

Christine S. McCreary

Preface

by Donald A. Ritchie

In her 45 years of service on Capitol Hill, Christine S. McCreary saw great changes in both the Senate and in Washington, D.C. Born in New York City in 1926, Christine Stewart was a student at Bethune-Cookman College in Daytona Beach, Florida, when the United States entered World War II and the federal government put out a call for civilian employees to staff the many new wartime agencies. She passed the typing test and immediately left for Washington. Although still a segregated city, the capital offered exciting challenges and opportunities for a young African American woman.

Beginning at the Office of Price Administration, she moved to the Federal Security Administration. One day while working in the FSA typing pool, Stewart was called to take dictation for an official whose secretary was out sick. The official, Stuart Symington, was so impressed with her work that took her along when he became chairman of the National Security Board and director of the Reconstruction Finance Corporation. She served as administrative assistant to Symington's assistant, George L. P. Weaver. In 1952 Symington won election to the United States Senate from Missouri as a Democrat, and offered her a position on his Senate staff. She accepted, but waited until after the birth of her son. She had married Rivers D. McCreary, then a railroad postal clerk in Washington and a musician. They had two sons, Rivers and James.

Very few African Americans held professional positions in the Senate in 1953. Jesse Nichols had become the government documents librarian for the Senate Finance Committee in 1937, and Marguerite Ingram became the first black secretary when she joined the staff of Senator Paul Douglas, an Illinois Democrat, in 1949. By 1953 the Senate restaurant in the Capitol and the staff cafeteria in the Senate Office Building remained unofficially segregated. Although most of the kitchen staff, waiters and cafeteria workers were black, the patrons were exclusively white. Christine McCreary was among the first to challenge this de facto segregation by dining regularly in the staff cafeteria.

McCreary remained on Senator Symington's staff until his retirement in 1977. She then joined the office of Senator John Glenn, Democrat of Ohio, who was serving in his first term. McCreary retired from the Senate in 1998 at the end of Senator Glenn's fourth term, when he chose not to run for reelection. During her nearly half century on Capitol Hill she saw size of each senator's personal staff multiply. When she began the entire Senate staff worked out of one Senate Office Building. By the time she retired, three office buildings accommodating a staff that had increased seven fold. During those years she moved from the Old Senate Office Building (later named the Richard Russell Building) with its mahogany

doors, crystal chandeliers, and marble fire places, to the newest building (named for Senator Philip A. Hart), with its duplex office suites, computer terminals, and satellite dishes for instant communications. The staff of the Senate also became more racially integrated, as did the Senate floor with the elections of Senator Edward W. Brooke, a Republican of Massachusetts, and Carol Moseley Braun, a Democrat of Illinois. Christine McCreary died in Dover, Delaware, on May 30, 2006.

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. His article on "Oral History in the Federal Government," appeared in the *Journal of American History*. His books include *James M. Landis: Dean of the Regulators* (Harvard Press, 1980), *Press Gallery: Congress and the Washington Correspondents* (Harvard Press, 1991) and *History of a Free Nation* (Glencoe, 1998). He also edits the *Executive Sessions of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee (Historical Series)* (Government Printing Office). A former president of the Oral History Association and of 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.
