

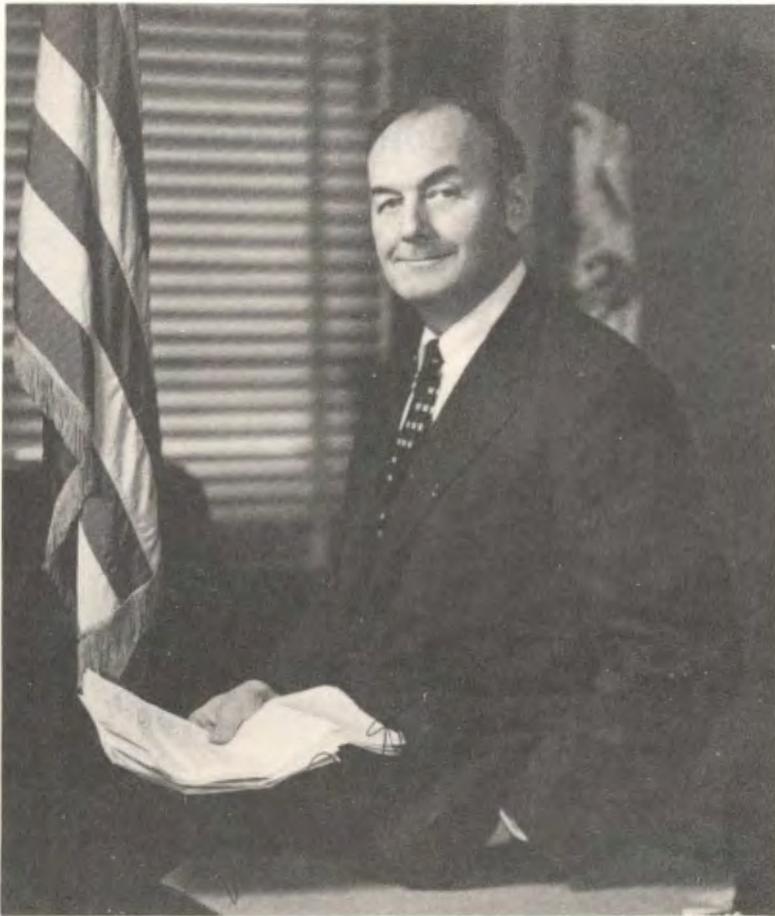
# Honest John Williams



U.S. Senator  
from Delaware

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Carol E. Hoffecker



**Senator John J. Williams. Photograph by Robert Gifford. Courtesy of the University of Delaware Library.**

# HONEST JOHN WILLIAMS

## U.S. Senator from Delaware

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DELAWARE

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# Acknowledgments

In the years before he died, Senator John Williams gave considerable thought to the disposition of his papers. When he left Washington in January 1971, the voluminous collection of letters, speeches, reports, scrapbooks, photographs, and other memorabilia that he had created and collected during his twenty-four years in the U.S. Senate was transferred to his feed company office in Millsboro, Delaware. There, he and his long time secretarial assistant, Eleanor Lenhart, culled the material to destroy unsolicited letters that contained unproven accusations against individuals. This attentiveness to protecting the reputations of innocent people was characteristic of the man who had earned the title as “the conscience of the Senate.” Equally characteristic was his decision that the papers should ultimately find a home where they could be available to “the citizens of Delaware.” Shortly after the senator’s death, his widow, Elsie Williams, and his daughter, Blanche Williams Baker, fulfilled the senator’s wish by donating his papers to the University of Delaware.

When the collection arrived at the University of Delaware Library in July 1988, it was processed by a young assistant librarian, L. Rebecca Johnson (now L. Rebecca Johnson Melvin). Over the next few years she organized this mass of material, discarded duplicates, and prepared a comprehensive guide to a collection that now occupies nearly 150 linear feet of shelf space in the library’s Special Collections. In the process of this endeavor, Rebecca Melvin became a most knowledgeable and enthusiastic promoter of the Papers of John J. Williams. Her organization of the senator’s materials, and *Guide* to their use, provide a clear map through a massive and many-sided collection.

I first encountered the Williams collection in 1991 while doing research for a book about the Federal District Court for Delaware. Impressed by the senator’s refusal to bow to pressure from state Republican Party leaders to nominate an upstate corporate lawyer to the U.S. District Court for Delaware, I decided to explore the Williams papers more thoroughly. In 1993, when I described my

intention to Rebecca Melvin, she suggested that I begin my enquiry with the senator's scrapbooks of news clippings and magazine articles. Wisely, as it turned out, I did not ask how many of these there were. Had I known that there were forty-five large volumes, my enthusiasm for undertaking this project might have evaporated before the research was begun. As I persevered, first through the chronologically organized scrapbooks, then later through office files, correspondence, committee files, speeches, and other materials, the good sense of Rebecca Melvin's initial suggestion became ever more clear.

From the outset, one of my goals in writing a biography of John J. Williams has been to better understand the history of Sussex County, Delaware and, most particularly, the spectacular emergence of that county's poultry industry since its beginnings in the 1920s. The University of Delaware's College of Agriculture's library provided useful materials on that subject, but I also learned a great deal about Sussex, its poultry industry, the town of Millsboro, and John Williams's relations to his home surroundings through interviews with a number of Sussex residents who included my university colleague, William H. Williams; John G. Townsend, Jr.'s biographer, Richard B. Carter; and the present leader of Townsend's poultry firm, Coleman Townsend. Millsboro residents who provided valuable insights into the town and its favorite son included John Williams's close friend, the late Wilbur S. Shockley; former majority leader of the State Senate, Richard Cordrey; and a neighbor, E. Edward Carey, Jr. Other Sussex County natives who helped to fill in gaps about Sussex history were Grace and William Lowe of Lewes and Ronald F. and Rebecca Dodd of Georgetown.

Political figures who interacted with Senator Williams and consented to interviews included the Honorable Elbert Carvel, twice governor of Delaware, who ran against the senator in 1958 and 1964, and Senator William V. Roth, who replaced Williams in the Senate and currently chairs the Senate Finance Committee on which Williams served during most of his political career. Both of these men provided useful and interesting tales about John Williams. Another important source of first-hand recollections was the Honorable Michael Mansfield of Montana who was Senate Majority Leader during Williams's final decade in Washington and, despite belonging to a different political party, was among John Williams's closest personal friends in the Senate.

Others who assisted my enquiries in important ways included Richard Bayard, currently chairman of Delaware's Democratic Party, who graciously shared with me the political scrapbook of his

father, Alexis I. du Pont Bayard, John Williams's opponent in the 1952 election. Federal District Court Judge Caleb Wright, the Sussex lawyer whom Williams insisted upon appointing to the federal bench, told me about his relationship with the senator, and the Honorable G. Burton Pearson, a former judge of Delaware's Supreme Court and a member by marriage of the du Pont family, gave me insight into the controversial DuPont-GM divestiture. Robert F. Kelly, the late J. Allen Frear's legislative aide, was also a valuable source on the complexities of the DuPont divestiture controversy, while Littleton Mitchell, former leader of Delaware's NAACP, provided a very useful perspective on the senator's interaction with the state's civil right's leaders. Others who assisted this project by supplying information on specific points included Marjorie J. Tilghman, Yvonne Townsend Smith, and Marilyn Cooper.

The most important subjects of interviews about John Williams were his daughter, Blanche Williams Baker, her husband Raymond Baker, and his former assistant, Eleanor Lenhart Hoefler. The Bakers and Hoeflers invited me into their homes near Millsboro, answered questions all morning, served lunch, and resumed responding to questions for the balance of the afternoon. Without their assistance this biography would have been denied a strong sense of the human being behind the speeches, press clippings, and the constituent correspondence. Blanche Baker also made available family photographs, some of which are reproduced in this book.

Throughout this project I had excellent and enthusiastic help from a corps of graduate students at the University of Delaware who, supported by University research money, undertook to search out documentation on a variety of topics. Their endeavors not only saved me a great deal of time, but also provided thoughtfully rendered analyses of several important issues. Neva Specht collected census data on Sussex County. Douglas Jerolimov tracked down the senator's land holdings in the Sussex County Recorder of Deeds Office and analyzed his findings. Jessica Elfenbein uncovered information on the Bobby Baker case, and her husband, Robert Finestine, Esq., amassed legal materials pertinent to the DuPont-GM divestiture. Gary Daynes analyzed Williams's voting record in the Senate, and James Honaker, an especially able undergraduate, wrote a paper that explained how John Williams applied his conservative principles to various types of legislation. Among the most valuable contributions was that of the late Richard E. Powell, who collected and studied materials concerning the evolution of the Delmarva poultry industry. Richard's subsequent tragic death cut short a most promising career in the field of agricultural history. Finally,

James Godwin leant his editorial assistance by putting the endnotes in proper form and Karen Druliner's expert editing improved the flow of several sections.

Much of the research and writing of this book were done in short bursts lasting an hour or even less amid the many responsibilities of a college professor who was also, during the early years of this project, serving in an administrative post. I am, therefore, particularly grateful to the University of Delaware for granting me a full year of sabbatical leave in 1995–96 and especially to University President, David P. Roselle, who provided me with a fine office in his office suite near the center of campus and the library, away from other distractions, where I composed the first draft of most of the manuscript during that year. I am also very indebted to Dianna DiLorenzo, the most speedy typist it has been my privilege to know, who typed the entire manuscript from my handwriting in her free time and has promptly and cheerfully submitted to my innumerable requests for revisions.

Finally, I am indebted to those among my colleagues and friends who read the manuscript and offered helpful editorial and substantive suggestions that have improved its scholarship and style. These people include Gary May, an accomplished biographer of post World War II figures in America's political history, who advised me on placing Williams in the Washington scene. William H. Williams, of the University Parallel Program in Sussex County, who first suggested that I study the career of Senator Williams (no relation), and corrected several errors of interpretation in the early chapters. Raymond Wolters, a colleague in the History Department, shared with me his knowledge of the civil rights movement and of conservative politics, and offered other editorial suggestions, and another colleague, Anne Boylan, who read the manuscript carefully, caught many errors, and made useful suggestions that improved several sections. Finally, I am indebted to Barbara E. Benson, Director of the Historical Society of Delaware, on whose fine editorial judgment I have long relied.

With the help of so many knowledgeable and generous people, many of the original manuscript's errors and infelicities have been corrected, and gaps in the argument have been filled. Readers can blame any remaining mistakes in fact or judgment on me.

# HONEST JOHN WILLIAMS



# Introduction

He seemed an unlikely U.S. Senator, this chicken-feed dealer from an obscure village on the remote agrarian near-island called the Delmarva Peninsula. His speaking voice was so inadequate that Senate watchers called him “whispering Willie,” his formal education had ended one year shy of earning a high school diploma, his life experiences had followed a narrow path, and he had held no previous government office. Even in small Delaware, few knew him when he was first elected to the Senate, and hardly anyone in Washington was prepared to take him seriously. Yet this seemingly miscast man was destined to serve in the Senate longer than any Delawarean before him and to earn the title “the conscience of the Senate.” Perhaps the term “integrity” would have suited better, for that is the single word that best sums up the gift that John James Williams brought to the United States government and to the American people.

John Williams’s career in Washington began in January 1947 and ended in January 1971. He served in the Senate during the presidencies of five men: Harry S. Truman, Dwight D. Eisenhower, John F. Kennedy, Lyndon B. Johnson, and Richard M. Nixon. It was the period in which the United States accepted world leadership, fought two frustrating Asian wars, went through a revolution in civil rights, and saw the expansion of the welfare state. Williams played only a minor role in creating the policies that guided these historic developments. His vision aimed neither toward a more interventionist foreign policy nor toward a more liberal state, but toward a more principled, fair-minded, and honest one. His name did not appear on any landmark legislation, he led no crusades for new programs, nor was he a political conciliator, coalition builder, or kingmaker. During his four terms in the Senate, the Republicans were in the majority only twice—in the 80th Congress when he was a freshman and again in the 83rd when he was still too junior to acquire a chairmanship. Williams’s significance came from his willingness to devote time and effort to analyzing the federal budget in search of waste and fraud. In that endeavor he concentrated on those areas

that he best understood, especially agriculture and finance. Ironically, his investigations largely ignored military spending, although it was by far the most rapidly expanding element in the federal budget. The likely explanation is that he was self-conscious about his ignorance of defense and felt the need to specialize.

Williams was not an intellectual, a systematic thinker, or an ideologue, but he came to Washington with a set of principles firmly implanted in his mind. He believed that the government must live within its means. Debt was an evil that, if left unchecked, would destabilize the economy and destroy the nation. He believed that government bureaucracy anywhere, anytime, was subject to unfair manipulation and corruption that could never be completely eradicated, but could be held in check by constant vigilance. He believed that, in nearly all instances, the workings of the free market were to be preferred over the imposition of artificial government controls, and that programs allegedly designed to help the poor often helped the rich. He believed that the mandates of the U.S. Constitution extended to all Americans regardless of race or gender but that, in the achievement of human brotherhood, government programs could be no substitute for religious and ethical teaching. Guided by faith, he made no effort to impose his beliefs on others, only to call them to live up to their own. He championed an amendment to allow school prayer, not to give the government influence over religion but to support the moral authority of the home, the school, and the community. And, perhaps most important, he believed that, in fulfilling the watchdog role that he assumed, fairness should begin with careful attention to fact gathering, honest assessment, and a scrupulous effort to protect the reputations of the innocent.

Williams's unwavering adherence to these concepts was his guiding star, his gyroscope in a complex sea of opinions and pressures. Sometimes his principles led him to take stands that in retrospect seem shortsighted, as in his vote against the Marshall Plan. Sometimes they got him into trouble with powerful constituents from his home state, as in his opposition to a cheap and easy solution to the DuPont-General Motors divestiture. Sometimes they brought him into conflict with presidents, even those of his own party, as in his refusal to support one of Richard Nixon's nominees for the U.S. Supreme Court. Yet it was Williams's consistent application of those principles to the areas of the federal government that he understood best that earned him the respect of his colleagues in the Senate and made him a dangerous foe for occupants of the White House. Williams's perceived political invulnerability in his home state allowed him the luxury of ignoring interest groups and lobby-

ists. He did not need their support, financial or otherwise. His sizable correspondence from every part of the nation testified to ordinary Americans' yearning for the nation to equate patriotism with honesty and their trust in this principled man who embodied that quest and looked out for their interests fairly and consistently. He became the pride of Delaware, the state's most successful and admired political figure, who four times defeated the very best, most respected political figures of Delaware's Democratic Party.

John Williams did not appear to his constituents as an especially warm personality. To them he seemed cool but observant. He gave his total attention to listening to people who appeared before him and was known for his ability to keep confidences. Among his greatest assets were patience and perseverance. He had an accountant's familiarity with spreadsheets, an analytical mind, and the willingness to commit himself to endless hours of toil to find out rascals. Among his most significant allies were a number of newspaper reporters who learned that this U.S. Senator could be trusted to keep confidences and to dig out facts, who would never indulge in spreading dubious, politically inspired fabrications. Williams never attempted to persuade others through the use of rhetorical devices, personal entreaties, or bargains for support. The ammunition for his investigations came from facts, most often taken from the government's own accounting reports.

The founders, whose intention was to make the U.S. Senate the house that would attract the nation's best, most highborn, and brightest, might not have thought a man of John Williams's background exactly what they had in mind, but Williams's political career demonstrated that it takes people of many backgrounds and perspectives to make up an effective legislative body. The Senate, and indeed the whole nation, was a better place because of John Williams. He held every proposed program, every proposed tax break, every budget, every government agency to the highest standards of purpose and accountability. While other politicians talked of integrity, John Williams seemed to embody it. He went to Washington to make the federal government more accountable for its actions, and to a remarkable degree he succeeded in doing so. His service was a tonic for the nation's soul. In examining his story, we see an approach to public service that is always needed but too often neglected. Amid the political maneuvering, image making, and self-advancing manipulations that take up so much energy in Washington, political figures like John Williams who are truly dedicated to the goals of integrity and fairness will always be needed to maintain a government worthy of the people's trust.

# 1

## By Sussex Shores

John James Williams was born at Bayard, Delaware, a mere dot on the rural map of Baltimore Hundred in southeastern Sussex County, on May 17, 1904. He was the ninth child of Elbert Frank and Annie Eliza Hudson Williams whose family clans were deeply rooted in the flat, sandy coastal soil of southeastern Sussex. An earlier Williams, Ezekiel, born in 1752, had helped to found a Methodist church at Indiantown near the Indian River in 1784 and had joined a local society dedicated to the abolition of slavery. Ezekiel's son, Ezekiel Clows Williams, John Williams's grandfather, born in 1823, created a hamlet called Williamsville that, like similar places in an overwhelmingly rural environment, consisted of Ezekiel's house, a steam-powered mill, and a store, which was owned by a family named Adkins. Ezekiel had enough education to pass for a learned man in his community where, in addition to milling, he taught school and provided legal advice to his neighbors. His death in 1878 resulted from a bizarre accident at the Adkins's store, the details of which remain in dispute. According to one version, Williams was teasing his friend Mrs. Adkins about her mathematical ineptitude while he assisted her in drawing up a "due bill," a device used in the barter economy of country stores to credit a customer's account. Perhaps nursing some embarrassment, the woman playfully raised an old pistol in the air and it fired, accidentally killing Ezekiel Williams. An alternative story has it that the gun went off when it fell to the floor from a bolt of cloth.<sup>1</sup>

John's father, Frank Williams, was in his teens when he was orphaned by his father's death, his mother having died earlier while giving birth to twins. Six years after the tragedy, in July 1884, Frank married Annie Hudson, one of twelve children of a prosperous local farmer. Their first child, a daughter named Sarah Ellen, was born in May 1885. Another baby, Ida Smith, arrived in 1886, followed by Mary Eva in 1889, Elbert Frank, Jr., in 1891, Harry Ezekiel in 1894, Annie Kate in 1897, Roxie Mary in 1899, Olive

Miller in 1902, John James in 1904, Blanche Avery in 1908, and Preston Lee in 1912. By the time of the last baby's birth the Williams family owned a farm in Dagsboro Hundred southwest of the town of Frankford. The Williams's farm consisted of one hundred acres, a bit larger than the county's average farm size of eighty-five acres. In nearly all respects the family was very typical of its neighbors. Like them, the Williamses raised corn, were committed Methodists, and Frank voted the Democratic ticket.<sup>2</sup>

The Sussex County that John Williams knew as a boy had changed little since his grandfather's day in the mid-nineteenth century. Sussex is the largest, most southern, most isolated, and most traditional of Delaware's three counties. The county sits squarely in the middle of the Delmarva Peninsula, the two-hundred-mile spit of land that separates the Chesapeake Bay to the west from the Atlantic Ocean and the Delaware River and Bay. The peninsula comprises nearly all of Delaware, as well as the eastern shores of Maryland and Virginia. Located near the center of the peninsula, Sussex looks both eastward to the sea and westward toward Maryland and the Chesapeake Bay. Only one of Sussex County's three land-based sides borders Delaware. To the south and west Sussex is connected to the eastern shore of Maryland.

In the seventeenth century when English kings were awarding American land on the basis of crudely drawn maps of unexplored territories, Sussex County became the object of a fierce dispute between William Penn, the proprietor of Pennsylvania and of "the three lower counties on Delaware" that he called New Castle, Kent, and Sussex, and Cecil Calvert, Lord Baltimore, proprietor of Maryland. Calvert and Penn both issued titles to the land that comprises Sussex County and the Marylanders even resorted to military attacks on Penn's Sussex County seat, the maritime town of Lewes, located immediately northwest of Cape Henlopen, where the Delaware Bay meets the Atlantic Ocean. The proprietors' dispute was ultimately settled in less lethal fashion by the English court of Chancery, but not until after the original litigants were long dead. It was not until the Mason-Dixon survey in the 1760s that the boundary was established between the two proprietorships. Sussex Countians paid heavily for the lengthy conflict in the failure of their region to develop as rapidly or as smoothly as did undisputed areas to the north and south. It was not until the eve of the Revolutionary War that residents of Baltimore Hundred, in the most southeasterly portion of Sussex, were confirmed in their legal identity as citizens of Penn's Sussex County. Prior to that time the Lords Baltimore, from whom the hundred took its name, had issued deeds, collected

the taxes, and generally commanded the allegiance of the inhabitants.

The geography of Sussex County evolved from the land's relation to the Atlantic Ocean, which had once covered its entire ninety-four square mile land mass. The eastern part of the county tilts toward the Atlantic and the Delaware estuary, the western part toward the Chesapeake. Like similar coastal areas in Maryland, North Carolina, and New Jersey, the major features of southeastern Sussex are its shallow bays—Rehoboth Bay, Indian River Bay and Assawoman Bay—which draw their brackish waters from both inland streams and ocean inlets. These bays line the eastern edge of the county and are separated from the sea by only a narrow strip of grass-covered sand dunes. Inland from the bays, the lowlands in the south-central portion of the county are dominated by wooded swamps filled with tea-colored water that flows southward into Maryland's Pocomoke River. In colonial times, the swamps covered a larger area, but still today a profusion of bald cypress, white cedar, black gum and holly grow from their thick black muck. Northeastern Sussex drains toward the Delaware Bay and the Atlantic Ocean; its shallow, meandering rivers, principally the Mispillion, Broadkill, and Indian Rivers, provided settlers access to the Delaware River cities of Wilmington and Philadelphia. By contrast, the principal river of western Sussex, the Nanticoke, flows westward into the Chesapeake Bay. As recently as the early twentieth century when John Williams was a boy, there were forests of loblolly pine, oaks, and an undergrowth of holly everywhere throughout the county separating the cleared fields. These trees still grow in the mild climate and sand-mixed soil of Sussex County.

When Henry Hudson first sighted the Delaware Bay in 1609, the Lenni Lenape and Nanticoke Indians occupied the lower peninsula. The natives were never completely displaced by the settlers who followed. Some Nanticokes intermarried with the newcomers from Europe and Africa and remained on lands adjacent to the Indian River Bay. There, among the pine forests and swamp lands, the Native Americans grew maize and harvested the multitude of clams, oysters, crabs, and fish that filled the bay. Two groups claiming Indian descent inhabited the pinewoods and farmlands adjacent to the Indian River and its bay. One group believed they were descended from the Nanticoke Indians, the other, called "Moors," said that they had a common ancestor, a Moorish settler, who had married an Indian. Although the Moors and Indians appeared to be generalized "yellow men" to outsiders, they were intent upon maintaining their racial distinctions. Neither group acknowledged the African blood

or European blood that others believed had been interwoven into their pan-racial ancestry.<sup>3</sup> These peoples lived apart, maintaining their social lives separate from the Anglo and African American societies that surrounded them.

Colonial Sussex was not an egalitarian society. Much of the county was divided into large tracts to which dynastically minded owners gave such whimsical names as Stockley's Adventure, Pearson's Choice, Evans' Venture, Jacob's Struggle, and Hap-Hazard.<sup>4</sup> The largest colonial land owner, Colonel John Dagworthy, a veteran of the French and Indian War who held two patents amounting to 20,000 acres of timberland and farm land, lived near Frankford in a house approached through an imposing avenue of trees.<sup>5</sup> The English settlers, whether they held their land patents from the Penns or the Calverts, were attracted by the county's commercial possibilities. Sustained principally by raising corn and maintaining farm animals, they and their servants, slaves and tenants, dug ditches to drain the swampland, cut down the pine and holly, and concentrated on growing tobacco and exploiting the area's rich timberlands, particularly the cedar and cypress, whose rot-resistant woods were highly prized for shingles by builders in Philadelphia and other coastal towns. Typically, in the colonial era, Sussex Countians built their houses of cypress shingles, and some of these buildings have survived into the present. The process of cutting the cypress for shingles on such a grand scale changed the ecology of the swampland. When an area was clear-cut, sunlight reached the ground and the swamp floor dried into a peat that was highly flammable. The former swampland became subject to devastating fires which produced clouds of black smoke that choked people for miles around. These long-lived fires often went underground among the roots of the harvested trees only to reappear in a different part of the swamp. Amid such fiery drama, arable land grew at the expense of timberland.<sup>6</sup>

Tobacco, the cash crop of the Chesapeake, was the county's chief crop in the eighteenth century and the cause for the introduction of African slaves into Sussex County, especially into the Nanticoke River valley adjacent to Maryland. But as the century progressed, the tobacco culture dwindled and was replaced by more general farming. The importation of slaves became more rare and manumissions more common. There evolved a working class of free blacks—mostly tenant farmers, workmen and waterman—who grew corn and tobacco, cut lumber, and harvested various kinds of seafood from the bays and rivers.

The conclusion of the Penn-Calvert dispute ended neither the dis-

turbances that had earlier characterized Sussex County nor the area's sense of isolation. During the American Revolution, a number of the county's landed gentry refrained from helping the American cause and some became outright tories. The war confirmed the mutual suspicions that divided Sussex County from the rest of Delaware and further separated Sussex Countians from the outside world. Ethnicity played a significant part in that political and social standoff, for the leaders of Sussex were overwhelmingly of English stock and resented the Scotch-Irish Presbyterians from upstate who pressed for separation from England.

In a book entitled *The Stolen House*, the historian and folklorist Bernard Herman has explored the interaction of social and economic factors that influenced the tightly bound society of post-Revolutionary central Sussex. He discovered that during the first two decades of the nineteenth century only half of the inhabitants of this swampy region were land owners and that the richest ten percent of the taxables owned two-thirds of the wealth.<sup>7</sup> Yet, despite those seeming social differences, most people, whether owners or tenants, lived in one- or two-room houses. Though the inhabitants appeared to be independent, they were, he found, closely bound by reciprocal relationships that grew out of the power of the land owners to control the timber trade that was the source of survival for all. Just as the swamp seemed impenetrable to outsiders, so did the "system of shared expectations, reciprocal obligations, and common knowledge" that those residents shared.<sup>8</sup> Herman observed that the seeming simplicity of the farmers' and foresters' homes obscured their owners' involvement "in the commercial movements of a larger world."<sup>9</sup> Although the swamps had ceased to be the center of that commerce long before John Williams was born, the social values that Herman describes would have been familiar to him.

The most significant change in the lives of the county's people during the Revolutionary era was not in politics but in the advent of Methodism. John Wesley, Methodism's founder, was a minister in the Church of England who introduced an emotionally charged evangelical and pious spirit into the staid complacency that characterized the eighteenth-century English state church. Among the adherents of Wesley's reforms was the dedicated and resourceful Francis Asbury, whom Wesley had sent to America on the eve of the American Revolution. Asbury spent the war years on the Delmarva peninsula where he found a colleague in the Maryland farmer, Freeborn Garrettson. Those itinerant lay ministers proclaimed the sinfulness of man and Christ's power of redemption among the people of Delmarva during the 1770s, undeterred by

charges of Toryism that, for a time, drove Asbury to seek safety in the wilderness of western Kent County.

In April 1779, Freeborn Garrettson preached to an audience of two hundred at a clearing called Sound near Assawoman Bay in Baltimore Hundred. Many had walked ten to twelve miles to hear him. "They had been as sheep without a shepherd," he wrote, and were so moved by his message that they "appeared as if nailed to their seats . . . and weeping was on every side." Garrettson's host at Sound was a "Brother Williams," perhaps the Senator's great-grandfather Ezekiel, who became a founder of the Sound Methodist Church. Struck by the peoples' need for religious support in that remote area, Garrettson remained there for some time and continued preaching to enthusiastic crowds as often as four times daily. "I suppose the people in this part of the country had scarce heard any kind of preaching," Garrettson said, and he noted that through his effort "the wilderness and the solitary places began to bud and blossom as the rose; and many hearts did leap for joy. Hundreds who were asleep in the arms of the wicked one awoke, and were enquiring the way to Zion, with their faces thitherward."<sup>10</sup>

Methodism infused all life with the religious melodrama of a contest between good and evil in which each believer, assisted by the fire of the Holy Spirit, must hold aloft the banner of Christ in a world suffused with the devil's temptations to sin. Methodists believed that God extended grace to all people. Those who accepted the challenge of God's grace would strive to do God's will on Earth, as it was laid out for them in a number of specific actions that embrace charity toward others and responsibility for one's own behavior. It was an optimistic religion, not inclined toward inward contemplation so much as toward outward action. It was the faith in which John Williams was reared, and its tenets and practices were to play a major role in his life and his world view.

Historian William H. Williams, who has explored the conditions that made the peninsula's people so open to the Methodists' appeals, argues that the Methodist preachers who came into Sussex found a population uninspired by the emotionally restrained ceremonies of the Anglican Church and the social hierarchy that the church represented. Many had ignored church altogether, and even among faithful church goers there was little connection between religious belief and daily life. Prosperous farmers, as well as poor tenants, were prone to engage in excessive drinking, gambling, and dancing. This frolicsome behavior was associated with what Williams calls the "vener of culture" of the gentry who owned the large farms, set the social tone, and controlled local politics. The

gentry's culture was predicated upon a hierarchical social order that discouraged individual effort or ambition among those below the gentry class.<sup>11</sup>

Methodism offered a way out of this conundrum. Significantly, the original Methodists were English and theirs was seen as an "English" faith unlike the Presbyterianism of the Scotch-Irish. The Methodists' itinerant preachers proclaimed a path to individual salvation that required converts to turn away from the Devil's power and to embrace a purified, purposeful life free of alcohol and frivolous activities. Freeborn Garrettson observed that when he first came to southeastern Sussex County the people there were poor and preferred to hunt and fish rather than to farm, but after they converted to Methodism they tilled their fields and built better houses. Methodism's emphasis on the equality of all people before God also brought about a social revolution among a people who had been unexcited by America's political revolution. To the Methodists, equality extended not only to poor whites but also to black slaves and freed men, many of whom became enthusiastic adherents and a few of whom, notably Harry Hosier, Richard Allen, and Peter Spencer, became important Methodist preachers and leaders. In the early days of Methodist enthusiasm, this emphasis on brotherhood in Christ led adherents like Ezekiel Williams to demand the abolition of slavery, and, to remain in good standing, Methodist slave owners were strongly encouraged to free their slaves.<sup>12</sup> The religiously induced spurt of enthusiasm for racial equality lasted just long enough to insure the manumission of thousands of slaves on the peninsula in the 1790s and the first decade of the nineteenth century, but the deeply held racial prejudices of the whites eventually overcame their sense of Christian mission and by 1808 white Methodists were backing away from their initial support for racial brotherhood.<sup>13</sup> Black Methodists, at first welcomed into common congregations, came to feel unwelcome in predominantly white churches and founded their own African American Methodist churches.

By the early nineteenth century Methodism had become the dominant faith in Sussex County. Methodist churches appeared in every town, and the new religion attracted adherents from every level of society. As William H. Williams points out, the Methodists did much more than promise salvation, they created a new sense of "psychological security" that gave adherents the inner strength to surmount the difficult labor, loneliness, boredom, vicissitudes, and disappointments that characterized life in the economically depressed rural isolation of Sussex County.

The church was the center of what little social life people enjoyed. It encouraged neighbors to help one another in time of trouble, and it provided farm wives with opportunities to use their household skills in God's service. The Methodists even found a means to promote proper Methodist courtships at the camp-meeting revivals that took place each summer. But for all their willingness to be good wives, husbands, and neighbors, the Methodists were socially austere. In 1811 an Episcopal minister in neighboring Dorchester County, Maryland, characterized them as a "gloomy, morose, and sober" lot who were "uncharitable, backbiting and censorious."<sup>14</sup>

The great innovations in transportation and manufacturing introduced during the first half of the nineteenth century transformed many parts of America, including New Castle County, Delaware, which was at the forefront of the new technologies. But those powerful changes played only a modest role in Sussex County. Sussex white oak, pine, and other forest products were cut, sawed, and shipped to Philadelphia, Wilmington, and Baltimore, where they were used to construct houses, river steamers, schooners, railroad cars, and carriages. But while urbanization and industrialization expanded the exploitation of Sussex timber, the county's soil lost its fertility so that Sussex agriculture fell behind the highly productive corn- and wheat-growing regions of the trans-Appalachian West. Railroads came late to Sussex County. It was only in 1858, twenty years after the construction of a major interstate railroad through northern Delaware, that a railroad reached Seaford, the major town of western Sussex, and railroad construction into the eastern part of the county came only after the Civil War. Americans and foreigners alike eschewed the county, and many of its more ambitious young people left to seek new farms in the rich western lands or to make their mark in the growing cities of Baltimore, Wilmington, or Philadelphia. Those who remained were the descendants of the Native Americans, the English settlers and the Africans who had populated the county in colonial days. Their names—Burton, Derrickson, Waples, Pepper, Williams, Lingo, Tunnell, Marvel, and Houston—continue to be prominent in Sussex today.

Nineteenth-century Sussex was a place of contrasts as well as of homogeneity. Slavery, never very prevalent in the eastern portion of the county, had nearly died out there by the eve of the Civil War. But in western Sussex, with its water-borne ties to the Chesapeake, the "peculiar institution" retained some vigor until it was finally outlawed by the Thirteenth Amendment in 1865. Baltimore Hundred had the smallest population of black residents of any hundred

in the county. The absence of black residents in the county's south-eastern corner suggests that its farms could be managed by the farmer with the help of his immediate family without the additional support of slaves, hired hands, or tenants. By the 1860s when John Williams's parents were born there, some farmers in the hundred were improving their land with drainage ditches and fertilizers in anticipation of the construction of the railroad branch line that connected the Delaware Railroad from Wilmington to Milford, Georgetown, Millsboro, Frankford, Selbyville, and thence into Maryland's Worcester County. In other parts of the state, the railroad had heralded the development of a flourishing business in peaches and other fruits, a lucrative trade that the farmers of eastern Sussex hoped to join in.

But the promise of the railroad proved disappointing. Peach trees sickened from a disease called the "yellows" and Sussex farmers reverted to growing corn and wheat as their primary crops, supplemented by vegetables and some fruits that were processed locally in small canneries. Although the new ocean resort at Rehoboth attracted summer visitors from the cities, the rest of southeastern Sussex continued to be isolated and slow to change. Until late in the century, farmers cut their grain with hand-held sickles and their wives made homespun clothes. Conveniences such as cook stoves, reapers and thrashers were only introduced into the county slowly in the 1870s and 1880s. Most farmers hardly made enough to live. They fed their corn crop to their mules and kept a portion of the wheat crop to feed their families. Only what remained of the wheat, vegetables, and fruit was available for sale. Since grain brought in little income, farmers turned to cutting down holly trees to make Christmas decorations as a means to earn cash, thus destroying thousands of trees annually.<sup>15</sup>

This stagnant agricultural economy was not helped by Delaware's archaic system of public education, which was at its most perverse in poor rural areas where tax dollars were few and tiny, dilapidated, segregated one-room and two-room schools were many. Teachers, like John Williams's grandfather Ezekiel, provided instruction part-time as only one among numerous other obligations. In 1905, when John Williams was one year old, there were 265 schools throughout Sussex County, with an average of forty pupils enrolled per school. Most children attended school a few months each year for only a few years until they had mastered the rudiments that a life spent as a farmer was thought to require. Black children were hardly encouraged to attend school at all. Even many whites were illiterate, and few stayed on for high school.

As in many of America's rural communities, politics was an outlet for ambition, for entertainment, and for organizing society. Because John Williams was to make his mark in politics, it is important to understand the political history of the region from which he came. Since colonial times the voters of Sussex have tended toward a rigid conservatism that is in keeping with their traditional mode of life. In the early nineteenth century, the Federalist Party continued to win elections in Sussex County long after its pro-English, socially static policies had lost favor in most of the United States to Thomas Jefferson's Democrat-Republicans.<sup>16</sup> When the slavery issue dominated American politics in the 1850s, Sussex voters turned to the Democrat Party because it supported the "peculiar institution." Many people in the county, especially in the western portions, sympathized with the southern cause, and the party of Lincoln could count but a few stalwart adherents among the county's townsmen.<sup>17</sup> The Democrats continued to win elections in Sussex during Reconstruction because they opposed the Republicans' interventionist policies on behalf of the freedmen. By the late nineteenth century, most Sussex voters were powerfully convinced of the truth of Thomas Jefferson's contention that "that government is best which governs least." In their cash-poor economy they were willing to forego government services as the price for low taxes. Their Democratic political chieftains were Senator Thomas A. Bayard, a Wilmington lawyer whose family produced several generations of Delaware statesmen, and the Saulsbury brothers of Milford—Eli, Gove, and Willard. The Bayards and Saulsburys contested for control of the state party but generally closed ranks against the Yankee Republicans.

The centerpiece of Sussex County politics was Return Day, a popular political festival that took place on the Thursday following election Tuesday. Return Day originated in the early days of American independence when communications moved no faster than a horseman could traverse muddy roads. In that era it took two days to collect and count the votes from each polling place and to carry the returns to the county seat at Georgetown. Residents curious to learn the results gathered on that day to hear the clerk read out the winners from the courthouse that faced the town's circular green. As this custom grew, Georgetown's hoteliers and enterprising citizens laid on extra food and drink to sell to the anticipated crowds.

By the late nineteenth century, Return Day had become the county's most notable custom. Farm families from the four corners of Sussex arrived in the morning by train, on horseback, or in carts pulled by oxen, horses, or mules. The entertainment justified their

effort. Colorful booths and stalls were erected around the green where Georgetown's cooks, both black and white, served hot corn pone with black molasses, sweet potato biscuits, opossum, rabbit, fish, oysters, clams, fried chicken, hominy, beer, cider, apple jack, preserves, pickles, cakes, and the grandest of all, a steer roasted on a huge spit. Merchants displayed their stock in front of stores. At noon, when the election results were read from the courthouse, adherents of the winning party fired guns, cheered, and joined in a parade of marchers, horsemen, and politicians in carriages or on floats. In 1882, for example, when Charles Stockley was elected governor, he was invited to mount a float designed to resemble the U.S.S. *Constitution* adorned by Delaware's state symbol, the Blue Hen, and decorated with ribbons topped by a dried coon skin suspended from the mast. After the parade, band concerts, cock fights, and more opportunities to congratulate the winners, commiserate with the losers, and visit with friends and relatives followed. Return Day was a holiday that no Sussex farmer would willingly miss.<sup>18</sup>

In John Williams's youth, Sussex farm families such as his were deeply influenced by their Methodist faith, Democratic political convictions, and economic isolation. While farmers worked hard to earn only a few dollars, they generally lived comfortably. In 1914 in a Farmers' Day Address, Henry C. Conrad, a Delaware lawyer, Republican politician, and historian, aptly noted the proud self-sufficiency that characterized Sussex's cash-poor farmers. "We are not poverty stricken, we are not appealing for aid. We are well able to take care of ourselves," Conrad proclaimed. Sussex people, he said, are "strong and honest in character, frugal and provident in habit, keen but conservative in business, tender in domestic life, given to hospitality."<sup>19</sup> An old timer recalled of those days "You didn't have and you didn't want. You just had a happy time home with everybody."<sup>20</sup>

Neighborliness was a highly developed virtue among Sussex families. People watched out for one another to a degree that attracted the admiration of visitors. At hog-killing time, farm families traveled from farm to farm to assist one another. The men killed the hogs while the women made sausages. If a neighbor's wash failed to appear on the line on the usual day, her neighbor would check to see what was amiss, and, if the woman was sick neighbors would do her chores for her. People were not in the habit of locking their doors and were accustomed to borrowing from one another at will.<sup>21</sup> In contrast to the hierarchical society that had predominated a century earlier when Colonel Dagworthy maintained a gentry man's estate amid his 20,000 acres, society of the late nineteenth

and early twentieth centuries knew only one major social distinction: race.

Most farmers continued in the ways of their forbearers, but a few enterprising souls envisioned a new future for Sussex. The most successful of those entrepreneurs was John G. Townsend, Jr., a man who was destined to play a major role in the lives of Sussex County, the state of Delaware, and John J. Williams. Townsend was a native of Worcester County, Maryland, just south of the Delaware state line. Like many farmers' sons of that era, young Townsend attended a one-room school and had no opportunity to go to high school, but his intense curiosity and drive made up for this want of formal education. In Townsend's generation ambitious farm boys typically took off for the city, lured by the glitter and dynamism of the nation's rapidly growing urban economy. But John Townsend, a man who, throughout his long life, demonstrated an unerring eye for profitable ventures, sought his opportunities closer to home among the untapped resources of Sussex County, Delaware.<sup>22</sup>

Beginning as a telegrapher for the Delaware, Maryland, and Virginia Railroad he learned of the railroad company's need for lumber and, at the age of twenty, embarked on the first of his many business enterprises. With money borrowed from his father, he purchased lumber rights and a movable steam saw mill and moved with his young wife to Selbyville, Delaware. Soon Townsend was also investing in farmland to grow strawberries, a crop which provided a good cash return that he could use to buy more timberland. The strawberry business did so well that he became a solicitor, or middleman, who bought berries from farmers to sell to urban commission merchants. To maximize sales and reduce damage to berries in transit, Townsend introduced refrigerator cars to southern Delaware.<sup>23</sup>

Townsend became a force in Sussex agriculture in the 1890s at a time when improvements in transportation held the prospect for a more market-driven agricultural economy. But it was the vision and hustle of people like him who made possible a new era in the county's history. Fruits and vegetables became cash crops, canneries were built, and the railroad tied farmers to the growing urban markets.

Two decades before, midwestern farmers had made the bitter discovery that the railroads, which gave farmers their cash market, were more interested in maximizing their own profits than in assisting farm communities, and that railroads controlled politicians. Now this perverse reality belatedly struck Sussex County. Since the railroad owners and the leaders of the Democratic Party were often

the same people, Sussex Countians were ripe for a political revolt. Farmers and merchants in western Sussex had some leverage with the railroad because they could choose to ship their crops and canned goods down the Nanticoke River, but in eastern Sussex the railroad had a stranglehold on bulk transportation. According to Sussex historian and political observer Richard Carter, this difference explains why the Democratic Party continued to win elections in western Sussex through the twentieth century while the Republicans became a force in the eastern portion of the county. "The Democratic Party in lower Sussex, successful for so long, was more closed to outsiders than the Republicans," Carter asserts, and "the Democrats were bound tightly by bonds of family association, business arrangements and old time alliances."<sup>24</sup> The Republicans, although weak in southern Delaware, were strong in the more urban, industrial world of New Castle County where the business leaders and professional men who led the party demonstrated a "gentlemanly disdain for the downstaters."<sup>25</sup> Meanwhile, black males, who could be counted on to support the party of Lincoln, were kept from the ballot box by a poll-tax law that had been adopted by the Democratic legislature in 1873.

Those political relationships, the outgrowths of the post Civil War era, were about to undergo radical change. In 1889 a slick, fussily dressed, self-made Philadelphia gas magnate with the improbable name John Edward O'Sullivan Addicks, a resident of Claymont, Delaware, just south of the Pennsylvania line, appeared in Dover, Delaware, and announced to astonished Republican leaders that he intended to fill Delaware's vacant seat in the United States Senate as a Republican. Thus began an extended political donnybrook that, in the next decade, would remake politics in the First State.

Initially rebuffed by the legislators of both parties as an absurd choice, Addicks fought back with money, lots of it by Delaware's standards. The newcomer met with icy disdain among New Castle County's Republican leaders, but in Sussex County his appearance coincided with resentment against the Democrat-controlled railroad. Addicks seized the opportunity to gain political influence there. His apparent concern for the county's problems soon earned him a significant following, which was further assisted by his willingness to pay the poll taxes of poor residents, whether black or white. The outsider's growing influence brought about a schism within Republican ranks: the Regular Republicans, who were led by upstate elitist Civil War veterans General James A. Wilson and Colonel Henry A. Du Pont, and the Union Republicans, who sup-

ported Addicks. Viewed by the Regulars, the Union Republicans were hardly Republicans at all but rather a bunch of nobodies influenced solely by the crass manipulation of Addicks's money. But in southern Delaware support for Addicks represented the best means available to achieve "liberation . . . both from the Democrats and from the upstate Republican organization."<sup>26</sup>

By 1903 Addicks was running out of money and had become the object of a muckraking attack in the national press. His downfall was inevitable. Ultimately the biggest winner to emerge from that extended political feud was Thomas Coleman du Pont, president of the Du Pont Company and a political pragmatist who reunited the Republican party under his well financed leadership. Du Pont oversaw a political revolution in Delaware in the second decade of the twentieth century when the GOP became the state's dominant political force. Although Addicks failed to win a seat in the United States Senate, his persistent campaign introduced two-party politics to Sussex County and attracted a variety of newcomers to Republican ranks, including forward-looking young men like John Townsend.

The rise of the Republican Party as the dominant force in Delaware politics coincided with the Progressive Movement, a broadly based explosion of reform that swept America at the turn of the century and culminated with America's entry into the First World War. Progressives, dissatisfied with the complacent acceptance of political corruption and fearful of the consequences of industrialization, mass immigration, and urbanization, demanded reforms that were to enlarge the role of government in American life. The movement's most prominent national figures were Republican Theodore Roosevelt and Democrat Woodrow Wilson, presidents whose policies centered on controlling business monopolies and restoring economic competition. The major thrust of the Progressive reformers was not, however, at the national level but rather in the states, cities, and local communities where Progressives campaigned for improvements in public education, welfare reform, fair election practices, public ownership of utilities, and a myriad of other causes. Although Progressives came from all sections of society and often championed causes that were contradictory to one another, in general they were middle class, usually native born and college educated people who believed that scientific enquiry and modern technology could solve many pressing problems.

In Delaware several members of the du Pont family, especially T. Coleman du Pont, Pierre S. du Pont and Alfred I. du Pont, who

associated with the scientific and modernist aspects of Progressivism, introduced significant reforms in transportation, education, and welfare. A hearty, politically ambitious engineer, T. Coleman du Pont made the astounding offer to build an ultramodern motor highway across Delaware at his own expense. Du Pont proposed to commence this unique state-wide undertaking in Sussex County on the Maryland border near Selbyville. Suspecting some hidden agenda in this seemingly generous offer, the typical response among Sussex farmers was skeptical if not hostile. Only after several years of convincing and compromising did the state legislature adopt enabling legislation for the highway in 1911.

Among those who recognized the enormous possibilities inherent in the highway proposal for Sussex County agriculture was John G. Townsend, Jr. Townsend was so enthusiastic and confident of the rightness of the road that he assisted du Pont as the agent for purchasing the right-of-way. When one farmer north of Millsboro refused to sell a strategically located property to du Pont, Townsend purchased the land for himself rather than halt construction. In gratitude for his vision and spirited generosity, du Pont backed Townsend's nomination as the Republican candidate for governor in 1916. Townsend served as Delaware's governor during the final heyday of the Progressive Era. On May 24, 1917, in a ceremony marked by the greatest assemblage of automobiles Sussex County had ever seen, Governor John G. Townsend, Jr., on behalf of the state of Delaware, formally accepted the first twenty miles of the du Pont Highway from Selbyville to Georgetown. "It was," Townsend's biographer asserts, "one of the sweetest moments of John G. Townsend's long life."<sup>27</sup> Progress on the construction project continued pressing northward, finally reaching Wilmington in 1923.

In addition to championing the du Pont Highway, Townsend gave his support to other Progressive causes such as women's suffrage and the reform of the state's embarrassingly antiquated school system, a controversial reform that was sponsored and funded by T. Coleman's cousin and business associate, Pierre S. du Pont. Once again Sussex Countians suspected duplicity or worse from the upstate explosives magnates. Sussex's representatives to the General Assembly voted overwhelmingly to retain the multitude of cheaply maintained, tiny school districts, each controlled by local residents, that had been a familiar part of Delaware's rural scene for generations. Sussex Countians could see no need for large, expensive school districts, modern comprehensive schools, and a powerful state superintendent of education. One prominent Sussex politician labeled the proposed reform "undemocratic, autocratic,

oligarchic.” But in spite of loud protests, the upstate members of the Assembly had enough votes to enact a new school code in 1921.<sup>28</sup>

Those skeptics who had scorned T. Coleman du Pont’s claims for the transformative powers of his highway were proved wrong. The du Pont Highway opened a new era in the history of Sussex County that even visionary boosters like Governor Townsend could hardly have imagined. The highway not only broke forever the monopoly of the railroad, it also encouraged the state to develop a system of secondary paved roads to link rural communities and individual farms to distant markets. In the early twentieth century, the county’s special niches in the agricultural economy included the production of highly perishable commodities such as apples, strawberries, cantaloupes, sweet corn, watermelons, tomatoes, and farm-fresh eggs. In the past those products had reached urban market via river boats or railroad cars. The creation of the du Pont Highway offered farmers a faster, cheaper way to bring those same products to market while at the same time increasing their independence from large transportation companies. For Sussex farmers the era of truck farming was truly coming into its own. Henry C. Conrad rhapsodized about the potential for Delaware’s most rural county: “Here at the very threshold of Philadelphia and New York lies a land that God has endowed with the best He can give, a land that is capable of feeding the teeming millions of our cities, but a land that has been overlooked in the westward scramble for farming land.”<sup>29</sup>

Except in the hands of a few entrepreneurial farmers like John G. Townsend, Jr., whose farms produced huge quantities of strawberries and apples, most farmers treated truck crops as extras to supplement their income from grain farming. Chicken eggs, in particular, constituted an important but subordinate segment of farm production that depended upon access to urban markets. Farm wives were usually responsible for keeping some layers and for selling their eggs for the cash that families typically referred to as “mother’s egg money.”<sup>30</sup>

In the egg business, hens are the producers and the roosters used for propagation come from special breeding stock. Each spring farm wives would allow some eggs to hatch in order to replenish their supply of hens. The males that hatched, called cockerels, were an unnecessary by-product and were kept for about three months until they reached a weight of two pounds when they could be sold as “broilers.” Typically, broilers came on the market only in summer. The biggest market for those young birds was in New York, where the city’s large Jewish population ate meat freshly killed ac-

cording to kosher law at the Sabbath meal on Friday night. Both kosher butchers and Jewish families preferred chicken over other meats.

In 1923 a woman from Ocean View, Baltimore Hundred, Delaware, named Cecile Steele, the wife of an employee at the nearby Coast Guard Station north of Bethany Beach, brought a batch of broilers to market earlier in the season. Her enterprise was well rewarded when she earned sixty-two cents per pound on the sale of 387 birds.<sup>31</sup> Elated by her earnings, Mrs. Steele decided to turn her attention from eggs to broilers. News of her success spread rapidly throughout Baltimore Hundred and other farmers began raising broilers year round as well. The new business was especially attractive to the fishermen, called proggers, who had depended upon the crabs, oysters, clams, and fish of the Indian River Bay for their livings. Recent changes in the inlet that connected the bay to the Atlantic Ocean had reduced the bay's marine life and the proggers were desperate for a new enterprise. By 1925, when Wilmer Steele quit his job at the Coast Guard Station to assist his wife in her new enterprise, the Steeles were producing 25,000 broilers a year. By 1928 it was estimated that there were 500 broiler producers in Sussex County, mostly in Baltimore Hundred, and the business was doubling each year. A new day had indeed dawned for southeastern Sussex County; the age of the broiler industry had begun.

## 2

# The Heart of Chicken Land

Although John Williams would one day make his mark on Sussex County's economy as a feed dealer and broiler man, his childhood preceded Mrs. Steele's historic experiment. John was reared in a large family among ten brothers and sisters. His daughter, Blanche Baker, recalls her grandmother Annie Hudson Williams as a "very gentle" woman with a good sense of humor who baked pies for her family. But grandfather Frank was a humorless "no nonsense" person. "You didn't go crawling into his lap," she recalls.<sup>1</sup> John Williams's recollections paralleled those of his daughter. In 1979 the senator told an interviewer that his parents were very strict enforcers of ethical behavior and added, "they'd thrash me at any time I ever slipped."<sup>2</sup> It is likely that Frank Williams's stern demeanor and serious approach to life were results of the incidents of his own troubled childhood that included his mother's dying young after giving birth to twins and his father being shot in the Williamsville store adjacent to the family home. The unexpected deaths of both parents left Frank bereft of the support and education that would have been his had his school-teacher father lived. Instead, according to the custom of the time, Frank was bound out to a farmer, as if he were an indentured servant, to do manual labor in exchange for food, clothing, and shelter. The orphan boy received little formal education until, as an adult, his wife Annie helped him to improve his reading, writing, and arithmetic. Once armed with those basic skills Frank discovered his aptitude for numbers. Granddad, Blanche remembers, was a very good businessman and farm manager who could do arithmetical calculations quickly in his head.<sup>3</sup> His son John inherited that gift for arithmetical calculation, which became the basis for his success, both in business and in government.

Although father and son shared a love for numbers, they were dissimilar in other respects. While Frank's life experiences had made him unbendingly serious, John enjoyed playing practical



**Frank Williams with his ninth child, John, ca. 1910. Courtesy of Blanche W. Baker.**

jokes. If a young man came to the house to court one of John's sisters and the girl happened to be in the outhouse when he arrived, John delightedly seized the opportunity to tell the suitor where she was and offered other mildly embarrassing information about her. Once he and some friends tied a long string to the school bell and lay in wait until the school board members had assembled in the school building. After the meeting began John rang the bell. Jarred by the noise, the school board was confounded to discover that they were alone in the building. Like his love of numbers, an enjoyment of playful kidding and practical jokes would remain a part of the senator's nature throughout his life.

Money was a carefully guarded resource in the Williams's large household, and John's father had strict rules about how it could be acquired. It was Frank's custom to give each child a quarter on Independence Day. John generally used his gift to buy peanuts. The experience was a memorable one, for as an adult he instituted the same practice with his daughter. Father demanded that his children conform to the high standards of scrupulous honesty that made social life tolerable among the deeply rooted kin groups that made up the population of southeastern Sussex. When he was a child, John

accepted the responsibility for keeping the neighboring farmer's cow out of the Williams's corn field. The neighbor, pleased to be relieved of that chore, gave the boy a dollar for his effort. Frank did not think it appropriate that his son should be paid to perform a task that benefited both parties and made John return the money.<sup>4</sup>

John's boyhood in Sussex County introduced him to the rigorous standards of Methodism and to the different religious practices among white and black Christians. His family regularly attended services in the Frankford Methodist Church, where hymn singing, preaching, and prohibition were considered the main elements of religion. Frank Williams, like most Sussex County Methodists, was a strong supporter of prohibition, and liquor was never served in the Williams home. John also had some contact with the emotionally compelling world of the black Methodists. His father's farm was adjacent to a black church that stood across Honolulu Road. It was a custom for Methodists of both races to hold camp meetings in the summer and, because the Honolulu Road church was the site of such a meeting, local people called the road "Hallelujah Road." The sound of singing that emanated from the church was so compelling that John and his brothers and sisters would slip away from their labors in the cornfield to partake of the good food and to listen to the spirituals at the black Methodists' camp meeting.<sup>5</sup>

The future Republican senator was reared in a family of Democrats. His father was a life-long member of the party, and John suspected that, once women were accorded the vote, his mother followed the Democratic path as well. John's father respected the government and the senator recalled that when he was a child a government official, probably a county farm agent, would sometimes be invited to Sunday dinner. On those occasions the children were ordered "to get slicked up, because we had important company coming. . . ."<sup>6</sup>

In contrast to his father, who had been deprived of the opportunity to complete his education, John and his brothers and sisters attended the local school and then went on to Frankford High School. John did not participate in extracurricular activities or sports after school, however, because he was expected to return home to do farm work. In 1921 John completed the third and final high school grade that was offered at Frankford High School. Had he been one year younger, he would have been afforded the opportunity to attend a fourth year and earn a Delaware high school diploma. In 1921, the year when the new state school code that aroused such hostility from Sussex County politicians was adopted, Frankford High added a fourth year to its program. In common with

education in other Sussex towns at that time, very few students in the Frankford area remained in school through the high school years. There were only four students in John's class, and the high school's entire faculty consisted of a similar number. Only two students received diplomas in Frankford's first year as a four-year high school.<sup>7</sup>

John Williams was seventeen years old when he completed high school and eager to make a life for himself. One night he announced at the dinner table that he was now old enough to make his own decisions. His father thought a moment and replied "All right! You'll make your own decisions, but as long as you have your feet under my table and eat at my board you'll take my orders."<sup>8</sup> Admonished by this rejoinder John took a job working in a store, but clerking for someone else could not purchase his independence. He dreamed of going to college and eventually attending law school, but he knew that his family could not afford the expense. In 1922 John's brother Harry, ten years his senior, proposed that they go into the feed business, and together they asked their father for a loan to get started. Frank demonstrated great respect for his sons' abilities when he supplied the loan. John was finally free to make his way in the world.

Harry and John began the Millsboro Feed Company just two years before Cecile Steele demonstrated that broilers could be lucrative. The brothers began small, but they worked hard and practiced the fair play with their customers that gained their loyalty. Harry minded the store and John drove the delivery truck.<sup>9</sup> Their store was a modest building located adjacent to a railroad siding in Millsboro, Delaware, a town of several hundred people at the head of the Indian River. Millsboro had been founded in the late eighteenth century at the location where the Indian River was dammed to create a mill pond and spillway that supplied power for several grist mills, saw mills, and an iron furnace. The furnace was quite successful during the pre-Civil War years and supplied the pipes for New York City's Croton Water Works and the railings that surrounded Independence Hall, but in later years it could not compete with larger iron producers and it was abandoned in the 1870s.<sup>10</sup> In contrast, a plentiful supply of pine, oak, and hickory in the forests near town assured a continuing source of employment, and the town's saw mills were kept running well into the twentieth century.

When the railroad reached Millsboro after the Civil War, the town's entrepreneurs began to manufacture boxes from local timber and developed a seasonal trade in holly wreaths. Millsboroites can still recall going out into the forests each fall to cut down holly trees

and then remove the branches to be carted home to be made into wreaths. The prickly hollies dug into their fingers but it was an exciting, festive time, and the sale of the wreaths brought in extra money for Christmas. A cannery, which opened in 1895, provided employment during the harvest season. Improvements came slowly to Millsboro by the standards of more populous American towns. Main Street was not paved until 1913. A decade later, at about the time that the Williams brothers opened their feed store, the town built sidewalks and covered its secondary roads with oyster shells. On a memorable Saturday night, February 11, 1922, electricity illuminated the streets for the first time. The town's initial production of electricity was so meager that the current was only turned on at nighttime, except for Wednesday afternoons when it was made available so that housewives could do their ironing.

Millsboroites were never more than a few blocks away from farmland, and the conservative values of rural life ruled. The Sabbath was treated with great solemnity. No barbershop could be open on Sunday and all merchandise and wagons were required to be off the streets.<sup>11</sup> Yet all was not dour. Town boys played baseball, ladies made afternoon calls (but presumably not on Wednesdays), in winter there were sleigh rides and dances, and silent movies were shown on the second floor of the lodge hall on Friday and Saturday nights. The center of Millsboro, at the intersection of State Street and Main Street, known locally as "the four corners," was the location of the town's bank, post office, and retail stores. Old men who sat rocking and spitting tobacco on nearby porches kept tabs on the town's doings and spread the word should something out of the ordinary occur. A major event might be the delivery of Missouri mules at the rail depot and their subsequent auction. Farmers in the area continued to use mules to plow and to pull wagons well into the 1930s. Saturday night was the big shopping night for townspeople and farmers alike. The four corners was so crowded with people that "you couldn't stir them with a stick."<sup>12</sup> Stores stayed open until midnight to accommodate the throngs.

Delaware was a segregated state in which black and white residents did not mingle socially or at school. The separation of the races was powerfully enforced by custom, even in small communities like Millsboro where blacks lived just outside of town beyond the mill pond or toward the woods. Many of Millsboro's black residents worked as loggers or as mill hands. The two races typically interacted only in situations where blacks were supplying work for whites. The black communities of Delaware towns had their own churches, schools, and entertainments, but each town's black popu-

lation was too small to support a black middle class. Generally speaking, the conventions of coexistence were well understood on both sides. Alice Dunbar Nelson, a black English teacher in Wilmington, who was well acquainted with racial conditions throughout the state, said that in the early twentieth century race relations throughout Delaware were separate and unequal, but unstrained compared to other states.<sup>13</sup> In the southern part of the state, the great majority of residents of both races were native to the immediate area in which they lived out their lives. There had been fierce but brief disturbances in the Reconstruction era over the establishment of public education for blacks, but since that time racial disturbances had become a rarity, and those blacks who sought to improve their status moved north.

