Interview with Mrs. Nellie Lee Bok

(12/12/79)

(in Mrs. Bok's Rittenhouse Square apartment)

Question Number One: How did you come to know Curtis Bok and marry him?

In 1925, I was asked by the president of a women's college in Columbia, Missouri, Stephens College, to undertake some interviews. He was most interested in women's education, and he thought that a young woman interviewing men who were interested in world affairs or in women's education, per se, would be helpful to him in planning the curriculum for this small junior college.

He gave me a list of persons whom I was to interview and told me that I could make additions if I wished. He said, "I want you to begin interviewing Edward Bok*, who was then the retired editor of the Ladies Home Journal. He then said I should go to England and interview a number of people there, including Maude Royden and Dean Inge who then was the dean of Saint Paul's Cathedral in London.

I asked him if I could add Havelock Ellis and one or two other prominent Britishers to the list and he said, "Yes, and that's your summer work for 1925."

And then, in 1926, I was to start off to India and spend as much time as I thought important in one or two of the ashrams of Mahatma Gandhi. This, of course, was before the salt march to the sea, but it was after he had spent some time in prison because he was endeavoring to bring home rule to India.

I was delighted with this assignment, but I said, "Can't I please go into Russia if I can get in?" And that was to be in September, 1926. There were very few tourists permitted into the Soviet Union. But I was not exactly a tourist; I was someone coming from an American college, and a college for women, so I did manage to obtain a visa.

I had been interested in prisons since I was eight years old. I was born and brought up in Nebraska and I had an opportunity as a child to see a prison halfway through its construction. The walls were up and I had a chance to see some of the cells for solitary confinement which were only partially finished. I was very much impressed by them. And every time I went to see my aunt in Lincoln, the train went past the prison farm for the state penitentiary of Nebraska.
The father of a playmate of mine was made the new warden. And my mother was very shocked at that, when it was announced that my father's friend, Warden Fenton, would take his wife and two small children, including one of my playmates to live inside the prison. My mother was so shocked that she said to Father, "What is Bill Fenton thinking of?"

And Father said, "He's thinking of bringing about some change in the management of penitentiaries, and I predict that he will make a brilliant career".

Of course, I was eager when my little friend came home from her first year, living in the penitentiary, to learn what her father had done. And my interest never decreased. So of course, when I thought I would get a chance to go into Russia in September 1926, I was eager to visit some Russian prisons.

I managed to get into one, where some of the worst of the criminal offenders were allowed to come and to bring their families, including children...small children. I never forgot the experience, I can assure you, and later on, after I returned from what actually was twenty-seven months...not twenty-seven months....but, it was two trips which totaled about twenty months, circumnavigating the globe, as it were, and doing my interviews along the way. I had not managed to meet Edward Bok.

Well, 1928 came, and 1930, and 1933 arrived...and I still hadn't managed to meet Edward Bok because he had died in January 1930, and my president was not in the least pleased. He said, "I don't see why it is that the man closest to home is the one man that you've missed". And I really couldn't answer.

So in 1933, he said, "Well, I can't wait any longer. I want the answers to some questions. Edward Bok and I", said my president, whose name was James Madison Wood, "had a conversation about how you stimulate young women, girls, in having art of good quality in their own rooms". And he said, "I want to do something in the college about having art available to the girls, of a good quality, in their own dormitories. So I've decided, since we cannot talk to Edward Bok, to send you to meet one member of his family. And I have chosen the one for you to meet. I want you to meet his older son, Curtis Bok, because", he said, "I understand that he's just come back from Russia, where he was as interested in Russian prisons as you were".

So I knew there was nothing for me to do but try to arrange an interview with Edward Bok's older son. Well I managed it.
And the first thing I said was, "I understand that you have had two visits to Russia, and I've only had one, but yours was last year and this year, and mine was in 1926. And I understand you saw some prisons and I'd like to know which ones". And then I laughed and said, "This is not what I was supposed to interview you about, but I just can't help asking the question".

So we talked a little while about the prisons, and I had managed to see a prison that he hadn't managed to see. And so that made us both laugh a little bit, because he had seen more than I had...but not the one I particularly had seen. So after we talked about my president wanting to talk to him about what his father might have said about teaching art, he said, "Well, what do you do at the college? Let's go out to lunch."

So we went out to lunch and we were married about sixteen months later. So that's how I happened to come to meet Curtis Bok. And it was because he was interested in education of all kinds, and we were both interested in prisons.

Now, your second question follows very close to my arriving in Philadelphia as a bride in November, 1934. You ask me, "Would you tell how the law firm of Dechert, Bok and Smith happened to be formed, and what you remember of the roles in public affairs played by the partners?"

In the summer of 1933, I had met an old school friend of mine from our native town in Nebraska. And he said, "I think you would enjoy going to a polo game this afternoon". It was near Trenton, New Jersey. "And afterward, we'll go to dinner with one of my good friends in Trenton", whose name was Carroll Wetzel.

So, it was fascinating to see Carroll Wetzel play polo, and a great deal of fun. And the dinner was rather nice and pleasant. And my old friend, with whom I'd always gone to school in Nebraska, said, "Carroll, did you decide to join that Philadelphia law firm...new Philadelphia law firm?"

And Carroll said, "Yes indeed, I did. I like the partners very much, and so I joined up".

And my host, whose name was Ted, said,"Well now, how many will there be?"

And he said, "Well, I'll make the fourth one. Robert Dechert is the senior, and Curtis Bok is almost the same age, but Bob really was given permission to practice law...certified...a little bit before Curtis...something like a year or six months. There're two younger ones, so that makes four in the group, Owen Rhoads and I. But we do not
have our names on the door...yet".

