

Interviewees: Livingston Biddle and Mrs. Catharina Biddle

Interviewers: Dr. David DeVorkin, Dr. Tom Crouch and
Mr. Donald Lopez

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TAPE 1, SIDE 1

DR. DAVID DEVORKIN: This is an interview with Mr. Livingston Biddle and with Mrs. Biddle. We're interviewing in the director's conference room of the Air and Space Museum. The date is the twenty-ninth of November 1993. Would you say just your name and say hello.

MR. LIVINGSTON BIDDLE: I'm delighted to be here, and my name is Livingston Biddle. I'm here with my beautiful wife Catharina.

MR. DONALD LOPEZ: I'm Don Lopez, the senior advisor, at the moment, of the museum.

Dr. TOM CROUCH: And I'm Tom Crouch, the chairman of the Department of Aeronautics.

DEVORKIN: I just want to mention that the interview will be transcribed, and we will send you a copy of it for your further comment and suggestions, alterations, that sort of thing. Before we place it in the archive, we want to make sure that you appreciate that you have literary control over the material that we discuss today.

BIDDLE: Thank you very, much.

DEVORKIN: What we want to do is structure the interview in three parts. First of all, we would like to obtain, in your own words, a brief biographical profile of your training and how you came to Washington. Then the second part would be your involvement in the arts, and specifically in promoting museum activities, because I know from your autobiography that you also wrote legislation, or suggested legislation, for the National Museum and for supporting museums generally. Then at that point we can center on the Smithsonian and your involvement with Senator [Claiborne] Pell [D, Rhode Island] with the history of this museum.¹

¹Claiborne Pell (b. 1918). U.S. politician, business executive, U.S. senator (D, R.I.), 1960- . Author of *Megalopolis*

So let's start first with your own life and training.

BIDDLE: I was born in Philadelphia, in Bryn Mawr, in 1918, and grew up on what is known as Philadelphia's Main Line. I went to day school there, then to boarding school at St. George's in Newport [Rhode Island], then to Princeton University, and was graduated from Princeton in 1940 with a B.A. degree.

During the second war, after serving about a year and a half as a newspaper reporter in Philadelphia, I joined the American Field Service (AFS), which was a volunteer ambulance-driving organization, serving primarily with the British and their allied forces in the Middle East and North Africa and then in Italy. And finally with the French Army I served in France and Germany, and the war ended on the edge of Austria.

During those three years of work with the American Field Service, my eyes were opened to the world at large far beyond the confines of my little limited sphere in Philadelphia. I was twice decorated by the British for work in forward areas, and I was in command of a platoon of ambulances at one point, and finally with the French I was second in command of the AFS in France. But during this three-year period, I served with Indian troops, with Transjordanese troops, with partisan Italians, with Polish troops, and with troops from all over the British then empire, with some South Africans, with Canadians, and with troops from the United Kingdom.

I learned, it seemed to me, so much about other parts of the world than my own home town, that when I came home I wanted very much to write about it. Using some of the training that I'd had as a newspaper reporter, I began writing novels. There were four of them published between 1946 and 1961. They were primarily about Philadelphia and its environs as related to other parts of the world, but they were rather critical of my own home town and its mores and customs.

I remember my father saying to me once when the subject of my possible writing came up, he offered me the three so-called (to him) Biddle professions--banking, law, and medicine. I said, "Father, perhaps I'm going to answer 'neither of the above.'" And I told him my ambition to be a writer.

And he said, "Well, what are you going to write about? Certainly you're not going to write about Philadelphia, are you?"

Unbound, 1966; Power and Policy, 1972.

And I said, "Yes, that's the only place I know of best."

And he looked at me for several seconds, in silence and disapproval, and he said, "Couldn't you write about Chicago?"

Well, I couldn't write about Chicago because I didn't know Chicago, but I wrote about Philadelphia, and the books were reasonably successful.

I might mention the long story about the fourth book and how it was my work called *Sam Bentley's Island* was mistaken for the work of my wonderful cousin Francis Biddle, who served as attorney general to Franklin Roosevelt. His book and my book were published on the same day by Doubleday, and his book was sent out to California, where I was promoting mine, a huge volume, and mine was nowhere to be found. I always thought that I made Francis Biddle's little slender monograph called *A Casual Pass* into a bestseller, because people were going out to buy it everywhere, thinking that it was mine.

DEVORKIN: Could I interrupt at this point and ask Tom and Don if you have any questions about the World War II experience or about Livy's relationship with his cousin Francis that maybe we should explore? Because I know you have to leave at two, so I wanted to give you a chance.

CROUCH: That's okay, David. Let's forge ahead, and I'll have to leave and come back, if you're still at it.

LOPEZ: I can wait till the end, too. Why don't you go ahead with your very interesting narrative, and then we'll interpose some questions.

BIDDLE: After my fourth novel had been thought to be the book of my cousin Francis Biddle, and after that book had sold magnificently throughout the country--his book--I was so discouraged that I thought, "I'm going to give up writing. I'm going to concentrate on something else, another part of the world."

Claiborne Pell, my friend from school days and from college days--we went to Princeton together and were graduated in 1940, as I mentioned--Claiborne invited me to come to Washington and serve as his chief advisor on cultural matters. But at the beginning, he hired me as a writer, and it was interesting because he said to me, "We'll make an agreement. You'll work for me for two years and then you'll be free to go back to your writing if you want to go, but in the meantime you'll be concentrating on what I need in the way of writing and other things," and we made this very friendly agreement.

After I'd been with him for about a month, he said, "You know, Livy, I'm not going back on my word, but if you should find something here in Washington that really fascinates you, tell me about it, because maybe we could work on it together."

So I thought what a wonderful opportunity that was for a young staffer to have the chance of working for a newly elected senator who was open-minded about doing things that might not be quite in the usual patterns. And I said to him after about three weeks of thinking about this, "Claiborne, I'm not a sociologist. I'm not an economist. I'm not an expert in foreign relations. I'm not an educator. I'm none of the things that you are thinking about as staking out for your future in Washington. But I do know about the arts. I've grown up knowing about the arts. My mother loved the piano. My father liked writing, even though he didn't see it quite as his son's profession. The only thing that I really can provide for you, Claiborne, is that understanding of the arts. How would you like to be," I said, "the founder, the senatorial father, of a program that would deal with developing and advancing the cause of the arts in the United States?"

