

NATIONAL PRESS CLUB NEWSMAKER LUNCHEON WITH DONALD RITCHIE, ASSOCIATE
SENATE
HISTORIAN

TOPIC: "SCOOPS, PACKS AND

CLUBS:

A CENTENNIAL SURVEY OF THE NATIONAL PRESS CLUB AND THE WASHINGTON
PRESS CORPS"

MODERATOR: SYLVIA SMITH, PRESIDENT OF THE NATIONAL PRESS CLUB

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MS. SMITH: Good afternoon, and welcome to the National Press
Club. My name is Sylvia Smith. I'm the president of the National
Press Club and the Washington editor of the Fort Wayne Journal
Gazette.

I'd like to welcome club members and their guests today, as well
as those of you who are watching on C-SPAN. We're looking forward to
today's speech, and afterward I'll ask as many questions from the
audience as time permits.

I'd now like to introduce our head table guests and ask them to
stand briefly when their names are called.

From your right, Meyer Odze, the producer of Auteur Productions
and of -- and the producer of the National Press Club centennial
documentary; Marc Wojno, a club member and associate editor of
Kiplinger's Personal Finance magazine and the chairman of our History

Committee; Florence St. John, the vice chairwoman of our History Committee; Andrew Glass, senior editor of Politico; Joe Keenan, director of the Senate Press Gallery and guest of the speaker; John Cosgrove, the senior past president of the National Press Club, in 1961; Richard Baker, the U.S. Senate historian and guest of the speaker.

Skipping over the podium for a moment, Melissa Charbonneau of CBN News, and vice chairwoman of the Speakers Committee.

Skipping over our speaker, Emi Kolawole, a staff writer with FactCheck.org and the member who organized today's lunch; (James/Jane Saylor ?), compiler and organizer of the memoirs of Arthur Krock, and a guest of the speaker; Gil Klein, past president of the Press Club and the editor of our centennial history book, "Reliable Sources: 100 Years of the National Press Club."

Don Larrabee, a club member and the president of the Press Club in 1973.

And Jonathan Allen, politics reporter of Congressional Quarterly. (Applause.)

Most of us are familiar with much of the history of the National Press Club and its role around the world. In fact, a number of you have contributed in ways that have fundamentally changed the course of the club and the nation's history. Many of the highlights in any eighth grade student's history book has a link to the National Press Club. For instance, President Franklin Roosevelt was the first speaker at our club luncheon series 76 years ago. Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev explained his "we will bury you" comment at this podium. And the fights over racial and gender integration were fought here, just as society at large was grappling with the same issues.

And now there's the Internet. Career reporters are asked to cross-platform their stories from print to web to video. We are asked to compete not only with other mainstream journalists, but with citizen journalists to be the first to get the story. And just when we begin to think about how journalism as we know it will evolve and survive, we're reminded that when the club was founded in 1908, the over-the-fence gossip was the only competition newspapers faced. Radio and TV news broadcasts were yet to exist, and there was no 24/7 news cycle. These are just a few aspects of our collective present that provide us with an opportunity to reflect on the club's past.

But this afternoon, we're not going to just reminisce absently over a drink at the Reliable Source. Today we have the opportunity to take a tour through the club's 100 years of history with an expert guide.

Donald Ritchie is the associate historian of the U.S. Senate and author of eight books, including two on the Washington press corps, and is a leading authority on oral and political history. When it comes to the press and Congress, Don is a go-to source and a great friend to many here at the club. Don has also served as head of the Oral History Association and led the two-year project to have the sealed McCarthy papers released from the National Archives. Those

papers were subsequently prepared for publication in 2003, 50 -- on the 50th anniversary of the McCarthy hearings.

It is only fitting that as the National Press Clubs celebrates 100 years of service to Washington and the journalism community, we invite Don Ritchie to join us.

It's a good time to remember the rich history of the National Press Club and how journalists, despite fierce competition and rough economic times, came together to form one of the nation's most enduring organizations. So please help me welcome to our podium the U.S. Senate's associate historian, Don Ritchie. (Applause.)

MR. RITCHIE: Thank you, Sylvia. It's a great honor for me to be here today. I'm just so flattered that you asked me.

And I want to start, however, with a full disclosure. And that is, I studied newsmaking, and I don't make any myself. The reason I stand before you today is to provide some historical context for the centennial of the National Press Club, and I'm about to pose a question, which is, how is it possible that a band of competitors

formed a collegial social and professional organization and managed to keep it afloat for a hundred years? This association, this club was founded in 1908, but the National Press Club actually had many short-lived predecessors.

For instance, when I was doing my research on a book called "Press Gallery" on the Washington correspondents, I came across the Washington Correspondents' Club, which held a memorable dinner on the eve of the president's impeachment trial. Now, I mean President Andrew Johnson's impeachment trial in 1868. There were about 50 reporters who gathered that evening at a restaurant near where we are right now for a good meal and a lot of after-dinner toasts, including a ribald toast by Mark Twain, to women. Now, of course, this was a stag dinner he was delivering it to. But among the many women that he toasted was George Washington's mother. He said, "She raised a boy who could not lie, but he never had a chance. It might have been different for him if he'd belonged to a newspaper correspondents' club." (Laughter.)

Now, the Washington Correspondents' Club convened at one of the most intense times in American political history. It was in the middle of a monumental clash between the White House and the Congress over the Reconstruction of the South, and that was the clash that led to the president's impeachment and his acquittal by a single vote and an acquittal that was not sure until the last vote was counted.