About the time that the Williams brothers began their business in Millsboro, John attended a lawn party where he was introduced to Elsie Steele, the Millsboro telephone operator. At eighteen, Elsie was a year younger than John and, like him, had been reared in a large farm family. Her mother, a practical nurse, had taught Elsie, her oldest child, to care for the younger children. Elsie's father was one of only a few farmers in the area to own a steam harvester, which he used to harvest his neighbors' crops to earn extra money. John was quite taken with Elsie and asked her if she would be free for a date the following week. Elsie, who already had an engagement for the evening in question, responded "Sorry, I have a date, but some other time." John must have heard just enough encouragement in her intonation of the word "but" to ask again.<sup>14</sup>

The Williamses were married in 1924. Like most young couples they looked forward to rearing a family, but this pleasant anticipation was shattered when Elsie was badly injured in an automobile accident. The prospect that she would be unable to bear children drove her toward emotional collapse. Her doctor suggested that adopting a baby might be her best therapy. Fortunately, this proved to be both a remarkably easy and successful strategy. Elsie's mother had given birth to a baby, her last, only a few months after the Williamses were married. The baby, named Blanche, was a frequent visitor in the home of her big sister, especially because Elsie nursed the infant through a bout of scarlet fever. The usually heart-wrenching prospect of giving up their child to adoption was made less onerous for the Steeles, because Blanche would remain within the family and would be living nearby. Although the legal adoption did not take place until she was nine years old, Blanche lived with John and Elsie from a very early age and regarded them as her parents.<sup>15</sup>

In 1926, John Williams purchased an acre lot on Millsboro's State Street for \$1,300 and the following year his family moved from their first home, a duplex, into a clapboard house that they had built on the lot.<sup>16</sup> The two-story house, typical of middle-class homes of that era, had a large front porch and an interior layout that consisted of living room, dining room, and kitchen on the first floor and bedrooms and bath on the second floor. In later years the Williamses removed the porch because it got so dusty from traffic rolling over the oyster shells that covered State Street. They also built an office for John next to the living room. Subsequently John Williams purchased the house next door and had it torn down so that his property would extend to the end of the block. The Williamses put a white wooden picket fence around their property and both enjoyed working in their neatly kept yard. Elsie was the gardener; John fertilized the gardens and tackled other chores.

Blanche recalls growing up within a loving, conventional family. Her mother, Elsie, developed into an excellent cook who enjoyed making special dishes for her family and for guests. Her father loved to read novels about the West—Zane Grey was his favorite—and to see western movies. He taught a boys Sunday school class at Grace Methodist Church, which was located just a short walk from their home. Sometimes John would pack his family and his Sunday



**John and Elsie Williams's new home on State Street in Millsboro in the late 1920s. Courtesy of Blanche W. Baker.**

school class into the feed truck and take them all to Georgetown to see a movie. Afterwards, he'd buy them all Cokes. Some of the boys called him "Uncle John," and three of his best students became Methodist ministers.

Behind the Williamses' house was a chicken house that could hold 500 chickens. Blanche recalls that it was her responsibility to feed and water the chickens. By the age of eight she had an egg route, and her father encouraged her to start a savings account with her earnings. She also raised broilers and can recall the big truck that came to take them away and the check that would be handed to her. But the money was not all hers; first, she had to pay her father the feed bill. He encouraged her to buy a share of AT&T stock with her net earnings so that she could see her money grow.<sup>17</sup>

Having been reared in Methodist traditions, neither John nor Elsie drank liquor and neither learned how to dance. They maintained their prohibition on alcohol throughout their lives, but set aside their hostility to dancing. When Blanche was fourteen she was invited to a dance and asked her father's permission to go. He said no, but he did so in a gentle way that made her feel that she had reached that decision herself. Not long after, it was announced that there was to be a cotillion in Millsboro. John purchased two tickets and asked Blanche to be his date. The whole family went to Wilmington to purchase a formal gown for her to wear, and Blanche taught her father the basic dance steps. Thereafter, John offered no resistance to his daughter's requests to attend dances.

Throughout the 1920s, as the Williams family settled into life in Millsboro, Delmarva's poultry industry was growing rapidly in size and sophistication. Delaware produced 500,000 chickens in 1925; by 1928 this figure had quadrupled to two million, which then doubled to four million in 1930.<sup>18</sup> As the broiler industry expanded, egg production decreased and the growers shifted from the lighter leghorn layers to heavier breeds such as Barred Plymouth Rocks, New Hampshire Reds, and Rhode Island Reds, which were trucked into Delmarva as eggs or chicks from breeders in Maine and New Hampshire where the cold climate was thought to be congenial to hatching chicken eggs. A Delaware extension poultry man, H. S. Palmer, described the process of poultry production in the twenties and thirties:

Most of the broilers in Baltimore Hundred are brooded with coal stoves and in shed roof houses, 14 x 14, having sand floors. The yards are seeded to rye, and the chicks allowed to run outside on pretty days

throughout the year. A few growers and hatchery men are using long-type houses in which the chicks are kept confined all or most of the time. Most of these long houses are heated by hot water piped from a central heater. Feeding practices vary greatly. Mortality ranges from 10 to 40%.<sup>19</sup>

Now long abandoned, the disintegrating remains of those early chicken houses are still everywhere in evidence throughout Sussex County, some showing vestiges of red paint, others stripped bare. These long single-story buildings with their gently sloping roofs bear testimony to the early days of the poultry industry. Feed dealers, like the Williams brothers, and feed companies played an increasing role in the industry as growers made the transition from feeding small flocks with scraps and home grown rye to feeding large flocks that spent their short lives in long poultry houses eating from large battery feeders. Laying flocks were fed a "five-bag mix" that consisted of equal parts of cornmeal, wheat bran, middlings, ground oats, and meat scraps, but that diet was not good for broilers because it did not produce fast growth. In 1925 the Beacon Milling Company produced the peninsula's first commercial poultry feed designed to speed maturation, and in 1929 the company improved the mixture to control for coccidiosis, one of several diseases that could decimate flocks. Other large milling companies, including Ralston Purina and Red Comb, soon moved into the trade. The milling companies wrested the market away from local feed mixers, not only because they offered lower prices, but also because they carried on research programs that led to improved products. Vitamin supplements and later hormone additives produced larger, healthier birds. The Red Comb Company marketed its feed directly to the growers, but it was more common to have feed companies (such as Larro and Wayne, which the Millsboro Feed Company distributed) sell through local feed dealers.

The Williams brothers received shipments by rail in 100 pound bags that were stored in a warehouse pending delivery to customers. Feed represented 60 percent of the expense of raising broilers, so it was the feed companies and dealers who offered the growers credit and actively encouraged the efficient production of healthy chickens. The large firms employed service representatives who visited "their farmers" regularly to offer suggestions and to do rudimentary veterinary work.<sup>20</sup> Dealers also supplied equipment. The Williams brothers' Millsboro Feed Company profited considerably from its exclusive franchise to sell a device called the Buckeye Brooder throughout the Delmarva Peninsula. The brooder was a



**The Millsboro Feed Company in 1929. Courtesy of Blanche W. Baker.**

large umbrella-shaped apparatus that warmed young chicks more safely and efficiently than could their own mothers. Early brooders used coal heaters, but by the 1930s electric brooders were being introduced in the wake of rural electrification.

In addition to their feed business, John and Harry bought property together, including farms, town lots, and timberland. Beginning with just a few purchases in the 1920s, they expanded their real estate holdings in the 1930s. According to records from the office of the Sussex County Recorder of Deeds, by the early 1940s the brothers had acquired twenty-three separate parcels that included ten farms, totaling 839 acres and 1,783 acres of timberlands and undeveloped tillable land. Their purchases, centered in eastern Sussex County, especially in Broadkill Hundred, Dagsboro Hundred, and Indian River Hundred, were usually made at auctions held in order to execute a will or to pay debts, and the sale prices were often far below market value. The brothers profited from lumbering and from their farms, where tenants were also their feed customers.

The Williams brothers' business partnership appears to have been strained. In the late 1920s, John established a separate enterprise, the Frankford Feed Company, in the nearby town of his birth, while he continued to be Harry's junior partner in the Millsboro company. In September 1941, John and Harry dissolved their Millsboro Feed company and divided their land-holding assets. John Williams then established a new partnership with his younger

brother, Preston, and later with his son-in-law, Raymond Baker, who married his daughter, Blanche.<sup>21</sup>

By 1941 2,362,000 broilers were produced in Kent and Sussex Counties. Sussex produced more broilers than any other county in the United States, and the young birds accounted for nearly half of Delaware's agricultural income.<sup>22</sup> Some farmers kept small flocks and raised other crops while others were large-scale poultry men who used hired labor and produced birds throughout the year. Generally full-time producers raised three batches annually, with the strongest concentration on the winter and spring markets when religious holidays boosted sales. Ownership arrangements varied among broiler producers. Farmers who owned their land but lacked capital received chicks and feed from hatcheries and feed dealers with whom they shared profits. In other cases, the hatchery or feed dealer rented the farm and the farmer's labor for a fixed price or for a percentage of the profit. The availability of credit was crucial to the industry. In the mid-1930s, nearly half of the broiler growers borrowed to buy chicks and fuel. Banks and feed dealers were will-



**John Williams, to the left, and his brother Harry, to the right, flank fellow convention goer Edwin Ryan on the Atlantic City Boardwalk in 1936. Courtesy of Blanche W. Baker.**

ing to make loans because the broiler business was prospering in defiance of the Depression and because, in the close knit communities of eastern Sussex County, lenders and borrowers knew one another personally and were likely to be related by birth or marriage.<sup>23</sup> In that rural society bankers truly practiced the lending maxim of "your word is your bond," and sometimes required no signature or written promise from the borrower.

Once the birds had matured, the broiler producer faced the most problematic part of the process: marketing. Prices could vary greatly depending on numerous factors. An observer noted that "the industry has always been of a highly competitive, highly speculative nature where artificial gluts and famines were used as a common technique to manipulate prices in favor of the dealer."<sup>24</sup> The price generally rose toward the latter part of the week when housewives bought meat for the big weekend meal. A snow storm in the Appalachians that blocked the transport of western birds could momentarily raise prices for eastern producers, whereas a sudden unforeseen influx of birds would depress prices. The health of the birds was another factor in determining price. In the early days when flocks were small, growers usually sold an entire flock or "clean house." But purchasers complained that the practice stuck them with an unknown number of low-grade birds, and a two-tiered price structure evolved with a lower price for "clean house" and a higher price for culled birds, or "knots out."

Poultry buyers visited a farm at the invitation of the producer to make bids on the flock. Buyers rushed to buy or delayed their purchases depending on the market price. Since every day of delay cost the producer, wary farmers demanded agreement on an exact date of purchase before closing a deal. Once the birds had been purchased they were "loaded out," a process that involved capturing them and putting them into large wooden crates for shipment. The men employed as catchers were generally blacks who had developed skill at grabbing two birds in each hand and thrusting them into the crates without injuring the birds. The goal was to keep the birds alive until they reached the processing plant or city market.

The pioneer Sussex County poultry trucker was Homer Pepper of Selbyville, who bought a Model T Ford pickup truck in 1921 with the intention of hauling ice cream to Sussex County from Philadelphia. Knowing that there was a market for poultry in the Quaker City, he once took several crates of live birds to sell there and was so gratified by the price he received that he made poultry an important part of his business, especially in the winter months. In summer he trucked fruits and vegetables to the city. By 1928, large ship-

ments of chickens from Sussex County to Philadelphia commission merchants had become routine.<sup>25</sup> The birds were unloaded into a dressing plant where they were killed, de-feathered, and readied for sale. Some merchants specialized in selling to kosher butchers who prepared the birds according to religious law, which required a clean kill to avoid causing pain to the bird. Kosher butchers kept the birds alive until a customer selected a particular bird for the butcher to kill. The customer was then responsible for de-feathering the bird and was required by the religious law to cook and consume the bird soon after. Because Orthodox Jews could not eat pre-killed birds, kosher butchers required frequent shipments of live poultry from a nearby source. In the 1920s and 1930s, most of the dressed poultry that entered east coast cities originated from the Midwest, but the live poultry destined for kosher markets frequently came from the Delmarva Peninsula.

The Great Depression introduced a brief period of uncertainty and severe price fluctuations in the poultry industry that forced the small, inefficient producers out of the business. The downturn was soon reversed, however, and by 1934 Delmarva was producing seven million broilers annually. Although the young industry was expanding and dampening the effects of the Depression among Sussex County farmers, the growers felt abused by the big city commission merchants who always seemed to have the upper hand in dictating poultry prices.<sup>26</sup> Sussex farmers also complained that the commission merchants, feed companies, and big hatcheries were encouraging unemployed city dwellers to come to Sussex County and invest their savings in becoming poultry producers, thus reducing the incomes of established farmers.

Two major changes took place in the Delmarva poultry industry during the 1930s that had long-range implications for the maturation of the industry. One was the introduction of large processing plants on the peninsula; the other was the opening of the New York City market to Delmarva chickens. The first processing plant, owned by a subsidiary of the Swift Company, opened in Selbyville in 1937.<sup>27</sup> By 1939 poultry entrepreneurs had opened similar processing plants in abandoned tomato canneries in Millsboro and Frankford in Delaware, and in Salisbury, Maryland. The owners of the Millsboro Poultry Company came to Delaware from the New York City region and employed 150 local people. The company's promotions rightly identified Millsboro as the "Heart of Chicken land."<sup>28</sup> Processing opened the way for Delmarva to market dressed poultry, but live birds remained important, particularly in the New

York poultry market, the largest in the world. The New York market also had earned a notorious reputation for slick practices and gangsterism. In the early twentieth century, most poultry bound for New York had come in refrigerator cars after processing in Chicago. Once the poultry reached New York, it was sold in one of several well established markets. But the city also had a large population of Jews, Italians, and Chinese—groups that preferred, or were required by their religious beliefs, to consume freshly killed chickens. The largest market for Kosher chicken was West Washington Market located in lower Manhattan, near the east-side tenement district that was home to the majority of the city's tens of thousands of Jews.

Commerce in chickens, dead or alive, was a big business that involved multiple transactions among shippers, handlers, truckers, merchants, butchers, and retailers. There were possibilities for fraud and price gouging at each juncture in this complex network, and by the beginning of the century the business had earned well-deserved notoriety for chicanery, graft, monopolistic practices, and racketeering. In 1906 the New York Live Poultry Commission Merchants Protective Association was formed to bring the market under the control of its members. This organization was a frequent target of New York State district attorneys under the state's antimonopoly law. But while the actions of regulators attracted little public attention, the murder of Barnet Baff a prominent poultry dealer became headline news when he was gunned down in the Washington Market in 1914.<sup>29</sup>

During the 1920s rival gangs continued to use every illegal means including murder to control the marketing and processing of chickens and turkeys in what the newspapers dubbed the "poultry wars" to distinguish them from the look-alike "bootleg wars" that were the scourge of the Prohibition era.<sup>30</sup> Even after the end of Prohibition in 1933 brought respite from the bootleg wars, nothing and no one, not even Mayor Fiorello H. LaGuardia and District Attorney Thomas E. Dewey, proved equal to the poultry men's price-fixing schemes and monopolistic, gangster tactics.<sup>31</sup> The ongoing chicken wars form a now long-forgotten background to one of the most significant events of the Depression decade, the U.S. Supreme Court's repudiation of the National Industrial Recovery Act, the cornerstone of the early New Deal's effort to bring fairness and stability to business markets. *A. L. A. Schechter Poultry Corp. et al. v. United States* is famous in American legal history as the case in which the "sick chickens killed the blue eagle," the blue eagle having been the much ballyhooed symbol for the National Recovery

program. The Schechter brothers, who operated a slaughter house in Brooklyn, had been found guilty in lower courts of violating the poultry dealers' code of fair play that had been negotiated under the aegis of the National Recovery Administration. The code made it unlawful for a dealer to permit selected customers to rearrange the chickens that arrived in coops so as to eliminate underweight or "sick" chickens from the batches that they intended to buy. In a remarkably narrow interpretation of the interstate commerce clause, the Supreme Court justices declared that, although the birds had undoubtedly reached the market in Manhattan from another state, because the Schechter brothers purchased their chickens in West Washington Market, the chickens were no longer in interstate commerce and were, therefore, outside the jurisdiction of federal law.<sup>32</sup>

In national terms the Supreme Court's ruling was a severe blow to the Roosevelt administration's plan to restore business confidence, but on the local level the invalidation of federal authority over the notorious New York poultry market threw the problem back onto the state and the city. A deeply disappointed Mayor LaGuardia compared the Schechter case to the morally bankrupt Dred Scott decision of pre-Civil War fame,<sup>33</sup> and his administration demonstrated its exasperation by offering to arm poultry dealers to assist them in resisting racketeers.<sup>34</sup> In 1938 when Thomas E. Dewey, the former prosecutor, campaigned for the governorship of New York State, he emphasized his role in combating fraud in the poultry trade, which he described as "the most infamous racket in the city of New York."<sup>35</sup>

American entry into World War II in December 1941 heightened the demand for poultry, as it did for all food products, and ushered in an era of direct government intervention in the pricing of many foods. In 1942, as poultry prices tripled their prewar value, a host of new producers entered the field, some natives of Delmarva but also many newcomers enticed by cheap land and high profits. By 1943 there were 12,000 to 15,000 producers on Delmarva, some of whom were operating on a large scale.

One of the largest producers was John G. Townsend, Jr., who, with his son Preston Townsend, entered the poultry market on a grand scale in 1938. At that time the largest Delmarva producer raised 400,000 birds a year, but the Townsends, who, thanks to John G's investments, owned more farm land scattered throughout Sussex County than the total area of Manhattan, were soon producing chickens in the millions. The family was the first to create a vertically integrated poultry business that began in their own hatchery just outside Millsboro and ended in their processing plant across

the street. By war's end, the Townsends were hatching 17,000,000 eggs a year and converting 45,000,000 pounds of feed, some of it grown on their own farms, into 9,000,000 pounds of chicken.<sup>36</sup> The Townsends supplied chicks to farmers on a profit sharing basis, then collected them when they matured. Their integrated approach was to become the pattern for the industry throughout Delmarva in the post-war era.<sup>37</sup> But in the early 1940s vertical integration was rare, and the older rough-and-ready style of pricing and marketing poultry still prevailed.

During the war the federal government appointed boards and commissions armed with powers to harness the nation's economy in support of the war effort. For the first time in over a decade, American workers had money to spend but, paradoxically, there were few products available for them to buy. In order to prevent a massive escalation in the prices of scarce consumer commodities, the Roosevelt administration created the Office of Price Administration, or OPA. In January 1942 Congress authorized the OPA to set maximum prices for selected commodities. The OPA designed a rationing system that became its chief weapon in its unrelenting battle to stem the tremendous pressures of consumer demand.

Black marketeers challenged the price-control system most particularly with respect to three major commodities: oil products, meats, and poultry. The term "black market" refers to practices that were as elusive as they were nefarious. As Richard R. Lingeman, a historian of the home front during the second world war, notes, the black market was not "a clandestine place like a speakeasy or brothel," nor, as romanticizers might imagine, was it "a little man saying 'Psst' from a doorway and opening his shabby coat to reveal pendant steaks, butter, canned pineapple" or other scarce commodities. It was instead, according to OPA director Chester Bowles, "any transaction where a sale is made over a ceiling price" or without the proper use of legitimate ration stamps.<sup>38</sup> Much black market activity involved "legitimate" businessmen who concocted ways to charge willing customers prices above the OPA ceiling or to evade rationing. A common technique was to sell unrecorded stock, which could be accomplished by short-weighting produce that entered the store. According to a Gallup poll, one quarter of the American people purchased black market items on occasion.<sup>39</sup>

To the dismay of Sussex Countians, Delmarva poultry became a centerpiece in the government's battle to enforce price ceilings. The demand for poultry was at an all-time high. Unlike red meat, poultry was not rationed and, therefore, became a popular red meat substitute during the war. Supermarkets, then a new food merchan-

dising mechanism, became major retail outlets for prepackaged items such as dressed chickens. The U.S. Army also discovered the advantages of dressed poultry and served chicken at its camps. The result was an "almost overwhelming" demand for Delmarva chickens that hastened the mechanization of the poultry industry and created a huge supply problem.

The demand for chickens together with the OPA price-ceiling regulations brought a level of turbulence to the peaceful towns of Sussex County that natives had never before witnessed. Everyone in the business—producers, dealers, and processors—was making money, but everywhere there was confusion, suspicion, and resentment. Much of the resentment was leveled at the OPA because the agency, while holding firmly to pre-war price levels for poultry, had given into the political pressures of the midwestern farm bloc to raise the price of grain to 110 percent of parity, that is to 10 percent more than grain farmers had received in their best years of 1910–1914.<sup>40</sup> This policy, widely regarded as unfair among feed users, put poultry men in a squeeze. OPA policies also favored processed chickens over live chickens, which discouraged the sale of live birds and disrupted the volatile, unstructured poultry market.

The marketing system that had long prevailed in the poultry industry was ready made for abuse. Except in those cases where producers were contractually bound to provide broilers to particular processing plants, the producers were accustomed to selling their flocks to the visiting buyer who offered the best price. Wartime conditions altered the pattern of sale. According to a university agricultural extension agent, out-of-state truckers began appearing at farms to offer farmers prices for their birds in excess of the OPA ceiling. A common tactic was to offer the farmer the ceiling price, then ask to buy some inexpensive tool for a large sum or, in at least one case, to buy the farmer's mongrel dog for a large sum, then immediately set it free.<sup>41</sup> Regular channels for the receipt of birds practically dried up because it was nearly impossible to police the truckers' contacts with the many small time poultry producers who grew the majority of the birds. Large operators, knowing that their records would be subject to investigation, were more inclined to abide by the letter of the law.<sup>42</sup> The most significant and powerful purchaser of dressed chicken from processing plants was the United States Army Procurement Division, an organization that would not permit its needs to go unfulfilled.

In 1939 poultry men revived the Delaware Poultry Improvement Association, founded in the 1920s, to protect themselves from racketeers. John J. Williams was among those who created this organi-

zation, and he led the association as its president during the war years. The Delaware Association was an affiliate of the Eastern Poultry Producers' Association, which worked with Mayor Fiorello H. LaGuardia to clean up the poultry business in New York City. The price squeeze and black market issues that arose during World War II were major concerns for the Delaware association. Members tried, with little success, to convince OPA officials to raise the ceiling on poultry to bring it in proportion to the price of feed. The association attempted to cooperate with the OPA's efforts to curb the black market. The larger, better-established poultry men who made up the majority of the organization were themselves direct victims of black market sales of poultry to truckers, because they could not attract enough birds to maintain their processing operations at full capacity. But intervention to prevent the hundreds of small deals between individual farmers and buyers who offered prices above the ceiling proved to be beyond the scope and power of the association.

Among native Sussex Countians, the black market raised issues beyond economics that related to community ethics, integrity, and patriotism. Sussex Countians prided themselves on their high standards of personal and community behavior. These were people only one generation removed from a barter economy; they never locked the doors to their homes and thought of themselves and their neighbors as honest citizens. Now, however, in the midst of wartime, an ugly atmosphere of suspicion and envy prevailed as neighbor suspected neighbor of profiting from the black market. As president of the Poultry Improvement Association, John Williams grew increasingly frustrated by his inability to convince officials in Washington that some U.S. government agents were conspiring with a few corrupt producers to commit fraud and then cast blame on innocent farmers.<sup>43</sup>

Hostility between poultry producers and their government continued to mount throughout the war. Government officials were determined to enforce price regulations and to secure sufficient quantities of poultry for military use, but producers believed they were paying the cost and taking the blame for a bad system. In April 1943 the chief of the OPA told a meeting of poultry producers at Georgetown High School that the federal government would take decisive action, if necessary, to maintain its policies. At a later mass meeting in Salisbury, Maryland, where 300 poultry men requested simplification of OPA procedures to increase compliance, an OPA representative who threatened to federalize the industry was hooted down by the audience.<sup>44</sup>

In July 1943 the federal government took decisive action to regain control over what it regarded as a serious breach in the government's economic controls. On July 16, a federal grand jury in Wilmington indicted eighteen poultry buyers from six states for paying \$11,000 in bonuses above ceiling prices to Delaware poultry growers. According to the U.S. district attorney, those indictments were "only the beginning;" he promised "to crack down and punish every violator of the poultry ceiling, be he grower, local buyer, processor, or out-of-state buyer."<sup>45</sup>

A few days later on July 21, 1943, federal authorities took an even more dramatic step when, with no prior warning, the army set up a road block on the du Pont Highway near Dover to stop and search every poultry truck traveling north toward Wilmington, Philadelphia, and New York. Inspectors demanded to see the drivers' shipping manifests, and only truckers whose paperwork showed that the poultry on board had been sold at the ceiling price were permitted to proceed. The poultry on all other trucks was requisitioned for army use for which the trucker was paid the ceiling rate. An OPA official announced that this move was necessary in order to destroy "the worst black market area in the country for poultry," which was capturing a quarter of the Delmarva poultry that came to market.<sup>46</sup>

The confiscation blockade of July 1943 made national headlines and began the restoration of order in the poultry markets. Another round of arrests the following September targeted truck drivers charged with receiving stolen chickens.<sup>47</sup> That same year a federal court found four Delawareans guilty of black market activity in the poultry industry.<sup>48</sup> In the wake of those events, the poultrymen and the OPA reached an accommodation. Poultrymen pledged cooperation with price controls and, in 1944, the OPA raised the ceiling price for poultry to insure the army's supply.<sup>49</sup> Government officials were relieved when Delmarva producers agreed to set aside as many birds as necessary for the army camps in the "Chickens for Fighters First" campaign.<sup>50</sup>

The government's handling of the poultry industry was deeply resented in the "heart of chicken land." United States Senator James M. Tunnell, Sr., a native of southeastern Sussex County and a staunch supporter of President Roosevelt's New Deal, was moved to denounce the OPA's policies as unsound and impractical. Responding to the army's announcement that it would confiscate all Delaware poultry raised in 1945, the senator protested that such a policy would discourage production.<sup>51</sup>

The war's conclusion in August 1945 soon brought an end to

army confiscations, rationing, and OPA price ceilings. Taken altogether the war had been a good time for poultry raisers, and peacetime promised to be even better. But the wartime regulations had left a bitter taste and engendered suspicions in the chicken producing areas of Delmarva that still linger more than a half century later. The people of Sussex County had seen their federal government at close range, and some did not like what they saw. No one was more angered or concerned about what was locally perceived as the government's mismanagement and lack of fairness than was John J. Williams, the president of the Delaware Poultry Improvement Association.

# 3

## A Political Novice

Although the du Ponts had made the Republicans the dominant party in Delaware, each of the state's three counties remained a political world unto itself. Allegiance to the local folks back home transcended party loyalty, especially among politicians in southern Delaware, where resentment against party leaders in New Castle County, whether Democrats or Republicans, was common.<sup>1</sup> In the 1920s, the state's Democrats, mirroring their national party, were more a coalition than a party. The party consisted of two seemingly incompatible elements: one built on the immigrant wards of Wilmington, the other on the land-owning gentry of southern Delaware. The Democrats' greatest strength was in rural Kent County. But while the Democrats lacked an inner core, by 1920 the state's Republicans had healed their deep wounds from the Addicks era and had come together under the leadership of T. Coleman du Pont. The former president of the DuPont Company was determined to become a U.S. Senator. He achieved his aim briefly in the early 1920s when a Republican governor appointed him to fill the seat left vacant by a Democrat who had been offered a judgeship. The exchange came to be known as "Delaware's Dirty Deal." The phrase stuck to du Pont and helped to defeat him in 1922 when he lost his seat to Thomas F. Bayard, Jr., the son, grandson, and great-grandson of distinguished Delaware senators.<sup>2</sup> Two years later T. Coleman du Pont used every ounce of his influence and financial clout to defeat James M. Tunnell, Sr., a leading attorney in Sussex County.

Delaware's political parties selected candidates for significant elective offices through an informal process of county rotation. With Senator du Pont then representing New Castle County, the Republicans, in 1928, turned to Sussex County to secure a candidate to contest Thomas F. Bayard Jr.'s seat in the United States Senate. The Republicans chose former governor John G. Townsend, Jr. Elected in the Hoover landslide, Townsend went on to serve two

terms in the Senate. That same year, T. Coleman du Pont was forced to resign his Senate seat because of a fatal illness. A Republican governor appointed Daniel O. Hastings, a Wilmington lawyer and long-time party worker, to fill the remainder of du Pont's term. Thus, when America entered the Great Depression and when Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal began reshaping the nation's relationship to the federal government, Delaware was represented in the United States Senate by two Republicans. Although both Townsend and Hastings were critics of the New Deal, they approached the nation's problems very differently. Hastings was an unimaginative party hack, who opposed everything the Roosevelt administration put forward. Townsend, by contrast, was an old Progressive, who based his voting decisions on principles as well as politics.

John G. Townsend, Jr., earned a reputation in Washington as a hardworking senator who spent his time studying proposed legislation, attending committee meetings, and dealing with constituent problems instead of courting publicity.<sup>3</sup> An outgoing, gregarious man, he developed close friendships with two Virginia Democrats: Carter Glass, the father of the Federal Reserve System, with whom Townsend worked on the Banking and Currency Committee, and Harry Flood Byrd, who, like Townsend, was a major producer of apples. Townsend and the Virginians shared a commitment to fiscally conservative government. Their views often conflicted with the proposals put forward by the Roosevelt administration and its liberal friends in Congress. Unlike the Virginians, however, Townsend was not congenitally opposed to everything the New Dealers were trying to accomplish. He supported measures to bring greater fairness to the market place, particularly those designed to protect the interests of small business. As a member of the Banking and Currency Committee, Townsend, who owned a Sussex County bank, represented the views of the small banks. It was Townsend who overcame the opposition of big bankers, as well as the skepticism of President Roosevelt and Senator Glass, to create the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation. Although he favored reform in banking policy, Townsend opposed most of the New Deal's major legislation. He voted against the Agricultural Adjustment Act, which provided government support for selected major agricultural commodities of cotton, corn, hogs, and wheat. He was also among a handful of senators who opposed the Social Security Act because he thought it was fiscally unsound.<sup>4</sup>

Delaware voters were not so hostile to the New Deal as were their representatives in the Senate. In 1936 the voters replaced the rigidly

anti-New Deal Hastings with Democrat James H. Hughes. This example might have forewarned Townsend that he should step down in 1940, but he counted on his popularity with Delawareans and ran again. His opponent was his neighbor from Baltimore Hundred, James M. Tunnell, Sr., who saw a chance to redress his loss to Coleman du Pont in 1924. The election campaign took place against the backdrop of the Battle of Britain, a time when many Americans were just recognizing their vulnerability to the powerful, menacing dictatorships in Germany, Italy, and Japan. As the challenger, Tunnell aggressively attacked Townsend's voting record in the Senate, especially citing Townsend's opposition to key New Deal economic reform measures such as the National Labor Relations Act, the U. S. Housing Authority, and, most significantly, his stand against Social Security. The Democratic candidate also stressed that Townsend had voted against measures designed to strengthen our defenses and he labeled his apple-growing neighbor as among "the most hard shelled, die-hard conservatives in the U. S. Senate."<sup>5</sup>

The Republican senator was kept on the defensive throughout the campaign. His supporters' efforts to depict him as a "liberal" senator only served to demonstrate the popularity of the New Deal among voters in 1940. "His principles have always been an open book" Townsend's advertisements proclaimed.<sup>6</sup> Although his record as governor from 1916 to 1920 had been liberal for that time, the New Deal had changed the meaning of that term, and Townsend found it hard to campaign against social security or rearmament. The senatorial campaign was, of course, merely a modest side show to the presidential race between Franklin D. Roosevelt, running for an unprecedented third term, and the unproven Wendell Wilkie. In such perilous times, the people of Delaware who went to the polls voted a clean sweep for the Democrats. The President's party lost only one significant race in the state, the governorship, which the Republicans won only because the incumbent Democratic governor's bad health had forced him to withdraw from the race late in the campaign. Tunnell defeated Townsend by nearly five thousand votes as the Democrats racked up majorities in all three counties. The news that FDR had carried the First State by a margin of over ten thousand votes produced a spontaneous demonstration in Wilmington. "For several hours," one of the city's Republican newspapers reported, "Market Street was a mass of tangled traffic" as people on foot, and in cars and trucks blew horns, cheered, and set off sirens to celebrate the Democrats' victory.<sup>7</sup>

James Miller Tunnell, Sr., could have posed as the model for what Delawareans thought a United States Senator should be. He

seemed born to politics. Tall and distinguished looking, the scion of a prominent Democratic family in eastern Sussex County, the Senator was a major land owner in his native Baltimore Hundred, an astute member of the Sussex bar, and an excellent debater. The Tunnells were descended from Scotch-Irish Presbyterians who had begun their rise to wealth and power as storekeepers in eastern Sussex County. James Tunnell, Sr., had made his first bid for the Senate in 1924, a year in which the state's resurgent Republican Party defeated Delaware's Democrats. In 1940 Tunnell had won as a pro-New Deal liberal Democrat.

Six years later, when Tunnell's term came to an end, the United States had just emerged from fighting in the greatest war in world history and the national mood was very different. Tunnell hesitated to accept his party's nomination and did not do so until the Democrats met at their state convention in August of that year. His diffidence may have been related more to his poor health than to his prospects for reelection, although some speculated that he feared that his association with the Roosevelt-Truman administration might hurt him. Delawareans had already demonstrated their inclination to return to the Republican fold in 1942 when they rejected Thomas F. Bayard Jr.'s bid for reelection to the Senate, choosing instead the late T. Coleman du Pont's son-in-law and former state governor, C. Douglass Buck. By 1946 the public was frustrated with the Democrats in Washington, who seemed unable to deal effectively with reconversion to a peacetime economy. People complained of labor unrest, shortages of consumer goods, and lingering price controls.

Tunnell had represented Delaware well during the war. He met and corresponded with servicemen and their families to help them in every way that he could, and he supported the administration in its requests for war-related authorizations. Tunnell voted as a mainstream Roosevelt Democrat, but he had supported Delaware's poultry growers against the bureaucrats of the OPA in their efforts to control the price of poultry. Perhaps his most significant service had been as an active member of the Truman Committee, which won acclaim for its evenhanded oversight of the allocation of government contracts during the war. Senator Tunnell was the best known and most widely respected active political figure in his own Sussex County, and he had good reason to expect victory despite the resurgence of the Republican Party, given that the Republicans were bound by the rotation rule to choose one of his lesser known neighbors to oppose him. As the election season approached, the senator made public statements in support of the United Nations

and the rights of organized labor. In anticipation of possible attacks, his press releases emphasized that the senator was a generous employer to the workers on his many farms and was therefore “immune to strikes.”<sup>8</sup> Proclaiming that he placed himself on the side of the “common people of America,” Tunnell based his re-election campaign on the expectation that the majority of voters would favor continuing New Deal policies into the post-war years.<sup>9</sup>

On June 22, 1946, readers of the *Wilmington Morning News* may have been intrigued by a most unexpected, indeed puzzling story concerning the first person to file for the senate seat from either party that began, “John J. Williams of Millsboro, a leading farmer, poultry raiser and feed merchant in Sussex County, announced here last night that he would seek the Republican nomination as U.S. Senator from Delaware.”<sup>10</sup> As no one in populous New Castle County had ever heard of John J. Williams, the newspaper account went on to explain that Williams owned and operated nineteen farms and had been a partner in a feed business since the early 1920s, was active in the Methodist church and the Masonic order, and was a past president of the Georgetown-Millsboro Rotary Club and the Delaware Feed Dealers’ Association. His only political experience had been twelve years of service on Millsboro’s town board. His hobbies were tennis and gunning. “During the past fifteen years,” the article concluded, “Mr. Williams, a student of economics and foreign affairs, has traveled in all of the forty-eight states, in Canada, the West Indies, Europe, Central and South America.” After the rather ordinary description of employment and community service outlined earlier, this final statement may have come as a surprise, especially to readers in New Castle County, who had difficulty imagining that an ordinary Sussex Countian, unattached to southern Delaware’s prominent families—the Townsends, Tunnells, and Cannons—might have traveled so broadly and yet remained unknown throughout the state.

The *News-Journal* papers, the collective name for Wilmington’s *Morning News* and *Journal-Every Evening* were the property of a du Pont family holding company called Christiana Securities. As the state’s only daily papers, they had the widest circulation in Delaware and their editorial policy was distinctly Republican. It is noteworthy, therefore, that the papers followed the Williams announcement with a speculative article suggesting that other contenders might arise, including John G. Leach, the vice president of Beacom Business College. Leach was a New Castle Countian, and his selection would, therefore, represent a breach in the rotation

system, but he had close ties to the Republican governor, Walter Bacon, and had served on a veterans board. The *News-Journal* may have been encouraging the Leach candidacy as a way to keep the door open in the hope of attracting candidates more palatable than either Williams or Leach.

June 1946 had found John Williams restless and dissatisfied with his government and at loose ends in the feed business. Having recently consolidated his operations with his brother, Preston, the management had become top heavy, so "one of us could get out," as John later recalled.<sup>11</sup> One day John Williams found himself sitting in the feed company office discussing the state of affairs with his younger brother. John remarked that although everyone feared inflation, people had grown disgusted with the government's awkward efforts at price controls through the much-hated OPA. He had great respect for Jim Tunnell, who was his personal lawyer. Tunnell had assisted in the Williamses' adoption of Blanche and handled the legal needs of the family's feed business. The common wisdom had it that Tunnell would win reelection easily, but John sensed that the winds of change were blowing toward the Republicans.

The Williams brothers' discussion then shifted to whom the Republicans might nominate. The sitting governor and the senior senator were New Castle County Republicans and the party was known to be grooming a man from Kent County to run for governor in 1948. This meant that the senate nomination should go to Sussex County. Word was that the party leaders had already approached several prominent Sussex Countians, but they had declined to run because Tunnell seemed unbeatable. Then John blurted out that he might run. The suggestion struck Preston with disbelief. You must be "nuts," Preston said. But John was serious.<sup>12</sup>

During the next few days John Williams floated the idea of his running for the senate among his neighbors and fellow businessmen. Most assumed that he meant the state senate. When he disabused them of that assumption, they too thought he was crazy to entertain such a notion. But John was not deterred. He later recalled, "I thought I had as good a chance as anyone and besides, so many other Republicans were a little scared of Jim Tunnell."<sup>13</sup> He suspected that the GOP leadership in New Castle County would welcome a candidate from Sussex who was "fool enough to run down here and kill Sussex County's turn for a high office in the next election. . . ."<sup>14</sup> Until June 1946, Williams had been so remote from state politics that even former Senator Daniel O. Hastings, the ultimate Republican insider of his generation, commented that "I



**John Williams and his brother Preston were photographed in their feed store for a *Saturday Evening Post* article in 1952. Photograph by Olie Atkin. Courtesy of *The Saturday Evening Post* Society.**

thought I knew all persons in Delaware who would be considered . . . but I . . . had never heard of him.”<sup>15</sup> John was so innocent of politics that it did not occur to him to consult with Ike Brown, the state Republican chairman, before filing for the election. He did, however, know that he must go to Wilmington to receive the blessing of the state party’s real leader, Frank du Pont, T. Coleman du Pont’s son.

Du Pont received the feed merchant in his office at 10th and Market streets in Wilmington’s center. It must have been obvious that the tall, lean man who stood before him speaking in a thin, raspy voice with the twangy accent of Sussex County was a political novice. But Williams appeared to be sincere and determined, and given that no better candidates had come forward, he probably would have as much chance as anyone to unseat Tunnell. Du Pont ended the meeting decisively by lifting his telephone receiver and calling Henry T. Claus, the president of the News-Journal Company. “Henry,” he said, “I’m sending over to see you the next U.S. Senator from Delaware, his name is John J. Williams.” Claus replied that he had never heard of Williams and du Pont admitted that until very recently he had never heard of him either. Leaving the Du Pont Building, Williams walked two blocks down Orange Street to the *News-Journal* offices, where he met Claus. After Williams had departed, Claus summoned the city editor, W. Emerson Wilson, and told him “This fellow Williams looks like a nice intelligent man, but I don’t think he’s senatorial timber.”<sup>16</sup> Others at the newspaper were equally unimpressed and wondered why Williams did not get some experience in a state office before he put himself forward for the United States Senate. It was the common reaction throughout the state. But it was an assessment that John Williams did not share. Several years later a *News-Journal* reporter recalled meeting the unknown candidate in June 1946. The reporter admitted that, as he had never heard of Williams before, he had to ask him even the most basic questions for his profile story. “That’s just fine,” Williams replied. “Maybe my being a quiet man I’ll get elected but I think you may hear from me later on when I’m elected.”<sup>17</sup>

Years later when John Williams’s face had appeared on the cover of *Time* magazine and he had become the subject of considerable interest in the national press, he explained to an interviewer from the St. Louis *Post-Dispatch* why he had entered politics. “I just got fed up, like a lot of small businessmen, with some of the things that were going on in Washington. I thought I saw a chance to be nominated and I took it.”<sup>18</sup> He explained to a magazine writer that “I

wasn't popular enough to be asked to run, and so I just announced my candidacy."<sup>19</sup>

The candidate's perception of government owed a great deal to his reading of history and to his foreign travels prior to his election to the Senate. In 1937 John and Elsie Williams had gone to Europe to attend an international convention of Rotarians. They crossed on the *Queen Mary* and attended the Rotary meeting in London. Afterward, the Williamses visited France and Germany. In his report to the Georgetown-Millsboro Rotary Club, John shared his perceptions of the Nazi government in Germany. He noted that although there was no unemployment in the Third Reich, all workers belonged to one big union led by Adolf Hitler. German censorship was so tightly controlled, he noted, that there was no mention in the press of Germany's involvement in the civil war then going on in Spain. John took pride in the fact that, despite the official anti-Semitism of the Nazi regime, Jews were still welcomed as members of Rotary clubs throughout Germany. The American visitor expressed a naively optimistic hope—that Rotary might help people bridge their ideological differences and might therefore influence events in Europe.<sup>20</sup> Williams did not refer to his visit to France in his official report, but he told members of his family that he was appalled by the state of the economy in that country. Rampant inflation threatened to destroy all personal savings there just as it had done a decade before in Germany, thus precipitating the Nazis' political triumph.<sup>21</sup> It was a sobering and unforgettable experience for the young Sussex County Rotarian, and one that helped to shape his mature reflections on the importance of maintaining economic stability as a necessary support for democracy.

In the weeks between the announcement of his candidacy in June and the Republican state convention in August, Williams campaigned hard to garner supporters and to head off challenges from any late aspirants. He spoke before service clubs and church groups throughout the state, and talked to people he met along the streets of Delaware's towns. "It was the hardest work I've ever done in my life," he said.<sup>22</sup> His anonymity threatened to make his candidacy a joke. The Democrat Wilmington *Sunday Star's* political editor wrote on June 30, "Delaware Republican leaders have maneuvered themselves into a rather mysterious situation. The Williams candidacy seems like a bad vaccination, not to have taken well. In some upstate communities Republican voters are asking 'Who is Williams and where is Millsboro?'"<sup>23</sup> Williams plugged away. He kept his message to the voters brief and to the point. By the time

the convention met in Dover on August 14, he had attracted a strong following, especially among Sussex Countians. No one rose to challenge him for the nomination.

On August 14, 1946, Delaware's Republican candidates converged on the stage of the Capitol Theater in Dover to face more than 300 delegates and alternates who filled the theater. John Williams and Senator C. Douglass Buck sat together along with Governor Walter Bacon and J. Caleb Boggs, a Kent County-born World War II veteran who was the party's candidate for the U.S. House of Representatives. The keynote speaker, State Attorney General Clair J. Killoran, aroused the delegates' enthusiasm with an attack on the Truman administration's "hodgepodge of inconsistent, vague and . . . unnecessary restrictions" and a call for the restoration of peacetime law.<sup>24</sup> After years of Democratic control in Washington, the Republicans sensed that victory might be theirs in 1946. The national Republican party's slogan for the election was "Had Enough?," a short question that appealed to voter frustration.

In Delaware, politics has always been more personal than is the case in larger states where the public can meet the candidates only through the intermediary of mass communications. In the 1940s a conscientious candidate in the First State could reach most of the voters through such simple, inexpensive, but exhausting and time-consuming expedients as ringing door bells, speaking to local organizations, attending community chicken and oyster suppers, and greeting shoppers on street corners. It did not take a lot of money to run a campaign, so John Williams had no need for a campaign manager. The party's main responsibility to its candidates was to get out the vote on election day. Political parties did not give candidates in Delaware much financial support, nor did they need to. John Williams received \$6,500 from the Republican National Committee, of which he returned \$1,070.28 after the election. He spent the balance for posters, badges, labels, and newspaper advertisements. In 1946 television was not yet a factor in politics, and radio was used primarily as a vehicle for broadcasting major speeches. In addition to the du Pont-owned Wilmington dailies, the state press included fourteen small weekly papers that served Delaware's towns. The candidate's total newspaper advertising bill was \$1,362.22. Individual newspaper advertisements were inexpensive; the most costly was \$84 for a page in the *News-Journal*.<sup>25</sup> Williams, like every other Republican candidate, could count on the state's only dailies to publicize his speeches and, in general, to put the best

spin on his campaign. The *News-Journal* editors touted Williams by attesting to his popularity among his fellow Sussex Countians, who “know him for what he is—a man of great ability, wide reading and solid worth. . . .”<sup>26</sup>

Delawareans, used to politicians like Jim Tunnell who were skilled orators, were intrigued by this six-foot-tall man who spoke so quietly, listened so intently, and preferred to talk to voters one-by-one rather than at mass meetings. “What manner of man is this fellow Williams?” they asked.<sup>27</sup> A reporter for the Democrat *Sunday Star* noted that “his personality is so quiet and serious and straightforward that he is a definite relief from the polished politicians one meets on every hand.” Williams had “an amazing calmness,” the reporter said, even when he was criticizing the OPA, and he lived “quietly and unostentatiously” in Millsboro.<sup>28</sup> Bill Frank, the *News-Journal*’s senior columnist and commentator on the state’s politics, later recalled an incident during the campaign when he was asked to go to a Wilmington radio station to sit with Williams while the candidate broadcast a speech. Frank was summoned because the microphone seemed so impersonal to Williams that he could not speak into it without a person in view to whom he could direct his remarks. Initially, the newspaperman, though impressed by Williams’s intense feeling for his subject, found him to be a coldly remote individual. Only later did he recognize that the candidate’s ability to listen so carefully to those who spoke to him and to answer them directly constituted an effective way for him to connect with others.<sup>29</sup>

The Williams campaign of 1946 fell rather neatly into two phases. In the first phase, which lasted from June through mid-October, the candidate portrayed himself as Mr. Everyman, a typical businessman who had never contemplated running for public office until he got disgusted with the federal government’s “cockeyed rules” that were interfering with postwar recovery.<sup>30</sup> This phase of the campaign prefigured the role that Williams would later assume in Washington. He told listeners on Wilmington’s WDEL that the Democrat-controlled Congress had covered up “scandals in the expenditure of billions of dollars during the war,” and promised that a Republican Congress would investigate these conditions and set things right.<sup>31</sup>

Williams concentrated his attack on the federal government’s efforts to control prices and direct economic production, especially in agriculture. The Truman administration was itself torn by dissension on its agricultural policy. As 1946 began, Truman’s Secretary of Agriculture, Clinton P. Anderson, fearing a postwar decline in

demand for foods, urged the rapid end to controls. Chester Bowles, the head of the OPA, argued for continuing controls and for holding back grain from domestic animals in order to feed the millions of starving people in Europe. Discord within the government led to confusion and anger in American grocery stores. The American people believed that their own wartime sacrifices entitled them to resume eating meat, despite famine in Europe. During the months of the campaign, the government scrambled to maintain the public's support for its price control policies but with little success. As the election approached, popular frustration was running high with shortages, especially of meat, and with lingering price controls. In addition to those annoyances, the economy was rocked by a series of strikes in crucial industries. People seemed angry because they could not at once achieve their long postponed consumption-driven desires. *Time* magazine reported that people were convinced that "they were living in an immoral age, that somebody was to blame, and that they were rapidly going broke."<sup>32</sup>

John Williams's intense identification with the public's disgust with their government's apparent ineptitude and continuing interference in agricultural markets grew from his own experiences as a poultry man. Poultry raisers depended on receipt of corn from the Midwest. In 1945-46, however, due to the government-imposed differential in corn prices and hog prices, the midwestern corn farmers could make a bigger profit by feeding the corn they grew to their own hogs rather than selling it to become chicken feed. When poultry men turned to wheat, they were accused of precipitating a wheat crisis that threatened to starve Europe.<sup>33</sup> The charges only exacerbated the resentment that already festered in John Williams and his fellow poultry raisers as a result of their wartime experience when federal regulators had abused the Delmarva poultry industry and had accused their industry of black-market profiteering. From those experiences John Williams drew the moral that the federal government should not interfere with the natural rhythms of the production and marketing of consumer products. He believed that government involvement in those economic processes was tantamount to socialism and that government regulators unfairly favored powerful groups over those that were less politically powerful.

In the tradition of the Republican party, Williams made a special plea to attract the support of black voters. New Deal programs to aid the unemployed and provide Social Security assistance had eroded the traditional loyalty of Delaware's black voters to the Republican party, but the Republicans could still appeal to the black electorate by pointing to their party's support for antilynching mea-

tures that were anathema in the Democrats' Solid South. In several major addresses Williams accused Democrats of creating racial and class-based animosities and vowed that, if elected, he would strive to represent "all of the people of our state recognizing no . . . lines of segregation as to race, color or creed and promising special privileges and consideration to no one."<sup>34</sup> On the eve of election day Williams addressed a rally of 400 black municipal workers and their friends in Wilmington. Judging from newspaper accounts, his message centered more on criticizing his opponent's party's stand on race issues rather than on defining goals of his own. Tunnell and his fellow Democrats, Williams reminded his audience, were the people responsible for keeping blacks subject to the lynch law and away from the ballot box throughout the South. They were the ones who were sending black American soldiers into foreign lands to assure democratic elections abroad while they continued to make "it impossible for those same Negro soldiers of southern birth and family to vote at home."<sup>35</sup>

In mid-October, with only a few weeks until the election, Williams shifted his focus from government waste, corruption, and racial hypocrisy to attack Tunnell and his party as dupes of the Communists. This change in tactics might have been a last minute bid to frighten the voters in a close race, but it was also in line with a shift in national Republican strategy. In response to Republican candidates' attacks on the government's clumsy efforts to maintain price controls, the Truman administration had acted defensively to lift ceilings in the hope of parrying the Republicans' best weapon. First coffee, then flour and bread until, by late October, only the price ceilings on meat and automobiles remained and the OPA itself was slated to be scrapped at year's end.<sup>36</sup> But as the Democrats overcame one set of troubles, Republicans responded with claims that Democrats and members of the Truman administration were friendly to Communism.

The Communist issue entered into the Delaware race when the reporter/newscaster Lowell Thomas told his national radio audience that the USSR's Communist Party newspaper, *Izvestia*, had endorsed several senators who were standing for reelection whom the paper praised as "progressive personalities." James Miller Tunnell, Sr.'s name appeared on *Izvestia*'s list because he had accepted the support of the CIO's Communist-tainted Political Action Committee (PAC). If *Izvestia*'s crude efforts to help reelect pro labor senators were genuine, its effects proved to be highly counterproductive. At the very least, the Communist Party newspaper's endorsements hurt the candidates whom they sought to help. More

insidiously, however, the newspaper's action encouraged a growing trend among some American politicians to resort to Red-baiting.

Although he knew that his opponent was no Communist, John Williams used the Communist issue to his advantage in his effort to unseat Senator Tunnell. Tunnell, placed on the defensive, did what he could to respond to those attacks. The Democratic incumbent said that he did not want the Communist vote in Delaware, although he doubted that one existed.<sup>37</sup> As for Lowell Thomas, Tunnell remarked that the famous newsman "seems to be in touch with both the Republican party and Mr. Stalin," adding, "I am not in sympathy with the Republican party, nor am I in touch with Mr. Stalin." Regarding the CIO-PAC, the senator said that he knew many labor leaders, but "I know of no Communists among them," and suggested that his opponent would welcome labor's support if he thought he could get it."<sup>38</sup> Tunnell believed that the United States must find accommodation with the Soviet Union. "We must either work out our problems amicably," he pleaded, "or destroy each other."<sup>39</sup>

Williams, who must have felt uncomfortable suggesting that his own lawyer could be sympathetic to Communism, concentrated his anti-Communist attacks on the Truman administration, which, he warned, was showing dismaying signs of drifting toward totalitarianism. As election day neared, President Truman ended the hated price controls on meat. Fearing that ranchers might resort to a tactic that had served them in the past, the President threatened that, should the ranchers hold back supplies to drive prices to an artificial high, the federal government would seize cattle and send them to market. Williams considered this threat "un-American" and symptomatic of a shift from New Deal regulation to Communist-like brute force. "We do not have to look abroad for Communists," Williams warned, "and at home we do not have to look for black hats, bags full of Bolshevik bombs or big moustaches. Our Communist enemies are smooth. They move easily in and out of our highest political circles. They differ from us in that they believe that government should own and control all business and industry and regulate the lives of the people. They are not necessarily men who have sworn allegiance to a foreign flag. They merely hate our American democracy."<sup>40</sup>

On the last day of the campaign, both candidates published newspaper advertisements that summarized their message to the voters. Tunnell emphasized his past experience and public service and, to counter Williams's claims of Democratic hypocrisy in race rela-

tions, pointed to his support for fair employment practices for blacks and for the abolition of the Senate filibuster.<sup>41</sup> Williams's advertisement also stressed his support for civil rights with the words "eliminate class hatred and racial prejudice under our flag." The Republican candidate also promised to remove economic controls, balance the federal budget, and "revive the faith of the American people in their government."<sup>42</sup>

On November 5, 1946, while John Williams took a break to go hunting with his bird dog on the shore of Rehoboth Bay, an activity that was to become an election day ritual for him, the national Republican party won its greatest triumph since its debacle in 1932. In Delaware, even traditionally Democratic Kent County gave the Republicans a majority. J. Caleb Boggs was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives and John J. Williams defeated Tunnell by nearly 12,000 votes, winning 55% of the vote. Senator Tunnell's concession, delivered at 11:30 P.M. on election night, was gracious and dignified. He was grateful for his years in the Senate, which had been "a full and rich experience. Being defeated is never a pleasure," he said, "but it can be less uncomfortable when the victor is a friend. John Williams has for years been a client and friend to myself and my sons. I wish him well. . . ."<sup>43</sup>

The election of 1946 made history because it ended sixteen years of Democratic control of the U.S. Congress and because it served to quicken the anti-Communist hysteria that was to grip the nation well into the next decade. In Delaware the election had brought forward a man who was destined to become one of the state's leading political figures in the postwar era. Throughout the campaign John Williams had enjoyed telling his audiences that he had always advised others to stay out of politics. Some of these same people were now asking him why he had ignored his own advice. "But I'm not going into politics," he would reply. "I'm staying in business. All I'll be doing will be moving into the front office—in Washington!"<sup>44</sup>

## The Freshman Senator

In Frank Capra's Depression era film classic, "Mr. Smith Goes to Washington," released in 1939, Jimmy Stewart played the role of a patriotic boys club leader chosen from a small western town to complete the term of a deceased senator. The neophyte senator's idealism, symbolized by his reverence for the gleaming white dome of the Capitol, is soon put to the test by the boss of a political machine that controls Smith's state and even reaches its corrosive hand all the way to Washington to corrupt the nation's most powerful legislative body. In the film's dramatic conclusion, Senator Smith reveals the machine's machinations in a Senate filibuster and awakens his fellow senators to Smith's grand vision of American democracy. As in another Capra film of the same era, "Mr. Deeds Goes to Town," made in 1936, the story presumes that the elite who manage America's politics and economy cynically manipulate the public by controlling the press and legal processes. People in those Capra films are divided between those "in the know" and the naively ignorant. Among the former group are some who chafe at the system, but they see no way to overcome the power of the corrupt cabal until a Mr. Deeds or a Mr. Smith, armed only with guileless confidence in the ultimate power of truth, justice, and democracy, shows the way.

That there was something of the Smith-Deeds character in John Williams is attested to by several contemporary comparisons in national press articles and in the perceptions of Delawareans who compared the Delaware senator to the Capra creations. Like Deeds and Smith, Williams came from a small rural town and had no previous government experience; like them he locked horns with powerful men and exposed the hidden hydras of conspiratorial corruption that lurked beneath the surface of some agencies in the federal government. Williams's quiet, extremely controlled demeanor effectively heightened the melodramatic effect of his contest against bureaucratic carelessness and governmental waste and



**John Williams in his Senate office in 1949. Courtesy of Blanche W. Baker.**

mismanagement that, he believed, threatened American democracy. Like Capra's heroes, his personal integrity, clear vision, and painstaking preparation kept him from succumbing to his critics' power. But these heroic-seeming characteristics went unacknowledged among those who disagreed with the senator's political philosophy or rejected his priorities. To his detractors, John Williams was a narrow reactionary politician, partisan, small-minded, obstinate in his economic conservatism, and parochial in his disregard for America's global responsibilities.

John Williams saw his role as the people's spokesman in Washington rather than as Washington's spokesman to the people. The people back home in Sussex County who had known him before he became a U.S. Senator were invariably impressed by how little his exposure to the nation's capital appeared to change the man. Unlike senators and representatives from distant states, who in that period seldom returned home and by necessity became part of Washington society, John Williams came home nearly every weekend. Saturday mornings he could be found sitting behind his old desk in the feed-company office, greeting visitors, assisting his constituents, and

swapping stories. His uninterrupted proximity to his home base no doubt did much to sustain the notion that Williams never changed. He remained aloof from the capital's social scene, but in the course of twenty-four years in the Senate he did learn and change. The positions that he took regarding America's world role or the nation's internal responsibilities in his first term were more parochial than his views in his later terms. Through four terms in the U.S. Senate, John Williams grew in his exercise of his responsibilities, but he did not change in his relationship to his friends and neighbors.

The Senate that convened in January 1947 to begin the 80th Congress consisted of fifty-one Republicans and forty-five Democrats. Its majority leader, Robert A. Taft of Ohio, son of President William H. Taft, was a highly intelligent but acerbic man whose ambition was to return the Taft family to the White House. Taft focused his considerable political skills on domestic issues and conceded to his colleague, Senator Arthur Vandenberg of Michigan, chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, major responsibility for foreign policy. As the first Congress elected after the end of World War II and the death of Franklin Roosevelt, the Democratic president who had dominated American life for a generation, the Republican-controlled 80th Congress promised to bring a different vision to American public life. Two major questions confronted the Congress: to what degree would the Republicans modify Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal during this period of reconversion from a wartime economy, and to what extent could the Congress work with President Harry S. Truman to develop a bipartisan foreign policy that would protect America's interests in the dangerous postwar world.

Among the newcomers to the senate, Republicans all, were Irving Ives of New York, James P. Kem of Missouri, Edward Martin of Pennsylvania, John Sherman Cooper of Kentucky, William Jenner of Indiana, and Joseph P. McCarthy of Wisconsin. Some had considerable experience in government. Edward Martin, for example, was a former governor of Pennsylvania, while John Sherman Cooper had been a judge. Others, including Senators Jenner and McCarthy, were veterans of World War II. Williams, who was accurately described by *Newsweek* as "slim, quiet, and reserved," was one of three farmers among the new senators.<sup>1</sup> Surely no other had as little previous experience in public life. Williams, himself, wrote that when he first arrived in Washington he had relied heavily on his fellow Delawarean C. Douglass Buck, who "could not have been joined by a colleague greener than I."<sup>2</sup> Drew Pearson, the opinionated columnist known for his "predictions of things to

come” and a leading senate watcher, was profoundly unimpressed with the new man from Delaware. In his widely read *Washington Post* column, the “Washington Merry-Go-Round,” Pearson accorded John Williams a grade of D, noting that the grain dealer and turkey raiser “pretends to be an expert statesman” but is “out of place in the Senate.” The pundit was more favorably impressed with North Carolina Democrat, William Umstead, who earned a C because he knew parliamentary procedure and was “at home among the mediocrities surrounding him.” Pearson showed his greatest prescience in assigning the lowest grade of E to Joseph McCarthy, who impressed the columnist as a loud-talking hypocrite.<sup>3</sup>

Stories concerning acts of unintended rudeness directed at new, unrecognized senators are legion and it is not surprising that several concerning Williams reached the press. In one story, the Senate elevator operator refused to allow the Delawarean to board the “Senators Only” elevator. Another more telling story concerned Merriman Smith, the dean of White House correspondents, who was present on the floor of the House of Representatives to hear President Truman’s State of the Union Address to the new Congress. A man seated behind Smith politely asked the newsman to move over a bit so that he could see. Smith moved slightly, then slid back to his original position, where upon the man asked again that he move. This annoying dispute went on several times when finally the unknown man told Merriman Smith that if he would not move he could take this—and kicked him. It was John J. Williams.<sup>4</sup>

Donald R. Matthews, the author of a thoughtful analysis of the Senate during the decade that began in 1947 entitled *U.S. Senators and Their World*, divided senators into two basic categories: “professionals,” people for whom holding public office was their profession, a category that included 82 percent of the senators, and “amateurs,” who, like John Williams, interrupted careers in other fields to pursue public office.<sup>5</sup> Most senators, Matthews found, had been born in rural areas or in small towns and about one-third were the sons of farmers.<sup>6</sup> Williams’s rural background put him in the majority, as did his Protestant religion and northern European ancestry. He was different from all but 16 percent of his fellows, however, in never having attended college. Nearly one-fifth of his fellow Republicans, including Yale graduate Robert A. Taft, were alumni of elite Ivy League institutions.

