Charles Martson

Assistant Superintendent, House Press Gallery

Oral History Interview
Final Edited Transcript

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"And Dick Embly gave a push at me and said, 'Get moving, Marston.' And I went out and went into this phone here, picked it up, and let it ring the Senate Press Gallery, automatically when you pick it up. Howard Dawes answered the phone over in the Senate. He was assistant superintendent over there. And I said to Howard, 'Tell the locals they are shooting up the House.' I heard him before he hung up the phone. He said, 'They're shooting up the House.' Needless to say all the reporters that were in the Senate Press Gallery came over to the House, led by Milton Berliner of the *Washington Daily News*."

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Abstract

Following in the footsteps of an uncle who worked at the Capitol, Charles Marston accepted an entry-level position as an elevator operator for the U.S. Senate in the mid-1940s. In these two interviews Marston fondly recalls his first job on the Hill where he had the opportunity to meet Senators like Harry S. Truman who later went on to serve as President. Marston discusses how he moved to the Senate Press Gallery and then ultimately found a permanent spot as an assistant superintendent in the House Press Gallery.

During his more than three-decade career on the Hill, Marston facilitated the work of reporters covering the House. He recalls how as a liaison between Members and the press he focused on "getting information," answering questions (about pending legislation, for example), and posting updates on a centrally-located bulletin board in the press gallery. Marston spent much of his tenure attending committee hearings where he distributed press releases and handled accommodations for the press. He recalls, in particular, hearings held by the Ways and Means and Science Committees. On occasion Marston also monitored floor proceedings. He provides a detailed, eye-witness account of the shooting that transpired in the House Chamber on March 1, 1954. Marston's career spanned many technological changes which he discusses in this oral history. He speaks of how the press used telegraphs, teletype machines, and typewriters in the gallery when reporting on Congress. Marston also shares his memories of the correspondents who covered the House and how women and African Americans gradually integrated the predominantly white, male press corps.

Biography

Charles (Charlie) Franklin Marston was born in Culver City, California, on November 22, 1928, to Percival Franklin Marston and Catherine (Roeder) Marston. Before his first birthday he and his mother moved to Silver Spring, Maryland. As an only child, Marston was raised by his mother and grandmother. While attending local schools in Maryland, Marston worked part-time at a drug store, bowling alley, and gas station—all located in Silver Spring.

With his uncle employed at the Capitol, Marston found a job on the Senate side as an elevator operator during the mid-1940s. In this position he met many Senators, including Carl Hatch of New Mexico and future President Harry S. Truman. Harold Beckley, the superintendent of the Senate Press Gallery convinced Marston to leave his elevator post and take a temporary job as a messenger in his office. Marston later moved to the House Press Gallery when a permanent spot became available in 1948. From 1950 to 1953, Marston served in the U.S. Army during the Korean War. After his discharge he returned to his job at the House Press Gallery as an assistant superintendent. In this position Marston gathered data about Members, kept abreast of legislation, and attended committee hearings to assist the press in their coverage of the House. On March 1, 1954, Marston witnessed armed assailants fire gunshots from the public galleries onto the floor of the House Chamber wounding five Representatives. As he made his way from the chamber, he alerted his colleagues of the shooting, describing the corresponding scene in the press gallery as "sheer chaos" as reporters and staff gathered to document what had occurred on the House Floor.

After reaching his 35-year mark of service in the House, Marston retired in 1979. He went on to work as a bus driver for Prince George's County Schools and for senior citizens in College Park, Maryland. Charles Marston passed away on December 10, 2015, at the age of 87.

Editing Practices

In preparing interview transcripts for publication, the editors sought to balance several priorities:

- As a primary rule, the editors aimed for fidelity to the spoken word and the conversational style in accord with generally accepted oral history practices.
- The editors made minor editorial changes to the transcripts in instances where they believed such changes would make interviews more accessible to readers. For instance, excessive false starts and filler words were removed when they did not materially affect the meaning of the ideas expressed by the interviewee.
- In accord with standard oral history practices, interviewees were allowed to review their transcripts, although they were encouraged to avoid making substantial editorial revisions and deletions that would change the conversational style of the transcripts or the ideas expressed therein.
- The editors welcomed additional notes, comments, or written observations that the interviewees wished to insert into the record and noted any substantial changes or redactions to the transcript.
- Copy-editing of the transcripts was based on the standards set forth in *The Chicago Manual of Style*.

The first reference to a Member of Congress (House or Senate) is underlined in the oral history transcript. For more information about individuals who served in the House or Senate, please refer to the online *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress*, http://bioguide.congress.gov and the "People Search" section of the History, Art & Archives website, http://history.house.gov.
For more information about the U.S. House of Representatives oral history program contact the Office of House Historian at (202) 226-1300, or via email at history@mail.house.gov.

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Interviewer Biography

Kathleen Johnson is the Manager of Oral History for the Office of the Historian, U.S. House of Representatives. She earned a B.A. in history from Columbia University, where she also played basketball for four years, and holds two master's degrees from North Carolina State University in education and public history. In 2004, she helped to create the House's first oral history program, focusing on collecting the institutional memory of Members and staff. She co-authored two books: *Women in Congress: 1917–2006* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2006) and *Black Americans in Congress: 1870–2007* (GPO, 2008). Before joining the Office of the Historian, she worked as a high school history teacher and social studies curriculum consultant.

— CHARLES MARSTON —
INTERVIEW ONE

JOHNSON: This is Kathleen Johnson with the Office of the House Historian. Today's date is August 28th, 2014, and I'm with Charles Marston in his home in Adelphi, Maryland. Mr. Marston was a longtime employee of the House Press Gallery. This is the first interview with Mr. Marston.

We are recording now, and I wanted to first thank you for letting me come to your home today to talk to you. I wanted to start with some biographical questions. The first one would be when and where you were born?

MARSTON: In Culver City, California, November 22nd, 1928.

JOHNSON: And when did you come to the DC area?

MARSTON: I was roughly six months old. I didn't come under my own power. I wound up at the Colesville Road address [in Silver Spring, MD].

JOHNSON: What are your memories of Washington, DC, in the 1940s and the 1950s?

MARSTON: Well, part of it was during the war years, and I had a bunch of jobs. Before the war years, 1930—got an off switch?

JOHNSON: Sure.

BRIEF INTERRUPTION

JOHNSON: We're back recording now. I was wondering about some of the jobs you had when you were younger.

MARSTON: First real job I had was at a soda fountain at People's Drug Store Number 136 in the heart of Silver Spring. There were two People's Drug Stores in Silver Spring. One was on Bonifant Street and Georgia Avenue, and that was 135. I worked at 136 at Colesville Road and Georgia Avenue. Incidentally, the fellow that did the book on [the history of] Silver Spring was a little erroneous. He had Wright's Jewelry down on the corner; that was really where the People's Drug Store was that I worked. I worked part-time after school setting duckpins for the Arbaugh's Silver Spring bowling alley. Pretty good pay because it was leagues. They tipped well. And I worked at the Exxon station, well, it was an Esso station—Artie Barrett, Esso. I rode in with my uncle. I didn't have transportation. And my uncle bought a White Owl cigar and filled the tank with gas every morning because his gas gauge didn't work, so he put a dollar's worth in every morning.

I worked part-time another summer at the Betholine Richfield station, which was across from the Esso station. Eddie Tolker, T-O-L-K-E-R, was the manager of that. And the Esso station was Artie Barrett Esso. And across the street from Artie Barrett was Wolfe Motor Company, Garland Wolfe, G-A-R-L-A-N-D. And Garland had the most beautiful Christmas tree. It was two stories tall, and he just had the prettiest tree in town, in the town of Silver Spring, that is. Well, Garland Wolfe sold it to the government, and the government had something secret going on there. We didn't know what it was, and we were told there was a secret project. After the war we were told what it was. They were building the proximity fuse, which was a special fuse. When a shell flies over a hill or what have you, it hit a space where the proximity fuse would cause the shell to go off. That's where it got its name, proximity fuse, proximity of the target. I never worked at the theater.

JOHNSON: How did you end up working at the Capitol?

MARSTON: My uncle Jimmy. I'm trying to think how. Well, Uncle Jimmy was an employee of the United States Senate. Senate engineer.

