South Carolina Political Collections
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interview

with

W. A. “Al” Cook

University Libraries
University of South Carolina
Interviewer:
Herbert J. Hartsook

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Cook home, Harbor Island, S.C.

Synopsis:
W. A. “Al” Cook (1925 - c. 2005) was former Legislative Assistant to S.C. Second-District Congressman John J. Riley and chief of staff to his successors, Albert Watson and Floyd Spence. He served on the Hill from March 1953 to his retirement from federal service in 1985. Here he reflects on his career and the members under whom he served.

Transcriber:
Benjamin Petersen
Hartsook: I always like to start by just asking you to tell a little bit about your background. Where you were born? What your parents did? Where you were educated?

Cook: I was born November 23, 1925, in Patrick, South Carolina, which is a very small town in Chesterfield County. My dad was a Methodist preacher. Had, I think, on that charge, there were probably four churches, at the most, that he served. My mother was also a school teacher, but in those days she didn't have to have an advanced degree. My dad, I think, finished high school at a school called Leesville Academy, which I don't think exists anymore. Leesville, in Lexington County.

Hartsook: Did you go to the public schools there in Patrick?

Cook: No, I only lived there for three weeks. We moved to another town called Rembert in Sumter County. We were there four years. Moved to McBee also in Chesterfield County one year. Then I moved to Lamar in Darlington County. We were there four years. That's where I started school. I went to McCall Elementary; then we moved to Tamplico, to Harleyville. My mother died in '38. My dad had three children at home and really didn't feel that he could take care of us and do his work among the rural churches. He sent me to a school in north Georgia called Young Harris. It was a four year college with a high school program. I was just thirteen years old; I was almost fourteen. I didn't think I was homesick, but I couldn't stand it, so he let me come home.

After I was home awhile, I agreed to go back, but unknown to me he went to see my brother, who was also a Methodist preacher, at Myrtle Beach. His name was Pierce Cook. He talked him into letting me come live with him and his wife. He'd only been married a few months. They more or less adopted me, and I finished high school at Myrtle Beach. Went to Pfeiffer Junior College in Misenheimer, North Carolina. It's now a four year school. I went there a year and a half. Transferred to the University of South Carolina. Went three semesters, and was eligible for the draft at that time so I had planned to go to law school. Had a program where at that time you could go three years. Then your first year, if you took
the proper courses and got the sufficient credits in the fields that you needed, you could get your AB degree at the end of your first year of law school. Since I faced the draft I talked to every professor on campus whether I should attempt to go and take that year, or get it in. But the likelihood of my being drafted early was rather grim.

I was hopping bells at the Wade Hampton Hotel. I was drafted from there. Didn't go into the Army until September of '44. I was inducted at Fort Jackson. I was trained at Camp Croft in Spartanburg. Then went overseas early in January of '45 and went straight to the front lines. Joined the Rainbow Division. I was in K Company, 242nd Infantry, Rainbow Division, that's a rifle company. I was in the weapons platoon, the machinegun section. Started out as an ammo bearer. At the end of the war, I was a second gunner. Major things that we did, we were in reserve quite awhile. March 15 of '45, we made the initial push. Are you interested in all this?

**Hartsook:**  Sure.

**Cook:** ...to go into Germany. We were in Alsace-Lorraine. We were in the Harz Mountains. I was with the 7th Army, which was the southern army. I remember the night we were at Worms, on the night of April 1, which I think was Easter Sunday night. After that we went to Wurzburg, Schweinfurt, Fürth, which is a suburb of Nuremberg, and on to Munich. My group passed by the edge and from the hillside we could see clearly people moving around in Dachau.

**Hartsook:**  Did you know what Dachau was at the time?

**Cook:**  Didn't know a thing about it. Didn't know what I was seeing. I saw an inmate shoot a guard and saw him stagger. I recognized a place where probably people were imprisoned, but we didn't have any perception of what was happening.

**Hartsook:**  When did you get your first knowledge about what was going on in the camps?
Cook: We found out later that day or maybe the next day what had been there. We went on into Munich. In fact, we were on our way into Munich when that happened. They sent tank destroyers [TDs] out. You would've thought when we took Munich we were liberating New York City. People were lining the streets, cheering us, and bringing beer out. I didn't drink at the time, but they handed beer out to us on the TDs. It was downhill after that, for them. The end of the war, that was around May 1st. Hitler, I think, died the 30th [of April] or the 1st, in that time frame. The next Sunday, the 6th of May, we got word; the Chaplain told us at services, that German Army Group G, which was all the forces in southern Germany and Italy, had surrendered. Two days later we heard that the whole thing had happened. I wouldn't believe it until I heard Churchill's speech, which I still think was a great speech. It was a very short speech, and somebody in later years told me that in victory be honorable. Other times have challenged people to be strong, and Churchill in my view met that [with] what I thought was a short, simple, great statement. We went into Austria the 13th of May, into Alen-Salzburg[?], which is a state, like a province of Austria. We went from little towns, and I spent a month in Salzburg. The following year we went to Vienna. That's when I left to come home in July of '46. I was a right guide for the honor guard for General Mark Clark. We had a platoon made up of members of all the units in the regiment. As people went home, I got promoted up to where I was eventually platoon sergeant, even though I was just a kid. We had a company day room, which was really a nightclub, but they wouldn't let us call it that. So it had to be a dayroom. We'd sell drinks for ten cents. Made enough money to have a free night at least once a week. I paid an orchestra of four men just about every night. I still didn't drink, but I bought big barrels of stuff, and paid men to bottle it in whatever bottles were available.

Anyhow I came home and went to law school at the University. I was twenty at that time. Most of the men in my class were closer to thirty, and they had the three-semester-per-year program. They opted to go on, most of them, to accelerate their [education]. I didn't see any hurry for that.

Hartsook: Let's back track just a second. Did you ever consider going to any other law school other than USC?
Cook: Not then. I did later, but not initially.

Hartsook: Was it easy to get in?

Cook: I didn't have any trouble, that's all. I'd been valedictorian in high school. My college grades weren't impressive. But, I got in. I think there were a hundred in that class, which was a huge. .... They had us in two sections. Lee Chandler was a classmate, he later became Chief Justice. Had a lot of people that became prominent in the state.

Hartsook: A lot of future politicians.

Cook: Let me see, who was in that class? Bob Chapman, who is a federal judge, retired, Circuit Court, was a classmate. Muller Kreps, from Columbia. You ever heard of Muller?

Hartsook: Yes, sir.

Cook: He was a classmate. I know them all. I just can't right now think of them.

Hartsook: We have heard from a lot of veterans that said that when they came back, they were in a big hurry. They wanted to get through law school as quick as possible.

Cook: I was still a kid. I had two years in the Army. I had all my pre-law done. I just wanted to take the summers off, which I didn't. In '47, I worked at the Ocean Forest Hotel. I'd worked there as a kid the summers of '41 and '42. The Ocean Forest was a great big hotel. It opened about '29, and whenever people refer to the Ocean Forest, they more commonly than anything else call it the “Million Dollar Hotel” because it had cost a million dollars. Seven stories high. It was a beautiful building. It was just open in the summer. In later years, it was open year round. One of the experiences of my life was walking up there after it had been torn down. I expected to go up and see some rubble, and it was as if nothing had ever been there. That was quite an experience. Let me think who was in that class.
**Hartsook:** Well, instead of that, what teachers impressed you most?

**Cook:** Coleman Karesh was the most outstanding. Everybody had awe and reverence for him.

**Hartsook:** Why?

**Cook:** I don't know. He was smart, and he could impart. . . . I think he liked me. I remember the first time I ever met him. I heard about him in '47. A friend of mine was going to New York as a salesman. He asked me to go with him so I would pay all the expenses. I took that week off law school just to go up there and spend a week. I came back and this was my first semester of my second year. I had the highest average; I didn't have the most points, because I had one less hour than Bill Murray, who was from Charleston. He made a lot of money in New York. In fact, Bill heads up some foundation up there now. Does nothing but give away money. I was at the 50th anniversary of our graduation and he announced that his foundation had given the law school money. With that reputation, I walked into Mr. Karesh's class late. He said, "Who are you?" I said, "Cook." He said, "Oh, you're the redoubtable Mr. Cook." I'd never heard the word redoubtable before. Later learned it meant worthy of big praise. And, I was very flattered. Anyhow, Mr. Karesh was quite a fellow.

**Hartsook:** When did you get interested in politics?

**Cook:** When I was studying political science under Professor Sherrill before I went into the Army in '42 and '43 at Carolina. That's the reason I went to law school. I wanted a political career. I enjoyed reading about the achievements of great men. I had dreams from childhood to excel and aspire to higher callings and things like that. Dr. Sherrill was the political science department, as I recall. If anybody else had been there, they'd gone to war or something. He was a North Carolinian, and he was a funny man. But, I learned a lot from him, learned a lot about Constitutional law. I got interested in what happened in [the] early
Roosevelt [administration] because I read those decisions, particularly Judge Roberts, as I remember. He questioned the limitations on federal authority. Attacks on the commerce clause by those that wanted to expand the federal government. I've always rather been a strict constructionist. I've said many times that a high percentage of what we were doing in Congress was not authorized by the Constitution. Of course, they're pretty well seated in there now. It's too well established to be challenged. So many things; but there's no Constitutional authority in my view for many things the federal government does, and I'm not saying they're not good things. That's what I recall, studying history and primarily after Dr. Sherrill. He didn't inspire me to go into politics. I just [did that] sort of on my own based on what I was learning and reading got interested in it.

**Hartsook:** How did you get your job with the legislative counsel?

**Cook:** After I finished law school in '49, I applied for Harvard. They must have had very generous standards. Even though I was number one in my class, my class was only thirteen. The larger classes, because of that three semester a year business, were graduating in February and September. I got in and went up in September of '49. Ran into Walter Bristow, whom I knew of, but didn't really know. We knew each other, but not well. He hadn't found a place to live and I hadn't either, so we lived together. We lived together in a rooming house briefly, then he and I and a graduate student from Texas found a home, the bottom floor of a house. Our landlord was an Irish cop from Cambridge. He was the nicest fellow I ever saw. Every time we said, "Where can we get a used this or that." [He said,] "Got one upstairs I'm not using." He had everything. Joseph O'Conner. He was great guy.

