

**The Capitol Visitor Center**  
**Interview #5**  
**Wednesday, September 1, 2010**

**Scott:** Welcome back. Thank you for being here.

**Baker:** Thank you. I'm very glad to be back.

**Scott:** I thought today we'd talk about the origins of the Capitol Visitor Center, the CVC. I wanted to start in 1995 when Secretary of the Senate Kelly Johnston submitted a report to the Senate Rules Committee which recommended establishing a visitor's center in order to enhance and improve the visitor experience. Can you tell us a little bit about what a typical visitor experience was like before the opening of the CVC in 2008?

**Baker:** In a word: awful, just awful, particularly during the periods of high visitation in the summer and leading up to the summer. Even the basic facilities, such as dining areas and restrooms, were not available. It was basically a 19<sup>th</sup>-century building, the Capitol Building, constructed at a time when it was very difficult for people to get to Washington and not that many did come. That of course had changed by the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, if not earlier. So the building was long overdue for some very serious rethinking about how to accommodate visitors.

We learned in 1995, and even before, that people were paving a detour around the Capitol down to the Smithsonian or over to the Library of Congress and especially down to the Air and Space Museum and the Museum of American History. The Capitol Building was something to look at from a distance. The long lines were very discouraging for many visitors. As early as the mid 1980s we conducted some informal surveys with the Senate Curator's office. We obtained from the Smithsonian template surveys for the quality of the visitor's experience. It was very unscientific in terms of the way we administered those surveys but we got a quick sense of what we already knew: that it was not a pleasant experience.

In the mid 1980s, the upcoming bicentennial of Congress, and then in the early 1990s the bicentennial of the Capitol Building provided tremendous impetus, at least we thought it did, to get some movement. Nineteen-ninety-three was the Bicentennial of the laying of the Capitol cornerstone. The year 2000 was the Bicentennial of the opening of the building. If you can't focus congressional and public attention during that time, you never will. We did, and it worked out. It

took a long, long time from the Kelly Johnston survey of 1995. As you might expect, there are just so many people involved, so many definitions of what it is that you want to take away from a visit to the Capitol.

**Scott:** How did this movement to build a Capitol visitor's center start? Did it start in the Historical offices and the Curators' offices, or were there also senators who were particularly concerned because their constituents were talking to them about their experience?

**Baker:** That's an interesting question. We found that there was more concern on the part of House members, maybe because they represent smaller groups of constituents. They have more time to focus on quality of visitation issues than senators who simply are distracted by a million different things coming in their direction.

The idea for a visitor's center was a fairly old one that had just never come to fruition. The east front of the Capitol was extended between 1958 to 1962. That begged the question about extending the west front of the Capitol because they had picked up 90 rooms on the east front extension. So the idea was to do the same for the west front. There was a lot of dissatisfaction about the way that the east front extension of 32.5 feet looked. If you stand in front of the Capitol on a sunny day you realize that the façade of the Capitol was constructed at different times. The central portion, the east front extension, is much whiter than the yellow, almost orange, tone of the House and the Senate wings constructed in the 1850s. This is a Georgia marble and it just didn't fit. A lot of architectural critics pointed that out very quickly. There were cost overruns and a lot of members inconvenienced by the construction. It turned out that they decided, after a very long period of consideration, not to do a west front extension. The House basically was in favor of a west front extension. The Senate generally was not. It turns out that the House leaders, most of them were on the west side of the building to begin with and they would benefit by getting more space. Senators weren't quite as concerned. It was a very complicated issue.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s there was a desire on the part of the Senate to restore and renovate the Old Senate Chamber and the Supreme Court Chamber below it. The House wasn't going to have anything to do with that. "Why should we spend taxpayers' money for the glorification of the Senate?" So the Senate would pass legislation for the funding and the House would just ignore it. Finally, Lady Bird Johnson in 1972 called the chairman of the House Appropriations Committee, who was a fellow Texan, George Mahon, and asked

him if he would relent on the appropriations. She was given assurances that if he did, the leadership of the Senate would relent in its opposition to funding for the west front extension. There was a trade-off there. So the funds did come and work began on the restoration of the old chambers in about 1972. A lot of other political issues intervened in terms of the west front extension. It didn't happen.

The reason that I go into some detail about this is that included in the west front plan was the visitor's center. At one point the plan was to build a bus ramp that would allow these buses to come up and disgorge their passengers in a little tunnel on the west front of the Capitol and then drive away. This was actively discussed during the 1960s and by the early 1970s the funding wasn't available and that was the end of that. Then came the bicentennial of the American Revolution and again a lot of focus on the Capitol Building, which then looked really grimy. I recall how atrocious the Rotunda looked in 1975, perhaps from cigar smoke. The paintings, the murals, the frieze, and the canopy, were in a state that would not have pleased their creators. Using the forthcoming bicentennial of independence, particularly given the fact that four of the eight murals in the Capitol Rotunda were about the American Revolution, it was time to tidy it up. In the mid 1970s there was a sense that we've got to make this a more attractive and educational destination for visitors. Our office was established in 1975 as part of that same spirit. It didn't take us too long to make common cause with the Senate Curator to see what could be done.