JOHNSON: What was your first job there?

MARSTON: First job?

JOHNSON: When you were working at the Capitol, you started on the Senate side. What was your first job?

MARSTON: Elevator operator, which I enjoyed very much. I enjoyed meeting with the notables. Senator Carl [Atwood] Hatch—not too sure of his first name, but I think I'm right on that—of New Mexico bought me a Coke every morning. And I would stand in the little snack bar right off on the first floor. We'd have our Coke every morning. He would buy, of course.

And I have a short story I can tell you on that with [Harry S.] Truman. President Truman was the Vice President in those days I recall. And Sergeant Byers was a Capitol cop at the entrance to the Senate Wing on the first floor. And one morning Sergeant Byers came roaring in, running into the little snack bar, and said, "Charlie, Truman is here." Oh, my goodness, I'm through. And breathing very profusely, very upset—I just knew I'd lose my job. I didn't lose my job. Well, about two weeks later, Truman came in. I was sitting on the little ice cream parlor type chair out in front of the elevator. Very demonstrative, he looked at his watch and said, "Charlie, I must be running late. I see you've already had your Coke." The Coke bottle was under the chair, the old glass bottle.

I went to work as a temporary employee in the Senate Press Gallery. Mr. Harold Beckley entered my elevator one day and said—

JOHNSON: Was he the superintendent on the Senate side in the Senate Press Gallery?

MARSTON: Superintendent, yes. He said, "I'd like you to come to work for me." I said, "I'm not interested, Mr. Beckley." He said, "My name is Harold Beckley, superintendent of the Senate Press Gallery." I told him I wasn't interested in working for him. I liked what I was doing, and I really did. I enjoyed the elevator immensely because I got to know all the powerhouses. I was impressed with many of them and got to know the little idiosyncrasies about them. And wait for a minute. Sorry to be so—

JOHNSON: No, you're doing great. Not in a hurry at all. Was he surprised that you turned him down?

MARSTON: Yes, he was. I truly was not interested. I liked the Senators. I had a chance to . . . I'm trying to put it together now.

JOHNSON: So you ended up working there for a while?

MARSTON: Yes, less than two years.

JOHNSON: And then how did you make it over to the House side, to the House Press Gallery?

MARSTON: Special deal between Mr. [William J.] Donaldson [Jr.] and Mr. Beckley.

JOHNSON: Mr. Donaldson was the superintendent for the House Press Gallery?[1]

MARSTON: Donaldson. Yes. He was a character, to put it mildly. Liked his hooch, but he never really drank on the job. He had a lot of friends that go way back, friends in Congress. I'm trying to think how to get back to the Press Gallery.

JOHNSON: Mr. Beckley made a deal you said, for you to go over to the House side?

MARSTON: Yes.

JOHNSON: What was your position when you were on the House side? Do you remember? Were you a messenger? Was that your first job?

MARSTON: I don't think they called it messenger. They called it messenger in the Senate. And then they equalized the status; that's what this bill did on each side. And I lost my job when I came out of the service.

JOHNSON: When you were in the Senate Press Gallery?

MARSTON: Yes. That's when Tim Murray told me after he knew about it. He said, "Hear you had an offer, a job upstairs." I said, "Yes, sir, but I'm not going to take it." He said, "I'm going to fire you and make you take it." Word has already been around. At one point I was going to the Capitol Page Boys School. Mr. [Ernest] Kendall was the principal. So they pass the bill, created my job. I got drafted into the Army and went to Korea. Then after I stayed in Korea for a little over a year I came back, and I got my job back.

JOHNSON: Can we go to when you first started at the House Press Gallery? Can we go back to that? So that was in 1948 you had said when you first started there. Do you remember what some of your jobs were, your responsibilities when you were first starting in the House Press Gallery? What were some of the things that you did?

MARSTON: I have to insert the fact that I chauffeured a Senator through the '48, '47 campaign, and I drove over some wild country that summer—wild and wonderful West Virginia. The Senator was very kind to me. I traveled all over West Virginia in the campaign. He liked to talk about going up to this holler or that holler. Just about the time I finished up with him they passed the bill that created my job. I was there from then on.

JOHNSON: Your job in the House Press Gallery.

MARSTON: Yes.

JOHNSON: What were some of the things that you did when you started with the House Press Gallery? What were some of your responsibilities?

MARSTON: Answering inquiries on the telephone, of which we had many.

JOHNSON: Can you think of an example? What were some of the questions that you'd be asked?

MARSTON: What legislation was pending, any questions on the board [in the press gallery], statistics.

JOHNSON: What kind of statistics?

MARSTON: "Who was the oldest?" "Who was the youngest?" Just some of the questions we got.

JOHNSON: And these questions were coming from reporters?

MARSTON: Yes, wasn't necessarily all reporters. I would post news on the bulletin board.

JOHNSON: So this was the bulletin board that was in the House Press Gallery, and that's where the statistics would be posted?

MARSTON: What?

JOHNSON: That's where the statistics would be posted? On the bulletin board?

MARSTON: Yes. This was the statistics board. It was back of the main desk. I would attend committee meetings as assigned by the superintendent, and that's where I got to know Wilbur [Daigh] Mills. I was regularly assigned his

committee [Ways and Means]. Contrary to what happened to him, I thought he was a real genuine person. I was proud to know him. Shame what happened to him.

JOHNSON: You said you were assigned to the committees. You would attend hearings?

MARSTON: I would attend hearings.

JOHNSON: What would you do while you were there? What was your job while you were at the hearings?

MARSTON: Hold places for the wire services, for example. Make sure there were press people at the press tables. And I would go regularly to Wilbur Mills' Ways and Means Committee. Incidentally, every time I had a child, he would have an Antonio and Cleopatra cigar.

JOHNSON: Did you ever have to keep a log at the hearings? Like sometimes I know you had mentioned that people that worked in the press gallery would keep a running log of what was happening on the floor for reporters. Did you also do that at hearings?

MARSTON: I was learning that when I was with Mr. [Richard (Dick)] Embly when they shot up the House.[2]

JOHNSON: In 1954.

MARSTON: March 1st, 1954, 2:32 p.m.

JOHNSON: Would you like to talk about that now, what you remember from that day?

MARSTON: If you'd like to.

JOHNSON: Sure, we can talk about that.

MARSTON: Well, I was in the next to the last seat in the press gallery where they had benches to write on, and Mr. Embly was the far seat nearest the railing there. And I was in training to keep his log. And all of a sudden this firing started—wasn't sure it was gunfire. I happened to look, and there's this girl with a flag, waving it and saying, "Viva la Puerto Rico." I understood her to say, "Viva la Mexico." I didn't know anything about Spanish. And she dropped the flag, reached in a black leather bag, and she pulled out a Luger pistol. I recognized it as a Luger because I owned one. And Dick Embly gave a push at me and said, "Get moving, Marston." And I went out and went into this phone here, picked it up, and let it ring the Senate Press Gallery, automatically when you pick it up. Howard Dawes answered the phone over in the Senate. He was assistant superintendent over there. And I said to Howard, "Tell the locals they are shooting up the House." I heard him before he hung up the phone. He said, "They're shooting up the House." Needless to say all the reporters that were in the Senate Press Gallery came over to the House, led by Milton Berliner of the *Washington Daily News*.

And then I went back in, observed Dr. [Walter Henry] Judd of Minnesota, a Congressman as well as a doctor; he was bending over Alvin [Morell] Bentley of Michigan, who was down in the Republican part of the well of the House. He was shaking his head like he couldn't get any pulse. Ben [Benton Franklin] Jensen of Iowa got a bullet in the flabby part of his back. I figured that was from the girl. She said she didn't mean to kill anybody in a recent article.

JOHNSON: Lolita Lebron, the woman that was shooting that day.

MARSTON: Yes. I didn't see [George Hyde] Fallon of Maryland or [Kenneth Allison] Roberts. He alleges in his book, "Fishbait" Miller quotes the Congressman from Alabama, his motto was "Everything's made for love."[3] When the other

Congressmen asked him when he was leaving the chamber, said, "Where are you going?" "I'm going home." Frank [William] Boykin was his name. He said, "I'm going home to Alabama." "Where's your gun?" "Home in Alabama." He was one. I'd see him every day in the barber's chair. And there were two barbers' chairs in the House Wing near each other on the first floor. Smitty was the barber for the Members. Frank Boykin liked Red the barber, supposed to be the employee barber. He'd rub handheld vibrators all over Frank Boykin. Red the barber, I don't know his last name. Smitty, I don't know his last name. But every morning Frank Boykin would be in the chair. What do you want to know about?