Muller Kreps was working at the State House. He was an assistant to Inez Watson, who was the clerk. Muller said, "General Merritt needs somebody." Louie G. Merritt was the director of the Legislative Council. He was a major general, Marine Corps, retired. Had gone to law school when he was on active duty with the Marine Corps. Had commanded Cherry Point, North Carolina. I understand that Merritt Field, the air station here, is named for him. Muller told me about that. I applied and he hired me. A month later, Reeve Sams, a friend of mine here in Beaufort, walked in. He had started after me in law school and finished earlier because he went three semesters. Reeve and I worked together before I went
to Washington. I was there from August of '50 to until March of '53 when I went to Washington.

Hartsook: What did you do? What were your duties at the Legislative Council?

Cook: Draft bills primarily and do research.

Hartsook: Which of the members of the General Assembly stand out in your mind?

Cook: Well, before that, I had worked during the sessions of '44, '47, '48, and '49 in the state Senate. I had come to admire all of them. I mean Edgar Brown was the power. Everybody remembered [Rembert] Dennis, later. Marion Gressette. There wasn't a member sitting I didn't like. None of them who were unfriendly. I kind of admired them all. [Richard Manning] Jefferies had been a governor at one time because when [Joseph E.] Harley died Jefferies was President Pro Tem of the Senate. He was there. Brantley Harvey, Sr., from Beaufort. Rembert Dennis I mentioned. I don't know. I just thought well of all of them. I was an attendant for the first two years that I worked there.

Here's an experience I had in '44. In '43, my daddy died. I had caught a ride with a gentleman that I didn't know. We were chatting; he had somebody else with him. [He] just picked me up. I was a kid. I had been to a football game in Orangeburg. On the way back, I still didn't know who he was until I told him I had to stop in Sumter to get my bag. I was going on to -----. He was going to Mullens. When they went into a restaurant, they were going to feed me, and they gave me their car to go get my bag. I walked into the restaurant and saw him and said, "That's Ransome Williams. He's lieutenant governor." He never had told me that. I told him, "I'd like to work for the legislature." He said, "Well, call me." He got me a job. I've worked as an attendant. From there when I went into the Army; I came back and I tried to get a job and I went to Mr. [James H.] Fowles who was a clerk [Clerk of the Senate]. That was Lovick Thomas's father-in-law. Do you remember Lovick?

Hartsook: I know the name. I never met him.
Cook: He was clerk for a long time after Fowles. He said, "Son, you're kind of late." I said, "Well, I've just got back from the Army. I've worked here before, and I didn't realize the need for early application." He said, "Oh, you've worked here before? You're out of the Army?" He found me a job based on being a veteran. I was impressed with that. I worked there. The next two years, Dean Prince chose me. He was allowed to select a student every year, and he chose me for two years. I worked for the Senate as a committee clerk for those years, primarily with the Judiciary Committee, and with the general committees. Just wherever they needed me. My duties were rather general. I made a lot of errands.

Hartsook: Did they work you pretty hard?

Cook: No, not hard. I think I was useful. The other job I had was proofreading the Journal. We did that. You had to be pretty careful doing that.

Hartsook: Now how about with the Legislative Council? Was that very demanding? I would think it would be. [The Legislative Council is responsible for the “organization and operation of the research, reference and bill-drafting facilities” serving the General Assembly.]

Cook: It could be, during the sessions. Even year round, people began to come in there early with ideas. It was better, frankly, because you had more time to devote to it. If somebody wanted a statute, we'd go look for another state. New York's a pretty model state. They experience things much earlier than many other states. Situations likely to arise, particularly in business affairs. They were a little bit more advanced than others, in that things [that] were going to occur nationwide usually took place in larger states earlier. We'd look for model legislation. You go to the books and see what has been treated. You get some ideas from other states on drafting bills. I worked to some extent on the election laws. I had to know them fairly well at one time. As I recall, mainly, I just worked generally. Somebody'd come in, and need a bill; we'd get him a bill. It was extensively proofread and all that. We'd sit down with the member and go over it, and tell him what we had tried to do. Don't try to direct him. No matter if you thought it was the worst idea you've ever heard,
you couldn't indicate that. Some of the worst ideas we've ever heard, have become good laws in some senses too. I'm sure that's true.

Hartsook: How did you come to hook up with Congressman [John J.] Riley?

Cook: Here we get back to Muller Kreps. Mr. Riley was [elected] in '44. When Hamp Fulmer died Mr. Riley was elected to succeed him. [Hampton P. Fulmer represented S.C.'s 2nd District in Congress from 1921 to his death in 1944.] I think the Barnwell people had a lot of influence in narrowing on him. Even though he was not elected without opposition. He was elected in '44. He was defeated in '48 by Hugo Sims, a young Army lawyer from Orangeburg. When Hugo went to Washington, [he] got off to the left, politically, apparently. In a hard campaign in '50, Mr. Riley defeated him and got his seat back. Leonard Williamson had gone to Washington with him. He was a lawyer from Aiken. But Leonard had been elected solicitor. He [Riley], not being a lawyer, wanted a young lawyer [on his staff]. Muller talked to me. I said, "No. I'm not interested in going to Washington." He did at least two other times. Finally, one time, he said, "Al, Mr. Riley's going to come over here next week. Would you be willing to meet with him?" I said, "I'd love to meet the congressman." I came from the State House and met him over there in the Columbia Hotel. I remember we had a nice conversation. One thing I'll never forget, I've told people that I was riding around with my friends at the legislature. They let parking tickets stack up on the side of their car that thick and not worry about it. Mr. Riley kept looking at his watch. He ran out to feed the parking meter. I said, "Congressman, don't worry about a parking ticket when my friends at the legislature don't pay any attention to them at all. But he went out and fed his meter.

He offered me half again what I was making. I think it was $7,200, and I was making about $5000. It was almost half again. That got my attention. There was a law firm in Columbia that had talked to me, and I was interested in them. I said, now I've got all this experience here in the legislature. This was late fall of '52. If I go to Washington to work on Capitol Hill for two years, I'll come back and I'll know more than any other lawyer in the world. [laughter] I went to Washington with the idea of staying for two years. I went up on a train. I went to see General Merritt, and he was really upset that I was going to
Washington because the session was coming up and he needed me. I told Mr. Riley, "The General wants me to stay." He said, "Well, whatever you have to work out with him will be fine." We decided I would start in Washington on March the 15th. I remember that. I rode up on the train. I ate a meal going up on the train. I ate with [U.S. Senator] Olin Johnston. I think it was breakfast the next morning. Whatever meal it was. He had come down. He was on the train going back for a funeral for [Congressman] Joe Bryson, who was the Fourth District, who had died. He was Bob Ashmore's predecessor. They got me a room in a boarding house right there on Capitol Hill just a half block from the Supreme Court called the Betty Aldin Inn. The Reserve Officers Association headquarters is there now. It's next to the Methodist Building. [Arizona Senator] Carl Hayden lived in that building. I think Sam Ervin lived in that building, senator from North Carolina. He wasn't in the Senate then, but later. I know Carl Hayden lived in there. But anyhow, that's how I got to Washington.

Hartsook: What was it like to have breakfast with Olin D.?

Cook: It was nice. We just chatted.

Hartsook: Did he sit with you because you were a South Carolinian?

Cook: I recognized him. He didn’t know me from Adam. There was a vacant seat there, and I think I invited myself or something. Maybe he said, "Sit down, young man." I don't remember. But I did eat with him. In later years, I carried school groups around; we used to conduct tours and take them. Run into Olin Johnston, he would take all his time, he never appeared to have anything else to do. He would take those students, and I had a hard time moving them along. Maybank on the other hand. . .

[Side 1 Ends. Side 2 Begins.]

Cook: Olin was the other way.
Hartsook: Was he always truly in a hurry do you think, or that was just his nature?

Cook: Maybank, I think, was just more businesslike. Olin just loved people. Maybank, I get the impression, I've spent enough time here. All of them had things to do, all the time. There's stories told about people not knowing what to do. I've always said about members of Congress, particularly in later years, from '53 to when I left, it just changed. I imagine today it's quite a bit different, even worse. A member gets a schedule in the morning, and he's led by that. I said, "That ain't freedom. That's slavery. You following what you're doing.” Somebody tells a story about a Senator being at a party and looking at his schedule, and somebody said, "What are you trying to do, Senator? Figure out where you ought to go next?” He said, "No, I'm trying to figure out where I've been” [laughter] It’s a good story.

Hartsook: What were your original duties in the Riley office?

Cook: I was a legislative assistant. That was my title. I was supposed to work with him on legislation. I did that to an extent. The first real job I remember, I was telling you that this morning, was writing a speech for him on tidal lands. That's '53. I worked and I worked and I did all the research on the debate in the prior congresses. I think the bill had passed, but Truman had vetoed it. Eisenhower had indicated he would sign a measure. I had become totally familiar with tide ----, and there was a lot of debate. I had a lot of material. I wrote a speech that quoted from everything that had been said. Rather a long speech. I didn't know the rules of the House. I didn’t know you go, “I yield 15 seconds to the gentleman,” or, “I yield two minutes.” I wrote that long speech expecting Mr. Riley to get up and deliver that speech. He told me, "I couldn't get any time, so I just put it in the Record." That's when I learned that debate in the House is limited. That's the first major test that I remember I’d done. I did whatever I was told. I argued some cases. I used to go and argue cases in the Board of Veteran's Appeals.