So the two men talked and Carroll Wetzel said, "Well now, the partner I particularly got acquainted with was Curtis Bok". And he turned to me and said, "Curtis Bok is the son of Edward Bok who used to be the editor of the Ladies Home Journal". And I smiled a little bit, because I had just met this man, and I was just not about to discuss anything about the Russian prisons when the dinner party was all settled around Carroll Wetzel's new firm.

But in November 1934, Carroll and Owen Rhoads did come out to Nebraska to be present at our wedding. And so did Geoff Smith and Bob Dechert. All four of them.

(WMP: How about Joe Clark?)

Joe Clark didn't come out to the wedding and he was the only one...by that time he was in the firm...he was the only one who didn't come out from the firm. And that's because he was going to be married to Noel the following April. And he was told that if he expected all the firm to come to his wedding in April, he'd have to stay in Philadelphia and tend the shop until the rest of them came back from Nebraska and Curtis' and my wedding. It was, in other words, a collection of young men who were very fond of each other, who had a great deal in common, particularly a great deal of respect for each other.

(WMP: And they had a great sense of the public domain.)

Every one of them had a great sense of their role as individuals in the United States at that time. We had just pulled out of the Depression a little bit. Also in the spring of 1934, George Earle had been elected governor of the state of Pennsylvania. He was a Harvard graduate, Geoffrey Smith was a Harvard graduate, Owen Rhoads had been a Rhodes scholar and had graduated from Haverford College. Robert Dechert was University of Pennsylvania...law school graduate, and Curtis had done his work in law at the University of Virginia. So they represented a tremendous variety of training for the law schools. I believe Joe Clark took his law at Harvard. So therefore, they were men who had been trained...

(WMP: I'm not sure about that.)

Well, I thought so, because he's been a Harvard overseer.

(WMP: Yes, but he was an undergraduate there.)

Yes, I think he was an undergraduate at Harvard. I believe he is no longer an overseer, but after all, this is 1979. Joe was very much interested in public service, and they all were. Of course, Robert Dechert was a Republican, and
the others at that time were a little more sympathetic to the Democratic party, but not what you'd call party men. But when Governor Earle came in and talked to some of them, he rather pricked my husband's conscience. Curtis had been on the board for the large state prison in Philadelphia on Fairmount Avenue. It was called Eastern Penitentiary at that time. He had been a member of the board and was extremely interested in the improvement of prisons. Curtis had been greatly touched by the poverty that he had a chance to see in Philadelphia during the Depression. And he had belonged to a barter society; it wasn't very well known, but they tried to have people who needed repairs on their house to work to help repair the other fellow's house, so that in the end, they'd all be a little more shipshape and a little more weather-tight in their houses than they had been previously.

I think that it was in relation to the Octavia Hill Society, which was a housing...it was definitely a group to help people own their own houses. But it was small...it was very small.

So Curtis had had those ventures into government. And in 1925, and going into 1926, Curtis had volunteered to work for the secretariat of the League of Nations. Manley O. Hudson was the most important American in the work in the secretariat with which Curtis was affiliated.

(WMP: He was at Harvard.)

Manley O. Hudson was a Harvard professor at that time, but he was also a native son of Columbia, Missouri. And I knew his family and particularly his sister. So strangely enough, I was just moving around in the same group of people, but in new sections of the country. I was at the League of Nations during the time....the six months that Curtis spent there. But I spent all my time with Manley O. Hudson, and I didn't meet Curtis at the League of Nations.

When George Earle said to some young Democratic sympathizers, "I can't help Pennsylvania alone; I'm going to have to have some committees and some groups of people to help me". And Joe Clark and Curtis Bok volunteered, and a law partner of Joe Clark's, who was at that time leaving his father's firm. But this man who'd been in the Clark firm with Joe Clark before he came to the Dechert firm, was Gerald Flood.

(WMP: I was just going to ask you about Gerald Flood.)

So Curtis got acquainted with Gerald Flood, and I think it was one of the most beautiful friendships in his life, and I must say, in my life too, with Gerald Flood and his wife, Mary. And since I'm the last one of that group living, I keep track of
the Flood children.

(WMP: Do you? How are they?)

They're fine. Of course, Gerald, junior, is a lawyer, and Henry Flood is interested in writing and he's also in the bond business. But at the moment it's not a flourishing business, as you know.

At any rate,....let me see...this is 1934; we were married in November. But by spring of 1934, Curtis had met John B. Kelly, who was very much interested in making over the Democratic party in Philadelphia. And he knew of Gerald Flood. And he knew of Joe Clark and Curtis. And they all met and talked together, about what could be done, frankly, to unseat sixty years' residence of the Republican party in the government of Philadelphia.

Another person, the son of Roland Morris, who had been appointed to be ambassador to Japan by Woodrow Wilson, and who was a close friend of Edward Bok's, was also on that committee. I think his name was Edwin Morris, but I'm not quite sure. He was the son of Roland Morris, and because I knew of Edward Bok's friendship with Roland Morris, I never was too sure what his name was. I'm sorry.

At any rate, in the spring, they began meeting. And they decided that they would work very hard to build up a new Democratic party. And at that point, Robert Dechert, Carroll Wetzel and Owen Rhoads were not taking part, but Joe Clark and Curtis were. As a matter of fact, those men never did work at party politics in Philadelphia...at least not in the organization, so to speak.

Well, we came to Philadelphia in November, '34, and Curtis would go, regularly...oh, with such a conscientious regularity, to this meeting that they would have...what could be done to form a virile Democratic party in Philadelphia, so that, as soon as possible, they could capture the mayoralty election.