Meanwhile, the Capitol Historical Society that we've discussed earlier had in its 1962 congressional charter a provision to provide educational information to the public for free. They thought they were doing that. So once again, there was a line of demarcation between the internal Senate operations for history and art and what the Capitol Historical Society was doing. They thought everything was fine; they didn't need any help. It was difficult to unite. If we could have united with them and had gotten them to say, "Yes, a visitor's center would be great," it would have moved it along a bit faster. But they said, "No, we are already doing it. We provide educational material. Everything is just fine." They had a kiosk down in the so-called crypt area right underneath the central Rotunda. That slowed down progress on a visitor's center considerably.

**Scott:** Were they really providing educational materials? What were they doing?

**Baker:** Maybe at the beginning they were, a little bit. But then they realized they needed to make money. Then they began to sell educational

materials. Very early on they produced a guidebook called *We the People* in conjunction with National Geographic Society. That operation was pretty much driven by National Geographic as far as I can tell. The National Geographic and the Historical Society made a great deal of money. They did foreign language editions of the *We the People* book. They had some ancillary publications on art and history as well. It led them to say, "We don't need any help from any newly established curatorial or historical programs. We're doing it well." The real guiding force of the publication really did come from the National Geographic. National Geographic did most of the writing and provided the illustrations. Again, we're just kind of standing on the outside looking in.

**Scott:** There's a movement among some people to create a visitor's center. And then upcoming commemorative ceremonies make people think about the Capitol Buildings being in the national spotlight. These issues are now in the national consciousness and part of a national conversation. How do we get from Johnston's report in 1995 to a commitment by the House and Senate to fund the construction of the CVC?

**Baker:** One word with a capital "S": Security. In 1998 two Capitol policemen were shot and killed by a crazy man trying to race into the House side of the east front of the Capitol. That focused attention enormously on extending the security perimeter of the Capitol and rethinking visitor access to the Capitol. Having the Kelly Johnston report, and having people around like Senator Robert Byrd, former Congresswoman Lindy Boggs, and a number of others who took this very much to heart---it wasn't going to be totally security, but it was driven by security. How can we make it a better experience for visitors?

That's when, as part of reconstruction planning, the idea of the visitor's center really got underway. The architectural firm RTKL did a very thorough design. One of the major decisions was where to put this thing. There really seemed to be no choice other than underground on the east side of the Capitol. The slope of the hill worked against anything on the west side. A plan was put together right after the 1998 shooting. But then it languished again. It moved slowly. There was a groundbreaking ceremony. The Pew Charitable Trusts in Philadelphia got involved in it and they provided some seed money. A woman named Rebecca Rimel was and still is their president and chief executive officer. She got very interested. So there was a grand ceremony turning that first spade of earth in 2000. Then things languished a bit until 9/11/2001. And then again it became an issue of, "How do we protect the members of Congress? How can we get them into an underground bunker?" And this is the underground bunker. This

is the visitor's center where you can have all kinds of air handling equipment if there's a chemical attack. There was a lot of concern about chemical attacks. How you can scrub the air inside and have the facilities to literally wash everybody off? Give everybody a shower in place to decontaminate them.

**Scott:** This couldn't be done in the old 19<sup>th</sup>-century building.

**Baker:** No. There was no space. And the infrastructure was not there. After 9/11 it got going in earnest and the U.S.A. Patriot Act authorized an appropriation of \$40 million available for this kind of Capitol protection out of which a lot of money came for the visitor's center. Earlier, in the mid 1990s, the idea was that they would raise money through private subscription and that went on for a while. They approached Bill Gates and I think Bill Gates provided \$5 million. Well, they needed \$100 million. If that's all he's going to give—

**Scott:** One of the wealthiest people in the world.

**Baker:** Exactly. Earlier, at the time of the congressional bicentennial in 1989, Congress passed legislation to have the U.S. Mint strike coins, \$5 gold coins, and so forth. The surcharge from those coins would provide funding for a Capitol visitor's center. That ended up raising initially about \$17 million, which was good, but it wasn't \$100 million. That went in the bank, over to the Library of Congress—they have a trust fund and they managed it, everything was handled very properly. But it just wasn't enough. That was the state of the matter at the time of 9/11. After 9/11, the big decision was made that Congress will fund the construction of the visitor's center as opposed to having it done privately. I've never thought it made any sense to do it privately. But this was in the era of George W. Bush Republicanism where we need to turn to the private sector to share some of these public burdens. It was worth trying, but it just didn't work.