Reporters who covered the rough-and-tumble of Reconstruction said that it was even more intense than anything that they had experienced during the Civil War. And one of them said he would rather run all the risks of the Gettysburg campaign again than go through the storm times of Reconstruction.

So the Reconstruction-era reporters formed a club to dispel some of that political tension and to entertain their friends in Congress

and the administration and maybe to divert attention from the impeachment trial just for an evening. And it managed to do that for that evening, but it didn't last very much longer. It held three more dinners before it finally disbanded.

The earliest Washington Correspondents' Club was actually founded by a group of Washington Civil War correspondents who showed up here in 1861 to cover the war. The first battle was only 30 miles away, in Manassas. And the best news about the battle was at the bar at the Willard and the bar here at the Ebbitt Hotels, where their generals and the politicians gathered at night, and in between were all the little newspaper bureaus and the telegraph office down the end of the street. So this was newspaper row at that time.

They called themselves the Bold Buccaneers, and they were also known as the Bohemian Brigade. And those are the reporters who stayed in Washington after the Civil War was over and whose numbers began to grow throughout the late 19th century. But they repeatedly tried to form press clubs, and they repeatedly failed in this period.

Instead of a clubhouse, the most comfortable place for most reporters in the late 19th century were the Senate and House press galleries, because those were set aside for them as early as 1841. The White House didn't have a press room until 1902. They were sometimes allowed in when it was raining, but for the most part, reporters stood outside the White House in the 19th century.

But in that period you could go to the press galleries, where they had comfortable leather couches. They had Brussels carpets, gilt mirrors, chilled water coolers and, quote, "any reasonable quantity of very red liquor." (Laughter.) And I'm sure today in the Senate Press Gallery they have the water coolers. They're still there, in the press's -- but that was where reporters could go to write their stories or play cards or take a nap during some of the slow moments in the Senate.

In fact, we have an engraving of a group of reporters in the press gallery in the 1860s and the caption is, "Reporters During a Stupid Speech in the Senate." And they're all -- got their feet up on the table. The press superintendents would tell them when anything of any importance was happening on the floor, and then they would all go out into the gallery.

And in fact, the tour guides in the Capitol in the 19th century used to say that the best way to tell whether anything really important was happening on the floor was whether or not the reporters had taken their seats up in the press gallery. Actually, there's a certain truth to that today as well, in terms of what's going on in the Capitol chambers.

The sleepy atmosphere in the 19th century in the press galleries continued right up to the Second World War, according to a number of the veteran reporters I've interviewed. And once, in the early 1980s, I had an opportunity to take the columnist Joseph Alsop on a tour of the press gallery. He said he hadn't been in the Senate Press Gallery in about a half a century. He was absolutely appalled to see that the big couches where he used to nap had been replaced and that there were

all these desks sort of cheek-to-jowl. He called it a rabbit warren. And the fact of the matter is, it's even worse today in terms of the space and the squeezing in people into that space.

Among other things we've lost in last 20 years is the telegraph office. When I first came to the Capitol in the 1970s, people used to type their stories, send them over to a telegraph operator and telegraph them back to their newspapers. Telegraph has gone and very shortly the telephone booths are probably going to go from the press galleries as well, as technology changes.

During the Gilded Age after the Civil War, there were a whole series of lobbying scandals that took place.

And not only did the members of Congress get caught up in these scandals, but so did some of the reporters. It turned out that some reporters were moonlighting as lobbyists, and some lobbyists were posing as reporters. And that had a detrimental effect on some of the reliable sources that the members of the press were looking for. (Laughter.)

And so to stop this confusion, the leaders of the Washington press corps actually went to the leadership of Congress and said that they would take over the management of the press galleries, set the rules and determine who was allowed into the press galleries. And they did this about 1880 by creating the Standing Committee of Correspondents, elected by reporters. That's exactly the same system that we still have today.

Its intention was to remove lobbyists, and it did that very successfully, and it still works very hard to keep lobbyists from entering into the press galleries. But by requiring that you must report for a daily newspaper via telegraph, the rules that were adapted also eliminated all women correspondents and all minority correspondents. Whether that was an intended or unintended consequence, I've never been able to determine, but I'll talk a little bit about the consequences that played out.

But the exact same correspondents who created the Standing Committee of Correspondents in 1880 got together in 1885 to try to find a social equivalent of that. They wanted an evening where they could entertain political guests and try to, again, reduce some of the friction that was going on. They didn't have much money, and so they decided to create a club without a clubhouse. And they tossed around several names. They were going to call it the Terrapin and the Skillet, and they finally settled on the Gridiron, after the rack on which chops were roasted.

And the Gridiron threw lavish dinners and they put on songs and they did political lyrics to these songs and all the rest of it. And it apparently succeeded in sort of bridging over some of the gaps with the politicians, because by 1890, the House of Representatives had to send its sergeant at arms to one of the Gridiron dinners so that he could get members to come back to Capitol Hill and establish a quorum.

The Gridiron, however, was a self-consciously elite organization. It initially was limited to 35 members, which that meant it

automatically excluded almost everybody else in the press corps. And

so to fill the gap, there was still a demand to create a press club. So in 1891, reporters founded the National Capital Press Club, which also did not last very long, although it apparently had a good time, because I read through the newspaper accounts that said they had a piano and they used to play the piano at night, and everyone, quote, "sang lustily" by all present. So it was a jovial group of people who got together.