And he looked at me as if I'd handed him a curious weapon of some sort, and he said, after he saw that I was quite serious about this, he said, "Livy, it's never going to win me a single vote. You know that. But let's do it together if you say I should do it."

And that's the way I became his cultural advisor, spending a great deal of my time on this idea of a new program, precedent-setting indeed in our country at the time, to develop the arts and then the humanities and then, a little later, museums. That became a passion with me, and it has been a passion with me for these thirty years since that time.

DEVORKIN: Was Claiborne Pell already chairman of the subcommittee for the Smithsonian?

BIDDLE: Claiborne Pell was appointed chairman of the Smithsonian subcommittee, but we had to create, between us, a subcommittee for the arts in the Senate. The Rules Committee was the parent group of the Subcommittee on the Smithsonian, and I have to say that in those days there was a feeling that the chairmanship of the Subcommittee on the Smithsonian wouldn't really lead to great advancement of a senator's life, because very little was being done then at the Smithsonian to cause great excitement. It wasn't really until [S.] Dillon Ripley became secretary [of the Smithsonian Institution] that there was a change of momentum at the Smithsonian. But Claiborne was chairman of the Smithsonian under Leonard Carmichael and started in that time.

The Subcommittee on the Arts began about two or three months after his appointment as chairman of the Subcommittee on the Smithsonian, and the Subcommittee on the Arts to begin with became the Subcommittee on the Arts and Humanities later on, then the Subcommittee on the Arts, Humanities, and Education still later. That subcommittee came under the Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, as it was then called, under Lister Hill [D, Alabama] from Alabama, the senior senator from Alabama, and the subcommittee gradually took shape on the arts, and we began to hold hearings.

There's a little vignette I might intrude on that, because I had a great friend on the Hill, whose name was Stewart McClure, who was a marvelously adept chief of staff of the Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, and Stewart liked the arts. I went to him and I said, "I have this idea, Stewart, of developing a program for the arts for my boss Claiborne Pell. How should I go about it?"

He said, "Well, first we have to have a subcommittee and then your principal, Mr. Pell, will become its chairman, so that whenever we get to the point where hearings are held and the bill finally gets to consideration by the full Senate, Mr. Pell will be the floor manager of the bill."

All this was news to me, because I didn't know the processes of the Senate at that point, and I was studying very hard with my friend Stewart. He said, "As a matter of fact, I'm going in to see the chairman this evening, as I usually do. I will broach to him the subject of a Subcommittee on the Arts."

So the next day I went to see my friend, and he said, "Yes, I saw the chairman last night, but the unexpected happened." He said, "Livy, you'll have to realize that in politics the unexpected is always the rule. I went in to see the chairman, and I've known him for years, and after we concluded our little usual evening business, he said, 'Now I've got a few minutes here, Stewart. Is there anything on your mind?'"

And my friend said, "Well, yes, as a matter of fact, there is. You have a new member on your full committee."

"Oh? Who is that?"

And my friend said, "It's Claiborne Pell."

"Oh, yes. Pell. Pell. Nice fella. Got a Southern name-- Claiborne. I think that may be Mississippi."

Well, my friend said, "Yes, it is Mississippi indeed."

"I knew that boy was all right when I saw him. Now, what does he want?"

"Well, Mr. Chairman, he would like to have a subcommittee."

And the old chairman, Lister Hill reared back in his chair, according to my friend Stewart, and said, "What do you mean, he wants a subcommittee? He wants to be chairman of a subcommittee? Am I hearing you right, Stewart?"

Then he said the old chairman got up and turned around his chair and came back, and he said, "You know very well, Stewart, that it is my rule that nobody is chairman of a subcommittee till he's elected the second time and then reelected after that. If he wants Pat McNamara's subcommittee or Jennings Randolph's Subcommittee on Public Works or any of these subcommittees that I've established, you tell Mr. Pell he gets himself reelected, he gets himself reelected after that, and then he comes to see me, and maybe--maybe--I might listen to him. Now, is that clear, Stewart? And I'm very surprised that you bring it up in that way."

So Stewart McClure said he was just overcome with embarrassment, and he was backing out of the room when the old chairman held up his hand and said, "Just before you go, Stewart, which one of the subcommittees does he want to chair? Which one of my subcommittees?"

"Oh, Mr. Chairman, he doesn't want to chair any of those that you mentioned."

"Well, what does he want? We cover everything here."

"He wants a Subcommittee on the Arts."

"What was that again, Stewart? On the what?"

"On the Arts, Mr. Chairman."

"On the Arts? You mean like painting and music and stuff like that?"

And Stewart said, "Yes, sir, on a whole variety, the whole scope of the arts."

He said the old chairman looked at him for a minute. He said, "Well, if that's all he wants, he can have it. He won't be bothering me for a while." [Laughter]

So that's the way, actually, the Subcommittee on the Arts was created, and it led me into a totally new experience and a new life, because it gave me the opportunity of beginning to work hard on legislation to develop the arts and then the humanities and museums. In doing this, I became less and less of the neophyte I was in the beginning.

But you asked about museums and the National Museum. Early on, when I was still very much still of a neophyte, there was passed a National Museum Act. Some people, looking back on that time, have decided that the National Museum Act was indeed a national nationwide act for museums, but it applied to the National Museum of the Smithsonian Institution, and it was a fairly limited program to provide professional training for museum experts.

CROUCH: Museologists.

BIDDLE: Museologists.

CROUCH: That was Office of Museum Programs. They ran all that training and courses and audio courses and all that sort of stuff. Very helpful.

BIDDLE: Yes, and Paul Perot.

CROUCH: Oh, yes, Paul Perot. It was under him. That's right. He's out in Santa Barbara now.

BIDDLE: Yes. I got a letter from him the other day.

DEVORKIN: When did this come to your attention, and for what reason?

BIDDLE: Well, because we were trying to give the Smithsonian subcommittee--this came under the Smithsonian subcommittee, not under the arts subcommittee--some new ideas, some new life. Dillon Ripley was very much involved in that kind of resuscitation, renaissance of the Smithsonian.

CROUCH: 'That was '63. He was supposed to retire in '84 with twenty years.

BIDDLE: Yes, it was about then. But that was about the same time. It was very early in Dillon's tenure--that we started on this very museum that we're sitting in today, the National Air and Space Museum.