**Scott:** It's a political issue, why should Congress appropriate this money for themselves? It's always hard to sell to constituents.

If we could back up a minute. I laughed as you described the proposal to have a bus ramp where people could be let loose on the Capitol. I laugh because security around here has increased so greatly since that time. I wonder if you can talk about what kind of security measures were in place in the mid-90s when Johnston submits this report. Clearly there weren't the same security concerns that there would be later. Did that early vision for a visitor's center include increased security in the mid-90s, or did that come much later?

**Baker:** No, it was there. The issue was there. It really began with a bombing in the Capitol in 1971 in a first-floor barber shop on the Senate side. All of a sudden, people woke up to the fact that we're living in a different world. That was during the middle of the Vietnam War and there was a lot of domestic unrest and unhappiness with that war.

**Scott:** It was a faction of the Weathermen who planted the bomb?

**Baker:** Yes, that's right. And then fast forward to 1983 when there was another bombing right outside the Senate Chamber in the corridor just across from the Democratic leader's office. It happened about 11 o'clock at night. If it had happened earlier, or if there were plans for the Senate to stay in session that night . . . It blew out the windows in the Republican cloakroom. It was a horrible situation. It did maybe \$250,000 worth of damage. It was just a mess. I walked into that area the next morning and it would just break your heart. Rubble everywhere. You think, "Wait a minute, this is a whole new world." The earlier 1970s bombing led to the installation of television cameras above doorways and in the ceilings and a more comprehensive system of identification cards. But 1983 really expanded the security. There were areas closed off in the Capitol so it was no longer possible for visitors to walk and stand in front of the Senate Chamber. Lobbyists were very upset because they were treated like tourists. Well, tourists are lobbyists and lobbyists are tourists. [Laughs]

**Scott:** All members of the public. [Laughs]

**Baker:** Exactly. There were a lot of hurt feelings during that time. So by 1995 security was a major issue but not to the extent that people ever believed that someone would try to fly an airplane into the Capitol Building. With that realization after 9/11/2001, it's off to the races in terms of all kinds of overreaction, as far as I'm concerned. It's hard to sit there and say to some security person, "You're nuts. You're going way too far." And they are saying, "Well, how are you going to prevent the next airplane from trying to fly into the Capitol?" That's another story.

**Scott:** So the CVC is created with a dual purpose: an inviting area to enhance the experience of the visitor, but also a safe haven for elected officials and their staff in the event of another national attack.

**Baker:** Exactly. When they drafted brochures about the visitor's center, they would put that in there. I kept editing it out, the fact that they had security as the first reason. I kept putting in public education, and then security. And it kept coming back with security and then public information. It's clear that without 9/11 we'd still be worrying about when they were going to build the visitor's center.

**Scott:** They decide to build the visitor's center and you become part of an advisory team to the Capitol Preservation Commission which oversees the construction and development of the educational components that will be a part of the CVC. Is that right?

**Baker:** You mention that commission. It's also another sad chapter in the history of the Capitol Historical Society. The Historical Society was in a position to be the Capitol Preservation Commission. They had the organizational structure. But their founding spirit, Fred Schwengel, refused to go along with the idea that on the 15-member board, 8 members would be congressional appointees and 7 would be private, he adamantly opposed that. Joe Stewart, who was Secretary of the Senate at the time, had the clout to make it happen if Schwengel had agreed. As a result, in the legislation, they paved a very large highway around the Capitol Historical Society and created the Capitol Preservation Commission, which was basically an 18-member body of House and Senate leaders and people who could elevate the debate and short circuit some of the delays and get it done. That was the idea.

**Scott:** From what I can tell, the commission does not do much from its creation in 1988 up until the early 1990s. Is this a body that is doing work around the Capitol?

**Baker:** I had forgotten that the Capitol Preservation Commission was created as early as the 1980s.

**Scott:** From what I can see, there are periods of time—years—when it didn't even meet.

**Baker:** No, it really didn't become active until just prior to that groundbreaking ceremony, or maybe the time that those two police officers were murdered. Then it became particularly active. It became clear that they were going to move ahead and that this was going to be real. Once a week, a representative of every one of the 18 members of the Capitol Preservation

Commission, a high level representative, met in a shirt-sleeves working kind of meeting to make decisions. That went on for years. That was really where the work got done and the major decisions were made.

**Scott:** Were you in on those meetings?

**Baker:** No, but the secretary of the Senate was an ex-officio member, an active member and I believe the assistant secretary of the Senate was as well. The group included the staff director of the Senate Rules Committee and the ranking minority member of the Rules Committee staff and their counterparts on the House side. These people, from what I can determine, really got to know each other over the years. There was a huge amount of turnover because party control was changing back and forth during that time, leaders were changing, but the nucleus was there. It was kind of a travelling road show. That's what got it done, basically.

