

Using Oral Histories To Heal the Archival Wounds of Watergate

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Society of American Archivists

26 August 2008

or:
A History of CREEPs

I work for these people:



Disclaimer

My opinions do not reflect the official views or policies of the Richard Nixon Presidential Library and Museum, the National Archives and Records Administration, or any other agency of the federal government.

CREEP

- 1971 – Formation of Re-Election committee began, outside of RNC
- John Mitchell, Attorney General, designated director
- **C**ommittee for the **R**e-**E**lection of the **P**resident, based at 1701 Pennsylvania Avenue NW (across from White House)
- (In)Famous for Watergate Break-in



Provenance of CREEP

(What we know)

- Official Nixon collections were impounded by Congress in 1974
- Supreme Court ruling, 1977
- Decades of litigation followed, yielding private Nixon library in California and official Nixon Project in Maryland
- CREEP papers were kept in a legal limbo
 - Ownership in question until mid-1980s
 - Administrative records from this entire period – sparse to non-existent

Provenance of CREEP (What we know)

- CREEP Materials (in 19 Crates – 7' x 7' x 4 ½') moved to California in 1989
- Nixon Foundation placed the crates in a self-storage facility
- Remained in facility until 2008



CREEP Treated Separately

- On July 10, 2007, The CREEP Collection was deeded by the Nixon Foundation to NARA as part of the establishment of the Richard Nixon Presidential Library and Museum



Allen Weinstein announcing establishment of Nixon Library, July 11, 2007

Meeting CREEP

- On February 12, 2008, the materials were moved to NARA Pacific Region space in Laguna Niguel
- It took two full weeks for 9 staff members to unpack the crates and rebox much of the contents for temporary storage at the NARA Laguna Niguel facility
- What was found? The expected 1100 c.f. of Committee records, **AND** an entirely new series not expected (possibly the Finance CREEP records) ... locked file cabinets, furniture, office equipment, artifacts, and about 265 c.f. of audiovisual materials
- Totaling approximately 2200 c.f. of materials

Unpacking CREEP



Unpacking CREEP



Unpacking CREEP



Understanding CREEP

- **Original order had long since been compromised**
 - Picked over by FBI
 - Investigated by Justice Department prosecutors
 - Rummaged through by Senate and House committees
 - Combed through by plaintiffs and defendants in civil litigation
 - Materials packed and repacked - moved from location... to location... to location.
 - And, of course, CREEP employees had destroyed many of the most sensitive materials to avoid prosecution

Questioning CREEPs

Provenance

- Those unknown materials – Finance Committee?, file cabinets, furniture (including shredder), audio-visual materials
- Chain of Custody - materials changed hands more times than expected from 1973 to 2007
- Obstacles
 - Time, time, time
 - Lack of Administrative Records
 - Politics – relations between the former President, NARA, RNC, Nixon Foundation, 1972 Campaign Trust impact understanding provenance of collection¹⁴

Researching CREEPs

- **Numerous books written on the 1972 campaign**
 - Most avoid discussion of actual committee, and instead focus on Watergate
- **Senate and House Testimony**
 - Organizational charts entered into evidence, however again focusing on Watergate (pre-June 1972)
- **CREEP Materials**
 - Reviewed boxes labeled with names such as Director MacGregor, Deputy Director Magruder and an unknown name - Robert Odle
 - Provided memos detailing the evolution of the committee, as well as personnel