Although the overall theme of Matthews’s work suggests the similarities among senators, the author discovered some significant differences between Republicans and Democrats. Democrats were

more likely to be lawyers and to have chosen political careers when they were in their twenties. Republicans, by contrast, came to politics later after developing careers in the business world. That is, more Republicans were "amateurs," while the preponderance of Democrats were "professionals."<sup>7</sup> Party affiliation was constantly reinforced because members of the same party ate together, sat together on the Senate floor and looked to the same leadership for committee assignments.

Among Matthews's most important discoveries was a distinction that he attributed to the insight of Arizona's Senator Carl Hayden, who distinguished between senate "show horses" and "work horses."<sup>8</sup> The behavior of senators who strove for fame differed greatly from that of those who were hard workers behind the scenes. "If you want to get your name in the paper," Senator Hayden told Matthews, "be a show horse. If you want to gain the respect of your colleagues, keep quiet and be a work horse."<sup>9</sup> The work of the Senate and of its committees, Matthews reported, was often tedious, time consuming and "politically unrewarding." It was the senate "work horses" who uncomplainingly shouldered the burden. This behind-the-scenes work generally did not achieve fame outside the Senate, except possibly in a member's home state, but the "work horses" earned their colleagues' respect while "others whose names are household words are thought to be second-raters and slackers."<sup>10</sup> Since no one could become an expert on all the subjects that come before the U.S. Senate, effective senators learned to become specialists, and when they did rise to speak, other senators paid attention to what they had to say. John Williams could well have been a model for the kind of specialist "work horse" senator that Matthews described. Other senators soon learned that when the slender man from Delaware with the thin reedy voice rose to speak he had something to say, because he never spoke until he had done his homework.

The formal record is silent on the subject, but it is reasonable to assume that one person to whom the fledgling senator turned for advice at the beginning of his career in Washington was John G. Townsend, Jr. Townsend and Williams were good friends, and the older man often drove the short distance from Selbyville to Millsboro to meet with Williams when the senator was in town. As an old man, Townsend was an erratic driver and his car was easy to recognize, because he sometimes parked in the middle of the street. Even after he succumbed to his sons' pressure to get a driver, Townsend would sometimes emerge from the place he had been visiting while the driver was off having a smoke, get behind the wheel and

drive off, leaving the driver behind. Townsend was a beloved figure, especially in his home area, and even though he had his eccentricities, he was an experienced politician. In many respects Townsend had set the path that Williams would follow. The two men had much in common. Both were Senate workhorses who studied issues diligently, concentrated on committee work, and earned the respect of their peers. Both focused on the impact of government policies on small businessmen and farmers, particularly those engaged in the poultry business. Both considered their service on the Senate Finance Committee to be their most important committee work in the Senate, and both became close friends of Harry Flood Byrd of Virginia, who was, by Williams's time, a ranking Democrat on the Finance Committee.

John Townsend's public career had exposed him to a wide range of experiences that informed his thinking and may have influenced his discussions with Williams. In 1945 Townsend had an unexpected opportunity to perform one final service for his nation when President Truman selected him to be a member of the American delegation to the organizational meetings of the United Nations. Townsend traveled to Europe for the UN meetings, which were held in London, and also visited Berlin, where he was deeply impressed by the destruction and poverty that surrounded him there. He wrote to his children, "I decided the UNO must succeed and end all wars or the next war would destroy all civilization even without atomic bombs."<sup>11</sup> In the London meetings Townsend served as Eleanor Roosevelt's alternate to the committee that addressed humanitarian and social concerns. In spite of their political differences, the former first lady and the Sussex County farmer found that they enjoyed one another's company and shared similar concerns for achieving world peace and human freedom.

Mrs. Roosevelt, after decades of deferring to her mother-in-law and her husband in the management of the Hyde Park estate, now had ownership of the property, and who better to advise her about planting and maintaining the estate's apple orchards than John Townsend. After the conclusion of the meetings in London, Eleanor Roosevelt, accompanied by her son Elliott and his wife, the actress Faye Emerson, visited Townsend in Selbyville to see the nation's largest apple-orchard operation at first hand. As was her custom, Mrs. Roosevelt described her experience in her syndicated column "My Day" on June 16, 1946. "I went down to look at one of the most remarkable farming operations which I have ever had the pleasure of seeing," she told her readers. Sussex County impressed Mrs. Roosevelt's practiced eye as "ideal farming country with its

mixture of sandy soil and rich bottom land and its areas of woodland." "The fields," she wrote, "are broad and flat, without stones. To a New Yorker it seemed an incredibly rich and easy land on which to farm. Over the whole area chickens were being raised in great numbers and every farm looked like a satisfactory and prosperous undertaking." She also rhapsodized about the county's dairy farms, which she found "beautiful," while "the fields of peas and beans and other produce seemed endless." The Roosevelts were guests for a lunch at Townsend's home in Selbyville where they were treated to a home-cooked country meal that consisted of fried chicken, mashed potatoes and gravy, greens, biscuits, all finished off with homemade ice cream and cake.<sup>12</sup>

The image of well-ordered agrarian prosperity that Eleanor Roosevelt glimpsed on a June day in 1946 reflected a world that John Williams was dedicated to preserving. It might have disturbed Mrs. Roosevelt to know that, in the mind of Delaware's new senator, the most serious impediment to that objective was the federal government as it had grown under her late husband's leadership. Senator Williams enunciated his hostility to big government on many occasions, but perhaps never so succinctly as in a radio broadcast in May 1947 when he warned that the United States "stands on the brink of financial collapse and is rapidly drifting into a socialistic pattern of government." Comparing America's peril with that of ancient Rome on the verge of its decline, he argued that "the danger to our American form of government is not so much the activity of Socialism or Communism as the inactivity of individual free enterprise and a free economy . . . governed by a free market in which prices, supply and demand are free to reach an equilibrium without government intervention."<sup>13</sup>

The most destructive among the government's economically interventionist bureaucracies, in Williams's personal experience, was the Department of Agriculture. John Williams had a score to settle with the USDA. As soon as he arrived in Washington, he quietly began to investigate the department's role in the black market scandal that had embarrassed the Delmarva poultry industry during the recent war. With his other responsibilities and his passion for thoroughness, the investigation moved slowly, so it was not until August 1949 that he made public his findings. By then the black-market story had faded from most people's minds and Williams's revelations resonated with only a small number. But to John Williams and his neighbors in Sussex County, his discoveries represented a vindication from an unmerited indictment.

According to Williams, the real culprit in the black market ring

had been Charles Herbert, known as the “Czar of the Eastern Poultry Industry,” a convicted racketeer, who headed the West 17th Street Poultry Company in New York City. Herbert, Williams charged, led a gang that gained control over Delmarva poultry sales during the war. With the complicity of key USDA officials and in violation of antitrust and OPA regulations, the conspirers forged the names of Delmarva farmers to permit forms that allowed truck loads of live chickens to escape their proper destination on the plates of American soldiers and wind up instead in lower Manhattan where they were sold at high black-market prices.

That gangsters had profited while giving Delaware and Maryland poultry farmers an undeserved reputation for unpatriotic rapaciousness roused the senator’s ire. But what really made him angry was the complicity of government officials who were being paid by their countrymen to prevent the very sort of activity that they secretly connived to permit while simultaneously feeding false accusations against the farmers to the newspapers. “I remember how during the last war the farmers in my state . . . were unjustly blasphemed by the same group of irresponsible government agents who were at the same time withholding and concealing this damaging evidence on the real culprits,” the irate senator declared. “Then as a plain citizen living in that area, I protested those lies—and got nowhere.”<sup>14</sup> The peninsular black market scandal had been a burr under the saddle of John Williams, but after the war few people outside of Delmarva cared about it anymore. Williams’s revelations made little impact in Washington. His investigation did serve to satisfy his constituents back home, and it set the tone for his later investigative work.

Exposing government officials’ complicity in illegal or irresponsible acts became the hallmark of John Williams’s Senate career and helped to earn him the title “conscience of the Senate.” Over the course of his four terms in the Senate, Williams consistently blasted one agency more than any other, the Department of Agriculture’s Commodity Credit Corporation, or CCC. In Williams’s view the CCC’s policies, which were supposedly intended to help farmers, were in fact harmful to agriculture.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt had created the Commodity Credit Corporation by executive order in the fall of 1933 as an emergency measure to prevent ruin among the nation’s cotton farmers during a severe slump in the price of raw cotton. Using money borrowed from other government agencies, the CCC offered loans to cotton farmers at a rate a bit above the market price and took the

farmers' crops as collateral. The terms of the loan required participating farmers to restrict their planting for the following year in an effort to control overproduction. If the market price rose above the price of the loan, farmers could redeem their crop.<sup>15</sup> In the years that followed, the CCC's lend-and-store program was extended to include other non-perishable agricultural commodities, and the agency became the federal government's primary mechanism for stabilizing agricultural production and prices.

In his maiden speech before the U.S. Senate on March 19, 1947, John Williams addressed government purchases of agricultural commodities. At that time meat prices were rising fast, just as the Democrats had predicted they would when the Republicans had insisted on ending price controls in the fall of 1946. But was the demise of OPA responsible for these skyrocketing prices? Williams thought not, and he had marshaled a host of statistical data to demonstrate that the USDA's own Commodity Credit Corporation was the true culprit. According to Williams's numbers, the CCC had been buying large quantities of bacon, sausages, and other agricultural commodities at a time when prices for these commodities were already high, thus driving prices higher still, destabilizing markets, and wasting the taxpayers' money.<sup>16</sup> This was standard Williams oratory on a typical Williams theme to which the Senate and the American people were soon to become accustomed. He was clear; he was hard-hitting; and he had the facts drawn from pages of numbers in obscure agency reports to back up his argument.

Like other freshman senators, Williams drew assignments on several of the Senate's less significant committees. His one important committee in the 80th Congress was the special committee that had been created during World War II to investigate war procurements and production. Originally chaired by Harry S. Truman when he represented Missouri in the Senate, the committee was in its twilight in 1947 when Williams and another Republican freshman, Joseph McCarthy, were assigned to it. The special committee's work failed to appeal to the junior senator from Wisconsin's appetite for scandal mongering, but it provided Williams with the opportunity to investigate wartime poultry procurements that led to his revelations about the black market cover up.

John Williams first made national headlines in the course of the Special Committee's interrogation of the multimillionaire airplane builder Howard Hughes. Hughes appeared before the committee to explain why his firm had been unable to produce well designed planes in an efficient, cost-effective manner. The aspect of Hughes's wartime work that captured Williams's attention, how-

ever, was the manufacturer's claim that he made no wartime profits. His suspicions aroused, John Williams scrutinized Hughes's tax records to discover that Hughes had indeed made significant profits during the war. When the senator confronted Howard Hughes with his discoveries during a committee hearing, the revelation created what the *New York Times* called a "violent but short-lived sensation" that made national headlines.<sup>17</sup> The national press was surprised at Williams's sudden emergence as a forceful committee-man. Up until his clash with Hughes, the Delawarean had seemed content to sit silently, chin in hand, listening to his more loquacious Republican colleagues who had been doing their best to discredit FDR's son Elliott Roosevelt, because the late President's son had intervened to help Hughes secure an Army contract. Williams had nothing to say about that politically charged issue, but tax returns were something concrete that Williams could interpret. It was through his persistence that the Hollywood millionaire was made to pay nearly \$6,000,000 in back taxes.<sup>18</sup>

During his epic campaign to be elected President in his own right in 1948, Harry Truman toured the country by train, stopping at every town and city to castigate the Republican-controlled "do nothing 80th Congress." The insight that comes with time would suggest that, whatever else the 80th Congress may have been, it did not merit the sobriquet, "do nothing." From the Republican perspective the Congress's most important accomplishment was the Taft-Hartley Act, which limited the power of labor unions and was adopted over Truman's veto. In the area of foreign policy, the 80th Congress worked with the President to forge bipartisan support for Truman's containment policy toward the USSR, which included historic initiatives such as aid to Greece and Turkey, and the Marshall Plan, a fund to reconstruct Europe named for its creator, Secretary of State George C. Marshall.

President Truman made his appeal to Congress to commit the United States to aid Greece and Turkey in April 1947. At the time Greece was engulfed in a civil war in which communist forces seemed likely to be victorious, while militarily weak Turkey was threatened by its powerful Soviet neighbor. The loss of these countries to the "free world" would have seriously weakened western access to the eastern Mediterranean, the Holy Land, and the oil fields beyond. America's intervention was the nation's first major commitment in the Cold War, and Truman presented his request as part of a broad new policy to resist totalitarian communism throughout the world.

Despite the pleas of the Republican chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee Arthur Vandenberg, John Williams did not vote for aid to Greece and Turkey, nor did he support the Marshall Plan. The independent-minded Delawarean identified the President's request for aid to Greece and Turkey as one that involved "a new American political doctrine for the world, the cost of which could reach untold billions and the deployment of American manhood in the front line trenches of the global ramparts." Williams inclined toward isolationism and he was acutely sensitive to the cost of such an open ended commitment, which, he feared, might ultimately bankrupt the United States.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, he refused to bend to Senator Vandenberg's arguments to support the Marshall Plan. In the course of negotiations between Republican Congressional leaders and the State Department, the Republicans had urged that U.S. aid to Europe go to assist private enterprise rather than national governments. When the administration insisted on the latter, Republican Congressional leaders acquiesced, but John Williams refused to yield, and so voted against the Marshall Plan. By contrast, Delaware's other senator, Republican C. Douglass Buck, voted for the plan to aid European recovery.

That same year Williams also voted against the establishment of the National Science Foundation because he feared that it might be politicized, and he opposed a retirement bill for federal employees when, after careful reading, he discovered that it favored the interests of short-term employees in discontinued agencies over those of life long careerists.<sup>20</sup> His most acerbic criticism, however, was directed toward David E. Lilienthal, the former director of the Tennessee Valley Authority and a quintessential New Dealer, who was under consideration to become director of the Atomic Energy Commission. Williams, who viewed the TVA as a socialistic scheme, had little confidence in its director. Lilienthal, in turn, described the Delaware Senator as "a sallow, hollow-chested man," one among many ill-informed pests who made him question his decision to remain in public service.<sup>21</sup> Despite opposition from Williams and a few other ultra-conservatives, Arthur Vandenberg rallied enough Republican votes to confirm Lilienthal.

To Capitol Hill watchers, Williams was just the sort of naysayer that Truman had in mind when he castigated the "do nothing 80th Congress." Williams refused to support any bill that seemed to him to advance socialism. He was even more hostile to government spending than was Senate Majority Leader Taft. He not only opposed the historic beginnings of America's containment policy, but he also stood against any federal aid to education because it would

lead to federal control of the schools. He was one of only three senators to vote against the 1948 farm bill. Williams's conservative stands seldom drew fire from his state's press, but Wilmington's *News-Journal* papers did publish an editorial regretting the junior senator's vote against the Marshall Plan.<sup>22</sup>

Not only was Williams consistently hostile to new concepts in domestic and foreign policy, he was even willing to ignore Senate procedure in order to make his opposition known. Such a case occurred when Senator William Langer (R-N.D.), chairman of the Civil Service Committee, was presenting the federal employee retirement bill to the Senate. According to Senate etiquette, majority party members of the committee did not speak against a bill that had won their committee's approval. When John Williams violated this rule by questioning a provision in the bill, Langer accused the Delawarean of procedural bad form. What Langer failed to acknowledge was that in the committee meetings he had used his power as chairman to prevent Williams from voicing his reservations. Thus, Williams felt he had no choice but to remain silent or to use his privilege to speak against the bill in the one forum where he could not be silenced. Williams told the Senate that his opposition was not to the bill as a whole, but only to the provision that provided a higher rate of retirement pay for employees who were fired or released from their jobs than for those who completed a lifetime of service. Williams's remarks caused the Senate to take a second look at the legislation and to modify it accordingly. Afterward, Senator Harry F. Byrd congratulated the Delawarean for having saved the taxpayers "hundreds of millions of dollars." In a letter to Williams Byrd observed "I heard quite a few senators compliment you although they voted against you."<sup>23</sup> In this episode Williams had demonstrated more than thoroughness. He had shown that he would not be thwarted.

John Williams was fulfilling the charge that he had promised to his constituents. He was fighting what he viewed as government waste and creeping socialism. He had salvaged the bruised honor of Delmarva poultry men. But those accomplishments were modest, backward looking, and hardly the stuff of legend. The incident that propelled Williams's career into a higher orbit was not of his making, but it was one for which he was prepared.

A few days before Christmas in 1947, John Williams made a startling announcement to the Senate that was to change his life and to have major consequences for the United States. Speaking quietly in the voice that had already earned him the nickname "whispering

Will,” Williams explained that early in the year he and his Senate colleague from Delaware, C. Douglass Buck, had received letters from people throughout the First State who claimed that the Bureau of Internal Revenue had overcharged them for their taxes. The Delaware senators had intervened in a routine way. They told Senator Styles Bridges, chairman of the Appropriations Committee, about the problem and he offered to send one of his committee’s investigators to Wilmington. When the investigator visited the Wilmington BIR office, he asked for the list of tax delinquents. Two aspects of the delinquent list aroused his interest: its inordinate length, and the appearance of John J. and Elsie Williams’s names on it for failure to pay their 1946 income taxes.

Senator Bridges had the unpleasant duty to bring the embarrassing fact to his Delaware colleague’s attention. Williams was shaken and embarrassed to hear that he had apparently failed to pay his taxes in the very year that had seen his election to the U.S. Senate. Years later Williams could still recall the self-questioning that assaulted him. “Well, I knew I’d paid it, but yet, did I mail it? Did they cash it? . . . a lot of things go through your mind.”<sup>24</sup> The freshman senator immediately called his Millsboro office and asked his business assistant to check through his canceled checks and let him know immediately if his and Elsie’s tax payment checks were there. Shortly after, Williams received a call confirming that, indeed, the senator’s canceled check for \$15,000 and his wife’s check for \$7,500, both endorsed by the BIR, were in the office file.

Assured that he was innocent of any wrong doing, Senator Williams focused on preventing his name from being besmirched by false accusations. He instructed his assistant in Millsboro to send the checks and the office copy of his tax return to his Washington address by registered mail and further cautioned that “before you seal the envelope you let the postmaster make a notation of the checks and the numbers, because I don’t even trust the registering.”<sup>25</sup> He further advised that the postmaster should witness the sealing of the envelope.

Meanwhile, the Appropriations Committee investigator discovered that the Williams’s checks had indeed been received by the cashier, stamped, and deposited in the Federal Reserve Bank in Philadelphia on June 4, 1946, “ostensibly to be applied to the accounts of persons other than the remitter.”<sup>26</sup> The investigator believed that this falsification of the record was entirely the responsibility of one employee, the cashier, who had used the Williams’s money “to cover” his own “alleged peculations.”<sup>27</sup> In light of those findings, Williams asked the Commissioner of Internal

Revenue, George J. Schoeneman, to write a letter that might be made public to clear the senator's name. Schoeneman resisted. Would it not be better he demurred, to keep quiet about the whole matter lest it stir up a storm in the press? But Williams argued that leaks were bound to reach the press anyway and insisted that the Commissioner vindicate him publicly. The senator also contacted the Comptroller General and the U.S. District Attorney for Delaware to request similar statements. On December 19, 1947, Commissioner Schoeneman reluctantly obliged with an unapologetic letter that exonerated the senator and informed him that the case of the errant cashier had been remanded to the District Attorney.<sup>28</sup>

With Schoeneman's letter in hand Senator Williams took to the floor of the Senate in early February 1948 to announce the discovery of irregularities in the Wilmington tax office. In his speech, Williams demanded that Commissioner Schoeneman suspend all employees in the Delaware office who had known of the illegal activities, and he demonstrated the enormity of the swindle by listing the names of more than five hundred people and firms whose tax payments had been made but not entered in the bureau's journal. The following day the story made headlines in Wilmington but excited little interest elsewhere.<sup>29</sup> This was, after all, embezzlement on a very small scale: one employee in the nation's smallest tax office had proven to be a bad apple and the authorities were taking steps to deal with the problem.

Although the crime appeared small, it was, nonetheless, troubling. Williams continued to receive more facts about the Wilmington cashier's activities from an internal BIR investigation conducted by the bureau's Philadelphia area supervisor of accounts and collections. The dishonest cashier, Maurice A. Flynn, had been appointed to his post in 1938. Two years later, finding himself short of cash, he began his criminal escapade by cashing a few taxpayers' checks and pocketing cash payments. He covered his defalcations with the checks of other taxpayers. After a while he got greedier. The accounts were more seriously scrambled, the check kiting more rampant. The Williamses' checks just happened to arrive conveniently at a moment when Flynn needed their \$22,500 to cover other checks. The Williamses' checks were especially tempting because they had prepaid their taxes, which meant that the theft was not likely to be discovered for so long that John and Elsie Williams might forget that they had already paid when they received the notice of nonpayment.

In all, Flynn had tampered with the payments of two thousand Delawareans. Strangely, no one in the Wilmington office appeared

to notice his embezzlement, except for one lowly female clerk whose suspicions were assuaged by the trust and respect that she bore toward Mr. Flynn, her boss's boss. What struck the Senator was the strangely forgiving attitude of the District Collector, Norman Collison, and of the collector's assistant. When first confronted with evidence of the cashier's thievery, these two officials did nothing. When the pattern of embezzlement was brought to the attention of the commissioner of the Bureau, the United States Senate, the U.S. District Attorney, and the public, the Wilmington collector still argued that the cashier had done nothing terribly wrong and should be permitted to repay the money owed and continue in his job. When asked why he had not admitted his crimes before, Cashier Flynn told the BIR investigator, "My bosses did not open their mouth so why should I tell on myself."<sup>30</sup>

Such indifference struck Senator Williams as hardly appropriate to officials who were entrusted with guarding the people's money. It was only due to pressure from regional and national BIR officials that Flynn was finally suspended and not until months later that BIR Commissioner Schoeneman reluctantly admitted the wrongdoing to Senator Williams. As late as February 1948, the commissioner was still defending Collector Collison for his refusal to suspend Flynn until he had obtained "incontrovertible evidence of theft."<sup>31</sup> Commissioner Schoeneman refused Williams's requests that he suspend Collison nor would he write letters of apology to the taxpayers whose accounts had been misappropriated to reassure them that the source of the problem had been found. Such a revelation, the commissioner told Williams, might "disturb them needlessly."<sup>32</sup> Schoeneman's attitude was not shared by J. E. McNamee, the supervisor of Accounts and Collections in the BIR's Philadelphia office, who wrote to Schoeneman's deputy that the efforts of the Wilmington collector and his assistant to hide and then hush up the embezzlement had been "presumptuous, to say the least."<sup>33</sup>

Having done his best to obtain justice from the politically appointed BIR commissioner, Williams turned to the warmer welcome of the Republican-controlled Senate. In March 1948 William Langer, Chairman of the Post Office and Civil Services Committee on which Williams served, agreed to appoint the Delawarean to lead a subcommittee charged with investigating the question of the Wilmington collector's culpability. As chairman of an officially constituted subcommittee, Williams had the power to subpoena confidential information that he could not otherwise obtain. Through the subcommittee he could call witnesses to testify under oath about matters within the committee's area of responsibility. In

his appearance before the subcommittee, Norman Collison fell back on a then-common sexist technique to vindicate himself. He had first been informed of Flynn's embezzlement in November 1946, he said, but had dismissed the charges because they were made by "this little girl," a mere clerical worker. Collison's condescension was reinforced by the Bureau's deputy commissioner who said that the suspicions of an unclassified clerk of questionable mathematical skills counted for little. Every time Collison mentioned the clerk he discredited her with the prefix "this little girl," until Senator Williams exploded that excuse with the remark that "apparently she knew more of what was going on than anyone else in the office."<sup>34</sup>

Maurice J. Flynn later pleaded guilty to embezzlement and was sentenced to four years imprisonment in January 1948. Williams failed, however, to find sufficiently damaging evidence to remove either Collector Norman Collison or his assistant from their jobs as the Delaware District's top tax gatherers. By all outward appearances, Flynn had been a rogue in an otherwise clean operation. But if that were so, why had Flynn's superiors been so complacent about his thefts? Williams was not satisfied with the bureau's evasions. "I always try to finish what I start," he told a reporter as he continued to dig.<sup>35</sup> In May 1948 Williams told the Senate that his investigation had uncovered an unacceptable level of complacency and unfairness in the Bureau of Internal Revenue's handling of Flynn's malfeasance. Flynn's superiors, who had done nothing when they found out about the embezzlement, were being pensioned off or given raises to their already substantial salaries while the real heroine of the case, the \$2,394 tax office clerk, whom Collector Collison had described as a "little girl," had earned no reward.<sup>36</sup> Having made his point, seen some degree of justice done, and brought the Bureau under scrutiny, it appeared to John Williams that the tax office issue was closed. His experience had given Williams insight into the organization of the Bureau of Internal Revenue and into the priorities that guided the Bureau's leaders. The affair left the Delaware senator with lingering doubts about the integrity of the nation's tax collection system.

In the summer of 1948 John Williams once again concentrated his attention on agriculture. He condemned as inflationary the USDA's policy of providing price supports for farm commodities above the cost of production. Equating free-enterprise markets with personal freedom, he kept up his argument that agriculture should be governed by the law of supply and demand rather than held hostage by government controls. He pointed to the example of potatoes, which were then in oversupply. Delaware farmers were selling



**An angry Williams speaking before the Senate Agriculture Committee in 1952. Courtesy of University of Delaware Library.**

potatoes to the government for \$2.75 a pound and buying back the same potatoes as animal feed for a penny a pound. Why, the senator asked, couldn't the potatoes that were rotting in government warehouses be shipped to feed the starving people in other countries?<sup>37</sup> On a related topic, he aroused the ire of farm cooperatives in the West with a suggestion that the undistributed earnings of the cooperatives be taxed as were undistributed earnings in other businesses.<sup>38</sup> Williams also warned a convention of grain and feed dealers in Chicago that free enterprise would be doomed if the tax laws continued to permit farm cooperatives to stash away money not subject to tax and estimated that such a tax would yield \$600,000,000 a year to the U.S. Treasury. His positions were not popular with all farmers, of course, and it was clear to anyone who knew about Williams's own business that the poultry farmers stood to benefit from cheaper grain prices. Williams did not advocate eliminating the price-support system altogether, for he believed that government supports were needed to protect farmers from bank-

ruptcy in the event that commodity prices fell below production costs. For this reason he favored lowering the supports to just under the cost of production, just enough, that is, to encourage farmers to adjust their production to market realities and prevent the costly accumulation of government-stored superfluous commodities.

Meanwhile, 1948 was a presidential election year. Predictably, Williams had supported fellow Senator Robert A. Taft going into the Republican convention and swung around to the more moderate Thomas E. Dewey only after it became clear that Taft could not win. As a first time senator, Williams was asked to do little speaking during the campaign. His support for Taft, combined with his demonstrated interest and ability, did gain him a significant reward. Although the Republicans lost their majority in the 81st Congress, Taft, now the minority leader, chose Williams to fill the one Republican seat on the Finance Committee, a position from which he could keep an eye on the tax collectors and help to write tax law.

Williams continued to keep a close watch on agriculture policy, and when the 81st Congress met he renewed his attacks on the Commodity Credit Corporation. Charging that the CCC's books were more than \$350,000,000 out of balance, he requested that the agency make a full financial report to Congress. Senator Scott Lucas (D-Ill.), chairman of the Agriculture Committee, angrily accused the Delaware senator of "grand standing."<sup>39</sup> In spite of their majority, the Democrats could not hide the agency's financial affairs from the public, for by now Williams had earned a reputation for never speaking before he had the facts to back up his assertions. His consistency won him more than respect; it gave him power. The press was paying attention. The *Philadelphia Inquirer* charged in April 1949 that the CCC scandal was beginning to "make Teapot Dome look like an anthill," and the paper's editors credited Williams for digging out the figures that brought the missing hundreds of millions to the public's attention.<sup>40</sup>

Williams's most damning assault on the CCC concerned the agency's manipulation of grain storage during the 1948 election year. In a June 1948 campaign speech in Dexter, Iowa, Harry S. Truman first made the memorable charge that his favorite whipping boy, the Republican "do nothing 80th Congress" had "stuck a pitchfork in the back of American farmers." The President cited an obscure provision to the CCC recharter bill that had prevented the agency from acquiring storage bins near grain farms. The agency's inability to acquire bins was important because the CCC's rules forbade it from making loans to farmers unless their crops were properly stored. That year, however, a bumper crop had outrun existing

storage facilities. The President argued that, because of the Republicans' stipulation against bins, grain farmers would be forced to sell at low prices. Truman's charge played well among worried farmers, especially in corn producing regions, and it became a significant factor in his unexpected victory in November.<sup>41</sup>

Among Republicans, John Williams was best equipped to counter the President's charge, but he was unable to put together a counterattack until after the election. It took Williams until April 1949 to assemble evidence that the Truman administration had deceived the American voters on the grain-bin issue. Contrary to the President's charge, Williams found, the administration itself, not the Republican Congress, had created the grain price plunge in 1948 by its own policy of selling off government storage bins.<sup>42</sup> The source of his information was the CCC "Grain Bins and Equipment Report" of October 1947, which revealed that the agency had sold four-fifths of its wartime supply of bins as surplus and that the government was still selling off its bins on the very day when the President made his charge in Dexter, Iowa. Furthermore, the senator could recall no Democrats rising to protest when the bins provision was placed in the CCC bill. By the time that Williams made his countercharge, the grain bin issue had lost its immediate political appeal, but neither Senator Williams nor Truman's equally feisty and tenacious new Secretary of Agriculture, Charles Brannan, would let go of it and both used their contacts with the press to prolong the battle. Brannan fired back at Williams in an article that appeared in the *Washington Post* in August 1949. Williams's claim that the government had sold storage bins was unfair, the secretary said, because the bins in question had been on leased land and by law the government could not renew the leases. The senator was also wrong, Brannan responded, in accusing the administration of having failed to warn Congress about the danger of the prohibition against government acquisition of bins close to farms when the CCC Charter was revised. The President, Brannan said, had criticized that provision when he signed the re-charter bill into law.<sup>43</sup>

Williams was not to be denied his own counter punch. He provided his evidence to a journalist named Glenn D. Everett, who wrote an article on the subject entitled "The Great Farm Hoax of 1948." Everett tried unsuccessfully to peddle the piece to several popular mass-market magazines but none would accept it. The editor at *Collier's* told Everett that his article was "a delayed post-mortem."<sup>44</sup> Everett did not give up; he merely set the Farm Hoax article aside until political conditions might make it timely once more. That opportunity came four years later as the nation ap-

proached its next presidential election. In the summer of 1952 the *Saturday Evening Post* published Everett's article under the title "WOW! Did Truman Ever Fool the Farmers!" The sensationalized introduction promised "An inside report on President Truman's most daring gamble in his 1948 campaign, and how it paid off: the great farm hoax of Dexter, Iowa, which never would have been exposed if a stubborn senator hadn't smelled a rat."<sup>45</sup>

In this widely circulated article Everett portrayed Williams as a "one man investigating committee" conscientiously seeking facts to satisfy his suspicions. He explained how the senator had gone into CCC records and had discovered that the CCC was selling bins before they were even unpacked from the factory at a fraction of what the agency had paid for them. According to the senator's findings, Everett said, during the weeks that proceeded the election of 1948, the CCC mysteriously failed to make grain purchases despite the bumper crop. Consequently prices fell, the farmers blamed the Republicans, and Harry Truman was elected President of the United States.<sup>46</sup>

John Williams continued to oppose Charles Brannan's price support policies at the USDA throughout President Truman's second term. Williams emerged as the major voice on behalf of northeastern farmers, who typically produced crops that had no government supports, or, as in the case of the poultry industry, for whom price supports for grain represented an additional cost of doing business. Williams argued that price supports encouraged costly overproduction and discouraged experimentation to find new crops. Although his advocacy on behalf of free enterprise in agriculture made him a significant figure in agricultural affairs, it was his investigations into the Bureau of Internal Revenue, an agency that directly touched the life of nearly every adult American, that was to catapult Williams into national headlines.

## Uncovering the Tax Mess

In March 1949, Jesse Cooper, a Dover-born tax accountant and a Democrat who had served in the Bureau of Internal Revenue until he was elected in 1944 to a term as Treasurer of Delaware, visited Senator Williams in his Washington office. Williams, who knew Cooper only slightly through their mutual association with the Masonic Order, did not know the reason for the appointment. When the door was closed behind them, Jesse Cooper looked the senator in the eye and said, “what I am about to tell you must be kept absolutely confidential. My name must never be associated with it.” After Williams had agreed to those terms, Cooper told him that he had information, the source of which he would not divulge, that there was an organized tax-fixing ring within the Bureau of Internal Revenue that reached to the top of the organization. Cooper said that he lacked the specific information to prove his amazing allegation, but he knew that it was true.<sup>1</sup> “The agreement was that I was to take that information if I felt I could do anything with it, and work with it. But if I ever got overboard, caught out on a limb, never to call on him to back up what he was telling me. He said ‘You’re on your own.’ ”<sup>2</sup>

No one can say for certain why Jesse Cooper chose to bring this information to John Williams. Several years later when high-ranking BIR officials were being indicted and John Williams was credited with breaking the biggest scandal in the Truman administration, journalists who wrote about the senator’s role assumed a direct tie between the earlier Wilmington tax case and the later revelations about even more serious problems in the tax offices of St. Louis, San Francisco, Boston, and elsewhere. It made a good story to picture the Delaware senator discovering the existence of a nationwide tax-fixing ring through personal experience. But to see the story in that light was to telescope two not directly related events. The only relationship may have been that Williams’s demonstration of investigative skills and discretion in the Wilmington case gave

Cooper confidence that, although Williams was a Republican, he was the right man to entrust with the task of tackling tax corruption on a national scale.

Throughout 1949 and 1950, as Senator Williams worked quietly to discover if facts bore out Jesse Cooper's claims, he used no investigative committee and no special staff and desired neither, because he did not want anyone involved in the investigation who might leak information. Williams did the work himself with only one helper, a junior secretary in his office, Eleanor Lenhart, a native of Millsboro who had come to Washington with the senator at the beginning of his senatorial career and remained his employee until his death. Although Miss Lenhart was only an assistant to his primary secretary, Arden Bing, the senator recognized her special talent for reading budgets and accounts, an affinity that matched his own, and she remained his chief investigative colleague throughout his years in Washington.

During his four terms in the Senate, Williams maintained a small staff that never exceeded more than eight employees. From his first term until 1959, the senator's chief aide was George Short Williams (no relation), who might be described as the elder statesman among Millsboro residents. Compared to the senator, George Williams was a seasoned professional in the world of politics. Mayor of Millsboro in the 1920s, he had gone on to become state treasurer during the worst years of the Depression and then had served one term in the U.S. House of Representatives. George Williams had been born in Ocean View in 1877 and was a graduate of Dickinson College. He was seventy-three when he began in the senator's office and eighty-one when he retired. His primary job was to oversee the staff and to handle constituent problems and draft legislation. Within that office structure, Senator Williams maintained a cordial relationship with his staff. Occasionally he played practical jokes on them and they reciprocated in kind. One year for the senator's birthday, the staff wrapped two Washington D.C. telephone directories in tinfoil and got the Senate cafeteria baker to put chocolate icing on them. They presented the "cake" to the senator and gave him a knife to cut into it. After that experience the senator was forever suspicious of cakes and always refused to cut them.<sup>3</sup>

Eleanor Lenhart had known John Williams and his family all her life. Her childhood home was across the street from the Williams residence. Her family owned a farm and bought their chicken feed from Williams. She had been a member of the same high school class as the Williams's daughter, Blanche, and had then gone to Wilmington to study in a secretarial college. She was working at a

bank in Wilmington when the newly elected senator came to visit her boss. Later that day, her boss told her that Senator Williams was offering her a job in his Washington office if she wanted it, and if her boss would release her. It was typical of the senator, she said, to have shown such courtesy to her boss at the bank as to ask his permission to offer a job to one of his employees. Eleanor moved to Washington in early 1947 and found an apartment in the city's northwest section, which she shared with several other female government employees. Only later in her Washington years could she afford a small apartment on her own.

Her work days with the senator began early with routine correspondence and other paperwork. At 8:00 A.M. she frequently joined Williams at breakfast in the Senate cafeteria. From ten until noon the senator was usually engaged with committee work, after which came lunch and the afternoon Senate session. Work on special investigations had to be done at night. The senator always insisted on



**John Williams and Eleanor Lenhart at work during the tax scandal era in 1952. Reproduced from *Pathfinder News Magazine* in Washington, D.C. Courtesy of University of Delaware Library.**

eating dinner before he resumed work. He and his secretary often walked to a local restaurant at Union Station or ate in the Senate restaurant. Sometimes they were joined by Mrs. Williams. Senator Williams favored restaurants that served his favorites: steak; lobster; and raw oysters. Work then resumed, often until 10 P.M., before they quit for the day.<sup>4</sup>

Despite Jesse Cooper's leads, progress on the tax investigation went slowly. For nearly fifteen months the senator practically lived in his office, working late even on weekends checking on allegations. Williams, always the gentleman, proceeded in the same fashion that had marked his hiring of Miss Lenhart: he asked the commissioner of the Bureau of Internal Revenue and other administrative department heads to provide him with information. They refused. Roadblocks abounded, but Williams was patient and persistent. Finally, an employee in the BIR who had heard of his investigation came to the senator with suggestions. "I began to get information," Williams recalled. "And when I did, for the next several months it just snowballed."<sup>5</sup> The senator's source became impatient that Williams was not making his revelations public, but the senator refused to divulge anything until he had collected as much information as possible, because, he said, "as long as I'm getting it, I'd better get it all, because once I start [making public charges] you're going to be sealed off as a source."<sup>6</sup> By the time he was ready to go public, Williams had amassed enough information to fill three drawers of a filing cabinet with documented cases of tax frauds involving tax collectors in cities all over the country. Of the sixty-four collectors in the country, eight were eventually indicted and convicted of tax fraud.

The materials that Williams analyzed so carefully and packed into the filing cabinet were certain to damage the Truman administration. Although the senator was not of the President's party, he always insisted that his motivation was not to gain partisan advantage but rather to rid the country of a serious problem in its tax collection bureaucracy. Senior Senate colleagues counseled Williams that protocol dictated that he should alert President Truman to problems in his administration so that the President might take appropriate action and preclude embarrassing public revelations. Williams, therefore, instructed Eleanor Lenhart to make an appointment for the senator to meet with the President.

When she called President Truman's appointments secretary, Matthew Connelly, Miss Lenhart was asked about the general nature of the matter that the senator wished to discuss. After hearing her explanation, Connelly replied that the President was a busy man

and could not spare the time to see the senator at any time in the foreseeable future, but that the White House would contact the senator's office if and when time became available on the President's calendar. A month went by with no word from the White House before Williams asked Miss Lenhart to call again. Once more she received the same negative reply. Three months after her original call, Miss Lenhart called yet again and, as the senator later explained "I never got a call back, and I figured, okay, if you want to play that way, I'll go to the Senate floor with my statement. So I went. . . . I was perhaps unduly harsh against the Truman administration because I was a little bit peeved."<sup>7</sup> What Williams did not know was that Matthew Connelly was personally tied in with the tax manipulators, so he conspired to keep the President from ever meeting with Williams. Connelly's role in a tax manipulation plot to aid a St. Louis company did finally catch up with him, and he was sentenced to a jail term in 1955.

Truman never knew that the senator from Delaware had asked to see him and he ever afterward harbored an intense dislike for John Williams, in part because he believed that Williams had failed to follow proper etiquette. Truman scholar Alonzo L. Hamby wrote of the President's attitude toward men like Williams that it was "a compound of personal indignation and mistaken political calculation. He seems to have genuinely believed that much of the outcry against corruption had been created by McCarthy-like senators seeking to embarrass the administration and grab publicity for themselves."<sup>8</sup>

Williams, in turn, was in no mood to spare the President. Following Truman's call in January 1951 for the public to make sacrifices by paying higher taxes to finance the Korean War, Williams countered by introducing a bill in the Senate to repeal the special tax advantages enjoyed by high government officials including congressmen, but most especially targeting the President's expense account. Republican newspaper editors and cartoonists delightedly trumpeted the story to embarrass the President, and the senator's mailbag reflected an outpouring of public support for his bill.<sup>9</sup> Responding to the public outcry, Truman told reporters at a news conference that he would be agreeable to paying taxes on his \$50,000 expense account.<sup>10</sup> Only later did it come to everyone's attention that the Constitution forbade altering a President's compensation while he was in office, so Williams and his cosponsor, Congressman Noah Mason [R.-Ill.], changed their bill to begin the tax on the President's expense account in 1953 when a new President would be inaugurated.

Fifteen months after Jesse Cooper had come to see Williams, the senator had seen enough documented evidence of misdoings at the Bureau of Internal Revenue to make a public statement. On February 5, 1951, he rose in the Senate and began what was to be a series of fact-laden speeches on the errant Bureau of Internal Revenue. The timing was right from the senator's point of view, not only because he had completed his investigations, but also because, in the aftermath of the 1950 elections, Williams had recently been made a member of the Senate Finance Committee, the committee charged with oversight of the government's tax collection and debt administration.

"Mr. President, today, possibly more than ever before in the history of this country," Williams rasped in a voice so low that the Senate stenographer had to move next to him to record his words, "the question of taxes has become of foremost and vital concern to almost all of our citizens. The sacrifices which each of us makes in the cause of freedom throughout the world in a large measure is represented in the taxes we pay. . . ." "Never," he remarked, "has the integrity, efficiency, and competency of the persons who collect our taxes been of greater importance. And yet it is doubtful if it has ever been much worse." The senator suggested that the Senate conduct a "careful, complete and constructive investigation" to insure that the government was collecting the money due it and to insure that the tax collection system was working fairly and accurately. His study of the problem, he said, had convinced him that "the morale, efficiency, and even the honesty of some of those who collect our federal taxes are distressingly bad," and he charged that "tax collection is shot full of cheap, inexcusably political manipulation." He planned, he said, "to devote a large part of my time in the days ahead in bringing to the attention of the public what I consider to be a deplorable situation. . . ." <sup>11</sup>

In this first speech, Williams exposed specific examples of bad management in the BIR's Third District of New York. That office, which employed 381 office workers and 241 field workers to cover tax collection in New York City, was one of the largest in the nation. In the five years since the end of World War II, eight deputy collectors from that office had been convicted of criminal offenses and sent to jail. Commissioner George J. Schoeneman had called the deplorable conditions in the office to the attention of Secretary of the Treasury John W. Snyder on several occasions and internal investigations had pointed to the ineffectual administration of the office's collector, James W. Johnson. Yet Johnson remained, untrained political appointees continued to handle some of the most

complex tax forms in the country, and morale sank ever lower. Williams climaxed his exposé with the demand that Johnson be removed in light of his demonstrated deficiencies as an administrator.<sup>12</sup>

Headlines in the New York press the following day proclaimed that BIR Commissioner Schoeneman had already asked for Johnson's resignation, citing his inefficient management of the Third District office but that no action had been taken.<sup>13</sup> Among the letters that Senator Williams received in the wake of his speech was one from a tax consultant in New York City who had been calculating federal taxes since 1919. In the early days, the writer said, when the tax code was simple, the BIR was concentrated in Washington and run by experts. But later, the code got more complex and politics got in the way. The Bureau was decentralized and political appointees who knew little about tax collection or tax law were placed in charge of the regional offices. James Johnson, one such appointee, had inherited a mess in the Third District office which, the writer said, Johnson lacked the experience or the authority to change.<sup>14</sup>

Another letter came from John O. Hopkins, Wilmington, Delaware's most successful black business leader and a major figure in the state's Republican party. Hopkins wrote in his capacity as chairman of The Colored Republican State Executive Committee. He told the senator that "Jimmie" Johnson was the only black person among the sixty-four revenue collectors in the nation. Hopkins suspected that the Democrats, having reluctantly appointed Johnson, were only too happy to see a Republican senator attacking him. Appealing to Williams's reputation for fair play, Hopkins asked the Senator to "do all in your power to see that no injustice is done to my friend, Jimmie Johnson."<sup>15</sup> Williams replied that he had been ignorant of the New York collector's race until after his investigation was underway and that race "was not the reason for the investigation. . . ." If Johnson had done no wrong he would not be implicated, the senator promised.

Compared to later revelations about collectors who collaborated with tax cheaters and gangsters, James Johnson was innocent of wrongdoing. Neither Williams nor anyone else charged him with committing a crime. Johnson, a Democratic attorney, had the misfortune to be the object of the senator's first tax scandal revelation because he and the Third District office that he oversaw vividly exemplified why politics and tax collection were a poor mix.

In March and April 1951, James Johnson testified before a subcommittee of the Senate Finance Committee that politics often did

conflict with fair administrative practices. "If a collector does a good job administratively," he noted, "he is subject to criticism from political sources. If he does . . . a good job politically, he is subject to criticism administratively."<sup>16</sup> Johnson told the Senators that prior to his employment as collector he had been interviewed by Michael Kennedy, the head of Tammany Hall, who asked about his loyalty to the Democratic party. He also said that certain politicians occasionally gave him "advice" concerning the hiring and firing of people in the BIR office. But no one, he told the senators, had ever interfered in the disposition of tax cases. Asked about how politicians brought pressure to bear on him, Johnson replied that a commonly used technique was to plant hostile stories about the collector in the press. He said that he had never been offered a bribe, and on further questioning retracted his original statement that he was subjected to political pressure.

Throughout the Johnson hearing, Senator Williams focused his questions on an internal supervisor's report that had blamed Johnson for permitting employees to come to work late and take long lunch breaks while hundreds of unanswered taxpayers' letters piled up on their desks. These deplorable administrative oversights, Johnson responded, had never been called to his attention. He was aware, he said, that the office suffered from administrative deficiencies, but the problems had been there when he had arrived and he had been able to do little to overcome them.

The week before James Johnson appeared before them, the Finance subcommittee had heard testimony from Commissioner George Schoeneman, a longtime veteran of the BIR, who had assured the senators that the Bureau was ahead of Senator Williams in spotting and correcting its own deficiencies. Asked by Senator Williams if the commissioner's investigations included the Bureau's office in St. Louis, Missouri, where a federal grand jury was probing alleged improprieties by the regional collector, Schoeneman responded with an emphatic "No."<sup>17</sup>

This exchange foreshadowed Senator Williams second target for revelations about corruption in the BIR. Just two weeks after Schoeneman gave his Senate testimony, James P. Finnegan, the collector of Internal Revenue for St. Louis, resigned from office. The press labeled the resignation "another scalp for Senator Williams," but President Truman refused to concede any ground and accepted the collector's resignation "with extreme reluctance."<sup>18</sup> A month later, on May 7, 1951, Williams took the Senate floor to lay before his colleagues the full story behind the St. Louis collector's departure.

The St. Louis BIR office and its leader, who was a career politician in the Democratic machine of that city, were the object of intense scrutiny in the spring of 1951. In March a federal judge ordered a grand jury to investigate alleged corruption in the office. Although Finnegan was exonerated, he resigned his office in early April. Williams, who was paying close attention to the case through informants within the government and at the St. Louis *Post-Dispatch*, quietly applied pressure to the Truman administration to reveal publicly why Finnegan had felt compelled to resign.<sup>19</sup> When that tactic failed, Williams went to the Senate floor on May 7 and accused the administration of withholding damaging information about Finnegan from the grand jury. The senator did not reveal until much later that he had already supplied much of this information to the Treasury Department, which had done nothing with it. Williams then read into the record a stream of verifiable facts that demonstrated how Finnegan, while serving as collector, had entered into business deals in which he used his government office to benefit himself and his business partners. In one case, Finnegan had supplied a list of tax delinquents to an insurance company that wanted to sell policies to people with tax problems. Under the terms of his arrangement with the insurance company, Finnegan was to earn a percentage from every policy sold to a name from the list. In another instance, Williams traced a complicated set of transactions whereby Finnegan had acted as attorney for the American Lithofold Corporation, a St. Louis-based business form supplier. Lithofold had been denied a loan from the government's Reconstruction Finance Corporation (RFC) because of a negative financial report. Finnegan used his influence to reverse that decision and the company was awarded a loan of \$565,000.<sup>20</sup>

The St. Louis case proved important politically because it exposed President Truman's weakness for protecting his old associates from Missouri's Pendergast machine and other friends from the early days of his political career. The senator's speech about the St. Louis tax office and its collector coincided with a second grand jury probe into Finnegan's influence peddling that ultimately produced indictments against the former collector and also led to the resignation of J. Howard McGrath, the attorney general of the United States, and T. Lamar Caudle, the head of the Tax Division of the Justice Department. President Truman's appointment secretary, Matthew Connelly, was also linked to the deal makers, hence Senator Williams's belief that Connelly had deliberately kept the senator and the President from meeting. It should be noted, however, that Finnegan was appointed collector for St. Louis in 1944 when

Franklin D. Roosevelt was in the White House. The BIR Commissioner at that time had been Robert E. Hannegan, formerly chairman of the Democratic National Committee and a longtime friend of Harry Truman. Hannegan and his successor at the BIR, Joseph D. Nunan, Jr., another Roosevelt appointee, claimed to have selected political figures to be regional collectors, in part as a strategy to overcome the Bureau's reputation for unbending, and sometimes inhumane, application of the tax laws. But as the BIR investigations demonstrated, political patronage proved a poor substitute for rule-bound bureaucracy.

In the course of his exposure of the nefarious doings in St. Louis, Williams was assisted by Ted Link, an investigative reporter at the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* who wrote a series of articles about American Lithofold's RFC loan that won him a Pulitzer Prize and drew national attention to the sorry state into which that once incorruptible Depression era agency had fallen. Link kept voluminous files on gangsters operating in the St. Louis region that he shared with the Senate's crime-investigating committee led by Democratic Senator Estes Kefauver of Tennessee and with other politicians who impressed him as honestly attempting to clean up corruption.<sup>21</sup> Link was but one among a number of reporters scattered throughout the United States who admitted Senator Williams into their confidence. Mutual trust characterized the relationships between the senator and his investigative partners in the press. On more than one occasion reporters delayed printing stories to allow the senator to complete his investigations, thereby insuring that potential sources would not be closed to him.<sup>22</sup>

The tax cases brought John Williams into the national spotlight at a time when Americans hungered for greater honesty in government. During the same year the shrill voice of Senator Joseph McCarthy was heard denouncing clandestine communist conspiracies in the State Department and the Kefauver committee was investigating links between government officials and figures in organized crime. The search for heroic figures who displayed the courage and tenacity to expose wrongdoers and to restore Americans' faith in the fundamental decency of their society found expression in articles about John Williams that appeared in the press and in national magazines in the early 1950s. The Delaware senator's rural origins, his quiet unpretentious demeanor, even his weak speaking voice and wooden delivery style, all fed the heroic image of the crusading senator.<sup>23</sup> Unlike Senator Joseph P. McCarthy, who proved to be a problematic hero, Williams always did his homework before he

opened his mouth in public and took supreme care to avoid making false accusations. Furthermore, Williams honored the confidences of those who gave him sensitive information. It was this latter characteristic especially that led government workers and others to confide in John Williams, knowing that he would not use the information they supplied to expose them or to hurt innocent people.

Typical of the sort of unsolicited adulation that the senator received from groups as well as from individuals during the tax-scandal period was a resolution from the Public Forum of Spokane, Washington, dated March 30, 1952, "commending the courageous and able Senator for raising the curtain on this foul nest of government officials. . . ." <sup>24</sup> Another writer, a lawyer from Baltimore, Maryland, commended the senator's forthright stand against corruption, saying "I have heard many boys in the [government] service . . . tell of what had gone on under their eyes, and when asked why they did not expose such doings, they universally replied, that they would wind up in trouble and the big brass et. al., would go free. . . ." <sup>25</sup> Others wrote asking advice on their personal tax problems or to voice their suspicions about particular government employees. Some suggested avenues of investigation or told of grave injustices that had been done to them. Most acknowledged that they had learned about the senator and his work through reading a magazine article or hearing him on a radio or television news show. To all, the senator sent individual replies, suggesting that those with tax problems consult an accountant and directing others to appropriate government officials. To one writer, Senator Williams responded, "I am hoping that out of the cases thus far exposed there will be established a new era in the tax department whereby all tax payers can be treated fairly." <sup>26</sup>

While problems in the New York and St. Louis tax offices pointed to bad management practices and political corruption, cases in some other cities suggested that gangsters and racketeers were taking advantage of weaknesses in the BIR. The situation in the San Francisco office offered a dramatic instance. On May 17, 1951, the *San Francisco Examiner* reported that a federal judge in California had halted a grand jury probe into alleged problems in the Bay City's tax office and had rebuked a young assistant U.S. attorney named Charles O'Gara for presenting some disturbing information about the BIR office to the grand jurors. The incident, which the San Francisco press labeled "wild Wednesday," exposed festering deceptions and coverups that were being abetted by a California custom whereby that state's federal grand juries could only inquire into

those areas designated by a federal judge or a U.S. district attorney. O'Gara had not been authorized to present materials on the Bureau to the grand jury and he got dressed down by a federal judge for his impertinence.

O'Gara was not alone in his perception of corruption in the San Francisco BIR office. A Bay City newspaper reporter named Richard Hyer, who corresponded with Senator Williams, confirmed the senator's suspicions that the BIR was intimidating newsmen into shutting down their investigations by subjecting their income taxes to intense scrutiny.<sup>27</sup> Hyer supplied the senator with detailed information about the matters that O'Gara had given the grand jury. Included in the packet was the tale of a BIR employee in Oakland who, under extreme stress, had confessed to his wife that he had been keeping a girlfriend on the side. To support his mistress, the employee had made special deals with taxpayers and had also engaged in check kiting and similar schemes to secure cash. The wife, herself a former employee at the BIR, was shocked at her husband's admission about his mistress, but she was not surprised that such things happened routinely in the tax office because she recalled once having been told by her bosses to keep quiet about a massive underpayment by a large company. In the same vein, an anonymous correspondent, who claimed to be a civil service employee of the San Francisco BIR, wrote to the senator to thank him for his exposures and urged him to continue to fight the control of "racketeering, hoodlumism, and gangsterism" that had taken over tax collection and other parts of the government.<sup>28</sup>

Frustrated and frightened citizens, government employees, reporters, those who feared reprisals if they came forward with information about criminal activities in the BIR, all found a powerful and faithful friend in John Williams. Through the senator's efforts, Charles O'Gara was invited to appear before the Senate Finance Committee in August 1951. O'Gara told the senators that he had "seen the outlines of a shocking system of corruption in the handling of San Francisco internal revenues." The corruption, he warned, was of "gigantic" proportions and reached into high places. Corrupt officials had engineered the firing of one inquisitive newsmen and had blocked investigations by two grand juries, the young attorney said.<sup>29</sup> Soon after he made those charges before the Senate committee, O'Gara was subjected to an FBI investigation and was threatened with dismissal from government service, presumably because he had gone over the heads of his superiors. In the face of those threats, Senator Williams promised that he would "not sit idly by and see any reprisals against you or anyone because of

your cooperation,”<sup>30</sup> to which the young lawyer replied, “you have no idea how deeply I feel your encouragement and assistance. It has always come when things appeared blackest.”<sup>31</sup>

Assistant District Attorney O’Gara’s testimony destroyed the BIR leaders’ efforts to hide the San Francisco Internal Revenue Bureau’s corrupt practices. Not only the collector but his immediate subordinates, men with nicknames like “Pious Paul” Doyle, “Fat Jack” Boland, John “Marble Head” Malone (brother of “Willie the Fix” Malone), and Charles “Rubber Legs” Baird were brought to trial and convicted of a variety of crimes that included shake downs of legitimate businesses and the cover up of delinquencies in exchange for bribes.<sup>32</sup>

Among the cases of BIR maladministration that John Williams investigated, the most colorful involved special treatment for William “Big Bill” Lias, a hefty, double-chinned gambler from Wheeling, West Virginia. Speaking before the Senate on October 17, 1951, Williams said that the Kefauver committee’s investigation of the underworld had made him suspect that tax laws were not being applied to gangsters with an even hand. To test his suspicion he decided to study one instance that might serve as an example. The senator proceeded to lay out the story of William Lias, born, probably in Greece, with the surname Liacocas. During Prohibition Lias had made his living as a bootlegger in Michigan, Ohio, and West Virginia. He was arrested several times and served terms in jail. When Prohibition ended, Lias shifted his operations to cigarette-vending machines and gambling, ultimately owning portions of eighteen gambling clubs centered in Wheeling, West Virginia. In 1935 Lias was found guilty of tax evasion for failure to file tax returns between 1928 and 1932. A court sentenced him to make restitution but Lias defaulted, claiming financial inability. By 1947 he owed the government over \$2 million in back taxes. In the meantime, however, he had purchased the Old West Virginia State Fair grounds in Wheeling, where he built Wheeling Downs Race Track. In 1948 the government again prosecuted the gambler for tax evasion. Lias pleaded guilty, but when the judge imposed a harsher sentence than the gambler had bargained for, Lias accused the court of double crossing him and rescinded his guilty plea. Lias was then retried and the sentence was reduced to payment of the outstanding taxes.

Over the next three years, while the government made no effort to collect its money, Lias quietly shifted the bulk of his assets to members of his family. During the period from 1948 through 1951,

Senator Williams discovered, Lias paid nothing to Uncle Sam but paid \$300,000 in lawyers' fees to fight the government's claim. "This case," the senator told his colleagues, was "presented as an example of how the government has enforced the tax laws as affecting one of America's most notorious racketeers. Instead of my drawing any conclusions I have attempted to merely state the facts—each taxpayer can compare this case with the treatment he has received."<sup>33</sup>

The senator had first learned of the Lias case from Chester (Chet) Howard, a reporter for the *Pittsburgh Press*, who died shortly after he gave materials on the tax-evading gambler to the senator. With Howard's preliminary work as a guide, Williams and his staff spent over six months collecting and analyzing government documents before the senator announced his findings.

Williams's revelations led to yet another Lias tax evasion trial. This time the government claimed that Lias owed over \$3 million. The Wheeling race track was placed in receivership to make certain that Lias would pay his debt, but, much to the amazement of Senator Williams, Lias was appointed as receiver to manage the track and was accorded a substantial salary to do so.

Big Bill was understandably angered that the Delaware senator had singled him out for such costly public exposure. According to a press story, the gambler had been on the verge of a settlement with the government whereby he would have paid only 25 cents on the dollar when the senator's exposé had destroyed the settlement deal.<sup>34</sup> As a result of Williams's revelations, a subcommittee of the Senate Finance Committee summoned Lias to give testimony. The meeting proved to be an exercise in mutual frustration, with Senator Williams prodding Lias to no avail about how he had arranged such easy terms with the government, while Lias sought to convince the senators of his willingness to meet the government's terms.<sup>35</sup>

Several years later, in 1955, Lias requested a private meeting with Senator Williams. Eleanor Lenhart recalled the arrival of the huge man in the senator's office as among her most memorable experiences in Washington. No chair was large enough to accommodate him, so Big Bill straddled two. Aside from the senator, the gambler, his attorney, and Miss Lenhart, representatives of the Justice Department and the Senate Finance Committee were also present. As in their previous interaction, this, too, was a meeting between men of different worlds who talked at cross purposes. The senator hoped that his visitor had come to reveal secrets of the gambler's dealings with crooked BIR officials, but confessions and revelations were not on Lias's agenda. The gambler was seeking

vindication. Senator Williams, Lias complained, was “the log in the road” preventing him from reaching an agreement with the government. Back in the 1920s, he explained, bootleggers did not pay taxes. He had never heard of the income tax until 1931 when he was in prison and heard about Al Capone’s tax troubles. “That’s the first time in my life, as there is a God above me . . . that I knew anything about income tax,” the gambler pleaded. Big Bill had done his homework on Williams and tried to appeal to the Senator’s strong religious and ethical values. He claimed that he was not a gangster but was a family man and a man of faith whose business enterprises supported his wife and children. To prove his point, he showed the senator photographs of his family accompanied by Greek Orthodox clergy. He also defended his appointment as court-appointed receiver of the race track on the grounds that no one had a more sincere desire to see it succeed than he.<sup>36</sup>

The confrontation produced results for neither party. Williams’s conviction that Lias was a racketeer and a tax cheat did not change, nor did the Senator acquire any new information about corrupt officials. In 1957, Wheeling Downs Race Track was sold for taxes. Lias successfully refuted the government’s effort to deport him to Greece on the suspicion that he was not American-born, and he continued to live in Wheeling, West Virginia, until he died from congestive heart failure at age sixty-nine in 1970.