Well, the question is, why did those clubs fail, repeatedly? There are probably two reasonable reasons why this club succeeded, why those clubs failed. The first was that most of those clubs allowed their members to run up a tab at the bar. (Laughter.) And the National Press Club from day one set a rule that there was no credit for the bar or the food around here. And that seems to have had a stabilizing financial effect on the club.

The other was suggested by a New York Times reporter in those days, named Charles Murray, who said, every attempt to organize a press club had proceeded on the idea of shutting out the correspondents, and every correspondents' club had barred the local press.

So the correspondents were the national correspondents, and the press clubs were the local reporters, and the two clubs never seemed to come together. Part of this was because the national correspondents in those days looked down on the Washington newspapers. In fact, if you lived in Washington in the late 19th century, you'd probably rather read the Baltimore Sun than any of the local Washington newspapers. And the local Washington reporters looked down on the national correspondents because as soon as Congress adjourned, they would pack their bags and leave town. And so they looked on the national correspondents as transients who were only here for about half of the year.

It was the genius of the National Press Club in 1908 to finally bring the two groups together -- national correspondents and the local press -- in creating a club that managed to succeed. So, anybody in the Washington press could join the Washington -- the National Press Club, except they had to be men. This was a men's club, originally.

And so there were women reporters, but they were writing society news. And society news and the color commentary didn't justify the expensive telegraph tolls, so they didn't write for a daily newspaper via telegraph. They mailed their stories in. And in the 1890s, there was a sizable number of women journalists here in Washington. They used to hold lunches over at the Willard Hotel, and they had formed something called the Washington National Press Association. This was the first generation of women correspondents in Washington.

By the First World War, there was a new generation of young women who came with the women's suffrage movement. Actually, many of them handled press relations for the women's suffrage movement. And when women got the right to vote, they stayed in Washington as correspondents. The old association was a little too stodgy for them,

and so in 1919, they created the Women's National Press Club.

In addition to gender, race raised an issue, because there were black reporters in Washington and there were black newspaper associations. They were trying very hard not only to get their members into clubs, but to get them accredited to the press galleries. There were a lot of black newspapers, but they were daily newspapers, and again -- they were weekly newspapers. You had to be a daily newspaper to get into the press gallery.

In the 1940s, the Associated Negro Press was really pushing to try to get one of their members admitted. And Claude Barnett, who headed the Associated Negro Press, commented about the Senate and the House press galleries. He said, they're really like clubs. He said, those lounges maintained by the Senate and House are really like clubs, and I suspect that therein lies the reluctance to admit us. This was at the same time that I.F. Stone resigned from the National Press Club because the club refused to seat his luncheon guest, who was the dean of the Howard University Law School.

In 1947, the Senate Rules Committee finally ordered the standing committee to accept its first black reporter. That was a man named Louis Lautier, who reported for the National Negro Publishers Association. And they also admitted Alice Dunnigan, who reported for the Associated Negro Press. Lautier and Dunnigan, by the way, were as fierce competitors and rivals as the Associated Press and the UP, and I -- it was just amazing to me in reading through their correspondence at how hard they fought to scoop each other in terms of getting the story.

Louis Lautier had been a stenographers before he was a reporter. He had a dry wit. He was well-liked by folks in the Washington press corps, especially because he used to lend them his stenographic notes after the president's press conferences.

So in 1955, the National Press Club actually held a vote of its entire membership as to whether or not to allow Louis Lautier to be a member. And it voted to admit him into the club. He came in, but Alice Dunnigan did not, because of course the club was all men at the time.

Meanwhile, the National Women's Press Club had earlier invited Alice Dunnigan to a luncheon in 1948 as a way of perhaps getting her as a member. She was a bit intimidated by the really fast-talking, aggressive women correspondents that she was around. She kept fairly silent during the lunch, and no invitation to join the club followed. But when Louis Lautier was admitted to this club, the women felt that they had been discriminating in their own way and they admitted Alice Dunnigan to their club.

She was pretty resentful of the seven-year delay, but she said that joining that club was the best thing that happened to her professionally because it opened avenues for many exclusive stories and personal interviews from prominent dignitaries.

The men tried everything possible to keep the women out of the

club. In the early days, they used to have regular ladies' dinners and ladies' days. And the men reporters would actually dress in formal wear and cutaways to greet their women guests.

At the same time, the Washington -- or the White House Press Correspondents' Association actually admitted women as members of the association but wouldn't allow them to come to their dinners. And when they didn't, the women reporters complained. Merriman Smith, who was president of the association at the time said, well, the trouble is that the dinners were too dirty. He said the entertainment was too dirty and that the men liked it bawdy and they weren't about to change it. The women reporters sent in their checks for tickets to attend the dinners, and their checks were returned. And the next year the men tried to hide the date on which the White House Correspondents' Association was holding its dinner.

Radio correspondents, when they came, they were second-class citizens in this club and elsewhere. They were allowed to join the club, but not to vote in any of the elections, for instance. And I think because they had felt that they weren't quite equal with everyone else, when they held their dinners they did invite women radio correspondents to attend, although this created some problems because the wives of the radio correspondents were not permitted to attend. And so there was some friction and concern in their minutes as well.

But all clubs in Washington, for the most part, were segregated by gender. The Cosmos Club, the Metropolitan Club were men-only clubs. And once you got to be a columnist, you usually applied for membership in one of those clubs along the way. Arthur Crock, who had been a working reporter before he became the bureau chief and a columnist in The New York Times, took out a membership in the Metropolitan Club. And his old friends here at the National Press Club scoffed that it meant that Crock used to be a good reporter, but now he's a journalist. (Laughter.)

