

PREFACE

When the Senate elected its first Secretary of the Senate in 1789, among other responsibilities it assigned to him the role of chief disbursing officer. The Secretary paid the Senate's salaries and bills, and kept its financial ledgers. For many years the Disbursing Office operated out of a room adjacent to the Secretary's, with a bank-like, grided teller's cage where senators and staff collected their pay, in person and in cash. Eventually the Disbursing Office moved to other locations in the Capitol, and the duties were assumed by a Financial Clerk who reported directly to the Secretary. The tradition of payment in cash continued through the 1960s, when the phenomenal growth of the Senate staff forced the institution into the computer age.

William Ridgely served in the Disbursing Office from 1949 through 1977. He started as a clerk, became head bookkeeper, and rose to Financial Clerk. During those years he observed the dramatic changes in the institution from his side of the teller's window. In his oral history interviews he recounts the problems of paying for the Senate's expanding business, including its staff, committee work, and special investigations, as well as the Disbursing Office's dealings with the Appropriations and Rules committees.

In later years, Ridgely also handled arrangements for the Senate's participation in the International Parliamentary Union. He describes the purpose and planning of these trips, including an eventful meeting in Havana, Cuba. Ridgely retired from the Disbursing Office in 1977, and served as a consultant until 1979, when he returned to full time duties as Assistant Secretary of the Senate. He held that post until his retirement in 1981.

William Ridgely was born in Upper Marlboro, Maryland on May 9, 1922. He served in the United States Army Air Corps during World War II, studied accounting at the Eastern College of Commerce and Law, and worked for the Internal Revenue Service before joining the Senate staff.. After his retirement, Ridgely moved to Rhode Island. He died of a heart attack in Woonsocket, Rhode Island, on September 14, 1996.