John Williams’s next major tax exposé concerned the questionable activities of former Bureau of Internal Revenue Commissioner Joseph D. Nunan, Jr. Nunan, a lawyer and son-in-law of Tammany chief Charles Murphy, had served as Collector of Internal Revenue in Brooklyn and Queens before he was appointed to head the Bureau in 1944. Like the other political appointees who held major administrative positions at BIR, Nunan knew no more about taxes than the average man in the street. In the absence of well-defined rules of conduct, professional elan in the BIR, or close scrutiny from superiors, Nunan found it easy to maintain his private law practice while he served as the nation’s top tax official. After he resigned from the BIR in 1947, Nunan applied for, and was awarded, a special waiver of government policy whereby he was permitted to represent clients who had troubles with the BIR. The senator also discovered that Nunan had himself been a tax delinquent during the time when he served as tax commissioner.<sup>37</sup>

Among the former tax commissioner’s clients was Jacob Udell, a New York native who had moved to Frankford, Delaware, where he got rich in the poultry industry during World War II. Between 1942

and 1945 Udell paid none of the nearly \$800,000 in taxes that he owed the government. When the BIR pressed him for payment, Udell hired Nunan to represent him and, through the helpful intervention of Treasury Department lawyers T. Lamar Caudle and Charles Oliphant, Udell's tax case was postponed beyond the statute of limitations. When he presented the Udell case to the Senate, John Williams remarked upon the necessity of protecting taxpayers' rights to contest assessments, but, he warned, "we have a responsibility to see that our tax laws are enforced impartially . . . not . . . on the basis of whom the taxpayer knows or who he employs as his attorney."<sup>38</sup>

Once again Senator Williams's charges proved accurate. Joseph D. Nunan, Jr., was convicted of tax evasion in a federal court in Brooklyn. He was not, however, held accountable for the \$3.5 million that, according to Williams's calculations, he had cost the government through his interventions on the part of tax-evading clients. President Truman subsequently fired Caudle and Oliphant, the Treasury Department attorneys whose intervention had proved so beneficial to Nunan's client. Both were found to have accepted gifts in exchange for undeserved favors.

An interesting epilogue to the Nunan case appears in a memorandum that Senator Williams wrote in 1971, several months after he had retired from the Senate. He recalled that shortly after Nunan's conviction, he had encountered fellow Senator Walter George in the lobby of the Mayflower Hotel. Senator George had chaired the Finance Committee during the period of the tax scandal, but the two senators were not close. Since both were going to the Capitol, at George's suggestion they shared a cab. En route, Senator George told Williams that once he had been very critical of the Delawarean for impugning Nunan's integrity. George had thought highly of the *New Yorker* and "he could not conceive of his having been guilty of improprieties such as I had charged." Now Senator George knew better and he apologized to his colleague. "I told him," Williams recalled, that "an apology was not necessary since I recognized that he, too, was acting with complete sincerity, but I did appreciate his comments and frankly thought much more highly of him because it took a big man to admit mistakes. . . ."<sup>39</sup>

In the fall of 1951, roughly coincident with Senator Williams's revelations concerning William Lias, a subcommittee of the House of Representatives Committee on Ways and Means began its own investigation into the tax scandals. The subcommittee, which was chaired by Representative Cecil R. King [D.-Cal.], conducted a public inquiry that lasted until April 1952. Its proceedings fill two

massive volumes. Included is the testimony from BIR Commissioner John B. Dunlap, various actors in the James P. Finnegan drama, and Secretary of the Treasury John Snyder. Dunlap used his appearance to complain that the real problem was not the bad apples in the BIR but rather the inadequate staffing of the agency that made it difficult or even impossible to catch wrongdoers. Regarding Finnegan's and Nunan's outside work as independent attorneys, the commissioner reassured the committee that it was the Bureau's policy to employ collectors who were not career tax men but rather persons who took a broader view and that collectors were free to continue their private professions so long as in doing so they were not "in conflict with the Government's interest."<sup>40</sup> The committee was not persuaded by these excuses, nor was the public at large.

The BIR scandals ultimately led to the dismissal of district collectors in eight of the nation's sixty-four revenue districts. All eight had been appointed during the Roosevelt administration from big-city Democratic political machines. But the problems of the BIR reached beyond district offices and led to a raft of resignations in the Bureau's Washington office, including those of Commissioner George J. Schoeneman, Assistant Commissioner Daniel A. Bolich, and Chief Counsel Charles Oliphant—all for "reasons of health." President Truman ignored the problems at the Bureau for too long and behaved defensively when evidence of corruption surfaced, actions for which his reputation and his party paid a high price.<sup>41</sup>

When the President could no longer ignore the facts, he took decisive action to clean up his administration. In January 1952 Truman announced a plan to reform the Bureau of Internal Revenue. The reorganization plan centralized responsibility for tax collection in Washington and replaced field office heads who held their positions due to political patronage with civil-service employees. The sixty-four existing field offices were reduced to twenty-five. The reform represented the most significant change in federal tax collection since the Civil War.<sup>42</sup> Senator Williams, who had been urging that politics be eliminated from the BIR since he had come to the Senate, supported the administration's plan. Although a sizeable minority of senators from both parties attempted to scuttle the plan, it was enacted in March 1952.<sup>43</sup>

By that time politics was heating up in anticipation of the 1952 elections, and the news media found John Williams an appealing subject. The first major article about the senator and his efforts to root out corruption at the BIR appeared in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* in August 1951 at the time of the Finnegan exposé.<sup>44</sup> In Octo-

ber of that year the weekly news magazine *U.S. News and World Report* featured John Williams, whom the writer called the “prime force” in uncovering internal revenue corruption.<sup>45</sup> That same month an article in *Pathfinder* described the Delaware senator as “a quiet prober, sparing with words but lavish with uncomfortable facts [who is] watched warily on Capitol Hill.”<sup>46</sup> Williams hit the major print media in November 1951 when Henry Luce’s *Life*, America’s most popular and prestigious photo news magazine, featured him in a six page in-depth article entitled “The Hands in the Taxpayers’ Pockets.”<sup>47</sup>

In the last weeks of 1951 Williams was the subject of extended articles in the *Philadelphia Bulletin*, the *Kansas City Star*, and again in *U. S. News and World Report*, which put him on the cover of its December 7 issue and included a page-long interview with the senator as part of its eight page coverage of the tax scandals. By the beginning of 1952, newspapers throughout the country were producing pieces drawn from earlier press stories about the chicken feed dealer turned super sleuth on behalf of the American taxpayer. *Look* magazine’s version of the story, entitled “The Man Who Broke the Tax Scandal,” described Williams as “a chicken farmer with the prim Yankee mouth of Calvin Coolidge and the soft accent of the rich Delaware flatlands [who] has become the newest Washington sensation.”<sup>48</sup> Williams, *Look* gushed, “singlehandedly has unearthed so many administration scandals that thousands of taxpayers have to regard him as their personal ambassador in Washington.”

In its thirtieth anniversary issue in February 1952, the *Reader’s Digest* published a piece entitled “Williams of Delaware—The Senate’s One-Man FBI” that began with the prediction that “corruption in government will be an issue in this year’s election, perhaps the dominant issue.” Writer Stanley High described how the senator had discovered the tax-fraud issue by accident when a crooked cashier tampered with his tax payment. “But how was he to know that this man was one of the most determined, persistent and intelligent of investigators.”<sup>49</sup> That same month *The American Magazine* featured Williams as “just an ordinary, small-town guy, going quietly about his business, ‘Honest John’ Williams of Millsboro, Delaware, set off the income tax exposures which have rocked the nation. He has shown us all what any wide-awake citizen can do about graft and corruption. . . .” The story’s writer, Roul Tanley, had ventured to Millsboro to interview the senator in his unprepossessing, simply furnished office amid bags of feed. After listening to Williams for a few minutes, “I began to see,” he wrote, “why

this man, singlehanded, without premeditation, without making wild charges, without smearing, and without irresponsible ranting, had been quietly able to drop blockbusters on the political life of Washington. He was the most lethal of opponents—an honest crusader without personal ambition.”<sup>50</sup>

The last words in the national news fascination with John Williams came from two of middle America’s favorite organs of news and opinion, the *Saturday Evening Post* and *Time*. The *Post* article, by author Paul F. Healy, which appeared in the March 1, 1952 issue, began with the familiar comparison of John Williams to Frank Capra’s movie hero “Mr. Deeds,” but concluded that the ‘Williams Story’ is . . . so unlikely that few Hollywood producers would dare offer it to a paying public.”<sup>51</sup> John Williams joined highly select company on October 13, 1952, when an artist’s rendering of his face appeared on the cover of *Time* magazine with an income-tax form in the background and the caption “He found the rascals out.”<sup>52</sup> Although the story that followed was laudatory, John Williams did not like the tone of big-city cynical sophistication that distinguished the writing style in *Time*.<sup>53</sup> In contrast to other accounts that described him as homey but heroic, *Time* called the senator a “small-town chicken-feed dealer with a mousy look and a whispering voice.” According to *Time*, he was neither “a mental giant” nor “a man of burning ambition.” *Time*’s metaphor for the senator’s accomplishment was that of “a man who pulled a loose thread . . . until the whole covering that screened one of the worst U.S. public scandals was unraveled.”<sup>54</sup> The aspect of the article that irritated Williams was not so much its irreverent condescension as it was the magazine’s mistaken description of the senator’s father as an “illiterate” owner of a “hard scrabble farm.”

How significant were the BIR scandals? To answer that question one must cut through the hyperbole of newspapers and magazines edited by Republican partisans on the one hand, and the apologists for Harry Truman who discount the administration’s scandals as minor affairs that were blown out of proportion by Republicans.<sup>55</sup> Viewed from the late 1990s, the postwar era has assumed an aura of prosperity and innocence that owes more to reruns of early television sitcoms than to the historical record. Historical surveys of the postwar years that concentrate on the economic boom of the period and on America’s crusade against communism leave little space for the significance of the government scandals that undermined public confidence in the federal government during the Truman presidency.

The New Deal's legacy to America consisted of more than the big government welfare state. Franklin D. Roosevelt's unprecedented four election victories depended on a coalition of political factions that included most of the big-city political machines in America. Journalist Jules Abels, writing in 1956, noted that while the New Deal's welfare agencies undermined many of the functions that had once sustained the city political machines, in the postwar period big government opened new opportunities for astute machine politicians to make government pay.<sup>56</sup> Furthermore, as American incomes rose and the government's need for money increased, more Americans were paying income taxes and so had a direct stake in the integrity of the system.

In 1950 when President Truman committed American troops to halt the North Korean invasion of South Korea, the administration made a courageous decision to finance the war by raising taxes rather than by running up the federal debt. The sacrifice associated with paying additional taxes was the chief way in which ordinary Americans demonstrated their loyalty during a trying time in their country's history. The discovery that corruption was rampant throughout the nation's tax collection system came as a particularly stunning blow at that time of citizen sacrifice. The tax scandal followed in quick succession after the Kefauver committee's televised investigations of organized crime. Scandals were uncovered in numerous departments of the federal government including the Justice Department, the RFC, the Federal Power Commission, the Maritime Commission, and the Commodity Credit Corporation. None of those abuses of the public trust was deemed so serious as the corruption that ate at the heart of the agency charged with collecting the nation's taxes. As Abels wrote in *The Truman Scandals*, "on the machinery for collecting revenue rests the security of the nation and of the free world."<sup>57</sup> "The tax scandals," in the judgment of historian Cabell Phillips, "were by far the most odorous ingredient of 'the mess in Washington.' They showed an unmistakable pattern of dishonesty, shady dealings, and political favoritism in a branch of the government toward which the average citizen has an innate suspicion. . . ."<sup>58</sup>

The federal income tax did not become a mass tax until World War II when federal expenditures increased twelvefold in a mere five-year span. To pay for the war, the government instituted payroll deductions. The number of Americans whose earnings made them subject to the income tax expanded rapidly from seven million in 1940 to more than forty-two million by 1945.<sup>59</sup> During the war years, BIR officials, fearing massive noncompliance, urged citizens

to file their tax returns and threatened that tax evaders would be caught and punished. When the war ended, Treasury Secretary John Snyder concentrated on improving the efficiency of the massive tax-collection system.<sup>60</sup> The goals of the Treasury Secretary and those of BIR critics like John Williams were the same: to create an agency that made a reality of the concept of a "government of laws, not of men." The very rapidity of the BIR's growth during the 1940s coupled with the increasingly political nature of the Bureau's leadership during the war years and the vastly increased importance of the income tax in the American consciousness, rendered the old, politics-as-usual style of the local BIR offices both antiquated and unfair. Two BIR commissioners during the war, Robert E. Hannegan and Joseph Nunan, turned the agency into a vast amphitheatre for political patronage.<sup>61</sup> Treasury Secretary Snyder's efficiency campaign might have eventually curtailed the corrupt practices instituted during the Hannegan and Nunan regimes, but Williams's revelations pushed the administration and the Congress to face the problems sooner and more forcefully, thus restoring the public's faith in the fairness of the nation's tax system.

Many people helped to unmask the clique of miscreants who had opened up America's tax collection to systematic abuse. Cecil King, a Democratic Congressman from California, who chaired the subcommittee of the House of Representatives Committee on Ways and Means, carried on a protracted public investigation of the BIR. Various journalists explored corruption in the tax offices in their home towns, and Treasury Secretary John Snyder investigated irregularities in the BIR's offices in Boston and New York. Why then did John Williams garner the major credit for "prying the lid" off the tax scandal? Williams certainly forced the pace of the Treasury Department's own investigations, but beyond that, unlike the trusting Treasury Secretary Snyder and BIR Commissioner Schoeneman, Williams was driven by a distrust of those who reported to these men. Jesse Cooper had alerted the Delawarean to expect a conspiracy emanating from the top, so Williams looked under every rock, even the largest. Once the senator provided incontrovertible evidence concerning corrupt practices, the public outcry was such that within a year the President and Congress had agreed to reform the bureau. Williams was not content with that victory. He pestered the administration to make public the names of companies and individuals that had made what Williams called "cozy deals" with the tax bureau. The release of that information forced many to make restitution on unpaid taxes.<sup>62</sup>

The tax scandal investigation brought together the senator's most

potent personal qualities, experiences, and beliefs and revealed his mettle to the nation. His thoroughness, his quiet tenacity, his fairness, and his courage all came in for praise. He appeared to most commentators as a new political star who had come out of nowhere: a somewhat cranky, rural plodder with narrow political vision who suddenly made major headlines. To those more familiar with his background, his emergence was not so mysterious. True, the tax scandals had fallen into his lap by chance, but Williams was well prepared to see their significance and to do what was necessary to secure reform. For years Williams and his neighbors in Sussex County had battled gangster-dominated urban poultry markets and their wartime experiences had demonstrated the potential for corruption among government officials. The tax scandals were but a new and different version of a familiar theme.

John Williams worked long nights and weekends for many months to scrutinize the Bureau of Internal Revenue, because he believed that Americans must have confidence in their own integrity and in that of their fellow citizens and their government if our largely self-policed income tax system is to work. "If people . . . ever lose confidence in our tax collecting system we're done because we do operate on the voluntary tax system," he warned. "It won't function if people ever lose confidence in the integrity of the system itself."<sup>63</sup> Williams always denied that his motivation for pursuing the tax inquiry was partisan. He was intensely aware, although he could not reveal it at the time, that the source of his knowledge about rot within the BIR had come from a public-spirited Democrat, Jesse Cooper. The senator maintained that political affiliation had nothing to do with corruption. "If a man's a crook," he said, "he changes his political philosophy to suit the occasion."<sup>64</sup> That being the case, corruptible people attached themselves to whichever party was in power, and especially if that party remained in power over a long period. Nor did Williams blame President Truman for the scandals. The senator recognized that the President's loyalty to his subordinates had allowed administration scandals to fester, but he gave Truman credit for his efforts at reform, however delayed. From the distance of a quarter century, John Williams told an interviewer in 1979 that Harry Truman had been "as honest a man as we ever had in the White House." He said of the President who, like Williams, had retired from Washington to live modestly in his former home town, "I think his life and his style showed that he had not capitalized on his office, and I think he'll go down in history as one of the great Presidents."<sup>65</sup>

# 6

## The Eisenhower Era

In the second week of July 1952, Republicans gathered in Chicago to choose their presidential nominee. Bill Frank, the *Wilmington News-Journal* papers' on-site reporter, told readers back home that their senator was "one of the most popular personalities" at the convention whom crowds "gawk at . . . as if he were a Hollywood star."<sup>1</sup> The object of this celebrity attention, John Williams, had come to the GOP convention as a member of the Delaware delegation to support the nomination of his party's leader in the U.S. Senate, the Republicans' leading conservative, Robert A. Taft of Ohio.

Senator Taft's principal support came from people who shared many characteristics with John Williams: self-employed residents of small towns and rural areas particularly in the Midwest who wished to reverse the New Deal, to restore individual initiative as the keystone of the American economy, and to end America's protracted involvement abroad, especially in Europe. The other major wing of the party was centered on the northeastern seaboard among the old American elite and included leaders of major corporations. This group supported an internationalist foreign policy, a corporatist view of the economy, and a "middle-of-the-road" or "modern Republican" domestic policy that accepted many New Deal reforms. Their candidate, the popular war hero General Dwight D. Eisenhower, won the nomination and chose as his running mate Senator Richard M. Nixon of California, an ambitious young politician whose zealous pursuit of the purported communist spy Alger Hiss in 1948 and 1949 had won him admiration among conservatives.

The "mess in Washington" became a major campaign issue. The very term sounded as if it had been created by a Republican public-relations firm. Actually it was first used by the Democrats' presidential candidate, Adlai E. Stevenson, in a maladroit answer to a question about the Truman administration scandals. Eisenhower seized the opportunity presented by his opponent's embarrassment.

The general called Senator Williams to meet with him in New York in late August to explain the “mess” in detail. Williams brought with him a briefcase bulging with illustrative documents that he gave Eisenhower. Their meeting lasted over two hours.

Two days later, Eisenhower flew to Atlanta, Georgia, where he told a cheering crowd that when he got to the White House there would be a wholesale cleanup of the executive branch to root out “too many men who are too small for their jobs, too big for their breeches and too long in power.” Government corruption, the general emphasized, was “an overriding moral issue in this campaign.”<sup>2</sup> “I promise,” Eisenhower told an audience in Miami, Florida, the following day, to “use the scoop-shovel—not the white wash brush—in handling this dirty business.”<sup>3</sup>

Eisenhower, who credited John Williams as the person most responsible for ferreting out government corruption, proclaimed that Williams “has been tireless in his exposure of . . . the venality—the outright theft of the people’s money” which “is staggering in its proportions. . . .”<sup>4</sup> An editorial writer for the conservative *Chicago Tribune* wrote that the general’s earnest denunciations of corruption were waking up what had begun to be a sleep-inducing campaign.<sup>5</sup>

Meanwhile, John Williams concentrated on his own reelection. Six years before, as a political unknown, he would have experienced defeat as only a minor personal setback, but now that he had established a senatorial record, the personal and political stakes had become much higher. Williams’s national prominence did not discourage the Democrats from trying to unseat him; rather it strengthened their resolve to remove this archconservative who had so embarrassed their President. They were confident of regaining Williams’s Senate seat. In 1948 the Democrats had captured the governor’s office, the lieutenant-governorship and a seat in the U.S. Senate. Democrats explained Williams’s 1946 victory as a postwar aberration in a state that was usually Democratic and they expected to unseat him in 1952.

Delaware Democrats met in May 1952 to choose their candidates and give them the longest possible campaign season. They enthusiastically endorsed the reelection of their popular activist governor, Elbert N. Carvel, the owner of a fertilizer company in the western Sussex County town of Laurel. For the U.S. Senate seat occupied by Williams, the Democrats chose their lieutenant-governor, Alexis I. du Pont Bayard, a popular candidate who could contest John Williams’s quest for a second term from a position of strength. Bayard, who bore the names of Delaware’s two most prominent families,

had earned a purple heart in World War II and had already run successfully for statewide office.

Lex Bayard's campaign literature did not exaggerate when it proclaimed "the story of Lex Bayard is the story of Delaware."<sup>6</sup> "There is nothing like the Bayards in U.S. history, not even the Adamses, not even the du Ponts" said a *Time* writer admiringly in an article in which Williams was described as a mousy man with parochial right-wing views who, by mere chance, had "pulled a loose thread" that had exposed the tax scandals.<sup>7</sup> Bayard's mother was a du Pont; his father, Thomas F. Bayard, Jr., had defeated his own wife's distant cousin, T. Coleman du Pont, in 1922 to capture a seat in the U.S. Senate. Lex's grandfather, Thomas F. Bayard, had served three terms in the Senate in the 1870s and 1880s and was several times a serious contender for his party's nomination for president of the United States. In 1885 President Grover Cleveland appointed him secretary of state and later awarded him with the plum diplomatic post of ambassador to the Court of St. James. Lex's great-grandfather was James A. Bayard, Jr., who represented Delaware in the Senate during the Civil War and Reconstruction. Lex Bayard's great-great-grandfather, James A. Bayard, also a senator from 1804–1813, had, as a Congressman, been instrumental in concluding the contested Jefferson-Burr presidential election in 1800 and later led the American delegation that negotiated the Treaty of Ghent to end the War of 1812 with Great Britain. Another collateral relative, Richard B. Bayard, represented Delaware in the Senate from 1836–1839, while Richard Bassett, who was Lex Bayard's great-great-great grandfather, was one of Delaware's original senators when the federal government was launched in 1789.

Lex Bayard followed most of his male ancestors to Princeton, where he graduated in 1940. The day after the Japanese struck Pearl Harbor, he interrupted his study at the University of Virginia Law School to volunteer for the Marine Corps and rose from private to captain in the 5th Marine Division, the outfit that raised the American flag on Mt. Surabachi on Okinawa. Bayard was wounded during the campaign to capture Iwo Jima. Returning to the United States, he completed his law degree at Virginia then returned home to Wilmington. An enthusiastic liberal, Bayard chaired the United Negro College Fund and participated in a variety of other civic causes before he ran successfully for lieutenant-governor in 1948. In 1952 the Wilmington Jaycees chose the tall, pipe-smoking veteran their "man of the year."<sup>8</sup> At thirty-four Bayard had many significant political assets, not the least of which was his family, an outgoing wife who engaged in civic activities and five photogenic children.

The Williams-Bayard senatorial contest of 1952 was among the most hard fought in Delaware history. But, when compared to more recent elections, it was not costly. Neither candidate spent more than \$10,000. Williams reported that he had received \$5,000 from his party, whereas Bayard received \$4,500 from the national Democrats. Bayard also accepted \$2,000 from the American Federation of Labor.<sup>9</sup> Williams refused to accept contributions from well-wishers, whether they were Delawareans or citizens of other states. Williams returned all offers of money with a polite letter of thanks.<sup>10</sup> When the election was over, Williams also returned \$447.30 in unexpended funds to the national Republican Party.<sup>11</sup>

For both candidates, public appearances were vital to reaching the electorate, and newspapers and radio were the major communication media. Television was not as yet an important tool for politicians, particularly in Delaware, which, then as now, had no commercial television station. Bill Frank, who had his own daily radio program in addition to his newspaper column, praised Lex Bayard for using radio more effectively than any previous candidate in the state's history.<sup>12</sup> In the print media Williams could count on favorable coverage from the weekly press in southern Delaware and from Wilmington's pro-Republican *News Journal* papers, the *Journal-Every Evening*, and the *Morning News*. Not to be outdone, Bayard purchased the Wilmington *Sunday Star*, which enjoyed a large statewide circulation.

At the state Democratic convention Lex Bayard pledged to wage "a fighting campaign the length and breadth of the state" because he was determined to win.<sup>13</sup> From the first, he took the offense by reaching out to the traditional Democratic electorate and by attempting to discredit his opponent's conservative record. Despite its small size, Delaware was a well balanced state economically and socially, with factory workers and African Americans as well as corporate administrators and poultry farmers. Bayard appealed to those who had benefitted from New Deal-Fair Deal legislation. He reminded blue-collar workers that John Williams had supported the Taft-Hartley Labor Act, a bill that organized labor had vigorously fought because it contained features that weakened labor unions and their leaders. Bayard called on African American voters to desert the party of Lincoln in favor of the party that had supported the creation of the Fair Employment Practices Commission, and he told farmers how John Williams had tried to undermine federal price supports for agricultural commodities. Williams was also vulnerable on foreign policy and defense for his votes against the Marshall Plan and his opposition to some defense expenditures. Bayard la-

beled Williams an "isolationist" and called his views "myopic." "Time and again John Williams has voted to defeat or dismember measures designed to help the free nations" Bayard told an audience at New Castle's William Penn High School.<sup>14</sup> The Democratic candidate cleverly attempted to link Williams to the Red-baiting Senator Joseph McCarthy and to the arch conservative, America Firster Colonel Robert McCormick, owner of the *Chicago Tribune*.<sup>15</sup>

Williams fought back with a series of questions for his opponent that focused on the tax scandals. Bayard's adroit rejoinder in the *Sunday Star* proclaimed that fighting tax fraud was not enough to justify Williams's reelection. Senators, Bayard said, are elected to represent the interests of their constituents and "Senator Williams has voted against the interests of the people of Delaware time and time again."<sup>16</sup>

As summer drew to a close, the senatorial election appeared to be close. The *U.S. News and World Report* concluded in mid-August that Williams might keep "his seat but only narrowly," because "his weak speaking voice" was against him in the tight race.<sup>17</sup> Caleb Boggs, who had been Williams's colleague in Washington in the House of Representatives since 1946 and was now challenging Carvel for the governorship, felt compelled to assist his fellow Republican in a Sussex County radio broadcast. "In the U.S. Senate," Boggs asserted, "John Williams has not only distinguished himself but has brought renown to our state."<sup>18</sup> That same day Governor Carvel charged that Boggs, and by implication all Republican candidates in Delaware, was "a captive of Frank du Pont," the state party chief, who stood for a "reactionary, backward, labor baiting" style of politics.<sup>19</sup> In a letter to his party's national senatorial campaign chairman, Everett M. Dirksen of Illinois, Williams revealed his fear that the election would be close "and I am running scared."<sup>20</sup> Rumors abounded that major New York mobsters were pouring money into Delaware to defeat him. There is no evidence that Williams took those reports seriously, but in light of the easily corruptible voting procedures in Delaware at that time, ballot-box stuffing would have been within their grasp.<sup>21</sup>

The core of the hotly contested senatorial campaign emerged in a series of debates between the candidates that were held in the intimate surroundings then favored in Delaware's diminutive political world. The first debate took place in Hanna's, a popular Wilmington restaurant. Hosted by the Christina Business and Professional Women's Club, the debate dealt primarily with labor policy. Given

the fact that most of those present were businessmen and women, Williams appeared to come out ahead, but both candidates were really appealing to the much larger audience who read about the discussion in the papers or heard excerpts on the radio.

The most interesting part of the first debate occurred when the candidates fielded questions from the audience. In response to a query from a labor union official, Williams defended the Taft-Hartley Act as "a working man's bill of rights" and, citing his vote against Senator Kerr of Oklahoma's gas depletion allowance bill, said that he was no corporate stooge. Another Democratic questioner asked the senator why he did not support a Fair Employment Practices Commission to correct injustices against blacks. Williams responded that he too wanted to end segregation but thought that it should be up to the U.S. Supreme Court and the Delaware legislature to do so. "The sooner we have a nonsegregated system the better off we will all be," he said.<sup>22</sup> Bayard later seized on this answer as proof of the senator's waffling on an issue of social morality that was eliciting growing concern both in Delaware and throughout the United States. In contrast to Senator Williams, Bayard told an African American audience in Wilmington that if he were in the Senate he would fight for a fair employment law to eliminate second-class citizenship for blacks.<sup>23</sup>

In October Bayard turned up the heat further yet. He told a largely working class crowd in Claymont, Delaware, that John Williams had "one of the shabbiest legislative records in the history of Delaware in the U.S. Senate" and that the Republican party put "property ahead of persons."<sup>24</sup> In late October two major national Democrats visited Delaware to urge Delawareans to vote for Bayard and reject the conservative Republican who was an impediment to their policies. Eleanor Roosevelt campaigned with Bayard at Wilmington's armory. Two days later when Harry S. Truman's whistle-stop campaign chugged through Wilmington, Bayard and Carvel flanked the President as he castigated the GOP in his inimitable "Give-Em-Hell Harry" style, calling John Williams's charge that the Commodity Credit Corporation had deliberately manipulated prices before the 1948 election a "Big Lie." In the same combative spirit, Williams, speaking in Sussex County that day, denounced Bayard "for welcoming Red Herring Harry with open arms," which, Williams charged, demonstrated that his rival endorsed corruption. That was one of the few times during the campaign where Williams alluded to the standard Republican charge that Truman, and by implication all Democrats, had ignored communist infiltration into the federal government.<sup>25</sup>

While his challenger was working so hard and seemingly so effectively to unseat him, John Williams's cause was greatly assisted by a continuing string of major indictments against tax offenders in and out of government during the summer and fall of 1952, together with the largely laudatory stories about the senator's sleuthing that were appearing in popular magazines. Just as the magazines said, Williams's posture came across as balanced between morality and partisanship. His reaction to the discovery of vice presidential candidate Richard M. Nixon's special campaign fund was illustrative. When the charge was first made against Nixon, Glenn Everett, the free lance reporter who had written the *Saturday Evening Post* article about the grain bins, advised the senator to denounce Nixon. Such a gesture, the journalist believed, would underline the contention that the Republicans were the party of principle. Williams, Everett wrote, was "the one great spokesman for integrity in government" who should take the lead in heading off this dangerous situation in his party and, simultaneously, enhance his own image.<sup>26</sup> Williams ignored the advice and told the press that he would not prejudge the issue but awaited his California Senate colleague's defense and urged others to keep open minds as well. If Nixon could not provide a convincing explanation, Williams warned, loyalty to his party would not prevent him from condemning the nominee for doing wrong.<sup>27</sup> After Nixon's famous "Checkers" speech aired on television, the senator announced that from what he could discern, the party's vice presidential nominee was "basically honest" because he had not used the fund for personal gain, but that accepting the campaign money had been "an error in judgment."<sup>28</sup>

In mid-October the senator spoke on foreign policy, defending his vote against the Marshall Plan and accusing the Truman administration of "bungling," a characterization that rang true to Americans frustrated by the costly stalemate in Korea. Williams explained that his vote against aid to Europe indicated not that he was an isolationist, as his critics charged, but rather that he wanted to put the aid program on a "sound business basis." He and his Democratic colleague, Harry F. Byrd of Virginia, had envisioned an international loan plan modeled on the Reconstruction Finance Corporation that would have offered loans to private industries rather than making gifts to governments, many of which used the money to support the nationalization of major industries and similar socialistic schemes. "I felt then and I still feel that we have a responsibility in Western Europe, but at the same time I believe these nations should have some responsibility of their own," he said.<sup>29</sup> Throughout the campaign, Williams maintained that his approach to foreign

affairs was "one of careful examination of our promises and pledges and hesitation in providing Truman with a blank check for his experiments."<sup>30</sup>

On the Sunday before election day, the Williams campaign bought a full page advertisement in Bayard's *Sunday Star* to remind voters of the incumbent senator's accomplishments and of his positive record in support of social security, labor reform, and a flexible farm program. The same edition carried an editorial, perhaps written by Bayard himself, entitled "The Williams Tragedy," which began "If there is one thing Senator John J. Williams has clearly demonstrated during his six years in the Senate, it is a bitter hatred of the federal administration and all its works." The *Star* editorial accused Williams of harboring "hatred . . . a soul-twisting poison" that led him to distort facts, and to vote against the interests of the people of Delaware and the nation.<sup>31</sup>

Bill Frank, the *News-Journal* papers' leading political columnist, demonstrated his respect for both candidates early in the campaign, but then predictably swung over to Senator Williams when the race appeared to be very close. "Win or lose on November 4," Frank wrote in October, "John J. Williams will go down in Delaware history as one of her outstanding U.S. Senators."<sup>32</sup> A week later the columnist warned that "the National Democratic Party is out to gag him [Williams], once and for all," and urged readers to come out and assist his campaign.<sup>33</sup>

The 1952 election campaign presented John Williams with his most difficult electoral challenge. Not only was Lex Bayard a vibrant campaigner with a dazzling genealogy and a purple heart, he was also an articulate spokesman for the liberal Democratic creed that had carried Delaware in previous elections. Furthermore, the state's Republican leaders in New Castle County, where the bulk of the state's population resided, were unsure of Williams's appeal and lukewarm in their support.<sup>34</sup> But Williams, too, had powerful advantages, most particularly his recently earned national reputation as an effective foe of government corruption, a factor that played especially well in a small state whose citizens often felt marginalized and insignificant at the national level.

At the climax of the campaign Bayard took a calculated risk when he charged that his rival was possessed with "soul twisting" hatred for the federal government. Since traditional Democrats were already on his side, the challenger was aiming his rhetoric at undecided waverers, those who might be proud of Senator Williams's fame but vaguely troubled by his political goals and methods. The technique failed because it did not evoke the John

Williams that Delawareans knew and respected. Williams had presented himself to the voters as a careful, quiet-voiced, sincere and modest skeptic of a discredited administration, and that image rang true in the minds of the majority of his fellow First Staters.

On election day John Williams polled the largest majority in Delaware history, running well ahead of the victorious Eisenhower and the GOP gubernatorial candidate, Caleb Boggs. Nearly one in ten of the senator's 93,020 votes came from people who switched columns to put an X by his name on their otherwise Democratic ballots.<sup>35</sup> He ran well ahead of Bayard in Sussex, Williams's home county, and in rural New Castle County, Delaware's Republican heartland, but he also defeated his opponent in traditionally Democratic Kent County and lost only in the heavily Democratic city of Wilmington. Yet, even in the state's major city, he polled over two thousand more votes than Eisenhower. In Delaware as throughout the nation, Eisenhower's popularity coupled with voters' disgust with tired Democratic leadership and the stalemate in Korea were powerful enough to produce a landslide for the general and his party. But no one could say that John Williams was reelected on Dwight Eisenhower's coat tails. The majority of Delaware's voters had not rejected Alexis Bayard; they had embraced John Williams, not because of his conservatism but because of his character.

Among Williams's congratulatory telegrams was one from former President Herbert Hoover and another from a famous counselor to Democratic presidents, Bernard M. Baruch, who wrote, "My dear Senator: Your re-election was one of the things that gave me real pleasure. If you had lost, it would have been a grievous blow, because of the fine work you have done. Although of the other party, I supported General Eisenhower. I did so as an American."<sup>36</sup> Frank du Pont, Delaware's GOP leader, wrote "while I am naturally gratified with the outcome of the election, I am particularly happy that you gave my cousin such a trouncing."<sup>37</sup>

Williams, no doubt relieved by the vindication of his victory, lost no time in getting back to work. He told celebrators at Georgetown's Return Day that having won the White House and the State House, Republicans must now "do the things . . . that need doing."<sup>38</sup> In the days that followed, Williams hastened to do just that. He made national headlines for his denunciation of the Truman administration's decision to move Internal Revenue Commissioner John B. Dunlap to the safety of a civil service post as head of the Bureau's Texas district office while he still had some explaining to do before Congressional committees.<sup>39</sup> Newspaper readers might also have noted that one month after the election former Commis-

sioner Joseph D. Nunan, Jr., under whose management in the mid-1940's so many of the BIR's problems had festered, was indicted in New York City for income-tax evasion.<sup>40</sup>

With the Republicans in control of the Senate and the White House, John Williams could look forward to making progress on the issues that had prompted his entrance into politics: to reduce the size and scope of the federal government and to balance the federal budget. He also may have envisioned an era in which there would be fewer obstacles to impede his path toward uncovering wrong doing within the governmental bureaucracy. That assumption, ironically, proved incorrect.

The new Republican chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, Eugene D. Millikin of Colorado, distrusted "lone wolf" probers. They reminded him of Senator Joseph R. McCarthy of Wisconsin, the Senate's most notorious scandal-monger, who called people traitors first, then looked for evidence to substantiate his charges. In 1953 McCarthy stood at the height of his power over the public consciousness. Responsible Republican leaders like Milliken tried to handle the demagogue with care while they attempted to finesse him into powerlessness. Thinking to remove him from the Communism-in-government issue that had such devastating effects on the rights of many loyal Americans, Senator Taft appointed McCarthy to chair the Committee on Government Operations where, it was presumed, he would be bogged down in duller, less dangerous investigations.<sup>41</sup> Similarly, Senator Millikin laid down a rule in the Finance Committee that in the future no subcommittee chairman could report findings to the full Senate without authorization from a majority of the whole Finance Committee.

Millikin intended to prevent the airing of false accusations through his committee. He hoped that his action would encourage other Senate committees to do the same and thus restore a degree of fairness in the Senate. This commendable purpose collided with Williams's past practice of presenting the findings of his investigative subcommittee (which really meant himself) directly to the public through his disclosures on the Senate floor. The Chairman of Finance in the previous Congress, Walter George, had been amenable to Williams's practice and the Delaware senator saw no reason why it should not be continued, especially in light of his unblemished record for careful preparation of evidence and for affording government bureau chiefs the opportunity to see evidence against their agencies and then take the necessary actions to correct problems so that a public disclosure would become unnecessary. Wil-

Williams would not accept the continuation of his subcommittee on the terms that Millikin offered. He preferred to go it alone. The power to subpoena witnesses to extract information from them under oath, often under the public gaze of the press, was not the way that Williams went about his work in any case. His leads came from individuals—government workers, citizens, or reporters—but his evidence usually came from government reports that were already in the public domain. Rarely did he resort to using the special powers entrusted to a subcommittee chair.

Williams objected to being limited by a blanket policy that would hamper responsible investigators in the vain hope that it might thwart one irresponsible rogue senator. It angered him that, by hiding his real purpose, Millikin was casting a mantle of official distrust on Williams. Another Republican senator known for her independence shared the Delawarean's view. Senator Margaret Chase Smith of Maine remarked on the irony of imposing a policy that would only harm the Senate's most careful investigator. To add further to the irony of the situation, Senator Joseph McCarthy made a public gesture of offering Williams the opportunity to pursue his probes through McCarthy's Committee on Government Operations, an offer that the Delawarean declined. The fracas caused consternation in the nation's press, which found it an inauspicious sign that the Republicans muzzled one of their own "whose indefatigable labors probably won hundreds of thousands of votes" for the Republican ticket, said Raymond Moley in the *Chicago Daily News*.<sup>42</sup> Wilmington's press summed up the situation with one headline, "Williams Will Play Lone Hand in Hunt for Fraud in Taxes."<sup>43</sup>

The Millikin-Williams tempest ended in late March with each senator presenting his final views before their colleagues. Millikin initiated the finale in a Senate speech in which he sought to justify his action and to pour reconciliatory balm on Williams. "Come back home Senator," he concluded, "the light is in the window." But John Williams could not be cajoled into compliance. "I will never bind myself in advance to withhold from the public evidence of a crime because a committee majority votes against it," he retorted. "I shall never draw the line politically in a matter of this sort."<sup>44</sup>

The lone hand suited Williams well. His was not so much the prickly independence of the recluse as the quiet self-confidence of a man who felt most comfortable when he was in control of his own destiny. He distrusted working through committees because he could not control possible leaks that might hurt innocent people, dry up sources, and give credence to the view that his real motiva-

tion lay in gaining publicity for a politically inspired witch hunt. Working only with his own staff kept things under his control and better suited his style of documentary investigation. Williams earned the respect of most of his Senate colleagues and the friendship of a few. He enjoyed sharing meals with them, attending their banquets, and, if asked, speaking in their states. But he felt no need to be part of their team.

One paid a price for not being a part of the Republican team. In his autobiographical account of his first presidential term, *Mandate for Change*, Dwight D. Eisenhower mentioned Williams only once, and then merely to remark that the Delaware senator was one of three independent-minded Republican senators who voted with the administration only sixty percent of the time on key bills.<sup>45</sup> Williams could not be counted on to support the administration's mutual security expenditures; he favored the Bricker Amendment to curb the President's treaty-making powers, an amendment that the administration opposed; and he stood with Harry F. Byrd on the principle that tax cuts should be enacted only when accompanied by a balanced budget. On the other hand, he voted for the administration's Housing Act of 1957, the Defense Highway Act of 1956, and for Eisenhower's defense bills. Williams also supported the censure of his colleague Joseph R. McCarthy when that politically charged measure came before the Senate in December 1954.

Williams was at his most stubborn in his opposition to an administration sacred cow: the oil depletion allowance. Since the 1920s oil companies had been permitted to deduct 27-1/2 percent from their gross earnings in computing their corporate income taxes to compensate them for the depletion of underground oil reserves. Williams believed that the allowance, which cost the U.S. Treasury as much as two billion dollars a year, amounted to a subsidy for the rich oil companies at the expense of the American taxpayers. In 1954 when he first took up the oil depletion challenge, the senator announced that his study of the problem had shown that 15 percent would represent a more equitable allowance.<sup>46</sup> His proposal represented an entering wedge for future negotiations and further study. His allies in this lonely battle were two New England Republicans, George D. Aiken of Vermont and Margaret Chase Smith of Maine. In 1957 the three attempted to reduce the allowance to 20 percent but were voted down by oil-state senators and their allies in a voice vote.<sup>47</sup> Not discouraged, Williams kept up his annual efforts to get the allowance reduced, and, as the federal deficit mounted, he began to gain more allies. Rich Texans and Oklahomans and their

political friends found Williams to be a difficult foe. In April 1959, when *Forbes Magazine* published an article entitled "The Coming Battle Over Depletion," the writer quoted Congressman Wilbur D. Mills, the Chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee, as saying that the depletion rate had become the number one issue before his committee. The article featured a photograph of the chief depletion allowance opponents in the Senate: William Proxmire [D-Wisc.], Paul Douglas [D-Ill.] and John Williams. Not surprisingly the oilmen's best friends in Congress were two powerful Democratic leaders from Texas, Senate majority leader Lyndon B. Johnson and Speaker of the House Sam Rayburn. Oil depletion politics were regional, not partisan. None other than Franklin D. Roosevelt had called the allowance "the most glaring loophole" in the tax code, but Dwight D. Eisenhower was inclined to make concessions to the American oil industry, regardless of the cost to the Treasury.<sup>48</sup>

Agriculture policy continued to be close to Williams's heart as it was to the pocketbooks of the senator and his southern Delaware constituents. He helped to defeat the Truman administration's Brannan Plan, which would have replaced the New Deal's parity-based supports and controls with a complicated formula designed to encourage farmers to grow more in order to lower consumer prices, and provide government payments to farmers if the market prices failed to compensate them adequately. The plan met a rough reception from agricultural economists who, like Williams, believed that it would make farmers virtually employees of the federal government, and that any savings consumers might experience at the market they would more than pay for in higher taxes.<sup>49</sup>

Williams rejoiced at Eisenhower's appointment of Ezra Taft Benson as Secretary of Agriculture. Like Williams, Benson believed that the United States should retreat from the New Deal-Fair Deal policies that guaranteed commodity farmers high prices at the expense of the shopper and taxpayer and led to vast overproduction. Benson's moves toward more flexible supports to restore the discipline of the marketplace met with the Delaware Senator's enthusiastic support. As in the case of the oil-depletion allowance, Williams introduced his own agriculture bill in 1953 in an effort to begin the shift toward lower prices for major farm commodities. The Williams bill called for reducing 90 percent parity to 75 percent. The bill failed, but it helped pave the way for the administration's less draconian flexible support plan that the Congress adopted the following year.

Williams was a fearless foe of wasteful policies wherever he

found them and whoever might be profiting from them. In 1955 he caused a ruckus in the Senate when he claimed that the government's land conservation practices encouraged farmers in the plains states to plow up marginally valuable land and watch the soil blow away as they collected government payments for not planting over-produced commodities. Fellow Republican Senators Edward J. Thye of Minnesota and William Langer of North Dakota were so outraged by this dollop of truth that they yelled at Williams that Delaware had received subsidies during the war and that it was only fair that their states should receive agricultural subsidies.<sup>50</sup>

With a like-minded Secretary of Agriculture in office, Williams focused his attacks away from the overall structure of the government's agriculture policy and on those components that, in his view, encouraged the growth of large corporate agriculture at the expense of family-owned farms. He was incensed in 1957 that the government paid out over \$1,000,000 in drought relief to the famous King Ranch in Texas, which had ample corporate funds to overcome the effects of the drought on its own, thus reducing the fund available for average farmers. Two years later he released a study showing that in 1957 three vast corporate farms had consumed \$3.4 million in government payments. His report listed the fifty-four farms that had received over \$100,000 in government support, mostly cotton and rice farms in the South. Northeastern newspapers published a cartoon showing a fat cat slurping down all the milk while a weakened skinny cat labeled "the little farmer" looked on, but the reaction throughout the South was predictably quite different.<sup>51</sup> A columnist in the Memphis, Tennessee, *Cotton Trade Journal* thundered that Williams was a "flannel mouthed demagogue with an irresponsible disregard of facts" who failed to comprehend the government's legitimate role to insure the "orderly marketing" of cotton.<sup>52</sup> According to their champion in Congress, Harold D. Cooley [D-N.C.], cotton farmers secured government loans by mortgaging their cotton, not through outright gifts from the government. Williams countered that the largest recipient of the federal cotton supports was a British company that was gorging on American taxpayers' dollars that had been intended to assist small farmers.<sup>53</sup>

In his ceaseless drive for federal austerity John Williams spared no one, not even the Congress itself. He believed that Senators and Congressmen should be well compensated for their service, lest the Congress become a "rich man's club," but he opposed their tax-free allowances, and was critical of junkets justified as study trips. In 1955 he introduced an amendment to the budget bill that would

have tied Congressional salary increases to the achievement of a balanced budget. It was, not surprisingly, roundly defeated.<sup>54</sup> Two years later he attracted considerable national press attention when he attempted to give back to the Treasury the unspent portion of his senatorial stationery allowance.<sup>55</sup>

The senator's prickly independence and stubborn resolve were manifested on many occasions during the Eisenhower presidency but nowhere more so than when Williams had his first opportunity to influence an appointment to the federal bench. In February 1954 Congress authorized the creation of thirty new federal judgeships. One was designated for the Federal District Court for Delaware, which was then struggling along with only two judges, both Democratic appointees, one of whom was elderly, the other critically ill. Both were residents of New Castle County. Although federal judges are appointed by the President of the United States, it is the tradition that the senior senator of the President's political party in the state in which the appointment is to be made has a major influence over the selection. Of Delaware's senators in 1954, only Williams was of the President's party and so he alone was invited by the Justice Department to participate in the selection process. Williams met with Attorney General Herbert Brownell and his deputy William P. Rogers to discuss the nomination in early 1954. Afterward, in his typically systematic fashion, Williams made a list of the potential candidates.

The senator was besieged with arguments from members of Delaware's legal community on behalf of particular candidates who were put forward because of their high standing before the Delaware Bar, their service to the Republican Party, and/or their experience as state judges. Many writers made a case for a particular candidate on the basis of his county of residence. Kent County and Sussex County correspondents pointed to the fact that lower Delaware was unrepresented on the court. Some writers for New Castle County candidates argued for the appointment of Edward Duffy as a reward for his outstanding service as a community leader and as head of the state Republican committee.<sup>56</sup> Major funders of the Republican Party in Wilmington's business community, however, uniformly urged the appointment of a corporation lawyer or a sitting state judge on the grounds that the court must maintain its hard earned reputation for excellence in handling complex corporate and patent issues. Frank du Pont, the state party's most influential leader, who was then serving in Washington as Eisenhower's commissioner at the Bureau of Public Roads, echoed their pleas.<sup>57</sup>

John Williams, meanwhile, had decided that the appointment must go to an attorney from lower Delaware. His initial list included the lawyers and judges in Kent and Sussex County. Then, working with the state bar association, he gauged each name according to his own criteria that the appointee must be of the highest character with regard to honesty, integrity and morals; must possess a judicial temperament; and must be a member of the Republican Party. Williams justified his insistence on a downstate Republican on the grounds that neither of those groups was represented on the court. One had to go back to the early nineteenth century to find a federal judge from southern Delaware and to the era of Theodore Roosevelt to find a Republican. Based on those considerations, the senator chose Caleb Wright, a Sussex native who was practicing law in Georgetown, Delaware. Wright was forty-five years old, a graduate of Georgetown High School, the University of Delaware, and the Yale Law School. Unlike most of the attorneys who had been recommended to Williams, Wright had very little experience in government, having served only briefly as a deputy attorney for Sussex County and as attorney for the state General Assembly. Contrary to the rumor that circulated at that time, Wright was not John Williams's lawyer. In fact, Wright hardly knew the senator.<sup>58</sup> At that time Williams's attorney was James Tunnell, Jr., a Democrat and son of the man unseated by Williams in the Senate election of 1946.

When news of the Wright nomination reached the Wilmington party establishment, its members were appalled. No one in Wilmington had ever heard of Caleb Wright, a fact that in itself seemed to disqualify him. Didn't the senator recognize that Delaware was the national legal home of corporate America and that Wilmington's most prestigious law firms served important Fortune 500 clients? Could he be unaware of the role of the Federal District Court in maintaining this lucrative business for the state? How could a general-practice lawyer from a rural area handle complex corporate law suits or disputed patents? A member for Delaware of the Republican National Committee and wife of a prominent corporate attorney expressed her concern to the senator. "From a political point of view," she wrote, "I think it would be very bad" and would "redound to the discredit of you. . . ."<sup>59</sup> Her view was widely shared.

The Wright nomination sailed through the routine FBI check but ran into a storm of protest in the Justice Department. Attorney General Brownell made a practice of clearing all nominations for federal judgeships with the American Bar Association. One of the ABA's key criteria required that a nominee be in the top half of his

or her class in law school. As Caleb Wright failed to meet that quality check, the ABA advised that he not be appointed. The Justice Department agreed.

Now it was John Williams's turn to be appalled. Stubbornly he persisted in his conviction that his nominee met an acceptable standard for selection. In a characteristic act that combined humility with unyielding resolve, he wrote Attorney General Brownell in December that "in view of the fact that I personally was unfortunate not to have completed high school, it would appear rather ridiculous for me to question the qualifications of a graduate of both the University of Delaware and the Yale Law School."<sup>60</sup> January 1955 brought no resolution to the impasse. Williams received some welcome political support from Delaware's Republican Governor, J. Caleb Boggs, who wrote to him to praise Wright's qualities and to second the senator's notion that the appointment should go to lower Delaware.<sup>61</sup>

In mid-January Williams tried one last time to bring Brownell around to accept his point of view. He wrote the attorney general a lengthy letter of over four single-spaced pages in which he expressed his reasons for insisting on Wright's nomination. He explained the long history of New Castle County's dominance in judicial appointments; he argued that geographic considerations were not out of place in making the selection; he recalled how he had attempted to work with the Delaware Bar Association and the Justice Department on this issue. He expressed his disappointment that "in the selection of a federal judge you and the American Bar Association place greater emphasis upon a man's rating by a national rating agency than you do upon his background of honesty, integrity, and judicial temperament." In conclusion, Senator Williams said that he would not participate in the "farce" of making the public announcement of the selection of some other candidate chosen by the ABA. The idea that a professional organization should have the power to veto government appointments in their field struck him as "dangerous." Should television and radio station owners pick the members of the FCC? It is interesting that at the top of the file copy of the letter is written by hand "no reply."<sup>62</sup>

Pressure to end the impasse mounted. The Federal Court was clogged with work. One of the two sitting judges was too ill to carry on. The upstate bar blamed Williams. Might not their obdurate downstate senator cost the state its reputation for judicial excellence? Might corporate litigants find reasons to sue one another in another state? Behind the scene John Williams worked to resolve the problem. Perhaps one of the two sitting judges could be elevated

to a higher court, thus opening two spots? Williams said he would agree to appoint an upstate corporate attorney if he could also appoint Wright. He would not retreat from his determination that one of the three seats must go to southern Delaware. In May and June, the Kent and Sussex bar associations adopted resolutions supporting the Wright nomination.<sup>63</sup> They agreed with the senator that someone among their federal judges should understand the problems of rural Delaware. Williams sent copies of their appeal to the Justice Department and to the White House. He talked about the seriousness of the situation to the President's assistant, Sherman Adams, and to Vice President Richard Nixon. He told Senator Barry Goldwater, the chairman of the Republicans' senatorial campaign committee, that if the Attorney General insisted on making another appointment, Williams would not try to block it but that he "would probably not be too active for the Republican Party" in the 1956 elections.<sup>64</sup>

Williams's dogged persistence finally paid off. The administration could not afford to offend the man known throughout the nation as "Honest John Williams," merely for the sake of one judicial appointment. The call came to the senator's office: the senator was to meet at the Attorney General's office on June 22 at 11:30 A.M., when he would be advised that Wright's name was being submitted to the President. Eight days later President Eisenhower signed the nomination, the Senate unanimously confirmed it, and on August 4 Caleb Wright took the oath as a judge of the District Court for Delaware.

The man whose credentials the Wilmington bar had questioned went on to become a great judge in patent cases and to cast the deciding vote to end the de facto segregation of New Castle County's suburban school districts by incorporating them with the Wilmington School District in a celebrated case in 1977. Shortly after Wright's appointment, his two colleagues resigned and Senator Williams nominated Edwin Steele, a leading corporate attorney, and Caleb Layton, a state judge, both of New Castle County, to fill the vacancies. The Justice Department enthusiastically endorsed both choices.

By 1957, after spending ten years in Washington, John and Elsie Williams had become familiar figures in the nation's capital. In that year John was invited to join the GOP's Senate Policy Committee and Elsie was elected President of the Congressional Club. The club had been founded in 1908 for the wives of Washington's political leaders as a means to overcome their loneliness in the capital



**Elsie and John Williams at a Republican Party fundraiser in Georgetown, Delaware, December 1957. Courtesy of University of Delaware Library.**

city. Like other women's clubs of the early twentieth century, the club acquired a handsome residential headquarters and engaged in activities that encompassed charitable work for the Red Cross, classes in subjects such as flower arranging and public speaking, and social activities including teas, receptions, and luncheons, all climaxing in an annual banquet at which the President and First Lady were often the club's honored guests.

A club pamphlet explained that presidents of the congressional club were selected on the basis of their "personal popularity" coupled with "their ability to lead."<sup>65</sup> Elsie Williams possessed both characteristics. In their early days in Washington, John and Elsie received many invitations to attend receptions. John, who did not particularly enjoy socializing, declined nearly all, citing his need to work late into the evening. Elsie, however, decided to accept and thus made many friends.<sup>66</sup> Gracious and dignified without seeming stuffy, her small town background, so similar to the roots of many wives of senators and congressmen, organizational talents, and willingness to devote her time to achieving the club's goals, made her an ideal president. Because Elsie Williams's presidency coincided with the Congressional Club's fiftieth anniversary, she oversaw preparations for a Golden Anniversary Breakfast held May 22, 1958, in the Mayflower Hotel, where the Williamses and many other Congressional families lived. First Lady Mamie Eisenhower joined President Williams at the head table on the big day.

As the ironies of Washington life would have it, hardly one month after the anniversary breakfast, the club president's husband was deeply engaged in a controversy with the White House concerning Sherman Adams, President Eisenhower's chief of staff. Adams, a former governor and congressman from New Hampshire, had accepted valuable gifts, including an oriental rug and a vicuna coat, from a Boston-based textile manufacturer named Bernard Goldfine. Adams made a public apology for his impropriety, promised to be more careful in the future, and declared that gifts had no influence over his judgments of men and situations. Not everyone was convinced. John Williams went to the White House to tell the President that Adams had been discredited and must go, or the Republicans would be unable to honor their claim to be more concerned about integrity than the Democrats.<sup>67</sup> Williams also criticized Adams's refusal to acknowledge the impropriety of his actions in a Senate speech in which he noted that "under the preceding administration the acceptance of lavish entertainment and large gifts by officials was strongly condemned, and it cannot be condoned now."<sup>68</sup> Wil-

Williams's voice, along with those of other party leaders, eventually brought the reluctant Adams to resign.

In 1958 John Williams completed his second term in the United States Senate. There was a strong tradition in Delaware for its senators to serve no more than two terms. Even a popular senator like John G. Townsend, Jr., had bowed before the voters' sense that two terms were enough. As the election year approached, Williams told a political reporter that he would probably run again only if the Democrats chose the liberal former governor Elbert Carvel as their candidate. Because the senator had failed, not once but twice, to recommend Ed Duffy, the popular state GOP leader, to a federal judgeship, some speculated that Williams planned to step down rather than face the possibility of an intra-party fight.<sup>69</sup> In November 1957 Senator Williams proved that he could still pull a big statewide audience when he spoke on a cold rainy night at the Community Hall in Lincoln, Delaware. Bill Frank, who covered the event for the *News Journal* papers, noted that while some might grumble at John Williams's conservatism, the senator was popular because of his independence, his abhorrence of cheap politics and florid language, and, most of all, his sincerity and personal conduct. "He has a warmth about him that makes him a real friend to those who merit his friendship. He's what I would call a healthy conservative."<sup>70</sup>

The Williams family was not among those urging him to run. A report that the senator's grandchildren had been knocking on doors in Millsboro asking neighbors not to vote for their grandfather so that they might see more of him made the papers and caused the senator to comment that their action was "the finest tribute my grandchildren could ever pay me."<sup>71</sup> But despite his grandchildren's plea, in February 1958 John Williams announced his candidacy for reelection.

Like the Bayard-Williams race of 1952, the Carvel-Williams race featured two candidates who were well known and respected throughout Delaware, either of whom would serve the state and nation with distinction. It would be a contest not only of men but of issues. A huge hearty man with a friendly smile and a sincere demeanor, Carvel radiated the people-centered values of his liberal political creed. Like Bayard before him, Carvel concentrated on Williams's stubborn refusal to support the goals of progressive liberalism that called for ever more active government intervention on behalf of the less fortunate in the United States and in the world. As a former governor who had done much to improve public education and transportation in the state, Elbert Carvel drew particular

attention to his opponent's failure to use his position in the Senate to bring federal projects to Delaware. Carvel repeated that theme throughout the campaign and coupled it with the related proposition that Delawareans were paying a great deal more in federal taxes than they were receiving in federal support.

Williams campaigned as he had done before, on his own with no campaign manager and making no new concessions to special interests to gain votes. Convinced that the moderate Republicans could not out-promise the Democrats, he told Delaware's teachers that he was opposed to federal aid to education because it would lead to federal control,<sup>72</sup> and told the electorate at large that federal assistance in any area endangered Americans' freedom and self-reliance.<sup>73</sup> In his acceptance speech Williams declared that an election was not a popularity contest but rather a contest about how the government should be conducted. The federal government, he reminded his audience, possessed no "mysterious source of income;" its money comes from us. "The only way for you as a taxpayer to get more money out of Washington is to keep it out of Washington."<sup>74</sup>

Several months before the election the Republican State Committee commissioned an opinion poll of Delaware voters. The survey revealed that John Williams had little reason to fear voter rejection. Not only did he have the highest voter recognition of any Delaware candidate, he was leading Carvel by ten percentage points and had especially strong support among older, wealthier, white voters—a segment of society that voted in large numbers and was deemed more "campaign-conscious" than others. Carvel had an overwhelming edge among black voters. Only one in ten black Delawareans surveyed said he or she planned to vote for the senator. Over all, however, Williams was expected to win easily in spite of the fact that 38 percent of Delaware's registered voters were Democrats compared to 24 percent Republicans and 33 percent Independents.<sup>75</sup>

In contrast to 1952 when Williams's preelection day newspaper advertisement had been a page-long laundry list of the candidate's voting record, in 1958 the Williams advertisement featured a large photograph of the senator on which was superimposed a brief message: "John J. Williams is a distinguished Delawarean and an outstanding member of the United States Senate. A thoroughly honest and conscientious public servant, he is nationally known and respected by Republicans and Democrats alike for his relentless fight against inefficiency, waste, and corruption in government regardless of party. Delaware can be proud to return to Washington a man

of Senator Williams' experience, ability and integrity."<sup>76</sup> For a man who boasted of having no publicity agents, it was a sophisticated ad and a shrewd move that mirrored the remark of a Delawarean who had told a reporter from the *Chicago Daily Tribune*, "Why, a vote against Williams would be a vote for dishonesty."<sup>77</sup>

The election results justified Williams's strategy. He defeated Governor Carvel decisively in every part of the state except Wilmington. In Ed Duffy's Brandywine Hundred, a heavily Republican Wilmington suburb, Williams gained 75 percent of the votes cast, and in Sussex County, where both candidates resided, Williams won by a margin of over two thousand votes. In contrast, Representative Harry Haskell, wealthy son of a Du Pont executive who called himself a "modern Republican," lost to liberal Democrat Harris B. McDowell in the statewide race for Delaware's lone Congressional seat, and the Democrats gained decisive victories in most other state and county contests. Across the nation the Democrats rebounded to win an overwhelming Congressional majority in both the House and Senate.

The 1958 election demonstrated that the John Williams phenomenon was a political anomaly. He, who pundit Drew Pearson had predicted to be a complete failure at the beginning of his senatorial career, had survived to become the only member of the Republicans' "class of '46" to remain in the Senate for a third term and the first Delawarean of either party to do so for more than a century.

## Desegregation

No issues were more controversial in Delaware or throughout the nation during John Williams's political career than those that dealt with race relations. Civil rights reform and desegregation of the public schools represented a political mine field in a border state like Delaware. Those issues, which had the potential to destroy a politician's career, tested John Williams's reputation for fair play as did none other.