Well, there was such an election, as you well remember, in 1935. Jack Kelly was the candidate for mayor, Curtis was the candidate for district attorney. We made campaign speeches all over town. We were not very effective in Chestnut Hill. The farther down into South Philadelphia we went, the more successful we were. However, it was exciting, and when the votes were counted, Jack and Curtis had been defeated. Matthew H. McCloskey had had his first experience as a fund raiser, and had been very successful. Senator Joseph Duffy was, at that time, in his first term as a Democratic senator, and Franklin Roosevelt was in his first term as president of the United States. It was highly amusing when the returns came in and we could see how much of a defeat Jack and Curtis were going to take. And Matthew H. McCloskey would say, "I
thought we'd carry that ward by..."...as much as they were losing it. And Joe Duffy would say,"Matt, you're entirely too optimistic!"

I would say that Mr. Duffy gave a great deal of education that night to Joe Clark, Gerald Flood and Matthew H. McCluskey and Jack and Curtis. He really was a professional and he had climbed up, very much the hard way, to get to be a Democratic senator in Republican Pennsylvania. That was, as you see, November.

By December, Curtis and I were invited to dinners in the neighborhood. And we went to the residence of one of the most noble and dignified and respected members of the Philadelphia bar. And I was seated at our host's left. He was a good friend of my mother-in-law's. And he was one of the lawyers who quietly went about to his Republican clients and said, "And how much will you contribute to the next Republican war chest?"

So I knew exactly what a venerable citizen I was sitting next to, and I knew he was a dear friend of my mother-in-law's. And this patriarch of the Republican bar said to me, "Of course, Curtis and Jack must know that they were counted out in the paper wards". There were ten paper wards in Philadelphia; the other wards had machines. And I said quickly, "Of course, he doesn't know that and neither does Jack".

And this venerable man said, "It is true".

Well, of course, when I reported that after the dinner party to Curtis, intact, he told Jack the next day. And they began to investigate. They never found any evidence immediately. They did hear rumors. And so we move into 1936, defeated candidates. It was time for what was then called the President's Birthday Ball. And that meant Franklin Roosevelt's birthday. It had been preceded by the March of Dimes campaign which had been started when he was president. And the dimes were collected by mothers for the crippled children of America and for the efforts of research in infantile paralysis. I have never seen so many people in Convention Hall in my life. And they were all dancing at the President's Birthday Ball. It was in late January or early February...I'm not quite sure...because the March of Dimes had preceded the Birthday Ball a little bit, so it doesn't matter whether it was January or February. What did matter was that George Earle was to cut the birthday cake. And he was to be in some kind of uniform, and he was to cut it with his sword. And I can assure you that four thousand people on the dance floor couldn't have been more excited! And there were two bands to play, so dancing was continuous, and the bands could rest while the other band was playing.

George Earle cut the cake, and then he came back to where Curtis and I were sitting in the balcony. And he leaned over
and said, "Curtis, did you know that Judge Henderson died today?" And Curtis said, "Yes. And I have written you two letters of endorsement to two good men that would make excellent successors to Judge Henderson".

And George Earle said, "Well, I was just going to tell you that I have the privilege of choosing the man I wish to be my first judicial appointment. And I have already made up my mind that you were going to succeed Judge Henderson!

And Curtis said, "I can't possibly do it". My husband was a lawyer, as I've mentioned. "I think being a judge on the Orphans' Court would be putting me in a refrigerator! I would hate it, George! I just can't do it!"

George said, "Curtis, I have made up my mind! The day I sign your commission, I will accept your undated resignation. But I think I know you; I have not known you very long, but I know you're going to like being a judge. Besides, I have a little vested interest", he said, "I'm ten years older than you..."

***Interruption due to changing of tape***

He said, "I have a personal interest in you being a judge. I know I'll never be anything but a one-term governor of Pennsylvania. I'll never live down my grandfather. But you're younger than I by ten years, and if you start with a good title like a judge, you can live down your grandfather and be your own man."

Well Curtis said, "Oh George! This is terrible! Think of those two men I promised to work for!"

And George Earle said, "I already have; I'm not going to appoint them!"

Well, we started home. Most of the time we walked down the middle of the street because Curtis was simply bowled over at the thought of being an Orphans' Court judge. And he said, "Well, I don't know why I said it would be a refrigerator. Being an Orphans' Court judge has to do with estates and trust companies. As a matter of fact, I think there's quite a lot of work in that court".

So all night long I don't think he slept a wink. But the next morning, he said to George, "But what about those two men I promised to work for?" And Governor Earle said, "Well, I can take care of them later. But I want you to take this commission." So Curtis did. And the other two men were duly taken care of, later. And Curtis was put on the Orphans' Court, when he said, "I'd much rather have criminal cases". He said, "I really think it would be very important for a man
interested in prisons to be a judge in criminal cases. That I would like to do."

Well that's exactly what happened. But meanwhile, Curtis had said to President Roosevelt that he would like to go back to Russia as ambassador. And then came the campaign of 1936 when Mr. Roosevelt was to seek his second term. I was asked to be master of ceremonies for a national TV program at 12 o'clock noon...as I said, a national program. It was to be aired out of NBC in New York and I had to go over every Tuesday and Thursday for rehearsal and to work on the program and be ready for the air at 12 o'clock. It was quite a lot of work. But it did give me a pleasant opportunity to be in a national campaign, which was extremely interesting, and also Curtis had met Franklin Roosevelt and Mrs. Roosevelt many times and so that was a friendly gesture toward them.

We went to luncheon the Sunday before the election at Hyde Park with Anthony Biddle and Steinhart. Steinhart was then ambassador to Norway, I think, and Tony Biddle had been sent to Poland. But at that particular meeting, it was perfectly obvious to Curtis that he didn't want to be ambassador to Russia; he wanted to stay where George Earle had put him...in the Orphans' Court. So his interest in the Russian Embassy quieted down.