JOHNSON: I wanted to go back to the shooting for a minute. I had some other questions I wanted to ask you. Speaker [Joseph William] Martin [Jr.] had said later on that he thought that it was firecrackers going off; he didn't realize it was shooting. Did you know right away that it was shooting because of the angle where you were sitting?

MARSTON: I knew it was shooting when I saw her pull the pistol out of the bag. This was about halfway down on the west side of the first balcony. I saw her fire a weapon right in the middle gallery. I don't know who apprehended her. She was gone when I went back in.

JOHNSON: So you and Mr. Embly made it safely back to the House Press Gallery. And once you informed the Senate that this was going on what was happening in the House Press Gallery? What was it like in that room? Do you remember?

MARSTON: Yes. Sheer chaos! I was worried that it might be more than just the ones that I saw. I saw she was midway on the platform. They're all seats there. There's a rail between Mr. Embly and the section where Lolita was which was the ladies' gallery, I believe. Definitely not the front row. Mike Michaelson, the

Radio-TV Gallery superintendent, was back from his usual seat.[4] He had a seat in the front row. The angle that he could see most of the gallery. He pointed out to me one day where the hole was in his counter where a bullet went in through there.

JOHNSON: You mentioned that it was chaos back in the gallery. Was it just a lot of reporters that were in there together trying to figure out what had happened? Who was in the gallery at that point?

MARSTON: I can't tell you. I was concerned there might be some more gunmen.

JOHNSON: So you went back into the chamber?

MARSTON: I went back into the chamber, saw what was happening, and came back to the office.

JOHNSON: And what did you do, and the other people in the press gallery in the hours after the shooting to try to help the press? What were you doing? Do you remember?

MARSTON: Not really. Just answering phone inquiries as usual. We had a lot of inquiries every day.

JOHNSON: What happened afterwards in the weeks after the shooting? I know there was a lot of talk about increased security and different ideas about what could be done to make the chamber safer.

MARSTON: Well, one thing, we were told that the uniformed police could not enter the chamber when it was in session. So there were two plainclothesmen in the Capitol. One was Captain Carl Schamp, the other, Captain Mike Dowd. They were both—Mike Dowd was assigned to the Senate side, and Carl Schamp was assigned to the House side. He's the one that took a beating

when they had some of the hearings. And they had sharp—the girls had sharp toes on their shoes, and they really messed up Carl Schamp's leg kicking him as he went. He widened the seats to make more room, so the police could get in there to Martin Dies' [Jr.] committee. We were sent—

JOHNSON: Are you talking about HUAC [House Un-American Activities Committee]? The HUAC Committee and Martin Dies?

MARSTON: Yes.

JOHNSON: Before we go there, I just want to go back a little bit and talk about some of the superintendents that you worked for. Would that be all right? You mentioned Mr. Donaldson. How did he run the press gallery? What do you remember about him and his leadership of the gallery?

MARSTON: Very highly thought of and respected. And Tony Demma was Bill's right-hand man. Eventually when Ben West was superintendent [of the House Press Gallery], he apparently had a friend that he owed in the chain of command.[5] At the time that the new bill came along he was hopeful of getting the friend in there I was told. He was very disappointed that he couldn't. Bill was a likable Irishman—had a wonderful sense of humor. He called Tony Demma, "Antony."

JOHNSON: Is he in one of those pictures?

MARSTON: What?

JOHNSON: Is he in one of those pictures? Is that what you'd like to show me?

MARSTON: I'm looking for . . . Tony took a real ribbing at this.

JOHNSON: So this is a picture of Lolita Lebron.

MARSTON: Right. And this is Tony Demma.

JOHNSON: Okay, who worked in the press gallery. How did he get in this picture? Do you know?

MARSTON: I have no idea, but he took a ribbing. Friends all over the country, they said—one of them said, "Tony, that's the roughest-looking guy I've ever seen." This is in the *Post* magazine.

JOHNSON: You worked closely with Mr. Embly as well. What do you remember about him and the way he ran the press gallery?

MARSTON: Laid-back, very quiet, World War II veteran, artillery—and he was a friendly superintendent. He was married, had a farm belonged to some relative in Perryville, Maryland. He would go there weekends. He had a little truck farm out there that he liked to go out and attend to. He took the train to go out frequently. He was a nice guy. That's about all I can say about him.

JOHNSON: That's fine. And Mr. West was the other superintendent that you worked under. What do you remember about him and the way he ran the gallery?

MARSTON: We didn't get along too well, Ben and I. He wanted that job open, so he could put somebody there. He had a very similar life to me. He had a single mother and liked his own way. He demanded it.

JOHNSON: He also had to start working at a young age.

BRIEF INTERRUPTION

JOHNSON: You were talking about Mr. West. Do you want to continue from there?

MARSTON: Mr. West demanded perfection. He had the most beautiful writing you ever saw in your life. I don't know if you've seen it.

JOHNSON: I've seen it.

MARSTON: He expected, demanded respect from the staff. Matter of fact in the agreement we had he wanted me out of there. I had enough seniority that I could almost retire. He said, "Come February 1st, you're out of here." That was the agreement we had between us as soon as I reached the 35-year mark.

JOHNSON: I see. So that was in 1979 when you retired.

MARSTON: Yes.

JOHNSON: Did he have a replacement in mind? Is that why he wanted you to leave the gallery?

MARSTON: Yes. He had a friend he wanted in there, so he skipped me at one point. He had Thayer Illsley in there as assistant superintendent, and he was Bill Arbogast's son-in-law. Ben West got him to throw the job open, my slot, froze me where I was, and Bill Arbogast put his son-in-law up before the standing committee. And his son-in-law got the job. And they did another skipperoo like that to Jim Talbert and froze him. Precedent already had been set, so I hung in there. He said, "Come February 1st your job slot will go for a touch-typist and someone with knowledge of computers." I didn't have a computer, didn't know the first thing about them. We still had typewriters available for all the—shortly after I retired, they put in computers. I don't know the arrangement they had if they had to bring their own computers or whether the government furnished the computers like they did for the typewriters. The typewriters were all government issue.

JOHNSON: What was the technology like when you started in the late '40s and into the '50s and the '60s? What were reporters using to try to get stories to their newspapers?

MARSTON: They were using Western Union—copy editor.

JOHNSON: So this was all done by telegraph when you first started?

MARSTON: Telegraph and telephone. A lot of it was telephone.

JOHNSON: And were there teletype machines that the journalists used as well? Were those in the gallery?

MARSTON: Yes, teletype machines belonged to the AP, the UPI, and the third wire bureau, INS (International News Service). And they each had their enclosure in the middle room as we called it. And when we finally merged with the AP, they had their own teletypes. I used to admire the teletype operators. They hit a rhythm of the teletype machine. They'd hit a rhythm where you'd sit there all day long just sitting there punching, punching was on tape. It runs through the annunciator and on out. A good puncher could stay ahead, 60 words per minute.

JOHNSON: This was taking place in the gallery?

MARSTON: Yes. In the mid room of the gallery. We had the outer room, and the east front, it had the teletype room. Then you had the big entrance. And you had another room that was the—one half of the room was AP regional and the other was Western Union. Jimmy Mathis, James Mathis, had Walter Shearer on the Senate side head of the bureau in the House, and the AP bureau was Bill Arbogast. UPI was Frank Eleazer. E-L-E-A-Z-E-R.

JOHNSON: Eleazer.

MARSTON: Frank Eleazer, UPI. And Raymond Wilcove, he was International News Service, was taken over by UPI.

JOHNSON: Very few people had access to the press gallery or would know what was going on in the press gallery, for people that are looking back to try to figure out what it was that you did. Can you describe what an average day would be like for you when you were working there? What types of activities took place in the gallery?