When John Williams was first elected to the U.S. Senate in 1946, Delaware was a thoroughly segregated state. The "colored people" or Negroes, terms that both races used interchangeably at that time, occupied a world apart from whites. In every Delaware town and city black residents lived in their own part of town, often quite literally on the other side of the tracks. Residential segregation was endorsed by the state's real-estate industry and reinforced by strong custom. In Wilmington blacks were welcomed only at their own black-owned movie theater. Elsewhere in the state blacks were relegated to the balconies of small-town theaters. Blacks were excluded from major hotels or restaurants, and when they became ill they were sent to segregated wards in both private and public hospitals. The state maintained dual school systems: one for white children, the other for black. Educational segregation extended even to the college level, where blacks were admitted to Delaware State College in Dover but excluded from the larger, more academically challenging and comprehensive University of Delaware in Newark.

As was true elsewhere in America, challenges to segregation began to mount in the state during the years following World War II. Because of Delaware's border state heritage, the state's population included many people of both races who questioned the morality and legality of segregation. Pressures for change had already brought some successful challenges to segregation prior to the U.S. Supreme Court's historic reversal of the "separate but equal" doctrine in *Brown v. Board of Education* in May 1954.

The man who played the most significant role in breaking the grip of segregation on the state was Louis L. Redding, the first Negro admitted to the Delaware Bar. Redding, a Wilmington native and the eldest child in a highly disciplined, upwardly mobile black family, was a graduate of Brown University and Harvard Law School who had reluctantly answered his father's call to return to Wilmington in 1929 to practice law among his native city's poorest, least educated, and most powerless citizens.<sup>1</sup> In 1950 Redding brought suit in the state's Court of Chancery on behalf of black clients who sought admission to the University of Delaware. The judge in the case was Vice Chancellor Collins J. Seitz, also a Wilmington native, who found segregation morally repugnant. Seitz accepted Redding's argument that his client could only acquire the education he sought from the state's university and the first wall of segregated public education in Delaware fell. The following year Redding was once again in Seitz's court room, together with Jack Greenberg, an NAACP lawyer, on behalf of two black youngsters from northern New Castle County who sought admission to white-only public schools that were not only better equipped than the separate-but-unequal segregated schools to which they were assigned but were also located much nearer to their homes. Again Seitz ruled in favor of the plaintiffs but only on the narrow ground that the black schools were unequal. The vice chancellor was constrained by the continuing sway of the separate-but-equal doctrine at the federal level not to strike down segregation in public education in its entirety. He did, however, anticipate its reversal, and the Delaware cases, together with similar suits from other states came before the U.S. Supreme Court in 1953, grouped together under the heading of the soon-to-be famous as *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas, et al.*

In Delaware, where the assault on segregation had already won a few minor victories on behalf of specific clients, reactions to the Brown decision varied from relief to extreme hostility and fear. The Delaware cases had involved integration in northern New Castle County—the University in Newark, the City of Wilmington, and the towns of Claymont and Hockessin, located adjacent to the state's border with Pennsylvania. In Wilmington the school board had already contemplated the demise of segregation and, shortly after the *Brown* decision, announced a phased plan of integration to be completed in three years. Throughout southern Delaware, however, segregation was more deeply rooted in community life. There, one district school board courageously and independently under-

took to begin the process of integration with only the Supreme Court's ruling as its guide.

Milford, Delaware, described by its mayor as "a sleepy little town" of about 5,200 people in 1954, straddles Kent and Sussex counties along the shallow meandering Mispillion River that runs from the central peninsula to the Delaware Bay.<sup>2</sup> Like other southern Delaware communities, the town served an agricultural hinterland with its shops, movie theater, churches, lodge halls, fertilizer and feed stores, and its two public schools: an elementary school and a junior-senior high school for whites; and one school, Benjamin Banneker, that included grades 1-8, for blacks. Blacks made up nearly one-fifth of the town's population, roughly the same racial proportion that existed in other towns throughout lower Delaware. Black youngsters from all the towns of the region attended one high school, William Jason High in Georgetown, a new state-of-the-art school designed to withstand any plaintiff's contention that lower Delaware's schools for blacks were separate but unequal. The court's decision in *Brown* had, however, rendered the quality of Jason High a moot issue.

In the summer following the Supreme Court decree, the Milford School Board decided that in September 1954 it would admit a small number of self-selected black students to the 10th grade class of Milford High School as a first step toward integration. The appearance of ten or eleven black students in the formerly whites-only school on Milford's Lakeview Avenue caused no disruption of classes on the first day of school. But when students went home and told their parents about the innovation, questions were raised about the board's action. Why had not the parents been notified of the impending change before school began? Did the board's action come at the request of state authorities? Who, in fact, was responsible for initiating this momentous change?

When it became evident that the Milford School Board had integrated the high school on its own initiative without even informing the State Board of Education, many Milford residents demanded that the board rescind its invitation to the black students until such action was mandated by the state or by the Supreme Court. On Monday, September 20, 1954, Milford's schools were closed so that citizens could attend a public meeting in the auditorium to discuss the matter. Protests from some people were so vehement that the board decided to keep the schools closed indefinitely, even after the president of the local NAACP chapter offered to send the black children to Jason High School to give whites "the opportunity to understand that they must respect the decision of the board."<sup>3</sup> That

was precisely what hostile whites were unwilling to do as they yelled and beat on the windows of the room where the school board met to formulate its next move. The board members felt isolated. They had requested but received no support from Governor J. Caleb Boggs or from the State Board of Education. Under the strain of intimidation, a key board member, the owner of the town's ice and coal company, resigned, and his resignation was followed in quick succession by those of his three colleagues.

By the third day of the "Milford Incident," news of the confrontation had spread to the national media. NBC sent a cameraman and reporter to the scene to interview the mayor for John Cameron Swayze's nationally broadcast evening news. The town had become bitterly divided and the situation was deteriorating daily. A leader of the opposition who lived in the nearby village of Lincoln, where roughly half the school-age children were sons and daughters of black migrant farm workers, told the *News-Journal* that "this thing is getting bigger than we ever dreamed it would and I don't know where it will stop now."<sup>4</sup> Meanwhile, in the state capital, Governor Boggs and the state's attorney general, H. Albert Young, were seeking ways to maintain calm, prevent the imposition of mob rule, uphold the dignity of the state, and, if possible, save the Milford school board's integration effort. Young, in particular, was convinced that the school board had acted legally and that state authorities should support its initiative. Boggs also favored integration, but he wanted to proceed slowly and in an orderly fashion to bring the majority of Delawareans along, to isolate die-hard segregationists, and to snuff out the hate-filled rebellion that was already building in the Milford area. On Friday, September 24, the Milford schools were reopened on an integrated basis while the attorney general sought a ruling on the Milford integration plan from the state Supreme Court.

Over the weekend the segregationists reacted. The owner of the Harrington Airport, located only three miles west of Milford, opened his facility to a mass meeting to discuss a school boycott. Radio advertising brought a crowd estimated at two to three thousand people to the rally. The few blacks who bravely sought admission were told that it was a private meeting and were turned away. The meeting began with a prayer, salute to the flag, and singing of the National Anthem. Afterward a succession of speakers came forward to denounce integration and race mixing. One speaker captured the mood of the event with the proclamation that "if God intended us to be one race He would have made us all white."<sup>5</sup>

The airport rally's principal speaker was Bryant Bowles, until

that moment a totally unknown figure in Delaware. Bowles, a native Floridian, then a resident of the Washington, D.C. area, told the crowd that he represented an organization called the National Association for the Advancement of White People (NAAWP), which was not anti-black but pro-white. "We believe," he declared, "that the legal means can be found to defeat the opposition because we have the greatest weapon available on our side—the will of the majority of the people."<sup>6</sup> He advised parents that they had the right to keep their children home from school if they feared violence and urged his audience to support the boycott as the best way to defeat integration. He then invited those present to join his organization by paying the membership fee of \$5 each. The crowd voted to join the NAAWP, and many came forward with their payments. The next day Bowles held another rally in Marshall's Garage on Route 113 near Milford. Inflamed by his earlier success he again urged a boycott of the integrated schools, demanded the ouster of Milford's school superintendent, and said that those favoring integration were communists and left wingers.<sup>7</sup>

Bill Frank, who covered the events around Milford for the News-Journal papers, compared the Milford incident to "a grass fire."<sup>8</sup> The boycott and rallies that were heralded throughout the state with banner headlines also drew the attention of such staid, prestigious national newspapers as the *Wall Street Journal* and the *Christian Science Monitor*. Ministers, priests, and rabbis throughout Delaware discussed the moral issues involved from their pulpits. Frank was in Milford on the day after Bowles's airport rally to witness the reopening of the schools and to capture the feelings of the community. After watching a big crowd milling about in front of the high school he concluded that integration of the schools would be "tough, if it ever comes" and warned that "strong arm methods won't do." "The resentment against integration is much deeper," he advised his readers, "than anyone in Wilmington may suspect."<sup>9</sup> As the tense week wore on, Bowles extended his sphere to other towns in Sussex County, where he encouraged whites to demonstrate their hatred of the dreaded integration and their sympathy for Milford by pulling their children out of school. The integrationists, he told an audience in Laurel, were losing the fight. Yet in spite of cross burnings and taunting crowds, some white parents continued to send their children to school. Store owners who took such action saw their businesses boycotted, even ruined.<sup>10</sup>

By the end of the second week, the confrontation continued its dangerous escalation and both sides dug in for a long struggle. A new Milford School Board rescinded the enrollment of the black

students, which ended the boycotts but brought no real peace. In sorrow, Wagner D. Jackson, president of the Wilmington NAACP, criticized the responsible officials and other influential people in the state for their cowardice in failing to “stand up and be counted against the forces of evil. We have just experienced here in Delaware the shameful, degrading spectacle of our duly constituted authorities ignominiously surrendering to the illegal actions of a lawless mob.”<sup>11</sup> On the same day that Jackson’s remarks were published, Bowles held a “victory rally” at Lincoln, Delaware, and a cross was burned in front of Milford’s Benjamin Banneker School. But the segregationist leader’s feet of clay began to crumble when the state police announced that Bowles had a long arrest record in Florida and, more recently, in Maryland for passing bad checks to the employees of his roofing company. This revelation gave state Attorney General Young the head wind he had needed to arouse public support for a deeper probe into the NAAWP.

During the third week, as a tense calm settled over lower Delaware, action moved from the field of rallies to the courtroom. The attorney general sought an injunction in the Court of Chancery to prevent Bowles from soliciting memberships in the NAAWP, and Louis L. Redding urged the same court to enjoin the new Milford School Board from removing the black students. As the chancellors deliberated, Bowles defiantly told his supporters of his plan to carry the segregation crusade northward to Dover and even to Wilmington. His threats were realized to some degree when seven of the eighteen black students who had quietly integrated Dover High School voluntarily departed and enrolled in Kent County’s all-black William Henry Comprehensive High School. The capstone of the week came on Sunday afternoon when Bowles flew from his home near Washington to Delaware to hold a mass rally at the Harrington airport. When his plane landed, Bowles was arrested by the state police and whisked off to his arraignment. Several thousand angry people waited three hours until Bowles returned after posting \$6,000 bail to whip them up with an anti-Semitic harangue that targeted the Jewish attorney general, H. Albert Young, and his fellow Jew, Bill Frank, whose newspaper reports on the Milford incident had aroused Bowles’s ire.<sup>12</sup> Significantly, in Frank’s most recent column on the situation published several days earlier, the reporter quoted from a letter that he had received from a Milford resident who wrote that the people were following Bowles’s leadership because lower Delaware’s natural leaders, its more affluent and politically powerful men, had kept silent.<sup>13</sup>

Just at that time John Williams came forward to supply a moderating voice of reason. On the same weekend when Bryant Bowles held his rally at the Harrington Airport, the senator attended a large Republican gathering at Kent County's Hartly Fire Hall. The room was packed with citizens who supported Bowles's resistance to integration. Knowing that this hot issue would be discussed, Senator Williams arranged with the meeting's chairman that if anyone were to ask about desegregation, the chair would turn that question over to Williams. As expected, a questioner brought up the issue almost immediately and John Williams made his initial public statement on the volatile issue, not from the security of his Washington office or in a newspaper release, but in person before a large, impassioned crowd. His appeal to his listeners' better natures and to the rule of law calmed their ardor as no other leading Delaware politician could have done, because none commanded the respect of white southern Delawareans as he did. He called upon the people to look beyond their personal opinions and to "join together as American citizens . . . that we will solve this problem and in so doing uphold the laws of the state of Delaware and of the United States."<sup>14</sup>

On the following Monday the senator issued a press release on desegregation on which he had labored for some time. Titled "An Explanation of the Supreme Court Decision as it Affects Integration," the senator's typed statement, covering five single-spaced pages, appeared in the state's newspapers the following day. Williams explained that it was not his purpose to discuss "whether there should or should not be segregation in the public schools." That decision had already been made by the Supreme Court. "Personally," he admitted, "I felt that the nine men comprising the Supreme Court of the United States took upon themselves too great a responsibility in determining so important a social question . . .," which "should have been left with each of the 48 states to solve. . . ." The Supreme Court had decided otherwise. The court's decision "is the supreme law of the land, and as law-abiding citizens we have no alternative other than to uphold the law." Neither the governor of Delaware nor the Congress of the United States could change that fact. Even the President of the United States was powerless to overrule the Supreme Court's ruling, Senator Williams noted, as Franklin D. Roosevelt had discovered when the court invalidated the National Recovery Act in *Schechter Poultry Corporation v. U.S.*, the famous "sick chicken" case. Against constitutionally sanctioned power, raising money or mounting protests accomplishes nothing. Furthermore, the senator warned that "it would be nothing short of sheer demagoguery for any candidate for

public office to campaign on the promise that if elected he can do something to nullify the Supreme Court decision. I personally shall repudiate and help defeat any candidate, Republican or Democrat who does so.”<sup>15</sup>

The most powerful admonition in the Williams statement focused on what citizens could do to reverse the court’s decision. There were two possibilities, the senator said. One was to amend the Constitution to make school segregation legal. But this, he made clear, would never happen, because an overwhelming majority of the states already practiced integration and would never vote in favor of such an amendment. That left only one other recourse: “to resort to the violent overthrow of the government of the United States.” In applying the exact words used to describe the goals of the Communist Party, Williams aimed directly at the heart of Bowles’s support. There was more to the Williams statement, however, that brought some solace to the resisters’ cause. Delay was not only possible, it was even necessary, he said, because the Supreme Court had not as yet established a timetable for the imposition of its ruling, and integration was, as yet, not legally mandated. By implication, the Milford School Board had acted prematurely, as would the state if it were to compel integration ahead of the Supreme Court’s decree. The “Williams Ultimatum,” as Bill Frank labeled it, had an immediate effect on the super-charged atmosphere in Delaware. On the big issue that pitted white supremacy against law and order, Williams had unambiguously weighed in on the side of law, but he had not come out in favor of integration.

Two days after the publication of the senator’s statement, H. Albert Young appeared in a Sussex County court to seek authority to re-integrate the Milford School. In an impassioned speech, described as “one of the most gripping . . . ever heard in a Delaware courtroom,” the attorney general proclaimed that integration was now the law of the land and that the law would be enforced even if it took “the governor of the state and our United States Senators . . . to lead these Negro children by the hand . . . into that school.”<sup>16</sup> As he spoke, the veins stood out in Young’s neck, the *News Journal* reporter told his readers, and “for a moment, in the courtroom which was obviously made up . . . of pro-segregationists, observers could literally have heard a pin drop,” but the moment passed and divisive laughter broke out among the segregationists that drowned out the scattered applause of the adherents of integration. Young’s plea and the reception he received from the court gallery spoke volumes about the social distance that separated northern and southern Delaware. The attorney general alluded to that difference in his pre-

sentation when he casually remarked that Delaware was “a northern state with a southern exposure.” That phrase, which New Castle Countians often used in humor, seemed to Sussex Countians to belittle and demean their part of Delaware, as if their region were somehow less worthy than the more populous, progressive north.

John Williams was one son of Sussex who took offense. “At a time when every responsible public official should recognize that this is a time for cool tempers,” the senator told the press, “it was most unfortunate that Attorney General Young made his defiant statement.”<sup>17</sup> Williams was particularly disturbed that Young had said that the senator would lead black children by the hand into a school. I have “never delegated to any person . . . authority to speak for me,” he said, adding that the attorney general had interpreted his statement on integration too “narrowly.”

In his original statement, Williams had emphasized the Supreme Court’s constitutional omnipotence on deciding law; now his emphasis shifted to the incomplete nature of the court’s ruling. “I am of the opinion that this whole controversy in our state arises from the belief that state authorities are attempting to force integration even before our Supreme Court has handed down its final decision as to how integration should be put into effect. . . .”<sup>18</sup> A reasonable interpretation of the senator’s statement would be that, in his opinion, the original Milford School Board and the state’s attorney general bore as much responsibility for the serious disquiet, cross burnings, and threats of violence that had overtaken southern Delaware as did Bryant Bowles and his followers.

On the day that saw publication of the second Williams statement, Bryant Bowles called on Governor Boggs to fire Attorney General Young, and Vice Chancellor William Marvel ruled that the ten black students be reinstated in Milford High School. On hearing the vice chancellor’s decision, Bowles threatened another boycott.<sup>19</sup>

Friday, October 15, Hurricane Hazel hit Delaware with ninety-eight mile per hour winds that uprooted trees, ripped sides and roofs from buildings, and killed seven people in the First State and nearby sections of Maryland. The fiercest storm that Delawareans had experienced in a generation was an apt metaphor for the social agony that now encompassed Milford. Barely a day after the big storm, Bowles held another rally where he urged his followers not only to boycott the Milford schools but to refuse to buy from any merchant who supported integration.<sup>20</sup> In the days that followed, as the new Milford School Board petitioned the state Supreme Court to stay the Court of Chancery’s order, Bryant Bowles’s destructive campaign reached its crescendo with his demand that J. Caleb

demonstrated their frustration with the state's Republican leadership by electing Democrats J. Allen Frear and Harris McDowell to the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives.

Williams's statements had the effect of quieting both sides. With one hand he destroyed the segregationists' hope that defiance could lead to victory, as with the other he undercut the integrationists' plea for immediate compliance. Although he was personally a very religious man, Williams took care to avoid treating race relations within a religious or moral context. By basing his view strictly in terms of the U.S. Constitution, he stayed clear of fierce religious or political debates, but he also lost an opportunity to discuss the civil rights issue in moral terms. His failure to do so suggests that he did not grasp the moral dimensions of the calls for racial justice. Williams knew southern Delaware as well as anyone. He knew how far and how fast its citizens could be pushed, and he was more concerned about maintaining the rule of law than about either avoiding or imposing racial integration. Williams's endorsement of delay tactics in the imposition of integration may have helped to slow the inevitable process in southern Delaware, but the senator's position supported the Supreme Court's right to choose the timing of integration. At the time of his statements, Williams had no reason to assume that the court's second *Brown* decree would permit the vagaries inherent in the words "all deliberate speed."

The senator's public statements drew numerous letters, most of them appreciative. A Methodist Church official wrote that "your stand is bound to help bring reason and understanding to the problem . . . I have been proud of many things you have done to represent our state, but never more so than in this."<sup>28</sup> John A. Perkins, president of the University of Delaware, also praised the senator's "intelligent and forthright statement."<sup>29</sup> A segregationist, however, wrote, "you have stooped very low" and criticized the senator for ignoring public opinion. To this criticism Williams replied that his intention was "to point out the realities of the law rather than discuss opinions."<sup>30</sup> Undoubtedly the most historically significant correspondence that the senator received came from Governor J. Caleb Boggs who wrote in gratitude "to thank you for your wonderful statement. No man could have done better. . . ."<sup>31</sup>

Strikingly absent from the senator's files are letters from black constituents. John Williams did not develop a warm relationship with blacks, and many saw him as hostile to members of their race. His attack on James W. Johnson, the New York City federal tax collector, in 1951 soured Delaware's black Republicans on Williams. Although the senator claimed that he had been ignorant of John-

son's race until he was well into the investigation, blacks believed that Williams had singled out the nation's only black tax collector for unfair accusations. Unlike other collectors whom Williams targeted, Johnson was not personally corrupt—he had merely inherited an ill-organized office. Williams had ignored the pleas of Delaware's black Republican leaders on that occasion, and they never trusted him again.

In 1956, two years after the Milford Incident, the senator again singled out a black official for especially harsh criticism. This time his target was Louis L. Redding, the lawyer whose work on behalf of the NAACP had helped to bring school desegregation to Delaware, but who now appeared to be guilty of income tax invasion. Based on information that Williams had received concerning alleged income tax irregularities among self-employed professional people in the Philadelphia region, the senator urged the Treasury Department to investigate. The department's report was presented to a federal grand jury in Philadelphia, which in January 1956 announced that nine unnamed lawyers in the Philadelphia-Camden-Wilmington area had failed to file federal income taxes for several years. The headline caught John Williams's attention. Together with several Senate colleagues, he protested the blanket indictment to the commissioner of Internal Revenue. By not releasing the names of the nine offending lawyers, Williams said, all lawyers in the region were cast as potential delinquents. The commissioner, however, refused to release the nine names.

John Williams did not give up easily. In February he wrote again to the commissioner to inform him of the rumor that was making the rounds that Louis L. Redding was one among the nine lawyers. "If this is untrue, the rumor should be stopped," the senator said, "and if true the public has a right to know."<sup>32</sup> On that same day, James M. Tunnell, Jr., Williams's personal lawyer and the president of the Delaware State Bar Association, wrote to thank the senator for his continuing efforts to clear the suspicion that hung over the many innocent, tax-paying members of the state bar.<sup>33</sup> Several weeks later Williams's secretary, Eleanor Lenhart, represented her boss at a meeting in Secretary of the Treasury George M. Humphrey's office, where she heard confirmation that Redding's name was indeed among the nine, but she failed to learn the names of the others. In her notes of the meeting she remarked that "the senator is pretty much disgusted with the whole thing."<sup>34</sup>

Only when his efforts to smoke out the names of all nine had failed did Williams go public with the information he knew to be accurate. On May 28, 1956, he released a statement that described

how his complaints of laxity in the Philadelphia tax office had launched the inquiry that had “shocked the whole area with the sensational charge that . . . nine lawyers in the . . . area had for several years been failing to file any tax returns.” Since the Treasury Department refused to name the nine, he was naming one of them in the hopes that his revelation would force the government to release the other eight. The name he provided was that of Louis L. Redding.<sup>35</sup>

Redding was subsequently indicted for willful failure to file his taxes and was tried in federal court before Judge Caleb M. Wright, whose appointment John Williams had championed only two years before. Redding’s lawyer was Edmund (Ned) Carpenter, son of a DuPont Company president, an active Republican, and a rising member of the Delaware Bar. The defense showed that Redding had been overworked preparing major civil-rights cases while maintaining his other client load and attending to family troubles. Carpenter contended that Redding had not willfully refused to pay, he had simply forgotten to do so in the rush of work that often kept him at his desk fifteen or sixteen hours a day seven days a week. Based on Judge Wright’s instructions concerning the legal definition of “willful,” the jury, which included two blacks, quickly rendered a verdict of not guilty. Redding was, of course, responsible for paying his back taxes, a process that he had already completed before the charge of willful neglect had been filed, but he was not convicted of a federal crime and was free to resume the practice of law.

The Redding trial attracted much public attention in Delaware and the verdict produced numerous indignant letters from Senator Williams’s constituents, some of whom did not realize that Redding had paid back the taxes he owed. Mary Houston Robinson, the redoubtable editor of the *Sussex Countian* editorialized: “We are old-fashioned, we suppose; but we were brought up on the precepts such as ‘ignorance of the law is no excuse’. . . .”<sup>36</sup> Her editorial attracted John Williams’s attention, and he wrote her to say that while he normally refused to comment on newspaper editorials, this was one case where he had to agree. He even had copies of the editorial made and sent them to correspondents with the comment that Robinson had expressed “the opinions of many of the citizens of our state.”<sup>37</sup>

Williams’s actions concerning Louis Redding’s tax delinquency were by no means underhanded, but whether the senator acted fairly is open to question. Redding’s biographer judged that the senator “seemed motivated more by politics than patriotism since he denounced none of the white lawyers indicted.”<sup>38</sup> It is unclear how

the senator became aware that Redding was among the nine but could not discover the names of the others. No one can say whether, if the name he had known had been that of a white Delaware lawyer, Williams would have named him to smoke out the Treasury Department. It was typical of the senator to use tactics of this sort to force revelations from government agencies when he was confident that the information he already possessed was accurate. He was also frustrated by having spent several months fruitlessly trying to pry the list of the nine from the Treasury Department. These factors may not add up to a justification for his action, but in Senator Williams's view there was no greater test of integrity and public responsibility than one's payment of taxes.

The senator is also open to the charge of racial bias in his public attacks on Harlem Congressman Adam Clayton Powell in early 1963. Powell, another tax delinquent,<sup>39</sup> was the most notorious, in the sense of best known, abuser of Congressional perquisites of his time. He was the perfect foil for John Williams, because the two men were polar opposites. In February 1963 Williams took to the Senate floor to question the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare's (HEW) decision to provide \$250,000 to fund an anti-poverty program sponsored by the urbane, wily Harlem Congressman. Williams denounced "the loose manner in which the Administration has been shoveling the taxpayers' money" to Powell, a man who had carried his wife on his Congressional payroll as a full-time employee while she vacationed in the Caribbean. Powell also had recently traveled to Europe on the taxpayers' money, accompanied by two nubile secretaries.<sup>40</sup> Powell seemed delighted by the opportunity for combat with a man he viewed as a hypocritical, moralistic hick. He called Williams a "liar, no gentleman," and finally "a chicken plucker," and added, "the chicken pluckers get mad when Negroes give indications of moving in on big money."<sup>41</sup>

The senator's attack on Adam Clayton Powell attracted a great deal of national attention. Wayne Morse, the independent senator from Oregon, moved that William's remarks be stricken from the Senate record, but the Delawarean fought back. In what reporters described as a "debate tinged with bitterness,"<sup>42</sup> Williams said that he would have made a similar attack on any Congressman, regardless of race, who had Powell's record of unethical behavior. The canny Delawarean then used the excuse of Morse's action to introduce additional derogatory information about Powell's payroll padding and absenteeism into the Senate record that under other circumstances would have violated Senate rules.<sup>43</sup> Williams was lauded throughout the South for his courageous exposure of Powell.

Typical was the editorial in the *Fort Lauderdale News* which carried the headline "Outraged Senator Brings Unsavory Powell Business to Nation's Attention." "Never before," the editor wrote, "has Representative Powell been more soundly castigated and for more good reasons than he was at the hands of Senator Williams. . . ."44 Even the liberal *Washington Post* took Williams's side calling Powell's behavior "appalling," and noting that the Delawarean's attack was not racially motivated.<sup>45</sup> But an African American newspaper in the nation's capital castigated Williams for his charges against Powell, arguing that blacks would not achieve equality until they could indulge in the same behavior as whites without being condemned.<sup>46</sup> It is noteworthy that Senator Williams focused his major assault on the congressional junketeering of the flamboyant black congressman instead of undertaking a more systematic, comprehensive study of the problem of congressional abuse of privilege that would have included white members of Congress as well.

John Williams served in the Senate throughout the civil rights revolution and had a mixed record on civil-rights legislation. In 1950 he voted to end a southern filibuster that was holding up a Fair Employment Practices bill, and he told Leslie S. Perry of the National NAACP that he would support legislation to make lynching a federal crime and to abolish the poll tax.<sup>47</sup> In 1957, however, he was one of only five Republicans in the Senate to oppose the Eisenhower administration's civil-rights bill. He explained that he opposed the bill because it denied those charged with violations the right to trial by jury. The administration had written the "no jury trial" rule into the bill because of their fears that southern juries would not convict those who violated the law. Caught between two sets of rights, Williams was more concerned about protecting the jury system than eliminating violations of blacks' rights.

In the early 1960s, when civil rights had become a major national issue, the senator continued to apply those same principles in spite of growing objections from civil rights advocates that his cool, legalistic approach to the issue of racial equality was out of step with the times. In response to a woman from Ridgewood, New Jersey, who had asked for his solution to the race problem he wrote, "I share your belief that every American is entitled to equal treatment under the law and that rights which are enjoyed by one man should not be denied another only on the basis of race or creed. I think we run into difficulty when it comes to the application of these ideals . . . Reasonable men may well differ as to the best way to protect the rights of all of us. . . ."48

The Powell controversy had made Williams a target of the

NAACP. The organization's regional director challenged its Wilmington chapter to do something about the difficult senator.<sup>49</sup> The Reverend Maurice J. Moyer, the Wilmington chapter president, told a reporter that the senator had a poor voting record on civil rights. "We've talked to him many times. He listened, but he just had his mind set."<sup>50</sup>

The tempest over Powell formed a prelude to the hostile confrontation between Williams and civil rights leaders the following summer. On August 28, 1963, the day of the historic "March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom," Williams refused to cancel previously made appointments to meet with Delaware's march leaders. On the morning of the march, Delaware's contingent assembled at a downtown church before they proceeded to the mall for the main ceremony in the afternoon. Senator J. Caleb Boggs and Congressman Harris B. McDowell readily agreed to meet the group at the church, but Williams would not rearrange his schedule to do so. He did, however, offer to see representatives of the group in his office later in the day. Roosevelt M. Franklin, chairman of the Political Action Committee of the Wilmington Branch of the NAACP, told the press that "if Williams is so tired he can't go a mile to meet us, after we have come a hundred, maybe we can give him some rest in 1964." The leaders refused to meet with the senator at his office and chose instead to send him an acerbic telegram.<sup>51</sup>

Approximately 1,200 Delawareans traveled to their nation's capital to participate in the march and hear the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech. Only two among them chose to take up Senator Williams's offer to visit his office. Those two sat with the senator for two hours while he explained to them that his civil-rights record had been "thoroughly misunderstood."<sup>52</sup> In October 1963 Delaware's civil-rights leaders held a rally in Wilmington's Rodney Square to urge black Delawareans to register and to vote for their interests. The rally attracted about three thousand people who heard speakers denounce various state politicians for their disregard of civil-rights issues. John Williams came in for particular criticism.<sup>53</sup>

After President John F. Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas, Texas, the new President, Lyndon B. Johnson, vowed to get the administration's stalled civil rights program through Congress. The omnibus civil-rights bill that came before Congress in early 1964 provoked intense controversy. A liberal bill passed the House of Representatives but was threatened with strangulation in the Senate by a southern filibuster. To save the bill, senators sought to attach amendments to make it acceptable to a majority.

In April 1964, forty-five civil-rights advocates from Delaware, including black and white clergymen and NAACP leaders, journeyed to Washington to discuss the bill with their state's senators. It was a revealing confrontation. When the state's two senators entered the room the visitors applauded Boggs, but not Williams. Boggs was, as in the past, warmly receptive to their cause and promised to vote for the bill whether or not it was amended. Williams was more cautious. He listed several reasons why he could not vote for the bill in the form in which it had come from the House, citing most especially the bill's denial of jury trials for those charged with contempt. As Williams wrote to a constituent who had questioned him on this point, he believed "that no forward step has been taken in the cause of protecting individual rights if we merely substitute one man's rights for another's."<sup>54</sup> The senator's position on jury trials appeared to civil rights advocates as merely an excuse to permit white southern juries to dismiss abusers of blacks' rights. The Reverend Maurice J. Moyer admonished the state's senior senator, "I am peeved with your integrity. You are dotting every "I" and crossing every "t" while we . . . are being trampled upon. You are treating us like machines and forgetting the human equation."<sup>55</sup> Even Bill Frank, usually the senator's enthusiastic supporter, had written in a column that appeared in the *Wilmington Morning News* that day in which he scolded the senator: "with cold logic, Senator Williams can be most convincing . . . but . . . racial justice cannot be administered solely by logic. It thrives best when fed by the understanding, sympathetic heart."<sup>56</sup>

Williams, too, was peeved. He defended himself from the Reverend Moyer's charge by noting that he had voted for a majority of the civil-rights bills that had come before the Senate "and now you criticize me. The only other person who ever criticized my voting record on civil rights was Senator James O. Eastland of Mississippi. . . . Now—specifically, what in my voting record on civil rights do you object to?" He explained why he thought some amendments were crucial. Jury trials were an important part of Americans' civil liberties, he said. In addition he wanted the word "willful" inserted in descriptions of civil rights offenses, and he opposed the current bill's intention to deprive whole states or counties of all federal assistance programs if just one agency was found to be guilty of discrimination. "My decision on the civil rights bill," he remarked, "will not be determined by the number of votes I may get in the fall." He concluded by saying that he believed "in the principle of public accommodations and I believe that every citizen, regardless of color, has the right to be served by places of accommodation on

public highways. I am against civil disobedience. No man has the right to take the law into his own hands.”<sup>57</sup> The civil-rights delegates may not have liked the senator’s response but he had convinced Bill Frank who wrote the following day, “He may not have heartbeats for the NAACP, but he has heartbeats for what the NAACP ultimately wants—solid civil rights.”<sup>58</sup>

On June 10, 1964, before packed, anxious galleries, the Senate ended seventy-five days of southern filibuster with the fourth cloture vote in the legislative body’s history. Cloture required support of two-thirds of the senators and was adopted with just four votes to spare. John Williams and Caleb Boggs voted with the majority, with Williams casting the crucial 67th vote to end the debate. He voted for cloture, he said, because the debate had “lasted long enough and the Senate had an obligation to act on this proposal.”<sup>59</sup> His action delighted Bill Frank of the News Journal papers, but disappointed Jack Smyth, editor and publisher of Dover’s *Delaware State News*, who agreed with Barry Goldwater that enforcement of the civil-rights bill would bring police state tactics to America.<sup>60</sup> Williams’s vote did little, however, to heal his breach with Delaware’s civil rights advocates. The Reverend Maurice J. Moyer told the press that the senator had voted for the bill just to gain a few Negro votes. But Bill Frank, who knew the senator much better, demurred saying that Williams was “color blind when it comes to blocs.”<sup>61</sup>

Even at the stage of the bill’s progress when passage seemed assured, Williams refused to predict whether or not he would vote for the bill. It all depended on the amendments, he said. Because it was an election year, many viewed the vote of any senator facing reelection as calculated to appease one or another voting group. In the case of John Williams, however, some saw other motives at work. Ned Davis, a Democratic columnist who interviewed Williams at that time wrote “that he [Williams] voted for cloture and for civil rights without worrying too deeply about the political consequences to his own future. Rather, from the nerve center of the nation’s capital he saw that in some states, though barely at all in Delaware, there is injustice and repression of human beings and this situation was one that he could not in conscience ignore.”<sup>62</sup>

The NAACP must have disagreed most strenuously with the senator’s complacent view of race relations in Delaware, but Davis did, in fact, capture Williams’s position on the issue. The senator who was respectful of Harry Byrd and became an ardent supporter of Barry Goldwater’s presidential campaign that year, nonetheless voted for a bill that Byrd and Goldwater strongly disapproved. The

senator's mail, from Delawareans as well as other Americans, also ran against the bill, but Williams was guided by his conscience and by his belief, expressed to the editor of a southern Delaware weekly newspaper, that failure of the Congress to act would invite intervention by the Supreme Court.<sup>63</sup>

To the end of his Senate career, John Williams's positions on civil-rights issues were an enigma to many, but his position did follow an internal logic based on his reading of the U.S. Constitution's guarantees of rights for all citizens. The concept of remedial action to compensate for past abuses was antithetical to his thinking because, in his view, such action was not sanctioned by the Constitution and inevitably caused injustice to others. In general, he believed that civil rights should be left in the hands of states and that federal interference was only warranted when the states failed to act justly. In 1965 he supported the Voting Rights Act and opposed southern senators' attempts to insert a literacy test into the bill. Williams offered an amendment to that law designed to prevent cheating in elections.<sup>64</sup> Coming from Delaware with its history of election bribery, he told reporters, "I strongly support the principle that every American citizen should have the right to vote, but it is equally important that every American be guaranteed that his vote will be counted in a clean election."<sup>65</sup> "Voting fraud," the senator told his colleagues, "is in every bit as much a blot on the American image and the democratic process as are instances of denial of the right to vote based on race or color."<sup>66</sup> The Williams "clean elections" amendment received unanimous support in the Senate, no one daring to vote for election fraud. But Roy Wilkins of the NAACP opposed attaching the amendment to the Voting Rights bill on the grounds that it would weigh down the voting-rights legislation. Wilkins's suggestion that clean elections be enacted as separate legislation was adopted and both bills were signed into law that same year.<sup>67</sup>

Conversely, Williams opposed the Civil Rights Act of 1968 because of its open-housing amendment, which he believed gave federal law-enforcement authorities unconstitutionally sweeping powers over the sale of private property. To a Catholic cleric in Wilmington who expressed his disappointment with the senator's position, Williams wrote that he believed it to be "an unwarranted infringement on the rights of the individual to use and dispose of his property . . . so long as its use does not adversely affect the property rights of others. . . ." Williams noted that the existence of state open housing laws had not prevented racial riots in several northern states and added, "In the past I have supported every civil rights bill . . . because it was clear that the rights of some were being

denied either by a government or by individuals with respect to public accommodations. But since neither is the case here, I could not support the proposal.” He added that laws of this kind would be unnecessary if people would adopt the religious teachings of brotherhood on their own.<sup>68</sup>

This was not the only time when Williams appealed to religious morality as the surest defense of racial justice. In response to a seminary student who had written in reference to the murders of civil-rights workers in Alabama, Williams wrote that “it would appear that the teachings of the church . . . have not been as effective as they might have been, and it might be well to consider ways in which Christian ideals of truth and justice could be made to guide more effectively. . . .”<sup>69</sup>

Most of the senator’s constituent correspondents on civil-rights issues came from white civil rights advocates who lived in Wilmington or its surrounding suburbs. Clergy were heavily represented in the group. The senator received some letters from correspondents scattered throughout Delaware and from southern states who opposed civil rights for black Americans. He received little correspondence from black leaders on this issue, nor did he have much personal interaction with black Delawareans. Black leaders preferred to direct their lobbying efforts toward Senator Caleb Boggs, who embraced their goals wholly without the restrictive constitutional fences that Williams sought to impose.

Some prominent blacks wrote John Williams off as an enemy of their cause. Raymond L. Reaves, president of the Wilmington Federation of Neighborhood Associations, told an audience that the senator’s success with Delaware voters represented a “demonstration of racism in our state,” while Littleton Mitchell and other state NAACP leaders expressed their opposition by refusing to stand to honor the senator at a public banquet.<sup>70</sup> Perhaps Williams summed up his own view of race relations best in a letter to a member of the arch-conservative John Birch Society from Birmingham, Alabama, who had expressed his confusion over the Delawarean’s position. “I have never been considered a proponent of civil rights as such,” Williams explained, “I look at each piece of legislation separately to determine if the legislation provides equal rights for all people and whether the legislation denies the state the right to make its own laws. This viewpoint has made me a proponent of civil rights in the eyes of some and anti-civil rights in the eyes of others, however, I do not believe either category fits.”<sup>71</sup>

## The DuPont Divestiture

The parallels between Williams's roles in desegregation and the DuPont-General Motors divestiture begin where both of those complex matters entered the senator's arena of action: in precedent shattering actions of the United States Supreme Court. The DuPont-GM divestiture case arose from an antitrust complaint filed by the Truman administration's Justice Department in 1949 when Attorney General Thomas Clark announced that the government would move to break up what he characterized as "the largest single concentration of industrial power in the United States," the DuPont Company's controlling ownership of General Motors Corporation.<sup>1</sup>

The coupling of the two giant manufacturing companies had occurred during the World War I period when the DuPont Company's principal stockholders were looking for investment opportunities for their enormous wartime earnings from the manufacture of gun powder and explosives. DuPont's president at that time, Pierre S. du Pont, acting on his own account, purchased a substantial equity in the General Motors Company. The DuPont Company also purchased GM shares and, in addition, Pierre du Pont created a holding company called Christiana Securities which held DuPont and General Motors shares for himself and for other members of his immediate family.<sup>2</sup> Christiana Securities, which owned about 30 percent of all DuPont stock, invested a small percentage of its wealth in non-DuPont projects, most notably Wilmington's *News-Journal* papers, the major source of news and opinion throughout the state. Thus, Pierre S. du Pont, his siblings, and his close associates acquired large blocks of General Motors stock via three sources: as owners of DuPont Company stock, as owners of Christiana Securities stock, and as direct investors in the General Motors Corporation. To insure the value of their investment, Pierre took direct control of General Motors during the 1920s as the automobile company's president, and DuPont Company executives and du Pont family members were active on the GM board thereafter.

In its complaint, the government contended that the DuPont Company's 63,000,000 shares in the nation's largest automobile manufacturer, representing 23 percent of GM stock, amounted to a conspiracy to restrain and monopolize trade. The government pointed to the fact that DuPont and GM executives sat on one another's boards and that DuPont made numerous products used in the manufacture of automobiles. When the Eisenhower administration came into office in early 1953, the case was before Judge Walter J. LaBuy of the United States District Court for the Northern District of Illinois. In December 1954 the judge dismissed the government's complaint on the grounds that the Justice Department had failed to prove that the DuPont Company had used its influence to force the auto maker to purchase DuPont products. With a new Republican administration in Washington, the DuPonts assumed that the Justice Department would drop the case, but their relief was short-lived for, to the surprise of many observers, the Justice Department appealed the ruling to the United States Supreme Court. The du Ponts had run afoul of the Eisenhower administration's determination to prosecute the case as part of its strategy to use anti-trust laws to maintain a competitive business environment instead of relying on the New Deal Democrats' regulatory agencies.<sup>3</sup> DuPont executives continued, however, to assume that Republican leadership in the executive branch of the government would guarantee favorable consideration of the Du Pont-GM case, a presumption that was to bedevil the company's leaders throughout the proceedings that followed. On June 3, 1957, by a vote of four to two, the Supreme Court reversed the lower court's ruling. The Justices agreed with LaBuy that both DuPont and General Motors had acted honorably, but they concluded that too many financial and administrative links connected the two corporations for the combination to meet the test of open competition demanded by the Clayton Anti-trust Act. The Supreme Court remanded the case back to Judge LaBuy for remedy to dissolve those links.<sup>4</sup>

The Supreme Court's ruling, which stunned Wall Street and shocked hundreds of thousands of DuPont and GM stockholders around the country, unleashed a complex series of processes that ultimately were to include all three branches of the U.S. government. While Judge LaBuy was still considering remedy proposals from both the Justice Department and the DuPont Company, the Internal Revenue Service fashioned its plans to tax the expected divestiture. Russell Harrington, Commissioner of Internal Revenue, ruled in May 1958 that, should the DuPont Company be ordered to divest its General Motors stock to its own stockholders, current law

required the IRS to treat the DuPont stockholders' acquisition of the DuPont Company's GM shares as taxable dividend income, that is, as if the GM stock certificates were part of the stockholders' DuPont dividends. Twin fears now gripped disconsolate DuPont executives and shareholders: that a precipitous divestiture decree requiring immediate sale of Du Pont's GM shares would seriously depress the value of the stock, and, equally frightening, that, should Judge LaBuy order a distribution of the shares to DuPont stockholders, the tax penalty would completely erase the shares' value to their owners. Walter S. Carpenter, Du Pont's chairman of the board, calculated that the cost of the IRS ruling to the company's shareholders would be between seven hundred million and one billion dollars, or about one-third the value of the chemical company's stock.<sup>5</sup>

In response to that troubling expectation Delaware's junior sena-



Delaware's Congressional delegation, from left to right: U.S. Representative J. Caleb Boggs (R), Senator John J. Williams (R), and Senator J. Allen Frear (D) ca. 1950 posed with outsized scissors to show support for the Hoover Commission Report's call for greater government efficiency. Photograph by F. Clyde Wilkinson. Courtesy of University of Delaware Library.

tor, J. Allen Frear, decided to come to the rescue of the Du Pont stockholders. Frear, a Dover Democrat, businessman, and farmer, had captured C. Douglass Buck's Senate seat in 1948, the same election in which Harry S. Truman had defeated Thomas E. Dewey. Not unlike President Truman, Frear was a compact, dapper man who favored bow ties and exhibited the small town businessman's pleasure in belonging to Rotary and the Masonic Order. For a Democrat, he was unusually conservative, a characteristic that did not endear him to Harry Truman but eased his relationship with John Williams. Though of separate parties, Delaware's senators had developed a friendly personal and working relationship. By mutual agreement, while Williams pursued national investigations, Frear concentrated his attention where he felt he could do the most good, on federal relations with the state of Delaware. Frear was responsible for a number of federal investments in Delaware, most significantly the massive extension of the Dover Air Force Base during the Korean War era, and he was rightly proud of his commitment to constituent service. Like Williams, Frear was a member of the Senate Finance Committee. Frear was also active on the Banking and Currency Committee and he may have assumed that those committee assignments, together with his chosen arena of constituent service, made him the appropriate official to act on behalf of Delaware's largest corporation.

On June 3, 1957, Frear was in the Senate cloakroom when news of the Supreme Court decision flashed across the news ticker. He immediately ordered his office staff to contact DuPont executives with an offer of help. Within three days, Frear's administrative assistant, Robert F. Kelly, was corresponding with DuPont Company leaders about the possibility of Frear's submitting a bill to rewrite a portion of the Clayton Antitrust Act so as to negate the court's ruling.<sup>6</sup> When that approach proved unworkable, Frear turned his attention to saving DuPont shareholders from the confiscatory taxation threatened by IRS Commissioner Harrington's ruling. In June 1958, Frear introduced S. 200, a bill designed to treat the probable DuPont divestiture in a manner similar to the treatment of bank stocks under the Bank Holding Company Act, that is, as a mere transfer of an asset from one form (as part of the stockholder's DuPont stock) to another (as a separate piece of that same stock now divided into two parts: Du Pont and General Motors). The shareholder would pay no tax until he or she sold the stock, when the shares would be taxed as capital gains, rather than at the much higher income-tax rate. Introduced late in the legislative session, the Frear bill did not receive serious attention until the following

year, by which time DuPont stockholders were rallying behind it and Senate skeptics were picking it apart.<sup>7</sup>

Although there are no records showing that Delaware's two senators discussed S. 200 during the time between the bill's introduction in June 1958 and its appearance, in somewhat revised form, before the Finance Committee in September 1959, it seems likely that they did so. During that lengthy interval the DuPont Company sent out several mailings to the company's stockholders soliciting their support for Frear's initiative, and both Delaware senators received a host of mail from DuPont stockholders urging enactment of the bill. Most letter writers were small investors, some retired people, who depended on dividends from their DuPont shares to maintain themselves. Those people were frightened. One woman wrote to Senator Williams: "I purchased DuPont stock in good faith but if the government proposal is put into effect I will have to sell stock to pay taxes on money that I never had in the first place."<sup>8</sup> Some writers referred to Senator Williams's reputation as if assuring themselves of his power and good will while urging him to take action on their behalf. "I am sure from your past record that you will do everything in your power to see that justice is done and that the holder of a common stock in these companies is not penalized for his thrift," said another correspondent.<sup>9</sup> Writers frequently drew attention to the failure of the government's antitrust lawyers, despite their massive effort, to prove that DuPont had done anything wrong, and cited the fact that although stockholders were innocent of any wrong doing, they were threatened with serious tax penalties. In his standard reply to those writers, Williams shared their belief that the Supreme Court ruling had been unjustified, and acknowledged "that legislation of some type is necessary" to ease their potential tax burden.<sup>10</sup>

None of those replies could have prepared the stockholders for the senior senator from Delaware's unforeseen action in the Finance Committee on September 5, 1959. On that day the Finance Committee took up Senator Frear's bill, which, in an amended version, had already passed muster in the House of Representatives Committee on Ways and Means, where its sponsor had been Delaware's Democratic Congressman, Harris B. McDowell. The Finance Committee heard testimony from the Treasury and Justice Department officials who objected to the bill on the grounds that Du Pont stockholders should be required to pay tax on the divestiture in the year in which they received the GM shares. In contrast, DuPont Company lawyers and executives praised the bill as fair, especially in light of the fact that the courts had not found DuPont guilty of any

wrongdoing. The Finance Committee then voted eight to seven against recommending Frear's proposal. To the surprise of most, both John Williams and committee chairman Harry F. Byrd voted with the majority. The committee then considered a resolution sponsored by Williams and Byrd that was based on a plan submitted by the Treasury Department. The Treasury plan, called "partial liquidation," required stockholders to pay some tax when they received their GM shares. The committee voted to adopt it by a similarly close vote.

DuPont executives and the company's 16,000 stockholders in Delaware were stunned by Senator Williams's failure to support the Frear proposal. It seemed inconceivable to them that Senator Williams would vote against Senator Frear's bill and in favor of a Treasury Department substitute. The DuPont Company conveyed its disappointment with Williams's position to its stockholders, and in the following days and weeks, Senator Williams's mail bag was filled with letters expressing anger and disillusion with his leadership. Williams's judgment was also assaulted in a lead editorial in the *News-Journal* papers-entitled "The Frear Bill Is Fairest," which found the state's senior senator's action "shocking and distressing."<sup>11</sup> The bulk of the senator's mail came from heavily Republican districts, particularly in the DuPont bedroom communities of Brandywine Hundred north of Wilmington. A constituent from Wilmington wrote, "I simply cannot reconcile your past reputation for honesty and fair dealing with your action in this case. . . . I am almost forced to the conclusion that you are 'mad' at somebody and are willing to sacrifice my interests . . . in attaining your purpose."<sup>12</sup> Another irate Delawarean accused Williams of "demagoguery of a very cheap . . . sort."<sup>13</sup>

Secure in his belief that his correspondents misunderstood the complexity of the situation, Williams presented his rebuttal in responses to individual writers and in a speech that he delivered before the Wilmington Lions Club in mid-October and later released to the press. In this speech Williams praised Senator Frear for his initiative but laid out what he saw as troublesome in the Frear bill.<sup>14</sup> Williams said that he had studied the Frear bill in relation to the complicated set of problems that it sought to resolve and had concluded that the bill, although well-intentioned, was fundamentally flawed. Even more to the point, the Frear bill was doomed to lose in the Senate because it lacked support from the Treasury Department. The Frear bill had been designed to be private legislation, but its effects had to be made to fit several other pending antitrust cases involving corporate break-ups. Any proposal to alter the nation's

tax code must, therefore, meet a high standard that promised fair treatment in a wide variety of potential situations. Williams was convinced that the Frear bill failed to meet that broader test and that it would open loopholes in the tax code. He noted that by making the distribution tax exempt, the Frear bill would increase the value of DuPont stock.

Furthermore, by his own calculations, Williams concluded that the Frear bill inadvertently favored owners of Christiana Securities stock, mostly very wealthy people who had held their shares a long time, going back to when GM stock had been cheap, and the capital gains tax would loom large. In contrast, those who held DuPont stock directly included small investors who had purchased their shares more recently when GM was much higher and for whom, therefore, the capital gains tax would be far lower. In addition to eliminating the capital gains tax on the divested shares, the Frear bill would also allow Christiana holders to bypass the federal intercorporate tax that holding companies paid annually on their earnings from stock owned in other corporations. Eliminating Christiana Securities' intercorporate tax from the GM portion of its Du Pont shares would cost the government millions of dollars in revenue and would have the effect of rewarding Christiana Securities holders for having lost the antitrust case. That inequitable provision would have the effect of taxing the richest stockholders—that is those who held their DuPont shares through Christiana Securities—the least.

Although he privately complained that the *News-Journal* papers made strategic deletions in reporting his views, Williams remained confident that his was the right course and that once they were properly informed, Delaware's DuPont stockholders would see things his way.<sup>15</sup> To a tax consultant who wrote about his fears for his aged mother's income from DuPont securities, the senator wrote, "I do not need to tell you, a tax consultant, that this is a very complicated problem and one upon which it is very difficult to find a fair and equitable solution."<sup>16</sup> To another very irate writer the senator replied that "a compromise . . . while perhaps not pleasing to everyone would at least be fair to all." The Frear bill, he said, could not get the votes to pass, so was it not better to seek a workable solution; "put yourself in my position—as having an interest in not only working out a solution to the problem of the DuPont stockholders, but a responsibility as a member of the Senate Finance Committee to see that any formula adopted as permanent legislation will in the years to come be fair to all companies and to all stockholders. . . ."<sup>17</sup>



**Senate Finance Committee Chairman, Harry Byrd (D-Va.) conferring with his friend and colleague, John Williams. Courtesy of University of Delaware Library.**

The Treasury-Williams-Byrd “partial liquidation” plan offered a compromise between the harsh tax penalty envisioned in the original IRS ruling and the tax-deferral approach of the Frear bill. It required DuPont stockholders to pay tax on the General Motors shares they received at a rate 75 percent lower than that imposed under the IRS ruling. The plan was also calculated to equalize the cost to DuPont and Christiana Securities holders and to distribute the heaviest tax burden to those who had bought their shares long ago when GM was cheap (mostly the largest, wealthiest stockholders) and reduce or eliminate the tax for those who had acquired their DuPont shares more recently when the GM shares cost close to their present market value (most of the small stockholders, including DuPont Company employees enrolled in the company’s Thrift Plan).

Perhaps the most revealing correspondence in Senator Williams’s DuPont-GM divestiture file is a letter the senator sent to his colleague Harry F. Byrd dated November 10, 1959, in which Williams

explained his strategy. "Our mutual friend Senator Townsend has been telling you of the running debate we have had in our state in connection with the Finance Committee's action on Senator Frear's bill," Williams began. He believed that he was getting his point across to the public in spite of the adverse reaction of the Christiana Securities owned newspapers. "The real punch was when I released a letter from the Treasury Department confirming that Christiana Securities and its stockholders would, over a ten-year period under the Frear bill, have actually received a forty-five million dollar reduction in tax liability as compared to existing law. I referred to this in my speech . . . but the papers played it down; however, on November 2, I was able to get a front page release including the Treasury Department's letter confirming this point. . . . There was no rebuttal to this release, and the reaction since has been exceptionally favorable." Williams concluded with the observation that "the more I study the formula under Senator Frear's bill, the more convinced I am that the Senate Finance Committee was right in rejecting it."<sup>18</sup> To this, Byrd replied in a brief, paternal letter that "I am proud of the way you handled this matter, I will stand shoulder to shoulder with you."<sup>19</sup>

The friendly working relationship that hitherto had prevailed between Delaware's senators was threatened by the ongoing battle over divestiture legislation. Frear urged a cessation of hostilities and Williams instantly agreed that he, too, was "disturbed . . . over the recent misunderstandings," which he attributed to misinterpreted press statements. "Let us be frank," Williams admitted. "Perhaps both of us have been a little overenthusiastic about our positions, and perhaps what we need to get back on the right track is for us to get together and take our wives out to dinner, and the first one who again mentions this controversy pays the check. After all, we both have the same objective in mind, and we have five more years to work together."<sup>20</sup> Frear replied that he'd welcome such an air-clearing dinner in January 1960 when Congress reconvened.<sup>21</sup> Interestingly, Williams anticipated that Frear would be reelected in 1960 and that he, Williams, would leave the Senate in 1964 after three terms. As it turned out, neither of those predictions proved true.

Meanwhile, on October 1 and November 17, 1959, Judge LaBuy announced his framework for relief from the government's complaint. In conformity with his earlier finding for the defendants, LaBuy declared that forced divestiture would be "unnecessarily harsh and punitive" and structured a narrow remedy whereby the DuPont Company might continue to own its GM shares but assign

the voting rights to its individual stockholders as a "pass through." The judge also ordered that executives of the two corporations no longer sit on one another's governing boards.<sup>22</sup> Once again the Justice Department was not satisfied with the Illinois District Court's judgment and appealed to the Supreme Court for complete divestment. In the meantime, LaBuy's pass-through concept joined Frear's S. 200 formula and the Williams-Byrd-Treasury "partial liquidation" plan as options to be considered in the search for a final settlement that would meet the test of approval by Congress, the Treasury Department, and the Supreme Court.

Through all those months of negotiations and maneuver, Crawford Greenewalt, the DuPont Company president, remained hopeful that the Frear plan would ultimately prevail. In early November 1959 he wrote to John Williams that he was "distressed" by Williams's public statements opposing the Frear plan and by the senator's suggestion that S. 200 would provide a "windfall" for Christiana Securities.<sup>23</sup> The senator's scenario assumed that the government would insist on total divestiture that would include Christiana's investments, but within the DuPont Company a more optimistic view held sway that would have made the Williams plan appear unnecessarily punitive.<sup>24</sup> Williams replied that all parties should begin anew to find an acceptable formula and added a gentle warning, "Personally, I am convinced that neither the Treasury Department nor the Congress will agree to divestiture without some form of tax payable upon distribution." Would it not be better, he cautioned, to work to decrease the tax rather than to continue to hold out to stockholders the "futile" hope that the distribution would be tax free?<sup>25</sup>

In June Senator Frear's old S. 200 was introduced in the House of Representatives in a slightly updated form. Williams professed to be "very much disappointed and surprised," but, in light of LaBuy's latest ruling and the fact that Frear faced an election in November, the junior senator's action could have been anticipated.<sup>26</sup> Williams, whose attitudes and interests dictated that the divestiture issue stay out of politics, was apparently quite angry with his colleague's behavior, especially since Frear's new bill, H.R. 5547, retained the preferential treatment for Christiana Securities' owners that had been the basis for Williams's opposition to S. 200.

Shortly after H.R. 5547 was introduced into the House of Representatives, John Williams met with President Eisenhower to discuss the divestiture issue. Others present included Secretary of the Treasury George Humphrey and Senate minority leader Everett Dirksen [R-Ill.], a Frear bill supporter. Dirksen later informed Frear that Ei-

senhower had told the group that if H.R. 5547 passed he intended to veto it. In light of the President's stand, Dirksen told Frear that, as a Republican who was loyal to his party's President, he must take his orders from the White House and would oppose the bill. Frear recognized that, although he had held out hope of garnering enough votes to overcome the opposition of Senators Byrd and Williams, he could not possibly win sufficient Republican support without having Dirksen and the President on his side. In a note to himself, Frear wrote that "a short while later . . . I happened to pass the senior senator from Delaware and the Chairman of the Finance Committee in front of the Senate Chamber and overheard the senior senator from Delaware tell the Chairman of the Finance Committee of his success with the President, both were smiling profusely apparently over the results. I walked up and made the remark, 'I believe you men are plotting against me,' of course, I received no response."<sup>27</sup>

The conspiratorial mode continued throughout the summer. Among the most revealing series of papers in the Williams Papers are the senior senator's notes describing his execution of a carefully laid plot to defeat H.R. 5547 in August 1960. The senator's daily notations project the drama of Williams's wily maneuvering. On August 9, 1960, DuPont President Crawford Greenewalt called Williams about the chances of the Frear bill and the senator "played dumb." Simultaneously, DuPont Board Chairman Walter S. Carpenter was insisting to Senator Byrd that Frear's bill be adopted and said that he was supporting Frear in his senatorial campaign against the popular Republican governor and former congressman, J. Caleb Boggs. "He was very mad about my opposition," Williams noted.

Several days later at a meeting in Senator Byrd's office, E. L. Gemmill, a DuPont representative, presented a compromise plan to which both Byrd and Williams agreed. To seal the deal, Senator Williams asked that Gemmill provide him with a letter confirming that the company had withdrawn its support from the Frear proposal. A week later no letter had arrived, but Crawford Greenewalt was back in Washington trying one last time to keep the Frear bill alive. At a meeting in Senate Minority Leader Everett M. Dirksen's office, Greenewalt agreed "reluctantly" to support the Williams compromise. Williams then told the DuPont president that "if he thought Allen's bill was meritorious then stay with it and I would cooperate fully in having it brought up for debate, but would oppose it." Later in the meeting, according to Williams's notes, Senator Frear said that he was not "sure he would agree with [the Williams]

compromise even though Greenwalt may approve,” to which Williams added his strongest expletive: “Bull!”

That evening while Greenwalt flew home to Delaware with Frear in tow, Williams launched what he called “operation ‘Williams’.” To outfox his colleague, he attached the least objectionable features of Frear’s bill to an innocent-seeming piece of legislation dealing with the tax on cigars. He then attached the heart of the Frear bill to several other pieces of tax law that faced severe opposition. After hatching his plot, Williams returned home “tired—but Happy.” It took some days before Allen Frear realized that “we had stolen his vehicles and that he has no car to ride in.” Shortly after, E. L. Gemmill of DuPont recognized the futility of further lobbying for the Frear bill and told Williams that the company would cease pressing for action that year.<sup>28</sup>

Frear, though outmaneuvered, had once again demonstrated his sincerity on behalf of DuPont’s shareholders and hoped to win their votes away from the Republicans in November. He had need of Republican support because his conservative voting record had estranged him from his party’s most significant voting bloc: organized labor. In the fall, while Republicans like Walter Carpenter were rallying Republicans for Frear, labor leaders distributed 30,000 yellow cards providing their adherents with instructions on how to “cut Frear.” The result might have been predicted. Frear won majorities over Boggs in Kent and Sussex counties, but in more populous New Castle County where the election would be decided, he failed to capture significant Republican suburban switchovers to compensate for his deficit among Wilmington’s working class. While John Fitzgerald Kennedy carried Delaware by about 3,000 votes, Frear lost to J. Caleb Boggs by about the same number.<sup>29</sup> Frear did not entirely beat himself, however, because he had run against an extremely popular opponent, a liberal Republican who had just completed eight successful years as governor of the state.