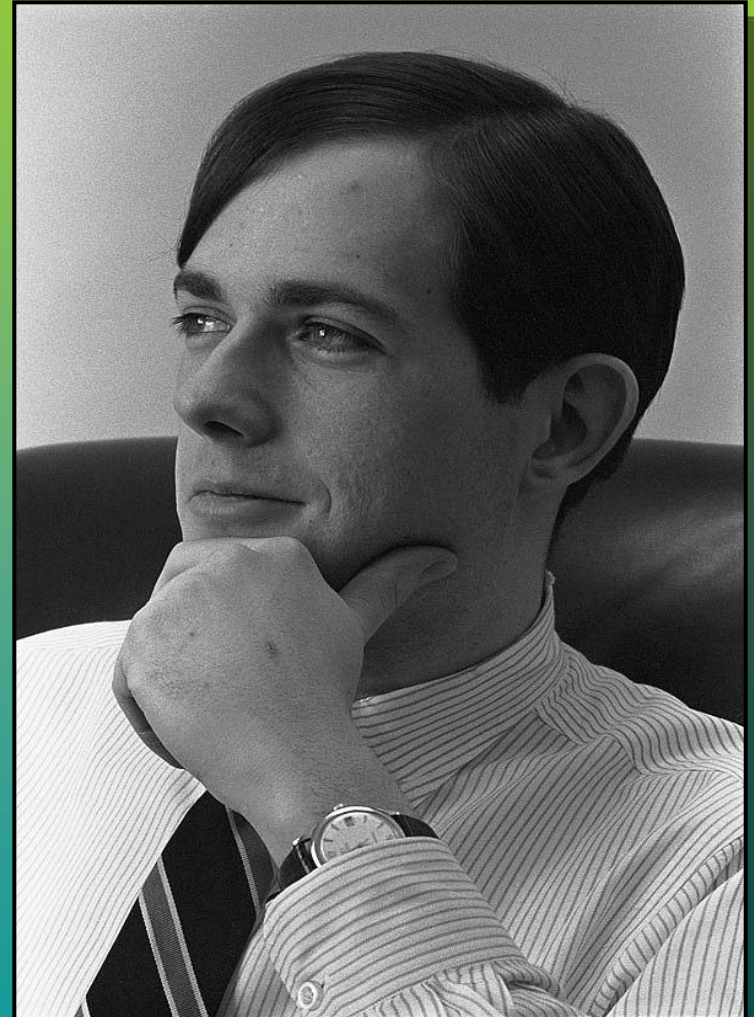
Asking a CREEP Creator

- The Nixon Library is conducting a large-scale (80+ interviews) oral history with former administration officials, longtime Nixon associates, and others who were prominent in the era
 - John Kerry, Len Garment, John Dean
 - Al Haig, George Shultz, Charles Colson
 - Jeb Stuart Magruder, G. Gordon Liddy, Fred Malek
 - And most important (to me): Robert C. Odle

Robert C. Odle

CREEP Director of Administration

- Worked in the White House for the Herb Klein in the Department of Communications
- Recruited by Jeb Magruder and H.R. Haldeman to be part of the re-election committee start up.
- Served as Director of Administration
- Responsible for office management, lower level personnel hiring, and records management



In Odle's Words: The Deputy Directors



- Fred [Malek] “management whiz,” in charge of vertical organizations around the country
- Jeb Magruder – horizontal operations, advertising, citizens groups, background in advertising
- 3 had offices near each other, with conference room in middle
- Campaign was 24/7
- Few disputes between them