MARSTON: Started in the morning, AP, wire services. Started in the morning, you'd go to the wire services over to committees like Ways and Means Committee—that was generally the one I went to. And I'd bring back press releases, mark them for the wires, set up press accommodations table. Witnesses would bring in testimony. They wanted good coverage; they'd bring a number of copies, which I would distribute to members of the media that were there at the committee. Sometimes I'd go to two committees. One committee I remember in particular was NASA.

JOHNSON: The Science Committee? The hearings for the Science Committee?

MARSTON: Yes, Science and Astronautics. I don't know what they call it now, but I had the privilege of going to the first meeting of the Apollo program. And Al Shepard was the leadoff witness, and in attendance was John Glenn and Gus Grissom. I asked Al Shepard for his autograph before he testified. He was very happy to do so, seemed like.

JOHNSON: Were those hearings well attended? Were a lot of people there?

MARSTON: No, just the opposite. I would have expected more of a turnout than we had. I remember AP photographer Bill Allen took my picture unbeknownst to me. He slipped it to me the next day in the hearing. Took a picture of Al Shepard

speaking to me. I was quite taken aback by that, and so I decided to start a collection. I got them to sign a bill that they were considering at the time, not the one they passed. They passed a different number, but I got all seven astronauts. I have a bill with 26 signatures on it—Wernher von Braun, German rocket scientist, and President [Richard Milhous] Nixon, sent down to the White House for his signature. And a friend of mine on the committee sent down to one of the astronauts for his autograph, sent to Houston.

JOHNSON: I had asked you earlier, and I was just curious about when you were at some of these hearings. You talked about setting up accommodations for the press, making sure that they were where they needed to be. But did you take a log? Did you take notes for press that couldn't attend the hearings? Was that part of your job?

MARSTON: No.

JOHNSON: So when you were at the hearing what else were you doing?

MARSTON: Looking after seats for the press. Some of the hearings the lobbyists would try to take over the press seats. We would scold them and ask them to stay away. Matter of fact, one day on the Ways and Means Committee, a fellow was trying to grab some testimony that was being offered. And this guy reached for the one I was reaching for. So I went {slam} like that. They heard it all over the room. I'll never forget it. I got a look from the chairman. The chairman, matter of fact, he was quite pleased to do it. So I looked out mainly for the welfare of the press. That was my job.

In the afternoon, when I did the committee list, call all the committees, and the Capitol operator would stay with me on the manual line. In other words, she knew the routine, did it every day. And she would say, "Next?" I went down the line with her, and I'd do a dozen copies of it, take it to the

Speaker's Office, "Fishbait" Miller's office, Radio-TV Gallery, Speaker's Gallery, and Radio-TV, Periodical Gallery.

JOHNSON: Was this a list of hearings that were taking place?

MARSTON: Yes. I'd have it the day before.

JOHNSON: So each day the House was in session that was one of your primary responsibilities?

MARSTON: Yes.

JOHNSON: And then were you also there to answer questions from the press that if they wanted to know a little bit more about the hearings that you were able to tell them?

MARSTON: Yes.

JOHNSON: What do you think was the primary responsibility, the role, of the House Press Gallery? What was really your bigger mission in the House?

MARSTON: The press gallery was a place for the reporters to hang their hat and get information on witnesses and historical background. We had general information that the press desired. Never knew from one day to the other what they were going to call about. Maintenance of the typewriters, that was my job, too. That was the main job that I had, other than attending committees and doing the committee list.

JOHNSON: Did you see your role—yours and the superintendent and everyone that worked in the gallery—as liaisons between the press and Members of Congress?

MARSTON: Yes.

JOHNSON: Was that a difficult role sometimes?

MARSTON: Yes. Can't please all the reporters, all the time—some of them, some of the time. We kept like on this board I showed you, kept historical board—that's where statistical generally asked questions.

JOHNSON: One thing I wanted to ask you about today was a little bit more about the reporters. And especially when you first started, so again in the late '40s into the '50s, how would you describe the average reporter? Who were these people?

MARSTON: They were hometown boys, a lot of them, up here to do a job for a newspaper. We tried to help them out as much as we could—an accommodation where they could maintain their physical plant like the typewriters. If things would go bad, lights went bad, we called the electrician's office.

JOHNSON: Most of the reporters that covered Congress and most of the reporters in the country at the time were white, and they were men. But do you remember any of the women reporters?

MARSTON: Heavens, yes. Malvina Stephenson, Sarah McClendon, Elizabeth May Craig, Maggie Kernodle.

JOHNSON: How did they fit into this group of reporters that were mostly men?

MARSTON: They were pretty well accepted. We had one that was very dislikable; that was Elizabeth Wharton of the United Press. She was a very disagreeable woman. She had some problems. She swore like a sailor. I never did respect a woman swore like that. I tried to avoid her. I can't think of the girl over the UPI in the White House.

JOHNSON: Helen Thomas?

MARSTON: Helen Thomas. She was in the office daily when she wasn't at the White House. A lot of the television reporters went through our office to get to the Radio-TV. That was behind their office. They didn't like to walk downstairs—avoid the public. I got to speaking with a number of them.

JOHNSON: Do you remember any of the African-American reporters at the time? Because just when you were coming into the gallery, there were barriers that were being broken for Black reporters as well in the gallery. Do you remember any of the early reporters?

MARSTON: Reporters that were Black?

JOHNSON: Yes, that were Black, like Alice Dunnigan and any of the other reporters that were African American.

MARSTON: I'm trying to think of the male. I can picture him, but I can't picture his name.

JOHNSON: Louis Lautier?

MARSTON: Louis Lautier, yes. I don't remember any problems, any sign of racial discrimination. Matter of fact, they fit in pretty well. There was no call for discrimination. Ethel Payne [was an African-American member of the press.]

JOHNSON: Did you have a chance to observe the relationships between reporters and Members of Congress at the time? Just how they might have worked together, or how they got along? Again in the '40s and the '50s and even into the '60s—how would you describe that?

MARSTON: Well, I don't think I'm at liberty to speak about one relationship. There was a reporter. There were three South Carolina reporters. They were sisters, and one of them worked for the *Wall Street Journal* and dated a reporter. And there's another reporter who dated William Jennings Bryan Dorn, South Carolina. And Millie married a reporter. There were a number of dates within the press gallery.

[A 22-second segment of this interview has been redacted.]

Yes, there was dating between the press.

JOHNSON: One of the things I was interested in was not so much the dating, but, just, were they collegial in the sense of the reporters getting along well with Members and not adversarial? Did they get along? Did they talk? Did they go out to lunch that you saw? Were there those kinds of relationships where they would get to know each other?

MARSTON: Some were good; some were bad. I don't remember them all.

JOHNSON: That's fine. I also was looking for even just general observations with Watergate and how the relationship with the press generally might have changed with Members. But before that in the '50s and the '60s. If there was more—

MARSTON: Camaraderie?

JOHNSON: Exactly. Yes. Did you see that? Do you think that was the case?

MARSTON: I would say things changed. We had no discrimination in the galleries, but that's all. I had my feelings about certain people too, but that didn't go across racial lines. I'm trying to think of some of the other Black members [of the press].

JOHNSON: That's something we can fill in later. But I also want to ask you about the physical rooms of the press gallery, again since a lot of people didn't have access outside the institution. If you can describe what they looked like and some of the activities that took place there.

MARSTON: We'll start with the east front. The east front room had a telephone booth like a regular phone in it. And had a general workroom, east front room, general typewriters on two sides of the wall—two sides of the room, I should say. My memory doesn't serve me well on this next room they called the "flushing heights" program where the ladies got their own john. It was a real accomplishment.

JOHNSON: Mr. West said that that was a big deal at the time.

MARSTON: Yes, it was a big deal. The ladies got pretty riled up. They got what they wanted—"flushing heights" project. It went from the two men's and ladies' room adjacent to each other to the wire service, UPI, then the AP. INS had already been broken up. Then you had a main room with a picture which I can see.

JOHNSON: Is this where the reporters would spend a lot of their time talking and maybe waiting for—

MARSTON: And smoking. Carter Manasco, former Congressman from, I believe, Alabama, came up and visited often. He was the last one I recall that chewed tobacco.

JOHNSON: Some people have described the noise level in the gallery.