**Scott:** Were they making decisions about the design of the CVC, the way that the public would be educated? Or did that come later when the group of curatorial advisors came on board?

**Baker:** Simultaneously. They turned to us and said, "All right, what is the narrative? What is the story we should be telling, what is the script? You do a script." So we worked with our counterparts in the Office of the Architect of the Capitol and in the various historical offices over on the House side to put together a script. It worked really well. I think it worked well particularly from our perspective because we had been around a lot longer than the folks on the House side. I think, very immodestly, I can say that we had more to offer since we'd been accumulating information about the history and culture of the Capitol and of the Senate. Having assisted Senator Byrd in writing his *The Senate, 1789-1989*, we really had worked out the narrative during the 1980s in terms of Senate development. Then you have to focus on Capitol Building development and all that. I think we were a force for stability and for some enlightenment as part of that process. On the House side, the people from the historical office kept changing, although they had some really good people over there who made some excellent contributions.

**Scott:** Then the House created the Office of the Historian. So in some periods you were dealing with two offices?



**Baker:** We were, which was a little strange at times. But, you know, the more the merrier!

Robert Remini came in as House Historian in 2005. I think he attended only one meeting. In fairness to him, he really needed to get up to speed on the subject. A number of people around that table had been dealing with the proposed visitor center for five or more years. So he made his contributions, but he wasn't terribly active. But his deputy, Fred Beuttler, was active. And then people from the Office of History and Preservation were very active, including Ken Kato who had been the director of a predecessor to that office, and his successors, Matt Wasniewski and Farar Elliott, and of course Senate curator Diane Skvarla, from the Architect's of the Capitol's office, architectural historian Bill Allen and curator Barbara Wolanin.

We really had a team spirit. There were really no fundamental differences around that table even though we represented profoundly different institutions. We all tried to stay on our own turf. Nobody in the House told us how to interpret the Senate. I can't think of any major issues of conflict between the working people on the Curatorial Advisory Committee.

We also had really important help from the Library of Congress Manuscript Division. Particularly, Barbara Bair and Jim Hutson, head of the Manuscript Division, and of course the National Archives' Center for Legislative Archives director Mike Gillette and his successor Richard Hunt. All of a sudden there was an embarrassment of riches. Not everybody was at the same meeting at the same time. Sometimes there were collateral meetings. There was a separate group of the art curators who would have their meetings about where do you place the statues and what kind of artwork is going to be commissioned. That was way beyond our area of expertise. It fit together very nicely primarily because of the coordinator, Martha Sewell. She was absolutely the right person at the right time. There were some tense moments, often spurred by not the personal differences around the table so much as concerns about the people we all work for and trying to get them on board as well. And Marty Sewell was always unflappable. She just kept the ship moving very, very smoothly.

**Scott:** Was she at the AOC?

**Baker:** Yes, she was.

**Scott:** And she was the coordinator for the whole project.

**Baker:** For the exhibition gallery and related areas, she was.

**Scott:** One of the greatest contributions that this office made was helping to author the text for the CVC educational program. It seems like a great challenge but also an opportunity because you'll be able to teach these millions of people who come through the Capitol something they don't already know. But how do you condense all of that information into 50-word paragraphs? Or 200-word paragraphs? Maybe you can talk about how you worked in this office to produce the narrative and the text that we can now see in the CVC.

**Baker:** I think one of our major impacts was the basic structure of the exhibition gallery. It didn't have to be arranged chronologically. But as historians, we have a certain appreciation for chronology. It could have been done topically—here's the advice and consent gallery, here's the treaty gallery, or whatever. So we decided pretty early about using a chronological format for the main part of the exhibition. We worked with a top-notch design firm, Ralph Appelbaum Associates. They have a long list of distinguished projects that had been accomplished at that time. So the designers came down from New York and would sit around the table. It was interesting to try to educate them as well. "What do you mean by this? Why do you think we should do that?" But we all worked together pretty well. The one thing we heard from them over and over again was, "You can't put a book on the wall." If you want to see the reason why they said that, take a visit to the Constitution Museum in Philadelphia. Although that was their project and that was done almost concurrently with the visitor's center, the planning was a little bit ahead of the visitor's center. But, unfortunately, the Philadelphia museum is nothing if not a book on the wall, too many books on the wall. It's overwhelming.

You were mentioning earlier 50 words or 500 words. Basically we identified major events in each chronological period. The periodization was a big problem and one we probably didn't handle as successfully as we might have. You start with 1789 and you come up with your periods. You are limited by the configuration of the space to six periods. Well, you sort of back into that last period. The last period begins in 1946, and runs to the present. And when you consider the average visitor, 1946 might as well have been the Civil War! [Laughs] So we probably would have been smarter to start at the end and kind of work back in the periodization. Maybe we should have had that last section begin in 1975 or maybe even, heaven forbid, a little bit later than that. But I think you could have made a good case for 1975. But then it didn't fit with working

backwards. That was a bit of a challenge. We very much needed space for a seventh period.