In February 1961 the Supreme Court heard arguments concerning LaBuy’s remedy decree and, on May 22, 1961, the court pronounced the lower court’s “pass-through” solution to be inadequate “to redress the violations and restore competition.” The court directed the DuPont Company to divest its entire General Motors holdings within ten years.<sup>30</sup> With Frear gone from the Senate and a Democratic administration now in command at the Treasury Department, the DuPont executives turned to Senator Williams to devise a bill that would minimize the stockholders’ tax burden. Williams worked with Treasury Department officials, his col-

leagues on the Finance Committee, and with cosponsors Congressman Hale Boggs [D-La.] and Senator Wallace Bennett [R-Utah] to write a bill that would tax DuPont stockholders after the distribution, but only at the capital gains rate and only on the increase in value of the GM shares since the time when each owner had acquired his or her DuPont stock. This was essentially the formula that Williams had pressed for all along. The Justice Department intervened during hearings before the House of Representatives Committee on Ways and Means to strip the bill of its generic quality and make it apply only to the DuPont-GM case. Although Williams had hoped to create a model formula that could cover many antitrust actions, he accepted the change as the price for getting the legislation passed.<sup>31</sup>

When the Williams-Bennett bill came before the Senate in January 1962, two Democratic liberals, Senators Paul A. Douglas [D-Ill.] and Albert Gore [D-Tenn.], proposed an amendment to increase the tax penalty on the Christiana Securities distribution beyond what the bill's supporters thought was fair or justified. A long and fierce debate ensued before the Douglas amendment was rejected by a vote of seventy-two to eighteen. With the hostile amendment out of the way, John Williams spoke on behalf of the bill, emphasizing that it had the support of the Treasury Department and of fourteen of the sixteen members of the Senate Finance Committee. "The bill has erroneously been labeled as a bill to aid the rich," Williams said. "It is quite the contrary. In fact, the \$470,000,000 in revenue which will be raised . . . is collected in its entirety from the Christiana Corporation and from those stockholders who own DuPont and Christiana stock at exceptionally low cost."<sup>32</sup> The bill passed the Senate late that night in a sudden, dramatic voice vote and was signed into law by President Kennedy on February 2, 1962.

The divestiture controversy earned Williams both admirers and detractors. Drew Pearson and his assistant, Jack Anderson, neither of whom thought highly of the Delaware senator, proclaimed him a hero for his defiance of the du Ponts;<sup>33</sup> but in Wilmington, Williams's actions were regarded as those of a self-important, arrogant, and vengeful man. Walter Carpenter's biographer, Charles W. Cheape, wrote that Williams had "punished" the DuPont Company "for flouting . . . congressional protocols" and described the senator's carefully planned gutting of the Frear bill as an act of "revenge."<sup>34</sup>

The DuPont divestiture presented the most difficult set of problems of any that John Williams confronted during his twenty-four years in the United States Senate. It is highly unusual, not to men-

tion risky, for an elected representative to pursue a course of action that, by all public appearances, is antithetical to the interests of his constituents, and particularly so when the constituents in question constitute a large and powerful segment of his own political party. Why did John Williams act as he did and what do his actions reveal about his priorities and his character?

The divestiture issue was a dynamic one involving multiple facets that could not be readily grasped even by people who were knowledgeable about tax policy, the stock market, the DuPont Corporation, and the antitrust laws. Williams once described the divestiture as “about the most complicated problem that I have ever attempted to work on.”<sup>35</sup> He told a DuPont employee-stockholder who had written to him that he had “spent as much, if not more time in trying to work out an equitable formula for this proposal than in any previous situation,” and added that, “while I am not so narrow-minded as to insist that I alone am right, nevertheless I will say that I think I am right.”<sup>36</sup> This declaration, which cuts to the heart of the senator’s attitude, can be interpreted as a sign of self-confidence, or alternatively as vanity. Was Williams’s perception of reality an accurate one or was he being an obstructionist, a meddler who purposely and unnecessarily destroyed the chances for his colleague Senator Frear to introduce his legislation?

Surely the Eisenhower administration Justice Department’s insistence on breaking up the DuPont-GM nexus and the Treasury Department’s determination to tax the divested stock convinced Senator Williams that Senator Frear and the DuPont executives were ignoring reality. In the course of the maneuvering to find an appropriate formula for the divestiture tax liability, Williams took a good deal of public criticism from the DuPont Company. He also lost the good working relationship that he had enjoyed with Frear. This he tried to repair, but his cleverly plotted maneuver to scuttle the Frear bill reopened the breach. Frear certainly had reason to resent Williams’s action just as Williams had resented Frear’s legislation, both because it was faulty and because he had been ignored in its preparation.

It was Williams’s duel with Frear that gave the controversy its drama. In that contest, personal interest would surely have dictated that the combatants reverse their roles, not only for the sake of political advantage, but also because Frear owned no DuPont stock whereas Williams was a Du Pont stockholder.<sup>37</sup> The reason the two Delaware senators approached the divestiture in such different ways must be sought not in their politics but in their perspective. It is

likely that, as some of his detractors alleged, Williams was influenced by the views of the Treasury Department and of Finance Committee chairman Harry Byrd to oppose the Frear bill, and that Byrd and Williams acted in concert throughout the two years of conflict over the divestiture taxes. But why could not Frear, who was also a member of the Finance Committee and, like Byrd, a conservative Democrat, have worked with the powerful committee chairman to devise a politically satisfactory solution? Furthermore, why did Frear introduce S. 200 without consulting with Williams? The answer may be that the junior senator feared that Williams would restrain him from embarking on his hastily conceived action. Frear's optimistic, can-do approach lulled the DuPont executives and himself into false expectations and made them resentful of John Williams's more cautious methods.<sup>38</sup>

The divestiture was both a Delaware issue and a national issue. Senator Frear treated it primarily from a Delaware perspective, seeing himself as his state's representative charged with reducing or eliminating his constituents' problems with the federal government. It was in that spirit and from that perspective that he acted. John Williams, by contrast, always saw the issue in the larger context of national policy. His duty was to the United States, not just to Delaware, and the locus of that duty was in Washington, in the Finance Committee, with representatives from the Treasury and Justice Departments, and with President Eisenhower. In addition to his effort to find a solution that could pass muster in Congress, Williams was also determined that it be equitable to all parties including both stockholders and the U.S. Treasury. In this instance Williams had proved to be no lone wolf but a team member who knew how to deal successfully with the Capital's other high-level players.

## The Honor of the Senate

Americans entered the 1960s in a spirit of self-confident optimism that by mid-decade had changed into one of turbulent social upheaval and bitter polarization. After what had seemed to many as a complacent decade under Eisenhower, the American people by a thin margin elected John F. Kennedy to lead the nation in 1960. The young former senator from Massachusetts aroused high expectations with his promises of government intervention to secure a more vigorous economy, a more dynamic foreign policy, and a better life for the nation's less fortunate. The president called on Americans to strike out for a New Frontier that was best symbolized by his determination to put an American on the Moon before the decade's end.

John Williams approached the new administration with his usual skepticism. Although he liked Kennedy personally, he disagreed with the new president's emphasis on greater federal government activism. Williams offered what was perhaps the clearest statement of his conservative political philosophy in 1961 when he spoke in the Senate against the young president's plan to provide federal aid to education. In remarks that foreshadowed his later criticisms of President Lyndon B. Johnson's War on Poverty programs, Williams accused the Kennedy administration of enlisting glowing rhetoric in support of an elusive objective. The Kennedy education bill ultimately floundered on the twin rocks of southern opposition to federal intervention on behalf of blacks and religious groups' objections to the exclusion of religiously affiliated schools from the proposed plan.

Senator Williams's opposition to the Kennedy education plan sprang from neither racial nor religious concerns but rather from fiscal conservatism, fear of expanding federal power and concerns about the fairness of the bill. Using the analogy of the race track, the Delawarean argued that whenever Americans turned to the federal government to do something that had traditionally been accom-

plished closer to home they paid a political brokerage fee to Washington just as the betterers at the race track pay a fee to the track regardless of who wins.<sup>1</sup> “I could make an eloquent appeal for some of these programs too,” he said, “if we could forget the cost.”<sup>2</sup> Beyond the program’s cost, he warned that federal assistance to education would lead to federal control that would sap local and state initiative and responsibility. As he presciently noted, “We should . . . ask ourselves very seriously whether we are now prepared to make our state governments merely administrative offices of the federal government.”<sup>3</sup> In spite of his misgivings concerning Kennedy’s education proposal, Williams said he would support federal aid to bring the schools of poor states up to an acceptable national standard if those states “after making every effort possible” could not do so on their own. He noted, however, that Congressional politics had dictated a funding formula that did just the opposite, benefiting wealthy and undertaxed states at the expense of their less wealthy or overtaxed neighbors. In the proposed legislation, Mississippi would receive less per child than New York, while Pennsylvania would get a 60 percent higher allocation per pupil than more heavily taxed Delaware, and Washington D.C. would be awarded nothing at all. He advised the bill’s sponsors that they should alter the wording to include the District of Columbia’s schools and to provide a new source of funding to pay the projected cost of the program. Then, he said, its sponsors might be less inclined to go home and brag that they had provided their constituents with a new cost-free entitlement.

At every opportunity Williams returned to the two related themes of cutting the cost of the federal government and raising its revenue. Most particularly, he repeatedly drew attention to the government’s gargantuan appetite for stockpiling strategic materials allegedly to preclude the possibility that the nation would be cut off from these necessary materials during a war for national survival with the Soviet Union. In the name of defense, the United States had amassed a vast multibillion dollar hoard of metals, food stuffs, and other commodities that, in John Williams’s view, far transcended any potential eventuality. Looking at that costly program from a taxpayer’s perspective, the senator concluded that, beyond a certain point, its supporters’ real motives had more to do with providing windfalls to mine owners and agriculture storage companies than with protecting the country. He was heartened, therefore, when President Kennedy questioned the extravagance of the program and promised an investigation.<sup>4</sup> Williams told the Senate that he, for one, strongly welcomed the enquiry and would supply the administration with

all the facts he had gathered. A Senate subcommittee chaired by W. Stuart Symington of Missouri uncovered a pattern of waste and extravagance that could be laid at the doors of both parties, and, therefore, became a matter of crusade for neither. At the very least the exposure of the stockpile surfeit restored some accountability.<sup>5</sup>

Williams applied the same watchdog approach to foreign-aid programs and consistently voted to reduce the size of America's financial commitment to foreign governments. Americans both inside and outside the federal government who supported those programs believed in their high-sounding goals but usually failed to look closely at how the money was actually spent. John Williams treated these programs with deep suspicion. In 1961, during the Senate debate on President John F. Kennedy's Alliance for Progress bill to increase American aid to Latin America, the Delaware senator questioned whether the money would actually assist poor people or would be siphoned into the coffers of corrupt dictators and their wealthy friends. To illustrate his point, Williams noted that the U.S. government already had in place a program that loaned money to South American governments at a 5 percent interest rate for the purpose of underwriting housing for the poor. The recipient South American governments then loaned the American money to their own citizens at astronomical rates of interest, thus giving ordinary South Americans the impression that the United States was exploiting them. To prevent further abuses of that kind, Williams proposed an amendment to prohibit interest rates in excess of 6 percent to the ultimate borrower. "It is time," Williams argued, "that we decide whether we want to protect the money lenders in their monopolistic hold over credit in those areas or to help the people themselves."<sup>6</sup>

Alliance for Progress supporters retorted that inflationary pressures in these countries made a 6 percent cap impractical, but Williams would not give up. He admitted that his choice of 6 percent had been arbitrary, but he warned that the United States could not help the needy people of South America or encourage political reform in their countries if our assistance program permitted usurious interest rates. In response to his warning, the Senate agreed to a compromise proposed by Senator William Fulbright [D-Arkansas], the chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, to limit interest on loans to the legal rate of interest in the country in which the loan was made, a compromise that disappointed Williams.

The Delaware senator also continued his assaults on that most famous of tax loopholes: the oil depletion allowance. Noting that Jack Kennedy had once voted to cut the allowance, Williams confidently told a writer for the *Oil and Gas Journal* that he would at-

tempt to enlist the new president's support to shift the 27½ percent allowance downward. The industry journal, which labeled Williams as depletion's "top foe," said that the quiet, serious Delawarean was "biding his time" until conditions would be favorable to amend a tax bill to reduce the allowance to 15 percent, a figure that Williams thought would represent fair compensation for the cost of oil exploration and depletion.<sup>7</sup> In 1961 Williams, joined by New England Senators George Aiken and Margaret Chase Smith, introduced a bill to reduce the allowance gradually to 20 percent, but the measure failed. Williams's leading opponent in that endeavor was Democrat Robert S. Kerr of Oklahoma, whose power in the Senate during the 1950s and early 1960s earned him the title "King of the Senate." Kerr hovered over the 27½ percent allowance like a hawk defending its young. "God Almighty put the oil in the ground," he wrote in an article for *Look* magazine, "and nobody else can ever replenish or restore it."<sup>8</sup> The Oklahoma senator came just short of crediting the Almighty with also creating the 27½ percent allowance that Congress had enacted in the 1920s when tax rates in general were much lower. Typically, Williams never revealed that his own stock portfolio was heavy in oil investments. The Delaware senator's ability to disassociate his private finances from his public responsibility would have astonished Bob Kerr, a man whom Bobby Baker described as a wheeler dealer who used money to buy people and who unapologetically supported programs that benefited his own pocketbook and accepted payment for use of his influence.<sup>9</sup>

Another continuing theme in John Williams's career was his crusade against what he regarded as extravagant, economically unsound agricultural price supports. The senator urged an orderly withdrawal from high supports so as to restore market forces to agricultural commodities, reduce food prices for the public, lessen the costly federal bureaucracy, and give family farmers a better chance to compete against corporate farms. He had applauded Eisenhower's Secretary of Agriculture, Ezra Taft Benson, who embraced those same goals, but in the Eisenhower years the Democratic Congress had thwarted Benson's efforts. Kennedy's Agriculture Secretary, Orville S. Freeman, reverted to the Democrats' old policy of high supports accompanied by strong federal controls to curb excessive production. Williams took heart in June 1962 when the House of Representatives turned back the new administration's farm plan. "The Kennedy-Freeman program," Williams declared, "would have increased these already high supports, . . . and then to control production, they proposed to place the American farmers in a straight jacket of controls whereby they could be sent to

the penitentiary for disobeying any whim of some New Frontier bureaucrat.”<sup>10</sup>

In the spring of 1962 a major scandal came to light that demonstrated some of the flaws in the nation’s agricultural policies. Billie Sol Estes was an affable, enterprising, young Texan who developed close relationships with a number of political figures in his state’s Democratic Party and got himself appointed to the Agriculture Department’s National Cotton Advisory Committee. A self-made multimillionaire, Estes built an agricultural empire in west Texas through a complex series of manipulations of grain storage facilities, fertilizer supply, and cotton acreage allotments. In January 1962 a newspaper in Estes’s home town of Pecos, Texas, published reports that Estes had received millions of dollars in mortgage loans for nonexistent fertilizer tanks. As tales of the young Texan’s many fraudulent schemes began to surface, law enforcement agencies belatedly took a hard look at the boy wonder’s operations. In March 1962, following an FBI investigation, a U.S. Attorney in Texas charged Estes with fraud in securing government mortgages for the nonexistent fertilizer storage tanks. Estes’s other enterprises in cotton and grain storage also came under scrutiny and some wondered if his friendships with, and gifts to, prominent politicians had gained him undue favoritism within the Department of Agriculture. Both Secretary Freeman and President Kennedy denied any wrong doing.

N. Battle Hales, a lawyer and career civil servant in the Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service, believed that records in his office files would corroborate the charges of Agriculture Department favoritism toward Estes. Convinced that the political appointees who were his immediate superiors were covering up, Hales made an appointment to see Secretary Freeman personally to warn him of the Department’s involvement in the scandal. When Hales came to the secretary’s office for his appointed meeting, he was shunted into the office of a subordinate who, after listening to his story, suggested that Hales take his information to the FBI. That course of action proved impossible, however, because the Department chose this very time to transfer Hales to another section and used the transfer as an excuse to seal the files in his former office before he could show them to FBI agents.

The next chapter in the Estes-Hales drama at Agriculture bordered on the bizarre. On the morning of April 20, 1962, the day following Hales’s frustrated effort to warn the Agricultural Secretary, the only person remaining in Hales’s old office was his long-time secretary, Mary Kimbrough Jones, a woman with a record of

twenty-five years of service in the department who lived alone. To Miss Jones's surprise, a man showed up at the office to change the combination lock on the safe where Hales had kept sensitive documents. Miss Jones questioned the locksmith about his authorization and asked whether those who knew the new combination had proper security clearance. Her objections were swept aside. Several days later Miss Jones had trouble getting into the office and concluded that someone was trying to prevent her former boss from proving the department's complicity in Estes's schemes. On April 25, a medical doctor who worked for the department came to her office, presumably to check on a claim that she was behaving strangely. As the doctor approached her, Mary Kimborough Jones clutched a pile of sensitive records to her bosom and tried to leave the room. The doctor barred the door and then called the police. Later he accused her of having assaulted him with her shoe as the police were dragging her off to a patrol wagon. Miss Jones was taken to the District of Columbia General Hospital, thrust into a cell-like room and held there for nearly two weeks. With no relatives or close friends to intervene for her release, the secretary seemed to have been abandoned.

Press reports of the accusations against Billie Sol Estes attracted John Williams's attention. In April, about the time that Hales was attempting to communicate with Orville Freeman, the Delaware senator introduced a Senate resolution calling for an investigation of the Texan's business dealings. In May the senator took the floor again to criticize Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy for his "appalling lack of interest in the whole Estes case" and to denounce the Agriculture Department for its treatment of Mary Kimborough Jones, who, the senator said, had been "railroaded into a mental institution for no reason other than that she knew too much about the Billie Sol Estes case."<sup>11</sup> The story of the secretary's abduction made for some arresting headlines. The *Delaware State News* ran it under the banner "Lady Railroaded Into Looney Bin, Williams Charges."<sup>12</sup> Secretary Freeman called Williams's suggestion that Agriculture Department officials were systematically thwarting Hales from proving his accusations "preposterous and unthinkable." According to the Secretary of Agriculture, the department had responded appropriately when Miss Jones exhibited signs of mental illness and attacked a fellow employee. Furthermore, Freeman reported, since Miss Jones had only "general knowledge" of the Estes case the Department had no reason to want to silence her.<sup>13</sup> The chairman of the District of Columbia Mental Health Association corroborated Secretary Freeman's assertion that Mary

Kimborough Jones had indeed exhibited signs of mental illness that required hospitalization.

The Agricultural Department's denials of its responsibility for mistreating Mary Kimborough Jones aroused John Williams's ire. The senator found the department more culpable for its treatment of Miss Jones than for its favoritism to Billie Sol Estes. "The loss of dollars can be replaced but we can never repay this girl for the suffering she has had to endure," he said, in a Senate speech on May 17, 1962. Williams questioned how Miss Jones could have been mentally ill when she was admitted to the hospital and yet have been declared sane when she was released only thirteen days later after she had received no therapeutic treatment. He wondered "why all the effort is being made to discredit this girl. She certainly must have had a horrible enough experience as it was." Why hadn't they simply sent her home to rest or called her family? "If the girl . . . were ill . . . she needed help, sympathy, medical attention, and she should not have been carried off in a paddy wagon that is used for ordinary criminals. . . ." The department's actions, he declared, were counter to America's democratic ideals and more like those associated with Communist dictatorships. "This girl's family was miles away. She was alone. She was not allowed to call anyone. There was no friend around to help her."<sup>14</sup> In Senator Williams view the administrators of the Department of Agriculture had denied a longtime loyal employee her civil rights in order to cover up corrupt practices in the department.

Williams launched his own investigation of the Mary Kimborough Jones incident. The day after his Senate speech he wrote to District of Columbia General Hospital to ask how many patients were brought to the hospital by police. He wanted the data divided into two categories: those coming from private property and those coming from government property. He made similar enquiries to the District of Columbia police and to other area hospitals. Not content with that, he queried police in cities around the nation for comparable statistical data. Williams and his investigative assistant, Eleanor Lenhart, interviewed nearly everyone who was associated with the case and worked with Miss Jones's lawyer and siblings to clear her name. He would have continued the enquiry farther yet had not the publicity-shy Kimborough Jones requested that it be dropped.

A decade later, several years after his retirement from the Senate, John Williams encountered a visitor to Rehoboth Beach who had been a clerk in the Commission on Mental Health in Washington. The man said that he had had access to documents that showed that

Mary Kimborough Jones had been judged of sound mind at the time when she was held captive in the hospital. It had struck the clerk as an outrage, he said, and made him cynical about "some of the so-called great liberals."<sup>15</sup>

Among those leading liberals was President John F. Kennedy, who held a press conference on the same day that Senator Williams had made his second Senate speech concerning Miss Jones. By that time the President recognized that Billie Sol Estes posed a serious public relations problem for his administration and that officials at the Agriculture Department might have been overly glib in their earlier denials of favoritism. The President promised, "this Government is staying right on Mr. Estes' tail."<sup>16</sup>

On June 27, 1962, the Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, commonly known as the McClellan Committee for its chairman, John L. McClellan, opened an enquiry into the government's involvement in the many shady deals of Billie Sol Estes. The revelations that emerged drew attention to the size, cost, complexity, and manipulatability of the nation's agricultural policies. Although Estes took the Fifth Amendment rather than answer the Senate Committee's questions, he was later convicted of fraud in federal court and sentenced to fifteen years in prison. The incident provided John Williams with new ammunition to attack another "glaring example" of "the ridiculous program" that allowed wheeler dealers to earn lavish sums from the government while legitimate family farms floundered.<sup>17</sup> N. Battle Hales suffered the usual fate of bearers of bad news. He was denied promotion while a political appointee who had been involved in the cover up was awarded honors.<sup>18</sup> As a footnote to the entire episode, the senator clipped and saved a newspaper article that appeared in November 1983. It reported Billie Sol Estes's assertion on his release from prison that he could have prevented Lyndon B. Johnson's election to the presidency in 1964 had he revealed certain information in his possession.<sup>19</sup>

The Billie Sol Estes scandal proved but a warm up for the biggest political scandal of the decade and of Senator Williams's career as a Senate sleuth: the matter of Bobby Baker. The Baker case pitted John Williams and his philosophy of government against the most powerful American politician of the decade, Lyndon B. Johnson, whose political skills, aspirations, and personal ambitions were pivotal in the government-corporate ties of the era.

Washington cynics could never understand John Williams. In a town ruled by political infighting over power, status, and wealth, it

was assumed that anyone who would so unrelentingly pursue the investigation of wrong doing by an unelected Senate employee such as Bobby Baker must have had some larger political target in his sights. In Bobby Baker's case the targeted figure was easy to distinguish as President Lyndon B. Johnson, the man who, as Senate leader, had said that Bobby Baker was the first man he saw on coming to work in the morning and the last man he saw at night. Of course, John Williams did see the long shadow of LBJ standing behind Baker with all that Johnson represented to Williams as a big-spending liberal politician. Williams was not immune to the opportunity that the scandal provided to gain advantage for his party and for his conservative agenda. But if partisanship or personal animosity alone had dominated his behavior it is doubtful that he could have been such a thorough, respected, balanced, and ultimately successful investigator. Nor could he have swayed a Congress dominated by Democrats to take the Baker case seriously. At its core, John Williams's motivation was not to hurt Johnson or the Democratic Party but to achieve something much larger, more lasting, and more meaningful. It was for the honor of the Senate that John Williams contended. It was a strange battle, fought not with guns but with painstaking enquiry, deliberate presentations of facts, and, above all, with unrelenting persistence.

The Bobby Baker case was the capstone of John Williams's career in the United States Senate. He did not plan it that way; he did not look for it to happen. As Williams liked to say, everybody in the Senate liked Bobby. He was a very likeable fellow. But when the unsavory facts about Baker's intermingling of private deals with the public's business came to light, the challenge brought to the fore all of John Williams's analytical skills, his extensive knowledge of how government worked, his experience and reputation as an investigator, his astute sense of right and wrong, and his unbending determination to get to the bottom of the trouble. As the facts began to come out, it became clear that the friendly Senate Secretary was at the center of a web of business, social, and political contacts that involved a great many prominent people, a few of whom were at the very pinnacle of national power. Williams always looked at the case not as an opportunity to "get" Baker or to embarrass Johnson, but as something that needed to be done to free the government from corruption. In an ultimate sense, then, the Bobby Baker case afforded John Williams his greatest opportunity to teach his fellow citizens once again the lesson that summed up his career—that democratic government depends upon the honesty and fairness of those who are accorded power. "Our form of govern-

ment,” Williams reminded his fellow senators in his first public speech on the Baker affair, “will stand only so long as its public officials respect the integrity of their offices.”<sup>20</sup>

We are accustomed to view the 1920s and the 1980s as decades of materialistic excess while we characterize the 1960s as a period dominated by a more selfless ethic as best expressed by President Kennedy’s inaugural address where he urged that we “ask not what the country can do for you, but what you can do for the country.” The truth is, of course, that human nature changes little from decade to decade. Had the Bobby Baker episode come at a more tranquil time when the country was not focussed on the major traumas of a presidential assassination, a civil rights revolution, and a polarizing war, the lessons that John Williams drew from the scandal and tried to impart to his countrymen might have penetrated the national consciousness more fully, but one cannot pick an optimum historical moment to investigate corruption.

Bobby Baker liked to describe himself as “a child of the Senate,” and the description was apt. The son of a South Carolina millhand, Baker had come to Washington to be a Senate page in 1943 at age fourteen. With nothing much to go back to, he made the most of the opportunity. He was a close observer, a quick study, and a hard worker. In 1955 Lyndon Johnson, then the Democratic majority leader, called on the knowledgeable young man to become the majority leader’s secretary. The accommodating Baker counted votes for the leader, shared his confidences, and helped Senator Johnson to plot strategy. At Johnson’s side, Baker learned from a master how deals were made that got controversial bills enacted, ruffled feathers smoothed, and appetites satisfied.

As Johnson’s emissary Baker became so influential in telling Democratic senators how the leader wanted them to vote that he boasted that “on any issue I have ten senators in the palm of my hand.”<sup>21</sup> According to Baker’s account in his autobiography, *Wheeling and Dealing*, it was Oklahoma Senator Robert S. Kerr, not Johnson, who introduced the impressionable young man to ways of making money through the connections that are available to senators and their associates.<sup>22</sup> Kerr was a multi-sided man who balanced deeply held religious convictions with a ruthlessly ambitious entrepreneurial spirit. Born in a log cabin, Kerr had become rich as owner of the Kerr McGee Oil Company. “Money,” Kerr told Baker, “is the most powerful substance known to man.”<sup>23</sup> Next to Johnson, Kerr was judged to be the most powerful man in the Senate, a man who demanded that he be dealt in to every deal or he would destroy it. His power base was among his southern and west-

ern colleagues and was focused on the committees on which he served and often dominated: Finance; Public Works; Appropriations; and Aeronautics and Space Sciences. Kerr was particularly concerned with protecting the oil interests of his state and in building the space program. He is credited with single-handedly turning Oklahoma from a primarily agricultural state to a site of high-tech industries that depend on government contracts.<sup>24</sup>

Mentored by men of such superlative ambition, power, and wealth, the Senate secretary grasped eagerly at the enticements that surrounded him. In addition to his Senate responsibilities, Baker earned a law degree in night school at American University and opened a practice with a partner. His rise to wealth from his modest Senate salary to a fortune that exceeded two million dollars was founded on influence peddling: some handled through the law firm; some coming directly through his Senate contacts. As long as Lyndon Johnson remained in the Senate, Bobby was kept so busy on Capitol Hill that he had little time for business ventures, but, when Johnson became Vice President in 1961 and Senator Mike Mansfield succeeded him as the Democrats' majority leader, the majority secretary had a far less demanding leader and now found that he had more time to devote to his outside activities. These ventures included not only business but also pleasure as a playboy around town while his wife and children stayed in their big Washington home purchased through his cunning manipulations. Few senators, especially among the minority Republicans, were aware of Baker's extracurricular life until July 1962 when the Senate secretary staged a spectacularly splashy opening for his Carousel Motel—nightclub in Ocean City, Maryland. Among the throng of Bobby's socially and politically prominent Washington friends in attendance at the opening were Pearl Mesta and Vice President and Mrs. Lyndon Baines Johnson, who were driven to the Maryland shore resort in their official vice presidential black limousine. Bobby hired buses to transport the other guests, keeping the riders happy throughout their two-hour journey with a champagne brunch. Advertisements described the sleek new beach-front motel as a place "where every minute is an adventure." Equipped with a heated pool, a coffee shop and a dining room, the Carousel also featured two cocktail lounges, one called the Sinkalagas Lounge and nightclub where, according to the advertisement "you glimpse Washington big wigs at play, as well as Hollywood and Broadway stars in town for a few days of play, play, play."<sup>25</sup>

Ocean City, Maryland, occupies a thin spit of land between Assawoman Bay and the Atlantic Ocean. Immediately south of the Dela-

ware border, it lies a mere fifteen miles from Rehoboth Beach, Delaware, where Senator Williams had a summer home. In the early 1960s, before the enormous construction boom that has since transformed the beachfront between Rehoboth and Ocean City, travelers driving south from Rehoboth passed a few communities of small clapboard and cedar-covered summer houses at Dewey Beach, Bethany Beach, and Fenwick Island separated from one another by a landscape of undisturbed sand dunes. South of Fenwick Island, where the boundary line separates Delaware from Maryland, lay several miles of uninhabited dunes before one reached the outskirts of Ocean City, a town characterized by blocks of white-painted wooden walk-up apartment houses and a two-mile-long boardwalk along the beach. In the midst of the undeveloped land just north of Ocean City, Baker and his associates, Alfred Novak, a former accountant with the General Accounting Office, and his wife Gertrude, known as Trudy, a secretary with the Senate Small Business Committee, built the Carousel. A city block long, the four-story motel was the largest, and certainly the most colorful, building on the beach between Rehoboth and Ocean City.

Baker's motel enterprise proved to be more costly than he had anticipated and construction delays drove Baker and the Novaks ever deeper into debt. Al Novak became so despondent that he took his own life in early March 1962. The next day, matters got much worse when the most destructive northeaster ever to strike the Delaware-Maryland coast wiped out the progress that had been made on the Carousel. To extricate himself from the quagmire of debt, Bobby turned to his friend, Senator Kerr, who arranged bank loans for him and, according to Bobby, also gave him \$50,000 in cash. Baker put that money in a safe in his office, from which he took \$30,000 in \$100 bills to give to Trudy Novak to cover mortgage payments.<sup>26</sup> Despite this infusion of capital, Baker remained desperate for additional sources of revenue and was quick to seize upon another suggestion from Kerr, who urged him to go into the vending machine business. According to Baker, Senator Kerr had been intending to enter the vending business himself with a partner named Fred Black, a lobbyist for North American Aviation, but the senator was talked out of it because of the potential conflict of interest. The plan was to create a vending company that would put machines into the plants of defense contractors, beginning with those of Black's client, North American Aviation, a leading aerospace contractor. Black, who was later convicted of tax evasion, kept a lavishly furnished office in the Carlton Hotel on Capitol Hill and

had access to large sums of money to expend among senators and congressmen on behalf of his client.

With a bank loan arranged by Senator Kerr, Bobby Baker, together with Fred Black and some other partners that included two Las Vegas gamblers, created the Serv—U Corporation. Using Fred Black's contacts, Serv—U negotiated a major contract with North American Aviation to provide soda and candy machines for its plants, but Serv—U soon ran into a conflict with the Capitol Vending Machine Company because Capitol Vending had the contract to supply machines to the factory of Melpar, a North American Aviation subcontractor, located in Falls Church, Virginia. Capitol Vending's owner, Ralph Hill, threatened to disclose Baker's influence peddling if his company lost its contract with Melpar. When Bobby Baker refused to back down, Hill filed a civil suit in federal court against Serv—U in September, 1963. It was this lawsuit that first alerted the press and Senator Williams to Bobby Baker's involvement in Serv—U and opened a major Washington scandal. The timing could not have been worse for Baker, because neither of his powerful mentors could intervene to protect him. Robert Kerr had died on New Year's Day 1963 and, as Vice President, Lyndon Johnson was politically hobbled.

Except for the press coverage of the attention-grabbing Carousel, John Williams had no knowledge of Bobby Baker's business life outside of the Senate until he read the press description of the Hill-Baker vending contract controversy. To a naturally suspicious person familiar with the ways of Washington, the story suggested that much more might lurk behind the scenes that, Williams feared, could potentially embarrass the Senate. While the civil rights march on Washington and President Kennedy's proposed nuclear test ban treaty were occupying the headlines in the summer of 1963, John Williams and Eleanor Lenhart began quietly to delve into the business life of the secretary to the Senate majority leader.

Williams relied on an investigative technique that sociologists call the snowball method. He started with the names of people who seemed most likely to know what was going on, in this case Ralph Hill. From Hill, Williams began to build a wider list of names that included one particularly valuable find: Don Reynolds, a Washington insurance broker and former business partner of Bobby Baker. Another knowledgeable source was Gertrude Novak, Baker's original partner in the Carousel, whose husband had killed himself rather than face the uncompleted motel's debts. The senator also looked into government documents to trace down various connections to Baker, especially any special favors that agencies of the

federal government or government contractors had done for Baker or for his various business partners. Williams's investigation was also materially aided by an article critical of Serv—U that appeared in the September 1963 issue of *Vend*, a trade magazine for the vending machine industry. The *Vend* article provided additional names and information about the Serv—U Corporation's success in co-opting vending contracts in defense plants.

By early October John Williams had amassed considerable information about Baker's business activities, some of which suggested that the Senate secretary was misusing his government contacts for his private advantage. The information came primarily from Ralph Hill, the rival vending machine contractor, who had spoken freely to Williams on September 30, trusting the senator's reputation for fair dealing. In addition to supplying more details about his clash with Serv—U over the Virginia factory contract, the Capitol Vending president told the senator about Baker's involvement in a deal to import meat from Haiti and a Jacksonville, Florida, land development in which Baker's partners were Senator George Smathers of Florida and Teamster Union boss Jimmy Hoffa.<sup>27</sup> Williams decided to take the information that he had gathered to Democratic majority leader, Mike Mansfield of Montana, Baker's boss, not in the form of accusations but rather as the basis for Mansfield to raise questions with his secretary.

Senator Mansfield found the Delawarean's revelations troubling. He asked Senator Williams to contact Baker directly in the hope that Baker could provide explanations to satisfy Williams. But after Williams tried and failed to reach Baker by phone, the majority leader called Baker himself and arranged a meeting that would include Baker, Mansfield, Senate minority leader Everett Dirksen, and Senator Williams. At that meeting Baker could hear the evidence and explain his actions. In his autobiography Baker says that he objected to the inclusion of John Williams in the meeting because, as he told Mansfield, Williams "is out to get me as a way of getting to Lyndon Johnson. I don't think he'd give me anything like a fair hearing."<sup>28</sup> Mansfield refused to eliminate Williams from the meeting because the Delaware senator would interpret his exclusion as an effort by the Senate's Democratic leadership to stall or to whitewash the investigation.

As the time for the meeting approached, Bobby Baker reports in his book, *Wheeling and Dealing*, he became depressed and lost his nerve. On the day of the meeting, Baker had lunch with some Texan friends at the Quorum Club, a private bar in the Carroll Arms Hotel, located at First and C streets across from the Capitol Building.

Bobby had been a founding member of the Quorum Club, a place where senators and congressmen who were members gathered to meet lobbyists and constituents. Cursing Senator Williams, the frightened Senate secretary downed four double Tanqueray gin martinis. He then “stumbled across the park” to Senator Mansfield’s office and told him, “Senator . . . if you insist upon my meeting with Senator John Williams then I’m compelled to resign forthwith.” He then went to the house of Carole Tyler, his mistress and secretary, where he proceeded to “get gloriously drunk.”<sup>29</sup>

John Williams also recalled the meeting. He, Mansfield, and Dirksen waited until about forty minutes after the agreed meeting time of 3 P.M. for Baker to show up. Finally when Baker did appear, he tendered his resignation and departed. Thus, Williams concluded, Bobby Baker had been given an opportunity to explain or deny the allegations and suspicions against him, but had chosen not to do so.<sup>30</sup>

Several days after Baker’s resignation, John Williams introduced a resolution in the Senate calling on the body to investigate charges of improprieties or conflicts of interest against employees of the Senate. “We in America,” he said, “are extremely fortunate in that we have one of the best forms of government ever conceived by mankind. But that form of government will stand only so long as its public officials respect the integrity of their offices and it can hold and maintain the confidence of the American people.”<sup>31</sup> With the support of both Mansfield and Dirksen, the resolution passed by voice vote unopposed. The Senate Rules Committee, chaired by a North Carolinian Democrat, B. Everett Jordan, was appointed to undertake a probe into Bobby Baker’s apparent conflicts of interest and influence peddling. When the Rules Committee began its hearings in late October, 1963, John Williams was its first witness. It was an uncomfortable experience for both Williams and the Democrats on the committee, from which the Delaware Senator concluded that the Democrat-controlled committee was more interested in containing the scandal than at digging out the facts.

By the time the hearings began, reporters had uncovered additional evidence of Baker’s business dealings and missteps. Baker’s involvement in the mysterious Quorum Club had been the subject of an exposé by the *Washington Star*. In November Congressman Williams H. Ayres [R-Ohio], a member of the club’s board of directors, invited Senator Williams to visit the Quorum Club, but Williams refused because he had played no part in discovering its existence and said that he had never heard of it before reading about it in the *Star*.<sup>32</sup> Another press revelation in the case involved a Ger-

man call girl named Ellen Rometsch who lived in Washington and was friendly with Baker. Clark Mollenhoff, an investigative reporter from the *Des Moines Register* and a Williams confidante, broke that story, and Washington insiders assumed that the senator had leaked the Rometsch story through Mollenhoff to put pressure on the Rules Committee. In his testimony Williams took pains to deny his involvement in the publication of the Rometsch story. He told the committee that he did have some information about her but had not as yet checked it out and was not in the habit of using leaks to maneuver Senate committees. He did suggest that the committee consult the FBI about the German call girl. His policy of sticking only to what he knew to be true through his personal investigations guided the Delaware senator's careful responses to the Rules Committee; and his reticence to conjecture beyond factual information lent credibility to his pronouncements.

Ellen Rometsch brought sex to the forefront of the Baker enquiry. Photographs of this striking woman with her tall beehive hairdo appeared in newspapers all over the country. Born in what would become Communist East Germany, she moved to West Germany as a teenager and came to America in 1961 with her husband, a sergeant in the West German Army who was assigned to the German Embassy in Washington. The stunning Mrs. Rometsch, who quite possibly had been trained to spy for East Germany, soon became what Bobby Baker described as a "lady-about-town who sometimes visited the Quorum Club."<sup>33</sup> In his autobiography, Bobby Baker says that Senator John F. Kennedy had asked the Senate secretary to introduce him to Rometsch, an allegation that appears to be confirmed by Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy's action in having her quietly and speedily deported in August 1963.<sup>34</sup> John Williams was not interested in Ellen Rometsch as a means to embarrass the President. Neither sex scandals nor spy hunts were ever in his sights. His concern was that Baker and possibly others had used Rometsch's services on behalf of lobbyists to secure government contracts or favorable legislative decisions from partying congressmen, senators, and government officials. Anyone's suspicions would have been aroused by the tabloid headlines that appeared at that time and proclaimed "VIPs and Those Washington Party Girls" and "Nude nymphs taking champagne baths as Big Businessmen looked on . . . Cuddle-for-Cash Cuties provided free by lobbyists. . . ." <sup>35</sup>

With England's Profumo sex scandal then fresh on everyone's mind, Williams sought information about the German call girl's contacts with lobbyists. A woman who had once shared lodgings

with the Rometschs asked to speak to the senator. He visited her Washington apartment house while newsmen and FBI agents staked out the building. The former roommate supplied additional details about Rometsch's activities as a call girl. Williams later contacted the FBI and offered to share his information with them, "but," he wrote in a memorandum to himself, "I emphasized . . . that when I said 'work with' it was a two-way street and I was not interested in operating as one of their leg men, but they could be prepared to bring the Ellen Rometsch file to my office and we would exchange information."<sup>36</sup>

Finding the FBI uncooperative and Rometsch mysteriously returned to West Germany, Williams did not pursue the favors for sex scandal further but concentrated his investigation on venues more familiar to him concerning money, taxes, and contracts. As Robert Kennedy had hoped, the German call girl quickly disappeared from the newspapers and from the Rules Committee's enquiries. In January 1964 a Republican member of the Rules Committee confided to Williams that Senate majority leader Everett Dirksen had been told by FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover to ignore Baker's call girl connections because, as Williams put it, "a complete investigation would disclose such a large percentage of the Senate as being of such low morals that it could undermine the confidence of the people in the integrity of their government and may even prove disastrous to the country."<sup>37</sup> Williams was convinced that Hoover, whose integrity he trusted, had said no such thing and thought that Dirksen was either bluffing or was repeating a bluff told him by Lyndon Johnson. Williams believed that Rometsch was deported so precipitously neither for her immoral behavior, as the government claimed, nor because she was a spy, as some journalists speculated, but out of fear of whom she might expose.<sup>38</sup>

Initially, the question that most attracted John Williams's attention was where Bobby Baker had gotten the money to build the Carousel and to capitalize Serv—U. Trudy Novak came to Williams's office on November 2, 1963, the day before Baker's abrupt resignation, and spoke frankly to the Delaware senator about her knowledge of Baker's business affairs. Like most of the other people whom Williams interviewed throughout his career, she came in spite of the fact that Williams had neither subpoena power nor official sanction from the Senate to investigate the case. She was willing to talk to Senator Williams because she trusted him to deal with her fairly and because she was angry with Baker for selling the Carousel at a cut-rate price to the Serv—U Corporation. Eleanor Lenhart was present to take notes on the statements made at that

and other private meetings, but no tape recorder was used and the senator promised to treat the information supplied by visitors such as Mrs. Novak confidentially.<sup>39</sup> Trudy Novak gave the senator details about the cash payments Baker had made to her to maintain the Carousel's mortgage and about the recent sale of the debt-ridden but valuable Carousel to Serv—U at a cheap price that hurt her as Baker's business partner in the motel but did not hurt Baker because he was part-owner of both buyer and seller. She said that Baker's initial investment in the ocean-front motel had come from stock he owned in the Mortgage Guaranty Insurance Company of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, known by its call letters as M.G.I.C. and pronounced MAGIC. On October 4, Mrs. Novak returned to the senator's office and gave him mortgage-payment documents that provided proof of her statements.<sup>40</sup>

Baker's M.G.I.C. stock had already surfaced as a major component in his business relationships. Williams first heard about Baker's investment in M.G.I.C. from rival vending company owner Ralph Hill. M.G.I.C. had been created in 1957 to insure low down payment mortgages. In 1959, when Bobby Baker bought his first shares, M.G.I.C. stock was selling for \$3 per share, but Baker was permitted to buy shares at a much lower figure—some as cheap as \$1.56 per share. The company president explained his largess to the Senate secretary as good business because "I thought Mr. Baker knew a lot of people."<sup>41</sup> A year later, M.G.I.C. stock soared in value thanks to a very favorable tax ruling from the U.S. Treasury Department. The possible connection between the Senate Secretary's purchase of the mortgage company's stock and M.G.I.C.'s subsequent good fortune at the hands of the nation's tax collectors was naturally of special interest to Senator Williams. The M.G.I.C. investment helped explain Baker's recent purchase of an expensive home in an exclusive Washington neighborhood and his confidence in initiating the Carousel undertaking. It was just the sort of misuse of government power to undercut the level playing field in the business world that Williams deplored, and he and his staff worked hard to develop a complete profile and chronology of the mortgage company's operations.<sup>42</sup>

Through Ralph Hill, Williams had also learned about another of Baker's business partners, a Washington-area insurance agent named Don Reynolds. Although Reynolds ultimately proved to be Williams's most significant informant on Baker, at their first meeting on October 2, 1963, the senator and the insurance man were wary of one another.<sup>43</sup> Afterward, when he had checked on Reyn-

olds's few revelations and found them accurate, John Williams came to trust Reynolds and later protected him from a myriad of politically-inspired assaults on his integrity. Similarly, Reynolds had sized up the senator and concluded that he could place his confidence in the quiet, inquisitive Delawarean. Clark Mollenhoff, who had developed the Rometsch story on his own, was the only member of the press who knew of Williams's as-yet secret probe. Mollenhoff exposed nothing of what Williams was learning, "because," he explained, "the senator . . . wanted to have some ammunition before he started shooting. . . ."44

The senator and reporter discussed the best strategy for negotiating the treacherous political waters of Washington. In his exposé of government corruption entitled *Despoilers of Democracy*, Mollenhoff wrote that "Senator Williams did not reason in the manner of many Senate 'regulars.'"45 By this he meant that Williams was relatively uninterested in gaining either political advantage or revenge. Mollenhoff was willing to work collaboratively with Williams because they shared the view that "the honor of the whole Senate . . . was at stake."46 It would be a difficult maneuver to persuade the Democrat-controlled Senate to undertake a thorough enquiry into the actions of their party's most important Senate employee, a man who had done favors for many, was a friend to all, and possibly a business partner of some. Thus, the investigative reporter and the senator kept one another's confidences as they waited for the right moment to reveal their findings.

In subsequent interviews Don Reynolds told Senator Williams that his friendship with Bobby Baker had begun in their shared South Carolina heritage. The Senate Secretary and Reynolds had formed a loose association whereby Baker offered to steer potential insurance clients his way. Most noteworthy among those clients was Senate majority leader Lyndon B. Johnson, who had experienced difficulty in obtaining a policy on his life after he suffered a serious heart attack. Reynolds successfully brokered a policy for Johnson, but at a price he had not expected. Through Baker and Johnson's assistant, Walter Jenkins, Reynolds had been told that the Senate leader expected two kickbacks for his patronage: an expensive Motorola stereo set for Mrs. Johnson and an advertising contract with the Johnsons' Austin TV-radio station. Jenkins threatened that if Reynolds failed to comply, Johnson would take his insurance business to a Johnson cousin in Texas. Senator Williams listened with interest. Could Reynolds produce a receipt for the stereo, he asked. Reynolds soon placed the document in John Williams's hands.<sup>47</sup> These revelations about kickbacks attracted Williams's

closest scrutiny. By contrast, the senator buried the insurance man's allegation that he had once inadvertently come upon Lyndon Johnson and a Senate secretary engaging in sexual behavior.<sup>48</sup> Williams's refusal to use this information goes far to refute Bobby Baker's claim that Senator Williams's primary motive was to "get" Lyndon Johnson.

By the time that the Rules Committee investigation got underway in late October 1963, the press had uncovered other suspicious stories about Bobby Baker's business dealings. Rumors in the press concerning Bobby Baker's acquisition of wealth focused on the underworld and Teamster chief Jimmy Hoffa. *Newsweek* referred to Baker as "Lyndon's boy," and its companion publication, the *Washington Post* called him "the ultimate insider."<sup>49</sup> Williams hoped that the Rules Committee would systematically take up all allegations, research them thoroughly, follow wherever they might lead, and discover the truth. But he was too wise in the ways of politics to expect the committee to probe deeply unless someone forced the committeemen to do so. That was the role John Williams intended to play.

In his first appearance before the committee held in closed session, John Williams reviewed the circumstances of his abortive effort to query Baker about his business affairs which had prompted the Senate secretary's hasty resignation. Williams dismissed the charge that it was he who had leaked the Rometsch story to the press and he focused instead on providing evidence about Baker's involvement with M.G.I.C., the mortgage insurance company that had received such favorable rulings from the IRS and had become so prosperous. John Sherman Cooper of Kentucky, one of three Republicans on the committee, asked, "what significance do you attach to this?" to which Williams responded, "I have not reached any firm conclusions" but added that "it is a very proper question to ask just why this is any more than just a lucky investment."<sup>50</sup> The Delaware senator then brought up the issue of the financing of the Carousel motel. He presented the committeemen with detailed information about the motel's finances, mostly obtained from Trudy Novak. By that point in his testimony some committeemen were expressing their impatience because Williams was not providing the dirty linen they had been led to expect. The senator, however, was not aiming to bring out sensational revelations, but rather to provide a solid foundation of fact on which the committee could build its investigation. There was nothing wrong with owing money or paying one's debts in cash, Williams noted, adding that perhaps the committee might want to know where Baker had gotten such a

large sum of cash. Undeterred by the irritations he was creating, Williams proceeded in his usual calm, deliberate fashion to tell the senators what he had learned about the Serv—U Corporation.

Williams made a second appearance before the committee on November 14, 1963, to tell them of additional material that he had developed. He provided evidence, showing that the Haitian Meat Company had made payments to Baker for arranging a special deal for them. He also told the senators of Don Reynolds's allegations concerning the circumstances of his gift of the \$588 stereo to the Johnson family. To prove that such a transaction had taken place, Williams handed over Reynolds's canceled check.<sup>51</sup> The senator later provided a statement to the press concerning the transaction that attracted widespread favorable editorial comments. Editorial writers commended Williams for his even handedness, noting that the senator had condemned Eisenhower's deputy Sherman Adams for accepting a vicuna coat as he now condemned the Johnsons for accepting the gift stereo. The senator's words were widely reported: "Whenever anyone gives a public official an article of such value he is expecting something in return . . . there can be but one code for public officials."<sup>52</sup>

The Bobby Baker investigation was now the Rules Committee's responsibility, but this did not stop John Williams from continuing his own enquiries, which now focused on Don Reynolds. Neither Reynolds nor his wife wished to parade the insurance man's business affairs before a Senate committee controlled by politicians eager to discredit him, but Reynolds trusted Senator Williams to protect him from abuse. He was confident that the Delawarean's interest in the case was not intended to get at individuals but to expose corruption. At about that time Williams confided to a reporter for the *Houston Press* that he took no pride in exposing people who yield to temptation, especially since those revelations invariably hurt innocent members of their families. "I have never taken any pride in tearing down anyone, and I hope I never will. But I am proud of the Senate for the way it has moved in to clean its own house."<sup>53</sup> Williams's goal was to use the leads that Reynolds gave him to build solid evidence of corruption that he could then provide to the Rules Committee.

While the Rules Committee investigation was progressing, Don Reynolds told Senator Williams about another peculiar business transaction that he had undertaken at the behest of Bobby Baker. A major stadium, later named in honor of Robert F. Kennedy, was being planned for the city of Washington. Although his was not the lowest bid submitted, the construction contract had been awarded

to the firm of Matthew H. McCloskey, Jr., a Philadelphia builder who had served as finance chairman of the national Democratic party. Williams already knew about McCloskey, because in 1962 the senator had objected to President Kennedy's appointment of the Philadelphia builder to be U.S. Ambassador to Ireland. John Williams almost never interjected himself into ambassadorial appointments, but in that case he had argued against McCloskey's appointment on the grounds that the contractor had been party to manipulation of the bidding process in the acquisition of Navy property in Florida some sixteen years earlier. In the highly partisan vote that followed, only one Republican, Hugh Scott of McCloskey's home state of Pennsylvania, voted for McCloskey's confirmation.<sup>54</sup>

Don Reynolds confided to John Williams that there had been a hidden element embedded in the McCloskey-District of Columbia stadium deal. According to Reynolds, in the spring of 1959, when the stadium bill was stalled in Congress, Bobby Baker arranged a breakfast meeting at the Mayflower Hotel where Reynolds and Baker were to meet with McCloskey. Former President Harry S. Truman, who was also visiting at the Mayflower, joined them for breakfast but was not a participant in the conversation that transpired afterward. Reynolds told Williams that after Truman left them, Bobby Baker and Matt McCloskey agreed on a strategy to clear the way for Congress to pass the stadium bill and to bypass the \$5,000 legal limit on campaign contributions. As in any public project, the builder was required to provide a performance bond to insure that the contract would be carried out on time and in conformity with the specifications. McCloskey would merely insert a large contribution to the Democratic party, together with payoffs for Baker and a few other individuals, into the performance bond. Instead of going directly to a bonding company, McCloskey would pay the money to Reynolds, who, in turn, would purchase the performance bond, distribute the rest of the money as prearranged, and be paid a hefty commission of \$4,000. McCloskey subsequently sent Reynolds a check for \$109,205, which represented \$35,574 more than the actual cost of the performance bond. At Williams's request, Reynolds provided the senator with the canceled check that Reynolds had received from McCloskey, together with other documents in support of his allegations.

Meanwhile, the Rules Committee investigation continued under the leadership of Senator Everett Jordan, later described by Bobby Baker as "something of a bumbler,"<sup>55</sup> a Democrat who appeared more concerned about protecting the administration and the reputa-

tions of his fellow senators than with uncovering the facts. In the meantime, the assassination of President John F. Kennedy on November 22, 1963, had made Lyndon B. Johnson President of the United States and thus placed the whole Bobby Baker matter in a heightened political frame of reference. Rumors were rife throughout Washington, and indeed the nation, linking Johnson and/or Teamster chief Jimmy Hoffa to Bobby Baker's rapid rise to wealth, and especially to the stash of cash that Baker had kept in his office safe.<sup>56</sup> Baker, who knew that he had a lot to hide, relied in part on the self-interest of senators with whom he had had business dealings to keep a lid on the investigation, but knowing Williams's tenacity and penchant for digging out information, he also hired expert legal counsel. His first lawyer, Abe Fortas, whom President Johnson later appointed to the Supreme Court, left the case to join Johnson's staff in the White House following the Kennedy assassination. Baker then retained William Bennett Williams, another experienced Washington defense attorney whose former clients had included Joseph McCarthy.

Little happened regarding the case during the month that followed Kennedy's death. In January 1964, as the country began returning to normal under its new president, the Senate was abuzz with rumors about how the Rules Committee would conduct its investigation and what it might discover. On January 9, Don Reynolds appeared before the committee in closed session to repeat the information that he had earlier provided to Senator Williams. But, if the mood of the committee had earlier been one of reluctance to believe or to act on what it heard, it was now actively hostile to doing so, and the negative attitude extended to Republicans as well as to Democrats. Senator Carl Curtis, a Republican member of the Rules Committee, and Williams's closest friend on the committee, informed John Williams confidentially that Everett Dirksen, the Illinois Republican who was the Senate Minority Leader, had urged the Republicans on the committee to bring the Baker hearings to a speedy close and not to explore the call-girl issue or any aspect of the case that might reflect badly on either the new president or his predecessor.<sup>57</sup> Williams also heard from a contact at the *Washington Star* that "unimpeachable sources" had informed the paper of the committee's intention to stop investigating anything having to do with President Johnson, including Reynolds's testimony about the stereo set, and asked the paper not to publish information about Johnson's involvement in the kickback. Senator Williams advised the paper to wait a bit in the expectation that the Rules Committee might release this information to the public.<sup>58</sup>

In his advice to the *Washington Star* Senator Williams apparently acted on his belief that, if presented with sufficient proof of corrupt practices, his Senate colleagues would be forced to delve more deeply into the Baker case. If that was his premise, he was sadly mistaken. According to Bobby Baker, the Johnson White House succeeded in silencing Senator Hugh Scott of Pennsylvania, the most outspoken Republican on the Rules Committee, with a threat to close down the Philadelphia Navy Yard.<sup>59</sup> Throughout the spring of 1964, as the Rules Committee moved to close down its investigation, Williams met with a series of roadblocks. In April he complained that government agencies from whom he had requested information about the case were forwarding copies of his requests and the information that they provided to him to the committee as well, a practice that Williams charged amounted to "monitoring my mail."<sup>60</sup> A month later his exasperation rose even higher when the Rules Committee's counsel leaked the committee's preliminary report on the case to the press. The report admonished Baker for committing vaguely defined "gross improprieties" but said that no laws had been violated. After reading this tepid report, Williams warned the Senate that he would "not sit back and allow the results of the Baker episode to be brushed under a rug. . . ."<sup>61</sup> He was particularly disturbed by the efforts of Baker's defenders to discredit Don Reynolds because Reynolds's decision to come forward with his testimony had been based on Williams's assurances that the insurance man would not be subjected to abuse. It was a tense time. Williams's secretary, Eleanor Lenhart, took the precaution of having the senator's telephone lines in both his Millsboro and Rehoboth homes checked for wire taps. She also made duplicate copies of all the senator's notes on the case, which she secreted away so that the evidence would be burglar proof.

The Johnson White House tapes reveal a President who was made very uneasy by the Baker investigation. Working both directly and through emissaries, Johnson encouraged Everett Jordan to cut off troublesome questions from Republicans on the Rules Committee. The President was particularly sensitive to Don Reynolds's charge that Johnson had demanded a stereo television set in exchange for his insurance business. In January 1964, Johnson complained to Senator Richard Russell [D-Georgia] about that "son-of-a-bitching Williams" for going after him when Williams had ignored Eisenhower's acceptance of gifts for his Gettysburg farm.<sup>62</sup> Four months later, still feeling threatened and put upon by the Baker enquiry, the President remarked to Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield

[D-Montana] and Hubert Humphrey [D-Minnesota] “This Williams is mean and he wants to make speeches. And somebody is just going to have to be there and take his britches off. . . . I never handled any money.”<sup>63</sup> Clark Mollenhoff’s articles in the *Washington Star* about the Baker investigation also disturbed the President, who defended himself to another journalist with the countercharge that Don Reynolds was nothing more than “a no-good character assassin son of a bitch.”<sup>64</sup>

During the spring of 1964 when suspicion, innuendo, and political maneuvering surrounded the Baker case, making it appear that powerful forces might succeed in covering up Baker’s past, the Delaware senator made his decision to run for a fourth term. It was not an easy decision. While Delaware Republicans urged him to run, Elsie Williams pleaded with her husband to give up the hectic pace of his labors in the Senate and return to the quiet of Sussex County.<sup>65</sup> John Williams was strongly tempted to follow his wife’s advice. He did not enjoy life in Washington and he had never intended to remain there for three terms, much less four. The state press liked to point out that in the entire history of the Republic no Delaware senator had served more than three terms. After much soul-searching John Williams decided to run one more time. He did so for two reasons. He knew that in the absence of another strong Republican candidate his fellow Sussex Countian Democrat, Elbert Carvel, would likely be elected. While Williams liked and respected Carvel personally, he was strongly opposed to Carvel’s liberal Democratic positions on public issues, most particularly on government spending. Even more significant, however, the Baker case weighed heavily in Williams’s mind. No one could doubt that with John Williams gone the Rules Committee’s proposed white-wash report would seal the end of the enquiry. Williams could not stand by and see the Senate’s dirty linen, like an awkwardly projecting lump, being shoved under a rug.

The Williams-Carvel campaign of 1964 was in some ways a replay of their contest of six years before, except that the political stakes seemed higher and the potential national significance of a Williams victory greater. In 1964, in spite of his votes to end the civil rights filibuster and his support of the Civil Rights Act, Williams was viewed by civil rights advocates as an enemy of their cause. They intended to make him pay at the polls for his refusal to change his schedule and meet with them during the August 1963 March on Washington and for his support for jury trials for those accused of civil rights violations. In addition, unlike the off-election year 1958, Williams’s Senate campaign in 1964 coincided with

a presidential election, one that the Democrat candidate, Lyndon Baines Johnson, was sure to win against the Republican, Arizona Senator Barry Goldwater.

John Williams did not attend the Republican convention that summer. Nor was he an early supporter of Goldwater. To the contrary, he allowed the Delaware delegation to vote for him as a favorite son candidate in order to deny votes to Goldwater in the hope that some more centrist and electable candidate might emerge. But once the Arizonian was chosen, John Williams worked hard on his behalf. Even though he knew that Goldwater was not popular with most Delawareans, Williams appeared with his party's presidential candidate when Goldwater campaigned in the First State. Williams seemed to ignore the Democrats' efforts to equate him with the unpopular Westerner.

A number of factors worked in favor of Williams's reelection. Most Delawareans were immensely proud of him and his accomplishments. They relished his fame and basked in the glory of the attention that was, by Delaware standards, heaped upon him in the national press. The Bobby Baker case had rekindled the attention that the national press had bestowed on the Delaware senator during the tax scandals of the Truman administration.