MARSTON: The what?

JOHNSON: The noise level, that it was really loud in there at times because of all the type. Do you remember that as well? That there was a lot of noise and hustle and bustle?

MARSTON: There was a lot of commotion in the wire service room. It was a small room, had two teletype operators going. I wouldn't say it was that necessarily loud. That's the main room. This is 30 years ago. I heard, I don't know that the Rules Committee was taken over by the Photographers' Gallery. Is that so? Do you know?

JOHNSON: I don't know.

MARSTON: I can describe this if you'd like.

JOHNSON: Sure.

MARSTON: In the main room, you had the west room, which was where it had general, another small work area. This is two or three typewriters. Western Union would send a lot of those stories—had two men in there that worked, and a lady in there, too, at one time. But they would send the regular telegram to the office, the tape—used to be tape you'd glue to the telegram. Then you'd have the west front, that's the back door, west front, Radio-TV Gallery. We had on the top of these booths a light, a green light. We can answer any one of these phones, any of the phones.

JOHNSON: Were the lights there just to show if it was occupied or not—if the booth was occupied? What were the lights for?

MARSTON: When the phone rang with the bell. In other words, we could answer the phone over here at the desk, answer any one of these phones. The light in

addition to ringing the phone, ringing the payphone, payphone type arrangement.

JOHNSON: Were press conferences held in the press gallery?

MARSTON: Oh yes. Jerry [Gerald Rudolph] Ford [Jr.] was a regular for a while. [Everett McKinley] Dirksen would have a regular news conference scheduled every week in the Senate Press Gallery.

JOHNSON: So for the press conferences like Jerry Ford, what kind of preparation was necessary for that in the gallery? What kinds of things would you have to do?

MARSTON: Nothing. All set up for it. It was an impromptu press conference, right in the middle of the room.

JOHNSON: Were those usually well attended, the press conferences that you had up in the gallery?

MARSTON: Not really.

JOHNSON: What about for Mr. Ford? The ones for Mr. Ford, were a lot of people there for those conferences?

MARSTON: No. He'd just come in, have a few words to say, and field some questions. He'd stay in the middle of the room, right around here. We had things like the budget. I think that was the budget. That's impeachment hearings.

JOHNSON: Which is something I want to ask you about, maybe next time if we can do a second session. But before we end today, since we're talking about the gallery and the physical space, Mr. West in his oral history talked about a major remodeling that took place in the late 1960s in the gallery. Do you remember that?

MARSTON: Yes, I do.

JOHNSON: Can you describe what the gallery looked like before and then what it looked like after the remodeling?

MARSTON: The main thing in my memory were the chairs in the main room. They were replaced with modern chairs, the old plush leather chairs that folded around you when you sat down in them. People didn't like the new ones that Mr. West picked. He didn't like the old-fashioned stuff.

JOHNSON: He wanted to make the gallery more modern or to look more modern?

MARSTON: Yes. And most of the people wanted to keep it the old way. This couch here, the one with big thick arms on it. And that one there, down here. Here's a chair there, but somewhere in there is a sofa. And some reporters had a bad night, they'd conk out on the couch. We almost had a fistfight one day when John Koening of the AP lay down on one of the couches. They gave him a hotfoot. It must have really hurt. I just stayed neutral, stayed out of it. He said, "What SOB did this?" I don't remember any fistfights. There were some disagreements.

JOHNSON: Was it part of your job to try to stay neutral?

MARSTON: It was a big part of my job. Get information.

JOHNSON: I think this is a good place to stop, and maybe we can pick up with Watergate and some of the other questions that I wanted to ask you, if that's good for you.

MARSTON: Watergate didn't affect me.

JOHNSON: Well, the hearings for the Judiciary Committee on the House side as well, with Chairman [Peter Wallace] Rodino [Jr.]. But we can talk about that next time. It's something that Mr. West talked about in his oral history, too—the preparation that you had to do for that.

MARSTON: Preparation for the Judiciary Committee.

JOHNSON: But that wasn't something that you were involved in?

MARSTON: No. I was involved in Martin Dies' committee.

JOHNSON: So we're going to stop for today, but thank you very much for talking with me.

— CHARLES MARSTON —
INTERVIEW TWO

JOHNSON: This is the second interview with Charles Marston, who was a longtime employee in the House Press Gallery. This is Kathleen Johnson with the Office of the House Historian, and today's date is September 19th, 2014. Today's interview is taking place in Mr. Marston's home in Adelphi, Maryland.

In the first interview, you described the physical layout of the press gallery. You gave a good description of what it looked like, but I was hoping you could talk about some of the more unique features. You had mentioned to me that there were fireplaces that were in the gallery.

MARSTON: Yes, the fireplaces were in each room. The main press gallery had two fireplaces which would burn every day up until sometime. I don't know whether they'd still be doing it or not, but they had two fireplaces in the main room. And they brought wood every day that went into these window seats, which was a seat that had a hinge on it that opens up, and this is for the storage of wood. And that was very popular—had it going winter and summer, both fireplaces in the main gallery. They had a wood cart that would come up, had a wood man they called him, to bring wood, cart wood, and he'd refill the window boxes, window seats. It was a warm feeling.

JOHNSON: You also talked about the spittoons that were in the gallery.

MARSTON: Yes, there were two in the main office there. One of them disappeared. The second one disappeared too because I have it. It was being thrown away, and I wouldn't stand for that. So I asked if I could take it home, and the superintendent said, "Sure."

JOHNSON: Why was it being thrown away?

MARSTON: It didn't contend with the modern age. And there was only one person left that used the spittoon. He was a former Member of Congress, Carter Manasco. He was from Alabama. He was a real, real country boy.

JOHNSON: So the spittoons were going to be removed with the remodeling that Mr. West had started?

MARSTON: Yes. And the remodeling, speaking of that, that didn't go over too well with a lot of the members of the press. They liked the old plush leather, brown leather; it would just fold around you when you sat down. But they were getting old. They were I guess I'd say 100 years old. They weren't that old, but they were replaced with modern, lots of metal showing. And people just didn't like it. Couldn't curl up in that like they could the plush sofas—had one sofa and then several armchairs.

JOHNSON: What did the reporters do in the press gallery during the slower times if they were waiting for something to happen? What kind of things took place in the gallery?

MARSTON: They played cards. Not when it was in session though. I recall they'd read magazines and what have you. After all, this was their lounge. I recall this from memory. You have a picture here of the gallery?

JOHNSON: I don't have one with me today, I don't think. No, not in my file today. Oh, we do have one. Is that helpful?

MARSTON: This is the one I want. This tells all. This is after the remodeling. Unfortunately, I don't have one before. Look here, you'll see the phone booths.

JOHNSON: And were these the window boxes you were talking about?

MARSTON: Yes, that's one of those window boxes. That lid folds back and you put wood in there. As I say, these are phone booths down here. Doc Yap, Diosdado Yap, from the Philippines, he had a publication called *Know Your Congress*, and he'd have it out before the government would have it. This was the sofa they objected to.

JOHNSON: Okay. The newer, more modern sofa.

MARSTON: Yes. The chairs faced this way. The gallery faced east and west. And it would be the press releases would be tacked on the board here. This is the bulletin board. These are statistics. Here's the entrance to the chamber, one and two. We had the office there. But it was a shame to cover the Minton tile. But it protected it for future generations, I guess. Looking this way, looking towards the Radio-TV Gallery, that's the main press desk there. And over here, press statistical information on these walls there.

JOHNSON: You just mentioned the Radio-TV Gallery. What kind of relationship did your gallery have with them? Was it a collegial relationship? Did you work well together?

MARSTON: Yes. I remember Tina Tate was a doll, and she was there quite a few years.[6] And she'd get anybody to cooperate with her. She had a deep Southern drawl. Have you interviewed her?

JOHNSON: I did. She was wonderful. And before that was Mike Michaelson. Do you remember him?

MARSTON: Oh, yes. I sold him a car. I had a Volkswagen that he liked. I had a Mustang in mind that I wanted to buy. Mike, I had an arrangement with him. He

walked in the back door, which was where his office was in the gallery, and delivered me the '68 Volkswagen. And Ralph Scalzo, the police officer, I wanted to buy his Mustang, so we exchanged cars. And my daughter still has the Mustang. She's having it completely rebuilt. I love that car.