We decided that this is going to be about stories. So we had to come up with a certain number of House stories from each time period, a certain number of Senate stories, and a certain number of Capitol stories, and the stories can only be a very limited number of words. Back in the office Don and Betty and I would put our heads together. What are the Senate stories we want to tell? We came up with a list and it was a longer list than we had space for. We chopped a few off and then we would add some and drop some, you know, a typical kind of working by collaboration with your respective colleagues. That worked out pretty well.

The one event that I will never forget is with regard to the number of words. There are six galleries of national aspirations: freedom, unity, common defense, knowledge, exploration, and general welfare. The original plan was to come up with a 400-word statement that would be incised in marble about what is the meaning of “freedom” in the context of all of this. Or unity. Let’s use unity as an example. You start off with a topical sentence and then maybe in the middle you’d have an example or a couple of colorful quotations and then a conclusion. It didn’t take long to add up to 400 words. After we did that, we patted ourselves on the back about how brilliant it was, for all six of these topics. But, alas, we heard back from the designers: “It’s putting a book on the wall.” Too many words, let’s cut it in half to 200. So out went the middle section, basically. This left the topic sentence and the conclusion. That wasn’t too wonderful, but we worked on it. There are various stages of this story, but it came down to “We just need about 25 words.” From 400 words to 25. My attitude was, “Forget it. We’re historians.” [Laughs] But Don Ritchie, to his everlasting credit, said “Let me take one final whack at it for all six of them.” These we had to get by the House side as well. The Clerk of the House, Jeff Trandahl, was a very sharp guy, very hands on. He had his ideas of what should be in those statements as well. Everybody was sort of at their wits-end. Finally Don produced a draft that sailed through the committee review. Everyone involved eventually signed off on it.

For the unity section, unfortunately, it began “As our nation’s motto, *E pluribus unum* says, Out of many, one.” And you know, a lot of people, perhaps several dozen, looked at this. Unfortunately, *E pluribus unum* hasn’t been our nation’s motto since 1956! [Laughs] So this was rather embarrassing. But it was more than embarrassing because there was, by that time, a group of fundamentalist Christians who had zeroed in on the text of the visitor’s center. The text literally had been put together in a book, maybe a 100-page book,

including the whole text with illustrations, all the panels from start to finish. It had gone out to all the members of all the Capitol Preservation Commission including Tom DeLay [House Majority Leader]. Tom DeLay from Texas had a friend named David Barton who was the deputy chairman of the Texas Republican Party. Beyond that, he apparently was a self-taught historian and a guardian of the telling of the story of the nation's origins through an organization called Wallbuilders. And the story he wanted to tell was that the United States was a divinely inspired nation. God was at work at the Constitutional Convention. The drafters of the Declaration of Independence and those who signed off on it realized and saw the hand of God at work even though they didn't go into a lot of detail about that. David Barton and some of his allies took a very good look at that script and saw almost no references to God. But then, when they saw that the unity section had as our nation's motto *E pluribus unum*, they felt we had deliberately left out "In God We Trust." That was the final straw.

So they put together their counter document. They got a lot of press in their world on the subject. They were able to use this single mistake—my mistake—as the key argument that there is a bunch of basically leftist liberal intellectuals who are trying to hijack this project. Believe me, that couldn't have been farther from the truth in terms of who was sitting around that table. They attached all these other perceived slights throughout the rest of the script. If it hadn't been for that one slip, their case might not have seemed quite as dramatic.

Meanwhile, this had already been cut in marble in the visitor's center. Shortly after, all of this hit the press, I went down to the visitor's center and somebody from the Architect's Office had taken Plaster of Paris and filled in "as our nation's motto." And it worked! The text then began, "*e pluribus unum*: Out of many, one." So it happened to work. Eventually they ended up removing the whole panel. It's one thing when you make a mistake in a book manuscript. [Laughs] But when you do it in marble!

It energized David Barton who had been around here for a while. He had developed a relationship with the Senate majority leader, Bill Frist. At one point Senator Frist organized a senators-only tour of the Capitol, a religious history tour of the Capitol, given by David Barton. Nobody accepted the invitation. Bill Frist was the only one who ended up going on this tour of the Capitol with David Barton standing up on the benches out in the Rotunda and pointing to the religious figures in the various murals and so forth. It was another manifestation of what we are seeing today. Some very conservative people see a conspiracy afoot. They

say that if we get away from our founding principles, if we misinterpret our founding principles, we are in trouble. Of course, the whole purpose of the exhibition gallery was to highlight those founding principles.