Hartsook: For constituents?
Cook: Yes, for constituents. I've argued cases before Boards for Correction of Military Records for the Army and Air Force. I've been before the Appeals Board, discharge review boards, of all three services. I'd go down to argue cases before the executive agencies. In later years, they discouraged that, and for one, I didn't have time. Number two, the American Legion, the VFW, and the Red Cross, all had people that are full time that are so much better versed in those things. But I would do it if I had to go to a hearing. I'd say, "I'm here to represent the interests of the congressman and I concur completely with what the representative from the agency has said on behalf of this veteran." If I picked up anything that I thought had been overlooked or should be emphasized, I would do that.

Hartsook: What were Mr. Riley's legislative interests?

Cook: He was a man that I seldom saw whenever the hearings began on defense appropriations. He was on the sub-committee. George Mahon of Texas was chairman. Not the first Congress. That was a Republican Congress. Gerald Ford was on the sub-committee. I think Mel Laird [of Wisconsin], too. When these hearings started, we didn't see much of Mr. Riley. All morning and night they were going just everlastingly. That was his major interest. He was on military construction, which provides for bases, not only in the United States, but construction overseas. Just the general operations of the DOD [Department of Defense]. In those days, they do it today, but whenever the Armed Services committees started doing authorization bills, as I recall, I may be in error, but when I went there first, Armed Services didn't authorize expenditures. The congressional process now is authorization, and then you can't appropriate unless it's authorized. In those days, I don't think they ever authorized much of that what they were doing until, I think, maybe Mendel [Rivers] became chairman, or somewhere in there they started doing an authorization bill. Maybe they always had, but I don't think so.

Hartsook: Who ran the Riley office?

Cook: Mrs. Stiggens was her name. Mary Stiggens.
Hartsook: Did she really run it, rather than he himself?

Cook: She did what he told her, but she took care of everybody and everything. She kind of kept things to herself. She didn't want share her turf too much. There were times when I wasn't given quite as much as I was capable of helping on. She had worked for Mr. Fulmer, who had been the chairman of Agriculture. He was from Norway, down in Orangeburg County. Mr. Fulmer died. I think his widow succeeded him briefly, like Mrs. Riley did for Mr. Riley in 1962. She was in charge. We used to send out pledges of allegiance to all high school graduates. We had a District office we'd open in the summer, not year round. That was in Orangeburg. In later years, we put one in Columbia too. I'm thinking about travel. They didn't pay but for one round trip a year. That's all they authorized. I think he was making fifteen when I went up there. It might've been twelve. That was a member's pay. Let's say it was fifteen, but it could've been twelve. It hadn't been fifteen long. He got one round trip a year. He'd probably drive up for that. He and his wife lived in the old George Washington Inn, which is now, well, it has garages there. Right across the street from his building. He traveled by train, and he was so thrilled when they'd put on a car in Union Station that when they got to Florence, instead of continuing on to Charleston, they'd cut that car off and send it to Atlanta. He could stay on the train to Sumter. He thought that was ideal. When Albert [Watson] came along, he brought his family up, but he found out, I'm in South Carolina as much I am up here. I see more of them at home. He had them up there about a year or maybe two, and then the children wanted to go to school at home. By then, most of the transportation was by air.

Hartsook: Let me take you back a little bit. When you first got to D.C. did somebody take you under their wing and teach you the ropes or did you have to learn on the job?

Cook: I just more or less learned on the job. Nobody particularly. I picked up as I went along. You meet other people in other offices and pick up from them. Other staff members eventually get to know people gradually. I lived in a boarding house, as I told you. There were a lot of staffers there. A lot of them were young. I guess the major group of us were young girls who were working for the FBI Identification Bureau. That was near the Hill.
That was down at D [Street] and 3rd or 2nd Southeast. There were other staff members in there. This was three old homes that had been tied together by cutting a door between them. They had common walls. That was the Betty Aldin Inn. I paid, I think it was $80 a month for two meals a day, plus a room which I shared. My first roommate was a Senate page. He was seventeen. His name was Steve Toby, and his daddy was Toby of New Hampshire. Those crime hearings or some hearings they had before I went to Washington, he got the moniker, "God's angry man." I don't remember much else about the Senator. He died shortly after that first summer when Steve and I lived together. But he was a nice young man. He later went on to become a professional pilot in the Navy. Last time I heard of Steve, he was teaching school back in New Hampshire. His daddy was the state director of the park service.

**Hartsook:** Now, did Mr. Riley pay a lot of attention to constituent mail?

**Cook:** Everybody pays attention to constituent mail. That's important. That's your lifeline. That's your major communication with them. You know what they're thinking. Anybody that ignores his mail is doing so subject to peril. Members can't look at every letter. Even back then, when it was relatively low. If you've got a question with a letter, you ask him how to approach it, or what his ideas are. Nearly all the time, you have to do your suggested response. You get the information that's needed to reply. In time, you get a feel for what the individual is going to do.

You asked me what my job, working for Albert [Watson] and Floyd [Spence], and I used to tell them, really, when I stopped analyzing, I said, "Put out fires." I didn't get involved in a lot of stuff, the legislative mail, in later years, not too much. We had people that had that major territory. In the trouble areas, I'd get the difficult problems or things that were somewhat different. People ask you to do all kinds of things. A lot things are “pave my road,” which is not your responsibility. One fellow – he was a lawyer in Columbia – he asked me to get him a desk from General Services. You know, surplus stuff. That's kind of hard to do. You get unique requests. But, a lot them are not in your territory. They're local.

As I say, quite a bit of people want you to fix their road or have a school bus stop for my child. Something like that. You expect people to ask you about anything. They don't know
your realm of responsibility as compared to what the state and local governments are supposed to do.

**Hartsook:** How often would you have to go to the member and say, "Gee I just can't get them to listen to reason"?

**Cook:** Oh, usually you’d put a stack up, of things that you needed to ask him. You'd say, "You got a few minutes?" They'd say, "Yeah." Then you'd go over. Senate side, I guess they’re so much bigger, but our staff. . . . One of your questions there is about the staff size. When I went, we had three girls and me. That was the staff. Mr. Riley had patronage and he had a good fellow that worked for him, was the assistant doorkeeper. One of the doorkeepers over on the House floor. It was Mrs. Stiggens, and a young lady from Orangeburg, and a young lady from the Washington area. That was our staff. Four of us. In the summer the lady from Orangeburg and I would come home. The other two would stay in Washington.

**Hartsook:** That's expensive for you, right, because you're keeping a room in Washington?

**Cook:** I didn't for two or three years, but after that, when I got an apartment about '57, I was able to rent it. I could usually break even on that. So I could keep my apartment. The office was in Orangeburg. Mr. Riley said, "Well, that's central to the district that we keep." This lady's dad was in the insurance business. He had an extra office. We used it. I don't know if he paid him any rent for it or not. If so, it wasn't much. But I wasn't running the financial aspects of the office or payroll or any of that at that time, because Mrs. Stiggens ran everything. I was in Columbia. I didn't have a car then. I'd ride the bus to Orangeburg, I think, about two days a week. I got a car the next year, but for a while that was the way I got down there. I lived in Columbia at the YMCA. I could work that out and get a room there and leave it when you wanted to. I was a young fellow. It worked out fine.
Hartsook: Of course, by the time you left Mr. Spence, the district situation had grown quite a bit.

Cook: Work load. Initially, when Congress slowed down, it was hard to find anything to do. It was slow. In later years, I never could tell much real difference between the session and the. . . . The mail didn't change that much. The things you were involved in continued to grow. The workload just seemed pretty constant.

Hartsook: It would seem that it would just be natural that there would be jealousies between the District staff and the D.C. staff. Did you see that in your later years?

Cook: No, never did. I never did. We all worked together. We had a full time office for Albert [Watson]. Albert ran his own office. You ever heard of [Randall] "Front Porch" Harmon from Indiana? You ever heard about him?

Hartsook: No, sir.

Cook: He was a member from Indiana who leased his own office out of his own home. It was a front porch that had, apparently, been closed in. They called him "Front Porch" Harmon because he got a lot of publicity for leasing from himself. Well, Albert leased from his law firm, but he got an appraiser to come in and value the rent. Since the realtor valued the thing, that's what he paid to the law firm. He wasn't practicing law. Frankly, in the early days you could. They didn't think anything of it. Manny Celler of New York, they used to say his firm in New York, he was chairman of Judiciary. They would go to him for immigration bills. He would pass them all. Private bills. Whether it was true or not, that was the story. They were only there a few months. They didn't make enough to live well on what they were making there. In later years it got to be where you couldn't have that outside activity. We were talking about what?

Hartsook: We were starting to talk about the three members [Cook had served]. I'd like to ask you what kind of personal direction each of them gave the office. You hear so many
people in the general public think that the staff runs the office. In a lot of cases that's not true and in some it is.

**Cook:** The men that I worked for were definitely in charge. Mr. Riley and this lady get in the habit, you can handle nearly everything. If you got a problem, you go to the member. You run into something for the first time, you go to him. Often they would say, "What do you think?" I'd tell him, but then he'd say, "Well that's fine," or he'd say, "Well, why don't we do it this way?" I know Albert and Floyd both, you go to them with a case where they really wanted to help somebody and you've been to the agency and they probably turned you down. They couldn't accept that. They would want you to try again, and you'd do it again. They were anxious to help people. I dealt with cases that I didn't think had a lot of merit in law. They were hard situations, of course. You'd want to help them, but there wasn't any way for the government to involve [itself] based on the existing law. They didn't want to give up. They were persistent whenever you wanted to try to help somebody, if they knew about the case. No doubt to me ever who was in charge. Albert and Floyd left a lot of it to me. Here's the way I would handle people, I think this is pretty consistent for both of them. We only had to fire a couple of people. That was hard for a member and for me too. You get somebody that's great in the interview, but just doesn't perform; you just have to let them go. That was my job, but never without their concurrence. I would interview people. I'd never hire. Before we'd hire, I'd let him meet him. I never would hire anybody without his having met him. He'd say, "That one's OK." But I screened and ran all the interviews. In other words, he was giving me the chance to present him somebody for veto. Now, he didn't tell me to do that way. I don't remember why. We just got along.

