

Donald J. Detwiler
Senate Page, 1917-1918

PREFACE
by Richard A. Baker

The uniformed pages who sit on the steps around the presiding officer's chair represent an old tradition in the United States Senate. Since Henry Clay and Daniel Webster appointed nine-year-old Grafton Hanson as the first page, pages have served in and about the Senate chamber, running errands, carrying messages, sorting papers, filling ink wells and snuff boxes, and doing whatever tasks were assigned to them. Truly children of the Senate, the pages had full run of the Capitol, racing through its corridors, climbing its dome, and even bathing in the marble tubs in its basement. After they grew up, some remained on the staff in higher capacities, a few were elected to Congress, and others went on to successful careers elsewhere. For most, their terms as pages were simply unforgettable experiences of their youthful years.

Donald J. Detwiler served as a Senate page from 1917 to 1918, during momentous years for the Congress and for the nation. Born in Toronto, Canada in 1903, Detwiler spent his early years in Kansas City. At the age of fourteen, Detwiler received the opportunity of a lifetime when his father, a Kansas City attorney, arranged for his appointment as a Senate page under the patronage of Kansas' senior senator, William H. Thompson (D). On November 28, 1917, Donald, in the company of his mother and younger brother, boarded a train for Chicago and thence to the nation's capital. In this interview he recounts, with great clarity and insight, the subsequent events and images of his tenure as a page sixty-seven years ago.

In the fall of 1918, Detwiler completed his career on Capitol Hill and resumed his high school studies, graduating from Washington, D.C.'s McKinley High School in 1921. He attended George Washington University for three years and then began a professional career that included service as an electronics engineer and naval officer. He spent the major portion of his working years with the Civil Aeronautics Administration and took early retirement in 1957. In the years since his retirement, Detwiler has vigorously pursued a diversity of challenging avocations. This interview was conducted in the book-lined study of his Capitol Hill home where he has lived since 1945.