DEVORKIN: What was your sense of the National Museum itself?

What was the involvement that you had? Was it with the act or with centralizing?

BIDDLE: I wrote the legislation, as I did the arts and humanities legislation, and it was really to give the Smithsonian a little more national exposure in the whole field of museum training. Claiborne Pell has always been very interested in museums and can pronounce "museologist" better than the person here. But Claiborne really, from the very beginning, felt that the new arts and humanities ideas should encompass museums, and he considered the Smithsonian the country's most important museum, as I do too.

BIDDLE: So an opportunity to expand its areas of concern appealed to him very much. Of course, later a separate program was developed for museums called the National Institute of Museums, and I wrote the legislation also for that for Claiborne Pell.

CROUCH: That's in Health and Human Services. Institute of Museum Services, they call it now.

BIDDLE: Yes. At first. Later it became independent.

DEVORKIN: It's the same. Let me ask. Who were you getting to know in Washington during this period who, possibly like Stewart McClure, you found you were able to work with, bounce ideas off of? I'd be interested in if you had any collaboration or friendly advice in formulating the National Museum Act.

BIDDLE: Well, Paul Perot, of course, here, was very much a friend and very much involved with me.

DEVORKIN: Did you get to know him through this activity?

BIDDLE: Yes. And also there was Frank Taylor who was also involved in this concept.

DEVORKIN: Who outside of the Smithsonian, but within the Washington circle?

BIDDLE: Well, what happened to me, David, was that having been given this opportunity by Claiborne Pell to develop an area of our government which had not been attended to much before this, I found myself in the position of being almost the only staff person--in fact, the only staff person--to work on this full time. There were other senators involved--Senator [Jacob J.] Javits [R, New York], Senator [Hubert H.] Humphrey [D, Minnesota], Senator [Joseph S.] Clark [D, Pennsylvania] from Pennsylvania, and a number of others, but not very many, who saw that this idea of a federal program for the arts had merit.

But for the most part, Claiborne Pell in those days was looked on as eccentric, unrealistic, in talking about this program, and it took a lot of persuasion to change the minds in Congress.

DEVORKIN: How was the coalition built? How were people won over?

BIDDLE: Well, I would go to my friend Stewart McClure, and I would say, "I'm going to see Senator So-and-so's staff tomorrow. How should I approach this?" And I had developed a kind of list of possible senators that would be helpful.

DEVORKIN: The ones you mentioned--Javits, Humphrey, Clark?

BIDDLE: Yes, but beyond that, looking at the whole Senate. Stewart would say, "Well, when you go to see So-and-so, don't see his legislative assistant. Go and see his administrator, because he has a girlfriend who loves Mozart." He knew every staff person in the Senate. He had been the chief of staff for years and years, and there wasn't a staff person that he didn't know and who didn't respect him on both sides of the aisle. The Senate was then organized under the Democrats, but Republican senators would come and say, "Stewart, I'm having a problem with this legislation. How do you advise me?" And he would give his very excellent advice, often very wise advice, to whoever asked him, regardless of party. I think that's why he was so well liked.

But little by little, and just by dint of going and knocking on doors and talking to people, gradually this kind of coalition began to take form. So a year and about nine months later, when we got to the floor of the Senate with the first bill for the National Foundation on the Arts, as it was called then--this was without Humanities--we had enough votes to pass it, because more than fifty senators had signed up. When we finally got to final passage of the Arts and Humanities Act in 1965, in June of 1965, again a majority of the senators had co-sponsored. Now, co-sponsorship doesn't mean that they'll automatically vote for it, but it means that they're favorably inclined.

I remember when we finally came down to the floor with the Arts and Humanities Act, Senator [Mike] Mansfield [D, Montana], who was then majority leader, came up to Claiborne and said, "You've got enough votes to pass this now right here. Let's do it by a voice vote."

So the opposition to these ideas was overcome really by just hard work and making friends.

DEVORKIN: What was the primary opposition?

BIDDLE: The primary opposition was that this was too far-fetched. Artists were considered dangerous, even politically, possibly communist, unpredictable, not synonymous with votes, and then there were people like Senator Strom Thurmond [D, South Carolina], who was then a Democrat senator from South Carolina, who considered the whole thing unconstitutional. He and Senator Pell had this great argument about the constitutionality of a possible program of this kind.

DEVORKIN: What was your strategy in response to that, and how did you develop that strategy?

BIDDLE: David, I made up strategy as I kind of went along, and in this case I knew from my friends that Senator Thurmond was going to make a major attack on the endowment legislation on the floor and watch out for him, because he was going to call the bill unconstitutional, because there was no place in the Constitution that talked about the arts or even mentioned the arts.

So I wrote a defense for Claiborne to give on the public welfare clause of the Constitution and studied madly to try and bolster that with some other legal opinions. But, you see, at the time, very little attention was being given to this. Lawyers were not pontificating. It was all a very fresh burgeoning idea, but there wasn't a track record. There wasn't congressional history, as they say.

So the debate between Mr. Thurmond and Mr. Pell, if you read it today, would sound pretty simplistic, because neither of them strayed too far afield from the fact that the Constitution didn't contain the word "arts," and that there was a provision called the public welfare clause in the Constitution. Neither went really beyond that into any depth. I think you can argue education, you can argue anything that's good for the country. Therefore you have to prove that, or you have to put the debate on the merits of the arts as being beneficial to the general welfare. And Mr. Pell was able to persuade his colleagues that it was, and Senator Thurmond didn't win that battle.

DEVORKIN: That's an interesting constitutional question. Then what you can say is that in the formulation of this, you had to face that. You had to face that constitutional question. It's a question of interpreting the Constitution.

BIDDLE: It's a question of interpreting the Constitution. You know, if we had all been gifted with foresight and hindsight, we could have foreseen that that would be a major issue, and I could

have done a lot more studying.

DEVORKIN: Did you have constitutional lawyers who you could call, for instance?

BIDDLE: Well, there was a legal counsel in the Senate, but in this case I didn't need to call on them because the other side was not bolstered with a legal argument, a legalistic argument, and the general welfare clause was taken as enough.

DEVORKIN: Sure. Well, that certainly got your feet wet, thinking about museums. Can you relate how that began focusing your interest on the future of the Smithsonian? It's interesting that you depict the Smithsonian as a rather quiet place during the period '60 up to--under Carmichael, let's say.