We had a wonderful relationship. Mr. Riley was a father to me in a sense. A much older man; a wonderful man. Albert and Floyd were contemporaries. Albert was born in '22. I was born in '25. Floyd in '28. I knew them both through Columbia. Had heard of them. I knew who they were. I didn't know either one of them well until I became closely associated with them. But I knew who they were, and they knew me. Again not well. The direction of the office was in no doubt. Everything that I did, I did it with the belief that it was with the member's approval. I knew what I could do, based on what had been done in prior times or similar situations. Another thing, I never would commit the member. They'd
say, "How does so and so feel about this bill?" I'd say my inclination is that he would support it or that wouldn't be something he would support based on that, but I don't know the wrinkles of this thing that he would know about that I won't. I found that out, too. The members, I believe, rely on each other more so than they do on their staff. I'm sure they watch their mail and so forth. You got a friend on a committee that studies a situation for years, type of situation that is ongoing. You're going to listen to your friend, that thinks along the same lines you do, more so than you're going to listen to someone who's not as well versed in that field. Someone who will ask you to do something. All of them want to do what people ask them to do. I think that's in their nature. They want to please, to accommodate people's wishes. Can't ever know what somebody wants if he or she doesn't tell you. That's the reason that I say the mail's the lifeline. You've got to know what your people are thinking. Those questionnaires they send out, often just merely reinforce what the member already feels. I mean, he's been involved in public life well enough to get a gut feeling in most instances about how his people will react. I think that's a major guideline. “I feel so-and-so about government interests and responsibilities.” That's my initial reaction to any proposal that I'm confronted with.

Hartsook: Did you see any development or evolution over time among the members that you served? Did they change much?

Cook: I saw this about the South. In '62, Mr. Riley died. The 2\textsuperscript{nd} of January, I think it was. Mrs. Riley was elected in a special election to fill the vacancy. All the leaders in the District said everybody hold off. She'd agreed just to run to fill out the term. Mattie Thomas Fitzgerald from Richland, who'd been a lady from the Richland delegation in the House, saw a chance she thought to get a seat, and she got in. It was amazing. She got clobbered. She led the ticket in Richland County. She just saw an opportunity to step in, and she actually thought she was going to walk in because she was so popular. I'm sure she was a good member, but that was not the thing to do. I got in that race. I didn't know what opportunity I had, but I'd been there nine years. I felt I knew my way around. I didn't have much political sense, but I had a desire to serve. I worked for Mrs. Riley probably three weeks. A short time.
I decided to make a race, so I resigned and came home. I ran a respectable fourth. Albert led the ticket. [laughing] He was very close to Dr. Frank Owens, a former mayor of Columbia. Leonard Williamson was a solicitor from Aiken, and then I and then the last fellow was Gerard Hartzog. He was a retired attorney with the, I think the Internal Revenue Service, or some federal agency. Nice fellow. Leonard Williamson was a solicitor or whatever, so he had Aiken and Bamberg, where most of his votes were. I ran second in Sumter, Orangeburg, and Calhoun. I was very proud of that. I helped Albert in the run-off two weeks later. In a very close race, he beat Dr. Frank. Floyd was our opponent in November. During the race I had really knocked the Republicans. My beliefs were that they were splitting their conservative party and the minority vote was going to be a controlling factor. It would go either way. I said, "The tail would be wagging the dog." That was a genuine belief on my part. That too many conservatives didn't want to be Republicans, and there wasn't enough strength. I was wrong. Maybe I was right at that time, but in later years it turned out to be not correct. Floyd was our opponent in that year. That was a very close race when Albert beat Floyd in '62. I noticed this. Somebody always says it's tradition, it don't repose to remember a second time. Albert had no opponents in '64 and Floyd had none in '72. I don't know how I got off on this.

Hartsook: We were talking about the evolution that members go through.

Cook: When I went to the Hill, Bruce Alger from Texas, as I remember, was the only southern Republican. Cramer from Florida might've been there, but I think he was another term later. That was a Republican Congress, the 83rd [actually the 88th]. There were two black members. Adam Clayton Powell from New York and Dawson from Illinois. Dawson was a highly respected, not flamboyant, flashy, man. He was vice-chairman later over the Democratic Party. Everybody thought the world of Mr. Dawson. Adam Clayton Powell was flashy. That's another story, later on when Albert spoke against his seating. I think Albert was responsible for that. I truly do. As I see it, we always talk about the conservative South. When Albert ran against Floyd, his pitch was put up on television, all the southern committee chairman, and Albert said, "You're going to replace me with these?"
Hartsook: You were talking about the evolution of Mr. Watson.

Cook: In those days southerners were conservatives. Let's just go on and do that '64 race. Albert was for Goldwater. Spoke for him. He worked for Nixon in '62. When Albert went to Washington, Kennedy was in the White House. Albert was a Democrat. Normally, you get patronage. You get to appoint Postmasters or rural carriers. You don't appoint them, but you recommend them and they are appointed. Mr. Riley, when I was there, had Eisenhower in the White House. He only had patronage from the time Kennedy took in until he died. That was one year. Mr. Riley did have patronage for a brief time. I never became familiar with it. Albert, they didn't give it to him because he worked for Nixon in '60. When he came in '63, that administration didn't give him patronage. When Nixon was elected, Albert in the meantime had become Republican in '68. He [Nixon] came in, and he changed the postal service and made it non-political. Albert never had patronage.

In '65, when Albert went back after the '64 race, he had no opposition himself. He had worked for Goldwater. That's when they stripped him and John Bell Williams of Mississippi. I knew John Bell real well. Charlie Griffin, who succeeded John Bell, was a friend of mine. I spent nearly every weekend at Charlie's house cooking and just having social weekends. These were very conservative people, southern Democrats. John Bell stayed a Democrat and two years later was elected governor of Mississippi. He supported Nixon in '68, and I think probably supported Republicans as long as he lived. When Albert came back in '65, and then reorganizing the House in committee assignments, they purged him of his seniority and moved him down. He was near the bottom anyhow. They put him at the bottom and John Bell on top of him. John Bell was second to the chairman, and would've been chairman instead of Harley Staggers [,Sr.] when Harris was appointed to the federal bench and went back to Arkansas.

Albert, as you know, resigned. He tried to create a vacancy without leaving the seat. [Governor] Donald Russell wouldn't have it. Albert said, “I'll leave if you set the election,
but in the meantime the district will have a voice.” But, Donald Russell wouldn't do that, so Albert said, "Well, I'll resign." He did. In the meantime, he'd consulted with Drake Edens and others; I'm sure the Senator [Thurmond]. One of your questions [was] what influenced Albert to do it? I truly don't know. All he told me is he was going to do it. He told me about the press conference. He and Drake went alone. How long he'd thought about it...? If he started thinking about it when Thurmond changed in October, the year before, I don't know. He just said, "Even though I had been ardently Democratic for the purposes I told you, I am basically conservative. I realize that the party has left us."

Hartsook: Do you think that was a difficult decision for Mr. Watson?

Cook: I really don't know. I'm sure he was pulled both ways. Once made, it was the right decision. I whole heartedly applauded it. I'll tell about me, personally. I was in the Burro Club, which is the main assistants to the Democrats. I was honored to be president of that in '57, I think it was. I walked in to the Bull Elephants the first time, for Republicans; somebody introduced me, and hell, you'd have thought I had conquered Mount Everest. They gave the biggest round of applause I've ever gotten in my life. Of course, that was all because of Albert, not me. They really were overjoyed to have us on their side. They thought that was great.

Hartsook: How did the other staff react to his decision?

Cook: Outwardly, friendly. Inwardly, I don't know. They probably didn't like it, but nobody was ever hostile to me as a result of it.

Hartsook: How about people in the district?

Cook: Well he won by 78%. They put up Preston Callison. His daddy was attorney general. Awfully nice fellow. His brother Jack was Floyd's old partner. Of course, Floyd had already changed. I don't know what Albert's reaction was, but Floyd has told this story many times. In '62, he said some of his friends wouldn't speak to him. He had a difficult
time. [Spence was then a member of the South Carolina House and became the first Democratic office holder to switch parties. In that year, he mounted an unsuccessful race for the state Senate as a Republican.] Albert never really mentioned that, but it was rather well-received, based on the vote. Party affiliation, to a public figure, is a serious matter. But, I'm sure he thought it out ahead of time. I'm sure Albert had talked to a lot of people. I'm sure he probably talked to the House leadership. Was it Charlie Halleck or was it...who had come on board the House as leader? I don't know.

Hartsook: What do you recall of Mr. Watson's reaction to the Thurmond party-switch?

Cook: I don't really remember. I know that it didn't displease him.

Hartsook: Can we go back and talk more generally just about the District over the years of your service? What changes you witnessed in the District and the demands that they placed on the members?

Cook: When I first went to Washington, the only people we’d see were the occasional tourists and men from state agencies, and school representatives who wanted to get federal impacted aid. Public Laws 815 and 874 designed to help districts impacted by federal procedure. Most people we saw from home were people from various state agencies that had federal programs that they wanted to be sure were funded. School people had that interest in getting federal funds under those two programs. One was for operations. I think the other was for construction. 815...I've forgotten. Most people were there by train or automobile. The tempo was, just as I say, slow. I've always said Sam Rayburn knew how to adjourn the Congress. He died in, was it '62? I said the Congress forgot how to adjourn, because after that, sessions got longer. With Rayburn, they always said if it’s time to go home, we're going home. What else?

Hartsook: When did that all start changing in your office? When did you start noticing more calls and more people?
Cook: I think it's a gradual process, and I don't know if it's reflective of what we did, if it was reflective of the activity of the member. Mr. Riley would seldom issue press releases, but Albert wanted to do them all the time. Finally, I said, "Look, I don't have a news background. There's a young man here that's covering [for] The State paper. They're going to give that to Lee Bandy." I think he was covering Greenville, I'd heard. Ken's not going to have a job. I thought maybe Albert would ask me to talk to him. That's all I said, and the next thing I knew, Albert had talked to him, and Ken came on board.