Examples of national press publicity directed toward Williams during 1963 and 1964 are legion, but among the most memorable may have been the *New York Daily News* characterization of Williams as the "Walter Mitty of Muckrakers."<sup>66</sup> Unlike Mitty, however, the *Daily News* noted that "Senator Williams's triumphs are real." Doris Fleeson began a column in the *Washington Evening Star*: "the public's best hope of learning the complete Robert (Bobby) Baker story lies with the growing army of men and women who confide in Senator John J. Williams of Delaware, the man who started it all,"<sup>67</sup> while the *New York Herald Tribune* maintained that Williams "doesn't join 'inner circles'—he destroys them."<sup>68</sup> The *Miami Herald* was more laudatory yet, writing of the Delaware senator: "If the U.S. Senate may be said to have a conscience, it resides in the person of Senator John J. Williams."<sup>69</sup>

The most influential free publicity of all came from the *New York Times* which featured Williams in an article by Frederic W. Collins in its *Sunday Magazine* on February 9, 1964. The subheading to the title proclaimed "The Delaware Republican, the man behind the Bobby Baker case, has become the Congress's demon investigator of misfeasance, nonfeasance, and malfeasance." Williams, the *Times* article claimed, had brought down more people who were cheating the government than anyone, yet he acted without either



**John Williams campaigning with Republican presidential candidate Barry Goldwater in Dover, Delaware, 1964. Photograph by Jack Bungarz. Courtesy of Historical Society of Delaware.**

subpoena power or an investigative committee. People who had initially laughed at the chicken-feed merchant as a statesman, now respected his application of accounting principles to the government's business and took note of his independence from DuPont Company influence, Collins wrote.<sup>70</sup> The author described Williams's assistant Eleanor Lenhart as "the Lady in Red" because she favored clothing of that color. He characterized Williams as a friendly, conscientious, fair-minded, nonconfrontational person who specialized in cleaning up messes rather than sponsoring legislation. Although Williams was not in charge of the Baker case, Collins concluded, "he's an irresistible and inescapable propulsive force behind it."<sup>71</sup>

As the campaign season advanced into spring, Williams's candidacy was once again assisted by a laudatory article in the *Reader's Digest* entitled "Incorruptible John Williams—The Conscience of the Senate." The article's subheading read "The shy, philosophical chicken farmer who triggered the Bobby Baker investigation has led Washington's most successful continuing crusade against graft and corruption."<sup>72</sup> One month later, *Fortune* featured Williams in an equally admiring article entitled "The Lone-Wolf Guardian of Federal Morality."<sup>73</sup>

Elbert Carvel, then completing his second non-consecutive term as governor, faced a daunting challenge in running against an opponent who was winning such favorable endorsements from the national press. In February, before either candidate had declared, he tried to portray Williams as an archconservative who had opposed



Delaware Governor Elbert Carvel, who twice challenged John Williams for his Senate seat at left, looks relaxed at a dinner in Wilmington's Hotel Du Pont with Senators Williams and J. Caleb Boggs, n.d. Courtesy of University of Delaware Library.

the Kennedy tax cut. But Williams countered with a clever tongue-in-cheek rejoinder. "Governor Carvel is in a unique position to put his fuzzy economics theories to work right in the state of Delaware," Williams suggested. "I am sure all Delaware taxpayers are eagerly awaiting his explanation of why he is not pushing for a huge state debt. Certainly, if he really believes that cutting taxes on borrowed money is the way to erase debt and bring booming prosperity he owes it to the taxpayers of Delaware to get busy on his tax cutting program right away."<sup>74</sup> Carvel responded that Williams was "against most things and for very little" and that the senator's economic theories were "moldy with age."<sup>75</sup>

The Senate Rules Committee's refusal to continue the Baker probe helped Williams's candidacy. In May 1964 Williams caused a sensation when he interrupted the Southern filibuster on the civil rights bill to introduce an amendment extending the Senate's investigation of Baker and threatened that, should the amendment fail, he would be forced to discuss the case on the floor of the Senate "in all its dirty details."<sup>76</sup> In June the nation's attention shifted from the growing conflict in Vietnam to the U.S. Senate where the civil rights bill moved toward final passage. Williams's vote to end the Southerners' last-ditch filibuster and his support for the final bill brought praise tinged with relief from the *Wilmington News-Journal* papers' political columnist Bill Frank and disappointment from Jack Smyth's *Delaware State News*.<sup>77</sup> In a telephone interview Williams told both Frank and Smyth that Congress was obliged to pass a civil rights bill or see the federal courts fill the vacuum by mandating equality in race relations anyway.<sup>78</sup> His lukewarm support won him no friends among blacks or white civil rights advocates and disappointed white social conservatives throughout the state, most particularly in his native Sussex County. From a purely political perspective, however, it was wise, and it apparently expressed his true sentiments.

In July after the excitement of the Civil Rights Act had died down, the Rules Committee made its final report on the Baker matter "with the enthusiasm of a debutante cleaning fish," in the *Chicago Tribune*'s memorable phrase.<sup>79</sup> Some Republicans labeled the report a coverup designed to protect Lyndon Johnson. A few weeks later Attorney General Robert Kennedy, then about to quit his cabinet post to run for the Senate from New York, told the President that the Justice Department had no plans to prosecute Baker. These announcements shifted attention back to John Williams, because he represented the only hope for keeping the ethics investigation alive. On September 1, the senator made public the information he had

gleaned from Don Reynolds about Baker's \$35,000 kickback for his intervention on behalf of Matt McCloskey for the Washington, D.C. stadium contract. Photographs of the senator holding the pay-off check as if it were a fisherman's prize catch appeared on front pages around the country.<sup>80</sup> Acting fast to do damage control, President Johnson asked the FBI to explore Williams's charge, knowing that the agency's report would not be made until after the November election.

Meanwhile, Governor Carvel strove to shift Delaware voters' attention away from the Baker case toward Williams's hostility to LBJ's Great Society programs. The two candidates maintained a friendly rivalry despite their political differences during four debates held throughout the state. Carvel charged that the senator had let elderly people down when he opposed Medicare. Williams countered that the new federal health program would rob funds needed to support Social Security. Williams argued that the Johnson antipoverty program was politically inspired and that its aims could have been better achieved through existing state and federal agencies. He also spoke against the Supreme Court's ruling in favor of reapportioning state voting districts to achieve greater fairness, saying that it should only apply to the lower houses of state legislatures but not to upper houses.<sup>81</sup> As the election neared, polls showed that the President held such a substantial advantage over Goldwater in Delaware that all Democratic candidates for statewide office might be swept in on LBJ's coattails. The closeness of the senatorial contest and the issues raised by Johnson's liberal domestic program and the Baker probe attracted strong voter interest.

With the outcome in doubt, John Williams used humor and irony to build his appeal. He drew laughs with old quotes from LBJ in praise of Bobby Baker. To Carvel's frequent lament about Williams's negative voting record the Senator would pointedly reply, "There's another negative vote that the governor didn't mention, I'm against sending Governor Carvel to the U.S. Senate."<sup>82</sup> Williams toured northern Delaware in the company of his Senate colleague Caleb Boggs, who was a popular vote getter among the more liberal suburbanites. Williams also campaigned in shopping centers and, when time allowed, rang doorbells. "I always figure I need one more vote and proceed on that premise," Williams admitted. "I'll need one more the night before the election and I'll be working to get it."<sup>83</sup> Although Williams spent far more than Carvel in the campaign, the amount of money involved was trivial by more recent standards. Williams reported expenditures of \$6,360.11 to Carvel's \$1,423.32.<sup>84</sup>

Two days before the close of the campaign, President Johnson made the strategic decision to give some of his final precious hours to Delaware, a state with only three electoral votes. On November 1 the President participated in rallies in Dover and at the Greater Wilmington Airport. His message was simple and direct: "Pull that lever all the way for LBJ."<sup>85</sup> The GOP's national chairman, Dean Burch, declared that the President's visit to Delaware was merely a "grandstand play" to unseat Williams, while the senator claimed to be flattered by the President's attention.<sup>86</sup> As in the past, the DuPont-owned *News Journal* papers announced their support for Williams. Claiming that "the eyes of the nation and, indeed the world will be on little Delaware tomorrow," the *Morning News* urged those voters who planned to vote for Johnson to cross over and vote for Williams as well. The paper prominently presented instructions on how to vote a split ticket.<sup>87</sup> Editors of the *Delaware State News* and even the *New York Times* endorsed Williams. Against those press endorsements the Democrats ran an advertisement urging voters to "send a U.S. Senator to Washington who is FOR people,"<sup>88</sup> while the Delaware Leadership Council, a civil rights group, told their supporters to reject Williams for his "record of indifference, if not hostility to basic humanitarian goals."<sup>89</sup>

Election day produced a Democratic landslide that rolled over Delaware and across much of the nation. Democrats were elected to every statewide office in the First State, except one: John J. Williams was returned to the United States Senate by a majority of nearly sixty-five hundred votes. Johnson's majority in Delaware was over forty-four thousand which showed that many voters in all parts of the state had indeed crossed over to vote for the conservative senator who had won their respect. Williams had expected to lose the election and had even written a concession speech. In recalling the election six years later, he pondered the ironic possibility that LBJ's weekend visit to Delaware had turned the tide in Williams's favor.<sup>90</sup>

Two days after the election a crowd of over 5,000 people, some dressed in costumes of bygone times, gathered in Georgetown, Delaware, to celebrate Return Day. The traditional ox was roasted while, to the music of school bands, horse-drawn carriages carried both winners and losers through the town to the courthouse circle to hear the official election results proclaimed from the balcony of the Sussex County courthouse. The two Sussex Countians who had contested for the senatorial seat exemplified this day of political and personal reconciliation. Governor Carvel congratulated John Williams as "our great senator" and Williams, who proclaimed

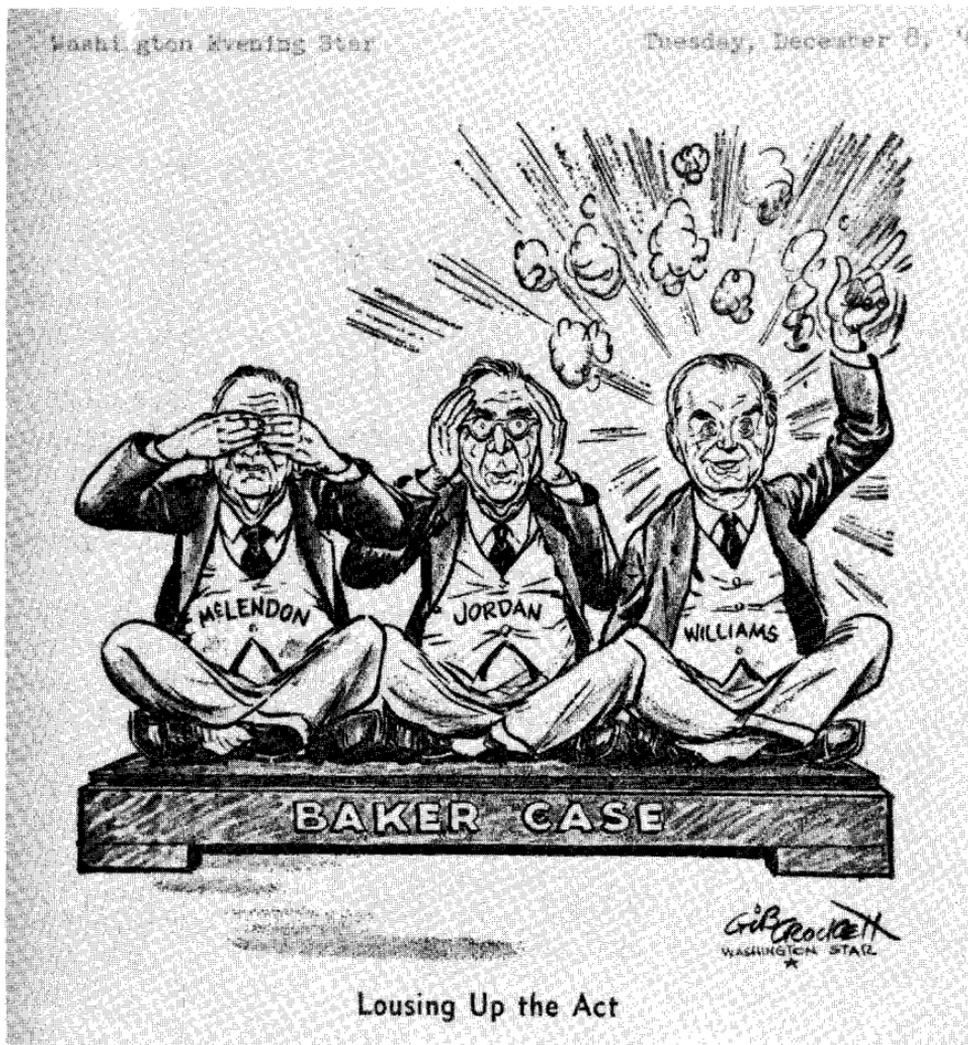
Carvel to be “a great American,” thanked the people of Delaware for their support. Bill Frank told *Morning News* readers that the governor had been “magnificent in defeat” because “I know that his heart was almost broken,” while the senator was “superb in his modesty and humility.”<sup>91</sup>

With the election over, the Senate Rules Committee once again reluctantly confronted the Bobby Baker case. Many members of both parties, including the committee chairman B. Everett Jordan, had hoped that the committee’s earlier report would have ended the matter, but John Williams’s revelations about the Washington, D.C. stadium kickback had pried back the lid and forced the Senate to order its committee to resume the enquiry. Just one month after the election, Don Reynolds testified before the Rules Committee in open session about his role as bagman for McCloskey. The Democrats tried to discredit him, but Reynolds’s documents supported his claims. Meanwhile, a federal grand jury in Washington, D.C., began its investigation of potential criminal misbehavior in the Baker-Reynolds-McCloskey payoff scheme.

In the wake of those disclosures, the defense went on the offensive. Matt McCloskey publicly proclaimed his innocence. He claimed that a clerk in his office had inadvertently overpaid the performance bond. Bobby Baker stonewalled and refused to supply records to assist Senate investigators.<sup>92</sup> The Rules Committee’s special counsel, a seventy-four-year-old attorney from North Carolina named L. P. McLendon, angrily accused John Williams of lying to the committee and rebuffed the Delawarean’s effort to give him the file of documents that Williams had gathered to support his accusations. Knowing that the counsel’s show of emotion was designed to trick him into some ill-considered statement, Williams at first maintained his composure, saying “I am not in the habit of being called a liar,” but “this investigation is far too important to be pushed aside by a controversy between the counsel and myself.”<sup>93</sup> But when McLendon continued his attacks on Williams a second day, the Delaware senator suspected that the counsel’s strategy was to divert attention away from the investigation by targeting Williams. The senator showed that he, too, could play an offensive defense. In a scene that made national headlines, Williams threw his investigative file on McLendon’s desk and dramatically stormed out of the hearing room. Asked by a reporter if his decision to leave the committee room signaled his intention of abandoning the investigation, Williams replied, “No sir, I still have my sources of information. . . . And I have six years to express that interest, and the Senate is

my forum.”<sup>94</sup> The usually mild mannered senator’s abrupt action unleashed a flood of calls, telegrams, and letters of praise that overwhelmed his office staff in the days that followed.

Having severed his relationship with the Rules Committee, Williams was free to do as he wished with any damning materials that might come his way. The committee remained under pressure. On December 6, the *Washington Post* editorialized that legislative cor-



*Washington Star* cartoonist Gibson Crockett captured the reluctance of Senate Rules Committee Chairman, Everett Jordan (D-N.C.), and his committee counsel, L. P. McLendon to recognize Bobby Baker’s mafeasance while Senator Williams spoke out in December 8, 1964. Courtesy of the *Washington Post* and the University of Delaware Library.

ruption represented a free government's greatest danger and that "Congress has the most solemn obligation to get at the bottom of these alleged payments of money to influence its judgment."<sup>95</sup> John Williams knew that the stakes were high. He told a reporter for the *Delmarva Sunday News*, "A lot of big names are involved. It takes men who are not weak-minded, but with real strength of character to bring out these facts."<sup>96</sup>

As a loose cannon Williams represented a threat to many senators. It had been his resolution to investigate improprieties by Senate employees that had launched the Rules Committee's initial investigation. Throughout the period of the Baker probe, Senator Williams repeatedly said that he believed senators themselves to be employees of the Senate and, therefore, subject to investigation should evidence lead in their direction. Few, if any, of his Senate colleagues agreed with that interpretation of the enabling resolution. Bobby Baker's claim that he became the scape goat or whipping boy for the sins of the Senate has some merit.<sup>97</sup> But Baker was wrong when he claimed that Williams's motivation for attacking him was to destroy Lyndon Johnson. There is no evidence in Williams's extensive files on the Baker case to indicate that Johnson, or any other senator past or present, was his particular target. Indeed, the Delawarean seemed to shy away from those aspects of the investigation that could have proved most embarrassing to Presidents Kennedy and Johnson. In targeting the Senate as a whole, Williams either naively miscalculated the willingness of his fellow senators to endure the klieg lights of intense scrutiny, or he really meant it when he said that his ultimate goal was not to expose particular wrong doers like Baker but to raise the level of honest dealings within the Senate and within the federal government generally.

In so complex a case, Williams could develop leads only if people like Ralph Hill, Gertrude Novak, and Don Reynolds were willing to confide in him. He and Eleanor Lenhart tracked down a number of aspects of the case, some of which were developed by reporters, especially Clark Mollenhoff, and others by the government prosecutors who later indicted Baker and presented the evidence that sent him to jail. The significance of the Bobby Baker revelations lay not so much in the specific allegations made by Senator Williams, but in the larger pattern of backstairs deal making and favoritism that they exemplified, and which occasionally produced disastrous results for the country.

A case in point may have been NASA's Apollo disaster on January 27, 1967. Three astronauts—Virgil Grissom, Edward White, and Roger Chafee—lost their lives when fire broke out in their

space capsule during a routine preflight check out. The background of that tragedy lay in the politically entangled procedures under which aerospace contracts were determined. According to historians of the space program, the decision in 1962 to award the contract for building the space craft to North American Aviation represented “the closest thing to an out-and-out scandal” in the space program.<sup>98</sup> Knowledgeable people believed that Martin Marietta Corporation had presented a better proposal and had greater expertise in the construction of the module, but the deal-making skills of North American’s lobbyist Fred Black, together with the Democrats’ desire to help Pat Brown win reelection as governor of California over challenger Richard Nixon, determined that North American would get the contract and that components would be built in the company’s plants in Orange County.<sup>99</sup>

Throughout the spring of 1965 the Rules Committee’s investigations followed a familiar pattern of denial. Democratic leaders of the committee welcomed a report from the FBI that undermined Don Reynolds’s credibility.<sup>100</sup> In May political columnists Rowland Evans and Robert Novak reported in the *Washington Post* that they had been shown the committee’s still-secret report and that the document contained such statements as “contrary to stories appearing in the press and statements by Senator John Williams,” language that Evans and Novak found “precedent shattering” for its direct assault on the veracity of a Senate colleague. The columnists called the report “an unsavory conclusion to an unsavory chapter in U.S. Senate history.”<sup>101</sup> The committee’s chief counsel, L. P. McLendon, hastened to respond that the columnists had seen only a preliminary draft, not the final report, which, he said, would not mention Williams.

Once again, Williams rather than Baker had become the focal point of the story. Feeling that his integrity had been challenged, Williams spoke for two hours on the Senate floor asking colleagues to either denounce or support his actions. As Everett Jordan sat mutely, a parade of senators rose to praise the Delaware Senator.<sup>102</sup> The following weekend Williams appeared as a guest on the CBS show *Face The Nation* and told the TV audience that he had never experienced such resistance to an investigation. Williams said that he did not believe that President Johnson had personally tried to intervene to kill the case, but he later told the *Wilmington Evening Journal* that the administration had launched a “diabolically clever” effort to discredit him by leaking the draft report.<sup>103</sup> *Time* magazine’s story on the affair, entitled “Watchdog Beware!” included a typical Williams statement: “Back home where I come

from, a man's word and his honor are considered to be all that he has."<sup>104</sup>

If the leak of the draft report had been an effort to dampen respect for John Williams, it proved to be a boomerang that put public and media pressure on the Rules Committee rather than on the senator. When the committee's report was finally released in late June it contained no hint of criticism of John Williams and was highly critical of Baker's influence peddling. Yet even the generally Democratic *Washington Post* found the report to be "defensive," "tepid," and "half-hearted." Like Senator Williams, the *Post* was disappointed that the committee had failed to address the issue of full disclosure of financial affairs by U.S. Senators as well as Senate employees.<sup>105</sup>

The Baker case now moved from the U.S. Senate to the courts. On January 4, 1966, a District of Columbia Grand Jury handed down a nine count indictment against Baker for various illegal acts including tax evasion, theft, and conspiracy.<sup>106</sup> John Williams told a reporter from the *Washington Post* that while he took "no pleasure in seeing a man indicted, it is encouraging to see that progress is being made."<sup>107</sup> Reporters credited Williams with having uncovered the evidence that underlay three of the nine counts in the indictment, and the senator was praised for his willingness to stick to his investigation in the teeth of persistent, powerful opposition. Through all the adulation Williams maintained his folksy tone, telling one reporter that "whitewash put on over dirt won't stick. We country boys know that."<sup>108</sup> A year later a jury found Baker guilty on all counts and, after exhausting his appeals, the former secretary to the Senate majority leader was sent to federal prison.

Shortly after the indictments were returned, John Williams wrote a thank you letter to Clark Mollenhoff, the reporter whose sleuthing had helped bring Baker's improprieties to light. He praised Mollenhoff's willingness at several critical points to forego the opportunity to publish his discoveries in the interest of developing the larger aspects of the case. Williams wrote that his "impression of the American press has increased tremendously during my service in the Senate" and credited newsmen in general for their efforts to get the facts before the public. He concluded this private letter with a statement that summed up the essence of the Baker probe as he saw it. "It was essential that we push this case through to a satisfactory conclusion and demonstrate to the public that honesty in government is considered important and that influence peddlers and crooks do not always escape."<sup>109</sup> Mollenhoff later reciprocated, saying "it has been pleasant playing Paul to your Perry Mason," a ref-

erence to the detective-defense lawyer team in a popular television series.<sup>110</sup>

In the course of the Baker investigation, various means may have been attempted to impede Williams. The tried-and-true formula of threatening to expose unsavory information about the senator to shut him up did not work. The senator's opponents must have rejoiced when a rumor surfaced that the notably upstanding Delawarean had been seen having breakfast alone with a pretty young girl in a beach resort restaurant near Rehoboth, Delaware. It was all true, the senator said, adding that the young lady in question was his granddaughter.<sup>111</sup> Nor could opponents get at him by drawing attention to federal programs that supported his business interests because there were no federal price supports for the poultry industry, nor did the senator receive other forms of government help. Except for the Dover Air Force Base, which Senators Frear and Williams had worked together to establish in the 1950s, there was little in the way of federal support to Delaware's economy that might come under threat.

The name of Delaware's former Senator Allen Frear, who had served in the Senate from 1949 to 1961, did surface in the Baker case. At his trial in 1967, Baker testified that the cash he had supplied to Gertrude Novak to maintain the mortgage payments on the Carousel Motel had come from a cash gift of \$50,000 that Senator Robert Kerr gave to Bobby shortly before Senator Kerr's death. To strengthen his case, Baker sought to establish that Kerr had been in the habit of handing out large cash gifts and loans, but he lacked the proof to do so. In his book, *Wheeling and Dealing*, Baker laments that during the trial he failed to mention that Kerr had given Senator Frear \$200,000.<sup>112</sup> Baker did testify that he, himself, had once made \$13,750 available to purchase M.G.I.C. stock in Frear's name, presumably as a bribe to secure Frear's support for some piece of legislation.

Frear adamantly denied those charges but shortly thereafter he resigned from his position on the Securities Exchange Commission, to which President Kennedy had appointed him, purportedly for reasons of health. At least one of John Williams's friends among the reporter fraternity believed that Frear might have been guilty. Glenn D. Everett told Williams that Frear had been "a strong Johnson man the last several years he was in the Senate. And I have every reason to believe, that Johnson and Kerr were cutting him in on a number of cozy little business deals."<sup>113</sup> Williams, however, suspected that Baker attacked Frear as a way to undermine his friend, John Williams.<sup>114</sup>

When Frear was called as a witness during Baker's trial, an article appeared in the *Delaware State News* that noted the former senator's close ties to the accused. John Williams wrote a letter to *State News* editor Jack Smyth to explain that readers would receive an "erroneous impression" if they inferred that Frear had been involved in Baker's "financial manipulations." "I can state most emphatically," Williams wrote, "that at no point in anything which has been called to my attention has there been the slightest indication . . . that Allen Frear. . . ." was involved. He added, "sure, Allen was a friend of Bobby Baker, but so was I and so were many other members of the Senate, and all of us were greatly surprised and somewhat shocked by the developments."<sup>15</sup> Shortly thereafter, when the Frears visited Washington they called on John and Elsie Williams to thank the senator for his letter. On a later occasion the couples met for dinner in a Washington restaurant. There is no further reference to the Frear-Baker connection in Williams's files, nor in Frear's papers.

John Williams and Clark Mollenhoff continued to provide evidence and leads to federal prosecutors after the Baker case went into the courts. William Bittman, the chief prosecutor in the case, was a Justice Department top gun who had also led the prosecution of Teamster President Jimmy Hoffa. Bittman had been close to Robert Kennedy and apparently had no hesitation in digging out information that might embarrass Lyndon Johnson. At Bittman's request, John Williams flew to Nassau in August 1965 to persuade Don Reynolds to return to the United States to testify against Baker. Williams was authorized to tell Reynolds that the Justice Department was willing to grant him immunity from prosecution in exchange for his cooperation. Williams also alerted Bittman to the existence of illegal campaign contributions that Baker had secured from west coast savings and loan associations in exchange for favorable tax advantages. Clark Mollenhoff believed that Williams's tips to the Justice Department were crucial to winning the government's case.<sup>16</sup>

As in any human triumph, the victory was only partial. Sending Bobby Baker and Fred Black to jail had never been John Williams's aim. His real goal was to shine such a clear, bright light on the corrupt practices in which they had indulged that the Senate would be obliged to reform itself. While the case made many headlines and attracted much attention, it was not the blockbuster that Watergate was to become only a few years later. The reasons are not hard to see. Whereas Watergate focused directly on a sitting President, the Baker case seemed only to be tied indirectly to Lyndon Johnson.

More important perhaps was the nature of the times. Watergate came at the end of a highly disruptive war; the Baker case coexisted with that war and with a series of other gripping national events, including the murder of a President, the Great Society, and the rise of antiestablishment protest. It was hard to compete for the public's attention in the midst of all that.

The Baker case did matter, however. It revealed the insider deal making and manipulation that fueled NASA and other aspects of the military-industrial complex and that influenced the U.S. tax code. John Williams was under no illusions that powerful private interests could ever be prevented entirely from working their will in these matters, but the Baker case was sufficiently embarrassing to push Congress into writing new legislation to require candidates for the Senate and House to disclose their business dealings. It was only through the persistence of this respected loner that Congress took these first steps toward self-reform.

On a more modest note, the case also won Williams a most unlikely fan. In February 1964 when the Baker probe was at its height, John Williams received a letter from Groucho Marx. The comedian had seen a newspaper article about the senator that "filled me with pride. It is so unusual to read about an honest senator or congressman that I just had to write you this congratulatory note." Marx said that although he was a life long liberal, he would vote for John Williams for President. "You can count not only on my vote, but on those of all my brothers."<sup>117</sup> Williams, the irrepressible practical joker who always read the funnies first when he opened his daily newspaper, must have been very pleased.

## He Just Played It Straight

The Baker scandal thrust John Williams into the national consciousness and made him a popular figure among Republicans. During Lyndon Johnson's term as an elected President, Williams was invited to address numerous Republican conferences. His message was always the same: the Johnson administration was spending beyond the nation's means, pretending that the nation could have both guns and butter without facing up to the inevitable consequences. In November 1965 he told a GOP audience in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, that "fiscal integrity and responsibility" were the biggest issues facing the nation. The President, he said, should admit that we are at war in Vietnam, make winning the war his top priority, send in enough troops to win quickly, "and not let it drag out eight or ten years where we can lose a lot of American manpower."<sup>1</sup>

Williams viewed the growing American involvement in Vietnam from the dual perspectives of the Finance Committee and the Foreign Relations Committee. As a member of Foreign Relations he was privy to briefings by top officials at the State Department, while as the ranking Republican member of Finance and, unofficially, chairman Harry Byrd's alter ego on that committee, Williams grew increasingly concerned about the burgeoning national deficit, inflation, and the world's diminishing confidence in the value of the U.S. dollar. By the late 1960s, John Williams knew as much or more about the state of the nation's finances as anyone in the Senate. The confidence that he manifested in his ability to comprehend the complexities of taxes, budgets, borrowing, and interest rates was decidedly less pronounced in the realm of foreign policy and defense, where he had little personal experience. Thus, he did not hesitate to disagree with pronouncements of a Secretary of the Treasury if he thought it right to do so, yet he accepted the views of Pentagon and State Department officials less critically. Throughout his Senate career, Williams ignored the gigantic potential for waste and corruption associated with defense, the nation's

most costly program, to concentrate on areas where he believed his personal experience and knowledge to be more reliable guides. Having never served in the military and having no association with military affairs in the Senate, he left that area to others.

The result of his feelings of inadequacy to judge military situations was evident in Williams's statements about the war in Vietnam. The man who heaped criticism on Lyndon Johnson for his domestic spending and federal intrusiveness was initially a strong defender of that same President's war policy and critic of those who disagreed with the President. Williams consistently voted against costly government give away programs and foreign aid because he questioned the ability of the federal government to solve complicated problems, but he could be counted on to vote for defense spending, including Johnson's and Nixon's huge military requests to sustain the war in southeast Asia.

The senator's public statements about Vietnam suggest that he, like other Americans at that time, was trying to make sense of a constantly shifting set of realities. In January 1965 he urged the United States to take a clear stand. The administration, he said, should study the situation, decide what course of action to take, and then act on it "in clear terms so the whole world will know what we're doing."<sup>2</sup> Six months later he criticized those among his colleagues in Congress who were urging that the United States pull out of Vietnam. Speaking before the Masonic Club of Delaware at the height of his battles with the Rules Committee over the Baker investigation, Williams said that "we must join together as Americans behind the President. If we have our differences we can tell him in private."<sup>3</sup> In October 1965 he denounced war protesters and suggested that if they wanted to march they could do so in the front lines in Vietnam. "I don't question the demonstrators' right to express their opinion, but there are certain times when the good of the country must come first."<sup>4</sup> Americans, he believed, had no choice but to back their government's policy on Vietnam. In a speech in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, in February 1966 he said, "When you're in a war you have to leave it to the President to make the major decisions. As an American, I'm going to back him. Whatever it takes to win, we're going to put it up."<sup>5</sup>

By February 1967 when a group of antiwar clergymen from Delaware visited their state's senators and representative on Capitol Hill, Williams appeared less convinced that the administration's policy was succeeding. "I don't think we're ever going to have a military victory," he admitted.<sup>6</sup> But despite his growing doubts, he continued to denounce the protesters, whom he labeled "card burn-

ing screwballs and beatniks who seem to take pleasure in denouncing their country.”<sup>7</sup> Williams believed that the protesters were giving aid and comfort to the enemy and hurting American troops in Vietnam, but in private he was no longer so sure of the President’s policies. An analysis of the opinions of members of the Foreign Relations Committee by Marvin Kalb for the *New York Times Magazine* in November 1967 listed Williams among the “flutterers” who were neither hawks nor doves.<sup>8</sup>

In February 1968, soon after the Tet offensive, another group of Delaware clergy visited Capitol Hill on behalf of peace. Episcopal Bishop J. Brooke Mosley, their spokesman, denounced the war as “immoral, unjust and unnecessary.” The clergymen urged Senator Williams to use his skills as an investigator to examine the expenses incurred by U.S. participation in the war and to search for swindles by war suppliers. Confronted by those Christian and Jewish leaders, the senator revealed his genuine perplexity about the moral dilemmas of the war. “We never should have gotten into a land war in Asia,” he admitted, “but we’re there.” The responsibility, he suggested, lay with President Johnson, not the Congress. “I wasn’t consulted. The President, the Commander-in-Chief, moved our action from advisory to military. What can we do short of impeaching the Commander-in-Chief? What is the answer?” Having come close to blaming Johnson for leading the country into a quagmire, Williams then retreated. He believed in the President’s sincerity, he said, and would therefore continue to support administration requests for military appropriations. “I can’t vote against supporting our fighting men. My father told me once, ‘If you don’t like the minister, don’t quit the church and keep your contributions up.’”<sup>9</sup>

Just as he was shocked by war protesters, Williams was extremely hostile to urban rioters. He supported an amendment to the civil rights bill of 1968 to make it a federal crime to cross state lines for the purpose of inciting riots and showered praise on Delaware’s Democratic Governor Charles L. Terry, Jr., for his uncompromising efforts to restore law and order in Wilmington following a minor disturbance in the summer of 1967 and a more serious disorder in the wake of Martin Luther King, Jr.’s assassination in April 1968. Williams condemned the participants in the Wilmington riots as “outlaws and insurrectionists,” “looters,” and “a gang of thieves.”<sup>10</sup> Williams recognized that the rioters presented a difficult dilemma. He told the executive editor of the *Wilmington Morning News* that, should Congress enact new programs for the cities in the wake of riots, such action would be viewed as bribes to insure lawfulness. On the other hand, if Congress should discontinue ex-

isting programs on the grounds that they were inefficient or not working, such action could be seen as punishment and might inspire more rioting. Recalling the racial unrest that accompanied Milford, Delaware's aborted effort to begin integration in 1954, the senator said that just as most white people had resisted and disapproved of the segregationist extremists at that time, so he thought most black people disapproved of the rioting few now.<sup>11</sup>

During the period of urban riots Williams emerged as a proponent of gun-control legislation. In 1968 he supported a proposal by Senator Edward Kennedy to ban mail-order rifles and pistols. Williams saw no threat to Americans' liberty to buy or own guns in such a law, and he consistently voted for gun control and spoke on its behalf during the remainder of his career in the Senate. It may have seemed something of an anomaly for a conservative country man whose favorite recreation was duck hunting to join the ranks of gun-control sponsors, but Senator Williams believed that registering a gun should be no more dangerous to Americans' freedoms than registering their automobiles. Crime, anarchy, the potential for violence that underlay fringe group militias—all appeared to him to be more serious threats to the lives and liberties of the American people than gun control.<sup>12</sup>

In July 1967 Raymond T. Evans, a black member of the Delaware General Assembly, came to Washington to talk frankly behind closed doors with Senators Boggs and Williams and U.S. Representative William Roth. Evans told a tale of misapplied federal efforts to heal urban ills that resonated strongly with Williams's experience and assumptions. As Evans described it, the War on Poverty was in part responsible for civil unrest in Wilmington. Black people resented the government for the failure of its poverty programs to fulfill their promise. The Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) Director in Wilmington had recruited "a gang of hoodlums whom decent colored people don't respect" and paid them large government salaries with government funds. While those who needed help went begging, the money went to pay for bureaucrats and gangsters.<sup>13</sup> Evans described an organization called Wilmington Youth Emergency Action Council (WYEAC), a sort of super gang made up of the most notorious among the city's black gang leaders, that OEO funded in an effort to end gang warfare in the city. One year after Evans's warning to the state's congressional leaders, a group of heavily armed WYEAC members were arrested while engaging in target practice with rifles on a marsh east of the city.<sup>14</sup>

As in the past, John Williams continued to explore allegations of wasteful spending and corruption in government. During his final

term, aside from the Bobby Baker scandal, the major focus of Williams's investigative skill was his ongoing study of the practices of the Federal Housing Authority (FHA), an agency that had been created in the New Deal to provide mortgage money and guarantees for new building projects in order to revive the home construction industry and to encourage home buying. John Williams became interested in the FHA in 1965 when he learned that the agency had lost \$24 million in defaulted loans to Matthew McCloskey on nine luxury apartment towers in Florida. McCloskey, Williams discovered, had misled the agency into the belief that a burgeoning market existed for such projects. During the Baker investigation, when Williams was trying to build a case against McCloskey in connection with the Washington, D.C. stadium performance bond payoff, the senator reached the conclusion that FHA officials had not looked deeply enough into the Florida apartment project before granting the Philadelphia Democrat a loan. McCloskey's default, Williams told the Senate, "raises a question as to whether or not the principal objective of some of the builders is the profit they can get on the construction contracts, with the government assuming all the risks rather than their being interested in the housing projects themselves."<sup>15</sup>

The senator continued to direct his attention to FHA practices during the next several years. In 1967, while Williams was on the alert to spy out waste and fraud, Senate liberals led by Robert F. Kennedy, then senator from New York, accused the FHA of supporting luxury construction at the expense of the poor. Stung by this criticism and fearful that the liberals would create a new housing agency if FHA failed to respond, the FHA quickly expanded its policies to focus on the construction of low-income housing. In their haste to enter a new market, the agency's personnel tolerated sloppy procedures that played into the hands of unscrupulous builders who overcharged, padded costs, and defaulted, leaving the American taxpayers to pay the cost. Williams investigated a number of allegations sent to him by informants.<sup>16</sup> He sent his findings to the Justice Department and described cases of abuse to his colleagues in the Senate. The senator focused on a survey of the FHA's failed multifamily projects. He discovered a pattern of overestimates and defaults in cities throughout the country that resulted from the use of government money to build housing units on cheap marginal land, to use inflated markups, and to construct shoddy buildings that failed to attract residents.<sup>17</sup> Williams's goal was not to exclude low-income housing from the FHA's mandate, but rather to insure that the government's money was used in the interests of

those who would occupy the new housing rather than in the interests of fraudulent builders. His revelations prompted the FHA to tighten its guidelines.

From his vantage point as the ranking minority member of the Finance Committee, John Williams played a significant role as the chief conservative critic of New Frontier and Great Society economic policies. Despite his faith in market-driven economies, Williams accepted the view that the government must play a corrective role in the economy to hold down inflation and promote the public welfare. While he consistently argued for the elimination or reduction of expensive government programs, he stood ready to support some domestic program initiatives, but only if their supporters were willing to raise new tax money to pay for them. Williams always gave his highest priority to debt reduction and did not distinguish federal fiscal policies from those of a family household or a business enterprise. He remained deeply distrustful of the Keynesian economic policies pursued by the Kennedy and Johnson administrations. Although the Kennedy tax cut can be seen in retrospect to have stimulated the economy and increased the government's tax revenue, John Williams vehemently opposed it when it came before Congress. He also opposed the concept of tax credits as means to stimulate the economy, because the credits disproportionately benefited the rich and because, in his view, they provided a false sense of prosperity based on borrowed money.<sup>18</sup>

Williams was not, however, merely a naysayer. He was a compromiser who looked for ways to achieve desired ends through financially prudent means. A case in point was his role in reconstructing the Unemployment Compensation Extension Act of 1961 in which he succeeded in adding amendments to prevent "double collection" and to provide a pay-as-you-go feature whereby taxes to support the program would be collected in anticipation of need. "Why saddle the employers with an unnecessary \$40 million in interest charges," . . . he argued.<sup>19</sup> "If the purpose is to charge employers, and if this is an employment tax, let us impose it and be honest about it. Let those who go home and boast that we voted a billion dollars of benefits also tell about the billion dollars in taxes."<sup>20</sup> The Williams amendments secured the support of Republicans and of enough conservative Democrats necessary to pass the bill.

In his final term in the Senate, Williams scored his greatest victory for fiscal responsibility. During the second half of the 1960s, Lyndon Johnson's determination to fight a war in Southeast Asia while maintaining his War on Poverty at home seriously distorted

the nation's economy. The so-called Kennedy tax cut of 1964, which Williams strongly opposed, had encouraged economic expansion and had seemed to prove that the way to raise the government's income was to lower taxes. But economic expansion had led to inflationary pressures that were further exacerbated by the cost of the war and the Great Society programs. To cover its escalating expenses, the federal government sold land and some of its stock-piled goods, devalued its coinage, and borrowed heavily. In 1966 and 1967 the Johnson administration and Congressional leaders worked together to shift taxes upward slightly, fearful of incurring a politically damaging public outcry. An excise tax raised the cost of automobiles and telephones and a modest surtax was enacted in the hope that it might curb spending, cut the deficit, and thus dampen the inflationary spiral.<sup>21</sup> These palliatives failed to halt inflation or to bring down the federal deficit. In November 1967, Great Britain devalued the pound sterling. An international crisis ensued as foreigners who held U.S. dollars, fearful that the United States might do the same, recognized that their wealth was melting away and began cashing in dollars for gold, thus creating a serious drain on American gold reserves. Always concerned about the effects of monetary and fiscal policies on people of modest means, John Williams warned that inflation was a silent thief that stole money from pensioners and others on fixed incomes. If nothing were done to halt the accelerating drop in the dollar value, he said, the United States would face an economic disaster like the one that had overtaken Germany in 1923.<sup>22</sup>

The Constitution requires that tax bills originate in the House of Representatives, where Wilbur Mills, a former banker from Arkansas, was the chairman of the Ways and Means Committee. Although Johnson and Mills had cooperated in the past, in 1968 they took opposing views on the issue of whether there should be a tax increase to raise revenue or a cut in programs to reduce costs. Neither side would budge. The Ways and Means chairman and other Congressional conservatives were determined to cut spending rather than accept a politically unpopular tax increase. To save the Great Society, the President took the opposite view. Johnson requested a tax hike in his State of the Union address in January 1968 and again in late March, but House conservatives remained committed to their no-tax-increase position. As the nation's economy floundered on a sea of inflation, high interest rates, and evaporating gold reserves, interest groups and politicians alike became mired in a debate over

what to throw overboard.<sup>23</sup> At that critical time Johnson got help from what he termed “an unexpected quarter.”<sup>24</sup>

In his own account of the monetary crisis, Lyndon Johnson credited John Williams and George Smathers [D-Fla.] for seizing the initiative that led the Congress and White House to a resolution in the form of the budget bill of 1968. Williams’s whole Senate career had been devoted to the goal of limiting the cost of government to the amount that Americans were willing to pay. In 1967 Williams had scoffed at the administration’s 10 percent surtax proposal as inadequate to balance the “chaotic financial situation.” In January 1968 Williams introduced two bills: one, his familiar effort to raise revenue by cutting the oil and gas depletion allowance; the other, the Balance of Payments and Domestic Economy Act, was designed to combine the measures Johnson and Mills advocated: to enhance the government’s stream of revenue and to cut its costs. Speaking in the Senate, Williams urged Congress to work with the President to extend the excise tax and the surtax on both individual tax payers and corporations, but he also urged that there be a freeze on government employment and a moratorium on public-works expenditures, which, he noted, had been done to keep down costs during World War II and the Korean War. Had the Williams bill dealt merely with taxes it could not have been introduced in the Senate before clearing the House, but because it was a comprehensive bill that included reductions in government expenditures it was constitutionally legitimate.<sup>25</sup>

Williams’s tax bill got a chilly reception among most of the Democrats on the Finance Committee, but it opened the door to a chain of events that moved the debate from the exclusive province of private negotiations between the President and the chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee into the light of public access. Williams’s action brought more players into the action and was ultimately credited by the President himself as the crucial first step toward resolving the impasse.<sup>26</sup> As the leading Republican expert on the budget, Williams played a major role in shaping the debate within the Finance Committee over the budget of 1968. In mid-spring Williams and Florida’s Democratic Senator George Smathers drafted a compromise bill that became the basis for the final budget act. That was John Williams’s finest hour on the Finance Committee. His knowledge of the government’s finances and of Senate procedures, wedded to his deep concern for the nation’s financial future, helped avert a potentially devastating financial crisis.

In the midst of the negotiations over the budget bill, President Johnson announced his intention not to seek another term. Against a background of war, assassination, inflation, and racial and ideological discord greater than the nation had experienced since the Civil War, America's voters elected Republican Richard M. Nixon to be their next President in November 1968.

Three weeks after the election, President-Elect Nixon's assistant, Bryce N. Harlow, a former Eisenhower aide and now Nixon's Congressional liaison, wrote to John Williams to ask the senator's advice.<sup>27</sup> Williams replied promptly with a number of specific suggestions. He urged the new administration to appoint a "strong" (that is unwaveringly committed to deficit reduction) Secretary of the Treasury and a Secretary of HEW who would resist new spending initiatives. The senator also offered advice about how the new president could shift blame for continuing fiscal problems onto his predecessor and take on politically unpopular projects, such as an upward revision of the debt ceiling, if he acted quickly early in his administration. He argued for continuing the surtax at least one more year and mentioned two of his favorite themes: reducing the oil depletion allowance and repealing the "farcial" low-interest ceiling on low-cost long-term government bonds. The interest earned from the inexpensive bonds, geared to the pocketbooks of working men and women, had not kept up with rising interest rates. They were uncompetitive within the private bond market and offered their ordinary American purchasers no hedge against inflation. Williams also warned against the enactment of more tax-credit incentives until Nixon got a sense of how Congress might react. The concept of tax credits was not popular among his colleagues, Williams said, because "it is almost impossible to set them up without creating a situation where they can be abused." In closing, Williams offered a general observation that he hoped would guide the new administration: "we must not overlook the fact that the American voters did not vote *for* the Republican Party this year; to a large extent they were voting *against* the Johnson-Humphrey administration and the manner in which they conducted our domestic and foreign affairs. What we really won was an opportunity."<sup>28</sup>

President Nixon's budget priorities during his first year in office paralleled much of what Williams had recommended, but that was largely because Nixon shared the senator's desire to balance the budget, not because this policy had been recommended by anyone in the legislative branch. From the first, the Nixon White House operated independently of Congress, and the advice of Bryce Harlow, who, according to Nixon biographer Stephen E. Ambrose, "knew

Congress and its workings better than any living man” was usually ignored.<sup>29</sup> Williams was also ignored, but he continued to play a key role in budgetary and tax matters within the Senate.

Aside from hosting Nixon on his occasional campaign swings into Delaware, John Williams did not have a close relationship with the new President. Nixon was to discover, as had other presidents before him, that the prickly Delawarean was his own man. Williams’s most noteworthy clash with the Nixon White House came over a Supreme Court nomination. As a critic of some opinions of the Supreme Court under Chief Justice Earl Warren (most particularly the school prayer decision and *Baker v. Carr*, which required states to reapportion both their upper and lower houses according to the “one person one vote” principle), Williams could have been expected to rally behind Nixon’s effort to appoint more conservative justices. He was not in the habit of voting against presidential nominees to the Court, except under extraordinary circumstances, and he did not oppose the confirmation of judges on ideological grounds. In 1967, for example, he had voted to confirm Johnson’s appointment of the first black justice, Thurgood Marshall, and he had also voted to confirm the liberal justice Arthur Goldberg. He had, however, fiercely opposed Johnson’s nomination of his former aide and one-time Bobby Baker attorney, Abe Fortas, whom Williams believed was a mere political fixer unworthy to serve on the nation’s top court.

In the spring of 1969, after Fortas was appointed to the court, *Life* magazine disclosed that the justice had been involved in several conflicts of interest that included having accepted a fee (which he later returned) to do research and writing for a private foundation while serving as a justice. When he read of Fortas’s faux pas, Williams announced that he would introduce an amendment to the next tax bill to tax honoraria paid to government officials at 100 percent.<sup>30</sup> Fortas resigned from the court rather than face a political firestorm, and his resignation presented Nixon with the opportunity to nominate his second Supreme Court justice during the first year of his presidency.

President Nixon’s choice was Clement F. Haynsworth, a judge on the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals from a wealthy, prestigious South Carolina family. A highly visible manifestation of Nixon’s so-called southern strategy, designed to build a constituency for himself and his party among southern conservatives, the Haynsworth nomination was immediately unpopular among liberals, especially organized labor and blacks, who discovered objectionable opinions in Judge Haynsworth’s past; but the President counted on

enough votes in the Senate to override the opponents' efforts to defeat him. Unfortunately for the President and the judge, evidence emerged from Haynsworth's past that he, like Fortas, had been involved in personal conflicts of interest. No one suggested that Clement Haynsworth was a crook, but at the judge's confirmation hearings Senator Birch Bayh, an Indiana Democrat and the leading Senate opponent of the nomination, pointedly asked why Judge Haynsworth had not disqualified himself from several cases in which litigants had business dealings with companies in which Haynsworth was a stockholder. It also became public that Haynsworth had orchestrated an elaborate house swap with Furman University that appeared to be an effort at tax evasion. Haynsworth's supporters claimed that the liberals were out to get the South Carolina judge in retaliation for what had happened to Fortas, and they argued that it would be very difficult for any wealthy judge who owned stock in many companies to be completely free of the potential for conflict of interest.

In his *Memoirs*, Richard Nixon blamed the defeat of the Haynsworth nomination on partisanship and ideology. He discounts the charges leveled at the judge as constituting a mere "appearance of impropriety" that in themselves could have persuaded no one to oppose him and quotes an anonymous senator who told a reporter "conflict of interest is so much jazz; we are against him for what he believes."<sup>31</sup> H. R. Haldeman's diaries present a fuller picture of contemporary White House thinking. Haldeman blamed Bryce Harlow and John Mitchell for not working hard enough or smart enough to win confirmation because they mistakenly believed that they had the votes to confirm him. Their complacency was shattered in early October 1969 when expected supporter Senator Robert Griffin of Michigan, the Republican whip, told the White House that he could not support Haynsworth.<sup>32</sup>

Belatedly, after the confirmation hearings had ended, the White House recognized that the nomination was in trouble and mounted an intensive campaign to shore up votes among other potentially wavering Republican senators. As the Senate's most prominent exponent of high ethical standards, John Williams was a key target. On September 30, on returning to his suite in the Mayflower Hotel, the senator found a message from Attorney General John Mitchell requesting a meeting early the next morning. According to John Ehrlichman's account, Nixon had instructed Mitchell to tell the Delaware senator that "the President is on the line for Haynsworth," and added "this is his first big issue in the Senate. You can't let him down."<sup>33</sup> Nixon believed that Williams represented

the key swing vote—the domino—on which the nomination’s victory or defeat would depend. Williams went to Mitchell’s office the next day. His memorandum to the file of the meeting says, “I expressed my concern over some of the questions that had been raised in connection with Mr. Haynsworth’s background of activities and pointed out the manner in which this placed those of us who had insisted upon only men of the highest caliber and unquestionable integrity being placed on the court. Mr. Mitchell insisted that legally, and based on the canons of ethics of the A.B.A. he [Haynsworth] was clear, but I insisted that the American people based their judgment not on what the Bar Association said but rather upon the circumstances as they appeared.” Williams also took advantage of this rare opportunity to meet with a Nixon confidante to say that in his view the administration was in serious trouble in several key areas. He cited the President’s failure to end the war in Vietnam and to control inflation, which would soon be “our” inflation, not that of LBJ, and finally, Williams noted Nixon’s apparent failure to live up to his pledge to restore integrity to the government.<sup>34</sup>

The following day President Nixon summoned Senator Williams to the White House to intensify his campaign to secure Williams’s vote. The senator was not to be cowed. He told the President that he had not as yet made up his mind how he would vote, but that he would inform the White House when he had made his decision.<sup>35</sup>

The White House had another advocate in its stable whom John Williams might have been more likely to heed than either the President or the attorney general. This was Williams’s former sleuthing colleague from the press, Clark Mollenhoff, who had worked with the senator on the Baker case and was now serving as deputy counsel to the President. Mollenhoff contacted Senator Williams several times during October and early November 1969 to explain various aspects of Haynsworth’s conduct and rebut the charges that had been made against him. On October 6, for example, the deputy counsel called the senator’s office to dispel the rumor, then featured in the tabloid press, that Haynsworth had ties to fellow South Carolinian Bobby Baker. Although both Baker and Haynsworth owned stock in M.G.I.C., the Mortgage Guaranty Insurance Corporation, and both were stockholders in the same South Carolina cemetery, Mollenhoff assured Williams that the men had no mutual business dealings.<sup>36</sup>

In addition to pressure from the administration, Williams was also the target of persuasive efforts by fellow Republicans in the Senate. Robert Dole, [R.-Kansas],<sup>37</sup> Roman Hruska [R-Nebraska], and Marlow Cook [R-Kentucky] all wrote letters to members of

their party defending Haynsworth's character and judicial record.<sup>38</sup> Williams also received affidavits from Haynsworth's business associates attesting to the judge's integrity.

Senator Williams took a long time to reach a decision in that difficult matter because he was engrossed in other Senate business during October and early November. It was not until November 17, several days after the Senate debate on Haynsworth had begun and only four days before the scheduled confirmation vote, that Williams wrote out his views of the nomination on a pad of yellow legal-sized paper. Having studied the Judiciary Committee's report on Haynsworth and reviewed the testimony given before that committee during the judge's confirmation hearings, the senator analyzed what he had read and discovered that Haynsworth's opponents had assailed him on two points: (1) his "conservative background;" and (2) "whether or not he is sensitive to the delicacy of the position of a judge." As for the first point, Williams believed that senators should not base their decision to support or oppose confirmations to the judiciary on the basis of a nominee's legal philosophy. The American people had chosen a conservative President who would be expected to nominate conservative judges.

Williams was, however, concerned by the second ground for opposition. In his view, Judge Haynsworth had not lived up to the strictures laid down in the *Canon of Judicial Ethics*. Judges were well paid and given life tenure and generous pensions so that they would not be tempted into conflicts of interest. The Judiciary Committee's report showed that Judge Haynsworth "did participate . . . in cases where he had some financial interest." Moreover, earlier in 1969, before his nomination to the Supreme Court, Haynsworth had appeared before a congressional committee charged with improving the judiciary in the wake of the Fortas resignation. The judge had told the committee that he had resigned from all business associations and directorships when he entered the judiciary. But this statement was later found to be untrue when it was revealed that Haynsworth had retained some directorships from which he continued to collect annual fees. Williams saw no one egregious breach of ethics in Haynsworth's behavior that would disqualify him, nor did he doubt the judge's fundamental honesty, but he did see a pattern of insensitivity to judicial ethics. He found this particularly disturbing at a time when the nation needed to "restore respect for our highest court." "For years," Williams concluded, "I have been critical of Federal Judges' neglecting their judicial duties and directing their energies toward outside activities for the purpose of financial gain, and to confirm Judge Haynsworth as an Associate

Justice of the Supreme Court in light of his record would, in my opinion, be placing a stamp of approval on such outside financial operations.”<sup>39</sup>

As the vote drew near, the count was so close that the outcome was expected to ride on one or two votes.<sup>40</sup> Senator Ralph T. Smith [R-Illinois] announced his support and pronounced the charges against Haynsworth to be “specious . . . based on half-truths and misrepresentations.” Republicans George Aiken of Vermont, Caleb Boggs of Delaware, and Ted Stevens of Alaska also made public their intentions to vote for Haynsworth. Only a few senators were as yet uncommitted when John Williams rose to read the statement that he had written a few days before. According to the *Washington Post*, when Williams had finished, one of Judge Haynsworth’s Republican opponents was heard to say “that’s the ball game.” The *Post* reporter explained that as the single most respected member of the Senate on the question of ethics Williams’s opposition was likely to be persuasive with enough of the remaining uncommitted senators to kill the nomination.<sup>41</sup> The next day, three more Republicans, Charles Mathias of Maryland, John Sherman Cooper of Kentucky, and Gale McGee of Wyoming, declared their opposition, and on Friday, November 21, before packed galleries, the senators voted 55 to 45 to reject Haynsworth, the first time the Senate had defeated a nominee to the Supreme Court since 1930.<sup>42</sup>

No one could recall such strong pressure both for and against a Supreme Court nominee in the modern history of the United States. The *Washington Post* reported that the AFL-CIO and civil rights groups had exerted all of their power against Haynsworth while the White House had countered with threats to remove federal funding from states whose senators voted no.<sup>43</sup> If the Nixon White House did use such threats, it did not use them against John Williams, knowing perhaps that threats would have been counterproductive. Although the liberal press claimed that the defeat had cost the President dearly in prestige, Nixon’s chief aide, H. R. Haldeman, believed it had provided a useful lesson in how not to woo the Senate. Only two weeks later, however, Haldeman’s mood of philosophical resignation had shifted to anger against Republican senators who defied the President. Nixon, he remarked, would in future give the cold shoulder to those who opposed him and “work closely with the good guys.”<sup>44</sup> Harrold G. Carswell, the administration’s next choice for the Supreme Court appointment, proved to be a “good clean” candidate whom John Williams could support, but Carswell’s nomination, too, fell amid charges of racism and mediocrity,

and Nixon finally found a confirmable candidate in Harry Blackmun, a circuit court judge from Minnesota. Williams, meanwhile, joined in an unsuccessful effort, strongly supported from the White House, to unseat the liberal Justice William O. Douglas on the grounds that he had accepted speaking fees from a foundation while sitting on the court.

As the 1960s drew to a close, John Williams determined that he would not seek a fifth term in the Senate. In January 1971 when his present term would end, Williams would be approaching the age of sixty-seven. Were he to win another term, he would be nearly seventy-three when he retired. Williams believed that by then he would be too old to carry out his senatorial duties at the level that he demanded of himself. Looking around the Senate, he saw older men who, in his opinion, had stayed on too long, usually at the request of their party because they were proven vote getters. Unable to keep up with the work as they had done formerly, they became increasingly reliant on their staff people to do the work for them. This, Williams resolved, would never happen to him, nor should it be tolerated by the voters who thought they were electing a senator, not a staff of senatorial assistants. Williams concluded that the nation needed a Constitutional amendment to mandate a retirement age not only for senators and congressmen but also for other high government officials including judges. In May 1967 he presented his idea in a speech to the Wilmington Rotary Club. No senator, he said, should be elected after he had reached the age of sixty-five, nor a congressman after sixty-eight.<sup>45</sup> In December 1970, on the eve of his retirement, John Williams introduced the amendment to the Senate. It was introduced in the House of Representatives by his Delaware colleague William V. Roth.<sup>46</sup>

The age-limit amendment was John Williams's last major crusade. Like so many before it, age limits seemed a quixotic quest at the time, but Williams, like any farm boy, recognized that he was but planting a seed that might not flower for some time to come. After all, he had spent a career taking on powerful foes and frequently winning. Even the mighty oil companies had finally had to bend to the senator's relentless campaign when in 1970 the depletion allowance was lowered from 27½ percent to 23 percent.

Since Williams was already beyond sixty-five when he floated his age-limit idea, it should not have come as a surprise when, in February 1969, he announced that he would not be a candidate in 1970. The Delaware press responded with predictable regret and with fulsome praise. The editor of the *Delaware State News* called the an-

nouncement “the saddest news I’ve heard in years.” Williams, he wrote, was the man above purchase. “He is,” the editor noted, “the only political candidate to my knowledge in either party who has never accepted a campaign contribution.”<sup>47</sup> The *News-Journal’s* Bill Frank devoted a lengthy column to Williams, recalling how in 1946 this unprepossessing man from Millsboro had first appeared to Frank as an unlikely U.S. Senator.

The response from the national media to Williams’s retirement statement was more interesting because it was less predictable. Walter Cronkite devoted five minutes of his CBS *Evening News* show to pay tribute to the Delawarean beginning with the line, “He was known as ‘whispering Willie’ because he mumbled when he spoke and his voice hardly carried across the room. Yet, he became a thundering symbol of morality and ethics.”<sup>48</sup> In a lengthy article in the *Washington Post*, Robert C. Albright wrote that “Williams may have fared poorly in his battles with the Senate establishment, but his one-man campaign against government wrong doers and wrong doing has won him acclaim,” and, he noted, had saved the Treasury hundreds of millions of dollars.<sup>49</sup> The Scripps-Howard papers ran editorials calling Williams the most valuable member of the U.S. Senate,<sup>50</sup> while the editor of the *Miami Herald*, a Knight paper, wrote that “No member of the U.S. Senate has done more to expose the vast waste, inefficiency and bureaucratic bungling. . . .”<sup>51</sup>

Praise came also from a most unexpected quarter. Walter Reuther, head of the United Automobile Workers, told his union in a newsletter that, although Senator Williams had been no friend to labor, “he was a man of impeccable integrity” who had fought against the oil depletion allowance and against big government subsidies to corporate agriculture. “He was never wined and dined by big bankers and big corporations because he was never for sale,” Reuther said.<sup>52</sup>

In 1970, his final year in the Senate, John Williams helped to kill the Nixon administration’s major domestic initiative, the Family Assistance Plan. President Nixon announced his revolutionary Family Assistance Plan (FAP) in a television speech on August 8, 1969. The plan, he said, would replace welfare with “workfare,” assist the working poor, and push the nonworking poor into the workforce. Both the President and Daniel Moynihan, the President’s domestic advisor who was the chief architect of the plan, anticipated attacks from both ends of the political spectrum: liberals because it provided only a small allotment per family; conservatives because it was a socialistic give away. In spite of those fears, the FAP bill passed the House of Representatives in April 1970. In

the Senate it became stalled and was eventually killed in the Finance Committee. Nixon blamed "southern conservatives" on the committee for its defeat.<sup>53</sup>

Since John Williams led the opposition that bottled up the Family Assistance bill in the Finance Committee, he was presumably the chief conservative whom the President had in mind. Contrary to administration rhetoric, Williams did not oppose FAP as a concept, nor did he denounce it as socialistic or begrudge government assistance to the poor. For Williams, the devil was always lurking in the details. He became suspicious of the bill when he was convinced that it was based on flawed studies and inaccurate numbers. Williams believed that in determining the amount that poor families would receive from the proposed welfare reform HEW should take into account not only the direct funds from the proposed assistance program, but also other indirect tax-free government payments to poor Americans including Food Stamps, Medicaid, and rent subsidies. Only when all of those assistance programs were tallied together as a package, he argued, could one get a clear picture of the potential effects of the administration's proposed program. In typical fashion, John Williams asked that the administration provide the Finance Committee with calculations of how much assistance families or individuals might receive under a variety of possible circumstances. He wanted to be assured that the program would not encourage people to go on welfare who might otherwise get jobs in the private sector. His request embarrassed Robert Finch, the Secretary of HEW and the administration's point man for the bill on Capitol Hill, because the legislation had been drafted so hastily that no such statistical data existed. Under Williams's questioning the secretary agreed to rewrite the bill so as to cluster various forms of assistance.