And this brings us, of course, to December, 1936. And George Earle was finishing his term in the state of Pennsylvania. There were so many courts needed that George Earle had created Common Pleas Number Six and Common Pleas Number Seven. And Curtis became the president judge of Common Pleas Number Six, and Gerald Flood and Lou Levinthal were the other two judges. And Common Pleas Number Seven was also initiated with Stauffer Oliver and and Joe Sloane and Judge Crumlish. And they really had very, very interesting work.

Now, I have covered the question two about the work of Curtis and Joe Clark in the early years of the Democratic work in Philadelphia. And I've mentioned Robert Dechert was very much interested in Republican politics, but more on the fringe of party organization.

(WMP: Well he was never a Democrat then?)

No, he was never a Democrat. Never.

The public affairs of the partners increased when Joe Clark was in the firm. And of course, after World War II, Joe Clark and Richardson Dilworth were interested and worked in Philadelphia. Richardson Dilworth had come here after Second World War...I don't know quite when he first came to Philadelphia.

(WMP: When Dick came?)

I don't know whether he came before the Second World War or
not. But it's highly possible. Oh, I feel sure he was here before 1936. Yes. I'm quite sure that that is true.

At any rate, Richardson Dilworth and Geoffrey Smith and my husband and Jack Kelly and Gerald Flood were friends and they worked very hard. This is...in public affairs...still under your question Number two, there was a city planning program which Jack Kelly, Curtis, Young Morris and Gerald Flood tried to put over. That was the time when Jesse Jones from Texas was in charge of the great public works program. And I can't tell you exactly the name of what Jesse Jones' work was to do, but it was to get city councils to give matching funds, and then they would do big projects in the cities. I know Saint Louis and Toledo and Cleveland and Detroit...all of them had big convention halls built with federal money. It was a very good venture. But the wonderful planning that was done by a group of city planners, and that Jack and Curtis took to Jesse Jones was accepted by Jesse Jones. And he called it one of the best projects ever submitted to him. But there was not enough interest among Philadelphians to put it across.

The city plan called for four blocks, beginning with South St, going down toward Catherine, in the ribbon area...from the Delaware River to the Schuylkill...to be completely rebuilt...housing, industry, schools. And they were going to heat this group of buildings by the steam that would be furnished from burning the garbage of that area. It was called the ribbon area because it had the highest night population of residents, the most crowded segment, with the highest frequency of tuberculosis.

I was told to hang onto that set of plans and study. And I must say I did hang onto it, but there never was a call from anybody..."What was it that we wanted on such and such?", that I couldn't produce the little stack of planning papers. But then Joe Clark and Dilworth were elected, and Edmund Bacon's plans came forward. And I used to say to Curtis, "What about the ribbon area in the plans?" And he said, "Just keep them."

But when I dismantled our library...Curtis' library, really, I sent that to the Fine Arts Library. Really, it was the library for architecture in Philadelphia, so that it is still useable if anybody ever wants to see what people had dreamed about in the early 1930s. It's at University of Pennsylvania.

Well now, I have talked, you see, about my husband's civic activities. I haven't followed this list very clearly, but I'll stop at Number Three, the founding of the Curtis Publishing Company and the role that it played in the city of Philadelphia.

3. To what extent were you and your husband involved in the Curtis Company?
Well, first of all, Curtis' grandfather, Cyrus Curtis, came to Philadelphia at the time of the first Centennial, 1876. He came in September to look the place over. His only child, his daughter, had been born in August, 1876. And Cyrus Curtis had been a Maine boy, sold newspapers. He began with a capital of three cents, and had worked his way to Boston where he became more involved in printing and newspapers, and where he decided that he wanted his own publishing company. He had married...he and his bride were married in 1875, and he was twenty-five years old. He married the little secretary of Julia Ward Howe, who also lived in Boston with her husband, Dr. Howe. And this young secretary was eighteen, and she had just imbibed some of the spirit and interest in public affairs Julia Ward Howe had. Julia Ward Howe may have written the "Battle Hymn of the Republic" and been interested in slavery. But she was interested in the United States and anybody who lived in it. And this little girl was utterly on fire with what she thought of Julia Ward Howe's interest in public affairs and what could be done. She was a very ambitious little girl. Her name was Louisa Knapp.

They came here with their baby. Cyrus Curtis said, "Have a publishing business in Philadelphia, but we'll have to live in Camden. I don't think we'd like to live in Philadelphia." So he went back and forth on the ferry, and chatted practically every evening with Walt Whitman, who would come down and sit and watch the evening ferry bring the young fellows back from Philadelphia jobs.

My mother-in-law also used to go down to meet her father, and so she knew Walt Whitman almost as well as her father did.

The publishing company grew. Louisa Knapp criticized her husband's women's page in his first paper. The center was a double spread and that was the women's page, and it was generally called the ladies' journal. And she said to Cyrus Curtis one day, "Nothing ever original on this women's page! If I couldn't have a better women's page I wouldn't have any!"

He said, "Well, if you don't like my women's page, take it over!" And she said, "I'd love to!"

She succeeded; she got more fan mail than her husband...the rest of the paper. And she was doing so well that one day he said, "Louisa, you've expanded to four pages, but if your mail keeps on, you'll go up to six." He said, "I think you'd better have a paper of your own".

So she said, "Well I think so, too".

They worked out the first mock-up. And somehow the printer misread the ladies' journal, about the home...something like that...and inserted the word "home" between ladies' and journal. And the fan mail came in addressed to the Ladies' Home Journal,
with such praise, that she said to Cyrus Curtis, "Are we stuck with this name, The Ladies' Home Journal?" And he said, "I think you're stuck with it!" And so she was the editor. [I was able this summer to buy some of the early copies] She worked very hard.

(BF: What year was that?)

Well, I'm ashamed to say I can't tell you, but I can look it up.

(BF: Approximately.)