I think David Barton was his own worst enemy. His reading of history didn't stand up to any standard interpretation of American history, whether by liberals or by conservatives. He was way over the mark. Eventually it ended with sound and fury, but no substantive action.

**Scott:** He also lost his support when DeLay resigned in 2006 as this was starting to blow up. Some of the members who had supported his interpretations also happened to be leaving.

**Baker:** It died down a little bit, but it did not end. Countless hours were spent behind the scenes going through that text finding every possible hint of a reference to a religious event or personage. We put together a list of all of these to calm down some of the members of the Capitol Preservation Commission. There were a few changes made. There are virtual House and Senate displays and the motto "In God We Trust" was added over the House theatre. A reasonable person on any side of the issue could say, "All right, they heard us and they added these changes." The visitor's center very much reflects Congress, which is an institution designed to stimulate and embody compromise. It only works when compromise is in place. When people are unwilling to compromise, it doesn't work, it falls apart.

**Scott:** The CVC opened in December of 2008. What do you think of the final result? Were you satisfied with the way things turned out? Are you very proud of your contributions there and the contributions of the office?

**Baker:** I'm not focusing on me. I'm proud of the Senate Historical Office and what the office did and what this team of more than 40 historians did. That team didn't exist 25 or 30 years before. There were no slots and no salaries for these people. They brought a lot of cumulative expertise. If you had to go out and hire independent contractors to do what these in-house historians and curators and architectural specialists did, you couldn't have done it. You wouldn't have been able to do it to the degree of effectiveness.

That's also true in terms of working with the producer of the CVC orientation film, Donna Lawrence. She came and she told us what she needed. We provided what we thought we had. It was a high level dialog right from the very

beginning. It was a very expensive project. I'm sure she lost her shirt in terms of what it cost her to produce that film, but she was willing to do that for a variety of altruistic reasons, I'm sure.

**Scott:** What was her background? How did she come to the project?

**Baker:** She is based in Louisville, Kentucky. She did the film for the Constitution Center, among others. But that was the one that I think people around here looked at. A number of us were in on the preliminary review of probably five or more filmmakers who wanted that commission. We boiled it down to three and put her name at the top of the list, principally because of the Constitution film. I mentioned Marty Sewell being easy-going, but with a lot of steel behind that velvet, and the same was true with Donna. She really knew what she was doing. When she had to sit down and explain to members of the Senate and the House of Representatives, who weren't necessarily willing to be totally reasonable on some of these questions, she was just the master at addressing their concerns in a highly intelligent and effective way. That was very important.

I think that the Exhibition Gallery is a knockout, it really is, once you get into it. The problem, as you have undoubtedly experienced, is that it can be easily missed. It's an RTKL problem, or a fundamental limitation in the terrain they had to work with. Right from the very beginning when they designed it, it was sort of the last thing that they placed when they were developing the major elements of the visitor's center. I can see on paper logically placing it in the back up against the east front of the existing Capitol. But it's not in the best traffic patterns. It certainly is possible to go into the visitor's center and not even know that the gallery is there. CVC administrators have gone out of their way, at least at the very beginning, to have aides pointing it out as people walk in the front door. "If you have time before your ticketed performance of the orientation film, by all means go into the exhibition gallery." I haven't been there lately, but I did make a point of observing on a number of occasions and there just are not that many people in the gallery compared to the number who are out in the atrium a few yards away and who are moving around by the gift shops. That is a fundamental structural problem and I don't know what you do about it. You can put all the signage that you want out there but people don't read signs.

**Scott:** One of the other problems is that it's not necessarily, from my own perspective, an inviting space because when you see it from a distance it looks dark. It's a dimly lit area because of the documents. So you aren't drawn to it in the same way that you might be drawn to another space.

**Baker:** One of the governing principles in all this was that this exhibition gallery would be the one place that visitors could come and see original documents. They don't want to see facsimiles. If you can say "We're going to have an exhibit with the original document from the Constitutional Convention or the First Congress" that will attract a certain sector of the population that comes to visit. Unfortunately, the lighting and the placement of those documents for preservation reasons, undoubtedly, is almost completely counterproductive. You have to take it on faith that you are looking at the document that is described in the accompanying text. [Laughs]

**Scott:** You're absolutely right and it's such a shame because the documents are so wonderful.

**Baker:** And it can be done, they do it at the National Archives, you can see original documents. They do it at the Library of Congress. That one they may need to work on a bit. Again, there may be some structural problems working against a happy solution. But I hope they don't give up trying.

**Scott:** When the CVC opened in 2008 there was a little bit of controversy about the center itself because of cost overruns and because of a delayed opening. Why were there cost overruns and why did it open later than anticipated?

