

INTERVIEW FOR THE GEORGE D. WOODS BIOGRAPHY

Transcript of interview with

CHARLES L. BARTLETT

**July 23, 1985
Washington, D.C.**

Interview by: Robert Oliver

[Begin Tape 1, Side A]¹

OLIVER: This is Robert Oliver about to have a conversation with Charles Bartlett about George Woods, talking about some of the things which are perhaps not already transcribed on our previous interview. This is July 23, 1985, at about 2 p.m. in the afternoon. Since we have been talking about the subject already, let me ask you a sort of strange question to begin a conversation with. What sort of frustrations did Mr. Woods have at one time or another in your acquaintanceship with him for whatever reason or at whatever time?

BARTLETT: Well, I was in, had martinis with him after he came back to New York, and we used to talk on the telephone at least once a week, generally on Sunday afternoons. And the frustration that sort of emerged from those conversations was his concern that the system wasn't really functioning well. I mean, he felt that we could be doing a lot better than we were and that this was one of the reasons he agreed to join some of us in this push for a single 6 year term. Even after he wasn't feeling well, he would give some of his energy to this cause because he really believed that a single 6 year term for the President would have been a very great asset. He was there at the founding meeting in the University Club in New York. I think it was the year that he died. And we met, and he was on hand, and he was one of the luminaries. But George, I think, was actually very disappointed in the [Jimmy] Carter Administration. I think he was disappointed in the [Gerald R.] Ford Administration in the sense that the Republican Party seemed to him so deferential to the right wing, particularly in its treatment of Nelson Rockefeller. I think that the Republican Party really lost the sympathy of George Woods—I mean, the way Nelson was sort of run unceremoniously, booted out of the White House and booted out of the Vice Presidency by a moderate President and by Donald Rumsfeld. I think it was a—I think George thought that a pretty rough deal which did not auger well for the future of the Republican Party. I never knew whether he voted or not for Ronald Reagan in 1980. I also didn't ask him about that. I also know he didn't have respect for Carter, but he could not have had much enthusiasm for Ronald Reagan, coming as he did from the Rockefeller wing of the Republican Party.

OLIVER: Was his loyalty to the Rockefeller wing of the Republican Party a loyalty to Nelson Rockefeller as a person or was it matter of kind of ideology?

BARTLETT: I don't think I'd classify George Woods as a political liberal. I think I'd call him a sort of a Republican progressive. I think that he would have been a Bull Moose man if he'd been around when Teddy Roosevelt was going, and I think that he really had a great sense of the progressive potential in the Republican Party. I never heard him attach himself as to a party, and I don't really know whether he was a Democrat or a Republican. But he said he was a friend of [Dwight D.] Eisenhower's, and he certainly got along with [John F.] Kennedy. And he got along reasonably well with Lyndon Johnson. So I think that there was a sort of an open-mindedness as opposed to a

¹ Transcribed by the World Bank Oral History Project. Neither a tape nor a transcript of the previous interview referred to in the first Oliver question has been located.

party classification. But he did feel frustrated by events, the way that all of us did in the period of the '70s.

OLIVER: Did I understand in the earlier conversation with you that you had known John Kennedy yourself?

BARTLETT: John Kennedy and I were friends, yes, before I came to Washington.

OLIVER: Can you shed some light on the Kennedy-Woods relationship, the reason why Kennedy appointed Woods President of the World Bank?

BARTLETT: I didn't know George Woods at that point and so therefore John Kennedy never discussed with me his plan to bring him down to be President of the World Bank. Douglas Dillon was the Secretary of the Treasury, and to me, just guessing without knowing, I would suspect that Douglas Dillon was probably the one who recommended him. I doubt whether any of the liberal types around Kennedy would have done it. Ralph Dungan, I don't think so. I would imagine it came from Doug Dillon. And I think that—it happened to be while Doug Dillon was the Secretary of the Treasury so I'm almost certain it was Doug Dillon or maybe one of the subordinates in the Treasury Department. If you need help on that, I'll be glad to help.

OLIVER: Can you comment on Woods' relationships with the United States Treasury Department in subsequent years, '64, '65, '66?

BARTLETT: No, I really can't.

OLIVER: Those were times when the United States was very concerned about balance of payments problems [inaudible] bonds, for instance, I should have thought that Woods might have been frustrated in those days.

BARTLETT: Yes, he must have been but he didn't discuss it with me. As a working newspaperman, there was a difference in our relationship. In other words, he had to be careful. I wasn't tuned in to the day to day problems that he was having down here. And I think that the—our discussions really became much broader after he left the office, talking person to person.

OLIVER: You mentioned in passing about the time the one term, 6 year movement was getting started, he was a strong supporter, even though he was not feeling well. Can you comment at all about his health, in the years during the Bank and after the Bank? We know, for example, that he had an aneurysm in 1963. Some observed that he would get tired in the afternoons beginning 6, 6:30, 7. Did you notice anything like this?

BARTLETT: Well, I didn't. We talked about, you know, his experiences and it was obvious that he formed a lifelong friendship with the doctor who took care of him out there. He didn't talk about his health. I think it wasn't something that [inaudible]—I was always talking about getting him to exercise. He was reluctant to exercise. We talked

and joked a lot about that. He was quite proud of himself that--after his last problem we talked about he began walking rather regularly. He gained some energy and walked rather regularly and was very proud of himself. Exercise wasn't basically his inclination.

OLIVER: Did you describe on the other tape that you've already finished how you met George Woods in the first place?

BARTLETT: Yeah, I did.

OLIVER: And did you talk in that tape about the major desires that Mr. Woods had as the President of the Bank, what kinds of things he wanted to accomplish, what visions he had?

BARTLETT: You see, we knew each other very little at that point so he wouldn't have discussed his visions with me. In other words, he came in as a businessman to begin with [inaudible] You know, I think that his approach to the Bank [inaudible] can tell you much better than I could. As a person, the characteristic of George Woods was, "What makes sense?"

The greatness of the man, I think, was that he pulled away all the posturing and the sort of illusions and all those things and really got down to, you know, "What is the sensible thing to do?" And I think that that's why he was impressive. He had a good mind and he cut through all the baloney. And the world was changing rather rapidly in the early '60s, and Kennedy wanted to do a lot of things. And there was a sort of a foreign policy consensus in this country and a much healthier state of mind than we have today when you have everyone going every direction. There was a sort of a consensus that we had to help India, we had to go out and get funds to help India, and we should to be a leader in the effort. We had then more support, therefore, for multilateral systems than you have today in foreign policy.

OLIVER: So, after he left the Bank [inaudible], from time to time, did he think back on his many experiences, comment on one way or another on what he thought had happened?

BARTLETT: Yes, he did, but always in reference to something that was developing at the time. You know, he didn't reminisce out of hand.

OLIVER: What other things should I be asking you?

BARTLETT: Let's give you the tape and then you can--you give a look at the transcript and see. Then in the future if you want I'll come back and we can talk some more. You want to do that?

OLIVER: Absolutely. Thank you for today.

[End Tape 1, Side A]

[End of Interview]

Addendum from Charles Bartlett

As a journalist in Washington over 55 years, I have dealt with a great many who were blessed with incisive minds and high motivations. George Woods is, however, unique in my memory, and I believe this is because of the clarity of his thinking, the quality of his warmth and humor, and the depth of his devotion to the nation.