BIDDLE: Right.

DEVORKIN: Of course, that's the period when the American History Building was built.

CROUCH: I think that opened in '66.

DEVORKIN: Yes. There was expansion going on. What stimulated your interest to consider the Smithsonian in terms of what should be done? When you thought about the Smithsonian as you came here and got to know Washington, what was your sense of it, its purpose, its reason for being?

BIDDLE: Well, I visited the Smithsonian and I got to know a number of the people involved with its leadership, including Peter Powers, who was then the legal counsel.

CROUCH: He still is.

BIDDLE: And still is. He and I actually are pretty much contemporaries in the beginning and the middle and the end, but Paul Perot became a friend.

CROUCH: He's a wonderful man.

DEVORKIN: You met these people in their official capacities?

BIDDLE: Well, you see, I was in a nice position because here I was the chief staff person on the Subcommittee on the Smithsonian, so I could call up and say, "Can I come and see you?" and they would open the door. Also I should point out that Claiborne Pell and Dillon Ripley became very good friends, and Claiborne looked upon Dillon as a sort of bright eminence that was going to

metamorphize the Smithsonian and give it new life. Claiborne used to say, "It's been the attic of the country in its collections. Let's make those collections much more vital and visible."

DEVORKIN: Can you say anything about Claiborne Pell's influence in bringing Dillon Ripley to the Smithsonian? Was there any influence on your part or on Claiborne Pell's?

BIDDLE: I think that was decided outside of Claiborne's jurisdiction. It was decided without his major input. But I know that he thought highly of Dillon when his name was proposed by the Regents, but he didn't know him then. They became friends socially. But Dillon and Claiborne used to have regular meetings together in the Senate Dining Room, which I was privileged to attend as the staff guy involved, but Dillon was full of ideas about an expanded role for the Smithsonian, and Claiborne liked the idea (a) of the Smithsonian as the principal museum of the country and (b) because he saw the Smithsonian collections as being unexcelled in Washington. So it was a kind of nice wedding of similar goals.

DEVORKIN: What about the relationship between Claiborne Pell and your own contacts with people who were on the regents at that time, such as [Michael J.] Kirwan [D, Ohio], Representative Kirwan, or [George] Mahon [D, Texas]? Clinton [P.] Anderson [D, New Mexico] was certainly a regent at that time. I have a number of--[J. William] Fulbright [D, Arkansas] was a regent.

CROUCH: Fulbright was one when I was here, when I first got here.

DEVORKIN: Did you have any contacts with them?

BIDDLE: Yes, because Clinton Anderson from New Mexico became known to me through friends of his, and later on with the National Endowment [for the Arts], the person that Roger Stevens hired to be sort of administrative secretary, Luna Diamond, had worked for Clinton Anderson. So I knew that name.

Mr. Mahon from Texas was chairman of the Appropriations Committee when Roger Stevens was chairman in the very beginning, and, as an aside, called Roger when our first appropriations bill was coming up for consideration and said, "Now, Roger, there's one thing that I insist on your never funding, and that is those dancers on their tippy-toes." And Roger said, "It won't be done, Mr. Chairman."

So I had to explain to the chief clerk--I was then Roger's deputy chairman--when I went up to present our budget, that the American Ballet Theater was really the American Ballet Theater.

He said, "Oh, I know Mr. Stevens is interested in theater. All right, I understand."

But these were very simplistic days, unlike today when there's a much greater number of staff people involved and looking into all kinds of convolutions every step of the way.

DEVORKIN: So there were not other staffers who were as helpful as Stewart McClure, let's say, who worked for Fulbright and who worked for others that you worked with. That's what I'm trying to get at here.

BIDDLE: Not really, David. I was pretty much my own boss then, because nobody wanted to devote time to it, is what it amounted to.

CROUCH: It wasn't a pathway to success.

BIDDLE: No.

CROUCH: At least they didn't think so at the time.

BIDDLE: Senator Javits had some wonderful people working for him, and he was deeply involved, because New York State and New York City is a center of the arts, so politically it was important to Senator Javits. But Senator Humphrey's person was only at times involved, yes.

CROUCH: Peripherally involved, yes.

DEVORKIN: Okay. Let me turn the tape over.

BIDDLE: And that was the nice part of my job, really, that I could be so much in charge of the whole evolution of this.

DEVORKIN: That's when you were the chief of staff.

BIDDLE: I was known as Senator Pell's special assistant.

CROUCH: That's what you started with.

BIDDLE: Yes.

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DEVORKIN: You were known as his special assistant.

BIDDLE: Which gave me latitude to develop ideas without a hierarchical kind of situation.

DEVORKIN: Exactly. Let me now ask you to turn to the National Air and Space Museum and its origins and your involvement with it.

As you related in your autobiography on page 294, you indicated that Claiborne Pell asked you to look into what a friend of his was talking about--Charles Webb was talking about--concerning a collection of aircraft out in Suitland [Maryland] at that time. What was your sense of what Claiborne was asking you to do?

BIDDLE: Well, David, I would like to think that Claiborne was prescient with all kinds of future visions, but mainly he wanted to accommodate his old friend Charlie Webb, who had this passion for flying and didn't have a fear of flying at all, and loved old aircraft. Charlie said, "There is a collection of historic airplanes..." When I'd started knowing know Charlie as a friend--

DEVORKIN: Prior to this point. So you already knew him?

BIDDLE: I knew him, but I got to know him much better due to this experience. I remember the day vividly that he drove me out to this field in Suitland, and here were these magnificent examples of flying all through a period of years, many planes from the Second [World] War, but they went far beyond that. I went into a hangar, I remember, and here I think it was a plane that Admiral [Richard E.] Byrd had flown.

CROUCH: That was the Stars and Stripes. That was the name of it.

BIDDLE: Yes. To the South Pole.

CROUCH: A Fairchild.

BIDDLE: These artisans were working on stitching the wings of some of these old aircraft, and they were using a stitch that they had mastered, and it was the authentic way of putting canvas on wood.

CROUCH: They used the techniques that were used in the original.

BIDDLE: Yes.

CROUCH: They learned lots of techniques because they changed through the years.

BIDDLE: And that impressed me very, very much that they would spend so much time and effort and skill putting together these old aircraft which I could immediately see had a lot of historic value. Now, I'm not exactly sure of the date of that visit to Suitland.