Meanwhile, there were a lot of women working in this building down below, and they were getting frustrated at the fact that they couldn't take the elevator up to the 13th floor to eat a meal here when they worked odd hours or when the weather was terrible outside. They felt cut off from the social networking that went on here and the professional networking. But what really grated on them was that there were these newsmaker lunches that often made news and that they were unable to cover them.

And so the club finally made some compromises along, and one of it was that in the mid-1950s, in 1956, the club said, okay, any member of the working press -- women as well -- can come to any luncheon that we have, a newsmaker luncheon, except if you're a nonmember, you sit up there in the gallery, and you leave as soon as the lunch is over.

And so the first women to attend any lunches in this room were women reporters who were up in the gallery. And that meant sharing the space with the TV cameras and the lights and the rolls of electrical cords and all the rest of it. Marjorie Hunter once spent an hour standing on a rolled-up rug in the back of the balcony, where she

could barely see and couldn't hear the speaker. And she stormed back to the New York Times Bureau and said to her bureau chief, "Scotty, don't you ever send me back to that damn National Press Club again."

So, what women did at that stage was to go to the guests and ask them not to speak unless the women were allowed to sit down with the men and break bread. One of the very few who accepted was Nikita Khrushchev when he was here. He was always happy to expose a capitalist injustice. And so women reporters were down here on the floor, out of the balcony, for a Khrushchev speech.

One of the speeches where they didn't get a chance to come down here was when Martin Luther King spoke here. He was desperate to get publicity for the March on Washington in 1963, so he was willing to speak to an audience that was segregated by gender rather than by race. At the time, Art Buchwald wrote a wonderful column who said that -- it was sort of an awkward situation, he said. "Our women were happy to sit in the balcony until outside agitators from the North came down here and started trouble." (Laughter.) He said, "If the men let the women reporters eat with them, pretty soon they'll want to dance with us and neck with us, and before you know it, all the barriers will be down and they'll be wanting to play poker with us." (Laughter.)

Now, at that time President John F. Kennedy, who had started as a Hearst reporter, was a paid member of the National Press Club. In fact, John Cosgrove told me he wrote a \$90 check. And I asked if the check was still here in the archives, and he said, no, the club needed the money, and so they cashed the check at the time. (Laughter.)

But President Kennedy actually lobbied members of the press to ask them if they wouldn't vote to admit women. And Merriman Smith on Air Force One once told the president that it was kind of a dicey issue, that there were strong feelings here, and the president ought to stick to things you understand, like the Congo. When Lady Bird Johnson was first lady, her press secretary, Liz Carpenter, also tried to talk all members of the Johnson Administration not to come to speak here unless women were admitted on the floor.

But in the end, it was not presidential interference but economic situations that changed the National Press Club. In the 1960s, Washington lost its streetcars; reporters started moving to the suburbs; we had riots here in 1968, which left much of the downtown desolate and dark and dangerous. The Willard Hotel was closed across the street, about to be demolished. And so membership at the club and attendance really began to go down. A few of the club presidents have told me that they had to pay for the bar bill out of -- or the beer deliveries out of pocket at that time.

And so when Don Larrabee was coming up in the chain here, he realized that economically the club really had to admit women or go down the drain, as he said. And so he helped persuade the board to have a vote of members to decide to admit women.

The first vote was by mail ballot, and it failed to get the two-thirds vote necessary. So they held a second ballot at a meeting, and it won. It won 227 to 56. There was a last-ditch effort to admit

women to every place except the bar, but that failed also in the vote. And then finally in February 1971, the first women were admitted to the club. "You don't know what it means to me," said a tearful Sarah McClendon. "I've worked here 25 years on the 10th floor, and it's taken me a quarter of a century to travel three floors."

Now, this left the Women's National Press Club trying to decide whether they should admit men, and they finally decided actually to merge with the National Press Club and to create the Washington Press Club Foundation.

That left the Gridiron as the last male bastion in terms of press clubs here in Washington. They had admitted their first black member in 1972, but they still resolutely refused to admit women. And so younger women journalists began to picket the Gridiron. They posted signs in the women's restrooms as The Washington Post and The Washington Star, which were engaged in large debates and actually a lawsuit as to women's status and salaries in those newspapers. They got women out on the streets picketing to try to embarrass the high-level guests coming in. It didn't work. You know, everybody went to the dinner, even though they sort of ducked into the dinner at various times.

But the women then changed and found a different strategy. They decided to hold their own dinner on the same night. And so there was a counter-Gridiron performance over at Mount Vernon College. And actually more presidential candidates and television anchors and other celebrities went to the women's dinner than went to Gridiron. And the men realized that when it came to throwing a party, they had been defeated, and so they admitted in 1974 the first women members of the press club.

One more club to mention is the Overseas Writers' Club, which was founded by Americans coming back from Europe after World War I and also by European and other foreign correspondents who were here in the United States. At first, admittedly, the foreign correspondents thought Manhattan was the best place to cover the United States, more than Washington. They could come to Washington on the train once in a while if there was some story coming.

Between the Second -- the First and Second World Wars, the most prominent correspondent in Washington -- foreign correspondent was a man named Wilmott Lewis, who reported for the Times of London. And he did all of his reporting from this club and in fact in the card room of this club. He decided that he could save on shoe leather by just asking his colleagues what he needed to be reporting about and picked up all the news he really needed here.

In return, he gave them great quotes. He was a very good quipster. And for instance, when President Franklin Roosevelt was trying to pack the Supreme Court, and one justice changed his vote to try to get around the animosity and the fact that the Supreme Court was turning down so much of the New Deal at that point, it was Wilmott Lewis who coined the phrase which appeared in every newspaper at the time: "a switch in time that saved nine." (Laughter.)