Well, I think it was in the early '80s, because they worked very hard and rather fast. And by the '90s, she was beginning to get tired. Her daughter was about fifteen...the daughter was born in 1876, so...I'm right...by the time she was fifteen, that would make it 1891, Louisa Knapp said, "This is now more than I wish to carry". And so Cyrus Curtis said, "Well, you started it, so now, if you wish to retire, you can't retire until you find your own successor and train him. Have you anyone in mind?" And she said, "Oh yes, I have. A young Dutchman that is very well spoken of in New York". And so Cyrus Curtis said, "Well, bring him over". And that was Edward Bok. And he became the editor and Louisa Knapp was very pleased with him...Louisa Knapp Curtis...and so was Edward Bok. He married the boss' daughter about 1896, in the spring. No, I guess it was '95...October they were married. And my husband was born in September. 1897.

So we've always been on the edge of the company and their problems. The role that it played in the city, I think, is very important, because Cyrus Curtis was a real publisher. He was very particular about the editors he hired. And Louisa Knapp Curtis helped; she selected Edward Bok and she helped in the selection of George Horace Lorimer. But he, as a publisher, said,"The editors are responsible for the magazine; I'm responsible for the business. Therefore I need to see to it that there is developed a very, very fine group of advertising agencies." And he made friends with M. W. Ayre. And the Ayre Building is on the west side of Washington Square and the Curtis Publishing Company Buildings are on the north side of Washington Square. The fact that they were good friends, and they worked to develop the profession of advertising, is, I think, something that has been very important to the town...and to every other town. Cyrus Curtis wanted to have his own publishing company from the ground up. And therefore, he went early into the manufacturing of paper, and re-forestation. He had a little saying, "If you profit by paper, you must plant trees". And he did have extensive re-forestation projects.

But now, this brings us to number four. Would you be willing to tell what you feel were the problems which caused the Curtis Publishing Company, which had been so successful, caused it to close down.
I would be willing to say what I think, but I must confess, it's only a personal opinion. I was never on the board of the Curtis Publishing Company. Curtis was on the board of the Curtis Publishing Company after the death of his grandfather, but the hour he became a judge, he retired from directorship of the Girard Bank, directorship of Penn Mutual Life Insurance Company and on the Board of Directors of Curtis Publishing Company, because he said it's against judicial canon.

(WMP: That's right.)

And he received a most beautiful letter from Effingham Morris who was president of the Girard Bank, saying, "Well, Curtis, if that's the kind of judge you're going to be, your father, I know, and I would be very pleased".

So, of course, Curtis' father was long dead, but nevertheless, Effingham Morris was a great friend of Edward Bok's.

So we had no direct knowledge of the Curtis Publishing Company, as Curtis would have had had he remained a member. But he did keep in close contact and we were very close friends with Bruce and Beatrice Gould who were the very successful editors of the Ladies' Home Journal for a good many years. They came in, I think, in 1935, as editors. They were co-editors. And they had a little refrain that was always in their advertising, "Never underestimate the power of a woman"...which I thought fitted Louisa Knapp Curtis perfectly, because she had been very, very much a part of the Curtis Company.

(BF: Did they originate that saying?)

I don't know, but it was their slogan. They even had the most enchanting cartoon, with a situation in which you shouldn't estimate the power of a woman, and they had it printed on scarfs and sent it out to all their friends, one Christmas greeting.

Why did the Curtis Company slow down?

I frankly have to tell you I don't know...that means "no". My brother-in-law said, during the time when the Curtis Company was being dismembered, that it was going to take fifty years to clear away the misunderstandings and get down to the facts. And the true history could not be finished until those fifty years had passed.

(WMP: What was Mr. Fuller's role?)

Mr. Fuller was president of the company at one time; I think he probably succeeded Mr. Curtis. Mr. Curtis died in 1933. And Mr. Fuller, I know, was president when I arrived in town.
I think that perhaps, Mr. Curtis' desire to have all copies of the magazine published in Philadelphia was a mistake... because the rival, of course, was Henry Luce with Time magazine, and Henry Luce published regionally. That saved money of transportation, and it saved a great deal of money of other things. Henry Luce put more money in research than the Curtis Company did. And as we get farther and farther into the 20th century, being able to be flexible, as you couldn't be if you started with raw pulp to make the paper, you couldn't change as quickly as a man who buys his paper and rents his printing presses.

Well, I think that probably Mr. Curtis had envisaged a vertical empire from the trees to the printed magazine, and the changes due to television and radio, which he never really envisaged. He died, you see, in 1933, and Edward Bok in 1930. They had no idea the changes that would be made in publishing as well as advertising, by these technological changes. And that's about all I can say honestly about item four.

Item five...what do you remember of your husband's civic and political activities?

Curtis worked very hard, as I previously told you, to bring about a two-party system in Philadelphia. Many of us, including, I think, Dick Dilworth...or...it was either Dick and Joe, or Dick or Joe, and Curtis, had lunch with Eleanor Roosevelt one day. And this was after the Second World War, I feel sure...after Dilworth or Clark...one of them...I guess it would be Clark had become mayor. And Eleanor Roosevelt said, "Now I know how hard you've worked to bring about the two-party system. And you're the reformers. But who's going to stay around and watch the reformers?"

And you know, nobody did stay around to watch the reformers. And consequently, we have something that looks like a one-party system again. And Curtis said to me several times, "I wonder if sometime we'll have to work hard to get the two-party system back".

But I hope not, because I think that in Philadelphia there's a chance of the two-party system coming back.

(WMP: I hope so.)

I think I believe in a two-party system. It's too easy to become stratified in a one-party system.

Number six, would you tell how your husband became a judge? I did tell you that.