Jeb Stuart Magruder

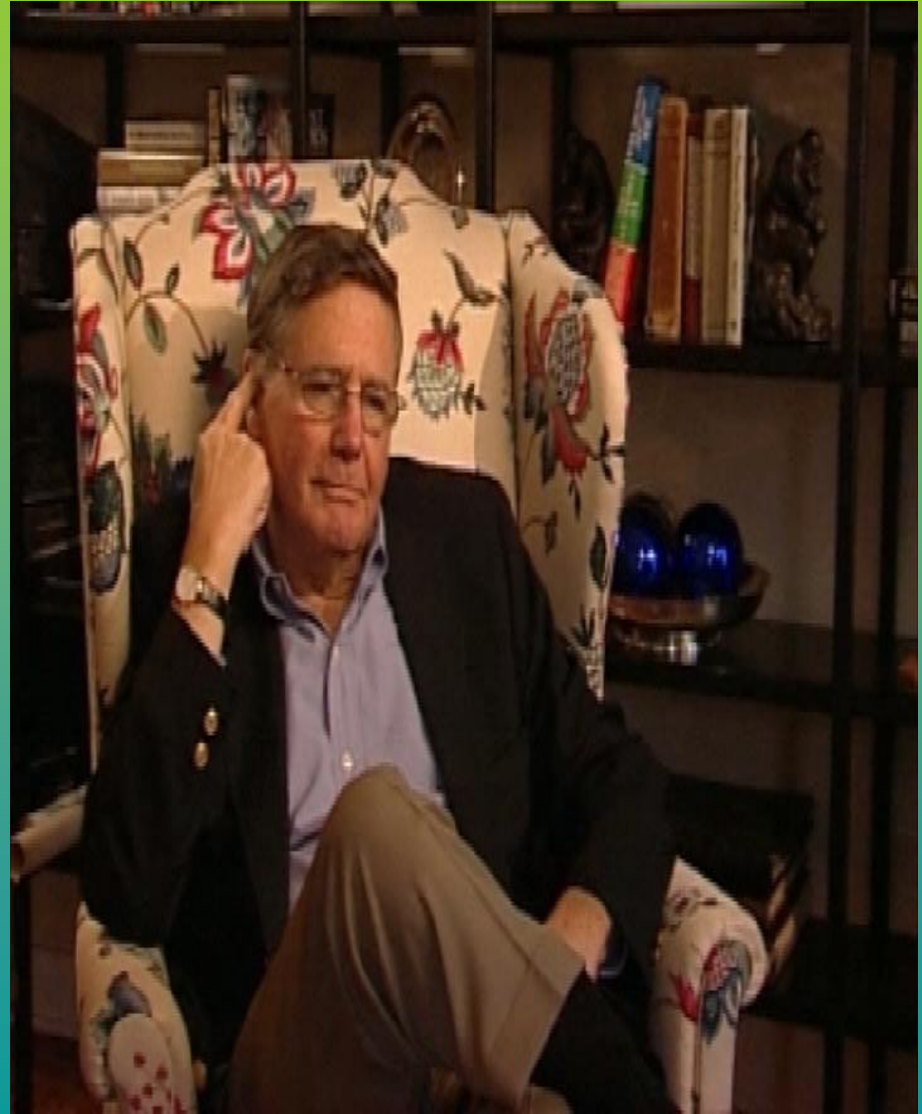
CREEP Deputy Campaign Director



- Appointed Special Assistant to the President in 1969
- Acting Director of CREEP, then Deputy Director
- Ran Administrative functions of committee
- Pleaded guilty to conspiracy to obstruct justice in Watergate break-in case

In Magruder's Words: The “Committee”

- CREEP – came from the initials, press put them together, thought it was funny
- Q: But what did you call yourselves?
- A: Oh, the Committee to Re-Elect



The Positives and Negatives of the CREEP Oral Histories

- **Positives:**

- Established the background of the Committee from an operating standpoint (as opposed to the testimony of CREEP employees in the congressional and other investigations, which were about crimes)
- Workflow from Director to Deputy Directors and other parts of the Committee
- Assisted in clarifying the organization of the committee and the evolving nature of the committee (Odle - one of the first to come, and one of the last to leave)
- Added to the store of evidence about how the materials had been organized and maintained originally
- Opportunity to ask questions never asked before

The Positives and Negatives of the CREEP Oral Histories

- **Negatives:**

- Unanswered questions:

- » Bad memory (events took place 36 years ago)

- » Difference in emphasis (major events or issues to an archivist can be very minor to a participant)

- » Personal allegiance or malice towards individuals

- Information contrary to other evidence

- » Responsibilities of staff members (Malek, Magruder and Citizens Groups)

- » Name of the Committee (“for the” instead of “to”)

File

Committee for the Re-election of the President

MEMORANDUM

August 17, 1972

MEMORANDUM FOR:

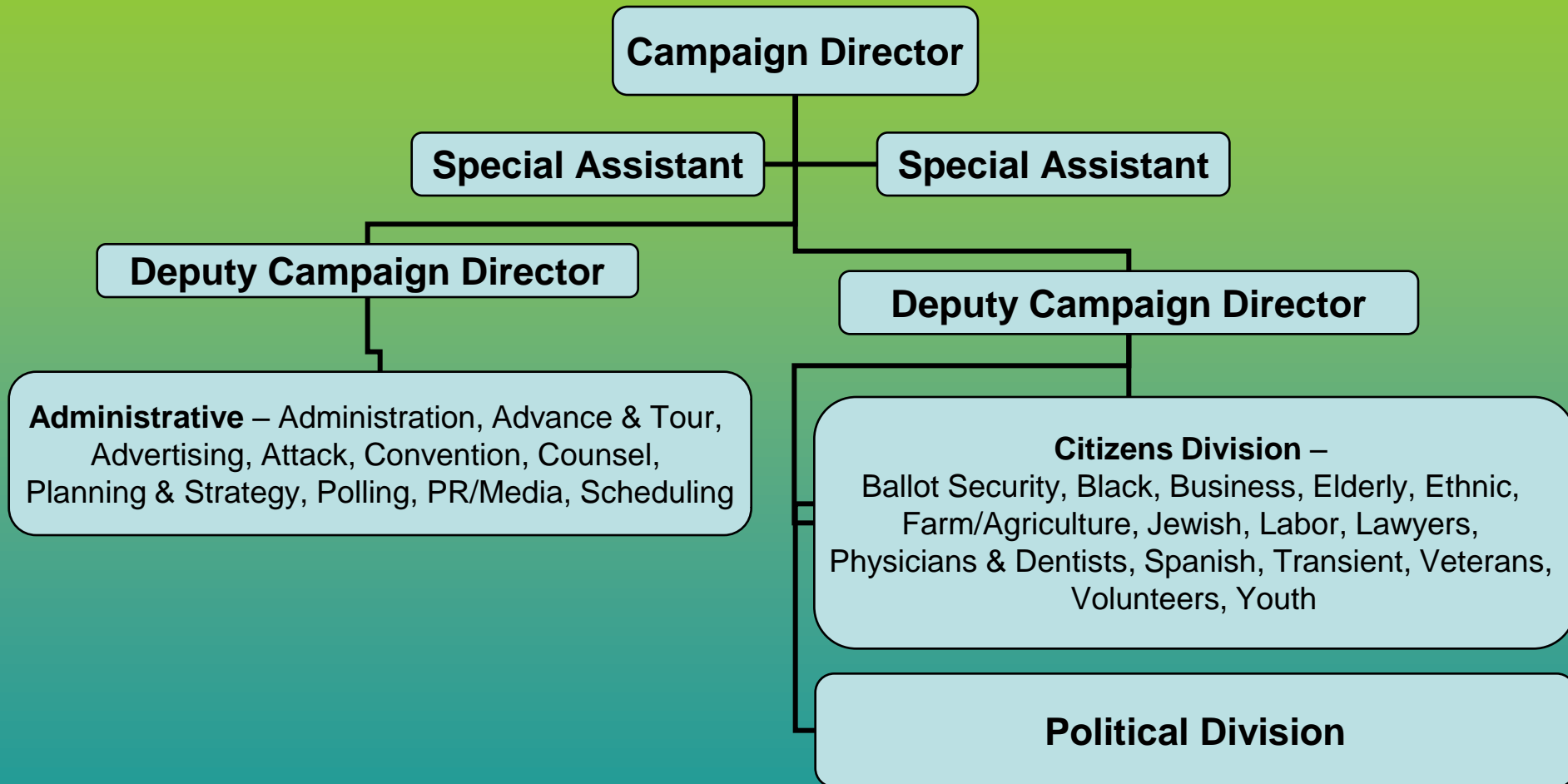
AL ABRAHAMS
PETE DAILEY
ED FAILOR
JON FOUST
BART PORTER
BOB MARIK
ROB ODLE
VAN SHUMWAY
BOB TEETER

As some of you may have been aware, there was consideration being given to changing the name of the Committee. A final decision has been made to retain our current title, "Committee for the Re-election of the President".