**Baker:** The Madison Building at the Library of Congress, for instance, or the Hart Building, the very building that we're sitting in today, both opened behind schedule and had huge cost overruns. The Hart Building was built during a period of inflation so the original estimates totally were out the window. As a result they cut back on a lot of the fundamentals of the building.

The same was true with the visitor center except that by calling it a visitor center it kind of skews the argument a little bit. It is a visitor center, but it's much more than that. By the time that the construction was completed, by the time that they finished with all the add-ons, maybe two-thirds of it was the visitor center and one-third of it was additional workspace for the leadership of the House and Senate, and security and administrative space. The Office of Senate Security moved from a little warren up in the attic of the Capitol to wonderful accommodations. No visitor to the center is ever going to see those accommodations. They have all of those kinds of appropriate and necessary secure briefing rooms and so forth. But that is high tech and it costs so much money. All of a sudden, the estimates went from the \$250 million range to about

\$600 million. A lot of that was added on for security, though I'm in no position to know how much. But certainly without that extra meeting space and so forth it wouldn't have been anywhere near what it actually was. But that doesn't translate very well in terms of a stand-up television report where the reporter has a minute at the most to talk about it all.

**Scott:** In spite of those early criticisms it has, I think, exceeded people's expectations. It's very well attended. They have had an increase in visitors as a consequence of having the CVC.

**Baker:** I think visitation has nearly tripled. There used to be something like one million a year and now it's well over three million.

It had a personal impact on my life in that I was trying to decide when to retire. I thought that I didn't want to leave here until the CVC was completed, just from a proprietary sense of wanting to make sure it all worked out the way that we hoped it would. It opened in December of '08 and nine months later I retired. Now it's into a whole new phase of operations and there will always be issues in terms of how do you make it work effectively. But that's a whole new ball game.

**Scott:** We've talked about the educational component of the CVC with the exhibition hall and the film. But there's another educational component to this in that the CVC trains the "red coats," that is, the tour guides. Additionally, House and Senate staff attend one- or two-day training sessions where they have an opportunity to tour the CVC and to create their own narrative stories about the history of the House and Senate that they can use on tours with constituents. I wonder how that became a component of the CVC? That they would also train the people in House and Senate offices to improve that visitor's experience because they would be telling more accurate and more complete stories.

**Baker:** That has always been a problem. One of the major purposes of the CVC was to control crowd flow in the Capitol. Not only to enrich the quality of the time while people are here, but also to keep visitors flowing in a time-efficient and predictable manner. There is a security element to that, as well. You begin to think of it almost as a manufacturing process, to move "x" number of cans through the assembly line, get them in and get them out at a precisely determined time so that the total time that anybody is in the Capitol proper outside of the visitors' center can be measured in very few minutes. So that means a more structured touring experience.



There was a time in the 1970s when Majority Leader Mike Mansfield killed a plan that some other senators had come up with, in response to constituent requests, for self-guided tours of the Capitol. We worked on a brochure that was available at the door. People could come in and wander around the Capitol and go stand around outside the Senate Chamber and that's when the building's legislative purpose slammed smack up against the museum function. Mike Mansfield said, "We have to get rid of those self-guided tours, we can't do it." Still, it was in the spirit that you could come in and wander around and see what you wanted to see.

As more and more people came to Washington, as security became more of a consideration after the 1998 shootings of Officers John Gibson and Jacob Chestnut, the idea of having organized tours became more popular. Meet the people out front, march them through and then deposit them back into the visitors' center, where they can go look at the exhibition gallery or whatever. We found that a lot of members do not want to turn over 300 crossing guards from their state or district to Capitol tour guides either because of a logistical problem or because there is not much space. Instead what they want is their own personal tour. There is nothing more memorable than having a member of Congress taking you on a tour of the Capitol, regardless of how inaccurate the information. Then that devolved from the member leading the tour to staff leading the tour. Very quickly that meant that interns would start leading the tours in the summertime. It would break your heart to hear some of the stories that the interns would tell. Never let the facts get in the way of a good story! [Laughs]

Now, with the more structured arrangements of the Capitol Visitor Center and the need to move people through in a predictable amount of time, if the tours aren't going to be led by a Capitol tour guide, they've got to be led by "trained" staff members. That led to a real nightmare: How do you credential these staff members, particularly if they are interns and they are only here for three months? The host office wants to get rid of them. They aren't going to be drafting legislation. That got to be a real headache. We developed a script and Betty Koed, in particular, took that on as a major responsibility. "Here are the take-away points about the Senate." I know that Betty is long-suffering and a very helpful person, but I think that even her good nature was sorely tested in her dealings with people from the CVC. That's an ongoing challenge, I suspect. In the summertime, the last figure I saw, in terms of the number of summer interns who descend upon the Senate, is about 2,000. That may be ridiculously understated. That puts a huge burden on members' offices and these people end up as tour givers.