JOHNSON: Was there any competition that developed or rivalry because of the growing popularity of television and the increased number of reporters that were using that type of media?

MARSTON: Well, they had to be very careful how they used the Radio-TV outlet because some of them had dual membership. But they had to choose one or the other. That's the numbers, list of Members.

JOHNSON: The room assignments.

MARSTON: This table we're seated at, previously they had desks there and old-fashioned pen and ink.

JOHNSON: I can take that back from you. Thank you. Did you have any mentors when you first came to work in the gallery in the 1940s or into the 1950s? Any mentors or people that gave you advice or maybe that you looked up to? Members of Congress or other staff?

MARSTON: There was Harold Beckley. He was my mentor. He was superintendent of the Senate Press Gallery. Incidentally I just found my first gallery admission card. It's 1944. Sandy Hays, she was a friend of mine. She has a raccoon of mine. We raised a raccoon from a baby—a little rambunctious. Sandy had a farm down in the country. We named him "Randy Raccoon." He's quite a character—scratched at the door every morning, wanting scrambled eggs. That's getting far afield from the subject.

JOHNSON: That's okay. What about Sam [Samuel Taliaferro] Rayburn? Do you remember him?

MARSTON: My "granddaddy." I feared him, but I loved him at the same time. And I only crossed swords with him one time. Sam Rayburn's elevator, you might call it because it was near his office. His office was at the end of the press gallery. Well, I said that wrong. He was one floor down. And I feared him, but I loved him at the same time. When I retired, I went to Bonham, Texas, to his library museum there, and I think I found an old rostrum that used to be in the chamber, marble, white marble.

JOHNSON: The marble rostrum, yes, it is there.

MARSTON: It's from the gallery.

JOHNSON: Yes.

MARSTON: I remember two powerhouses, one above him was Judge [Howard Worth] Smith of Virginia; he was on the gallery floor at the end of our office. Sam Rayburn, he didn't pull punches. I'd go down to pick up the roll call when it was done, back before it was electronic. Can you shut if off?

JOHNSON: You want to shut the recorder off for a minute? Do you want me to stop recording?

MARSTON: Yes.

BRIEF INTERRUPTION

JOHNSON: We're recording again. You were talking about Sam Rayburn.

MARSTON: Yes. I'd go down to pick up the roll call after the vote. They made the roll call available for the press, and I'd usually be the one, the only really low man who had to get it. I'd be just a couple feet or so of the Speaker, Speaker Rayburn. And he'd say to the clerk there, "Who's that SOB now? What does he want to have?" He had a pet name for any one of them, especially if they stayed for special orders, and he was stuck with the special order. And he didn't pull his punches.

One experience I remember was on the elevator. I had gotten on before the Speaker and stopped at the first floor and picked up the Speaker. He says to me, "Which way are you going?" I said, "Mr. Speaker, any way you're going." He said, "I asked you which way are you going?" "Any way you are, sir, the next floor will be fine." Said, "Take him up." I tried to avoid him. That was about it with him.

JOHNSON: Did he ever come into the House Press Gallery?

MARSTON: Not very often. I don't recall him, no. I had other Members that came up there like Jerry Ford and Senator Dirksen used to come up there pretty regular.

JOHNSON: Besides Members, I also wanted to ask you about some of the longtime staff. One of them was Lew Deschler, the Parliamentarian that started in the '20s and was there all the way to 1974. Did you ever have any interactions with Mr. Deschler?

MARSTON: Not really.

JOHNSON: What do you remember about him?

MARSTON: Deschler, very forceful man, too. Carried a lot of weight. Real gentleman and very knowledgeable in his work. No, I didn't have any direct contact.

JOHNSON: That's fine. What about "Fishbait" Miller, the longtime House Doorkeeper?

MARSTON: "Mr. Speaker!" I knew him very well. I was on his payroll. The House staff was on the Doorkeeper's payroll. I know his introduction of the President will be missed. Nobody could do it like he could. I hope the archives will preserve a recording of him.

JOHNSON: Did he stop by the press gallery from time to time?

MARSTON: Not very often.

JOHNSON: We had talked a little bit off tape before recording about presidential inaugurations, and I wanted to ask you about the role of the press gallery in these inaugurations and some of the responsibilities that you had.

MARSTON: We were assigned by the Inaugural Committee, and I have to think who did what. We were assigned providing credentials for members of the press. The party would furnish the credentials to us, for us to pass it to the members of the press that had the right to them. We would go to both the conventions and the inauguration to police the tickets as it were. They were highly sought after, lots of examples today.

JOHNSON: Is there one inauguration that really stands out in your mind that you attended?

MARSTON: JFK [John Fitzgerald Kennedy]—that was my first one. It had Frank Sinatra. That's when the Rat Pack was pretty close by, within throwing distance of him, of Sinatra, that is. That was the coldest inauguration. Had the Poet Laureate, I forget his name.

JOHNSON: Robert Frost.

MARSTON: Robert Frost. Dear old man. Very, very cold that day. It snowed the night before, and incidentally the inauguration was held on the east front. Ronald Reagan was the first to try the west. It worked out so well; I don't think it'll ever be any place else again. What used to get me, they would pave over the whole paved parking lot with wood, wooden stands.

JOHNSON: It must have been a busy time in your office before the inaugurations.

MARSTON: Oh, yes. Yes, indeed.

JOHNSON: Was that something that everyone helped out with; was it all hands-on deck before the inaugurations in the gallery?

MARSTON: Yes. How do you mean did everyone help?

JOHNSON: Everyone was chipping in and helping out before the inaugurations?

MARSTON: Yes. Radio, TV, periodical, they all had their sections.

JOHNSON: Since you brought up Kennedy, what about the role that the press gallery played in his lying-in-state ceremony in 1963? That was in the Capitol Rotunda. What role did the gallery play in that? What do you remember about that event?

MARSTON: Good place to get warm, and the press was suffering from the cold just as bad as anybody else. I remember a heater caught fire, shorted out, and caused quite a stir for a few minutes. This was on the platform next to the dignitaries.

JOHNSON: Was that for the inauguration?

MARSTON: Inauguration, yes.

JOHNSON: What about the lying-in-state ceremony after Kennedy was assassinated? What do you remember about that? Do you remember what the press gallery did for that event?

MARSTON: We attended it—closed casket of course. And it was one of the busiest days of my career. Of course I found it hard to believe. I'd like to get back to the Alabama Congressman.

JOHNSON: Sure. Mr. Boykin?

MARSTON: Yes. At the time of the shooting by the Puerto Ricans.

JOHNSON: In 1954?

MARSTON: March 1st, 1954, 2:32 p.m.

JOHNSON: I guess you remember that event pretty well.

MARSTON: I remember. Yes, I was there, as you know. And Frank Boykin, he was a character. He was leaving the chamber when the shooting occurred, and one of his colleagues said, "Where you headed, Frank?" "Home to get my gun." "Where's that?" "Back in Alabama." He was a character. "Everything's-made-for-love," Frank Boykin.

JOHNSON: Is it all right if we go back to Kennedy for a minute?

MARSTON: Sure.

JOHNSON: You said it was one of the busiest days of your life in the press gallery for the lying-in-state ceremony. Do you remember what you were doing?

MARSTON: Not the lying-in-state.

JOHNSON: Oh, the inauguration was the busiest.

MARSTON: No. When the announcement came that Kennedy had been shot, that was the busiest days I ever had.

JOHNSON: What happened? What do you remember about what was going on in the gallery?

MARSTON: Well, I was reading AP wire to the Speaker of the House [John William McCormack]. I'd grab it off the A wire with Arbogast's permission, Bill Arbogast, and go back and read it to the Speaker. Everybody was busy that day. But the Speaker called up and asked could I read him the outcome; I mean off the wire. I still can see it now.

JOHNSON: Let's take a break for a minute.

MARSTON: Yes.

BRIEF INTERRUPTION

JOHNSON: We're recording again, and you were telling a story about after you learned about the shooting of Kennedy, and you were reading off what happened to Speaker [McCormack]. Can you talk more about that, please?