Hartsook: Who was that?

Cook: Ken Black. He was from Johnson, over in Edgefield County. Ken had come up there out of school, and worked for the Senator and his patronage, working for Thurmond. He grew up in Edgefield County. His mother, I think, had dated Strom as a youngster. Had known him all his life. Dated the Senator. He came with us. He could do the press releases. He had ideas. He worked for that paper. That was a good move. Ken stayed with us. Floyd had other arrangements, even though he kept me. I was the only one he kept. Ken went on and worked for Barry Goldwater and ----- and other members. Then when I left, Floyd brought Ken back. That was fifteen years later.

Hartsook: Did you notice a big difference in the media coverage of Mr. Watson once he had a press secretary?

Cook: Yes, 'cause Albert would generate some news. He had ideas, and he wanted to say something about them. Albert went over to the floor and made some remarks. I don't remember…that year of Adam Clayton Powell. He'd been widely publicized, and drinking down there in Bimini. He still got re-elected in that Harlem district. The question came up whether or not he should be seated. It was going to happen, but Albert went over there and made one fiery speech. It didn't happen. They voted it down. The Supreme Court later made the House seat him; but I had a friend who was a reporter on the House floor; he'd been a committee reporter, but as a vacancy occurred. . . . You've got to be pretty talented. He
told me he went up to Albert after that speech and said, "Man, you can go." Albert was a national debating champion in the university, his team. So, he could talk.

His twin brother, Allen, was a Baptist preacher in Tuscaloosa, Alabama. Nixon used to have White House services on Sunday morning and Allen was invited to one of those. We were fortunate enough to be invited down there. Chief Justice Burger was there. Julie [Nixon] and David [Eisenhower]. Nice occasion. One thing about Nixon. I met [him] when he was vice-president, and when he was running again we were on the Hill trying to get his support, vote in '68, a couple of times after he was President. He always heard what you said. You've been through receiving lines? "How are you today?" You say, "My grandmother just died." "Well, nice to see you." They don't hear you. [laughing] Nixon always responded. I would tell him, “I work for Albert. I worked for John Riley the first time I met you as vice-president.” He said, “I served in the House with John. He's a great fellow. Give him my best.” He always heard what you said and gave you a response. He had his shortcomings, but he has my admiration in many ways.

But anyhow, the growth of the District as the country grew. I don't know. All of a sudden I know that we were awful busy. And, we didn't get the time to relax and do nothing. We never complained about it. You never even sat back. You would hardly get time. In later years it was hard to tell the difference between session and adjournment.

**Hartsook:** You've represented your members, I think, in a very personal way. Can you talk about what you think of as your strengths as a staff member, and your weaknesses, and the qualities that make for a good staff person?

**Cook:** One of your questions, I think, was about what I consider the greatest attribute.... I think loyalty is. I could be completely loyal without compromising principles. My members, they were different, but they were all honorable men. All dedicated to doing what they thought was best. I'm sure they were trying to stay in office, but they also would've felt that they were there for a good purpose, that they were conscious of the authority that they had and the seriousness of their work. You got to be confident. You got to know what the job.... I had the capability of learning it. Sometimes I would want experience, but more than anything else I would look for people who were smart and had the ability to learn, because I
thought they could learn quickly and soon be up to snuff. If I wasn't able to offer them anything, and yet I thought that that individual had a capability to make a useful contribution, I would encourage them. “Take whatever job you can. If you're on the Hill, that is a plus in your interview with anybody else.” Once you have your foot in the door, you say, “I've already been on the Hill.” That enhances you a notch. I said, "You might not be getting the job you're looking for, but it will give you a perch." You'll be feeding yourself and you'll have the opportunity to watch for other activities. Furthermore, sometimes you may find that what you've got was more appealing to you than what you thought you wanted. That's happened to many people. They got into a field that they didn't think to be interested in it, turned out to be more appealing than what they had worked on.

I told you about my reluctance to go to Washington in ‘52 because it had no appeal to me. Dean Acheson was scum. Harry Truman was going out of office, but he was not popular. We know how people regard him now. Somebody showed me a cartoon, I've never forgotten it. It's a picture of a man sitting on a toilet, and the caption is, "the only man in Washington that knows what he is doing." I always thought that was representative of what the public's attitude was. I roomed with the son of a friend of mine. I didn't room with him – we both lived in this boarding house. He worked for Karl Mundt, senator from South Dakota. His daddy was on the supreme court of South Dakota. He later became controller of the currency. Jim Smith was his name. He said, "My daddy told me that Washington was the largest county seat in the country." Truly, it was representative of that in many respects. That boarding house I referred to, those young ladies were from all over the country, a lot of them southern. Most of them, probably, in that house were southern. They'd come from small towns to the city to get that job working for the FBI or another agency. Washington was made up, the Hill at least, of people coming in, not from rural, but small-town America.

**Hartsook:** Now in the mid-'50s there was a lot of fear about the infiltration of government by communists.

**Cook:** Yes. I remember Joe McCarthy. That was probably before I went to Washington.
Hartsook: I know Olin Johnston, the champion of the federal employee, was furious over those kinds of charges. Were you and Mr. Riley? Was that a concern? Did that impact your office at all?

Cook: Not that I recall significantly. If what McCarthy said was true, of course it was a concern. I don't guess anybody really knew. Joe had some points. Some of it was wild. But, he had enthusiastic backers. I remember going out in a restaurant one time, up at the old Raleigh Hotel. Group of ladies came in, they were singing a song. I don't know if they'd come from Wisconsin or everywhere, but they were [singing], "We love our Joe." He had a cadre of people that were dedicated to him. He obviously was reckless. I guess the dominant thing is that he was quite reckless. But, he had some meat. I don’t know....

Hartsook: As a staffer on the Hill, were you looking around at your fellows, as you walked...?

Cook: No. I don't remember Olin's concerns. I just wasn't that much into it. I do remember going over to the Army-McCarthy hearings. Roy Cohn, I remember him. Then the fellow, Stein. Let me tell you something about me in '54. I was an eyewitness to the three top news stories of that year. Number one, the first news story according to the press was [the] Army-McCarthy hearings. I saw those in part. My girlfriend worked for Senator Flanders and I could usually get by the line and go in whenever we wanted to. So, I'd go over there often and sit in for part of them. I've seen Roy Welks and all that around those hearings. Number two, I don't know which was two or three, whether [it was] the Supreme Court decision or the shooting in the House. On March the 1st, Mr. Riley's friend, Archie Shifly, from Orangeburg, was visiting Mr. Riley, and we were meeting in the House dining room. The bells rang for attendance on the floor. Mr. Riley got the check and paid it. He said, "Archie, sit here. When you finish, come on up. I got to go on up and answer the roll." I think it was just a quorum call. We went up and sat in the gallery on the front of the Capitol side. Mr. Archie and I were sitting there. I think it was the second row. I heard this noise up in the front, in the corner. I looked; they were waving flags and doing... . When I first heard it, I didn't know what it was. I looked at Joe Martin, who was the speaker, and looked for a clue.
He seemed befuddled. I saw those guns, and I jumped over the rail. I was in the infantry. I knew to look for cover. I jumped straight over and laid down. I said, "Archie get down." He sat there, petrified. That's when they shot those five members and sprayed bullets all over the chamber. March 1st, Puerto Ricans were… I thought they were debating a Mexican farm labor bill or wetback bill, and I tried to associate it with that. I attended the legislature and see them maybe whoop it up a little bit on adjournment night. I said, "Here in the House, why would they be doing that? Are those firecrackers?" The news recount the next day said, Cook ducked behind the gallery rail, but Shifly continued to sit erect and watch the melee. I got a telegram from one of my friends. “Your little niece was born yesterday,” not really my niece, but, “Keep ducking Puerto Ricans.” Somebody sent me this. They knew I admired Douglas McArthur and Winston Churchill. He said, "Famous Military Quotes. Winston Churchill: ‘V for victory;’ Douglas McArthur: ‘I shall return;’ Al Cook: ‘take cover too’."

laughter

Then, on the other, I’d seen the Supreme Court in session only briefly when I lined up to go to the Rosenberg rehearing, when they were trying to stop the execution. I kept saying to myself, I'm going over there one day just to see them in session. I had no idea May 17 would be the day they read that decision. I went over there early and I got in. [They] admitted lawyers first. I saw Dean Acheson there. He moved to admit somebody to the bar of the court. Each judge announced an opinion in summary fashion. Then the Chief Justice began to read. I recognized immediately what the case was. I had followed that case even before I went to Washington. I looked up there at that bench. These four this way, and these four this way. Which way is number five going? It was a five to four decision. I realized which way he was going and obviously that was the majority opinion. This part does not appear in the written opinion. He said, "We unanimously vote." That jolted me, that opinion was unanimous. I was expecting it could have gone either way. When I realized which way the court was going, I got nervous all over. I guess people at home thought I was doing nothing but living in terror. I got off the subject, but I did want to make that point. Harriet Means who worked the [Charleston] News and Courier said, "I'm going to start following you around. You're always where the stories are." I got off track there didn't I?
Hartsook: Not really. About the same time, a little before that, Burnett Maybank passes away. Was that a shock?

Cook: Totally unexpected. September 1st, ’54, at Flat Rock, North Carolina, early in the morning. I remember in addition to his death, it was always said that he was the first person to benefit from the federal life insurance program for federal employees. It went into effect that morning, at midnight. He died two or three hours after it had gone into effect. I'm sure his family probably was the first beneficiary of that program.

Hartsook: Did that really shake up the delegation?

Cook: Yes. We wondered, who's going to fill it? It was time for the primary and he was unopposed as I recall. Not for the primary, but for the general election. He was the nominee. Of course, you know what happened after that. Mr. Riley, I referred earlier to his support from Sol Blatt and Edgar [Brown, leaders of the South Carolina House and Senate respectively, both of Barnwell]. We weren't involved in this thing, but we were more or less for Brown. Thurmond was fine too, but he [Riley] was just closer to Edgar Brown. That's the way I’m sure he went in that race. I guess I always thought Thurmond would take credit for things he hadn't done, but I think all senators tend to do that because when their partners give announcements, they tend to give it to senators first. When they announce approval of projects or something like that. Have you ever heard of Harry Dent?

