

Joe Bartlett

Competition for House Reading Clerk

Personal account of the competition which took place for House Reading Clerk in 1953.

Interview recorded October 12, 2006

We had, we had a competition in the House Chamber, the House being out of session and everybody gone, everybody cleared the chamber. And a committee made up of Leo Allen of Illinois, John Allen of California, and [William] Sterling Cole of New York, heard the auditions. And, one of the tricks they played, and the candidates were not there. They were out in the Speaker's Lobby, other than the one that was being tested. They turned off the power, turned off the mic, and then they waited to see what they did. Well, of course most of them waited for the mic to go back on. Well, I didn't know enough to do that. I just upped my voice a little bit. {laughter} And it ended up that we had, that day, it was narrowed down to two. And then we had a competition on the job that went on for some weeks, I don't know, three, four weeks or something. It was a very difficult period. I, I . . . That was a part I disliked the most, because I know several times during that period, I was ready to say, "Well, just give the job to the other fella. This is no fun." And each time I felt that way, somebody was very kind to saying, "Stick with it, Joe. You're doing fine." Okay, well, we went along with it and at the end of the period, why Joe Martin told me I was selected. That made me very happy and I did enjoy it. And, I think I've told you many times, or in many ways, that my greatest blessing is that I had the benefit of Alney Chaffee from Iowa who had been reading clerk for 52 years, and had, knew every trick in the trade. He had been a very effective reading clerk before they had sound amplification. It's just incredible to me to reflect upon the years that he did serve. Well, talk about a resource, Mr. Chaffee was so willing, so eager to give me the benefit of his years of service and all the things he had learned, that I, I had a really the benefits that few people could ever have in being introduced to a very complex and challenging and responsible job. I will be eternally grateful to him for that. And, it did enable me to do a lot of things very quickly. I, I felt comfortable doing things, I'm sure a lot quicker than most people would in that circumstance.