MARSTON: Speaker called, asked if I could read him the latest off the A wire, and I stuck by him reading with permission of the AP head. I kept the Speaker apprised of what was happening in Dallas. That was about it, I read. Other members of staff were reading to other Members of Congress—didn't have the communications in those days as you have now.

JOHNSON: What about the reporters, and what was going on in the gallery? Do you remember what was happening?

MARSTON: They were talking to their bureaus. It was very busy—reading reports from the Capitol.

JOHNSON: What about the cloakrooms? Did you spend time in the cloakrooms?

MARSTON: Yes, I did.

JOHNSON: How would you describe the atmosphere there?

MARSTON: Relaxed. Members would go there to relax. Chairs sat sideways to the chamber. There was a wall—had two entrances to go into the chamber from the cloakroom. And then everyone loved Helen Winfield Sewell.[7] She was a real nice girl. Everybody loved her. She had a helper who would serve brunch. Helen's specialty was tuna fish on a steamed roll. Everybody'd have to have a taste of that. The powers that be let me go in the chamber, enter the cloakroom through the chamber. There was an entrance to the cloakroom from the hall. It was a short door; you had to bend over to go in. And Members had a board across their lap on which the food was served to them. They would discuss strategy and what have you. And I didn't hear a thing. I guess that's why I stayed in good faith there. I could hear it, but I didn't hear it.

JOHNSON: So staff would regularly go into the cloakroom and have lunch or have a snack, that was common?

MARSTON: Yes. Just one or two staff members that were allowed in there. I felt very flattered that they would let me. Nobody ever said anything.

JOHNSON: Who else? Who was the other person?

MARSTON: It wasn't any particular one regular. I guess Jim Talbert would be the one. Jim Talbert, he'd have been.

JOHNSON: Last time we met, you talked about some of the changes in technology. We talked about telegraphs and telephones, and teletype and how all that was used in the press gallery. By the time you retired in 1979, what was the most frequently used technology the reporters used for transmitting information back to the news bureaus?

MARSTON: Telephone.

JOHNSON: It was still telephone?

MARSTON: Yes.

JOHNSON: Were computers being used at all at that point?

MARSTON: When I retired out the back door, they brought computers in the front door. I wasn't a fan of computers. Matter of fact, I don't have one now. The one in the living room is my wife's. I did not willingly accept them.

JOHNSON: You mentioned a few minutes ago about when you would get the roll, and you would bring that to the Speaker, get the vote, the roll call. What about electronic voting because that came in the House in 1973? So that was towards the end of your career. Do you remember that and how it might have affected how the press reported what was going on in the House?

MARSTON: It was pretty effective, and it sped things up—much more efficient. A lot of Members objected to it at first, but they straightened out after a while. We'd get a printout right away. I think the old clerk when they called the roll.

JOHNSON: The reading clerk.

MARSTON: "Adair, Abernethy. . ." All down the roll. I've forgotten his name. He was an old-timer, too.

JOHNSON: Was it Irv Swanson? Irving Swanson? He was one of the longtime clerks.

MARSTON: Seems familiar.

JOHNSON: And then later on Joe Bartlett was one of the reading clerks.

MARSTON: Yes, I knew Joe quite well. We would stand behind the rail and talk. Stood behind the rail—there was a railing between the occupied seats and the floor. Swanson was the one, yes, he was the one that amazed me how quickly he could learn the new Members' names. He had to know them because of the new Congress. He'd remember their names. Yes, Swanson. Joe Bartlett had to do the same thing.

JOHNSON: Were the reporters from what you could tell mainly in favor of electronic voting? Did it make their work more efficient, being able to get the information quickly?

MARSTON: I can't give a judgment call on that because I just don't know how it affected them.

JOHNSON: That's fine. I wanted to go back to something else you had talked about in your first interview. You said that one of your responsibilities was calling all the committees every day. Can you explain why you did that?

MARSTON: To obtain information: who, what, when, and where. And I'd call them the day before. They'd give me the information that they had, and I'd type it up, and in those days, we didn't have any copying capability other than a copying machine. And I would type a dozen copies, the most I could get out typewritten. Then you had to really bang on the keys. When I would get a

dozen copies ready and distribute them to the Speaker's Office, Radio-TV, Periodical Gallery, I had all dozen spoken for. That was my job, to call. And the operator knew that line was committee information.

JOHNSON: What kind of information did you receive when you made those phone calls? What was it that you were looking for?

MARSTON: Who, what, when, and where. What committee, what witness they were going to have the next day, and the room number. And I had a collection of photographs. I don't know whether I've shown them to you or not. Did I show you those?

JOHNSON: Of some of the hearings?

MARSTON: Astronauts. Yes.

JOHNSON: I don't think I've seen any photographs. I've seen the bills where you have some of the signatures, but I don't think I saw any photographs of the hearings. Maybe we can look at those later.

MARSTON: Say it again.

JOHNSON: Maybe we can look at those later. Sure. That sounds great. I just had a few more questions today. Since we're talking about hearings, I know that you worked some of the HUAC hearings, and you talked a little bit about Martin Dies. You mentioned him towards the end of the session that we had last time. Do you have any specific memories from the HUAC hearings of maybe when the Hollywood Ten or other actors or screenwriters were called in to testify?

MARSTON: Not really. No, I was new to the game. Ben West, guess he could tell you that.

JOHNSON: And the Hiss and Chambers hearing as well? That was in 1948, so you would have been pretty new at that point.

MARSTON: Yes.

JOHNSON: But you said that you had worked some of the HUAC hearings, and those clearly were big events for the press. Do you remember what kinds of things you had to do to prepare; what you had to do for those?

MARSTON: As many tables as we could get in there, writing tables and all across the front row. Next to the front row was the witness. They had the front row press tables because it was a big press event. And some of the actors there, really worked over some of the witnesses. We had two plainclothesmen: one in the Senate, one in the House, Carl Schamp and Mike Dowd. And they tried to keep the peace as best they could. Carl Schamp got a badly bruised leg from where some of the women had sharp-toed shoes on, and they really did a number on Carl. There were some nasty people there. I remember seeing Alger Hiss. Just doesn't come to mind who the others were. I don't remember—going back 55 years ago.

JOHNSON: Right, that's a long time ago. When you knew that you were going to have big press events like that for hearings particularly, did you meet as a group in the press gallery to try to plan out what you were going to do and talk about strategy?

MARSTON: No. Ben West would be head of the group.

JOHNSON: The superintendent would dictate what was going to happen? It was his call?

MARSTON: Yes, we knew pretty much what we had to do—had to try to keep the demonstrators away from the press table without getting in a fistfight

ourselves. Some of those hearings were pretty rough. I was happy to get back to my old Ways and Means room which made me think of Wilbur Mills and his swim in the Tidal Basin. It was so unlike him. I just felt so sorry for him because he was one of my favorite people, and he was a gentleman and a scholar if there ever was one. And I admired him greatly. He wasn't bad all his life.

JOHNSON: You worked in a lot of his hearings for the Ways and Means Committee?

MARSTON: Yes, almost daily. And I had an in through the clerks of the committee. I'd get some of the handouts that I needed before it went on a public table. Wilbur Mills, he was a gentleman, and as I say a scholar, and really handled that hearing, no matter what it was, handled it very nicely.

JOHNSON: How in particular? What do you remember? What was his style like in a hearing? How'd he run the hearings?

MARSTON: He would run it very quietly. He didn't get excited like [John David] Dingell [Jr.] of Michigan. He really gets excited sometimes. But Wilbur Mills didn't. He'd sit there and listen to droll testimony hour, after hour, after hour. It'd drive you nuts, and he sat there and took it. I admired his courage. He was a chairman's chairman as far as I'm concerned. I can't say enough good about him. It broke my heart when he showed up in the newspaper.

JOHNSON: One area that we haven't discussed yet about the press gallery is their role in the national conventions—how they assisted the press in the national conventions. What were some of your responsibilities?

MARSTON: Well, the main responsibility was issuing the tickets to the press that were provided by the national committee. We would distribute them on a daily

basis during the convention. I didn't go to all the conventions. I went to the ones that were assigned to me, or I was assigned to them.

JOHNSON: By the superintendent? Would he decide if you would go to a convention?