Wilmott Lewis was playing cards in the card room when he learned that the king of England had knighted him. And the members of the National Press Club threw him a formal diplomatic reception in honor of his knighthood. They all wore formal attire with convention badges and other political memorabilia instead of diplomatic materials. And people asked him what it meant to become a knight, and he said, "Well, I'll tell you, my boy." He said, "Wilmott Lewis used to fetch \$250 a lecture. Sir Wilmott gets \$500." (Laughter.)

Now, most of the low-budget single-person foreign bureaus couldn't compete with Wilmott Lewis's contacts. So that's when the U.S. Information Agency created the Washington Foreign Press Center here in the National Press Building to provide access to press briefings and equipment and other things to reporters. It also created some sort of a social status between the well-paid foreign bureaus and those who were struggling.

And some of the bigger bureaus told their correspondents that they didn't want them to be treated like reporters at the eighth floor of the Washington Press Center. So there's all these stratas (sic) in the history of the Washington press.

Whether or not a reporter's story appeared in the newspaper, on the air, regardless of their race or their gender, whether they were foreign or domestic, Washington correspondents historically have operated out of a city populated by politicians who desperately crave publicity and desperately sought to stem the publicity that they were getting. It's a city that's been filled with sources, each one of them convinced that he or she is the most misrepresented person who has ever served in public life. It's a city that both suppresses and leaks news profusely. It's a city filled with policy wonks who can't speak except in acronyms and who are about to provide you with information that you will never be able to persuade an editor back home that you can get into a story. Not long ago, the reporters in the Senate Press Gallery had to advise a senior senator that there was absolutely no way for them to explain a second-degree amendment to anyone outside the Beltway.

The pressures that reporters face today actually mirror those of the predecessors over the last century, except that the deadlines now come faster and more frequently. But there's always been creative tension in the press gallery between the scoop and the pack, between the professional rivalries that pit people against each other and the other forces that sort of pull competitors back together again.

Washington reporters always, going way back to the 19th century, have spent a lot of time standing in corridors outside of closed doors together. They've spent a lot of time riding on campaign trains, campaign planes and campaign vans. They've been handed the same press releases. They've attended the same press conferences. They've cultivated the same sources. And circumstances like this have built very strong friendships in the press, as well as very strong rivalries.

As soon as carbon paper was invented, the Washington press corps adopted the practice of blacksheeting, which was when you had a colleague who was indisposed from whatever and couldn't put out his

story, his colleagues, his competitors would give him carbon copies of the stories that they had written for newspapers that were in different cities that could be mailed back, you know, in that person's absence. And occasionally you read of stories in which editors

received several stories from their Washington correspondents, all sent in independently by his colleagues. So saving the blacks demonstrated how much that the pack looked out for each other.

Now counteracting this pack journalism has been the eternal dream of the scoop, landing the big story that made the difference. And competition in journalism, of course, has always been intense. It's not always been between individual journalists, however. It's often between -- in different types of media. The rules of the press gallery and the clubs that have been created in Washington have been designed to sort of smooth over the frictions between reporters and their sources, but periodically, whenever the relations between politicians and the press get too cozy and too comfortable, some new form of media comes along to upset the whole established order.

So when this club was founded in 1908, newspaper reporters who had dominated Washington for a century before it were competing with muckraking magazine writers. By the 1920s and the 1930s, print reporters, whether daily or weekly or monthly, were competing with radio broadcasters who came along. By the 1940s and '50s, both the radio people and the print reporters were having to cope with television.

In each case, advertising revenue shifted dramatically from the old form of media into the new, actually much quicker than anyone ever anticipated.

From print to radio, from radio to television, was a -- forced changes in the way in which media operated, and that put additional pressures on the reporters who were the front lines of those medias, competing for their medias. And now, of course, print and broadcasting are competing with the Internet, and a whole sea of bloggers, who are -- some professional and some amateur and they're all over the place, but they are demanding a seat, essentially, at the table.

As a sign of the times, last week's Nielsen ratings for the 30 top online news sites put The Washington Post at number 22, The New York Times at number 12, Fox and CNN at number three and number four, and the Drudge Report at number one. (Laughter.) So, constant and sometimes unsettling competition has kept Washington journalism away from complacency. Each technological wave has fostered a greater media scrutiny of government because there's been more competition, and that's been a good and healthy factor for democracy.

When I studied the history of journalism, I came to the conclusion that the phrase "adversarial journalism" applies just as accurately to the relationship between journalists and different types of journalism as it does between them and the government.

So somewhere between the scoop and the pack, the club has provided a welcome respite for the working press. It's been formed

for the reasons of camaraderie. They've helped to shape the Press Club, its membership, and to define exactly what is legitimate reporting. In this respect, we are unique among world governments. In most countries, the government decides who is a reporter and hands out the press passes. Here, the government allows reporters to decide who is a real reporter and who should be accredited and admitted.

The press has guarded this prerogative jealously, and it has very -- has worked diligently to sort out the amateurs and the lobbyists and the one who are, in a sense, masquerading as journalists from the -- from those who should be here. Sometimes, however, it's been too narrow in its definition, and too slow to diversify. But ultimately, the galleries and the clubs have expanded to accommodate a far more diffuse news business. The Internet is not going to be the last of the challenges to the way in which news is reported.