**Scott:** I recall giving a couple of CHIP talks this summer during the one-day training sessions. The audience was huge, 200 interns, and some would be taking the “training” at the end of their internship—

**Baker:** Good timing!

**Scott:** There they’d be in the training session. How many stories had they told over the summer that were inaccurate, or just a good story, but not factual?

I’d like to end today talking about the relocation of the Senate Historical Office from the Capitol Building to 201 Hart Senate Office Building, where we are meeting today. We’ve joked several times in our interviews that the currency of the Senate is always office space. How can you get more office space? How to keep the office space that you have? I wonder if you can tell us the circumstances that led to the move to 201 Hart? We’re in a great office and you’ve managed to keep it since you moved here in the early ‘80s. What’s the story behind that?

**Baker:** It was a once in a lifetime opportunity. We had heard similar stories when the Dirksen Building opened in 1958, all of a sudden you have this big building and a lot of space and not everybody has fought over every inch of that space. But as time goes on, all of a sudden, instead of fighting over blocks of space, you start fighting over square-inches of space because it gets so crowded. We had the opportunity to come in and select office space, because from 1975 to 1983 we were in two offices. That basically meant that we had two staffs. People from the Immigration Building staff would come over and chat with the people in the Capitol, but it was inefficient and polarizing to some extent. The idea that we would all be together as a historical office in one space was great.

We looked at a number of Hart Building locations, including one up on the 8<sup>th</sup> floor. I knew that wasn’t going to work because each time I’d go back to show somebody else where our possible space was, I couldn’t find it! It was really remote. And then there was an opportunity down on the first floor. I thought, no, we don’t want to be there because everybody looking for a telephone (in days before cell phones) or directions is going to stop by the office. We need to be a little more removed, though not too far removed. So the second floor of the Hart Building seemed perfect. What I particularly liked about this suite was that you couldn’t punch a hole in the wall to allow the people in the suite next door to take over our space. It was self contained and it was too small for a senator’s office, too small at 1,500 square feet for any function like a senator’s office, so that worked out well.

There was a room down the hall and around the corner, Room 204 that was given to us to use. When Joe Stewart became Secretary of the Senate in 1987 he had a number of friends who had worked for the Senate whom he believed would be suitable interviewees for our oral history program. Don conducted really good oral histories because these were long-standing Senate staff. We needed a place for them to work. Joe also occasionally provided us with additional staff during the Bicentennial. We needed annex space for them. So we had this room down the hall and we used it.

The then-Senate Chaplain, Richard Halverson, whose office was located right next door, had a fair amount of clout around here and he decided that he wanted that whole suite. He didn't want his partitioned half suite, he wanted the whole suite. He did research to learn that it was just a matter of knocking out the wall, there were no permanent load-bearing walls there. We didn't want him to do that. So there was a battle that went along and we won with lots of help from Joe Stewart. I remember running into him in the men's room one time. Chaplain Halverson would always greet me in the restroom with a "God bless you brother." One day, referring to the space issue, he said, "I think I've finally brought myself to the point where I can forgive you. But my secretary hasn't." [Laughs].

We were always worried about losing that space in 204, though never about the prime space here in 201. That was ours and as secure as anything on Capitol Hill can be. But this adjunct space was not. Finally, in 2001, there was an evenly divided 50/50 Senate. The committees needed to expand their space. The Finance Committee, which is right across the hall, had been coveting that space for years. It finally won. It was a decision at the leadership level and we didn't stand a chance against that. So we lost that space.

Then we ended up getting space down in the basement. When a crop of new senators arrives, those members have temporary space there until the permanent office suites are made ready for them. After the first three to four months of a two-year congressional cycle, when the new members are settled in permanent quarters, we were able to use that for our archival processing facility. Diane Boyle, the archival assistant, was down there. But we got booted out eventually. Finally we got space, temporary space, back on the 8<sup>th</sup> floor, 801. It was just a tiny telephone booth kind of office. Slowly but surely, again, thanks to Diane Boyle, we worked with the Rules Committee to get the next-door office, one that nobody ever seemed to be using. Gradually, we turned it into working space and that's now where the photo historian has her office. In terms of office

space you never can say that you're secure with what you have, except for SH-201. Although even with this suite, there was a move some years ago to convince us to move down to the Postal Square annex.

**Scott:** Talk about being off campus!

**Baker:** They were looking for these odd entities. You know, does it matter where the historian is? Well, we have an archival component and the archivists need to be very close to the committee staffs and so forth. So we did defuse that effort. They said, "We'll give you twice as much space as you have here." And we said, "Thank you very much but we're happy." There really hasn't been a serious move on this space. But you never can let down your guard!

**Scott:** You never know!

Ok, I think that's a good place for us to stop. Thank you very much.

**Baker:** You're very welcome.