Would you tell us how the Bok Award came into being? What recipients of the award do you feel were the most appropriate?
The Philadelphia Award came into being a little bit before 1921. I think probably 1921 is about when the deed of trust was written. It was Edward Bok's idea. Edward Bok was, of course, very Dutch, even though he was a very patriotic naturalized citizen. He always had an international interest and was devoted to Woodrow Wilson...wanted very much for the United States to join the World Court. But the Nobel prizes fascinated him and stimulated him. And he thought that there was just nothing greater than the stimulation that those prizes, in his judgment, were. So he said, "If I feel this way about the Nobel prize worldwide, certainly there could be a Philadelphia prize for accomplishment in the neighborhood of Philadelphia...of greater Philadelphia." So he set about doing it. I can let you copy the purpose of this prize, which is only this much. Would you like to have me read it in?

(BF: Yes, that would be good.)

"The Philadelphia Award was founded in June 1921, by Edward W. Bok who created a fund for this purpose. A prize of $15,000 is conferred each year upon the man or woman living in Philadelphia, its suburbs or vicinity, who, during the preceding year shall have performed or brought into fruition an act or contributed a service calculated to advance the best and largest interests of the community of which Philadelphia is the center."

Now, that is, of course, something that's used on present programs, because in 1921 Edward Bok offered a $10,000 prize. But as inflation came along, and as investments matured, it was considered reasonable and proper to change from a $10,000 award to a $15,000 award. So that's where we are at this period of inflation. I hope we don't have to shrink that but you can't tell.

Now here are the winners of the awards. The award for 1921 was given in 1922, because you can't say what has been accomplished which is most significant in a year until the year has ended. And I can't give you this because I don't have that many filed copies, but this is a very interesting list of public servants.

(BF: I think we must have that.)

(WMP: Yes, I served on the board with you for many years.)

We were on a city planning board together. Were you on the board of the Philadelphia Award?

(WMP: Yes.)
Well I'm not surprised, but I didn't know that. You see...

(WMP: My contribution was to get the award for the people who invented the computer...the ENIAC...Mauchly and Eckert.)

Oh, of course! You and I were on the board together! What's the matter with me! Yes, you haven't been off the board very long. Now the computer was...they received the award for 1972. So that award was presented in the spring of '73. And you were on the board for that award; I know.

(WMP: That was my idea.)

It certainly was.

***Interruption due to changing of the tape***

Now, if you ask me...it's very difficult for me to say which I think were the most appropriate awards, but I can just use my own judgment. I would be very glad to do that.

I think that the first award, to Leopold Stokowski, was truly merited. And I think the second award, to Russell H. Conwell for the creation of Temple University is a perfect example. I think Samuel S. Fleisher, for the Graphics Sketch Club, was wonderful. I personally do not know Charles C. Harrison, but I'm told that that was a very fine award too.

(WMP: I don't know him.)

After that, 1925 was Samuel Yellin. Samuel Yellin represents an individual who was possessed of a great creative, artistic imagination and worked as a medievalist, in a medieval medium, and did work that is just greatly loved throughout this country.

And then we go on down to 1929, when Connie Mack received the award. But Connie Mack, you know, his name is Cornelius McGillacuddy. And nobody ever knows who that is. Cornelius McGillacuddy...Connie Mack. And then, of course, this is just a list of magnificent people. But I think one very great award was the 1977 award, when it was given to Stewart Rauch, for his work with black businessmen.

(WMP: Yes, that was very important what he did.)

Well now, you may want to look that over.

(WMP: We have interviewed Stewart Rauch.)

Oh yes. Well, now then, what have been your civic activities over the years and which do you feel the most significant?
Now I take that to mean my own individual activities.

(WMP: Yes.)

Well, my first civic responsibility in this town was to be a member of the board of categorical relief, public relief. I was appointed by Governor Earle. It was the board for public assistance to widows and dependent children...public assistance for the mothers of dependent children.

(WMP: For the state or just the city?)

Philadelphia County. The assignment was the mothers' assistance, blind relief and old age relief. I was only one of a team, and I knew nothing at all about social work, but it didn't take me long, with such expert fellow board members to learn that public relief was a very, very great problem, and that we didn't know how to handle it; it was new and we all had to learn.

And then they did away with categorical relief, and we were merged, overnight, with unemployment relief. And I learned that bigness is even more difficult than just ordinary problems. The size of it seems to just mushroom in growth.

So the next work that I had, that I greatly enjoyed...you see, all of that was before I resigned from that board as soon as George Earle left office, because I believe that a governor should be able to appoint his own board members...for state hospitals and state penitentiaries and state welfare jobs. That is debatable, but that was my conviction. He could re-appoint anybody he wanted to.

Then we come to other things that I did. During the war, World War II, I didn't have time to do anything of my own, because my husband immediately volunteered to be a dollar-a-year man and to work for the War Production Board, while carrying his own duties as president judge of Common Pleas Number Six. It was really an awful lot of work, so I had to do a lot of things that he previously had done. And he was originally for a local commissioner for the War Production Board; Geoffrey Smith was high up in the War Production Board in Washington. Joe Clark was in India, and Carroll Wetzel was with the Air Force in Great Britain, around the Cambridge airfield. I would say that Owen Rhoads and Robert Dechert were left to run the law firm, although, of course, one by one, Smith and Clark and Curtis and Stewart Rauch and Judge Van Dusen had left the Dechert Price firm for city jobs. If you notice some of the city jobs, like Stewart Rauch, that the Dechert firm members had moved out to, you'd see that many of them went out from the firm into public service.