And in this transformation, the National Press Club has been the central institution and a common ground for both newsmakers and news reporters. I think it would be hard to imagine the operation of the Washington press corps without this club.

So let me offer my congratulations to the National Press Club on completing its first century, and wish its members the best of luck with the next century. However, if the past is any indication of what the future is likely to be, it seems to me the best way to conclude is with the immortal words of Bette Davis in "All About Eve," when she said, "Buckle your seat belts. It's going to be a bumpy ride." (Laughter, applause.)

Thank you.

MS. SMITH: Thank you so much.

Legend and, in fact, our own history book has it that one of the reasons for the founding of the Press Club was to create an after-hours watering hole for journalists who couldn't find an open bar.

Is there any truth to that?

MR. RITCHIE: I suspect -- actually, the interesting thing about Washington, Washington was never quite as open a city as New York or Chicago, places where the reporters were used to being. And when they came here to Washington, they found it a little on the dry side, although there were a number of saloons in Washington.

But fortunately, during prohibition, there were twice as many speakeasies as there were during the -- saloons before that. So perhaps if the club had been founded a little bit later, it wouldn't have had that same need.

MS. SMITH: Do you see the same relationships today between -- among media reporters that you saw among reporters earlier in the club's history?

MR. RITCHIE: Well, the press has just gotten much more diverse. When I wrote my first book, which is about the 19th century, it was a lot easier. There was a lot more commonality between the reporters.

They were all newspaper reporters. They were all white men. They were all, essentially, from larger cities. They had a lot more in common. They'd been to university; it was a very well-educated group of people.

Over time, when I tried to write the second book, the population of the press corps changed so dramatically. You get a whole different group of people with magazine writers, radio reporters, television reporters. It has gotten so diverse that it seems to me that it makes more sense for clubs to perform that kind of bringing-together situation, because it's not as automatic, I think, as it was in the 19th century.

MS. SMITH: How about the relationship between legislators and reporters -- how's that changed over time?

MR. RITCHIE: Wonderful stories about the old days when this was newspaper row down here, and the members of Congress would all stop down here to read the reports, the next day's news, essentially, before it came out. And members of Congress and members of the press tended to be very close. In fact, what I found in the 19th century is members of Congress tended to own the newspapers that the reporters were working for. And they were much -- in those days, the papers were a lot more politically connected along the way.

I think today a lot of members of Congress wish that relationship was as close as it was in those days. And they probably wish that they were actually employing some of the reporters. But certainly all of them are just as interested in seeing their names in the newspapers and getting some air time as their predecessors were.

MS. SMITH: As a historian, how would you critique the memoirs written by politicians? What are some examples of well-done political autobiographies or memoirs?

MR. RITCHIE: That's interesting. Actually, when I was writing my books the best sources I had were the memoirs by the journalists. I used to go to the annual Vassar book sale and collect stacks of used books that were memoirs from journalists in the 19th and the 20th century. Journalist memoirs, by far, are better than the politicians' memoirs. You know, politicians spent their lives not telling you everything. And it's very hard for them to make that leap. I'd say the best journalists -- of politicians' memoirs are those who are safely retired. And some of them are more colorful than others, but actually the truth of the matter is even the best of the politicians' memoirs are usually ghost-written by a favorite journalist.

MS. SMITH: What's the backstory on the release of the McCarthy papers? Was there any resistance to making them public?

MR. RITCHIE: This is an interesting project. We started back in 1975 and 1976. And some of the first requests we got from researchers was to see the closed papers relating to Joe McCarthy. There's more written about Joe McCarthy than any other U.S. senator. And there's a lot of open material, but all of his closed hearings -- which he had 160 closed hearings over a two-year period. And we went to the committee and asked permission to publish them -- edit them and get

them out so that they could be ready for distribution.

But at the time in the 1970s there were still a few members of the committee who had served on the committee with Senator McCarthy. Some of the staff was still there. And there was a great concern that many of the witnesses had never testified in public. About 200 of the 500 witnesses had never testified in public.

And so there was a concern that somehow this would affect their reputation later. And the committee then chose to seal it for 50 years. It's a right under the rules of the Senate. So, if you wait long enough, time passes, and we noticed that we were approaching the year 2003, which was the 50th anniversary, and we went back to the committee, and the committee said, yes, that was not an issue.

We did check to find out who was still living. We found that 90-some-odd percent of the witnesses were deceased, which on the one hand was somewhat of a relief, because you weren't going to be embarrassing them in any way. On the other hand, it narrowed the number of sources that journalists had to interview. And it was quite interesting how many reporters sought out living former witnesses who were willing to talk and had gotten caught up into that press conference at the time. But it was a matter of feeling uncomfortable about records if they weren't absolutely certain about what was there.

We reproduced the records exactly as you would see them in the National Archives except that we cleaned up some of the transcription problems that the transcribers had at the particular time. But we footnoted everything and tried to make it as accessible and transparent as possible.

MS. SMITH: A member of the audience says, "Tell us about Joe McCarthy's role at the National Press Club."

MR. RITCHIE: Well, that's interesting. Joe McCarthy really had a hunger for publicity. He liked reporters. He helped reporters find apartments when Washington was short on apartments in those days. He brought wheels of Wisconsin cheese to the National Press Club. He spent a lot of time at the bar at the National Press Club. He was the kind of person people liked to sit and drink with.

And he went out in 1949, in the summer of 1949, he went to Charles Town, West Virginia, with the National Press Club, where the National Press Club had a Preakness Day race. And he actually rode in the Preakness race, and his horse came in last, actually, in that race. And the National Press Club invited me in and I went down to the basement and went through the photographic collection with the archivist, and I discovered there is a photograph of Senator McCarthy riding last in that race.

