

FIRST FEMALE SENATE PAGES
Oral History Interviews with
Ellen McConnell Blakeman
Paulette Desell-Lund
Julie Price

Oral History Interviews

U.S. Senate Historical Office
Washington, D.C.
December 5, 2012-April 15, 2014

Deed of Gift

I, Ellen McConnell Blakeman, do hereby give to the Senate Historical Office the recordings and transcripts of my interview on October 17, 2013.

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

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

Ellen M Blakeman
Ellen McConnell Blakeman

8/25/14

Date

Accepted on behalf of the Senate Historical Office by:

Donald A Ritchie
Donald A. Ritchie

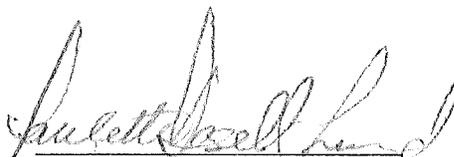
September 3, 2014
Date

Deed of Gift

I, Paulette Desell-Lund, do hereby give to the Senate Historical Office the recordings and transcripts of my interviews April 15, 2014.

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

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


Paulette Desell-Lund

1/12/15 Date

Accepted on behalf of the Senate Historical Office by:


Donald A. Ritchie

January 21, 2015
Date

Deed of Gift

I, Julie Price, do hereby give to the Senate Historical Office the recordings and transcripts of my interview on December 5, 2012.

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

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

Julie Price
Julie Price
Sept. 18 2014
Date

Accepted on behalf of the Senate Historical Office by:

Donald A. Ritchie
Donald A. Ritchie

September 22, 2014
Date

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Preface

In 1971 the Senate broke a 150-year-old tradition when it accepted female appointments to the Senate page program. Nearly a century and a half earlier, Senator Daniel Webster had selected the first male page, Grafton Hanson, the nine-year-old grandson of the Senate sergeant at arms. In 1831, the Senate added a second page—12-year-old Isaac Bassett. Beginning a tradition in which service as a page sometimes became the first step on a Senate career path, Hanson held a variety of increasingly responsible Senate jobs over the next ten years. Bassett, who is well known to students of 19th-century Senate folklore, remained in the Senate's employ for the rest of his long life.

By the 1870s, the Senate required pages to be at least 12 and no older than 16, although those limits were occasionally ignored. Until the early 1900s, pages were responsible for arranging their formal schooling during Senate recesses. In various page memoirs, there runs a common theme that no classroom could offer the educational experience available on the floor of the Senate. At Vice President Thomas Marshall's 1919 Christmas dinner for pages, 17-year-old Mark Trice explained, "a Senate page studying history and shorthand has a better opportunity than a schoolboy of learning the same subjects, because we are constantly in touch with both. We boys have an opportunity to watch the official reporters write shorthand and they will always answer questions that we do not understand, thereby making a teacher almost useless."

Though no Senate rule explicitly forbid the appointment of women, the practice of appointing male pages persisted well into the twentieth century. In the 1960s, senators began to challenge the tradition of "boys only" page appointments. In a 1961 letter to senators, Sergeant at Arms Joseph C. Duke defended the "boys only" policy, citing safety concerns and the physical demands of the job, which included carrying heavy materials and walking and running all day. The passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibited discrimination in the workplace on the basis of sex, as well as a grassroots movement to end gender discrimination throughout society, prompted some high school-aged girls to apply for Senate page appointments. The pressure to admit female pages continued to build, and in early 1971 the Senate Rules Committee held hearings to consider the issue.

Senators Jacob Javits of New York, Charles Percy of Illinois, and Fred Harris of Oklahoma testified on behalf of three young women they wished to sponsor. Noting that the Senate did not have a rule explicitly prohibiting the appointment of female pages, Senator Javits argued that the issue was a "question of fundamental human fairness." "I feel that in accepting girl pages to serve in the U.S. Senate," explained Senator Fred Harris, "we would be taking a symbolic step." The Senate should "end discriminatory hiring practices based on sex alone," he urged, to "serve as an example [to] employers at all levels of American industry."

After long debate and delay, the Senate finally approved a resolution allowing for the appointment of female pages on May 13, 1971. Soon thereafter, Paulette Desell, Ellen McConnell, and Julie Price made Senate history when they were sworn in as the Senate’s first female pages. In these interviews, Paulette, Ellen, and Julie remember what it was like to break the gender barrier—the long waiting period between being selected by their sponsoring members until the Senate formally approved their appointment; the media attention; and their reception by the boy pages and the senators. They recall the members, staff, and other pages they got to know, as well as some of the political and policy debates that defined the era. They reflect on how their experiences as Senate pages shaped their lives.

About the interviewer: Katherine (Kate) Scott is a historian in the Senate Historical Office. A graduate of the University of Washington, she received a M.A. in history from the University of New Mexico and a Ph.D. in history from Temple University. Scott is the author of *Reining in the State: Civil Society and Congress in the Vietnam and Watergate Eras* (University Press of Kansas, 2013) and other publications, including “A Safety Valve: The Truman Committee’s Oversight during World War II,” in Colton Campbell and David Auerswald, eds., *Congress and Civil-Military Relations* (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2015). She serves as the Vice President of Oral History in the Mid-Atlantic (OHMAR). She lives in Rockville, Maryland, with her husband and two children.
