

**REIN J. VANDER ZEE**  
**ASSISTANT TO THE SENATE DEMOCRATIC WHIP**  
**AND ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF THE MAJORITY**  
**1961-1964**

Oral History Interviews  
January 28, 1992

Senate Historical Office  
Washington, DC

## **DEED OF GIFT**

I, Rein J. Vander Zee, do hereby give to the Senate Historical Office the tape recordings and transcripts of my interviews on January 28, 1992.

I authorize the Senate Historical Office to use the tapes 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, National Archives, Senate Library, 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.

Rein J. Vander Zee

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Accepted on behalf of the  
Senate Historical Office by:

Richard A. Baker

## *Preface*

Behind swinging doors in the rear of the Senate chamber, on either side of the central door, are el-shaped cloakrooms for Democratic and Republican senators. Close to the floor, but away from public view, senators can meet informally in the cloakroom to work out legislative compromises, use the phones, or simply rest on the leather couches. The cloakrooms have become synonymous with backstage political dealing, as majority leader Lyndon Johnson once advised Senator Hubert Humphrey:

Now you don't just come right out on the floor and lay important bills right out in front of God and all those voters. That's not the way it's done, and you could lose before you get started, which doesn't look good to the folks back home. You have to take it slow and easy, working your colleagues over like gentlemen--not on the floor but in the cloakrooms--explaining and trading, but always letting them see what's in it for them. Then when you're sure--Ivory soap sure, and you know you have the votes buttoned up in your back pocket--you come out statesmanlike on the Senate floor and, in the spirit of democracy, have a little debate for the people.

Rein Vander Zee served both as assistant to Senator Humphrey when he became Democratic whip and later as assistant secretary of the majority, where he supervised the Democratic cloakroom and

assisted majority leader Mike Mansfield and Democratic secretary Bobby Baker. Having previously worked on the staff of Iowa Representative Steven V. Carter, Vander Zee had joined Hubert Humphrey's presidential campaign during the 1960 primaries, most notably in the decisive West Virginia primary between Humphrey and John F. Kennedy. He then acted as an advance man for the Kennedy-Johnson ticket, before joining the Senate staff in 1961. His oral history recounts the personalities and politics of the era, among the senators, the staff, and presidential administrations of John Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson.

Born in Texas in 1928, and raised in the Hill Country, Rein Vander Zee attended public schools and the Texas Military Institute, Schreiner Institute, and the University of Arizona. After college he worked for the Federal Bureau of Investigation and served in naval intelligence. He later received a law degree from Georgetown Law School. After leaving the Senate staff in 1964, he remained in Washington as a lawyer and lobbyist, and worked for Johnson and Humphrey during the 1968 campaign, before returning to Texas in 1970.

*About the Interviewer:* Donald A. Ritchie is associate historian of the Senate Historical Office. A graduate of C.C.N.Y., he received his Ph.D. in history from the University of Maryland. He has published articles on American political history and oral history, including "Oral History in the Federal Government," which appeared in the *Journal of American History*. His books include *James M. Landis: Dean of the Regulators* (Harvard

Press, 1980), *The U.S. Constitution* (Chelsea House, 1989), *History of a Free Nation* (Glencoe, 1991), and *Press Gallery: Congress and the Washington Correspondents* (Harvard, 1991). He also edits the *Executive Sessions of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee (Historical Series)* (Government Printing Office). A former president of both the Oral History Association and Oral History in the Mid-Atlantic Region (OHMAR), he received OHMAR's Forrest C. Pogue Award for distinguished contributions to the field of oral history.

*Transcribed by* Elizabeth J. Strannigan