Hartsook: I've met him a couple of times.

Cook: He was a news reporter. When he came up, [USC law school] Dean Prince called me and he said, "I've got a young man coming up there to be a reporter for The State, but he's finished this semester in law school, but he can't take his exams. If I send him to you, will you give them to him?" Congress was not in session, and I said, “Surely.” I gave Harry his exams in Mr. Riley's office. Mr. Riley was at home. He took his law exams, and I mailed them back to the school. Harry covered for The State newspaper. In that race, he said, "I worked for Senator Thurmond during his last campaign. I wonder if there's any chance of
my getting a job with him?" I said, "Hey. I know what we get, but a senator gets quite a bit more than we get for allowances. He needs a staff. Won't hurt to apply." Harry got the, I think, number two job over there. You know the rest of the story.


Cook: Alec McCullough was Thurmond's choice to be his administrative assistant but Harry was the number two man. He took off from there.

Hartsook: Also about the same time the state government is battling calls for integration, and Governor Timmerman is staunch in his opposition. Senator Gressette has the Education Committee trying to find a way to maintain the status quo. [South Carolina Congressman] James P. Richards notes, "Honest members of Congress from north and west just do not approve our practice, nor get our viewpoint." How is that impacting on the office?

Cook: We were really supportive of Timmerman. I remember flying home one weekend. Charlie Wickenburg was working for Timmerman. You ever heard of Charlie?

Hartsook: We’re good friends. He's a very nice fellow.

Cook: He was up with the governor on a National Guard plane, and they were on Meet the Press. It was live. I went and sat in a room out there in the Shoreham Hotel, wherever the studios were. I flew back with the governor because I was coming home for a visit. I liked George Bell [Timmerman]. He'd been lieutenant governor when I worked in the Senate. Presided over it. I always held him in high regard. We were fully supportive of him. He made a proposal one time that I never would've thought of and never heard since. He said something to this effect as I remember, "We don't need a Supreme Court. We just have the circuit courts." Then I said, "Well, then you wouldn't have one uniform law, a
nationwide...." He said, "Well, what's wrong with that? We've got states with different laws now." That was a proposal that I never heard anybody else suggest.

I remember Jimmy Byrnes after Eisenhower's victory in '52; I was down in the governor's office [in the State House]. Two of the ladies down there were good friends of mine. I was working upstairs. He was singing, "Oh, what a beautiful morning." He was really happy with Eisenhower's victory. Back then, the governor's office was downstairs. One of these gals made my picture sitting in his office in Jimmy Byrnes's chair. That was a big deal for me. He was a great fellow.

**Hartsook:** Now his [Timmerman’s] lieutenant governor becomes governor. Fritz Hollings – much more activist style of governor, working very hard to continue the more limited development initiatives that Governor Timmerman had inaugurated. Does that impact at all on the delegation in Washington?

**Cook:** We were cooperative whenever the state requested anything. The governor asked you to do something, you don't ask questions about parties or anything like that. We always responded as favorably as we could to any request. Muller [Kreps] was Fritz's top assistant, so I'd visit him in that office fairly often. We had good relations with Fritz. He was a good governor. What amazed me though was not that Olin beat him, but that he wiped him out in that '62 race. [Hollings challenged U.S. Senator Olin Johnston in the 1962 Democratic primary and was defeated by a two-to-one margin.] He had a good sense of humor though. He carried Calhoun County, Fritz did, and I lived there. They asked him, "What happened governor?" He said, "Well, obviously I concentrated too much of my time and resources in Calhoun County."

When [Richard] Riley was governor, he did one thing that I thought was very helpful. He invited every member of the senate staff to see what the state government was doing with federal funds. Even though I had been in Washington a long time, I was not anywhere near where the impact ...how much the state government was utilizing federal money. It's a huge percentage. I don't remember, but there's a lot of federal money now going to the states. Catalog of Federal Assistance used to be that big. Now it's about that thick. I remember somebody asked me one time about Riverbanks Zoo in Columbia. He said, "Is
any federal program [available] to help this?” I said, ”Not that I know. I'm sure there's
nothing for that.” But, they got federal money for it. I don't know if this gave economic
development or what, but it was large. That was a nice thing to do. We met the governor.
He gave us a reception. No other governor has ever done that. I thought it was a good
move. It was helpful to me, and a help to the state.

**Hartsook:** How did you cope with Mr. Riley's death?

**Cook:** It was surprising. He had been sick. He’d had a heart attack in our early years there.
But, I thought he was doing well. He was just sixty-seven. I think he had a couple of ups
and downs, but death was totally unexpected to me. As I said, he was a father figure. I
really loved Mr. Riley. He just was a selfless man and a wonderful gentleman. I remember
one thing about his funeral that always impressed me, and I appreciated it. Olin Johnston
was there. He might've known my name, but he knew who I was. At the cemetery, he said,
"I don't know what your plans are, but if you need any help, I'll find a place for you." That
meant a lot to me. It just came out of the blue, and I always appreciated that. I got along
fine with his staff. Politically, I was more conservative than they were, but they were
awfully good people. And, Tommy was a great guy, ----- ----- -----. I appreciated that.

That race in '62 between Olin and Fritz.... Fritz was a very popular governor. He
defined the technical [education] system; he expanded the Development Board. Fritz was a
great governor. He really was. But I went to the Township Auditorium for their open
campaign. I think I had already probably declared my candidacy but we weren't on the slate.
That was a Democrat-sponsored event. Olin got up. I don't remember who spoke first. The
only speech I remember is Olin's. I had never heard the man. He kind of roared out there.
He turned to Fritz and said, "Boy, you were in knee pants, I was already doing something."
He was loud and firm and forceful. I said, "I never saw this man before.” Fritz kind of
paled and turned red. But, anyhow, it was one heck of a speech. I had heard about Olin on
the stump, but I had never seen it before. As I walked out, Van Newman and Bob Barton,
Newman and Barton, they were public relations people. They were handling Fritz's
campaign. I said then, "I never saw Olin like that before." He said, "We got a bigger job on
our hands than we thought.” I didn't expected Olin to whip him that bad, but he did. What got me onto this? Riley's funeral. Things developed after that with my campaign.

**Hartsook:** Now, Mr. Watson was a much younger man, an ambitious man. How did the office change when he became congressman, and did your duties change under him?

**Cook:** The duties didn't change, but the level of activity did. The focus of interest did. We had just been reacting, but Albert was innovative. He wanted to initiate and move forward and push things. He was active. We got more in pursuit of what was going on.

**Hartsook:** What areas was he interested in? What was his legislative agenda?

**Cook:** He wanted to get on Armed Services. Believe it or not, it was tough to do back in those days. I don't know, being with his background and the fact the White House wouldn't give him patronage. Probably, the leadership didn't give him much support for that. He was on Un-American Activities, which he did want, and Post Office. What amazed me, is there he's a freshman, but apparently he could ask questions and pursue things, because general counsel and committee counsel would come in and talk to him and ask him about things. He was giving guidance. He was a freshman member of that Committee on Un-American Activities. I remember now, being in the office and looking across the street where Un-American Activities was holding its hearings, when they were throwing all those people out in hearings in the early ‘60s; Albert was right in there on all of that.

**Hartsook:** Do you think he wanted that for the publicity value or...?

**Cook:** I'm sure he wouldn't run from that. But, Albert and Floyd both, Floyd had the Un-American Activities Committee in the State Senate, and Albert was very much interested up there. I can't remember right now who was chairman. Albert eventually did get on Commerce. I'd never seen [such] a level of activity from the lobbyists coming by. They really did. All the jurisdictions of the committees are different now. That committee's jurisdiction has been spread to more than one. But, they had all forms of transportation – air,
truck, rail, barge. All those people and money. They’d come in there. They got interested in us. Albert could look at a situation and sum it up pretty fast. He and a friend of mine, whom I roomed with in law school, Billy Jones, was solicitor up in Greenville. If I had practiced law ever, I probably would've practiced with Bill. He wanted me to come with him. These two men could go into a situation and just listen for a short time and drop right into it. They caught on fast. Albert, I remember, one time, coming back, he said, "That Bob Dole's the funniest man I ever saw." I remembered that for years. That's the only time we've ever discussed it, I guess. He always, apparently, had a great sense of humor.

Hartsook: Did Watson have a good sense of humor?

Cook: I thought he did. Yes. He'd tell some stories.

Hartsook: Did he have much of a temper?

Cook: I never saw it. We lived next door to Bob Mathias, from California, the decathlon champion. The grape people distributed grapes on Capitol Hill. I had never seen those grapes. I didn't know there was such a thing. There was a grape that big. [indicating a very large grape] South Carolina gave peaches every year. We'd help distribute them to the members. Every one of us got grapes. Some members came to Bob's office and brought the press with them, and they were throwing grapes into his office because that was the Caesar Chavez controversy and all that. They were for the grape workers, harvesters, not the growers. I didn't understand it all. We just sat there in the door looking one door down. Albert went in there to tell Bob, “I'm for you,” and all that. I just told him to sit. He didn't hold back. [laughing] No, I didn't see him lose his temper. You know, Albert and Floyd had run against each other. I never heard either one of them say anything adverse about the other one. They didn't necessarily praise each other. When Albert lost his [1970] race for governor, he represented clients from Washington a few times. He'd come by the office. They was friendly.
Hartsook: When did you get your first intimation that Democratic leadership might punish Mr. Watson for his support for Nixon’s presidential campaign?

Cook: I don't know. Maybe Albert told me or something. He might've even known it, because I don't know if they weren’t even warned beforehand that they might do it. But, he didn't let that deter him. I don't truly recall, specifically.