Well, as World War II was drawing to a close, in Philadelphia there was a great deal of dreadful propaganda...dreadful pam-
phlets and writing on sidewalks and houses against our Jewish neighbors and our black neighbors. And anyone who knew about other times when there has been ethnic or religious persecution, we knew the Catholics would be added. So the American Friends Service Committee gave hospitality at the old Twelfth Street Meeting, for a committee that felt its way into fruition. And that was called together partly by the American Friends Service Committee and partly by the Anti-Defamation League of the Jewish group, and the very sensitive leaders of the Catholic community, and by NAACP. And what we were to do was to counteract. Curtis and I were new members of the Society of Friends at that time, and this was to be called the Race Relations Committee. There was to be no dodging of the issues. And what grew out of that committee...well, first we really didn't have a name. But Maurice Fagan, who was then one of the leaders of the Anti-Defamation League, Gerry Flood was on the committee for a while; we had representatives from the School Board, and from the Council of Churches. And how I was ever made chairman, I'm not sure, but it came through the Service Committee. I guess that was part of the hospitality venture.

Well, what grew out of it, of course, was the Fellowship Commission.

(WMP: Oh really...Maury Fagan.)

And Marjorie Penney. Marjorie Penney had a little new project at that time, called Fellowship House. And the two of them worked together and they were the stars of this committee. And as you will see, in 1946 Marjorie Penney and Maurice Fagan won the Philadelphia Award.

(WMP: We've interviewed them.)

Well, that came out of this determination that anything that was inflammatory which was said, was going to be countered, one way or another.

By the time, we were just nicely started, so it wasn't so important for me to stay there, and then Fellowship Commission was moving along, the Service Committee asked me to be chairman of the Service Committee's project called the Race Relations Committee. That was just a matter of races, that meant American Indian and Spanish neighbors, Puerto Rico and Mexico, and also it meant relations between church groups or ethnic groups.

One thing we were supposed to do...we were supposed to do anything we could. I was very new to the way the Society of Friends worked, so I went very slowly, I think. And at that
time, the Service Committee was receiving quite large sums of money to help bring Jewish people out of Europe. And the Service Committee's foreign workers...I mean Americans working abroad, worked very hard. They talked with Goebbels who was head of the Gestapo; the men that went were Rufus Jones and George Walton, head of George School, and Robert Waring...Bernard Waring. And the point of that effort was to get as many Jewish people out from under Hitler's activities as possible.

It was understood that the Service Committee's men, workers, would have courtesy and protection, and if they didn't want them there, all they had to do was to say so. And that worked until the time came for Hitler to really squeeze down, and then he said, "Quakers, go home". And they did, very sadly.

I was very much interested in that because...well, it was just part of life during the Second World War. What we all felt, the thing we didn't want over here, was for ethnic and religious prejudice to catch the German epidemic, as it were, the Hitler epidemic. And we were to try to do things like this; help learned black scholars have an opportunity to teach in distinguished universities, not just in their own universities. And then, to get other smaller colleges to have black faculty members. We really started out at the bottom; we would say, "So-and-so is a very great black philosopher, a great black teacher of literature or political scientist. Will you invite him for one lecture...one convocation...and have the white faculty of that department meet with him at lunch? Or perhaps he can stay in one faculty home". We began to help them. And it worked...until now I do not think there are very many colleges that do not have black scholarly professors.

We went from one lecture to a weekend seminar to a week's visiting professor to a month. We just climbed up. And then, of course, dear old Haverford came through with a professorship. And then other Quaker schools came through with a professorship. And we just built ourselves up that way.

Now, I think that the work I had the pleasure of doing with the Service Committee is the work that I think is most significant. The Race Relations Committee changed its name as soon as the war was over...no more racism did we want to talk about, and called this Community Services. That's when we began getting in the self-help housing, Friends Neighborhood Guild, and began to work for integrated housing sections.

We had another point here, that I'd like to mention, and that is that by that time, the Community Relations Division had grown to such an extent that the person who was the chairman of it should have been able to travel all over the United States. And I had two girls in high school, and my husband was very busy, and I just said, "Can't travel. I have to be
I also was, for a time, on the board of the Women's Medical College. That was during the war when we had to conform to many defense emergencies. We even had to have blackout curtains for the whole institution. I enjoyed those years with the Women's Medical College very much.

And since 1955, I have had to limit my activities to the projects which my parents-in-law started. Edward Bok started the American Foundation, which runs the Mountain Lake Sanctuary. My mother-in-law started the Curtis Institute of Music, and I have been on those boards. I've been president of the American Foundation from 1956 to 1979. Now I'm chairman of the board. And we have had the great privilege of working at this very pleasant Mountain Lake Sanctuary, which has many visitors; it's very placid. It differs from Longwood Gardens to the extent that it's not so large, and our purpose is not the flowers and the birds, per se, but it is the pleasure and the quiet that the visitors find and enjoy.

(BF: Where is it?)

It's near Lake Wales, Florida. We do not charge admission; we charge a modest parking fee for the car, no matter how many people are in it. That's been a great pleasure, but we've managed to have a little money left over, so that at long last, Curtis and I could set sail into work with prisoners, management of prisons.

In 1956, Curtis and Judge Flood had figured out that there could be an impact, just trying to alert people to the inhumanity of incarceration and the way it is now in the United States...the way it was then in the United States. And it's only grown worse since then.

So I didn't work alone in the Foundation and in the prison project. The American Foundation has had two projects; one, the sanctuary and the other is work with the prisons. Edward Bok had worked to get the United States government to recognize...to become a member of the World Court. And as we put our hostages...the case of our hostages before the World Court, which we never joined, in the way Woodrow Wilson expected it, I couldn't help but have a little smile, wondering how Woodrow Wilson and Edward Bok would feel about the World Court case of our hostages. And I couldn't help smiling, thinking the old boys would have said, "We told you so!"

At any rate, the American Foundation in the Twenties did a study. There was always the sanctuary, but this is the social conscience wing of the Foundation...the Foundation made a study of the economic relations between the United States and the Soviet Union, before we recognized Russia. And as soon as the
powers-that-be in Washington saw how much relationship we had with them, they said, "We might as well recognize it and make it more closely knit".

