

Internal MemorandumInterview with Miss Margaret Myers (Mrs. Haggott Beckhart)

I asked Miss Myers to lunch in order to try to secure her cooperation in the effort to get the H. Parker Willis papers moved intact from the Willis house on Staten Island to a responsible repository, preferably Columbia University Library. It took no great effort to persuade Miss Myers that the collection would be more valuable if it was intact than though it was sorted and culled by some member of the family. She said that her husband, Dr. Haggott Beckhart of Columbia University, had recently a biography of Parker Willis for the Dictionary of American Biography, and that this connection together with an old friendship with Parker Willis might act as a stepping stone for conversation with the Willis boys about the papers.

At the same time she put in a warning note by way of a small incident which was illustrative. It seems that H. Parker Willis was born in Elmira, New York, but he did not like Elmira and preferred to have been born in Massachusetts. (Who's Who states that he was born in Weymouth, Massachusetts.) In the biography Dr. Beckhart had used the authentic birthplace, much to the distress of Mrs. Willis who thought that her husband should be allowed to go down to posterity as born where he chose to say he had been born. On the other hand, a sister of Dr. Willis who lives in Chicago was a sturdy defender of the fact. Miss Myers was not sure that Dr. Beckhart would be as welcome in the Willis family, having refused this concession to Dr. Willis' preference, as he might be otherwise.

The incident sheds a curious and interesting light on the veracity of this very pugnacious and effective worker for the Federal Reserve System. Miss Myers said that he had been a classical scholar before he went into economics, and was deeply learned in Greek and Latin history. She seemed to suggest that his imagination at times got the better of him, but this

may have been an unwarranted inference on my part. In any event, this curious business of the birthplace does shed light on controversies which took place between him and other individuals in the early days with whom he did not agree.

Miss Myers wrote her Ph.D. thesis under Willis, at Columbia, but did not have very much contact with him at that time. He was a distant figure of great repute, rather than a warm personal friend. It was as Mrs. Beckhart that she became more closely acquainted with him, and her husband's friendship is deeper and covers a much greater period of time.

In about 1920 Miss Myers came to work for the Federal Reserve Bank of New York. In that capacity she knew Carl Snyder and considered him a most interesting personality. I spoke to her of the decline in close cooperation between Mr. Snyder and Mr. Strong, and she said that Snyder was under a cloud toward the latter years of his service. She had no particular reason to assign for this unless it was the coming in of Dr. Burgess with his academic degrees and his meticulous critical sense. She was a young employee, not far advanced in the hierarchy, and her observations on this subject were necessarily casual.

She said at one point that Dr. Beckhart thought he might do some writing on the history of the Federal Reserve System. Whether this remark was merely casual or intended as a trial balloon, there is no way of knowing. She said that she thought he could by now do detached and dispassionate work on the subject. He had been closely with Dr. Willis, was a devoted pupil, and had taken Dr. Willis' attitude that the Federal Reserve System had been betrayed by its operators into something which the founding fathers did not accept. She now felt that whether or not he had shed this attitude, he could look at it without the heat of earlier years.

She said that Dr. Beckhart had a leave of absence for the year 1956-57, that he would spend the first half of this with her in Poughkeepsie, and that in the spring they would both go to Australia. She thought that he might have a Fullbright Fellowship, and she herself had some assigned research to do there. It was obvious that the Australian trip was something of a holiday, but a holiday with a purpose.

Miss Myers will let us know whether or not she has any success ~~XX~~ either herself or with the aid of Dr. Beckhart in getting the Willis papers to Columbia. It was necessary to assure her that Columbia would welcome them, as she thought that the Library was completely crowded and unable to accept anything else.

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MARCH 28, 1956: A news note in the New York Times concerning a new law library and other buildings which Columbia expects to erect indicates that there will be a great increase of library space and especially for the economics and business library. This may make the whole project of bankers' collections much more viable.

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