Now, that's six months before he went to Wheeling, West Virginia, and broke into the national news with his speech about -- I hold in my hand. But it was an interesting indication of his relationship with the press, and in fact it continued to be a very close relationship, even during his very stormy chairmanship. And that became a chapter in my book, "Reporting From Washington," about the reporters who sided

with McCarthy as well as reporters who sided against him, and what that did to their careers.

MS. SMITH: Are there any other groups of papers or documents you're working on to unseal, a la the McCarthy papers?

MR. RITCHIE: The nice thing about the Congress is that most of what it does, it really wants you to know about. So about 80 percent of what it does on a regular basis it actually publishes. That leave less of an amount of material for us historians to try to break through. But there are closed hearings of committees; and especially before the sunshine rules in the 1970s, there were a lot of closed hearings.

We have been working with the Foreign Relations Committee to open their closed hearings. That's usually the testimony of the secretary of State, the secretary of Defense, the head of the CIA, about issues that they felt they couldn't talk about in public. And we've been working with them for a number of years in producing -- we're up to about 1968 now in terms of releasing those. And we also work with other committees as well, but there's more interest in the national security things from the Foreign Relations Committee, and Armed Services Committee as well.

MS. SMITH: How often is your office used in major political debate on the Senate floor? And how has that information you've provided been used?

MR. RITCHIE: The Senate Historical Office is resolutely nonpartisan. We do not get involved in any current debate. If people want to know about trade policy or immigration policy, they call the Congressional Research Service. But if the senators happen to be filibustering an immigration bill, they can call us to talk about the history of filibusters and clotures, about the role of leadership and how it's changed. We get involved when things are definitely of historical nature, and certainly the Senate thinks of itself as an historic organization and has a lot of ongoing historical events.

Probably the busiest our office was, was during the president's impeachment trial in 1999, because they hadn't impeached a president since 1868. And interestingly enough, we had done an oral history with Floyd Riddick, who was the parliamentarian in the 1970s. He had actually planned for Richard Nixon's impeachment trial, which never took place, because Nixon resigned. And when we did that interview, and we thought, "Well, this is an historical oddity, but you know, it's never going to be used," well, it turned out that everybody wanted to read that oral history when they were preparing for the Clinton impeachment trial. And many of the things that they thought of in the 1970s, including putting TV in the galleries, was -- were now factored into what was going on in the 1990s. We got calls from the leadership of both parties. We got calls from senators on their way to town meetings, because they knew they were going to be asked questions of an historical nature. And so we were very much plugged into that.

On most issues we're not as intimately connected, but if it's a historical issue, certainly they -- both parties turn to us.

MS. SMITH: For the first time since 1960, a sitting U.S. senator will be elected president. Why has it been such a challenge for senators to win the presidency? And when senators become president, do they deal with that for their former body differently?

MR. RITCHIE: If both parties nominate a sitting senator, it will be the first time in history that two sitting senators have run against each other. There have only been two previous presidents who went directly from the Senate to the White House. One was John Kennedy in 1960. The other was Warren Harding in 1920. So there's a -- you know, a definite historic moment's about to happen.

In the in the 1880s a British observer named James Bryce wrote a book called "The American Commonwealth." And he has a chapter in it called "Why Great Men Never Become President." And he's trying to explain why the United States never elected Henry Clay, Daniel Webster or John C. Calhoun as president, but we elected Franklin Pierce and James K. Polk and James Buchanan. And part of it is that senators then and now have to vote on every controversial issue of the day, and those votes can be used against them when they run for president. It's hard to expand your base when you have offended them by one vote out of the hundreds that you've cast. It's easier to be ambiguous if you're a governor or if you're out of politics.

But actually that -- having -- running two sitting senators against each other will probably neutralize that issue in this particular election.

MS. SMITH: We don't have many examples to choose from, but of those few people who have become president who were senators, do they deal with their -- with the body of the Senate differently than somebody who was never in the Senate?

MR. RITCHIE: Actually, 16 presidents served in the Senate. It's only two of them that went directly from the Senate to the -- most of the others went via the vice presidency or some other office -- you know, the secretary of State or something else.

So the question is whether or not senators can deal with the Senate better than non-senators. Well, Warren G. Harding was not known as a stellar president, but he actually was able to do more with the Senate in terms of foreign policy than Woodrow Wilson had been -- Woodrow Wilson, one of the great geniuses who ever served as president, had written books about Congress, who in his first six years was eminently successful as president in getting things done and then failed with the Treaty of Versailles in his last two years. And Harding sort of picked up the pieces and was able to establish some sort of postwar foreign policy.

So his Senate relationships clearly helped him at that stage.

John Kennedy had a lot of troubles when he was president at first because a lot of senior senators, the old bulls, the people who chaired the committees, thought of him as a back-bencher, and they weren't as deferential to him as president when he first came in. I think the longer he was president, the more he was able to get from

Congress and the more stature he developed.

But his successor, Lyndon Johnson, was -- (inaudible) -- the master of the Senate. He was the super Senate majority leader. And so much of what happened in the later 1960s in getting Kennedy's program through and other programs came through because Johnson knew the Senate better than most of the sitting senators did at the time.

MS. SMITH: The word "unprecedented" gets tossed around at Senate press conferences quite a bit, and we want to know, is there really anything new under the (sun ?)? But more specifically, what are the most noteworthy developments in the Senate in the last decade or so?

