

**CHARLES D. FERRIS**

**Staff Director, Senate Democratic Policy Committee**

**1963-1977**

Oral History Interviews

Senate Historical Office

Washington, DC

April 5, 2004-September 23, 2009

## Deed of Gift

I, Charles D. Ferris, do hereby give to the Senate Historical Office the recordings and transcripts of my interviews between April 4, 2004 and September 23, 2009.

I authorize the Senate Historical Office to use the recordings and transcripts in such a manner as may best serve the educational and historical objectives of their oral history program. I also approve the deposit of the transcripts at the Library of Congress, the National Archives, the Senate Library, the papers of Senator Mike Mansfield, and any other institution which the Senate Historical Office may deem appropriate.

In making this gift, I voluntarily convey ownership of the tapes and transcripts to the public domain.

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Charles D. Ferris

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Accepted on behalf of the  
Senate Historical Office by:

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Donald A. Ritchie

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## Table of Contents

Preface. ....	i
Interview #1: Mansfield and the Democratic Policy Committee.....	1
Interview #2: The Civil Rights and Voting Rights Acts. ....	30
Interview #3: The Great Society. ....	54
Interview #4: The Cost of Vietnam. ....	79
Interview #5: From the Senate to the House. ....	107
Index. ....	156

## Preface

Charles D. Ferris called his decision to join the staff of the Democratic Policy Committee in the fall of 1963, “the best decision in the world,” because it gave him the opportunity to work with Senator Mike Mansfield for almost fourteen years on some of the most significant issues of the twentieth century.

Born in Boston on April 9, 1933, Charles Ferris graduated from Boston College and Boston College Law School. He came to Washington in 1961 as a trial attorney at the Justice Department. In October 1963, Senator Mansfield anticipated a protracted debate over President John F. Kennedy’s civil rights bill and recruited Ferris for the Democratic Policy Committee staff. In 1964, Ferris became the Policy Committee’s General Counsel and Staff Director, a position he held until Senator Mansfield’s retirement in 1977. As Ferris relates in these interviews, Senator Mansfield used the Policy Committee both as a legislative scheduling device and as a sounding board.

The Policy Committee is an outgrowth of the Legislative Reorganization Act of 1946, and an active arm of the Senate Leadership. While Senate Republicans elected a Policy Committee chair separate from their floor leader, Senate Democrats in the Mansfield era combined the posts, so that the majority leader also chaired the Democratic Policy Committee. The Policy Committee served as “the eyes and ears” of the majority leader, representing him in negotiations with committees and their staff, arranging the scheduling of legislation, and keeping the legislative calendar.

Charles Ferris’ fourteen years with the Policy Committee began with the epic fight for passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and extended through the rush of Great Society legislation, the divisiveness of the Vietnam War, the Watergate investigation and the resignation of President Richard Nixon. Throughout these tumultuous events, he developed profound respect for the Senate and its members, and the unique role they played in the American legislative process.

After leaving the Senate in 1977, Charles Ferris briefly served as Chief Counsel to House Speaker Thomas P. (Tip) O'Neill, before being appointed Chairman of the Federal Communications Commission. He served as FCC Chairman until 1981, when he entered private law practice. At the time of these interviews he was a partner in the Washington, D.C., offices of Mintz, Levin, Cohn, Ferris, Glovsky and Popeo, P.C.

*About the Interviewer:* Donald A. Ritchie is Historian of the Senate. A graduate of the City College of New York, he received his Ph.D. in history from the University of Maryland. His books include *James M. Landis: Dean of the Regulators* (Harvard University Press, 1980), *Press Gallery: Congress and the Washington Correspondents* (Harvard University Press, 1991), *The Oxford Guide to the United States Government* (Oxford University Press, 2001), *Reporting from Washington: The History of the Washington Press Corps* (Oxford University Press, 2005), *Electing FDR: The New Deal Campaign of 1932* (University Press of Kansas, 2007), and *The U.S. Congress: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2010). He served as president of the Oral History Association and of Oral History in the Mid-Atlantic Region (OHMAR), and received OHMAR's Forrest C. Pogue Award for distinguished contributions to the field of oral history.

*Illustrations:*

Following page 29:

Majority Leader Mike Mansfield with Minority Leader Everett M. Dirksen.

Following page 53:

Senators Edward M. Kennedy and Robert F. Kennedy

Following page 106:

Charles D. Ferris