

## 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 Thayne 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.]*



