

**RUFUS EDMISTEN**

**Staff to Senator Sam Ervin, N.C., Subcommittee on Separation of Powers,  
Subcommittee on Constitutional Rights,  
and Deputy Chief Counsel, Senate Select Committee on Presidential Campaign  
Activities (Watergate Committee)  
1964-1974**

Oral History Interviews  
U.S. Senate Historical Office  
Washington, D.C.  
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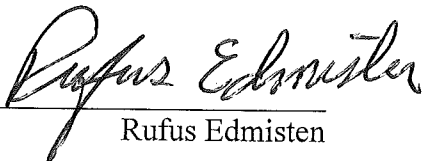


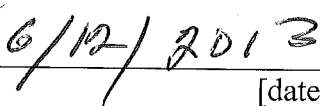
**Deed of Gift**

I, Rufus Edmisten, do hereby give to the Senate Historical Office the recordings and transcripts of my interviews between May 24, 2011, and August 28, 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.

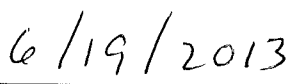
In making this gift, I voluntarily convey ownership of the tapes and transcripts to the public domain.

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Rufus Edmisten

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
[date]

Accepted on behalf of the Senate Historical Office by:

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Donald A. Ritchie

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
[date]

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## Preface

As a young boy growing up in the Appalachian Mountains of North Carolina, Rufus Edmisten dreamed of a life in politics. Inspired by local politicians, Edmisten gave his first “stump” speech in the field of his family farm to an audience of squirrels, cows, and horses. When he graduated from the University of North Carolina, he moved to Washington, D.C., to attend law school and pursue his lifelong dream. It wasn’t long before he was hired by Senator Sam Ervin of North Carolina. Edmisten learned the ways of the Senate as staff to two of Ervin’s Judiciary Committee subcommittees, Separation of Powers and Constitutional Rights. Edmisten also served as Ervin’s “body man,” driving the senator to his home state on weekends and holidays to campaign and meet with constituents.

Senator Ervin used his subcommittees to investigate some of the pressing issues of the 1960s, including executive privilege, abuse of power, and freedom of the press—issues that would later be central to the Senate Watergate investigation. During this time Senator Ervin also championed civil rights for Native Americans. Edmisten traveled with the senator to the Southwest, exploring conditions on Native American reservations, and helped the senator draft legislation to provide tribes greater protections under the law.

When Majority Leader Mike Mansfield selected Sam Ervin to chair the investigation into allegations of improprieties and illegal campaign finance during a presidential election year, Edmisten leapt at the chance to work on what later became known as the Senate Watergate Committee. As deputy chief counsel for the majority, he worked closely with committee staff, securing the real estate that the committee needed to conduct a thorough and efficient investigation. During the hearings, he describes working as the senator’s right-hand man, protecting his political interests back home in North Carolina.

In 1974 Senator Ervin announced his plans to retire at the end of his term and North Carolina attorney general Robert Morgan declared that he would run for the open seat. A general election would be called to fill Morgan’s position in November of 1974. With the Watergate investigation wrapping up, Edmisten announced his plans to run for attorney general. Over the 10 years that he had traveled with the senator to North Carolina, Edmisten met a lot of influential people. He turned those connections into a broad coalition that helped propel him to a decisive victory, taking 60 percent of the vote in the general election. Edmisten served as attorney general until he won the Democratic nomination for governor in 1984. Though he did not succeed in his bid for governor, he came back four years later to win the election for North Carolina secretary of state, a

position he held until 1996. Edmisten now owns Edmisten, Webb and Moore, a law firm specializing in government relations and litigation in Raleigh, North Carolina.

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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). She lives in Rockville, Maryland, with her husband and two children.

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*Illustrations:*

**Following page 65:** [from left] Rufus Edmisten, Senator Ervin’s “right-hand man,” Senator Sam Ervin, unidentified, and chief counsel Sam Dash during the Senate Watergate hearings.

**Following page 74:** Rufus Edmisten smokes a pipe during the Senate Watergate hearings.

**Following page 85:** Rufus Edmisten and Terry Lenzner arrive at the Executive Office Building to deliver the subpoena to President Richard Nixon’s aides.