DEVORKIN: A rough date would be good, because there is no date in your autobiography.

BIDDLE: No, there isn't, because I couldn't think of it.

DEVORKIN: Give me a year.

BIDDLE: I think it must have been about 1963. For an Air and Space Museum then.

DEVORKIN: That would have been right, because they started moving the aircraft in from other places in the early fifties, and they had pretty much finished getting the airplanes here by around '61. So that would be reasonable.

BIDDLE: And it would have to be between '63 and '64.

CROUCH: That would be very reasonable, because Ripley was here then, wasn't he?

BIDDLE: Yes.

CROUCH: So it might be after '64.

BIDDLE: It might have been '64, yes.

DEVORKIN: What was Charlie Webb asking you to do?

BIDDLE: Charlie said, "These are aircraft that should be in a great museum somewhere," and at the time--and I'm trying to think of the correct dates--but John Glenn had orbited the Earth.

CROUCH: That was February '62, John Glenn circled the Earth and landed in the Senate--a very accurate flight. [Laughter]

BIDDLE: Are you sure it was February?

CROUCH: Yes.

DEVORKIN: Is there a significance to the date for you?

BIDDLE: No, but I was trying to nail down some of this time. But Sputnik was previous to Glenn.

LOPEZ: Oh, quite a bit previous. That was '57, wasn't it?

BIDDLE: I'm just trying to kind of set the mood for what was going on in space. There were also, as I recall, before there

ever was a hearing on the idea of a National Air and Space Museum, there were old rockets outside of the Castle Building.

CROUCH: Right. And a V-2, I think.

BIDDLE: And that was about all that demonstrated our ability in space--just these couple, maybe three--

CROUCH: Right alongside the Arts and Industries Building.

BIDDLE: Yes.

DEVORKIN: So you knew they were there at that time.

BIDDLE: And Charlie said, "You know, we are on the threshold of huge discoveries in technology in space. Why don't we have an air and space . . ." He didn't call it that, but an Air and Space Museum was the emerging concept.

I went to Claiborne Pell and I said, "I've got this wonderful idea. We should have a space museum, a national space museum."

And he said, "Livy, I've got more priorities on my desk than that one. I'm afraid you've been brainwashed by our friend Charlie."

And I said, "I certainly have been, and I dream about these old planes."

DEVORKIN: You had no prior interest?

BIDDLE: No, except that I did see in some of these wonderful old aircraft Japanese planes, German planes, and planes that I had become familiar with in the Second War, and they were all in mothballs, in such heavy plastic, that you couldn't really see them except when you went up and really looked in and saw what was there--all preserved pristinely, it seemed to me.

So Claiborne said, "All right, let's have a hearing. That's the way we do things here. We'll have a hearing and we'll see how much this might cost."

I remember the hearing was not terribly well attended. Few people really all gung-ho about this idea, except me and Charlie Webb. I should, of course, say Jim Bradley from the Smithsonian.

BIDDLE: And of course through him, or because of him or whatever, Dillon Ripley. But I used to go and see Jim, and Jim used to come and see me even before Charlie Webb got involved.

DEVORKIN: But Bradley came to see you about other things, not about this?

BIDDLE: Well, always he would say, "We ought to have a national space museum. This is my dream," and it had been his dream for twenty years, he told me.

DEVORKIN: Bradley. Okay.

BIDDLE: He was the visionary of that. "But," he said, "I've never gotten anywhere with the Congress." Yes, we did work on other things. We worked on the Smithsonian's Research Center in Panama.

CROUCH: STRI [Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute].

BIDDLE: And of course we worked on the National Museum Act. But Jim would always come back to this idea for an air and space--or a space museum.

DEVORKIN: What was Charles Webb's relationship to the Smithsonian at that time?

BIDDLE: He didn't have any. He was just a flyer who was a great friend of Claiborne Pell and who loved old planes.

CROUCH: Where is he from?

BIDDLE: He's from Virginia. He's no longer alive, incidentally. His widow is alive.

LOPEZ: I've vaguely heard the name, but I didn't know him. But I've heard of him.

BIDDLE: He was a kind of loner type, not very gregarious.

DEVORKIN: Do you know how he and Pell came to know each other and became friends?

BIDDLE: I think they just socially saw each other in Washington. They moved in a similar set.

DEVORKIN: Webb was a businessman of some sort. What was his business, did you know?

LOPEZ: No, I don't know.

DEVORKIN: Here is a man who was pivotal in his bringing you out

there and getting you excited. We would like to know more about him.

CROUCH: We'll have to look. I don't know, but that would be worth learning.

BIDDLE: His widow is still alive and her name is Lucy.

MRS. BIDDLE: Lucy, who invited us to that party just a little while ago.

BIDDLE: I saw her after many years the other night--not the other night, but about a month ago, and sent her a copy of this book, because I said, "Charlie's in it." She had never known that.

DEVORKIN: That, for the purpose of the tape, is your book *Our Government and the Arts*.

BIDDLE: Right.

DEVORKIN: What were Claiborne Pell's higher priorities, since you said he had other priorities?

BIDDLE: Well, he had become very much interested in education and in foreign relations. I must say that those remain his principal priorities even today.

DEVORKIN: So it wasn't a question of having any adverse feelings about an air or space museum, but it was just that he had other priorities.

BIDDLE: Claiborne is a very practical senator, and he finally saw that the Arts and Humanities Bill was going to succeed, but in the beginning he was a little bit dubious. Museums, however, he was always front and center with museums.

DEVORKIN: Let's try to parallel this with various other activities in support of bringing in National Air, then later National Air and Space Museum to the Mall. I know that Clinton Anderson was very much involved as a Regent in at least convincing people that it should be on the Mall. In 1963, he would ask for information from people running the National Air Museum here about the question of the importance of siting it on the Mall as opposed to other places that wanted it, such as Denver, it turns out.

CROUCH: Back then?

DEVORKIN: Yes.

BIDDLE: I think there was even some thought about putting it out in a place like Suitland.

DEVORKIN: Yes.

BIDDLE: Or in an area outside of Washington.

DEVORKIN: At what point--that's what I need to ask now--did you start working and communicating with other senators, other staff, who were interested in having the museum and siting it here, such as Anderson and others?

CROUCH: Jennings Randolph was very big on it.

DEVORKIN: Jennings Randolph. Yes.