Someone in the Nixon administration must have been very annoyed with Senator Williams's opposition to FAP, to judge from an unflattering portrait of the senator that appeared in a Rowland Evans and Robert Novak column in the *Washington Post* in August 1970. The generally pro-Nixon columnists portrayed Williams as an uncompromising zealot who was willing to sacrifice his party on the altar of his stubborn penny pinching. They described a recent scene in the White House when the President had unsuccessfully tried to push Williams and other Republicans on Finance to get the FAP bill out of committee and before the full Senate.<sup>54</sup> When the President's effort to persuade the Republicans on Finance failed, Nixon proposed a compromise whereby the bill's mandate would not go into effect until 1972 pending field tests of its viability.<sup>55</sup>

Williams was not impressed by this concession and even took the unusual step of calling a press conference to explain his position. Why not postpone passage of the bill itself until field tests were run, he suggested. The potential effects of the bill should be studied carefully before it was adopted, not as an afterthought. As written, the bill would add 14,000,000 more people to the welfare rolls and cost an estimated \$10.8 billion. But since the administration had made a \$800,000,000 miscalculation in its original estimates, it was difficult to determine what it might really cost. Williams said that he supported the idea of work incentives and added, "I don't think any taxpayer would object to supporting those who can't help themselves or their children. At the same time we don't want to encourage people to get more than they should. As long as we have a man or woman making more money in welfare than they can in full-time employment we will not get them off welfare."<sup>56</sup>

Ultimately, the Nixon welfare initiative went down to defeat, not only in 1970 but again in 1971 after Williams had retired from the Senate. As the bill's leading critic in the Finance Committee where it was buried, Williams bore a good deal of responsibility for the failure of that potentially promising approach to welfare reform. But blame for the defeat can be shared by many. As he made clear in his press conference, Williams was not trying to kill the bill; he was trying to modify it. He wanted more accurate information concerning its cost and probable effects. His effort to engage the administration in a serious dialogue about the shape of the bill failed because President Nixon was unwilling to hold such a dialogue. According to Nixon biographer Stephen Ambrose, the President had gotten what he really wanted out of the bill already—the publicity value for having introduced it—and did not care whether it was adopted or not.<sup>57</sup> Another group also bore responsibility for the bill's defeat: the liberals who complained that FAP would not pay enough per family and worried that it would cost thousands of social workers their jobs. As it turned out, the Family Assistance Plan lacked strong support either from the president who proposed it or from liberals or conservatives in Congress, and the United States lost an opportunity to reverse the trend toward welfare dependence.

Williams also took issue with the President's most controversial foreign initiative of 1970, the incursion into Cambodia. On April 30 Nixon told a startled nation, benumbed by the seemingly endless war in Vietnam, that he was sending American troops into Cambodia to destroy enemy bases there. Hostile reaction from Senate doves was to be expected, but heretofore John Williams had sup-

ported presidential initiatives in Vietnam, however costly and unpopular, on the grounds that the President was commander in chief and that we must not let down our fighting men. He had pointedly backed Lyndon Johnson's war policy in Vietnam even at a time when he was extremely critical of the President's domestic spending. But now, Williams, like many millions of Americans and many senators, had had enough. *Look* magazine later reported that Nixon's chief foreign policy advisor, Henry Kissinger, had briefed Senators John Stennis (D-Mississippi) and John Williams privately about Nixon's invasion plan before it was announced. While Stennis had supported the incursion, Williams had opposed it.<sup>58</sup>

Senate doves reacted to the President's move with two resolutions designed to take control for the war away from the President. One was the Church-Cooper amendment to a military appropriations bill. It required the President to withdraw American troops by June 30, 1970, and was adopted on the day Nixon did remove the troops. The other, the McGovern-Hatfield amendment, went further: it cut off funds for the war and required a complete American withdrawal from Vietnam within one year. Taken together, the amendments amounted to a direct challenge to presidential authority. During the Senate debate on those amendments, John Williams took the position that the amendments had it backward. The Senate should not cut off the pay of soldiers in the field as was proposed, but rather should cut off the pay of the President and the other top administration officials who had sent them into Cambodia. He therefore voted against both amendments. His opposition did not, he said, represent support for the President's policies. "I want to get out of this engagement," he explained. "I don't want any spread of this war. I think we made a big mistake when we went into South Vietnam, but as long as there's a boy in there, as far as I'm concerned, the U.S. government is going to be in back of him until we get out."<sup>59</sup>

In this case, and in others, the administration found Williams's vote hard to get. Despite great pressure he voted against the President's SST, the supersonic transport plane that the administration planned to make the cornerstone of America's air power. The SST struck Williams as costly and unproven. Delaware's other senator, Republican Caleb Boggs, voted for the SST.<sup>60</sup>

It is instructive to compare the voting records of the First State's two Republican senators. Although those who knew them would have defined Williams as the more conservative, statistical analysis suggests otherwise. According to the *Congressional Quarterly*, in

1969 Boggs voted with the conservative coalition 72 percent of the time, while Williams voted with the conservatives only 67 percent. Boggs was also more loyal to his party and to his party's president than was the idiosyncratic Williams. Boggs supported the Nixon White House 78 percent to Williams's 67 percent and supported party votes 76 percent of the time to Williams's 70 percent.<sup>61</sup> Williams belonged to no one's coalition. His ideology came primarily from his small-town business background and his religious convictions.

In 1970 John Williams had one final opportunity to help shape federal tax policy on the Finance Committee. After years of effort he had won the first concession on the oil-depletion allowance the year before. That time around he was "happily startled" to win a modest but symbolic victory in his long-standing effort to reduce subsidies to large-scale farm operations when the Senate agreed to cap payments to individual farms at \$20,000.<sup>62</sup> The last target of the senator's ceaseless efforts to cut wasteful spending was the Medicare-Medicaid Program, where fraudulent billings from doctors, hospitals, and other health care providers had already reached scandalous proportions in the late 1960s. Had he remained in the Senate, Williams would have concentrated on correcting those abuses. It was also during Williams's final months in the Senate that the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) was resuscitated by the growing women's movement. True to his belief that government should not discriminate among its citizens, John Williams was unwavering in his support for the ERA. The amendment did not, however, pass the Senate until 1972, after Williams's retirement.

In the spring of 1970, when Clark Mollenhoff resigned as special counsel at the Nixon White House to return to journalism, he sent a memorandum to Nixon urging the President to create a cabinet-level post to receive citizen complaints about suspicious or overbearing bureaucrats and to investigate government corruption. Mollenhoff suggested John Williams as the best man to head a department designed to restore people's trust in the government.<sup>63</sup> Mollenhoff had not consulted Williams, who would probably have refused the job. Nixon was not interested in creating such a post and, even if he had been, would likely have chosen a team player who could give the job publicity value, rather than an uncontrollable loner such as Williams.

As Senator Williams's final days in office drew to a close, the tributes began pouring in. The Senate's Democratic leader, Mike Mansfield, told *Nation's Business* magazine that Williams had "been a giant and his departure . . . will leave a void that will be

almost impossible to fill.” Another Democrat, William Proxmire, also known for his efforts to expose government waste, described Williams as a “remarkable man” and the Senate’s “most able sentinel.”<sup>64</sup> In December 1970, the Senate paused in its acrimonious debate of an Omnibus Budget bill to pay tribute to Williams. One after another among the Senate’s leaders rose to praise him. Russell Long of Louisiana, Chairman of the Finance Committee since Harry Byrd’s departure in 1965, noted his Republican colleague’s knowledge of Senate rules and his skill in using parliamentary procedure; Abraham Ribicoff of Connecticut, with whom Williams had often disagreed, pointed to the Delawarean’s readiness to work with his opponents. As an example, he recalled that Williams had recently told him, “you know, Abe, if they’d let us alone we could work out a good family assistance program.” Charles Percy of Illinois declared his belief that Williams’s greatest achievement had been getting the Johnson administration to agree to a spending cap in 1968.<sup>65</sup>

Newspapers and magazines joined in with their praise. The *Wil-*



**By the end of his final term John Williams had accumulated a wall-full of cartoons relating to his years in office. Courtesy of University of Delaware Library.**

*mington News Journal* papers chose Williams as the “State Star of the 60s.”<sup>66</sup> The editor of the *Philadelphia Bulletin* wrote “there was something old-fashioned, almost Biblical about the plain-speaking Mr. Williams’ insistence on honesty in government. . . .” Perhaps the most fulsome statement came from the Scripps-Howard chain’s *Washington Daily News*, which called Williams unique. “Senator Williams,” the paper observed, “practiced a type of politics few politicians understand. He just played it straight, with himself and with his constituents. He made no pitch for the limelight, sought no favors from anyone, aspired to no other office, stamped his trademark on no special legislation, cottoned to no cliques . . . he was merely one damned fine United States Senator.”<sup>67</sup>

Williams had made it a practice to stay out of Republican party politics in his home state, but he did have a successor in mind who shared his views, and Williams worked quietly but effectively to secure his nomination. Williams’s choice was William V. Roth, Jr., a Montana native and Harvard Law School graduate, who had married Jane Richards, daughter and granddaughter of distinguished Delaware attorneys and leaders of the state GOP. Since coming to Delaware as an attorney for the Hercules Corporation, Roth had been an active party member and was currently serving as the state’s lone U.S. Representative.

Williams demonstrated his preference for Roth in subtle ways. He made a point of being seen accompanying the younger man to a Republican event in nearby Maryland and backed Roth in his unsuccessful bid for the state party chairmanship.<sup>68</sup> In May 1969, Roth announced to the press that he would run for Senator Williams’s seat with the senator’s blessing.<sup>69</sup> Williams neither treated Roth as his protégé nor did he insist on playing a role in Roth’s campaign. He left his successor free from any obligation to him. To do otherwise would have been inconsistent with Williams’s belief that U.S. senators must not be beholden to the dictates of others. Williams did do Roth’s candidacy a great service, however, by telling the people of Sussex County that “I . . . can’t think of any man in the state I’d rather turn my job over to.”<sup>70</sup> In one final demonstration of his support, Williams resigned from the Senate on January 1, 1971, two days ahead of schedule, so that Bill Roth could begin his term early and thus gain seniority over other newly elected senators.

On a cold, windy day in early November 1970, Delawareans gathered to celebrate the traditional Sussex County ritual of Return Day. Bill Roth had the flu and could not attend, but his wife Jane was there with the family’s mascot, a massive, friendly St. Bernard

named Ludwig, who wore a blanket bearing the message "Thank You." Other Delaware politicians, past and present, including Senator Caleb Boggs, former governor Elbert Carvel, Governor Russell Peterson, former Senator Allen Frear, and the newly elected U.S. Representative Pierre du Pont were all on hand, together with high school bands, antique cars, Georgetownites in period costumes, festive floats, the traditional horses and carriages to carry the winners and losers, and even a U.S. Marine Corps Band. John J. Williams, Sussex County's native son, was guest of honor.

Wearing a dark coat and a fedora, Williams stood expressionless to hear the accolades that were showered upon him. "This year," the program read, "the Sussex County Return Day Committee has unanimously agreed to break all precedents and traditions by extending a special honor to one of its most beloved and respected citizens. We are proud to proclaim him as our outstanding citizen—one of us who has served all of us well. He has brought honor and acclaim to himself, his community, Sussex County, the State of Delaware, and the Nation." Speaking in his thin reedy voice, in the southern Delaware accent that he shared with most of the crowd, Williams thanked the people for their support. America, he told them, was the greatest country in the world and it had the talent to solve its problems. He noted that many of the problems in medicine and agricultural production that had plagued people in the past had yielded to solutions. Today, he said, we face problems of pollution, poverty, starvation. Many people had lost faith that the government could solve these problems, but he had not. "Don't lose faith in America," he urged the crowd.<sup>71</sup>

On January 13, 1971, Robert (Bobby) Baker, having exhausted his legal appeals, entered the federal prison at Lewisburg, Pennsylvania, to serve a sentence of one to three years. Coincidentally, the following evening a testimonial dinner was held in the Hotel DuPont's Gold Ballroom to honor John Williams. The principal speaker for the evening was Baker's old boss, Democrat Majority Leader Mike Mansfield, who had traveled to Wilmington to pay tribute to a personal friend whom he admired as the "paragon of common sense, a friend of frugality, and a force for fiscal morality." He would miss Williams, he said, particularly at 7 A.M. each weekday morning when they had often shared breakfast with Senator Aiken in the Senate cafeteria.<sup>72</sup> In a later interview Mansfield recalled that the three senators, all from states with small populations, discussed politics only once: when Mansfield was up for reelection in Montana and Aiken and Williams offered to go there to speak, either pro or con, whichever might promote Mansfield's

popularity with the voters. As majority leader, Mansfield had no trouble working with Williams because the Delawarean always kept his word and voted his conscience, not his party. He recalled that Lyndon Johnson had been less appreciative of Williams. "When John Williams got up to speak, it was like lighting a match and Lyndon was ready to go after him—but John Williams usually got the last word."<sup>73</sup>

John and Elsie Williams had less difficulty readjusting to life in their home town than is typical among couples who have spent many years in Washington. Beyond the obvious factor of the proximity of Millsboro to the nation's capital, the Williamses had, in a real sense, never left home. John Williams had always thought of himself as the people of Delaware's representative in Washington, not as a Washingtonian who occasionally returned home to touch base with his constituents. Throughout his years in the Senate he had faithfully returned to Millsboro almost every weekend to receive local visitors in his feed company office and to examine his farms, talk with his tenants, and keep abreast of the feed company's business affairs. By 1971 John had long since given up management of those businesses, first to his brother Preston, then later to his son-in-law, Raymond Baker.

In the 1970s tourism and recreation were becoming major businesses in the coastal portion of Sussex County. Descendants of James Tunnell, Sr., the man whom Williams had toppled to go to the Senate in 1947, were among the first to dredge and fill marshy land that they owned near Massey's Landing, along the west bank of the Indian River Bay, where they developed mobile home communities with names like Pot Nets and Indian Landing for recreational boaters and fishermen. Soon other land owners in the area did the same. Baker and Williams sold land along the access road leading to the Tunnell's vacation communities for the development of a small strip of stores. On a larger scale, Williams and his son-in-law developed a tract of land that fronted on picturesque Guinea Creek and was accessible to the Rehoboth Bay. They called the community of upscale permanent residences that were constructed on this tranquil site Winding Creek Village.

Williams made the old feed-company office adjacent to the Millsboro railroad siding his permanent office. There, in a room with inexpensive recreation-room style wood paneled walls, John Williams and Eleanor Lenhart, who had returned to Millsboro to continue working for the senator, weeded piles of senatorial correspondence to destroy all evidence of accusations that had proven

untrue. Williams did not want to cause suffering to people who had been falsely accused or to their families. In his post-senatorial interviews, Williams admitted to having made many mistakes in the Senate. He always professed to having disliked accusing people of wrong doing, and emphasized how careful he had been to make certain of the facts in such cases, while also recognizing that innocent family members suffered when guilty persons were exposed.<sup>74</sup>

The year 1971 must have seemed like one long parade of accolades for the former senator as service clubs, schools, and colleges throughout Delaware presented him with awards and sat respectfully to hear his opinions on public affairs. Then, quite suddenly, in November a faint cloud of doubt appeared to obscure the Williams legend. The crusader for corporate accountability, Ralph Nader, sent a study group to Delaware to investigate the influence of the DuPont Company and du Pont family on the state. Headed by James L. Phelan, a third-year law student at Yale, the group of young enthusiastic people, most in their early twenties, came to Delaware intent on finding evidence to show that DuPont dominated the tiny state, its government, its courts, its nonprofit institutions, and its politicians. Even Mr. Integrity, Senator John Williams, they charged, had once assisted du Pont family members by sponsoring special legislation to ease their tax burden.

Delawareans first found out about those charges on November 30, 1971, when the *Wilmington Morning News* published the banner headline, "Williams Linked to Tax-Break Bill." The story that followed, written by political correspondent Ralph S. Moyed, was based on a preliminary copy of the Nader group's report. Moyed explained that Irénée du Pont, Sr., a former president of the DuPont Company and among the wealthiest members of the family, owned a large palatial vacation property in Cuba that he called Xanadu. After the Cuban revolution, Fidel Castro's government seized all American-owned property. According to the Nader group, Irénée du Pont's heirs had gone to see Williams, who had agreed to assist them to get compensation. Williams subsequently amended the Revenue Act of 1964 to permit the heirs to take a huge tax deduction to cover their loss.

Asked by telephone about the report, Williams told Moyed that he could not recall the incident, "but I would have done it because it's routine," and added "I don't think they [the du Ponts] ever considered that I carried the ball for them."<sup>75</sup> Williams also reminded the journalist of the relative insignificance of the du Pont family holdings in Cuba compared to the entirety of American property

claims against Castro. His explanation failed to deflect criticism. An editorial in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* noted ironically that Williams had provided special favors to a rich family of his state at the very time when he had been attacking Bobby Baker for influence peddling.<sup>76</sup> Two weeks later, at a press conference held to announce the publication of their exposé entitled *The Company State*, the Nader group's leader, James Phelan, defended his group's charges against Williams, saying, "the report shows that even a guy like Senator Williams gives in."<sup>77</sup>

In December 1971 *The Company State* was the talk of Delaware. The book offered a catalog of accusations that the DuPont Company, its founding family, and its agents had exerted strong-arm tactics to win favoritism. Delawareans ignored the authors' proclaimed but undeveloped goal "to provide a framework for assessing the community policies of large firms throughout the country" in an orgy of excitement over the book's many claims of unethical acts committed by or for the du Ponts. The Xanadu tax-break story appeared in a chapter entitled "Lawmakers and Lawbreakers," under the subheading "special Law For Special People." The investigators charged that Irénée du Pont's heirs had hired a Washington lawyer who had illegally lobbied on their behalf in Congress without registering as a DuPont lobbyist. The lawyer-lobbyist had met with Senator Williams and had reported to the heirs that Williams was sympathetic to their plight and had agreed to help. Subsequently, Williams introduced an amendment to the Revenue Act of 1964 to cover Americans' loss of private property in Cuba.

Williams was incensed at the perceived challenge to his integrity. In an effort to establish his innocence, he dug through the vast mound of as yet unorganized files in his office and even spent a week in Washington tracking down additional information. He then took the "sheaf of letters and other documents" together with a ten-page rejoinder to the Nader version of the story to the editors of Delaware's major newspapers. "Though clearly smarting under the aspersions cast upon him," the editor of the *Delaware State News* wrote, Williams tried to control his anger. "It is obvious," Williams told the *State News* editor, his voice rising to an uncharacteristic decibel level, "that he [Nader] first wrote his conclusions and then stopped looking for any facts which did not coincide with his views."<sup>78</sup>

The Williams version of events differed little from the Nader group's as to the facts, but it differed greatly concerning the construction one might put on those facts. Williams disputed the allegation that the du Pont's lobbyist had influenced him. Having heard

similar stories from others who had lost property to Castro, Williams had already planned to introduce the amendment when the lobbyist came to his office, he said. Williams emphasized that the goal of his amendment had been to relieve all American property holders unfairly penalized by Castro's seizures, not just the du Ponts. In a subsequent edition of *The Company State* published in 1973, the Nader group noted that Irénée du Pont's Xanadu had been by far the largest such private holding, a fact of which Williams could not have been unaware.<sup>79</sup>

Another issue of contention was the Nader group's claim that neither the Treasury Department nor the Finance Committee had been given the opportunity to study and accept Williams's Cuban property compensation amendment. Various interpretations might be placed on the words exchanged on the Senate floor when Williams had brought the amendment forward on February 7, 1964. On that day the Senate was scheduled to vote on the revenue bill. After the Senate vote, a conference committee, made up of members from both houses, would meet to work out differences between their two versions of the legislation. As minority leader of Finance, Williams played an active role in the discussion on the floor, introducing or cosponsoring several amendments. His cosponsors for the Cuban confiscations amendment were Senators Gordon L. Allott of Colorado and George A. Smathers of Florida. When he introduced the amendment, Williams told the Senate that he had cleared it with both the Finance Committee and the Treasury Department. The Nader group disputed that statement on the basis of Finance Chairman Russell Long's response that the "matter" of an adjustment to the amendment could be worked out in conference with the cooperation of the Treasury Department. The Nader team took that to mean that the Cuban confiscation tax break had not been vetted before those groups previously. But, in the context of the Senate discussion, Long's words more likely suggested that since the House version of the tax bill did not include the Williams amendment, it would be a subject for discussion when the conference committee met.

After Long spoke, Williams provided the Senate with a short argument designed to show why the amendment was appropriate. "I see no reason why individuals whose property is confiscated by Castro should not be allowed to claim such loss . . . in the same manner they would should the property be destroyed by fire or flood." Senator Smathers agreed, saying, "the amendment would provide simple justice for everyone." No one rose to disagree. The Senate then adopted the amendment by voice vote. Ironically, when

the vote on the full revenue bill was taken later in the day, Senator Williams was among a minority of twenty-one who voted in the negative.<sup>80</sup>

The Nader group's implication that Williams had sneaked the amendment onto the Senate floor at the request of the du Ponts' lobbyist was particularly galling to the senator. He went to considerable lengths to show that he had personally drafted the amendment without the urging or help of outside parties. Furthermore, Williams said, the Nader group had based some of its conclusions on letters exchanged between the du Pont heirs and their lobbyist in which the latter claimed credit for having secured Williams's assistance on his client's behalf. Such letters Williams contended, were standard fare among Washington lobbyists. "That's how they build their fees."<sup>81</sup>

Once Williams made his explanation public, the voices of Delaware's leaders rose to support their favorite son. The *Wilmington Evening Journal* editor said that while there was much merit in the Nader study, it had many errors, the "most serious" of which were "statements that misrepresent the actions and impugn the motives of honorable men," including Williams.<sup>82</sup> That same day, Senator Bill Roth defended his predecessor on the Senate floor noting the irony that Williams "should now be the victim of precisely the kind of action he always shunned—an attack based on innuendos and incomplete investigations."<sup>83</sup> Many other members added their voices in support of their former colleague's unshakeable integrity, drawing attention particularly to Williams's refusal to kowtow to the DuPont Company's desires when the GM divestiture had required special tax legislation.

The Nader matter now safely behind him, John Williams and Elsie embarked on a month-long round-the-world tour in early 1972 that included a visit to Bangkok, Thailand, to see their granddaughter and her husband, an army officer stationed there. They were back in the United States in June 1972 when the plumbers' unlocked door opened the house of horrors known as Watergate. As Delaware's greatest living authority on questions of integrity in government, John Williams was frequently asked his views as the evidence mounted against Nixon and his White House associates. In August 1972 Senator William Proxmire even suggested Williams's name as an appropriate person to participate in an independent investigation of the Watergate affair, but nothing came of it.<sup>84</sup> In March 1973 as the first barricade of silence was beginning to give way in the White House, President Nixon and his chief aide, H. R. Haldeman, considered the possibility of appointing a com-

mission to study the matter in the hopes that their cover-up might hold through such an enquiry. Haldeman suggested the names of senators Sam Ervin of North Carolina and Howard Baker of Kentucky, both members of the Senate committee that later held public hearings on Watergate, as potential members of such a commission, and then considered John Williams on the grounds that the former Delaware senator was “unassailable.”<sup>85</sup> Nothing came of that discussion either.

Williams made no effort to conceal his distaste for Nixon’s handling of Watergate. In April 1973, on the eve of the Ervin Committee’s hearings, he told a reporter for the *Los Angeles Times* that the President’s stonewalling and invocation of executive privilege were “indefensible” and warned that if the President did not provide a full explanation and complete access to the record, the good things that he had accomplished during his administration would be forgotten in the wake of the scandal.<sup>86</sup> Later that spring, at a time when most Republicans were still defending Nixon, Williams told a Delaware audience that Watergate represented “an arrogant misuse of power.”<sup>87</sup> In July 1973, following the revelation of the Oval Office tape recordings, columnist James J. Kirkpatrick suggested that a small committee of people noted for unimpeachable integrity, including John Williams, be appointed to listen to the tapes and extract germane information without prejudicing national security.<sup>88</sup> Nothing came of that suggestion either because Nixon was then confident that he could maintain the confidentiality of the tapes.

Williams did not merely denounce the Nixon White House’s handling of Watergate, he saw the scandal as an opportunity to enact reforms. Several months before Nixon was forced to resign, the *Readers’ Digest* published an article by John Williams entitled “After Watergate: A Plan to Control Campaign Bankrolling,” in which the former senator made several specific suggestions to clean up election campaigns. Williams urged that: (1) campaigns be shortened; (2) candidates be given free television time and mailing rights; (3) big business and big labor be ineligible to bankroll campaigns; (4) small contributions become the backbone of political financing; and (5) enforcement of the existing campaign funding laws be made stricter.<sup>89</sup> Williams’s suggestions went unheeded.

As the years passed, John Williams receded from public view, but he was never forgotten. Senator John, as he was known in his home town, enjoyed visiting with his grandchildren and remained one of the regulars at breakfast at Sam’s Restaurant, later called Floyd’s, a low-slung white building about a block from his home. There, where he insisted on being called by his first name, he

amused his fellow Millsboroites with stories of his days in Washington. One of the restaurant's other regulars was Williams's friend Richard Cordrey, a Democrat, who rose to be majority leader of the State Senate. Williams also indulged in practical jokes at Sam's, some designed to pay back those who had done such things as to put salt in his coffee once during his Senate days.

On the occasion of his eighty-fourth birthday, the Sussex County Republicans published an interview with the senator in which he said that the two greatest presidents during his years in Washington had been Truman and Eisenhower. He especially admired Truman for his handling of General MacArthur, Williams said, once again proving his independence from Republican conservative doctrine. The years had not softened his view of Lyndon Johnson, however. "I had no respect for the man," he was quoted as saying. "He was known as a 'strong man.' I was never impressed by him."<sup>90</sup> Looking back, he recalled when he had first come to Millsboro in 1922 before electricity was available in the town, and, he added, before crime had become a problem even in small-town America. In 1987 he told a reporter that he never voted a straight Republican ticket and that in Washington he had tried to represent the people of Delaware, not the Republican Party. He acknowledged that "the civil rights bills and decisions had to be done. A lot of people opposed them, but now when you look back, it is obvious that it was done for the good of the country."<sup>91</sup>

On January 11, 1988, John Williams died of heart failure in the Beebe Medical Center in Lewes, Delaware. His wife, Elsie, outlived him by only two years, dying in February 1990. They are buried in Millsboro.

An appropriate eulogy for John Williams might be the one he offered for Jesse Cooper, the man who in 1949 had alerted Williams to the national tax scandal. Speaking at the dedication of a state building in Dover in 1971, which, at John Williams's insistence, was named in honor of Cooper, Williams had said: "The life span of a man is but a fleeting moment in the passage of time, and yet in each generation there arise a few who, as the result of their unselfish dedication to the service of their country and fellow man, leave a record that will live long after they have departed this life. Such a man was Jesse Cooper."<sup>92</sup> Such a man was John Williams.

# Notes

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30. Williams Papers, Box 18, Folder 028. J. E. McNamee report to Paul A.

Hankins, Deputy Commissioner of Accounts and Collections, BIR, 13 November 1947.

31. *Ibid.*, G. J. Schoeneman to John J. Williams, 25 February 1948.

32. *Ibid.*

33. Williams Papers, Box 21, File 113. J. E. McNamee to Paul A. Hankins, 13 November 1947.

34. Williams Papers, Box 18, Folder 028. Subcommittee transcript of 31 March 1948.

35. *Wilmington Sunday Star*, 22 February 1948.

36. *Wilmington Morning News*, 29 May 1948; and *Congressional Record*, 80th Congress, 2nd Session, 1948, Vol. 94, pt. 5: 6686 and 6690.

37. *Wilmington Sunday Star*, 15 August 1948; and *Congressional Record*, 80th Congress, 2nd Session, 1948, Vol. 94, pt 8: 9803; see also 6 August, 9956–57.

38. *Pacific Northwest Co-Operator*, Summer 1948 and *Labor*, 18 September 1948, which charged that Williams had “made a fortune in the grain business as a ‘middleman’ ” and therefore opposed co-ops because they eliminated the middleman.

39. *New York Times*, 26 March 1949.

40. *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 20 April 1949.

41. Matusow, *Farm Policies*, 173–76.

42. *Washington Post*, 23 April 1949; and *Congressional Record*, 81st Congress, 1st Session, 1949, Vol. 95, pt. 5: 4932–33.

43. *Washington Post*, 18 August 1948.

44. Williams Papers, Box 12. James C. Derieux to Glenn D. Everett, 1 July 1949.

45. Glenn D. Everett, “WOW! Did Truman Ever Fool the Farmers!,” *Saturday Evening Post*, 16 August 1952, 30, 83.

46. *Ibid.*

## CHAPTER 5: UNCOVERING THE TAX MESS

1. Morrissey interview, 12.

2. *Ibid.*, 13.

3. Eleanor Lenhart Hoefler, interview by the author, Millsboro, DE, 26 August 1994.

4. *Ibid.*

5. Morrissey interview, 13.

6. *Ibid.*

7. *Ibid.*, 24.

8. Alonzo L. Hamby, *Beyond the New Deal: Harry S. Truman and American Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1973), 463.

9. *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 12 January 1951; and *Omaha World-Herald*, 19 January 1951.

10. *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 26 January 1951.

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12. *Ibid.*, 950.

13. *New York Journal*, 6 February 1951.

14. Williams Papers, Box 20. H. Alston Jeffers, New York City, to John J. Williams, 7 February 1951.

15. *Ibid.*, John O. Hopkins to John J. Williams, 8 May 1951.
16. Williams Papers, Box 22. Hearings of Subcommittee Investigating Internal Revenue Collectors of the Committee on Finance, 20 March 1951.
17. *Ibid.*
18. *Congressional Record*, 82nd Congress, 1st Session, 1951, Vol. 97, pt. 4, 4929.
19. Williams Papers, Box 27, Folder 352. John J. Williams to John W. Snyder, Secretary of the Treasury, 11 April 1951.
20. *Congressional Record*, 82nd Congress, 1st Session, 1951, Vol. 97, pt. 4, 4929–40.
21. Williams Papers, Box 24, Folder 249.
22. Morrissey interview, 32–33.
23. *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 26 August 1951.
24. Williams Papers, Box 29.
25. *Ibid.* George W. Williams to John J. Williams, 15 March 1952.
26. *Ibid.* John J. Williams to Fred W. Voges, 25 August 1952.
27. Williams Papers, Box 17, Folder 10. Richard Hyer to John J. Williams, 31 March 1952.
28. *Ibid.*, Anonymous San Francisco correspondent to John J. Williams, 23 November 1951.
29. Williams Papers, Box 17, Folder 11. O’Gara statement to the Senate Finance Committee, 31 August 1951.
30. *Ibid.*, John J. Williams to Charles O’Gara, 17 December 1951.
31. *Ibid.*, Charles O’Gara to John J. Williams, 9 December 1951.
32. Williams Papers, Box 17, Folder 9. Undated memo.
33. *Congressional Record*, 82nd Congress, 1st Session, 1951, Vol. 97, pt. 10, 13325–30.
34. Williams Papers, Box 24, Folder 247. David Heller to John J. Williams, 8 October 1957.
35. Williams Papers, Box 24, Folder 243. Subcommittee meeting of 13 March 1952.
36. Williams Papers, Box 24, Folder 246. Meeting of 15 September 1955.
37. Williams Papers, Box 25, Folder 291.
38. Williams Papers, Box 133, Folder 105. John J. Williams speech before the Senate, 28 February 1952. See also *Congressional Record*, 82nd Congress, 2nd Session, 1952, Vol 5, pt. 2, 1579.
39. Williams Papers, Box 25, Folder 291.
40. Internal Revenue Investigation, House of Representatives, 82nd Congress, 2nd Session, Vol. I, 277.
41. See David McCullough, *Truman* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992), 862; and Robert H. Ferrell, *Harry S. Truman: A Life* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1994), 363.
42. James H. Shelton, “The Tax Scandals of the 1950s.” (Ph.D. diss., American University, 1971), 314.
43. The story of this legislation is described in Andrew J. Dunbar, *The Truman Scandals and the Politics of Morality* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1984), 121–34.
44. *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 26 August 1951.
45. *U. S. News and World Report*, 12 October 1951.
46. Williams Collection Scrapbook, September 15–December 1951, clipping taken from “Grain Dealer turns graft exposer,” *Pathfinder*, October 17, 1951, no pages.

47. Richard L. Williams, "The Hands in the Taxpayers' Pocket: The Truman Administration's Worst Scandal is in the Making as Corruption is Found Throughout Internal Revenue Bureau," *Life*, 19 November 1951, 146–160.

48. Fletcher Knebel, "The Man Who Broke the Tax Scandal," *Look*, 18 December 1951, 69–70.

49. Stanley High, "Williams of Delaware—The Senate's One Man FBI," *Readers' Digest*, February 1952, 140–45.

50. Tanley, "The Man Who Broke the Tax Scandal," *The American Magazine*, February, 1952, 119.

51. Paul F. Healy, "He Exposed the Thefts in the Revenue Bureau," *Saturday Evening Post*, 1 March 1952, 17.

52. *Time*, 13 October 1952.

53. Hoefler, interview.

54. *Time*, 13 October 1952, 27.

55. The oft-repeated view that Truman was "right on all the big things, wrong on most of the little ones" goes back to the latter days of the Truman administration when journalists such as James Reston of the *New York Times* wrote in praise of the President's foreign policy initiatives and saw his failing to keep his underlings in order as a relatively minor flaw. The appraisal is commonly attributed to Speaker of the House Sam Rayburn, one of Truman's oldest and staunchest friends. Cabell Phillips, *The Truman Presidency: The History of a Triumphant Succession* (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1966), 3. Robert H. Ferrell, another Truman biographer, concludes of the "mess in Washington" that it "was the sort of political mess that contained too many errors of judgment to dismiss and yet was basically about minor irrelevant matters." See Ferrell, *Harry S. Truman*, 359.

56. Jules Abels, *The Truman Scandals* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1956), 29.

57. *Ibid.*, 312.

58. Phillips, *Truman Presidency*, 411.

59. Carolyn C. Jones, "Mass-Based Income Taxation: Creating a Taxpaying Culture, 1940–1952," in W. Elliot Brownlee, ed., *Funding the Modern American State* (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1996), 106.

60. *Ibid.*, 139–41.

61. Shelton, *Tax Scandals*, 23–27.

62. *Wilmington Morning News*, 22 August 1952.

63. Morrissey interview, 12.

64. *Ibid.*, 36.

65. *Ibid.*, 23.

## CHAPTER 6: THE EISENHOWER ERA

1. *Wilmington Morning News*, 9 July 1952.

2. *Washington Evening Star*, 2 September 1952.

3. *Wilmington Morning News*, 3 September 1952.

4. *Ibid.*

5. *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 4 September 1952.

6. "Meet Lex Bayard the Fighting Legislator," campaign comic book, courtesy of Richard H. Bayard.

7. *Time*, 13 October 1952.

8. *Wilmington Journal-Every Evening*, 19 February 1952.

9. *Wilmington Morning News*, 3 November 1952.
10. Williams Papers, Box 131, Folder 41.
11. Williams Papers, Box 132, Folder 42. Everett M. Dirksen to John J. Williams, 16 December 1952.
12. *Wilmington Morning News*, 5 November 1952.
13. *Wilmington Journal-Every Evening*, 27 August 1952.
14. *Wilmington Morning News*, 23 September 1952.
15. *Wilmington Journal-Every Evening*, 27 August 1952.
16. *Wilmington Sunday Star*, 14 September 1952.
17. *U. S. News and World Report*, 15 August 1952, 19.
18. *Wilmington Morning News*, 16 September 1952.
19. Ibid.
20. Williams Papers, Box 132, Folder 42. John J. Williams to Everett M. Dirksen, 17 October 1952.
21. Ibid., Cortland Schoonover to John J. Williams, 23 October 1952.
22. *Wilmington Journal-Every Evening*, 19 September 1952.
23. *Wilmington Journal-Every Evening*, 28 August 1952.
24. *Wilmington Morning News*, 13 October 1952.
25. *Wilmington Morning News*, 22 October 1952.
26. Williams Papers, Box 124, Folder 12. G. Everett to John J. Williams, 18 September 1952.
27. *Wilmington Morning News*, 23 September 1952.
28. *Wilmington Journal-Every Evening*, 25 September 1952.
29. *Wilmington Morning News*, 15 October 1952.
30. *Wilmington Morning News*, 22 October 1952.
31. *Wilmington Sunday Star*, 2 November 1952.
32. *Wilmington Morning News*, 10 October 1952.
33. *Wilmington Morning News*, 21 October 1952.
34. Williams Papers, Box 144. Edwin F. Koester to John J. Williams, 6 February 1963, describes a visit to Frank du Pont's office during the election campaign in which the party leader expressed his reservations about Williams.
35. *Wilmington Morning News*, 7 November 1952.
36. Williams Papers, 1952 Scrapbook. Bernard M. Baruch of New York to John J. Williams, 7 November 1952.
37. Williams Papers, Box 131, Folder 40. Frank du Pont to John J. Williams, 5 November 1952.
38. *Wilmington Journal-Every Evening*, 7 November 1952.
39. *New York Herald-Tribune*, 19 November 1952.
40. *Washington Daily News*, 2 December 1952.
41. Richard Rovere, *Senator Joe McCarthy* (New York: Harcourt, Brace Jovanovich, 1959), 187–88.
42. *Chicago Daily News*, 10 April 1953.
43. *Washington Daily News*, 20 March 1953; *Wilmington Journal-Every Evening*, 20 March 1953; *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, 23 March 1953; and the *New York Times*, 31 March 1953.
44. *Washington Times-Herald*, 31 March 1953.
45. Dwight David Eisenhower, *Mandate for Change* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1963), 218.
46. *Denver Post*, 2 March 1954.
47. Williams Papers, Box 54, Folder 20. Voting records.
48. *Forbes Magazine*, 15 April 1959, 17.

49. Matusow, *Farm Policies*, 202–3.
50. *Wilmington Morning News*, 27 April 1955.
51. *Washington Daily News*, 26 February 1959; and the *New York World Telegram & Sun*, 26 February 1959.
52. Williams Papers, Scrapbooks. Seton Ross, *Memphis, Tennessee, Cotton Trade Journal*, No Date.
53. *Wilmington Journal-Every Evening*, 3 March 1959.
54. *Pittsburgh Press*, 11 July 1953.
55. *Wilmington Journal-Every Evening*, 16 February 1955.
56. Williams Papers, Box 72, Folder 449.
57. *Ibid.* Frank du Pont to John J. Williams, 1 March 1954.
58. Judge Caleb M. Wright, interview by the author, Wilmington, DE, 15 October 1993.
59. Williams Papers, Box 110, Folder 926. Mrs. Edmund N. Carpenter II to John J. Williams, 30 April 1954.
60. *Ibid.*, John J. Williams to the Honorable Herbert Brownell, Jr., 15 December 1954.
61. *Ibid.*, J. Caleb Boggs to John J. Williams, 7 January 1955.
62. *Ibid.*, John J. Williams to the Honorable Herbert Brownell, Jr., 19 January 1955.
63. Sussex County Bar Association, resolution dated 31 May 1955; Kent County Bar Association, resolution dated 6 June 1955.
64. Williams Papers, Box 72, Folder 449. Memos to file dated 6, 7, and 8 June 1955.
65. Williams Papers, Box 144, Folder 20.
66. *Wilmington Morning News*, 9 January 1962.
67. Williams Papers, Box 5, Folder 251.
68. *Congressional Record*, 85th Congress, 2nd Session, 1958, Vol. 104, pt. 9, 11503.
69. Ned Davis, “Things Politic,” *Delaware State News*, 13 January 1958, 4.
70. *Wilmington Morning News*, 19 November 1957.
71. *Roll Call*, 15 January 1958.
72. Williams Papers, Box 131, Folder 37. October 1958.
73. *Ibid.*, 15 September 1958.
74. *Ibid.*, 27 August 1958.
75. *Ibid.*, Opinion Research Corporation, “Confidential Survey for the Delaware State Committee,” August 1958.
76. *Wilmington Morning News*, 3 November 1958.
77. *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 28 October 1958.

## CHAPTER 7: DESEGREGATION

1. Annette Woolard, “A Family of Firsts: The Reddings of Delaware” (Ph.D. diss., University of Delaware, 1993), 282.
2. *Wilmington Morning News*, 24 September 1954.
3. *Wilmington Morning News*, 21 September 1954.
4. *Wilmington Morning News*, 22 September 1954.
5. *Wilmington Morning News*, 27 September 1954.
6. *Ibid.*
7. *Wilmington Morning News*, 28 September 1954.

8. *Wilmington Morning News*, 27 September 1954.
9. *Wilmington Morning News*, 28 September 1954.
10. See Ed Kee, "The Brown Decision and Milford, Delaware, 1954–1965," *Delaware History* 27, no. 4, (Fall-Winter 1997–1998), pp. 205–43 for a detailed examination of "the Milford incident."
11. *Wilmington Morning News*, 1 October 1954.
12. *Wilmington Morning News*, 11 October 1954.
13. *Wilmington Morning News*, 6 October 1954.
14. *Wilmington Morning News*, 13 April 1970.
15. Williams Papers, Box 3, Folder 192.
16. *Wilmington Morning News*, 13 October 1954.
17. Williams Papers, Box 3, Folder 192.
18. *Ibid.*
19. *Wilmington Morning News*, 14 October 1954.
20. *Wilmington Morning News*, 18 October 1954.
21. *Wilmington Morning News*, 20 October 1954.
22. The State Board of Education received an additional legal impetus from a case filed by Louis L. Redding on behalf of clients in rural Clayton, Delaware, entitled *Evans vs. Buchanan* in 1956, but the full impact of that litigation would not be felt for another decade (*Evans v. Buchanan*, 152F.Supp. 886, 889 (D. Del. 1957)).
23. Williams Papers, Box 3, Folder 192. "Millsboro Desegregation Plan, 1965."
24. *Wilmington Morning News*, 13 April 1970.
25. Williams Papers, Box 65, Folder 234. Dr. George R. Miller, Jr., Secretary, State Board of Education in Dover to John J. Williams, 21 November 1954.
26. *Ibid.*, Typical letter expressing this view from Irving L. Dempsey of Wilmington, Delaware, 13 October 1959.
27. J. Harvie Wilkinson III, *Harry Byrd and the Changing Face of Virginia Politics, 1945–1966* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 1968), 152. See also Ronald L. Heineman, *Harry Byrd of Virginia* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 1996), 329.
28. Williams Papers, Box 65, Folder 234. O. A. Bartley, District Superintendent Peninsula Conference of the Methodist Church, Dover, to John J. Williams, 11 October 1954.
29. *Ibid.*, John A. Perkins to John J. Williams, 12 October 1954.
30. *Ibid.*, Ira C. Workman of Salisbury, Maryland, to John J. Williams, 9 October 1954, and Williams's response of 14 October 1954.
31. Williams Papers, Box 3, Folder 192. J. Caleb Boggs to John J. Williams, 13 October 1954.
32. Williams Papers, Box 24, Folder 239. John J. Williams to Russell C. Harrington, 20 February 1956.
33. *Ibid.*, James M. Tunnell, Jr. to John J. Williams, 20 February 1956.
34. *Ibid.*, Eleanor Lenhart memo of 7 March 1956.
35. *Ibid.*, John J. Williams statement of 28 May 1956.
36. *Ibid.*, John J. Williams to Mary H. Robinson, 18 December 1956; *The Sussex Countian*, 6 December 1956.
37. *Ibid.*, John J. Williams to Elwood A. Tazewell of Wilmington, Delaware, 11 December 1956.
38. Woolard, "A Family of Firsts," 282.
39. Powell was tried for failure to pay his income taxes, but the trial resulted in a hung jury on 23 April 1960.

40. Williams Papers, Box 41, Folder 103. Williams statement of 5 February 1963.
41. *Washington Daily News*, 20 February 1963; *Muhammad Speaks*, 15 April 1963.
42. *Wilmington Morning News*, 7 February 1963.
43. *The Reporter*, 11 February 1965.
44. *Fort Lauderdale News*, 7 February 1963.
45. *Washington Post*, 22 February 1963.
46. *Washington Afro American*, 23 February 1963.
47. Williams Papers, Box 110, Folder 896. John J. Williams to Leslie S. Perry, 2 May 1949.
48. Williams Papers, Box 110, Folder 894. John J. Williams to Mrs. R. W. Hamilton of Ringwood, New Jersey, 6 December 1963.
49. *Wilmington Morning News*, 25 February 1963.
50. *Wilmington Morning News*, 21 February 1963.
51. *Wilmington Morning News*, 27 August 1963.
52. *Wilmington Morning News*, 28 August 1963.
53. *Wilmington Morning News*, 21 October 1963.
54. Williams Papers, Box 109, Folder 880. John J. Williams to Bernard M. Taylor of Wilmington, Delaware, 21 May 1964.
55. *Wilmington Morning News*, 28 April 1964.
56. *Wilmington Morning News*, 27 April 1964.
57. *Ibid.*
58. *Wilmington Morning News*, 29 April 1964.
59. Williams Papers, Box 109, Folder 880. John J. Williams to John Quincy Adams of San Marcos, Texas, 10 June 1964.
60. *Wilmington Morning News*, 12 June 1964.
61. *Wilmington Morning News*, 23 June 1964.
62. *Wilmington Evening Journal*, 23 June 1964.
63. *Delaware State News*, 19 June 1964.
64. Williams Papers, Box 190, Folder 877. John J. Williams to David Lawrence, 22 April 1965.
65. *Wilmington Morning News*, 17 March 1965.
66. *Wilmington Morning News*, 14 April 1965; *Congressional Record*, 89th Congress, 1st Session, 1965, Vol. 111, pt. 6: 7844–45.
67. *Wilmington Morning News*, 15 May 1965; *Wilmington News Journal*, 7 August 1965.
68. Williams Papers, Box 109, Folder 873. John J. Williams to Rt. Rev. Msgr. Paul J. Taggart of Wilmington, Delaware, 29 March 1968.
69. Williams Papers, Box 109, Folder 876. John J. Williams to Richard L. Ullman, 11 October 1965.
70. *Wilmington Evening Journal*, 13 May 1968; and *Wilmington Evening Journal*, 20 May 1966, interview with Littleton Mitchell.
71. Williams Papers, Box 109, Folder 875. John J. Williams to James M. Hubka of Birmingham, Alabama, 9 December 1966.

## CHAPTER 8: THE DUPONT DIVESTITURE

1. Charles W. Cheape, *Strictly Business: Walter Carpenter at DuPont and General Motors* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 234.

2. Another du Pont family syndicate, Delaware Realty and Investment Company, had become a part of Christiana Securities prior to the government's antitrust suit.

3. Theodore P. Kovaleff, *Business and Government During the Eisenhower Administration* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1980), 3-7.

4. *U. S. v. E. I. Du Pont de Nemours & Co.*, 353 US 586, (77 S. Ct. 872 1957).

5. Cheape, *Strictly Business*, 242.

6. Papers of Senator J. Allen Frear, Jr., University of Delaware Library, Newark, Delaware, Box 12, Folder 39. Robert F. Kelly to John L. Bradley, 6 June 1957. Hereafter cited as Frear Papers.

7. Williams Papers, Box 11, Folder 239. Frear described these events in a speech before the Wilmington Rotary Club on 22 October 1959.

8. Williams Papers, Box 88, Folder 298. Ollieve D. Dumanick of Wilmington, Delaware, to John J. Williams, 24 April 1959.

9. *Ibid.*, A. M. and A. I. Northam of Wilmington, Delaware, to John J. Williams, 23 April 1959.

10. *Ibid.*, Many copies.

11. *Wilmington Journal-Every Evening*, 11 September 1959.

12. Williams Papers, Box 88, Folder 295. Earl C. James of Wilmington, Delaware, to John J. Williams, 28 October 1959.

13. *Ibid.*, Ignace J. Krelima of Newark, Delaware, to John J. Williams, 12 November 1959.

14. Williams Papers, Box 11, Folder 239. Handwritten notes for a Lions Club speech, "Pay Respects Frear. Regret Difference."

15. Williams Papers, Box 11, Folder 636. John J. Williams to Harry F. Byrd, 10 November 1959.

16. Williams Papers, Box 88, Folder 295. John J. Williams to Thomas W. Pearce of Wilmington, Delaware, 27 November 1959.

17. *Ibid.*, John J. Williams to Earl C. James of Wilmington, Delaware, 15 September 1959.

18. Williams Papers, Box 11, Folder 636. John J. Williams to Harry F. Byrd, 10 November 1959.

19. *Ibid.*, Harry F. Byrd to John J. Williams, 13 November 1959.

20. Frear Papers, Box 41, Folder 174. John J. Williams to J. A. Frear, 4 November 1959.

21. *Ibid.*, J. A. Frear to John J. Williams, 4 December 1959.

22. *U. S. v. E. I. Du Pont de Nemours & Co.*, 177 F. Supp. 1; 1959 Trade Cas. (CCH), 69 and 461.

23. Williams Papers, Box 11, Folder 630. Crawford Greenewalt to John J. Williams, 4 November 1959.

24. Williams Papers, Box 11, Folder 638. L. Schreiber memo of 25 August 1960, "Comments on Senator Williams' Letter to Stockholders."

25. *Ibid.*, John J. Williams to Crawford Greenewalt, 10 November 1959.

26. Williams Papers, Box 88, Folder 293. John J. Williams to William Prickett, 12 August 1960.

27. Frear Papers, Box 41, Folder 173. Memo of 27 June 1960.

28. Williams Papers, Box 11, Folder 635.

29. *Wilmington Morning News*, 10 November 1960.

30. 366 U. S. 316, 81 S. Ct. 1243 (1961).

31. Williams Papers, Box 88, Folder 289. John J. Williams to Nicholas R. du Pont, 18 August 1961.

32. Williams Papers, Box 134, Folder 293; *Congressional Record*, 87th Congress, 2nd Session, 1962, Vol. 108, pt. 1, 703–31.
33. Williams Papers, Scrapbooks, *Washington Post* clipping of January 1962.
34. Cheape, *Strictly Business*, 247, 248.
35. Williams Papers, Box 88, Folder 292. John J. Williams to J. N. Osterlund of Wilmington, Delaware, 27 September 1960.
36. *Ibid.* John J. Williams to Roy A. Kinckiner of Wilmington, Delaware, 21 October 1960.
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38. Cheape, *Strictly Business*, 246–48.

## CHAPTER 9: THE HONOR OF THE SENATE

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2. *Ibid.*, 8657–58.
3. Williams Papers, Box 134, Folder 279.
4. *Washington Post*, 3 February 1962.
5. Clark R. Mollenhoff, *Despoilers of Democracy* (New York: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1965), 50–73.
6. *Congressional Record*, 87th Congress, 1st Session, 1961, Vol. 107, pt. 12, 15982.
7. *The Oil and Gas Journal*, 6 February 1961.
8. Robert S. Kerr, “Tax Loopholes: Fact or Myth?,” *Look*, 13 March 1962, 92–96. Also in Williams Papers, Box 24, Folder 331.
9. Bobby Baker, with Larry King, *Wheeling and Dealing: Confessions of a Capitol Hill Operator* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1978), 87–8.
10. Williams Papers, Box 134, Folder 316. Statement of 23 June 1962.
11. *Baltimore Sun*, 14 May 1962; *Congressional Record*, 87th Congress, 2nd Session, 1962, Vol. 108, pt. 6, 8343.
12. *Delaware State News*, 15 May 1962.
13. *Washington Star News*, 12 May 1962.
14. Williams Papers, Box 1, Folder 40; *Congressional Record*, 87th Congress, 2nd Session, 1962, Vol. 108, pt. 7, 8717–22.
15. Williams Papers, Box 1, Folder 42. John J. Williams memo of 14 July 1973.
16. *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: John F. Kennedy, 1962* (Washington, DC: USGPO, 1963), vol. 198, 407.
17. Williams Papers, Box 134, Folder 319. Statement of 9 July 1962.
18. Mollenhoff, *Despoilers*, 130–31.
19. Williams Papers, Box 1, Folder 40; *Wilmington News Journal*, 15 November 1983.
20. Williams Papers, Box 30, Folder 20. Statement of 10 October 1963.
21. *Washington Post*, 13 October 1963.
22. Baker, *Wheeling and Dealing*, 81–9.
23. *Ibid.*, 88.
24. Ann Hodges Morgan, *Robert S. Kerr: The Senate Years* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1977), vii—viii.
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26. Baker, *Wheeling and Dealing*, 165.
27. Williams Papers, Box 33, Folder 148. Ralph Lee Hill interview of 30 September 1963.
28. Baker, *Wheeling and Dealing*, 179.
29. *Ibid.*, 180.
30. Williams Papers, Box 30, Folder 41. John J. Williams before the Senate Rules Committee, 29 October 1963; *Hearings*, Part 21, 1795.
31. *Congressional Record*, 88th Congress, 1st Session, 1963, Vol 109, pt. 14, 19181.
32. Williams Papers, Box 30, Folder 13. Memo of 14 November 1963.
33. Baker, *Wheeling and Dealing*, 78.
34. *Ibid.*, 80.
35. Williams Papers, Box 30, Folder 12. Xerox copy of undated news clipping.
36. *Ibid.*
37. *Ibid.*, Memo of 10 January 1964.
38. *Ibid.*, Memo of 28 October 1963.
39. On 7 October 1963 Williams took the Senate floor to deny a statement published in the *Washington Post* that he secretly tape recorded interviews with people who came to his office. Nobody would come there, he explained, if they thought that their words were being secretly recorded. *Congressional Record*, 88th Congress, 1st Session, 1963, Vol. 109, pt. 14, 18743.
40. Williams Papers, Box 33, Folder 152. Notes on Williams's meeting with Gertrude Novak of 2 October 1963.
41. Baker, *Wheeling and Dealing*, 156.
42. Williams Papers, Box 33, Folder 157.
43. Mollenhoff, *Despoilers*, 277–78.
44. *Ibid.*, 178.
45. *Ibid.*, 279.
46. *Ibid.*
47. Williams Papers, Box 33, Folder 154. 31 October 1963.
48. *Ibid.*
49. "The Baker Affair," *Newsweek*, 14 October 1963, 30–31.
50. Williams Papers, Box 30, Folder 41, hearings before the Committee on Rules and Administration, United States Senate, 1963.
51. *Ibid.*
52. *Washington Evening Star*, 22 January 1964.
53. *Houston Press*, 25 November 1963.
54. *Wilmington Morning News*, 13 July 1962.
55. Baker, *Wheeling and Dealing*, 183.
56. *Washington Daily News*, 2 October 1963.
57. Williams Papers, Box 30, Folder 20. John J. Williams memo to file of 17 January 1964.
58. *Ibid.* John J. Williams memo to file, 16 January 1964.
59. Baker, *Wheeling and Dealing*, 195.
60. Williams Papers, Box 31, Folder 65. John J. Williams statement to the Senate of 3 April 1964; *Congressional Record*, 88th Congress, 2nd Session, 1964, Vol. 110, pt. 5, 6832.
61. Williams Papers, Box 31, Folder 66, 19 May 1964; *Congressional Record*, 88th Congress, 2nd Session, 1964, Vol. 110, pt. 9, 11253.
62. Michael R. Beschloss, *Taking Charge: The Johnson White House Tapes, 1963–1964* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997), 175.

63. *Ibid.*, 353.
64. *Ibid.*, 239.
65. *Wilmington Morning News*, 8 November 1963.
66. *New York Daily News*, 30 October 1963.
67. *Washington Evening Star*, 1 November 1963.
68. *New York Herald Tribune*, 3 November 1963.
69. *The Miami Herald*, 3 November 1963.
70. Frederick W. Collins, "Senator Williams—Public Eye," *New York Times Magazine*, 9 February 1964, 9.
71. *Ibid.*
72. James Daniel, "Incorruptible John Williams," *Readers' Digest*, May 1964, 105–10.
73. Harold B. Meyers, "The Lone-Wolf Guardian of Federal Morality," *Fortune*, June 1964, 126.
74. *Wilmington Evening Journal*, 12 February 1964.
75. *Wilmington Morning News*, 13 February 1964.
76. *Congressional Record*, 88th Congress, 2nd Session, 110:8, 13 May 1964, 10783–94; *Washington Star*, 13 May 1964.
77. *Wilmington Morning News* and *Delaware State News*, both 19 June 1964.
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## CHAPTER 10: HE JUST PLAYED IT STRAIGHT

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37. *Ibid.*, Robert Dole to John J. Williams, 13 November 1969.
38. *Ibid.*, Roman L. Hruska and Marlow W. Cook to John J. Williams, 9 and 15 October 1969.
39. *Ibid.*, John J. Williams draft statement of 17 November 1969.
40. *Washington Post*, 18 November 1969.
41. *Ibid.*, 20 November 1969.
42. *Ibid.*, 22 November 1969.
43. *Ibid.*, 20 November 1969.
44. *Ibid.*
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47. *Delaware State News*, 18 February 1969.
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51. *Miami Herald*, 23 February 1969.
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53. Nixon, *Memoirs*, 428.
54. *Washington Post*, 26 August 1970.
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58. David R. Maxey, "How Nixon Decided to Invade Cambodia," *Look*, 11 August 1970, 22–25.
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65. *Wilmington Evening Journal*, 19 December 1970; *Congressional Record*, 91st Congress, 2nd Session, 1970, Vol. 116, pt. 32 42333–48. Delaware's junior Republican senator, J. Caleb Boggs, began the testimonials and proceeded to act as "emcee" while the following senators rose to praise John J. Williams: Mike Mansfield (D-MT), 42333; Wallace F. Bennett (R-UT) 42333–34; John Sparkman (D-AL), 42334–35; Russell B. Long (D-LA), 42335; George D. Aiken (R-VT), 42335–36; Carl T. Curtis (R-NB), 42336; J. Strom Thurmond (R-SC), 42336–41; Abraham Ribicoff (D-CT), 42341; Herman E. Talmadge (D-GA), 42341–42; Jack Miller (R-IO), 42342; John O. Pastore (D-RI), 42342; William Proxmire (D-WI), 42342; Harry Flood Byrd Jr. (D, I-VA), 42342–43; Hugh Scott (R-PA), 42343; Thomas J. McIntyre (D-NH), 42343; John Tower (R-TX), 42343; George Murphy (R-CA), 42343; Clifford P. Hansen (R-WY), 42343–44; Edward W. Brooke (R-MA), 42344; Clifford P. Case (R-NJ), 42344; Charles H. Percy (R-IL), 42345; Paul J. Fannin (R-AZ), 42345; Jacob K. Javits (R-NY), 42345–46; Gordon Allott (R-CO), 42346; Norris Cotton (R-NH), 42346; James B. Pearson (R-KS), 42346; Len B. Jordan (R-ID), 42346; Howard H. Baker Jr. (R-TN), 42346–47; Hiram L. Fong (R-HI), 42347; Henry Bellmon (R-OK), 42347; Winston L. Prouty (R-VT), 42347; Edward J. Gurney (R-FL), 42347–48; Ernest F. Hollings (D-SC), 42348; Richard S. Schweiker (R-PA), 42348; Barry Goldwater (R-AZ), 42348; and Ted Stevens (R-AK), 42348.
66. *Wilmington Evening Journal*, 31 December 1969.
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68. Senator William V. Roth, interview by the author. Wilmington, DE, 12 December 1996.
69. *Delaware State News*, 16 May 1969.
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72. *Wilmington Morning News*, 15 January 1971.
73. Senate Majority Leader Michael Mansfield of Montana, interview by the author. 13 August 1996.
74. Morrissey interview, 18.
75. *Wilmington Morning News*, 30 November 1971.
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81. *Wilmington Evening Journal*, 15 December 1971.
82. *Ibid.*
83. *Congressional Record*, 92nd Congress, 1st Session, 1971, Vol. 117, pt. 36, 47417.
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86. *Los Angeles Times*, 12 April 1973.
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