JEB MACRUDE

cc: Fred Malek

Developing Conclusions about CREEP



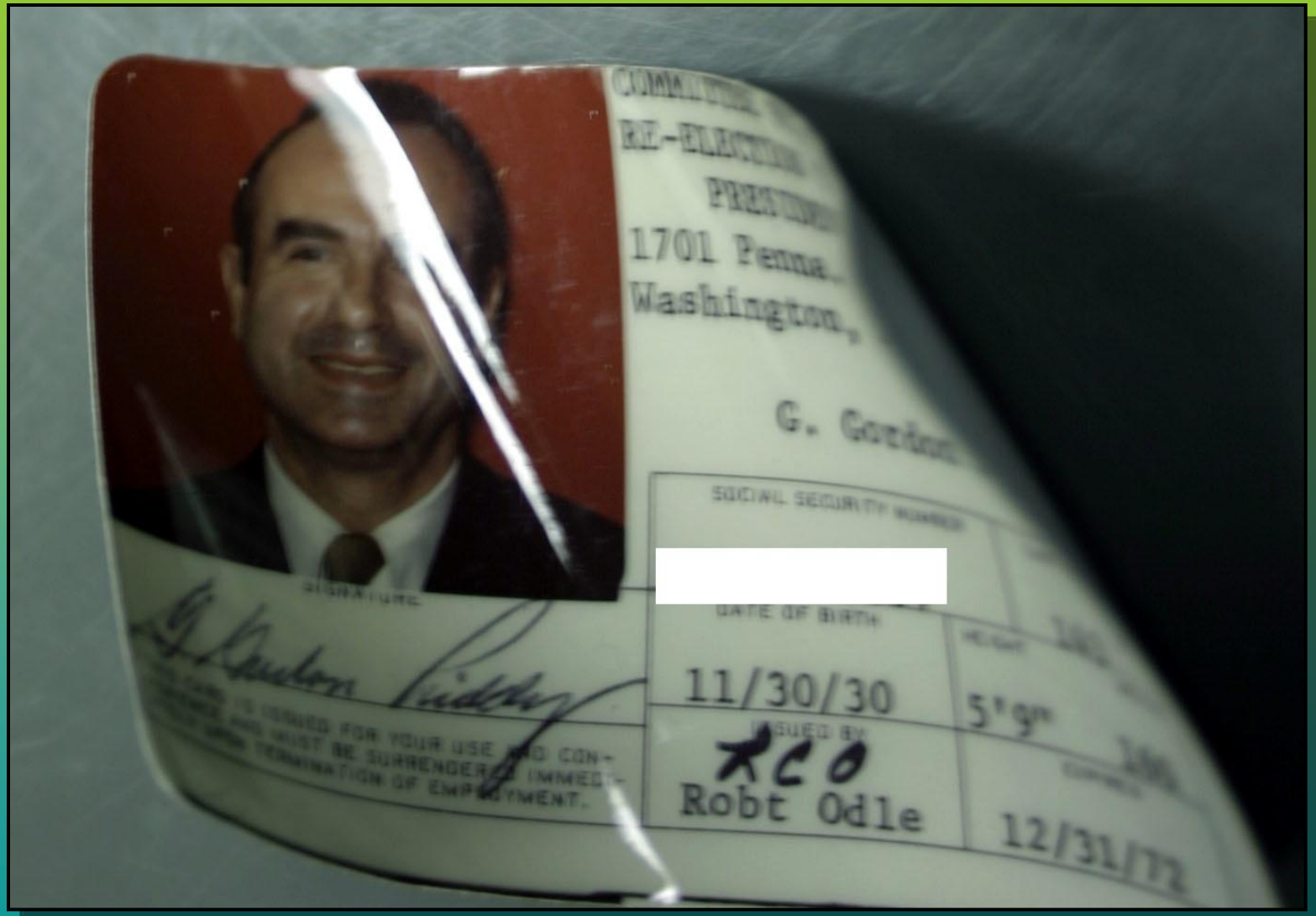
CREEPing into the Future

- Continuing research into history of collection
- Processing the Jeb Magruder Series
- Evaluating materials including possible Finance Committee records
- Preservation of audiovisual materials
- More Oral Histories!





One Very Special CREEPster (G. Gordon Liddy)



The Deputy Directors



The “Committee”