BIDDLE: Well, I think this all came down to the hearing in the subcommittee on the Smithsonian. That is when the firm of Helmuth, Obata, Kassabaum came up with what I thought was a magnificently imaginative plan, which is the plan that's here essentially--that is, modules and then walkways between the modules and walkways around the aircraft themselves. I remember coming to the Smithsonian and seeing the Spirit of St. Louis hung from the ceiling. It looked all full of dust, and you couldn't really see it.

LOPEZ: You couldn't see it. It wasn't well lighted.

BIDDLE: No, but there it was. That was the airplane that set all kinds of great things in motion.

DEVORKIN: Were you the writer of the legislation in the 88th Congress, the Bill 2602, that changed it from National Air Museum to Air and Space?

BIDDLE: I was involved with that, yes, yes.

DEVORKIN: Where did the pressure come from to add "space"?

BIDDLE: I think after the hearing and after the enthusiasm, at least for me, that this was a wonderful concept, and after Mr. Pell had changed from a little bit of skepticism to greater approval, and after the initial estimate by the architectural firm of \$40 million, people began to see this as a realistic possibility.

Then we come to this, to me, crucial meeting of the full Rules Committee, which is described some in my book. But let me set the stage a little bit, this old tradition. One of the finest

examples of senatorial tradition, I think, is the meeting room of the Rules Committee with windows, great windows along one side and this long table and the chairs prepared and all the trappings that go with senatorial courtesy and dignity. And here were assembled the principal members of the committee at that time. As I was saying to David, I was hoping I had in my briefcase, but I put the wrong book in it, the members of the committee present that day.

But I can tell you that the Democrats included Joseph Clark from Pennsylvania, Howard [W.] Cannon from Nevada, Robert Byrd from West Virginia, and the Republicans included Carl [T.] Curtis from Nebraska and Hugh Scott from Pennsylvania. The chairman was a very skillful, again Southern gentleman like Lister Hill, in a sense, a little further north, from North Carolina, and the chief clerk I shouldn't overlook, because he was very key to me--Gordon Harrison.

You see, being a somewhat junior person to these very, very senior staff directors of committees gave me an opportunity to win friends, but also they a little bit took pity on me. They saw me as someone striving, but not fully acquainted with all the processes at this point. This is about 1964, I guess, and I'd been in Washington then just two years.

But Gordon was a feisty individual and loved to smoke cigars, and in those days that was a sign of great virility. Even in the committee, he would be puffing on his cigar, quietly, and very, very trusted by Stewart McClure, like the trust he had from Lister Hill. Everett Jordan trusted Gordon Harrison. Gordon said to me, "You know, this is a good idea, Livy. Let's do it."

I came into that Rules Committee meeting after the hearing, sitting at my usual place behind Claiborne's chair, and I had a briefcase just packed with arguments for it, all the architectural drawings and the estimates down to the last detail, and what Sputnik had meant to Russia, what John Glenn's flight had meant to the United States, what Jack Kennedy--Jack Kennedy had also spoken about, "We will put a man on the moon by the end of this decade," which was fulfilled.

DEVORKIN: But it hadn't happened yet.

BIDDLE: But it hadn't even gotten off the ground. So there was sort of a climate of an interest in space that there hadn't been earlier, and I think that is what was frustrating to Bradley. He hadn't had that platform to launch his ideas.

Anyway, here's this meeting, and at the given moment Everett Jordan leaned over and said, "Now, Claiborne, Senator Pell, I understand you have something you want to bring to our attention today."

And Claiborne said, "Yes, it's an idea for a National Space Museum. You see, Mr. Chairman, it's very valuable to this country because we're on the threshold of exploring space," or something like that--period.

And there was silence. Then "How much is this going to cost us?"

"Well, we've got the firm estimate--\$40 million."

There was another long silence. People were thinking, "Forty million dollars, if it was translated into my program." Nobody spoke.

Then Carl Curtis from Nebraska, who was an ultra conservative senator, looked up and said, "You know, Clay, not a bad idea. If you say we should have it, let's have it." Just like that.

And Everett Jordan, whose antennae were so marvelous, like all those old-time chairmen, he said, "All in favor?" And it was unanimous. And that was the passage by the committee.

Then Gordon and I wrote a very glowing report with fulsome detail that went down to the Senate, and there was no problem. There was some trouble on the House side, however, and it was another year or so, I think, before the House finally approved.

LOPEZ: It was '66 it got approved, finally.

DEVORKIN: That was Frank Bow. He was a Regent, you remember, member of Congress.

BIDDLE: Yes.

DEVORKIN: And he pushed for the passage on the House side. Certainly at this point, authorization is what we're talking about.

BIDDLE: Right.

DEVORKIN: Did you stay in the process after that point?

BIDDLE: Well, you see, in 1965, I went from Claiborne over to the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) as its deputy chairman, and I kept very much in touch with Jim Bradley and the staff of Pell on the Rules Committee, but the authorization had cleared the Senate and it just really remained for the House to eventually concur. According to what Jim Bradley said, this was the major

breakthrough to get Senate approval of the legislation, and he said, "We'll get the House sooner or later."

LOPEZ: That's very much the way our bill went.

DEVORKIN: Yes.

LOPEZ: Approval was gotten in the Senate relatively easily, but it took a lot of grinding over the years to finally get the House to come around. Senator Barry Goldwater was very strong for it in the Senate and helped push it through.

DEVORKIN: Goldwater became involved later, because the authorization, when it was finally passed in the House, the funding of it was tied to decreasing funding for the Vietnam War. Were you still in it at all at that point?

BIDDLE: No, no.

DEVORKIN: How did you feel about that--linking these activities to Vietnam, whereas the art museums--

BIDDLE: Well, I wasn't crazy about the war in Vietnam, David.

LOPEZ: Well, no.

BIDDLE: I was just anxious to get this legislation through, and I think probably the climate was so turning against [President Lyndon B.] Johnson at this point over Vietnam, that that was a weapon that Goldwater could use to get the Air and Space Museum.

LOPEZ: Did you read the comments of Goldwater about Johnson in the paper this Sunday?

DEVORKIN: No.

LOPEZ: [Laughter] Boy!

DEVORKIN: But you were at the NEA by then.

BIDDLE: Yes.

DEVORKIN: You were still watching things happen. Did you have any involvement with them? Did you talk to people?