MARSTON: Yes. One memory, I don't know why it sticks in my mind, was the [Miami] Florida convention. We had the Boom-Boom Room in the Fontainebleau [Hotel]. That was wild. I don't know whether that still exists or not. My favorite one was Convention Hall in Atlantic City. Had a mother and son that played the pipe organ, and they could really play it. I'm a pipe organ fan anyhow. I'd go and listen to them rehearse during the day. I missed out on the Chicago riots. My colleagues, they wound up going.

JOHNSON: The 1968 convention—that was the Democratic convention. What about 1960, [John F.] Kennedy's Democratic convention? Do you remember that at all? Did you work that one?

MARSTON: Yes. All I remember is Frank Sinatra standing on stage practicing, and Don Ferguson, one of our periodical superintendents, he was trying to harass Frank. "Get off the stage, you!" That kind of stuff. I'm there with him. "Shut up, Don." I have a picture of the Rat Pack coming to bust their heads. I don't remember much about it.

JOHNSON: You said something about pins too, didn't you? About the PT pins. Didn't you say there were pins that were given out for the convention for Kennedy?

MARSTON: Oh, yes. They were very popular. Tie clasp in the form of a PT [patrol torpedo] boat, had 109, which was the number he [Kennedy] had shot out from under him. And I don't know who got the gold PT boats, but I got a silver one. I guess maybe it was family that got the gold one. Did I show you that?

JOHNSON: I haven't seen that, no.

MARSTON: I've got one here—Edie [Mr. Marston's wife].

JOHNSON: We can do that later. That's okay. I just have a couple more questions and then we can look at photos and artifacts.

MARSTON: I keep forgetting.

JOHNSON: No, that's fine; that's good. It's good when you forget that we're recording, that means that we're having a good conversation. We can wait until later. That's fine. Thank you.

I just wanted to ask you a few wrap-up questions, and these are more retrospective, just looking back in time. If you had to offer advice to a new House Press Gallery employee, someone who's just going to join the press gallery, based on your experience, what would that advice be?

MARSTON: Do as you're told. There are plenty of bosses. Enjoy the part of history that you are. I feel like very important phase of history or phases I went through. I saw history in the making. I felt very privileged for a young country boy. I didn't have much education. That's a reason I felt so good about it. I was afforded the opportunity. That article I brought you said the same thing about [Tommy] Boggs—the one I showed you the other day?[8] He was a fan of Sam Rayburn's, and he went from the elevator job for Sam Rayburn to a lobbyist. I didn't make it to a lobbyist. I think the elevator job was the one I enjoyed the most.

JOHNSON: Why is that?

MARSTON: I got to meet so many nice people. I remember Senators and Congressmen that go way back and little idiosyncrasies about them. Matter of fact, Mr.

Beckley rode my elevator one day. I didn't know who he was. I didn't appreciate his riding my elevator. He asked me one day if I'd come to work for him. I said, "No, I'm not interested." Word got back to my boss in the Engineering Department that I wouldn't take the job. Mr. Murray said, "You'll take that job, or I'll fire you and make you take it." So I took it and missed the elevator job. I got to take Presidents, Vice Presidents, Senators of all kinds. I don't want to sound like I didn't like my job in the press gallery. It's just that I got to meet more notables.

I guess the outstanding one was Harry Truman—had a memory like an elephant. Senator from Nevada, can't think of his name, used to buy me a Coke every morning in the little snack bar just around from the Senate Wing elevator. And Congressman Hatch of the Hatch Act would buy me a Coke every morning. And this one morning, Truman came in. And I wasn't on the elevator; I was at the snack bar having a Coke with Hatch. And Officer Byers who was at the Senate door came in and says, "Charlie, Truman is at your elevator." Oh my God, I'm fired, so I apologized very profusely. About two weeks later, Truman came in. I was sitting in a little chair outside the elevator. I didn't dare leave it anymore. Very demonstrative, [he] looked at his watch, said, "I must be running late, Charlie, I see you already had your Coke." The Coke bottle was down under the chair, but he remembered that. I took him up in the elevator first time as President—surrounded by Secret Service men. He said, "Hi, Charlie." "Hello, Mr. President." But he had an excellent memory.

JOHNSON: I had one other question for you today about the press gallery, what you thought the significance of the press gallery was to the House, to the functioning of the House. What role, what importance, do you think the gallery plays?

MARSTON: Helps get many a man re-elected. They held in some cases the key to getting re-elected, and they were the ones that kept in touch with the back-home press. They gave the word to the public and the district, his or her district.

JOHNSON: You just talked about some of the things that you really liked about your job in the elevator as elevator operator. What were some of your favorite things in the House Press Gallery?

MARSTON: Well, many of the members [of the press] were very nice. I don't want to mention some radio-TV types, but Walter Cronkite used to walk through the office. And we'd see a number of them that would come to the elevators at either end of the press gallery. And the elevators went down to the first floor near the barbershop—shops, I should say. Some of the more popular correspondents would be ducking some of the lobbyists or what have you, and they'd get on the elevator at one end, go up to the gallery floor, across and back down again to avoid some people.

Some of my best friends were reporters. One was quite a tragedy. Jack Morris of the *New York Times*, he was a former skipper of a PT boat. And he was very athletic, lived in Bethesda, and would ride a bike, weather permitting, to the Capitol from Bethesda. One day he was running down, I think it was Pennsylvania Avenue—somebody opened a door on him, and he hit the edge of the door, and he died. That was a tragedy to me. He was one of my best friends.

I got to meet some of the notables, like Jerry Ford when he came up to the office. Trying to think of some of the occasional so-called movie stars. I'm coming up with a blank.

JOHNSON: That's okay. Was there anything else that you wanted to add before we wrap up today?

MARSTON: It's been a pleasure being interviewed by you. It's a first for me. I'm sure it showed.

JOHNSON: You did a great job. It's always fun learning more about the House and certainly about the press gallery.

MARSTON: We had a melting pot of people in the press gallery, as a segment of the House Floor. And you got to know their haves and have-nots and their desires in a lot of cases. And the ones that were a lot of fun had real good humor both on the floor and the press gallery. Like Congressman [Robert Fleming] Rich of Pennsylvania, he was well named because his motto was "Where are you going to get the money?" Clare [Eugene] Hoffman of Michigan had his pocket sewed up on his jacket, so he couldn't put his hands in his pocket. Bella [Savitzky] Abzug and her hats. There was no love affair between she and the Speaker [Carl Bert Albert] that is. He was about to throw the gavel at her one day. It was mutual disagreement. Elizabeth May Craig of Portland papers. She wore a hat but not to antagonize the Speaker. She just wore it.

JOHNSON: That was trademark for her, wasn't it?

MARSTON: Yes, it was. She was a lovely lady. Yes, she was [a journalist] from the Portland [Maine] area. Come to think of it. And some known for their zaniness. Can't think right offhand what some of the trademarks were.

JOHNSON: Since you spent so much time with these people, you must have really got to know them very well.

MARSTON: Yes. Like members of the family. Good and bad. Mostly good, thank goodness. They had their likes and dislikes. The staff as well. I would say I was privileged to be there, lucked out. Thank you for the interview.

JOHNSON: Thank you. It was a very good set of interviews. I appreciate you taking the time to speak with me.

MARSTON: My pleasure.

JOHNSON: Thank you.

NOTES

[1] William Joseph Donaldson served as superintendent of the House Press Gallery from 1913 to 1960.
[2] Richard (Dick) Embly was the superintendent of the House Press Gallery from 1960 to 1969.
[3] William "Fishbait" Miller served as House Doorkeeper from 1955 to 1974.
[4] Mike Michaelson served as superintendent of the House Radio-TV Gallery from 1974 to 1981.
[5] Benjamin C. West served as superintendent of the House Press Gallery from 1969 to 1986.
[6] Tina Tate was the director of the House Radio-TV Gallery from 1981 to 2007.
[7] Helen Sewell provided snacks and meals in the Republican Cloakroom. For information on her career, see https://history.house.gov/Historical-Highlights/2000-/Longtime-House-employee-Helen-Sewell/.
[8] Reference to Tommy Boggs, the son of Representatives Thomas Hale Boggs Sr. and Corinne Claiborne (Lindy) Boggs of Louisiana.