIDENDS

Numerous tangible dividends emerged from the commemorations that extended from the mid-1980s through 2000.

### National Archives Independence

In 1985, Congress granted the National Archives independence from its unhappy status as a subordinate unit of the General Services Administration. Archivist of the United States Robert Warner had privately promised that one of the first fruits of independence would be a separate division devoted to managing the long-neglected records of the U.S. Congress. Congress did its part by enacting legislation adding funding and staff to the newly organized Center for Legislative Archives. The center eventually grew from three overburdened custodians to an exceptional cadre of 15 historians and archivists. They have produced useful finding aids, including the first comprehensive guides to the official records of the Senate and House, and notable exhibitions.<sup>30</sup>

In the statute that expanded the Legislative Archives Center, Congress created the permanent Advisory Committee on the Records of Congress.<sup>31</sup> That 11-member panel, meeting twice each year since 1991, is chaired by the secretary of the Senate and the clerk of the House. It includes the archivist of the United States, the historians of the House and Senate, and six outside professionals in the fields of history, political science, and archival management. Over nearly two decades, the Advisory Committee has proven to be a potent engine for keeping issues concerning the documentary record of Congress sharply in focus for that institution's officers and leaders. The value of such a structure is becoming increasingly evident as we confront the myriad challenges of preserving electronic records.<sup>32</sup>

In 1991, the archivist of the United States selected Michael Gillette to direct the Center for Legislative Archives. Formerly head of oral history programs for the Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library, Gillette brought a welcome fund of energy and creativity to the center.

### The Encyclopedia of Congress

Preeminent among Gillette's contributions was the four-volume *Encyclopedia of Congress*, published by Simon and Schuster in 1995. An editorial team, comprised of a journalist, a political scientist, and a historian, recruited more than 500 scholars, members of Congress, journalists, and others with practical experience and theoretical knowledge on the workings of this complex institution. This project evolved into a robust network of experts, most of whom would never otherwise have had reason to communicate with one another, let alone to read one another's work. The

*Encyclopedia of Congress*, with its 1,000 separate entries, stands as a singular achievement in recent congressional history.

### A Century of Lawmaking

As the *Encyclopedia* was going to press in 1995, the Library of Congress formed a team of congressional documents specialists and information technology experts to produce a new resource, unprecedented in scope. Their goal was to provide online access to the official printed records of Congress's first century. The project, "A Century of Lawmaking for a New Nation: Congressional Documents and Debates," now includes searchable text of a linked set of congressional journals and floor proceedings for the century between the First Continental Congress of 1774 and the 43rd Congress of 1875. By the year 2000, this vast documentary treasure had become available to anyone with Internet access.<sup>33</sup> Since then, subscription services have evolved to offer fully searchable content of the Congressional Serial Set from 1817 to 1980, including 12 million pages of legislative reports and documents. Soon the *Congressional Record*, electronically available for proceedings since 1989, will be fully accessible through the Internet, back to its first volume in 1873.

### C-SPAN

The experts who worked on many of the above-mentioned projects included individuals who were becoming increasingly familiar to the public thanks to the cable network C-SPAN. The development of C-SPAN, from its founding in the mid-1970s to the advent of gavel-to-gavel televised coverage of House and Senate floor proceedings by 1986, paralleled and reinforced the growth of historical programs on Capitol Hill. Throughout those years, C-SPAN Chair Brian Lamb had contemplated an extended series of programs on the history, art, and architecture of the U.S. Capitol. His dream finally came true in May 2006 with a nine-hour series, *The Capitol*. In a review, *American Heritage Magazine* observed that "*The Capitol* proved as enthralling a history lesson as TV has ever offered—and a dazzling art and architecture survey in the bargain [that guided] viewers where tourists never tread."<sup>34</sup>

### Capitol Visitor Center

Thirty years of focused study on Congress and the Capitol culminated in December 2008 with the opening of the \$621 million, 580,000 square-foot Capitol Visitor Center. Since the 1980s, private financial contributions and sales of bicentennial coins produced significant revenues to defray the

cost of exhibitions in a gallery that spans the length of two football fields. Unlike the bicentennial of 1976, however, Visitor Center planners did not have to search for resident experts. Three decades of growth in congressional history offices and expertise proved invaluable. Just as historians and archivists enjoyed the dividends of "bicentennial fever," now Congress and its leaders reaped the benefits of its well-established historical offices. Staffs of the House, Senate, and Architect of the Capitol's historical and curatorial programs joined with congressional specialists from the Library of Congress, the National Archives, and the Smithsonian Institution. They also worked closely with academic scholars in the fields of women's history, African American studies, and Native American culture to develop detailed exhibition scripts. In this, the team was guided by Ralph Appelbaum Associates, museum exhibit designers, whose deeply impressive work can be viewed at Washington's recently opened Newseum and the Holocaust Museum. For the first time, Congress will have a user-friendly visitor center, accessible to people of all ages, to promote inquiry and discussion surrounding the nation's "first branch" of government. The center's gift shops will expand the reach of the center's exhibitions, films, and interactive features by offering a range of educational materials conveniently available under one roof. The existence of these commercial outlets, patronized annually by an anticipated 3 million visitors, is likely to attract the attention of authors and publishers ready to exploit this newly energized market.<sup>35</sup>

Congressional scholars now have access to a vast public. C-SPAN routinely features the writers of books about Congress in its various book programs. DVDs of its recent series on the Capitol sell by the thousands. Historians employed by the Senate, House, Architect of the Capitol, and the National Archives Center for Legislative Archives create interpretive text for publications—both printed and Web based—that reach an audience numbering in the multiple millions. The Web pages of the nation's congressional research centers have a correspondingly wide reach.

Over the past third of a century, resources and networks for the study of Congress have expanded far beyond Everett Dirksen's dream "to humanize the history of the legislative process." For congressional studies centers, however, this expansion presents significant challenges. To remain vital, centers and collections initiated in a burst of enthusiasm with the high-profile donation of a single member's collection must maintain long-term reliable funding sources, shape programs attractive to ever more diverse audiences, and refresh their principal holdings with collections of subsequent generations of former members. The future will not smile on centers devoted to just one former member, no matter how prominent or accomplished.

Ensuring continued vibrancy for the study of Congress is the public's insistence on the right to know about the processes by which the nation sets

its priorities. David McCullough got it exactly right. "Above all, we need to know more about Congress because we are Americans. We believe in governing ourselves."

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