MR. RITCHIE: The most frustrating thing for those of us in the Senate Historical Office is reporters who are calling to say, "Something has just happened; is this the first time it's ever happened?" The suggestion is there's only a story here if it's the first time. And after 200 years, there's very little that's the first -- we get these calls from senators occasionally as well; you know, "Am I the first senator to be governor, representative and senator from my home state?" Well, actually there are 101 others in that category. But if you should stand on your left foot when you're doing it, you might get into that category. (Laughter.) We have to break a lot of hearts, in other words, in the process.

There are variations. Like I said, for instance, this will be the first election which two sitting senators ran against, so there's still some possibilities of a Guinness Book of Records achievement along the way. But the Senate does change, even though it changes slowly in some respects. In many cases, it's not so much that it changes from inside as the country changes around it from the outside.

And probably the most startling change in the 30 years since Dick Baker and I have been there has been the nature of the two political parties. And that is, when we first got started, the two political parties were very much internally divided. There were as many moderate Republicans as there were conservative Republicans. There

were a lot of conservative southern Democrats. They were the chairs of most of the committees. No vote in the Senate was ever a party-line vote in the 1970s. Just didn't happen. And now practically every vote in the Senate is a party-line vote, and that's because the two parties have become very internally consistent and coherent, and there's much less of a middle ground for negotiation -- which makes it a lot harder in the Senate to get something done because you really can't do anything on a strictly partisan basis in the Senate, you always need a supermajority to get things going. So that's something that the Senate itself didn't design; it's what the voters design in every election. And it's the cards that are dealt to the majority and minority leader that they have to figure out how to play with.

MS. SMITH: And along that line, we read a lot that politics in Congress today has never been so divisive, but wouldn't the Civil War and the civil rights movement and other periods have even been more combustible? And talk about that a little bit, please.

MR. RITCHIE: When I talk about the Senate as a place of great

decorum, they say, well, what about your Senator Charles Sumner, who got beaten up in the Senate chamber? And I say yes, but that was by a House member who did that -- (laughter) -- a House member who objected to one of his speeches and came in with a cane and beat him over the head while he was sitting at his desk. And it was an indication of Sumner's popularity that no other senator came to his rescue while he was being beaten. (Laughter.) But his empty seat for three years while he was recuperating was a very vivid sign that the Civil War -- the coming Civil War was not going to be put off by political compromise, which they had been trying so desperately to do up to that point.

Yes, there have been great issues, emotional, divisive issues from day one in the Congress. It was Thomas Jefferson, when he presided as vice president under John Adams in the 1790s, who wrote the first manual of -- rules manual for the Senate. And one of the things he said was political issues are going to be emotional issues no matter what; what we have to do is diffuse them by being a little bit politer to each other. So he starts the practice that you can't mention another member by name, you can't criticize their state, you've -- we've this sort of -- you know, get the "my distinguished senior senator from the great state of" language that started then and is still part of the Senate. And the Senate places a huge premium on decorum.

But the issues have periodically been extremely divisive, and it's nothing new in that sense. It's something that you could find certainly in reading through the record. And actually the record today is a little more honest than it used to be because before C-SPAN started covering the debates, members could easily remove the insulting remarks they'd made the night before. For instance, the reference to another senator as a "rancid tub of butter" disappears from one day to the next, for instance, in the process. (Laughter.) So it was said about Homer Capehart, and I believe it was said by

Wayne Morse if I'm not mistaken. But in any case, it was noted by the reporters in the press gallery but did not appear in the next day's Congressional Record. So I think you could say that hot tempers have always been part of the political process.

MS. SMITH: We're almost out of time, but before asking the last question, a couple of important matters to take care of.

First, I'd like to remind those of you who might be near a TV tonight that the WETA will be airing our documentary at 10:00 tonight, so hope you can watch that.

And then some upcoming lunches. April 16th, Janet Murgasey (sic), who is -- Murguia, I'm sorry -- president and CEO of the National Council of La Raza, will be our speaker. On April 24th, Charles Overby, chairman and CEO of the Freedom Forum and CEO of the Newseum will be here. And on April 28th, Dan Glickman, chairman and CEO of the Motion Picture Association, will be our guest.

Second, I'd like to present our guest with our centennial gift, which is "Reliable Sources: 100 Years of the National Press Club," our history book. And so I'm glad you told us that the story about

the liquor is correct. (Laughs, laughter.)

And for my last question, usually I like to ask something that's a little cheeky or humorous, and usually I know the answer. I'm taking this one on faith. (Laughs.) Did you ever have a pickle sandwich at the National Press Club bar? And why? (Laughter.)

MR. RITCHIE: As a matter of fact, I have never had a pickle sandwich at the National Press Club bar. (Laughter.) I'm not sure why. But I always trust the advice I get from veteran correspondents, and I'm sure one of them probably advised me not to have a pickle sandwich at the Press Club bar. (Laughter.)

MS. SMITH: Thank you so much. (Laughs, applause.)

I'd like to thank all of you for coming today. And I'd also like to thank National Press Club staff members Melinda Cooke, Pat Nelson, Jo Anne Booze, Howard Rothman for organizing today's lunch. And thanks to the NPC library for its research. The video archive of today's lunch is provided by the National Press Club Broadcast Operations Center. Press Club members can access free transcripts of our luncheons at our website, www.press.org, and non-members may purchase transcripts, audio and video tapes by calling 1-888-343-1940. For information about joining the Press Club, please contact us at 202-662-7511.

Thank you. We're adjourned. (Sounds gavel.)

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