In the prison project, which we've carried on now since 1956, we have emphasized the technique of being a catalyst and doing things like making films and making studies of prisons and prison populations, and the many different states. The man who is now the president of the Foundation, William Nagel, is an expert in corrections, and he was invited by the governor of Alaska to come out and help set up the correction system for that new state. You know, that was just marvelous...a marvelous opportunity for him to be able to do that. And the design for corrections in Alaska bears his influence.

So I think the thing I individually enjoyed most was the Service Committee, so far as my individual freedom was concerned. But of course, the activity that I am most grateful for, is to work in the American Foundation for this Institute of Corrections.

(WMP: Well, I can see you've had a very full life.)

It has been full, but I've never strayed away from that eight-year old interest in the prisoners!

Now, you said, would you tell us of the family's involvement in the Curtis Institute of Music.

Well, my sister-in-law is a widow; Curtis had no sisters and only one brother, and my sister-in-law is young enough to be my own daughter, and she's president of the Curtis Institute now. I am vice-president of the Foundation which supports the Curtis Institute. So all I can say is, we're in the Curtis Institute, as far as Mrs. Cary Bok and I are concerned, with all the energy that it requires...which is plenty!

The Curtis Institute was founded the same year the American Foundation was founded, 1924. Edward Bok started the Foundation, and she started the Curtis Institute of Music the same year. Edward Bok was at the helm of the American Foundation until he died in 1930, and then my mother-in-law, gallantly, carried on the leadership of the American Foundation all the years, from 1930 to 1956, as well as the Curtis Institute of Music. She worked harder than any woman I have ever known. It was terrific! But she did a good job of it.

And during that time, when she was at the helm, the social concerns of the American Foundation...well she carried the Soviet study through till the Soviet Union and the United States recognized each other diplomatically.

And then, in 1934, my first year here, the American Foundation began to study something which has been published in four
volumes. The first part of it was to study what the medical profession, itself, thinks it needs. That we did through correspondence and through polling recent graduates from medical school, doctors who'd been accredited for ten years, twenty years, thirty years, deans of medical schools. And of course, what they said...their correspondence...all we did was to correlate. What they said the medical profession needed most of all was to know the status of medical research and who paid for it. Very subtle! And that's exactly what we brought out. Those two volumes were a thousand pages each. And a great number of physicians were very grateful. So when they said, "We want to know what is the status of medical research; who pays for it?" we didn't think that would take very long. We thought, this is three years' work. But what happened when we were just about ready to finish, and then Curtis and I thought, "Now we get the money for the prisons...we were just about ready to tell the doctors what they wanted to know, when penicillin and the sulfa drugs were developed. So it all had to be done over again, because the impact of that change in the drugs was so great.

So it took until 1955 to get that in print. And of course, we gave away the books, because our purpose was to inform, not to be a publishing company. But when it came to...we ran out of the first edition of the Mid-Century Survey of Medical Research; when we ran out, everybody wanted copies. Little Brown was the publisher, and Little Brown said, "Let us bring out an edition and we'll sell it at cost", or something like that; it was dirt cheap. And I'll tell you, that edition sold out so fast, and at that point, we phased out of the medical studies which had gone on for eleven years.

And then we started in with the corrections project. We're phasing out of that now, too, because we've done as much as we can do. We have to spend so much money on a study now that we just don't have the money. And to use federal money is all right for universities, but I think as a foundation, it's better not to. We do not want at any time any research that we do to have the dot of an "i" or the crossing of a "t" influenced by anything.

But we have a very good staff of young people, beautifully trained to do research in prison management and in the education of prison personnel. We've made three films on the subject, including one on the jails. And we are setting up this group of young people into a new organization that will be called The American Institute of Criminal Justice. It will have a tax free status. In other words, our staff that we've worked with over the years is now able to stand alone. And they already have been asked to take on more research projects than they possibly can.
(WMP: And they get paid for them, do they?)

Yes, they're paid for sometimes by municipalities, sometimes by counties...generally by states. And sometimes the federal government, the Department of Justice, asks them to do something.

We've been doing researches for L.E.A.A., Law Enforcement Assistant Agencies, for years. Not for years, but since 1967, when we made a film on the jails, which we called "The Revolving Door"...into prison one weekend, and out. The next Saturday night in and out, again.

So we are very pleased that we are finishing the work of the American Foundation Institute of Corrections...that's what we've called our program. We have been working now for two years for L.E.A.A. on a study of prison industries, and how prison industries can be improved. It is a reasonable thesis to say that idleness is one of the very most important bad elements in prisons.

(WMP: I would think so.)

Idleness. Furthermore, the lack of education. We've never had the money, or the time, or the staff to make a study of how ignorant our prison population is. But as Curtis said again, and again, and again, "The prisoners are the ones who are the least friendly, have the fewest friends, and the least education". I would like to know how many of them are brain-damaged. But that diagnosis I don't think, could possibly come for another ten to twelve years. There's hardly a chance for the medical staff and the leadership to make that study. But we can make spot ones. And you see, what is happening is we find that when the prisoner is given a real job, a skill to learn, he becomes much more interested in the classes which are offered to him. And he becomes a better workman. And he can leave the prison whenever his time comes, with more savings. And he can send something home to whatever family he has.

And the wardens are very grateful for it. One of the things we early understood: the legislature and so on, is happy to have prison industries improved...teach them to make something else besides straight-jackets for the mental institutions, or to make license plates for the automobiles. But they have to have somebody teach them how to keep the books. So every time we go in to help make over the prison industry, we have to have a staff who can teach the warden's staff how to keep the books so they don't run into debt and have the legislature say, "You can't do this...can't have the money".

But so far, it's working like a charm.