BIDDLE: Well, I always try and maintain relationships over the years, and I still go up to Capitol Hill. Incidentally, there's a wonderful guy who took the place of Gordon Harrison, I think, named Bill Cochrane. Does that name ring a bell? He's been with

the Rules Committee for years and years, and in many ways he was a mentor to me. I'm very fond of him. He was also one who looked after me--"We're going to get this for you, Livy. Don't worry." He would say about the Museum.

DEVORKIN: That's quite interesting. As a coda to the story, you mentioned that Claiborne Pell was actually quite taken aback when he saw how big the museum was on the Mall.

BIDDLE: Well, that is a true story. Claiborne, ever since he first came to Washington, has believed that the Mall should be for jogging, for outdoor exercise, as a big open space. I didn't dare quite tell him the size of what we had created. I often went home with him in the evening, and I would always take him up Pennsylvania Avenue, away from the museum site [Laughter]

BIDDLE: I could see it myself, growing and growing. But finally one day he said, "Livy, come on. Let's go over and look at that museum of yours," because he attributed it to my intervention, my enthusiasm for it.

I said, "Oh, Claiborne, you don't want to see that tonight. You're a little late."

"No, let's go. Let's go see it."

So I drove him over, and we saw the end of the museum, the first two modules. And he said, "You know, that's not bad at all. That's great. Looks wonderful."

Then we turned the corner, and BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! BOOM! And not only these, but these. Claiborne looked at them, really in some concern, and he said, "From now on I'm going to call this Biddle's Folly." [Laughter] But he said it with some facetiousness, because he really has become a believer in this. As a matter of fact, Catharina and I had our twentieth wedding anniversary the other evening, and Claiborne was there. He was reminiscing about Biddle's Folly and the Arts and the Humanities, but he said, "You know, that's the most popular museum in the country."

LOPEZ: In the world.

BIDDLE: In the world. And I misquoted in my book here. I said that 80,000 visitors were coming.

LOPEZ: It's about 175,000 a week, average.

BIDDLE: So it's 9 million, you told me.

LOPEZ: Right. A figure just about double the 80,000, more than double it.

BIDDLE: Well, we love this museum, and to bring you really up to the minute, our wedding anniversary was the third of November, and son and daughter-in-law and two twin grandchildren, boy and girl, five years old now, were down for the festivities, and the next morning they came here to visit the Air and Space Museum. The reports were fantastic.

LOPEZ: Oh, good.

BIDDLE: It was the best thing they'd ever seen. These two little kids were absolutely goggle-eyed with the magic of the whole thing.

DEVORKIN: During all of this, to me it's quite interesting that the history has always been one primarily of how Barry Goldwater brought the museum to its fruition around 1970.

LOPEZ: More for the appropriation.

DEVORKIN: For the appropriation part. But clearly, if the origins of it on the Hill were more from the Arts and the Humanities side, it's a very interesting statement about things. I was wondering if you have any observations about that.

BIDDLE: I do have the observation, because I have sometimes thought about this museum and why it so fascinated me, the idea. I think that creative expression in the arts, humanities, and sciences, real creativity, are so linked together, so indivisible. The creative scientist and the creative artist have a tremendous amount in common.

DEVORKIN: Was this the vision of an idealist?

BIDDLE: I think what I tried to do in Washington, Dave, is to translate my ideals into actions, sometimes succeeding, sometimes not succeeding. But they begin with an idealistic or a goal-oriented approach. The goal has been connected with some idea of how the country can be improved.

LOPEZ: Since this thing all sort of got started on your visit to Suitland, have you been there lately?

BIDDLE: No.

LOPEZ: You really should see it. We'd be most happy to take you out anytime you want.

BIDDLE: I'd love to go, Don.

LOPEZ: I think you're enjoy it very much, because it's improved so much.

BIDDLE: There was just one hangar when I went out.

LOPEZ: There are twenty-four buildings now. About twenty-two belong to Air and Space Museum.

DEVORKIN: If you don't mind me pursuing this--

BIDDLE: No.

DEVORKIN: --more of an ideological line, since we have you captive here just for a moment. When you said before we taped that World War II was a different war in your sensibilities and that certainly there were righteous wars and there were others that were futile in our own past, and you saw all of these aircraft out there in the fields at Suitland that were mainly World War II, World War I vintage, the ones that were being reconstructed or the ones that were simply there in decay, what, to your sense of a person who is a man of the arts, is the purpose of commemorating and preserving these kinds of devices that were primarily devices of war?

BIDDLE: And engines of destruction, you might say.

DEVORKIN: Engines of destruction.

BIDDLE: Well, there's a great deal of beauty in any aircraft, I find, and the fact that it is maybe misused in war is not as important to me as the design, the beauty, the shape, and the idea of flying, the idea of extending our boundaries, and the idea of extending our boundaries into space. So that has an ideological value to me that transcends just a temporal situation where some of these can be used to kill others or destroy property. There's a great beauty in a rocket taking off into space, and there is a great beauty even in such a terrible event as a kamikaze plane diving onto the deck of an aircraft carrier. It's something that speaks both to man's sense of speed and destruction and, on the other hand, speaks to something that says it doesn't have to happen this way if it were better controlled.

DEVORKIN: And the value of preserving these objects and displaying them, and possibly the question of context for displaying them--what are your thoughts about that?

BIDDLE: Well, I think they're beautifully displayed here, and they give you the feeling--at least they give me the feeling that I'm a part of them as I move around and see the different sides, the different shapes, and I get a kind of transcendent feeling out of that experience, that I'm participating in something really very intrinsic to man's aspirations, even though misused from time to time.

DEVORKIN: So you didn't see building the Air and Space Museum as a possible vehicle for placing a moral judgment on war or anything? It's primarily the aesthetic, the creation?

BIDDLE: I think for me it's more the aesthetic and the inventiveness of human beings.

LOPEZ: Yes, that was part of what we tried to do. I was head of the Aeronautics Department in charge of the airplane part of the museum during its creation. We just wanted to have a place that Americans, or anybody, could come and feel proud that mankind had been able to do these unbelievable, miraculous things, and feel some sort of pride in not only the human race by itself and our own country, especially.

BIDDLE: Well, maybe it comes a little bit, David and Don, from the fact that I was an ambulance driver during the war.

CROUCH: That would give you a different view.