Cook: Were we in recess when he died. Do you know what time of year he died? I think I was in South Carolina when he passed away. You think of the staff members you knew, and your heart goes out to them. I knew Sol Blatt's mother-in-law worked there. She was a nice lady. Young Sol's mother-in-law, Doris Gadden. I knew Baxter Funderburk and Tom [Chadwick]. We were sympathetic to any member of any group that’s lost their family. I guess speculation arises then as to who is going to succeed. With every case, like with Floyd, it doesn't take long for people to start talking about who's going to succeed.

Hartsook: Did it surprise you when Governor Russell stepped down and was appointed? [Governor Donald Russell resigned as governor. Lt. Gov. Robert McNair succeeded him and immediately appointed Russell to fill the Senate vacancy until a special election could be held to fill Johnston’s unexpired term. Russell held the seat for approximately one year, then was defeated by Fritz Hollings.]

Cook: I didn't think it was wise because the history of that is that the only man that ever survived that self-appointment was “Happy” Chandler [of Kentucky]. All the other governors that appointed themselves had not been able to continue to serve. It happened to [James Howard] Edmondson of Oklahoma; that I remember. He had a brother in the House. He appointed himself senator, or got himself appointed. It happened three or four times that I recall, but never successfully. In that race, Albert was at the top of his career, and could've had that nomination. I don't know why he didn't take it. Maybe he thought it was too big of
a risk. I know, he told me later, "Fritz said, 'I'm glad I didn't have to run against you.'" Albert was at the peak in '66. The fall election came, and it might've been, had he gone then rather than '70, maybe things would've been different for him.

**Hartsook:** Do you know, did he take in part in the recruitment of Marshall Parker into the Republican Party? [Marshall Parker of Oconee County was a force in the state Senate. He switched parties and ran as a Republican in 1966 for the U.S. Senate, losing to Hollings in a remarkably close race.]

**Cook:** I don't know that he did. I do not know that. I'm not aware of any activity.

**Hartsook:** Parker certainly pulled more votes than I think anybody would have assumed he might.

**Cook:** I knew him before, and then he'd run in the same race I'd run in, in '62. He was running for Lieutenant Governor when Bob [McNair] won. I got to know him and [wife] Martha then, but he came up to the Small Business Administration [Parker served as an administrator in the SBA under the Nixon administration.], and I saw him from time to time in Washington. Been in his home. I think very highly of Marshall. He's an impressive man.

**Hartsook:** I met him for the first time last week. Very impressive.

**Cook:** Is he still in good health?

**Hartsook:** Looks grand.

**Cook:** Wonderful. Did you meet his wife?

**Hartsook:** Yes, she looks good too. He has had a hip replacement. He fell and did some damage to the hip, so he's having a little bit of trouble getting up and down.
Cook: I think I knew Marshall as a state senator, but I'm not sure if I did then or not. I already knew who he was when he was running for Lieutenant Governor in '62. I remember Crawford Cook, who later worked for Fritz, was his campaign manager, wasn't he? You know Crawford? Where is Crawford now?

Hartsook: Crawford is in Columbia. He lives in Shandon near Hand Junior High, and still has his thumb in just about everything going on.

Cook: How about Lee Ruef? Where's Lee Ruef?

Hartsook: Lee Ruef, I believe, is still in the Columbia area. I'm not sure how active he is. I've never met him. You hear his name, of course.

Cook: He was always a big Democrat. Of course, Lee, I think, is into some lobbying now where he's kind of non-political, maybe. At least non-partisan. I'm off the track again.

Hartsook: That's alright. Can you talk a little bit about the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965?

Cook: All I remember is that we were against it. Still don't like the fact that the South still is subject to all that Department of Justice review of everything. I think Floyd finally voted, as I remember, before I left; I think he voted for one of the extensions. It got to be something that everybody came to accept and not oppose. I don't think that our abuses are any worse than those from some other parts of the country that aren't subject to the Act. No, we weren't for it. That's the history under which we grew up. Everybody's mellow today, and you've seen frequent references to Thurmond. He's turned the table on it. We've all done that in our hearts, now. I'm glad that generation is behind us. I am. It happened though, from history, so I’m not trying to justify it or condemn it. That was not popular legislation with us within the past.
**Hartsook:** Hollings did something that they termed the "Hunger Tour," in 1969. A lot of people criticized him for highlighting a problem in South Carolina that was really a universal problem. It also ended up having some pretty good impact for South Carolina. Do you remember much about that? [In 1969, Senator “Fritz” Hollings’ “Hunger Tour” publicized widespread hunger and malnutrition among South Carolina’s poor. Many in leading positions in the state attacked Hollings and/or denied the existence of the problem. Others saluted him for his courage in bringing light to the desperate conditions in which South Carolina’s poor lived. Ultimately, Hollings wrote a book on the subject, *The Case Against Hunger*, and authored legislation addressing the issue. South Carolina became one of the first states to test food stamps, in part due to Hollings’ efforts.]

**Cook:** I remember. Not a lot, but I remember my reaction. It was just like you said. He was glorifying in the state's shortcomings. Someone who took advantage of a situation for his own uplifting. Only he can know his own motives, but there were those who did think exactly as you said.

**Hartsook:** Can we talk a little bit about Mr. Watson's gubernatorial campaign? Were you active in that?

**Cook:** Not really. No, I minded the store. That's what I did in all the campaigns. When I went to Washington, the routine was this; we all had an automatic typewriter called rototype. They didn't say anything back then about campaigning from the office. [Today, campaigns must be kept separate from the member’s office and staff.] You had to put stamps on the letters. We might've even used congressional stationery. I didn't. Mr. Riley only had one campaign. We lent ours to somebody else. If we needed it, we'd borrow theirs. You’d get a whole series of typewriters and somebody sent them out. That was the only way you could produce original letters. We would write letters from congressional offices. Of course, that became increasingly taboo. By the time we got into the '60s, we were very busy. Then it became highly improper for a member to have an outside income from the work. I never did go down [to South Carolina] and actively campaign. Mr. Riley, the one time he ran, I went down and I went to a lot of stump meetings. If I had literature, I would've passed it out.
That time Mr. Riley had an opponent, in '54, Republican opponent, [and] paid no attention to him. His name was [I. S.] Leevy and he was their leading funeral home [director] there. He was a black Republican nominee. We ignored him and, of course, he didn't get any vote to speak of. In '58, Pat Lindler was from Lexington County. He was a legislator. He ran a very hard and active campaign. I think there are 216 precincts, and he carried two. That was the extent of Mr. Riley's opposition. Incumbents, there were very few of them been beat. Mr. Riley beat Hugo [Sims] to get his seat back. Bryan Dorn had run for the Senate in '48 against Maybank and been wiped out. Jimmy Hare served that term for him. Bryan had beat Mr. Hare right after the war. He was in that class of '46, wasn't it? Bryan got eager kind of early, and Maybank wiped them all out, easily. Bryan got his seat back in '50. Other than those two, I don't know of anybody else that's been beaten since '50. Can you think of any sitting member that lost a seat? [The] status of incumbency is pretty strong in our state. In fact, Albert's first time in '64 and Floyd's first time in '72 [seeking reelection, they had] no opponent at all.

**Hartsook:** Is it fair to characterize that [1970, Albert Watson] gubernatorial campaign as a racist campaign?

**Cook:** I don't think so. There are people who would say that. Jack Bass. You know Jack? Ever heard of him? He certainly had it that way. They played a tape of Albert's remarks in Lydia. Played that for the overturning of the buses in Lamar. Jim Edwards was down here last week for Joe [Wilson]. I went to that event at Joe's headquarters here [and] chatted with Jim. He was our first governor. [James B. Edwards was the first Republican elected governor since Reconstruction] That was '74. Albert had missed four years earlier. I was talking to him. I said, "Albert almost had that." I think it was A.C. Flora that lost the race for him. I don't know if my view's shared or not. It's just my view. One night I was in Columbia. Albert couldn't go to some function there locally. So, he sent his brother Allen, the preacher, who was also quite a speaker, to represent him. John West was there and he had on the most discouraged look on his face I've ever seen. He had the look of a defeated man. A few days later, the event happened at A.C. Flora High School. Are you familiar with that?
Hartsook: Yes.

Cook: There was a student uprising. [My wife] Wanda has named him. I wouldn't have named him. A campaign worker was riding by, [and he had] a Volkswagen covered with Watson stickers. [He] started taking pictures. Somebody said to him, "Are you from the press?" He said, "No, I'm from the Watson campaign." All of a sudden, the press had Albert Watson's people out there instigating that riot. You know Weston Adams? You ever heard of Weston Adams?

Hartsook: I know the name. Former mayor.

Cook: Weston was working for Albert up there on the crime committee that Claude Pepper chaired. Albert was the ranking member. Weston said, "My daddy even said to me, 'What's got into Albert?'" His dad was a staunch Republican. Everybody was blaming Albert. The sheriff, Frank Powell, was a good friend of ours. He was a Democrat, but they were very close friends for a long time. Tried to call a press conference and point out Albert had nothing to do with it. But the press wouldn't heed it. I think that lost the race for Albert. That's my view. Hastings Wyman may know because he was the campaign manager. Never talked that over with Hastings, but that's my view. Jim Edwards the other day referred to Lamar. I think we'd gotten over that because it had been some time earlier. Albert spoke at Lydia. Some time later, people go and turn over a school bus in Lamar, which is thirty miles apart. He gets the blame for it. I don't think it was a racist campaign even though there was an ad run one time that was pulled. It had some racial scenes of riots in it, and things like that. That probably was a mistake to run that ad, but Albert never saw it. His people he hired in Atlanta did that. That wasn't a smart move. As soon as he heard about it, he pulled it. I never heard Albert make a racist remark. Face to face with black people, I've never worked with anybody who wasn't as kind with them as they were with anybody else.

[Tape 2 Ends. Tape 3 Begins.]
Cook: I guess we were all protective of the way of life that we’d inherited, to an extent. We were all growing at the same time. We're where we are. Hopefully, we will keep growing in the right direction.