BIDDLE: So while I saw the terrible tragedies of war, I was not shooting down the dive-bomber or whatever.

CROUCH: You saw the results of all that, which was much worse.

BIDDLE: But, you know, from time to time, when I was in charge of my platoon of ambulances in Italy, I was spending the night, let's say, in the cellar of an Italian farmhouse because we were always under German surveillance from the mountains above and from the air. There was a particular sound of an aircraft that used to come around our farmhouse, and I knew from the way the engine sounded, it was not an Allied plane, it was a German plane. I thought it was like a wolf sniffing out the vulnerable. You remember that scene in Ernest Hemingway's *The Snow of Kilimanjaro* where the hyena sniffs out the poor guy with his foot bleeding--Gregory Peck, in this case. I had the feeling that this German aircraft was going to find me some bad night and drop its bomb right on top of me, and I can still hear that sound in my musings. But it doesn't make me think badly of a German reconnaissance plane.

DEVORKIN: That was my first question. [Laughter] Well, we've gone an hour and a half. I think we've had a lovely interview.

BIDDLE: Well, it's been wonderful for us.

DEVORKIN: I want to know if there's anything you would like to add, Don, or Catharina?

MRS. BIDDLE: Catharina I was born in Holland. It's the old spelling.

LOPEZ: I have one. Do you know Ralph Wheeler? He was involved in helping to keep this particular site for the museum. At one time they had planned to put the Kennedy Center here, and he fought for the Foggy Bottom site. It's in his book *Miracle on the Potomac*. I didn't know if you know him or not, but he--

BIDDLE: I met him, but I don't know him. I don't recall any great argument that I was involved in with regard to the site. I do remember a huge argument about the site of the Kennedy Center.

LOPEZ: Oh, yes. That was really the argument. It wasn't that the Air Museum would be here. He was arguing for the Kennedy Center not to be here, because it would have been height-restricted and lots of other things, and parking would have been a real problem and so on. But it turned out that it saved the site for the Air and Space Museum, which was a good site for it, I think.

BIDDLE: Incidentally, as a little footnote, why was the new museum, the new Smithsonian museum, put underground? The African-American and Asian, the Sackler.

LOPEZ: I don't know. I guess they didn't want to obstruct the view of the Castle. I don't know of any particular reason.

BIDDLE: I think it goes back to Senator Pell's jogging. [Laughter]

LOPEZ: That could be.

BIDDLE: And the open space.

LOPEZ: Well, anybody from Rhode Island should appreciate space.

BIDDLE: But, you know, once a year regularly, and more often sometimes, Dillon Ripley and Claiborne would have lunch in the Senate Dining Room, and after lunch, they would go outside onto that great terrace overlooking the Mall and the Air and Space Museum. Claiborne would say, "Right down there, Dillon, is

Biddle's Folly."

And Dillon didn't smile. [Laughter] He would say, "Well, now, Claiborne, today, as I did a year ago, I'm going to try and get your thoughts and hopefully your approval on my next great museum, which is to be the Museum of Man."

LOPEZ: Oh, that's right. Yes.

BIDDLE: And Claiborne would say, "Well, now, where are you going to put that, Dillon?"

"Well, possibly over there." [Laughter]

DEVORKIN: What did he mean? Where did he point?

BIDDLE: Over beyond this museum.

LOPEZ: The open space next to the Air and Space Museum, where the Indian Museum is going now.

DEVORKIN: Yes.

BIDDLE: And Claiborne would say, "Dillon, your next museum is going underground."

DEVORKIN: Oh, really? He did say that?

LOPEZ: It might have had some effect. I know I was at a meeting one day with someone from the Congress, I can't remember who, and Secretary Adams, and he asked Adams why in the world would anybody put a museum underground, and Adams just said, "Why indeed?" That's when they were having all that trouble with the water coming in, when they were trying to build it.

DEVORKIN: So Senator Pell was influential.

BIDDLE: I would say.

LOPEZ: It sounds like he was if he had that thought.

DEVORKIN: Any parting thoughts?

BIDDLE: I think we've covered everything so well, David.

LOPEZ: It was very enlightening for me.

DEVORKIN: Thank you so much.

LOPEZ: I didn't know a lot of this, and I'm really glad to know it, and I thank you for finding us a nice place to work.

BIDDLE: [Laughter]

LOPEZ: I've enjoyed it very much.

BIDDLE: Well, I wish I could take full credit for it, but you know others were involved. But I do think that that Senate Rules Committee meeting is what turned the tide.

LOPEZ: It sounds like it, yes.

MRS. BIDDLE: I often feel that the greatest sculptors of the day are the designers of the aircraft when I see some of them and how beautiful they are.

DEVORKIN: Let me ask about some of the records that you have kept while you were special assistant to Claiborne Pell. Did they go with Pell's papers and are they deposited officially at the National Archives?

BIDDLE: Unfortunately, David, they're gathering dust in the Biddle cellar.

DEVORKIN: I think we should put on record that they should be preserved and they should be certainly collected together and made available.

TAPE 2, SIDE 1

DEVORKIN: What did you just say about the papers?

MRS. BIDDLE: No, that was just a joke. It would be nice to have some extra space in the cellar.

DEVORKIN: Let me say very seriously--but many times that's how we get our greatest collections. We recognize that certainly collections such as yours should go to the official repositories, but if there's some reason why you have personal papers that relate to the Subcommittee on the Smithsonian, it would be very appropriate for those papers to come to the Smithsonian, and I would encourage you, above all, to see that they are preserved and deposited someplace proper.

BIDDLE: David, I'm going to look at them again and I'm going to see what is really pertinent that you might want to have, because--

DEVORKIN: You are probably the worst determiner of that. Let us do that. [Laughter]

BIDDLE: All right. Boxes and boxes.

DEVORKIN: Seriously, though, have a look and talk to me, or I can give you names of people in the Archives who would be very interested to collect these. Of course, they have all of Dillon Ripley's papers, they have Carmichael's papers. It's a very, very fine archives. If for some reason you would think that this is an appropriate place, they would also talk with the archivist at the National Archives at the Library of Congress and make sure it was appropriately done. It would be a tragedy if this material were not preserved.

MRS. BIDDLE: I can take David's card and let him know what you have.

DEVORKIN: I'll give you my name and address. I'll turn off the tape at this point, okay?

BIDDLE: All right. And our many thanks.