Hartsook: Let's talk a little bit about Mr. Spence. You were the only staffer, you said, that he retained?

Cook: Yes.

Hartsook: Was that smart? I always think it's smart when you keep the staff.
Cook: Floyd has always told me that he missed me. The last time I saw him alive was during the campaign last year. There was a break during a reception at a fundraiser given here in Beaufort. I had no idea that anything like this was happening or anything. I often reflect on it. I missed him, and I think he missed me. We had a warm relationship. I'd work at night because I couldn't get things done in the daytime. I'd usually do my dictating after everybody had gone.

Hartsook: You were his top staffer?

Cook: Right. They call them chiefs of staff now. They called me administrative assistant then. I was for Albert [too,] except for the first few months. He had his campaign manager, Ross Higgens, went up. But Ross decided though to come back to Columbia. I succeeded him probably in July or August of Albert's first year, '63.

Hartsook: Weren't you disappointed that he didn't retain more of the staff?

Cook: I was particularly with Ken. Ken Black went over to Barry Goldwater, Jr., and other members. He went to Mr. Betts of Ohio. Ken did alright. He was an able person.

Hartsook: Was that hard to hire a whole new staff?

Cook: He brought up three young girls with him that they’d already hired in Columbia. They worked in his campaign. I got a senior lady who worked for Ross Adair of Indiana, who'd been defeated. I had Lila. She was capable of running things. It was easier for me.

Hartsook: Was Caroline Bryson one of those three?

Cook: No, we hired her in '83. That was thirteen years later, before we got her. Bob Hodges, who is now on the Court of Claims, a judge, he was with Thurmond. I don't know how he got over there. You know Crawford Clarkson? Crawford was Floyd's treasurer, always, and handled the money. That is a loyal, tireless fellow who just works like heck for
somebody. And Joe Wilson. Those two just worked loyally for Floyd. I've never thought of anybody else to succeed Floyd other than Joe. I'd say something to Joe about doing it, and he would not respond even. I said something the other day, when we talked, "I've always wanted you to do this." He said, "Well, both of us had too much respect for Floyd." They wouldn't talk about it. That's true.

We were talking about staffing. I get off the subject too easily. I had Lila. She was great, and those young girls, they would listen to her. Oh boy, we had more people drop by to see those pretty girls. They were very lovely young ladies.

Hartsook: Did Mr. Spence ask anything different of you than what you provided for Mr. Watson?

Cook: No, just kind of carry on. What I learned about him and Albert, both of them had held legislative positions, they'd been public figures. They knew how to act and what to expect. They came in green, and they got a lot to learn. But, they pick up real fast. They just know how public bodies operate. They were quickly responsive to what was going on and to their duties. They fell right into things. What surprised me about Floyd, he came up before he was sworn in a couple of times. We ran into Allen Lowenstein. You ever heard of him?

Hartsook: Yes, sir.

Cook: They knew each other, greeted each other in such a friendly way. Allen [was] a flaming liberal and Floyd a conservative. I said, "What's going on here?" Floyd said to me later, "I bet you wonder how I know him. I was [student body] president of the University of South Carolina, and he was president of the student body in North Carolina. And, we used to have these conferences." That's where they got to know each other. That did surprise me, the first day. No, it wasn't any problem at all. Floyd got on Armed Services, and he began to be absorbed into that. He was a reserve officer in the Navy. He had commanded the Columbia reserve unit, whenever he was elected.
I'm thinking about staff. That staff stayed pretty much intact for a long while. Lila finally left. Shirley O'Neal came in. She had worked for Bryan Dorn, way back. I knew she might be available. She worked for a gentleman from Pennsylvania. I got a young lady who worked for a North Carolina member that I knew, when Shirley left. I think Caroline succeeded her.

Hartsook: How much direction were you providing to the district office?

Cook: Not a lot. More assistance than direction.

Hartsook: At one point did you turn over all the constituent service work, basically, to the district office?

Cook: They did do a lot of case work; I think [it] transferred down there. When I was there, it seemed like we each one handled whatever came into that particular office. Orangeburg handled her share and Columbia its share, and we did our share. I think after I left, I think they began to farm things down to the district more than had been done before. People that Floyd had at his field offices were people that he knew. They might ask me for something, but I didn't stay up to operating day-to-day control over them in any sense. Orangeburg to some extent; Chessie, Ms. Powell, would ask us. Columbia pretty well ran on its own. Even Chessie would ask the person in charge of the Columbia office for most of her inquiries. She would ask people out at ----- sometimes, in Washington. Albert probably was the first one to have a full-time district office. Mr. Riley, as I recall, maybe we did in the latter years of his [tenure in the House]. Doris Cook worked for us. I think we began to go full time in Orangeburg. Yes, we did. I'm not positive on that. I'm just kind of vague on it.

Hartsook: I usually ask about the member's corps of advisors, who they would turn to for advice. I'm kind of learning that, in most cases, that's not a good question, because it's such a broad group. Did Riley, Watson, or Spence, did they have a little core group of people that they would turn to?
Cook: Not that I'm aware of. I think they, more or less, worked up rather than down. I mean, if anybody had anything he wanted Floyd to know, or Albert, or Mr. Riley, they were receptive and grateful for that contribution. But to call up somebody and say, "What should I do on this key vote?" I don't think any of them did that. If they did, I'm unaware of it. All of them had friends that were close to them, that they respected. But, I think on the everyday voting, as I said earlier, I think that they listened to the members, their colleagues who were on the committees that had jurisdiction over whatever was coming before the floor. A major piece of legislation, obviously, you're going to have your own opinion about it. I think for details, and all that, they were dependent on the experts among their colleagues. I may be wrong, but I don't know of any of them that said, "Look here, I've got to call a conference," and so forth.

Albert tried something one year. He was going to give a free trip to Washington for the constituent that came up with the best new idea for legislation. The committee selected [the winner,] he didn't. A group of people at home made the choice. I forget whatever they chose. What they chose wasn't a bad idea, [but] it wasn't new either. I don't remember what it was. But, that didn't get much response.

Hartsook: You mentioned, I think before we started recording, that there was a little lunch group of administrative assistants, can you...?

Cook: Well, they weren't all administrative assistants. We were staff members. Some of us were. Some of us weren't. We just sat at a table down there.

Hartsook: And how many folks would that be?

Cook: Ten to twelve, sometimes at a table. Probably didn't hold more than a dozen.

Hartsook: How often would you all have lunch?

Cook: Every day for lunch. It was seldom that everybody was there. It wasn't a standard thing; if you had another luncheon engagement, or had to get a sandwich in your office,
which was often, you didn't get there that day. Just, whatever you had. Somebody from
down there that you knew, from another office. We would talk. I enjoyed the “Bull
Elephants” and the “Burro Club.” Those were scheduled meetings, with notices, and have
memberships, and so forth. The Democrats, we used to meet over in the Library of
Congress. First we met upstairs in a restaurant down on Independence Avenue. That's
where I met Jack Kennedy. I’d never heard of him. One of my first meetings, I went down
there and he came in, somebody said, “He beat [Henry] Cabot Lodge. He's in the Senate
now.” Youngster. He was a very energetic, eager, pleasant person. He spoke to us. We had
Dean Acheson. Dean Acheson said something once that I thought was humorous. After
Adlai Stevenson's first or second loss, I'm not sure which, he said, "I don't know why they
keep referring to Adlai Stevenson as a titular head of the Party, except that he always seems
to have hold of the hind end." That surprised me. He obviously didn't hold him in too high
esteem. That's what Dean Acheson did say.

Hartsook: How did you come to leave the Hill?

Cook: After thirty-two years, I'd reached maximum benefit. I thought I might have a career
in lobbying or something like that. That was a crowded field, and it didn't work out. Wanda
wanted to come back home. I stayed up there [in Washington] nearly three years, two and a
half years [after leaving the Spence office]. I worked a while for a telemarketing company,
just trying to get something going and promote the political use of it. Today they do it, but
back then I couldn't sell it. I tried. They thought I could sell that thing. That was the major
thing that I did. I didn't make any money. That was tough going. We decided to come on
back home. I'd finished high school at Myrtle Beach. We starred every beach and came all
the way down, and found we like Beaufort. We bought a lot here. Never did build on it, but
we eventually sold it. It was a good purchase because I made some money on it. I'd been to
Beaufort once before, visiting with a member of the legislature, one of my friends. Other
than that, I'd never been down here. [Talbird] Reeve Sams – I referred to him – I'd worked
with him. It was good to know he was here.
Hartsook: I always end my interviews with the same question: Are there any questions I should've asked, and you want to respond to, and I just didn't know enough to ask?

Cook: No, but let me think. I've got a list here. I told you he [Watson] was on the crime committee. He worked with Claude Pepper. They got along fine. When Albert died, that obituary in The State was awful. I thought, if somebody didn't know Albert, [and] read that, they would have thought that he was the worst ever. The headline [was] "Segregationist." Albert was a judge of the Social Security Administration in his later years, and he retired from that, hearing cases. And I had a very liberal lawyer in Columbia, a Democrat, said, "I got the fairest hearing from Albert that I got from anybody." Nobody did anything but praise his work on that committee. He was concerned about everybody.

I want to say this about Ronald Reagan. In 1967, we had a rally in Columbia. I don't even know if it was at the state convention or what, but a group met with Ronald Reagan at the Wade Hampton Hotel. I walked in the room and Harry Dent said, "Governor, this is Al Cook. He works for Albert." I shook hands with him and had my picture made with him. I sent it to him and he autographed it. I still have it. That night, at Township Auditorium, this man spoke. It was the most moved crowd I've ever seen. There was an electricity in the room when that man [spoke], at least, that's the way I felt. I've never seen a more enthusiastic group in my life than that thing with Ronald Reagan.

I remember when Harry Dent was running for chairman; he spent a lot of time over in Albert's office. They would make a lot of phone calls. We did work hard to make him [Dent] chairman of the Party.

I think we've hit it pretty well. That just about covers just about everything I had on these notes.

[Interview ends.]